

Powys Notes



Special Double Issue--Powys at the Millennium
Spring 2000
volume 13, nos. 1 and 2

Powys Notes

Spring 2000

The Powys Society of North America

Powys Notes , Volume 13, Numbers 1 and 2 © 2000 The Powys Society of North America. Quotations from the works of John Cowper Powys are used by kind permission of Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson, those from T. F. Powys and Llewelyn Powys used by kind permission of Laurence Pollinger Limited, on behalf of the respective Estates of these Authors.

Powys Notes

The semiannual journal and newsletter of the
Powys Society of North America

Editor

Nicholas Birns
New School University

Associate Editor

Michael Ballin
Wilfrid Laurier University

Editorial Board

Constance Harsh
Colgate University

Ben Jones
Carleton University

Morine Kriessdóttir
University of Guelph

Denis Lane
CUNY

Charles Lock
University of Copenhagen

Richard Maxwell
Valparaiso University

Subscriptions (one year/two issues)

Individuals, \$15 US, \$18 Can, £9 UK
Includes membership in PSNA
Institutions, \$15 US

US and overseas:

Nicholas Birns
205 East Tenth St.
New York, NY 10003

CANADA

Michael Ballin
Department of English
Wilfrid Laurier University
Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5

ISSN 1058-7691
Printed in USA

Contents

John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*:
A Phenomenological Vision of the Flood
J.P. Couch

4

Llewelyn Powys in Dorset:
A Rediscovered Writer for the New Millennium
by Frank Warren

30

A letter from John Powell Ward

35

Brief Reviews of current books on the Powyses

36

Yellow Bracken: meditations on Wolf, Gerda, and
"Mythology"

43

Alyse Gregory and *The Dial*
by Jacqueline Peltier

53

Another Note on 'Welshness'

64

Founded in December 1983, the Powys Society of North America seeks to facilitate the study and appreciation of the literary works of the Powys family, especially those of John Cowper Powys (1872-1963), T.F. Powys (1875-1953), and Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939). The Society takes a special interest in the North American connections and experiences of the Powyses, and encourages the exploration of the involvement of the Powyses in American literary culture and of the extensive collections of Powys material in North American libraries.

4

John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*: A Phenomenological Vision of the Flood

by J. P. Couch

What ends it then? What excuse did you find for writing this? The excuse found by God when his world got beyond his control. What was that? The Flood.¹

As John Cowper Powys ends what has been acclaimed his greatest novel he lets loose a flood of no minor intensity.² The flood that ends *A Glastonbury Romance* has received a somewhat curious and divided critical attention from Powys scholars. On the one hand, most scholars acknowledge its suggestive intensity and its skilful narration.³ On the other hand, the same scholars often do so only in passing, giving it no more than a few scattered remarks or a paragraph or two.⁴ Running through this critical attention is a shared attitude. It is my intention in this essay to elucidate this shared attitude and then to move on to a critique of it in order to bring about a phenomenological consideration of the flood.

In order to do so, I will (1) remove the flood from the present paradigmatic conception of it as merely conforming to the Biblical conception of the flood and (2) conduct a rigorous consideration of it that does not originate in any natural attitude stemming from any Biblical heritage but which takes as its point of departure the idiosyncratic Glastonbury flood itself. Once the preconceived notion that the flood merely invades Glastonbury is dispelled it will become evident that a certain play pertains to the Glastonbury region. However, further considerations will show that this play alone cannot account for the peculiarity of the region. Instead, it will be shown that a certain

correspondency, what I prefer to call reciprocal residual recognition, is in effect between a reduced and bracketed subject and a reduced and bracketed object.

A consideration of previous analyses of the flood makes it clear that these analyses form a surprisingly homogeneous body of thought. That a flood ends the novel is only fitting if one agrees with Charles Lock, who argues that water "is the central element of *A Glastonbury Romance*"⁵ and that "[t]he novel begins in one aquatic landscape, Norfolk, and moves to another, Glastonbury."⁶ The most blatant coming to power of this element is, of course, the flood. The shift, or progress, from river to flood⁷—from Norfolk to Glastonbury, from the second chapter *The River* to the last chapter *The Flood*—is not only a rise to power and prominence of water but an increase in narrative intensity. Morine Krissdottir calls attention to this intensity by quoting extensively from the work on the grounds that the flood is an image that "reverberate[s] at all levels of the reader's consciousness."⁸ Percy Hutchinson seconds Krissdottir's stance arguing that "[t]he flood which at the end sweeps in from the sea to engulf the Glastonbury of [Powys's] imagination is as full and stirring a flood as fiction has yet produced."⁹ Few, if any, critics seem to disagree with these points. Even Jocelyn Brooke, in an otherwise critical review of the novel, feels that the narration of the flood embodies a "brilliance of execution,"¹⁰ and Angus Wilson ranks the flood scene among Powys's most successful.¹¹

Furthermore, most critics understand the flood as purgatory. John A. Brebner views the flood as "a cleansing force."¹² Indeed, Brebner goes so far as to argue that "[t]he flood comes like a giant enemy bearing the purgative, life-giving, salt-water into the interior."¹³ Ned Lukacher agrees with Brebner and argues that a need of "a necessary purgation"¹⁴ is fulfilled. G. Wilson Knight relates the flood "to the cleansing of an agonised world,"¹⁵ and Krissdottir

interprets the flood within her overall mythological framework as a freeing of waters fertilising the land.¹⁶ Similarly, A. P. Seabright likens the flood to "the waters of the womb of the Goddess breaking over the world, and making the world anew."¹⁷

In addition to its purgatory and healing power most critics also call attention to the flood's destructive power. Brebner understands the flood as an "agent of general rather than individual destruction"¹⁸ and Brooke argues that "one is vaguely aware that the flood represents the final triumph of Nature over the works of Man."¹⁹ Geoffrey Skelton, in a review of the novel, sums up this destructive element in a typically 'naturalised' or anthropocentric way when he states that "in the end all the material things are swept away by the great flood with which the book reaches its climax. All these many people face the ultimate fact that they are, whatever the stage of their material and spiritual development, a tiny part of the vast unexplained force of Nature."²⁰ Similarly, Geoffrey West points out that the flood "sweeps the achievement of both capitalist and communist away together."²¹

The dual nature of the flood, its power to destroy and its power to purge, comes to embody a balance, much like that of the dual First Cause. This sentiment is most strongly formulated by Brebner who views the flood as a judgement "directed towards Glastonbury herself"²² which in its execution helps to "maintain the novel's aesthetic balance"²³ and to restore "the natural balance of community living"²⁴

A point of minor disagreement among Powys scholars is the flood's temporal condition. At one extreme, P. J. Kavanagh argues that "because of its intentional timelessness" the whole novel seems "completely undated"²⁵ At the other extreme, Susan Rands points out that in the winter of 1929, a time when Powys seemingly "kept in close touch with local news,"²⁶ there occurred "[t]he greatest flood in the

recorded history of that area"²⁷. With this in mind Rands argues that *A Glastonbury Romance* "is a picture of [Glastonbury's] events and mores in the late 'twenties."²⁸ This argument reduces the flood in *A Glastonbury Romance* to a mere representation (picture) of a particular flood that appeared at a particular time in a particular place. Arguing both sides, Knight's opinion is that the flood "may be related to both the sub-world and the super-world of our various human delineations, and to the great beyond, eternity as against time."²⁹

A general sentiment that is of importance to any analysis of *A Glastonbury Romance* and one that is shared by several critics as well as by the narrator is the importance of Glastonbury's idiosyncratic topography. In his review of the novel, Basil Davenport emphasizes the prominence of genius loci in the work. "There is a very real feeling of just that corner of Somerset, with its apple trees and its thick mists, as being different from all other places in the world; the sense of a genius loci has never been more strongly conveyed."³⁰ He is supported by Elizabeth Barrett who argues that "[t]he phenomenon of place-the power of genius loci-is crucial in *A Glastonbury Romance*"³¹. She goes on to argue that "Powys's imagination, however, transforms the physical reality of Somerset in such a way that his representation of this fictional territory constructs itself out of a topographical material which appears almost to breathe under its surface."³² Rands concludes that "the novel is, at least partly, structured on the topography of Glastonbury"³³. The most important topographical aspect of Glastonbury for a consideration of the flood and one that the narrator continuously reminds the reader of is Glastonbury's closeness to the Bristol Channel and the fact that Glastonbury, apart from the Tor, is situated below sea level. In other words, the flood is given as always imminently possible.

This body of thought characterized rather by

addition and agreement than by conflict and disagreement may be reduced to a few points. (1) The flood is understood in relation to the importance of water and topography. (2) The narration of the flood is unanimously held to be skillful and successful. (3) The flood is purgatory. (4) The flood is destructive. (5) These two last points are not in conflict but reinforce each other. (6) With this mutual reinforcement balance is achieved. (7) The temporality of the flood may be not so much either specific or eternal but specific and eternal (Knight).

It is quite evident that in so far as this critical body of thought constitute the paradigmatic understanding of the flood, the paradigm in question is the Biblical one. Put differently, the prevalent understanding of the flood is the Biblical one where God lets loose a flood because "the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence"³⁴ simultaneously as he blesses "Noah and his sons, and said unto them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth.'"³⁵ The flood destroys in order to heal. The question I want to raise is the following: Can the Glastonbury flood be reduced to the flood of the Bible? In other words, can a biblical account, such as the present paradigmatic one, of the Glastonbury flood do the Glastonbury flood justice?³⁶

Apart from this Biblical influence and kinship, what is ultimately shared by this body of thought is the view of the flood as an object, a phenomenon, a thing of critical (scientific) attention; an object out there, available for criticism to seize upon; an object that science may appropriate, conquer, understand, explain, excuse, account for, handle, deal with. In the final analysis, the flood is taken as a matter of fact, as a matter of course. Following Edmund Husserl, I will refer to this view as the natural attitude.³⁷ The question I want to raise is the following: If the flood is taken as a matter of fact and a matter of course, as simply reiterating a Biblical account, how can it

"reverberate at all levels of the reader's consciousness?"³⁸ If this is so, how can the Glastonbury flood be "as full and stirring a flood as fiction has yet produced?"³⁹ How can a matter of fact, a matter of course be marked by a "brilliance of execution."⁴⁰ In short, how can a matter of fact that lacks all sense of the enigmatic summon up remarks such as these?

The readiness of critics to comprehend the flood as merely subscribing to an empirical manifestation of the flood as transgression comes as a surprise when critically attending to the flood. Although a flood, any flood, depends upon transgression as its condition of possibility, it is questionable whether this condition is the answer to the questions asked a moment ago. This readiness seems to derive from the immersion in this natural attitude rather than from a radical consideration of the idiosyncratic Glastonbury flood. Empirically, a flood is nothing but a transgression-water transgressing the border, or the line of demarcation (coast/bank), separating and distinguishing water from land. However, a quick consideration of the Glastonbury flood makes evident that such a line of demarcation is not fully in power in the first place and, consequently, comprehending the flood primarily as transgression is a miscomprehension.

