

Powys Notes

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Powys Society of North America

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The Powys Society of North America

Founded in December, 1983, the Powys Society of North America seeks to promote 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 extensive collections of Powys material in North America and the involvement, particularly of John Cowper and Llewelyn, in American literary culture.

Powys Notes, the Society's publication, appears in Spring and Fall issues and presents scholarship, reviews, and bibliography of Powys interest.

In This Issue

Our focus in this issue of *Powys Notes* falls on the work of T. F. Powys and, in smaller measure, on that of Llewelyn Powys.

"Life, in the Powys philosophy, is the supreme mockery." Such was the pronouncement of Percy Hutchinson in his review of Theodore F. Powys's *Mockery Gap* upon its publication in the United States in 1925. And three years later Margery Latimer wrote in the *Herald Tribune* of Theodore's *The House with the Echo*: "He seems to think that by being direct and simple and always understanding, and by being unmoved by anything his characters think and do, the reader will experience the full force and grimness of the tale. . . . Some people might think that the attitude of these peasants toward death is literary rather than real, but the people in a Wisconsin village seem to have the same reaction and in the country you will find old people, like Mr. Powys's, who accept death as the natural, lawful end of life, who accept disease as they accept disease in their fruit or vegetables, and who have either given up or never known any questioning about happiness and the meaning of the experience and the spirit of life."

Comments of this kind are certainly indicative of what many readers have found in the writing of Theodore, namely a severe, almost mystical insistence on living beside, and living through, the more profound, immeasurable and fantastic aspects of life. We offer here several views of Theodore's thought—of its growth and fixations in his published works, and of its apparent culmination in the personal readings that he favored in the last year or so of his life. More on Theodore can be found in the reviews section.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Llewelyn Powys. Scholarship on Llewelyn is rare these days, and though it would have been desirable to do so we are unable to present any new assessments of his work which, according to the obituary that appeared in the *New York Times* of December 5, 1939, "reflected the distinctive, eager personality of a man who had been hurt by life and was impatient of orthodox social and religious values." Llewelyn was, however, also known as an essayist of considerable elegance and it would not seem inappropriate on this occasion to re-present his own little-noted statement on the subject of style, as it appeared in a letter to one W. Taylor, editor of a 1932 anthology called *Types and Times in the Essay*.

The Editor would like to acknowledge the kind, and considerable, assistance of his colleague Timothy Stevens in the production of this issue of *Powys Notes*.

Theodore F. Powys *via* Meister Eckhart

MARIUS BUNING

The question whether or not Powys can be considered a mystic is not easy to answer. In his youthful work *Soliloquies of a Hermit* there are some references to mysticism that amount more or less to a whimsical rejection:

No doubt one day we shall find all the mystic writers leaving their pens and their burrowings into the unutterable mystery of God's being, and instead busy themselves all day long peacefully planting cabbages.¹

Much later (28 May, 1926) he wrote to his brother Llewelyn: "Your brother John calls me a mystic—but a mystic who believes in clay more than in grace I fear," an answer that gives us something to go on but remains essentially ambiguous.²

The evidence from some of his close friends is also rather contradictory: both Alyse Gregory and Sylvia Townsend Warner have stated the opinion that "he wasn't much of a mystic," although the latter added that "he would have liked being one"; the great family friend L.U. Wilkinson, however, was of the opinion that Powys was a "born mystic with his own heterodox mysticism."³ Gerard Casey, who knew Powys intimately in his last years in Mappowder, has recorded in *The Powys Review* his conviction that Powys was "essentially a religious contemplative seeking to realize his own mode of vision. His writings are merely incidental to this."⁴ He further believes that Powys's decision to give up writing in 1936—a decision that has puzzled more than one critic—can be explained as the natural outcome of a mystical nature that no longer needed literary expression, but instead found fulfillment almost exclusively in the reading of the Bible and Christian devotional works. The marks Powys left in these books—works by Richard Baxter, Jeremy Taylor, William Law, George Fox, John Wesley, Traherne, Johannes Eckhart (from whose sermon "The Emanation and Return" I quote below), Boehme, St John of the Cross, Tauler—are of decisive significance for an understanding of his inner life at this time: "It is always the mystical 'way' of negation, of silence, of inwardly stripping to the barest essentials that receives emphasis" (italics mine).

In my article "Mappowder Revisited: Powys's Reading in Retirement" I examined the way in which Powys developed his own way of self-expression after he had given up writing officially, by way of marking up passages, often with comments in the margin.⁶ This unique form of "post-writing" confirms Casey's overall thesis, although it would appear that he underestimated Powys's literary ambition since the latter's

marginal comments constantly reveal his writerly interest as much as his unquestionably contemplative nature.

Casey's reference to Meister Eckhart and to the mystical "way" of negation remains of particular interest however. In answer to an enquiry of mine, Gerard Casey kindly lent me the edition of Eckhart that he had lent to Powys in the autumn of 1952, in exchange for Jakob Boehme's *The Signature of All Things*. In a private communication he writes that Powys's remarks about his own reading were (as always) appreciative, whimsical and ironical, but also "baffling to an estimate of his inner reactions." In the present essay I offer a closer look at the way Powys read and responded to the Eckhartian text, which will give us some further insight into Powys's mind shortly before his death. In retrospect, I think, this research may also open up a new perspective for reconsidering his major writings in the light of Eckhart's *via negativa* or bold "theology of negation," which has attracted a good deal of attention lately, not least in the writings of certain so-called deconstructionist critics, including notably Jacques Derrida.⁷ How all of this applies to Powys's fiction would be the subject of further research—a project that is all the more delicate because we obviously cannot speak of any direct influence; a similar situation occurs, by the way, with other writers Powys studied closely, such as Boehme, Freud, St John of the Cross, Lao Tze, Pascal, and Johannes Tauler, whose so-called "influence" remains a matter of speculation and hindsight. For the time being I trust that the seasoned Powysian reader will not fail to recognize the appeal which the writings of Eckhart—the Dominican preacher, theologian, and contemplative mystic (d. circa 1327)—must have had for Powys, who saw his own mind reflected in the mirror of his speculative predecessor. Inevitably, the reader will also recall a good many passages, from *Soliloquies of a Hermit* and *Fables* through to *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, *Unclay* and the last short stories, where the authorial voice is often remarkably close to that in Eckhart's work.

Theologically speaking, Eckhart's writings are particularly interesting; their author accused of preaching to the people in their own language "things that might lead to heresy," according to the Inquisition at Venice in 1329. He was posthumously condemned, with a list of seventeen specific heretical and eleven objectionable doctrines being appended to the indictment. Yet as one scholar puts it: "Eckhart taught what Dionysius [the Areopagite] and Thomas Aquinas taught . . . but he goes further than any of his predecessors and crosses the borders of church dogma."⁸ Eckhart's unorthodoxy must have been particularly attractive to Powys, who had a predilection for writers who clashed with authority, either worldly or clerical (Baxter, Boehme, George Fox, Pascal, Spinoza), and to writers who led unorthodox lives and brooded over unorthodox systems of thought (Pascal, Cardinal Newman, Simone Weil). All of these were religious writers and all were imbued with a sense of mysticism.

Eckhart's prose is by no means easy to read, not even in translation.

