

# Powys Notes

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STERLING DEAN: Selected Powys Books from the Watson Library (sample inscription at left) Proceeds to benefit PSNA

For  
Hildegard  
From  
John Cowper Powys  
March 11<sup>th</sup>  
1959  
"Zeus loved Mnemosyne  
with a beautiful hair  
and of her the  
Nine Muses were  
born"  
Hesiod

The recent re-issue of James Purdy's novel Malcolm (Grove Press, 1988) permits us to present the following brief but previously unpublished essay by John Cowper Powys, which he wrote for the original publishers on July 12, 1959.

JOHN COWPER POWYS

ON "MALCOLM"

I have read James Purdy's "Malcolm" with the greatest interest and I do indeed think it is a unique work of genius such as nobody but James Purdy could write. The whole idea of the character and tragically brief life of the boy Malcolm is simply wonderful. It has about it the simplified concentration much more like the concentration we get in the Greek tragedies especially in Sophocles and Euripides than anything in the more complicated stories of Dickens and Balzac.

The part played in the tale by the Bench on which the boy Malcolm was wont to sit carries with it that special and peculiar influence of the Inanimate upon a human soul which impresses us so frequently in the poetry on Wordsworth. The various characters under whose influence Malcolm comes are

so well portrayed that no one would read this book without exclaiming again and again "Oh how like Mr. So-and-So is Dr. Cox the Astrologer with his Addresses," and again "How like Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So are Madame Girard and her husband Mr. Girard Girard." The author has clearly succeeded in doing the one thing that all of us writers are constantly--but with O what varied results!--aiming at doing, namely conveying into the character of our hero some of our most intimate and secretive reactions to our life and to the people round us and about us.

That longing for his vanished Father and that wild and desperate scene toward the end when for a moment he thinks he has found him have an emotional and super-emotional intensity that makes us think of the Bronte family. One after another as the various characters in the story approach and withdraw, approach again towards, and withdraw again from, the ever-awaiting Malcolm, yes! the central, ever stationary Malcolm, we get a clearer idea of their personalities and our interest is increased and enhanced in each individual case as we wonder with more and more anxiety what their effect upon the boy will be and what his effect upon them will be. This agitated life of actresses and singer together with the part played by money in their relations with their patrons and audiences is told with a sympathy and understanding that is rare among authors. And there is in this unusual and extraordinary book another topic which plays its heart-rending role in all human intercourse that has been by the author of "Malcolm" O so wisely adjusted to the extravagantly different temperaments involved in the Tale. I need hardly say I refer to sex. The effect upon an immature and extremely simple nature of the sex-appeal, whether exercised in a normal or abnormal way, with a sadistic or masochistic tendency, whether mingled with true love or inspired by momentary attraction, is most penetratingly tender and subtly handled in this weird and unusual book.

The little Kermit remains my favorite character in the story; but the reader of "Malcolm" need have no favorite. The tale floats and rocks like a boat on that mysterious river of which none of us really know either the beginning or the end, the river of human life upon earth.

Item courtesy of Mr. James Purdy. © The Estate of John Cowper Powys. Used with kind permission of Laurence Pollinger Limited.

MICHAEL BALLIN

"GREAT CREATIVE NATURE": THE PARALLEL VISIONS OF  
JOHN COWPER POWYS AND G. WILSON KNIGHT

G. Wilson Knight was one of the first critics to claim for Powys the status of a major writer. Their correspondence during Powys's maturity as a novelist (1937-1949, the period of Maiden Castle, Owen Glendower, and Porius) establishes a unique relationship between critic and creative writer. In referring to the "parallel visions" of Powys and Knight I reflect Powys's own perception of his relationship to Knight expressed in letters edited by Robert Blackmore. Powys stresses the independent way in which both writers had conducted their mutual voyages through strange seas of thought. In a comment to Knight, May 6 1949, Powys alludes to the notion of a parallel development. He says of Knight: ". . . the quality of your thought and imagination suits me and goes on parallel lines with my own thought and imagination." (36)

It is clear from this quotation that Powys credited the critic Knight with a visionary insight comparable to his own, a compliment few creative writers wish to attribute to their critics. The specific writings of Knight which

called forth this compliment were the essays "New Testament as an Art Form" and "Mankind in Glory, an Essay on St. Paul" in The Christian Renaissance<sup>2</sup>