It is evident that the district in which Glastonbury is embedded is one where land and sea are not clearly distinguished. In *A Glastonbury Romance* there is, just as there is in Powys's *Weymouth Sands*⁴¹ and in any coastal region for that matter, a play between land and sea.⁴² In *A Glastonbury Romance* this explicit play between land and sea shapes the very topography of the geographical pattern of the western coast in question. On the one hand, the land of this region

closest to the sea, the channel-shore, is marked by several topographical features that serve to render null the very idea of a distinctly cut line clearly separating land and sea. Phenomena such as sands, shoals, mudflats, inlets, estuaries, sand-wastes, sand-dunes, grassy shelves and sea-banks abound. The shore in question is not a line merely enabling simple transgression. On the other hand, the land further away from the actual channel-shore is marked by "thousands of unfrequented backwaters" (1064), pools, marshes, inland meres, rivers and tiny streams which all render the very idea of a land free of water null. Water has already invaded land. All these topographical features found in basically any coastal region serve to shape the porous borderland between sea and land. In addition, all fortifications of and on land, all sluices, weirs, dams, rhynes, ditches and dykes whose purpose it is to protect a land below sea-level from the sea by holding it back, serve to make this land vulnerable to a serious sea invasion. The eight miles of land between the Bristol Channel and Glastonbury which are in this way "intersected" (1066) is, due to this intersecting, also made porous. If these porous fortifications begin to yield to any increase in water-volume they "are liable to do so in vast numbers" (1065). Further undermining the land's autonomy from the sea is precisely the fact that this whole region is "all beneath sea-level" (1066). The land is lower than the sea and on the beach there are "sand-sunk boat skeletons" (1064) in need of no water for their sinking. The land is reminiscent of the sea and in turn the waves of the rising water are rather akin to earth than to sea. As a matter of fact, the whole sea is more akin to earth than to sea. The deep-sea waves of the Atlantic are "like the death mounds of some huge wasteful battlefield carried along by an earthquake and tossed up into millions of hill summits and dragged down into millions of valley hollows as the whole earth heaved" (1063). Further, these earthy waves of hill

summits, valley hollows, and death mounds carried along by a sea-earthquake making the whole sea-earth heave are not "churned into flying spray" (1063) or "lashed into tossing spindrift" (1063) as they approach land. Instead of the dispersal expected of waves hitting land one finds them "smooth and slippery as the purest marble" (1064). All of this serves to expose the paradigmatic notion of the flood as the coming to power of transgression as a notion lacking in idiosyncratic sensitivity. Land and sea are not clearly separated, and in so far as there is transgression, it has already occurred.

Increasing the intensity of the unsettling of the very notion of transgression as something primarily pertaining to the flood is the very nature of both the human and non-human dwellers of the region in question. There are two kinds of intertwining unsettling the stability of these dwellers—the intertwining of land and sea and the intertwining of salt-water and fresh water. The older human dwellers of this region are a "queer amphibious race" (1065). They are the descendants of Norse invaders and aboriginals who were themselves intermingled with Celts. In addition, non-human dwellers such as "brackish pools" (1064) and "brackish ditches" (1065) are a mixture of sea water and fresh water, whereas non-human dwellers such as "amphibious growths" (1064) and "terraqueous marshes" (1064) are a mixture of land and sea. Evidently, these very words—brackish, amphibious, terraqueous—harbour a certain amount of unsettling energy. They are all marked by a certain degree of inherent play.

Further increasing the blurred distinction of this coastal "margin" (1064) is the fact that the land has at least once already merged with the sea. In the memory of these old amphibious dwellers there is an intense image of the last Glastonbury flood. That time "the waters of the sea had swept so far inland, mingling with the waters of the land, that the configuration of

the country had completely changed" (1065). It is speculated whether it is not most likely that in this mingling "[m]any infinitesimal sea creatures, tiny sea animalculae and microscopic salt-water beings" were "carried over the land where these unnatural tides pushed their way" and that "many of these marine invaders, when the waters receded, were deposited in the rich loam of the Isle of Glastonbury" (1065). Although it is the sea that sweeps in over the land the notion of invader and invaded is unsettled in the very phrasing of this notion. On this past occasion when land and sea merged, "the sea had come so far that the land-in many cases always lower than sea-level-had reverted to the sea and become part of it" (1065; emphasis added). The implication of the very phrasing of this sea-invasion is twofold. On the one hand, it implies that the land is given initiative. Not only does the sea invade the land but the land invades the sea. On the other hand, it implies that the motion of the land is not an invasion but a return, a restoration. In other words, the land does not invade the sea as much as it returns to it. This calls attention to the shared origin of sea and land-the sea.

Evidently, the flood is not merely a sea invasion. In fact, "the western coast that Spring seemed almost to welcome this sea invasion" (1064). Thousands "of unfrequented backwaters, bordered by dead, windswept rushes, clammy with salt-smelling marsh-lichens and thick-stalked glaucous-grey weeds, seemed actually calling out to the sea to come and cover their brackish pools" (1064). In addition, "[s]alt amphibious growths, weeds of the terraqueous marshes, they seemed to be yearning, these neutral children of the margin, for the real salt sea to rush over them and ravish them" (1064).

Given that multiple transgressions on various levels have already occurred before the flood sweeps over Glastonbury, it is unlikely that the element of transgression belonging to this flood is the element

that sets it apart as an extraordinary event worth critical attention. Put differently, the flood transgresses, but since transgressions already dominate the Glastonbury region and since the reinforcement of transgression brought about by the flood is evident, it is unlikely that the transgressive element of the flood can account for the critical excitement it has aroused.

What seems to be called for to replace the natural attitude empowering current criticism is an attitude that does not reduce the flood to transgression, thereby missing the very element responsible for excitement and arousal. What seems to be required is an attitude that acknowledges that the Glastonbury region is a "singular" (1064), "strange" (1065) and "peculiar" (1065) one at the same time it refrains from accrediting this peculiarity to instability, unsettlement and play. In other words, what seems to be needed is an attitude that acknowledges that transgression is already in effect simultaneously as it brackets ⁴⁵ transgression and acknowledges that this unsettlement is not responsible for any radical excitement. What is desired is not a shift from natural transgression to unsettled transgression-play. Although the last chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance* seems at a first consideration to call for such a shift, a second consideration makes evident that there is that which is not unsettled by any play. What makes this phenomenon enigmatic is that it neither seems to be possible to put in play.

The impossibility of being put into play pertaining to this phenomenon is foregrounded in certain Celtic names still found in this region. As was made clear above the dwellers of this region are "a queer amphibious race, descended from Norse invaders and Celticised aboriginals" (1065). A certain transgression

is necessarily inherent in this idiosyncratic amphibiousness as well as in the invader/invaded heritage. Whereas the dwellers of this region have over time been transgressed and put in play, making it impossible to judge to what degree they are Norse invaders, Celts and aboriginals, certain names pertaining to this same region remain untouched by any notion of transgression. It is explicitly stated that about the scattered farms and hamlets of this region "many curious Celtic syllables still cling, like the appellative Gore, for instance, syllables full of old mythological associations" (1065). Here, these "old magical names lingered intact" (1065). This notion of the intact foregrounds precisely a passivity when it comes to transgression and play. In distinction to that which is in play (heritage), that which does not participate in play (certain Celtic names and syllables) remains intact. A further delineation of the notion of the intact is found in a similar notion, namely, survival.

As the tides of the flood begin to cover the coast, a play between absence and presence is foregrounded. The flood is called attention to as a harbinger of presence, whereas Time is foregrounded as an exodus out of presence. As the tides roll in they awake "strange legends and wild half-forgotten memories" (1064). Similarly, "[a]ncient prophecies" that over time have "perished long ago" seem "to awake and flicker again" (1064). Before the flood quickens them these prophecies are "like blown-out candles . . . cold as the torch-flames by which they were chanted and the extinct fires by which they were conceived" (1064). The shift from absence to presence, from sleep to wakefulness, implemented by the flood, and the shift from presence to absence, from wakefulness to sleep, necessarily associated with the passing of time, explicitly foreground a play or interaction devoid of enigma. In other words, that the flood resurrects, that it establishes presence where there was once absence and

that things over time slip into absence, is obvious, evident, foregrounded.

However, there is that which is not completely devoid of, if not enigma, then at least peculiarity. There is that which is not affected by the passing of time and which is not made absent. Hence, there is that which does not require the flood for its presencing. Consider the "subtle correspondencies" (1064) that reside between "the imaginations of men, especially such as are stirred up and made tense by the wrestlings with the Unknown, and the geographical pattern of the earth's surface" (1064). Such correspondencies "may survive many sunken torch flares and many lost harp notes once heard across the capes and promontories" (1064). These "subtle correspondencies" (1064) do not over time slip into absence. However, it is questionable whether this necessarily means that they are restricted to presence. To the extent that presence is only understood in opposition to absence, this radical non-participation in absence-here, embodied by the notion of survival-seems to shun presence as well. These "subtle correspondencies" (1064) seem not to be part of the play between absence and presence explicitly dominating this region. Instead of surfacing with the flood and drifting away over time they are marked by survival. Here, survival comes to embody the very notion of not subscribing to play. Still, in this case, survival does not seem to occur outside of play, beyond play's reach. Rather, survival seems to be located in a between radically different from the between of difference, the between of demarcation and transgression. Whereas play is made possible through a distinction between differences⁴⁴, survival seems to occur not in the differences but in the very contact pertaining to the between itself. Here, the region "[b]etween the imaginations of men" and "the geographical pattern of the earth's surface" (1094) seems to be not so much a region of demarcation as a region where the very playfulness of play is made null

through the establishing of contact. Instead of play, survival is established as the alternative to play. "[S]ubtle correspondencies" (1094) seem to take the place of any absence/presence dichotomy.⁴⁵

It is decisive to note that the subtle correspondence in question is not one between this peculiar region and man. Man does not enter into non-playful correspondence. In the place of man, "the imaginations of men" (1094) rise to prominence. In addition to the subtle correspondencies between the imaginations of men and the Glastonbury region there is a subtle correspondence between the flood and something that is not man. The flood effectuates a reduction⁴⁶ where man is bracketed in favour of something more originary.⁴⁷ which in turn is precisely in subtle correspondence with the Glastonbury region.⁴⁸

The reduction effectuated by the coming of the flood reveals a subtle correspondence between the flood and the "inmost souls of many dwellers in northwest Somerset" (1066). Just as man is exposed to the reduction baring the phenomenological residuum⁴⁹ inmost soul, so the flood becomes bracketed revealing a phenomenological residuum of "far-drawn channel airs and remote sea odours" (1066). Through reduction this correspondence is removed from "the exciting public events" (1067) dominating Glastonbury's political, economic and religious scene in which the people of Glastonbury (man, as it were) remain preoccupied. This confederate correspondence between "the sharp poignancy of smell" (1066) and "the spirit" (1066) reveals an unbroken contact between one age of human life and another. Over time this contact is not brought to an end. Instead, over time this contact remains as "a feeling of mysterious elation" (1066). Just as this confederacy is removed from publicity, it is also removed from history. In the place of history, elation rises to prominence. The a-historical phenomenological residuum of man-spirit, soul, the "hidden wanderer, incarnated in our temporary flesh

and blood" (1067) remains, over time, in contact with "its old experience" (1067) of the phenomenological residuum of the flood-the smell of "deep-sea seaweed and sun-bleached driftwood and the ice-cold chill of Arctic seas" (1067).

Although this confederacy is removed from publicity to the extent of being almost completely ignored, it arouses "feelings that had not come to the population of those places for many a long year" (1067). These feelings catch them unawares as they go about their business and disturb them "with thoughts 'beyond the reaches of their souls'" (1067). Instead of beckoning attention this confederacy lacks the power to itself effectuate a reduction whereby the Glastonbury populace would be bracketed and a residual recognition established. In its place, a disinterest is established where these "airy syllables" (1067) of a confederacy are given "little heed" (1067). Here, "these fleeting intimations drawn forth from the recesses of their beings by these ocean smells, smells so soul piercing and so mysterious" (1067) remain unacknowledged.

In contradistinction to this lack of acknowledgement of a reciprocal residual recognition, the non-enigmatic visual might of the flood as it sweeps in over Glastonbury is acknowledged in all its ghastly glory. The morning of the fifteenth of March finds Philip Crow upon the summit of Wlrral Hill surveying the rising expanse of waters with a field-glass. The sun being up, this expanse of water spreads "away before him under a light that display[s] the full extent" (1077) of the flood. In this light and with the aid of his field-glasses Philip sees every detail of this "panorama" (1077). He sees birds in panic upon telegraph wires, bodies of drowned animals, huddled human shapes upon the roofs in the Paradise slums

and rescuers moving about in boats. Silently, he exclaims "What a sight it was!" (1076). Not only is the flood apprehended by Phillip as a sight and a panorama in front of him, fully lit, yielding its every detail to his penetrating gaze, but further increasing the distance between the observer and the observed, between the perceiver and the perceived, is the fact that the flood is understood as "spectacle" (1078) with Phillip as the implied audience. The very insistence on the flood apprehended as panorama, sight and spectacle through the aid of light and field-glasses erects a distance between observer and observed (perceiver and perceived). Empirically, the flood is foregrounded as something displayed in front of an observer which in turn is capable of perceiving it because of the distance between it and him/her.

