

# The Powys Review

NUMBER TWENTY-FOUR





# The Powys Review

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Cover: John Cowper Powys in Sussex:  
a watercolour by Tim Kahane  
(Courtesy of Stephen Carroll)

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# Subi Swift

## An Eye for Interiors: The Influence of Genre Painting on the work of John Cowper Powys

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The influence of the visual arts on the descriptive writing of John Cowper Powys has tended to be somewhat overshadowed by more philosophical, mystical or literary considerations. Yet the visual arts were important to Powys; he mentions specifically, in the fiction and the non-fiction, some eighty artists, his taste in art ranging from the homely domesticity of Dutch genre painting of the seventeenth-century to the modern visions of twentieth-century Post-Impressionists, from the Classical Arcady of Claude to the concrete expressions of Modernism, from the savage, Romantic grandeur of Salvator Rosa to the wooded bowers of Gainsborough and Watteau. His creative, critical and personal writing reveals him as Protean figure, moving easily between aesthetic naïveté, minute observation, and visionary power. Powys is, at one and the same time, a skilful technician, aware of the dramatic potential of pictorial devices like framing and spatial distancing, the importance of composition, the effect of set pieces, and a trained naturalist, able to depict in minute, Bewick-like detail the petals of a flower or the texture of a tree trunk. He shifts, with apparent ease, between the precise interior detail of narrative or genre painting and the loose, dissolving forms of Impressionist art; between the exactitude of precisely focused candlelight on faces or the minutiae of sun-motes and the iridescent diffusions of sunlight on water.

Of the many and wide-ranging artistic influences that shaped Powys's work and thought, Dutch genre painting of the seventeenth century provides an interesting starting-point. Where painters like Cuyp, Hobbema, Rubens and Ruysdael influenced many of Powys's descriptions of landscape,

most notably in *Rodmoor*, it was to Rembrandt, Jan Steen and Teniers that he turned for his more homely, domestic scenes. These Dutch Masters, and their nineteenth-century successors, influenced many a Powysian interior, from Ashover House to Othery's Creamery, from Glastonbury Vicarage to Kimmeridge House. This is not to suggest that all Powys's interiors are the same or that genre painting is the only influence at work, but it does seem to me that the particular musty, mellow, old-fashioned quality of so many Powysian interiors owes a considerable debt to the genre tradition, both Dutch and English.

It is this relatively narrow aspect of Powys's descriptive writing that I hope to explore, influenced by my general view that Powys's greatest strengths lie in description rather than narrative. It is a view that tends, at least in part, to place Powys in a tradition of Romantic fiction in which, from Mrs Radcliffe to Emily Brontë, from Poe to Hardy, detailed attention, as Wellek and Warren put it, is given to setting:

Romantic description aims at establishing and maintaining a mood: plot and characterization are to be dominated by tone, effect

Setting is environment; and environments, especially domestic interiors, may be viewed as metonymic, or metaphoric, expressions of character. A man's house is an extension of himself. Describe it and you have described him.<sup>1</sup>

And while, of course, description is rarely an end in itself to Powys, his work is marked by an extraordinary richness of interior description often, it seems to me, more memorable for its vivid pictorial detail than for any concomitant signification.

We know from his *Autobiography*, for instance, that Powys was especially sensitive to certain interiors, like the drawing-room at Penn House in Weymouth, and that he was keenly susceptible to the kind of “homely, almost Dutch domesticity, quaint and mellow . . . like a picture by Jan Steen”<sup>2</sup> that he discerned in the writing of Sterne. Similarly, “no one but Balzac”, he was sure, “except it be some of the rougher, homelier Dutch painters—has caught the spirit of those mellow, sensual ‘interiors’ of typical country houses”

where an odour of centuries of egotism emanates from every piece of furniture . . . and from every gesture of every person seated over the fire! . . . the imagination finds starting places for its wanderings from the mere gammons of dried bacon hanging from the smoky rafters and the . . . (rustics) . . . who quaff their amber-coloured cider under the flickering of candles.<sup>3</sup>

Like Hardy (“Emotions would be half starved if there were no candle-light”, *Desperate Remedies*, VI, 3), Powys was well aware “how everything looks different and is different when the candles are lit”,<sup>4</sup> developing, like Sebastian van Storck’s Haarlem artists, “the old Low-country taste for interiors”.<sup>5</sup> He liked the kind of Dutch genre painting that was rich in anecdotal and realistic detail and, above all, bathed in light, particularly the golden light of the sun streaming in through a window or door, or, most especially, the carefully focused rays of candle-light. He will have seen paintings like Vermeer’s *Women Reading* in Dresden, de Hooch’s *Boy bringing Pomegranates* at the Wallace Collection,<sup>6</sup> or Vrel’s *Woman combing a little Girl’s hair* in Detroit, noting their careful play with light and reflection. In addition, he greatly admired Rembrandt’s handling of “the lights and shadows of fire-light and candle-light” and his “treatment of sunshine”.<sup>7</sup> In much of his presentation of interiors, I would suggest, Powys is as avowedly pictorial as Hardy is in *Under the Greenwood Tree*, subtitled “A Rural Painting of the Dutch School”. And it is clear that many of his minutely described interiors

draw heavily on seventeenth-century Dutch genre painting as well as nineteenth-century narrative painting which is derived from it.<sup>8</sup>

From the earliest work we have detailed, carefully furnished interiors, like the confectioner’s in *Rodmoor*:

Mother-of-pearl shells, faded antimacassars, china dogs, fruit under glass cases, old faded photographs . . . tarnished christening mugs . . . all the sweet impossible bric-a-brac of a tea-parlour in a village shop (440),

or Baltazar Stork’s room, furnished in “exquisite and characteristic taste”, its rarified objets d’art, arranged in perfect symmetry, painting as telling a picture of its owner as any portrait could:

Old prints, few in number and rare in quality, adorned its walls. Precious pieces of china, invaluable statuettes in pottery and metal, stood charmingly arranged, with due space round each, in every corner. On either side of the mantelpiece was a Meissen-ware figure of engaging aspect and Watteau-like design, while in the centre, in the place where a clock is usually to be found, was a piece of statuary of ravishing delicacy and grace representing the escape of Syrinx from the hands of Pan. (R, 58)

And typical, too, is the carefully posed and lit figure of Philippa, alone in her room at midnight:

The heavy curtains were drawn but the window, wide-open behind them, let in a breath of rain-scented air which stirred the flames of the two silver candles on the dressing table and fluttered the thin skirt of the girl’s night-dress as she sat, tense and expectant, over the red coals of a dying fire . . .

The firelight cast a red glow over her long bare limbs and the flickering candle flames threw wavering shadows across her lifted arms and slender neck . . . Her smooth forehead and small delicately moulded face showed phantom-like in the mirror. (R, 49)

This might easily be transposed, in a nineteenth-century narrative painting, into a pictorial representation of “The Sleepless Night” or “The Midnight Appointment”. Indeed, the deliberate blurring of actuality

in the novel with painted representations of it is suggested by Nance's response to the interior of the "Petit Trianon" or summer-house in the grounds of Oakguard. Her eyes take in a variety of features, from flower pots and gardening tools to a coat-of-arms in the window and then, with "a most odd sensation", a "carpenter's table upon the raised dais, with some dimly coloured Italianated picture behind it, inserted in the panelling"; "Where", she wonders, "had she seen an effect of that kind before? In a picture—or in reality?" (*R*, 396) It is a question we often ask ourselves reading Powys's fiction.

In common with narrative painting, Powys's interiors carry messages; commonplace, everyday objects are given particular significance, like the vase of bluebells or milk-jug in *Wolf Solent* or thinly-cut bread and butter in just about any of the novels, and the figurative grouping, lighting and features of his interiors point up thematic or narrational signification in a way that is analogous to the visual arts. Powys uses his interiors to further his narrative, allowing, as painters do, the composition, decor and light to tell the tale. This, for example, is how he describes, with explicit pictorial intentionality, the relationship between two 'rival' women, Netta and Ann, in *Ducdame*, the drawing-room of Ashover House providing "their background":

The chairs and sofas of the chilly room wore a kind of grand ghostliness in their chintz covers. They seemed to survey these two warm-blooded persons like so many wistful defunct nuns . . . the landscapes on the walls were all in pale water colour or pastel. The whole room had the look of something that accepted Time and Change and Death as its lords and masters and yet refused to yield one inch of its own dignity and ceremoniousness . . . all individual difference between them dropped away; while two depersonalized figures, as in some old faded print entitled 'Women Arranging Flowers', substituted themselves for the real Ann Gore and the real Netta Page. (*D*, 23-24)

And here, rather differently, interior warmth and light are set against exterior

dullness and rain in order to suggest the alienation of the two women from their surroundings and from Lexie:

The drenched condition of the two women seemed to draw into that little room a desolate melancholy . . .

The red coals in Lexie's grate seemed to lose something of their power. The rosy glow reflected from Lexie's crowded bookcases seemed to fade. The little blue fire devil that danced like a demon butterfly on the top of the coals flagged and drooped. (*D*, 31-32)

The "gray featureless face of the rain" presses in against the window and the two soaked figures appear to belong to the drab exterior, not the warm interior from which they are separated by "an impassable barrier". This is characteristic of Powys's use of exterior and interior conditions to point tensions between his characters, the use of light and posture suggesting the ability of the exterior world to penetrate and colour interior appearances.

Similarly, the cold stateliness of the Ashover drawing-room, in its "gilt and its whiteness, in its water colours and French prints" (*D*, 191), is able to express hostility, just as Mrs Ashover's "luxurious" boudoir, an "almost flawless work of art", conveys the delicacy and refinement of its owner, lit and warmed as it is by a fire in the grate and the subtle, diffused emanations of the day which float in through the open window, 'hovering' over the bric-a-brac, the Queen Anne chairs and tables, the rosewood tea table, polished silver and Meissen china. (*D*, 73-74) Interior light and room contents used in this way help to define character: describe a man's house, as Wellek and Warren say, and you have described him; and they underline Powys's themes. As in narrative painting, we are able to 'read' a great deal of the story by looking at the state of the room.

Powys's settings tend to be either bathed in sunlight, picked out in candle-light, or chilly, inhospitable and poorly lit. Notations like this are commonplace:

The fire on the hearth was almost extinct; the great silver punch bowl was empty; most of the candles had guttered down till nothing but

flimsy blue flames hovered like shapeless astral lights over the prostrate wicks and liquid grease. (*D*, 157)

And common, too, is a tendency to suggest collusion between the human and the inanimate, rooms often shown to both reflect and participate in human action:

Ann looked round the room, and it really did seem to her as if the place were full of woe-begone, abject wraiths . . . At the end of any long entertainment between the same four walls there is something of this effect, with the forlornness of which the very furniture seems to conspire. (*D*, 159)

Portraits or pictures in the room often add to the conspiratorial effect, interiors invariably decorated with images which comment on or reinforce themes, as they do in genre paintings, or a Pre-Raphaelite work like *The Awakening Conscience* (1853) in which a picture of 'The Woman taken in Adultery' points up Holman Hunt's moral message. In Powys we find countless examples of this kind, from the gold-framed miniature of Rook's father (*D*, 192) to the "grotesquely sentimental picture of Nell as a little girl" (*D*, 393); from the large Arundel print of a "richly-gilded picture" by Benozzo Gozzoli and a "morbidly sanctimonious Holy Family" by Filippino Lippi (*WS*, 28; 40) to the "Old-fashioned prints, old-fashioned pastels, old-fashioned engravings" which give to Mrs Otter's pleasant dining-room "a spirit that seemed to emerge from centuries of placidity and stretch out consolatory hands to every kind of wayfarer". (*WS*, 44; 56). These last are set in opposition to the "monstrous" mid-Victorian works of art by Landseer, Leighton and Alma Tadema which so discomfort Wolf and give his bedroom "a sort of reading-room or club-room aspect". (*WS*, 29 and 41; 41 and 53)

But it is light, above all, that shapes and colours Powys's interiors. It is the candle-light that renders Jason Otter's room "detestable" (*WS*, 18; 40) to Wolf; the "impalpable", "lovely bluish light" of winter twilight pouring in through the uncurtained window of Darnley Otter's bedroom at Pond Cottage that provides him, con-

versely, with "a wholesome and liberating peace". (*WS*, 420 & 423; 436 & 439) It is the "vaporous March light filtering in through dingy muslin curtains" which throws "a watery pallor upon . . . abortions of human mediocrity" like the cheap novels owned by T. E. Valley, the King's Barton vicarage presented as a picture of "shabby desolation" and "a forlorn emptiness that was worse than squalor". (*WS*, 132-33; 144-45) It is the "dim light", the unlit gas-jets, that render "almost spectral" the eyes of Mr Malakite in "that old furrowed face staring forth like black holes burnt in a wooden panel" (*WS*, 67; 79) and the "ill-lighted" obscurity of his pornographic bookshop that shapes and defines its sinister and perverted enterprise. It is, more pleasantly, the "mingling of twilight and firelight" that gives Selena Gault's drawing-room its "particular atmosphere" (*WS*, 118; 132), just as the morning light, falling on Christie's chandeliers, antimacassars, rosewood chairs, Geneva clock and the heavy gold frames of the water-colour pictures, gives her room "a charming character of its own". (*WS*, 78; 90)

There is a tendency, in passages like this, to rather overload the narrative with detail; it is a kind of over-furnishing that directly recalls both rooms stuffed with Victorian bric-a-brac and nineteenth-century pictorial representations of such rooms, packed with ornaments and telling objects like an opened letter, a half-eaten apple or a pointedly closed bible. Where paintings like *The Awakening Conscience* cover almost every inch of the canvas with reinforcing symbols or, like *The Last Day in the Old Home* by R. B. Martineau, fill every corner of the picture space with furniture, ornaments, people and anecdote, some of Powys's interiors are made to carry a rather heavy burden of detail or symbolism. The description just cited, of Christie's sitting-room, is a case in point, not only tending to list every feature of the room, from the "dusky carpet" to the "mahogany curtain-rod", but also burdening the passage with a certain pompous tone. Certainly, we already know something of



Robert Braithwaite Martineau, *The Last Day in the Old Home*, 1862 (Tate Gallery)

Wolf's dislike of Victorian bric-a-brac, but I find something unconvincing and a little forced in his tone of expert connoisseurship which notes the smallest feature of the room and "observes" "the unadulterated mid-century style of its cut-glass chandeliers". (*WS*, 68; 90) The eye for detail and sensitivity to surroundings may be characteristic of Wolf, but the note of expertise seems somehow too emphatic and pedantic.

More effective, I would suggest, are Powys's more 'casual', less symbolically burdened groupings of people and places, caught, as it were, at random, like the "quaintly-furnished interiors" of the row of cottages Wolf passes as he walks along Lentylane into the centre of King's Barton. Here we are reminded of Dutch genre paintings, and of Hardy, as Powys presents a series of small, homely interiors, lit by the

light of a spring late afternoon and framed by windows and doors:

Many of these cottage-doors stood ajar . . . and it was easy . . . to observe, their quaintly-furnished interiors: the china dogs upon the mantelpieces, the grandfather's clocks, the highly-coloured lithographs of war and religion, the shining pots and pans, the well-scrubbed deal tables, the deeply-indented wooden steps leading to the rooms above. Almost all of them had large flagstones, of the same mellow, yellowish tint, laid between the doorstep and the path; and in many cases this stone was as deeply hollowed out, under the passing feet of the generations, as was the actual doorstep which rose above it. (*WS*, 54-55; 66)

The absence of connoisseurship or authorial intervention in passages like this allows the pictorialism to speak for itself; Wolf, and thereby the reader, simply see the picture

presented and absorb its visual impact, unhampered by the 'psychic auras' and 'emanations', the staring grotesques or 'hideous' East Indian idols that adorn so many of Powys's interiors.

One heavily furnished and detailed interior in *Wolf Solent* does, though, stand out as an impressive literary narrative painting, set in the darkening twilight of Mr Smith's dining-room where a small group gather after his death. Here the contents of the poorly lit room coalesce, "with shadowy persistence", into a vivid picture of funereal gloom:

In the darkening twilight of the room . . . the man's slim figure . . . had the appearance of some old Van Dyck portrait come to life in a Victorian house. Behind his back the great heavily-bound editions of . . . *Sundays at Home* and *Leisure Hours* . . . gathered the summer darkness about them with that peculiar mystical solemnity which old books . . . display at the coming on of night.

"The gathering darkness" assists the atmosphere of the room as it falls on all its "ponderous objects", including silver, chairs, dark curtains, a grotesque portrait, leather bound books, a coal-scuttle and so on. (*WS*, 299-300; 311-16) And as Wolf interrupts the funereal proceedings by calling for light, "Please bring us the lamp!" his unuttered impulse to cry out, Claudius-like, "Lights! lights! lights!" suggests a fitting title for a nineteenth-century narrative painting depicting just such a scene. Its symbolic detail and its vivid realization of material and physical substantiality recall the work of painters like Martineau, Augustus Leopold Egg or Luke Fildes.

Also drawing on nineteenth-century narrative or, indeed, seventeenth-century genre painting is Powys's liking for the seated, often reading, figure, illuminated in an otherwise dark room by the local light of candle or lamp. In an example reminiscent of paintings like George Clausen's *Reading by Lamplight*, Wolf looks in at an elderly woman reading by candle-light, his view framed by the cottage window, unhindered by curtain or blind:



George Clausen (1852-1944) *Reading by Lamplight*  
(Leeds City Art Gallery)

her chin [was] propped upon one arm, and the other lying extended across the table. The woman's face had nothing remarkable about it . . . but as Wolf stared in upon her, sitting there in that commonplace room at midnight, an indescribable sense of the drama of human life passed through him . . . there, by those two pointed flames, one isolated consciousness kept up the old familiar interest, in love, in birth, in death . . . That simple, pallid, spectacled head became for him at that moment a little island of warm human awareness in the midst of the vast non-human night.

He thought to himself how, in some future time . . . some wayward philosopher like himself would still perhaps watch through the window a human head *reading by candlelight*, and find such a sight touching beyond words. (*WS*, 168; 181)

I am reminded here of both nineteenth-century genre painting and earlier, similar studies by Rembrandt, like *The Holy Family* or *Rembrandt's Mother Reading the Bible*; the emphatic suggestion of a title, the framing of the scene, the subject, and the light notation all point to Powys's pictorial

intention and reference to comparable works of visual art.

Similar compositions are to be found throughout Powys's writing. Sometimes they point to a domestic homeliness, where a shaded lamp or burning fire cast a warm radiance over a room's contents, like the "dainty" tea-table, old fashioned urn, silver teapot, cups and saucers of Dresden china, and large plate of thin bread and butter (*WS*, 71; 83) which, in almost comical contrast to the darkly sinister interior of the pornographic bookshop below, fill Malakite's cosy upstairs room. Similarly, "the heavy-globed gas-jets of the candelabra shed so mellow a glow" (*WS*, 129; 142) on the little supper-party gathered around the table at Mr Smith's. Quite differently, the flickering candle-light picks out the gruesome character of Dr Brush, the vivisectionist, as he sits, "straight as a scarecrow", staring into "the dead cinders of Cattistock's grate":

The candle-light flickering down upon him gave him . . . a curiously malignant and even phantasmal detachment. What he really looked like—with his white face balanced above his new light-coloured over-coat . . . was the Hanged Man of Gipsy May's Tarot cards. (*Wey S*, 439)

*A Glastonbury Romance* also draws heavily on the genre tradition of painting, in scenes like the one at Othery's Creamery, a small dairy on the ground floor of a Jacobean house. The sun shines in through its open door, giving the spot "an old fashioned, mellow look", the "blending of Jacobean brickwork with warm dusty sunshine" bathing the interior, with its "large, cool, white receptacles full of milk", in "enchantment". From inside the dairy the sunlight is seen to flood the gravel and the wooden benches with a dusty glow that gives to the interior of the little shop "a dim cloistral coolness", while the view out has the "look" of a "shimmering picture, framed . . . in the doorway, a picture whose only background was a tiny space of misty blue between two ramshackle sheds across the road". (*GR*, 332-33; 324-27)

Particularly noteworthy, too, is Powys's presentation of the Maundy Thursday feast at Glastonbury Vicarage, a "homely" gathering for a choir-supper of "cheerful human beings . . . snug and warm, full of chattering gossip . . . lively hummings and buzzings" in the kitchen and scullery. There is much emphasis on the "homely" nature of the occasion and on its pictorial quality: "It was indeed a scene worthy of Teniers or Jan Steen or Breughel". Recalling, too, Hardy's *Under the Greenwood Tree*, details of physiognomy, dress, seating arrangements and light are all noted with care, the scene filled with country characters of all shapes and sizes and names like Penny Pitches, Mr Weatherwax and Tossie Stickles. It is a vivid picture of warmth, jollity, cooking and eating, glowing with the light of the hot oven and the candles on the chimney-piece and on the table, which throws,

over all these faces a soft yellow glow that seemed to draw out something peculiarly individual from their folds and creases and wrinkles . . . all of which in daylight might have been inexpressive and insignificant. (*GR*, 385-87; 373-76)

The resemblance between such description and seventeenth-century Dutch genre paintings like Teniers's *Merry Company*, *The Card Players* or *A Music Party* is striking indeed, the pictorialism explicit and clearly intentional.

And *Weymouth Sands*, too, despite its proliferation of exterior views and settings, contains a wealth of interior descriptions; rooms, people and actions again coloured and characterized by light. Set as they are in opposition to the vast, glittering expanses of sea and sand outside, the interiors of *Weymouth Sands* seem particularly rich in a kind of "old-fashioned faded sumptuousness", oppressive to some, pleasurable to others, like that of the drawing-room at Spy Croft, home of the Loders. Although "like a mausoleum" to Ruth and Rodney, to Magnus Muir its chandelier, with its "tinkling prismatic pendants that hung down inside their oval glass cases from a pair of gilded candle-sticks" and its "polished

ornamental coal-scuttle” evoke “a deep, almost sensual content”. (*Wey S*, 179-80 & 297) Some interiors, like that of Mrs Wix’s front room, are “the reverse of welcoming”, a “fireless and airless throne-room of propriety” where Magnus has to wait, “in company with a new-lit lamp . . . which . . . smoked, stank, flared and spat, and acted towards him with a malignity that seemed inspired”, while others, like her kitchen, full of warmth, cooking smells and bright utensils, suggest refuge and hospitality. (*Wey S*, 313-15) Other interiors are rather more unwholesome; some are stained and sordid, like Sark House, or artificial and theatrical, like the bedroom assigned to Perdita at High House, home of Jerry Cobbold, the famous clown, which, even in warm, dim light gives off an air that is “unhomely, transitory, insecure, and a little disconcerting”. (*Wey S*, 52-53)

More typical, though, is the interior of Miss Le Fleau’s drawing-room at Kimmeridge House, a “brown” womb for Magnus, “separated from the real chaos of life” taking place outside its “snug” bow-windows. The picture is characteristic of Powys’s presentation of nineteenth-century solidity and slightly shabby comfort, shaded here by colour rather than light, although the central figure, Miss Le Fleau, sits upright under her green lamp. The room is surveyed by Magnus, standing, in appropriate pose, with his back to the fire:

*It is a brown room, this room . . . the effect of it was, in some odd way, brown; though except for the round mahogany table, and that was polished till it looked like deep water, there was not an actual brown thing in it. The wallpaper was a pale “Dutch pink”, bordering on yellow. The cushions and carpet were a dull, rather muddy plum-colour. The pictures*

were all old, coloured prints, most of them of that smooth, mellow, *greasy* effect that is so peculiarly soothing—as if a misty, oily film, stolen from many natural twilights, had been spread over sketches in crayon; while the books in the three solid rosewood bookcases were almost all green and gold, their bindings carrying all those quaint curleques and flourishes so popular in the middle of the nineteenth century. (*Wey S*, 34-37)

We have, in such interior descriptions, a vivid evocation of nineteenth-century substantiality, somewhat shabby homeliness, and mellow, soothing ambience. Colour, texture, light and precise noting of material, solid objects, combine with the permanent, evocative smell of “old, long-forgotten summers by the sea-side” to produce a picture that is, at one and the same time, physically felt and nostalgically suggestive:

The peculiar smell of the interior of Kimmeridge House . . . brought its own assuagement; for a multitude of long peaceful lives at Weymouth seemed condensed there, like ancient flower-petals in some old pot-pourri, lives whose re-vivified exits and entrances were at once cleansed by salt-blowing winds and mellowed by glowing fires and flickering candles. (*Wey S*, 105)

It is a combination which is typical of much of Powys’s descriptive writing. His novels are packed with “quaintly—furnished interiors” which, in terms of colour, texture, light, realistic detail and composition, owe much to the seventeenth-century Dutch masters he so admired, as well as to the nineteenth-century genre painters who followed them. Like Balzac and those “rougher, homelier Dutch painters”, Powys, too, produced interiors from which emanates the “odour of centuries”.

#### NOTES

The following editions of John Cowper Powys’s novels have been used:

*Rodmoor* [R] (1916), London: Macdonald, 1973.  
*Ducdame* [D] (1925), London: Village Press, 1974.  
*Wolf Solent* [WS] (1929), London: Macdonald, 1961;

Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964, 1978.

*A Glastonbury Romance* [GR] London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1933; Picador, 1975.

*Weymouth Sands* [Wey S] (1934), London: Macdonald, 1963 and Picador, 1980.

<sup>1</sup>R. Wellek & A. Warren, *Theory of Literature* (1942), New York: 1948, pp. 228-9.

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<sup>7</sup>John Cowper Powys, *The Meaning of Culture*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1930; Village Press, 1974, p. 67.