This work seems to be the most useful starting point for an exploration of the illuminating parallels between Knight and Powys. In his direct criticism of Powys Knight can exhibit a strangeness and eccentricity which is paradoxically parallel to Powys's own more than occasional eccentricity. However, Knight's insights in The Christian Renaissance not only reveal equivalencies to Powys but provide implicit commentary on Powys's own creative fiction

The Christian Renaissance reveals that Powys and Knight rely upon mutual resources which include Shakespeare and an esoteric interpretation of Christian traditions. Critic and novelist alike were prompted to surrender themselves to the continuities and contradictions of experience, a surrender which resulted in a transcendence of conventional categories. Their correspondence reveals that Powys was deeply affected by Knight's esoteric vision, developed in the course of his critical clarification of Shakespearean tragedy and romance. Powys's positive estimate of Knight's visionary thought was heightened by his recognition that he had developed a similar vision in the course of his development as a creative novelist.

G. Wilson Knight's interpretations of Shakespearean drama led him to a recognition of contemporary spiritual problems. Knight's criticism is frankly prophetic: he perceives the beginnings of a poetic and Christian Renaissance in the world. Knight thus felt an urgent need to relate his interpretations of Shakespeare to Christianity; in fact, he saw the poetic visions of Shakespeare and the New Testament as also parallel. Shakespeare educates the reader in a level of poetic understanding or visionary reading which encourages a productive interpretation of the Scriptures.

What were these modern spiritual problems which the New Testament, read in the light of the visionary, spatial and atemporal imagination, made clear? First, is the recognition that a dualism between body and soul is at the root of the abstracting intellect. Knight comments,

. . . Jesus sees man, not as body or soul, but in a body-soul continuum: all dualisms are at root the same figments of the abstracting intellect. If we are to explain his miracles in terms of the intellect that denies them, we shall say that facts happen in the material order, whereas miracles happen in the real world made of body and soul. (17)

This connection between the Shakespearean imagination and the miraculous world of the New Testament had already been made in Knight's early essay on Shakespeare's final plays in Myth and Reality (1929).

In the essay "The New Testament as an Art Form," which Powys had picked out for special praise, Knight attempts a unique definition of the prophetic voice as a blending of the voices of poetry and history. Powys, who moved confidently and freely between the worlds of social reality, past history and mythic vision in his novels, would have recognised a description of his own unique aesthetic form in such statements as: "The New Testament shows us a convergence of two lines: the line of value and the line of fact, that of poetry and that of history," (The Christian Renaissance, 54). In the scriptural texts, "the divine imagination is interlocked with history"; Powys blends social realism and symbolic reality expressed through myth in A Glastonbury Romance, for example.

The interpenetration of such mythic levels with at times mannerist abruptness results in the expression of a disharmony or dislocation in experience which Knight and Powys perceive to be a second major spiritual problem of the modern world. Knight comments,

Vast masses of our greatest literature. . . show. . . that man and his universe are out of harmony and that his dislocation takes the form of

sin, evil, death. The sin is not wholly and only man's; it exists rather in the inharmonious relation between man and God, or man and nature and either may appear to be an evil force. (The Christian Renaissance. 83; emphasis added).

The latter comment expresses an individual and visionary understanding of Christianity which is heterodox to say the least but which approximates closely to Powys's apprehension of Jehovah as a miraculous first cause reflected in the cruelty of natural processes.

Knight dealt boldly with a vision of cruelty in Shakespearean tragedy in his famous essay "King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque."<sup>3</sup> The thought which Powys deemed parallel to his own was the product of Knight's exploration of Shakespearean drama. Not only are allusions to Shakespeare consistently and significantly present in Powys's novels but Powys seems to follow a visionary and philosophical progression comparable to the transition between the tragedies of Shakespeare's middle period and the regenerative visions of the final plays. Shakespeare is thus a significant point of reference in Powys's novels and a Shakespearean progression from a tragic to a romantic vision is revealed in the sequence of the three novels Wolf Solent, A Glastonbury Romance, and Weymouth Sands.