It is tightly, often contortedly, argued in the well-known medieval Scholastic manner, and suffused with biblical and philosophical intertextuality; but at the same time it is most eloquent and expressive, and from a linguistic point of view highly original, especially in its original German, for which Eckhart earned the title of the Father of German philosophical prose. Stylistically speaking, it is a tough, argumentative and impassioned prose in which the learned and the theological alternate with the colloquial and the personal, a prose full of parallelism and paradox, a prose that is interspersed with homely, pithy expressions. Above all his prose is shot through with negation—a form of discourse that privileges the negative—both on the predicative and on the lexical level as found, for instance, in a typical Eckhartian statement such as: "God is not seen except by blindness, nor known except by ignorance, nor understood, except by fools."⁹

Powys read Meister Eckhart's work in translation by way of the two-volume edition by C. de B. Evans (published in London by John M. Watkins), which is mainly based on the classic (though by now superseded) 1857 edition by Franz Pfeiffer.¹⁰ Volume I (1924, 483 pages), consists of 104 sermons and "collocations" (discourses read aloud in monasteries during meal-times) which run from two to six pages, 19 tractates or longer essays (only one of which is more than 16 pages long), and a number of "sayings." Volume II (1931, 212 pages) is a more miscellaneous collection, possibly with some apocryphal material, ascribed to Eckhart rather than actually produced by him and, in my view, stylistically different from the authentic work. It comprises 13 "collocations," some 50 brief sermons, and a thirty-page treatise called *The Book of Benedictus*—a book of "Godly comfort" for those suffering from "pain of body, and distress of mind"—which Powys read most attentively.

Both copies are extensively marked by Powys (and by Gerard and Mary Casey separately and each differently) by way of heavy-pencilled side-markings in the form of a backslash (\). Unlike the case with many other books he read and pondered over, we find no comments in the margin; this must be due to the fact that they were borrowed copies. We do find, however, in pencil the encircled asterisk (*) to indicate the end of the paragraph read for a particular day, so that we can approximately determine the pace or tempo at which Powys was wont to read. It turns out that on the average he read four pages a day (sometimes only one, and maximally six); he completed the reading of volume I (with some 120 "tempo-markers") in about five months, and volume II (with only 40 "tempo-markers") in about two months. This difference in reading pace between the two volumes runs parallel with a noticeable difference in the number of marked up passages: well over 200 in the first, and just under 150 in the second volume, which may well be due to his failing physical powers.

It is possible to establish the date of Powys's reading of Eckhart quite conclusively: he must have read the Master between August 29, 1952—

a date inscribed by Mary Casey on the last page of volume I, and confirmed to me by Gerard Casey in a private communication—and the early months of 1953. Together with *Waiting for God* by Simone Weil and Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* (which contains in the margin of page 274 Powys's moving comment: "You see Humbolt, it is all over with me"), the two-volume Eckhart edition, then, is among the last—if not indeed the very last—books he read before the illness that led to his death on 27 November, 1953.¹¹

As was his habit, Powys noted on the fly-leaf the page references to those passages he thought particularly interesting. There are nine of them in volume I, which for the sake of readability I reproduce in context, with the passage(s)—usually marked in the left margin—in (my) italics; two page references (pp. 218-19), dealing with Eckhart's idiosyncratic notion of the "poor man" as one who "wills nothing, knows nothing, has nothing" are as such unmarked, and one (p. 318) reports a vivid, colloquial dialogue between Eckhart and his spiritual "daughter," Sister Katrei, who is an allegorical construction in fact.

"Here God's ground is my ground and my ground is God's ground. Here I live in my own as God lives in his own. *To one who even for an instant has seen into this ground, a thousand ducats of red beaten gold are worth no more than a false farthing. Out of this innermost ground thy works should be wrought without a why.*" (p.49)

"In the abstract Godhead there is no activity: the soul is not perfectly beatified until she cast herself into the desolate Deity where neither act nor form exists and there, merged in the void, loses herself: as self she perishes, and has no more to do with things than she had when she was not. *Now, dead to self, she is alive in God and the dead perish (in the tomb). Even so is naughted the soul entombed in God.*" (p.188)

"I was thinking as I came along that one might here in time succeed in mastering God. Supposing I were up on high and told him, 'Come up hither,' that would be difficult. *But if I said, 'Bide down below,' that would be very easy. That is what God does. . . . I was thinking on the way as I was walking here, I should not have come were I not prepared to get wet for friendship's sake. If you have all got wet let me get wet too. Good and ill both come from love.*" (p.223)

"Mark two degrees of freedom in the willing poor. First they abandon friends and worldly goods and honours and descend into the valley of humility. There the willing poor find outward freedom and dwell unsolaced by perishable things. Follow the scorn and bitterness of the world. *Courage, my children, establish yourselves in the valley into which you have gone*

down." (p.287)

"There are four signs to tell a man that he is sent from God. First, that in time he is superior to time and temporalities. *Secondly, being therein he is detached from creatures. The third is, that he is idle or quiet-minded. The fourth is that he is not changeable by nature.*" (p.401)

Lastly, Powys singled out page 341. Since the three marked-up passages are part of Eckhart's famous tractate, "Detachment" (in German: *Gelassenheit* or *Abgeschiedenheit*), which splendidly illustrates both his thought and style, it is worthwhile to look more closely both at the essay and at Powys's characteristic way of reading it. The eight-page text, marked up 15 times, was apparently read at three sittings. Eckhart praises detachment above all things, even above love and before meekness and mercy—the standard Christian virtues according to St Paul—because ultimately detachment is a virtue or quality attributable to God himself, who is "motionless detachment"; it is only when man's heart or soul is quite detached and "devoid of all creatures" that it is receptive to the divine "inflow" and, ultimately, after a "breakthrough" (*Durchbruch*) receives "Godhead." It must be remembered that Eckhart discriminates between God (*deus*) and Godhead (*deitas*), which are in his view as "distinct as heaven and earth"; God as a personal category is not essential, unlike Godhead, "the origin of all things that is beyond God," who is to be loved as He is, "not as a God, not as a Spirit, not as a Person, not as an image, but as a sheer pure One. And in this One we are to sink from nothing to nothing" (italics mine).¹²

The following passages from "Detachment" are marked up:

"Our doctors sing love's praise, as did St Paul, who said, 'Whatsoever things I do and have not charity I am nothing. *But I extol detachment above any love....Perfect humility is a matter of self-naughting; but detachment so narrowly approximates to naught that no room remains for aught betwixt zero and absolute.... But detachment abideth in itself. Now no going out however excellent, but staying in is better still.*" (p.341)

"But to be either this or that it [detachment] does not want at all. He who is this or that is aught; but detachment is altogether naught. It leaves things unmolested....Any event, however insignificant, will always cause some troubling of detachment....It is Boethius who exclaims, 'Ye men, why do ye look without [outward] for that which is within you?' " (p. 342)

"The man who is in absolute detachment is rapt away into eternity where nothing temporal affects him nor is he in the least aware of any mortal thing; *he has the world well dead, he having no relish for aught earthly....prayers and good works wrought by a man in time affect no more the divine detach-*

ment than if no prayers nor virtuous works had come to pass in time; nor is God any kindlier disposed toward that wight than if his prayers and deeds had all been left undone....God's motionless detachment was no more disturbed than if he had never been made man." (p. 343)

"Thus God, who has seen everything in that first eternal glance, in no wise acts from any wise at all, for everything is a foregone conclusion." (p.344)

"Attaining this [union with uncreated nature] the soul loses her name....the soul has a private door into divine nature at the point where for her things all come to naught. This door on earth is none other than absolute detachment. At the height of her detachment she is ignorant with knowing, loveless with loving, dark with enlightenment." (p.346)

"List ye, good people all: there is none happier than he who stands in uttermost detachment." (p.347)

It can be concluded that Powys not only read the tractate most carefully and singled out its essential thoughts, which appear so close to his own anti-acquisitive and profoundly spiritual nature, but that he had a keen eye and sharp ear for Eckhart's unique style and rhetoric as well.