<sup>8</sup>See Mario Praz, *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*, tr. Angus Davidson, London, 1956.



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# Susan Rands

## “This super-subtle Interpreter”: Aspects of Walter Pater’s Influence on John Cowper Powys

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In his admirable essay “The Genre of John Cowper Powys’s Major Novels”,<sup>1</sup> Ian Hughes draws ample attention to Powys’s expressed debt to Pater and traces in some detail the influence of *Marius the Epicurean* as it is displayed in *Wood and Stone*. He claims, however, that, after *Maiden Castle* Powys abandoned the Paterian plot of a philosophical romance and that his work then lost coherence. I hope to qualify this claim with particular reference to *Porius*, also to show that *Rodmoor* is at least as redolent of Pater’s influence as *Wood and Stone* and to indicate by further example other hitherto unremarked aspects of Powys’s debt to Pater.

To both Pater and Powys ‘action-man’ is of no consequence and their efforts are towards recording as precisely as possible the fruits of contemplation. “The aesthetic critic,” writes Pater, “regards all the objects with which he has to do, all works of art, and the fairer forms of nature and human life, as powers or forces producing pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less unique kind. This influence he feels and wishes to explain, by analysing and reducing it to its elements.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly Powys asks in *Autobiography*:

How can I find the right expression for the feelings that came to me in those days when the wind blew in a certain way as I followed some muddy grass-track along the edge of the Ely Road or the London Road? How can I describe the feeling I got, as if all the scarce-noticed sensations that had come lightly and incidentally to long generations of my ancestors, when they met the rain, or felt the sun, or heard the calling of rooks or the twittering of sparrows, or saw the smoke rising from human hearths, were rushing over me, in a hardly bearable flood of ecstatic

happiness, simply because, on that undisturbed road to the railway station, I heard some patient shop assistant mowing his scrap of grass behind a privet-hedge?

In *The Inmates*, Pantamount, a character who often voices some of Powys’s most fully developed and dominant ideas, lectures the hero, John Hush, thus:

And now consider this, my dear sir. The whole of our life is divided into two halves, the first action, the second contemplation; and the curious thing to note is that though they both tend to overlap each other, there is about twice as much over-lapping of action by contemplation as of contemplation by action.

For instance, I am going out now to help trimming some young firs. My chopping and sawing is unquestionably action; but, as I do it, are my taste, my eyes, my ears, my nose, my touch, entirely absorbed in this action? Of course not!

And what about women? A woman, let’s say, is washing up at her sink. She is rinsing and drying; but while her fingers are at work she can see a stream of sunlight striking the wood-work at her side or striking a rack of clean plates over her head, and she can note a leaf blown across the bricks at her feet, while the sound of rooks is reaching her through the window from somewhere outside, or the long-drawn whistle of a train.

We are thus compelled—as the academic logicians would put it, though, of course, really, we are *anything but compelled*, for all the world does the precise opposite!—compelled to recognise that contemplation occupies about three-quarters of our life, while action—though we may be supposed to be working twelve hours every day—really only occupies, that is to say entirely fills, our living consciousness for about a quarter of our life, or perhaps only a tenth. (207)

In this way is justified the amount of attention that Powys like Pater gives to contemplation, to attempting to express the details of unique, individual, human observation and sensation which most people, and most authors too, are content to leave in the limbo of the unverballed. To Powys, “it would seem that the grand master effort of the will should be directed . . . towards keeping clearly before one’s consciousness the idea of a certain thrilling calm of mind. This is the consciousness that a state of ecstatic peace is the deepest secret of the universe at which we can arrive.”<sup>3</sup>

This state is surely similar to, Pater’s “μονόχρονος ἡδονή” (“monochronos hedony”) which he translates as “the pleasure of the ‘Ideal Now’”,<sup>4</sup> the central tenet of the Cyrenaics, the Greek and earlier version of the Epicureans. In attempting to realize it, they, and Marius, sacrificed “much of human and religious sympathy”, Pater claims as by inference he did himself. “The monochronos hedony” “existed in certain moments”, “high-pitched, passionately coloured, intent with sensation, and a kind of knowledge which in its vivid clearness was like sensation.”(20) Powys borrows the Greek expression when he describes the mood of the good-hearted priest, Hamish Treharne in *Rodmoor*:

As he crossed his garden in the early morning and entered the church, the warm sun and clear-cut shadows filled him with that sense of indestructible joy to which one of the ancient thinkers has given the beautiful name of μονόχρονος ἡδονή—The Pleasure of the Ideal Now.

From the eastern window, flooding the floor of the little chancel, there poured into the cool, sweet-smelling place a stream of quivering light. He had opened wide the doors under the tower and left them open and he heard as he sank to his knees, the sharp clear twittering of swallows outside and the chatter of a flock of starlings. Through every pulse and fibre of his being, as he knelt, vibrated an unutterable current of happiness, of happiness so great that the words of his prayer melted and dissolved and all definite thought melted with them into that rare mood where

prayer becomes ecstasy and ecstasy becomes eternal. (118-119)

This is a happy example of the state described in *Marius* for whom “to be occupied with the aesthetic or imaginative side of things, is to be in real contact with those elements of his nature . . . which . . . are matter of the most real kind of apprehension.” (II, 25) To attain a state of harmony between their inner nature and the outside world, if only briefly, is the gradually realized aim of Owen Glendower, Porius and John Hush, even more than of the heroes of the Wessex novels; they too are sensitive individuals, in Hughes’s words, “learning the right philosophical standpoint both through introspection and through painful experience in a predominantly hostile social world.”<sup>5</sup>

Porius like Marius, is the head of his house and heir to a small kingdom; both are uncomfortably aware of their responsibilities. Marius has a sense of certain heavy demands upon him. (II, 6-12) Similarly “there were certain administrative and executive matters that Einion ab Iddawc insisted should be attended to by Porius and nobody else” (12); Porius is referred to as “a good youth and a dutiful” (206) and his mother calls him “my grave and moral son.” (122) Marius has “An impressibility to the sacredness of time, life and its events.” (II, 8) Porius feels that an “arbitrary and . . . inscrutable power . . . had risen from the stubble of the world’s past, and was threatening not only his own future but the future of the two women who ruled his life.” (6) Indeed Time itself and man’s allotted span on earth are represented in Porius by Myrddin Wyllt, “the captured god of time”, (59) whom Porius both supports, at the beginning of the novel, and rescues, at the end.

Just as Marius sets forth to a famous temple, Porius goes to brother John; both seek consultation with their ‘guru’. In second century Rome, just as in fifth century Wales “a variety of religions held sway”. Both heroes maintain a certain aloofness from the religions of others, pur-

suing instead what in Marius is termed "receptivity of soul" and in Porius "sensual contemplation" or "cavoseniargizing" wherein the "consciousness of his body . . . and the consciousness of his restless soul was temporarily bridged; so that his soul found itself able to follow every curve and ripple of his bodily sensations *and yet remained suspended above them.*" (83) It seems likely that Powys developed the idea of this activity or state of being from his understanding of Marius who felt the desirability of "refining one's senses till the whole of one's nature became one complex medium of reception". (I, 108)

Just as Porius cavoseniargizes as often as he can, so Marius directs his education "to the expansion and refinement of reception; of those powers above all which are immediately relative to fleeting phenomena, the powers of emotion and sense". (I, 111) Not long before he dies, Marius feels that "his unclouded receptivity of soul was at its height". Like so many Powys heroes, Marius was "wholly bent on living in that full stream of sensation" (II, 20), and like them he conceives "a world wider in its possibilities than all possible fancies concerning it". (II, 63) We may compare this with the end of *Porius*; "There are many gods; and I have served a great one". (682) *Porius*, like *Marius*, in the words of Pater's biographer, Michael Levey, "is a long arduous task of self exploration".<sup>6</sup>

The sense of infinite possibilities may account for the high-handed way, of both Pater and Powys, with myth. Perhaps the most significant and obvious example in Powys's work is Porius's freeing of Myrddin Wyllt from beneath the stone of Y Wyddfa where he has been imprisoned by Nineue; a freeing of Merlin is no where else related. Another example is Myrddin Wyllt turning bird into woman when in all previous versions women are changed into birds. A hint for this may have come from *Marius* where Socrates, in a passage read aloud when Apuleius is being entertained by Marcus Aurelius, speculates that it may be no more difficult "to turn women into birds

or birds into women" than it is "for the unmusical to play the flute or to read and write for those who have not learned". (II, 63) Myrddin Wyllt turns a great white owl into an eidolon of the persecuted girl Teleri, now "beautiful . . . under that far-flung moon" (656) and soon to "become the nightly visitor that could fly through any secluded ramparts between Caer Dathyl and Mur-y-Castell to respond to, to reciprocate, to realize, to satisfy the desperate imaginations of youthful longings and hopeless lusts". (657) This eidolon might well derive partly from the dream of Artemis who "gliding in upon a moon beam", "is the giver of sound sleep, of the benign night, whence—mystery of mysteries—good things are born softly, from which" Hippolytus "awakes betimes for his healthful service to her".<sup>7</sup> The Artemis/Teleri figure similarly imagined ministers in a similar manner to different purposes, the differences being characteristic of their creators and the age in which they wrote.

Pater has not the temerity to actually reverse myth as Powys does but he sometimes retells it with a very different emphasis from the source. For example Pater's Hippolytus, instead of being the cruel and boastful prig of Euripides, is a loving son, gentle companion and nature worshipper. The feelings and activities of his mother, who is barely mentioned in Euripides, are described at length with deft realistic touches. It is a very personal, almost perverse, reaction to the tale told by Euripides. Phaedra in particular, a tragic figure in the play, is made base by Pater.

Sometimes Pater seems to be the direct source of incident in Powys's work. "Nearly all of us," writes Pater in *Marius* (II, 137) "have had moments . . . in which our pain has seemed a stupid outrage upon us, like some overwhelming physical violence from which we could take refuge, at best, only in some mere general sense of goodwill—somewhere in the world perhaps. And then, to one's surprise, the discovery of that good will, if it were only in a not unfriendly animal, may seem to have ex-

plained, to have actually justified to us the fact of our pain.” This reads like a blue print for the water rat episode in *Porius* when Myrddin Wyllt, bereft and doom-laden suddenly

became aware of a curious sensation upon the knuckles of one of his hands . . . And there, curled up on the back of his hand, its hind feet steadying its cold, wet, plump body, was a bright-eyed water-rat, assiduously and with absorbed and intense concentration licking his knuckle.

An incredible feeling of warmth rushed through him. Starting from the determined motion of that small tongue, it suffused itself through the whole of his body. It revived his brain. It comforted his heart. It steadied his nerves. (286)

When, if we deduce rightly, Pater’s ideas are the source of Powys’s, he seems to follow the spirit of them closely. There is a remarkable similarity between Baltazar Stork of *Rodmoor* and Sebastian van Storck of Pater’s *Imaginary Portraits*. Sebastian van Storck is intellectually fearless;<sup>8</sup> Baltazar would be “able to look contemptuously into the Gorgon face of any kind of terror”; (366) Sebastian has “composure of . . . manner”, (82) Baltazar perfect manners and “the patient courtesy of a lifetime”; (365) Sebastian has no sign of vocation, (83) Baltazar is supported by his inheritance. The girl Sebastian might have married seems “vulgar” to him (102) just as Nance in *Rodmoor* does to Baltazar with all her well-meant femininity. Baltazar proves himself to be what Sebastian could be suspected of being, “a plotter against the common-weal” (100) as represented in *Rodmoor* by the kindly figure of Nance; for he turns both Linda and Adrian against her. Sebastian is much sought after; (83) mention is made of all Baltazar’s “admiring young women”, (423) the “contours of his face were exquisitely moulded” (148) and he is described as having superlative “beauty”. (430) Like Sebastian, Baltazar could “love God but not man or woman”; like Sebastian from the depth of his unhappiness he yet gives “casual bystanders an impression of

unmitigated well-being”. (291) Sebastian sees through what links “most men” to “existence” into a formless and nameless infinite world, quite evenly grey”; (110) similarly what Baltazar was “permitted to see, by reason of some malign clarity of intellect denied to the majority of his fellows, was simply the real truth of life, its frozen chemistry and deadly purposelessness”. (366-367) Both drown in flooding water, Baltazar by intent (429) and Sebastian ostensibly saving a child. Both Pater in “Sebastian van Storck” and Powys in *Rodmoor* make extensive use of the metaphor of the uncertainty of life threatened by the encroachment of the sea. In “Sebastian van Storck” emphasis is laid on the contrast between Sebastian’s temperament, as cold as the ice on which he skates so gracefully, and the fine rich surroundings of his family’s life. (98) In *Rodmoor* Nance endeavours to go with Adrian to “an old house by the river-side about a mile east of the town which had been, some hundred years before, the abode of one of the famous East Anglian painters of the celebrated Norwich school—a painter whose humorous aplomb and rich earth-steeped colouring rivalled some of the most notable of the artists of Amsterdam and The Hague”. (302-303) But it is too far for them. Having read “Sebastian van Storck” the implication of this is much clearer; “for,” writes Pater of the Dutch *genre* painters, “Themselves illustrating, as every student of their history knows, the good fellowship of family life, it was the ideal of that life that these artists depicted. . . . Of the earth earthy—genuine red earth of the Old Adam”. (87-88) It is a life which neither Adrian nor Baltazar will ever know.

Many minor derivations also illustrate how suggestive Pater’s work was to Powys. In *Porius*, for example, it is likely that Pater’s description of Antoninus Pius<sup>9</sup> whose “sincere old Roman piety had urged his fortunately constituted nature to no mistakes, no offences against humanity”, and whose “entire freedom from guile” provided the basis for the character of

Porius Manlius. Again what Pater writes of Christianity as being "no alien from that old mother earth", and of being "a power of sweetness and patience" is embodied par excellence in the character of Drom.

Incidents as well as characters in Powys's novels seem to derive from Pater's work. In *Owen Glendower* when the boy prince, Henry of Monmouth comes to Dinas Brân there seems to echo, faintly and intermixed with other characters and incidents, the arrival of the young King Charles in *Gaston de Latour* at the Chateau of Deux-manoirs. Charles is "very pale",<sup>10</sup> Henry has a "long white face". In both portraits their simple humanity is glimpsed beneath the mechanical play-acting of the political pawn. Powys fills with a wealth of imaginative detail the barer but richly suggestive outlines of Pater's work. Again for example it is at the Chateau of Deux-manoirs that Gabriella de Latour, having watched for ten years for the unlikely return of her beloved husband from the wars, dies of joy when he finally arrives; (20) just as Erddud in *Porius* dies of joy when her beloved Brochvael holds her in his arms. (469ff) Erddud's passion, like Gabriella's, seems to leave a palpable atmosphere in the place where it happens. It is possible that the incident in *Owen Glendower* where Tegolin is persuaded to wear armour to ride with Owen at the head of his troops is derived from Pater's unpublished story, "Gertrude of Himmelstadt" which Powys could have read about in T. Wright's *Life of Walter Pater*.<sup>11</sup> Gertrude in her husband's absence leads his men to victory wearing the suit of silver armour he left with her. Owen's unwillingness to battle is reminiscent of Marcus Aurelius's as portrayed by Pater, and Marcus Aurelius employs Marius, just as Owen Glendower does Rhisiart, largely because of his beautiful penmanship.

Powys not only borrowed ideas and incidents from Pater but actual phrases. For example, the title of his second book of essays, *Suspended Judgments* is the title of the fifth chapter of Pater's unfinished novel *Gaston de Latour*, which begins "The

diversity, the undulancy of human nature!", a perfect description of the import of Powys's novels. Pater's chapter describes Gaston's relationship with Montaigne, with many quotations from the essays, and descriptions of Montaigne's personality, imagined and deduced, partly from the essays and partly from his own self-awareness. Brilliant in its unique way, *Gaston de Latour* is hardly a novel; for Gaston is taken over in turn by Ronsard, by Montaigne and by Bruno. And this points to the chief difference between Pater and Powys. Pater, subservient to his subject, is a supreme essayist; Powys, although he claims his novels are by way of escape from himself, remains "lord of hosts" of selves he has willy-nilly created, and beautifully unfolds each individual vis à vis a number of others.

In *Marius* and *Gaston*, Pater's only two available novels, the hero is never in communication with more than one other character at a time and this invariably as observer or admirer. Pater's chapter is called "Suspended Judgment" because Gaston has come to feel that, under Montaigne's spell, he has lost touch with what might really be going on, in Montaigne's mind, his own and the world beyond. Powys suspends judgment because he has no sympathy with the act of judging and no confidence in any possible verdict; his criticism like Pater's is all empathy.

Like so many critics, both Pater and Powys seem to write of themselves when they write of others. For example, Powys calls the temperament and atmosphere of Montaigne that of "aesthetic egoism" and "philosophical scepticism"<sup>12</sup>—terms equally applicable to himself. One is far from sure that Powys's essay on Montaigne in *Suspended Judgments* does not owe more to Pater's chapters on him in *Gaston de Latour* than to an original reading of the essays. However he wanders in much wider circles around his subject than Pater does, becoming more himself as he goes; the essay on Montaigne becomes a series of lyrical descriptions of the delights of the country which he imagines Montaigne must have

relished. Pater, on the other hand, leaves Montaigne when he feels he has got as near to him as is possible. Powys's method is redolent of a glorious self-confidence compared with Pater's careful, more scholarly approach.

Pater, like Powys, is a master of the elaborately wrought scene with an inconclusive ending. When Marius visits Cecilia's house he is much impressed by the Christian service which seems “to define what he must require of the powers, whatsoever they might be, that had brought him into the world at all, to make him not unhappy in it”. (II, 105) So we might expect that the next chapter would describe Marius's conversion; but not at all; walking with Lucian the two chance to meet, just as Powys characters so often *chance* to meet each other, the philosopher student Hermolinus; a lengthy discussion ensues on logic and philosophy between Lucian and Hermolinus while Marius, like many a Powys hero, remains a silent on-looker. When his friends leave him, Marius's mood is a complete contrast to their logical philosophy; he is chiefly aware of human loneli-

ness and need for love. Rather than offer any solution to this, the following chapter describes suffering and our failure to feel for and alleviate that of others; moreover “no charity of ours can get at a certain natural unkindness which I find in things themselves”. (II, 133) Pater's novels like Powys's shift from one view of the human predicament to another, and there is little or no story-line, nor any need for one. But there is a very definite plot in the balancing of ideas, view-points and experiences of the characters; and there is development within their psyches. All Pater's heroes die tragically young; psychologically they are able to go no further. Powys's early heroes die young but his later ones all live on to achieve some sort of satisfactory *modus vivendi*.

And that is what happened in their own lives. Pater was struck down apparently in the full flush of his creativity, aged only fifty-five whereas Powys lived on to happy old age and in his work often elaborated with wonderful vitality many of Pater's insights so that we modern Philistines are more able to approach and appreciate that “super-subtle Interpreter”.<sup>13</sup>

## NOTES

Page references within the text are to the following editions of works by J. C. Powys.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Powys Review*, No. 18, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, London: Macmillan, 1893, p. xi.

<sup>3</sup> *The Meaning of Culture*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1930; Village Press, 1974, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) 2 vols, London: Macmillan, 1901, II, p. 20. Later references in the text are to this edition.

<sup>5</sup> *The Powys Review*, No. 18, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Levey, *The Case of Walter Pater*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1978, p. 167.

<sup>7</sup> Walter Pater, *Greek Studies*, London: Macmillan, 1899, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), London: Macmillan, 1910, p. 82. Later references in the text are to this edition.

<sup>9</sup> *Marius*, II, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup> Walter Pater, *Gaston de Latour* (1896), London: Macmillan, 1910, p. 15. Later reference in my text is to this edition.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Levey, *The Case of Walter Pater*, pp. 78, 212.

<sup>12</sup> J. C. Powys, *Suspended Judgments* (New York, 1916), London: Village Press, 1975, p. 23. See the further essay in which Powys qualifies Pater's views in *The Pleasures of Literature*, 1938.

<sup>13</sup> J. C. Powys, *Visions and Revisions*, (1915), London: Macdonald, 1955; Village Press, 1974, p. 173.

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# Penny Smith

## “A Kind of Prostitution”: John Cowper Powys’s Dependent Women

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Writing to Llewelyn in 1910 Powys complains that “everyone has got into some bloody trap or other”,<sup>1</sup> and in his early novels life is consistently caught: butterflies are pursued and pinned; flies are snarled in webs; foxes are snared; a girl is locked in the stocks . . .

The image of the trap is central to *After My Fashion* (written 1919, pub. 1980).<sup>2</sup> Richard Storm arrives in Littlegate and his presence reveals to Nelly Moreton the “trap she had to innocently, step by step, walked into”:

She felt almost afraid of making the least movement of resistance lest the thing’s remorseless teeth should close with a snap. And yet resist she must! A way of escape in some direction there *must* be. Life couldn’t intend to crush her with a stone before she had even begun to live. (50)

Nelly’s father, a heretical vicar, is about to resign his living and has persuaded her fiancé to agree that when the young couple marry he should live with them. Nelly is aware that “in these days of women’s freedom” she could probably find herself a job. “But she had no experience. She had not even done any serious ‘war work’. And how could she support both herself and her father?” (52) Looking shrewdly at the old man’s face across the table the young woman realizes that even if she said to him, “‘I don’t want to marry Robert,’ it would not alter his purpose one jot.” (56)

Nelly loves Robert but is not ‘in love’ with him; she does fall for Richard, however, and is faced with the necessity of coming to a choice—although, of course, she cannot come out and say this: “No girl could say to a man, ‘I *must* have one of you—now,

which is it to be?’” (108) Nelly’s choice extends as far as deciding between the two men in her life, but no further. She really must choose one of them, immediate marriage being the only escape from “a struggle for bare life with a helpless parent on her hands.” (110) The sheltered vicar’s daughter is forced to face the fact that “Life was certainly much more cruel to women than she had had any idea of before” (108).

Life catches men too, but not so completely. Nelly has been herded into a “fatal cul-de-sac” of economic dependence (50); and because of this her relationship with Richard is spoilt: “It made her irritable; it made her say things to hurt him; it made her *hate* him.” (108) In fact Richard is her unwitting captor before they even meet: he shuts the door of her father’s church and makes of her a “shy prisoner” (17). “*She’ll never move that bar*”, he thinks to himself when he becomes aware of her efforts to get out (18). And, of course, she never does.

Nelly has had to sell herself—although maybe not in such a blatant and potentially self-destructive way as another of Powys’s early women characters, Sasha Rurik. Sasha exists in a fragment of manuscript held in the National Library of Wales’ archives.<sup>3</sup> She and her brother, Vassily, would fit comfortably into some of the New York scenes in *After My Fashion*: however a brief allusion to “Rupert Stork’s appearance in Rodmoor” (6) suggests this work might have been written before the published *Rodmoor* (1916). Dating the manuscript is inevitably speculative; more certain is that these thirteen pages were originally part of a substantial text—Powys’s own pagination is from 85 to 98.

This remaining fragment begins with a

description of the depressing environs of Camperdown Terrace, situated on the banks of the River Loon in Mundam. Life here is not merely mundane but positively bleak: the dank river mists creep out over rotting barges and the area has become a dumping ground for debris and rubbish. In their downstairs room in one of the Terrace’s houses Sasha and Vassily are engaged in a fierce debate:

“You can say what you like, Sasha,” the young man was exclaiming, in rapid nervous tones. “You can say what you like;—the fact remains he’s simply making use of you! He’s tired of you. He want these girls;—one of them, both of them, what do I know?—and he finds it convenient to fling them down on us!”

The youth leant back at the end of the sofa, tossed his hair from his forehead, and stretching out a long white finger towards his companion’s breast, uttered these words. “Your successors, dear—your successors!” and burst into a malign chuckle.

\* \* \*

“Well? and what of it?” she said. “We asked him to help us—You got hold of him that night at the Café Royal and brought him to me. Together we played upon him. We had to. He was our last chance. He got me this silly work at this miserable theatre—He’d get you work too, if you’d let him—only you’re—you’re—well! You’re what you are, Vassily Rurik!” (7-8)

Their ‘benefactor’, Brandon, has moved two young girls into the house and Vassily warns Sasha that her lover will now be able to enjoy her and then “go upstairs”. Sasha, however, is aware that the rent the girls are paying will: “‘make the difference—We shall be able to send *them* what we have to send, without pinching now—*You’ll* be able to buy books—’” (10) They are exiles in a foreign land and have little choice: “‘What does it matter that he’s made love to me, as you call it? You know, as well as I do, what his love amounts to.’” (10)

She goes on to reassure her brother that she hasn’t really “‘given herself’” to Brandon—but this just makes matters worse:

“I can’t understand,” he cried at last, standing erect in front of her—“I can’t understand you—Do you mean to tell me—after all—you’re not in love with him? But—if so—your conduct’s monstrous, outrageous! It’s cold-blooded exploitation—nothing more nor less. It’s—it’s prostitution, Sasha!” (11-12)

Vassily’s masculine sensibilities are deeply offended; all his sister can do is sigh wearily in protest against such foolishness.