However, there is that which does not subscribe to this model. There is an element of the flood that ignores the distance established between itself and any observing cogito. This element is not passively perceived but actively takes initiative and strikes the cogito. The element in question lurks in the "livid tint of the waters where there were no streets" (1077). Although not being an imaginative person, Phillip is still "struck by the lurid effect produced by certain isolated houses, near the sinister rush of the main current of the Brue" (1077). Around these houses the water positively foams, swirls and eddies. Phillip is "struck" (1077) by "the extraordinary difference between this murderous-looking flood-water and all other bodies of water he had ever seen or known" (1077). The striking of this blow violates the distance between observer and observed. Once the blow has been struck it seems simplistic to still cling to a monist model of observer-observed. The blow being struck, it seems no longer valid only to apprehend the flood from a distance. Before this blow, the flood is comprehended as visible materiality, in other words, as a "panorama of a drowned world" (1077) with all physical-material

elements of such a world kept at a distance. With the blow, this kind of distanced materiality pertaining to the flood seems to come to an end.

In its place another kind of materiality is bared. After the blow, the water of the flood is no longer like the water of the sea or the water of a lake. Instead, it is "a thing different from every other natural phenomenon" (1077). This phenomenon, after the blow which violates the distance of observer-observed, is no longer material but more than material. "A breath of abominable and shivering chilliness rose up from this moving plain of waters, a chilliness that was more than material, a chilliness that carried with it a wafture of mental horror" (1077) and a "wind of death" (1078). In so far as the blow in question is a blow of reduction this more than material chilliness may be said to be the residuum of the flood. The residuum of the flood is thus characterized by being (1) more than material and (2) coextensive with a peculiar smell-the smell of death. Not only is this residual flood coextensive with a death-smell but it is also coextensive with a "death-look" (1078) found upon the livid flood-waters.

I suggested a moment ago that a peculiar and subtle correspondence was shown to be in effect between the residues of man and topography. Similarly, there is a correspondence between this residual flood and a residual cogito no longer fit to be called observer. The blow that strikes Phillip crosses out Phillip as observer. In its place a "hard, narrow cranium" (1078) is bared.⁵⁰ This cranium is not confused by any marginal qualms and is in need of no tearing away of elaborate psychic complications of social feelings in order to get to "the bedrock issue" (1078). Confronted with the residual flood it is not stunned, numbed, distracted, crazed, or even bewildered. Instead, it is concentrated, unclouded, strung-up and "abnormally alert" (1078). The residuum in subtle correspondence with the residual flood is found in the "primeval animal-skin shiver"

(1078) of the response to this residual-flood. Between the death-look of the flood and the animal-skin shiver of the response to the flood there seems to be no distance keeping an observer apart from what s/he observes⁵¹. Instead of a perception in need of distance as its condition of possibility, a peculiar recognition characterized by immediacy is bared. Philip himself understands this immediacy as a "skin-to-skin, belly-to-belly contest" (1078).

The primary response the flood elicits is panic. However, as is evident, the panic in question is a peculiar one. Although the flood is referred to as an "overwhelming 'Act of God'" (1077) prompting "some ultimate cosmogonic catastrophe implying the final extinction of all planetary life" (1077-78), it does not cause any ordinary psychological panic if by such panic we mean uncontrolled fear causing uncontrolled actions or shock causing a complete lack of action. Although it is stated that Mr. Geard's audience in the Rotunda is "stirred up, excited, panic-stricken" (1088) by the rising waters, the flood-panic in question does not seem to fit an ordinary psychology of panic. In contrast to the blackbirds and thrushes Philip sees fleeing the flood-waters in "sheer panic-terror" (1077) and gathering upon a line of telegraph wires, the people of Glastonbury finding refuge from the waters upon Wirral Hill, where an emergency camp has been established, are only in panic in a peculiar sense. When Mr. Geard arrives to Wirral Hill he sees a spectacle completely different from anything he has ever seen before. It is a scene of shocking disorder and scrambling confusion. However, it is not like "a refuge camp in war, famine, or pestilence" (1096). It does not at all resemble people escaping from bombardment. It is completely different from such an escape because "the fear of water, the flood-panic, evokes an utterly

different atmosphere from the fear of bursting shells or exploding bombs" (1096). Whereas the fear of bombardment very much is the fear of the unexpected, a "flood-panic is a steady and continuous presence lacking in the expectancy of anything crashing or deafening" (1096). In contradistinction to the cries and tears of bombardment, a "flood-panic is essentially a silent thing" (1096-97) which "has nothing of the wild distraction of a shipwreck, or of an ocean-storm, or of a mob-riot" (1097).

As I pointed out in the context of Geard making his way to the Rotunda on the morning of the fifteenth, the flood is precisely not accompanied by fire, "by a murderous up-rising of the mob" (1080), or "by signs and portents, by thunderings and lightnings, in air and sky" (1080). Actually, the flood arouses surprisingly little activity. This lack of activity is partially explained by comparing the "slow ghastliness of death by water" (1094) with "the swift horror of death by fire" (1094). Whereas fire is "so swift and deadly with its blinding flames and suffocating smoke" (1094), water "kills more calmly, paralyses more slowly" (1094). Unlike fire which "spreads a kind of vacuum around it" (1094), water "does not shrivel up the normal nerves of our human awareness" (1094) creating a vacuum around it.⁵² Still, it does not create any intense activity.

Later, when Geard is rowing towards the Lake Village mounds, the distinction between fire and water is again foregrounded. Upon the largest of these mounds he sees a man and a child desperately summoning him. Geard, in a cool and calm detached fashion, compares this scene with an old Bible picture of the flood he remembers from childhood. If the element that threatened so many lives had been fire "there would have been such an automatic beat of panic fear in his pulses that such mental detachment as he now felt would have been impossible" (1108). However, the element in question being water, the

panic is not one of intense automatic heartbeats.

In summary, the flood-panic is marked by certain idiosyncratic features. (1) The flood-panic is not "sheer panic-terror" (1077). (2) It does not cause "an automatic beat of panic fear" (1108). (3) It is not marked by a "vacuum" (1094). (4) It is "a steadily continuous presence" (1096). (5) It "is essentially a silent thing" (1096-97). (6) It is not tainted by "distraction" (1097). All of these features point to one single phenomenality. The flood-panic is not ecstatic.

With the non-ecstatic panic brought about by the flood a peculiar neutrality is achieved, a neutrality where opposition is made null. The coming of the flood is to a large extent the coming together of opposites. However, it is not a coming together of opposites in opposition but in nullity. Standing next to Philip upon Wirral Hill when he surveys the flood is Dave Spear. Throughout the novel Philip embodies capitalism and Dave Spear communism. A certain amount of the novel's energy is derived from this political and ideological opposition. However, as the two are standing next to each other upon Wirral Hill this opposition is no longer in effect-the flood has "reduced the difference between Capitalism and Communism" (1077) baring a residuum of "tragic neutrality" (1077). In so far as such a reduction shows the two opposing ideologies as secondary, that is, as possible to reduce, the political anarchist Paul Trent is right when pointing out that "a flood was the sort of occasion when governments and states showed what frauds they were" (1094).

The flood is also responsible for the coming together of Mr. Geard and Philip Crow. Not only does Philip Crow embody capitalism as ideology, he embodies capitalism as secularity. In comparison, Mr. Geard, in his own way, embodies the sacral believing that "everything that lived was holy" (1117). When the two meet in the water of the flood, the sacral and the secular come together not as opposites but as

neutrality. "The rival kings of Avalon met thus at last on what was certainly a spot-though it could hardly be called a ground-of undeniable neutrality"(1109). On this spot, which is not a ground, no opposition is acknowledged. The sense of neutral contact, of the nullity of opposition, is increased by the image of Mr. Geard's coracle meeting Philip Crow's airplane. The "the joasting in the water of these two vessels, the boat and the aircraft, were like the coming together of two aeons of time" (1110)--the ancient and the modern.

The flood-panic seems very much like a site where neutrality is made room for. In this neutral space which is opened up, but not extended, by the non-ecstatic panic, a recognition of the flood's phenomenological residuum seems to be not only possible but required. Although the response to the flood does not occur in a vacuum, it does occur in a milieu which seems rid of secondary, reducible elements. The most proper name for this sight seems to be first sight. "The first sight of that brownish flood . . . was something that no one who saw it could forget until the day of his death" (1093). What is seen in this sight is not primarily all the "floating refuse" (1093) that is exposed in "primeval indecency to the eye of the onlooker" (1094). What is seen in first sight is not the drama nor the tragedy of this refuse. What is seen is not the "[d]ead puppies, dead kittens, dead chickens, children's dolls, children's toys, bits of broken furniture, pieces of furniture that were not broken but were upside down and horribly disfigured" (1093); nor is it the towel-horses, the laundry baskets, the wicker cradles, the wooden chairs with their thin legs in the air, or any of the other "intimate utensils of human life" (1094) that float around in the flood-waters. All of this refuse is secondary, possible to disregard.⁵³ However, this is not true of the "first impression of the powers of the waters" (1093). In the case of Crummie Geard, this first sight of power remains with her "to the last hour of her consciousness" (1093).

The phenomenological residuum impossible to disregard is thus one of power. Although this power is both empirical (having the power of physical destruction) and psychological (having the power to cause fear), it seems primarily to be of a kind possible to apprehend in neither of these two ways. The intense power of the flood seems to reside in the fact that it is not motivated. What sets the flood apart from most other phenomena in *A Glastonbury Romance* is precisely the fact that it is not motivated. The flood is an "enormous entity without consciousness, or purpose, or feeling, or pity" (1108). In this respect it is quite unique in *A Glastonbury Romance*. This idiosyncratic uniqueness seems to be silently recognized in first sight. This recognition effectuates the reduction that bares non-ecstatic panic, non-ecstasy, immanence, silence and a reciprocal residual recognition.

The purpose of this essay has been twofold. First, I wanted to remove the flood from the present paradigmatic conception of it as merely conforming to the Biblical conception of the flood. Second, once this removal had been made I wanted to conduct a rigorous phenomenological consideration of it that did not originate in any natural attitude stemming from any Biblical heritage but which took as its point of departure the idiosyncratic Glastonbury flood itself. Once the preconceived notion that the flood merely invades Glastonbury was dispelled it became evident that a certain play pertains to the Glastonbury region. However, further considerations showed that this play alone could not account for the peculiarity of the region. Instead, it was shown that a certain correspondence, what I prefer to call reciprocal residual recognition, is in effect between a reduced and bracketed subject and a reduced and bracketed object.

Through this reduction this correspondence was shown to be removed from both play and publicity. The site where this correspondence occurs was variously named soul, first sight, and panic, and it was shown to harbour no ordinary ecstasy.

The present phenomenological consideration raises one fundamental question. If the site which is removed from play and publicity, thereby deserving the name reserved space, and which is marked by correspondence-reciprocal residual recognition-is held to be originary, and if this site does not harbour any ecstasy, what happens to the status of ecstasy in general? Does this imply that ecstasy is secondary? If the "subtle correspondences" between "the imaginations of men" and "the geographical pattern of the earth's surface" (1064) occurring in a reserved space are not limited to the correspondence between the flood and the response it elicits but instead permeate the whole of *A Glastonbury Romance*, to what extent is one right in holding *A Glastonbury Romance* to be ecstatic? Further, if this kind of correspondence is held to permeate all of John Cowper Powys's writing, to what extent is this writing ecstatic? Throughout the writing of John Cowper Powys, the most common name for the subtle residual correspondence found to be in effect once a reduction has been effectuated and once the phenomenon reserved space has been acknowledged, is sensuality. If sensuality in John Cowper Powys is primarily not ecstatic but reserved, a reconsideration of both ecstasy and sensuality is in order. What is required is a consideration of Powysian sensuality and ecstasy that does not subscribe to a natural attitude. What is called for is a phenomenological consideration of sensuality and ecstasy that does not continue to circulate these phenomena in a seemingly uncritical fashion but instead ask (1) what is the phenomenological content of these concepts, (2) what are their place in Powys's writing and (3) what is the status of the hitherto

unacknowledged phenomenon reserved space in *A Glastonbury Romance* specifically and in John Cowper Powys's writing in general.

