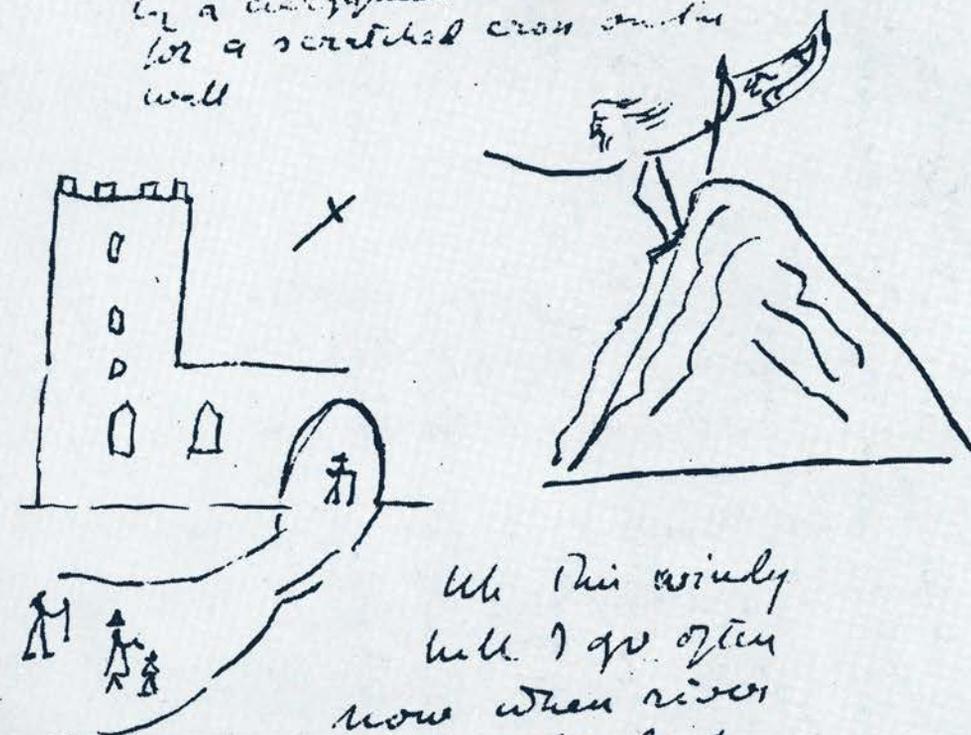


That has a flagstaff on the
top and a rugged rocky
ascent. This is the hill
from which Owen Glendower (the
famous Welsh Prince) his dagger at
the church, the dint of which
can be seen still but some
may be doubtful - never known if
it is for real and the dint was made
by a chieftain and is intended
for a scratched cross on the
wall



At this windy
hill I go often
now when river
banks is flooded
because the traffic on
the Holyhead road is
cut off - it is called
highway "A 5" by
motorists &
is not in

JOHN COWPER POWYS ————— in Picador.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Cover Photo:

Owen Glendower throwing his dagger down from the church.

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Editorial

Matthew Arnold's *The Study of Celtic Literature* (1867; republished in Dent's Everyman this year) seems to have remained a provocative work since its first publication which led, as Arnold intended, to the creation of the Chair of Celtic at Oxford (with John Rhys as its first tenant). *Studies in Celtic Literature*, rich in ideas, can be read in various ways. Principally, the work, often humorous, often witty, is an impassioned quest to define "an ideal genius", and, from that, a plea for an ideal mode or tone of life. In the "ideal genius", says Arnold, one would put "a great deal of the Celt", that is a "power of quick and strong perception and emotion", an affinity with "feminine idiosyncrasy", an "intimate feeling of nature and the life of nature" and a closeness to "natural magic". However, the weakness of the Celt is that he is "undisciplinable, anarchical and turbulent by nature" ("not a promising political temperament")—in contrast with "the steady humdrum habit of the creeping Saxon". "Do not let us wish that the Celt had had less sensibility, but that he had been more master of it". This failing, says Arnold, is shown in Celtic literature. The "Celt has not patience for" "a steady, deep-searching survey, a firm conception of the facts of human life".

So he runs off into technic, where he employs the utmost elaboration, and attains astonishing skill; but in the contents of his poetry you have only so much interpretation of the world as the first dash of a quick, strong perception, and then sentiment, infinite sentiment, can bring you. Here, too, his want of sanity and steadfastness has kept the Celt back from the highest success.

Ultimately, Arnold's *Study* produces some original critical interpretation, in his discovery of the "Celtic strain" in English poetry, especially Shakespeare's. This is used to illustrate the variety of temperaments within the British and to urge that we each recognise this variety within our individual selves, and blend them, not allowing

them to clash. The most attractive, most magical element of ourselves which we should cultivate as individuals could also be the most disastrous to us as a people:

if we are doomed to perish . . . we shall perish by our Celtism, by our self-will and want of patience with ideas, our inability to see the way the world is going; and yet those very Celts, by our affinity with whom we are perishing, will be hating and upbraiding us all the time.

As is clear from just this sketch of Arnold's main concern, *Celtic Literature* can be read simultaneously as a work of literary criticism, as a historical document, or even as a political manoeuvring. The Celts for Arnold were primarily the Welsh. Within this *Powys Review* we show a reaction to Arnold's challenge by a twentieth century writer with a principal concern in the Welsh character and largely claimed to be the greatest Welsh novelist writing in English at the present time.

Any reader of John Cowper Powys is likely to think at once that Powys would have identified his literary self with the Celt described by Arnold, even with the characteristics Arnold saw as failings. It appears that Powys wrote frequently in reaction to *The Study of Celtic Literature*, though seldom explicitly. Powys knew Arnold's poetry intimately, and quotations from it slip into his letters (and other prose) until late in his old age. Some of his personal sympathies with Arnold appear clearly in the essay in *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938); for examples, there is Arnold's "advocacy" of "University Extension culture"; his "struggle to live rather 'in the best that has been thought and said' than in any clever aesthetic venture"; his idea of "draw(ing) our strength from that mysterious spring of unconquerable endurance that rises up, as if from some non-human cosmic reservoir, in the depths of where the self touches the not self"; and his "worship of water and stone, this atavistic 'religion' *un*-touched by

morality". As we read this essay on Matthew Arnold, suspicion builds to certainty that Powys's criticism of the poetry is written with thoughts based on *The Study of Celtic Literature*. Suspicion comes with the frequent association of Arnold and magic: "except for Keats and Shakespeare, the most magical of all our poets"; "this union of discordant sound with magical imagery is his chief characteristic as a poet"; "his genius for the evocation of 'natural magic', prevents this stoicism from growing dogmatic". Then come precise references to passages in *Celtic Literature*. Arnold is praised as a "great generaliser":

He was in his best vein, for instance, when he generalised about the contribution to the imagination of our race of its Celtic element, and indeed all through his poetry the glamour of *race-contrast* is a recurrent spring of romantic interest.

Tristram and Iseult is found to have the flavour and "peculiar [Welsh] enchantment" of that passage from *Kilhwch and Olwen* quoted in *Celtic Literature*, and Powys declares, "Arnold and Shakespeare only do justice to the Welsh genius", then half retracts, "though the quest for the essence of the Celtic genius is as absurd as a similar quest would be for the essence of the English genius". Finally, *Empedocles's* yearning for "that state of blessed existence without motion or thought, which was interrupted when we were born" is identified curiously with the notion implied in Arnold's perceptive critical observation in *Celtic Literature* on the *Mabinogi*: "The medieval story-teller is pillaging an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret", building from "stones 'not of this building' but of an older architecture, greater, cunninger, more majestic", which Powys reads as "a response to that 'house not made with hands' whose builder and ruler is Death". Here we are on the verge perhaps of an interesting interpretation of the significance of Arnold's quest for the nature of Celtic magic. But Powys leaves the possibility and ends his essay with a gesture of fending off "highly-trained" critics from "our whole

Anglo-Celtic imagination, its chaotic, meteoric, dark-star orbits, its terrific individualism, its heroic provincialism".

Powys responds head-on to Arnold's challenges only a year or two later. In his "Answer to a *Wales* Questionnaire [to Anglo-Welsh writers], Summer, 1939" (*Obstinate Cymric*, 1949) we discover that his use of the term "Anglo-Celtic" at the end of the Matthew Arnold essay showed some valuing of Arnold's aesthetic wish to blend "Saxon" and "Celtic" modes of life. Powys seems to suggest, in his own way, a creative fusion that is centred, however, on Welsh identity.

I take it [the term Anglo-Welsh], should mean the same thing (in another connection) as Brito-Roman. This would and does represent a mingling (as wonderful and attractive as the mingling of Pagan and Christian in the early Italian Renaissance) of Roman tradition and British tradition.

An Anglo-Welsh writer, according to this view, would be a writer who united . . . the traditions of the English and the Welsh . . .

I follow Matthew Arnold in holding that the 'Celtic strain' in Shakespeare is of the utmost value and interest; and in Milton, too! But these are hardly 'Anglo-Welsh writers'!

This deep psychological mingling of the Anglo- and the Welsh is something much more subtle and spiritual than writing about Welsh things.

In his essay, "Welsh Culture—Inclusive or Exclusive?" (*Obstinate Cymric*), the consideration of the inauguration of the *Welsh Review* together with Saunders Lewis's declaration in 1939 that Anglo-Welsh literature is a mirage, brings Powys to a further elaboration of Arnold's ideas. Arnold's generalisations about races he sees as literary, socially ideal, but unpolitical notions and he works from them to a more actual precision. In this, Powys is concerned to realise the ideal Welsh character and from this an ideal Welsh literature and mythology. When, in the *Wales* Questionnaire, he refers to the Welsh language (which he was learning at that time) he is dismissive of the importance of maintaining the Welsh language as a political instrument:

the Welsh National Spirit has had to bank itself up in the Welsh language for want of being able to express itself politically.

(Arnold's wish to rid Welsh "practical, political, social life" of the Welsh language is thus dismissed as insignificant.)

But Powys's main interest in the Welsh language is because it is backward-looking, relating to the survival of the past, rather than to racial survival in the future. The Welsh language is for him "Aboriginal", keeping touch with the very origins of man and the seeds of creative life. This is shown, for example, in the thoughts which come from the hearing of 'Taliesin's chant to the wind' (*Maiden Castle*, 1936).

This old Welsh . . . must be the most primitive of all tongues. It sounds as if human invention, human necessities, human thought even, barely entered into it: as if its rhythm were identical with the orchestration of the planet, whose only notes are the motions of air and water and its only burden the ancient sorrow of the earth. What he's muttering now must be what the spirits of space must have heard, rising night by night, day by day, through millions of ages, from an earth that as yet knew no organic life.

He is however, as he shows in "Welsh Culture", interested in the language as "the representing of everything characteristic and interesting in the Welsh temperament"; thus he stresses that "There would be no Anglo-Welsh language at all if the Welsh language hadn't been a living language for so long" and likens Anglo-Welsh writers to the Anglican priesthood subsisting on the Mother Church—to outsiders all Christians.

Powys's development of Arnold's notion of the Welsh, with, like Arnold, a favourable view of *eisteddfodau* and a popular culture, is based on the primary concern in *The Study of Celtic Literature* with essential character.

Every Anglo-Welshman should decide in his own mind what it is that he *wants most* to draw upon amid his few drops of Welsh blood and his smattering of Welsh tradition. Matthew Arnold's beautiful phrase *natural magic* will not help us much; for that applies

to an assumed "Celtic" note in English literature and we are after something more narrowly Welsh.

Despite his dismissal of the quest for national "genius" as "absurd" in *The Pleasures of Literature*, in "Welsh Culture" Powys attempts a narrow definition of "the very essence of the Welsh Spirit" based first of all on a reading of the *Mabinogion* and the *Brut*, but looking on to Huw Menai and Caradoc Evans.

May we not hazard the suggestion that it lies in a certain airy detachment from pedestrian reality, in a queer gift for escaping from the heavy rubble of objective truth into an "overland", or an "underland", like the *Annwn* conquered by Pwyll, where "at a clap of thunder and a fall of mist" the peculiarities of the human heart are safe from attack?

. . . isn't every Welshman seeking an escape by feeling rather than a conviction by understanding?

. . . I think it is this vivid relish for the crazy happenings of life combined with the wistful and weary agnosticism of a very ancient race as to the causes—beyond the obvious "fate" or *tynged* of personal peculiarities—that produce these happenings, that is the dominant note running through the whole of Welsh literature.

Finally (and it is distorting to produce a summary of this) he detects the "spiritual detachment from the normalities of the earth" in the "Welsh spirit" as manifest in the Welsh writers' persistent perception of *cynneddf*, a "magical peculiarity" in human nature and fate which escapes logical explanation.

Powys argues primarily for his view of the Welsh character from the literature, unlike Arnold who finds a hypothetical character reflected in the literature. All the same, Powys in his description of the Welsh spirit may not seem to have moved very far from Arnold's definition of the Celt. The differences lie mostly in emphases and attitudes and these make a vital difference between them. Where Arnold's feelings towards the Welsh are ambivalent, Powys's are not. He ends his essay in looking towards a future

represented by the idea of the Anglo-Welsh writing as though the last four centuries have not passed.

Here . . . is what I came to Wales to find . . . a link between the spring-time of modern christendom and our modern age.

The source of this writing

is deeper than culture, more diffused than tradition, wider than language. It is the spirit of the Welsh character. It is the occult secret of the most conservative, the most introverted, the most mysterious nation that has ever existed on the earth outside of China.

In *The Pleasures of Literature*, Powys writes about Arnold's poetry from a tacit assumption that Arnold has affinity with the "Celt" and is expressing Celtic temperament in his ideas and style. He does not, apparently, remark this as ironic in view of Arnold's expressed attitude to the Celt in *The Study of Celtic Literature*, and

this suggests that Powys read Arnold here too as predominantly sympathetic with the Celt. If, in *Celtic Literature*, Arnold's perpetual inner conflict between an inclination to spiritual detachment and an involvement with the world is expressed in relation to the Welsh, that is, sympathising with their Celtic "sensibility" yet feeling that it should be controlled, he is different from Powys. Powys seeks and claims identification without restraint: "We Anglo-Welsh writers"; thus he possibly achieves greater precision in his lengthy, various and detailed analyses of the Welsh character in his essays (which I have only glanced at here) and in his novels. Perhaps some members of the "mysterious nation" will venture opinions as to Powys's success or failure in divining "the spirit of the Welsh character".

A Tribute to a Friend, Sylvia Townsend Warner

Sylvia Townsend Warner died in the Spring of 1978

This is a reprinting of T. F. Powys's Foreword to her *A Moral Ending, And Other Stories*, 1931.

In the early days of the propagation of the Christian religion there was one doubt that perplexed and troubled the minds of more than one of the Holy Fathers who strove for the unity of the Faith.

The doubt was a simple one. Would the All-Wise be likely to add to his other cares and vexations connected with the extraordinary creation of mankind upon the earth, by giving to woman the surprising gift of a living soul? One Father thought Yea, another Nay. There would have been no difficulty of decision had one of these doubting Solomons been fortunate enough, being caught in a storm of rain in the city gardens, to encounter Miss Sylvia Townsend Warner.

Time is as nothing to a good man. We may be sure that the honest Father, whoever he was, for being above us we had better not mention his name, had read *Lolly Willowes* and knew well enough that Mr. Saunter, leaning on the gate, was a pleasant, unaffected young man enough, but no more, and that Caroline was a tedious bluebottle.

The wise Saint knowing her writing, and wishing, of course, to hear her voice too, led her in the spirit under the pleasant shelter of a convenient grove, that though once used for pagan purposes was now employed as a mere arbour. Once there the good man taking Miss Warner's hand and looking seriously upon her, and a little sadly too, asked his question in good Greek, a language that the lady understood.

"Would you be so good, Miss Warner, as

to tell me what kind of a thing a woman's soul is, for from my experience of the sex I incline to the belief that she has one?"

"The field is full of complacent witnesses," Miss Warner replied modestly, "and yet I do not like to refuse you an answer to so simple a question, for I am not one of those who consider that woman is made to ask and man to answer."

"Say on," said the Father sternly, drawing her a little farther under the trees.

"No one," said Miss Warner with a smile, "can fully understand the nature of a woman's soul unless they have first read *The True Heart*." The Holy Man bowed.

"But tell me," he asked, "for I am one who loves all that you write, what a woman's soul is really like?"

"It is not like a chivvied piece of paper down Apsley Terrace," replied the lady.

"Do not trifle with me," said the good man, looking nervously into the bushes to see if a satyr were there.

"Are you so very anxious to know the truth?" asked Miss Warner.

"I certainly am," replied he, "for at the next Synod I have promised to read a paper upon the subject, and to whom shall I go for advice but to you?"

"Then I will tell you," replied Sylvia, lighting a cigarette, after first tapping it upon the back of her hand. "A woman's soul is a lovely bit of stuffing in a green goose."

"Ah!" cried the Father, starting off in a hurry. "Let's to dinner—"

The secret of Sylvia Warner's success in

literature is that she understands exactly how much flavouring to put into a dish—And she never lets the cake burn—Sometimes she snatches out a potato before it is quite done, but she puts it back again with a pretty fillip, so that it is impossible to notice that anything is lacking in the pie.

She knows what she likes. Her witty

writings are formed of good things, being in their natures like a piece of patchwork, sewn together in 1746, a tall pair of candlesticks, a fire of drift-wood, a bottle of old wine, a needle and thread—And a red slipper.

Miss Warner prefers a grandfather clock to a gramophone.

T. F. Powys

Hast Thou Found Honey?

Matthew walked slowly up the green hill. The bees went by him, he heard the sound of them—each one a little eager life in the air seeking for honey. The spring had come at last and the air was silent. Matthew watched a white cloud for a moment, that hung over the hill. The cloud took the form of a slender hand whose fingers spread over the earth and then vanished. The trees were all turned green by the cloud; the white and red apple blossom coyly tempted the bees, who each entered the womb of a flower and stole the sweets. Matthew noticed the butterflies; they were hungry for honey too, but they did not ravish the flowers so directly as the bees—they fluttered as if they only courted the sun. But all the while they knew what flower to go to and where the honey was.

Others too had found honey. Long Tom Ford in his black coat, for the day was Sunday, was leading Winnie Bond, his arm like a black band about her whiteness, to a soft mossy bank where he would seek as ruthlessly as the bees her sabbath store.

But all that pretty lovers still call honey had been denied to Matthew. Mrs Lind, his mother, a Godly widow, had guarded him even from the scent of flowers. She hadn't sent Matthew to a school, where sweets are sometimes spoken of, but had directed that he should be taught his grammar by the Rev. R. Hollamby, who at twenty had got him into Virgil to seek for honey there.

"Hast thou found honey? Eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled overwell, and vomit it."

Few visitors came to Coombe Hall, for Mrs Lind was a careful matron, though a rich; but Mr Hollamby was often there at tea, and his grave look discountenanced all lightness and pleasure. And besides, what

need was there of visitors, for Matthew's future was determined. Now that he was 20 he was to go out and learn a little farming from a practised man, so that he might become his mother's steward, and manage the home farm together with another nearby, whose tenant had ill behaved himself. There was Beatrice Sayland too, of Matthew's own age and the daughter of wealthy neighbours, who was naturally destined, for Mr Hollamby had been her tutor too, to marry Matthew. That was all agreed, and in three years Beatrice was to be the bride.

Matthew came down the hill to tea. Beatrice was there, conversing in a very proper manner about twill sheets and doyleys and how the poor ought to be managed and what was to be done with Mrs Lucy Flood who had been driven out of her mind because a dog had bitten her.

They were all old servants at the Hall—there was no honey there except the little maid Winnie Bond, who was rarely seen. And there was no honey in Miss Beatrice either, who was far too well nurtured and washed, and was as disdainful of all country sweetness as could be.

The conversation changed. Mr Hollamby introduced the subject of flowers, and a discussion followed in which Miss Beatrice, for honey was never mentioned, showed that she knew as much of the subject, or even more, than her master.

The next day was Matthew's last to be spent with his books. He would relinquish Virgil with a sigh. He had enjoyed some of the lines he had read there; they made him think of honey, at least he fancied so, though he had never tasted honey like Long Tom Ford.

He walked slowly down the green lane to the Rectory in order to read for the last time

what he had prepared with Mr Hollamby. Mr Hollamby's grey eyes looked sad. He had always preferred Matthew to Beatrice, perhaps because Matthew's hours were morning ones while Beatrice had brought her work in the afternoon. Also, when the glebe farmer's swine got into the Rectory garden and rooted about the grass in the lawn after pignuts, Beatrice would do nothing but watch them, which grieved Mr Hollamby, who wished her to keep to her task. But Matthew, when he saw the pigs come, took no notice at all.

A young man who is brought up strictly among old servants and who would as soon touch a skinned rabbit as a kitchen maid for very shame of the disgrace, isn't likely to know the taste of a pot of honey. Matthew's mother, as well as Mr Hollamby and Beatrice too, believed him to be a nice young man, a good son and destined perhaps to become a virtuous father.

The same behaviour a young gentleman uses in one village is expected of him in another. And Mrs Lind had no kind of apprehension for the safety of her son, when she arranged for him to gain a wider knowledge of agriculture with Mr Grassley, a relative of her housekeeper, who lived about 30 miles from Coombe, and was a large dairy farmer.

As soon as he knew his mother's wish Matthew became quieter than ever, and wondered often whether or no he might taste a sip of honey at the farmer's house. He would only taste that he might know how sweet it was, just as a pretty experience, that he could remember with a smile when he grew to be old. A kiss even, he hardly dared to hope for, for Mr Hollamby had told him and his mother had told him, that God's punishment falls heavily upon the wanton. If he found honey at the farm, he would only take what would be sufficient for him, though now that he was so near to going he began to think better of a skinned rabbit, and he supposed that Long Tom Ford was a hero who knew something about sweet food.

Mrs Lind never inquired whether Mr Grassley had a family; she had always

heard that the farmer was a respectable man who paid his rent, and as he was her tenant that was all that she wished to know. Matthew's luggage was sent by the carrier while he decided to walk to the farm so that he might notice the more carefully the crops and tillage by the way.

Mr Hollamby accompanied Matthew a mile upon his journey, informing him as they walked together that he was the only hope of his good mother, who ever prayed for his soul's salvation, while he himself, being childless, had always looked upon Matthew as a son too, and trusted that the young man wouldn't forget his Bible. "Beware of all things, Matthew," said Mr Hollamby, "that taste sweet. For what is sweet in the mouth turns to bitterness in the stomach."

Matthew chose the lanes for his walk where the butterflies were happy and the bees were busy. The month was July and all the land was one fair scented flower. Matthew was surprised at himself, he walked so merrily, for like all the insects he saw he fancied himself to be going directly to the sweets he wished to taste. At Coombe he had been to all the maids exactly like an image in the church. Winnie had never passed with Long Tom Ford without pulling her arm away from him and curtsying humbly. And Beatrice, so properly educated, was no mystery at all. Her taste was dull as a winter's noon; there was nothing about her that wasn't scoured and sharpened and blamelessly active. Her mein was proper, she had a right knowledge of her woman's body, and commanded its manner like a grave bank manager. She knew all about motherhood and no mossy lane could teach her anything, for all that kind of thing was bread and dripping to Beatrice.

Matthew's heart beat gladly. He was tired, but walked under the green shade of the trees and along the lanes where his heart fed upon the hot sun. At the farm gate Mr Grassley met him with a hay fork in his hand, for he had only that moment returned from the fields. Mrs Grassley was a fine large woman who smiled like a wise

big cat, and Matthew rested contented in the farmer's cool dining room, that was supported by great oaken beams.

Before Matthew had time to notice them three girls were seated at the tea table; they were Mr Grassley's daughters. Nancy, the youngest was sixteen, and she stole a coy glance at the young squire. At first they were all as quiet as mice, but soon they began to chatter gaily, and each looked boldly at Matthew. He had found honey.

As soon as tea was over, Mr Grassley walked off to the Inn, Nancy and Ruby hurried to the dairy to skim the cream, and as Matthew wished to post a letter Phyllis, the eldest girl, said she would show him the nearest way to the village, that led through a little copse.

Matthew walked by her side and looked at her greedily.

Phyllis walked loiteringly, putting a foot out as though she had a mind to let it linger, as though every step were telling a tale and that a lover's. Matthew felt her nearness as a gift, a gift of a taste of honey. But something had to happen to open the way.

Matthew fell down; he had caught his foot in a root and fell heavily. He hurt his ankle a little, and Phyllis, in spite of her laughter, helped him to a seat . . .

Matthew thought no more of the letter to be posted. He touched her hand. He held her hand and she smiled. In a few minutes she was in his arms.

"Oh," she said, "why it's too quick you know—we've only just met. I didn't come out to do this . . . but we can talk now it's over . . ."

Instead of waking and finding the house in flames and Phyllis and he lost souls burning in them, when Matthew came down to breakfast everything was simple and happy, with the summer sun shining. The girls, clean and smiling, came in from the dairy and Mr Grassley greeted Matthew with a hearty handshake, and as soon as breakfast was over took him to the fields.

Matthew looked strangely at the trees and green hedges as if he were trying to remember the taste of something that he

had eaten the evening before, and ere he reached the hayfield he had a mind to feed again.

Mr Grassley set him to turn the hay, and he did this so daintily, as if he turned the pages of a pretty book, but with one idea only—to continue his feast of honey as soon as he could.

And he hadn't to wait long. A girl's figure in a white frock came through the meads with her father's dinner. This was Ruby, who came to the men smiling and ready, for the sun had warmed all her plumpness like pretty red apples to the very core.

Matthew pressed his fork deep into the warm earth and walked off with Ruby, who said that the bull might do her hurt if she returned home alone. As soon as they were out of sight of the men Matthew took hold of her. The sun burned and scorched but there was a shady bank of cool white clover near. The bees were busy there, and Matthew thought that as they ate, why should not he?

"Oh, that's what you want, is it," said Ruby, and let him have his will. Matthew took the feast more slowly this time, and tasted more discernedly, while Ruby enjoyed herself as much as any sparrow, and teased him too.

During Matthew's meal one of the workmen had crept up to the hedge that shaded the bank, pretending that he had left his bottle there, and witnessed the merriment; and when Matthew returned to the field Mr Grassley, by a wink and a shrug, showed that he knew what had happened.

Matthew worked with a will—his shyness was gone and he joked and jested with the men in country fashion while the sunshine poured upon them in a steady golden stream.

At tea time he supposed that Ruby would avoid him and hang her head like a beaten outraged thing, but instead she was all happiness, and laughed gaily as she ate the bread and butter and then hurried to the dairy to prepare the churn. The weather was so warm that the butter was to be made late at night when the stars were out and the

air cool. Farmer Grassley and his wife retired to bed at their usual time, which was eleven, and left the three girls with Matthew, to churn the butter.

Matthew, with the taste of honey in his heart, found it hard to understand how they, with the exception of the youngest, Nancy, who was even more tender eyed and pretty than her sisters, could take the task of churning the butter so very seriously. Matthew churned, but he could not keep his eyes off Nancy, who always managed to be near him, and to show him herself in pleasing movements. It was midnight when the little yellow blobs of butter were to be seen upon the glass of the churn, and then the washing and the weighing began.

Nancy had been near to Matthew all the while, and now she declared that it was time for her to go to bed because it was her turn to be first up in the morning.

Nancy blushed shyly and put her lips near to Matthew, smiled and kissed his cheek. Phyllis and Ruby were busy with the butter.

"Come along too," whispered Nancy.

Matthew obeyed and followed her into the bedroom, that was shared by all the girls. He fell greedily upon the honey.

In an hour Phyllis and Ruby came to bed too; they were merry and glad because the butter had been so great a success, and they all wanted to be happy as Nancy.

Early the next day Matthew crept to his own bedroom when he heard Mr Grassley stirring. But he didn't go to work in the fields because he had filled himself with sweetness. He returned to Coombe. A sickness seized him and he could never again raise his eyes to look at a woman.

Time passed; Beatrice married another, and Matthew, shut up in his room with his books, heeded nothing.

Harlot Honey

The people of Tadnol had odd notions. They believed in signs and wonders. The signs were shown and the wonders happened.

A few hours before Mrs Truggin died, Mr Truggin was sitting over the fire. His candle burnt badly and a large piece of wax hung down. Mr Truggin carried the candle upstairs. He showed the shroud to his wife. Mrs Truggin committed herself to God, and Mr Truggin dug her grave beside her first husband.

That event happened in the Autumn; the time of year was now May. Mr Truggin, being alone, found his cottage too large for him. He decided to let all the front part, to keep the back kitchen for a living room for himself, and to sleep in a kind of hole where firewood had been stored. If sticks and coal could get in there, so could Mr Truggin. He swept out the hole, made his bed inside, and when it was light enough he amused

himself by watching the black spiders.

No one asks for anything in Tadnol. There they wait for the movements of God—who sends a sign and then the wonders happen.

Tadnol was away from the main road—it was near to a river that seemed to have lost itself in the meadows, and if one had a mind to a tenant, that tenant must needs be the infant teacher.

Mr Truggin had come home to his back kitchen. Mr Truggin was the village sexton; he was also gardener to the Rev. Silas Dottery, who paid him his wages. All that day he had been mowing the rectory lawn. Mr Truggin would have made an excellent seraph.* He watched his master and did as he did. He waited for the spirit to move him and then he moved. Mr Truggin had grown a beard in imitation of Mr Dottery's, he

* Powys deleted 'seraph' but did not replace it.

walked like his master, and he liked to be told what to do either from within or from without.

Mr Truggin finished his tea and sat before the fire. A noble poet once said that the summer only came to England for one month. Mr Truggin went further—he never believed in summer at all. The fact that his potatoes grew then was no proof to Mr Truggin that the season was kinder. The green leaves were only a truth to him for when they died and fell on the rectory lawn they had to be swept away. And whether the sun was hot or cold Mr Truggin never gave it a thought. All weathers were alike to Mr Truggin, except thunder weather that sometimes turned Landlord Toole's beer sour.

Outside Mr Truggin's back kitchen the evening sun shone warm. Tadnol looked at its best: dace rose on the river after the may fly, suddenly all the land had become, with the exception of the heath, a dazzling green. Mr Truggin's own well tended garden showed that spring had really come.

Mr Truggin looked at the fire. He had hardly sat down upon his stool, or chair without its back, than his nose itched. Mr Truggin scratched his nose meditatively. He let it alone and waited, perhaps it might itch again. He had not to wait long before this happened. Mr Truggin nodded his head. This was the second sign. At tea time he had dropped a spoon upon the floor. And now here was his nose itching.

Mr Truggin looked for the third sign, which would mean a certainty—it came. A nasty piece of cobweb-looking soot hung down from the uppermost bar of the grate.

"A stranger coming to Tadnol," said Mr Truggin, "and a woman to this house."

Mr. Truggin got up, he wanted to be the first to see her. There were two roads at Tadnol, the lower road and the higher. The lower road meandered along by the river and entered the village beside Mrs Spenke's farm. The upper road came boldly along the heath and suddenly without any warning dropped down a little hill into Tadnol.

Tadnol had two natures, the green underworld and the barren overworld. In the

overworld there were dry sticks to be gathered, in the underworld sweet flowers. Mr Truggin had a mind to gather some dead pieces of gorse. He had finished his gardening for the time and had nothing better to do.

Besides, Mr Truggin had his reasons for climbing the hill. Everyone knew that all interesting things came to Tadnol by that road. An enormous snake four feet long had been seen by little Betty Spenke coming down that road. If the Devil came to Tadnol he would come that way, if God came He would come that way too. The road frightened the children, for one parent would say, "Thee'll meet the Devil," and another, "God be about up there."

Mr Truggin went out of his cottage door. Upon the other side of the way, in Mr Lord's orchard, every apple tree was out in full blossom. The sweetest, the most delicious beauty was everywhere. All nature was become a wonder of soft colour. Here was a sure beauty, that needed only eyes to delight in it, a beauty that called as a spring bride to the heart.

The white and pink blossoms shone in the evening sunlight. And so they might; Mr Truggin heeded them not. The Inn where Mr Toole was landlord awaited him. Beauty was something Mr Truggin did not trouble himself about. Beer was another matter.

Mr Truggin stood still in the lane. "Where be going," said Farmer Spenke, who met him. "I be in want of a few sticks for the fire," said Mr Truggin humbly, "but 'e haven't no woon, no stranger who be in need of a house?" Farmer Spenke shook his head. Mr Truggin walked on.

His mind was simple; one thing engrossed it. He wanted to let his cottage. He must be the first to meet the stranger. He walked slowly up the hill towards the heath. Betty and Minnie Spenke were running down it with their hoops. Mr Truggin made them run the faster by calling out the devil followed. Mr Truggin believed himself that the devil if he came to Tadnol would come by that road.

Mr Truggin despised beauty as a good

gardener should. But he thought himself very distinguished. He had a master, the Rev. Silas Dottery, who instructed him in great matters. The Rev. Silas was always in his study reading or writing, and Mr Truggin had the charge of the parish. Whatever he thought his master ought to know, that he told him; and any matter that might disturb his master he told him not.

About his master he was always very mysterious. Farmer Spenke's five daughters were all under ten, and Mr Truggin had once told them that the Rev. Silas Dottery was God. "Then who be you?" asked Betty, the eldest. "The Devil's brother," replied Mr Truggin.

Among other matters of general knowledge, Mr Truggin was interested in words. Being a man of pride, he often used words that other people seldom used. As he saw the sooty piece of cobweb upon the bar of the grate, the word "harlot" came into his mind. The word conveyed nothing to him except a word. Had "otter" come to him instead it would have meant nothing. Words came to Mr Truggin without ideas. Words came alone. But sometimes he put them together.

Mr Truggin climbed the hill, and he was now on the heath. He had left the spring and stepped into winter. There the time of year might have been a December noon. All was yet barren and dead.

Had it not been for the hand of man, the heath would have been covered with beautiful gorse blooms. But all the gorse had been burnt so that wood might be

gathered. Mr Truggin went to a burnt bush and began to break out charred pieces of stock. He had hardly made a little heap of blacked sticks, before he saw a woman near to him.

She had come, he thought, along the Childs Madder road. But Mr Truggin did not think of her as a woman, he thought of her as a young girl, which was what she looked like. Mr Truggin saw her as the tenant for his cottage.

Mr Truggin looked at her lips, they panted. And at her breasts, that her thin blouse hardly hid, and they panted too. Mr Truggin saw that her eyes were merry ones, and that she had no hat.

"As I came along," she said, "a gust of wind took it off."

"They wind be called Sir Roger Blunt," said Mr Truggin, "and thee be the school teacher."

"Miss Chloe Huddy," replied the young woman.

Mr Truggin stared at Chloe. He thought he had heard of her.

"My hat is blown into a May bush," she said. "I will get it," said Mr Truggin gallantly.

Mr Truggin walked beside Chloe. She had pointed out a tall May bush, the only green thing in that world.

"There be something in thee's hat," said Mr Truggin as they drew near to the bush.

"'Tis a swarm of bees," exclaimed Miss Huddy.

A word came into Mr Truggin's mind and met another. "Harlot Honey," he said.

The Scapegoat

The Reverend William Tunley stood beside his border fence, that protected his kitchen garden from the wilderness. This wilderness was not the pleasant grove, planted with suitable trees, that the poet Cowper used to wander in, when he noticed the doings of

the little birds, and saw how a wanton twig will hold a fairy icicle on a winter's day.

The wilderness Mr Tunley looked upon was the Ashdown Heath—a sour, mournful waste, like a man's life who has seen no joy. A sandy place, but the soil, though sand,

was of a dull colour, to match the water pools, that lay so silent and still, even though the November winds blew over them.

Only a few thorn bushes were there, that leant towards the east, like sorry tattered beggars, who looked for a sun to rise that never came.

There were some gorse bushes too, though meagre ones, and as the November day grew dim, these bushes assumed the shape of strange beasts, as if they only awaited the arrival of a lonely one, to move upon him and tear him.

About a mile away across the darkening moor, there was a small sandy hill, which gave the true melancholy note to the scene, for the hill caught the eye before the watcher lost the view in the distance, and demanded that only the dull earthy heath should be looked upon, and that none should gaze into the nothingness beyond. About Black Noll Hill there curled a soft white mist, moving like a snake near to the ground, to take its way across the heath, hiding the bare ground for a moment and then vanishing away like a piteous prayer . . .

In the parlour of Ashdown Vicarage, Mrs Tunley had begun to work her sewing machine; she had moved the reading lamp near so that it threw its light upon her work.

Soon the soothing sound of the machine began, and when she had gone down the length of the skirt she was making, and stopped the machine, the kettle that was boiling for tea began its song too.

Elsa Tunley, the daughter of the house, put down her work too, a frock she was embroidering for a party at the Squire's.

The two women looked at one another.

In the corner of the same room, there appeared a different order of things, ill suited to the pretty furniture and domestic quiet of the ladies. This was a rough deal table, littered with papers. Here and there upon this table were patches of ink that had dried into the wood. Under the table and also upon it, there were books, and one of these, Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, supported a candle stuck into an empty inkpot. A Bible also lay ready to the hand.

Evidently the last occupier of this queer study had left it in a hurry, for the curtain that usually concealed this portion of the room had not been drawn.

Mrs Tunley spoke.

"Sarah Cutt has been here," she said. "She told your father that Nancy's trouble is all his fault."

Elsa Tunley looked indifferent.

"Mrs Cutt was horribly rude," said Mrs Tunley. "She abused and reviled him. She cried out that it was the sermon he had preached in the summer that had done all the mischief. I hardly like to tell you, Elsa, what she said."

Elsa moved the kettle a little; she seemed not to care whether her mother stopped talking or not.

"Sarah said it was his text," observed Mrs Tunley, looking at the writing corner from whence the text had come. She asked Elsa to draw the curtain.