Vassily doesn’t understand. Nelly would, however; and so would Bridget Alymer, another of Powys’s unpublished heroines. Bridget is also to be found in the National Library of Wales, in four manuscript chapters (114 pages) of an untitled novel set in Sussex in 1920.<sup>4</sup> This text is unusual for Powys in that, in these four chapters at least, the central character is a woman. Before we meet Bridget, however, we are introduced to James Goring, owner and editor of “The New Dawn”, a small, radical weekly paper. James is having problems with his newspaper—the patriotic fervour of the war has left an atmosphere antipathetic to its utopianism—and he is also experiencing difficulty in summoning enough courage to propose to Bridget, his second cousin who lives with himself and his mother. His friend and confidante, Barbara Gaunt, encourages him to make his move—but points out that Bridget’s position is also problematic:

“Don’t you see, Jimmy dear,” the girl continued, “the situation is not at all an easy one for her. She is quite dependent on your mother. She’s very fond of your mother. And no doubt she’s very fond of *you*. But suppose she found it necessary to reject your offer, it wouldn’t be very comfortable for her to go on living as she is now. It would break everything up, don’t you see? It would spoil everything.”

\* \* \*

“You would have received one of the sharpest blows to your pride that a man can receive. And she would know that *you* knew that she pitied you for this! It would be a wretched atmosphere for both of you to live in.” (23, 24)

Barbara is Bridget's closest friend but even she cannot guess what Bridget's answer will be. Bridget is the most interesting of Powys's women characters until Christie in *Wolf Solent* (1929). James loves her; however he has little idea of what she is really like and is less aware than Barbara of just how unknowable and troubled his young cousin actually is. They are of completely dissimilar temperaments, and Powys neatly shows this through their different responses to nature. As the troubled James strolls home he stops to look at a row of elms that, since his childhood, he has liked to imagine being an ancient avenue, leading to some romantic dwelling. Later the same evening Bridget slips out of the house; clad in her long, black evening dress she climbs a ramshackle gate and lies down under a tree in the long grass, watching the turbulent sky overhead. Where James fantasized a romantic road that ran past him and would continue on to its own mysterious destination, Bridget feels as if she is on a journey, riding the wind like the moon and stars. James is a thoughtful, appreciative observer of the natural world; Bridget, however, is part of that world:

. . . it was left to her white face and dark troubled eyes to give to that spot and to that hour the articulate expression which they might well have craved. She became the living symbol of these things and it was as though some wistful emanation from the night and the wind and the outstretched branches of the tree took visible form and embodied itself in her—(46)

Bridget is well-aware that James is about to propose. Although she loves him she is not in love with him; but when he asks her she will accept:

It would be impossible for her to do otherwise! . . . Whatever her feelings might be she would accept him. It was an outrage to herself to do so; but a fantastic desire in the depths of her strange nature urged her to inflict just that very outrage. As the great ash-tree moaned and wailed above her and the leaves torn from it went whirling off into the darkness she seemed to draw back from her own girl's heart

and girl's body and to exult in a kind of cruel ferocity at the thought of offering up these things to the will and pleasure of the embittered mind within her, the mind that secretly longed to play with life and with fate, as a child might play with a box of toys! (50-51)

Bridget's father committed suicide before she was born and until twelve years old she was dragged round Europe in the wake of an "unwise" mother and uncaring stepfather. Orphaned at twelve she came to live with her cousins and, although James's mother, Elizabeth, has been kind, her forced dependency has created depths of bitterness and suffering. At the same time the idea of taking on the world alone fills her with blind terror: "Contact with strangers paralysed her." (105) She sees the world as cruel and gross: the only way she can escape the humiliation of her current dependency is by "sheer unscrupulousness". (102) James makes his offer and though:

Her body remained cold and passive under his hands . . . her brain worked with terrible lucidity. "If I say 'no'," she thought, "I shall go on living with Cousin Elizabeth till my hair is grey, till I grow dull and stupid and old. If I say 'yes' . . . We might go to London, to Paris, to Rome—I might see Spain before I die—He is good—He loves me—I can make him happy—It will be a new life—It will make everything different!"

And she gathered the force of her will together and issued a fierce quick sudden mandate to her body. (66)

Bridget's is a fight for survival; she might be "'an unscrupulous adventuress'" but she doesn't care—why should she? "'I don't care if I don't love Jimmy—I don't care what I make him think. I want life, freedom, liberty, and I'm going to have it whatever I do!'" (74) She realizes that other people would be shocked but feels that what she is doing, fighting for her inner life, is in tune with nature. Trees and plants are her true companions and she owes it to them: "to play her own hand recklessly, unscrupulously, in the midst of such alien people". (76) The woods will always understand:

“You are glad for me to hide my thoughts and fight in the darkness. You don’t believe in all this unselfishness and resignation. You believe in life and freedom and wonderful secret loneliness.” (76)

She is the closest Powys will come to a female version of the ‘Powys-hero’.

\* \* \*

At forty-nine James is twenty-two years older than Bridget, and uneasily conscious of the fact that she has had no chance to see anything of the world. Unease becomes jealousy with the reappearance of his younger brother, Frank. Frank has lived in Canada and served in the army, and where James is thoughtful and not physically prepossessing Frank is energetic and flirtatious and handsome. Bridget actively flirts back, her startling cynicism providing a match for his wider experience. She has an unnerving way of coming out with the brutal truth:

“. . . you’d like to upset me [she tells Frank] without the responsibility of upsetting me. You’d like me to fall hopelessly in love with you but remain good and quiet. You’d like me to be *there* when you wanted me and not *there* when you didn’t want me—You know very well that nothing would ever have induced you to marry me.” (120)

Her prospective brother-in-law’s (somewhat nervous) comeback is that she knows very well that even if he had begged she would never have accepted. To which Bridget replies: “‘Would I—wouldn’t I—a little—passionately—not at all? I don’t think you can be so certain that I wouldn’t.’” (122) The fact is that she might very well have accepted Frank, or anyone else who had asked her. What other choice has she been given? And Frank finds his recognition of her plight, and his growing concern, extremely discomfoting:

“Anyone might say I was behaving scurvily to old James, I suppose, making love to his girl. But what can he expect? In these things anything’s fair. It wasn’t very honourable in *him*—if it comes to that—snatching at a girl like that before she’d had her chance or seen any fellows of her own age. How the devil *could* she see anyone in this god-forsaken hole? But,

Good Lord! it’s not right. She’s far too good for old Truepenny. It’s—oh damn it all!—it’s a kind of prostitution—” (125-126)

A “kind of prostitution”: Nelly and Bridget attempt to buy freedom from dependency; Sasha buys her brother books. And these are not the only women in Powys’s fictions who are unhappily dependent or forced into selling themselves in one form or another. *Lacrima*, in *Wood and Stone* (1915), agrees to marry John Goring, a man she loathes, in order to buy Maurice Quincunx’s freedom. Mortimer Romer has arranged the match to satisfy his own vicarious erotic pleasure: the knowledge that she is to be trapped into a form of prostitution is tremendously exciting. In *Rodmoor* Nance and Linda Herrick are dependent on Rachel Doorm, who takes advantage of the situation to torment Linda, while in *Ducdame* (1925) Netta Page escapes her role as “the ambiguously protected ‘niece’ of Major-General Sir James Caxton”<sup>5</sup> only to become an uncomfortable dependent in Rook Ashover’s fraught household.

Mattie Smith, in *Wolf Solent*, finds herself in a similar set-up to Bridget (although when Darnley Otter proposes she is genuinely happy to accept); in the same novel Christie depends on her elderly, incestuous father—until she puts an end to his fumbblings at her bedroom door by pushing him down the stairs. Economic dependence on the demanding and passionate Miss Drew ensnares Mary Crow in *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), and Perdita Wane is similarly trapped as the paid companion to Lucinda Cobbold in *Weymouth Sands* (1934). Dud No-man literally buys Wizzie in *Maiden Castle* (1936); Tegolin, in *Owen Glendower* (1940), prostitutes herself in order to save Rhisiart’s life.

Throughout these texts women sell what they have to—as they have always had to—and a male voice articulates the reality and pain of this: the author acknowledges what is happening even if his male characters frequently do not. Writing acts as a means of disclosure, and protest, as well as an acceptance of responsibility.

NOTES

<sup>1</sup>27 June 1910, *Letters of John Cowper Powys to his Brother Llewelyn*, ed. Malcolm Elwin. London: Village Press, 1975. Vol. 1, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>*After My Fashion*, London: Picador, 1980. All references within the text are to this edition.

<sup>3</sup>“Novels”, pp. 1-13. NLW MS 21928D, Department of Manuscripts and Records, National Library of Wales. The Library’s catalogue describes this as a “Chapter apparently excluded from Rodmoor”. All

references within the text use the Library’s pagination.

<sup>4</sup>“Novels”, pp. 14-128. MS NLW 21928D, Department of Manuscripts and Records, National Library of Wales. The Library’s catalogue describes this as a “Novel set in East Sussex in 1920”. All references within the text use the Library’s pagination.

<sup>5</sup>*Ducdame*, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1925; London: Village Press, 1974, p. 20.

# THE POWYS SOCIETY

(President. Glen Cavaliero)

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# Tony Hallett

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## Ramsguard to Blacksod: The Setting of *Wolf Solent*

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“all solid entities have to dissolve, if they are to outlast their momentary appearance, into atmosphere.”

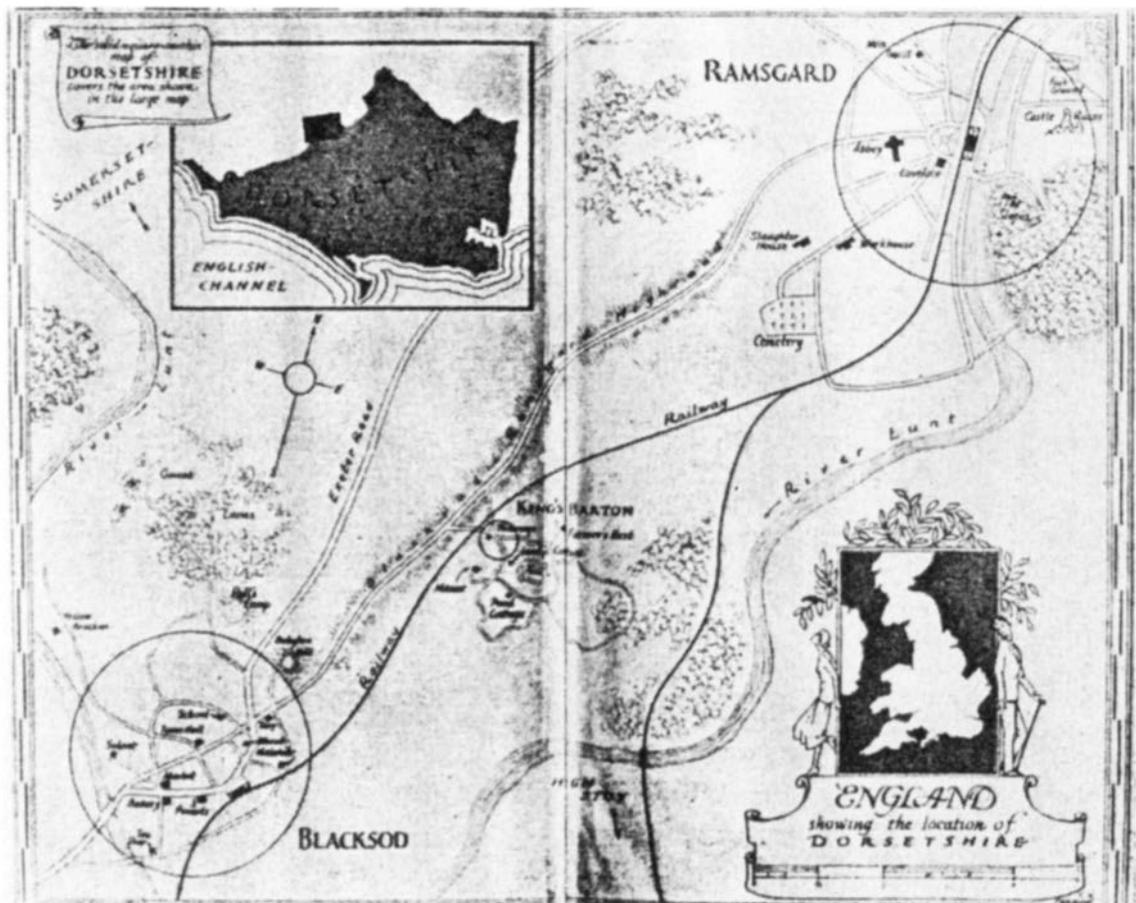
(J. C. Powys, Preface to *Wolf Solent*,  
Christmas 1960)

Beyond making clear that the principal towns of *Wolf Solent*, Ramsguard and Blacksod, are Sherborne and Yeovil respectively, Powys leaves his readers very much to their own devices. True, critics have sometimes correctly explained that King’s Barton

is Bradford Abbas, but they have by no means provided all the answers.

Even when armed with local knowledge, the geographical distortions of the novel can be extremely puzzling. Therefore, it is the intention of this article to attempt to penetrate the mysterious green mist into which the solid entities have dissolved.

Later editions of *Wolf Solent*, including the Penguin editions of 1964 and 1978, sadly do not contain the map reproduced here from the first one volume edition (1929)



The *Wolf Solent* map.

which is shown in Derek Langridge's *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement* (1966). The map, which I shall henceforth refer to as the Powys map, was presumably drawn either by Powys or under his supervision. It is at variance with the Ordnance Survey maps of the area, even those of Victorian times. At first glance the orientation is an obvious fault, as Sherborne and Yeovil lie due east and west with respect to each other. The River Yeo (Lunt) flows east and not west of Yeovil. Additionally the railway system is wrong as Powys well knew at the time of writing.<sup>1</sup>

The Powys map is itself greatly reminiscent of those for Thomas Hardy's Wessex novels which were set in a carefully mapped real landscape with fictional place names. Certainly Powys again resorted to a map when producing his next novel, *A Glastonbury Romance*.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

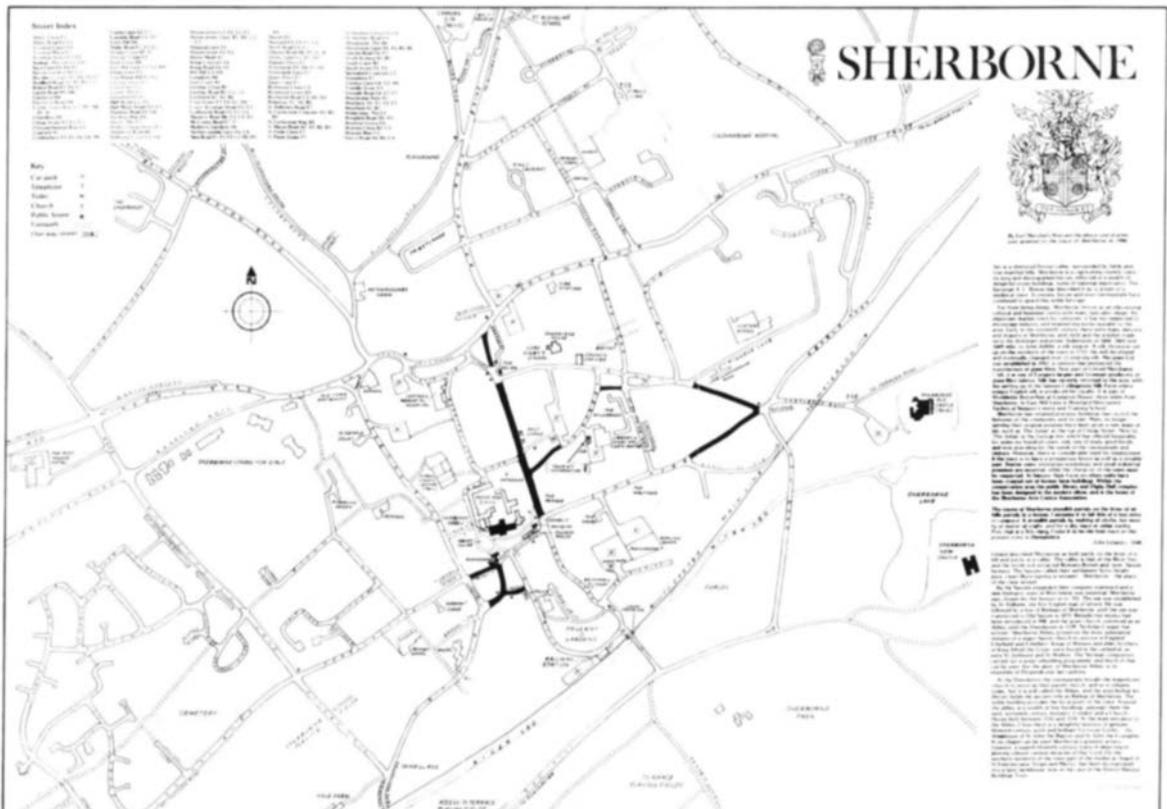
It is still possible to travel from London Waterloo to Sherborne along the same route as taken by Solent and there are still haunting eyes to be found at the great terminus by those brave enough to meet their gaze.

The modern scene at Basingstoke is now overwhelmingly dominated by the inscrutable, darkened glass Babel of IBM Computers.

Semley can easily be deduced to be Gillingham, Dorset, from the sign "For Shaftesbury". Longborne Port is Milborne Port.

By facing the direction of travel and looking to the south (left) of the line whilst approaching the town, the ruins of Sherborne Old Castle can be seen (S.M. 14).<sup>3</sup> The ground between the railway line and the Old Castle is the fairground (S.M. 15) of chapter 9, just as Powys describes and the map shows.

Sherborne castles, both Old and New, are open to the public on certain days. The ref-



Town map of Sherborne

erence Powys makes to the great Elizabethan owner whom he declines to name is to none other than Sir Walter Raleigh. Raleigh began renovating the keep of the Old Castle but abandoned the project and built himself the mansion known as the New Castle on the far side of Sherborne Lake (S.M. 13). The Old Castle was destroyed by gunpowder during the English Civil War following a sixteen day siege by Sir Thomas Fairfax. Hardy tells the story of an earlier unsuccessful siege in *Anna, Lady Baxby* in the collection, *A Group of Noble Dames*. Some while after Raleigh fell from grace, the estate passed into the hands of Sir John Digby, later created Earl of Bristol. The estate remains the property of the Digby family today.

Sherborne, Hardy's Sherton Abbas, is, like Montacute, a Conservation Area and remains substantially unchanged from when Powys knew it, despite peripheral development and Hitler's Luftwaffe.<sup>4</sup>

Emerging from the railway station (built 1860) (S.M. F2) Solent catches sight of the Lovelace Hotel across the public gardens which are opposite the ticket office. The hotel was built in the late 1860s as the Digby Hotel,<sup>5</sup> and is the large stone building to be most nearly seen to the left of the gardens on the far side of the road from them. No longer a hotel, it is now one of the Sherborne School Houses.

The Digby Hotel did indeed operate a bus service such as Powys describes, as a photograph of the Digby bus on display in one of the albums in Sherborne Museum reveals.

To the west (left) of the gardens Digby Road leads past the former hotel, the new police station, built on the site of its Victorian predecessor, and on to Sherborne Abbey (S.M. E3).

The public gardens were created in 1905 upon land formerly known as Half Moon Field; so the setting for *Wolf Solent* was not written entirely from boyhood memories. Properly called Pageant Gardens, their story may perhaps be of some small interest in connection with another Powys novel.

In 1905 Sherborne celebrated its twelfth

centenary with an historical pageant in the grounds of the Old Castle. Almost nine hundred people were engaged in the pageant itself which took place throughout Whit-week and it was visited by in excess of thirty thousand spectators. The event was intended to be non-profitable but the Trustees found themselves with £2000 in hand and so used the money to create the gardens for the benefit of the town.<sup>6</sup>

So successful was the occasion, apparently it was readily copied elsewhere and pageants suddenly became fashionable.

In July 1925, at a large gathering in the gardens the Pageant Master returned to unveil the following inscription:

This garden commemorates the Sherborne Pageant of 1905—Mother of all Pageants—invented and directed by Louis Napoleon Parker and joyously performed by men and women and children of Sherborne and the neighbourhood and by the masters and boys of Sherborne School to the Glory of God and in celebration of the twelve hundredth anniversary of the founding of the bishopric, town and school by St. Aldhelm A.D. 705.<sup>7</sup>

I cannot but help wonder what inscription Mr Geard might have been tempted to unveil: "The Pageant to End All Pageants"? However, I digress.

Emerging from the station, Solent turns east (right) over a small bridge and hurries up "St Aldhelm's St." to the house of Selina Gault.

Sherborne has no St Aldhelm's Street and St Aldhelm's Road is of too recent an origin. Selina Gault would appear to have had her home in Long St (S.M.F3 = G5). My conclusion for this is borne out by the description of the journey to the cemetery. Solent and Ms Gault go past the abbey, workhouse and slaughterhouse.

My first reaction was that the workhouse was the medieval Almshouse which stands in Abbey Close (S.M. E3), founded to provide for "poor, feeble and impotent" parishioners once in better circumstances. However, Sherborne was also possessed of a Union Workhouse, one of those feared institutions the very mention of which would send a

shudder of dread through the heart of the bravest of the working population. Workhouses were, to the rural labourers, the embodiment and personification of the uttermost degradation and shame. Sherborne closed its workhouse in 1929<sup>8</sup> and the building was demolished in 1939 to make way for the construction of Durrant Close (S.M. E2).

The route taken to the cemetery would appear to have been Long St, into Half Moon St at the top of South St (S.M.E3),<sup>9</sup> past The Abbey, Trendle St (S.M.E2), along Horsecastles, past Durrant Close (S.M. E2/D2) and along Lenthay Road (S.M. C2/C1) to the cemetery.

Upon their return from the cemetery the pair visit the Abbey which is now the parish church of Sherborne, although before the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII it was the abbey church, built upon the site of St Aldhelm's cathedral. The building contains the graves of both King Ethelbald and King Ethelbert, brothers of King Alfred the Great. The roof vaulting is said to be the very finest example of gothic architecture.<sup>10</sup>

After parting with Ms Gault, Solent travels with Darnley Otter to King's Barton (Bradford Abbas) along the Ramsguard to Blacksod Highroad. This is not to be confused with the A30, once the major coach road between London and Exeter which is shown on the Powys map as the Exeter Road. Rather it is the road which begins in Sherborne at Bradford Rd (S.M. B3) and skirts Bradford Abbas before curving round to join the modern dual carriageway of the A30 at Babylon Hill (O.S. 589-158).

Upon reading *Wolf Solent* for the first time, one of the most aggravating questions for me was, why Bradford Abbas? In the preface Powys states his favourite route home from Sherborne to Montacute as a boy was via the Trent Lanes, the Gwent Lanes of the novel. Why then is King's Barton not Trent (O.S. 595-185), Over Compton (O.S. 591-169), or Nether Compton (O.S. 598-174), since Powys could have easily placed it in those locations?

Firstly, Charles Francis Powys was curate in charge of Bradford Abbas at the time of his marriage and J.C.P. believed his consciousness must have experienced its first sensations here in the womb of his mother. This is the conclusion of Richard Perceval Graves in his biography *The Powys Brothers*.<sup>11</sup> Could it be that the misty or aqueous atmosphere of the novel which so fascinates Jeremy Hooker<sup>12</sup> is an attempt to convey the sensations of an embryonic consciousness within its amniotic fluid? Many important critics of Powys point to this conclusion but none of them express it quite so bluntly. Certainly this would throw an interesting light upon the final disappearance of Mr Geard with the bursting of Nature's waters. Particularly when it should be borne in mind that the Geards of Montacute were founding fathers of the Baptist church there.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, and my own favourite belief is that King's Barton is Montacute transposed into Dorset. Just as Burnham Wood came to Dunsinane, so Clifton Maybank went to Montacute, and Powys marched it back again.<sup>14</sup>

Once the home of the powerful Horsey family, Clifton Maybank House (O.S. 577-139) was with the exception of one wing largely taken down to pay off debts in 1786. The ornamental stoneworks and porch were purchased by Edward Phelps of Montacute who used them in the construction of the new west front of Montacute House.<sup>15</sup>

Sir John Horsey (died 1564) has an impressive monument within Sherborne Abbey. He had married Edith, daughter of Richard Phelps of Montacute House. At the time of his death he held the manors of Clifton, Melcombe Horsey near Mappowder, and Wyke (O.S. 602-145) which was formerly the grange or country home of the Abbot of Sherborne.<sup>16</sup>

Powys mentions Lady Wyke of Abbotsbury within the novel<sup>17</sup> when referring to Solent's researches for Urquhart's book. Thomas Hardy's short story "Master John Horsleigh" from the collection *A Changed Man* is worth reading in this connection,



Montacute House.

although I confess I have been unable to confirm the veracity of the tale. Hardy's scandalous story describes Clifton Maybank House and mentions the outline of the bowling green which can be seen from the train from Casterbridge (Dorchester) to Ivel (Yeovil).

In this present day, a "Private, No Trespassing" sign is visible at the end of the short drive of Clifton Maybank.

The public house in Bradford Abbas is the Rose and Crown which may or may not be the Farmer's Rest of the novel. The Powys map is so inaccurate I could not identify Lenty and Pond cottages from their descriptions in the text alone. Perhaps yet unpublished Powys letters may shed some light upon the subject but I am unable to go further from my own resources.

That, as far as King's Barton is concerned, leaves what for me was the most tantalizing puzzle of all, Lenty Pond. Certainly Bradford Abbas is not graced with such a delightful feature, but Montacute is.

Barely discernable on the Ordnance Survey map (O.S. 497-168) is the medieval fishpond of Montacute Priory in the field behind the church. This would undoubtedly appear like a small lake when seen through the eyes of a child; or an adult who deliberately cultivated a child's imagination. However, I am not convinced.