There are seven favourite passages noted by Powys on the fly-leaf of volume II; unfortunately, only two of them are at all side-marked:

"It is not in God to destroy anything that has being; he is the finisher of things. Therefore let us not destroy any the least good in us, not any homely way for something more imposing, but pursue it to its end in the Supreme." (p.36)

"Know, all creatures are asking this question ['Master, where dwellest thou?'], they are eager for being, to find divine being; all study of the works of nature is nothing but a search, a quest for, a question about the dwelling of God. Unless they did this, heaven and earth would be at a standstill. But, my children, why ask outside yourselves and seek God in strange lands of dead things?. Not there shall ye find him." (128).

As for the others pages (60, 113, 136, 140 etc, 165), they equally contain many pregnantly formulated mystic passages that Powys must have read with much approval.

The most heavily marked-up page in this volume (p. 167) concerns Eckhart's sermon (XXXIV) on Mary Magdalene, whose physical and spiritual life is described in evocative language, full of images taken from nature, and pregnant with symbolic overtones: "*she [Mary] rises like the dawn rising....[is] lovely like the moon....elect (or chosen) like the sun.*

But now our Lord is satisfied with very little. *He will give his kingdom for a drink of cold water. That, with a pure heart, is enough.* 'Blessed are the pure in heart,' Christ says. *He makes no mention of gross, external, corporal acts.* And St Bernard cries, 'Would to God we longed for Christ as much as those of old did for his coming,' *for with mortal things there is more pleasure in the thought than in the thing itself, but the realization of spiritual things is beyond all expectation. To think of that old longing is enough to make one weep.*" On the next two pages Powys selected: "*He has lavished truth on creature, but she is not truth itself....the rational soul, which can in fact find no rest in creatures; St Bernard says, 'The chastity of our Lady was acceptable to God, but humility made her God's mother.'*"

From his marking-ups it also becomes abundantly evident that Powys delighted in Eckhart's deft handling of the aphoristic paradox: "*He speaks best of God who in the fullness of his interior riches can best hold his peace.*" (p.87). "*St Augustine says, Those who seek and find not. He who seeks and finds not, he alone finds'....Soaring wishes lose us what we have and fail to bring us what we want.*" (p.109) "*He who loves the world least possesses it most,*" (p.155) "*No activity is so perfect but it hinders recollection*"(p.174). "*However perfect a man is, the loss of any temporal possession will trouble and upset him,*" (p.176)

The very last passage singled out by Powys shortly before his final illness occurs on p.196; in this sermon Eckhart contrasts human love which is only "self-seeking" with all-embracing, infinite divine love: "*No one is thinking of his neighbor but each one of himself. 'God alone,' a saint observes, 'is altogether kind, for he bestows his favours disinterestedly, simply out of goodness, out of kindness, he gives all his gifts.'* Suppose a man is forced to seek his own advantage—and sometimes there is need of this, if he is poor, for instance, *and unable to afford to do good itself—then, says St Augustine, 'Seek and find.'*" This passage is characteristic of the overall tendency of the second volume to contain many texts that use a relatively simple, straightforward style corresponding to its more homely, pastoral subject-matter.

In conclusion I would say that the *lietmotif* that runs through nearly all of the passages quoted (as well as through the hundreds left unmentioned for lack of space) is, manifestly, the *via negativa*, the "negative" or "apophatic" (from the Greek word meaning "denial") way of mysticism—a form of spirituality which maintains that we enter the Godhead, the Supreme Being, or ultimate reality, only by a process of self-stripping. In a wider sense it can be looked upon as a particular form of radical theology and epistemology which centres on *negation*, that is, on foregrounding the "presence of absence", as Heidegger expresses it. On the basis of my random sample of marked-up passages in volume I, we can say that, linguistically speaking, this form of discourse or text is distinguished first and foremost by negative predication, marked by such adverbial qualifiers as *not, no, neither, nor* (or in combination, e.g. "*God is neither this nor that*"), negatively-loaded verbs like *to naught, self-naughting* and *not-becoming*; secondly, by an absolute

preference for nouns (referring to God as well as man) like *detachment*, *inactivity*, *poverty* [of spirit], *impotence*, *nothingness*, *darkness*, *silence*, *stillness*, *emptiness*, and the *void*, as well as by Eckhartian coinages such as *not* ("thou must be free from not") and *naught* ("naught is seeing God"); thirdly, a great variety of negatively pre-fixed adjectives, (mainly referring to God's attributes), such as *unknowable*, *unfathomable*, *unmoved*, *unknown*, and *unknowing*, *uncreated*, and such adjectival phrases as *devoid* [any being of one's own], *bereft* of [matter], and the prepositional phrase like [to live] *without a why*, etc.

From a modern and even more from a postmodern viewpoint—a viewpoint, that is, informed by a fundamental *Sprachskepsis* ever since Nietzsche (and the Viennese philosophical linguist Fritz Mauthner), and acquainted with Samuel Beckett's writings which so poignantly express the inadequacy of language to intimate reality—the dialectics of *via negativa* are particularly attractive since its discourse also uses language against itself and consequently negates the positive claims made by language about the world and about transcendental presence.¹³ Of course, it should be borne in mind that at heart such a negative theology will, in spite of its negative detours, remain a philosophy of presence, but one with a difference.

Its similarity to deconstruction and especially to Derrida's complex notion of *différance*, which postulates that meaning is infinitely deferred/differed through an open-ended, unlimited "play" of signification, can only be superficial since deconstruction can never finalize the "transcendental signified" or centre (e.g. God's "superessentiality") in the way that this was possible for Eckhart or Powys.¹⁴ Yet we may spot in both writers a deconstructive practice at work, in that both problematize their own discourse and, to a degree, displace its implied metaphysics. Even Derrida in his most recent, long excursion into negative onto-theology (Dionysius, Eckhart and Heidegger) cannot "avoid speaking" about it, in spite of his "denegations."¹⁵ His most thoughtful essay should be closely studied by theologians and linguists alike, not least by the critic intimate with the rich material embedded in Powys's fictional work, including his *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, a text that in retrospect announces and sums up his own version of the *via negativa*:

I will tell you what my soul is. My soul is a waiting, hesitating, longing silence; it is the most delicate, the most ethereal, the most ready to die away of all the silent noiseless feet that we feel moving in our lives. And it waits, and often its flame goes out while it waits. It is not chained to the moods; it is the waiting silence in us that is free.¹⁶

NOTES

1. T.F. Powys, *Soliloquies of a Hermit* (1918, rpt, London, 1975), p. 61.
2. Cited in Michel Pouillard, *T.F. Powys: La Solitude, le doute, l'art* (Grenoble, 1978), p. 547.
3. L.U. Wilkinson (Louis Marlow), *Welsh Ambassadors: Powys Lives and Letters* (1936, rpt, London, 1975).
4. Gerard Casey, *The Powys Review*, IV (1978-79):85; see also his "Three Christian Brothers," *ibid.* 14-21.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
6. Marius Buning, "Mappowder Revisited: T. F. Powys's Reading in Retirement," *The Powys Review*, VII (1980):78-87.
7. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, 1978), p. 146.
8. Cited in *The Works of Meister Eckhart*, ed. Franz Pfeiffer (Liepzig, 1857), trans. C. de B. Evans, London, 1924 p. XII; vol. II was published in 1931. All subsequent quotations are from these two volumes, referred to as *Meister Eckhart: Deutsche Predigte und Tractate* (München, 1963).
9. *Meister Eckhart*, I, p. 188. On Eckhart, see C. F. Kelly, *A Study of Eckhart* (Yale, 1977).
10. For details, see above n. 8.
11. Marius Buning, p. 82.
12. Cited in Richard Woods, ed., *Understanding Mysticism* (London, 1980), p. 40.
13. On Mauthner, see Linda Ben-Zwi, "Samuel Beckett, Fritz Mauthner, and the Limits of Language" in *PMLA*, 95 (1980):183-200, and her "Fritz Mauthner for Company" in *Journal of Beckett Studies*, IX (1984):65-88.
14. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak (Baltimore, 1976).
15. Jacques Derrida, "Comment ne pas parler? Denegations" in *Psyche: inventions de l'autre* (Paris, 1987), pp. 535-96.
16. *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, p. 95.