"The text was," said Mrs Tunley, when Elsa had returned to her chair, "at least according to Mrs Cutt, 'His left hand shall be under, and His right hand . . .' It does come somewhere in the Bible."

"Very likely," said Elsa, coldly.

"Your papa said that she quoted the verse wrongly," remarked Mrs Tunley. "He tried to find the place but he could not do so. Sarah Cutt said that Nancy went out of Church all in a flutter to find John Cockaday and then the trouble was done. Sarah went away in a great rage. It was the same, you know, when we were at Little Dodder, people were always blaming him for everything."

Elsa, who had often blamed him too, said nothing.

"Where is papa now?" she asked.

"I daresay he is out on the heath," replied her mother.

"And we shall be bothered with his wet clothes," cried Elsa, crossly.

There were steps in the passage, and the clatter of cups. Elsa went to open the door. Mrs Cribb came in with the tea things.

When Mrs Cribb was in the kitchen she would talk to Mrs Tubb, the charwoman, about the harm that Mr Tunley had done

her. He had taught her to sin, she would tell Mrs Tubb, because in one of his prayer meetings, he had observed that a large sin has a large forgiveness. Mrs Cribb wished to sin largely, but to do so she looked for a helper, which she could not obtain.

Mrs Cribb laid the cloth and set down the tea things, but she did not hurry to go.

"Mr Cockaday has been, Miss," she said to Elsa.

Mr Cockaday was a young farmer's son, whose attentions Elsa said she despised. But as he was turned out of the front door, he came in at the back, for all doors were the same to Mr Cockaday where a young woman was concerned.

"He came to complain," said Mrs Cribb.

Elsa shrugged her shoulders.

"Not about you, Miss, but about Mr Tunley. He let the bull out."

"How did that happen?" asked Mrs Tunley, who always liked Mrs Cribb's stories.

"The bull be fierce," said Mrs Cribb, "and no doubt a clergyman who teaches others to sin taught the bull to do likewise. The bull leapt the fence to go after Mr Tunley, who was walking in the footpath, but as there were young beasts in the field he went after them instead."

"But didn't my husband drive him back?" said Mrs Tunley.

"No he did not," replied Mrs Cribb, "and they young beasts didn't aught to be visited; Mr Cockaday do say they'll lose pounds over the business."

"Papa is always doing something to annoy people," said Elsa, whose interest in one animal had made her more friendly to another.

Mrs Cribb left the room noisily.

Presently, after the mother and daughter had finished all the toast and cake, someone opened the front door, moving it gently as if loath to enter.

In a moment or two Mr Tunley was in the room.

He had entered timidly, as if he hardly expected to be allowed to stay. His clothes, threadbare enough, were wet with the mist of the evening, and his beard, that was

white and, though trimmed, was grown long, dropped moisture. He appeared in that clean tidy room like a beast from the night.

He had only sat down and taken up a crust of bread that neither of the women had cared to take, when Mrs Tunley said, "Did you notice the bulbs, dear, when you dug the front bed this morning. I had meant that bed to remain as it was, and in the spring we should have had a fine show of flowers. How could you have been so careless?"

"I forgot the bulbs," answered Mr Tunley.

"Sarah told us you were out there," observed Elsa, "she went by the crocus bed, on her way to the back door to complain about Nancy."

Mr Tunley looked at the drawn curtains that hid his table. He wished himself behind it.

But Elsa had more to say. She looked at her mother.

"I would never have refused Mr Cockaday," she said angrily, "only Papa would not turn Mr Tusser out of the glebe farm. Though the house is small it would have suited us for a while."

There was a knock at the door and Mrs Cribb entered.

"Is it my husband?" asked Mrs Tunley.

"Yes," answered Mrs Cribb, "I am always being pestered with complaints, and now it's Squire Yollop's servant who has come to request Mr Tunley not to encourage Tinker Jar about the place, for the man is a great thief, and he would steal even the souls of the people if he had his way."

"Have you seen this beggar today?" asked Mrs Tunley of her husband.

"Oh yes," he answered, "he is a quiet old man, and has travelled in many places."

Mrs Tunley looked with a curious contempt upon her husband.

"I gave him a shilling for mending the Sexton's kettle," observed Mr Turnley.

"He should only have charged twopence," said Elsa.

"Squire Yollop hopes you will send him

off," said Mrs Cribb, "he says it's all your fault that the hen houses are robbed."

Mr Tunley drank his tea hurriedly and withdrew behind his curtain.

Mr Tunley lit his candle. There, in that tiny place, he was safe. Had he used the large study, that indeed he was not permitted to do because of the expense of light and fire, he would not be so secure. But his wife would never dare to expose his presence where he was now. His untidy habits, his foolish sermon writing, could never have been shown to a visitor. There was only a stool to sit upon, but he sat contentedly. There was the heath too, that he could go to.

He tried to think out his next Sunday's sermon. He shivered, the cold November mists had eaten into his bones. He wished to describe the miracle of the loaves and fishes, in a way that would appeal to a congregation who never wanted food. He could think of nothing to say.

The whole day had been a long trial for him. He could never understand why his wife and daughter, whom he loved dearly, should always wish him out of their sight. His one candle burned dimly; he pressed his face with his hands.

What had he ever done that was good? Nothing. But he knew that no one of themselves can do good. He was unable even to step out into the garden without bringing trouble. If he took up a spade he did harm.

Mr Tunley started up, but he did not leave his corner. Someone had pulled the front door bell. When this had happened before when he was sermon writing, his wife would hurry him out, and expect him to receive the visitor.

But now with the suddenness of the ring, he must have been utterly forgotten.

Mrs Cribb tried to announce the visitor, who, however, pushed by her and announced himself. He was in a great rage, and named himself Archdeacon Temple.

There had been reports sent to him, he said, from a farmer, Mr Cockaday, about Mr Tunley's behaviour. But what had really made him angry was that he had fallen over a tree in the churchyard—for one way to the

Vicarage led through the churchyard—a branch of a tree had fallen across the path and instead of cutting this up and moving the pieces out of the way, Mr Tunley, hoping to please his wife, had dug the flower bed.

Archdeacon Temple, leaving his car in the lane, had taken the churchyard path. He had fallen over the tree, and committed sin too, for when he fell he cursed God. His leg was bruised; he came to the house in a great rage, meaning to blame Mr Tunley for all that had happened. The fact that he had hurt himself over the tree in the path, that Mr Tunley should have taken away, made him believe all the lies that had been told him in Farmer Cockaday's letter. "For," thought he, "a man who is capable of hurting an Archdeacon so badly that he curses God, is able and willing to commit any crime."

Archdeacon Temple spoke strongly on the subject. He was a big man, and fell heavily. He was afraid, he said, that Mr Tunley had been a little too familiar with a young woman, Nancy Cutt; according to Farmer Cockaday he had spoken about her too kindly in a sermon.

There were other complaints too. He had lunched that very day with Squire Yollop, who told him that Mr Tunley consorted often—and even was seen to drink with him at an inn, where the pair talked of religion—with an old reprobate named Jar, who the little village children had once heard boasting, when in his cups, that he had made the world. Mr Temple thought it best that Mr Tunley should exchange his living for another parish, more out of the way, more desolate—a wilderness.

The Archdeacon had refused to sit down, but on his way to the door he saw Elsa a little nearer, who had the sort of womanly shape that since women were created had always pleased the priestly nature. Mr Temple was angry with himself for going, but still he went.

When Archdeacon Temple said the word "Wilderness" Mr Tunley stood up. He trembled, with cold perhaps, certainly not with anger.

Evidently those who lived in the world, and who had dealings with him, found him a difficulty, a trouble; how could they be kind to him if he troubled them?

The other side of Black Noll there was a desolate pool of water; perhaps those waters would be kinder to him than his family and friends. He moved the curtain.

"You heard what the Archdeacon said," remarked Elsa coldly, when she saw her father.

Mr Tunley looked at her joyfully. He would flee into the wilderness.

"The Archdeacon said you ought to find a desolate place to go to," observed Mrs Tunley.

"I am going," he said.

Mr Tunley opened the front door and went out. The west wind, wet with the sea mists, still blew, but the night was not dark for the moon had risen.

Mr Tunley went swiftly through his garden, and coming to the border fence he stepped over. He walked upon the heath.

He gave a shout of joy. Why should he return? His own legs could carry him anywhere. He was not ashamed to beg.

He would look into the pond; if he wished he might descend into it—into the vast wilderness where time is nothingness.

As he walked, his body gathered strength from the ground, from the wild winds. The

free spirit of nature nourished his heart. What cared he for food or raiment? "Consider the lilies."

But he would have liked a word or two with Tinker Jar. Since he had first met him, Mr Tunley had grown very fond of this old man. He liked to see his great beard wag.

Mr Tunley came to Black Noll Hill. Should he go round the hill to reach the pond? No, he would climb the hill to feel the blast of wind at the top. The wind would rush by him, to where, to whither?

He cared not.

Mr Tunley climbed the hill and approached the top.

Then, to his surprise, upon turning a sheltered corner of the hill he came upon a man resting at his ease and warming his hands over a brushwood fire. The cave where the man sat was almost completely hidden; it had been hollowed out by summer children.

The glow of the fire gave the man's face a ruddy look. He was Tinker Jar.

Jar held out his hand to Mr Tunley.

"You have done me a mischief too," he said, "you have troubled me."

Mr Tunley turned away in sorrow, but Jar laughed joyfully.

"Ah, you have done me the greatest wrong of all," he cried. "You have made me love you."

Note

These three stories by T. F. Powys were all prepared for publication from manuscripts by Peter Riley and he has also provided the following information about them.

Hast Thou Found Honey and Harlot Honey come from T. F. Powys's final drafts. *The Scapegoat* exists in two versions, of which this is the earlier. In the revised version the central character becomes Mr Dirdoe who is not married. The conversation in the vicarage which forms the greater part of the story takes place in this revised version in the churchwarden's cottage, among Mr Tunley (the churchwarden), his wife, his daughter Elsa, and Mrs Cribb, in Mr Dir-

doe's absence, while he meditates alone at the vicarage. The Archdeacon speaks to Mr Dirdoe in person. The endings of the two versions are almost identical.

Hast Thou Found Honey (in some ways untypical of T. F. Powys) and *Harlot Honey* can only be dated as coming in Powys's "mature" period (roughly 1923-1930) whereas *The Scapegoat* appears to be a story written towards the very end of his writing career.

(*The Scapegoat* was produced by Peter Riley in 70 duplicated typescript copies in 1966.)

Peter Riley

T. F. Powys at Mappowder:

A consideration of his fiction in the light of the final twenty years of non-writing.

When a writer “retires” from writing, as T. F. Powys did in about 1933, it seems natural to wonder what became of the impetus, or what survived of the mental habits which informed the work. In the outstanding instance, that of Rimbaud, it seems that the impetus was translated completely into a life of action and travel to the extent that the identity of “poet” became completely alien. Indeed Rimbaud had also lived life to the full while he was writing, but it was a life marked by a series of dramatic turning-points or conversions, and the renunciation of poetry was the last of these. His writing career was complete, and he again sought to become a different person, and this was no greater a conversion than that from *Poésies* to *Les Illuminations* (with the intervening *Une Saison en Enfer* as catalyst to the change).

T. F. Powys was not in the least like this. His life and his writing career proceeded evenly, always writing the same kind of thing and never changing his way of life. After 1933 he continued to live in much the same way as he had before, which was a matter of “I did nothing; I went nowhere; I met nobody” as he himself put it in 1936.¹ What, then, was going on in his head during his final twenty years as a non-writer? Was the creative process simply cancelled, or was it instead halted short of its written manifestation?

I think that such a question can only be approached with reference to the nature of Powys’s writings during his whole career. It is a question of the kind of man he was, and how that showed itself in his work, but also of the actual nature of his work as a whole—its final drift, or strictly speaking its result, both for Powys and for his reader.

Such evidence as there is of Powys’s frame of mind in his years of retirement is contradictory in this matter, as well as generally uninformative. The interview *Why I Have Given Up Writing* of 1936 speaks of a dissatisfaction, a failure to reach a sense of achievement—“a stage of doubt, an inclination to do other things . . .” and also adds that the retirement from writing might prove to be temporary. These are surely symptoms rather than causes, and Powys would have us believe here that it was all decided as a wilful act for the best, and thus something in the nature of a conversion of life. Indeed he hints that writing was itself burdensome to him, and that he has now liberated himself from the interminable duties of realizing story after story.²

Early in the war Powys moved, for reasons of safety, away from the village of East Chaldon (near the coast), where he had lived since about 1915, to the village of Mappowder further inland, and here lived quietly and in more-or-less complete obscurity until he died in 1953. As what little notoriety he had as an author faded with the years, he was no longer bothered by interviewers asking why he had stopped, and there is almost nothing to tell us how his being may or may not have continued to relate to the body of strange stories he had produced in his prime of life.

In 1965 Drs Marius Buning and I toured these parts of Dorset seeking out people who had known Powys. There were few to be found. My outstanding impression was that Powys remained incommunicative on serious subjects and avoided mentioning his writings whenever possible. He shunned literary visitors (by escaping through a back window, it was said). His letters to J. C. Powys are mainly domestic with occasional

meditations in his typically wry mode on the inevitability of death and the futility of existence. His tiny cottage was pushed up against the bank of the graveyard so that as he lay in bed he was on a level with the buried, as he didn't fail to observe. He never entered into village life, such as it was—he spoke to few people. Every day he went the same walk. That was about it.

His intellectual world remained as it always had been—as opaque in his person as in his stories. Just as the tales present a virtually uninterpreted field of event, so his person resisted any disclosure of his sense of reality. The local vicar believed him to be a “devout Christian”; the doctor, an adoptive Buddhist, believed that Powys inclined towards Buddhism; someone else told us that he was sympathetic towards Fascism—this person was of course himself a Fascist believer. It swiftly became obvious that Powys mainly agreed, or appeared to, with those who talked, giving next to nothing of himself into the conversation.

This seems entirely at one with Powys's mode as a writer. The scenario he constructed in his fictions was neither discursive nor analytical, but worked by image, structure and ambiguity to form a quasi-archaic theatre of primal event. There was never any real authorial presence, direct or fictive, to mediate the narrative into the reader's perceptual field. Meaning remained always implicit, unrealised and deeply ambiguous. What we take from a Powys story in the way of interpretation or even articulation of the world (fatalism, moral sense, etc.) we do at the text's *suggestion* only, and there is no way of knowing how the text relates to a world of experience, authorial or otherwise. Simply a narrative construct is set up before us, which we take or leave as it is manifestly invented rather than recorded.

Powys himself was like this. Most of the time he presented the world with no more than a human presence, acting almost as a mirror to other people's insinuations rather than as a dynamic entity. He remained as impenetrable as the surface of his writing appears to be. But as soon as a person utters, in writing or speech, something *is*

revealed, if not directly then by implication in the mode and outcome of what is said. It is the silence of Powys's last twenty years which is impenetrable, as if he were determined actually to be the totally enigmatic format which his writings strove towards.

It is possible that in Mappowder we came across one lady who to some extent broke through Powys's dedicated reticence. This was Miss Vera Wainright, an admirer of his work who had moved to the village in the late 40s in order to become a neighbour of his. She compiled a short manuscript of notes of Powys's conversations with her when they walked together during the last four years of his life, and it is worth examining quite closely this, possibly the only testimony we have of Powys's last years, before turning to the tales themselves.

The notes were brief and disconnected, and again the main impression was of a lack of communication. But the point is that Miss Wainright did not, I think, present Powys with any strong discursive presence of her own for him to agree with (as he would have done), but in the main waited for him to utter, though her own personality undoubtedly coloured the text to some extent. What she noted down were the rare occasions when his conversation departed from the mundane or trivial into any kind of particularly characteristic generalisation or signification. There were only twenty such points over the four years, mostly rather “odd” remarks casually dropped by Powys out of any context.

I did not transcribe Miss Wainright's notes in full, but only noted the main points as she read aloud from her handwritten manuscript. These notes of mine are reproduced below, and represent only a summary of what she said. Powys is not quoted directly except where quotation marks are used.

There are fifteen points or “remarks” of Powys's. Three are fairly trivial. One of these three shows only Powys's nostalgic frame of mind—

—Modern bales of hay have something ‘unclean’ about them. (1952)

and another his love of pastoral beauty, with a touch of literary allegorization of it—

—Bunyan's Celestial City must have appeared to him as Shaftesbury Hill does in bright sunlight.

but one of them makes it clear that Powys was still thinking with the habits of a writer—

—On being told that the best way to sweep out a house is to *begin* at the door, he said that 'Begin at the Door' would make a good title for a story.

Three remarks show Powys's preoccupation with death as an ambiguously dreaded and longed-for consummation, and a kind of joke on mankind. Slight as they are, the tone of these remarks is exactly that of *Unclay* and *The Dewpond*—

—He said he was glad that a copy of 'Treatise on the Survival of the Human Personality' had become mildewed.

—"With life so short, how little our worries matter."

—He had a particular reverence for one oak-tree in a field, mentioning that the farmer had a superstition about it. He said, "Enough wood for a coffin." (1949)

This last could be considered a gloss on the oak-tree in *Mr Weston's Good Wine*: the connection with death is not explicit in the story itself.

A group of remarks uses the word "God" in a way which is, when they are taken together, deeply ambiguous and contradictory—

—We have only five senses, but God's interpretation of 'body' may mean something quite other.

—Men believed in God because they wanted someone to love.

—The Indians have a personal God, one to each field.

—On hearing of the declaration of the Assumption of the Virgin as dogma, he said, "A very good story . . . The Mother of the Gods should have all honour." (1949)

—The Third God is not The Holy Ghost, but 'God the Goblin'. (1950)

"God" is here an unfathomable linguistic construct, something singular / plural, believed in / not believed in, an invention of mankind / something completely exterior to mankind, just as the "god-figures" in Powys's tales are. Again it is a term Powys plays with as the total signifier combined with the total opacity, or just as a figure of totality itself. This total figure (God) has splinters (Gods) which are perceptible, but the one unitary God is both beyond (inhabiting the sixth and seventh senses), and also a fake (a substitute for love). This complete contradiction remains unresolved in these casual remarks as in any Powys story.

Of the remaining four remarks, two refer to "mysterious" events which Powys may have cultivated—

—As he hit a bewitched tree with his stick there was a strange crash at the other side of the woods, which he said was ". . . not like a tree falling".

(This tree is probably the oak tree again.)

—He told how in 1947 he had fallen down in a lane while out walking, and was helped home by a stranger in a van, who said, "I am going my rounds".

This latter is Miss Wainright's version of the famous meeting of Powys and Mr Weston: ". . . going my rounds" is an expression Mr Weston uses in the novel. Other accounts add that Powys at once recognised the tradesman, and that his appearance tallied with Powys's visual conception of Mr Weston (though in the novel Mr Weston is described as looking rather like Powys himself).

Two remarks are left, which I cannot categorise, but which are involved in much of the substance of the other remarks—

—Dog violets grow almost in the shape of a Cross. (1951)

—"One can feel the animal beneath the plant".

These cryptic remarks are the latest in date of a small assemblage of evidence in letters, reports by others, etc., of Powys's way of thinking during his retirement,³ all of which fairly consistently show him still bearing the writer's consciousness which

produced his narratives. If we ask "why he stopped" we would thus seek the answer more in the form of an arrest than that of a conversion. But if we think of it as a blockage, it is a blockage which is also present in the writings themselves, and indeed Powys's retirement is an inevitable result of what he wrote.

It is not just such things as the mention of a possible story title which show this; images and vocabulary in these remarks of Powys's reverberate right back through his writing career and come finally to indicate a whole mode of being which is intimate to the cast of his writing from the start. We can view this in two ways—as the pre-literary condition of his work as it had always been, meaning the mental habits which determined his particular way of writing still intact in his last years; but also as post-literary, as a condition which he had created and perpetuated by writing now come back upon its author to possess him. A straightforward example of the latter would be the way once he had concocted the figure of John Death in *Unclay* he ever after referred to death as "John Death".⁴ What we see glimpses of in Powys's last years is thus a mental surround to his work, which is partly a precondition of the writing and partly a result of it, often inextricably united. It informs the work and is informed by it. But to say what such a condition *is* and how Powys's final agraphia is integral to it we have first to consider the nature of Powys's writings as a whole, that is, the particular force he represents in the cultural field.

When we say Powys's tales lack an authorial presence we also mean that they are self-enclosed; their sphere of action is sharply separated from the real world in the form of a reduction of it which then reflects back a judgement, indeed at times a disdain. Such a mode of writing is involved in a deep paradox with regard to the implied status of the selfhood. On the one hand the author claims complete anonymity—there is not the slightest trace of the authorial self as an experiencing human being (though there are occasional reminders, and constant implication, of the

presence of the *writer* consciously fabricating the events before us). There is no "I" (or eye) through which the tales are viewed, no author's representative, and not for a moment are any of the characters allowed to accumulate sufficient human status to be perceived as individuals who could attract indentificatory sympathy with reference to a sense of reality. Powys eschews any mode of writing which would conjure a selfhood viewed from within—an effulgence or articulate passion or complexity of motive and result. Everything is brought down to a monotone and a diagrammatic shifting of quasi-human counters in a landscape. Humanity is thus viewed at a great distance, in terms of pure event, the village-world not actually inhabited but seen through binoculars from Powys's house high up on the hill.

Such authorial anonymity implies that the narrative is a demonstration of human presence and behaviour, and indeed such is often the tenor of a Powys story, severely pre-planned to demonstrate the futility of human endeavour in the face of death, and of human virtue in the face of a pervasive evil. But Powys cannot approach the true anonymity of, say, a mediaeval epic poet or for that matter Bunyan, where the events demonstrated are impersonal because they are factors of history and the Divine Plan. Powys inhabits the last remnants of such a possibility, and in many ways his writings in the end appear, paradoxically, as subjective—as a theatre of the selfhood in isolation. The whole textual mode, including the wry humour and the sharp moral distinctions as well as the minimalist bleakness, can be seen as a projection of the edges of the selfhood, by which I mean the defences and evading tactics which keep the rest of humanity at a distance, and by which a sense of identity is treasured. It is the drama of reticence itself, which absolutely refuses the sentimentality of human projection into the other, but can also retreat into the equally sentimental wistfulness of self-enclosure, whereby individuation is itself denied—all of humanity reduced to versions of the one intact and absent figure.

In Powys's narratives truth can only occur piecemeal and partially, and this too is a question of the status of the self in the text. The authorial self cannot enter to speak the truth directly for that would break the narrative mode; instead we have the characters, none of whom is qualified to speak the entire truth, as each only perceives his own characteristic colouration of reality (each has his presiding God, but no one is in contact with the actual God-figure). These characters are in a way all self-projections, but they are projected essentially as partialities, and therefore as *rejected* modes of possible behaviour and individuality for the self. Whoever it is, male or female, good or evil, we are constantly aware of the character's limitations, which is also a matter of the author's refusal to get "inside" any character and realise him as a full human being. The characters are also unaware of the significance of their acts right through all of the stories. They enact allegories and travesties of archetypal event in complete ignorance of the fact, all their attention focussed on the enclosed village world they inhabit.

But the longer narratives at least are all arranged so that in each one there is a sense of a complete representation of humanity, a complete ship of fools with every social grade, every temperament, every degree of good and evil or aggressiveness and passivity represented, each separately. There is thus an inescapable sense, in the end, that these various figures are all part of the one, single and unrepresentable human being. The individual items are "humours", traits, classifications of the psychic and behavioural particles of the total human being, the self. This implicit total self need not necessarily be identified as the author's self—it is more the *idea* of a self which can only be expressed in its partialities. But nevertheless, in a modern context such a mode of writing is bound to emerge as basically subjective, as there is no contextual field of reference available by which to identify the implied total self, and it must in the end fall upon the author's shoulders to be the self which the text

projects as a whole, just as the defining particles of this self are all conditioned by the author's habits and obsessions. Only he can have the *knowledge* denied to the characters.

There is a constant implication behind all Powys's writing, in the details of style as much as in the tone and the narrative modes, that no perception of other people as individuating forces is possible, and they can only be viewed as mirror-like echoes of the one basic human condition. They are all figures of the human *imago* itself. The text is withdrawn from human interaction, not just because it chooses not to represent such interaction in any detail but because it does not present the reader with any actual other with which to engage. People are viewed as surfaces, more or less reflective, and distorted. The authorial self is dissipated into a collection of more-or-less grotesque or limited characters.

The drama which is enacted by these figures is normally a form of redemptive narrative but with the final redemption undercut by the irony of death. No full redemption is possible because that would imply the elimination of evil, and the "evil characters" are indispensable parts of the action—it would be like losing a part of the body. The only consummation to such a narrative is cessation. An early work, *The Left Leg*, attempts to redeem a few selected virtues at the end by physically removing them from the village-mundus of the action. The survivors pack their belongings on a waggon and start travelling over the countryside. It is an impressive and moving episode, but as a summation to the narrative it is doomed because there is nowhere for them to go. The village represented the whole world or the whole human being seen piecemeal. The conflict was thus inner conflict and its resolution can only be inner resolution—self-redemption by achieving the harmony of ones warring parts. To move outside this self/world could, in a different kind of narrative, be a forceful signification of hope: to break the bounds of self-perception and open the self to outside, elsewhere and other. But Powys's narrative

sphere is so tightly conceived that to move out of it can only mean to die, and indeed it slowly dawns on us that the Gillets' journey at the end of *The Left Leg* is becoming a figuration of death itself, and their reward turns out to be the same as Farmer Mew's punishment. Immediately the joyful redemption of the ending to the novel is undercut by irony, and even if we interpret that slow journey as an acceptance of death, still death is the only thing that can actually happen to the Holy Family on the wagon.

The only figurations which are not enclosive in this way are the supernatural ones, which are of two kinds. Most, like Mr Weston and John Death (in *Unclay*) are not God—but Christ-like figures; they represent a juncture of human and divine, or the self's organs of contact with the Divine. They are the "Gods" we can perceive on the surface, and their narrative function is to reduce the heterophony of human possibility to the orderly simplicity of Divine plan—to recall man to his true nature and the brevity of his existence. The actual Divine, God Himself, is represented mainly by Tinker Jar. He is the One, the total signifier of the action, but where in a truly heroic narrative the signifier becomes an exterior power which is the consummation of all human possibility, in this subjectified version he can only represent the emptiness of anything exterior to the self. His total power and goodness becomes a parody of itself—an aged homeless and almost mindless wandering tinker. The total good is rejected by man and left to roam the moors in wind and rain. But he is also a nothingness—the inner vacuity of the self which refuses both interperception and extraception as creative forces. This total exterior figure, associated with the mineral world as that which is furthest from human or biological process, in the end can only confirm the absolute impenetrability of the self's enclosure; for not only is he a parody of power and goodness, being a decrepit old man incapable of any act at all except wandering around, but his Godhead is a fake—it is made clear again and again that Jar really is nothing but an old tinker, and

he becomes "God" only because the limited and neurotic inhabitants of the village-world force that signification upon him in order to justify their basically self-seeking ends. He is "God" in the same way that an old hat becomes "God" in the tale entitled *God*—because some human being chooses to worship it as God, as a projection of unsatisfied desire. But in the later Jar stories, it is not so much the characters as the implied author who effects this artificial deification of an invented tramp, and we are never allowed to forget that such is the case.

The self is cut off from reality in these constructs. The whole story is again and again a turmoil of strife by which the restricted and distorted particles of humanity struggle to achieve or maintain a primal harmony and purity among them, foiled by the intervention of faculties of possessiveness and pride, but within the constant condition that such aggressive faculties are as "natural" as Mr Mumby's bull in *Mr Weston*, and that the harmony sought after can only subsist in a release from this internecine strife into nothingness. This would be to achieve God, but that is impossible because God is so far above and below humanity as not to exist. He is not only concealed and beyond—he is also a figment of the imagination. In love we break through only to the edge of this concept of completion—to ecstasy, which is the province of the lesser Gods. At death we break right through, but that is meaningless because what we break through to is non-existence. This is made very clear in *Mr Weston* where the dark wine (death) is reserved for those who have nothing more to live for, and Mr Weston's offer of the dark wine as a healing release is obviously a tradesman's trick. Death is therefore, in this inevitably elliptical process, a deep infolding, a final access to the inner vacuity of the self, and a deliverance from aggression; but it cannot be welcomed unambiguously because it is also the complete and utter cessation of the self which seeks such recompense.

The contrast of T. F. Powys's stories with those of his brother John Cowper is helpful in trying to understand TFP's mode, especially as they can be seen to share a good deal of the pre-literary condition I have mentioned, perhaps inevitably. Certainly both were concerned to apprehend through writing a non-rational, intuitive perception of the world, and both were concerned with "the animal beneath the plant", or with the phenomenal world as an independent living entity working its way into human fate. Both would view the forest in search of its "Gods", and both were troubled with problems of the self's status and autonomy. It is in method that they diverge so extremely, and this is the result of JCP's so much more active concept of the self in relation to fate.

To TFP fate was a kind of blue-print, in fact mankind seems so utterly predestined to a puppet-like automatism based on the inevitability of his ending, that we can hardly speak of fate as a *force* at all—it is a purely static entity, a pattern or gene-print, not even necessarily exterior to mankind. Fate's figuration, the all-powerful/powerless God (Jar), appears above mankind only as mankind's projection of this inbuilt inevitability onto a void exterior. Humanity runs its course like a clockwork mechanism which has gone out of control, as a God-figure says in a large number of TFP's tales. There is a superficially similar sense of fatality in JCP, but there (as in Hardy) it is the product not of the human condition but of the self as an individual, the selves surrounding him, and the world of phenomena. The human condition is rather itself the product of these massed selves in action.

The self then gains immensely in stature in JCP, not as an inclusive receptacle or mirror to the world but as a dynamic agent in the world—that crucial separation from reality is not posited. And as a novelist JCP was thus able not only to establish the self's representative as a fully realised person, to send forth Wolf Solent as a perceptive and receptive agent of reality, grotesque, limited or distorted only in the last analysis

as a factor of his very humanity—he was also able, later, to diversify that realisation of the person, to dispose of the singular hero or anti-hero in favour of the successive welter of equally central bearers of the human image by which the reader is led through *A Glastonbury Romance*.

The medium for this regenerative vision is of course language, both spoken and written, as an enriched and enriching volatile weapon of the self's engagement with the world and with the other. And as the self is enriched and diversified so the exterior world gains in force and beauty, with language as the point of transmission also between the human and the non-human. Language not only opens the human sphere to phenomena; it is also their means of interaction, and the human also creates and perpetuates the phenomenal world by his expressive engagement with it. Language is thus constantly burgeoning in contact with organic energy by its placement at the felt centre of experience. Every facet of perception, from archetypal relationships to bent twigs and hesitant insects, is constantly called into play in a state of fluid interpenetration, the whole expanding from the centre. Reticence is also, of course, integral, but only as a form of resistance to fate and consequent delay, for fate is essentially the result of the courageous act which must, sooner or later, take place.

If we turn to TFP's use of language the contrast is stark. With him, since fate is static (regeneration only by contemplation, doom only by vacuity) language becomes minimal and retentive. It is reduced to the bare requirements of setting up relationships in a self-enclosed world, almost a shorthand such as longstanding inmates of an institution may speak to each other. The constant irony affects this much as does the Dorset dialect—by confirming the enclosure, in this case by placing the village world in contrast to an unspoken, wider world which is outside the book (the constant contrast of provincial simplicity and the language of trade, or between trivia and the underlying signifying psychic world

which the characters cannot approach except in their imagery as seen from outside).

Language is progressively reduced because the felt centre of experience is an absence; there is thus no direct engagement of humanity with phenomena or with each other. There are only the two planes of action—the village drama and the unknown original of which it is a pattern, which is the universe itself—lying parallel to each other and moving in sympathy across a vacuum.

The trivial event is certainly significant in T. F. Powys, indeed its significance is absolutely limitless. But this is not because as with J. C. Powys human and non-human forces converge upon the event, but because the event is rendered significant as a conscious artistic act which implies its insignificance outside the book. It is significant only within the terms of the one contract by which the reader is persuaded to disregard its manifest insignificance, and this is done by a mass of structural and referential devices which inflate the trivial event without bounds, while the underlying irony reasserts its insignificance as well as the insignificance of everything referred to. Tinker Jar is himself the extreme point of this process, for as soon as the reader contemplates him he starts becoming God, Zeus, Prospero, Satan, death, ecstasy, nothingness, the spirit, nature, the world, the author, the signifier . . . and before long there is no alternative term for him but Jar, who is a destitute tinker of no importance, as perhaps all those other things are. Like them, he doesn't actually do (or feel) anything, and if this doesn't fit (as with Zeus and Prospero) we have to eliminate those referents as less than the total signification of everything/nothing embodied in Jar. The fact that on top of all this Jar is a quietly *comic* figure much of the time only adds to the mutual destruction of significance and insignificance. In the end *all* events & images in T. F. Powys's stories are equally of unlimited significance, and thus they are all equally insignificant.

T. F. Powys's reduced version of language is his principal vehicle for this motley of self-defeating significations. Objects,

events and people are stripped bare of all possible complexities or ramifications, and emerge as starkly ambiguous cyphers. His earliest texts suffer badly from an intrusion of effusiveness into an ethic which denies any form of expansive expression.⁵ Perception must be inclusive, and thus not so much exploratory as colonising—the author scans the world until he locates phenomena which “fit” (quite intuitively) the nascent schema of the emerging story. Alien forms (modern hay-bales or Powys's own social and personal existence) are “unclean” because they could threaten the enclosive and isolating processes of the textuality.

“Literary fetishism” would be a harsh but not inaccurate term for Powys's whole mode of signification, as indeed fetishism is the process (recognised as such) by which so many of his world-weary characters achieve their “Gods” (viz. especially *God*, *Rosie Plum* and most of the *Fables*, but it is a factor of Powys's mode in general). His figurations are in the last analysis not allegories, not really emblems, but strictly fetishes, though an emblem could be seen as a graceful and refined form of fetish anyway, and we should allow Powys such refinement if not his characters.

The root definer of this condition of Powys's work is his obsession with simple numbers. As early as 1902, J. C. Powys wrote to him saying that he disagreed with this tendency to find a few basic archetypes in all human experience, and that for him the world was expressed as a multifariousness. But the main difference was one of approach. J. C. Powys did have basic configurations emerging in his work, but only because they were discovered anew each time, in the exploratory processes of the narrative. T. F. Powys's presiding figurations went the opposite way. Not only are they prior to the narrative but they are progressively reduced themselves, lowered from a state of unambiguous significance, and finally all reduced to one figure (God) who is inexpressible, and totally insignificant.

Writing of this kind does not arrive at a consummation but at a balance, where the

schematic structuring processes are held in equipoise against a sense of reality. *Mr Weston's Good Wine* is obviously the principal point of such balance in Powys's career. There are many ways in which a sense of the world at large is not denied in *Mr Weston* as it is in a number of Powys's tales, but is rather held in reserve, unspoken, but still an informing presence, principally in the person of Mr Weston himself. Most of Powys's best stories take the form of a visitation myth, of the "God" descending to humanity to enact the redemptive drama which is a paradigm of life and death. Jar himself does not descend in this way—he is too far above and below the social world to have any effect on it—but in *Mr Weston* Jar is put aside (mentioned, rather threateningly, once in passing) and the entire realisable presence of the signifying "God" figure is embodied in Mr Weston, who can be seen as an actual force in human life.

Mr Weston, travelling wine-salesman and God, visits a remote Dorset village to sell his two wines, "love" (light wine) and "death" (dark wine)—things which are already there if the village is to bear any resemblance to actuality, but what he brings is the *realisation* of these things, not as qualities but as events, which cannot be postponed or set aside. He comes from an exterior world which is not, this time, a meaningless void, but is actually the metropolis so rarely posited in Powys's tales except as a distant horror. And he approaches gradually: we first see him in a nearby market town, and the value of these introductory chapters is the sense of Mr Weston closing in on a receding point, travelling to a smaller and smaller enclosure until he reaches the central complete and enigmatic nutshell of representative (thus manageable) humanity in the village-world.

Perhaps as in no other Powys tale we are made aware that this village (Folly Down) is only part of a bigger world—fully complete and representative, and again amounting to a notion of a whole self, but set in contrast to an elsewhere, principally in Mr Weston's

language of trade and his worldly wisdom. What happens there can again legitimately be seen as happening to one hypothetical person, who runs the gamut from the refusal to love through the light wine to the dark wine, repressing his possessive humours and finally sacrificing his virtues to death. But that one self is acknowledged as no-more-than-one, as we know there are others, not so automatically included in the schemata by inference. And that silent elsewhere is not merely referred to but is a factor of the very plot: Mr Weston doesn't come to give his wine but to *sell* it—a price is demanded, and those who take are at once involved in a contract. They have to give themselves in exchange for love and death—humanity for humanity, which is a typically Powysian paradox, but the point is that the self is not completely autonomous and self-sufficient; it is forced to donate of itself into the world as a generosity simply to merit human status.

Mr Weston is also, of course, a trick of light and a fabrication. As he enters the village pub everyone there recognises him instantly, but each recognises him as someone different—as the particular saviour-figure that each obsessive particle of humanity needs to reach its consummation. He is the projection of these unfulfilled and unfulfillable desires, created by a torn and lost humanity in order to achieve its goals. And here as in many other stories (it is one of Powys's strongest points) the redeemer or fetish created by mankind turns round and bites him—the statue comes to life and offers to fulfil the promise inherent in its making, but at the price of exchanging roles, and the sculptor turns into the inorganic world of death. Mr Weston is a fabrication just as the metropolis he comes from, with all its immense power over our social and even perceptual modes, is a human fabrication, and a singularly back-biting one too. So too is art, which Mr Weston also signifies, a human construct which gains its own independent existence and instructs, delights and punishes men. Through these layers of his being Mr Weston, in his green overcoat,

emerges last as a figure of the perceptual world itself, and his trade terms are our brief contract with time and space.