The most likely candidate is Pitt Pond (O.S. 495-157). This is the Auber Lake of *Wood and Stone*, accurately located in that novel and doubtless named after "the dark tarn of Auber" from Edgar Allan Poe's *Ullalume*. The pond was used for skating and boating by the Phelps family. Llewelyn Powys's essay "Pitt Pond" in his *Somerset Essays* excellently describes how the atmosphere of the place could appear both benign and sinister with the changing of the seasons. The cottage and boathouse once there have disappeared but the pond has been refilled in recent years and is not as derelict as Llewelyn describes.

As can be seen from the map, Pitt Pond

lies in a steep valley away from the roads and it is very easy to become lost and exhausted when seeking it, as I discovered.

After passing the night in King's Barton, Solent walks into Blacksod upon Urquhart's errands to Torp and Malakite.

In stark contrast to Sherborne, Yeovil has undergone extensive development and re-development throughout the last century and the last twenty five years in particular. As Glen Cavaliero rightly observes,<sup>18</sup> the two principal towns very accurately represent past and present.

Yeovil is locally famous for its traffic problems. Often the skies are filled with aircraft. This is the home of Westland Helicopters, situated on the western edge of town closest to Montacute. Aircraft have been made here since 1915.<sup>19</sup> I cannot help but wonder why Powys makes no mention of aircraft manufacture when describing the industries of the town.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps it has something to do with the devilish Philip Crow owning an aeroplane.

Solent would have descended Babylon Hill and crossed the Yeo (Lunt) at Yeovil Bridge which is the boundary between Dorset and Somerset. From there he would have passed Chudleigh's Mill (O.S. 571-162) (opposite the Pittard factory) which is the Willum's Mill of Mr Manley. At the risk of incriminating myself I can personally attest that Lob Torp is not the only small boy to fish for the big chubb in the millpond whilst keeping a wary eye out for an enraged miller much given to the use of language not entirely suitable for a child's ears.

The Powys map of Blacksod bears no more than a passing resemblance to Yeovil town plans either past or present<sup>21</sup> and poses rather more questions than it answers as indeed does the text.

The villas which Solent observes when entering the town<sup>22</sup> are those which begin at the junction of Lyde Rd with Sherborne Rd (Y.M. E2). Penn Mill Railway Station should not be confused with the Blacksod station. Yeovil used to be possessed of two railway stations, three if Hendford Halt were to be included. Only Penn Mill remains

today. Yeovil Town Station was sited in the car park at the foot of Summer House Hill in the appropriately named Old Station Rd (Y.M. E3) and it is from here that Malakite would have travelled to Weymouth.

Yeovil has never had a Chequers St,<sup>23</sup> and the whereabouts of the Torp premises is beyond my comprehension. Monmouth Rd is not "Monmouth St". However, The Three Peewits is without doubt The Three Choughs, standing at the corner of South St and Hendford (Y.M. D3); it also receives mention in *Wood and Stone*.

Powys visited Montacute in the summer of 1926<sup>24</sup> by motoring there with his brother Llewelyn and Alyse Gregory. He recounts in his letter to Phyllis Playter of 3 June 1926, how he passed by Wolf Solent's home when passing out of Yeovil and also mentions buying a book in the Malakite shop.<sup>25</sup>

After much questioning of elderly natives, the only conclusion I have been able to draw for the location of the bookshop is that of the former premises of Whitby & Son, 8 Princes St, Yeovil.<sup>26</sup> This business closed in the mid-1960s and was dingily lined with books as I can just recall from my boyhood. I freely acknowledge it was not in sight of Babylon Hill, nor did it have a side alley.

The Solent home address is given as 37 Preston Lane. Yeovil has no Preston Lane, but it does have Preston Rd (Y.M. C2/B2/B3/A3), until recently the principal route to Montacute. Powys must have travelled this road many, many times as he doubtless did upon his visit in 1926. During the 1930s this area of the town experienced much development and I suspect Solent's "lath-and-plaster workman's villa"<sup>27</sup> was swept away.

To return once again to Yeovil Bridge (Y.M. F3) and standing with Yeovil and Somerset behind you there rises Babylon Hill. A battle was fought here during the English Civil War between the Marquis of Hertford for the king and the Earl of Bedford for Cromwell. Today, the scarring which can be observed of the grass on the hillside is caused by viciously snarling motorcycles which sometimes contest for

victory in races, the land being leased for that purpose.

A little beyond Yeovil Bridge lies Compton Rd, the entrance to the Gwent Lanes.

There is no great fortress-like earthwork surrounded by defensive circumvallations or rings to be seen from Babylon Hill such as Powys describes, as his map shows. The nearest similar feature is Trent Barrow (O.S. 987-608). Or most obviously Cadbury Camp where King Arthur's Camelot is reputed to have been.

However, magical earthwork there is. Scrutiny of the Ordnance Survey map will not appreciably reveal it (O.S. 577-155), but it is shown on the Yeovil Street Plan currently available, as Bradford Hollow (Y.M. G3/G3). A great bare-earth trench running down a natural fold in the curving hillside. My father tells me it was formed by a stream which once ran here. Not a mile from Bradford Abbas, it is midway between Sherborne and Montacute.

As if between the knees of the Earth Mother straddling past and present. Clothed in a mantle of green through which pierce shafts of brilliant sunlight. A golden place within the earth of the hillside from which the all too present Blacksod can be seen from under the protection of the shimmery leaves. This is Poll's Camp.

It is here that Powys is at his best. Here and in the golden buttercup fields below. Here Wolf and Gerda came and the black-

bird's song is sung. Here is the heart of the landscape that was Powys's home and to which he longed to return. This, is the very centre of Powys's creation.

Today the land to the south of the Yeo at Yeovil is designated as Green Belt but is under continual threat of development. Soon I fear it will disappear under pressure from the new invaders of Wessex—the turbocharged yuppies who make walking the lanes so dangerous.

I was saddened recently to read in a newspaper report that avaricious property developers have taken to using helicopters to seek out virgin land to ravish. Soon I fear the only birdsong to be heard will be the cackle of black CROWS.



Buttercup field by River Yeo.

#### NOTES

Women and children must not explore the river and countryside alone. Unless shown on the Ordnance Survey Map as a public right of way, no right of public access is to be assumed to any of the places mentioned.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to Llewelyn*, Vol. 1, 1975, 19 August 1926.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Rands, "Aspects of the Topography of *A Glastonbury Romance*", *The Powys Review*, No. 20, 1987, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> For ease of reference, map grid references have been incorporated throughout the text. Explanation: S.M. *Town Map of Sherborne*, Tourist Information Centre, Hound St, Sherborne, Dorset. (35p.)

O.S. *Ordnance Survey, Pathfinder 1279 (ST 41/51), Yeovil and Merriott*, ISBN 0-319-21279-3. *Ordnance Survey, Pathfinder 1280 (ST 61/71), Sherborne and Sturminster Newton*, ISBN 0-319-21280-7.

Grid references conform to the National Grid System.

Y.M. *Yeovil Street plan with index*, G. I. Barnet & Son Ltd., Ripple Road, Barking, Essex.

All are currently available.

<sup>4</sup> G. Pitman, *Sherborne Observed*, Sherborne: the Abbey Bookshop, 1983, pp. 40-46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-96.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95. See Llewelyn Powys, *Somerset Essays*, 1937, "St Ealdhelm".

<sup>8</sup> Photograph, Sherborne Museum, Church Lane.

<sup>9</sup> Sherborne Museum staff believe a slaughterhouse was once just off South St.

<sup>10</sup> *Sherborne Observed*, pp. 9-19.

<sup>11</sup> London: Routledge, 1983, p. 190. Belinda Humfrey tells me that this is the actual explanation, given in an unpublished letter from Powys to Phyllis Playter.

<sup>12</sup> J. Hooker, *John Cowper Powys*, Cardiff: U.W.P., 1973, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> R. W. Dunning, ed. *The Victorian History of the Counties of England, Somerset*, Vol. 3, London: O.U.P., 1974, pp. 222-223.

<sup>14</sup> Of those critics I have read, K. Hopkins, *The Powys Brothers*, 1967, and 1977, p. 36, is by far the most perceptive here.

<sup>15</sup> *Montacute House, Somerset*, the National Trust, 1988, pp. 38-41.

<sup>16</sup> John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, London: Westminster, 1870.

<sup>17</sup> *Wolf Solent*, London: Macdonald, 1961, p. 265; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978, p. 278.

<sup>18</sup> *John Cowper Powys: Novelist*, Oxford University Press, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Public Relations Department, Westland Helicopters.

<sup>20</sup> *Wolf Solent*, p. 56; p. 68.

<sup>21</sup> Leslie Brooke, *Yesterday's Yeovil and its Street Names*, Castle Cary: Fox Publications, 1979.

<sup>22</sup> *Wolf Solent*, pp. 56-7; p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57; p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> Richard Perceval Graves, *The Brothers Powys*, p. 197.

<sup>25</sup> Information given to me by Belinda Humfrey who is editing J. C. Powys's letters to Phyllis Playter.

<sup>26</sup> *Yesterday's Yeovil and its Traders*, Castle Cary: Fox Publications 1979.

<sup>27</sup> *Wolf Solent*, p. 213; p. 226.

I wish to thank: the staff, Sherborne Museum, the staff, Yeovil Public Library and the editor, *The Powys Review* for their kind help and encouragement.

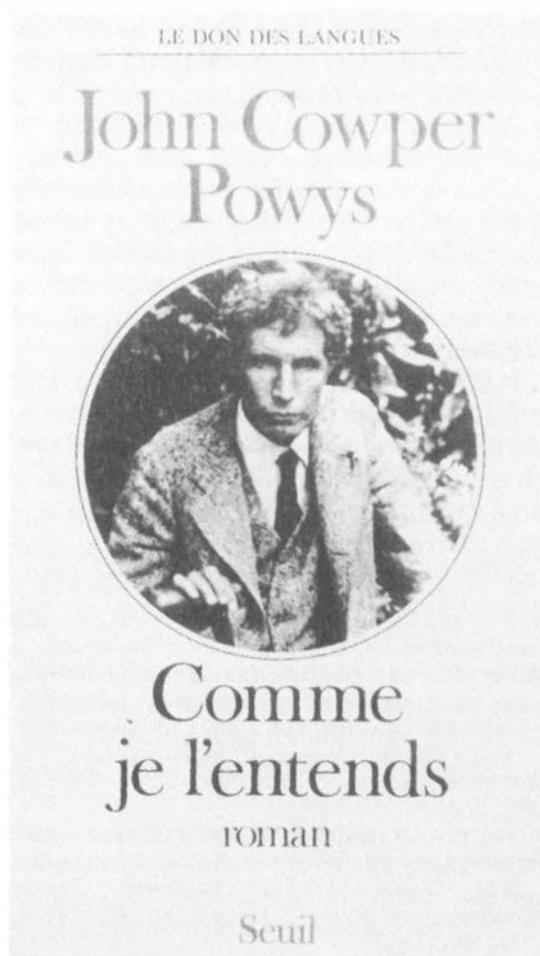


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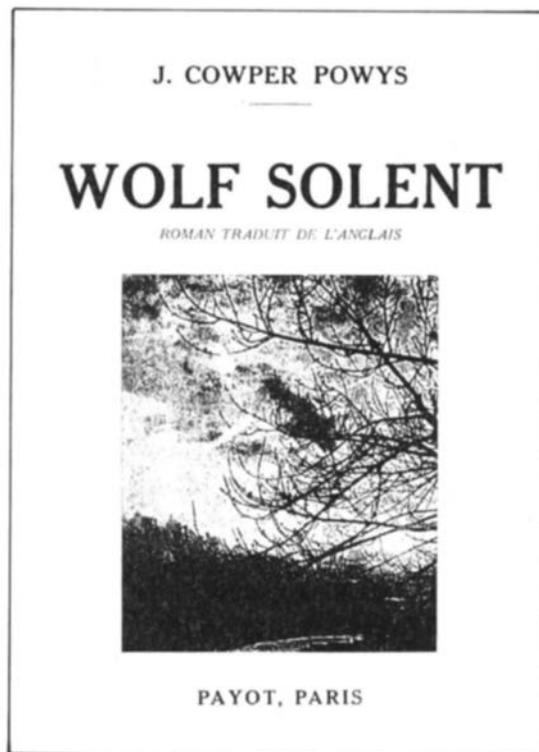
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# Jacqueline Peltier

## John Cowper Powys en français dans le texte

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Although I am not a really passionate collector of first editions, I am nevertheless proud to own the very first book which came to herald the name of John Cowper Powys in France and in French, *Wolf Solent*, published in June 1931 by Payot, Paris. The thick volume is unfortunately printed on poor paper, but its cover is adorned with a black-and-white photo, a cloudy sky against which a few bare boughs announce the coming Spring. The translation by Serge Kaznakoff is preceded by a one-page foreword presenting the author, which ends with these words: "All critics were agreed to recognize that *Wolf Solent* marked a great date in the history of English literature".<sup>1</sup> There follow two pages of laudatory comments from American newspapers and tributes by Will Durant, Dreiser, Edward Garnett, Lee Masters, all these in English except for two . . . in German! The back cover reproduces long extracts of reviews from French writers in newspapers, plus one short sentence by Dreiser and another from the *New York Times*. Apart from being precious for its own sake as the first Powys book in French, coming out only two years after it had been published in England and America, it is important because it attracted the attention and praise of two eminent and influential French writers, Gabriel Marcel and Jean Wahl. Philosophers both, exact contemporaries and born some twenty years before Sartre, they were close to Existentialism but with differences. Marcel, as a Christian, was deeply concerned with transcendentalism and the mystery of Being. Wahl, also a poet and historian of ideas, was attentive to subjectivity and adverse to any dogmatic systems. They both responded to *Wolf Solent* with enthusiasm, struck by the



lyricism of the work. Wahl was to show continued interest in Powys: in 1939 he wrote a long study of *In Defence of Sensuality*<sup>2</sup> and some twenty years later gave a very pertinent and inspired preface to *Les Sables de la Mer (Jobber Skald)* in which he stresses two Powysian themes, the "elemental opacity" and the "human/non-human multiverse". We must add to these names that of Bachelard (1884-1962), the post-office clerk who became that brilliant mathematician and philosopher of the elements. He also read and admired *Wolf Solent*, which he mentions in *L'Eau et les Rêves*.<sup>3</sup>

From this nucleus the interest in John

Cowper Powys emerged with a slow but powerful movement, enhanced by the dedication and talent of a remarkable woman, Marie Canavaglia, who translated three of his important books: *Les Sables de la Mer* (1958) was followed by *Autobiographie* (1965) and *Camp Retranché (Maiden Castle)* two years later. She was unanimously praised for the excellence of her work and John Cowper, whom she went to see in 1958, hailed her as his “inspired translator” on the copy he gave her of his *Letters to Louis Wilkinson*. Modestly she described herself as his “servant”, “la servante de son oeuvre”.<sup>4</sup>

The next important peak came in 1973 with the (yet unrivalled) apparition of *Granit*, five-hundred pages of which are entirely devoted to Powys. It forms the basis of a renewed interest in his books and is probably the catalyst of the translations to come. The main architects of this remarkable edifice are Diane de Margerie (formerly Fernandez), François-Xavier Jaujard and Michel Gresset, all three confirmed Powysians and translators, apart from being writer, publisher or professor. The two first named were to translate together *Ducdame* which was given the rather Powysian title of *Givre et Sang* (1973) to which Diane de Margerie wrote a discerning preface, as she did for *Apologie des Sens (In Defence of Sensuality)* and *Morwyn*. But we find in *Granit* many other contributors, ranging from the well-known names of Henry Miller, G. Wilson-Knight, Angus Wilson and George Steiner, to others, perhaps not so familiar to English Powysians but nevertheless important, such as writers (Marcel Brion, Ph. Jaccottet, Jean Markale, Kenneth White, Ph. Reumaux), professors (J. J. Mayone, Michel Gresset) and critics (Dominique Aury, Robert André). Many aspects of J.C.P. were thus brought to light through the eight sections, which gave the reader extracts from the most important novels, from the essays, some letters (to Philippa Powys, to Huw Menai, to Louis Wilkinson), as well as *The Ridge*, a poem given in the original with the translation of

F.X. Jaujard. Fifteen years later one can still turn to *Granit* as an indispensable work of reference, as well as food for thought.

So that from now on we behold the emergence of a non-negligible part of the “iceberg” with, every two or three years, the publication of a novel or of some of the essays, according to the mysterious choices of editorial staff. In 1975-76 Gallimard published *Les Enchantements de Glastonbury*, in four volumes unfortunately, which was, I think, an error and detrimental to sales: one can still come across the poor fourth volume on the shelves, in Paris and elsewhere. The translation was carried out by Jean Queval, a writer of note himself, a keen connoisseur of English literature and a friend of Raymond Queneau. A fourteen-pages introduction, which is in itself a study on a small scale, shows that the translator was much impressed, so much so that he took the trouble to investigate his subject closely and started by reading Wilson-Knight’s *The Saturnian Quest*, Glen Cavaliero and John A. Brebner, mentioning with gratitude Derek Landgridge’s invaluable bibliography as well as *Welsh Ambassadors*. Queval whose own work rather shows concision, in a typical Norman love for economical dryness, has clearly been fascinated, awe-struck by the immense and generous world described by John Cowper and he defined the novel as “this impossible work, misplaced in time as it may be, one of the most striking of our time and one of the really great”.<sup>5</sup>

The policy followed by publishers is difficult to understand, at least by non-initiates! One cannot but wonder at the extraordinary fantasy which seems to predominate. Gallimard, for instance, still a most important name in the French publishing landscape (Proust, Yourcenar, Giono, among others, are glorious assets) has apparently abandoned Powys but they have four of his major works in their catalogue and republished *Autobiographie* recently. Another important firm, Flammarion, singled out *La Tête qui Parle (The Brazen Head)* as their first Powys novel, which is

rather a curious choice. And one cannot but admire small publishing companies, such as Minerve, who gave us *Tout ou Rien (All or Nothing)* with, on the cover, a beautiful detail of a landscape by C. D. Friedrich. On the other hand, as the French writer, M. E. Nabe remarked, this diversity may be seen as a reflection of John Cowper's polymorphism and shows how so many different personalities find in his work nourishment agreeing with their own requirements, perceptions, pursuits.

The picture would be most incomplete if I did not draw attention to other publishers in other French-speaking countries. In Switzerland, the firm l'Age d'Homme, Lausanne, has so far published two essays, *Le Sens de la Culture* (1981) and *L'Art du Bonheur* (1984) and retains the rights for *Owen Glendower* and *The Pleasures of Literature*, the translation of which would certainly create a major literary event, each in its own right: the French-reading public has shown fascination for History these last ten, twenty years, their own but also that of other countries and cultures, so why not for the golden and misty figure of a prince of Wales? And would not there be pleasure indeed in re-discovering Rabelais, Montaigne, Proust, vigorously dusted, propped up and brought to the fore by one of their keenest critics, friends, and "fans" from the other side of the Channel, and mixing in the best of companies, with Dante, Goethe and Dickens, in true European spirit?

In Belgium we are pleased to hail two active and diligent Powysian friends. Catherine Lieutenant who has named her publishing firm "La Thalamège" after Pantagruel's ship in Rabelais's Fourth Book, devoted her work to Powys's short stories, such as *Spectres Réels (Real Wraiths)* or Oscar Wilde's essay on Socialism, preceded by the "Suspended Judgment" on Wilde. She is presently sailing on the high seas of the *Rabelais* translation. Whereas Benjamin Stassen was the "maître d'oeuvre" for *Plein Chant*, a thick volume of essays on J.C.P. by many Powysians,

English and non-English, international in spirit and wide in its reverberation, interspersed with extracts from John Cowper's letters, essays and poems, in Stassen's translation. The book is most attractive, with many interesting photos and drawings. This constitutes the most up-to-date of all the works on J.C.P. in French and contains wide-ranging and provocative critical approaches. With Belinda Humfrey, Elmar Schenkel and Sven-Erik Täckmark, we measure all the steps taken, the progress made . . . and the territories still to conquer in order to gain for Powys a wider audience still. Stassen was also active in two other publications at about the same time, *Filigrane* with his translation of *An Englishman Up-state* and of Elmar Schenkel's essay on Powys, and *Locus* where he translated a Scandinavian writer, af Geijerstam, meditating on Powys and Ekelund.

Twelve years ago, Professor Gresset at the close of his own analysis of the place of John Cowper Powys in France felt that,

JCP is no longer a writer for the very happy and very few. Or rather, the circle has now widened in such a way that it can safely be said that the quality of his French audience has changed with its quantity.<sup>6</sup>

Looking back at the list of books published since that date, and also taking into consideration the many reviews which appeared in major newspapers and literary reviews, one cannot but share that confidence. John Cowper Powys is no longer a shadow among his peers.

<sup>1</sup>"Tous les critiques ont été d'accord pour reconnaître que *Wolf Solent* marquait une grande date dans l'histoire des lettres anglaises".

<sup>2</sup>*Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, avril 1939. Republished in *Poesie Pensée Perception*, Calmann-Lévy, 1948.

<sup>3</sup>José Corti, Paris, 1942.

<sup>4</sup>*Granit*, p. 42.

<sup>5</sup>"Cette oeuvre impossible, si à contretemps qu'elle soit, l'une des plus étonnantes de notre temps et l'une des vraiment grandes."

<sup>6</sup>*The Powys Newsletter*, Five, 1977-78, Colgate University Press.

**French translations of the Works of John Cowper Powys and T. F. Powys since 1967:\* a list compiled by Jacqueline Peltier**

**JOHN COWER POWYS**

- 1972 *Les Sables de la Mer (Jobber Skald)*,  
Preface by Jean Wahl; tr. Marie Canavaggia (Gallimard, 1958), Paperback, Livre de Poche.
- 1972 *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, Mai, No. 233,  
"Les Plaisirs de la littérature", tr. Dominique Aury.  
"Le Greco" tr. F. X. Jaujard (from *Visions and Revisions*).  
"Adieu à l'Amérique", tr. Michel Gresset (from *Scribner's Magazine*).  
(This periodical includes two articles:  
"John Cowper Powys" by Claude Faraggi;  
"Powys et l'eau de l'inconscient maternel" by Diane Fernandez.)
- 1973 *Granit 1/2, Automne/Hiver*,  
Diane de Margerie, F. X. Jaujard & Michel Gresset, eds.  
Poems from *Wolf's Bane, Mandragora, Samphire*, and "The Ridge" (tr. F. X. Jaujard).  
Extracts from *A Glastonbury Romance, Owen Glendower, Porius, The Brazen Head, Homer and the Aether*, and others.  
Some letters (to Llewelyn, Philippa, Huw Menai and Louis Wilkinson).  
(Many studies and essays by English writers (translated) and French writers, critics and university professors.  
At the end of *Granit*, there is a detailed bibliography of JCP's works published in English and French up to 1973, a list of articles published in both languages, a list of books and studies on JCP, an accurate biography, six photographs, and two facsimiles of his letters.)
- 1973 *Givre et Sang (Ducdame)*,  
tr. D. de Margerie & F. X. Jaujard, Seuil.  
Paperback, Seuil "Points", 1982.
- 1975 *Apologie des Sens (In Defence of Sensuality)*,  
Preface by D. de Margerie; tr. M. Tran Van Khai, Pauvert.  
Paperback, Livre de Poche, 1977.
- 1975- *Les Enchantments de Glastonbury* (4 vols.),  
1976 Preface & tr. by Jean Queval, Gallimard.
- 1976 *La Fosse aux Chiens (The Inmates)*,  
tr. D. Mauroc, Seuil.  
Paperback, Seuil "Points", 1982.
- 1978 *Morwyn*,  
Preface by D. de Margerie; tr. Claire Malroux, H. Veyrier.
- 1981 *Le Sens de la Culture (The Meaning of Culture)*,  
tr. M. O. Fortier-Masek, L'Age d'Homme.
- 1984 *L'Art du Bonheur (The Art of Happiness)*,  
tr. M. O. Fortier-Masek, L'Age d'Homme.

\*For earlier lists on JCP see D. Langridge, *John Cowper Powys: a record of achievement* (London: Library Association, 1966) and additions to this in B. Humfrey, ed., *Essays on John Cowper Powys* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972). Also see *Granit 1/2*, 1973.