The Quest for God in the Fiction of T. F. Powys

BRUCE R. S. LITTE

The fiction of T. F. Powys has continued to fascinate me ever since I first discovered him over a decade ago while writing a dissertation on his brother John Cowper Powys. But while J. C. Powys has continued to find his champions, Theodore Francis Powys has found few—and, indeed, if there are any, they have been keeping their enthusiasm out of print. In a recent *MLA Bibliography* I found eight listings under J. C. Powys, two for Llewelyn, but not a one for T. F. Powys. This neglect is, to me, surprising and distressing, but it is not new. Even during the 20s and 30s, when his fiction was being published with some frequency, his readership appears not to have been large, and I have seen no signs of an increase. In the 20s, the rural settings and simplicity of his characters were of little appeal to the dominant urban dandyism; in the 30s, despite the interest of Leavis and others within the *Scrutiny* circle, his timeless allegorized village life was remote from the interests of the politically engaged writers who dominated the decade. He was too religiously obsessed, too Christian, for many of the worldly sophisticates but was too unorthodox, too pessimistic, for orthodox Christians (though an early—1933—commentator in *The Bookman* recognized that his fiction was either an interpretation of Christianity or, at least, used such interpretations). For some he was too moralistic, for others too blasphemous, too brutal and frank in dealing with sex ("senile lasciviousness" was the term used by a bright young Cambridge reviewer), and too insistent on death. The apparent simplicity of the prose style lacked appeal alongside the pyrotechnics of modernism; the spareness of the prose, its fablistic quality, was no more likely to appeal to the traditionalists. Yet to a reader coming to T. F. Powys today the freshness of the prose is very much in evidence, the surface simplicity barely covering a bracing ironic sophistication, not the sophistication of worldliness, but the sophistication that recognizes the complexity of fundamental moral issues, that continues to pose a challenge to facile and illusory thinking.

Of the nineteen volumes of fiction that Powys published, this essay will concentrate on the three that best illustrate my topic of the quest for God: his best-known novel, *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (1927), and two novellas, "Abraham Men," published in 1923 in a volume entitled *The Left Leg*, and "God," published in *The Two Thieves* in 1932. In these works, as in all the others, one finds few of the appurtenances of the 20th century, few of the specific social, political, economic, scientific, or aesthetic issues of the day but many indications of 20th century

religious concerns: concern with the presence of God, the nature of the life of God, the relationship of spiritual experience to everyday physical existence. The thematic movement of Powys' characters is the quest for God of my title, which I take to be their search for the truth about the nature of life and man's place and destiny in the universe. It involves casting aside righteousness and dogma. Though he was a life-long church-goer, frequently reading the lessons in his small Anglican church, his narratives offer much criticism of both the narrowness of official practices and the shallowness of theological trendiness: "The Christian churches," he wrote, "will be extremely glad to be rid of Him. They have already freed themselves of their belief in the Bible, and so God won't be much missed." God, as is discovered by character after character in Powys' works, is much larger than conventionally narrow conceptions of him. As the all-powerful, terrible author of good and evil, he infuses all life, manifesting himself throughout the fiction in some most unlikely ways. His presence is closely related to the instincts and feelings of man, both radiating forth and seeping out when least expected.

Godliness in Powys's fiction cannot survive without coming into contact with the mud. God is not attained by denying the earth, the creatures of or the fruits of the earth. Cloistered virtue makes a mockery of itself. The substance of mud is carefully chosen by Powys to represent basic facts of human existence—frailty and mortality. The Christian will not keep his feet clean. The narrator of the title story in *The House with the Echo* (1925)—one of Powys' few first person narratives—is a hermit with an "innate friendliness to man," who declares that he is not interested in "the religion that is preached in the churches, but in the religion that moves with the boots of a man. The religion that makes a mark of a nail in the mud." A story entitled "Parson Sparrow" presents a clergyman moving to a new cure, replacing a notably lax predecessor, and trying to be an exemplary spiritual leader:

Mr. Sparrow had a soft, gentle look, he read Keble and St. Augustine, and hired aged Mrs. Gale as his housekeeper because she was very ugly. Only to look at Mr. Sparrow once, and to notice what he did, was enough for anyone, and every word said about him was the same. He was humble, he was kind, then there was nothing more to be said.

His cloistered virtue rendered him ineffectual and ironically increased the depravity of his parishioners: having no froward parson to gossip about, they themselves turned to sinning. He is advised by a sagacious old man that the only way to save his villagers is then to give them something to talk about: to sin himself, or at least seem to. He follows the advice and causes himself to be seen associating with the village wanton. This not only brought the villagers around in short order but, as Powys remarks in the final line, "In a small time Mr. Sparrow was a Rural Dean."

The relationship between narrow, ineffectual religious ideas and the mud, that is the earth, is explored at greater length in "Abraham Men," set in the village of Little Dodder. Here the inclusiveness rather than the exclusiveness of God is particularly evident: "Nothing seemed to be of God, and all was of God. Magic casements opened to the light even in the very pigsties. Dodder was a quaint mixture of mud and Godhead." For Powys, mud and God are no more mutually exclusive than are living religiously and living secularly. The key word is "mixture." God is manifest in all Creation: the earth is charged with presence of God, and any attempt to compartmentalize religion and life is doomed to failure. The protagonist, Luke Bird, abandons his town job as a brewery clerk as well as his girlfriend to follow a vision that calls him to evangelize in Dodder. He awakens one morning to the thought, "Things were not as human eyes see them. A man might receive more than his wages; he might receive an immortal crown." For Luke, bringing God to Dodder involves dissociating himself from the physical world: any link between Godhead and earth is blasphemous. In fact, his mission has been fueled by a humorous remark he heard the local squire making one rainy morning: "If God came to earth again he would have to wear an overcoat and rubber boots."

Of course, Luke has no success in bringing God to Dodder, for he is already abundantly there. He does not have to persuade the villagers to reject materialism and recognize that things are not as human eyes see them, for they are able to believe nothing else. Nor does he have to convince them of the immanence of death, for they are already all too conscious of its presence. At the opening one hears two simple roadworkers conversing about stones. One says, "Do you know . . . that they stones bain't real stones. . . . 'Tis funny that stones be stones." Later, the omniscient narrator says, "No person in Dodder ever thought of a piece of wood as being a piece of wood." Luke had "expected to find them all thinking of the gross things of the earth, the mere getting and saving, the grinding and saving and pecking, doing ill and not good, and so losing their immortal souls." But the naive Luke eventually learns that they "saw more clearly than he could ever do a certain something that moved in the valleys and lived through all nights and days." They maintained their outward conformity to things seen and had no fear of the mud. But they also had "a real resignation that bowed low before the something more awful, the something more true, the something that is more living, the something to which men are but the shadowy fragments of a shadowy dream." Set against this brooding Presence, conventional religious categories do not readily apply to Dodder: "In the town small-sinning was a proper contrast to well doing that merely meant walking between the little trees. Townsinning was so easy to preach against, and so very easy to wrap up in little pink ribbons by the town ladies." Luke is unable to identify sin, let alone root it out. As his religious simplicities are no match for the stronger elemental powers, he retreats to town, having learnt that the villagers'

acceptance of loss and death bespeaks a deeper religious understanding than do his facile sermons.