Much of this applies to all Powys's visitation-myth tales (*Unclay*, *The Left Leg*, *The Two Thieves*, all the Jar stories, etc.) though *Mr Weston* is distinguished among them in several ways, not least by a stylistic lightness of tone, a withdrawal of Powys's habitual modes of threatening meaningfulness in favour of a delighted play with the twists and turns of the ironic situation he has set up. The two pastoral novels which precede and follow *Mr Weston*, *Innocent Birds* and *Kindness in a Corner*, have this quality too, though in a more specialised way which readily escapes from the harsher ironies of *Mr Weston*.

But perhaps the principal factor which distinguishes *Mr Weston* is Powys's manipulation of the time-sense, the suspension of time during Mr Weston's stay in Folly Down. As he enters the pub the grandfather clock stops, and so do the church clock and all the domestic clocks. It is five to seven, and remains so throughout the novel. The inhabitants are a little surprised at first, but soon accept timeless suspension and carry on as normal, at least until Mr Weston intervenes.

This makes an enormous difference to the reader's final sense of the novel's action. The entire redemptive drama, instead of occurring in a fabricated world (which would qualify heavily its seriousness) or in the real world (which we would reject), takes place in neither and both—it takes place in one moment, one infinitesimal flash, one timeless instant which is thus a fabricated world *within* the real world, not outside it. The action is thus abstracted from reality as an interlude from a continuum which is in fact the whole of life. And if, as I insist, there is still this sense in the partiality of human perception by language, that the drama is an enclosive event of a selfhood, a drama of non-interaction and withdrawal, its reduction to an instant leaves all the rest of life open to all possible alternatives, which Powys need no longer be threatened by.

The moment of the novel is a completed moment, which gains the status of lyric ecstasy because its actions are consummated—the wicked are foiled and punished, the lovers united, the good ascend into heaven, the weary attain eternal rest. We know that this does not happen in a possible world, and such knowledge normally forces on Powys's endings a sense of deep futility, and at times a suicidal resignation. But here it is all perceived in a double time sense—it all happens outside time in an instant which cannot by definition be either located or perceived, and at the same time the events are narrated within a perfectly normal time-flow, taking about as long (once Mr Weston has arrived) as it would take to read the novel. This effects an objectification of the whole narrative—the book itself becomes a special case, an interlude from the reader's normal perceptions as any book is, and a reminder of possibilities which cannot be looked for outside its covers. The writing is semantically true to itself as a separation from diurnal normalcy in order to view it at a distance and in a state of suspended equilibrium. It is in fact the process of the lyric poem, and it is noteworthy that Powys lamented in "Why I Have Given Up Writing" that the prose writer cannot gain the sense of perfected creation which a poet can attain in one flash of inspiration. The whole of *Mr Weston* is one flash of vision, which reveals the real by enacting a completion, a freedom from the partialities of conditioned perception, by bringing each partiality to its conclusion. As such it is unique, and its truth can be accepted as singular truth; the self there disclosed is a real self recognised by all. Powys's obsessions objectified on the page in contrast to the vast elsewhere (within time) which he is not obliged, as a lyricist, to enact.

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The course of Powys's writing after *Mr Weston* must have suffered from the unrepeatability of the device of time-suspension. Such a device seems absolutely

integral to his mode of narrative, and an operative justification for his eccentricities, and yet once performed it could not occur again without becoming a mere device, mechanically strapped onto the story. *Uncle* manages to suggest a timeless quality without actually mentioning it, but the main course of his later tales is set instead on a progressive reduction of both language and extraception in the narrative, as if to bring the structure down to the barest schema, until there was nothing left of either humanity or the world but a bleak and impenetrable cypher. The phenomenal world of intuitive perception was brought down through symbolic recognition of basic figures, eventually to the unitary insistence on the whole world as one sign, which must be a sign for nothing as there is nothing left in the world for it to signify. This is of course a quite different, inactive version of timelessness.

This progressive reduction of language and of the world as perceived in the text could also be seen as a result of the mode of intensely widespread signification which Powys developed. The Scholastic insistence that the slightest act is of immense (cosmic as well as societal and moral) importance was at first cultivated by Powys in a flowering of hinting references springing from each act and each image of the text, but undercut by ironies which questioned the whole fabricated erection, and by implication brought all those endorsed referents down to simple acts of ordinary men at various restricted sites. At points of equilibrium a fine play of suggestion and bathos was possible, but to achieve this Powys had to make sure he reduced the status of the human agent in the story as a vehicle of meaning as much as possible. As soon as a character surged up into expressive fullness (of speech or action) the balance was ruined, for meaning was then appropriated to a particular person instead of being spread over the whole mundus as an inherency, which was what Powys wanted. In *Mr Weston* no one can fully articulate the human condition, least of all the villagers, and that reality lies enfolded in

the person of Mr Weston as a focus—his acts and his relationship to the enclosure.

A different format of this balance was reached in *Fables* (1927) where Powys reduced the agent of language to absurdity—down beyond the human altogether into talking birds and old coats and spittoons. Here the signifying schema, the exterior universe, lies in polar opposition to human language, which is born by mere objects. It is the final extension of the fetishism of the object, for in all the *Fables* a dialogue takes place between two agents, often neither of them human, whose entire existence is projected onto them from the despair of humanity, via the author. They are bitter parables, in which all man's worst instincts are reflected back to him by creatures and objects which he himself endows with the ability to communicate, to his ruin. The sin of possessiveness, always a major concern of Powys, is here the prime focus, as the very mode of the writing enacts the possession of objects from nature by the author-reader construct. For he knows that to endow inanimate things with speech is also to deny them their proper reality, and to have a crow engaged in a theological discussion is in a way to violate the bird and rob it of its own nature. Such violation is in fact part of Powys's whole stance towards the presented space of his stories, though normally only as an undercurrent. But he does appropriate reality to a depersonalised sense of self, always.

Fables survive because the process reaches an open absurdity, necessarily brief and restricted to the one collection. The comic grotesqueness of glow-worms, trees and pieces of darkness persuading mankind to surrender himself to love and death is a neatly apposite factor of the elliptical meaning of all Powys's work—that humans have to have humanity revealed to them from an elsewhere which they create in order to have it revealed. And that informing agent can also conceal, and trick men into evil at their own behest. Man is not sufficient unto himself—he has to set up justificatory figures both for good and for evil, in order to fulfil himself, and in *Fables*

these figures are displayed in all their sorry obsolescence—tattered old coats, blind hens, disused artifacts and animals going about their own business—these are man's images of desire, deliberately chosen by Powys, friendly in their decay, with human personalities stamped on them from long usage, but in reality completely alien to human meaning which is forced on them by the writer in full knowledge of the artificiality of his act. By this process each fable itself becomes just such a fetishised object, reflecting back to the reader his own refusal to love alongside a sense of complete waste which could be the spur to love.

The *Fables* could well have been a culmination to Powys's work since they bring his methods to an extreme. But they rather represent a special case, a mode which he occasionally repeated later,⁶ and the main flow of his stories continued in its steady course of minimalisation and increasing pessimism towards its end. This did not come suddenly—Powys's writing career fades out in a decrescendo of tiny stories written around 1930 and 1933 (his last novel, *Unclay*, c. 1930, is mentioned later). These last stories sort themselves into two very distinct versions of his narrative art. One set was the bleak and almost eventless tales of the lost God-self (Jar and Dottery) pathetically alienated from the human world into a landscape of gloomy vicarages and empty heathland, with hope reduced to the impossibility of experiencing nothing; the other set was one of conspicuously failed tales where the fatalistic schema was ruthlessly applied to stories of inconsequentiality and trivia. In this latter set the figure of the other, who had always been a vaguely and distantly perceived force in the best tales, was reduced to almost nothing—a parody of itself, heartless as well as soul-less in the whole conception of the tale. Various grocers and village females whom we cannot for a moment begin to know, are put through their paces as quickly as possible, brought to the destructive extremity of their particular humour in a few brief and perfunctory strokes of the pen. The other tales, usually involving Jar,

are even barer, but there the central figure is now quite unambiguously the self—it is in a way as if Powys's story-telling art comes out into the open at last, and shows his concept of the self directly, but reduced now to an exile from humanity, a scapegoat and a Christ-like piece of persecuted virtue to whom nothing except death can possibly happen. Again and again the story enacts the conciliation of this self-figure with Tinker Jar: rejected by society and rejecting it, the exilic selfhood can only relate to the inorganic world, to Jar and nothingness—no feelings, no thoughts, no ideas, no events, no love except the welcoming affection of the Void itself.⁷

The minimal bleakness of all these last tales is striking, and it is hardly surprising that the whole narrative process ran to ground. The constant process of ontological refinement ended by cancelling itself—there was no longer any point in fabricating persons and events to delineate a state which was completely static and referred only to the insular selfhood, for which there is only one real event—death (the meeting with Jar is, of course, death).

Powys's successor, when the main course of his writing is separated from the wastage, is Samuel Beckett.

* * *

The silence of Powys's last twenty years was self determined as a choice, and self created as a product of this work's progressive minimalization of experience. But it was also, as he was aware, a mutual revenge between him and a society which did not want to know anything about his writings. The flash of truth in *Mr Weston*, and to some extent *Unclay*, made some public impact as it was bound to, but as his work increasingly withdrew from social interaction, so society increasingly ignored it. There is an undeniable justness in this course of events, whatever questions of taste or even literary quality may be invoked against it. Powys's fictions reject society as such, and especially reject whatever is new, modern, popular or metropolitan in favour of that which is obsolescent, neglected and

rural; for him to end up a "neglected writer" could almost have been a choice. The neglect of, say, Wyndham Lewis's Vorticist writings (or to a lesser extent J. C. Powys's fictions) is a different matter—society was disturbed and baffled; with T. F. Powys society was ignored (and probably baffled as well). I do not mean here that any reading public or manufacturers of university syllabuses with the vagaries of their preferences affected the fates of these writers; I mean more that all three produced work which operated on language itself, and language is also a social reality. Lewis and J. C. Powys re-energised it; T. F. Powys froze it; but all of them re-asserted language as idiosyncratic and claimed a singular usage. None of them can ever be popular or even respected in a society based on fashionable and de-personalised language, perhaps especially not T. F. Powys who actually mimicked the de-personalisation of language in his tales.

The ironies of Powys's last twenty years are remarkable. It is as if the world he created took him over and made him live by the dictates of his own style—which is only to say that a writer personalises language through his own obsessions, which he is then likely to get stuck with. But it is still strange how the events of his later life seem to be drawn from his stories, and his mode of expression in Miss Wainright's notes has its roots in the same source. Early in the war he re-enacted the escape at the end of *The Left Leg*, packing up and moving away from East Chaldon where he had lived for some thirty years in response to alien visitations which he would have recognised in the emblem of Farmer Mew (German bombing raids). So many of his last stories, written at East Chaldon, insist on the self as Scapegoat, expelled from the human enclosure by human aggression and meanness, remaining the only repository of a virtue now meaningless as it has nowhere to act. The self could only allow this to happen, let itself be exiled from the world, because its boundaries were now absolutely impermeable. They are depressing and alluring stories—we are tempted to identify

with this elect self-view while witnessing its unbearable consequences and being told that there is no alternative.

But ironically, Powys has never been a part of the village, and never known it, and it was not the village-world which rejected him and forced him to move out across Hardy's Egdon Heath to Mappowder (it was a move he greatly disliked), but a quite different force: an emissary of the metropolis which he had always refused to acknowledge.

In the second decade, at Mappowder, exiled inland, Powys reduced his life even further to a diurnal regularity and seclusion though it is also said that he "lost his melancholy" there in connection with his adoption of a baby girl; there certainly was an episodic rejuvenation of some kind then, but all the rest of the evidence bespeaks a continual autumnal melancholy and a lack of either communication or event, right up to the end.⁸ He ate and slept on the horizon of the dead, separated from them only by the thin stone wall he had talked of in his earliest writings, when he had longed to break through it to a strengthened light;⁹ but now he anticipated only non-darkness. This position he found himself in, almost part of the village graveyard at Mappowder, is an extraordinary echo of one of his principal obsessions, stated in his early work and implicit right through his published works—the notion of being separated by a barrier from a wider reality than human experience, which became equivalent to death and nothingness. The longing to break through was joined in the mature works by a paradoxical dread of the same event.

He walked the lanes and woods, noting occasional connections (the oak-tree again, the violet which is God spelled backwards bearing the cross of humanity). These were glimpses of the universe, essentially flawed (almost, but not quite, a cross), which could no longer possibly be embodied in a Mr Mumbly or a Miss Fetching. The image of the pure objectified instant at the centre of his career returned to help him home when he fell down in a lane. Mr Weston, representative of a wider world Powys had,

gracefully or otherwise, turned his back on, returned as an emissary from the novel which was undeniably the height of his career, the principal point at which human reality and any possible construct of it are held in harmony. Picking Powys up off the stones, that figure re-enacts the generosity implied in the whole novel as an instant of self-possession and cohesion. The motivating force of the generosity is also there—the recognition of the utter commercialism of fate's contract with mankind.

He passed these last years within a world-view which forbade its own realization—a reaching for significance which ends by making the slightest thing so significant as to cancel itself, or any act so important that no action is possible or bearable. Such is symbolism, which enhances the actual by stripping it of singularity and thereby stealing it from the world into the theatre of the book, where it lies unflawed and inert for ever. The symbolic percepts (the quasi-human characters and all their acts as drawn from the world) refer beyond the known and ultimately beyond the knowable. Then, as Powys intuitively recognised, when such percepts are referred *back* to reality they become so trivialised as to be not worth the telling. The very source of the percept, experience, is denied by the process of signification. It is all rendered meaningless against a total entity (God) which is unbreachable, incommunicable and not believed in.

Death, or rather John Death, remains the only possible event or non-event, the only signifier of human existence. Where an abstracted sense of identity is the centre of the narrative, only the destruction of that identity can set the narrative in motion. That treasured possession of the self, the experience of the I, is focussed on until it becomes a receding point, and its whole experience of the world comes to nothing in the end but a dewpond to drown in (God's Eye), a fetish to worship knowing it is a

fake, a wallpapered grave. Death is both loved and hated, and through this focus love and hate become coeval, and no meaningful conflict is any longer possible. In *Unclay* John Death comes walking into a village, which, we know, does not exist until he enters it; he sharpens his scythe and sets to work, and everything he does is simply the fact of biological human existence—resistance to him is denial of one's own reality. The whole plot is an inevitable fake—there is no alternative to Death's plan. So there is no real need for the plot to exist, and indeed it is soon afterwards dispensed with.

If you insist on seeing the world in this way, as if from outside, naturally you see only yourself and equally naturally nothing happens. An obsession with death is of course an obsession with your own life, with no outside to it. It is true, hence the strength of *Unclay*, though it need not be the whole of the truth. Powys, who insisted on extending this partial truth over the whole, was left walking the lanes constantly expecting to hear the whetting of the scythe, the crash on the far side of the woods as the coffin-maker sets to his paternal trade.

It is said in the family that Powys's last utterance, as he sat up in bed staring, was the one word, "bell", taken to be the Christian name Belle and referring to a friend of that name. But those who have read the unpublished novel *The Market Bell* (c. 1924), a text containing potentially the balance of *Mr Weston* though largely unworked, will be much more inclined to recognise the central image of that work: the bell, taken from Donne of course, which tolls as the call to death. In Powys's version that tolling is also the call to market, where we pay ourselves up as the price for living. Powys's whole corpus of writing stresses the price at the loss of what is actually bought, but at least we have the clear insistence that there are no cheap bargains or free gifts to be had in this business.

Notes

¹"Why I Have Given Up Writing", an interview with Claude F. Luke, *John O'London's Weekly*, October 23rd 1936, largely reprinted in my own *A Bibliography of T. F. Powys*, Hastings, 1967.

²"I never felt any real sense of achievement. I would finish a short story, and as soon as I was moderately satisfied with it my mind was immediately invaded with thoughts of the next. There was always the next story waiting. And the next and the next." *Ibid.*

³This consists of letters to members of his family and a few others, two commissioned brief essays in periodicals (D5 and D6 in my bibliography) plus reminiscences by Louis Wilkinson, Francis Powys and others. A very revealing text which I do not take into account here as it is too early in date is the unpublished "Conversations with Theodore" by Llewelyn Powys, 1931.

⁴E.g. ". . . all I can think of and consider now is Master John Death". Letter to J. C. Powys, 22nd December 1946.

⁵A good example of this is the speech of Mad Tom Button on the qualities of Jar, in *The Left Leg*—a sudden piece of Romantic afflatus which appears as an excrescence on the otherwise even-textured surface of the tale. It should be mentioned here though that such an incompatibility of manner and purpose is the feature of an enormous mass of early work from c. 1905 to 1918 which remains unpublished, including several novels.

⁶Powys at one time planned a second book of Fables, but abandoned the project. Stories intended for it were excluded from *The White Paternoster* but can be found in all the later collections, easily recognisable by the formulaic titles, "a and b". Many remain unpublished.

⁷These last stories are mostly unpublished, but some can be found scattered through *Captain Patch*, *Bottle's Path* and *Rosie Plum*. The Jar tales should be collected together into a book which would evince Powys's last literary condition at its strongest.

⁸The following is an absolutely typical example of Powys's 'serious' mode of expression in his later years:

"It is curious to think of yesterday being nowhere, and the day before that more dark until you get to complete blackness. The mild Octobers of yesterday are now completely gone as if they had never been." (This is followed by a quotation of *The Tempest* IV, i, 156-163, misquoting as in *Mr Weston* ". . . we are such stuff as dreams are made of") Letter to Vera Wainright, undated, 1941.

⁹The particular reference here is to an early story called *Theodore*, one of a group called "The Hindcliffe Tales", datable c. 1915 and all unpublished. *Theodore* is an attempt at psychological drama, concerning a character obsessed by a wall between him and "reality" which he finally breaks through, to achieve a blinding light connected with his father, at his suicide.

John Toft

John Cowper Powys's *Atlantis*

Keats in a reference to Dante said, "We ought to be glad to have more news of Ulysses than we looked for".

In 1954, the year *Atlantis* was published, there also appeared W. B. Stanford's *The Ulysses Theme* which summarised and analysed the considerable body of news we have been given about Ulysses from Homer to Joyce. No character of fiction has been more perennially alive (save his female counterpart Helen), which is as it should be for one whose principal characteristic is the ability to survive when all else around him founders and is lost.

The writers who have resurrected—or, one should say, drawn their own temporary breath from—this vital body range from Sophocles to Robert Bridges and Seneca to Gerhardt Hauptmann, with notable items of news and editorial comment, more or less biased, from Euripides, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, Shakespeare, Racine, Goethe and Tennyson. Professor Stanford distinguishes amongst those writers who treat Odysseus largely as he is in Homer—a wily, resourceful, balanced, practical home-lover; those who spotlight his shadier side which is shown in his dealings with Philoctetes and Iphigeneia; and those who, after Dante, give a romantic questing cast to his character, not originally projected but surely now an essential part of the complex reality which is Ulysses. It is this sometimes contradictory complexity (and, for English speakers, the power and plangent beauty of Tennyson's poem) that has given Ulysses a particularly striking lease of life in the twentieth century. Professor Stanford notes the contributions of d'Annunzio, Giraudoux and Kazantzakis as well as Joyce's, but he might also have added those of Pound, whose Cantos represent an

odyssey of the mind through the world's civilisations, and of Robert Graves who pursued in *Homer's Daughter* Samuel Butler's notion that *The Odyssey* was written by a woman.

Why all this interest in a small-time adventurer of primitive antiquity? What is it about Ulysses that can make him more significant for modern man than, say, Achilles and Oedipus who have such tragic grandeur, or Arthur and Merlin who are more romantically mysterious, or Faust and Hamlet who seem to share so many of our psychological hang-ups? It is perhaps noteworthy that Odysseus was not much use to Freud. Suppose we say that Arthur and Merlin are too magical, and Achilles and Oedipus too remote to represent us. Hamlet and Faust, who appealed much more than Odysseus to the romantic imagination, come very close to us in their frustrated attempts to make sense of the human situation. Odysseus does something both bigger and smaller than this, something that makes him representative not just of the self-conscious and boringly tormented intellectual elite of an over-sophisticated society, but of man common or extraordinary as he has always been and is likely to be. And it was precisely this something which recommended him to John Cowper: it is the fact that Odysseus is a *complete* being, physical and mental, in a real universe of concrete *things*. His environment has to him and to us the same reality as himself. How different from Hamlet or Faust or most of the heroes of modern fiction (including, one might add, Wolf Solent). This is what John Cowper means when he speaks in *Homer and the Aether* of Homer's supreme realism:

... what has made Homer for three thousand years the greatest poet in the world is his *naturalness*. We love each other as in Homer. We hate each other as in Homer. We are perpetually being interfered with as in Homer by chance and fate and necessity, by invisible influences for good and by invisible influences for evil, and we see the unconquerable power that Homer calls *keer* . . . There are many scenes in *The Iliad* where we touch the reality of our life as it is today, when it is transformed for us by our own private thoughts; as for example when we struggle with certain forces of nature . . . Matthew Arnold, one of my own favourite poets, tells us that Sophocles "sees life steadily and sees it whole". O what a pure delight it is to return to Homer after seeing life whole! Why, I ask you, *is* it such a relief and such a comfort? Because Homer has the reality of our natural feeling about life, and Sophocles has an intellectual vision of things . . . real life, as all men and women soon discover from personal experience, is the extreme opposition of anything you can see "steadily" or as "a whole".¹

Many readers will smile that a writer whose list of characters includes flying horses, tree-sisters, talking insects and all-knowing chunks of stone should set so high a value on the realism of another author who goes in for one-eyed giants, men changing into pigs and interviews with the dead. One thing that John Cowper very significantly does *not* do to Homer is to rationalise his magic—he does not, in fact, do what the publisher's blurb says he does, that is, "treat Homer's Odysseus as if he were a dramatic and subtle and complicated character in a modern prose novel". *Atlantis* in other words, cannot be categorised along with Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brethren* or with the brilliant archaeological reconstructions of Mary Renault. What John Cowper means by realism is, of course, the realism of Dante, Rabelais, Spenser, Cervantes and the Joyce of *Finnegan's Wake*, of the Bible, the ballads and the great fairy-tales, the enlarged reality of the world as opposed to the prison of the human consciousness when it refuses to irradiate its perceptions with the vitality of the imagination, refuses

to shape and sanctify, regarding whatever lies outside itself as at best an object of study and analysis, at worst the source of Sartrean nausea. The Ruler of Atlantis in its turquoise sea-fantasy is the allegory of the hideous consciousness that takes everything into itself; opposing it is the Odyssean or Powysian consciousness that, without losing its own identity and without invading the autonomy of others, longs to know what it is like to be all other things.

. . . on a heap of long-dead, long-decayed, long-rotted, long-dissolved, long-degenerated, filthily-stinking, foully-crumbling, horribly-putrefying mass of seaweeds in accumulated decomposition, reclined, or rather sprawled, the god-titan or goddess-titan, for this horrific and terrifying rebel against all Deities was completely bisexual and androgynous . . . This mysterious Being, whose physical appearance struck Nisos as more shocking and also more feminine than human words could convey, fixed her eyes upon the young man as he stared in stupefied horror and made with outstretched and inwardly curved fingers a series of gestures, of a dangerously magnetic nature, compelling him to approach her . . .

"From now on to the end of your lives," the voice from the Entity reclining on the dead seaweed grimly grated like a wheel, or grievously groaned like a ploughshare, "you three migrants to my kingdom . . . will go about the world proclaiming my kingdom's laws. These laws will, in their own time and in due course, become the law of the whole earth . . . This law will be absolutely and entirely scientific . . . Its one and sole purpose will be science for the sake of science . . . It will use people . . . as it uses animals. It will practise upon them and experiment with them, not for their sake, but always purely and solely, as it ought to be, for the only Purpose, the only Religion, the only Object, the only Ideal, the only Patriotism, the only Cause, Reason or Consideration worth anything in the world—to understand everything that exists in every aspect of its existence."²

It would be easy, especially in view of the interminably rolling sentences, to see all this as octogenarian self-indulgence, an obscurantist fantasy conjured up to secure an ageing man against the forces which are

rendering him obsolete, but this would be to ignore, not only John Cowper's fearless contemplation of death, but also the powerful contrary states underlying the book. Nisos, in the above quotation, testifies to that depth of longing for self-annihilation or absorption of the individual into a greater or mass identity which plays its part in political or sexual surrender as well as in the acceptance of the necessity of death. The Ruler of Atlantis is not alien to us but inside us. One sees it at work in children, in the desire to tear things apart and see how they work. One sees it at work in Odysseus himself. For is he not a type of scientist? The difference is that he is an *applied* scientist. His explorations and technologies are always to the point; they arise from specific concrete needs and not from a general abstract ideology. This is one reason why John Cowper saw him as a kind of Englishman, a pragmatist whose last home is America, albeit among redskins not WASPS.

And this has its own ambiguity, a moral one. From the beginnings of his story it has been recognised that Odysseus is a funny kind of hero. He is noted in Homer mainly for being "artful" and "adept in all devices". His single-minded boyish absorption in activity, his determined progress to a narrowly defined goal relates him to other uneasy heroes: Elizabethan privateers, the founders of British India, Foreign Legionaries. He is, after all, the grandson of Autolycus, possibly the son of crafty Hermes, and possibly a highly successful Semitic capitalist (which recommended him to Joyce). Many early accounts of him, especially those written by idealists, are hostile. Sophocles makes him admit, "My enemies have found me odious." Critics remain divided over the question whether Shakespeare means us to see *his* Ulysses as a ruthless manipulator or as the exponent of a wise and balanced polarity—or both at once. It is noteworthy that Dante unequivocally punishes him in Hell for precisely that intellectual curiosity for its own sake that John Cowper opposes him to; making him speak of "the ardour that I had to gain experience of the world"

and his longing for "experience of the unpeopled world behind the Sun". Yet, too, he speaks nobly of man's need "to follow virtue and knowledge"³ and it is this tendency which Tennyson so hauntingly romanticised, adding perhaps a pre-Nietzschean sense of ultimate self-realisation:

I am a part of all that I have met;
 Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin
 fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.

One might be excused for at first thinking that John Cowper develops (as to Kazantzakis and Pound) this romantic line on Ulysses, but in fact the hero of *Atlantis* is not a chronic wanderer, simply, as in Homer, a man with a mission.

It is appropriately, however, not Odysseus who identifies the Ruler of Atlantis as his enemy. It is Expectation or Seeming, Heracles' phallic club, who bashes in the beautiful androgynous face—entirely of his own accord or (which may be the same thing) according to some fundamental impulse beyond everything, beyond even the gods. This serves to stress the reality of every thing and every body. Expectation, like any moth or person or "one particular blade of grass" (83), is his own master and has his own identity which is not to be encroached on.

"So I am still myself" was the first clear thought of the great weapon. "Yes, I am still myself." (15)

And the description of old Dokeesis, like that of so many old creatures in it, is a marvellous feature of the novel, precisely because it is not merely a description but the proclamation of an absolute uncontradictable identity. Such proclamations are John Cowper's way of expressing that joyous individuation and inscape which so worried Gerard Manley Hopkins until he found a rationale for it in Duns Scotus and, though his way of writing was so utterly different from Hopkins's, John Cowper would have agreed with him in regarding poetry as the surest realisation of inscape.

But where he would have profoundly

disagreed with Hopkins and most other religious artists would be in his denial of the need to refer this individuality and multiplicity to some central unity. The process of this novel, as of *Porius* and perhaps the whole of John Cowper's art—one might call it the *periplum*, using the Homeric and Poundian word for the map of the voyage or pattern of life it represents—is towards the statement that either there are no gods at all or there are as many as you care to name. Whether there are none or many, what there isn't is only one, the one-god being cruelly limited whether he be the Christian Father which excludes Satan or the principle of knowledge enshrined in modern intellectuality which excludes the imagination, the Blakean Satan. This is perhaps the point of the ambiguous passage at the end of *Atlantis*, where the Moth and the Fly in their characteristic way of posing the polarities of the book's argument within their beautiful intimacy, beg to differ about gods: the Fly says:

"Anyway the Pillar has now revealed that as the revolt of a spontaneous and natural revolt all over the world against god-worship, all the gods that exist, from Zeus downwards, and all the goddesses that exist from Hera downwards . . . are fated to perish . . . And the fatal sickness that must ere long bring them to their end is caused by this growing refusal to worship them . . . If we stop worshipping them, the juice, the sap, the pith, the oil, the ichor, the very blood of their life vanishes; and like plants without sun and air, and plants without earth and water, they simply wither away."

The fly now became silent; but Nisos heard the moth answering him in her most vehement manner. "I don't see the use of dead things like sand and rocks and air and water and fire going on when living things like gods and men and insects have vanished away. That would mean that nothing would be left; for if no-one knew they were there, there'd be nobody there and everything would be nothing."

"Your voice, beautiful one," said the fly, "sounds as if you'd rather everything to be nothing."

"I would! I would! I would!" cried the moth; "for then the greatest Priest who has

ever lived would be right and the Pillar and the Club and all the rest of you would be wrong!" (448-449)

For John Cowper the One-God and the No-God ideas are equally negative and tyrannical, but what is more important than all so-called supernatural powers, whether they be called gods or the Mind of Man, are the purely natural impulses that are the source of, or arise from, that individuality of choice which is the birthright of all existing things. In his essay on *The Odyssey* in *The Pleasures of Literature* (76) John Cowper speaks of Homer's identifying of these choices as his special secret and his supreme contribution to poetry.⁴ *Atlantis* extends these choices, naturally, to other beings beside men.

It is such a choice inherent in the 'I am I' principle that enables the sensitive Nisos to accept the smashing of the Ruler of Atlantis even though the act nauseates him precisely because it appeals, as John Cowper admitted such violence did with him, to some sadistic streak in his own squeamish nature:

Nisos had never in his life been aware of so many cross-currents of thoughts and intentions, of revelations and counter-revelations, of insurrections and counter-insurrections . . . With one part of his soul he longed to lift his hand from the club and see the club plunge itself with all the power that killed the Nemean Lion into the face of this Mystery enthroned on this dead seaweed!

With the other part of his soul he felt that to see the terrible beauty of this majestic face mauled, crushed, churned up, smashed up, beaten up, pounded up, hammered up, reduced to an indistinguishable paste of pestilential mud and blood would be to assist at the most savage crime that his wickedest imagination had ever pictured. But there was an 'I am I' within him that was deeper than his divided soul; and with this he felt that the only conceivable alternative to letting the club obliterate this Ruler of Atlantis was to let the Horror have its way . . .

At that point Nisos is admitting the ironic mystery, that part of himself is as destructively cruel as the Ruler of Atlantis itself,

and it is that very part of him that he has got to call on in order to save himself and his friends. Homer himself seemed to recognise that Odysseus's progress through the Trojan War and his ten-year homecoming is marked continually by just this tragic paradox: the survival of one 'I am I' depends at critical points on the smashing of another. That the actual smashing in *Atlantis* is done by the club, and not by a too-complex too-divided human being, is another of the book's strokes of genius: it is a triumph of sex (normally innocent, but violent when frustrated) over deathliness.

Everything in the book asserts the ultimacy of its self, even the sociable and dependent fly:

"But after all the horrors I've seen, and after all the dangers from which I've been saved only by my constant and obsequious flattery of the goddess of Chance, I have learnt the supreme lesson of my life, that there is only one thing upon which a Fly can depend, namely himself." (249)

And Odysseus stands supremely for his own selfhood without making it in any way a limitation on other selfhoods. He is as "self-centred as a diamond" (114) but at the same time "crudely kind" and "of an almost supernatural discretion." He is deeply ordinary and pathetic—"an extremely old man without a wife, or a daughter, or a grand-daughter" (223)—but like Owen Glendower he has the power to abstract his self into its secret life and live within the security of his own multiple private sensations:

In his massive, caustic, long-sighted, super-human and yet sub-human way Odysseus had acquired the power of what might be called a "Postponement of thought" while a series of instinctive impulses directed his actions . . .

This power was not essentially a philosophical one, nor was it even predominantly an intellectual one. What it really might be called was the controlled release of that deep intimate rush of life which at special moments takes possession of us all with what feels as if it were a wild prophetic force under the direction of a calm calculating will . . .

It was indeed a very curious power that his soul possessed, of splitting itself up, if need were, into an array of square-headed conscious souls that were still Odysseus "pro tem", though they were Odysseus in multiplicity rather than Odysseus in unity! (56)

This, of course, gives us one of those 'messages' that John Cowper is famous or infamous for: the need of a wise passivity (which may be learned from a certain type of woman such as Arsinoe, "incompetent and divinely passive . . . protective of dreams and fancies and wishes and longings and illusions and imaginations and ideals, and rebellions, and destructions, and insurrections, and redemptions and recoveries, and rebirths, and by means of all these things eternally changing the movements and explorations of the energy of life from one generation to another . . ."), and the need to live the life of the earth as its other less busy and supposedly less intelligent inhabitants do. To do this one must take account of the unregarded flotsam of life. As the Fly says, "Unrecorded things are as important as recorded things" (248) and, if more people perceived them, the sum of happiness would be increased. We have the power of will and choice for this, for if we can will our own misery and destruction (as John Cowper says in *The Pleasures of Literature*⁵), we can will our own happiness. Will, however, is not in his view naked Nietzschean aggression, but simply the intensification of spontaneity and the realisation of the sub-conscious:

"To will," Zeuks told himself, "is simply to do a little more vigorously what we are already doing spontaneously. These efforts naturally occur when we grow consciously aware of some exercise in ourselves of the life-energy which moves in every offspring of the ancient earth. All we have to do is to use our will to intensify this." (286)

In other words, to make *her* will our peace. We can even will to forget ("But Maia, Mother of Hermes and grandmother of Pan, teach me to forget!") and to remember, and at times we must do both at once.

Another insight that is available to us all

is the sense of our earth-experiences as being archetypal ones. Nisos asks,

"Does everything come round in circles and repeat itself? Was there when people first invented boats and ships, some boy like me ten thousand years ago who lay on a ship's deck . . . and said to himself, just as I am saying now: 'I don't want to go back to mother and father . . .'"

"And will there be a boy like me ten thousand years hence . . .?" (387)

Nisos, being Odysseus's 'real' son, experiences vividly these moments out of time or in the whole of time, and these make him the true priest and prophet as opposed to Telemachus the 'false' son or the absurd Enorches. It is Nisos who understands the messages of Hierax the Hawk and who can interpret "the universal language of matter". It is Nisos who sees and hears Atropos (a wonderful portrait—one is tempted to say from life) and, through her, is in touch with the ultimate mysteries which are perhaps otherwise known only to the Sixth Pillar. They are mysteries quite beyond the gods and are so gentle and natural that they *seem* like accident or instinct at work. But they sanctify and make creative our individual choices, for example, they make Nisos and Arsinoe find and mercifully kill the maimed rat (412), and they make Zeus remember Pegasus's wound and make Nemertes join him in tending it (194-195). The fabulous Pegasus is real in just the same way that Pan and Babba the cow are real, being horsely where Pan is demi-godly and Babba cow-like.

The seemingly accidental impulses ('mysteries' is too obfuscating a word and 'powers' would suggest the wholly inappropriate and inadmissible cruelties of gods and men) give Odysseus his sense of destiny; his resolution to sail, not because there is some ulterior aim up a One-God's sleeve forcing and manipulating everything into a pattern, but because life must simply go on in its usual myriad-minded or myriad-unminded way.

What the Ruler of Atlantis would bring about, if it had its way, is the end of multiplicity and diversity. Odysseus's

natural enemy is the sea, from which, it is predicted, his death will come. Poseidon, says Chapman in his translation of *The Odyssey*, "reserves him still in life for still more death". The sea in this context means the undifferentiated slime of being—unity with a vengeance:

They were indeed confronted by what might have struck them as a vast reserve of creation-material out of which all the multitudinous formations of earth-life could be replenished, reproduced, refilled with pith and sap and blood-juice. (431)

The Ruler of Atlantis would presumably wish to keep it in this unindividualised and analysable form, subject to one mind and one purpose. It is important to note the anticipatory threat posed by Keto the Sea's eldest daughter as she advances on Tis's sister:

Keto's face was that of a beautiful woman, though it had at that moment an expression of horrible lust, mingled with insatiable greed: but it was not her face but her hair that was the strangest thing about her . . . absolutely ghastly in its reversion to a colour that could only be described as a manifestation of Death and Nothingness in the midst of Life and Joy . . . as if Nothingness itself, the primordial and perhaps the ultimate *Non Est* had chosen to incarnate itself in visible appearance.

"You will see me again!" it seemed to say to the old king, to the young farm-girl, to the club that slew the Nemean Lion . . . an offspring of this monster of the deep.

Poseidon himself has to step in to prevent the battle between Odysseus and Nothingness from prematurely taking place. A greater assertion of the absoluteness of his own being is to be demanded of the hero.

It may come as a surprise that both Keto and the Ruler of Atlantis have womanly faces since the struggle of cosmic forces which underlies the action of the novel (one might compare it with Keats's *Hyperion* in this respect) is supposed to be of the female principle against the male. It is, to put it in Robert Graves's terms, an attempt to re-instate the Triple or White Goddess in her

rightful place as "the Mother of All Living". As Petraia says,

"All that these silly boy-men want are more and more playthings. What they don't realise is the true meaning of this great news that is now spreading through the entire world. They don't realise, these silly boys, that during a few recent weeks there has been a revolution in Nature herself! Nature herself has decided to assert herself at last. And *this* means, *can* mean, *does* mean, and *will* mean only one thing! And that thing is this: Women from now on are no longer subject to men.