- 1984 *Une Philosophie de la Solitude*,  
Preface by T. de la Croix; tr. M. Walberg, La Difference.
- 1986 *Le Hibou, Le Canard et Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!*,  
tr. C. Lieutenant, La Thalamège.
- 1986 *Spectres réels (Real Wraiths)*,  
tr. C. Lieutenant, La Thalamège.
- 1986 *Jugement Suspendu* sur Oscar Wilde,  
(with *L'Ame de L'Homme sous le Socialisme* by Oscar Wilde),  
Preface & tr. by C. Lieutenant, La Thalamege.
- 1987 *Autobiographie*,  
tr. M. Canavaggia (Gallimard, 1965), Gallimard.
- 1987 *La Tête qui Parle (The Brazen Head)*,  
tr. B. Génies, Flammarion.
- 1988 *Tout ou Rien (All or Nothing)*,  
tr. F. X. Jaujard & G. Villeneuve, Minerve.
- 1988 *Plein Chant* 42-43,  
Benjamin Stassen, ed.  
"John Cowper Powys: Extraits du Journal (1930)", "D. H. Lawrence", "La Magie du  
Détachement", "Le Philosophe Kwang", "Le Vaisseau" ("The Ship"), Cinq lettres à Henry  
Miller,  
tr. B. Stassen  
(This volume includes twenty articles on JCP both new and translated from *The Powys  
Review*\* by Benjamin Stassen, Jean Pierre Otte, Cécile Miguel, Andre Miguel, Marc Edouard  
Nabe, Belinda Humfrey, Elmar Schenkel, Sven Eric Tackmark, Charles Lock, Ben Jones,  
Glen Cavaliero,\* T. J. Diffey,\* Paul Roberts, Penny Smith,\* Michael Ballin, Diane de  
Margerie, A. Thomas Southwick, Peter Easingwood, Richard Maxwell, Peter G.  
Christensen.)
- 1988 *Filigrane*, "Questions de Littérature" No. 2.  
Gilles Farcet & Marc de Smedt, eds., Albin Michel.  
"Un Anglais dans l'arrière-pays américain" ("An Englishman Up-state"),  
tr. B. Stassen.  
(This Review includes two articles on JCP:  
"John Cowper Powys ou l'imagination incandescente" by Elmar Schenkel, adapted from  
German by M. Drouet-Stassen & B. Stassen;  
"J. C. Powys et l'Amérique: un paysage intérieur" by B. Stassen.  
Other articles concern Lawrence Durrell and Jacques Lacarrière.)
- 1988 *Locus* No. 1, Automne-Hiver,  
(This periodical, mainly devoted to H. D. Thoreau, carries an article: "Rencontres et  
correspondances à la lecture de John Cowper Powys" by Carl-Erik af Geijerstam, tr. B.  
Stassen.)
- 1989 *Camp Retranché (Maiden Castle)*,  
tr. M. Canavaggia (Grasset, 1967), Grasset.
- 1989 *Comme Je l'Entends (After My Fashion)*,  
tr. R. Pépin, Seuil.

**T. F. POWYS**

- 1950 *Le Bon Vin de M. Weston*,  
Preface & tr. Henri Fluchère, Gallimard.  
Paperback with an introduction by Ronald Blythe, Gallimard "L'Imaginaire", 1986.
- 1961 *De Vie à Trépas (Unclay)*,  
tr. Marie Canavaggia, Gallimard.
- 1962 *Le Capitaine Patch*,  
Preface & tr. Henri Fluchère, Gallimard.
- 1983 *M. Bugby fait peur aux oiseaux (Innocent Birds)*,  
Preface & tr. Patrick Reumaux, J. C. Godefroy.
- 1984 *Bruit et Silence (Mr Tasker's Gods)*,  
tr. Patrick Reumaux, J. C. Godefroy.

**REVIEWS OF THE WORKS OF JOHN COWPER POWYS AND T. F. POWYS IN FRENCH NEWSPAPERS**

*Magazine Littéraire* (40 rue des Saint-Peres, 75007 Paris) Monthly.

- 1967 No. 4. Feb. "Camp Retranché" by R. Louit.
- 1973 No. 83. Dec. "La perversité de J. C. Powys" (*Givre et Sang, Granit: John Cowper Powys*) by R. Louit.
- 1976 No. 110. Mar. "Powys, égotisme et générosité" (*Les Enchantements de Glastonbury, Apologie des Sens*) by R. Louit.
- 1979 No. 147. Apr. "L'exploration du continent Powys" (*Morwyn*) by R. Louit.
- 1985 No. 214. Jan. "Bruit et Silence" by D. de Margerie.

*Le Monde*, weekly Review: "Le Monde des Livres" (every Friday).

- 1984 22 Juin "Cette étonnante famille Powys" by B. Génies.
- 1986 14 Feb. Mention of the recent publication of *Le Bon Vin de M. Weston* in paperback (Gallimard).
- 1987 25 Sept. "Le purgatoire de John Cowper Powys" by H. Bianciotti.
- 1989 8 Sept. (After Simenon's death) "Un admirateur inattendu: John Cowper Powys" a translation from letters to Clifford Tolchard by F. X. Jaujard.

*Liberation*, weekly books review every Thursday.

- 1987 2 Oct "Géant Papy Powys" by Gerard Meudal.

*Nouvel Observateur*, weekly.

- 1989 2-8 Mai. "Ré-édition: L'IMMEMORIAL" (on the repub. of *Camp Retranché* and *Plein Chant: John Cowper Powys*) by Michel Le Bris.

L I V R E S

GEANT

# PAPY POWYS

**Sexualité tellurique et légendes du vieux Sud (de l'Angleterre) : on retrouve dans « La tête qui parle » de John Cowper Powys, publié en français, les ingrédients chers à l'ancêtre du Dorset, mort en 1963 à 91 ans et l'un des plus grands écrivains anglais du siècle.**

Dorchester, envoyé spécial

**P**our le voyageur qui, au détour d'une petite route de la campagne anglaise, tombe à l'improviste sur le géant de Cerne Abbas, la surprise est de taille. Sur toute la hauteur d'une des verdoyantes collines du Dorset s'étale la silhouette d'un colosse, gravé à même le calcaire, il y a environ 1500 ans. Solidement campé sur ses jambes écartées, brandissant une énorme massue au-dessus de sa tête, il semble prêt à repousser les assauts d'un envahisseur invisible. Et il en est passé pas mal dans cette région proche de la mer, Saxons, Celtes, Romains... Mais plus qu'une image guerrière, le géant de Cerne, représenté en pleine érection, apparaît surtout comme « un symbole de l'impulsivité primordiale » qui en a fait loucher plus d'une depuis quinze siècles. Aujourd'hui encore des dames pudibondes protestent régulièrement contre la présence de ce géant ithyphallique dans le paysage et suggèrent qu'on replante un peu de gazon sur l'emplacement du sexe turgescent. D'autres, plus pragmatiques, viennent lui nuamment se livrer à ce que l'on ne sait quel rituel obscur qui a la réputation d'assurer une fertilité impeccable.

Ce « monstrueux géant dont le sexe érigé semblait attendre la venue, toujours différée depuis des milliers d'années, de la partenaire avec laquelle il pourrait se livrer au jeu immémorial, sans pudeur, au plein vu de la mer lointaine et du ciel éternellement jauni », n'est pas un simple personnage du roman de John Cowper Powys. *La tête qui parle*, il en est l'emblème. Cette espèce de gigantesque talousage est comme une représentation de la sexualité tellurique, caractéristique de l'œuvre de John Cowper Powys, ou les rapports charnels entre humains ne sont qu'un élément d'une espèce de « rituel cosmique », ce qu'un des personnages de *La tête qui parle* appelle « la dimension atmosphérique », composée, non seulement de l'ensemble des sensations de tout ce qui vit depuis les êtres humains les plus ingénieux et les animaux les plus intelligents, les oiseaux, les poissons, les reptiles, jusqu'aux plus stupides, les titards, les méduses, les poissons de mer, les vers de terre, les insectes, ainsi que l'incroyable quantité de végétaux qui poussent de par le monde ».

On pourrait ajouter à la liste les vieilles pierres et même l'atmosphère subtile qui subsiste encore sur les lieux où se sont déroulées d'importantes batailles. De Weymouth (le cadre des *Sables de la mer*) à Stonehenge, en passant par Glastonbury, lie à la légende arthurienne, de Maiden Castle à deux pas de Dorchester (traduit en français par *Camp romanche*) au géant de Cerne, tous les hauts-lieux du sud de l'Angleterre hantent les romans de Powys où défilent des siècles d'Histoire revus à travers le prisme d'une fantasmagorie toute personnelle.

*La tête qui parle* se passe précisément



\*\*\* John Cowper Powys près de sa maison de Blaenau Ffestiniog au Pays de Galles à la fin de sa vie : désert d'ardoises, torrent et brouillard

**Studies of J. C. Powys completed at the Institut D'Anglais Charles V De l'Universite Paris VII under the direction of Michel Gresset.**

Brigitte RIVORY, "Day-dreaming about *Weymouth Sands*. An Approach to J. C. Powys's novel through Bachelard's theory of imagination". mémoire de maîtrise, 116 pp. 1974.

Huguette AUDIBERT-LELOUP, "L'Universe fétichiste de John Cowper Powys", thèse de 3e cycle, 259 pp. 1975.

Alain MACLES, "Traduction commentée du *Joseph Conrad* de J. C. Powys, suivie de 'l'Empire de la Fiction'", mémoire de maîtrise, 123 pp. 1981.

Daniel THOMIERES, "Production du sujet dans les romans polyphoniques de J. C. Powys: *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands*", thèse de 3e cycle, 273 pp. 1981.

Guylaine VILLIEU, "J. C. Powys and T. Hardy, a Comparative Study (*Weymouth Sands & A Glastonbury Romance/Tess of the d'Urbervilles & The Return of the Native*)", 140 pp. 1983.

Jacqueline PELTIER, "The American Landscape in J. C. Powys's *Letters to his Brother Llewelyn*", mémoire de D. E. A., 33 pp. 1984.

**Editor's Note:** We should be pleased to receive information about other completed theses on the works of the Powyses in Europe and the rest of the world.

J. P. De WAEGENAERE of Belgium recently supplied the information that two novels by Sylvia Townsend Warner have been translated into French and enthusiastically reviewed.

1987 *Laura Willows (Lolly Willowes)*, Editions Picquier.

1988 *Une Lubie de Monsieur Förtune (Mr Fortune's Maggot)*,  
Preface Jacques Roubaud; tr. Denise Getsier, Editions Picquier.

*Le Monde*

1987 8 Mai "Sylvia Townsend Warner" by Hector Biancotti.

1988 8 Jul "L'infernale délicatesse de Miss Warner" by Geneviève Brisac.

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# Stephen Carroll

## A Burpham Miscellany

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On 15 July 1989, Iris Murdoch's seventieth birthday (blessings upon thee O Ancient Dame), I walked from the village of Amberley across the Sussex Downs to Burpham where John Cowper Powys owned a house for many years. I was in effect retracing the steps of J.C.P. who on 11 June 1926 walked to and from Amberley to visit Arnold Bennett, then a resident.

Four days after his visit, J.C.P. wrote to Llewelyn,

O did I tell you that I had a most pleasant time with Arnold Bennett who placed a whole bottle of whiskey at my side and let me take as much as I liked, scolding me as to the danger of drink but not hindering me. He says that you are an accomplished writer. Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham, Mr Wells, Eden Phil[l]pot[t]s are all constantly visiting him . . . I was so struck by his patience and massive goodness. His impediment of speech gives an added and touching weight to all he says. I like him very much.<sup>1</sup>

For his part, Arnold Bennett wrote in his diary for 11 June 1926,

John Cowper Powys walked over the Downs from Burpham today, and arrived before noon and stayed till after 5.30. He was delighted beyond measure when I spoke very highly of Dreiser's 'An American Tragedy'. He said Dreiser was very susceptible to praise. He said that Dreiser had sold the film rights of the novel for 50,000 dollars. Powys is a very sentimental man in many ways. He was rather in favour of the general strike, but gave in instantly to my argument that it was right to squash it; but I expect he is in favour of it again by this time. He has very fine literary taste, except when it is mislead by his few prejudices. I asked him about his days (not evenings) in provincial cities in America. He said he did nothing except walk about. He

wanted to work, i.e. write, but couldn't work in hotel bedrooms; at least had not seriously tried to. I told him I had written lots and lots in hotel bedrooms and he said that he should try. An untidy fellow, of very great charm.<sup>2</sup>

I live nearby and have walked this way many times. On this occasion, however, I had been invited to meet Simon Brett, the writer, and the present owner of J.C.P.'s Burpham House.

The walk is a fine one, passing across the South Downs Way and through some of the best scenery in the county. After a fairly steep climb you look down and see a huge landscape stretching away below you, and Arundel Castle comes into view. "You see it standing on the edge of its park, above its river, with the silvery gleam of the channel a few miles behind it, and you feel that Sussex can boast her 'melancholy seignorial woods' as well as any Chateau on the Loire".<sup>3</sup>

This is the landscape of *After My Fashion*, and Burpham, which lies halfway between Amberley and Arundel is surely the "Little-gate" of that novel.

"Bankside", or "Frith House" as it is now known, is within a stone's throw of the village church, "one of those small Sussex churches, looking as if it had been made out of the fabric of some huge barn, with the little squat erection, half-tower, half-spire, like an extinguisher upon an extinguished candle, plumped down upon its west end".<sup>4</sup>

As you would expect, a number of bodies mentioned in the *Autobiography* lie in Burpham churchyard now, and in particular that of the Sussex writer and authority on bees, Tickner Edwardes, a former Rector. Incidentally Mervyn Peake's grave is also to be found there. He lived nearby at the beginning of the last war and shares a resting



John Cowper Powys's house, Burpham, from "the fortification".



John Cowper Powys's house and garden (front) and Burpham Church from the fortification.

place with his artist wife, Maeve Gilmore. Their stone bears the inscription "TO LIVE AT ALL IS MIRACLE ENOUGH".

There is a hidden stone in the churchyard wall bearing the initials "D.N." there are two other such stones in the vicinity. Who was D.N., you wonder, and believe you may not have been the first to have had such a thought? Had Dud Noman not also stepped this way?

After lunch at the George and Dragon, Simon Brett invited me to look around the house. Entering the garden (by way of a garage opposite the pub) you come upon the "trim lawn" where J.C.P. paced, bound on its southern flank by the "fortification" on which he erected his sign "trespassers will be prosecuted" which failed to meet with the approval of some of the "bolder spirits" from the pub who hurled it into a ditch.

Frith House is now a substantial and attractive village property. It is considerably larger than in J.C.P.'s day when it must have been more of a cottage with an "annexe" at the bottom of the garden. None of the rooms are large, although the drawing room, in the older part of the house, is of "respectable" proportions and opens out at the back to what was the kitchen garden. From an inspection of the deeds, it would appear that a large extension on the southern side of the house was erected shortly after J.C.P. sold it.

When Simon Brett asked me what I did for a living, I had to confess that I belong to that breed of persons most disliked by J.C.P. I am a lawyer. He asked me if I wanted to see the deeds of the house which were in his study, in the new part of the house, and, without prompting, offered to lend them to me.

An hour later I was walking up Arundel High Street clutching a bundle of deeds evidencing J.C.P.'s ownership "in fee simple, or whatever it is called, of a parcel of England, from the surface of the chalky soil to the unknown and possibly fiery centre of our terrestrial globe".<sup>5</sup>

The chapter entitled "Burpham" in the *Autobiography* begins:

It was Harry Lyon, with the help of the Reverend S., who was at that time the Curate-in-charge of our new home, who helped us to leave Court House and settle at Burpham near Arundel in West Sussex. We had often admired from the train as we travelled from Brighton to Portsmouth, 'en route' for Salisbury and Wessex, this particular tract of country and I think I must secretly have "willed" that I should settle here . . .

It fell therefore to the destiny of Mr. S., our benevolent parish-priest, to produce the necessary loan; and for the expenditure of five hundred pounds I found myself the sole owner for nine hundred and ninety nine years of the little walled-in cottage and garden known at that time as 'Bankside' and later as 'Warre House'.

The deeds in fact show that there were two purchases. The first dates from Christmas Eve 1902 and by it Gertrude Anne Cartwright conveyed to J.C.P. for £550 "all the cottage garden hereditaments and premises known as Bankside Cottage together with the outbuildings in Fee Simple". There is a mortgage of the same date in favour of W. J. Greig, a Barrister of Lincoln's Inn, for the sum of £250 at 5 per cent per annum. This document is witnessed by Thomas Henry Lyon an Architect of 118 High Street Kensington. This mortgage was repaid in full as evidenced by a receipt dated 24 June 1904.

The next deed is dated 2 January 1904 and relates to the second purchase. By this, Clara Peckham assigned to J.C.P. the residue of a Lease dating from 1783 for ten thousand years at the annual rent of one shilling. This lease was of the "Cottage, Stable and buildings . . . including the shed adjoining the stable opposite to the George and Dragon Inn . . . together with the right of drawing water from the well belonging to the George and Dragon Inn . . . and the right of using the Privy standing on part of the garden thereto". The price paid was £160.

On 11 August 1904, J.C.P. mortgaged the two properties for £410. The lender was Elijah Solomon Saleebey of 8 Southwater Road, St Leonards on Sea, Sussex, a Clerk in Holy Orders, who is the Reverend S.J.C.P. refers to.<sup>6</sup> The document is signed

by J.C.P. using his name in full (as are all the documents which are signed by him) and witnessed by his father C. F. Powys, a Clerk in Holy Orders of Montacute, Somerset.

The mortgage to Mr Saleebey is a long business-like document by which interest is payable at 5 per cent like its predecessor. J.C.P. was obliged to effect insurance as follows:

Freehold: Bankside and outbuildings £500;  
Leasehold: Cottage, Stable, Buildings and shed £200.

The other little point of interest arising from this document is that it shows that at the time it was executed the stable and shed at the bottom of the garden were in the occupation of "Messrs. Constable of the Swallow Brewery Arundel as yearly tenants". Presumably they owned the pub.

The receipt on this mortgage is signed Elijah Solomon Saleby "formerly Saleebey" and was witnessed by G. E. Cripps, a parlourmaid of Leonard Stanley Vicarage (where Mr Saleby also then lived). It is dated 29 June 1931.

Then there is a Deed of Enlargement dated 21 August 1931, made by J.C.P. of Route, 2, Hillsdale, New York, by which he declared himself the freeholder of his leasehold property as he was then entitled by law to do. The Deed of Enlargement is witnessed by Arthur Davison Ficke, the writer, who was at that time J.C.P.'s neighbour. On 6 August 1931 J.C.P. had written to Llewelyn, "I see very little of Arthur these days. He does not come out (or if he does I don't see him) at all . . . Arthur is always very nice when I do get to see him".

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Letters . . . to his Brother Llewelyn*, London: Village Press, 1975, Vol. 2, pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup> *Arnold Bennett: The Journals* (1933), Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954, p. 513.

<sup>3</sup> J. C. Powys, *Autobiography*, London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1934 and Pan Picador, 1982, p. 318. T. J. Diffey has explored the representation of the Sussex landscape in *After My Fashion* and *Auto-*



The stile from Burpham Churchyard by which J. C. Powys used to flee from the villagers

The last of J.C.P.'s deeds is dated 11 April 1934 and is the conveyance whereby he sold the whole property (by then called "Warre House"), both titles having in effect been merged, to Lord Gorell for £1,625. This is signed by J.C.P. and witnessed by Samuel Myerson of New York.

Lord Gorell received £2,000 for the property on 2 July 1934, less than three months later.

*biography* in *The Powys Review*, No. 8 (1980-81), pp. 17-21.

<sup>4</sup> J. C. Powys, *After My Fashion*, London: Pan Picador, 1980, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 316.

<sup>6</sup> *Letters . . . to his Brother Llewelyn*, Vol. 1, pp. 23-24.

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# Gerard Casey

## Lucy Katie Will a pattern of memories

(a writing for Louise)

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“ . . . if we had before us (and they are ever before us) those who have been a blessing to us, and could tell them how it came about, they would be amazed to learn what passed from their life into ours . . . ”

Albert Schweitzer:  
*Memories of Childhood and Youth*

“On a dark ball spun in Time  
stands a giraffe beside a Tree  
of what immortal stuff  
can that the fading picture be?”

W. J. Turner

A September afternoon in Mappowder on Lucy’s lawn. Will’s friendly presence in his centenary year was as strong as ever as we sat there. Louise said—the tea-drinking ceremony over—“you remember in spring we saw a clump of white campions on the banks of the Oxus? I’d like to find their seed to sow in Lucy’s garden”. So off we went. Walking through the slanting sunlight pouring across Theodore’s fields from over the Dorset heights we approached the river. After some searching among the tall grasses a few late tattered blossoms were glimpsed. Louise collected her seeds.

Turning away from the Oxus we crossed The Fields of Paradise heading for Evilwood Lane. Along one of the field boundaries we passed under three fine oaks standing close together. “Have Lucy’s tree and Llewelyn’s tree been cut down yet?” I was not sure. I had walked under their shade some days before. In the evening sunlight we looked across the fields to Lucy’s oak. Nothing there. Then to the east to Llewelyn’s oak. Nothing there. Louise said quietly, “You will have to dedicate other trees”.



John Cowper Powys by his brother Will,  
Hillsdale, 1932.

Soon we were standing beside the huge boles—newly-felled, mutilated. The trunk of Lucy’s tree had been dragged along the old track of Evilwood Lane to lie beside Llewelyn’s tree. Many a morning, many an evening I had sat at their bases, my back resting against those trunks. *Sed fugit interea fugit irreparabile tempus . . .* We dedicated the three standing oaks we had passed under near the Oxus to: Lucy, Katie, Will; and another somewhat apart to the east to Llewelyn. Then home to evening quiet in Lucy’s cottage, in Mary’s cottage.

In that home-going the arms of Ahab’s Tree—lightning-struck many years ago so that Theodore had been reluctant to sit under it—no longer reached up against Bul-





always kind, courteous, sensitive at every level to the needs of all around him.

As sceptical as his brother John in the face of the claims of possessive 'love' either human or divine. One day a huge tortoise came lumbering through the scrub. Someone had painted in large white letters on its domed shell, "God is Love". At his word the tortoise was caught and brought to him. It was his whim to wash out the word "Love" and paint in its place the word "Good". That done the creature was released to wander again through the bush to carry its modified message for all with eyes to see.

Will shared close affinities with John. (It is of some interest that Lucy, Katie, Will rarely called him 'Jack'—almost always 'John'.) In the affinities however were differences of emphasis. Once he remarked to me—having just finished a re-reading of John's *Autobiography*—"we are very alike except that *he* is excited by girls' legs and *I* by lion's tracks". He was not impressed by J.C.P.'s claims to 'sadism' (or indeed by any of John's pretensions to any greater wickedness than the common peccadilloes flesh is heir to)—"the only 'sadist' in our family was Llewelyn . . ." When I wrote to him after John's death, speaking of the scattering of the old white magician's ashes on Chesil Beach and quoting a line on Homer by Antipater of Sidon "The uttering head that groweth not old", Will replied, "Yes! those words fit old John like a cap—especially when he was angry with Jehovah". He would speak of John as "my old brother who keeps no secrets" and would speculate with wry humour on "what would happen if *I* kept no secrets".

His quiet, ever-present, sense of humour was very Theodorean. He would on occasion read a story by Theodore with much chuckling. Once after reading *Mark Only*: "Yes, I'm like him in some ways but I'm not so frightened . . . but *Mark Only* . . . !!!" The amused look conveyed all where words failed.

Describing Marian, by that time crippled by arthritis, holding court as she was wont

from the bed in which all of them had been born—this had come out to Will in Africa after his father's death—in the course of her visit to him at Kisima, he remarked: "I'm still the little brother—she raps out orders just like a cross between Moses and Nietzsche".

Spirited and courageous to the end—a brittle frame of loosening bones—he would be lifted into his Land Rover by Kagwema his African friend and driver for one more and still one more drive over the wide earth he so loved and blessed through a long life of wrestling with Africa's unpredictable utterly testing vagaries.



Self-portrait by Will, 1974 (aged 86).

In a late letter to Lucy he wrote out for her words taken from Isaiah: a comment on his accumulating and distressing physical afflictions and his approaching end:

'But the word of the Lord was with him—precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little there a little, that he might go and fall backward and be broken and snared and saved and taken'.

On a great slab of unhewn granite over his grave are the words:

## WILL POWYS

Born at Montacute Somerset

Died at Ngare Ndare Timau

3 · 3 · 1888 4 · 10 · 1978

The pastures are clothed with flocks  
the valleys also are covered with corn  
they shout for joy: they also sing.

Psalm 65

A peal was rung for him at Montacute—it had been his pride that in his youth he was one of the team. I went up into the Tower with two of his grandsons, Michael and Francis, to watch the work—and feel the swaying of the Tower to the surging tumult of joyous sounds ringing far out over the fields and woods he knew and loved so well as a boy.

\* \* \*

At the end of the war, after seven years in Africa—spent for the most part in Somaliland and Abyssinia—an opportunity came to me to return to Britain for some months before my final discharge from the army. I was able to fit in a preliminary visit to Will and Elizabeth at Kisima. Will said: “Visit my sister Lucy at Shootash and my sister Katie at Chydyok—you will like them”, and so it happened. Later in that year one evening Mary came down the drive of her home at Shootash to meet me: one handclasp in the darkness forged on the instant an unbreakable link. Then into the house to meet Lucy in her room beside the fire with her Russian emigré friend Carina. Again the Powys head, the searching look, the quick acceptance. A face marked by inner affliction yet a welcome as radiant as only Lucy knew how to make it. But sorrows fall away from the heart of the old. For the next forty years I was to watch the slow fading out of that intensity of inner suffering. The radiance growing indefinitely out of a depth of blessing for all that lives under the sun.

Memories of Lucy in still pauses looking at a bird, a flower, a star—an utterly pre-occupied attention. Lucy sitting still as a stone in Romsey Abbey; listening to a nightingale beside the river Test or looking down



Lucy, painted by Will, c. 1947.

entranced at a trout in the silver eddies of that swift seaward-flowing river; showing me the place on the river bank where she would sit with John after one of his many returns from America—yes her father and mother too had sat with her in that very same place; reading to us one of her favourite poems or some treasured passage from one of her most loved writers; telling of how her mother read to her *Paradise Lost* and *The Divine Comedy*—and all the novels of Sir Walter Scott—before she was ten years old.

Images too, sharply etched in memory of Lucy in Africa: at Ruka's Drift on the edge of the Ngare Ndare forest. An old buffalo stumbling slowly down to drink at the river under the full blaze of the noon sun—Lucy quietly reaching out her hand protectively to the tiny child beside her though her gaze never wavered from the great blind beast stooping over the black water. Lucy at sunrise on the banks of the Uaso Nyiro river looking mischievously from Will to Charles as Charles showed her his hat bitten through

by a hyena in the night and the tracks of the savage creature running close to the camp-bed where she had been lying. Lucy listening intent and absorbed to a lion roaring:

The music of a lion strong  
that shakes the hill the whole night long,

or listening to the long whistling swish of storks gliding down from the high ridges of Mt Kenya to roost in the cedars at the forest's edge.

