

## In Defence of *Morwyn*

THERE SEEMS TO BE a competition in the critical appraisal of John Cowper Powys's novels as to which is the worst. *The Inmates* has been a strong contender, but for some the prize goes to *Morwyn*<sup>1</sup>. John Brebner, for example, complains that *Morwyn* "fails miserably as a novel"<sup>2</sup>. Glen Cavaliero, in his sensitive study<sup>3</sup>, finds specific elements to praise in *Morwyn*: he uses the words "coherence and economy", finds the Rabelais presentation moving, and describes the "spirit of questing curiosity, mediated half-humorously through the psychological reactions of the narrator". But he also writes "nevertheless *Morwyn* fails to realize Powys at his best", especially in relation to the presentation of characters: he alleges that the character drawing is "perfunctory.... *Morwyn* herself is simply an idealized embodiment of the sylph-like figures of whom Powys writes more interestingly elsewhere."

John Brebner supplies the strongest case for the prosecution and the awarding of an F grade to *Morwyn*. He lays five charges against the novel: its arguments against vivisection are not developed, the characters are thinly drawn, the themes are not fleshed out, details in the narration seem to spring from the author's whim and there is an overall lack of organization. Brebner's explanation for this disaster is creative exhaustion. Powys is drained of creative energies after the previous novel, *Weymouth Sands*. Is a defence possible against so many charges? My position is "It was the worst of novels. It was the best of novels". I paraphrase Charles Dickens in acknowledging some of the criticism, but I am convinced that there is a blindness to the distinctive qualities of *Morwyn*, stemming from some misconceptions and misunderstandings.

I begin with some reconsideration of the form of *Morwyn* and its place within John Cowper's oeuvre. Its date of publication, 1937, marks an ominous time in the history of Europe and the Western world. *Morwyn* marks the close of the *Weymouth Sands* idyll, with the sense of hope conveyed by its setting of sand and sea which had especially happy associations for Powys, marks a geographical displacement from the West Country Dorset world to be explored in one final novel, *Maiden Castle*, and looks forward to the Welsh locations and themes of invasion and defeat in the novels *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*—and after that the cosmic fantasies of tales like *Up and Out*, where the concerns with Hitler's invasion and possible defeat are replaced by the cosmic apocalyptic anxieties of nuclear explosion. Powys seems to me not to be resting from one creative accomplishment but to be preparing for the creative challenge of exploring a darker political world and of immersing in the ancient culture and mythology in Wales.

*Morwyn* as a transition novel draws into itself a darker thread from *Weymouth Sands*. The preacher Sylvanus Cobbold, disturbed by Dr. Brush's vivisection experiments, asserts that "*being allowed* to do this ... proves that we've given up trying to touch the secret of life by being just and righteous and pitiful. Good God! Given up the whole direction we've been making toward, from the beginning!"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J.C. Powys, *Morwyn or the Vengeance of God*, Cassell and Co, London, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> John Brebner, *The Demon Within*, London, Macdonald, 1973, p.160.

<sup>3</sup> Glen Cavaliero, *J.C.Powys Novelist*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973, p.103-6.

<sup>4</sup> J.C. Powys, *Weymouth Sands*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934, XIV, 525.

“To touch the secret of life” is a deeply felt expression of the capacity of literary fiction and the aim of literary art. Powys himself describes *Morwyn* as “my anti-vivisection romance”<sup>5</sup>—a paradoxical description, suggesting dramatic confrontation of extreme opposites: scientific cruelty and the idealized, magical worlds of romance. What kind of romance is an “anti-vivisection romance”? “Anti-vivisection” suggests a satirical pamphlet, a realistic debate novel. “Romance” suggests a work of imagination and the pursuit of idealized personal relations. However the “romance” of *Morwyn* is an incongruous idealized pursuit by a narrator, an aged man, of a youthful girl which ends in a sad and rather cruel abandonment of the protagonist.

*Morwyn* seems to be a form *sui generis* and I argue that there has been a failure in recognizing this special nature, which has resulted in the kinds of strictures against it that a critic like John Brebner makes. First I would like to clarify what *Morwyn* is not. It is not a thesis narrative or study of a human problem, neither is it a traditional or conventional romance with an emphasis on the quest for an idealised love by a male hero. In order to pursue this perspective I need to make a brief excursion into the topic of vivisection and its background, and to look at another actual example of a novel that is an “anti-vivisection romance”.

The topic has been seen as an obsessive and eccentric concern of John Cowper Powys. I have referred to its presence in *The Inmates* and *Weymouth Sands*. There have been defenders of the necessity for vivisections in the course of scientific research but no one has tried to defend it as a good in itself or a particularly desirable practice. Its existence makes most of us uncomfortable and many are deeply resistant to inflicting intense pain on animals. Nevertheless, Powys does present vivisection as an emblem of the worst and most demonic form of evil, a perspective that may seem exaggerated or disproportionate.