The quest for God theme is explored yet more explicitly in the novel "God," which traces the protagonist's search for and finding of God. One might say that this work operates on a simple premise: if God is truly omnipresent, then he can be found in the most unlikely of places. Here Johnnie Chew identifies God with his father's black silk top hat. Simple *childish* faith enables him to make this association; in maturity, a *childlike* faith enables him to maintain it. Chew, having heard the name "God" mentioned continually ever since earliest childhood, was convinced of God's immanence and set out to look for Him about the house. He learnt that words referred to real entities and that just as the word "mother" signified the most important feature in his youthful life, so the word "God" must likewise refer to an object equally real. He assumed that God must be a guest, although he couldn't find him until he realized that God was his father's hat placed so prominently in the front hall and worn so reverently every Sunday morning. As he grew up he learnt from his reading that

the glory of God might enter and dwell in a common hat as well as in a thorn bush. And once that the human heart has found solace and comfort in the idea that God inhabits any corner or building, or even mere headcovering, there is nothing more foolish than to set oneself up to think that God cannot be there.

This God is not difficult to find; he is readily accessible and the quest does not have to be long. The danger is not being unable to find God so much as it is letting the world talk one out of simple faith. Once again one sees the recurring idea that a church is not the first or only place to find God:

Everywhere, where a man believes God is, there he is. God is no respecter of holy places; a mousehole may be heaven. There is nothing so small or so common that may not contain the whole of the Godhead. God is in no church or state. He is exactly and truly where the most simple think He is.

Finding God does not, for Powys's characters, dispel melancholy, does not necessarily "lighten the heart or brighten the eye." For them the quest leads to a quiet resignation, an acceptance of the gifts of life, but also an acceptance of sorrows, of loss, of defeat, of death:

The good God always provides for His children. Though He hangs upon a peg all day, He neglects no one. He sets up a table in the wilderness that all may eat and be merry. Though God is only a hat, all good things must come from Him. To make a bed where the grass is green and the spring sun rejoices is very good. To shelter from the winter storms be-

side a clear fire is still better. To wish evil to others . . . is not a wise act. It's far better to bear the burden of your own sorrow without anger. To rest content, to receive willingly what will come, to rejoice in the Lord always, to accept the better and the worse, that is wisdom. To see the wicked and the good with the same understanding, to watch all the worlds and all life flowing into nothingness and yourself with it, with no foolish mournings, that is wisdom.

In *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* God appears in the guise of the title character, an itinerant wine merchant. While other characters are only gradually able to discover his identity, the reader does so almost immediately through a number of Biblical allusions, parallels and quotations, as well as through the richly ironic and allegorical dialogue and narration. Mr. Weston is described as a portly older man with hair of "white-like wool," reminding the reader of the vision in the first chapter of "The Revelation of St. John." He is a happy, gentle man "with the best power—the power of kindness—in his face." He is father of a rather large family. Though he drives about in a battered Ford truck, he runs "A vast business whose ramifications were everywhere." He is self-taught, but has "a fine and creative imagination, possessing in a very large degree a poet's fancy that will at any moment create out of the imagination a new world." The reader also observes his miraculous powers: his truck accidentally runs over a young girl who arises, laughing and uninjured, upon his bidding. He is able, furthermore, to change water into wine. Though wine is his trade, he only offers two varieties: "the light and less heady wine," the wine of love and life, and "a dark, heavy vintage, the wine of death and eternal peace." He admits that "people neglect our strongest oldest wine that brings to a buyer a lasting contentment, and eases his heart forever from all care and torment." But he is more than content to offer to all who would buy the popular variety, that most sought by those who have the least.

Once again one can observe Powys stressing the connection of God not with Church but with mud, earth, plants and animals, with plain simple folk. At one point Mr. Weston has been found standing at a church lectern reading "His Book," having just conducted a wedding. He admits that this is his first visit to a church; earlier he had stated that he would rather go "where my wine is drunk. In a condemned cell, in a brothel, in the kennels of a vast city, our wine is drunk to the dregs, but in a church they merely sip." The humble characters, the misfits, are first to taste the good wine and they have not far to go: Weston finds them out, and they are the first characters to recognize him.

Mr. Weston's arrival in Dodder coincides with the novel's central miracle—the stopping of time. This phenomenon is noted by the boisterous, prosperous villagers drinking beer at the inn, but they do not recognize the portent. Of them he remarks, "We must show them signs and wonders, wars and earthquakes, fire and tempest, plague and

famine, and all because we wish to draw their attention to our good wine." For the complacent burghers drastic measures are occasionally requisite: "We have agents all over the world to show hell to them and eternal damnation and a fire burning in a lake of fire." But most simple villagers, froward though they might be, will accept a glass of wine. A few of the most hardened refuse to taste it, but all are affected by Mr. Weston. On the one hand, the most unrepentantly evil character, a shrew who delights in encouraging the debauching of young girls, dies from fright of a lion that Weston has released from his truck (cf. Peter's "First Letter": "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour"). On the other hand, the vicar, who has seemingly lost his faith in God (due to the tragic death of his wife and his acute sense of the unremittant cruelty of life) welcomes Weston to the rectory and being told, "Your door has been open to me too long for me to forget the way into your house." The vicar drinks the light wine and finds a melancholy peace, "for Mr. Weston's wine was showing him the truth of the world." He has found what the poor and simple have always known, "that substance that enables them to live contentedly and bear all the toil of their lives." He has found what has been in himself all along, and does not have to wander out into the world, like Luke, preaching to the animals. His quest for God, rather, concludes in an acceptance of himself, of the suffering loss, and involves a probing into himself that takes him beneath anger to a deeper part of his being where "He had but buried Him, a little too deeply perhaps, but in a very good and suitable grave—the heart of a man."

For the younger characters, the light wine brings happiness. Luke Bird, for example, appears again in this novel, and here his frenetic quest ends in fulfilled marital love. Further, wanton young men are enough affected that they learn to love and marry the women they had violated and been prepared to abandon. Even the pathetic old sexton, who had relished his unsavory reputation as the village's dirty old man out of gratitude for getting some sort of recognition—"Tis a mortal pity . . . that any woon should try to lead a good life. For when a man do do good there bain't nothing more to be said"—comes to recognize Weston as his oldest friend. He is not alone. Like all the other characters whose quest for God ends in either the wine of life or the wine of death, the sexton drinks and finds that what has been seemingly missing from his tortured life has been present indeed all along. For all of Powys's questing characters the answer lies in the light wine that will enable them to accept the transitory joys and sorrows of the earthly life until they are ready for the everlasting contentment of the rich, dark wine. The news in T. F. Powys's fiction is not the "Good News" of some present day enthusiasts, but it is sustaining, albeit melancholic, news.

A Letter on Style

LLEWELYN POWYS

My dear Mr. Taylor:

It is difficult to analyze the airy substance we call style. At its best it seems to escape all definitions. It is as evasive as life. It would be as hard to predict the dancing flight of a flock of finches, or the subterranean movements of a single mole, as to explain a great writer's peculiar gift. The reason for this seems to me to lie in the fact that style is the ultimate expression of the author's unique spiritual consciousness. This spiritual consciousness has been arrived at through various influences. Ancestry has bequeathed to it a certain fundamental disposition, environment has thickened this congenital inclination, and the chance temperament of each individual has flashed it into life out of nowhere.

It has been suggested that style consists in saying what has to be said as exactly as possible. This, however, is a different matter altogether. True style has nothing to do with imparting information lucidly. It is not this. It is the scent of the herb, the mist over the blackberry hedge, the soul of the man. It is begotten of the senses, it is the quintessential feeling, the quintessential thought, of those fleet immediate messengers finding unity at last in the person of the being they serve. All the nights that a man has experienced, clouding in so mysteriously over the native earth; all the dawns that he has witnessed with wakeful eyes, have engendered it. The taste of wheaten bread, the taste of milk and wine, has caused it to grow. The sound of church bells heard in a wild place far from village or town has impelled words to dance like children in a May-day procession. The contact of sea waves against the skin, or the grateful warmth of fire against human nakedness can, and should, have an influence on every sentence. The smell of snow, the smell of a hay cock in the sun, nay, the smell that rises from the intestines of a rabbit when a man is paunching it with his pocket knife, should prove its periods.