There is no significant reference to Knight's Shakespearean criticism in Powys's letters. However, in his essay on Shakespeare in The Enjoyment of Literature<sup>4</sup> Powys complained that no one understood the philosophical dimensions of Shakespeare and emphasised that "...it is just possible to be a disciple of the philosophy of Shakespeare as to be a disciple of St. Paul or Dante or Rabelais or Goethe." (215) Powys may well have regarded Knight's Shakespearean criticism as a major corrective to this omission in Shakespearean studies.

Wolf Solent is a novel where Powys allows his protagonist to explore a potentially tragic universe. In the course of this exploration marked by significant Shakespearean allusions, Powys also dramatises a rebirth of self within Wolf which allows Wolf to transcend a tragic, Faustian outlook in a willing submission to a natural process. This new acceptance parallels the positive vision of the Shakespearean romances.

There are more than twenty allusions to Shakespeare in Wolf Solent and almost all of them are from the tragedies. More than half the allusions are to Hamlet; others are mainly to Macbeth and King Lear. The analogues to Hamlet are the most suggestive; Wolf Solent is the last novel Powys wrote from the perspective of the Jamesian single consciousness and Wolf is one of the most intensely introspective characters in modern fiction.

Wolf shows his affinity to Hamlet in his habit of intense introspective soliloquy. Also like Hamlet, Wolf returns to the scene of misdoings involving his own dead father to whom he refers several times as "Old truepenny-- Hamlet's nickname for the ghostly voice of his father. Wolf, like Hamlet, is a haunted man, haunted by his ancestral past and by the darkness of the present, symbolised by the man from the Waterloo steps whose image comes between him and his delight in Nature. The image, described as one against whom "providence had grown as malignant as a mad dog,"<sup>5</sup> reflects a Thomas Hardy like malignancy in Nature, also embodied in Lenty Pond. However, the novel is an extended diatribe against the whole course of human civilization epitomised in what Wolf calls "the monstrous apparition of human inventions." (15) His departure from London to Dorset was itself a condemnation of the modern wasteland, expressed in what Wolf calls his "malice dance":

He had danced his malice dance. . . He was telling his students quietly about Dean Swift; and all of a sudden some mental screen or dam in his mind completely collapsed and he found himself pouring forth a torrent of wild invectives upon every aspect of modern civilization. (14)

Wolf's "malice dance" expresses what Knight calls the "hate theme" in Shakespearean tragedy. In "Myth and Miracle" Knight comments that it is the "hate theme" which makes Hamlet cry out against the universe as "unclean" and which eats into the thought of Hamlet, Measure for Measure and Troilus and Cressida.<sup>6</sup> In The Complex Vision Powys explains that the word malice is the expression of hate on an impersonal and universal level.

Wolf thus incorporates within himself some of the maliciousness which is at the heart of nature and of man. The malice motivates his preoccupation with death: he contemplates the grave of his father; Urquhart and T. Valley are witnessed digging up the corpse of the buried Redfern; and Christie Malakite's favorite book is Browne's Urne Buriall. Wolf is associated with death, like Hamlet, whom Wilson Knight describes as "an ambassador of death walking amid life." Knight also states that "Death is indeed the theme of this play, for Hamlet's disease is mental and spiritual death."<sup>8</sup>

Wolf, who experiences in Chap. XIV the "spiritual essence from the presence of Death himself" is led inevitably at one point to the thought of suicide. When he feels his own integrity is compromised by his debt to the sinister Urquhart he confronts two black alternatives: return to London, the source of malice, or devise his suicide in Lenty Pond. (543) But the motto on his father's tomb, 'Mors est mihi vita,' is a prophecy: what dies in Wolf is the illusion that he is part of an occult cosmic struggle, but what is born is recognition of the reality of his own identity.