So much has this sense of disproportion been the case that it has aroused psychological speculation about the basis for Powys’s concern. Speculators have not had to look far. In *Autobiography* we learn about Powys’s self-confessed struggle with sadistic fantasy, the irresistible attraction to him for a long while of sadistic literature. We note the suavely presented figure of the Marquis de Sade in *Morwyn*. Powys also records in *Autobiography* that as a child he had wantonly dissected a live beetle and the revulsion and remorse he still felt for such an action.

The relation between extreme opposition to vivisection and the author’s own confessed sadism is clearly significant—the one being a defence against or compensation or reparation for the other. When sadism does appear in Powys’s fiction, especially *A Glastonbury Romance*, the reader recognizes a deep level of response rather than the presence of an obsession or compulsion in the author. In the characterizations of Owen Evans or Finn Cotter there is a genuine psychological depth of Dostoyevskyan or Shakespearean proportions.

The psychological depth evolves into a metaphysical depth: Powys confronts the presence of cruelty as a part of the nature of things and as a putative characteristic of a First Cause of a cruelty at the heart of human

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<sup>5</sup> ‘Romance’ is the word which JCP uses for some of his novels. According to Glen Cavaliero, it applies to the kind of novel which “draws its inspiration from ballad motifs, traditional legends, saga, heroic or epic poetry.” See *John Cowper Powys Novelist*, opus cit., p.10.

experience, summed up by the quotation from *King Lear* that Thomas Hardy used to preface *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport“.<sup>6</sup>

Psychological levels of cruelty do occur and are dramatized in *Morwyn* which continues the exploration of their psychological, metaphysical, even religious or theological significance. However I leave these depths for a while, to deal with J.C. Powys, member of the American Anti-vivisection Society and look at the historical background to this concern. The American Society developed at the same time as the British Society, and American founders travelled to Britain to meet with co-activists. After beginning an educational campaign it adopted the cause of complete abolition of live experimentation. Its members were based in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, and women were especially active. As we know, Powys spent time in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania and addressed many women's groups in his lecture tours.

The major concern with vivisection starts in the 1870's when there was a very particular controversy<sup>7</sup> concerning scientific experiments on live animals in the interests of developing knowledge about human physiology. Conflictual public debate about the issue raged in British periodicals from the mid 1870's to the mid 1880's and extended into the law courts and the British Parliament. There were outstanding test cases. Eugene Mangan, a French physiologist publicly injected a live dog with absinthe, causing obvious suffering to the animal. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals brought a case against him. A Royal Commission was set up to look into the pros and cons of the practice of vivisection. In 1881 a celebrated London physiologist, David Ferrier, was brought to trial for cerebral dissection of a living monkey but he was acquitted.<sup>8</sup>

The controversy raged between opposing camps. For example, in 1881 the International Medical Congress professed live animal experimentation to be indispensable to future research. The French physiologist Francis Magendie and the Scots physiologist Charles Bell had conducted live experimentations, which led to important discoveries concerning the dorsal and ventral roots of the spine and their different functions. Further progress was, however, deterred because the protracted cruelty to animals in dissection affected the scientists themselves adversely. However, there were important scientific voices who spoke in favour of live experimentation, including T.H.Huxley, Charles Darwin and Louis Pasteur.

On the opposing side there were equally opposing voices from journalism, social action and literature. Frances Power Cobbe<sup>9</sup> wrote most powerfully and comprehensively on the anti-vivisection case in response to the trial of David Ferrier. However, most impressive and significant in this context is the eloquent chorus of almost every well-known literary voice in protest. Humanist, moral,

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<sup>6</sup> *King Lear*, IV, i.