And it means more than that. It means that women are not only from now on freed from the yoke of men, but that from now on men are subject to women, and must learn, if they don't want to witness the death and perishing of the entire human race, to subject themselves to their mothers and wives and daughters.

From now on men must learn that their highest worship is their worship of women and that this worship is called *Uranian* because it resembles the inspiration of the Heavenly Muse!" (140-141)

Kelta the Dryad, Odysseus's Tree-Sister, another portrait straight from life, is struck by Zeus's last thunderbolt (a characteristic act of male cruelty) for her proclamation of the return of the Golden Age:

"It is a battle to restore to us women the ruling position we held at the beginning of things! In the reign of Kronos we held it—and *that* age was the Age of Gold. But it is Zeus the son of Kronos who has taken it from us, partly by his thunderbolts and partly by the cunning and strength of his two sons, Hermes and Herakles . . ." (224-225)

We know from the tone of this book as well as from his other writings that John Cowper's sympathies are with Petraia and Kleta. So, if the Ruler of Atlantis is the enemy of Zeus and the cause of a revolt against him, why should she have to be smashed and why should we be glad that she is? It is because she is not the Earth Mother or is at best only the terrible deathly aspect of her. The face of Death and Nothingness and the face of Life and Joy are both female. The opposing forces in *Atlantis* are not good and evil, but life and death,

man and woman, earth, sea and sky, mind and body, intellect and imagination, all powers that need each other. The only evil would be the monopolisation of the universe by one of them. In a world governed by men, women must rebel, and vice versa. It is the function of the thoroughly masculine Heraklean club to ensure that the Eternal Feminine does not become the appalling Death Mother.

All the female characters, nice and nasty, Keto as well and Kleta, are aspects of the great Goddess, who is called Gaia by Eione and Maia by Zeuks. The essential duality of the Goddess is neatly prefigured in the two endearingly dreadful 'auntie'-monsters, Eurybia and Echidna, or "far-flung force" and "the Serpent":

Eurybia was the grandmother of Hecate; while Echidna was the mother of the Hydra and of Cerberus, and also of the Lion of Nemea . . . In substance as well as in appearance the "eidolon" of Echidna was completely different from the image of Eurybia . . . At close quarters Eurybia was nothing but a thick wooden stump; while Echidna "the Serpent" was a short but very massive pillar of clearly articulated white stones, each one of which contained, embedded in the texture of its substance, a noticeable array of fossils, many of which though by no means all of them, had originally been shell-fish . . .

Yes, any reckless child, any rebellious prowler, any philosophical tramp, and desperate bandit, any life-weary beggar, any obsessed youth in pursuit of his ideal vision, could cross at will the boundary of this weird spot. Especially could any daring novice in religion, anxious to obtain supernatural support for his own particular interpretation of the Mysteries of Orpheus or the Mysteries of Eleusis come stealthily and humbly to a smooth lawn equidistant between these two Beings, or between the wavering pillars of vapour that represent them, and, as he listened to the wind-impervious, storm-immune, rain-indifferent, unbridled and unholy dialogue between them, either be upheld in his special vein of mystical revelation about the secrets of the cosmos or be driven in a wild reaction against every spiritual cult in the civilised world to the desperate madness of patricide or matricide or

to some astounding incest or bestiality or perhaps even some unheard-of attempt to side-track or undermine the very fountain-spring of human sexual life and to pervert the unmistakable intentions of nature. (26-28)

This shrine is Arima where Arsinoe carves the image of her father from an ash-tree and where Zeuks heedlessly rushes Telamonian Ajax to his sublime mystical death in symbolic reunion with and reconciliation between the two supreme tragic warriors, Achilles and Hector. Here Zeus learns that there is more to life than that which demands the simple response of defiance or Prokleesis: there is that which gives *The Iliad* its overwhelming grandeur. It is again that accidental-seeming impulse which is not finally amoral or disregarding of the horrors committed by gods and men, and again it is Nisos who, thanks to Atropos, is its interpreter:

And what became for Nisos a life-long memory, what became for him yet another symbol of that *spoudazo-terpsis*, "my whole will to enjoy what happens", which was now his war-cry, was the strange fact that this inward gleam in the left front hoof of the flying horse corresponded with, and answered to, an inner light in the fathomless depth of the liquid eye which Pegasos turned upon his passengers as he twisted his flexible neck round to see whether everyone was comfortably and securely mounted.

But no metaphysical war-cries and no mystical symbols can keep certain painful and jarring jolts and jerks from destroying our peace; and the splinter that now pierced our young friend's ideal chain of reasoning was a teasing and academic kind of question following closely on the childish one he had just asked himself about the conscience of a fly compared with that of a whale.

And the point was this. How far were the gods, by nature, by tradition, by custom, by international law, and finally by the necessity of the case, exempt from the moral law that all human beings of every tribe in the world feel an instinctive imperative wherever it comes from, to obey?

Themis, the Goddess of Order, may have been forced to yield to the embraces of Zeus, but it was she who named her daughter *Dike*, "Just Retribution" and all his lightnings and

thunderings cannot save the All-Father from the penalty of his crimes. (408-409)

But besides retribution there is also forgiveness. Enorches, for example, is forgiven for all the trouble he causes with his Orphic mania. He is not one of John Cowper's villains. He has the Moth's sympathies for a start and he speaks in a Rabelaisian style that gives away his essential state of conflict. For he is a sensual man as the enormity of his testicles suggests, and he has presumably taken on the Orphic religion out of frustration and misery, just as Telemachos has succumbed to it out of loneliness. They are both guilty of precisely that monomania which John Cowper identifies as the ever-present danger of life, a much more terrible form of which lurks in the Atlantis Ruler's "science". As priests were guilty in the past, so scientists may be today, of refusal to allow the existence of that which lies outside their pathetically limited terms of reference. As a consequence, forgetting Greek balance, mankind is thrown into a sequence of alternating and absurd extremes:

Nisos couldn't resist saying to himself: "Would this extraordinary creature advise us to lose ourselves in the madness of love or the madness of drink, and thus get to the Original Nothingness, before the earth, before the sky, before the sea, before the sun, before the gods created man, before man created the Gods, if he hadn't forgotten the oracle that my mother used to tell me was what, by his obedience to it, made Odysseus the wisest of men—*Meeden Agan*, 'nothing in excess'?" (397-398)

Enorches offers 'love' as cerebral and detached from any earthly reality, and this is because he suffers so much that he would really like to see reality wiped out. John Cowper makes us pity the man so much possessed by misery that he shapes his longings for oblivion into a religion: Zeuks says,

"Enorches is the unhappiest man on earth! Anyone who understood to the full the real nature of the unhappiness of Enorches would die of pity . . .

Enorches is deliberately lying when he says that Eros and Dionysos together redeem the

world . . . by means of mystical love or mystical intoxication. He implies they do it so utterly and completely that ordinary self-control, ordinary kindness, ordinary decency, ordinary honesty, ordinary courtesy, ordinary generosity, are rendered totally and wholly unimportant when these two mystical ecstasies are at work; and that it is in fact as an alternative to the good and the true, and the beautiful, that these celestial manias and heavenly drugs fill the entire stage and obsess the whole nature of man's consciousness . . .

What he really hates with a hatred that is so co-existent with his uttermost being and with the uttermost being of what he hates is nothing less than *Life Itself* . . .

In the depths of his own being he is so scooped out by despair, so bled white by abysmal unhappiness that he has only one desire left, the desire that Life once and for all and in every place under the sun and moon, and upon and within and below the earth, should be destroyed and brought to an end forever! Down in the depths of this priest's nature is something much deeper and much nearer an absolute than Death; for Death, after all, implies that something has lived or it could not have died; but in this man's nature, when we go down to the very depths of it, we find *that* which can in reality have no 'nature' of any sort at all, for it is Nothingness Itself". (192-193)

This is a very telling analysis of puritan natures that would bend all to a central belief. Such people are very frightening, but finally they need sympathy rather than condemnation, and they need the opportunity perhaps to make reparation for the harm they do, as when Enorches helps to heal with his spittle the terrible wound he has inflicted on Pegasos (405). Enorches allows his "corpse of living thought" to plunge into the ocean (351) and is able to join the select band who are taken up on Pegasos's back.

Thus, though Enorches himself would exclude so much of life, he is not excluded *by* life, within whose maternal scope also is drawn his natural antagonist, the earthy sceptic Zeuks, product of Pan's jolly promiscuity. Philosophy exists, John Cowper suggests, to bring the sexes together (245) and, of course, it is sex that is the originator of all our identities and

individualities, as Eione learns from her encounter with Pan:

"I told him it wasn't fair that our mother the Earth should just use us as procreating nest-eggs for her own purposes. And he agreed . . . 'Life', said Arcadian Pan to me, 'life is lured out of the inert and inanimate elements into its earliest existence by the promise of the indescribable ecstasy of sexual pleasure!'" (380-381)

Like sex, death, ordinary natural death as opposed to deathliness, is part of the comedy of life, and this is presumably why Zeuks dies laughing, along with the faithful Moth and Fly:

It is a curious thing but "what happens" as we say, often takes the course of events out of the hands of any particular power, even out of the hands of Tyche the Goddess of Chance herself, and yet doesn't yield it up to Fate or Destiny or the Will of Heaven. The event is not so much stranger than fiction as more appallingly natural than the natural, and to our amazement redeems all sorrows in the sweetness of its silent finality. (459)

Zeuks's laughter is not the laughter of bitter defiance or rejection but an embrace of life and still more life, like the reconciling fugal laughter which ends Verdi's *Falstaff* (also the product of a sublime octogenarian infant). Death is not life's opposite, but simply a part of life, one god, Aidoneus, among many:

"When you consider," Zeuks murmured, but Nisos could see, below the tragic pity of his words, a bubble of such defiant, mischievous merriment bursting through the whole body of the man that it seemed to arise out of the heart of life itself, "when you consider all the men and women and all the beasts, fishes, birds, reptiles and insects, isn't it awful to think of creatures dying in the panic terror of loneliness? Did you know, my friend,"—Zeuks' speech by this time was so low that Nisos had to bend to catch it—"that there are vibrations from one organism to another throughout the entire universe? Well! There *are!* And do you know what I'm going to do now? And please don't disturb me in it! I give you my word I'll die the moment I've done it. I'm going to tell everyone in this whole crazy and confounded world that they've got me, Zeuks, the son of

Pan, that is to say of the rebel who is everywhere, *on their side against Zeus*, and that the best way of fooling him and the whole lot of them is to die laughing, yes! laughing at this big, bloody, beggarly joke of a world! Stand back now, my dear!"

Nisos simply and silently obeyed the fellow; but the burst of stored-up ribaldry with which Zeuks died was so explosive that there was no corpse left to bury or burn. Out of the world-dust he'd come, and into world-dust he dissolved, and the tiny blob of insect lovers he'd swallowed, melted with him into thin air. (461-462)

"What happens", as John Cowper says, goes beyond the powers that *seem* to govern

it. What has happened in this book is that Odysseus has had to gather together from the fabric of Ithaca itself those forces both functional (such as the sail-cloth) and emblematical (such as Pontopereia), which will enable him to take the club Expectation to kill the Ruler of Atlantis and to bring about the wedding of Nisos and Arsinöe in a symbolic reconciliation of Greece and Troy. What happens in the end, on the shores of the New World, is that the "many-sided" Odysseus embraces the Multiverse and all the polygenic, polychromatic, polydaemonic life that is ever to come into it.

Kim Taplin

“No Man’s Girl” and Other Borrowings

Seeds of the central relationship of *Maiden Castle*—that between Dud No-man and Wizzie Ravelston—can be found in Borrow’s *Lavengro* and its continuation *The Romany Rye*. Whether or not John Cowper Powys was conscious of their origin, it is interesting to study their growth.¹

When Lavengro first encounters Isopel Berners she is in company with a tinker known as the Flaming Tinman and his “mort”. They lead a roving life with caravans and horses. Lavengro fights with the Tinman over the right to occupy Mumpers’ Dingle, and against the odds, and with some assistance from Isopel, lays him out. Isopel displays a hot temper and a ready tongue. The discomfited tinker and his “mort” prepare to take their departure, the woman cursing Isopel roundly, and Isopel, who has her own cart, elects to stay in the Dingle with Lavengro. When he returns after seeing off the tinker, he finds Isopel sitting by the fire in tears.

“They were bad people,” said she “and I did not like them, but they were my only acquaintance in the wide world.”

She is now alone with Lavengro.

Isopel lays stress on her virginity and on her high birth, indignantly repudiating the tinker’s reference to his “two mort” and taking pride in her “noble name” although born illegitimately in the workhouse. She and Lavengro live together for some time in the Dingle, sleeping apart, Isopel making independent excursions on unspecified errands and Lavengro visiting the pub and fraternising with the gypsies. They drink a good deal of tea together—they never seem to have a meal—and Lavengro attempts to teach Isopel Armenian.

She becomes fond of him, but finds his behaviour perplexing. What are his in-

tentions? She is touched by his preparation of the fire and the kettle in case of her return:

“I was beginning to think you were utterly selfish, caring for nothing but the gratification of your own whims”,

she says. The following day during a lesson in Armenian he makes her conjugate the verb to love, and then teases her when she takes it as more than a randomly chosen example. It is a blow to her pride. She unbent a little from her proud independence in allowing herself to become attached to him, and he then humiliated her. With a hint of sadism he presses on, and Isopel recognises the egotistical bully:

“Then you meant nothing after all,” said Belle raising her voice. “Let us proceed,” said I, “sirietsi, I loved.” “You never loved anyone but yourself,” said Belle.

The scene continues through tears to a proposal of marriage and emigration to America. The next day she leaves and does not return, and after a few days he receives a letter from her announcing her departure alone for America. It is couched in affectionate terms but complains of his “behaving in a very strange manner, till I could stand your conduct no longer.”

Now from one point of view the “strangeness” of Lavengro’s behaviour could be construed merely as the hesitation of a moral, prudent and modest young man to commit himself either to an illicit sexual relationship or to a hasty offer of marriage. Isopel says in her letter that had he offered marriage at the beginning of their acquaintance she would have accepted: clearly although virtuous she has none of the desire of an educated person to establish a mental relationship before plunging into matrimony. But there is something perverse

in Lavengro's apparent advance and then withdrawal, and also in his tyrannical insistence on trying to make her learn against her inclination and beyond her ability. Moreover the curious parallel story of his behaviour towards the gypsy Ursula points the same way. Unlike Isopel, Ursula is no better than she should be, and turns out to be married to boot. She dresses herself to kill and then is "loosed" to him while her brother Jasper lurks, like Polonius, on the other side of the hedge. Like Hamlet, Lavengro speaks strangely to her; it is as Jasper says "a rum conversation". Afterwards the gypsy is half-admiring, half-disgusted:

"I half-expected to have heard you make love to her behind the hedge: but I begin to think you care for nothing but old words and strange stories. Lor', to take a young woman under a hedge and talk to her as you did to Ursula; and yet you got everything out of her that you wanted . . . You are a cunning one . . ."

Again, this could be taken simply as faithfulness to Isopel, morality, modesty, and so on. Yet there is a hint of something unnatural in such behaviour, since not only do Ursula and Jasper see it in that light, but the reason for his meeting with her is to question her about her "Song of the Broken Chastity". Our hero, it seems, likes to arouse desire in women but not to satisfy it.

If we now turn to *Maiden Castle* we find that when No-man first encounters Wizzie Ravelston (the name is even a possible corruption of Isopel) she is in company with the circus characters known as Old Funky and Grummer Urgan. They lead a roving life with caravans and horses. Like Isopel, she first appears as a spirited virago. No-man does not fight, he buys Wizzie, and although she accompanies him voluntarily it is understood that she is to be what at an earlier period would be called "under his protection". She too is cursed at parting and waits before the fire on her first evening alone with the man she has taken up with. The Urgans were, if not "bad people"—there are few whom Powys would condemn so roundly—nonetheless pretty

revolting specimens of mankind; yet Wizzie's little girl Lovie at one point cries to be back with them.

Wizzie conceals the fact that she has been raped by Old Funky and had a child, but she also conceals her own birth:

"No-one knows how proud I am," she thought, and a look of hard, bitter satisfaction came into her face as she thought how she had completely hidden from D.No-man the fact of her mother's having been a "lady".

Although she was not born in the workhouse Old Funky associates her verbally with it in a tirade which could virtually have been made by the tinker upon Isopel:

". . . with her tempers and carryings-on and her "I will" and "I won'ts", she be no man's girl, and never will be nothink else. 'Tis to Wokkus, 'tis to nothink but Wokkus thik bitch belongs."

Wizzie and No-man live together, and indeed sleep together, although indulging only in unconsummated eroticism. They too frequently drink tea together—although they take breakfast and lunch apart; but whereas No-man has the separate life of his writing and his walks, Wizzie has little independence. No-man talks tiresomely to her of what she can't understand. Finally she leaves without warning for America, and after a few days he receives an affectionate letter from her which nonetheless declares "I couldn't stand it any more".

Both Nance Quirm and Thuella make advances to No-man which he does not discourage but keeps tantalisingly cerebral—although from Thuella he gets, in more than one way, what he deserves. Jenny Dearth's outburst against him contains the same accusations as were made against Lavengro by Isopel and by Jasper: she reviles his putting books before people, his slyness,² his giving Nance the same treatment as Wizzie and in sum, she says, "You thought only of your own selfish sensations".

What Powys has done to Isopel is to increase her psychological complexity and to de-romanticise her. Isopel is beautiful,

strong, solitary, virginal and utterly independent, though deeply affectionate. Wizzie is not beautiful, though she has of course a "lurin' figure". She does not disdain feminine adornment: Jenny and Thuella both like to help her titivate and she does not suffer it out of mere politeness as Isopel does at the hands of Mrs. Petulengro. Wizzie is not merely technically deflowered; she recalls her rape with mixed feelings. She feels disgust, but knows she could have prevented it, and at times is glad to have been desired and possessed by a real man. Wizzie in her stained lavender tights is a less noble and more realistic figure than Isopel. She is often selfish and trivial. Isopel painfully maintains her independence: Wizzie has to win hers. And even then, Wizzie does not go alone to America but in company with the enigmatic Thuella. Although we are to believe that she will follow her own career, whether she will continue dependent on Thuella is left in doubt. At any rate, it took Thuella to make her go. But we feel sure that both Isopel and Wizzie will remain "no man's girl" until a fit man can be found.

As far as Dud is concerned, in the light of the close relationship between *Maiden Castle* and the Isopel Berners incident, one omission is revealing. In her letter, Isopel wrote:

"I had almost become convinced that, though with a wonderful deal of learning, and exceedingly shrewd in some things, you were—pray don't be offended—at the root mad!"

The sentiment and the expression "at the root mad" could have come from Powys's own pen, yet he omits it from Wizzie's estimate of Dud. Elsewhere, in the character of Sylvanus Cobbold, he presents such an estimate of a man with the same sexual perversion, although he invites us to question it. Dud, who is perhaps closer to himself, he presumably wishes to exonerate. The theme of sublimation, or as Uryen puts it the attempt to "stir up sex until it would put out the sun and then keep it sterile", is of course one Powys explores in many places. Jasper's words to Lavengro

"you got everything out of her that you wanted" could refer simply to information on Romany language and customs, but I believe that Powys sensed in them, and that they may imply, something of that sterile, vicious pleasure which No-man feels when he looks at Wizzie or Thuella:

"I can enjoy her," he thought, "by simply looking at her . . . and not touching her at all!"

Much more of course could be said about Dud, and about Wizzie. However in delineating the relationship and in commenting elsewhere in the novel on the troublesome business of what he calls in *The Art of Happiness* "Woman with Man" and "Man with Woman" Powys goes far beyond Borrow.

In the first decade of the century Powys was giving a course of twelve lectures on the English novelists, the last being on Kingsley and Borrow. The printed syllabus lists only *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* as prescribed reading, and contains a number of revealing hints. As it is only available in the archive of the Department of External Studies at Oxford, I will quote at length:

Lecture XII. George Borrow.

Strange circumstances of his life . . . His vigorous, bracing and imperturbable character . . . His original, tough and sinewy English . . . His autobiographical stories half fact, half fable; their romantic charm and tantalizing incompleteness . . . power of semi-humorous description . . . His marrowy yet minute realism . . . His prejudices . . . His power of delineating strange characters. Jasper Petulengro. His pathetic sense of suppressed passion in strong yet tender natures. Isobel Berners. His sympathy for the Welsh . . . The preacher Peter³ . . . His historic sense of legends and traditions . . .

Without the references to Jasper, Isobel and Peter, this could be part of a synopsis of a lecture on Powys. And one could invent other headings in the same vein which could apply to the two writers equally—for instance:

His love of walking and of secondhand books. His interest in neurotic obsession and other abnormal psychological states. His inclination to credit the supernatural. His

fascination with the lives of those beyond the pale of ordinary society.

I suggest that Powys felt a strong sympathy with the character of Borrow as it finds expression in his "autobiographical stories half fact, half fable", and that besides the many other tastes they seem to have shared, he too enjoyed depicting himself in a quirky and romantic light in his own *Autobiography*. Both he and Borrow write with a mixture of jealousy and affection of an attractive and talented brother in contrast with whom their very reason was sometimes called in question. Both he and Borrow were allowed great freedom to range the countryside as boys, and both report weird and semi-mystical experiences. Both were deeply introverted, and both report suffering from chronic attacks of irrational terror. I am not casting doubt on the "truth" of the *Autobiography*—I am in no position to do so—but rather pointing out that there are parallels in tone and emphasis between it and *Lavengro*, particularly in the early years. Since we know he read *Lavengro* carefully it seems

reasonable to detect an influence—not here in the shaping of a fiction, but in shaping attitudes to fact.

A curiously Powysian character in *Lavengro*, the author with an obsession, speaks of his neurosis in the following terms:

"... it was neither more nor less than a doubt of the legality of my claim to the thoughts, expressions and situations contained in the book; that is, to all that constituted the book. How did I get them? How did they come into my mind? Did I invent them? Did they originate with myself? Are they my own, or are they some other body's?"

For him it was that way madness lay, since the quest for pure invention is of course doomed to failure. Nonetheless, if it comes as something of a surprise to detect in a writer apparently so hugely original as Powys anything but the grandest and most conscious influence, such as that of Homer or Dostoevsky, we should reflect, as we are well used to do with Shakespeare, that it is not the sum of the ingredients but the completed dish which is unique.

NOTES

¹ The earlier Powys version of the Dud and Wizzie story, which appears in *Wood and Stone*, owes little to Borrow. But in view of the connection which I demonstrate between *Lavengro* and *Maiden Castle* the word "flamingly", somewhat oddly used to describe the naming of the circus, recalls the "Flaming Tinman". Also, like the tinker, Job Love was not an "authentic gipsy".

² This slyness is of course precisely No-man's Odyssean trick, a trick crucial to Powys's philosophy of defeating the misery of the human condition by a supposedly harmless self-centredness. The idea is explored in *The Art of Happiness* and in many places in the novels. What is curious is that Jasper Petulengro

should use the rather unlikely word "cunning" in a similar context in *Lavengro*.

³ I include the mention of the preacher Peter although he is not connected with the Mumpers' Dingle episode, because he suffered from an obsessive fear that he had committed "the unpardonable sin". The tragic irony of his life is the same as that of Mr. Evans in *The Glastonbury Romance*: both men commit the sin not in the ways they imagine, by the childish articulation of unbelief or by the enjoyment of sadistic thoughts, but by their failure to believe redemption possible for these sins, by their despair. Both men are Welsh, and both have innocent and devoted wives who try to comfort them.

Barbara Dennis

Two Views of Matthew Arnold: A Note on John Cowper Powys's place as a Literary Critic

Matthew Arnold's poetry was an attractive subject of criticism for his contemporary fellow writers, among them Arthur Hugh Clough, W. H. Mallock, the novelist, J. A. Froude, the historian—who very notably shared Arnold's religious views but wrote about other themes in his poetry too—and R. H. Hutton. This critical interest has continued into our time. T. S. Eliot discussed Arnold with enthusiasm, and John Cowper Powys has revealed his fascination for his fellow-writer in both *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938) and *Visions and Revisions* (1955). For Powys, Arnold ranks apparently as one of the three clearly outstanding modern, that is post-Romantic, poets, the other two being Whitman and Hardy.

Of the Victorian critics, it is probably Richard Holt Hutton who contributed the most perceptive and sensitive analyses of Arnold to appear in his own time. It seems that John Cowper Powys has much in common with Hutton in his view of Arnold. Hutton, the most 'modern' of all the Victorian critics, had been, until he moved from the Unitarian faith to one of progressively high Anglicanism, the editor with Walter Bagehot of the *National Review*, and later (1861) he took over the editorship and part-ownership of the *Spectator*, making it, according to William Watson, the poet, "the most entirely respected newspaper printed in the English language". His position then gave him the opportunity to indulge his own particular literary interests, and to offer to the readers of the *Spectator* analyses of his favourites, who included Matthew Arnold. Of these, one of his own

contributors, Watson, was later to write, "Mr. Hutton's part has been that of seer rather than of mere critic."

With Hutton's background and interests (he was as much a theological writer and thinker as literary) it is, perhaps, not surprising that many of his emphases when he is writing of Arnold's poetry, should be on the religious side of it, though this is by no means his exclusive concern. It is interesting that both Hutton and Powys should choose to write about this side of Arnold in a similar fashion. Obviously the spiritual unrest of his generation was an important theme for Arnold, and one he explores in both his poetry and his prose. Both Powys and Hutton, while not writing exclusively on the theme, refer constantly to *Literature and Dogma* as well as to *Empedocles on Etna*, *Thyris*, *The Scholar Gypsy* and *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*. Powys tells us that there are "two main undertones of his recurrent poetic themes—his separation from the Marguerite of the Swiss poems and his separation from the faith of his fathers." Hutton has it that Arnold has "two distinct strands: first the clear recognition . . . of our spiritual unrest, and the manful efforts to control it; next the clear recognition . . . of the balm to be found in sincere communion with Nature." Both Powys and Hutton see in these themes Arnold's sense of "separateness", his deliberate self-differentiation from those around him. Powys feels that he betrays "a cold and weary distaste, a fastidious shrinking, a magnetic *repulsion* from the rough-and-tumble of human intercourse," and con-

sciously distances himself from the passions, ambitions, superstitions, illusions of the mass of his fellow-men, and adds that "to shake off the too hot, the too dusty, the too familiar pressure of life . . . seems to be the recurrent effort he is always making." R. H. Hutton comes to the same conclusions. "The sign of this limitation," he says, "of this exclusion, of this externality of touch, is the tinge of conscious intellectual majesty . . . There is always a tincture of pride in his confessed inability to believe—a self-congratulation that he is too clear-eyed to yield to the temptations of the heart". Powys confirms his point a little further on when he refers again to Matthew Arnold's "secret aloofness, from human warmth" and quotes his liking for the words 'sever', 'severing', 'severance':

"Who renders vain their deep desire?—
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade between their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea!"

So too, again, Hutton remarks on the *detached* Arnold, who writes about his fellowmen from the outside only, "with a certain intellectual superficiality of touch which suggests the sympathetic observer rather than the wakeful sufferer, and which leaves an unfathomed depth beneath the layer of perturbed consciousness with which he deals".

Not only do they agree about this deliberate isolation on Arnold's part (which a defender might shrug off as "In Utrumque Paratus"!), Powys and Hutton also coincide in their appreciation of Arnold's other distinctive tone. As Powys says, "A great deal too much has been made of Matthew Arnold's 'pathetic wistfulness', as he noticed the collapse of the Christian faith. He wrote of this event with sympathy and tenderness; but it is surely clear that it gave him profound philosophic satisfaction, and now and then I even detect a touch of heathen glee." Powys does not undervalue Arnold's anguish when he finds that the faith of his fathers is not for him, but neither does he fail to enjoy Arnold's mischievous delight in upsetting the platitudes of the orthodox. "That abysmal

respect for Christianity, that infinite terror of giving offence to believers, which Tennyson and Browning displayed . . . did not touch Matthew Arnold at all . . . He teases his bishops as lightly as he would have teased his 'dear Dr. Arnold' of Rugby". Powys even refers to Max Beerbohm's cartoon of Matthew Arnold and his little niece, later to become Mrs. Humphry Ward. Arnold is sprawling against the mantelpiece, grinning broadly, and the prim little girl is saying, "Why, oh why, Uncle Matthew, can you never be wholly serious?" For Arnold was never, as Powys points out, very particular about the figure he cut himself. And even Hutton, so much near Arnold in time, can point out the teasing spirit of his scepticism, the way in which his "mischievous and illuminating phrases" were so often designed to shock the conventional believer. Powys calls him an "easy-going amateur" who fully understood that to keep repeating the same hit in the same weak spot would invariably rouse the professionals to fury! Thus his definition of God as 'The Eternal not ourselves that makes for righteousness', his reiterated affirmation in *Literature and Dogma* that the most remarkable thing about Jesus Christ was his 'sweet reasonableness', his famous definition of Religion itself as 'morality touched by emotion', are taken up by both Powys and Hutton as examples of Arnold's genius for phrase-making.

Their conclusions about Arnold, too, are similar, though they may express them in different terms. For Powys what we learn from the "peaceful, industrious, philosophic personage . . . struggling in his conscientious, amateurish way to live according to 'the best that has been said and thought', an old-fashioned liberal, a patient public servant, whose most exalted 'cause' was the unsensational one of Secondary Education" is the "necessity of remaining an uncommitted agnostic, upon the necessity of depending on *nothing* in heaven or earth . . . but . . . the secret inner voice of one's own separate soul". For Hutton too, in all ultimate problems Arnold's solution is grounded, with an instinctive

rather than a rational bias, in his agnosticism. As he points out, in *Empedocles on Etna*, and all his other poems, Arnold "cannot paint the restlessness of the soul . . . without painting also the attitude of resistance to it, a nature that fixes the limits beyond which the corrosion of distrust and doubt shall not go, a deep, speculative melancholy kept at bay, *not* by faith, but by a kind of domineering temperance of nature". "It seems to be Matthew Arnold's secret in Art not to minimise

the tragedy or sadness of the human lot, but to turn our attention from the sadness or the tragedy to the strength which it illustrates and elicits".

Both J. C. Powys and R. H. Hutton, in fact, separated as they are in time and faith, see and like the same Arnold. Clearly, as Powys put it, his poetry, which "reaches in the secret depths of our hearts", has linked the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries in appreciation.

Emyr Humphreys

Arnold in Wonderland

On a Saturday in August in the year 1864, Mr. Matthew Arnold, Professor of Poetry at the University of Oxford and Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools, sat in number ten, St. George's Crescent, Llandudno, writing holiday letters to relatives and friends. The date, as always, is very relevant. In the dim caves of Mount Helicon where history is being constantly rewritten, dates are like glow worms that provide the weavers with the only source of light. But so is the address. Middle class and robustly anglophile. St. George's Crescent. An architectural scimitar lying across the dragon's throat.

The distinguished letter writer is forty two and in a state of pleasureable excitement: in Llandudno, on the Welsh coast, there was a distinct possibility that his poetic career, that seemed so ominously complete, could be resumed: the visionary gleam could be returning. The Inspector of Schools, braced and refreshed by the Celtic breeze, would turn once more to the "grand business of modern poetry, that moral interpretation, from an independent point of view, of man and the world".

"The poetry of the Celtic race", he wrote to his mother, "and its names of places quite overpowers me and it will be long before Tom forgets the line, 'Hear from thy grave, great Taliesin, hear', from Gray's Bard, since I have repeated it a hundred times a day on our excursions".

After all his mother was Cornish. Her maiden name was Penrose, a word surely cognate with that Penrhos through which he walked with his brother Tom on several of his excursions. Being half Celtic had become a stimulating concept. Perhaps it brought relief to the intensity of moral earnestness, labelled Teutonic by his father

and headmaster, deeply instilled in childhood and youth and then reinforced by a mature sense of mission.

"Then also", he writes to Lady de Rothschild, "I have a great penchant for the Celtic races, with their melancholy and unprogressiveness".

It is never difficult to trace the sources of Matthew Arnold's ideas and enthusiasms. He made little attempt to conceal them. His stance as an advocate of high culture and arbiter of literary taste in England did not depend on originality. The driving force of his message lay in its concern with, and application to, the English situation. His business was with the refinement of the condition of middle class success. History was clearly in the process of delivering the wide world into the hands of the English. England was the new Rome. A new form of Empire had come into being apparently as much by accident as by design. Such rude vigour and crude success had to be provided with a higher purpose. By some divine accident which a more superstitious age would have called a miracle, the imperiousness of the Norman, the honesty of the Saxon, the thoroughness of the Teuton and the Titanism of the Celt had been combined to create the potential of a new race of supermen. The Church of England, his father had already pointed out, needed to be made more flexible, to accommodate wider concepts. A place had to be made for the drive and dedication of Dissent, for the reorganisation of Education, for the fruits of Science and the Power that came with extended Trade and Knowledge. Dr. Arnold of Rugby was an opponent of Disestablishment for his own reasons.

The Church, never disestablished but dedicated to England . . . of all human ties

that to our country is the highest and most sacred: and England to a true Englishman ought to be dearer than the peculiar forms of the Church of England.

In that mild way which in the end merely reinforces the fact of apostolic succession, Matthew Arnold had rebelled against his father. For him, C of E, meant the culture of England. An improved breed of English poets and men of letters would eventually replace the old ministry. An elevated culture would be capable not only of providing a 'criticism of Life': it would also replace dogma to become the true source of righteousness and personal morality. But there was a great deal of hard work to be done. Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Tennyson, Browning, talented as they were, had not succeeded in lifting English verse up to the Olympian levels of the work of his hero Goethe. Until the whole body of modern English writing could be seen to combine the virtues and excel the output of German and French, the language could not take off and provide the best parts of the nations of the earth with the appropriate cultural extension of universal practical Christianity.

A man with a mission has earned his rest and he has a right to relax on his holidays. Reading *La poesie des races celtiques* by Renan, Arnold had learned that this obscure body of poetry was characterised by spirituality, melancholy and a heightened awareness of nature. Arnold had no knowledge of Welsh or of any Celtic language. But the poet in him quickly overpowered the educator. As he stood barefooted and bare headed *ar ben y Gogarth*, that most conspicuous of headlands, did he not feel within himself the exquisite sensations of spirituality, sweet melancholy and a heightened awareness of nature? True his feet were bare for mundane Teutonic reasons. He had a blister on his big toe as a result of too much excited tramping about on Wordsworthian 'excursions'. The place is now the Great Orme's Head and the site of cafes, overhead railways, litter bins, and funfairs, but in 1864 the coastline of Wales

could still provide a poet in any language with the feeling that he could be treading on sacred ground. Bays, inlets, rocky shores, promontories and deserted beaches combined with the generous sea to provide an infinite variety of symphonic sunsets.

At last one turns around and looks westward. Everything is changed. Over the mouth of the Conway and its sands is the eternal softness and mild light of the west; the low line of mystic Anglesey, the precipitous Penmaenmawr, and the great group of Carnedd Llewelyn and Carnedd David, and their brethren fading away, hill behind hill, in an aërial haze, make the horizon; between the fort of Penmaenmawr and the bending coast of Anglesey, the sea, a silver stream, disappears one knows not whither. On this side, Wales—Wales, where the past still lives, where every place has its tradition, every name its poetry, and where the people, the genuine people, still knows this past, this tradition, this poetry, and lives with it and clings to it; while, alas, the prosperous Saxon on the other side, the invader from Liverpool and Birkenhead, has long ago forgotten his.

The prose style is still beguiling. In an easy urbane fashion, it exercises its own authority. It is an active world of assertion from which all coarseness and vulgarity has been excluded. It has the strength of concern and the delicacy of a cultivated aesthetic sense. And it has more. For the purpose of these four lectures on *The Study of Celtic Literature*, Professor Arnold has donned druidical robes. The Order is of his own making. As befits a poet who is attempting to synthesise a modern mythology, his utterance is reaching out towards incantation. To achieve his effects he is prepared to pay the price of oversimplification. The levy is not onerous. In dealing with such an obscure subject, accuracy is not important: the effect is all. Somehow or other, the haughty Philistines of England must be made aware of the Celtic species expiring on the westward perimeter of the world's most advanced and prosperous state. Here was the son of Arnold of Rugby, 'That Teuton of Teutons, the Celt-hating Dr. Arnold', telling the

world that the despised and dejected Celts still had something valuable to offer.

When I was young, I was taught to think of Celt as separated by an impassable gulf from Teuton: my father in particular was never weary of contrasting them: he insisted much oftener on the separation between us and them than on the separation between us and any other race in the world.

The central argument of Arnold's message of reconciliation between conquered Celt and all-conquering Saxon was something he declared to be scientific.

The Celt's claims towards having his genius and its works fairly treated as objects of scientific investigation, the Saxon can hardly reject, when these claims are urged simply on their own merits, and are not mixed up with extraneous pretensions which jeopardise them.

An adroit manipulation of syntax conjures up the illusion of an atmosphere of scientific detachment. At the same time, the impersonal calm, the judicial manner, the authoritative concern for the English commonweal, underline the fact that the Celts in the manner of tramps, gipsies, poachers, disrespectful labourers and other elements from the unstable sediment of an otherwise well-ordered society, are up before the bench. In the end, sentence will have to be passed. The most pressing question at issue is which set of laws should be applied in this case. From his chosen stance as judge-advocate, there is no doubt in Arnold's mind.

What the French call the *science des origines*—the science of origins,—a science which is at the bottom of all real knowledge of the actual world, and which is every day growing in interest and importance—is very incomplete without a thorough critical account of the Celts and their genius, language and literature.