Powys borrowed from Spengler's The Decline of the West the notion that history reflects a transition between "Faustian" and "Magian" culture. The Faustian is associated with causation, science and the will to assertion: the Magian with spirituality, submission, impersonality. Wolf begins his private history in Dorset as a Faustian man. He believes in a mythology of dualism, the illusory notion that he can side with cosmic forces in their battle of creation. Though he prefers to think that he can side with good, he is, like Hamlet, involved in evil and like the Marlovian Faust, he "sells his soul" to the evil Urquhart when he accepts payment for his work on the scurrilous history of Dorset. Wolf's "defection" to Urquhart is associated with drinking old nectareous wine, an act which suggests a perverse sacrament. (T. E. Valley's Mass bell tolls in the background). Urquhart jokes at Wolf's suggestion that his soul lies between the pages of his book:

'Did you say your "soul" between its pages? "Soul" is good. "Soul" is a good word. So you've got a soul have you, Menelaus? Or you had before it strayed into my book.' (422)

Wolf abandons his mythology and his Faustian or Macbeth like role for a philosophy of acceptance and Stoic endurance. One of two direct quotations from Hamlet in the novel is: "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be not now 'tis not to come; if it be not now, yet it will come; the readiness is all." (525) The last chapter of the novel is called "Ripeness is All," a phrase which moves the philosophy of the novel towards a Shakespearean stoicism. Powys presents an agnostic abandonment of the will to everything except the celebration of the ability of the self to enjoy sensation and realise its own identity. Wolf abandons dualism, the philosophy which Knight characterised as "at the root of the abstracting intellect."

A Glastonbury Romance attempts to resolve this dualism. It moves also from a Shakespearean tragic vision of life, reflected in the presence of sadistic cruelty and evil to the Magian vision of the Romances. This novel reflects the themes of triumph within defeat, miraculous restoration and the prevalence of spiritual power in human affairs conveyed through "myth" (of Arthurian romance) and "miracle" (of Geard of Glastonbury)

In The Christian Renaissance Wilson Knight referred to the poetic pattern of the New Testament as "symbolic in its own right radiating power over and

above its place in the story." Powys uses the Grail myth as just such a poetic pattern, a "symbolic nucleus of creation and destruction," radiating its power across the centuries and reincarnated in the modern Faustian culture. Also, as Knight says of the New Testament, A Glastonbury Romance blends the worlds of poetry and history. Powys, like Knight, prophesies the rebirth of a Magian numinousness amidst the death fixation of the scientific-materialist Faustian will.

Allusions, overt and implied, to Shakespearean tragedy and romance are second only to the Arthurian allusions in the novel. One of Powys's favorite plays was Troilus and Cressida; Wilson Knight first pointed out the symbolic significance of the conflict between Trojans and Greeks, the two camps embodying destructive rationalism in the Greeks, and romantic intuition in the Trojans. Similarly, Powys opposes the worlds of Glastonbury and Norfolk of mystic intuition and rational scepticism, the worlds of Geard, Miracle and Myth in the worlds of Phillip Crow, Wookey Hole and Industry.

A tragic dimension is also included in episodes which recall the tragedies of Lear and Macbeth. Powys aims at a comprehensive vision in the phrase "great creative nature." The character Owen Evans is at the center of the tragic experience of the novel. Tortured by his sadistic imagination, Evans touches the malice at the heart of Nature, the cruelty of the First Cause to which he is psychically attuned. Here Nature is in its Thomas Hardy guise of the implacable force which delights in killing man for its sport. King Lear is a tragedy echoed in the vein of grotesque cruelty and sadism which runs through this novel and of which Evans is the most powerful representative. His marriage to and salvation by Cordelia may be no accident. The combination of grotesque and sadistic elements represented by Evans's character, his attempted self crucifixion, and the figures of Finn Toller and Mad Bet, all correspond to the elements of human indignity, torture and cruelty reflected upon in Knight's essay "King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque."

Next to Lear, Macbeth is the second most important point of reference to the Shakespearean tragic universe. The nucleus of destruction is powerfully dramatised in the chapter "Nature Seems Dead," a title which is itself a quotation from Macbeth:

Now o'er the one half world  
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse  
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates  
Pale Hecate's off'rings; and wither'd murder  
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf  
Who howls his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,  
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design  
Moves like a ghost. (II.i.49-56)

Powys dramatises the birth of the destructive impulse in the dreams of the inhabitants of Glastonbury in this tremendous chapter. Those who oppose the Grail wish to kill it; at night "there rose up, along with the destructive will-power of Philip, a cumulative malediction against the legend."<sup>9</sup> Although the urge to kill the Grail is a manifestation of a collective consciousness and an enmity at the heart of the First Cause itself, it is manifested on an individual basis by the homicidal Finn Toller, aided and abetted, if not controlled, by Mad Bet (whose name suggestively echoes "Macbeth").