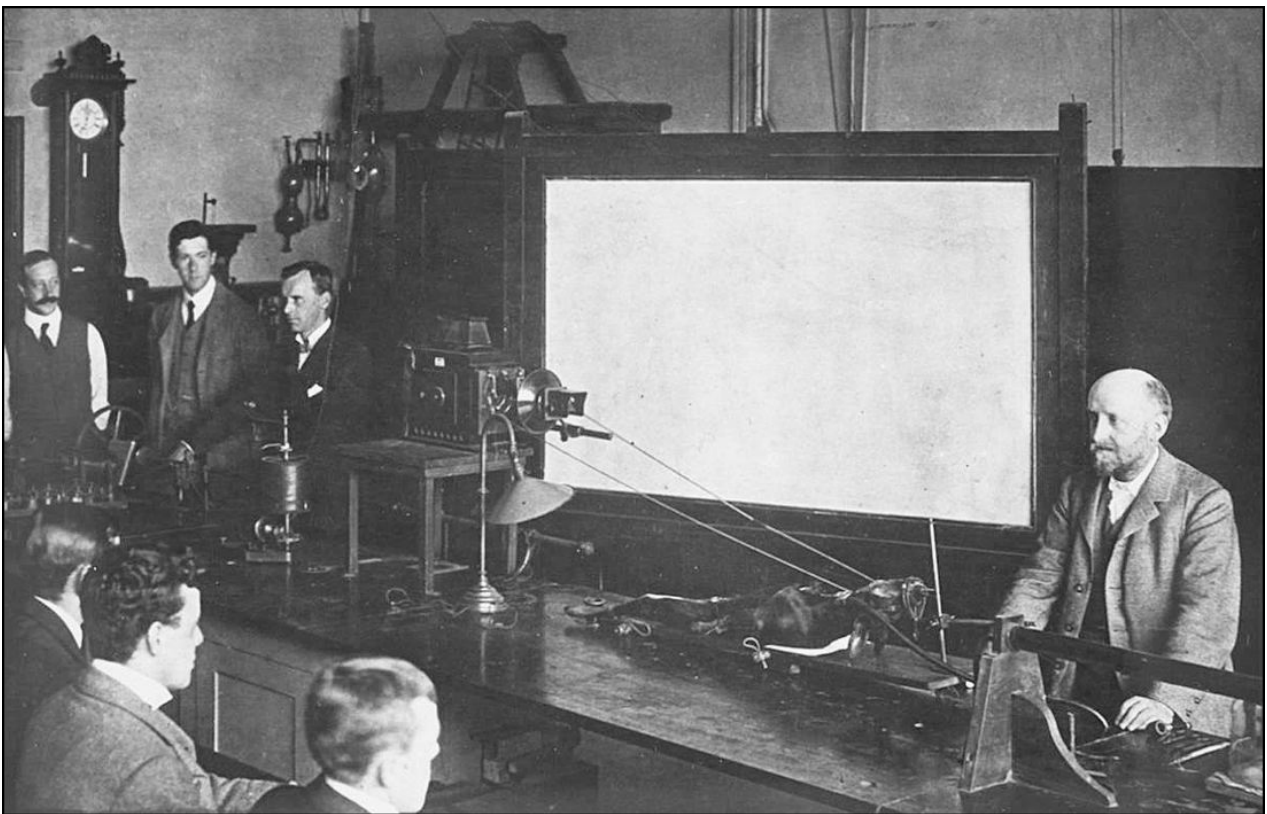
<sup>7</sup> see T.S. Eliot, 'Wilkie Collins and Dickens' in *The Victorian Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Ian Watt, OUP 1971, pp.136-7.

<sup>8</sup> My knowledge of this background was gained from the discussion on Science and Scientists in Lyn Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* in the series "Authors in Context", Oxford World Classics 2005, pp.186-9 and from the introduction by Steve Farmer in his edition of *Wilkie Collins, Heart and Science*. Broadview Literary Texts, Peterborough, Ontario 1957, especially in the Appendix B, The Vivisection Debate of 1870's and 1880's.

<sup>9</sup> Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904) was an Irish writer, social reformer, anti-vivisection activist, and leading women's suffrage campaigner.

aesthetic and existential issues were raised by Charles Dickens, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, Lewis Carroll, Leo Tolstoy, Christina Rossetti and G.B. Shaw. The whole literary world expressed abhorrence, revulsion and dismay at the thought of a hell on earth created for animals, the lack of limits on the exercise of cruelty, the lack of scruple of those who indulged experimentation from idle curiosity at the expense of suffering and the social evil occasioned by the advancement of knowledge at the expense of human character.

The controversy extended into the early twentieth century up to the First World War. It flared up again strongly in 1903-1910 with the so-called Brown Dog Riots. In 1903 William Bayliss of the Department of Physiology, University College, London, was charged with unlicensed dissection of a brown terrier dog. He reacted with a libel trial at the Royal Courts of Justice and the judge presiding



Bayliss behind his lab bench during the 1903 libel trial reconstruction  
*from Wikimedia Commons*

described the issues as of national importance. The affair was the occasion for a second Royal Commission on Vivisection in 1906. Anti-vivisection supporters erected a statue of the brown dog in Battersea Park and the animal memorial was the scene of riots and disturbances, one involving a pro-vivisection march of one thousand medical students. In 1910 the statue was removed at night by 120 London police. A new statue was raised seventy-five years later in 1985. Public attendance at the 1903 trial was large and three literary notabilities wrote to apologize for not being able to attend: Jerome K. Jerome, Rudyard Kipling and, significant for the Powys connection, Thomas Hardy.

The First World War did divert attention away from this controversy, but in the lifetime of John Cowper Powys it surfaced again in the 1920's with support from the Feminist movement, especially Emily Pankhurst.