Recaptured visions too of Lucy back in Dorset: walking for the last time with Theodore in faint starlight as far as the entrance to Evilwood Lane—sensing his growing weakness; reassured by his quiet presence as he asked her in his last illness to read to him from the *Book of Job*; happy in that he told her that Violet's loving care for him made him feel he was already in Heaven.

Lucy grave and pre-occupied as she went down to the sea with Mary and me to scatter John's ashes where the small waves were breaking on the Chesil pebbles that played so magical a part in his mythology: "oichetal eis hala dian" ("He has gone into the divine sea").

Lucy, almost blind and crippled by arthritis, listening with quiet self-control as I told her of Will's death, of Mary's death: so sudden and unexpected.

Lucy in her wheelchair, her sight improved after an operation for cataract, on innumerable walks through the lanes round Mappowder delighting in all she could see and all she could not see; greeting the returns after absence of Will's much-loved daughter Rose—or Louise who meant so much to her in her last years; asking us to play Beethoven's Spring Sonata for her on the last conscious evening of her life.

She has asked that the single word "Thankyou" appear on the stone marking her grave beside Theodore. That "Thankyou" can only be returned with a full heart by all who knew her.

\* \* \*

From Shootash my way was directed by Lucy and Mary to Chydyok to visit Gertrude, Katie and Alyse. Climbing up from East

Chaldon I tired at the top of Tumbledown and turned aside into the high standing corn to rest. Lay on my back looking at the clouds moving across the sky. Fell into a sudden dreamless sleep. Woke to see Chydyok shining clear before me across the valley and went on. Soon on the opposite slope a figure was striding swiftly down to meet me. In the valley bottom Katie met me. "I was watching for you from my garden. You vanished on the top of Tumbledown. I wondered. Then you were *there* again and now you are *here*." The look at meeting was the same I had received from Will and Lucy: expectant, searching, swiftly accepting. No words to describe Katie. That is beyond my power. Beyond the power of anyone with eyes to see. But look at Will's seeing of her in her sixtieth year. And as a gloss on that painting read a poem she wrote at about that time—a poem only for those with hearts to understand:

Sad breaks the day  
Clouds hold the Sun  
The Dawn lies dead  
Dark is the Forest  
But darker still are thoughts

The Rain falls fast  
The River flows  
The Tree on yonder hill remains

In solitude  
It hears the Wind  
Whose mournful dirge  
Brings no response

Low lies the Star  
It will not wait  
Birds are silent  
They fly apart  
Thought and Life  
Bear separate ways . . .

But let us return to the valley; the valley spirit never dies . . . "Now we are *here*: first we must go for a walk before we go *there*." Like Theodore Katie would give to certain words—replete for her with secret meanings—a peculiar emphasis at once moving and arresting.



Katie (Philippa), painted by Will, 1947.

So off we went leaving Chydyok out of sight to the west. Little talk—desultory—we were well content together. Looked out over the sea. On the way back I was gravely introduced to the Abram Bush. Once Gertrude had found a ram there caught by its horns. So down to Chydyok and Gertrude’s gracious presence. Tea on a small grassy shelf above Lulu’s shelter. A half an hour in her room in the neighbouring cottage with Alyse who wanted to know—the matter seemed somewhat urgent—how many Somali girls I had slept with. A slightly hesitant suspension of disbelief at my answer. Then Katie took me off to show me the room I was to spend the night in. Yes Jack, Littleton, Bertie, Willie yes and Bernie had on occasion all slept there . . . but said Katie “Now I want to take you to *my* place” and in the late twilight we went over the sloping down to Rat’s Barn—a retreat for a recluse inclining to ruin, barely furnished in the plainest fashion. Two candles were lit—one for each of us. Then

happy sharing talk . . . first of all, of One Tree Hill rising above the Ngare Ndare Forest on the way from the lower farm to Kisima . . . was the Tree still there? “On my rides I would often rest under it . . . it was a *good* Tree.” Yes, I too had rested under that Tree and so had Will. (In times to come Lucy and Mary too were to rest under it, it is the Tree beside which Will once saw a giraffe standing motionless for three days: the third nightfall there—the morning following not there . . .) Then of Will, Elizabeth and the children . . . and did I know and like Mr Swan the Dutch farmer and his family who lived below the forest? . . . they were *real* people . . . So an absorbed hour quickly passed. Then, “now I am going to read Walt.” I had noticed two books on the small table beside the bed: *Leaves of Grass* and *Moby Dick*. Several of her most-loved poems were read. I particularly remember “Give me the splendid silent sun” and “Out of the rolling ocean the crowd”, ending with “On the Beach at Night”. Katie read poetry—or at least the poetry of Whitman—with a wild chanting abandon I had never heard before and have never heard since. At the words “weep not my child, weep not my darling” she broke down into a paroxysm of grief for some moments, then carried on. It was now close to midnight. “Now we will go to the cliffs.” We walked in the starlight, Katie leading. Then came the sound of the sea and I sensed the trembling intensity of a wild creature as she walked faster and faster until we could just make out that vast rondure of darkness: “and now you’re tired you must go off to bed”. Of course I was lost—it was my first time on those cliff-tops and it was night. “Follow this track until you come to the Abram Bush . . . from there you will know the way.” Well, what more trustworthy waymark than the Abram Bush for any god-child of Abraham, by however tenuously remote an affiliation, such as myself? Had I not too rested in my time under the Oaks of Mamre? I uncertainly set off along the track only faintly discernable in the darkness. Looked back almost at once—and could just make out a dark figure very

still, facing the sea. Such was Katie: a free spirit had touched me:

'Leave all free as I leave all free.'

The next morning was devoted to a long walk along the cliff-tops to the White Nose where we rested on a tiny ledge of slippery grass that terrified me. Six hundred feet sheer fall to the sea. It left her quite unperturbed. Then back over the downs for a drink at the Sailor's Return, followed by a visit to her old friend, the farmer at West Chaldon, James Cobb. I was tired—Katie seemed tireless—by the time we reached Chydyok again for tea with Gertrude.

I was to see much of Katie in the following years, whenever I was back from Africa. Always her unforgettable and unrepeatable self, she would turn up to visit Lucy at Shootash, at Mappowder. I have never seen her happier or more relaxed than with Lucy:

Sweet Lucy  
In thoughts we unite  
In little deeds of the house  
In flowers that grow  
In sunset that flames  
The river and hills  
I shield you and guard you  
Dear girl of my heart.

We would set off on walks in a singularly contented companionship. Know still pauses together as Katie would sit on log or stone to smoke a woodbine, enjoying:

' . . . the peace  
where silence  
is stillness . . . '

At such moments she would sometimes speak a little as some intimate memory rose to mind: perhaps how she had gone down to the beach below the cliff-tops as darkness fell over the sea to gather driftwood when the final word came to her of Theodore's death; the silence would remain undisturbed under the quiet words.

She loved to go over to Montacute and when opportunity offered I would drive her there,

Montacute

In Somerset, that zigzag village of yellow  
stone  
With streets that wind with corners sharp  
Through the Borough and by the Church  
Where rises the hill of Michael's Mount.

One day when we were in the empty church Katie broke down, suddenly flinging herself, weeping unrestrainedly, into my arms. I could only remember and stammer: "Weep not my child, weep not my darling".

The last time I saw her—just before one of my returns to Africa—was in her little room at Restfield in Buckland Newton: "I am a child of nature. I don't know about anything else. Soon I will return to the earth. Don't grieve. We have been friends. That is enough."

Yes, Katie, that is enough and more than enough for all who loved you. The cup is filled to overflowing.

\* \* \*

ENVOI

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Lucy Katie Will  
to touch one was to touch all three  
number there in love was slain

memories fade  
leaves fall from trees  
sift to the return

here  
a shadow  
fading into brightness  
there

Jacob said to Theodore  
nothing stays in one stay  
rest in the nothing  
that is God's gift

G.C.

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# John Cowper Powys: An Impression.

A BBC Radio Broadcast, Welsh Home Service,  
27 June 1957

This programme was arranged and introduced by Raymond Garlick;  
the Reader was Al Hobson and the Producer Wilbert Lloyd Roberts.

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## RAYMOND GARLICK:

In an age when talent is perhaps more widespread than ever before, but genius just as rare, we invite you this evening to meet a great man. Come, then, in your imagination, to a town seven miles from the summit of Snowdon. See with your mind's eye a great amphitheatre of mountains, outlined like the scenery of a monumental stage against the clear backcloth of the sky. The stage itself is a plateau of rock set in this semicircle of mountains; a rich valley falls away beneath it, and to one side a road climbs up from the sea ten miles away. Come nearer now, and look down on this dramatic setting like one of Hardy's celestial spirits in *The Dynasts*. Let your gaze pass slowly over the town, over the squares and streets and quietly smoking chimneys. Notice to one side a waterfall, thrown like a long length of muslin over a perpendicular rock face. It falls and falls, and then becomes a rushing stream—swerving to avoid a pair of little houses squared to its bank. The upstairs window of one of them is lit. Looking up from the quiet open-space in front of it, you can watch the preoccupied figure lying in this window. It frames a head, a knee supporting a foolscap writing-board, a hand holding a pen.

Let us pass, like the eye of a camera, through the window and survey the room within. The warm light comes from a table-lamp with a large red shade. One entire wall and much of another are covered from floor to ceiling with bookshelves. At each end of the room burns an electric fire.

Beside the sofa stands a small table, bearing a tray littered with a variety of objects: milk, loaf of bread, a Greek silver coin stamped with the head of Pallas Athene, a bottle of ink, a sand-shaker in the shape of a small china owl.

Along the wall below the window lies the sofa, one end piled high with cushions. And now the window, and the roofs beyond it, and the mountains beyond them, are the background to the hand writing and the head engrossed in what it writes. But the head and the hand are things that only a painter or a sculptor can convey. Augustus John has been to this room for this purpose. Tonight we have asked a sculptor, Jonah Jones, to evoke them for us:

## JONAH JONES:

I have read the Powys family for many years, and each member, John Cowper, Theodore, Llewelyn and Littleton (who mirrored them all) has made a kind of physical impact. Photographs of their vast, curly British skulls, bear this out. Big, bony, strong-bred, patrician, behind them all one imagines a noble line of ancestors, all larger than life.

John, now full of years, rests his long limbs on a sofa across the upper window of his tiny quarryman's cottage. His head lies back on the cushion, the silver locks still curling in Powysian splendour over the vast cranium. The brow is Socratic, deeply furrowed, but untroubled. The eyes, deep-set and piercing are benign. It is,

with the nose, hawk-like, the nostrils wide-winged, that the Powysian spirit begins. Then comes the great wide upper lip, cruel, ready to boom. This is John. The mouth is built for rhetoric, his greatest love, and as I worked, the great head rose from the cushion and the strong mouth boomed line after line from *The Prelude*.

Is there any record, I wonder, of this voice that once held American, and British, audiences in thrall? And still it brings pilgrims, from the world over.

“Give me a platform” says John “and I’m happy. I’ll hypnotise them.” and how true it is. I had to listen. It’s a tumbling cataract of speech, drunk with the beauty of words.

The whole effect of the head is of the falcon, of Horus the hawk god, belying the underlying tenderness of the John who prays daily for the delivery of animals from the agony of vivisection.

No portrait is complete without the hands. As John Cowper Powys speaks, the long bony hands flutter in the air like birds, expressing most of all pleasure, sheer pleasure in life.

#### RAYMOND GARLICK:

Although much of the day is spent writing and reading in this characteristic position (that of a Roman emperor at his ease), it would be quite wrong to portray this writer as weighed down on his sofa by the load of eighty-five years. On the contrary, each day—whatever the weather—begins with a solitary walk up the mountain. The walk is as essential a part of the day’s pattern—and the creative process—as the sofa. Gilbert Turner—Librarian of the Borough of Richmond, and a Welsh-speaking Englishman—is one of those who have on occasion taken part in these walks:

#### GILBERT TURNER:

All the children of the Reverend Charles Francis Powys were obliged,

willy-nilly, to be good walkers. It had become John Cowper Powys’s custom—and indeed still is—to take his exercise before breakfast, and as I came to know him more intimately I used to join him on these early morning tramps up the Berwyn which rose immediately behind his house.

An early morning train would bring me to Cae Coed at about 7.30 a.m. Always there would be ready some delicate slices of bread and butter and a perilous cup of tea would be made, perilous because to so unpractical a man the operation of transferring hot water to tea-pot and thence to tea-cup is one beset by all manner of unexpected difficulties and dangers.

Then we would set off up the stony lane which runs by the house—John Cowper Powys wearing heavy boots and gaiters and during cold weather several waistcoats and even more scarves, surmounted by a raincoat, cloth cap on head and clasping one of his collection of remarkable walking sticks—a costume which harmonised perfectly with his surroundings. “There goes the Old Man of the Mountains”, cried one lorry-load of soldiers to another on one occasion, to his *huge* delight, and they were indeed quite right!

Sometimes we would follow the path to Liberty Hall, a disused shooting box at the summit of the Berwyn, but more frequently we would strike off the path through the fir plantations to the open moorland. Here are the rocks and cairns dedicated to the members of his family, to intimate friends and to figures from Welsh mythology, the topmost cairn of all being sacred to the memory of Pryderi.

With so apt a teacher, I too was soon able to recognise the bog plants, the mosses, the fungi, the butterflies and the birds and during the year I would be kept in touch with the seasonal developments. So, during one particularly

mild December he writes: "It's been four and five days of ploughed fields and a feeling, faint, faint, like the sprite of a spirit from Shelley's spring poem, of deep under the clods but thinking, thinking, thinking of emerging all among the under-stalks of toadstools and dead leaves and rubble and dead sticks and half-dead reeds and rain-soaked roots—of the *smell* of purple violets!"

But do not imagine these walks purely as nature rambles for we would talk also of that philosophy of life which finds expression in such books as *The Meaning of Culture* and *In Defence of Sensuality*. We would discuss his novel *Porius*, the scene of which is laid in the Corwen valley, and we would look across the Dee to Caer Gai where he portrays the death of Owen Glendower and within whose stone circle was written the final chapter of what is perhaps the greatest historical novel of our time.

Rarely did we encounter anyone on these walks, save for the occasional forester and the old man who kept the smallholding just above John's house and who related to him the story of a great battle which had taken place there in the remote past and which he was thrilled to recognise as a somewhat garbled version of the pursuit of Gwydion by Pryderi in *Math, Son of Mathonwy*.

#### RAYMOND GARLICK:

After many years in Corwen, John Cowper Powys has finally settled in Blaenau Ffestiniog—with the burial place of Pryderi a few miles down the road. Even nearer is the lake into which the maidens fell, and the place where Blodeuwedd was transformed into an owl. Indeed, the Mabinogi—with their sublime marriage of mystery and history—are a kind of archetype echoed in the novels of John Cowper Powys. And the "Pedair Keinc y Mab-

inogi" and the Welsh Bible, both within reach of his couch, remind us that he has made himself a Welsh-reading Welshman. Which brings us to his ancestry—a subject on which Malcolm Elwin (who has written several books on the Powys family) is an authority:

#### MALCOLM ELWIN:

When their friend Louis Wilkinson published his study of the Powys brothers, *Welsh Ambassadors*, one of the brothers objected to the title because he thought the family had been too long transplanted to England to be fairly described as Welsh. But John Cowper Powys has lived for the past twenty-two years in North Wales, and he does not regard Wales as at all his adopted country; in the very first sentence of his book of essays called *Obstinate Cymric*, he declares, "We Aboriginal Welsh People are the proudest people in the world".

The Welsh origin of the Powyses cannot be doubted. According to legend, the Princes of Powys descended from Rodri Mawr, who was King of All Wales. But by the fifteenth century the Powyses had moved across the border into Shropshire, and the head of the family was William Powys of Ludlow. What is called "the Celtic temperament" is often associated with the mystical and the poetical, but in fact the Powys ancestry shows little to suggest the wealth of artistic genius that emerged in the eleven children of the Reverend Charles Francis Powys, of whom John Cowper Powys was the eldest, T. F. Powys the third, and Llewelyn Powys the fifth son. [Apart from producing two or three distinguished lawyers, the Powyses were mainly content with their duties as country squires. Sir Thomas Powys was a judge in the reign of Queen Ann and acquired the manor of Lilford in Northamptonshire. His grandson had two sons; one

became a member of Parliament and was created Lord Lilford, the other became the great-grandfather of John Cowper Powys.]

John Cowper's father was a simple country parson. He was Vicar of Shirley in Derbyshire when his eldest son was born; he then moved to Dorchester in Dorset and finally to Montacute in Somerset. His simple character, his simple yet gracious way of living at the turn of the present century, are poetically described in Llewelyn Powys's *Somerset and Dorset Essays*.

But the poetical and imaginative qualities of the Powys brothers derived—not from their Welsh origin—but from their mother's blood, which had flowed in the veins of two great English poets, John Donne and William Cowper. The poet Cowper believed himself a direct descendant of Donne. "I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St Paul's," he said; "there is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper." William Cowper's mother was a Donne, and her brother's daughter was the mother of Dr John Johnson, known to readers of Cowper's *Letters* as his cousin "Johnny of Norfolk". And Johnny of Norfolk was the grandfather of Mary Cowper Johnson, who married Charles Francis Powys and became the mother of John Cowper Powys and his brothers.

John Cowper Powys declared in his *Autobiography*—that most searching study of self-revelation since Rousseau and De Quincey—that he inherited from his father's blood "the innate and almost savage realism" which contrasted with the "natural impulses towards romance and mysticism" inherited from his mother. And it was his mother's legacy that inspired, he tells us, "the imaginative, poetical cult, whereby I have romanticized and idealised my life."

#### RAYMOND GARLICK:

This "imaginative, poetical cult" has also produced a quantity of poetry. And though its author tends rather to dismiss it as a sideline, and to omit it from the canon of his writings, he has in point of fact published more books of poetry alone than many a well-known contemporary poet. Several of the early books are now hard to come by, but Kenneth Hopkins—who possesses them all—has agreed to introduce extracts from two of them:

#### KENNETH HOPKINS:

Although John Cowper Powys is not primarily a poet his six volumes of verse have much significance to those who wish to draw close to one of the richest minds of our time. As they are so little known, let me run over the titles: *Odes and other Poems*, 1896, and *Poems*, 1899, were published in London. The next three, *Wolf's Bane*, 1916, *Mandragora*, 1917, and *Samphire*, 1922, were published only in America. *Lucifer*, 1956, was written in 1905 and first published by Macdonald half a century later. It has a most interesting preface in which the author discusses something of his own individual approach to poetry, and says in passing, "*Lucifer* is the only poem of my own that I feel any temptation to pray that posterity will read." At a first reading of *Lucifer* perhaps the affinities with the manner of Tennyson and Milton will be most apparent—the heightened language, the austere imagery, the archaic protagonists; but at a second reading these are forgotten as the bold and characteristic conceptions of its author, which owe nothing to another, begin to work in the reader's mind:

#### READER:

Not long was the day risen, ere on the  
fields  
The Devil turned his back and took his way



only occasional reflections of human interaction. One may suspect him at first, as I did in reading *Atlantis*, of wanting to play with 104 cards in a pack instead of 52—or to score a try outside the touchlines just for the sake of being a curious fellow, a surprise packet, an innovator, the creator of a new picaresque disorder. But this is finally the very opposite of what he intends. His world is one of order, not disorder. Indeed, his plots move not so much by fortuitous invention in or from another dimension as by the sensitive penetration of the sub-human levels which act and interact with and upon the visible human plateau. Let the thoughts of Sir Mort Abyssum in J.C.P.'s most recent book *The Brazen Head* serve for introduction to the main concept:

READER:

When we are dead . . . we are absolutely dead. But while we live we are all, including the myriads of sub-human lives in air, on land, and in water, from whales to earth-worms and the tiniest gnats, in constant contact with an invisible, overshadowing atmospheric mist, crowded with feelings and dreams and emotions and what might be called sense-emanations and thought-*eidola* issuing from all that exists, whether superhuman, human or sub-human, whether organic or inorganic. This atmosphere dimension does not . . . contain the sort of entities we are in the habit of thinking of as souls; for these perish when we perish, but it contains the thoughts and feelings and intimations and sensations which, though they grow fainter with time, do not cease to exist when the body and soul which projected them have both come to an end.

ROLAND MATHIAS:

With such an introduction, it would be politic perhaps to explain no more—to proceed then to create peculiar effects within the human hall by ringing sub-human bells outside, by being, in fact, a little more complex and persistent

than the ghost-story writer. But John Cowper Powys has no such idea. In fact, he insists on explaining when not explaining might heighten the effect, and he does so because the didactic philosopher in him is stronger than the novelist, because the concept—the world and the life it has—is poetically and psychically more relevant to the reader's condition than any development to the stripped terms of story.

What then, within the agreed bounds of the novel, are the unique contributions he makes? I can think of three.

First, there is the readiness to find a non-human parallel for human peculiarities. Who else so often likens his people to things? Lil-Umbra in *The Brazen Head* immediately equates Heber Sygerius to "a certain broken and dilapidated stone pillar" and again, a second later, to "a desiccated willow-stump". *Porius* has a more complicated and significant image of his father, whose place in his thought-processes he can explain.

READER:

Strange that until this moment he had never thought of asking himself why it was that his father 'the man over there', should always be represented in his mind by golden drops issuing from a shapeless blur of vapour in the southern sky. Now that he *had* thought of it, he realized that all the dominant urges and master-influences of his interior life had come to take for him some material form or shape, not an intelligibly symbolic shape or a shape he could have described to another person without being thought mad; but rather some accidental, change-bestowed pattern of form and colour that in itself was quite meaningless, and very often absurd.

ROLAND MATHIAS:

The rejection of any simple set of non-human symbols as markers of the human course is, I think important. The intelligibility of other levels of life

*is*, just because it *is*, and not because it bends to the novelist's aid.

There is, secondly, the intrusion from the non-human world of some influence decisive for one or more of the persons in the narrative. Sometimes this is simply and literally a message, and when the moth and the housefly descend upon the hand of Nisos Naubolides in *Atlantis* and he calls on the virginal nurse Petraia to release their insect-consciousness into his. Less liberally the need for decision may be symbolised by some familiar object. Sam Dekker in *A Glastonbury Romance* met moral crisis every time he passed a certain old mooring-post, whose emanations set jangling the nerve-ends of his resolution.

Thirdly, the communication of *things* with each other is more than an echo of human conversation. It is an extension of consciousness, usually for a movable narrator (one of J.C.P.'s weaknesses as a novelist is the failure to separate the levels of sensitivity among several narrators). Thus while Owen Evans and Cornelia Geard walk through the rain to West Pennard, a Scotch fir and a holly-tree in the hedge strain lovingly towards each other, crying their ancient vegetation-cry across the leafless, unfrequented field. This echo adds meaning to the human level. Even more admirable however, is the limited extension of consciousness, the rarefied visitation which, as Sir Mort explained, exhilarated or saddened a man without any apparent inward or outward cause. Bonaventura in *The Brazen Head* looked out from his tower and caught sight of what was obviously an enormous oak-tree, by the side of which was standing a large white lamb.

**READER:**

Both the tree and the creature by its side were presented to the saintly traveller as if they had been mystical symbols, divided

from all other visible objects in the white thick encircling sea of light. The branches of the oak-tree were creaking in this unusual wind in a peculiarly personal manner, as if they were chanting the syllables of an immemorial incantation that the tree had learnt from the low mound on which it grew, and that the mound had learnt from some unknown angelic power that had been hovering round when that horrible devilish attack had been made upon the mass of formless matter out of which the world arose. The oak-tree was now trying to persuade the troubled creature at its side to accept the creaking and husky chant of its branches as the true oracular response to such agitated bleating on this wild night.

**ROLAND MATHIAS:**

Who else could write this but John Cowper Powys whose finger-ends are as sensitive as the leaf's tip? Man is perhaps punier for such perception, but undoubtedly greater for the achievement.

**RAYMOND GARLICK:**

How great is the achievement? To sum up—with this question very much in mind—we have invited G. Wilson Knight, Professor of English Literature in the University of Leeds, a Shakespearian scholar of distinction; the author of two books on Lord Byron: an interpreter of genius who does not share the traditional academic coyness towards it until it is dead. Professor Wilson Knight:

**WILSON KNIGHT:**

It's not so very easy to place the narratives of Mr John Cowper Powys within the "tradition" of the English novel. Their country settings make us think of Hardy, and the more extraordinary, and sometimes grotesque, people recall Dickens; but there are also depths of the kind we associate with Dostoevsky, or Herman Melville; and there is an undertone—or overtone—of Rabelais.

The first was *Wood and Stone*, over forty years ago, in 1915; a country story, beautifully and simply told, and yet large in conception, pointing on to what was to come. After *Rodmoor* in 1916 and *Ducdame* in 1925, there followed, with an almost unbelievable rapidity, *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, the *Autobiography*, *Jobber Skald* and *Maiden Castle*, all between 1929 and 1937. This it would be natural to call Mr Powys's greatest period.

*Morwen*, in 1937, stands a little apart: it is more of a parable, written for a purpose. Next, we have the major works of historical fiction, in descent from the Welsh themes of earlier books: *Owen Glendower* in 1941 and *Porius*, a tale of Arthurian times, in 1951; both loaded—perhaps even a little over-loaded—with historical knowledge and historical feeling. *The Inmates* followed in 1952, and from then on we can, I think, observe a change: in *Homeric Atlantis* in 1954, and the medieval *The Brazen Head*, in 1956, there is a relaxation, a less intense concern, a new lightness and freedom. We are nearer to the world of fairy-tale, to the fanciful.