Allusions to Shakespeare's final romances create a new dimension in the novel. Powys seems to allude to Knight's terms "Myth" and "Miracle" for he combines extended allusion to Arthurian myth and dramatisations of "miracle" by Geard of Glastonbury. If Shakespearean tragedy embodies the destructive assertion of man in the Faustian will, the romances correspond to the Magian values. The figures of Faust or Macbeth are exchanged for a Prospero like figure who combines supernatural power, renunciation and non-possessiveness.

Geard is this Magian figure, a spiritual prototype Powys recreates in Owen Glendower and the Merlin of Porius.

Geard, whose Easter celebration is composed of devouring bread and port wine on his knees in his garden, stands for a humanisation of religion in a vein of what Powys describes as "mystical realism." Though Geard prays at Marks Court for strength "to change the whole course of human history upon earth" (442) he offers a path of creation as an alternative to destruction and not through the assertion of his own will. In fact he yields passively to the Faustian asserters such as Philip Crow, from whom he accepts the "dolorous blow" against his plans for the pageant, and whose destructive ends he sees defeated in the course of his own voluntary suicide in the flood which ends the novel.

Geard unifies spirit and flesh and thus overcomes the "dualism at the root of the abstracting intellect" which Knight diagnosed as at the core of man's sickness. Of the miracles of Jesus, Knight also commented that they were facts within the material order which took place in the real world of body and soul.

Sam Dekker has to overcome the dualism of body and soul before his religion can make its peace with nature. He is forced into a choice between Eros and Jesus; Powys's dramatisation of this conflict is parallel to Knight's philosophical account of the antithesis between Eros, the driving force of artists and philosophers and Jesus who urges the sacrifice of instinctual desire. Knight, perhaps like Powys, believes that the paths of Eros or Jesus are neither complete in themselves. Knight concludes a discussion of the conflict with these words:

So the Eros and Christ are one; and whenever we forget that Jesus calls us not only to a mystic tranquillity but also to an impassioned adventure; to a love which is as bitter-sweet as Eros, as life-giving and yet as ruthless as he. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Powys makes Sam Dekker respond to Nell's argument that Christ would never separate those who love, with these bitter words which take up Knight's philosophical theme: "'Never want to separate us! You don't know Him, Nell. He's a lover, I tell you, a lover. . . a lover.'" (538)

However, the humanism of Romance does triumph over tragedy for Sam is eventually granted the Rabelaisian vision embodied in the "Caputanus" of Sylvanus Cobbold. A Glastonbury Romance thus assimilates the Hamlet like existential tragedy of Wolf Solent through myth and miracle.

The greatness of the underestimated Weymouth Sands consists in its attainment of a fully comprehensive Shakespearean vision, a vision which accommodates the themes and perspectives of Shakespearean tragedy and the final plays (especially The Tempest and centrally The Winter's Tale) to modern experience. Powys expands the range of his dramatisation of human experience yet further by balancing the tragic and the ironic dimensions of loss, cruelty and destruction with the positive visions of rebirth, transcendence and the human potential for happiness and fulfillment.

The novel celebrates the Magian world through a process of submission to the powers of a creating nature. Powys alludes to Spengler's concept in the chapter "Sea-Holly" when Perdita and the Jobber walk by the sea wall and refer to Richard Gaul who "would have recalled to their minds what Spengler says of the Magian Culture." (352)<sup>11</sup> Below the cliff, the Jobber and Perdita view a sculpture in stone made by the operations of wind and sea. The likeness is to a pair of naked lovers: "Man's nakedness and woman's nakedness locked together in the primordial creation of life." (355) The effect of this huge organic work of art was "god-like, cosmogonic, life-creating."

The work of "great creating nature" subordinates the will to power of mankind; its natural emphasis is redolent with the optimism and vision of



Shakespeare's final plays. The specific allusions to the worlds of The Tempest and The Winter's Tale are purveyed by the association of the human characters with the sea as an image of power and abundance of life, of tragic loss combined with restoration and with a vision of Nature which encompasses the rational, the imaginative, the spiritual and the sexual.