The Victorian anti-vivisection controversy was the occasion for a unique battleground between two intellectual camps comprised of scientists on the one hand and the whole literary establishment on the other. The anti-vivisection battle became a conflict between two opposed world views and extended into a debate on the nature of our relationship to and use of living, non human creatures. No great works of literature were born from this dialectical energy. However there was one writer who did so respond with a romance novel on the anti-vivisection theme.

Wilkie Collins, a contemporary friend and colleague of Charles Dickens, is a writer far removed in period and nature from John Cowper Powys. Famous as the author of *The Moonstone* (1868), “the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels”, according to T.S. Eliot<sup>10</sup>, his novels have recently been reissued and valued for their social commentary as well as their entertainment value. Collins’s output, apart from *The Moonstone* and the equally well-known romance *The Woman in White* (1860) was considerable. Many of his novels have been recently republished with scholarly commentary. Collins, like Dickens, was concerned with social problems, many the product of his early career in law, before he became a full-time writer, with Dickens’s help. Concerns with marriage laws that affected those who were illegitimate and other legal marriage issues such as prevailing laws on inheritance, concerned novels such as *No Name* (1862) and *Armada* (1866) which have recently been revived.

One experience in his own parental upbringing has a connection to J.C. Powys: Collins, like Powys, disappointed his father by not following his father's wishes that he should become a clergyman, or follow his father's profession as a painter. Nevertheless Collins’s values were generally Christian values in an ethical sense and his compassion for victims was extended to illegitimate children, the blind, mentally afflicted individuals and the victims of vivisection.

The title of his anti-vivisection novel, *Heart and Science*<sup>11</sup>, written at the height of the controversy, is significant. Collins was an admirer of Frances Power Cobbe and he wrote the novel as his personal supportive contribution to her anti-vivisection combat. He was criticized for his pains by Swinburne who disliked the way Collins’s fiction reflected specific social aims and issues. “What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition? / Some demon whispered ‘Wilkie! I have a mission.’” he wrote. However, as the title of the novel implies, the practice of vivisection is presented as a particular instance of a general tendency in experimental science to oppose itself to natural feelings. Collins attempts to distinguish good science from bad by defining good science as that which works in harmony with nature for the general good.

The novel reflects some general themes of the vivisection debate. For example, Lord Chief Justice Coleridge<sup>12</sup> opposed the enlarged claims of vivisection by asserting that “there has been a degeneration and growth in heartlessness” and he defended animal sympathizers with the observation about animals: “The question is not can they reason, can they speak but can they

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted by Nancy Armstrong in ‘When gender meets sexuality in the Victorian novel’ from *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian novel*, ed. David, Deirdre, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p.179.

<sup>11</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Heart and Science*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1883.

<sup>12</sup> J.D. Coleridge (1820-1894), Lord Chief Justice of England, great-nephew of the poet Coleridge. See *The Fortnightly Review*, XXVII, Feb. 1882, pp.225-6.

suffer.” One of the main characters in the novel, the sinister Dr Benjulia, is driven by sadism as well as by curiosity. His vivisection practice on a monkey and on dogs is conducted by suppressing his natural feelings. Rather than adopting false pretence, he performs cruelty “because he likes it.”

Was J.C. Powys aware of this nineteenth century and early twentieth century context for the vivisection debate? I have found no evidence for such specific awareness. However, as a card-carrying member of the Anti-vivisection Society, as one who had earned a degree in history at Cambridge and remained with a keen interest and awareness of history, I think it likely that he may have been so aware. Certainly, both the vivisection debate and Collins’s *Heart and Science* provide a context and a point of reference for Powys’s work and underscore the relationship of Powys to a past community of famous writers who had engaged with this issue. It is not an eccentric topic and has an evolutionary history right up to the current period. Collins’s novel stands as a contrast to *Morwyn* which is far from being a naturalistic novel about a social or cultural problem.

Although the perspectives of science and the perspectives of romance are presented as unbreachable opposites in both novels, the “romance” of *Morwyn* seems a stunted affair in comparison. The ‘Captain’, the narrator, who confesses that “what the human race meant by *love* is totally unknown to me”<sup>13</sup> does claim to have “pity” for physical rather than mental suffering. However, he regards such pity as a curse. He reveals an inner self that enjoys nature and, though advanced in age, is attracted to and pursues young women and enjoys free, animalistic sexuality, as exemplified by his liking for the “broad-mouthed” Rabelais. However, his relationship with *Morwyn* is platonic and not sexual. This elderly narrator also complains that his son’s “modern notions of sex” are alien to him. *Morwyn* is a very stunted love story, ending in a desertion of the narrator, which he is told by *Morwyn* is not necessarily final. However, the novel does not dramatize any restoration of the couple to each other. Neither is there any debate about vivisection in the novel of the kind clearly evident in Collins’s *Heart and Science*. So, does the label “anti-vivisection romance” really apply?