In order that no one should doubt his good intentions, in his introduction to the lectures, Arnold gallantly defends the hapless Welsh and their Eisteddfod from the blunt, blistering and blustering verdict of The Times Newspaper.

The Welsh language is the curse of Wales . . . An Eisteddfod is one of the most mischievous and selfish pieces of sentimentalism which could possibly be perpetrated. It is simply a foolish interference with the natural progress of civilisation and prosperity . . . Not only the energy and power, but the intelligence and music of Europe have come mainly from Teutonic sources, and this glorification of everything Celtic, if it were not pedantry, would be sheer ignorance. The sooner all Welsh specialities disappear from the face of the earth the better.

Arnold is opposed to the harshness and the brutal frankness: the unacceptable face of Anglican uniformity and Teutonic intolerance. What he offers is a softer approach to the first of the final solutions based on the science of origins which so deeply stirred the imagination and even the 'imaginative reason' of the men of the nineteenth century and provided the twentieth with its most terrifying popular myth. He cannot help being sorry for the Celts particularly "the quiet, peaceable Welsh".

. . . his land is a province and his history petty, and his Saxon subduers scout his speech as an obstacle to civilisation, and the echo of all its kindred in other lands is growing every day fainter and more feeble: gone in Cornwall, going in Brittany and the Scotch Highlands, going too in Ireland and there above all, the badge of the beaten race, the property of the vanquished.

That summer of sixty four, the Eisteddfod pitched its tent in Llandudno. Professor Arnold's little boys were disappointed when they discovered it was not a circus. The professor himself, expecting too much from a Bardic Congress conducted in a language he could not understand, was disappointed to discover that it was. The Gorsedd was held in the open air. The weather was bad. The speeches were long. The presiding bard was got up in some absurd costume. Inside the tent things were no better. The back seats where the Welsh should have been seated were nearly empty. The front seats were occupied by Saxons who came there from curiosity, not enthusiasm. And when a speech was made in English, powerful as it was, by a nonconformist divine, he

inevitably spoilt his case by overstating it. His eloquence was given a stony Teutonic response.

"The whole performance on that particular morning, was incurably lifeless".

The Arnold family's diversions during their Llandudno stay were not confined to romantic 'excursions' or attending Eisteddfodau. As he wrote to his sister when he mentioned spending three and a half hours on the Great Orme in bare feet . . . "There are one or two people here".

By this he means not the Saxon hordes he saw swarming in from Liverpool, or the natives, those obscure descendents of the myth-making Celts, selling vegetables and hiring donkeys to the prosperous invaders. He means the social life of his own kind: the privileged members of the middle class connected with the aristocracy, with the Church of England, with Oxford colleges, with government circles and less openly perhaps with commerce.

"There are one or two people here: the Liddells, with whom we dined; the Scudamore Stanhopes, him I slightly knew at Oxford; the Dean of Chichester, a clergyman or two, who have called".

The Liddells, of course, were the family of the Dean of Christ Church, Liddell of Liddell and Scott, the Greek Lexicon that was as much a pillar of English public school education as Dr. Arnold's Rugby reformations. Among 'the clergymen' or two was the Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, lecturer and tutor in mathematics at Christ Church. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that he may have deserted the West Shore to look in with clear-eyed curiosity at the proceedings of the Eisteddfod. And the three little girls could have accompanied him: Lorinda Charlotte, Edith and Alice. As far as I know there is no record of their reactions. The language barrier was unsurmountable. They must have returned to the West Shore to continue listening to the Walrus and the Carpenter. Alas, the pre-adolescent wonderland was not available to the Welsh. Like the oysters in the poem they were scheduled for polite but firm extinction.

The Eisteddfod existed to celebrate the antiquity and honour of the Welsh language, in what could only appear the most harmless manner. It is not easy to discover Matthew Arnold's deepest objections to the Eisteddfod. He states that he found the proceedings at Llandudno "incurably lifeless", yet in a letter to Hugh Owen he becomes quite fulsome .

When I see the enthusiasm these Eisteddfods can awaken in your whole people, and then think of the tastes, the literature, the amusements, of our own lower middle class, I am filled with admiration for you. It is a consoling thought and one which history allows us to entertain, that nations disinherited of political success may yet leave their mark on the world's progress, and contribute powerfully to the civilisation of mankind.

This would appear to be a remarkable insight on the part of an intelligent foreigner into the true nature of the institution, and its origin. Iolo Morganwg like Lewis Carroll had a passion for literary anonymity. Carroll wished to forge a world of innocence out of his obsessive observation of little girls between the ages of eight and twelve. Iolo's forgeries were more ambitious. He wanted nothing less than to restore the supremacy of the Cambro-British. The Gorsedd and the revived and enlarged Eisteddfod were the creation of a private patriotism of demented proportions. This Welsh Jacobin and Unitarian created a necessary institution for the unprecedented expansion of Welsh consciousness that occurred in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Welsh were as hungry for identity as they were for religion. But Arnold writes of the Celt that . . . "his speech is growing every day fainter and more feeble: gone in Cornwall, going in Brittany, and the Scotch Highlands, going too in Ireland . . ."

Going. Going. Gone. This is the language of the auctioneer, rather than that of the literary critic. A sale of remnants is afoot and the auctioneer from Oxford is anxious to persuade his Saxon clientele that there is something among the job-lot that is worth buying as well as burying. We cannot tell whether it is wishful thinking or a love

of masterful generalisation that plays Arnold false. As far as the Welsh language was concerned, he could have not have been more wrong. Unlike Cornish, Gaelic, or Breton, Welsh in the mid nineteenth century was expanding more rapidly than ever before in History. The Eisteddfod with all its trappings was only one external manifestation of this expansion. It was to be encountered in Chicago, Philadelphia, Cape Town, London, Sydney as well as in Llandudno. The Welsh rather like the Jews, sober and relatively prosperous, full of pretensions and those hated 'particularities', were irritatingly everywhere, carrying their language and their institutions with them.

There was a sound economic basis for this growth. Unlike Ireland and the Scottish Highlands, Wales in the nineteenth century was not ravaged by famine or depopulation. The industrial valleys of the South, and industry in the North (and that extension of Wales into Merseyside and Lancashire which gave us David Lloyd George and Saunders Lewis and gave them Selwyn Lloyd and Enoch Powell) were well able to absorb the population explosion. With the Welsh, religious and political motives remained as powerful as the drive for economic improvement. If Matthew Arnold had stayed long enough on the Great Orme's Head, with or without his boots on, he would have seen the first ship of yet another Welsh exodus—no chosen people are worthy of the title without this chapter in their story—the converted tea-clipper *Mimosa*, just avoiding the rocks off "mystic Anglesey" on her way to an exclusively Welsh wonderland in South America. The 'Mimosa' was their 'Mayflower'.

Perhaps Arnold was not so unaware of the rising tide of Welshness after all. The trouble with the language was not that it was going, but that it was stubbornly refusing to go. On either side of the Atlantic the congregations of the dissenting chapels were growing larger from one revival to another. The princes of the pulpit who had once governed this world-wide Welsh commonwealth with as firm a hand as Dr. Ar-

nold's at Rugby, had been obliged to bow to the popular desire for a wider culture and declare the Eisteddfod at least as respectable as the *Cornhill Magazine*. The occasional touch of royal patronage made it easy to conceal the republican and radical origin of Iolo's fancies under the Eisteddfodic robes.

But Professor Arnold was not easily deceived by such superficial symptoms. He recognised a dangerous disease and prescribed a remedy. While he waited in bare feet on the Great Orme's Head, the inevitable spark from heaven fell.

I must say I quite share the opinion of my brother Saxons as to the practical inconvenience of perpetuating the speaking of Welsh.

"Practical inconvenience" still has a contemporary ring about it. The language of government does not easily change. (It sounds equally well in the accent of Oxford or Tonypany). "Perpetuating the speaking of Welsh" is more characteristically nineteenth century, it smacks clearly of the 'Welsh Not':

the change must come and its accomplishment is a mere affair of time. The sooner the Welsh language disappears . . . the better; the better for England, the better for Wales itself.

At last the nature of the sacrifice has been indicated, together with its true purpose. "The moral interpretation", "The independent point of view", has been transformed into an irrevocable judgement and the romantic practitioner of the grand business of modern poetry is suddenly transformed on that windy afternoon in Llandudno, somewhat in the manner of a Hollywood Dr. Jekyll, into a relentless Benthamite. Welsh was a totally unsatisfactory appliance of communication because it had never been used by Mr. Jeremy Bentham or learnt by Mr. Matthew Arnold. It had made and was making an inadequate contribution to those utilitarian twin ideals of Progress and Success. It was no good for England, and therefore no good for Wales. It was insufficiently useful. If it was not useful, it could never be virtuous. If

it was not virtuous, much merit could be gained by discarding it. Ministers of Education (as it turns out Mr. Arnold's brother-in-law is the Minister of Education in 1870) must use the Elementary Schools to hammer Welsh out and English in, and "hammer it harder and harder". Arnold's phrase evokes the celluloid image of Mr. Hyde with his top hat on and his cloak flying, hammering away with his walking cane at the unconscious body of the faded prostitute lying on the pavement. Between punctuation marks he rushes back to the laboratory and swallows a draught of the restoring fluid before continuing in the more measured tones of the literary critic ready once more to do battle on behalf of culture and high art against the ranks of Philistia. The restoring fluid, we may guess, is by Taliesin. Three drops. Those oft repeated invocations have not been made in vain.

"Hear from thy grave, great Taliesin, hear!"

Since the Reverend Dodgson was in the vicinity he may have found a bottle with the words DRINK ME beautifully printed on it in large English letters. There should be no mistake in signs of this sort. It was not marked poison and it was perfectly safe to drink it. And that was how our hero first tasted *Celtic Magic*.

Those of us who wonder how our grandparents came so easily to abandon their native language, and our natural heritage, at a time when it seemed to be prospering as never before, should consider the correspondence between Matthew Arnold and that ubiquitous Benthamite busybody, Hugh Owen. In the eighteen sixties Welsh dissent, Welsh speaking dissent, was poised to become an independent political force. Arnold with his life-long fear of Irish Fenianism could not have been unaware of this. And the Welsh at that time were organised in a way that was still beyond the capability of the Irish. Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century chapels had been going up at the rate of one a fortnight. At first Welsh dissenters had been content to confine

themselves to theology. Unlike the *science of origins* that so took Arnold's fancy, theology was an exacting discipline. In their own language this people possessed on a popular level an extraordinary ideological net-work and a language which supported such a variety of newspapers, magazines, encyclopaedias, pamphlets, and books could hardly be described as dying. Every chapel and every meeting house was a potential political cell. Arnold understood this. As an Inspector of Schools it was part of his duty to be aware of any hidden threat to the uniformity of the State. He was as much devoted as his father had been to the concept of the State as a God-ordained, mystical, and sacred entity. From Hegel they derived that notable Teutonic ideal that States and the Laws of States, were nothing less than Religion manifesting itself in the relations of the actual world.

The fusion of all the inhabitants of these islands into one homogeneous, English-speaking whole . . . the swallowing up of separate provincial nationalities, is a consummation towards which the natural course of things irresistably tends.

Arnold's elevation of the concept of culture can be interpreted as an attempt to extend an Hegelian reverence for the State. This would account for his implacable hostility to the Welsh language on the one hand and his eagerness on the other, to make Celtic magic easily accessible for the enrichment of English civilisation. The Welsh language was an unreliable and volatile spirit which could give too much life to Welsh dissent and encourage an endless succession of disruptive and even seditious movements. Working class movements, trade unionism, manifestations of rural and industrial discontent all had their origins among chapel people. Disestablishment of the Church of England in England which had caused his father so much concern was hardly more than an academic issue: in Ireland and in Wales, provincial nationalisms tainted religious controversy. A separate language was an ever present threat of separatist intentions.

But Arnold need not have worried. There

was absolutely no cause for alarm. In the Wales of the eighteen sixties the leadership of the denominations, which still exerted what could almost be described as a spiritual dictatorship over the lives of the majority of the Welsh people, was securely in the hands of men dedicated to many of the ideals of Thomas Arnold of Rugby. (There is indeed an interesting parallel between the father-son relationship of Lewis Edwards, the Pope of Bala, and Thomas Charles Edwards, who became the first Principal of the University of Wales, and the relationship between Thomas and Matthew Arnold.) Nationalistic sentiments and separatist aspirations were safely channelled into such unrealistic ventures as a Welsh State in Winsconsin, or Patagonia. Already the Welsh were faced with an embarrassment of choice. They could be assimilated in one way in North America, in another way in South America and in a variety of ways within the Empire. The one option that seemed not available was to go on being themselves.

The institutions of Wales, such as they were, presented no threat to the integrity of anybody except the Welsh. The Eisteddfod, which Sir John Rhys was able to describe at the end of the century as "a thoroughly popular assembly representing the rank and file of the Welsh people . . . and a rallying point of Welshmen who live apart from one another, whether in Wales or other parts of the United Kingdom" was already securely under the control of respectable bourgeoisie anglophile social engineers like Hugh Owen. To quote Sir John Rhys again: ". . . about the middle of the present century, it struck some of the leading Welshmen of the time that the Eisteddfod was to a considerable extent a neglected force that might be utilised for the benefit of Wales. So Sir Hugh Owen and his friends undertook the attempt to regulate it and to add to its meetings opportunities for discussing social and economic questions connected with the future of Wales".

The key verbs in this passage are *utilise* and *regulate*. They reveal the motives

behind Hugh Owen's tireless activities. Schools, colleges, societies, eisteddfodau, the Cymrodorion and the network of denominational interest were all 'appliances'; active agencies for the dissemination of a comprehensive concept of social progress that he and his kind were adapting to suit the Welsh nonconformist temperament. The chapel, that key institution which had been brought into existence for the salvation of Welsh souls and therefore for the unspoken affirmation of Welsh identity, could now be utilised to introduce a system whereby the children of the most respectable and the most hard working could be set on the road to an improved material position in an ever improving material world. This was the moment when 'getting on' became part of the Welsh way of life. In that eisteddfodic hierarchy of morals debased into mottoes, 'eled ymlaen' and 'dyrchafiad arall i Gymro' superseded 'y gwir yn erbyn y byd' and 'oes y byd i'r iaith Gymraeg'. The eisteddfod was also 'useful' to foster the competitive spirit. As theological passions waned social progress quietly overtook the progress of the soul.

Arnold, in his first lecture, pokes mild fun at Hugh Owen's eisteddfod.

The recitation of the prize compositions began: pieces of verse and prose in the Welsh language, an essay on punctuality being, if I remember right, one of them; a poem on the march of Havelock, another. This went on for some time.

The subjects are of course characteristic of the twin passions of the mid-nineteenth century in Britain—utilitarianism and imperial expansion. No doubt the subjects were set, as I believe they still are, to please the committees and gain the approval of the men in charge. It would not be unfair therefore to attribute to men like Hugh Owen the noticeable coarsening of sensibility that overtook so much of Welsh literature in the second half of the 19th century. There is something peculiarly sad in the spectacle of the greatest poet of the time, Islwyn, being a consistent eisteddfodic failure. And it is ironic too that his

greatest work *Y Storm* would have been the one composition of that time in the Welsh language that would have gained Matthew Arnold's enthusiastic approval. His youthful admiration for *Stürm und Drang* and the great Goethe would have helped him to recognise an affinity that escaped Welsh critics until Mr. Saunders Lewis drew attention to it in the 1950s. Alas! as far as contemporary Welsh literature was concerned Arnold, in spite of his perceptive appreciation of Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of *Y Mabinogion*, was as insensitive as any Benthamite philistine.

. . . if an Eisteddfod author has anything to say about punctuality or about the march of Havelock, he had much better say it in English; or rather, perhaps what he has to say on these subjects may as well be said in Welsh, but the moment he has anything of real importance to say, anything the world will the least care to hear, he must speak English.

When Arnold's lectures on Celtic literature were first published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, Hugh Owen, apparently overwhelmed with admiration, and with a servility that still nauseates the reader, hastened to invite the great man to use the Chester Eisteddfod as a platform on which to read a paper on some fresh aspect of the Celtic genius. One cannot believe that such a thorough going utilitarian was so much taken with the idea of Celtic magic. 'Celtic' as a category that bundled the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists into the same bag as the Catholic Irish or Bretons or even the Wesleyan Cornish would not automatically commend itself: neither was 'magic' a word commonly used in the administration of the Poor Law or the deliberations of any of Hugh Owen's innumerable committees. What clearly delighted Owen and his friends was the prospect of doors of acceptance opening. A little more effort and a little more regulation and fresh paths of promotion and preferment would become available. Knighthoods were in sight; even O.B.E's for all. The Welsh-speaking Welsh were ideal material for the appliances of Benthamite brain washing: a proud and an-

cient people not actually in chains but with all their natural ambition still repressed, rendered docile by the even more effective fetters of an exacting and puritanical religion. If the price of the earthly paradise was no more than curtailing the growth of the native language this was a negligible price to pay.

It should therefore come as no surprise that when Hugh Owen's University of Wales eventually opens its doors in 1872, the national language should be overlooked. Hegel was in comfortable residence sometime before Taliesin came knocking at the door. In this kind of University, lip service was the last thing the language could expect. The first Principal, Thomas Charles Edwards was a noted preacher among the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists. He was in American political parlance 'their favourite son'. Possibly to placate some die hards of this powerful religious constituency, and to improve the collection of quarrymen's pence a place was found for Welsh literally in a cupboard under the stairs. (Long before Arnold's prestigious lectures, Lewis Edwards of Bala was writing to his son Thomas Charles urging him to avoid preaching in Welsh in order to improve his English style, this in spite of the fact that he himself was a Welsh writer of some distinction and editor of the best quarterly of the time *Y Traethodydd*, a magazine which I am happy to say still flourishes in spite of the forecasts of Matthew Arnold and the steady gnashing of the teeth of Hugh Owen's appliances.)

In the Welsh wonderland, this unlikely brew 'Celtic Magic' became the elixir of Assimilation. In less than a generation the University of Wales could take a Welsh Calvinistic Methodist or a Welsh Baptist and transform him with an efficiency bordering on the Japanese into an extraordinarily life-like imitation of one of Matthew Arnold's new Englishmen "more intelligent, more gracious and more humane". Being Welsh, which for their forefathers was compulsory, became optional for the educated, less essential than going to chapel. (This was the age of the *Inglis Côt*.) When the new Welshman

stared at the Tree of Knowledge he saw two instead of one. The most dangerous thing about 'Celtic Magic' was not that it made people larger or smaller, but that it introduced a permanent state of double vision.

It must be added that 'Celtic Magic' also filled a vacuum in that vital process of myth-making whereby the tribes and the nations reaffirm their faith in their own continuing existence. History like everything else is written from a point of view. In the nation-making process it is a vital industry. In the Welsh context the historian inherits the function of the bards and the poetic tradition. The breakdown of the bardic tradition may well be interpreted as the dissolution of a nation. When it is replaced eventually by an education system which is an amalgam of Utilitarianism and Cultural Imperialism, strange results were bound to occur. And indeed they did. And still do.

But it was in the political rather than in the poetical arena that Celtic Magic really made itself felt. Historical truth obliges us to record that without the help of any imported brew or magic bottle, for three centuries Welsh Utopias rose and fell with monotonous regularity: The Quaker Welsh Tract in the Peaceable Kingdom; Morgan John Rhys's Beulah; Robert Owen's New Harmony; Richard Lloyd-Jones's Valley of the God Almighty Jones; S.R.'s crazy Tennessee experiment (only nine miles from Thomas Hughes's Anglican Fool's Paradise, Rugby Tennessee); William Bebb's Venedotia and last but not least Michael D. Jones's Patagonia. Michael D. Jones may have failed in Patagonia but Emrys ap Iwan was surely right to describe him as the Welshman most worthy of honour. Certainly his national spirit and spirited nationalism gave two young politicians that confidence in themselves and in a vision of their own kind that seems essential for the completion of a successful enterprise. Thomas E. Ellis of Cynlas farm Bala became a successful Liberal politician. On the way he also went to Aberystwyth University and took his first taste of 'Celtic Magic'. In a grandiose essay entitled *The*

Influence of the Celt in the Making of Britain, he begins:

I desire at the outset to express my gratitude as a student and as a Celt to Mr. Matthew Arnold and the band of literary and scientific men who determined to see things as they really are, have endeavoured to understand the Celtic peoples and appreciate the Celtic genius.

The essay continues as a bare-faced take-over bid of all the virtues ever displayed by the peoples of Britain. Arnold's magic brew has touched off a more ancient intoxicant. Whose voice are we listening to? Taliesin's Urien Rheged or this product of Aberystwyth and Oxford?

Is it not this very Celticism which gives to Britain that special power and genius, that distinctive gift which differentiates Britain from Germany and which gives it the pre-eminence?

Michael D. Jones's other disciple was the first Welshman to invite a Fenian to address a Welsh radical meeting. Michael Davitt and David Lloyd George appeared on the same platform at Ffestiniog in 1886. Could Arnold have been right after all to suspect that a radical and Fenian spirit was lurking in the remoter recesses of the native language? Lloyd George was aggressively Welsh and he was not encumbered with a University of Wales education. His cultural interests may have been sporadic but there was no doubt that he had *Style* in abundance, and enough Titanism to set any British audience jumping off their seats. But again Matthew Arnold's ghost can rest in peace. The most demonic personal nationalism since Iolo Morganwg's was soon harnessed to the imperial cause. In the Great War the cloak of Arthur and the white hair of Merlin were visible attributes of the Celtic Magic that led the steadfast patriotism of the English and the imperial fantasies of the peripheral Celts to victory.

It is not too crude a simplification to maintain that the Institutions of Wales, old and new, were prepared to abandon the mother tongue in exchange for a mess of pottage with Celtic Magic. But Wonderland is a country provided with a variety of antidotes. As in any other children's story, a

rescue can arrive at any moment and from the most unexpected quarter. Thanks to Arnold's bare-footed sojourn on the sacred earth of Pen-y-Gogarth, a Chair of Celtic was created at Oxford. From this dizzy cultural elevation, it was inevitable in the course of time that scholarly privilege would percolate to the provincial extremities. Even at Aberystwyth, Welsh (if not Cymraeg) could come out of the cupboard under the stairs. The disciples of Sir John Rhys arrived like missionaries in the bush burning to spread the new light of philology among their unenlightened kith and kin. But the language of instruction remained English, as Matthew Arnold would have maintained, the only appropriate medium for scientific investigation and all modern purposes.

Wonderlands are unstable. They are always liable to disappear. Someone has to sit on with closed eyes and re-create the dream, otherwise it will dissolve and be forgotten for ever. Out of Hugh Owen's

Aberystwyth and into Arnold's Oxford, Owen M. Edwards came. He re-occupied that cave on Mount Helicon that had been left vacant far too long.

Mae'r oll yn gysegredig. It is all sacred. Every hill and every valley. Our land is a living thing, not a grave of forgetfulness under our feet. Every hill has its history, every locality its own romance, every part of the landscape wears its own particular glory. And to a Welshman, no other country can be like this. A Welshman feels that the struggles of his forefathers have sanctified every field, and the genius of his people has transformed every mountain into hallowed ground. And it is feeling like this that will make him a true citizen.

Owen M. Edwards laid the foundation for a brilliant literary revival because he re-established the links between the Welsh people and their own past and made a new beginning possible. Like Matthew Arnold he made his appeal to a landscape. The difference was that he belonged to it.

John Cowper Powys's Inscriptions to Elsa Vaudrey

Some Explanatory Notes by Belinda Humfrey

Elsa Vaudrey is an artist: she studied drawing in a Paris studio, her painting was "self-taught"; she was the first woman, then in her early twenties, to gain a Diploma at the Glasgow School of Art. Throughout her career she has developed a variety of skills and modes of art. During the last twenty years she has turned to the creation of oil paintings which are mainly abstract in form and colour, largely dependent on the capturing of light for their effects, yet based on archetypal images, such as the Grail, which have personal significance for her. The Grail, the subject of many paintings, is related to Elsa Vaudrey's happy residence for many years near Glastonbury combined with the experiences of personal "revival" given to her by her friendship with John Cowper Powys. It was her delight in the countryside of Somerset and the mythical-religious associations of Glastonbury, together with her reading of *A Glastonbury Romance*, which first gave her the impulse, "when petrol came back" after the War, to travel to Corwen and knock, unexpected, for the first of many times, on the door of Powys's house ("Phyllis said, 'John, there is a lady here from Wookey Hole to see you.' . . . He clapped his hands and said, 'Come in.'") Another of the late works, "The Magic Mountain" (Plate 10), has associations with Powys's slate mountain behind his home in Blaenau Ffestiniog, and Elsa Vaudrey's recognition of Powys's magical creative power: it was painted, she says, after one of her "inspiring visits" to him.

In conversation and in letters, Elsa Vaudrey's accounts to me of her visits to John Cowper Powys in Wales throughout his last twenty years, have been rapturous.

The occasions of her visits, the moods in which she approached his house at Corwen then at Blaenau Ffestiniog are remembered precisely, and so is the first impact of Powys's physical presence, "that great stature and grand simple beauty shone out at one"; but the details of her long hours of "talk" with "old John", "enveloped in his magic", seem to have been blurred or overwhelmed by the memory of the extreme sense of well-being, confidence and hope with which she left him: "they heightened one as if one had heard an oracle utter, or left one without the burden of doubts and fears one took with one—like having been washed clean of FEAR—which is the most deadly of the sins of just daily living".

* * *

Here is Elsa Vaudrey's written account of her going to John Cowper Powys's funeral. It is an amalgamation of two descriptions, neither of which she feels adequate to express "the grandeur of the experience".

I had a message from Phyllis Playter: John had died and would I go at once. When I arrived at Blaenau Ffestiniog I went straight to the hospital. Lucy Amelia Penny, John's sister was there. She came straight up to me and put her arms round me and said, "This is Elsa? Would you like to say goodbye to John?" I only had seen one dead person before, and I thought of that ghastly and utterly removed person with the terrible rigid nose and bound chin that was my beloved father on a death bed. I prayed that this would be different. And so it was.

The Matron took me to a little open shed nearby, there with the mountains all

around, and left me alone. There was John on a wooden tressel. He had no hideous bindings to disfigure him and his mouth was wide open, his head thrown back as if in the act of uttering some majestic and powerful sounds—sounds like great prophecies looming from that open mouth. I sat quietly by him, filled with the joy and pride of being with him and was inspired with so much joy at the sight of death seemingly so alive. John dead was still a great magnificent presence to be *with*.

I had to take a car to Colwyn Bay Crematorium. The mayor of the town was also the undertaker and the man who drove me there. He asked me why, if John was not a Christian, he had had a Christian service in the hospital. Knowing John's constant concern for the feelings of other people, I said I was sure this was because of the little nurses who had given him such loving and devoted care. Then I said I was sure nothing of the same would happen in the Crematorium.

The coffin was brought in while we stood silently there, and slowly disappeared. On the way back to Ffestiniog my taxi driver talked with me about old John and he asked again if John was a Christian. I said I did not think so but that indeed he was a worshipper and this sufficed. He seemed to understand.

Phyllis was terribly ill and hardly conscious, so I went up to the top of the

waterfall on the mountainside behind 1 Waterloo and found some little wind-bitten ferns and some rushes and bog myrtle and went down and put them at her bedside. Then in great distress I left to go back to London. Phyllis's being so ill and not there to share it all was almost the worst part of the whole visit. Never again to be revived by this generous and wonderfully enthusiastic counsellor seemed of course unthinkable.

* * *

John Cowper Powys's inscriptions to Elsa Vaudrey are visually works of art in themselves, so it is pleasing to be able to produce photographs of them. They should be read in Powys's hand and arrangements of line and spacial punctuation. Two of the nine are undated but it is easy to guess at their chronology. In providing a printed copy of them below, I have supplied the titles of the books inscribed, as they are occasionally relevant. In content the inscriptions are mostly self-explanatory. The first one makes play with Elsa Vaudrey's name by marriage, Barker-Mill ("Barcarolle"), Elsa Vaudrey being her maiden and "painting name". The frequent references to Goethe are made because Elsa Vaudrey's mother was German.

Affectionately
&
Admiringly
inscribed
for
Our Elsa
alias
Lady Barcarolle
with my
very special
Druidic
Blessing
upon the
head & shoulders
of her son
Linty
by
John Cowper Powys
Corwen
North Wales
Sept 5 1951

Plate 1. PORIUS

Affectionately & Admiringly inscribed for Our Elsa alias Lady Barcarolle with my very special Druidic Blessing upon the head & shoulders of her son Linty by John Cowper Powys Corwen North Wales Sept 5 1951

Inscribed
 with affectionate
 Wonder & admiration
 for our
 beautiful Elsa
 by one who

THE ART OF HAPPINESS
 was forced to choose
 at School
 between the Classics
 and the Modern Languages
 with the result that
 although HE (Goethe)
 the greatest writer of
 the World
 after those anonymous
 Homer & Shakespeare
 wd have commended me
 to make the choice I did
 I have remained until this
 my 80th year in
 disgraceful
 ignorance
 of Faust's
 Chief passage in English
 & still under the teaching
 of Goethe I hesitate not to
 express my complete
 disagreement with Faust's
 "uncontented moment"

Thus let him journey down his earthly day;
 When spectres haunt him let him go his way;
 In outward-striving find his bale, his bliss,
 He that each moment uncontented is."

PART II Midnight

John Cowper Powys
 March 12 1952

Plate 2. THE ART OF HAPPINESS

Inscribed with affectionate Wonder & admiration for our beautiful Elsa by one who was forced to choose at School between the Classics and the Modern Languages with the result that although HE (Goethe) the greatest writer of the World after those anonyms Homer & Shakespeare wd have commanded me to make the choice I did I have remained until this my 80th year in disgraceful ignorance of *Faust* in the Original & thus can only quote for you of all the world's beautiful and gallant Ladies the Chief a passage in English & still under the teaching of Goethe I hesitate not to express my complete *disagreement* with Faust's "uncontented moment"

"Thus let him journey down his earthly day;
 When spectres haunt him let him go his way;
 In outward-striving find his bale, his bliss,
 He that each moment uncontented is."

PART II Midnight

John Cowper Powys March 12 1952

Specially
with admiring
Affection
inscribed
for my
long-time
Friend
Elsa
by
her loyal
John Cowper Powys
Nov 4
1954.

" Ἐγχος μὲν κατέπηξεν
ἐπὶ
χθονὶ πλουβοτείρῃ "

Plate 3. ATLANTIS

Specially & with admiring Affection inscribed for my long-time Friend Elsa by her loyal John Cowper Powys Nov 4 1954

[1] Translation: "And she (he?) stuck the lance fast in the all-nourishing earth".

[1] " Ἐγχος μὲν κατέπηξεν
ἐπὶ
χθονὶ πλουβοτείρῃ "

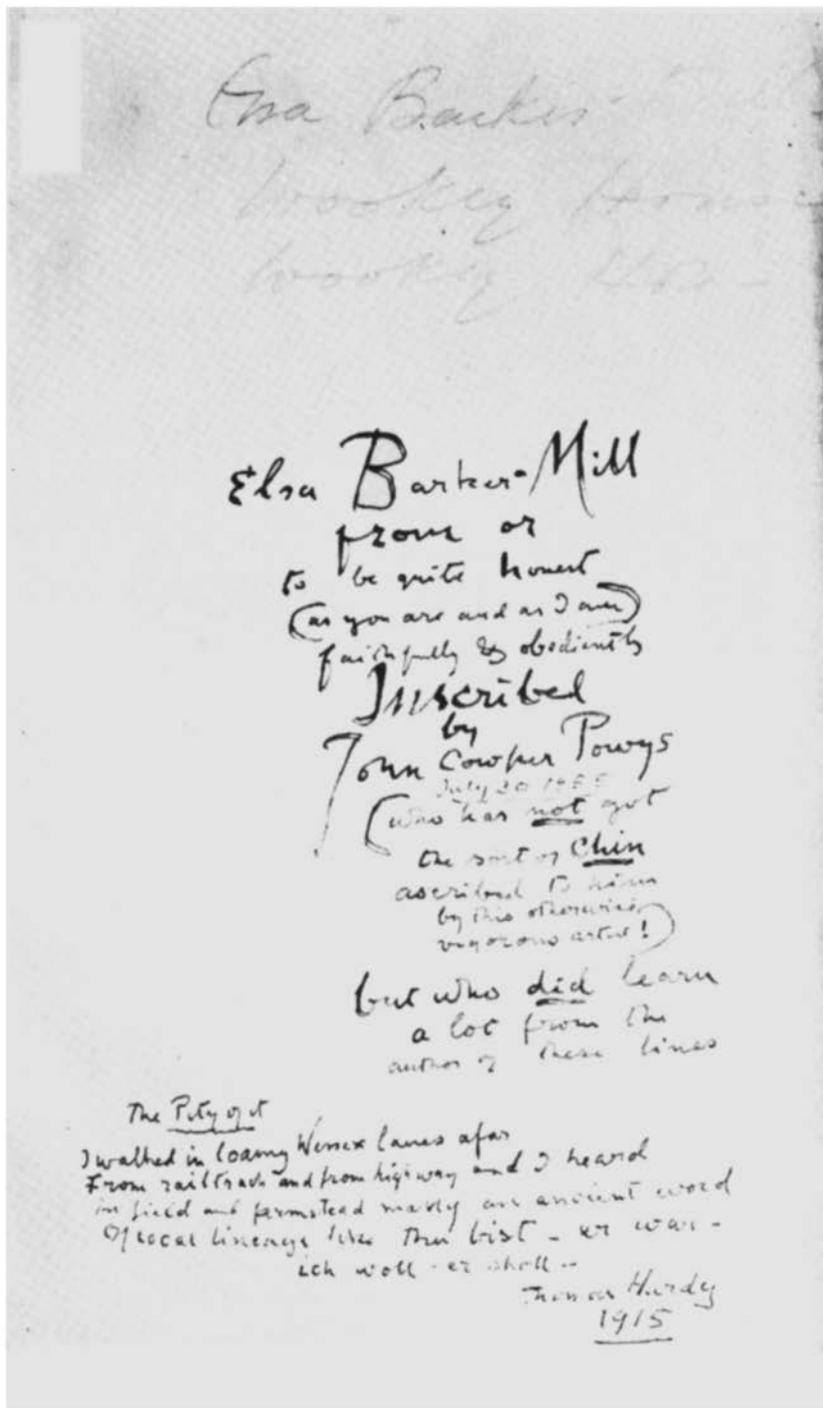


Plate 4. AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Elsa Barker-Mill from or to be quite honest (as you are and as I am) faithfully and obediently Incribed by John Cowper Powys July 30 1955 (who has not got the sort of chin ascribed to him by this otherwise vigorous artist!) but who did learn a lot from the author of these lines

The Pity of it

I walked in loamy Wessex lanes afar
From railtrack and from highway and I heard
In field and farmstead many an ancient word
Of local lineage like thu bist—er war—
ich woll—er shall—

Thomas Hardy 1915

For
our lovely
Elsa
who is our only
real Initiated
Embodiment
of the
Mystery pursued
by
the greatest Man
of the
West
since ~~Shakespeare~~
since he who always
commanded his
disciples
"Im ganzen, güten
Schoenen
Resolut zu leben"
From
John Cowper Powys
Feb 12th
1957
Blaenau
N. Wales

Plate 5. Littleton Powys, STILL THE JOY OF IT

For our lovely Elsa who is our only real Initiated Embodiment of the Mystery pursued by the greatest Man of the West since Shakespeare he who always commanded his disciples
"Im ganzen, güten Schoenen
Resolut zu leben"
From John Cowper Powys Feb 12th 1957 Blaenau N. Wales.

For
 Elsa
 From
 her devoted old admirer
 John Cowper Powys
 who is praying for her every
 time he touches
 that is to say every time I touch
 First the First, Second the Second,
 Of the two divine profiles
 Each about two thousand five hundred
 years old
 The First larger, the Second smaller
 But each made by Hephaistos
 The god of all beautiful inventions
 and who alone of gods and men
 could keep the Goddess of Love
 under control,
 the Profiles of Pallas Athene,
 who was born fully armed
 Out of the Head
 of Zeus
 The Father of All.

cc
 2) Homme dans l'univers
 n'a qu'un maître, lui-même ;
 et l'univers entier
 est ce Maître —
 dans lui —
 Verhaeren

Plate 6. THE BRAZEN HEAD

For Elsa from her devoted old admirer John Cowper Powys who is praying for her every time he touches that is to say every time I touch First the First, Second the Second, Of the two divine profiles Each about two thousand five hundred years old The First Larger, the Second smaller But each made by Hephaistos The god of all beautiful inventions and who alone of gods and men could keep the Goddess of Love under control, the Profiles of Pallas Athene who was born fully armed Out of the Head Of Zeus The Father of All.

"L'Homme dans l'univers n'a qu'un maître, lui-même ; et l'univers entier est ce Maître dans lui—" Verhaeren.

Inscribed
especially, admiringly, loyally
for his ideal friend
Elsa Barker-Mill
by her devotee
John Cowper Powys
who agrees wholly
and absolutely
with her opinions
about faith.

Wednesday, April 9th

1958

¶ Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani!

Plate 7. A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE

Inscribed especially, admiringly, loyally for his ideal friend Elsa Barker-Mill by her devotee John Cowper Powys who agrees wholly and absolutely with her opinions about faith.

Wednesday April 9th 1958

"Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani!"

Loyally
Inscribed
for my
Friend Elsa
of Montpelier Square
London
by
John Cowper Powys
Wednesday Oct 19
1960

"Is not what we call Nature"
"a wiser ruler of the World"
"than what we call God?"