The destructive world of tragedy is still incorporated into the novel and linked to a Shakespearean tragic paradigm through allusions to King Lear. The "hate theme" is centrally embodied in the figure of Jobber Skald; the concepts of sadism and insanity are present in the asylum of Dr. Brush and the character of Sylvanus Cobbold; the bitterness of failure is included in the character of Magnus who is reminiscent of Wolf Solent. However, the elements of rebirth and transcendence neutralise tones of tragic cruelty and destruction. Such a balance reflects Wilson Knight's description of Shakespeare's plays as resolving the dualism of the tragedies, explicating the quality of immortality and combining the spiritual rhythms of pain, endurance and joy.

The sea in Shakespeare's final plays is a potent symbol for loss and separation, as well as restoration. The sea is a similarly complex symbol in Weymouth Sands, linking the characters within the novel and providing also a link with Powys's previous novel where the sea floods up the estuaries of the Glastonbury river to establish a chaotic and triumphant close in a paradoxical combination of triumph and defeat.

As in The Tempest, the sea in Weymouth Sands unites the characters in a sense of loss and alienation. Perdita and Magnus are orphans; Sylvanus loses both his freedom and Marrett; Magnus loses curly; and, as a result of the destructive evil in human nature, Jobber Skald temporarily loses Perdita. Powys mixes destruction with creation, loss with restoration, hate with love and tempest with music. The latter antithesis recalls strongly a Shakespearean pattern which Knight was most famous for revealing in Shakespearean drama--especially in the final plays. Powys uses it, for example, in giving Jerry Cobbold, who dramatises a secondary "hate theme," one escape: "The comedian's passion for music was his one grand secret escape. Here lay--if anywhere--the solution of the mystery of his character; for Jerry's loathing of humanity was even deeper than that of Mr. Witchit." (222) Music also helps Sylvanus accept death as the other side of life:

That Homeric death-life is tragically sad, but it has a beauty like the dying away of music when instead of becoming nothing music carries us in its ebb-flow down to the sea-bottom of the world (261)

The associations of death, life, music and sea are redolent of The Tempest but especially at the shipwreck which occurs at the central point in the novel. Amidst the turmoil of wind and waves, Cattistock acquits himself bravely by swimming the tempestuous sea in a heroic rescue attempt

Evil dissolves in this novel, as Shakespeare allows evil and discord to dissipate in the final plays. Perdita is true to the Latin derivative of her name for she brings restoration back to a world of loss. She combines the qualities of Shakespeare's Perdita and Hermione in The Winter's Tale in that she disappears from Jobber Skald's presence when he is in the throes of his feelings of enmity against Cattistock. When Perdita returns from her absence she does so "like a defeated Cimmerian spirit, come back from those powerless heads of the dead" (561), and, as she returns to redeem Skald from the world of malice and hate, as Leontes is redeemed in the Shakespearean romance, Perdita claims that "the Powers have kept us alive." (562) Her appeal to the "powers" recalls Wilson Knight's allusion to "a vague numinous sense of mighty powers working both through the natural order and man's religious consciousness" at the end of his essay on The Winter's Tale in The Crown of Life. The agent of redemption is both human and natural in Powys and in



Shakespeare. Knight comments that Shakespeare foreshadows the philosophy of Wordsworth. Perdita in Weymouth Sands, in allowing herself to lie with the simple Larry Zed, becomes the emblem of a natural love and sensuality "possibly inspired by a great creative nature." (171) Perdita, like Cordelia Geard, has redeemed nature from its Darwinian curse and made it a redemptive rather than a cruel spirit.

Finally, the true stature of John Cowper Powys is surely indicated by the presence of Shakespeare as a major point of reference in his major novels. G. Wilson Knight would probably stand, in current critical parlance, as a proto-structuralist and the parallel with G. Wilson Knight opens up the possibility for a structuralist approach to Powys's novels which reveals a modernist aspect to his development of literary genre within narrative. Like his predecessor, Shakespeare, in the drama, Powys in the novel explores and takes to their limits the traditional concepts of romance, comedy and tragedy. He establishes the limits and the insufficiencies of all traditional modes in comprehending the truth of human experience which, to invoke a title of one of his early philosophical works, is truly a complex vision.