The aspect of romance most relevant to *Morwyn* is the quest. The narrator/protagonist is forced into a journey that compels a degree of self-discovery and is essentially a descent into an underworld, into aspects of evil which have been and are aspects of human experience and very much a part of history. Brebner mentions *The Odyssey* and Dante as relevant models—the former indicating Powys’s devotion to and literary preoccupation with Homer, manifest in works like *Homer and the Aether* and *Atlantis*. The journey downward into an underworld entailing dialogue with spirits of the departed famous in history—the Marquis de Sade, Torquemada, Rabelais and Socrates—certainly suggest the applicability of the Dantean model.

Commentators note that *Morwyn* is unique in having a first-person narrator and one distinct from the author. However, this narrator has occasioned further criticism of the novel on the grounds that he is deficient in any depth of characterization. The novel certainly has no deep psychological study of the kind achieved by Collins with Dr Benjulia. That he is individualized by his obsessive idealized attachment to *Morwyn* and his deep attachment to his dog, Black Peter, and experiences the psychological traumas of loss of both still does not satisfy the demands of critical readers needing a more rounded psychological portrait,

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<sup>13</sup> J.C. Powys, *Morwyn: or The Vengeance of God*, New York: Cassell, 1937, p.12..

or a romantic hero.

*Morwyn* does offer to the reader a relationship with an assortment of historically famous people: the already mentioned Torquemada, de Sade, Socrates and Rabelais and in addition a Welsh prophet, Taliessin. The novel also alludes to other famous figures of the past: Don Quixote and his author, Cervantes. Also in Part Four of the novel at the point where the author refers to Rhadamanthus and the demand for judgment of the Titan/victim there is an allusion to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, specifically the episode of the Struldbruggs, the undying old men.

The allusion to Swift reflects also the presence in *Morwyn* of a tone very different from Romance—one of “*saeva indignatio*”<sup>14</sup> against human cruelty with a satiric tone suggestive of the apocalyptic dystopia. I suggest that the perspective created by the author for his narrator is similar to the perspective imposed by Swift upon Lemuel Gulliver. Like Lemuel, the Captain journeys into hitherto unknown dimensions of human experience, in his case those of evil and sadism, some of which are reflected in himself. His pride and ego are drastically assailed and he has to confront a desolating abandonment of most of his illusions in the shape of his romantic pursuit of young female beauty, much faith in the good nature of his fellow man and even the devotion of his own dog. In *Laputa* Swift forced his reader and narrator to confront the restrictions of scientific ventures, divorced from experience and wisdom.

Quite unlike a romance or naturalistic social novel, *Morwyn* fulfills the aspects of the dystopia by presenting dramatically and sometimes comically quite horrific social and political perspectives through a protagonist, who, typical of the dystopian character, feels trapped and struggles to escape. He also questions not only social and political systems, but the whole cosmic order—what he refers to as “The System-of-Things”—as he experiences sometimes nightmarish perspectives of evil and cruelty.

There is poignant comedy in the presence of Black Peter, the narrator's dog in the novel. In the first of its five parts, a bond between *Morwyn* and the narrator is established. *Morwyn*'s Welsh mother had died in childbirth but related to this loss is her deep interest in Welsh history and legend. The Captain is able to share this with her. She also shares an equally strong bond with Black Peter, especially because of the dog's intense capacity for a state of ecstasy as shown at this early stage of the novel in a closely described action in which we see Black Peter

turn completely over on his back and proceed to roll in an ecstasy of joy ... turn over on his belly, and with his feathery legs outspread like a young crocodile, work himself forward with his stomach pressed against the ground and his head upraised, while his liquid brown eyes remained fixed in delirious rapture upon my own.<sup>15</sup>

Glen Cavaliero comments that he is “one of the best-observed dogs in fiction. He provides a touchstone of reality at every turn.”<sup>16</sup> I would add that he is a central character in the novel, along with the human ones, marking and further revealing the demonic cruelty that lurks within human and other nature, a more sensitive marker of the presence of the “sadistic nerve” than any other being in the novel.

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<sup>14</sup> “*saeva indignatio*”: violent indignation, from Swift's epitaph in Latin, written by Swift himself.

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

<sup>16</sup> Glen Cavaliero, op. cit., p.106.

He also reveals the limitation of the narrator's understanding.

I relate Black Peter to the statue of the brown dog despite Powys's distinctive individualising of him and the difference in colouring because of the emblematic function that dogs had in the context of antivivisection debate as the chief victims of animal experimentation. Black Peter's central role in the action reflects the same paramount concern with dogs as chief victims of physiological research as at the time of the early controversy in the nineteenth century.