Plate 8. ALL OR NOTHING

Loyally Inscribed for my Friend Elsa of Montpelier Square London by John Cowper Powys Wednesday
Oct 19 1960

"Is not what we call Nature"
"a wiser ruler of the World"
"than what we call God?"

Inscribed for
 our beautifullert of
 all women since
 Helen of Troy
 from her old
 Devotee
 John Cowper Powys
 no! I mean by her
 old Devotee J. C. Powys
 Here is the Homeric
 inspiration that
 reaches me from the
 Tetra-drachma Coins
 Big and Little that
 you gave me and here
 we can see the victors
 of Her whose face they bear
 namely Pallas Athene
 the Goddess of Wisdom
 over Aphrodite the
 Goddess of Sex.
 "After her!" called Hera
 to her friend, Athene
 Ἀφροδίτην μετέλθε
 And Athene who had just
 knocked Ares to earth with
 an ancient stone now
 with her hand smote Aphrodite
 so that the God of War & the Goddess of Desire lay side by side
 on the ground.
 The Iliad Book XXI
 Line 425

Plate 9. UP AND OUT

Inscribed for our beautifullert of all women since Helen of Troy from her old Devotee John Cowper Powys no! I mean by her old Devotee J. C. Powys. Here is the Homeric inspiration that reaches me from the Tetra-drachma Coins Big and Little that you gave me and here we can see the victors of Her whose face they bear namely Pallas Athene the Goddess of Wisdom over Aphrodite the Goddess of Sex.

"After her!" called Hera to her friend Athene.

And Athene who had just knocked Ares to earth with an ancient stone now with her hand smote Aphrodite so that the God of War & the Goddess of Desire lay side by side on the ground. *The Iliad*. Book XXI Line 425.

[1] Translation: "After her!" . . . Athene rushed towards her, rejoicing in her heart.

[2] ἄλλα μετέλθε!
 ἄθρηναυ μετέ σσυτο,
 Χαῖρε δε θυμῶ,

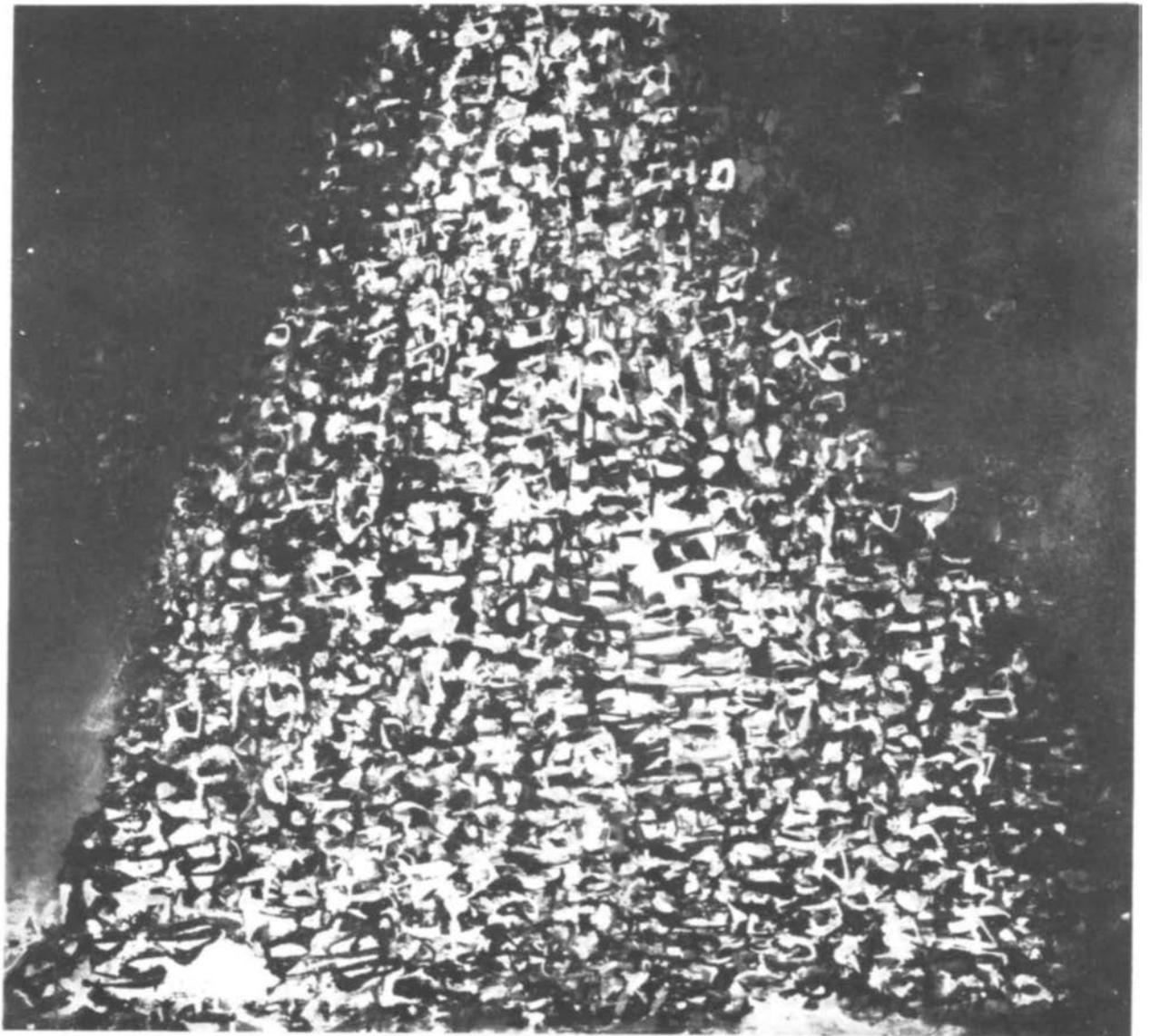


Plate 10. ELSA VAUDREY'S THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN

J. C. Powys to T. F. Powys: Some Letters from Wales, 1935-1949, assembled by Alasdair Tilson

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire
N. Wales.

Oct 28
1935

My dear Theodore

I do hope both you and Violet—and also little Susie have been well of late. The last letter I had from you was written when things were very nasty about your ears, and poor Violet was ill in bed, and all was at sixes, and sevens, but *that* was a long while ago and there's been time for many ups and downs since then.

Wild is the weather today and so it has been for the last two months. The wind howls round this house and indeed screams in a shrill whistle such as I've never heard the wind give. There is the rushing gusty, like seawaves on a beach, noise of wind round the walls and there is the wailing very ghostly (but to me very *agreably* so) of the wind in the chimneys but this Welsh wind or this Cae Coed wind (and in Welsh let me tell you my dear Cae Coed is pronounced "Ki Koid") is certainly peculiar among winds. It is Mudjekeewis Hiawatha's father the South West *wind* but I've never heard such a sound—its not a scream so much as a long drawn, but not *thundering*, whistle—not a train whistle, but such a whistle as an archangel might give as he *sighed thro'* his trumpet before blowing it for the Judgement! I've not dared yet to go up the Mountain. The Headkeeper goes about on a small pony with his feet nearly touching the ground. He looks like a picture of a missionary on a small mule with a big hat (for all the Welsh seem to wear hats, seldom caps) but not at all like our Saviour on an ass.

When the floods kept me from the path by the river—they have sunk now—but the

rain may bring them back—I used to climb up to the top of a little hill about the height of Montacute Hill or Hedgecock that has a flagstaff on the top and a rugged rocky ascent. This is the hill from which Owen Glendower (in a furious temper) threw his dagger at the Church, the dint of which can be seen still but some say he couldnt have thrown it so far and the dint was made by a clergyman and is intended for a scratched cross on the wall. [Drawing of Glendower throwing his dagger at the Church, Plate 11]. Up this windy hill I go often now when river bank is flooded because the traffic on the Holyhead road is awful—it is called *Highway "A5"* by motorists and must be the 5th most used road in Britain. Once I

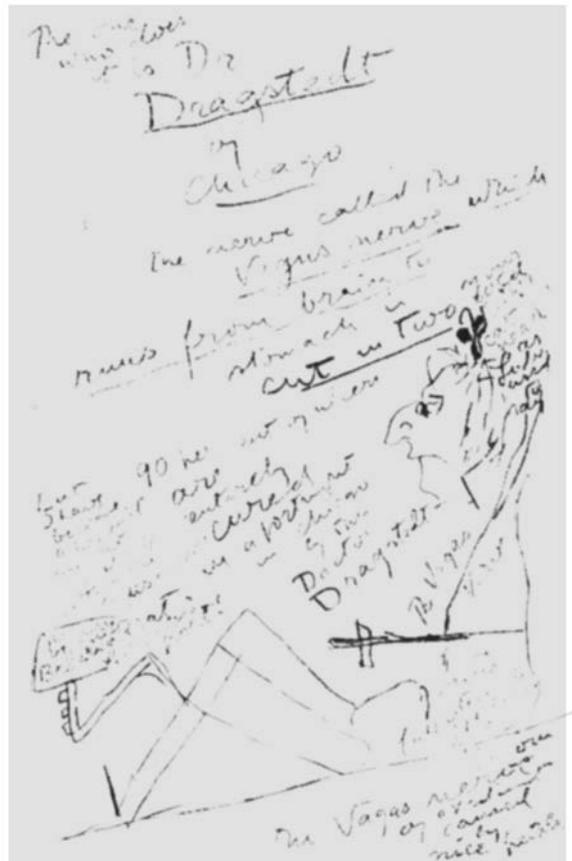


Plate 11.

tried to make this a more interesting walk for it isn't *very* interesting—you know what paths to eminences above little towns with seats at intervals are like—by climbing down where there was no patch but this led me first to the edge of a quarry and then to the Back Garden of the *Old Work House* which looked like a place for Suicides to be buried in. It was very easy to get down there but not to get up again!

Never but once have I seen any petticoat up there on a form younger than my own and, that *once*, the lady was like one of those sad middleaged women upon tombstones, and this one leant against the flagstaff in gloomy absorption; and the Dog dragged me away, for he thought, "She will soon do something to frighten me". This hill is called Pen-y-Pygin which being interpreted is "*the head of the Point*". Last time I met an Idiot no not *quite* that—but a curiously Wanting Husk of a man—on quavering legs who brought out his pocket book and showed me a picture of himself and it appeared that once he had served as a postman—he showed me too a dried specimen of Devil's Bit in his pocket-book. I escaped and went on; but *it ends* very soon . . . in fact it *isn't* a proper walk . . . it is a very short walk for a walker!—It ends in the Barbed Wire—*four rows of wire with barbs* on the top of a high wall wherewith the Hon. Colonel Wynn (2nd son of Lord Newborough) defends the Berwyn Mountains, till the Act of Parliament called the "Access to Mountains Bill" can be carried. But it ends too, in *another* wall, with *no* wire, belonging to a less important person than Colonel Wynn namely Miss Louisa Ragghet. *Over this, once*, in desperation, I climbed, and lifted the Dog, and found ourselves in a thick impenetrable wood of those newly planted very small spruce firs—which are not airy. Miss Louisa Ragghett had no gamekeepers there but there were large amounts of one [of] the most terrifying funguses I've ever seen. They were the colour of Manure and the texture of slugs and very shapeless and they seemed to say we grow we grow WE grow here!

[Drawing of wall, J.C.P., Dog, trees and fierce fungus]

It is raining and blowing very rough at this minute. But it is 4 o'clock and I must take my usual walk. So I shall now get up from my couch on the window-sill on which is the Welsh New Testament with the English opposite and I read *One* verse a day. Today I read this.

"Clywsoch ddywedyd,

Câr dy
gymmydog,
a châsa dy elyu."

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, ye shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy."

Well I must get up and put on my boots which are in the kitchen also goloshes which I bought not here but in Chester for they only had size eights here and I take sighs eleven and take Will's stick—no! it is too wild I think for Pen-y-pigin—and I feel as if the floods were out. I think I shall take Dog on leash and walk straight along asphalt road to Cynwyd Rectory and back.

Once doing this I met Mr Simon the Rector and said to him you are I believe Mr Simon and he said yes and we talked and he said he might, he didn't say *might* he, call on us but this might be awkward—we not being married—so I said nothing and smiled friendly and then I said its better for a house to have two stories because when you go to bed it reminds one of going up a tree and you feel safe and Mr Simon said it was so.

Bless you my dear—this is a true and authentic blessing—a kiss to Violet and a jest with Sue and I am John Side-Face.

[Drawing of J.C.P.'s left profile]

Your old brother.

Corwen
Merionethshire
Dec 29
1938

My dear Theodore

Aye! how thankful I was to see your hand and to have a letter from you.

I do pray that your trouble with care will by slow degrees really pass away. I have been wearing your scarf twisted *round and round* for its wondrous *long* which is a very great benefit, in the late hard weather. Yes you are right the best thing and the wisest and most hopeful thing in my low affairs that I can do I think is to go on as fast as I possibly can with my Historical Tale. I am now reading aloud to Phyllis every night the *Heart of Mid-Lothian* which I think is one of the best of the Waverley novels.

For the last month letters have been one of my bothers and handicaps; for *answering* them has taken me all morning and the best part of the afternoon so I haven't been able to *get to my work* till *after tea*. But I have resolved that if I am to stave off very bad money-panic I must just be resolute and drastic and leave most of these letters *unanswered!* They are due to my having for 30 years been a sort of *secular clergyman* or Deputation, and feeling proud of giving spiritual *advice* to so many young persons and they liking to be given spiritual advice and *I liking* to give the same; and so there you have the cause! But I must get drastic and grim now; even as those do who have to bestir a bit to earn their living—so I *will*, even at this *second*, only *post this to you* and then at once turn to my *Owen Gwendower* letting the un-answered letters talk to each other on the shelf and tell their troubles to *each other*, tied together with india rubber!

A kiss to Violet and my love and hoping she's well again to little Susan. With P's love;

Yr J.

Page 2 is on what ought to be Page 4

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire
N. Wales
Sunday Aug 27 1944

My dear old friend

Both Phyllis and I will be VERY pleased at this arrival at our door which you

predict—only there is no knocker and no bell on *any* door in "Cae Coed" or in the neighbouring "Council Houses", which our visitors from Sturminster Newton will almost certainly try first. But he will knock with the handle of his stick or if he's like George Borrow of his Umbrella and I shall hear if Phyllis is "in the back" or "at her mother's next door" and peep out of the window to see what he looks like and then seeing (as I shall) that he looks nice rush downstairs (in that old Blazer with a lily on its Pocket given me by Lulu and which I can only wear on hot August days like these for Blazers are much colder than coats) and give him my best and honestest welcome more in the style (in spite of Lulu's Blazer) of our Johnson—grand-father's grand father, the Dereham Tanner, than of the First Baron of Maen-y-Meifod.

[Drawing of railway engine, visitors, J.C.P. looking from house window] and Page 4 is where you might expect Page 8. This is Page 3. Yes this is Page 3. Turn pages *on* for Page 4.

Yes how did you know that 5.30 to 7 is our Perfect Time for Visitors?? For 'tis *then* that Phyllis nibbles a biscuit and sips one cup of tea (ere going over to her mother's for their evening meal) *up here with me* and I go on *Munching* stale dry bread like a Minotaur with no teeth and however *hot it is* with my Kettle—the *iron one* Mr. Edmunds the electricity—telegraph-poles man gave me or Phyllis' Kettle the *copper one* which a [deletion] Sailor (don't try to read behind that screen!)—well! which we got *off* (or *from*) a sailor once!—close to the *red electric Heater* which burns the legs of both men and girls but *not mine*—and drinking tea which I keep hot from the kettle but *put no milk or sugar in*—while like Mr Gladstone, with *majestic digestive slowness* I munch and swallow and swallow and munch and listen with lively attention to all.

Page 5 and for Page 6 see where if *this* was *really* page 5 you would come to Page 8.

I must tell you how much I *did* enjoy your letter about your stool and the devil and your grandson who I notice and remark

evidently takes liberties with your foot-stool such as I never took with my Johnson Grandfather's foot-stool. My Johnson Grandmother was and still is—that's why I keep that picture of her photograph I mean in her white shawl FAR my favourite of all my 4 grandparents she used to read to me "*The Children of the New Forest*" a book I've never seen since **Where Is it now?**—in that Northwold drawing room where there was a screen with hideous water monsters with goggle eyes on it. And I always said to visitors who interrupted this calm pleasure: "No: Grandmother likes reading to me very much because of my *Intelligence*." Well I must stop but I surely did enjoy that letter you wrote to me. I send a VERY nice kiss to Violet who seems far too young always to me to be anybody's grandmother. And love to Susan from Old Uncle John—and good luck to thee old friend.

7 Cae Coed
Corwen

Aug 28
1946

O I was so pleased old friend with your letter telling me of that Montacute trip of yours every word of which you can believe I studied like a page of the Book of Revelations. Today I tapped the *Theodore Stone* for your welfare and happiness! O so hard I tapped it! Phyllis was simply thrilled with Dr Smith's younger son and daughter when they came but I have as I have been told, *got to keep my cure going by seeing nobody at all*; for alas! the nicer the persons the more hydrochloric acid they stir up in me! In fact I am justified in my secret private discovery that the real cause of ulcers is *nervous excitement* from a new cure for ulcers the American papers tell of an operation called **Vagotomy** (you ask Dr Smith about this) by which and the one who does it is **Dr Dragstedt of Chicago** the nerve called the *Vagus nerve which runs from brain to stomach* is cut in two. 90 per cent of ulcers are entirely cured in a fortnight in

Chicago by this Dr Dragstedt [Drawing of John with sword cutting his Vagus nerve. J.C.P. is reading "The Works of Robert Browning that sociable poet . . ." On his stomach: "John's Stomach full of ulcers due to acid from the Vagus nerve of excitement caused by nice people." By his head: "Your old Brother John's cat head as Lulu used to say". Plate 12.]

But I have become a hermit without the help of cutting the *Vagus nerve*! But I am cured by Olive Oil and seeing nobody so I don't need vagotomy.

O how I do agree with your *skirting Montacute* like that! God! I would have liked being with you in the Doctor's car! I enclose some curious pages unknown to me before yesterday which will I think have an interest for you.

Your faithful and never forgetting to send *strong waves* of good luck to

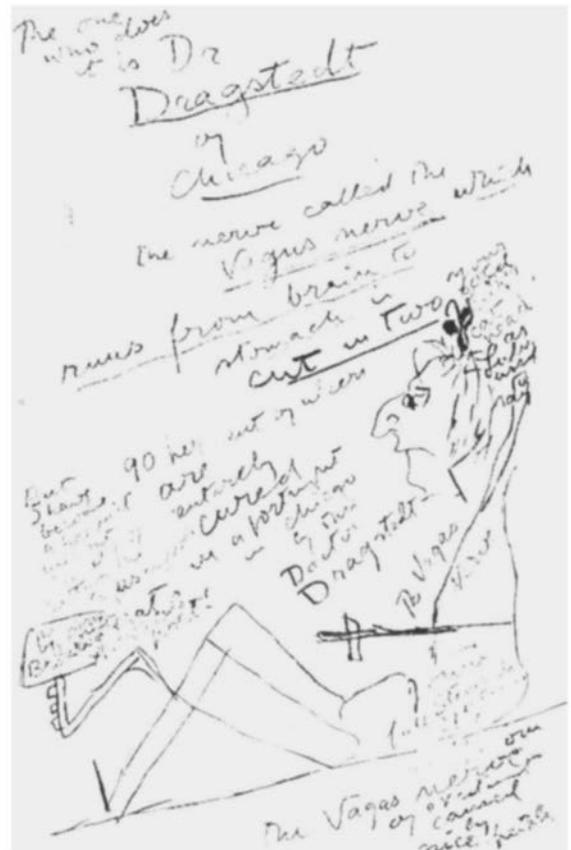


Plate 12.

you—John O' Dreams impregnant of any cause except antivivisection and that one to a cowardly tune and a kiss to V. and love to Susan if you please.

[Added at top of first page]

Only a scrawl of thanks for yours and no reply needed for it is a reply *itself*.

7 Cae Coed
CORWEN
Merionethshire
N. Wales

April 15
1947

My dear old Friend

Phyllis and your "Old Silly"—Jack—John—Straw of the Hedge—both think very strongly that you ought to receive *some money* from this American Publisher who wants to Publish in a Magazine your story. I don't know *how much* and I suppose if you said "go ahead publish my story *at the usual rates*" you would find that like *that man* from the Inn in Edwin Drood that your share was NIL. I have no experience in regard to a case like this but I have some experience of *publishers in general* and I rather fancy that like *generals in general* the world *could get on* even if they were all taken by the Russians into SIBERIA.

I saw the old-new waxing-waning moon today over a stone with lichen on it I call the Resting Stone. In some things my Ignorance is the worst of all of us for I am sure LCP yourself Bertie Lulu and Willy would all know **which way** the crescent **moon's horns point when seen in the morning against the blue sky**. These horns today pointed Due South-West and **away from due North-East!** I passed your great Stone today and I am glad to say that the Hawk's feather I carefully put into the wall yes into the wall *opposite it is there still* and I put it there a year ago. This means **good luck**.

[Drawing of J.C.P. ascending steps of the mountain behind the summit of which is the new moon. Below him are drawn

"Hawk's feather" and "T.F.P.'s signal-stone". Plate 13.]

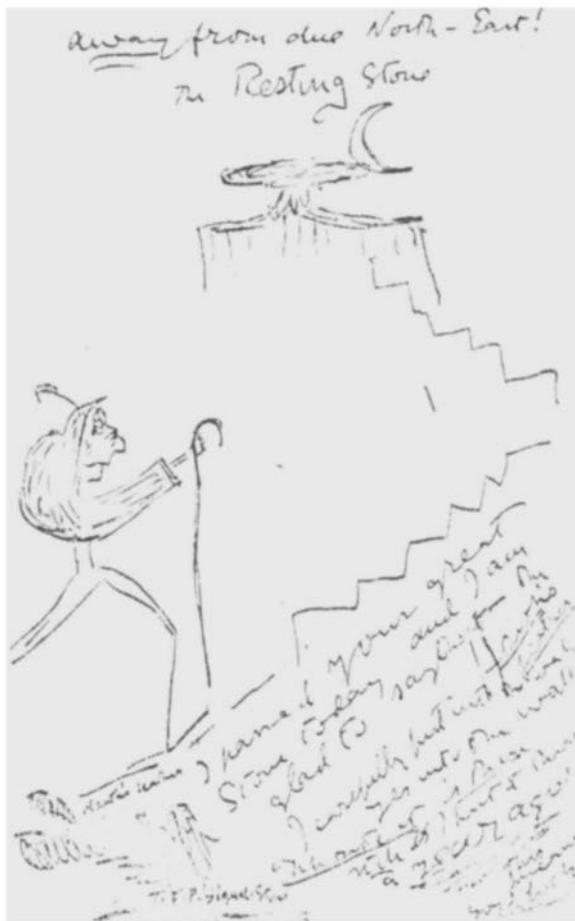


Plate 13.

All is going on fairly well—well up here but O dear how full the cupboards are of Medicine Bottles. Love from Phyllis and mine to V & S. your

funny old Jacker-John

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire
N. Wales

June 29
1949

Just a word old friend to ask how you and Violet and Susan are and if Francis and

Sally and their children namely John Francis Cowper and Barbara Ann are all well. And I'd greatly like to know my dear how you get on in the extreme heat? Whether you *like* it or *hate* it or just endure it? There it is! We've got to get through it, I know, but we can know in our hearts and *not only in our hearts* whether we LIKE heat or coolness best. It is hardest for Phyllis for she has to do the work and all the shopping and fetching and carrying for these two little houses though a neighbour helps with the *fires* and *floors* next door but no one helps in our house but we seldom go upstairs at all but live and sleep entirely in parlour kitchen and bathroom and Phyllis has her breakfast here with me and I have breakfast and tea which are my only two meals. By not seeing anybody for I now go up through the woods and on to the moors we call the mountain where I meet no one I get on quite well. Its the excitements of waving my arms and giving sort of lectures and going through my antics of exaggerated agreement or dodgy disagreement that makes acids come! But for walking and for climbing hills and getting over barbed wire I am strong on a completely empty stomach from 8.30 to 10.30 every morn. I had a horrid experience the other day "up the mountain" as its called for I came suddenly on a regular field of slaughter of sheep and lambs done by a black dog *acting alone* and not as they almost always do with another dog. I didn't see the dog but one sheep was *not* quite dead and I had to go to the farm to speak of this black dog who belonged to a very nice demented girl well not exactly a "demented" girly but a *nice pretty girl* a bit queer in her head and she lived with a Mister "**the Haul**" who lives "up our lane" in a little homestead Gertrude knows; in fact this girl talked to Gertrude once for she comes after people with a pen and a bottle of ink to make them tell her how to spell things—for instance once she came after me and put the ink on the wall and the pen in my hand for to write down for her the words "*Everybody too clever nowadays*" and this black dog was her dog but I didn't like it for I was terrified of it for it barked

and growled and *looked* like biting! So I felt like a sneak when I went to the Farm about the dead and the dying sheep because the dog had frightened me away from the house of Mister the "Haul" or the High which means *the sun* and he is spoken of as Mr "the Sun" to divide [him] from others of the same name and he is called the sun because once at Chapel Sunday School he gave an astronomical lecture. Astronomy is his chief interest though he is *not* a scientist but a painter of the walls of houses and propped up against his house are several ladders which I suppose he carries over the fields past the stone-circle where they make bards into the town. But in my imagination I still see this dog whose name was "Nigger" leaping through the air [Drawing of fierce dog. Plate 14.] as I come up the hill since I sneaked of him and the Policeman came and took him to the Police Station and killed him with a thing called a **Humane Killer**. Jesus Holy! I don't think I would care to be taken

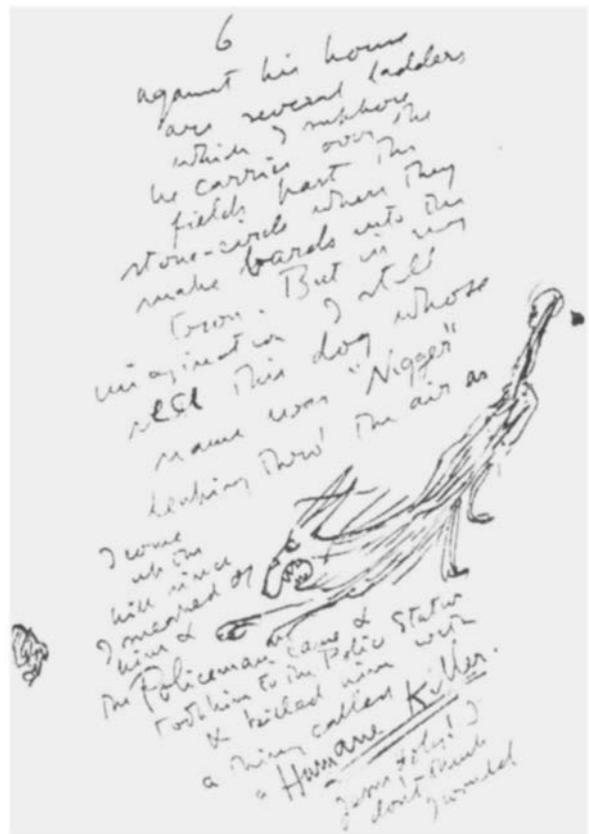


Plate 14.

to the Police Station to be killed with *Humane Killer!* But since I sneaked to that Farm where only the widow and her daughter live for the farmer with whom Katie made friends when she came Mr Thomas was his name has been long dead. But it was Mrs Thomas's sheep and when I went she sent her daughter running to another farm where another farmer I know lives and *he* came with his head full of "humane killers" for black dogs! and so I often see the ghost of the dog Nigger as I go gingerly up the lane. [Drawing of fierce dog's head snarling at J.C.P.]

Well my dear I must stop but so far I don't think my one eye is any worse than it was a year ago so it *may* last me all my days. We shall SEE! or rather you will and old Littelton will I daresay! Love from us both to Violet and Susan from *Johnny Sweet-Gums*

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire
N. Wales

Dec 19
1949

My dear old Friend of days so long ago that they seem to belong to a different World!

Here is a pound as a birthday present to keep for thee wone self OR (for I ken your ways) to DIVIDE into Three (*in order of the Blessed Trinitee!*) But if the latter alternative my Brother, 'tis a matter of arithmetic totally beyond me to divide 20 shillings into three, But if your little Susan can do it good luck to her! Or rather good luck to all three of ye!

Well Phyllis has had to convey the oldest of us 4 ex-Americans to the *Crematorium* at *Birkenhead*. Aged 86 Aunt Harriet was . . .

Her name was Mrs Van Dyke for her husband was a Dutchman. Mrs Playter comes next in line for *Master J. Death* being 83 and next comes Brother John in *his 78th year*.

My chief trouble now however has nothing to do with either Master John Death or Master John Cowper but with the latter's huge laborious carefully laboured-over with no few works of those *Professors* that Father in his stories about Giant Grumble and Fairy Sprightly used to cause to hop and *skip* as Lulu would say, out of the *London Library* which I have now from economical reasons had to *give up*, though I can tell you they scolded me for it as if I had resigned from the British empire, Romance of the Dark Ages about Corwen in 499 A.D. which has been rejected (it is in 33 chapters and has 1518 TYPED PAGES as "overwritten and undecypherable" by the American Publisher and has now been under consideration by the Bodley Head for nearly a fortnight and their Official Reader has already suggested that I should cut out five-hundred typed pages and leave out the most exciting and marvellous and "dark-ages" part of it about the Giants of *Cader Idris* and *Snowdon!*

But I still can walk for one hour and three quarters up this hill on an *empty stomach* and Phyllis can still climb down to the shops and up again with 2 heavy baskets and her mother is better. With our joint love (God! that sounds as if it were Meat!) to *you* ALL 3 and also if they come at Xmas to Francis and Sally and my god son John Francis Cowper and also to Barbara your ever old one who sends please a very special kiss to his *old friend Violet*.

Brother John the Evil One in a black cloud *humming his tune!*

J.

John Cowper Powys, *The Real and the Ideal*, reprinted from: *Spain and the World*, Supplement, May, 1938.*

Spain and the World—what a summary of the present condition of the human race lies in these four words!

Never has our poor, thwarted, bewildered, distracted humanity been more torn in its soul than at the present moment. All the most obsessing passions that have ever stirred the blood of men have been let loose at once; and let loose just at the fatal moment when the dangerous and treacherous and heartless and yet God-like servants of our race, Science, has given into the hands of touchy, reckless, unscrupulous rulers and tyrants and demagogues, engines of destruction beyond the dearest hope of Alexander or Caesar or Attila or Napoleon; just at the moment too, when the conquest of the air has made it possible to rain down death in its most terrifying form upon the masses of the most innocent and the most helpless!

And most simultaneously with this appalling gift of Science to a humanity that has always found destruction and force easier than creation and wisdom, the unhappy individual who tries to obey his conscience is besieged over the air and through the press by the most crafty, insidious, corrupting, lying propaganda, made possible by wireless, cinemas, and newspapers, that has ever been exerted in the history of our race, to swamp, drown, pervert and hypnotize every attempt he makes at thinking for himself.

To "think for yourself" has become today the one unpardonable sin! Surrounded by new ideologies—and how that fatal word will suggest pain and death and every sort

of cruelty to our happier descendants!—"ideologies" that were unknown a few hundred years ago, the wretch who deludes himself into the idea that it is either possible or permissible to "think for himself" will be lucky if his conscience allows him to bark the words of the nearest hypnotizer while his individual soul hides deep in the straw of its kennel!

We see our own Empire, we see the Democracy of France and the Democracy of the United States, so terrified of another World War—and one can excuse them when they think of a universal devastation twenty times worse than the last—and we can see the Dictator of the Russians and the Dictators of the Germans and Italians, like the upper and nether mill-stones, each with an "Ideology" pregnant with death and destruction for all within their borders who believe in the right of the individual soul to think for itself. This is no new thing in the history of humanity. The new thing, the wonderful thing, the miraculous thing, will soon be more rare geographical spots still left on the globe where freedom of thought, speech and pen is still allowed!

Spain and the World! *The Spanish Inquisition* is the most perfect example history offers us of the case for the efficiency of mass-thought and well-directed propaganda. The silent protest made by Dostoevsky's Christ, in Ivan Karamazov's story, might be imitated by a Catalan Anarchist today as he contemplates the orderly advantages offered him in the destruction of this dangerous, this inefficient liberty!

All power to the Soviets! was the plausible cry that inaugurated the Russian Revolution; that movement which to all liberty-loving spirits seemed an historic bridge into paradise.

But the urge to power proved stronger than the urge of freedom and in this cruel

*This article, difficult of access and not included in any published bibliographies of J. C. Powys, has been brought to the attention of the Editor by David Hunter, a student of the College of Librarianship, University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

and terrible choice between liberty and efficiency Russia, like Germany and Italy, chose efficiency.

Our own Empire and Dominions, along with the United States and France, still cling to the old-fashioned idea of *Government by Discussion* which implies a preference for liberty over efficiency. But here, of course, as we know well enough, as long as the money-power of Capitalism prevails, there will be plenty of economic pressure to limit and even annul such liberty. Democratic Capitalism does at least, however, give the individual *theoretical* liberty, and though in practice it often, perhaps usually, takes it away, it does not do so with quite as much effrontery, or as much outrage to our individual feelings, as when an arbitrary dictator does it.

The majority of the working-people in Spain, whose Government—before the champions of the priests and the land-owners revolted—was about the most easy-going *Government by Discussion* the world has ever seen, were as we know neither state-socialists nor communists. They were Anarchists; and they remain so. That is to say they hold views about the organisation of human society so enlightened, so intelligent and so rational, that if they could be put into efficient practice a real Utopia would result. These Spanish Anarchists are prepared to defend the individual liberty of the working-man, not only against the insidious oppression of Capitalism and the shameless hypnotism of Fascism, but against *any kind of Dictatorship*, even the kind in which Russian Communism has resulted.

Held back by their own and still more by their Government's fear of another world-war and universal death and destruction, the working-classes of France and Great Britain find themselves in the invidious situation of having to look on in helpless indignation while the rebels in Spain make use of the efficiency of the Dictators—or

perhaps we should say while the Dictators make use of the rebels in Spain—against the one single province in the world where a system of human liberty, never before tried in the history of our race, is being created. And in this epoch of the murdering of ideas by "ideologies" what a comfort to think of something new being created that will serve the future of mankind when this dictator era has become a pathological study for historians!

Dictatorships, of course, live by glorifying war. Efficiency in war is their *raison d'être*. And this is the reason why, when individual liberty is so desperately at bay, it seems hard for all extreme mystics and extreme egoists to do sympathetic justice to pacifists. Deep in our hearts—for such is human nature—we long for the enemy "ideology" to be crushed by force; and then, and only then, and not till then, let us have the peace of the world!

Pacifism to-day—whereas in the last war it was no negligible power—seems to have fallen into the category, along with the policing of the world by the League of Nations, of what one might call *Postponed Ideas*; ideas that for the moment pressure renders inopportune, like the idea of Cosmic Relativity when you are rowing in a life-boat.

A sympathetic and cynical person might well be pardoned for thinking that not only no ideology—for that anyway is a blood-thirsty monster—but no idea even, is worth the present sufferings of the civil population and of the refugees in Catalonia; but it does after all remain, even if the first really self-respecting and completely free life for the working people of the world were bombed into annihilation, that something more than an idea, *a living experience*, has come into being, to which, when humanity has disillusioned itself of these murderous and childish ideologies of efficiency, it can at last return.

Rosemary Manning

Alyse Gregory: A Biographical Sketch based on her Published and Private Writings

It is then only by pressing our ear ever closer and closer to the unceasing murmur of our own experiences, as a child fastens its ear to a singing sea-shell, or as it might sit up in its narrow nursery cot to heed in the lonely stillness of a black night the barking of a fox, that we shall come by a knowledge that will fortify, nay, even in sudden fortunate flashes, enrapture us, during the short time that we have to live.

(*Wheels on Gravel*)

Some men and women are known to us only or chiefly through their personal letters, their journals and private writings, which perhaps they never intended should see the light. Kilvert's *Diary* springs to mind at once, with Dorothy Temple's letters to her husband, and Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*. Although Alyse Gregory occupied for a time an important position in the New York literary scene, her published novels, autobiography and essays, have not remained in print, and her standing as managing editor of the influential American magazine, *The Dial*, is not likely to ensure her more than a mention in studies of literary life in the twenties. It is in her letters and journals that she should survive, when at last they see print.* To read them is to be admitted into the company of a rare, perceptive and courageous being.

It is difficult to give any idea of the complex personality of Alyse Gregory, wife of Llewelyn Powys. The liveliness of her mind, with what John Cowper Powys called "its free aromatic malice and its tonic wit", and her talent for friendship are qualities to which all who knew her can testify. I count myself fortunate that I enjoyed her friend-

ship for over ten years. If I make her live to those who never knew her, I shall regard it as a debt paid to someone who gave me endless support and encouragement and who had a deep influence on my life.

To portray Alyse is not easy because she deliberately adapted different facets of her personality to suit different people. "Each friend", she wrote in a diary of 1923, "is like a different universe in which we move in a different manner, in which climate, language, and the whole landscape is different". This does not imply that she tried to be all things to all men. She was too subtle and honest. Her sensitivity to others made it possible for her to savour with pleasure the company of people of widely varying characters and interests. Mere description cannot convey her "quicksilver intelligence", her richness of character and diversity of enthusiasms. For my sketch of her therefore, I shall make large use of Alyse's journals and other writings.