A perfect style is the perfect expression of a man's secret identity. It makes arrogant claims. It demands that the ordinary everyday world should give attention to the wandering goat-cry of a supreme egoism as sensitive as it is tough. It is for this reason that truly great writers are seldom recognized in their lifetime. Commonplace readers invariably appreciate commonplace writers. They prefer books that reflect ideas and methods of thought with which they are already familiar. At all costs the pamphlets they peruse must be partial and platitudinous. They shrink from that terrible spiritual sincerity that burns like fire and prompts a writer to leave his own seal, his own thumb-mark, upon every page he writes.

If I were to be asked by any young person the best way to acquire a style I would tell him to live intensely. The style of a man is the direct result of his passion for life. Learning and scholarship are of small value here. Style is the affirmation of a man's heightened awareness of existence and always grows up from within, from out of the marrow of his bones.

If it were my task to treat of this matter with undergraduates I should draw their attention to certain notable passages of English prose and show them clearly by specific paragraphs, sentences, or even idiosyncratic words, how these men have succeeded in preserving their spirits on parchment for all time. This particular and singular use of the country's language is beyond the scope of the vulgar. It would seem that the innate complexion of man's mind finds for itself fitting expression. Powerful and original characters write in a powerful and original way, shallow and commonplace characters write in a shallow and commonplace way. Style has to do with the grace, health, and vigour of a man's soul. It is a secret thing dependent upon a natural depth of feeling and no amount of playing the sedulous ape can pass off as authentic what is in truth counterfeit. Just as in the love between a man and a woman true emotion will find convincing expression so it is with writing. Sham feeling makes sham prose and it is easily recognized as such.

My own method is to give no thought whatever to the form of what I am writing. I put down my ideas as they present themselves pell mell to my mind, fanciful, extravagant, sentimental, bawdy, irreverent, irrelevant, they are all equally welcome. In going over my work, however, I am prepared to spend a great deal of care in endeavouring to find the just word or an adequate balance for any particular paragraph. I have noticed that when I am writing at my best I experience a peculiar physical sensation. I first became aware of this peculiarity at school as a boy of twelve when we were given an essay to write on the Pied Piper. I have never been able to think a subject through before writing. I daresay I should do much better if it were my nature to adopt such a method. I consider the greatest difficulty to be overcome by immature, untrained writers is lack of confidence. They are too self-conscious. When once the pen is in the hand it is important to forget about the opinion of others and to write away after your own fashion with careless, proud indifference.

Yours sincerely,
Llewelyn Powys

Reprinted from W. Taylor, ed., *Types and Times in the Essay* (New York: Harper, 1932), pp. 353-55.

REVIEWS

Judith Stinton. *Chaldon Herring: The Powys Circle in a Dorset Village*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1988. Pp. 184. \$26.90. Wendy Mulford, *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics, 1930-1951*. London: Pandora Press, 1988. Pp. 276. £6.95.

Between hermitage and pilgrimage there may be a causal connection. If the wise man will not go to the metropolis, then the metropolis must make its way to him. So it was with Theodore Powys who moved to the village of Chaldon Herring in 1904, and who remained there until his flight inland from the bombs, to Mappowder, in 1940. In that quarter-century Theodore's nights away from home are countable.

Yet until the mid-1920s the obscurity of Theodore's life was, as it were, justified: he had published only two books, *An Interpretation of Genesis* and *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, and "published" rather overstates the matter. But the manuscripts accumulated, under the encouraging watch of one Mrs Stracey, and when David Garnett had his moment of recognition, in 1922, books flowed in spate: *Black Bryony* and *The Left Leg* in 1923, *Mark Only* in 1924, *Mr Tasker's Gods* and *Mockery Gap* in 1925. Curiosity could not but be aroused.

This is just one of the reasons that Chaldon Herring owes its fame to David Garnett; just as importantly, Garnett himself published a novel in 1925 set in a disguise of the village, and named for its now celebrated pub, *The Sailor's Return*. As a study of racial prejudice active in provincial life, the novel has a quiet fury that is memorably self-reflexive. Quite uncoincidentally, 1925 saw the publication of an even more controversial novel, *The Informer*, written while Lian O'Flaherty was living in Chaldon Herring. As home subsequently, for varying periods, to Sylvia Townsend Warner, and Valentine Ackland, Llewelyn Powys and Alyse Gregory, Gerald Brenan and Gamel Woolsey (the "ands" in these pairings themselves subject to variation), Chaldon Herring has a place because it is a place in the annals of modern English literature.

Stephen Tomlin (who, with Elizabeth Muntz, lent sculptural distinction to Chaldon) wrote to Theodore probably in the late 20s or early 30s that Chaldon "now seems to be the best known village in England. Theo dear, we ought to have kept it a secret. But it would be hard to find a bushel sufficiently large and opaque enough to hide a light like yours." Theodore was indeed the centre, yet even before his move to Mappowder Chaldon was depleted of the attendant celebrities: Warner and Ackland had moved to Frome Vauchurch, in west Dorset, in 1937, the same year that Llewelyn left for Switzerland, not to return. After 1940 the village resumed its noiseless tenor, retaining only a suspicion of departed glory. And in recent years some of the dead have returned;

pilgrims are again to be seen, at the graves of Sylvia and Valentine, and at Llewelyn's stone, carved by Elizabeth Muntz, on the cliff to the south of the village.

There is ample material here for a book. There is a question, however, concerning the reason or justification for such a book. What significance does Chaldon have, apart from being the node at which the lives of diverse writers and artists crossed? Apart from the other people, was there anything in the place itself that mattered? Beautiful and remote it may once have been, but no more beautiful than hundreds of other villages in Britain, and by 1930 less remote than most.

Judith Stinton has performed a valuable service in preserving the record, in interviewing the older inhabitants and those with memories of the 20s and 30s. Much of this is in itself little more than gossip; the book reaches out for respectability with sections of literary criticism, only to lapse into anecdote. But Stinton's most serious fault is in her regularising and domesticating of the characters. Theodore's novels are rendered bland, and Sylvia Townsend Warner is anything but radical. For more than a counterweight, one must recommend Wendy Mulford's *This Narrow Place: Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics, 1930-1951*. Extravagantly contentious, never dull, Mulford explains why the Powyses and their friends were so unpopular in Dorset. (The attitude persists.) Not because of their eccentricities, nor even for their moral irregularities, but for the radical politics with which they were associated. Stinton gives barely a hint of their virtual ostracism from Dorset society, except in quoting J.M. Barrie on the unlikelihood of Theodore receiving a Civil List pension, "as so many people have a strong feeling against the work of the Powys family." Sylvia was such an unswerving communist that even 1956 led to no deviation, and a portrait of Stalin remained in her study until her death in 1978.

That detail may be almost comic in its eccentricity, but Warner's support for and participation on the communist side in the Spanish Civil War was entirely serious. Mulford's research into the political activities of Warner and Ackland is quite remarkable for its sense of public outrage. Chapter sub-headings such as "Joining the Struggle: Dorset and the Communist Party" give the savour. The oldest newspaper in Dorchester, and the most respectable, *The Dorset County Chronicle*, folded in 1942; by dint of sharp negotiations, Sylvia acquired its substantial printing press for the Communist Party. Mulford could also be charged with anecdote, but these anecdotes have a frame of social and cultural critique that makes each incident a telling one. Distortion and exaggeration may not be absent, but it would be very difficult after reading Mulford to return to an image of Warner as that rather cosy rustic spinster.