NOTES

- 1 John Cowper Powys, "The Creation of Romance" [Author's review of *A Glastonbury Romance*], *Modern Thinker* 1.1 (1932): 74-6; reprinted in *Powys Review* 9 (1981/2): 9. Both H. P. Collins and Charles Lock call attention to this author's review in relation to the flood. See respectively, H. P. Collins, *John Cowper Powys, Old Earth Man* (London: Village Press, 1966) 81 and Charles Lock, "Polyphonic Powys: Dostoevsky, Bakhtin, and *A Glastonbury Romance*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 55.3 (1986): 272.
- 2 To cite only two major Powys scholars, Glen Cavaliero views *A Glastonbury Romance* as "Powys's most enthralling novel and the one in which he expressed himself most fully" while H. W. Fowler holds *A Glastonbury Romance* to be "John Cowper Powys's best novel." See respectively, Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) 60 and Fowler's *Esthetic World of John Cowper Powys* (Rutherford/Madison/Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson Associated University Press, 1966) 150.
- 3 There are, of course, those that are of a completely contrary view. Jeremy Robinson argues that "[t]he final Flood sequence is confused in its symbolism and meaning. It is too obvious, too awkwardly handled, too much like join-the-dots poetry. It has potential, of course: the ancient Isle of Avalon asserting itself once again, surrounded by water. But as usual in this book Powys fluffs his chances of making something great out of it." See, Jeremy Robinson, *Thomas Hardy and John Cowper Powys - Wessex Revisited* (Riddeminstler: Crescent Moon, 1991) 21. E. N. Hooker is of a similar opinion including the flood scene among the scenes that "are strikingly conceived but weakly executed." See E. N. Hooker, "Powys in Glastonbury," rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *The Sewanee Review*, Jan.-Mar. 1933: 111.
- 4 This may partially be accounted for by the fact that relatively little critical attention has been paid to *A Glastonbury Romance*. There has so far not been a single essay dedicated exclusively to *A Glastonbury Romance* published in *The Powys Journal* and no anthology or monograph concerned with *A Glastonbury Romance* has yet appeared. The present body of *A Glastonbury Romance* criticism amounts to less than a handful of critical essays, single or partial chapters in books dealing with all of John Cowper Powys's major novels and a fair amount of reviews. Also, to merely indicate the marginality of the flood within this larger marginality it suffices to mention that Cavaliero's book, so central to an assessment of Powys's novels, does not address the flood at all. A similar absence is found in C. A. Costes, *John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape* (London: Macmillan Press, 1962).
- 5 Lock 271. This view is shared by most, if not all, critics.
- 6 Lock 272, 20.
- 7 Robinson understands this shift as a movement "from the water sign Pisces

- into the new-age of water-bearing Aquarius." See, Robinson 47.
- 8 Marjoe Kriesdottir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* (London: Macdonald & Jane's, Macdonald, 1980) 93.
 - 9 Percy Hutchinson, rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *New York Times Book Review*, 27 Mar. 1932: 24.
 - 10 Jocelyn Brooke, "On Re-reading J. C. Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*," rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *The London Magazine* Apr. 1956: 49.
 - 11 Angus Wilson, "Giant and Mystic," rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *The Observer* 26 June 1955: 21.
 - 12 J. A. Brebner, *The Demon Within: A Study of the Novels of John Cowper Powys* (London: Macdonald, 1973) 122.
 - 13 Brebner 123.
 - 14 Ned Lukeacher, "Between Philology and Psychology: Cronos, Dostoevsky and the Language of Myth in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*," *The Powys Review* 9 (1981/1982): 23.
 - 15 G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest - a chart of the prose works of John Cowper Powys* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1964) 42.
 - 16 Kriesdottir 93.
 - 17 A. P. Seabright, *The Elusives of John Cowper Powys* (England: Joe Bils Press, 1993), 34. The connection to the Goddess is also made by Robinson. See Robinson 21.
 - 18 Brebner 122.
 - 19 Brooke 49.
 - 20 Geoffrey Skelton, rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *Books and Bookmen*, May 1957: 11.
 - 21 Geoffrey West, rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *The Fortnightly Review*, 1 Aug. 1933: 250.
 - 22 Brebner 123.
 - 23 Brebner 123.
 - 24 Brebner 123.
 - 25 P. J. Kavenagh, "J. C. Powys - *A Glastonbury Romance*," rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *Theology* January (1977): 13.
 - 26 Susan Rands, "The Topicality of *A Glastonbury Romance*," *The Powys Review* 27-28 (1982-83): 49.
 - 27 Rands, "Topicality" 49.
 - 28 Rands, "Topicality" 52.
 - 29 Knight 41.
 - 30 Beall Davenport, rev. of *A Glastonbury Romance*, by John Cowper Powys, *Saturday Review of Literature* 26 March 1932: 616.
 - 31 Elizabeth Barrett, "The Borderland of the Miraculous: Romance and Naturalism in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*," *The Powys Review* 13 (1983/1984): 24.
 - 32 Barrett 28.
 - 33 Susan Rands, "Aspects of the Topography of *A Glastonbury Romance*," *The Powys Review* 20 (1987): 40.
 - 34 Genesis 6:11; I use the King James Version that would have been known

by JCP. 35 Genesis 9:1.

36 In the novel itself a Biblical account of the Glastonbury flood is exposed to a certain degree of ridicule, undermining to a certain extent any such account. In the final chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance*, Nancy Stiddles, prompted by Mr.

Geard, addresses the audience in the Rotunda. "This terrible Flood" she went on in a low voice, "that we must all face in a few minutes when we go back to the town, must have been

sent as a Sign." She paused again and then went on in a louder voice. "A sign that all this tin-mining and road-making and bridge-building is contrary to God's purpose." She sat down blushing deeply and staring at her lap" (1088). All numbers within parentheses refer to John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1996) unless otherwise stated.

37 See Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989) 15; Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy*, First Book (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1983) A71

38 Kriesdottir 93.

39 Hutchinson 24.

40 Brooke 49.

41 For a discussion concerning the play between land and sea in *Weymouth Sands*, see, Anthony Low, "Dry Sand and Wet Sand: Margins and Thresholds in *Weymouth Sands*," in *The Spirit of Powys*, ed. Denis Lane (London: Associated University Presses, 1990) 71-88.

42 Contrary to Low, I will not attempt to fit this play into a ready-made, albeit deconstructed, Derridean cast. Although the play in effect in the last chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance* is a play of differences it is doubtful whether it is also a play of difference. For an explication of the notion of the play of difference see primarily Jacques Derrida, "Difference," *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982) and Jacques Derrida "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978).

43 My use of the concept of bracketing follows the standard phenomenological use established by Edmund Husserl whereby all "all posittings of a 'non-immanent reality,' a reality not contained in the phenomenon . . . is shut off, that is, suspended." Husserl, *Idea* 34.

44 Any play, whether Derridean or not, depends upon difference. Thus difference, difference par exemple, requires both spatial and temporal differences. According to Derrida difference is both "temporalization" and "spacing." Derrida *Margins* 9. Ultimately, difference is a question of "an interval, a distance, spacing" necessarily being "produced" between the elements other." Derrida, *Margins* 8.

45 Contrary to the current paradigmatic ontological monism which denies the very possibility of an alternative to play, Michel Henry argues decisively for such an alternative. See, Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973); Michel Henry, *The Genealogy of*

Psychoanalysis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Michel Henry, *The Philosophy and Phenomenology of the Body* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975).

46 Again, I follow standard phenomenological procedure as established by Husserl. For a discussion on the concept of reduction see primarily Husserl, *Ideas* A756- A762 and *Cartesian Meditations* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999) A78.

47 Although that which is barred by the reduction effectuated by the flood can be called a subject that escapes play, that remains untouched by play, it does not seem to fit the cast of the very subject Derrida attacks, namely, the subject that "seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign," in other words, a subject who "throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology-in other words, through his entire history-has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play." Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 292.

48 Such a correspondency lies at the very heart of *A Glastonbury Romance*. Throughout Powys's writing the most privileged name for the correspondency in question is sensuality. However, since this name has been appropriated by the paradigmatic natural attitude dominating Powys's criticism and since it is naturalized to a certain extent by Powys's own discourse I will refrain from using it here.

49 The phenomenological residuum is simply that which remains after the reduction has been carried out. Again, my use simply follows standard phenomenological praxis. For a discussion of the concept of phenomenological residuum see the sources referred to in note 46 and especially Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*.

50 A similar reduction is effectuated when Mr. Geard drowns. The drowning waters bare the buried layers of Mr. Geard's residual body. "The brown flood that drowned him-bitter and cold from the arctic tides of the far Atlantic-stirred up in his consciousness at the last all those buried layers in his nature that were so much greater than his speech, than his theories, than his achievements" (1117).

51 The distance in question is not empirical but phenomenological. For a discussion of the concept of phenomenological distance, see Michel Henry, *The Essence of Manifestation* A710. Henry understands phenomenological distance "as an ontological power, as a distance-in-the-making and not merely as an already-made distance." Henry 66.

52 This is clearly seen in the case when Philip recognizes the death-look of the flood.

53 By secondary I mean that it does not withstand reduction. It does not remain after the reduction.

Llewelyn Powys in Dorset: A 'Rediscovered' Writer for the New Millennium

by Frank Warren

In January 1950 a friend wrote to me mentioning a book he had just bought. This was 'Advice to a Young Poet'. However in 1950 I had other matters to attend to. I had just been demobbed from the RAF and was looking around for a job. All thought of the book was put aside for a while in the onrush of civilian life.

Some months later though I began to read 'Advice to a Young Poet', a collection of letters from the aging writer Llewelyn Powys to the young poet Kenneth Hopkins. The letters cover a period of three years, the first from Chydyok in 1936, and the last from Clavadel, Davos Platz in 1939. Like a patriarch of old, Llewelyn Powys surveys the world from the dust-wrapper alongside his chosen symbol of life: the ankh.

From the start Llewelyn begins by advising Kenneth to 'wash your underclothes as if this extra personal fastidiousness were part of a religious life'. In his second letter to Kenneth Llewelyn writes, "I feel inclined to give you some advice as though you were my bastard and I were Lord Chesterfield."

Many years later I met Kenneth in Weymouth, and together with my wife Grace we had tea at the Greenhill cafe by the sea front. It was a very hot day, and we had more cups of tea as Kenneth talked about the Powyses...

"By day and by night no sight that we see, no sound that we hear, but has its own poetical burden.' Years later after reading many of Llewelyn's books I began to compile my own personal 'Book of

Days' writing down into a blue paper-covered exercise book my favorite passages from them.

I was certainly captivated--as so many other readers have been--by the style of the man...Sentence after sentence of flowing prose, a hedonistic philosophy, proclaiming a love of life. And what a love of life Llewelyn had! All this in spite of the tuberculosis that dogged him from Sherborne in 1909, to the end of his life in 1939 at Davos-Platz.

Many pages of 'Love and Death' are filled with a sexual ecstacy as fine after life of Llewelyn's prose declares her love for Dittany Stone. (Gamel Woolsey)...'My love for her could never be appeased. My passion for her was so inordinate that I saw her beauty as it were with the vision of a God, with the eyeballs of Siva. Although she was unwilling to concede the last union, to be fast joined, that is to say, as fell to flesh and as hardly to be separated, our loving was passionate intemperate. Every inch for her body shone for me like the radiant skin of Aphrodite when she lay entangled--a shining silver-white dace of a lady--in her goodman's meshed net of shiny brass'

Llewelyn wrote much of 'Love and Death', his 'Imaginary autobiography', at Chydyok, an isolated building--originally a farmhouse, in the hamlet of Chaldon Herring, Dorset. I will always remember the first time I found Chydyok. It was in the spring, the cherry blossom was in full bloom pink and white and there were thousands of primroses covering the lawn. The house was silent, the window shuttered. I knocked on the small front door but there was nobody there, only the total silence, the sun, and the lonely house. Some years later together with family and friends we had many happy holidays there.