At this point in the narration a significant word is first introduced which I will continue to explore. The 'invasion' comes in the form of the first appearance of Morwyn's father who 'invades' the harmonious trio of Morwyn, the narrator and Black Peter on a solitary shared walk<sup>17</sup>. Morwyn has an affection for her father even though he is "a tremendous vivisector"—admittedly a perfunctory characterization! This dimension of the father's character creates a rift with his daughter and shocks the narrator as he recognizes "a gloating response to some kind of horrible cruelty": Black Peter himself reacts against the father's visualizing of "effective straps" used to restrain an animal victim .



'The Great Day of His Wrath', by John Martin c 1853  
*from Wikimedia Commons*

Next comes the central event of the first part of the narrative: the meteor that arrives as a major 'invasion' from space, throwing the narrator, Morwyn, Black Peter and Morwyn's father into an underworld. This meteor is described as creating "a ghastly crack in the order of things" and as a "horrible invasion of the cosmos by chaos".<sup>18</sup>

Two major historic representatives of sadistic cruelty appear in this shocking new scene: Torquemada, the Spanish Inquisitor, and the Marquis de Sade. An

<sup>17</sup> *Morwyn*, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.



education into the nature of cruelty has begun and the meteoric event establishes a new dimension of sadistic cruelty as now a feature of the historical process, or what Powys terms in this novel, “the System-of-Things”. Now the possible evolution of qualities of pity and sympathy are opposed by a newly motivated tendency to cruelty. This scene is apparently the occasion for Powys to introduce implicitly into his novel some aspects of the state of the world at the time of its publication in 1937. In this new critical phase of history political, military and sensual cruelties are to be motivated and added to, by an element even more demonic. The Hell of this scene is marked by a new notice: not “Abandon Hope” but “Do as you Like”<sup>19</sup>. The suavely presented de Sade admits that he “pursued cruelty purely because of the sensual pleasure it gave me”<sup>20</sup>. But now there is a more demonic motivation appearing. The Inquisition prepared its way since it was able to justify its cruelty as done to save souls from the cruelties of damnation—no matter how much sadistic pleasure Inquisition practices may have derived from this pretext. Science and the “*mania* for knowledge” have entered the picture and even de Sade resists the motivation which gives rise to “more hardening to the heart” and is “more implacable to pity and sympathy, than what you are pleased to call my ‘cult’”<sup>21</sup>.

This new meteoric invasion may also reflect the invasion of fascism into the political experience of Europe, the development of new cruel ideologies which are to unleash massive destruction upon the world as history. This new perverse idealism will result in using torture in prisons and plunging whole nations into the anguish of war. The ideological excuses are not accepted by the realistically-minded Frenchman, de Sade.

Part Two clarifies the evils of false science which have brought not the most scrupulous use of anæsthetics (the nineteenth century anti-vivisectionists complained of the lack of anæsthetics in live experimentation) but the “best anæsthetics for Conscience our race has ever had.”<sup>22</sup>

Scientific torture is done in the cause of increased knowledge: “why, the Devil himself must have invented that beautiful idea!”<sup>23</sup>, Powys exclaims through the mouth of de Sade, and the cruelty of unscrupulous religion is now replaced by the cruel superstition of Science.

Powys ushers in a new historical period in which an original effort will be made to divert the whole evolutionary purpose embedded in a universal order. This order is the “System-of-Things” gradually developing a sense of pity and compassion amongst its prejudice for chance and free will. Thus the new ethic of cruelty is a sidetracking of the System. The issue at stake is achieved by this new idea to torture for knowledge, to still conscience with the scientific purpose of prolonging lives. Humankind is becoming the victim of a new Grand Inquisitor, the Vivisector whose purpose is epitomized: “It’s simply to substitute the cruel superstition of unscrupulous science for the cruel superstition of unscrupulous religion.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> It may also be an allusion to the sinister Aleister Crowley’s religion, *Thelema*: “Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law.” Powys loathed him. [Ed.]

<sup>20</sup> *Morwyn*, p.57.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.100.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.109.

Parts Three and Four of *Morwyn* take the reader into the deepest descent, into the abyss of uncertainty, of the extreme potential for cruelty in human experience. The roof and the floor of Hell disappear in a radical disruption of perspective and all certainty, and the characters travel at immense speed into realms apparently governed by hazard and chance<sup>25</sup>. This section is marked also by the appearance of a new prophetic voice, that of the Welsh poet, prophet and magician, Taliessin. Taliessin's appearance is timely for it provides a note of new possibilities in a cosmos which seems bent upon hellish cruelties. And the chaos itself is devoid of any hint of order. The scientists have joined forces with the theologians "*with the intention of driving us mad*"<sup>26</sup> in an orgy of sadistic ecstasy combining the worlds of religious festival with biological experiment. Taliessin pronounces a prophecy which combines grim realism with magical deliverance, warning that "more will perish because of Science than will live because of it"<sup>27</sup>. In the face of the increasingly demonic aspect of things the narrator becomes impatient even with Black Peter lying on his back in his 'ecstasy'.