#### NOTES

1. The Letters of J.C. Powys to G. Wilson Knight, ed Robert L. Blackmore (London: Cecil Woolf, 1983).
2. New York: Norton, 1962.
3. The Wheel of Fire (London: Methuen, 1959), pp. 160-76.
4. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1938.
5. Wolf Solent (London: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 15.
6. The Crown of Life, (London: Methuen, 1958), p. 10.
7. London: Village Press, 1975, p. 34.
8. The Wheel of Fire, p. 28.
9. A Glastonbury Romance (London: MacDonald, 1966), p. 747.
10. Shakespeare and Religion (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967) p. 73
11. Weymouth Sands (Cambridge: Rivers Press, 1973), p. 352.

MICHAEL BALLIN is Associate Professor of English at Wilfrid Laurier University. An expanded, French language version of this essay is to appear in a special John Cowper Powys issue of Plein Chant, due out later this year.

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BEN JONES

"AT THE END OF MODERNISM": the fourth annual conference  
of the Powys Society of North America

Our Fourth Annual Conference will be held June 3 to 5 at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, under the title "At the End of Modernism."

Papers will focus on the work of John Cowper Powys and T. F. Powys, and will address problems of placing their work in the context of literary traditions in the third and fourth decades of the century. In addition to the papers, and the discussion of them, there will be a presentation and discussion of the film Hilda's Book, which focuses on Ezra Pound, H. D., and Frances Gregg.

Papers to be presented include "The Androgyne and the Dynamo: Overcoming Modernism in A Glastonbury Romance" (Arnd Bohm, Carleton University), "The Archaeological Background of Maiden Castle" (W. J. Keith, University of Toronto), "John Cowper Powys, the Gothic and the 20th Century" (Linda Pashka, University of British Columbia), "Problems of Ontology and Omnipotence in Mr. Weston's Good Wine" (Deborah Wills, Carleton University), "Powys's Carnival:

Weymouth Sands, Rabelais and Bakhtin" (Charles Lock, University of Toronto), "The Genre of Porius" (Richard Maxwell, Valparaiso University), and "The Marriage of Myth and History in Porius" (Peter G. Christensen, SUNY Binghamton).

The Conference Dinner will take place on the evening of June 4. The Annual Business Meeting of the Powys Society of North America will be held at mid-morning on June 5.

Registration per person is as follows: Single, \$130 Canadian (\$104 U.S.); Double, \$115 Canadian (\$92 U.S.).

Direct all inquiries about registration and accommodation to : Ben Jones, Convenor, c/o Department of English, Carleton University Ottawa, Canada, K1S 5B6. Telephone: (613) 564-3645 / 564-3847.

R. V. SMITH

John Cowper Powys, "THE MEANING OF CULTURE"

[The following brief, but worthwhile, review is reprinted from The International Journal of Ethics, XL: 4 (July, 1930) p. 566. T. V. Smith was the Associate Editor].

Starting with the conception that "culture is what is left over after you have forgotten all you have definitely set out to learn," the author plays the high themes of philosophy, literature, poetry, painting, and religion, of happiness, love, nature, and destiny, until at last culture stands revealed to us as that which nourishes "within us a sturdy yet sensitive organism that shall be able to deal with the eternal recurrence of life and death " Here is manner as well as matter. There is no striving for consistency, no hesitation over small issues; but every part of life and reality that is lifted up for inspection seems to implicate all the rest in itself. The book is ponderous and poetic, full of pathos and calm. One quickly senses here the fact that a great personality is speaking much less and much more than it knows, that a soul is simply spilling over the narrow rim of utterance the boiling unutterable. Strangely moving things are said and more moving things are sensed while the author goes on talking never tritely about the tritest subject, "culture." Natural piety paraded as alternation between gratitude and defiance marks every page of this man masquerading here as a book.

#### EDITOR'S NOTES

A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE was re-issued in the United States in November under the imprint of The Overlook Press, New York, and distributed by Viking Press. A lengthy essay by GEORGE STEINER on A Glastonbury Romance and JCP's work in general is to appear in the May 2 issue of The New Yorker under the title "Life-Size."

On a Projected Powys Journal in North America. I have continued to look for funds whereby we might expand Powys Notes to full journal length, or alternatively resume publication of The Powys Newsletter. However, applications to the National Foundation for the Arts and to two other sources do not look as promising as they did a year ago. If any member can direct me to a possible source of funding for this purpose, of whatever size, I would be more than pleased to pursue it. [Editor's Notes continue on page 12]

## SELECTED BOOKS

from the LIBRARY of DR. JAMES SIBLEY WATSON, Jr ,  
and his wife, HILDEGARDE LASELL WATSON

Dr. Watson was Editor and Co-Owner of the DIAL MAGAZINE.  
He and his wife were friends of longstanding of the Powys families.