To reach Chydyok you have to walk over a very rough trackway called Chalky Knap, mentioned by Llewelyn in his essays. I wrote at that time some poems about Chydyok. This is one of them:

CHYDYOK

Here at Chydyok, nothing passes,
 Except maybe for a gull flying over
 On to White Nothe and beyond,
 Rain pelts against the window
 Nothing passes, all is quiet.

Here at Chydyok the wind
 Rattles the rafters, a mouse
 Scuttles and stirs, than is still.
 Chalky Knap shines white in the moonlight,
 Nothing passes over the chalk washed hill

(September 1993)

A summation of Llewelyn's philosophy can best be found I think in the essays gathered together in the two books *Dorset Essays* and *Somerset Essays*. Writing to the American artist Lynd Ward from Chydyok, Llewelyn mentions that, "My whole attention at present is concentrated upon writing a series of essays for the Dorset Echo., it enchants me to have them read by these old-world laborers and cow herds and discussed in every tavern from Weymouth to Shaftesbury...I am only paid £1 a time but they contain my best writing." *Dorset Essays*, published by John Lane, The Bodley Head, in 1935, contains 31 essays as well as 41 photographs by Wyndham Goodden. *Somerset Essays*, also published by the Bodley Head in 1937, contains 37 essays and another 40 photographs by Goodden. Both dust-wrappers are illustrated by Gertrude Powys. Some time ago, Redcliffe of Bristol issued a catalogue of re-issued books by Llewelyn with the front-cover announcement, 'the rediscovery of an important West Country writer.' On Page 2 of the catalogue under the title 'The man and his work': "After decades of inexplicable neglect Dorset-born Llewelyn Powys is today being 'rediscovered' as a

significant twentieth-century writer..." Though I wonder how many readers today read *Impassioned Clay*?

With so many secondhand bookshops closing down, unfortunately future readers will be denied the endless pleasures to be found in some places. No more browsing about in that dusty old shop full of paperbacks and crumbling leather-clad bindings, old bound copies of Punch, and maybe behind that pile of magazines, maybe if you are lucky will be the very book you are looking for, for years!

If we want to find those Powys books now we will all have to get connected to the Internet, and scan the titles for sale by the specialist dealer.

What would the Powys brothers have made of it all? I guess Theodore would have moved to the Orkneys!

From my journal, Thursday August 13th 1998.

Sunny day, toast Llewelyn's birthday in the garden. the grass is shriveled by the hot sun. How Llewelyn would have loved this weather. Read aloud to wilting evening primroses Llewelyn's 'Poxwell Stone Circle', essay from *Dorset Essays*. If a wayfarer walking from the Weymouth direction after passing Upton Lane goes through the first field gate beyond the keeper's cottage he will come upon the circle on the hill-top some hundred yards above the quarry. It is a Stonehenge in miniature, though in actual fact no bigger than a fairies' orb'. Remember also that today some members of the UK Powys Society will be drinking Llewelyn's health at 'The Sailors' Return' pub in East Chaldon, and then up and over Chalky Knap past Chydyok, and on to the heights above Chaldon to Llewelyn's Portland stone memorial overlooking the fields and the sea beyond

In Memory of Llewelyn Powys
(1885-1939)

Nancy Cooper, Witcombe Bottoms, White Nose
How your essays still seem living to those
Who know the sights and scenes you loved so well
Memories of Montacute and Yeo
Durdle Door, Lulworth, Poxwell...

But time passes, 'Earth memories' fade,
'Love and Death',
'Impassioned Clay'
'A Pagan's Pilgrimage'...
Walking the Dorset headlands staff in hand
Remember Llewelyn Powys who loved this land



From: John Powell Ward 24 April 1999

Dear Editor,

In reviewing Herbert Williams's *John Cowper Powys* in your Spring 1999 issue, Glen Cavaliero feared a "narrowness of focus and a provincial reputation" in that the book is one of the *Borderlines* series on England/Wales writers (and artists and composers). Since JCP shares the series with David Jones and Eric Gill, Wilfred Owen and A. E. Housman, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Bruce Chatwin, Edward Elgar, Raymond Williams, Dennis Potter, Henry Vaughan and others, this alarm is a touch comic.

Whether or not the series "includes no other writer of the profundity or scope" of Powys is, of course, entirely a matter of opinion; as editor I was delighted to include him since that is exactly what the series aimed at; namely, to demonstrate once again how an awesome geographical area (of whatever nature and however small) can generate writers of international stature in above-average numbers. Provence, The Lake District, the West of Ireland, parts of New England, St Ives in Cornwall, the Isle of Capri, the shores of the Tsinghai and many other spots worldwide have done the same for other writers, painters and composers.

Our commissioned authors include Norman White (author of the prizewinning Clarendon biography of Hopkins), Stevie Davies (John Carey called her book "the best writing on Vaughan this century"), John Allison (music critic for *The Times*, *Financial Times*, *Observer* etc) -- but this self-promotion is embarrassing. As John Cowper Powys illustrated in that magnificent first sentence of *A Glastonbury Romance*, provincialism is avoided not only by the metropolitan but also the local/cosmic. Dr Cavaliero's review was balanced and well-disposed, for which one is grateful; but it seems he has some catching-up to do in certain areas.

John Powell Ward (Editor, *Borderlines* Series, Seren Books)

Reviews In Brief

Robert Caserio, *The Novel in England, 1900-1950*, New York: Twayne Publishers; London: Prentice Hall International, 1999. xii, 441 p

The English Novel--Against the Grain

Robert Caserio's *The Novel in England 1900-1950* (published 1999) is a big, richly-argued, wide-ranging history of English modernist fiction (including, pace its title, some striking excursions into the realm of the short story). Caserio is extremely well-read and a lucid writer. He is also fond of arguing against the grain, both in the works he chooses to treat and in his often unconventional approach to them. Perhaps it is not so surprising, then, that the book has a substantial section devoted to John Cowper Powys. "No inattention to literary history and to literary achievement surpasses criticism's neglect of the novels of John Cowper Powys," Caserio begins--a familiar refrain to readers of *Powys Notes*, but not, perhaps, to that broader and less well-prepared audience for whom these comments are intended.

How to make room for Powys in the extensive modernist canon? "One strategy of critical rescue, for better or worse, is to point out how the neglected and underestimated writer speaks--even if in utter rebellion--to concerns that are essential to those already canonized." More particularly, Caserio connects *Weymouth Sands* with *Finnegans Wake* and with the "Nausicaa" section from *Ulysses*. As it happens, Leopold Bloom's Nausicaa exposes herself to him and thus causes him to masturbate; Caserio uses this incident as a opportunity to bring up Powys's doctrines of masturbation, exhibitionism, cruelty, and spectacle. Freud rears his head too (*Sexuality and the Psychology of Love*), as does G. Wilson Knight. These excursions prepare an extremely interesting reading of

Weymouth Sands, towards the end of which Caserio observes: "We have seen Powys take Freud on as a theorist and turn his novel into a theory....we have observed Powys derive a scenic inspiration (as it were) from *Ulysses* in order to elaborate this theory." And so we have.

Powysians will be pleased, no doubt, to share Caserio's enthusiasm and to benefit (by way or assent or contradiction) to his argument. More generally, it is worth emphasizing the ambition and freshness of *The Novel in England*, the best account of its subject this correspondent remembers having seen.

--Richard Maxwell



Timothy Walsh, *The Dark Matter of Words, Absence, Unknowing, and Emptiness in Literature*. Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1998, xiv + 206 pp. ISBN 0-8093-2172-6

This book devotes only seven or so pages to John Cowper Powys, but these are so perceptive, and the overall thesis of the book so important for Powysians, that it strongly deserves notice in this journal. Walsh focuses his argument upon the idea of "structured absence": there is a nothingness, a void, but this is a felt nothingness, and it is sculpted or molded by the entities that are there into a defined if unknowable entity. Reality may be indescribable, but it is also inexhaustible, and when we fail to describe we in the same instant solicit this plenitude. In narratological terms, this transaction is negotiated between author and reader. "Structured absence" meditates between existential alienation and deconstructive *différance*. Relying partially on Powys's *The Meaning of Culture*, Walsh discusses how 'reality' is beyond our linguistic means to express it, and thus easily shaded into 'nothingness'--but a nothingness that nonetheless calls to us. Despite what might seem forbiddingly theoretical concerns, Walsh's book is virtually jargon-free and is actually enlightening on all the primary authors it covers, not just using them as proof texts to illustrate an already paramount theory. Walsh is able to accomplish this partially because of the wide ground of authors he surveys, ranging from Virginia Woolf to Sir Walter Scott to Lewis Carroll to Hildegard of Bingen to Anglo-Saxon riddles, as well as relevant artists and composers. (Music seems especially important in this work, and as spatial as the idea of 'structured absence'; seems I sense something integrally musical about it.) Walsh is unafraid to take just what he needs from a primary source and move on; there is no sense of these authors being strip-mined for academic meaning.

Walsh explains "structured absence" most deftly through his explication of Henry James's short story "The Figure in the Carpet." An aging author alludes to some essential pattern or ultimate meaning that lies beneath him and his work; the identity of this pattern is never revealed to the reader; whether it exists at all is even in question. And yet, for all its emphasis on absence, Walsh's discussion has managed to introduce a needed note of dynamism into readings of James's story, to make it less the rehearsed epistemological parable it is usually taken as being.

Whatever Powys criticism needs, it is not dynamism--we have that in abundance. What Walsh does give the reader in his pages on Powys is glimpsed just before JCP is mentioned as such--in this superb passage near the beginning of the book.

There is, in fact, scarcely a year in our distant past that we cannot "see", since, of all the billions and billions of stars, we can always find one the requisite distance away to allow a glimpse back in time. It is not without a touch of irony that humankind often feels trapped in the present, irrevocably cut off from the past, since by simply venturing outside at night we can watch the sky replay the entire history of the universe (4)

This may most immediately recall a passage in Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts*, but it is intensely Powysian in its concern with what we might term the lyricism of space, the way an inert or objective entity can become emotional and "musical" without losing its objectivity. Nature, the cosmos, is a source of reassurance, but also of revelation. JCP's refusal to abide or inhere in the present moment, the sense of alternatives to every instant of time that his work continually presents, is also powerfully evoked. Further down the page, Walsh mentions the classical concept of the "aether", which of course has Powysian titular resonance, and the entire atmosphere of Walsh's observation--its tone much as its content--recalls Powys' late space romances, though with a bit more *gravitas*.

Walsh's insight into JCP's mentality as author is illustrated by his comments on *Wolf Solent*: "Night-scenes animated by wind and trees whisper half-heard secrets that declare themselves in print only through a recurrent refrain of verbal inadequacy" (126). Walsh helps us understand Powys's thinking, but, equally, he helps us listen to Powys's music.