Patience is difficult in the face of the free infliction of suffering on thousands. The narrator, exasperated by his dog's behaviour, says to him: "That's right, fool!...Trust to the good, kind System-of-Things. Why, they'll bake your guts by inches inside your living body before that ancient Snail moves the millionth part of an inch towards helping anybody!"<sup>28</sup> (Benjulia endorses baking dogs to study the effects of fever in *Heart and Science*. We are far from the world of Victorian sentiment.)

The narrator has a limited but human perspective which at least has the qualities of realism and outrage in the face of inhumanity. He struggles with a real metaphysical impasse before being answered by Taliessin's prophecy. There is a weak link in the reasoning of traditional Christian defenses of Providence. Is the necessity of Free Will any comfort to those caught in dimensions of extreme cruelty and suffering? Is the necessity of Free Will any comfort to those like Black Peter and Morwyn who face thousands of souls attracted to the prospect of torturing them? Perhaps Free Will should have been limited in order to place some limits on the extremes to which freely expressed cruelty can go?

There is only a visionary solution which can at least establish hope in the face of a demonic physical reality. Taliessin is that voice of hope: he emphasizes that "To the great Spirit who renews the world, a creative Illusion is far more precious than a dead dissected Truth."<sup>29</sup> And this creative illusion is asserted as a saving reality in two strong, positive proclamations of hope. First the narrator proclaims "*I know this for certain*, that the whole material cosmos is but a small part of the Reality of Life and that we all three—Morwyn, Black Peter and I—have something in us that's indestructible, something that belongs to a reality outside the astronomical universe"<sup>30</sup>. Then Taliessin declares "the great Spirit of the Cosmos is found in righteousness against unrighteousness, in good against evil, in mercy and pity against cruelty and injustice"<sup>31</sup>. Part Three closes with a vision of

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<sup>25</sup> *Morwyn*, p.134.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.131.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.205.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.145.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.134.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.207.

Caridwen's Cauldron, the Great Mother against the vivisecting Father, and of Merlin, the embodiment of sleeping Nature, heaving up and lifting his hand in judgment<sup>32</sup>.

However the visionary and imaginative levels of experience do not abolish the level of reality for those who live in a physical universe still existing within the only partially realized salvation of the ultimate evolution of the System-of-Things to pity and mercy. The Captain/narrator is still brought to a Lemuel Gulliver-like state of bitter disillusion in a process that involves the stripping from him of all visible comforts.



Black Peter  
courtesy *The Powys Press*

Morwyn, her Welsh oracle Taliessin and her father form a trio conspiring to create her vivisector father's salvation which will supposedly bring his renunciation as a vivisector. They are able to leave Hell on this saving quest, making the decision together quite apart from any input from the narrator who sees the whole process as a simple plot to desert him. For a while he takes consolation in the loyal presence of his darling dog, Black Peter: "I've got one friend anyway! I've got one friend anyway! I've got—" he cries<sup>33</sup>, stroking the animal. However, he has a rude shock. Black Peter, too, sides with Morwyn and deserts him with only one consolation: he turns round and gives him a last expressive look as he goes.

Like Gulliver with the Houyhnhnms, the Captain is left with only one illusion, one consolation which is animal, not human. His poignant protest to Morwyn is at the same time pathetic and comic. He reminds Morwyn that her two non-animal partners are dead and she is abandoning someone who is at least a living human!

This state of abandonment and hopeless stripping of all illusions leaves him at a low point, in need, as we all might be, of a therapist. Powys had a sustained suspicion of and disbelief in psychoanalysis, so the narrator gets no Freudian, Jungian or post-Freudian analysis. But he does get two therapists, no less representatives of humanist values, Socrates, who established "Know Thyself" as a basis for truth, and Rabelais the great celebrator of human physical existence and Nature.

Their wisdom and consolation represent the note of hope for the narrator and the reader who live on the material plane. The practical dimension is not devoid of metaphysical aspects. Socrates imparts a specific strength to the narrator, a sense of logic. Mankind has a soul which is a rational soul, capable of knowing itself. This capacity for self-knowledge is not irrational or an illusion. On a mythological level Socrates supplied another note of hope by obtaining from Rhadamanthus the judgment lifting the sentence from the suffering Tityos<sup>34</sup> who

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<sup>32</sup> *Morwyn*, p.209.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p.299.