Mr Powys's stories are written in a style which might be called "classic". It is a style of structure, weight, grandeur; and yet it somehow manages to be, simultaneously, colloquial, and even homely. Rich in "allusion", and with a vocabulary which might be called inexhaustible, it taps the accumulated wealth of our literary heritage, and is, indeed, a perfect medium for calling up the mysterious presences to which Mr Powys introduces us. For his people are regularly shown as responsive to magnetic influences—influences streaming in from the forgotten generations of man, and also from nature, from the living cosmos. Each setting in turn is chiefly an actor in the drama—

the earthiness of *Wolf Solent*, the lashing seas of *Jobber Skald*, the spirit-powers of *Maiden Castle*.

We may, I think, call this one of the major literary achievements of our century. Certainly it has produced our greatest single work of imaginative prose: *A Glastonbury Romance*. It is as though all our prose tradition—and much of our poetry, Wordsworth in particular—had been gathered up with this one, stupendous, book. The range of human understanding, both sensuous and mystical, is surely, unmatched. From the tormented sadist, Evans, to the saintly Sam and miracle-working Mr Geard—and with all normal sexual and religious impulses included—the vast survey *leaves nothing out*. The book has the strangeness of almost too complete, too profuse, a wisdom: and yet it is all appealingly *real*. Mr Powys is, indeed, a valiant realist, facing secrets, both sexual and spiritual, which are unrecognised—or undared—by his contemporaries. Here, more powerfully than ever, we are aware of occult significances behind the human plot. It is a work of what might be called an 'uncanny realism': one enjoys, for a while, an almost god-like insight.

Among his contemporaries, we could, perhaps, compare Mr Powys with James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence; and yet he is really as far from the technical innovations of the one as from the fiery impressionism of the other. He had, of course, his failings. He can, on occasion, be difficult; he is often diffuse; time may appear to stand still just when we are most itching to hear what happens next! But these are, after all, the faults of his virtues. Throughout there breathes a great calm, a majesty, and a kindliness; and a wonderful and cleansing, humour.

BECKETT IN THE EIGHTIES

*Samuel Beckett,*  
LINDA BEN-ZWI.

Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1986, \$16.95.

*Beckett at 80/ Beckett in Context,*  
ed., ENOCH BRATER.

Oxford University Press, New York, 1986,  
\$18.95.

*Samuel Beckett's New Worlds: Style in  
Metafiction,*  
SUSAN D. BRIENZA.

University of Oklahoma Press, Norman (USA)  
and London, 1987, \$24.95.

*Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama: Texts for  
Company,*  
ed., JAMES ACHESON and KATERNYA  
ARTHUR.

Macmillan, London, 1987, £27.50.

*Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text,*  
STEVEN CONNOR.

Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, £8.95 (paper-  
back).

For some readers it may come as a surprise to learn that Samuel Beckett is still alive and writing, since in the course of years he seems to have gathered an aura of non-being around him. Yet nothing is further from the truth: in early 1988 he published a new work in French, called *L'Image*, consisting of one sentence of some 1200 words, and later in the same year, in order to tide over his faithful American publisher, *Stirring Still* appeared in an illustrated limited deluxe edition (it has now been published in a more crammed style in *The Guardian* of 2 March 1989). Admittedly, these works are small in scale, but for anyone who has kept up with his publications over the last twenty-five years it will not be an unfamiliar situation, because he knows that for the later Beckett "less is more" (as he once said himself). Moreover, we know from experience that these and other more recent texts

are so dense and hermetic that size is never the first concern in the case of a writer who combines maximum expressiveness with minimum outward form.

Beckett is certainly very much alive and being written about from a critical and academic point of view. There is an unending stream of articles and books being published about him that it would already take much of a lifetime to read from cover to cover. Indeed, next to James Joyce he is the most frequently studied modern author, and like Joyce he is very much part of our critical and theoretical vocabulary. Their adjectivalized names also serve emblematically as figures of speech for two modern, though different styles of literary thought and expression that have become loosely associated with the concepts, however unstable, of modernism and post-modernism respectively.

The present batch of studies ranges from a well-informed overview by Linda Ben-Zwi, a highly sophisticated collection of articles culled from an academic conference by Enoch Brater, and a *Festschrift* in honour of his eightieth birthday in 1986 by the joint editors James Acheson and Katernya Arthur from Australia, to some more specialized monographs on Beckett's style in his later prose works (by Susan D. Brienza) and on his obsessive use of repetition throughout his work (by Steven Connor). Together with several other books that have appeared in the same period by Enoch Brater, James Knowlson, and Lance St. John Butler (whose *Makes Sense Who May* arrived too late for inclusion), they form a sample section of how Beckett is read and responded to in our decade.

Of the five books under review Linda Ben-Zwi's study, which appeared in the respectable Twayne English Authors Series, is the only one addressed to the general reader. Under somewhat fanciful titles all of Beckett's works are discussed in more or less chronological order, with the exception of his criticism which is given separate treatment in the opening chapter. By concentrating on his *Examination* essay "Dante . . . Bruno. Vico . . . Joyce" (the dots indicating the time span measured in centuries between these Italian writers as well as suggesting Joyce's links with them), his substantial

essay on Proust, "The Three Dialogues with Duthuit", and on his mainly pre-war critical reviews, a relatively firm grasp on his work is ensured. His early writings up to *Murphy* are discussed in one chapter, which also includes his poetry both early and late, and his unfinished works (a novel and a play). Subsequent chapters deal with his major fiction ("Solitary Wanderers" with *Watt* and the *Trilogy*; "Skullscapes" with his later experimental prose up to *Worstward Ho*), and with his drama ("Two Together", from *Waiting for Godot* to *Happy Days*—pieces with two or more characters on the stage—and "Animated Hieroglyphics", concerned with his more recent, solitary drama up to *What Where*). A final chapter, "Other Media", deals with his work for radio, film and television, including some dramaticules for German television.

All of these works are competently summarized and placed in relation to his overall artistic concern with how to "find a form to accommodate the mess" of experience. Such a rather neat overview is, no doubt, useful for the inexperienced reader, but it will hardly be exciting for the more seasoned Beckettian. However, Linda Ben-Zwi also caters for the latter category, particularly when dealing with Beckett's more recent work that is still, relatively, experimental and needs to be integrated critically with his earlier work. Thus she aptly describes the stage image of *Nacht und Träume* as that of a medieval woodcut, entitled "A dark night of the soul", or "The scholar dozing at his books", and convincingly relates Beckett's use of music to supplement the image in this mysterious, compelling television play to similar attempts in *Ghost Trio*, *Words and Music* and *Cascando*. Her study can therefore be recommended as a stimulating, dependable, and most readable introduction for an English-speaking audience to one of the constitutive writers of our century.

Enoch Brater's *Beckett at 80/ Beckett in Context* originated as a lecture series at the University of Michigan to mark the playwright's eightieth birthday on 13 April 1986. It consists of a brief introduction, sketching the artistic climate of Paris in the thirties and forties in which Beckett found himself, followed by twelve essays mostly written by noted critics from both sides of the Atlantic. Each essay centres its argument on a specific work or group of works and is distinctly focused on Beckett's revolutionary use of dramatic convention, which gives this anthology much coherence and solidity.

The first three essays are retrospectives in which the authors reminisce about their first experience with *Waiting for Godot* and how they have "grown (up?)"—to use Ruby Cohn's formulation—with that classic modern play; its resonance in Beckett's later work, especially in *Ghost Trio*, and in some of Harold Pinter's and Tom Stoppard's plays is touched upon as well as the implications of the label "tragicomedy" that, surprisingly enough, the author chose to give to his own translation into English. They also examine in some detail its dramaturgical dimensions, notably Beckett's exact and exacting use of silence. One readily subscribes to John Russell Taylor's conclusion that Beckett has refined the attention we nowadays bring to all theatre representations and indeed to ourselves.

The other essays offer a variety of perspectives on the later works, notably on *Not I* (1972), one of the briefest and most potent of the middle-to-late plays, and likely to remain another modern classic. Keir Elam examines its semiotic structure by invoking the rhetorical figures of *synecdoche*, responsible for reduction of meaning, and *litotes*, a strategic denial of what is tragically the case, that promotes nevertheless a kind of "negative affirmation". The late Bernard Beckerman singles out the speaker-listener motif which came to dominate his plays from *Krapp's Last Tape* to *Ohio Impromptu* and emphasizes the "tension present in the act of listening", either to others or to ourselves. Likewise Katharine Worth concentrates on Beckett's preoccupation with listeners, in particular with the most enigmatic of stage characters, the "Auditor" in *Not I*.

Michael Goldman discerns in the middle plays the important motif of the struggle between vitality, however dubiously presented, and deadness. He relates this theme in particular to the complex notion of *subtext*—the felt presence of something added by the actor to and through the text—composed of a partial Stanislavskian fidelity to the given circumstances, a *supertext*, an overarching intellectual position which in the case of Beckett is equal to an acknowledgement of a central void, an Artaudian expression of anguish, and the presence of forms of popular entertainment, the music hall, the circus, slapstick comedy. It is the actor's task to negotiate the gap between these components and to enact both the project toward action inside them and the "disauthentication" of action which surrounds them. James Knowlson analyses two different recorded versions of the television play

*Ghost Trio*, one in English and one in German, both supervised by Beckett himself. Although mainly concerned with its links to technology, the essay concludes on a warning against foisting allegorical and autobiographical meanings onto the work; instead it suggests that the "meaning" can be seized only in and through its formal patterning, where everything is shaped around an indefinable "absent center", longed for but never attained.

The resistance to simple allegorization and to the danger of neat identifications, and the emphasis on negation and the void that is noticeable in several essays can be appreciated as an expression of the current postmodern, deconstructive critical climate, for which Beckett's work is itself largely responsible. Contrary to the traditional view that tends to equate Derridean postmodernism with a rejection of humanistic values, it is equally possible to take a more positive, affirmative view of the situation, as becomes evident from Martin Esslin's perceptive essay, which combines his unparalleled theatrical expertise with a profound sense of mysticism.

Writing about Beckett's concept of infinite time, presented as an endless circle or as an endless cycle of recurrence, and of eternity as the cessation of time and the escape from the endless wheel of being, he links up Beckett's search for ultimate reality with that of the mystics from Ancient Indian philosophy and Buddhism to the great Christian mystics like John Eckhart, San Juan de la Cruz, or Jakob Boehme—in other words, with the great tradition of "negative mysticism". As I have argued elsewhere, Esslin's suggestion can be fruitfully applied to Beckett's later plays, which can be seen (among others) as dramatic renderings of the "via negativa" of classic mysticism. Although the ultimate goal, the attainment of the beatific vision, is never reached, this does not negate the quest itself, nor does it invalidate the earnestness with which "the beyond that is within" (*Molloy*), is pursued by the Beckettian protagonists. In passing I should like to point out the relevance of the topic of "negative" mysticism in connection with T. F. Powys, a writer whose later work invites comparison with Beckett in more than one respect, as I argued in a paper at the 1987 Powys conference. Like Powys, Beckett yearned for the end of time, the great "positive nothingness", according to Esslin, the ultimate timelessness, the release from the wheel of being—Eternity.

Martin Esslin, together with Enoch Brater,

Charles R. Lyons, and Katharine Worth, also appears in *Beckett's Later Fiction and Drama*, a collection of thirteen essays dealing with his fiction since *How It Is* (1961) and his drama since *Endgame* (1957). As the subtitle "Texts for Company" indicates, it is intended for the interested reader who feels he needs some help in coming to terms with Beckett's fictional and dramatic world. Many of the leading Beckett scholars of the day, drawn from various parts of the English-speaking world, have contributed to this unquestionably highly informative, critical anthology.

As can be expected, most essays are engaged in Beckett's fundamental *Sprachskepsis*, his obsessive misgivings about language as a medium of communication, but none more profoundly than Martin Esslin's "Towards the Zero of Language". The essay confronts the central Beckettian paradox of his love-hate of language itself that is manifest in all his writings which increasingly tend toward a "literature of the unword". Esslin considers Beckett's television plays to be the natural outcome of this struggle, culminating in *Quad 1 & 2* and *Nacht und Traüme* in which the verbal element has finally reached the point of zero: "the compression of the maximum of experience into the most telling and graphic metaphor which could then be incarnated, made visible and audible, in the most concise form of a living, moving image"—new televisual poetry.

Another theme that runs through many essays is Beckett's increasing tendency to cross over from one literary form to another, what Ruby Cohn once called "jumping genres". This raises the question, for instance, whether some of the late plays are inherently dramatic, or are they essentially works of prose enclosed in a theatrical conceit? This interesting issue is discussed in S. E. Gontarski's brief but compelling essay in which he recounts his stage adaptation of *Company* (1980), a fiction that appears to be perfectly "textually androgynous".

Two other essays deserve special mention: Dougal McMillan writes most informatively about the unfinished and jettisoned drama which preceded *Endgame*, *Krapp's Last Tape* and *Not I*, and demonstrates in detail how in these aborted dramaticules, from *Human Wishes* to *Kilcool*, written in the early sixties, Beckett is struggling with the overriding problem of the inadequacy and treachery of language, the importance of mime, and how to shape dramatic monologue. James Acheson's intertextual essay

“The Shape of Ideas” skillfully juxtaposes *That Time* and *Footfalls* with Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” and T. S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, without Beckett endorsing the former’s pantheistic optimism and the latter’s Christian outlook, of course. Acheson’s final comment on the latter play is particularly interesting because it raises the possibility of interpreting *Footfalls* as a dramatized attempt to achieve “the mystic’s inner experience of God”; his conclusion, however, that the protagonist’s quest for spiritual light has been in vain, strikes me as too hasty since it fails to distinguish “negative mysticism”—which privileges negation—from affirmative mysticism. Moreover, it begs, more generally, the question of whether affirmative propositions are more basic than negative ones. The issue cannot be pursued here but deserves further reflection.

The remaining essays in this *Festschrift* deal with Beckett’s minimalist texts of the last three decades in which the frontiers of postmodernist fiction are pushed back in a most original manner, as Brian Finney argues. Most critical attention is paid to *Company*, a novella that appeared in 1980 and nonplussed us all because of its visibly autobiographical vignettes, whilst at the same time it strongly undermines the very concept of autobiography. According to Katerinya Arthur, an Australian critic, this text can be seen as almost a blueprint of “scripsophrenia”, a form of disjunctive writing in which meaning is both composed and decomposed, just as the text constructs and simultaneously deconstructs the notion of company. A similar process can be seen at work in Beckett’s two other fictions of the eighties, *Ill Seen Ill Said*, full of imagery reminiscent of the Celtic cromlechs, and *Worstward Ho*, whose title ironically intertextualizes both a Renaissance play and a Victorian novel. Although these texts are decidedly difficult and, to a large extent, resist interpretation and reader identification, Enoch Brater in his penetrating essay manages to make a good deal of sense out of them. He concludes that Beckett’s language defiantly “stands” as a text for company, in spite of the dark silence that threatens to overwhelm us all—reader, writer, listener.

To anyone seriously interested in Beckett’s post-Trilogy prose, starting with *Texts for Nothing* (written in 1950, though published in English translation much later) up to and including *Worstward Ho*, Susan D. Brienza’s *Samuel Beckett’s New Worlds: Style in Metafiction* can be highly recommended. It is the first thoroughly

stylistic analysis of his postmodernist prose fictions, each of which comprises its own hermetically closed system of language and distinct imagistic terrain or geometrical shape, like domes, oblongs, cylinders, rotundas, and boxes which are figures of the mind and of the writer stuck within the prison-house of language.

As the subtitle indicates, she considers these texts to be self-reflexive studies in, and experiments with, language, “a chronicle about writing itself, in fact, a diagram of the workings of fictional language”; they are “metafictions” that inform us about imagination, creation and imaginative reconstruction. When viewed together these metafictional worlds in words make up a recognizable Beckettian universe, outside time and space, full of detached observers, self-conscious narrators, and self-reflexive metaphors, a cosmos founded on rituals of language and of motion. After a great deal of microscopic analysis of grammar and syntax, she concludes that there are close parallels between a character’s nature, position, and motion and the language’s construction and syntactical manoeuvres. In *Texts for Nothing*, for instance, stylistic devices such as pronouns that clash or are deferred and verb tenses that are constantly manipulated, enact both the narrator’s incapacity to achieve being and the story’s essential non-progress. She convincingly argues that *How It Is* can be seen as the turning-point in his stylistic experiments since in it the process of reduction and minimalization of language and narrativity sets in that will ineluctably lead to the later “zero” writings of the eighties.

As for her approach to style, it is based on Beckett’s implied credo on *imitative style* (the style imitating the content in some way) which “compels us to analyse the smaller units of clauses and phrases when sentences themselves lose their shapes, dissolve and fragment”, as is the case throughout the later prose. In accordance with current views in modern stylistics she sees style as a matter of linguistic and stylistic choices performed by the author, both consciously and unconsciously; whether their reconstruction by way of careful analysis and interpretation leads us ultimately into the author’s mind, as she claims, remains a matter of speculation. In her otherwise extensive bibliography the two seminal works on literary stylistics (one on poetry and one on prose) by Geoffrey N. Leech appear to be missing; this is a pity because they might have offered a more

solid theoretical basis for her analytical approach. Nor is there any reference to semiotics and in particular to the concept of *iconicity*, which covers her notion of “imitative style” to perfection and has the additional advantage of putting stylistic mimesis within the wider perspective of imitation in art. For the rest Brienza’s monograph must be warmly welcomed for offering such close and sensitive readings of Beckett’s masterful short fictions unrivalled by any other postmodernist writer except Borges.

Although her study duly acknowledges the importance of repetition, it is Steven Connor in his *Samuel Beckett: Repetition, Theory and Text* who is the first critic to offer a radical examination of this central and necessary concept within all attempts to understand individual and social being and representation. Drawing on the poststructuralist theories of Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze (whose importance has hardly yet been recognized in English criticism), he examines not only the paradoxical forms and effects of repetition in a linguistic sense within Beckett’s writing and theatre but he also includes his self-translating activity to and from French and English and his practice as a director of his own plays. In a still wider sense Connor also discerns repetition at work within critical discourse itself where Beckettian actors, directors and critics alike help to create and sustain by way of repeating their Master’s Voice the mythological aura that surrounds the great writer.

Following Deleuze, author of *Différence et Repetition* (1968) and co-author of *Anti-Oedipus* (1977), he distinguishes between “mechanical” or “naked” repetition, which merely represents the Same and thus points to identity with the original and to presence, and “clothed” or “disguised” repetition, which adds something to the original, imparts a difference to it and suggests absence or non-being. Repetition, then, comprises affirmation as well as negation; it both offers and withholds a sense of identity and being and simultaneously asserts and defers presentation and meaning. This interplay between presence and absence, origin and copy, unity and disintegration, turns out to be a source of deconstructive strength and power as much as of weakness or “impotence” in Beckett’s sense. Connor’s central thesis is brilliantly illustrated in the chapter on Beckett translating himself which, to my knowledge, surpasses all earlier literature on this subject.

On close investigation it appears that there is

much disparity between original and translation, particularly when there is a considerable time-lag between the two as is the case, for instance, in the French version of *Murphy* and *Watt*, and the English versions of *Mercier et Camier* and *Premier Amour*. Far from being simple transfers of pre-formed meaning, these translations turn out to be “supplements” or sequels to the original texts which they reproduce or repeat but with a difference. By deliberately making these texts different, either by adding to or omitting from them, Beckett not only effectively distances himself from these pre-texts but at the same time intensifies and displaces whatever precarious meaning they seemed to possess. Although these translations mutilate their originals in that any form of “unsaying” what has already been said points up absence, they can also be seen as improvements upon them since they confirm and complete the originals by opening up in them areas of uncertainty and deficiency. Thus they also gain in authority and tend to obliterate any precedence of origin over repetition. Beckett’s direction of his own plays in other languages, notably in German, offers further interesting examples of “clothed” self-repetition and self-translation, for each new production is different from the text it repeats, even as Beckett strives to make it definitive.

Space forbids me to do full justice to Connor’s study, but it should be clear that it deserves to be read and pondered by everyone seriously concerned with literary and cultural theory in general and Beckett’s writing and theatre in particular. As for his critique of the Beckett establishment, it certainly has to be taken to heart not only by that particular literary institution but *mutatis mutandis* by any literary circle, the Powys Society not excluded.

MARIUS BUNING

*Laughter from the Dark: A Life of Gwyn Thomas*,  
MICHAEL PARNELL.

John Murray, 1988, £15.95.

In an interview in 1968, Gwyn Thomas talked about the reasons behind his fascination with the dark and macabre:

Our felons, the large and terrible legion of murderers, rapists, robbers, cast a weird light into the darker corridors of our collective memory. It is almost as if there is some nour-

ishing absurdity in the antics of these outrageous clowns who allow their hatred, greed, boredom and witless wish for a change of idiom to head them towards the arch-discourtesies of theft and murder. They are the sore teeth that never fail to attract the tongue of our moral perplexity.

The extravagance of this casual passage is representative of the man's extraordinary imagination: the clashing epithets ("nourishing absurdities", "witless wish"), the pseudo-tactful collision of registers ("theft and murder" as "arch-discourtesies", "a change of idiom"), and above all the splendid final image of the teeth and the tongue, at once imaginative and physical, mundane and bizarre. Amongst so many others, this characteristic passage reveals Gwyn Thomas as a thoroughly mordant writer, in all senses of that resonant adjective. But its appeal is primarily textual and sensual rather than cerebral or autobiographical, in that we are induced to admire the way an idea is burnished and elaborated, given energy and pizzazz, while remaining fundamentally quite simple. Such a technique made Gwyn Thomas an outstanding raconteur and broadcaster, and it enlivened all his writing. Without the occasional flash of wit or idiosyncratic turn of phrase, even a novel as interesting as *All Things Betray Thee* could be very heavy going. It is Thomas's capacity to surprise, his acerbic deftness, that keeps the pages turning, not his ideas. In his own terms, it is the darkness, not the philosophy, that animates his work.

As a result, this linguistically dextrous writer becomes a difficult and potentially unrewarding subject for a biography. Michael Parnell cannot be faulted for his efforts in tracking his man down, but all too often he ends up, alas, sounding like the man who has to explain the jokes. As a record of the events of Gwyn Thomas's life, this book is valuable and authoritative, even if the events themselves are rather unremarkable. Gwyn Thomas's life was full and rich, but no one could really call it exciting or flamboyant, and as his own sort of autobiography (*A Few Selected Exits*) shows, it is a life which is best retold by ironic deflation and the embellishment of the miniature. The most interesting narrative within his life concerns the transformation of the reticent, bookish private man into a celebrity and public figure. In Parnell's account, this process is carefully laid before us, and adroitly presented, replacing the more sketchy account in

Ian Michael's *Writers of Wales* volume. It would have been interesting to see more evidence of the formative days at Oxford, where Thomas seems to have had a predictably bad time, but Parnell comes across as too much of a Varsity man to contemplate the unthinkable: "One cannot accept that Oxford rejected so totally and so injudiciously a man of Gwyn's potential: he must have brought it at least partly upon himself" (p. 33). Oxford seems to have rejected him because of his uncouth combination of socialism, shortness, and shyness. For Parnell, the institution thus seems to be exculpated, and Thomas somehow incriminated. "All about him were people of wealth, privilege and physical superiority, and he could not or would not at the time see beyond these trappings to the essential decency and mental and cultural excellence which were also there" (p. 41). All the efforts, it seems, should have been made by Gwyn, none by Oxford, with the individual rather than the institution having to learn tolerance and sensitivity. Surely, this will not do.

Elsewhere, Parnell's interpretive stance seems slightly maladroit. He presents his subject's sexuality as a mixture of ignorance and yearning, and seems to see his creativity as springing in part at least from repressed sexual urges, intensified by monogamy. Well, maybe, but the supporting evidence remains highly speculative and uncertain. Rather than dwell on these murky matters, it would be better to concentrate on Thomas's concern with the magic of ordinary life. His political sympathies with the neglected and inarticulate are given expression in the sparkle of his prose. Although never a writer of ideas primarily, his darkly comic vision is a way of lingering over the imaginative powers of ordinary people. His unique mixture of exasperation and accommodation sets him apart from his contemporaries, offering a voice which is at once elevated and ironic, and highly informative. Like our felons, our writers cast a weird light into the darker corridors of our collective memory, and anything that helps illuminate these corridors is valuable. Parnell's biography does its best service by enabling further commentary. Reading this book made me want to go back and re-read the novels and stories, and the intelligently handled chronology provided by Parnell helps invigorate a new reading of them in a biographical context. For this, we must be grateful.

IAN BELL

*Philip Larkin, the Marvell Press and Me*,  
JEAN HARTLEY.

Carcenet, 1989, £12.95.

The very title of these reminiscences by Jean Hartley has a refreshing directness. Larkin no doubt would have approved; his own literary preferences were strongly weighted to clarity rather than artifice. Moreover, the tripartite nature of the title is a fair indication of the principal strands which make up these sensitively written chapters of autobiography.