--Nicholas Birns



Jacqueline Peltier, *Alyse Gregory: A Woman at her Window*, London: Cecil Woolf, 1999, 52 pp, ISBN 1 897967 62 4

This attractively designed pamphlet is part of a "Powys Heritage" series produced in Britain by Cecil Woolf under the general editorship of Anthony Head and, I believe, available for sale there in a fairly accessible way. (From outside the UK it can be ordered from: Cecil Woolf, 1 Mornington Place, London NW1 7RP). Jacqueline Peltier makes a strong case of Alyse Gregory as a figure of significance independent of her being the wife of Llewelyn Powys; indeed, some of the most gripping pages of this essay are when Alyse Gregory relates how, though she loves Llewelyn, she intensely wishes not to be dominated by him: Gregory also had a strong connection with her brother-in-law JCP, and defended his works even in her waning years. Peltier points out that, like three other notable women in the Powys circle (Frances Gregg, Phyllis Playter, Gamel Woolsey) Alyse Gregory is American, born in fact in what has to be in one way one of the most American of places, Norwalk, Connecticut. As described by Peltier elsewhere in this issue if *PN*, Gregory wrote for the famed *DIAL* magazine, edited by the radical gadfly Randolph Bourne. But her circle of acquaintances extended very widely, at one point including the future president of Czechoslovakia, Tomas Masaryk. Reading about Gregory's New York gives the feel of the Greenwich Village of that era, physically similar to the present one but so much different in every other way. This was also the New York of the two Powys brothers who lived in America in that period, and it was of course while writing for the *DIAL* that Alyse Gregory met Llewelyn Powys. Strongly assisted by compelling photographs of the couple themselves and their Dorset house, Chydyok, Peltier chronicles her marriage to Llewelyn as well as her long widowhood (she died only in 1967) which ended in a

manner that seems very sad to the reader but, we are assured, was a release for Gregory herself.

What may be most American about Alyse Gregory's life is that, though she made a definite contribution to the cultural life of the 1920's, and published three novels, one essay collection and an autobiography, she was forgotten very swiftly and is probably not to be found in any encyclopedia of American women writers. It is only through "Powys heritage" that she lives today.

--Nicholas Birns

Please note: the new Overlook Press hardcover edition of *Weymouth Sands* is now out as of February 2000.



Yellow Bracken: Meditations on Gerda, Wolf, and 'Mythologies'

by Nicholas Birns

In spring 2000, for the first time ever, I will be teaching a John Cowper Powys novel, namely *Wolf Solent*, in an undergraduate classroom. This appropriately millennial event will be in the context of a course on "The Expanded Novel"--novels that in one way or another challenge the fixed limits of the genre. An interesting slant to *Wolf Solent* is that not only does it embody this sort of expansion, it enacts it in the process of its own unfolding.

Most critics, and readers, agree that *Wolf Solent* starts out as one kind of novel and ends as another. Broadly speaking, it begins as an English domestic chronicle and ends as a kind of apocalyptic revelation. What became of particular interest on this reading was the transition between these two states; when does this metamorphosis become apparent to the reader?

Though it is rather early in the book to be the most symmetrical node for this transition, the chapter "Yellow Bracken" seemed to me where it took place, or, more to the point, where the very sort of transition endemic to the book was presaged. Not everybody would agree; Belinda Humfrey, for instance, gives emphasis to the nineteenth chapter, "Wine", which certainly is at a more customary point in the plot, its 'seventh-inning stretch' as it were. But "Yellow

Bracken" demands to be valued before the reader moves on to the rest of the book. The seventh chapter in the novel, it is the one where our protagonist expresses his feelings for the beautiful Gerda Torp. Wolf thinks, and feels, that he has found love. "The reader" knows that this is not the last word on the subject, because of internal clues which will be canvassed below as well as the truism that it is too early in the book for such an important issue to be settled, in spite of the fact that, with slight alternations, "Yellow Bracken" would do fine as the closing chapter of a slightly more conventional novel. In terms of the "traditional domestic economy of the Victorian novel", a fancy way of saying that anyone of any acuity who has read ten or so mainstream English novels will be able to tell if the hero ends up getting the girl or vice versa, Wolf and Gerda's relationship cannot be settled in Chapter Seven, unless Wolf is suddenly to go off to sea and the novel take another direction entirely!

At the beginning of Wolf and Gerda's love-idyll in "Yellow Bracken", Gerda's boy-brother Lob Torp is there as a kind of obtrusive yet enabling Third Principle, much like Tom Barter in the Norfolk boyhood scenes of *A Glastonbury Romance*. Lob is quickly sent away to look for an egg-filled blackbird's nest (itself an image of generation perhaps paralleling Wolf and Gerda's impending romance). Wolf's love of Gerda is associated, indeed bound up with, his love of nature, and his finally coming upon meaningful love with her is equated with his escape from the "unbelievable drudgery" of his London academic routine. So finding landscape, finding locality, is equated with finding love.

But this is not just any landscape. It is the Dorset landscaper, even if somewhat close to Somerset, and thus the shade of Thomas Hardy is inevitably evoked. Powys's relation to Hardy has been covered extensively, and as in most cases of literary influence tracing its

contours can too easily degenerate into a parlor game. But the relationship between these two writers, so similar and yet so different, and both so basically unusual, bears some transcription. Wolf's entire expedition to Dorset is somewhat in the tradition of Clym Yeobright's in *The Return of The Native*. T.E. Valley is an exaggeration of Parson Thirdly in *Far From The Madding Crowd* and the poetry. Wolf's mother is reading Hardy's Napoleonic novel *The Trumpet-Major*, and is elsewhere spoken of as mounting a "Napoleonic campaign" which may be a counterpoise to the historical investigations of Squire Urquhart. And, of course, the Gerda-Christie dyad comes from the Arabella-Sue opposition in *Jude The Obscure*. There is already a *Jude* connection in *Wolf Solent*, as Jude Fawcley the stonecutter is imaged by Wolf's becoming son-in-law of the stonecutter Torp. But *Jude's* prefigurings of the Gerda-Christie opposition strike very deep. I recall an article I read about fifteen years ago written by a teacher who assigned *Jude* in the classroom, and mentioning that a (male) student of his said something like "I have met many Arabellas, but I have yet to meet my Sue". This comment (presumably, a lamentation), which makes one rather glad that Powys is not taught as frequently as Hardy, nonetheless has the merits of setting off the Gerda-Christie dyad from its predecessor. It is impossible to conceive even the most inane undergraduate saying "I have met many Gerdas, but I have yet to meet my Christie." Arabellas, or merely sensual women, are likely more plentiful than Gerdas, whose sensuality is enmeshed with a sort of uncanny beauty and a love of nature, as opposed to a mere subsiding within it. There are simply not many Gerdas around, and this is as true in the world of *Wolf Solent* as anywhere. Certainly Wolf finds Gerda very unusual. Her whistling like the blackbirds is a sign of her closeness to nature. But she is not simply some kind of lumpen, precognitive mass; her whistling is a kind of

percipience. So Gerda cannot be just mere nature. And any putative split between the more conventionally feminine Gerda as mere nature in contrast to Christie's ethereal spritellness, may come too close to gender stereotypes that, their undesirability aside, simplify the complex tenderness of Powys's vision.

The collection of essays on *Wolf Solent* edited by Belinda Humfrey and published by the University of Wales Press in 1990 is in my view among the best collections of essays ever devoted to a single novel. Yet some of the essays therein do less than full justice to Gerda. When Penny Smith says that Gerda is "desirable and physically exciting" she is at the very least testifying to the powers of the language Powys uses to describe the character. But, though there is certainly nothing wrong with being desirable and physically exciting, surely Wolf, a man, whatever his eccentricities, of discernment and sensitivity, sees something more in Gerda, and surely the reader does, or at least can, as well. Gerda tends to be underestimated. We tend to see her as a brake upon Wolf's soaring, transcendent spirit, and as a symptom of the temptations of the flesh far less inspiring than the more learned and, in her own way, cerebral Christie. When Wolf first receives the note from Gerda asking her to meet him, he notes how childish, how innocent is her tone. Though this may lead us to presume that Gerda is not Wolf's intellectual, spiritual equal, we must also note that her innocence, displayed in this context, has something slightly untoward about it. It is what Wolf himself calls an "abnormal innocence", not perhaps a total abnormality, but certainly a peculiarity, a quirk. It is not just that Gerda is innocent. Gerda is *strange*. Her whistling ability and her assumption, at times, of extra-human mentalities are not what one would associate with a woman of "mere" physical attractiveness, such as the buxom Arabella in *Jude*.

Another hint of Gerda's salience is her intimate relationship to Wolf's 'mythology'. 'Mythology' should almost be in two sets of quotes, as Wolf already has an ironic distance from it, or at least a self-consciousness inherent in *knowing* he has a mythology. Presumably Wolf if not all people has a mythology, but very few people *know* they have a mythology in the way Wolf does. Interestingly relevant is Roland Barthes' distinction between a myth and a mythology: the myth being mystified, the mythology as once being a further elaboration of the myth and its simultaneous demystification. If Gerda is so much a part of this complex, self-conscious mythology, surely she is not just a mere lumpen mass, a vehicle of the senses?

Wolf and Gerda express this complexity themselves. Gerda recounts to Wolf that some of the locals see her whistling as merely "whistling for a lover". As with the idea of a mythology, Gerda's disquiet at her whistling *only* being seen as an aspect of physical desire already expresses a super-physical dimension to the whistling. The dialogue here between Wolf and Gerda can easily be taken to establish Gerda as earth-woman and Wolf as intellectual savant, imbuing Gerda with a self-awareness that is not actually there. But this is to confuse the fact that Wolf is more *articulate* than Gerda--which is undeniable--with the far more arguable assertion that his feelings are on a higher plane of complexity and richness. Gerda may not wholly understand the verbal formulations that Wolf uses to express his sense of a set of human aspirations that surpass the mere need for immediate gratification. But she is the one who asks him "What do we all want to express?" when Wolf easily could have concluded by describing Gerda's whistling as her 'way of expressing what we all want to express' and just left it there, in other words just as a vaguely defined generality. Gerda prompts Wolf into much more creative reflection, as he expands (yet defines) the concept further, from "recognition" (which now sounds

vaguely Hegelian) to the more interesting, and characteristic, "gratitude". Gerda does not quite comprehend or, more fundamentally, accept Wolf's definition, but the two agree that her whistling is something beyond the base and given, that it is percipient and consequential. Notably, though Gerda cannot express her feelings with any dexterity, even Wolf has problems: his speech is filled with stammers and ellipses, it is neither smooth nor eloquent, even if profound: "I think that what we all want to express is--something--addressed--to the gods--some---kind---of--acknowledgement."

Yet the scene falls short of full concord. This is not a conventional romance or idyll, and when Gerda says "If you think it's no good, and you couldn't think of marrying a girl like me, you'd better let me go home now," a jarring note is introduced, even fit the reader understands that this episode will turn out happily, at least in isolation in the "mini-novel" that is "Yellow Bracken". But what does Gerda mean by "a girl like me." A homespun, simple country girl, not of the ilk of the cosmopolitan, upper-middle-class, London-educated Wolf? Or, indeed, a strange girl who whistles like the animals, a changeling, someone not of Wolf's world not through her ordinariness, her insufficient cosmopolitanism, but her *abnormality*? Though Powys takes much from the nineteenth century novel, I feel his focus on class issues here is less intense than, for instance, Hardy's would be.

Wolf and Gerda's verbal communication continues to be at cross-purposes in the next few pages, even though their emotional moods seem to be somehow in accord. It is here that the ballad "Yellow Bracken" itself enters the picture. Here I must confess my total ignorance about this ballad: I do not know whether Powys made it up or if it is a local song of long standing. Nor am I quite certain about even its most literal meaning. But nonetheless I will try to puzzle it out.

There'll be yellow bracken beneath your head;
There'll be yellow bracken beneath your feet
For the lass Long Thomas lays in's bed
Will have no blanket, will have no sheet

My mother has sheets of linen white
My father has blankets of purple dye
But to my true-love I have come tonight
And in yellow bracken I'll surely lie:

In the yellow bracken he laid her down,
While the wind blew swift and the river ran;
And never again she saw Shaftesbury Town,
Whom Long Thomas had taken for his leman!