<sup>34</sup> Rhadamanthus was one of the three judges of the Underworld. The giant Tityos, son of Zeus and Gaia, was punished and tortured for his attempted rape of the goddess Leto. Two vultures feed on his ever regenerating liver. (Hom. *Odyssey*).

then sheds his Tear. The Tear of Tityos supports the possibility for the System-of-Things to be bent upon goodness and mercy. These are realities that can be and are expressed in action and therefore go beyond both Faith and Doubt. We can feel pity and we can act to prevent and relieve suffering—as Socrates and Rabelais do for the Captain. That Tityos sheds a tear is meant as testimony that the cry of the world in suffering is not disregarded. If torment is recognized and its cry heard there is room for hope that the System-of-Things is on the side of pity and hope.



François Rabelais  
*from Wikimedia Commons*

To Rabelais, the master of the natural and acceptance of the grounding of humanity within nature, is given a vision of cosmic beatitude. The universe has beauty. Rabelais ends on an even more practical note: he is convinced that Morwyn will return and that her devotion to the salvation of her father will not succeed. The father-vivisector will not be able to give up his cruelty. That, for Rabelais, is the Vengeance of God: the loss of Free Will, the retribution of the universe for cruelty is the self-torment of the agent of cruelty. There is no Dantean vision of a redeeming love in this dystopia but an Augustinian sense that cruelty is its own punishment. Collins's Benjulia suffered the same fate.

I have argued that *Morwyn* is a dystopian satire more like Swift or George Orwell or even Samuel Beckett than Collins's *Heart and Science*. I conclude by speculating as to what J.C. Powys's response might have been to the current situation as a way of revealing the continued relevance of *Morwyn*. What is to be said about the relationship between "Heart" and "Science" today? The Anti-vivisection concern was developed within a social and historical context more than in a psychological or metaphysical context. Nevertheless the Anti-vivisection debate of the late nineteenth century broadened the significance of the movement against live animal experimentation to the opposition of the whole literary/artistic culture against the separation of science from emotions, feelings, empathy and nature.

This 'broadening' has continued to the present time. There is now a significant movement for animal rights, parallel to the movement for human rights. Live experimentation is still a concern, especially the use of animals in the laboratory to advance medical and other research. Questions are continually raised about the necessity for such experimentation and its usefulness since suffering for the animals cannot be avoided and the results have to justify its employment. Concerns for animal welfare have extended to many different contexts: the use of animals in circuses, in sports, the decline in popularity of bull-fighting, are all examples of the intense concern for animal welfare and

human responsibility in our relations to them. The conditions of farm animals and the effects of mass production in the food and agriculture sphere is another broadening of the concern. I imagine Powys would be gratified by the concern, if still saddened by the need for protest.

*Morwyn's* main thematic concern is however broader still. Is humanity more empathetic and less cruel than it used to be? Is evolution proceeding with a strengthening of the impulses towards pity and sympathy and away from cruelty which our Free Will allows us to inflict? These are hard questions to answer. Use of torture against fellow humans as a possible consequence of animal torture has been pondered in psychological and international legal contexts. There may have been advances in thinking and concern about these issues. However, no one looking at the conditions of the world today could say that such concerns are outmoded. The rationale for torture was revived as a debate in the context of the War on Terror. Powys's concern in *Morwyn* for the cruel potential inherent in ideologies continue to be intensely relevant as we experience the use of ruthless terror tactics by ideologically driven groups and leaders.

A final general area of concern for both the scientific community and the social order is Climate Change. Frances Power Cobbe opposed the use of the thousands of animals for live experimentation in medical research at that time. Now, however, human activity has been diagnosed as a chief cause of species genocide, because of environmental abuses. Powys's Taliessin and Merlin would be prophets of judgment, legitimately today. However there is a difference in the role of science in this huge issue. I would not hesitate to say that this environmental crisis has joined heart and science together. Scientists are the proclaimers of the voice of truth in this issue. And they are often abused and persecuted for their pains. Scientific voices are censored by governments and corporations who can withdraw funds and muzzle scientific truth in the interests of the oil economy and related financial interests. The fundamentalist evangelicals opposing the teaching of evolution in biology are no longer the only enemies of science today.

I conclude with a general comment on the notion of "The Two Cultures", a phrase introduced in the sixties by C.P. Snow, which caused an intense debate for a while on the specialized nature of education, especially in the United Kingdom, and also on the opposition between humanistic or literary and scientific notions of culture. I recall this debate in the context of the massive voice of protest against scientific methods by all of literary culture in the nineteenth century debate. The vivisection debate may have intensified a humanistic resistance to the scientific view of the world. There needs to be a recognition of the value of scientists in an ecologically-based process of investigation into the natural world and a case needs to be made for an increased level of educational awareness of the general public about the nature of the scientific world view, what counts as evidence in a scientific context and respect for the voice of truth in all human spheres.

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