The early pages are a convincing portrayal of the author's working-class background in Hull. It is fashionable in some quarters to place Hull as a backwater. Indeed John Wain is here reported to have prefaced his poetry reading at the University with a theatrical account of his complicated train journey to the city. But this is the stock-in-trade of music-hall comedians, the Sandy Powells of this world. The Hull of the 1950s, for all the ravages of the war, was a city of character and atmosphere. Jean Hartley was not impervious to this spirit of place and the bent of her romantic mind saw it as a microcosm of a larger world. She speaks, for instance, of a vista of distant copper domes awakening images of Kiev, and the prospect of New Holland across the Humber as a foreign country.

The story of family life, some years at a central school and early employment scarcely give us any indication of the remarkable literary eruption of the mid-fifties when the author and her husband George, an art student, decided to launch the poetry magazine *Listen*, having chosen at the last moment to reject conferring upon it the title *Poetry Hull*. "Let's be blatantly provincial" was their first thought, but their provincialism was geographical rather than literary or intellectual. There is one evocative passage when the author, at the close of a long evening of literary banter with like-minded friends, mused that it was possible, after all, to have a rich intellectual life in the provinces—who needs Bloomsbury? She might well have thought of the Swansea of Dylan Thomas, Vernon Watkins and John Ormond, or the Leicester of C. P. Snow.

For all her lack of academic schooling the author had a passionate feeling for poetry. One of the first invitations to contribute to *Listen* was sent to Ezra Pound, a firm and gracious supporter of the magazine, and after Vol 1 No. 1 the emerging giants of "The Movement"—

Larkin, Davie, Alvarez, Amis, Wain and others—were involved. By the issue of No. 3 it was not cavalier to suggest that *Listen* had become a creative force in contemporary literature. Nothing gave the editors more delight than a note from Larkin reporting that Donald Davie had complained of the late appearance of No. 4. "We were not Leonard and Virginia Woolf" the author reflects, "but we felt rather smug".

Editorial and other myriad labours involved in the production and distribution of the magazine are graphically described. They could afford no commercial travellers, and advertising was confined to exchange columns with other little magazines. There was much reliance on reviews and personal recommendations. Indeed the editorial office was a tiny terrace house equipped with a typewriter, but without telephone, refrigerator, bathroom or indoor sanitation. A local jobbing printer was entrusted with the first number of *Listen*, but all others were printed by Villiers Publications of London. The aesthetics of production were notably cultivated, and the cover designs were a feature, Henry Moore designing three. If issues of *Listen* were themselves a considerable achievement, the publication of books by Philip Larkin, Donald Davie, John Holloway and Anthony Thwaite under the imprint of their parallel venture, the Marvell Press (and the later issue of Marvell records) borders on the miraculous.

The contours of this whole saga however are dominated by the life, personality and poetry of Philip Larkin. When he contributed three poems to *Listen* No. 2 the editors were not aware of what was to follow, Larkin's arrival in Hull as the new University Librarian in 1955. He shared Jean Hartley's liking for the unpretentious comforts of a small provincial town and the nearness of unspoiled landscape. It was typical of him to state, before his arrival, that he did not need theatres, concerts and poetry readings. Not that Hull was devoid of these cultural fringes.

The publication of Larkin's early group of poems, *The Less Deceived* (1955) was undoubtedly the flagship of the Marvell Press programme; it brought instant recognition to the poet and the press, and benefitted both financially. It is, however, Jean Hartley's personal relationship to Larkin which colours the second half of this reminiscence. He is revealed as a lonely man with an obsession for order and routine. He constantly proclaimed himself a creature of the side-lines, in poetry and life

generally. He was kindly, courteous, affectionate, and abhorred foreign lands and cultures, largely because of a lack of confidence imposed by a long battle with a stutter. Self-deprecation and ironic utterance were trade-marks. Yet there were many anomalies in this make-up—he cultivated robust swearing and retailing jokes as an art form, and enjoyed watching boxing. He conveyed horrid forebodings of retirement and death. He could not understand why younger people had no knowledge of Janet Gaynor! So many aspects of Larkin's complex personality are brought to light in this absorbing recital of anecdotes and impressions. No less significant is Jean Hartley's own story, for she contended bravely with many emotional and physical difficulties, and writes here with great effect.

GWYN WALTERS

*The Art of Edward Thomas*,  
Edited by JONATHAN BARKER.

Poetry Wales Press, 1987, £9.95.

It is worth being reminded how prodigious Edward Thomas's literary output was. He produced 40 books before he died at the age of 37, supporting his wife and children almost exclusively by writing. The poems, on which his present reputation rests, were all written in the last two and a half years of his life, most of them after he had joined the army. His close friend Robert Frost wrote that the war "has made some sort of new man and a poet out of Edward Thomas". The image of the writer who at the very last found his voice is hard to resist, and it is largely confirmed by the essays in this collection. The Thomas of the last years sits uneasily, however, with the prolific pre-war writer whose style and subjects are so much more of their time. And this prose writing includes some very alien material—the deep involvement with nature, and the mystification of England, for example. This collection of essays sets out ostensibly to examine Thomas's art, but underlying several of the essays is the more controversial task of rehabilitating Thomas the prose writer, and inserting Thomas the poet into the mainstream of twentieth-century poetry despite the fact that he died on the brink of the modernist revolution in which he played no part.

The essays by Ward and Wells struggle with Thomas's placing in twentieth-century poetry.

J. P. Ward's on Thomas and modernism seeks to position him in what is called the main line of English poetry, on the basis of his concern with poetry's and language's difficulty. Ward dislikes modernism for its cultural eclecticism and the sense of derangement this produces, and he values Thomas instead of the opposing "quiet personal voice . . . the individual mind . . . in the ethos of the natural and domestic". Thomas's special contribution to this mainstream is his inner estrangement, and his subsequent struggles with language to express it. This tentative, self-testing voice derives its authenticity from its rootedness in nature. Ward's argument seeks to provide Thomas with valid twentieth-century credentials at the same time as connecting him with the great tradition of "Chaucer and Shakespeare". While the literary historical revisionism is unconvincing, the criticism of Thomas's language is illuminating; the way, for instance, in which phrases are repeated in a slightly different form as if the poet were trying a formulation as he is writing: "I could not love; I could not command love". Intriguingly, Ward suggests that what connects Thomas the uneasy user of words with the world of nature is "whispering", which are both sounds at the edge of speech and sounds made in nature.

Robert Wells's essay on Thomas and England is the outstanding one of the volume. In two deft opening paragraphs he sketches the influence on Thomas of Symbolism and Imagism, and places him in a European context. The demon that Thomas was trying to escape from was the demon of eloquence, which Symbolism and Imagism offered ways of defeating. Wells's essay goes on to analyse the meaning of "England" for Thomas: the apprehensions of the country which come directly from sensual experience, the anti-intellectual invocations of history, the soundings of narrow patriotism. The range of mental affiliations which emerges from Wells's analysis firmly places Thomas in a distant past. The kind of love of country which was felt rather than thought seems ominous now, given that a similar love of country with a darker twist was to dominate Germany two decades later. Thomas the reactionary clearly emerges in this essay. It is right then that Wells should describe the followers of the cult of Edward Thomas as being very suspect, and that he should mock those who have dedicated a hillside to his memory: only a thing made can be dedicated, "dedicating a hill-

side is laughable, as well as presumptuous". This essay is remarkable for its sudden useful insights: "Behind Thomas's partial attachment to Symbolist and Imagist methods lies a Puritan passion for reading the particulars of the world as signs".

It is disappointing, though, that *The Art of Edward Thomas* should contain comparatively little sustained critical analysis of the poetry itself. Peter Levi's contribution is, as it says, "Notes on Edward Thomas"; and John Bayley's essay on "The Self in the Poem" focuses on a comparatively narrow subject. Although Bayley's insights will certainly make a reader's responses to Thomas more subtle, they do not form an overall account of the poetry. John Pikoulis, on the other hand, writing on "Edward Thomas as War Poet", produces a reading of the last two years which sees the artistic drive combining with Thomas's own drive towards death. "There was no reason," writes Pikoulis, "why he should have put in for a commission. Having done so there was no further reason why, in late 1916, he should have volunteered to go to France or why, at Arras as Assistant Adjutant at HQ he should have asked to be relieved of staff duties and rejoin his battery, where he eventually died." Pikoulis thus offers a way of seeing how Thomas's earlier subject of rural life is bound into his mortuary desires to produce a fusion from which his finest art springs.

Perhaps the most fascinating and useful part of this book is the immensely detailed chronology of Thomas's life and work, prepared by Jonathan Barker. It puts Thomas firmly into history and makes me realise how badly the modernist movement was needed to release people like Thomas from the dim, becalmed cultural world of pre-war Britain.

LAWRENCE NORMAND

*The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda, 1914-18 and After*,  
PETER BUITENHUIS.

Batsford, 1989, £7.95 (paperback).

When we think of literature in the First World War, we tend automatically to think of the war poets, whose bitter, unsparing accounts fixed the popular image of the Great War as a monument to waste, folly, mismanagement and useless

slaughter. But there was another literary war being waged and that struggle forms the subject of Peter Buitenhuis' *The Great War of Words*.

At the very outset of the war on 2 September 1914, 25 of Britain's leading authors met with C. F. G. Masterman, head of the War Propaganda Bureau, to discuss how they might best serve the cause. Soon after, on 18 September 1914, a manifesto signed by 53 leading writers was published in *The New York Times* saying that Britain could not have refused to join the war without dishonour because of Germany's unprovoked invasion of Belgium which had violated the canons of civilized conduct.

What is remarkable about these events is the range of writers pledging their support for the Allied cause. They included not just the imperialists (Kipling, Haggard, Doyle, Newbolt, Buchan) and the romancers (Anthony Hope, A. E. W. Mason, Maurice Hewlett, John Masefield). These one might have expected to find. But there were also such exponents of the genteel and civilized "Great Tradition" of literature as Henry James, Joseph Conrad, Edith Wharton and Thomas Hardy; not to mention the fiery prophet of the Left, H. G. Wells. Among leading literary figures only Bernard Shaw, D. H. Lawrence and Bertrand Russell stood out against the wave of patriotic fervour that engulfed not just the literary establishment but also the nation.

Although the bulk of the documentary records of Britain's wartime propaganda agency, latterly transformed into the Ministry of Information, have been destroyed and he has been forced to use largely secondary sources, Professor Buitenhuis tells briskly and efficiently the story of the official literary war. Much of this work was issued not by government departments but by commercial publishers, something which ironically led to criticism of Masterman for not doing enough. In fact his propaganda was the more potent for not bearing a government label.

Buitenhuis sees the majority of the writers as inspired by three guiding principles: a belief in the ideals of British imperialism, a reverence for French culture and civilization and hatred of German militarism. Wells, although no imperialist, certainly saw Germany as a threat to civilization and proudly proclaimed the Great War as "the war that would end war", a phrase that came to haunt him.

The chief contribution of the authors was in the form of pamphlets, encouraging recruitment, expounding Allied ideals and exposing

German atrocities. But key writers—Arnold Bennett, Hilaire Belloc, Kipling, Doyle and Galsworthy among them—were sent to the front to report in upbeat terms on conditions and on the Allied advance. John Masefield wrote a whitewashing account of Gallipoli and Buchan did the same for the Somme. Their rhetoric was conventionalized and deliberately archaic, stressing chivalry, sacrifice, duty, honour, glory. But those were the terms in which war had been written about throughout the second half of the nineteenth-century.

Buitenhuis is anxious to point up the gulf between the official and non-official writings of the authors. But although it is true that Galsworthy, Wells and Bennett expressed greater misgivings about the war in their wartime novels than in their propaganda, others maintained a consistency of tone. Kipling's implacable hatred of the Germans spilled over into some characteristic stories of revenge and retribution, notably "Mary Postgate". Doyle brought Sherlock Holmes out of retirement to apprehend Germany's chief spy in Britain. Buchan invented Richard Hannay and pitted him against the secret forces of the Kaiser at home and abroad. Buchan's Hannay stories in Ian Hay's *The First Hundred Thousand* are self-consciously modelled on *Pilgrim's Progress*, giving the war a quasi-mystical justification.

Perhaps the most remarkable story of all in the field of wartime propaganda testifies to the deep need in the public that such an approach filled. In late 1914 Arthur Machen published in *The Evening News* a short story called "The Bowmen" in which a soldier has a vision of the archers of Agincourt brought by St. George to the aid of the Allies at Mons. Repeated and embellished, transformed into the appearance of the Angels of Mons, this story was widely taken to be true. Machen's repeated insistence that he had made it up was ignored. The public wanted to believe it was true; so it was.

Buitenhuis is also anxious to show that his authors became disillusioned after the war and rejected their propaganda past. But this also does not quite work. Galsworthy, Bennett and Ford Madox Ford painted a different picture of propaganda activity in post-war novels than they would have endorsed in wartime. Kipling, Doyle and Buchan were profoundly affected by the war but there is no reason to suppose that they would not have done the same again, given the same circumstances. Buitenhuis cherishes a romantic idea of the novelist as a detached commentator

and observer and implicitly rebukes his writers for departing from this stance. But he is operating with the wisdom of hindsight. He does not tell us what the writers, believing as they did that the very future of civilization was threatened, should have done. Most of them were too old to fight. So they sought to use their pens to save Western Europe from what in their manifesto they called "the rule of 'Blood and Iron' and the domination of the whole Continent by a military caste". In the immortal words of Syd Walker, what would you do, chums?

JEFFREY RICHARDS

*Speak Silence: Essays,*  
IDRIS PARRY.

Carcenet, 1988, £16.95.

Few academics possess the stylish grace, the arresting turn of phrase and deft flow of speech that Idris Parry demonstrates time and again in these collected essays. They may not be to the taste of every scholar, but that doesn't matter. He is not writing for scholars anyway, but for the intelligent, inquisitive person interested in literature and its meanings. Many of these essays were written as broadcast talks for BBC Radio 3, and they frequently elicited fanmail from listeners who were inclined to view Idris as their personal guru. It was a far cry from the one-and-a-half readers that are supposed to cast their eye over the average scholarly article.

Two previous collections—*Animals of Silence* (1972) and *Hand to Mouth* (1981) are reprinted in this present volume, and five other essays have been added to them. One of these was printed in 1973 in a handsome private press edition of 100 copies by Duine Campbell at the Black Knight Press, Leicester, a delight to its owners, but by the nature of things not accessible to all. Of the newly published pieces the one on Munchausen has an unexpected topicality through the recently released Gilliam/McKeown film.

As the title to this present collection indicates, Idris Parry's imagination feeds on paradox and making connexions between apparently unrelated things, events and people. Did anyone ever have a better nose for a title? Who would not want to find out about "Kafka, Rilke and Rumpelstiltskin" or "Cordelia and the Button"? A vibrant sense of discovery pervades

Parry's literary explorations, as he leads his readers into seeing things with new eyes.

The essays focus on a handful of German-language authors from the eighteenth century to the present day—Goethe, Winckelmann, R. E. Raspe (the anonymous original author of the Munchausen tales), Kleist, Büchner, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Kafka, Hermann Hesse, Robert Walser, Musil, Thomas Mann, Grass and Canetti. Idris Parry was one of the first advocates in Britain of Canetti's extraordinary genius and, fittingly, he was the presenter when Canetti, part of whose childhood was spent in Manchester, was awarded an honorary degree by the University of Manchester. But the ravishments of German literature are not the sole subject of this book. We find telling allusions to Sterne, Gogol, Dickens, Lewis Carroll, Faulkner, Melville, the Taliesin legend, Sheherazade, the folktale and much more. Margiad Evans is the subject of an essay to herself.

The catalogue of names suggests a particular kind of interest on the essayist's part. We are not presented with a representative list of great German authors, nor do we find a comprehensive analysis of any one work (though there are stimulating long sections on several works—for example, Goethe's *Elective Affinities*, Büchner's *Woyzeck*, Walser's *Jakob von Gunten*, Grass's *Tin Drum*). Parry is captivated by those aspects of literature that scholars often shy away from—the domain of human insight, poetic meaning on a personal level, myth and symbol in relation to the experienced realities of life. Not for him the vast, solid tracts of nineteenth century realism and naturalism and their modern successors, but rather the experimental, visionary and symbolic in whatever age, the works that have ragged edges, ask untidy questions, reflect the organic structures of the natural world and make ambiguous statements that one is forced to ponder and worry over. He is fascinated by folktales and the recurrence of their structures and questions in modern literature, especially by the themes of metamorphosis and the power of names.

The opening sentence of Kafka's long story "The Metamorphosis" must be one of the most astounding and compelling invitations to continue reading that we find in any literary work: "When Gregor Samsa awoke one morning out of troubled dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous beetle." Parry uses that opening in his essay entitled "The Talk of Guilty Men" to explore the nature

of Kafka's world, and he concludes: "[Kafka] inhabits a region not yet discovered by thought. Our understanding is stretched beyond rational comprehension and hovers in the realm of induced vibration, inexplicable. This is the place where imagination waits for life to catch up with it."

This feel for the mysteriousness of human experience, where illumination may seize one round the unanticipated corner, is everywhere in Idris Parry's writing. His concern with literature is quasi-religious (though he might not thank me for saying this) in that he *celebrates* and *expounds* the mysteries rather than attempts to *explain* them; for explanation means flattening things out, reducing them to the same level of ordinariness.

The readers of these elegant, perceptive essays do not need to be equipped with an intimate, independent knowledge of the works to be discussed. The information they need will be provided on the way. As they read they will be excited, seduced and almost certainly persuaded to go straight away and read something that they had never suspected could be so magical. Idris Parry has a marvellous way with words. His essays are an art-form in themselves, written in deceptively simple language, but crammed with seemingly throwaway aphorisms, *bons mots*, autobiographical anecdotes, provocative quotations and sheer enjoyment in making connexions. He quotes the Dodo's question to Alice: "What else have you got in your pocket?" and makes the reader want to put the same question to him.

DAVID BLAMIRE

*Erkundungen: 28 Walisische Erzähler*,  
Edited by HANS PETERSEN.

Verlag Volk und Welt (East Berlin), 1988, pp. 405.

As only a fraction of West European and American literature is available in East Germany, the publication of *Erkundungen* ("explorations"), an anthology of twenty-eight short prose works from both language communities in Wales, represents a major literary event in the German Democratic Republic and will be eagerly received by readers there.

Wales will certainly be no more than a vague concept to most East Germans, although the

similarities between the two societies are quite marked. Both have experienced the disfigurement of their landscape at the hands of heavy industry, both are home to a linguistic minority (in the case of the G.D.R. it is the Sorbs), both countries live behind international frontiers not of their own making and, within and without their literatures, the question of national identity remains an obsessive preoccupation. Disappointingly, but predictably, the editor Hans Petersen avoids drawing these parallels; he does, however, provide a succinct introduction to Welsh literary life, moving briskly from the death of Llywelyn ap Gruffydd to the creation of S4C and he succeeds admirably in exposing the particular tensions underlying so much literature in Wales.

The short story naturally lends itself to the anthology format far better than either drama or the novel, and it does not present the translation problems inherent in poetry. *Erkundungen* strives to offer a representative selection of twentieth-century prose from Wales although it cannot strictly be termed contemporary writing. The editor has reached back as far as Caradoc Evans, Kate Roberts and David John Williams, and by far the largest group of writers chosen are members of that generation born between the turn of the century and the First World War. These include Rhys Davies, George Ewart Evans, Geraint Goodwin, Glyn Jones and Gwyn Jones, Alun Lewis and Roland Mathias. Only three writers born in the 1930s are represented: Harri Pritchard Jones, Ned Thomas and Herbert Lloyd Williams, whilst there are five pieces from writers born after the Second World War: Duncan Bush, Tony Curtis, Peter Finch, Carl Tighe and Penny Windsor.

The East German reader will be bewildered to discover from the biographical notes provided that a number of the writers were born in England, and the editor does little to answer the question of what constitutes a Welsh writer.

The assuredness of the editor's selection may in part be explained by his acknowledgement of help from Meic Stephens, Glyn Jones, Gwyn Jones and Alun Richards. The translations, the work of over a dozen hands, are fluent yet only one of the six stories originally in Welsh has not been translated into German via an English version, and one suspects a criterion for the selection of the Welsh material must have been

the availability of an English translation. The practice of translating at second hand is rarely safe, justifiable only when the author is his own translator, as with Islwyn Ffowc Elis's contribution. The ratio of English to Welsh stories is defended on the grounds that it reflects the size of the respective language groups in Wales. This is a quantitative rather than a qualitative approach and fails to indicate which of the two literary traditions holds more interest to those viewing them from outside.

Just how remote Wales is to the East German reader can be seen in the numerous notes the editor has to give to various references in the stories. Merlin and Nye Bevan, Neil Kinnock and "Sosban Fach" all require a gloss; Of greater use to the reader in Leipzig or East Berlin might have been a short general introduction to the political and social context of each story. In Carl Tighe's story, for example, two teachers go to an Indian restaurant. To the East German reader the idea of secondary school teachers having easy access to exotic food is a vision little short of paradise; by contrast, the British reader will probably place a very different cultural interpretation on a buna ghosht and lager ordered in a South Wales establishment called the "Cymru-Tandoori".

All anthologies in translation invite one particular question: will the receiving culture be enriched by its encounter with the unfamiliar? Since the modern short story is not an indigenous genre in German literature—the *Novelle* tradition is quite different—it would be tempting to regard this anthology as a valuable model for East German writers, all the more so since the editor sees the Anglo-Welsh and Welsh short story as being heavily indebted to earlier French and American writers whose books, in turn, are not always readily available in East Germany. Given that *Erkundungen* is a unique undertaking and is likely to remain in its country the only window on Welsh literature for many years to come, the editor's verdict on the modern Welsh and Anglo-Welsh short prose is surprisingly muted. For Hans Petersen contemporary writing in Wales shuns the spectacular and the experimental, whilst content, themes and motifs remain essentially conventional. It all sounds remarkably like East German literature.

ANTHONY BUSHELL

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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IAN A. BELL lectures in English at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. He is author of *Defoe's Fiction* (1985) and of a forthcoming study, *Literature and Crime in Augustan England*. He has also edited *Watching the Detectives: Essays on Crime Fiction* (1989) and has written a number of articles on eighteenth-century literature and Scottish writing.

DAVID BLAMIRE is Reader in German at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *David Jones: Artist and Writer* (second edition, 1978) and has written the introduction to the exhibition catalogue *David Jones (1895-1974)* (Austin/Desmond Fine Art, 1989). His teaching and research includes German medieval and sixteenth-century literature and fairy-tales.

MARIUS BUNING is Senior Lecturer in English at the Free University of Amsterdam. He has published reviews and articles on such writers as Beckett, Joyce, Pound, and most recently on Potok. He is author of *T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist* (1986) and managing editor of the *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters*.

ANTHONY BUSHELL lectures in German at Saint David's University College, Lampeter, specializing in post-1945 German literature and society.

STEPHEN CARROLL, formerly a lecturer in Law at the College of Law, Guildford, is now a solicitor in Epsom.

GERARD CASEY, farmer and poet, was married to the writer Mary Casey, daughter of Lucy Powys, youngest sister of J. C. Powys et al. His writings include the long poem, *South Wales Echo* (Enitharmon, 1973) under the pseudonym Gerardus Cambrensis.

RAYMOND GARLICK was, with Roland Mathias, the founder of *The Anglo-Welsh Review* (then *Dock Leaves*) in 1949, and its first editor. He recently retired as lecturer, Trinity College, Carmarthen. He has published five books of poetry, including *A Sense of Europe* (1968), most recently *Selected Poems* (Gomer, 1987).

TONY HALLETT'S great grandfather was once the gravedigger at Bradford Abbas.

JONAH JONES, sculptor and novelist, was from 1974-78 Director of the National College of Art and Design in Dublin. *A Tree May Fall*, his trilogy of novels about Britain and Ireland was published in 1980, his illustrated *The Lakes of North Wales* in 1983, *The Gallipoli Diary* (Seren) in 1989.

ROLAND MATHIAS, editor of *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, 1961-1976, and various collections of stories and poems, including *Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1980* (with Raymond Garlick), has published widely on Welsh writers from *Vernon Watkins* (1974) to J. C. Powys (*The Hallowed-Out Elder Stalk: J. C. Powys as Poet* (Enitharmon, 1979)), with *Anglo-Welsh Literature: An Illustrated History* (Poetry Wales press, 1986). He himself has published collections of stories and six volumes of poetry, including *Burning Brambles* (Gomer, 1983).

LAWRENCE NORMAND lectures in English at Saint David's University College, Lampeter. He has written for such journals as *Poetry Wales* and *The New Welsh Review*.

JACQUELINE PELTIER is engaged in doctoral research on J. C. Powys's correspondence at Paris VII University. She is French correspondent of the Powys Society.

SUSAN RANDS wrote for *John O'London's Weekly* in the early 1950s and has recently returned to writing, having in the meantime lived with husband and children in Malaya and Germany and farmed in Somerset. She has published previously in *The Powys Review* and is Hon. Treasurer of the Powys Society.

JEFFREY RICHARDS is Reader in History at the University of Lancaster. His most recent works include *Mass Observation at the Movies* (1987), *Happiest Days* (1988) and *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (1989).

PENNY SMITH lectures in English at Newcastle-on-Tyne Polytechnic. Her recent articles in *The Powys Review* are based on her researches at the NLW, Aberystwyth, while a research fellow and lecturer at UCW, Aberystwyth. She is Reviews Editor of *The New Welsh Review*.

SUBI SWIFT lectures in English at St Mary's College, Strawberry Hill. This year she obtained a Ph.D. for a thesis on J. C. Powys.

GWYN WALTERS has been an Assistant Keeper in the National Library of Wales and Leverhulme Senior Research Fellow in the Department of English at Saint David's University College, Lampeter. His publications have centred on aspects of printing history and antiquarianism.