This Narrow Place is one of a number of recent books devoted to Sylvia Townsend Warner. A consensus is now emerging of Warner's major significance in modern British literature. She herself regarded T.F.

Powys as the most important writer of his time, and she would not be pleased at the astonishing indifference to his work shown by publishers and readers. In Britain now not one of Theodore's works is in print, and today almost all of Sylvia's novels are available in Virago paperbacks. Why this should be so is the sort of question that Judith Stinton's book ought to be able to help us answer. It does not, because in it Chaldon Herring is isolated from the rest of the world. Perhaps only hermits know the fallacy of isolation. Stinton might have been better advised to have treated Chaldon not as a refuge (according to Theodore's stated intentions) but as a microcosm, as he uses it in his novels. What facet of English culture was not represented among its inhabitants?

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James Carley. *Glastonbury Abbey: The Holy House at the Head of the Moors Adventurous*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. \$24.95 U.S.

James Carley's book is of particular interest to the reader of John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* because it has scattered through it many suggestive clues which could lead to an answer to the question, "What guided Powys's choice of Glastonbury as a physical setting for his novel and what is the significance of that setting for the novel as a whole?" Carley provides much disparate information about Glastonbury in three separate sections dealing with the history of Glastonbury, its cultural life and the historical narrative subsequent to the Reformation. A unity not easily apparent in the book as it is organized can be provided by the distinct perspective of the Powys reader.

The historical section indicates how Powys, the natural antiquarian, had drawn upon Glastonbury's rich historical past. This is a past which goes as far back as neolithic lake villagers—a remote period returning by allusion when the flood at the end of the novel recalls the origins of the Glastonbury landscape in water settlements. Names such as Zoyland and Zoy go back to the Anglo-Saxon period; Boorhtwald, for example, the third Anglo-Saxon abbot (688-726) restored to the abbey grants in the Polden Hills and Zoyland. Ealhmund (851-867) received lands at Zoy and Montacute. The association between Glastonbury and Montacute reinforces the relevance to Powys's early life. The Danish invasions also affected Glastonbury; they possessed the remains of the abbot Guthlac (824-851). The Crow family in Powys's novel is said to have Danish forebears and is hostile to the Glastonbury cult. Powys thus maintains a logic of historical tradition.

Cultural and religious factors mark the history of Glastonbury after the Norman conquest and Powys reflects them at a deeper level in his novel. For example, the associations of Glastonbury with miraculous healing begin with the reverence given to the body of St. Benignus (1078-96), whose remains were eventually placed at the high altar of the Great Church. Carley quotes John of Glastonbury's words that when the relics of the saint were brought out "such grace of divine generosity flowed out from the people, those vexed with various illnesses were healed." Thus John Geard seems to be a reincarnation of a Glastonbury tradition; the raising of a child from the dead is even included. Moreover Selfrid Peluchin (1120-1125), a bishop at Glastonbury, was burned in a coffin with a ring carved with the insignia of the serpent god Abraxas, a symbol of gnostic belief. Carley notes that gnosticism is associated with homosexuality, said to be practised by the Bulgar sect whose name gave rise to the term "bugger" used by John Geard as a vulgar expletive ("Bugger me black").

I wonder therefore whether Glastonbury traditions helped Powys to incorporate his themes of Faustian knowledge and cosmic dualism—both gnostic themes. Was Owen Evans's realisation of his masochism and sadism a reflection of the manner of death of Richard Whiting, the last abbot of Glastonbury who was killed in an apotheosis of the crucifixion scene?

The central Arthurian thread in the Glastonbury tapestry is developed in the reign of Edward I; Glastonbury's prestige grew from its claim to be founded by Joseph of Arimathea whose burial, Carley points out, was also associated with Montacute. To the abbot Richard Beare (1494) belongs the dubious credit for developing in Glastonbury what Carley describes as "a fully orchestrated cult designed to attract pilgrims" (70). Geard was obviously intent upon reviving that tradition. Finally, the Arthurian aspects of *A Glastonbury Romance* are further illuminated by Carley's discussion of "Arthur, Avalon and the Bridge Perilous." The hurling of the sword from the bridge Pomparles is an important allusion in Powys's novel. Avalon's association with the Celtic "other-world" would certainly have been important to the nurturer of a Welsh cult, like J. C. Powys. Glastonbury Tor is evidently linked to the Celtic "Annwfn" in the life of St. Collen, a name associated with Llangollen, the location of a later Powys novel, *Owen Glendower*.

Glastonbury's rich library and antiquarian associations are also significant to the Powys reader. Historical texts of Geoffrey of Monmouth and the life of Merlin are associated with this library. How much did Powys know of the antiquarians and archaeologists who wrote upon the excavated Glastonbury—for example, Richard Warner's *A History of the Abbey at Glastonbury* (1826)? Also, Frederick Bond excavated the site in 1908, in a dig which extended over a decade. The Powys who later invented fiction out of his interest in the archaeology of Maiden Castle may have been fascinated by the proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society. Evidently, Bond even

believed in the "anima mundi," the monks as spirit guides and attributed an occult significance to the design of the abbey. Carley's book therefore offers a new perspective upon Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* as an imaginative transformation of the historical, legendary and religious traditions of "The Holy House at the Head of the Moors Adventurous."

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Plein Chant 42/43: John Cowper Powys (Automne 1988). Dossier reuni & presente par Benjamin Stassen. Pp. 270. 120 f. Ordering address: *Plein Chant*, CCP 1 787 79 U, Bordeaux, La France.

This strikingly elegant volume is a special double-number of the French literary periodical *Plein Chant*. It has been skillfully compiled and edited by a young Belgian photographer, Benjamin Stassen. Not surprisingly, one of the volume's attractive features is its combination of photographs with the text, from the frontispiece portrait of a composed, utterly literary JCP through to JCP sprawled outdoors on a bench at Corwen, dressed for a walk, with one of the ubiquitous walking sticks, and concluding with an aged, sere image of the artist as an old man. And the volume as a whole is pleasing to the eye and to the hand, printed in well-spaced type on a fine textured paper, ornamented with small woodcuts at the head and end of the essays, and graced by a drawing of JCP for the cover, done by Gilles Chapacou. All in all, it is an artistic tribute to the work of JCP of the sort which dour academic publishing houses and university presses hardly dare dream in these days of the bottom line.

That is not to say, however, that the volume lacks substance. On the contrary, it should serve admirably to introduce a range of French readers to the present state of the discussion on the work and reputation of JCP. This is done by means of four kinds of texts.

In the first part, "John Cowper Powys aujourd'hui," we are given some literary responses by contemporary French writers to the presence of JCP. Jean-Pierre Otte, in "Marche et demarche en compagnie de Powys," re-enacts JCP's walk through the Welsh countryside as a walk through a literary topography. Cécile Miguel's "Rêve du 22 mars 1988," André Miguel's "Le 'Qui-vive' de John Cowper Powys" and Marc-Édouard Nabe's "Le Barde du Bonheur" are all literary testimonies to JCP's continuing influence. Even if it is difficult to do more than join in accla/excla-mation with pronouncements such as Nabe's "Il avait l'aura du mage en transe chamanique, l'éloquence spiralant l'auditoire en un tourbillonnant manège d'idées et de mots," these texts will prove

valuable guide-posts for future historians mapping JCP's reception.