The manuscript journals, twenty-three books, cover Alyse's life with Llewelyn Powys from 1930 till his death in 1939, and her years alone till her death in 1967. But that there were earlier diaries is clear from occasional references in the journals, and from the existence of a small green exercise book, in which she copied some extracts from journals of 1910, 1911, and 1912, when she was in her mid twenties. Moreover, the period of 1923 to 1930—the important years when she met and married Llewelyn, when she left *The Dial* and came to England—is covered only by a typescript, made by herself from manuscript diaries that no longer exist. Apart from reviews and essays in literary magazines, Alyse Gregory published five books. These are the

* Excerpts from her journals have been edited by Michael Adam: *The Cry of a Gull*, Ark Press, 1973.

novels: *She Shall Have Music*; *King Log and Lady Lea*; and *Hester Craddock*; an autobiography, *The Day is Gone*; and a volume of essays, *Wheels on Gravel*. (Publishers and dates will be given when a work is first discussed.)

The autobiography, *The Day is Gone* (E. P. Dutton, New York, 1948), tells of her life until her marriage in 1924. It is tantalisingly evasive, and according to Alyse's friend, the late Florida Scott-Maxwell, not always accurate. It is to be regretted that it contains so little of her life with Llewelyn in Greenwich Village, and even less of her work on *The Dial*. Presumably, it was when she had drawn on her early journals for this book, that she destroyed them.

The Day is Gone is typical of its author in its precariously-balanced qualities of candour and reticence. She refers wryly to these traits in her Preface, although even then, she shies away from true candour, accusing herself of mere loss of memory and laziness:

When I set myself the task of writing my life my desire was to reveal with candour and simplicity the most intimate secrets of my heart and the most significant events of my days. I found that my memory was so faulty, and my mind so indolent and refractory, and my discretion so cunningly persuasive that I was being continually thwarted in this all too innocent endeavour . . . Life is forever in flight, art forever in pursuit.

In her diary, however, on May 19th 1947, when Alyse must have been writing *The Day is Gone*, she pinned life down:

Our past is as fabulous as any legend or fairy story. My past became gainsaid when I married L. I have never been able to resurrect it. It is not in my book. That is but a faint reflection, a wavering image, an abbreviated distortion.

Nevertheless it is to the autobiography that we have to turn for details of Alyse's early life. She was born on July 17th, 1884, in Norwalk, Connecticut, where her father was a doctor. Her mother came of a scholarly and musical family. Alyse had a good voice and at fifteen began the training which might have led her, had she possessed a different temperament, to a

career in singing. As it was, her training took her to Paris, where she acquired a lifelong love for French literature.

Alyse adored her father and mother; the latter had been "a gifted child and a rebel", as her daughter was to be. There were a brother and sister in the family. It was, at least outwardly, a happy childhood, though looking back from 1948, she had reservations about it, especially as regards her brother (a surgeon, who died of consumption).

The most dominant influence in my life was that of my brother. He obsessed my thoughts. He was four years my senior . . . I was afraid of him, envious of him, and there was sown in my mind a seed of rebellion against tyranny and the ignominies of a girl's life that has borne fruit to this day.

One gains the impression that Alyse was closer to her father than to her mother. Of her father she wrote that he was

benevolent to the point of folly, a simple-complicated man, descended from the oldest American stock, brought up in the rigors of a New England homestead, with a love of flowers, animals, and all homely things, yet with a natural melancholy and a habit of self-depreciation and discontent that made others victim of his changing humours.

While Alyse's gift for music and her bookish tastes may have come from her mother, her melancholy cast of mind and volatile personality were a heritage from her father. From him, too, came her deep concern with poverty and injustice. He often took her on his rounds, and opened her eyes to the miseries that co-existed with middle-class comfort and wealth. Like her father, she was to have the gift of mixing with "tramps, beggars, Negroes, the very poor, and traveling salesmen" without condescension.

Alyse records an incident from her early childhood which deserves quoting, for it obviously made a deep impression upon her:

As a little girl, just after I had learned to write, I was once deeply grieved by something my mother had said to me and came to the conclusion that I would run away. I got a sheet of paper and wrote on it: "Your words

have cutted me like a knife. I am leaving your house forever" . . . My mother came up the stairs, followed by my father, and I heard her read the words aloud to him, and then I heard her laugh. This laugh lodged deep in my heart, and I never forgot it.

An incident very like this occurs in her first novel, *She Shall Have Music* (Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1926). The heroine, Sylvia, is a child when the book opens. Her parents (a good deal crasser than Alyse's) have had her pet duck killed and served up at a dinner party. The child overhears them talking and laughing with their guests about it—"Fancy making a pet of a duck". But the recalling of pain does more than lay the ghost of a childhood memory. It is skilfully used in the novel for what might be called "the education of the heart". Two new characters are introduced: the boy from next door, Marcel, who comforts her with words that give her "peculiar elation": "Nothing in the world matters so much", and her Uncle Horace, based upon Alyse's Uncle Nat, who stumbles as he hurries towards her, and opens her heart to another emotion:

No pain had ever touched her heart like this, to watch him hurrying to comfort her. Deeper, more subtly unassuageable than had been the discovery of her mother's perfidy, was this new kind of anguish. During that one fleeting second this child did not resist a knowledge of the infuriate terms on which life is lived. And perhaps even in later years . . . she could never protect herself, except now and then by scorn, against this quality of pity, pity for the defenceless who are unable to plead their cause.

As we learn from *The Day is Gone*, Alyse began her study of singing with a Norwalk teacher, Mrs. Katherine Fisk, who took her to Paris, to continue her studies. Phyllis Playter has kindly given me a photograph of Alyse as a girl, on the back of which is a cutting, presumably from a local Norwalk paper. It is dated May 1909, and headed HONOURS FOR NORWALK GIRL. I quote some sentences from it:

The following communication from the Paris correspondent of the New York Times appeared in the Sunday edition a week ago:

"Mme. Fisk gave a delightful tea in her studio in the Rue Chaptal on Sunday. Miss Minnie Tracey . . . sang, as did Miss Alyse Gregory and Gustav Ferrari".

The Paris "Gil Blas" has this to say:

"Miss Alyse Gregory sang exquisitely the "Shadow Song" by Meyerbeer. Her brilliant execution was remarkable . . ."

Still another critic commented "Miss Gregory's execution was especially remarked as being rarely brilliant. Her forte evidently lies in coloratura work".

Perhaps the world lost another Joan Sutherland, but Alyse knew her own temperament. All idea of a career in singing was abandoned. "My dislike for singing in public", she wrote, "and the fact that I should have had to build up my musical career against formidable obstacles, still supported by my father, turned me from singing as a profession".

Alyse was now in a state of rebellion against her environment, uncertain of what she wanted to do to make her independent, and stirred in conscience by the poverty, disease and injustice to which, no doubt, her father's liberalism and work as a doctor introduced her.

The following extract is typical of many of the entries copied into the green exercise book.

January 7th 1912. [*Alyse was 27.*] What do we owe to those around us, to the community? Most people drift on the tide and serve only to block progress. Am I any different? I will try to see. It is difficult for me to associate with the people about here, for if I express my true thoughts I estrange or puzzle them, for what they desire is acquiescence in the commonplace. . . . No one is interested in the position of women, the relation of the sexes, education, art. To cover their ignorance and hostility they ridicule all such conversation, as if one had made a *faux-pas* in introducing such topics. They are alien to me. We have not a phrase in common . . . There are times when I feel avid for life at any cost—to be vanquished if necessary, but to experience the battle.

Sylvia, in *She Shall Have Music*, is very close to this, her eyes looking rebelliously from her mother's carriage on the houses

"of the rich—so many sepulchres for the human soul". Like Alyse, Sylvia was a girl "whose heart cried out for experience, rich and dangerous and swift . . . for life at any cost!" The words echo the phrases of the diary. Like Alyse, Sylvia possessed "a troubled, vagrant spirit".

An incident in her home opened Alyse's eyes to the full misery of the underprivileged, and was eventually lead to her work for the suffrage movement. The story is given in *The Day is Gone*. Alyse is describing Harry, the maid-servant's young man.

He, too, was Irish, small of stature, with soft brown hair, parted in the middle, and large, ingenuous eyes. His right hand was swathed thickly about with bandages, and he told me that he had caught it in the machinery of the factory where he worked. He would receive no compensation, and if his hand were permanently injured, he would not be employed again.

These facts filled me with astonishment and indignation. The owner of the factory was a respected citizen of our town who lived in a large house and was an assiduous churchgoer. Heretofore my rebellions had centered chiefly in my head. From this moment they entered my heart . . . This casual conversation . . . was the door by which I entered a new life.

Sylvia in *She Shall Have Music* has a similar experience. She argues with her father about the injustice to the housemaid's young man.

He wiped his mouth deliberately on the napkin, cleared his throat, then looking up at his wife, said, "Are these grapes from our hothouse Kitty?"

(There are moments when Alyse writes with the iron of Jane Austen.) Sylvia starts a journal with a sentence taken from the green exercise book of 1911. It expresses a lasting tenet of Alyse's philosophy: "I believe that the greatest betrayal in life is the betrayal of one's real insights and preferences".

I must omit details of Alyse's years abroad: the singing lessons in Paris, a long visit to her married sister in Naples, further travel in France, a visit to England. She was

attractive and lively and enjoyed several lighthearted affairs. A rather more serious one with an American in Paris ended tragically when he was fatally injured in a road accident. The "new life" which Alyse entered after her return to America was with the movement for women's suffrage.

Once home in Norwalk, she found that "my obstinate and desperate pursuit after some meaning to life isolated me from everyone". She set about to inform herself of working-class conditions. A visit to a hat factory where women worked ten hours a day in deafening noise and temperature usually in the nineties, stirred her to action. With the help of friends, Alyse formed a women's suffrage club in New York, and here she worked, often with a sense of bewilderment, for her whole temper was opposed to being in the public eye, marching in processions, handing out leaflets to often hostile householders. Her doubts were finally dispelled and her belief in herself given reinforcement by hearing Keir Hardie speak.

To those who knew her later, when adversities lay in her path, Alyse seemed to have an inner strength, however uncertain and quick to retreat she sometimes appeared. No doubt she gained a certain toughness during her suffragette work, when she had to endure the boos and hisses of unfriendly crowds who, "a vast ocean of incredulous surly masks", filled the sidewalks and windows to jeer at suffrage parades. Militant in the cause for her "harassed sex" she may have been, but she had too much curiosity and wonder at the opposite sex to have much sympathy with 'women's lib' when she met it in later life.

My heart is quick to the legitimate griefs and injustices suffered by my sex, and ever, I hope, attentive to the legitimate grievances of that other sex whom I watch with an always undiminishing surprise and interest, an interest not wholly free of apprehension, an apprehension made up of scepticism, dependence, respect, and sorrowful isolation.

(*Wheels on Gravel*)

The period of her work for women's suffrage provided Alyse with experiences

which she enjoyed with all the avid love of life that was showing itself in her hitherto shy and nervous character. She followed the country fairs, setting up her booth and speaking hotly for her cause.

Next to my booth was a man who sold buttons with inscriptions: "Meet me tonight", "You're a Daisy" . . . He presented me with one of his buttons bearing the cryptic word ISHKABIBBLE. I gave him in return a "Votes for Women" button, which he pinned carefully under the lapel of his coat.

(*The Day is Gone*)

Mrs. Florida Scott-Maxwell recalls that Alyse would speak for ten minutes or so from the stage between two cinema shows and spoke in Italian to the Italian employees of a boot factory. Perhaps it was of this sometimes dangerous life that she was thinking when, some twenty-five years later, she wrote:

To live timorously, with meagre thoughts and protected senses, or even to live in a state of super-excitement, is to divorce ourselves from the vital flow of our healthy animal blood.

(*Wheels on Gravel*)

Much later in her life, when she went to Spain to stay with Gerald and Gamel Brenan, she witnessed a bullfight in Madrid, and made it the subject of a caustic article in *The Countryman* (Spring 1956). It ended with these words condemning a cultivated excitement:

Man has placed himself at the pinnacle of the animal creation separated from the dumb beast by *noblesse oblige*. To assist for pleasure at the torture of a blameless creature, inveigled in increasing anguish and bewilderment to submit at last to his own slaughter, must surely be repugnant to every person of decent feeling. It must also imperil the virtues of mercy and fair play so precariously wrested from a long and bloody past.

Gerald Brenan in his *Personal Record 1920-1972* tells that at a banquet at which the conversation turned upon bullfighting, Alyse rose from her seat and in quiet emphatic tones, denounced the cruelty of the so-called 'sport'.

It was through her work as organiser for a referendum on women's suffrage in the

State of New Jersey that Alyse met Randolph Bourne, the man who was to have the profoundest influence upon her mind of any, perhaps, in her life. "Hunchbacked either from a fall in infancy or from the effects of tuberculosis of the spine, he was grotesquely deformed, with a stunted body, huge head, and heavy features misshapen from a clumsy forceps delivery at birth". (Nicholas Joost: *Years of Transition, The Dial 1912 to 1920*, Barre Publishers, Mass., 1967.) Bourne was a man of subtle intellect and passionate liberal convictions. During the years of the Great War, Alyse and he met and corresponded continually.

In 1944, Alyse came across some old letters from Randolph Bourne. She wrote in her journal, that September,

He wrote then as I now feel—I never responded understandingly—All my life has been one desperate endeavour to seize what I didn't understand, to understand what was out of my reach, to live passionately without having the weapons in my hand—and now the stage is cleared, the actors have all gone home—and I have only my treacherous and lucid mind and my heart that reserves the sole talent of being able still to suffer—I rejected his (Randolph's) love, thinking it fantastic that I should ever feel physical attraction for him—I never really understood his difficulties—Too late! Too late! Always too late! Too late to call him back and bow down to him asking for forgiveness.

Alyse was now living in a furnished room in Patchin Place, trying to support herself by journalism. Her first job was not lucrative, working mornings only for ten dollars a week for a school for socialism. Nonetheless, her life was expanding into new ideas, new friends. Through Bourne she met Walter Lippman, and the two young men would sit in her room, debating hotly whether America should enter the war or not. Bourne was becoming well-known as a writer, important for his views on a form of cosmopolitanism which he called transnationalism. He wrote for *The New Republic*, and for an avant-garde monthly, *The Seven Arts*, and, in 1917, he became one of the contributing editors of *The Dial*.

No one meant so much to Alyse as Bourne.

We usually dined together, sometimes in my rooms, sometimes at a cheap restaurant called Gallup's, frequented by poor artists and writers.

However Alyse's delight in the enrichment of her own life—Bourne played the piano "exquisitely", creating another bond between them—was tempered by her observation of the condition of the underprivileged. She interviewed garment workers on strike, and found their children close to starvation, some virtually naked. Many of the workers were Jewish, which contributed to her growing interest in the Jewish people. She went to the Jewish theatre, and even took lessons in Yiddish. Her rooms in Patchin Place were near a courthouse and a row of lawyers' offices, disreputable and mercenary members of their profession. "Hardly a day passed when I did not see some girl, half mad with fright, being decoyed into the toils of these astute men like a fly into a spider's net". She would also see the Black Marias driving up and their occupants being herded into the courts. She could hear the cries of women from the cells. "On one occasion a woman howled half through the night. I could hear her as I lay stiff in my bed, this howl of a trapped human animal, rising to a shriek of frenzy and subsiding into a low wail of unutterable terror and despair". (*The Day is Gone*)

So far, Alyse's heart had been stirred by the miseries of others. Although she had little money when she left home for New York, she had previously lived an easy and protected life. Paris, Italy, dances and plenty of young men. Her feelings had not been so deeply engaged that she could not recover quickly from an unhappy situation. Now, in her early thirties, she sustained, almost simultaneously, two heavy personal blows. Randolph Bourne died in 1918. Alyse was at that time engaged in a love affair which was the most important in her life hitherto. She called the man 'Pierre', in *The Day is Gone*, and described her love as

"an uneasy enchantment that robbed all the rest of my days of meaning and yet held a menace". So absorbed was she in Pierre that she hardly realised that Randolph Bourne was dying.

It was during our love-making that the telephone began to ring. I thought, at first, I would disregard it, but it became so disturbing that I at last took down the receiver. It was a message to tell me that Randolph had died. I put back the receiver and returned to the arms of my lover. My dearest friend was lying dead on one bed and I was making love on another. (*The Day is Gone*)

At his funeral three days later she did not shed a tear, but she confessed that throughout her life, she suffered only one loss so painful to her.

Pierre, too, was musical. Shortly after Bourne's death, they went to a concert together. When they returned to her rooms to drink Marsala, she suddenly heard him saying, "in tones as distinct as the tolling of a bell in mid-ocean", that he was leaving for Paris. His wife was ill. He had not divulged to Alyse that he was married. They parted and she threw herself into her work with desperation.

Since leaving home, Alyse had earned only a precarious living from her pen. Now, "hopeless about all social reform", she set about finding work that would give her a more adequate living. She describes with humour the various jobs she found—work for the Carnegie Foundation, a long spell in advertising, described in a chapter called "In the Cage", and running a tea-shop. She also found time to expand her intellectual life among friends like Schofield Thayer, Henry Hoyt, painter and poet, and Dr. Sibley Watson. Thayer and Watson bought *The Dial* magazine, and their office was a stone's throw from Alyse's tea-shop. They would bring manuscripts there to discuss them over the refreshments. But the tea-shop venture foundered, when rats came in from next door, "bouncing fellows, as big as buffaloes".

However, she was writing again—reviews and articles. Schofield Thayer had been urging her to become his secretary on *The*

Dial, and at last, more impressed with Alyse's literary acumen and ability than she was ever to be herself, he and Dr. Watson offered her the post of Managing Editor. She did not accept without pressure, but once the decision was taken, a new world of literary discovery and friendship opened out before her. Nicholas Joost writes that *The Dial* was not merely a mirror of its times, but a work of art in itself that "actively influenced its immediate age". Its policy, in the words of its Editorial Comment in July 1922, was to publish "the best work available in both the accepted and the unconventional forms of expression". Alyse left an all too short account of her work on *The Dial*, consisting only of the final chapter of *The Day is Gone*. She gives some idea of the ethics governing this remarkable magazine, in which poets were honoured so highly that they were paid at twice the rates of prose writers. She describes briefly some of the distinguished writers and artists she met, many, like George Santayana and Marianne Moore, to become lifelong friends.

In touch with minds original and imaginative—the pick of all Europe and America—what higher fortune could I desire? . . . To find strength and inspiration in the fruits of our own minds is our only firm stake against disaster.

This she wrote at the end of her autobiography, looking back from 1948 upon this brilliant period of her life. It was into this world that there came, late in 1921, Llewelyn Powys.

Llewelyn tells the story of their meeting in *The Verdict of Bridlegoose*. At the age of 36, he still had no profession and little money, but his discovery of Patchin Place, and its "grave, delicately ironic hostess", was a turning-point in his fortunes. As Managing Editor of *The Dial*, Alyse introduced him to her wide circle of friends, and his work began to be published both in that magazine, and elsewhere. Before the year was out, Llewelyn and Alyse had become lovers.

About twelve months later, John Cowper moved into the upper half of No. 4 Patchin

Place, while Alyse and Llewelyn occupied the ground floor, and Alyse cooked for all three. 1923 and 1924 were productive years for Llewelyn, with the publication of five books: *Ebony and Ivory*, *Thirteen Worthies*, *Black Laughter*, *Honey and Gall*, and *Cup-bearers of Wine and Hellebore*. It was no mean achievement for a man who only two years before had felt utterly despondent over his writing, and it was in no small measure due to the support and encouragement of Alyse Gregory.

Alyse herself now began to write imaginative fiction. The theme of her first novel, *She Shall Have Music*, is the growing up of Sylvia, daughter of wealthy and remarkably insensitive parents, whom Alyse portrays with irony as products and producers of the artificial social life of her class. A beloved uncle introduces her to the beauty of nature: "She felt as if some priceless gift had been casually offered her and she seized it with a kind of surprised avidity". Sylvia, "with the self-contained intensity of defeated childhood studied her parents . . . Delicate and intractable, she built her own inner life apart". The intensely personal note is clear. The gardener's son on a neighbouring estate, Marcel Bradford, half-french and a student, works in a hunting lodge which he has converted into a study, in the absence of the land-owner. Sylvia spends much of her time with Marcel. Their somewhat intellectual discussions have an undercurrent of passion. Marcel's sensuality arouses a response in the girl and one night she visits him in his 'study', just before he is leaving America for Europe. Their passionate but brief love-making leaves Sylvia with mingled pain and exultation, above all, with a "power of detachment". Both these young lovers refuse to be "snared by this illusion of love, of perfect understanding".

When Marcel then goes abroad, Sylvia resists her parents' efforts to get her 'married well' and leaves home to live her own life in New York. She finds new friends, new loves. Her observation of poverty and the cries of women prisoners in a jail

nearby bring her the knowledge that the world is "full of ambushed pain". Alyse is clearly drawing on her own experiences which were only a few years behind her.

Unfortunately the last part of *She Shall Have Music* slackens in pace. The writing is not so subtle and is increasingly clogged with discussion on the relationship of the sexes and the position of women in society. Sylvia returns home to have an affair with the wealthy landowner nearby, but he admits ruefully that she is "too intelligent, too lucid" for him. Even Marcel's return cannot save the novel, for the triangular situation is described in too analytical a manner. Conversations are too stiff and awkward to carry the action along. "They returned to the discussion of Greek civilisation in relation to modernity", casts a chill over the page. Yet I cannot leave this novel without quoting its last sentence, so characteristic of Alyse's self-searching: "Between her and the object of her tenderness would always intervene some separate, subtle, unconvertible intimate vision, a vision that would be until death her unproclaimed, incontestible living self".

Before turning to Alyse's second novel, published in 1929, it is essential to say something of her life with Llewelyn, first in America and after 1925 in Dorset.

For Alyse the years with Llewelyn in America should have been as happy as they were productive. It is not for an outsider to attempt to gauge precisely how happy they were but one can say with fair certainty that the two grievous factors that were to lie across her married life and cause her such anguish were already casting their shadows. These were Llewelyn's health—he had a serious attack of bloodspitting in the autumn of 1924—and the hedonistic philosophy which he practised as well as preached. The Epicurean values which he argued so persuasively in *Glory of Life* (1938) are summed up in the statement that "mutual desire is its own justification". He added the rider that it should not cause suffering to others. The fallacy here lies in

the debatable nature of perceptiveness. Was Llewelyn blind to Alyse's suffering? Before and immediately after his marriage to Alyse in September 1924, he was enjoying a passionate liaison with a girl named B. in Alyse's journals. Remembering that we have only Alyse's typescript to go on, and no knowledge of what she omitted, here are the opening words:

Patchin Place, New York, July 21 (1923). L. and I went together to the 42nd Street library to work—up the sun-baked marble steps, the pigeons pursuing each other over patches of sun-scorched grass, the great buses rolling past, the cool, wide corridor, the still room with the tables piled high with books, and beside me this companion inseparable from my every thought, my every hope.

August 13th. L's birthday. He says he was "made to be loved".

Norwalk. Our walk through summer fields of feathery grasses, the goldenrod, the butterflies hovering everywhere, and this magic companionship that fills my heart with joy.

Patchin Place. September 22nd. L. and I with Phyllis and John to the New Jersey Canal—L. in his African shirt, a yellow feather in his hat he had picked up.

[I now omit some descriptive passages].

March 22, 1924. I must keep like a light always burning—freedom for L. with love, not with distrust. We must live alone *within* a relationship, where we are not taken unawares. It is not so difficult to prepare ourselves for sacrifices, as to make those sacrifices with generosity.

1924 (no date given). He says his love for me could never, never alter, that it is as if we were born for each other, and when I look into his eyes how can I feel doubt! Yet B. is so young, so beautiful, and loves him so passionately.

Oct. 1. Yesterday was my wedding day. It is what L. wanted, but some cloud lies upon my spirit as if I had betrayed something in myself. It rained so hard. John and Marian and Richard Le Gallienne came to the little church where Hamilton married us. What should I fear? Only one fear I have, that he will cease to love me as he does. I must always

be prepared for this, though he thinks this wounding to his illusions. But he is loved by every woman. This fear is the only thing that ever makes my heart sad, this and my anxiety for his health.

Jan. 26 1925. L. has asked to have B. here and I must try to show no feeling. It is, after all, what I have been expecting.

Llewelyn was homesick for England—altogether he had been absent for ten years—and in May, 1925, he and Alyse sailed from New York. They settled in one of a row of coastguards' cottages at the White Nose, a headland on the Dorset coast, within walking distance of Theodore Powys at East Chaldon, and the Powys sisters, Gertrude and Katie, who lived at the farmhouse called Chydyok, on the downs near the same village.

During the next four years, Llewelyn was well enough to travel. He and Alyse visited France, and Vienna, where they met Freud. There were visits to London, where Llewelyn researched for his book on Henry Hudson. The winter of 1927/8 was spent in New York, where Llewelyn was the visiting critic for the *New York Herald Tribune*. They lived in rooms at 5 Patchin Place, opposite the house where Alyse had spent her years with *The Dial*, and from which Llewelyn had slipped so often in the small hours. On the ground floor of the house lived Gamel Woolsey, a young American poet, and her husband, from whom she was about to separate. Alyse's typescript is silent about this. Indeed the entries for the whole six months they spent in New York occupy only two pages. They are not happy ones. Apart from her fears that "there will come a moment when his glance will have lost the ardour that is the fount of all my joy", she was saddened by a visit to Schofield Thayer, now confined in a mental home.

Llewelyn's long infatuation with Gamel Woolsey has been fully documented in two books published in 1973 by Kim Taylor's Ark Press: *The Cry of a Gull*, which consists of excerpts from Alyse's diaries edited by Michael Adam, with "A Tribute to Alyse Gregory" by her friend, Evelyn Hardy, and

So Wild a Thing, Llewelyn's letters to Gamel Woolsey, edited by Malcolm Elwin. In his Narrative, accompanying the letters, Elwin makes this interesting statement:

Coming downstairs from the rooms above hers, Llewelyn was continually meeting 'the little poetess', as he, Alyse and John called her . . . According to Alyse's own account to me (8 May 1945) she connived at and suggested Llewelyn's seduction of Gamel. She was going to visit her parents in Connecticut . . . [She] was away for only two nights, but during that time the seduction was accomplished.

Some have found more than a touch of masochism in Alyse. One should beware, however, of using such terms too lightly, when what appears masochistic could equally be an expression of Alyse's 'feminism'. This is well put by Malcolm Elwin: "It does seem that Alyse's feminism played her rival's game, for her theory of freedom recoiled from thwarting his inclination while pride prevented her attempting competition". She had acquiesced in Llewelyn's demand that B. should stay with them in New York. In fact, this went no further because the Powyses left America, but the same pattern was repeated with Gamel. Llewelyn and Gamel entered into a passionate correspondence as soon as he left America. Llewelyn was commissioned to write a book on Palestine (*The Cradle of God*, 1929), and after some almost idyllic weeks in France he and Alyse went to the Near East. En route, at the Hague, a letter from Gamel told Llewelyn that she was pregnant by him. Some weeks later, he received the bad news that Gamel had had a miscarriage.

When Alyse and Llewelyn returned to the White Nose in the May of 1929, Gamel arrived in England and took rooms in a nearby cottage. Llewelyn saw her almost every day. She became pregnant again and was advised to have an abortion, for she had signs of tuberculosis. She announced this news to them over their supper table. Again I quote Malcolm Elwin:

As she spoke, she wept; 'she always cried easily', said Alyse, who at that moment while

Llewelyn held Gamel in his arms to comfort her felt for her 'a tenderness very like his own.' All three travelled together to London, and Gamel accepted 'with her usual docility' the arrangements made for her at a nursing home, looking 'very pathetic' as they left her there.

After their return to Dorset, Gamel took rooms in East Chaldon. Llewelyn's visits were resumed. Some years later, when she came to write *Wheels on Gravel*, it is perhaps understandable that Alyse should allow a certain acerbity to enter her tone when she considers 'The Dilemma of Marriage'.

Married women, with the fear of desertion following close at their heels, like a bloodhound in pursuit of an escaped prisoner, retaliate by rendering their husbands ever more and more dependent upon them, fostering their egoistic illusions, taking charge of every small circumstance of their lives, accepting the position of mother, nurse, servant, and mistress all at the same time; and with anxious secretive perseverance devoting their best creative energies to such a sterile end.

It is only fair to say that in the essay as a whole, Alyse takes a larger view of marriage. Here in the last sentence there is a very personal note, for her second and third novels were published in 1929 and 1931, and it is therefore fairly certain that she must have been writing them right through the Gamel affair. Unfortunately, very little about either novel appears in her typescript diaries.

The second novel, *King Log and Lady Lea* (Constable, 1929), is dedicated to Llewelyn with this verse:

Those pretty wrongs that liberty commits
When I am sometime absent from thy heart,
Thy beauty and thy years full well befits
For still temptation follows where thou art.

One hardly requires a more direct pointer to the personal nature of the novel, but the book is not only a comment upon her own situation. It is oddly prophetic. The story is this. Mary Holland is shown at the outset to be struggling to maintain her inner life as a writer while married to a man who clearly thinks little of it. She recalls two years of

travel with her husband, when he was the centre of her world, "The very pigment of his skin seeming to glow with the sun's warmth while hers was but a piece of parchment". He receives a letter from a former love, Celia, and Mary suggests they invite her to stay, speaking "like a diver who knows he is attempting something too difficult for him, but lacks the presence of mind to withdraw".

Mary sits at her desk, considering the situation. Her life with Richard has become "a stultifying tranquillity. Where was that inner ear? Her intellect was maimed, maimed!" Years afterwards, Alyse was to write in her diary: "L. killed my wit, my vivacity. He never knew it. I have grown another life since he died", and later in the same year (1947) one finds the words: "The periods of my greatest intellectual and spiritual alertness have been—first, in my youth when I lived so solitary a life in Norwalk, and then after L's death when my anguish and loneliness bred in me a new and independent vision." She omits her New York years, *The Dial*, her friendships with Randolph Bourne, Schofield Thayer, Henry Hoyt and others, perhaps because she had trained herself long before to avoid dwelling on the loss she had suffered when she left that intellectually stimulating circle.

Mary Holland almost connives at Richard's affair with Celia. The story broadens out when Mary renews her friendship with Mark Dowson, who contains elements of Bourne and Thayer:

This young man, who was seven years her junior, had had a very definite effect on her life. Everything that her husband was not, he was—intellectual, scholarly, contemptuous of worldly values, with a brilliant, logical mind, and a kind of avid zest which he devoted to the pursuit of ultimate or relative truth.

The two women, Mary and Celia, draw together with "the recklessness of the dispossessed" (*Wheels on Gravel*). Richard feels himself rejected by both. He seeks out another old flame, but at last, unsatisfied by this life, he returns to find Mary living in

Celia's studio. That her relationship with Celia is lesbian is hinted at, but is unimportant. The story's power is in the alliance of these two women against the man they both love. The plot is wound up by the somewhat melodramatic death of Richard. The novel's interest lies in the subtle exchanges between the three ill-assorted characters, and in the prophetic theme of the friendship between the two rival women, for later on, Gamel and Alyse became friends. Another strand in the close-woven plot expresses one of Alyse's deepest regrets: Mary's bitterness at the knowledge that Celia will probably bear Richard a child.

In the summer of 1930, Gerald Brenan, in flight from his miserable relationship with Carrington, came to East Chaldon. He was at once attracted by Gamel, but his courtship was a difficult one. Meetings and letters between the lovers continued. When Alyse and Llewelyn were in America during the winter months of 1930/1931, the days were overcast for Alyse by Llewelyn's obsession with Gamel. He would be distraught if he had to wait more than a few days for her next letter. Yet Alyse was able to write, in a moment of passionate appraisal of the husband she never ceased to love:

Jan. 11 (1931). Last night at Edna's and E's [Edna St. Vincent's and Eugene Boissevain's] I could almost forget our trouble—L. seemed not unhappy, but how beautiful he looked sitting there opposite me, his expression so sweet, so rueful, his face where woe dwelt in a way so lightly, for how can so unprofitable a visitor remain for long in a countenance that brings life and love to everyone that views it! His rich mass of thickly curling hair, his eyes that I have seen burn like living coals searing every nerve in my body, now mobile with good will and modest lenience, his lips that any woman would leave any lover to kiss at any moment curved in a smile . . .

They returned to England "With hearts that still beat in a curious inarticulate reciprocity", and the drama was played out for another two years, with the continual exacerbation of the feelings of all four.

In May, 1933, Llewelyn had a severe lung

haemorrhage and was near death for several weeks. Gerald Brenan's extraordinary generosity, that overcame jealousy, had allowed a warm friendship to grow up between him and Llewelyn, and when he at last took Gamel to Spain for good, the situation became translated into a tenderness between all four of them which lasted until Llewelyn's death in 1939 and afterwards, for Alyse and Gamel maintained an intimate correspondence until Alyse's death.

On New Year's Eve, 1929, Alyse entered in her diary one of her rare statements about her writing: "My book has been a *real* failure, it would have been better had I not published it". In April 1930, she received 7/- in royalties, but she commented philosophically: "All that matters is that I should conserve my awareness. It proves nothing". This book must have been *King Log*. The third novel, *Hester Craddock*, was apparently finished, for only a few days later, she records that a publisher has returned it, adding: "My failures are manifold, yet there is one failure only that should matter, the loss of our own sensitive response to life. Expect nothing. No one owes anyone anything".

Hester Craddock was published in 1931 by Longmans, Green & Co. With a Dorset, one could say an East Chaldon setting, this novel depicts two sharply contrasted sisters, Hester and Nellie, who share a house near the Dorset coast. Staying not far away is Edwin Pallant, an intellectual, a bookman, but also a man of sensual longings, a hunchback whose only attraction for women is their "thirst for culture, for knowledge, for introspective understanding". The quartet is completed by Hal Tryan, a friend of Edwin's, and a painter (Richard Holland was a painter), "young and handsome . . . his dark hair clustering in curls close to his head". It is not difficult to relate these four to Alyse and others close to her, but this novel is the most imaginative of the three and it would be superficial to overstress the personal aspect. In it, it seems to me, Alyse was working through some of her major obsessions: the dichotomy between physical

and intellectual types, as represented by the two men (but handsome Hal is without sensuality, while grotesque Edwin longs for it) and the injustice dealt out to women by the refusal of men to take their minds seriously. At a deeper level, the novel is concerned with sexual jealousy, with Llewelyn's "rabble senses", with self-sacrifice.

Hester Craddock is a rich and powerful book, especially in its delineation of the two sisters. The hunchback is fascinated by both of them, but neither will give him the love he craves, for both love Hal, the painter. Hester passionately desiring intellectual understanding and stimulus, longs also to be conventionally 'attractive', to be courted for feminine charm and beauty. This gradually sours her relationship with her beautiful sister. "Everything that was desirable, beyond her powers, Nelly seemed to express—grace, elegance, and delicate charm, and some hard, unyielding, flintlike tenacity in her demanded with invincible will that she should fight for her own happiness, her own experience".

It is a novel of psychic moods, inner tensions and forces. Edwin, the hunchback, from his enclosed position, is often the commentator and the power of the writing can be judged from this attack which he makes upon Hester:

Perched on the edge of the chair as straight as it was possible for him to sit with his misshapen body, he looked into her face with sparkling venom. "You . . . are a jealous, self-centred, egotistic, selfish girl. You put out the light wherever you go. You have a gifted and interesting mind which you perpetually misuse."

Hester does not forget those incisive words, "you put out the light wherever you go", nor does the reader, watching Hester marring every relationship she makes. Yet such is the author's skill that she compels one to like her perverse heroine and care what becomes of her.

Again the novel has its roots in Alyse's obsessions. Hester represents the 'new woman' struggling to get free from the bonds into which male opinions of women have

bound her. Yet intellect and a passion for books is not enough. Hal paints a portrait of Hester, and she sees with horror "this sallow-ugly creature"—as cruel a picture in paint as Edwin's had been in words. Alyse was vehement for women's rights, but she would never allow that women could or ought to abrogate the uniqueness of their femininity. In a powerful chapter towards the end Hester and Edwin confront each other and confess their bitterness and emptiness. Neither has found love but they cannot love each other. "We can tell each other the truth", says Hester. "There is nothing to lose." Hal and Nelly have some hope of finding happiness in their love, but for Hester there are only two choices: "nothingness or torment, torment or nothingness".

Edwin Pallant identifies all men with himself in his bitter philosophy: "Behind all is emptiness, behind the fevered impulses of man there is but emptiness, an emptiness frantic and complete. It is about us everywhere, it is in the very air we breathe."

"We are both outcasts then", is Hester's conclusion, and they discuss death with bleak frankness.

However much of Alyse's personal experiences and torments went into the writing of this novel, they have been through the crucible of her imagination to produce a work of fiction of wide scale and deep intensity.

"Truth—all things seen under the form of eternity—is still my quarry," wrote Alyse at the end of *The Day is Gone*. How close to truth for Alyse herself was Hester's death? In other words, how near was she to suicide during these years? It is necessary to bring up this issue, because the only assessment of Alyse's position in print is Malcolm Elwin's in *So Wild a Thing*, and I for one cannot accept it. Here he says: "In all her statements she declares that she saw suicide as the only solution to her predicament." I am not clear what these "statements" were. Since Alyse did not, as far as I know, correspond with Malcolm Elwin to any extent, I assume that he refers to her journals. Alyse allowed Elwin to read

those diaries which covered the years of the Gamel affair, at the time when he was writing his *Life of Llewelyn Powys*. This must have been about 1945, nearly thirty years before he wrote the Narrative of *So Wild a Thing*. Certainly there are frequent entries in which Alyse expresses a longing for death, though less often on her own account than as a means to free the lovers for each other, and, if I had space, I could quote just as many that show an entirely different response to her painful predicament. Malcolm Elwin never, perhaps, kept a diary. If he had, he would have realised that day-to-day journals express the mood of that particular day, or even hour, even minute. Few people would wish to be judged by selected passages from their intimate diaries.