This exceptional offering includes twenty-three books by  
the Powys brothers, twelve of which are either  
autographed or inscribed by the authors.

Includes the following :

## JOHN COWPER POWYS

The Complex Vision (1920). First edition.  
Porius (1951). Inscribed by Alyse Gregory  
Homer and the Aether (1959). Charming inscription by JCP.

## LLEWELYN POWYS

A Baker's Dozen (1939). Signed limited edition.  
Somerset Essays (1937). Inscribed first edition.  
Rats in the Sacristy (1937). Inscription dated  
October, 1937, Clavadel, Switzerland.  
Wood engravings by Gertrude M. Powys.

## THEODORE POWYS

Soliliquies of a Hermit (1918)  
The House with an Echo (1928).

and

## HILDEGARDE LASELL WATSON

The Edge of the Woods: A Memoir (1979)  
an exquisitely produced volume, written with a  
style no longer practised. The chapter  
"Friendships" is devoted to John Cowper Powys,  
Llewelyn Powys, Alyse Gregory, and E. E. Cummings.

NOTE: THE NET PROCEEDS OF THIS SALE (\$80.00 OF EVERY \$100.00  
OBTAINED) ARE BEING GENEROUSLY DONATED TO  
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EDITOR'S NOTES (continued)

Readers will be saddened to learn of the death of KENNETH HOPKINS, poet and publisher, at Norwich on April 1, 1988. GERALD POLLINGER writes: "Nobody I know did more for the Powys family than Kenneth Hopkins. He wrote to me every week and phoned nearly every day with advice and encouragement and useful criticism. I shall miss him more than words can express." Mr. Pollinger has sent me a copy of the following obituary by GLEN CAVALIERO.

"Kenneth Hopkins, who died on April 1, at the age of 74, was a man of letters in the fullest sense. A poet who put traditional forms to distinctive and original use, he was also a literary scholar with the gift of combining erudition with the ability to entertain. Instances of this will be found in his study of late eighteenth century satirists, Portraits in Satire (1958), and in his history, The Poets Laureate (1954). His knowledge of the minor English poets was exceptionally wide-ranging, witness his English Poetry (1962). He was also a writer of detective stories, a literary editor and anthologist, and the champion of other writers' work: his biography of the Powys brothers [The Powys Brothers: A Biographical Appreciation] (1967) remains a valuable introduction to their books. From his own publishing house, Warren House Press, he issued the Collected Poems of the American writer Gamel Woolsey, as well as a number of out of print works of the Powys circle. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature he was, as his autobiography The Corruption of a Poet (1954) makes clear, a man of singular charm, modesty and wit."

Kenneth Hopkins and I were recently corresponding about the contributions of Llewelyn Powys to the New York Herald Tribune during the 1920s. In the course of his last letter received (written on the stationery of Winston-Salem State College, North Carolina), he asked me to print the following (now, in part, prophetic) remarks: "This morning I received Powys Notes, Fall 1987, and found it of outstanding interest because of Dr. Fawcner's illuminating review of John Cowper Powys's 1930 Diary. This diary can be approached in a variety of ways, and upon any of them a reviewer might make valuable observations, but to cover all these aspects of the matter would require a review as long as the book. Dr. Fawcner lights upon the most interesting angle, by concentrating on two (related) areas, both of which are to be found under discussion nowhere else in JCP's writings (except very peripherally, as now and again in his correspondence). These are, his relationship with Phyllis Playter, and his attitude to his writings and the manner in which he set these down on paper--with "all that that implies." These are themes which continue through the later diaries, and it is teasing to a reader as old as myself to reflect that the whole formidable row of volumes will not appear in print until long after he is dead. However, I predict that when published complete, this may well be considered the greatest of all of his works. Certainly no definitive biography can ever be written except by one who has had access to the complete diaries, whether in print or in manuscript--and alas, this envisaged biography is yet another work I fear I shall never see."

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## Powys Notes

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