Jason Otter's poems, particularly that about the Lenty Slow-Worm, almost sound like T.F. Powys. Peter Christensen, in one of the best essays on *Wolf Solent*, argues that Jason's poems represent an alternative vision to Wolf's potentially narcissistic and hegemonic "possession" of the novel. The "Yellow Bracken" ballad does seem to express Wolf's sensibility, and also reflects the "Yellow Bracken" chapter's tone of romantic consummation. But what sort of consummation? I assume when the ballad tells us that the woman who Long Thomas takes for his leman "never again..saw Shaftesbury Town" this either literally or allegorically refers to death. All the references to "laying her down", "surely lie", and even "purple dye" are certainly suggestive in a punning sense. Even if this is overreading and the song is simply a starkly romantic one, the undertones of the grave are there. And, rather obviously, the yellow bracken is an unconventional love-flower. The yellow bracken is from last fall. It is not a spring flower; it is residual, leftover, and thus proof of the past and nature's vulnerability rather than a symptom of the future and its resilience. The presence of the strewn bracken may connote a romantic reunion which only occurs in an afterlife, here of uncertain dimensions. In any event, the

efflorescence is memorial.

And yet, in the immediate moment, Wolf's courtship of Gerda is successful. Despite moments of doubt, she accedes to his suit; also despite moments of self-doubt about his full emotional engagement in the situation, Wolf is moved to fully open his heart. As he does, Lob returns, oddly for this rather feral child in doing so heralding a return of the social world which, in novelistic terms, usually accompanies romantic consummations. Wolf feels his 'mythology' being mediated into the 'real world' as a result of his love for Gerda, and the chapter concludes with Wolf seemingly far less restless than in earlier scenes. And yet there is this powerful, incantatory final vision:

"Whom Long Thomas had taken for his leman," he repeated in his heart (emphasis added); and it seemed to him that the lights of the town, which now began to welcome them, were the light of a certain imaginary city which from his early childhood had appeared and disappeared on the margin of his mind. It was wont to appear in strange places, this city of his fancy...at the bottom of teacups...or the window-panes of privies...in the soapy waters of baths...in the dirty-marks on wall-papers...in the bleak coils of dead summer-grates, between the rusty railings of deserted burying-grounds...above the miserable patterns of faded carpets...among the nameless litter of pavement-gutters....But whenever he had seen it, it was always associated with the first lighting-up of lamps, and with the existence, but not necessarily the presence, of someone...some girl...some boy...some unknown....whose place in his life would resemble that first lighting of lamps...that sense of arriving out of the cold darkness of empty fields and lost ways into the rich, warm, glowing serenity of that particular town...."

The sheer magnificence here is worth pausing a moment to admire. This is more than an epiphany, but less than a revelation; it is magical, but a haunted magic, a magic haunted by the phantom nature of his hope. Wolf's situation, both novelistically and in his own being, has been one of unfulfilment. His love for Gerda, and her acceptance of him, has changed this. But the fulfilment here is not just a byproduct of this

particular scene. It is notable that, within this shimmeringly described rural setting, it is an imaginary city that shines on the margin of Wolf's consciousness, and the occasions that evoke it are often anything but glamorous or idyllic. There is the same commingling of life and death, beauty and residue to be found, albeit slightly more lyrically, in the image of the yellow bracken itself. There is indeed something unsettled about the atmosphere here, and part of this may be traceable to Wolf's knowledge that he and Gerda are not entirely compatible. But even more is the awareness that one's feelings for any human being may well partake of a far wider range of abstract hopes and ideals.

The beloved that inspires this gossamer vision of lamplit fulfilment need not be, specifically, Gerda; indeed, as Powys makes clear, it does not need to be a woman, or even anyone physically present at all. Yet Gerda is indeed the immediate occasion of this vision, and however much it may exceed her. When we love one person, is it only that person we love? Wolf's answer to this seems to be no, and that answer leads him to a more capacious sense of romantic fulfilment. Wolf's vision is a vision of the not-yet-known, as Wolf must, in order to attain personal fulfilment, fully grasp the nature of what is outside himself. The local Gerda cannot equal the abstract potentialities of this vision, but then again neither could any incarnate human being. This vision totally exceeds Dorset (even though again Dorset is its occasioning feature) and makes Wolf's sojourn there a far cry from Clym Yeobright's even at its most optimistic; even at the moment where Wolf achieves consummated love with the "local girl" Gerda, it is far more than a mere 'return of the native'. Wolf's vision at the end of "Yellow Bracken" manifests a resistance to regionalism, groundedness, absorption. Yet the land is still beautiful, and the presence of the landscape is one of the features that tour hypothetical reader schooled in

the rudiments of nineteenth-century fictional technique most notices. All his is part of the strange and difficult balance of allegiances and ideals with which Wolf, and in many ways Powys himself, struggles throughout this novel. And "Yellow Bracken" is where the true difficulty of this balance is fully revealed. After "Yellow Bracken", we know that it will not be 'business as usual' in this novel, and it is because of Gerda, and because of Wolf's love for her, that we feel this. I will report back in the next issue as to how my class received *Wolf Solent*.



Alyse Gregory & *The Dial*

by Jacqueline Peltier

Alyse Gregory met Llewelyn Powys late in 1921. He was a young writer, just starting to publish his African stories in newspapers such as the *New York Evening Post* and the *Freeman*, she was the as yet unofficial Editor of *The Dial*, an outstanding literary review. Her too short passage at *The Dial* was momentous in her life.¹ There she met the literary and artistic intelligentsia, there she showed her mettle and was greatly appreciated for her intelligence and distinction.

The circumstances which brought Alyse to *The Dial*, were told by Rosemary Manning.² In her autobiography³, Alyse Gregory relates how the tea shop she had opened with a friend, two blocks from the offices of *The Dial* at 152 West Thirteenth Street, became a convenient meeting-place for its new owners Scofield Thayer and Sibley Watson, who brought manuscripts to discuss while having a cup of tea. Among the habitués of her shop, ranging from 'derelict characters to women of fashion', there were a small array of people more congenial to her mind, such as the poet William Rose Benét and his brother Stephen. But some years before, she had already made the acquaintance of a man who was of paramount importance to her: Randolph Bourne. Randolph Bourne, born in 1886 in Bloomfield, New Jersey, was to die, absurdly young, in 1918. His broken body, deformed by tuberculosis of the spine, enclosed the most brilliant mind. After he graduated from high school he had to work several years before he was able to enter Columbia University on a scholarship, at the age of 23. He received his master's degree in 1913. By 1917 he worked for *The New Republic*. With other writers like Bertrand Russell, Van Wyck Brooks, Dreiser or Dos Passos, he contributed articles to *The Dial*, at that time a radical fortnightly owned by Martyn

Johnson, and to the avant-garde monthly *The Seven Arts*. It was Bourne who introduced Alyse to Scofield Thayer. It was the beginning of a great friendship.

In March 1917 Bourne published an article in *The New Republic* in which he declared his stand against the entry of the United States into the war, a statement which cost him his job. Bourne wanted his country to have an intellectual leadership and held that 'Against the thinly disguised panic which calls itself "patriotism" and the thinly disguised militarism which calls itself "preparedness" the cosmopolitan ideal is set.' ⁴ He would certainly have played a major part in the development of Thayer and Watson's *Dial*, later on. Scofield Thayer admired Randolph Bourne and decided to back Johnson's *Dial*, which had financial problems, on the condition Bourne would be given a platform. But with the turn of events, the fortnightly changed its course and advocated a participation in the war. As a consequence Bourne's position as a contributing editor became less and less tenable. His final political leading article for *The Dial* was 'Conscience and Intelligence in War', in 1918.⁵

The influence which Bourne, along with Van Wyck Brooks, Waldo Frank and Lewis Mumford, exerted is stressed in a recent book, *Beloved Community*, and their importance now in modern American thought is underlined:

In contrast to a radicalism that defended natural rights or liberties, or which denounced the economic conditions that drained such rights and liberties of meaning, the Young Americans launched a critique of modern society that was moral, aesthetic, and, above all, personal. It was the personal failure of modern industrial life - its inability to give meaning and satisfaction to individuals - that was its most damning feature from the perspective of those raised on a republican conception of citizenship and a romantic belief in the authority of the creative imagination. 'We were all sworn foes of Capitalism', W. Frank later recalled, 'not because we knew it would not work, but because we judged it, even in success, to be lethal to the human spirit.'⁶

Randolph Bourne died suddenly, of influenza on the 22nd of December 1918. Alyse would much later mourn his memory and feel regret for having neglected him:

With Randolph I was too self centered to give him the warm assurance he craved. I did give him a great deal, but when I read these essays (*The History of a Literary Radical*) I realize how much more I might have learnt from him and how much more I might have given him.... How vibrant, subtle, sanguine these essays of Randolph are! They evoke a whole era. (January 26, 1947)⁷

Scofield Thayer and Sibley Watson bought *The Dial* at the end of 1919. For both, this was no ordinary business, and their wealth enabled them to be dedicated patrons of the arts. Alyse Gregory confirms this, saying that Thayer 'administered his wealth largely as a trust, supporting or helping to support many young writers and artists'. James Sibley Watson, the son of a banker, managed to escape his wealthy environment. After graduating from Harvard in 1916 he turned to medicine and received his degree of M.D. in 1921. As early as May 1917 he had published his first signed review on Samuel Butler. Scofield Thayer also came from a very wealthy family and studied at Harvard, a few years after T.S. Elliot. After graduating in 1913 *cum laude*, he went to Oxford to study classics and philosophy, but the beginning of the first world war put an end to his academic life. In 1918 he was asked to participate in the 'reconstruction' of *The Dial*. He had already written some reviews and essays, including an appreciative review of Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Lyrical Poems*, a feat of courage in 1918.

Alyse Gregory many years later would draw a subtle portrait of her friend:

Like most people of distinction he was often egocentric, though not egotistical; his courtesy could be exquisite and he was touchingly susceptible to the words of the people he valued.

His mind was inflammable and satirical and it was at the same time sober and sad. He defended himself with his wit, the best way of banishing fear. Like Diderot, he would rather be impatient than bored, and he alternated between the tempest and the frozen lake.⁸

'Dr Watson', as she called him, is also present in her memories:

I would sometimes catch sidelong glances from the large, expressive eyes of Dr. Watson - the most expressive eyes I have ever encountered. He was tall and strikingly good-looking, with fair hair, a fair moustache, and unusually beautiful hands. But perhaps the most unusual thing about him was the quality of his silence, so subtly and evasively provocative that it was difficult to tell whether it was offered as a lure to oneself or constituted his own sole means of escape.⁹

The Dial had known various phases: after being the chief periodical of the Transcendentalists, it oscillated between the radical and the conservative, trying to voice the aspirations of the younger generation, and veering again to a sedate position. From 1880 to 1916 in the hands of the Chicago Brownes it was subdued and prudent. In 1916 under the editorship of Martyn Johnson it veered to modern trends and *vers libre*. In July 1918 *The Dial* left Chicago for New York. People such as Thorstein Veblen, Randolph Bourne and Van Wyck Brooks were among the succeeding editors at that time. Lastly, under the guidance of Thayer and Watson, it was advocating 'the ideals of the cosmopolitan spirit in literature and the arts.'¹⁰

Soon after *The Dial* became his, Scofield Thayer offered Alyse first to be his secretary, then his assistant. Alyse, never confident in herself, declined the offer, 'still prizing humble liberty above "tottering honor"'. She finally accepted and when Gilbert Seldes left she was appointed Managing Editor, on December 18, 1923. This experience brought in her life a few years of welcome intellectual labour among the literati,

'in touch with minds original and imaginative, the pick of all Europe and America'. Discreet about her editorship, she only allowed that she was 'intensely anxious to live up to (her) obligations', but she gave a good description of the place:

The offices of *The Dial* magazine and *The Dial* Publishing Company occupied the whole of a large, old-fashioned, three-story house in a downtown residential section of the city, once fashionable...The word *office* is hardly, however, a suitable one to describe the spacious, square, homely rooms, with their casual collection of shabby furniture--selected, apparently, as little for display as for efficiency. They had something of old New York still lingering about them, its serenity and its leisured dignity.¹¹

At her office Alyse had her friend Kenneth Burke's help as an assistant editor.¹² She found time to compile a typed set of detailed 'General Instructions for Editorial Department' which was the rule afterwards, during Marianne Moore's Editorship. The work was exacting for nothing escaped Thayer's sharp eye:

Like Parliament after some public scandal, the staff held post mortem meetings, each month following the publication of the magazine. Scofield would arrive with a long sheet of paper on which he had meticulously noted down every error, and each would be remorselessly tracked to the guilty person. These were painful occasions, redeemed by the presence of Dr. Watson, whose quick and indulgent understanding offered balm to all.¹³

She wrote, with elegant and distinctive style, many signed reviews for *The Dial*, fifteen in all, but only after she had left, and some unsigned paragraphs in the 'Briefly Mention' section. Lafcadio Hearn, Sherwood Anderson, Katherine Mansfield, Paul Valéry, von Keyserling, Dostoevsky, were among the writers she reviewed. She it was who devoted a long review on Proust's recently published *Cities of the Plain*, in August 1928. Some chapters of her own work in progress, *She Shall Have Music*, were published in 1925. One of the (rare) comments she later made in

her diaries about her work as Editor concerns Hemingway: she was inordinately pleased to have rejected his stories, in spite of Ezra Pound's insistence. One story was on bull-fighting, which she abhorred. One would like to think that, on the other hand, she was at least partly responsible for the warm appreciation Proust always received from *The Dial*; and which elicited from him extravagant praise about his 'très cher Dial qui m'a mieux compris et plus chaleureusement soutenu qu'aucun journal, aucune revue. Toute ma reconnaissance pour tant de lumière qui illumine la pensée et réchauffe le cœur.'¹²

After his reckless exploits in the Rocky Mountains in May 1924 with Dr Watson, Llewelyn came back feverish and ill. Alyse decided New York would be too hot for him and rented a farmhouse at Montoma, in the Catskills, in September. They were married the following month, in Kingston, NY. Alyse had long tiring days, commuting, and finally, thanks to Kenneth Burke's help, she reduced her visits to her office to once a month. The strain was added to her worry about Llewelyn's health which was, from now on, to be a constant anxiety. Llewelyn meanwhile had decided to return to England. Alyse resigned in February 1925, thus putting an end to one of the happiest periods of her life.

On April 27 Marianne Moore, who had become a familiar name among the contributors, took over. She was the last Editor, for *The Dial* ended with the July 1929 issue. In her fervent tribute, 'The Dial: A Retrospect' she evokes the spirit of the place, 'the constant atmosphere of excited triumph' and alludes to 'Alyse Gregory's delicately lethal honesty' finding in it 'something apart from the stodgy world of mere routine'. She recalls the morals and the religion of literature held by the staff:

Above all, for an inflexible morality against 'the nearly good'; for a non-exploiting helpfulness to art and the artist, for living the doctrine that 'a love of letters knows no frontiers'.

Scofield Thayer and Dr. Watson are the indestructible symbol.

She also gives us interesting financial details: Contributions were paid for on acceptance; for prose, two cents a word; for verse, twenty dollars a page or part of a page; for reviews termed Briefer Mentions, two dollars each. There were not special prices for special contributors - a phase of chivalry towards beginners that certain of them suspiciously disbelieved in. Any writing or translating by the editors was done without payment Dr Watson's participation, under the name W.C. Blum being contrived with "quietness amounting to scandal." And payment was computed in amounts that are multiples of five.¹³

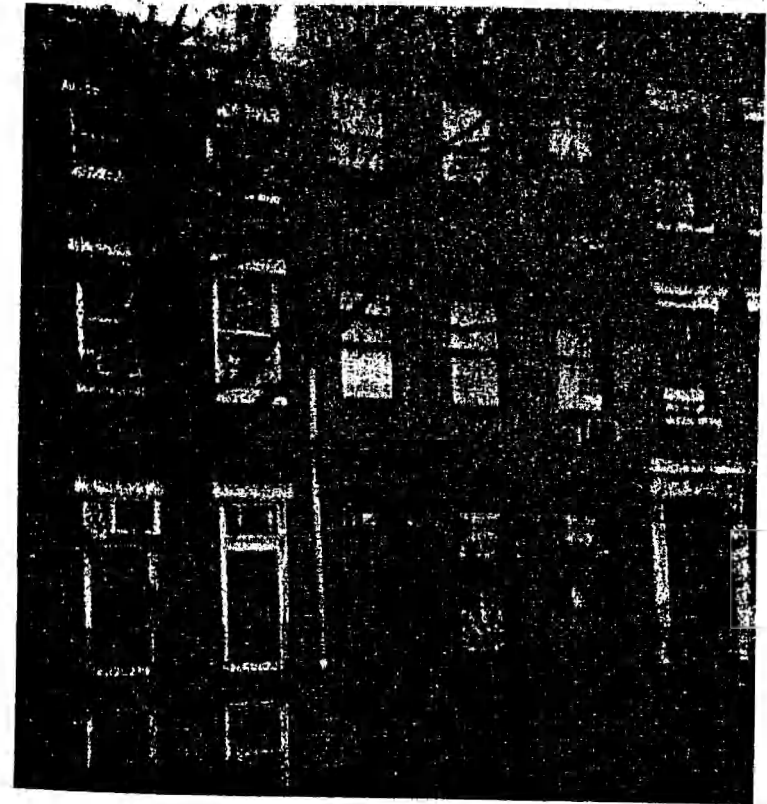
The Dial had its contents printed on the rose-sienna cover. The emblem, a stylization of a Georgian wall-hung sundial, adorned the first page of every issue. It offered about a hundred pages for each issue and cost 50 cents a copy. The subscription was of \$5 a year, from 1920 to 1929. In the November 1923 issue, the subscription leaflet mentions a membership of over thirty thousand readers. In fact the number of copies printed was more or less around 16,000 and the Business Manager of *The Dial* allowed the Editor to quote to potential advertisers a circulation of about 13,440. Needless to say that Thayer and Watson were in fact subsidizing American arts and letters at that time. Besides a variety of reasons, what brought its downfall in July 1929 was above all the dismal fact that *The Dial* never found a large enough audience and towards the end of the Twenties its integrity itself was its undoing. Marianne Moore, Kenneth Burke and Sibley Watson could not revive with scrupulous responsibility 'what had begun as a spontaneously delightful plotting in the interest of art and artists', as Miss Moore put it.

What made *The Dial* so exceptional, compared to the other magazines which flourished in those exciting post-war years? The answer lies in the exacting level

demanding by its patrons: only the best prevailed. The magazine was dedicated to the sole cause of 'high' modern art, sophisticated and innovative. It held no ideology except that of excellence, its only policy was that of 'an intelligent eclecticism'. Scofield Thayer's rich personality, his sense of form and style, his aestheticism, were paramount in the development of the magazine and from 1920 onwards an array of 'young' writers, poets and artists from all over the world, who would later be recognized, contributed to the magazine. Among them we find the Powys.

As early as April 1920 one of Llewelyn's stories, 'A Sheepman's Diary', had been published while he was still in England. He was the most published of all, with essays, articles and short reviews of books every year, some years two or three times, up to March 1929. But John Cowper also had essays and reviews published in *The Dial*: 'The Philosopher Kwang' in November 1923, 'Children of Adam' in May 1927 and his review of *Time and Western Man*, by Wyndham Lewis in November 1928. Theodore's 'The Painted Wagon', appeared in February 1925; *The Left Leg* was reviewed in 1923 under the title 'Lust and Hate', and Padraic Colum reviewed *Black Briony* in 1925 and *Mr Weston's Good Wine* in 1928. Part of a prose poem by Katie, 'Phoenix', was given in the August 1928 issue.

The Powys were therefore published alongside glorious company. In the November 1923 issue mentioned above, for instance, we find Chukovsky's 'Reminiscences of Leonid Andreyev', a review of Joyce's *Ulysses* by T.S. Eliot, philosophical pages by Santayana, Bertrand Russell reviewing Havelock Ellis' *The Dance of Life*, Vachel Lindsay's *Collected Poems* examined by Marianne Moore, and Henry Mc Bride expatiating on the Paris of Juan Gris and the Ballets Russes when he dined with Pascal and looked at his work ... The September 1924 issue opened with 'The Bounty of Sweden', an evocation of Stockholm by W.B. Yeats, on the occasion of his Nobel Prize visit; Paul



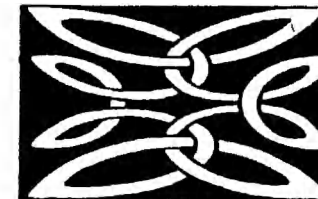
The former premises of the magazine, 152 West 13th St, New York City
(photograph: Nicholas Birns)

Morand, Proust's friend, sent his Letter from Paris and some Seurat paintings were chosen to echo Jules Romain's short novel 'Lucienne'. For texts and illustrations were often juxtaposed, intertwined. Every issue of *The Dial* was an adventure, offering exciting new vistas.

Through their conception of *The Dial*, Thayer and Watson were able to impress upon the decade of the 1920's certain components of aesthetic taste that have affected American art and letters to our own day. There is the urge toward formalism, the emphasis on the work of art as primarily a unique form ... There is also the accompanying urge toward a relative impersonality in the editorial regard of the artist and his created work of art... The focused interest of *The Dial* and its staff and contributors was in the work of art, the form that gave moments of delight. Still another urge the magazine expressed is the urge toward what Randolph Bourne called 'an intellectual sympathy which is not satisfied until it has got at the heart of the different intellectual expressions, and felt as they feel... the cosmopolitan ideal'.

Notes

1. For a detailed description of her life: *Alyse Gregory, A Woman at Her Window*, by J. Peltier, Powys Heritage, Cecil Woolf, 1999.
2. R. Manning, *Alyse Gregory: A Biographical Sketch*, *The Powys Review* n° 3.
3. Alyse Gregory, *The Day Is Gone*, E.P. Dutton, N.Y. 1948.
4. Nicholas Joost, *The Dial: Years of Transition, 1912-1920*, Barre Pub., 1967, p. 131.
5. R. Bourne, *The History of a Literary Radical*, ed. Van Wyck Brooks, 1920, pp. 197-204.
6. Casey Nelson Blake, *Beloved Community*, The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1990, p. 3 & 4. The title of the book is borrowed from one of Bourne's most famous essays, 'Trans-national America', published in the *Atlantic Monthly*, in July 1916.
7. A. Gregory, unpublished typescript of her diaries.
8. Joost, p. 81.
9. A. Gregory, *The Day Is Gone*, p. 208.
10. Jack Selzer, *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village*, Wisconsin UP, 1996, p. 119.
11. A. Gregory, *The Day Is Gone*, p. 211.
12. Joost, p. 276: 'this dear Dial which understood me and supported me better than any other journal or magazine. All my gratitude for such radiance which kindles the mind and warms the heart.' (transl. by J. Peltier)
13. Marianne Moore, *Predilections*, The Viking Press, N.Y. 1955, p. 113.



Another Note on 'Welshness'

I decided to look at Norman Davies' recently published history, *The Isles* (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), to see what he said about Owen Glendower. I didn't really expect the title character of Powys's novel, figure in the Henry IV plays, etc, to be indexed as "Glendower, Owen" but thought that "Owen Glendower" or maybe "Owain Glywn Dyr" or something of the sort would do the trick. Was I behind the times, or what? Davies indexes Owen Glendower as "Owain ap Gruffydd Glen Dwr of Glydyfrdwy". The reader can judge for themselves whether this is overdoing it. It is interesting that Powys, who so strongly declared himself an "obstinate Cymric" and gave the last three decades of his life to Wales, is content to spell the name in an English way for an English-speaking audience, whereas Davies, who though he has a surname that sounds Welsh has never given much space or passion to the Matter of Wales in his many other works, decided to turn on the authenticity spigot to full strength. Norman Davies is now Professor Emeritus at the University of London. According to a publisher's press release, "He is currently available for interview in London". Presumably he lives the life of a star on the academic circuit, whereas Powys lived in relative obscurity in the undramatic atmosphere of Blaenau Ffestiniog, North Wales, where he was respected by the local townspeople. Who is more Welsh? -- NB