Also valuable for the history of JCP's gradually widening reputation are the three texts dealing specifically with this theme. Belinda Humfrey reports on "La fortune posthume de l'oeuvre," Elmar Schenkel outlines JCP's impact on German writers, and Sven-Erik Täckmark, known for his translations of *Wolf Solent*, *Ducdame*, *Weymouth Sands* and the *Autobiography* into Swedish, informs us about some aspects of JCP's reputation in Sweden. Regrettably, there is no detailed discussion of JCP's progress in French letters, although the bibliography (pp. 264- 267) does provide a handy checklist of which of JCP's works have been translated into French. One would like to know more about the specific dedication of M. Canavaggia, who translated *Weymouth Sands*, the *Autobiography*, and *Maiden Castle*, for instance. Perhaps this kind of research is already underway. If not, it would be desirable. Similarly, very little is yet known about JCP's impact on American letters. Given the parlous state of American literary archiving, some urgency in gathering at least the materials for such investigations is indicated.

The longest section of the volume establishes a kind of dialogue between the remaining two sorts of texts, namely recent essays by scholars active in the field of Powys studies followed by excerpts from JCP's own writings which relate to the particular theme or topic. Charles Lock's "John Cowper Powys: Vie et Oeuvre" is a masterful introduction, compressing a great deal of information into a few lucid pages. We are then given some extracts from JCP's diary for 1930. These extracts are introduced briefly and have been translated by Benjamin Stassen. Indeed, all of the JCP texts have been specially translated for this volume by Stassen. Ben Jones examines aspects of the complex relationship of JCP to the writings of Nietzsche in "Ecrire après la Mort de Dieu: John Cowper Powys et Nietzsche." The parallels and differences between Powys and D. H. Lawrence are discussed by Glen Cavaliero in "Phénix et Serpent: D. H. Lawrence et Powys." This essay is complemented by JCP's own comments on Lawrence, taken from "Modern Fiction" in *Sex in the Arts; A Symposium* (1932). The status of Powys's philosophy and of his role as a philosopher is the subject of Thomas J. Diffey's "John Cowper Powys et la philosophie." From the vantage of the "professionals," Powys has remained a silent philosophical voice: "Il est peu probable que les philosophes de métier lisent Powys." This ignorance, however, does not imply that Powys's investigations of contemporary philosophical issues are necessarily empty as contributions to the discourse. As Diffey notes, Powys is more comparable to William James as a thinker than to the formal Cartesianism which prevails in academic philosophical discourse. To this one might add that JCP's rigorous phenomenological method has yet to earn the respect it deserves. Two passages represent JCP's philosophical writing here: "La magie du Détachement" and "Le Philosophie Kwang."

Paul Roberts outlines in "Gestes impérissables (L'Oeuvre poétique)"

the important, if relatively neglected, body of JCP's work as a poet. Little of the poetry has been translated, so the version of "The Ship/Le Vaisseau" is all the more welcome. Penny Smith deals with the theme of free will in "En quête de . . . la ligne de fuite, liberté et libre arbitre." Michael Ballin makes important observations on the connections of Shakespearean texts to JCP's works in the essay "'La Nature, cette grande créatrice' . . .", while Diane de Margerie offers perceptive comments upon a recurring Powysian paradigm in "Du sens de la régression chez John Cowper Powys." The trajectory to the origin demarcates the Powysian narrative:

L'émergence de l'antérieur a presque toujours lieu dans l'élément liquide d'un miroir, d'une mare, ou du flux de la mémoire. Cette fluidité n'exprime pas seulement l'amour de l'enfance et d'une figure primordiale, mais aussi la souplesse créatrice du héros powysien que rien n'arrête dans sa quête, ni dans ses contacts psychiques avec la vie d'avant la vie: pré-natale. (199)

One looks forward to de Margerie's forthcoming longer study on JCP, in the expectation that such subtle readings will be further elaborated.

The problem of the historical content of Owen Glendower is reviewed by A. Thomas Southwick in "Owen Glendower et l'Histoire," while Peter Easingwood considers JCP's Rabelaisianism in "John Cowper Powys émule de Rabelais." This second topic is fittingly followed by five of JCP's letters to Henry Miller. The volume is rounded out by two solid readings of the more inaccessible later works, both by younger American scholars: Richard Maxwell's "Le temps et le hasard dans *Porius*" and Peter G. Christensen's "Atlantis, la sexualité chez Powys." Slowly, but surely, even these works should become more available to readers.

There is no doubt that the appearance of this thorough and stimulating collection will be seen, in retrospect, as a major moment in the return of John Cowper Powys to the canon. Or rather, in his elevation to the post-modern canon, which is where he always already had a place. This is something which does not come through clearly enough in the volume, neither in Benjamin Stassen's introduction nor in the individual essays. For it cannot be pure chance that just now JCP should be coming into his own, in widely scattered settlements on the margin. Only much later will we speak with confidence about the necessity of this development, which saw, for example, the becoming-aware-of for JCP, H.H. Jahn, E. Canetti, W. Gombrowicz at the same time, when they had long been available. Meanwhile, we are grateful for beacons such as this number of *Plein Chant*, which should reveal JCP for many.

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ANNUAL MEETING, 1990. In lieu of a full-scale conference, the Powys Society of North America will hold an informal meeting during the 1990 NEMLA conference scheduled in Toronto between April 6 and 8. One of the principal purposes of this meeting will be to petition for the inclusion of a Powys session at the 1991 NEMLA conference to be held in Hartford, Connecticut.

If you will be attending the Toronto conference please so inform Ben Jones (Department of English, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada K1S 5B6) so that arrangements can be made for you to participate in the petition.

Recently Noted: Charles Lock, "John Cowper Powys: The Life and Works of a Neglected Master," *The Cresset*, March 1989: 17-22. Address: Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383; \$1.25 single copy.

Gerben Wynia, "John Cowper Powys, Een Queste," *Maatstaf*, No. 3, 1989: 65-80. Price: f13,50 (+ f4 postage and handling). Address: Weekbladpers, Afdeling abonnementen, Postbus 1050, 100BB Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Excellent recent photos of JCP locales.

The Powys Society Newsletter continues to expand, with useful articles and notes. Free with subscription to the Powys Society (U.K.). Address: Griffin Beale, 39 Church Street, Bridgewater, Somerset TA6 5AT, England.

Reprints: THE SCHOLAR'S BOOKSHELF (51 Everett Drive, Princeton Junction, NJ 09550) now offers "The John Cowper Powys Library," a softcover collection of 41 volumes from the Village Press. Includes *Porius*, *Wood and Stone*, and *Morwyn*; *The Meaning of Culture*, *Suspended Judgements*, and *Visions and Revisions*; *Letters to Louis Wilkinson*, *Letters to Llewelyn*; and books about JCP. Special price per set of 41 volumes: \$185.00. Also sold in subsets of fiction, poetry, essays, or letters.

For Collectors: STERLING DEAN still has for sale a number of interesting items from the Powys Brothers Collection of the James Sibley Watson, Jr. Library, including first editions and inscribed copies. Address for current list: 6 Sibley Place, Rochester, NY 14607.

In the UK a prime source for collectors is STEVEN FERDINANDO, a bookseller who has specialized in the works of the Powys family for over ten years. Lists for books by all members of the family, "plus friends, lovers, critics, stragglers and strangers." Address: The Old Vicarage, Queen Camel, Near Yeovil, Somerset, UK.

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Cambridge, Chicago, Colgate, Cornell, London, New York, Texas, Virginia, in addition to the Newberry, the New York Public Library, and the Library of Congress.

Won't you please encourage the library at your own institution to join this distinguished list? Libraries in Canada appear to be particularly under-represented on our rolls. And, of course, we are always pleased to welcome first-time *individual* subscribers from among the Powys-reading community. Your recommendations will help PSNA immensely.

IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF POWYS NOTES: Powys and the Feminine—essays by Linda Pashka, Peter Christensen, Michael Ballin; reviews, notes, and more.



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