Here is an entry which puts Elwin's statement in better perspective:

November 29. (1929) It is resolved for the time. My feeling melts in my love for L. and his love for me . . . Oh, let me watch myself over this dangerous path where we can all cling for the time and be safe. If I stumble or hesitate we are all lost. It is I who have the inner sight, it is I who can guide us all to comparative happiness.

There are many other statements showing Alyse's determination to make the situation viable for all three of them, and Malcolm Elwin himself quotes what is undoubtedly the most powerful reason for her endurance of a well-nigh intolerable pain, and her refusal to kill herself: "He was the core of my being."

In 1932, Llewelyn's health began to deteriorate. The following year, the tell-tale blood appeared again. He wrote: "My chest would get so full of blood that I could not breathe. Alyse was very brave and stood by me to carry the vessels away to bury in the ground of the garden." Alyse's apparent compliance in the Gamel affair, and the painful self-communings of her journals should not blind the reader to the relentless pressure upon her of Llewelyn's health. She looked after him on a shoe-string budget, and this she knew that Gamel would never be capable of doing.

At last, on December 2nd 1936, Llewelyn left England with Alyse for Clavadel, in Switzerland, and never returned.

Alyse's essays, *Wheels on Gravel*, were probably written while she was at Clavadel. Here she felt more of an exile than ever before. They stayed in the house of Lisaly Gujer, who had loved Llewelyn ever since he had first been in Clavadel before the Great War. The arrangement was an uneasy one. Alyse wrote: "I felt, when I first saw her, that I should never, never find anything in common with her." Lisaly could be aggressive and officious, but Alyse came to value her good qualities. Llewelyn wrote his novel *Love and Death* at Clavadel, and Alyse, freed from most of the nursing tasks she had been accustomed to, had time to write, and time to think. The essays have wit and wisdom, and a flavour of thoughts assembled with care and distilled from long experiences carried in the memory.

I think that *Wheels on Gravel* (Bodley Head, 1938) is the best work that Alyse Gregory produced, and I cannot do better than quote from John Cowper Powys's Preface:

Miss Gregory's book is a pessimistic book, and it is a passionate book, and what strikes my own mind particularly about her pessimism is that it rejects—and to my prejudiced intelligence this seems more feminine than feminist—every single one of the consolations that all men—surely I am right in this?—make use of against madness and despair.

He ends his Preface thus:

This slim volume, with its subversive reflections, will be treasured by that minority of people who . . . value thought that brings, not only the solace of an accredited despair, but also those unexpected liberations that are to be won by a mood at once sensitive and penetrating, gentle, uncompromising, and emancipated.

On December 2nd, 1939, Llewelyn died at Clavadel. A few weeks before, Alyse had written: "Llewelyn and I have been so happy together—as we might have been in our earliest days". Now his last words to her were: "Darling, I have been happiest with you. You have been so sweet to me."

Llewelyn's body was cremated. There was no service. His ashes could not be brought to England then, owing to war Regulations. They were finally buried on September 28th, 1947, by Alyse, Gertrude and Katie, on the downs above the sea, not far from the gipsies' track that Llewelyn described in one of his essays, a track that runs near the two homes that Alyse and Llewelyn shared in England, the coastguard cottage on the White Nose, and Chydyok.

There is little need to quote from the journals passages expressing Alyse's grief. The familiar scenes to which she returned for the first time after three years cried out upon her: "Llewelyn is gone". Life had to be endured without him, and there are few references to taking her own life though now it would have been a rational act. But *au fond* Alyse was a lover of life, and her journals bear witness to this and to the deliberate manner in which she made use of books, her contacts with both friends and strangers, her keen delight in natural things, and her passion for music, to nourish and sustain her mind and heart in this ordeal, until she could write:

How inexplicable is the sense of peace that comes sometimes to our hearts, even when we are surrounded by dangers! I looked out of the window and saw two cart horses in the field standing with their heads together and the wind lifting their manes and a feeling of pure happiness came to me and I could forget that L. was dead. (September 1940)

As time went on, she became more detached, more analytical about herself. She returned to the past but not as most of us are prone to do, with nostalgia and futile desire to live it over again:

We cannot cut out our past without doing violence to ourselves. It is like an amputation that leaves both a wound and a void. My obsessed love for Llewelyn drove out so much of my past. I was recreated in my love, and lost all the selves that were not contained in it. Now they begin to return again, or do I seek to transform them into something they were not? It is our power of transcending and assimilating our experiences that makes for strength and happiness, but this we are seldom able to do.

Her love for Llewelyn ran through the rest of her life like a ground bass, a long repeated phrase above which she continued to weave a variety of tunes, a kind of Purcell in words. The musical analogy is not too far-fetched for music often figures in her journals now. It is wholly absent from journals up to the date of Llewelyn's death, for the Powyses were almost all indifferent to the pleasures of music. It was one of Alyse's 'lost selves' that she found again. "Heard Brahms' 1st piano concerto—reborn!" (February 18, 1943)

"Music has again saved me, pulled me up on a silver line out of the abyss". (1948)

1957 was a difficult year, about which I shall have more to say. References to music occur on almost every page, proof of how much she relied upon its saving grace. Often it led her on into another theme, as in this passage, where you can actually see her mood changing:

Last night I heard Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* in my silent room and in the prison scene where Leonora saves her husband and they are joined in an impassioned reunion I wept for L as if in my very bones he lived. To what friend do we dare reveal ourselves? 'No receipt openeth the heart but a true friend' . . . The remoteness of a cat restores us, the remoteness of a friend increases our trouble. This is something to fix well in our minds, marked by Blake: 'If you mean to be loved, give more than what is asked, but not more than what is wanted, and ask less than what is expected.' 'But,' he adds, 'This aphorism is an oversight; this is human policy, as it is called'—and I add, Love makes its own rules. (March 8, 1943)

She knew the pitfalls that awaited her, day after day—the "morbidity, oversensitiveness, self-depreciations", and recognised the danger she was in. She examined herself ruthlessly often, and if she recorded her loneliness and unhappiness, she recorded also the many delights she found. Always present with her was the determination that having chosen to live, now Llewelyn was gone, she must make for herself a viable life. "It is out of these self-searchings that I build up my fortress." She could make her sensitivity serve her, and

transform a day or even a few moments into a positive, life-enhancing experience that would nourish her mind:

I walked up to the old barn where we used to find the first marsh marigolds. I saw a little owl standing on the stump of a thorn tree turning its head from side to side, feeling itself entirely alone, its body of soft feathers round like a ball, its bizarre physiognomy ancient and evil, integral with the phantasy of existence. At last it saw me and flew away, hardly stirring the air. I stood for long in that beautiful scene, the meadows opulent with summer grasses, and all anguish, all regret were lifted from me. The walls round the barn were crumbling and it had the look of a ruin of antiquity, as if I might have come to some old temple where no one ever intruded. The experience restored me and gave me an inner tranquility on which I can always look back. (June 14, 1941)

It is strange that Malcolm Elwin could state in *So Wild a Thing*, that Alyse had to learn a love of birds and wild-flowers, "but her love was thus acquired and not instinctive, *so brought no solace in times of trial*" (my italics). The above passage alone is complete refutation of Elwin's last sentence.

From the first journal written after Llewelyn's death, one finds that her grief is so raw that nature is almost an enemy, it reminds her so unbearably of her loss: "I saw Orion and the Pleiades in the night sky and my bones cry out for him" (December 1939). But very soon nature is knit into her grief, eventually to become a deep solace to her.

Jan. 1, (1940). I walked over the brown sodden fields to the pound where we used to have our shelter and it was difficult to imagine a war so alone is one on these hills, only the wild heifers with their thick black winter coats, shy and bold, staring and retreating, and myself with my heavy heart, and the outline of the downs against the horizon where the sun was setting leaving splashes of rose behind, and a few proverbs crying their melancholy cry and flying their zigzag flight.

As journal succeeds journal, one sees Alyse gradually turning her mind and sensitivity *outwards* to the natural world, and to the people around her: "Little children

running to school with bare knees and responsible faces", and "the broad back of the postman", and smell of his pipe wafting up into her window.

It may well have been from Llewelyn chiefly that Alyse learned her love of birds and wild-flowers and the night sky, so evident in the journals that date from her coming to England. I am indebted to Isobel Powys Marks for the reminder that essentially Alyse was a city woman and it is noticeable that references to nature become rarer as her life expands into visits to London and elsewhere, where she could enjoy the theatre, concerts and films. But the natural scenes around her are not neglected, and the journals testify repeatedly to the comfort she found in them, especially during the strain of the Gamel affair and immediately after Llewelyn's death.

John Cowper Powys finds the secret of Llewelyn's prose style not so much in turns of phrase, but in something more intimate: it is, he says, "to write as spontaneously as he walks, talks, eats, drinks, breathes". This is true of Alyse's style, and nowhere does it show this intimacy and spontaneity better than in her descriptive writing, whether of people or places. In her journals, it has an immediacy that is often most moving.

It is characteristic of her to allow her response to natural things to lead her effortlessly into some philosophic comment—in this example, the importance of nature in her scheme of things:

Nov. 12, (1943). Yesterday I stood in the cup of the valley and looked up into the sky far, far above me and saw some gulls, there must have been about a dozen, flying rapidly and silently across the heavens, sometimes in zigzag formation—and it gave me the same kind of incommunicable rapture that I have received from listening to certain music—as if it spoke direct to some secret knowledge of the spirit—it was both in the beauty and the rhythm of this silent flight of white birds across a firmament without limit or solution—no human in sight, not even the rustle of a leaf, or the murmur of the wind to break the silence. It is by such memories that I live . . . Our strength lies within ourselves,

and in our power of conserving and nurturing the purity of our poetic vision so that we are ever receptive to the sights and sounds of nature, our hearts more open to others.

Note the unobtrusive word 'solution' slipped in to the description and giving it a wider implication even than the last sentence.

"No roots, no centre, no country, no God—yet I live in an upper air of sporadic delight." Her journals, especially during the war, contain many vignettes of chance encounters that make one regret that she did not continue writing novels. (I think at once of that glimpse of Weymouth which glows with her own warmth, as she feels for the nimble children on the sands, and the young French soldiers (June, 1940, included in *The Cry of a Gull*.) She regarded people, sometimes with a detached, ironic eye, sometimes with heart-felt sympathy and tenderness. Her fellow-beings surprised and delighted her, as excerpts show:

Mrs. Ingilby ('Marjorie') is visiting Gertrude. A moustache, a leg done up in a steel brace, a bass voice, over seventy, with the strength of a horse and the enterprize of a boy. She is a survival from another age—one of the Phelipses, living in one of the great houses (Montacute House R.M.), accustomed to domineer, certain intonations she carries over from those days, as when she says 'He's a BOAH.' These are the things that interest me—the many selves, the many pasts, the stamp of class and the humility engendered by suffering added *on* to this, like a palimpsest. (June 17, 1949)

That summer she went to Paris with her friend, Joan Lamburn, and despite painful memories of the past—"my past is still an illness"—she wrote several pages about it, descriptions not so much of things seen, but almost entirely of people:

Our journey. The old Italian woman who feared her daughter would not arrive, her eager volubility when she discovered I spoke Italian, the daughter's appearance at the last moment (half Greek) snubbing her mother who kept directing nervous, conspiratorial, covert smiles in my direction. The plump young man, rather a dandy, with the angelically curving lips, the two light-hearted

American girls, very attractive, and the rich countryside of France, the corn growing in such profusion . . . the cattle heavy and immobile under the hot sun—miles and miles with the poppies and the green fields and the gardens and the church spires. (June 24, 1949)

Journeys by train or by bus, visits to friends and members of the Powys family, were frequent sources for such vignettes. "The nurse as expressionless as an ironed counterpane, trim and quick, with a heart done up, sealed, and put away in a pill box". (April 28, 1950) "Dr. Jackson administering the Holy Communion with sanctimonious unction . . . Snooker's head suddenly appearing over the hedge with a look of sly, deep-dug benevolent curiosity".

Curiosity was certainly one of Alyse's major characteristics. To meet her was to be at once swept by a fire of questions: had you read . . . had you seen . . . had you heard . . .? And then, a little later, more personal questions: how was the book going . . . or the marriage . . . or the divorce . . .? Or whatever it was that was currently engrossing one's days.

She was intensely concerned with world affairs, but equally with the minutiae of village life, which she found provided her with a wealth of dramatic incident. Magazines and newspapers littered her table among two or three newly published books. On the 13th December 1943 she wrote,

What a life I lead up here in my little room always alone—hour after hour, day after day letting imagination travel over the past. My understanding has never been more keen, my curiosity more alert. It is the very bone and flowering of my days.

She was to occupy the little upstairs room at Chydyok for nearly fifteen years more. Remote though it was, it was familiar. It wore the patina of years. It had witnessed her deepest happiness as well as her deepest pain. But Gertrude died and both Katie and Alyse knew Chydyok could not be viable much longer.

I have said that 1957 was a bad year for Alyse. It started well. For some time, the

friendship between Joan Lamburn, now Louis Wilkinson's fourth wife, and Alyse had been growing closer. When an accident made it imperative for Katie to move—to a cottage in Buckland Newton—Alyse decided to buy a cottage in Hazelbury Bryan, where the Wilkinsons lived. Both these villages were just north of the central range of Dorset hills, in the Stour Vale.

She kept the New Year's Eve ritual that she had kept with Llewelyn and ever since his death.

1957 New Year's Day. Last night I went out at the turn of the year, dense fog, the glass balls in my pond knocking against each other, the horns at Weymouth, and a faint sound that might have been bells—and then a sound mysteriously close and I turned to see the little cat in its thick winter coat of fur with shining eyes—a New Year's apparition. I took out the poems of Thomas Hardy, and here is where I put my finger:

I see the ghost of a perished day.
I know his face, and the feel of his dawn:
'Twas he who took me far away
To a spot strange and gray:
Look at me, Day, and then pass on,
But come again: yes, come anon!

The manuscript journal for this period is headed by a quotation from Cocteau: "It is in the shadow that the soul bears fruit."

She had an uneasy winter and spring that year and found it difficult to express the bleakness of her moods. "Oh, what I could write before it is too late, but do not." She was troubled, and had been for some years, by an unexplained pain in her side. Music often came to her aid. Beethoven's Septet: "pure, pure, unparalleled happiness. Would have lived for these moments alone".

But in May, Joan—"my chief consoler and support over all these years"—developed a mysterious illness. It developed rapidly, and on June 6th, she went into a nursing home, "too weak even to dress herself. My world closes down, no opening anywhere, no light". Shortly afterwards, Joan died. "My life swept *once more from* under me . . . How she slipped from us all, who was our joy and our safety".

Alyse had no heart now for the cottage in Hazelbury Bryan. An old friend, Rosamund Rose, had purchased a large farmhouse at Morebath, on the borders of Somerset and Devon. She offered Alyse the cottage opposite the main farmhouse, where she was going to live herself. Alyse accepted.

Katie left Chydyok in August. Alyse stayed on till mid September, and then after visits to friends went to Morebath just before Christmas 1957. On New Year's Eve, her finger found a page on which was printed Edward Thomas's poem, *The New House*.

Alyse was not happy. "Every need supplied . . . But the giver!" Rosamund seemed to have changed, but perhaps it was Alyse's grief over the loss of Joan—and the loss of Chydyok—that made it almost impossible for her to adjust to this new way of life. Five months after Alyse had moved to Morebath, Rosamund Rose died, very suddenly.

Friends, reading, music, all became lifelines to her, in this new loneliness in a strange place, for which she never learned to feel affection. She went away less and less often. As Evelyn Hardy says in *The Cry of a Gull*: "Her world was her upstairs sitting-room. Surrounded by her books, her French paintings, her collections of musical records and a few treasures of Llewelyn's—one of them Fitzgerald's shawl—she wrote endless letters, and opened her arms to visitor who flew in to see her for a few hours, or days only, from Africa, America and Europe. The world came to her door". However factually true this is, Alyse regretted the isolation of living in a tiny village. She had never felt other than an American *deracinée*, and this feeling was now accentuated. She suffered severely at times from depression. She found much solace in the friendship of Alan Parkes, who lived in Morebath and was a lover of books after her own heart. He saw her almost daily. Her friend from childhood, Florida Scott-Maxwell, lived at Exeter, and though they met more and more infrequently, they corresponded and

every evening, spoke to each other on the telephone. Tucked into the last manuscript volume of the journals is a short letter from Mrs. Scott-Maxwell, undated:

My dear,

I do not like to write letters, but when I have a chance to list your virtues and accomplishments then I begin eagerly.

You are better than I am—at—loving.

At attracting friends, and making them feel enhanced and exhilarated.

At social skill, and all its subtleties.

At courage, with its deep seated insights.

At conversation; at the great art of writing, and at that special grace, so human and so individual, of writing letters.

All these virtues of innate character and quality make me abashed to add—

That I am better than you at puffing up cushions,

At assembling my gear and boarding a train,

At inducing small objects to fall into order.

But I cannot go on listing such minor virtues.

... I will phone you later.

My dear,

Florida.

Entries in her journal became fewer. "Growing old—dissatisfied with life—Less delight in the world than ten years ago, less self-confidence—We are all walking the mine field together. The only question I never ask is what has it all been for" (December 20, 1958)

As she found it increasingly difficult to climb up and down her staircase, Alyse could foresee a time coming when she might be dependent upon others, might be compelled to go into hospital or, even worse, an elderly persons' home. Her nature revolted from such expedients. She wished to keep her fate in her own hands. "It is an affair with oneself. No one else should be asked to assume the burden with you." This is one of the last entries in the final journal.

Yet she remained very much the Alyse her friends knew, even when, as some of us were sure, she was carefully making her preparations for taking her own life. Her curiosity still jumps out of the

page—"What have we to show for life but the survival of our curiosity and our tribute to wonder?" And when I saw her on the day she died, August 27th 1967, she rose eagerly to greet me, and almost before I could utter a word, she picked up a preview copy of her friend Enid Starkie's new book on Flaubert.

"Look at this!" she exclaimed. "You must read this. What do you think of it?" She had put a marker in the book at the letter Flaubert wrote to Maxime de Camp describing the death of his friend Alfred de Poittevain, his watch by the body and attendance at the funeral. She watched me while I read, with that intent gaze from her blue-grey eyes, and a slight smile quivering on her lips. Her self-sought death was, perhaps, the final expression of her wonder and curiosity.

Alyse took her own life, lying on Llewelyn's old cloak, the night after I had seen her. When I reached home that evening I heard the telephone ring, and picked it up to hear her asking me whether I had had a good drive. "What a wonderful sunset it's been," she said. "What a wonderful sky."

An account of Alyse's death is given in the book which Kim Taylor designed and produced so beautifully from his own Ark Press in 1973. On the endpapers is printed a holograph of the last two pages in her diary. Her last written words were, "All must part."

Alyse lives on in her journals and in her published works. This passage from her essays, "Friendship and Solitude" in *Wheels on Gravel*, seems to me entirely characteristic of her, and so expressive of the philosophy by which she lived that it is a more appropriate conclusion than the farewell of her journal:

The true value of solitude is the opportunity it offers us for study and for contemplation, for increasing our knowledge of the world in which we live, of unearthing from their obstinate retreats our too tender idealisms, and extracting from them, as we would the wheat from the husk, what is true from what is false, of looking into the hearts of others as

we would into our own, with imagination and insight; and of fortifying ourselves against loneliness, illness, poverty, and the knowledge of our own death and the deaths of those we love. We should raise our banner high and sink our hopes low, remembering always that life as we would like it to be and

life as it is are two utterly different things; and while digging ever more deeply into actuality, we should, without cynicism, impoverishment of mind, or loss of our susceptibility to experience, make our final stand on a truly granite foundation of stern and enduring knowledge.

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Reviews

Mr Tasker's Gods, T. F. POWYS.
Trigon Press, 1977, pp. 312, £3.70.

The Novels and Stories of T. F. Powys,
WILLIAM HUNTER.
Trigon Press, 1977, pp. 34, £2.

It is hardly surprising that *Mr. Tasker's Gods* failed to find a publisher for nine years. A brief synopsis of the plot would go far to explain the enormous success of *Cold Comfort Farm* in the next decade: there are several very nasty things in T. F. Powys's woodshed. To have come to such a book for the first time—ignorant of what lay ahead, of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and the works in between, must have provoked many bewildered reactions in its original readers. Exactly what kind of a rural novelist was this?

A dramatist, certainly, a realist less securely; an ironist and a visionary it would seem—but the balance between these different roles and the tones in this first novel is never quite certain. It reveals Powys's obsession with physical cruelty, from the episode of the flayed horse devoured by the swine, through the beating to death of the little black dog in front of Mr. Neville, to the final ritual consuming of Mr. Tasker's father by Mr. Tasker's gods—his pigs. The penultimate chapter ends thus:

"The hare died in the gin. The owl tore out the bowels of the rat. In the heath cottage Molly covered the face of the dead Henry."

Henry has been felled by Mr. Tasker's father, so soon to meet his own horrible doom. Death is not so much a consumation devoutly to be wished here in the first of Powys's novels as in his last ones.

The book reveals an insistent association of physical love either with rape, or with a kind of rustic frolic which, in *Mr Tasker's Gods*, never touches the extreme levels of embarrassment that Alice Grobe's recollected skittishness produces in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. Here in the opening chapter,

the servant girls Alice and Edith are more realistic and less stylized than Jenny Bunce or the Kiddles, and Alice, pretty, thoughtless and stupid, is inevitably marked out as a victim, and for redemption. The good characters are already conceived as the types who will recur throughout Powys's books. Henry, the innocent and simple is to his family the idiot; Mr. Neville the outcast priest his friend, is persecuted by the villagers; Molly, Neville's saintly sister, unmoved by and above disaster. Only Rose Netley is cast in more realistic terms. Her profession, that of social worker, hadn't acquired such a tarnished image in those days as now. Even so, it is curiously unconvincing to find quite such a well-defined Martha-type of rescue worker in the society of so many Marys.

The rogues' gallery in *Mr. Tasker's Gods* is the most brilliant achievement of this extraordinary book. There is the drover whose violence strives against his innate sense of the supernatural (and who is saved by Neville's simple and striking advice); old Mr. Tasker the drunken tramp; Tasker the obsessive materialist; Mr. Turnbull the unconscious hypocrite who dies of frustrated lust in Mrs. Fancy's brothel; his two sons, John the sensualist and Dr. George the conventionalist. The Turnbulls are perfectly presented in the ironic mode of Jane Austen, most admired by the Powys brothers—though of all English novelists the least likely influence. But she is evident here, especially in the subtly tragic treatment of Mrs. Turnbull, the foolish submissive tool of her appalling menfolk. Mrs. Fancy is the least convincing of these evil figures. Theodore Powys must always have his bawd (like Richardson), perhaps the scapegoat on which his own deeply ambivalent sexual feelings can be loaded. Mrs. Vosper is a simplified type of this in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, and as such more successful because less analysed. But there is considerable shrewdness here in the

suggested connection of Mrs. Fancy's obsession with her furniture and her prurience, though it is not fully explored and, by the time Powys had decided to dispense with the props of the traditional psychological novel, he had learned how to take for granted the polarized natures of his main figures—and how to make the reader accept them with equal simplicity.

This quality in his work is suggested by the epigraph from *Pilgrim's Progress*. It is not only the allegorical tradition but the shrewd countryman's ability to designate good and evil, humorously, stoically, sceptically, which connects Powys with Bunyan. Each was aware of a deep literary inspiration and a profound personal conviction. The latter comes across painfully in *Mr. Tasker's Gods* for all the sophistication of style and literary influence which a sensitive reader would at once have recognized in it. But it is neither the irony, nor the violence, nor the concept of virtue that would first strike someone reading this flawed but powerful work; rather it is the poetic sense of impending reality which occurs early in passages like this:

The voices had come to Alice out of the night in the magical way that voices do come in the dark . . . Alice who had the sharper ears of the two, gave expression to the mysterious sounds that floated in from the fields, the sounds themselves clearly denoting the presence of startled, trembling, human creatures.

Powys is clearly a poet. The natural world is used, as many of his critics have said, as a symbol of spiritual states. But the actual symbolism is often crude. The pure sense of the reality of the material world is always subtle. He can create time and place, and timelessness and placelessness because of his finger-tip, real apprehension of the condition of living.

This may well account for the development of his genius. It was not enough for him—this particular gift. He wanted to put it to the service of an ideology, and by the time he came to write *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* the sophistication his brother John noted had enabled him to create a style which evaded the raw conflicts apparent in

Mr. Tasker's Gods. Perhaps there is no better way of seeing this than through John's letter of congratulation to him on *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (printed in *The Powys Review*, December 1977), where the humour (always associated by John with Sterne, most elegant and sentimental of stylists), reassures him that Theodore has learned to live with the appalling conflicts his sense of natural and supernatural cruelty evoked. John Cowper Powys is glad that the violence which provoked his own 'naughtiness' or sadism is less apparent, but he dislikes the playfulness of Mrs. Grobe and her little goose ways; it seems to me he recognizes that something has been lost in the transition to the perfect poise of that late masterpiece.

No doubt *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* is, as William Hunter observes, the one undoubted major work of Theodore Powys. Whether it is more than a minor masterpiece in twentieth-century fiction is open to doubt. In its way it is perfect; the humour is astringent, wit and sentiment perfectly combined in the fastidious peculiarity of the style—its lucid, uninterrupted flow of perfect fable. But there is no tragedy left in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. God is tactfully met, and God is tactful; those looming intimations of evil which old Mr. Tasker represents to Henry when he finally overwhelms him, the Apollyon figures, have disappeared. The lion that tears out Mrs. Vosper's heart and terrifies Martin Mumby is a stage prop. Death is now the dark wine which Mr. Weston himself wants to drink for oblivion's sake. When the good die by accident, angelic saviours carry them to heaven and blush (like Milton's angels) at the pleasures of human intercourse. Stylistically the transition is perfect and Powys is a great stylist in the great tradition. Nevertheless, a reading of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* suggests why he remains below the greatest. Unlike Hardy, he cannot continue to face what outrages him, nor to subsume it in the humble inspiration of the material world he so much loved. He, too, "was a man who used to notice such things", but they were not enough for him.

Like any Manichee he had to insist on the struggle between good and evil, and while maintaining a sceptic's position, use all the resonance of the Christian myth to support his final contention that of course good, though perhaps not triumphant, is always preferable. The way out is too easy. The means whereby he found that way are brilliant.

William Hunter writes well and sincerely about Theodore's genius. But he analyses too little. While asserting the perfection of Powys's technique he avoids any close explanation of how it works. This would matter less if he did not simply assume that the

stylistic brilliance justifies the philosophic position. Style justifies itself, and it is too little believed in today. But a genius who is to survive even by style must not himself refuse to face the conflicts which his vision provokes. It is hard not to believe that Theodore Powys produced a minor masterpiece in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, which in effect might be considered his last novel, because he was unable to resolve or to accept entirely the horrors and problems which his first novel so uncompromisingly reveals.

RACHEL TRICKETT

The Life-Technique of John Cowper Powys,
KENNETH WHITE.

Galloping Dog Press, 32 The Promenade,
Swansea, 1978, pp. 30, 60p.

Powys's philosophical books tend to divide his admirers. To many people they are inspiring books of quotidian wisdom, the perfect self-expression of a homely and endearing genius. To others they are the overblown elaboration of attitudes more effectively presented in the novels. To those trained in the proprieties of academic discourse these books are an embarrassment, calling for as much apology as do the final novels; and many of his admirers cannot get through them. The repetitiveness of Powys's platform style gets in the way of our understanding; even *The Complex Vision* is bedevilled in this way.

We may accordingly be grateful to Kenneth White for a short essay which charts with clarity the essential elements in Powys's philosophical position. He makes no bones about the essentially anti-social direction of his subject, stressing Powys's forthright rejection of the presuppositions and priorities of society, and the revolutionary nature of his cult of solitude. He distinguishes the latter from mere individualism which "is to society on the one side what utopianism is on the other". Powys's use of the term 'philosophy' is then elucidated, and his particular vocabulary accounted for. "He prefers to take up old words, and give them new connotations, so as not to scare off the ordinary man he claims to be writing for. It seems a doubtful policy." Such comments pepper the

essay, and keep it from being swamped by its subject matter.

Mr. White singles out a number of features for consideration—Powys's admiration for the pre-Socratic philosophers, his cultivation of race-memory, his interpretation of Taoism, and his use of fetish worship. The latter is seen as an acting-out of rituals designed to safeguard the lonely sceptical self against the terrors of a chaos it necessarily has to face. But these writings are more than merely tracts for the individual in a chance-governed world: they are prophetic of a suppressed human need, since "progress has meant . . . a loss of psychic density". Powys's seeming eccentricities are not wayward, but purposeful and intellectually based.

It is the peculiar excellence of this essay that it should make this point so clearly: it will be easier to take these books seriously after it has been read. At times it approximates too nearly to them in manner to be as lucid and persuasive as it might have been, and the opening sections are written in a style of demotic and suppressed excitement that repels; but once under way the essay yields many insights, and as the argument unfolds the prose improves. There are useful citations from such writers as Mircea Eliade, and some interesting comparisons with Thoreau: Mr. White writes from a wide background of reading. He demonstrates here that John Cowper Powys was no more a windy oracle in his philosophical writings than he was in his more formally impressive novels.

GLEN CAVALIERO

PHOENIX AND SERPENT: A Coda

The Editor apologises that, due to circumstances beyond her control, the final section of Glen Cavaliero's essay, *Phoenix and Serpent*, was omitted from *PR 2*. We add it now.

IV

Lawrence would, I suspect, have loathed Powys's work; it embodied too much that he rejected. Nevertheless the work of the two men is really complementary. Lawrence's critical intelligence is coupled with an intense emotional engagement with his own writing, and is in constant dialogue with itself. It appeals to the active temperament, and most especially, I suspect, to the aggressively masculine intelligence. He was a born writer from the start, using his creative powers for purposes of analysis and discovery—in one sense he is the representative writer of the scientific age, and every re-writing of a novel was a fresh experiment towards the truth, relying on the organic growth of the imagination. It is this intense liveliness, this spontaneous growth, which is the sign of his best writing.

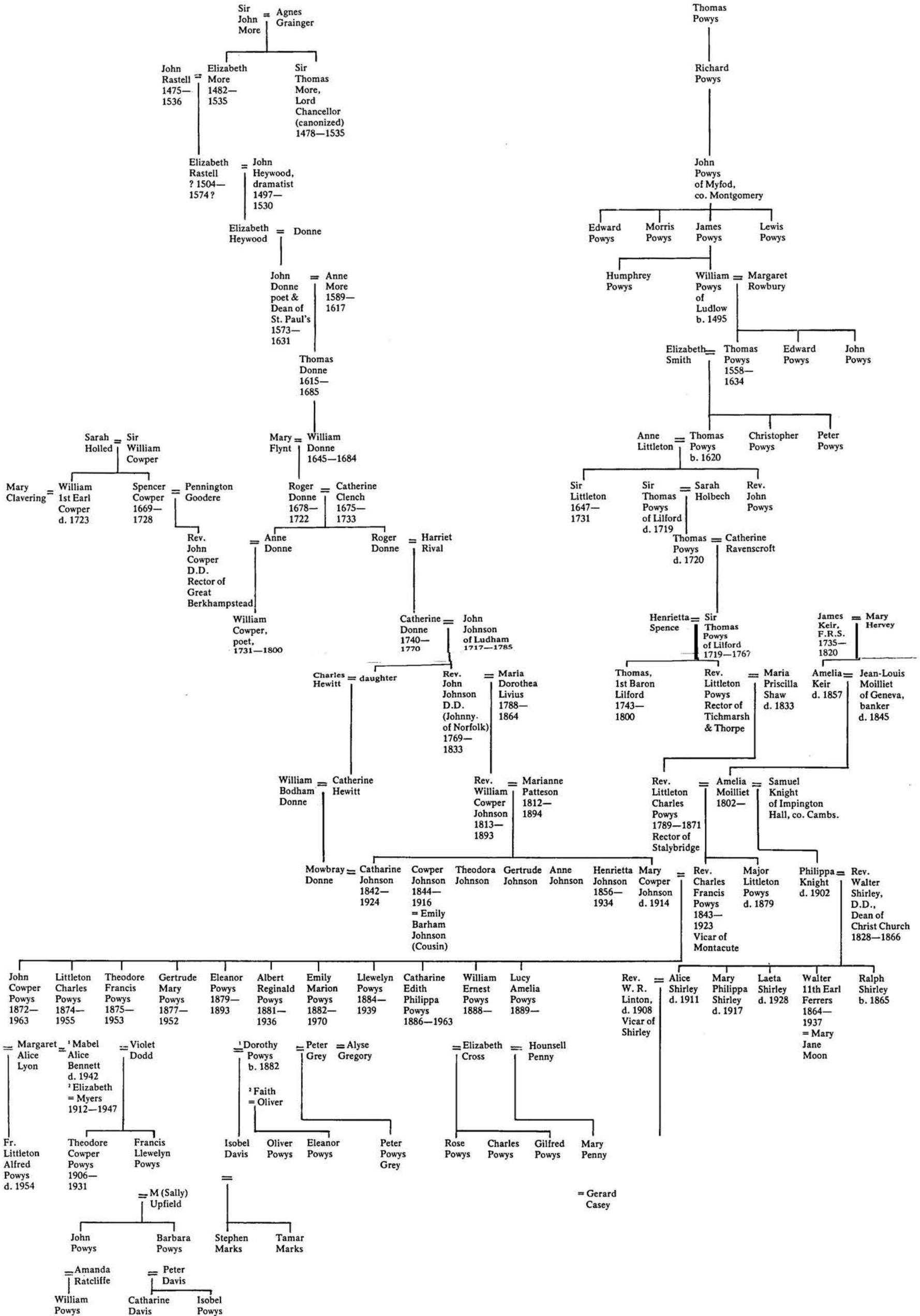
Powys, although as spontaneous a writer as Lawrence, did not find himself as an artist till much later, and then his writing had the character of a vast outpouring from a reservoir of accumulated feelings and impressions. He is an infinitely receptive writer, and H. P. Collins puts the matter well when he describes him as being essentially "an empirical psychologist".¹¹ The slowness, the large spaciousness of his novels, their essentially contemplative character (albeit a speculative contemplation) suggest something more feminine and passive than the work of Lawrence. It is the enduringness of stone, the elusiveness of

clouds and air that it recalls; the style is oblique and serpentine. Lawrence wrote a story in praise of the sun; Powys's most stately eloquence is reserved for the moon, and the non-human world is for him supremely relevant to man's concerns.

The difference between the two is also reflected in their prose styles. Lawrence writes with a keen sense of urgency by means of a patterned iteration of telling phrases. It is a style that at its best conveys a sense of strong immediacy and of participation in what it has to say. He distrusted 'literature', whereas Powys embraces it heartily, putting it to use through a leisurely, bookish style that serves as an inbuilt critique and distancing of his material. If Lawrence sought to dissolve the bonds of fiction, Powys used them as a means of emphasising the relativity of all attempts at getting at absolute truth. This was not so much a deliberate literary experiment as an instinctively right choice. Powys was far less of a conscious literary artist than Lawrence and eschewed experiments; there is nothing to be found in his work to compare with Lawrence's "Why the Novel Matters".

I have said that Powys and Lawrence are complementary writers; nevertheless I think that they are unlikely ever to appeal equally to the same readers. There is a fundamental temperamental difference between them and their books cannot be enjoyed in the same way. But they do safeguard each other's positive qualities, and it may well be that one cannot safely commit oneself to a following of the one without a sympathetic awareness of the other. For both phoenix and serpent are symbols of eternity.

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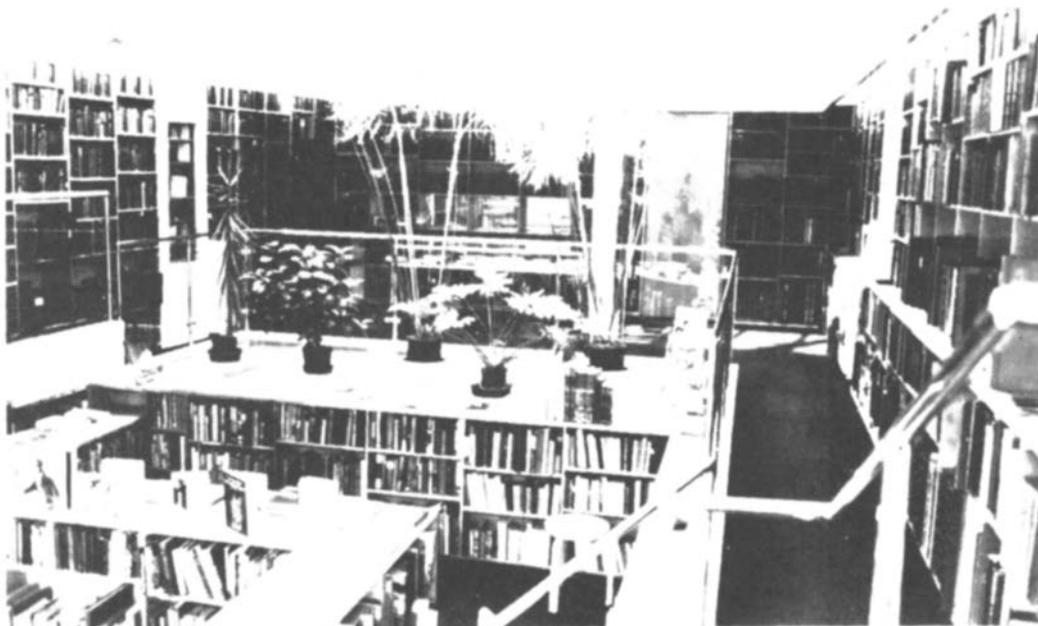


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