

The Powys Review

NUMBER THIRTEEN



The Powys Review

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The Powys Review is published with the financial support of the Welsh Arts Council.

We are grateful to Mr Francis Powys and Laurence Pollinger Ltd., for permission to quote from the writings of John Cowper Powys and T. F. Powys, and to Mrs Evelyn Elwin for permission to quote from the writings of Llewelyn Powys.

The Powys Review may be obtained from Booksellers for £2.50, or from Gomer Press, Llandysul, Dyfed, for £2.50 plus 60p postage.

The Powys Review is printed by J. D. Lewis & Sons Ltd., Gomer Press, Llandysul, Dyfed.

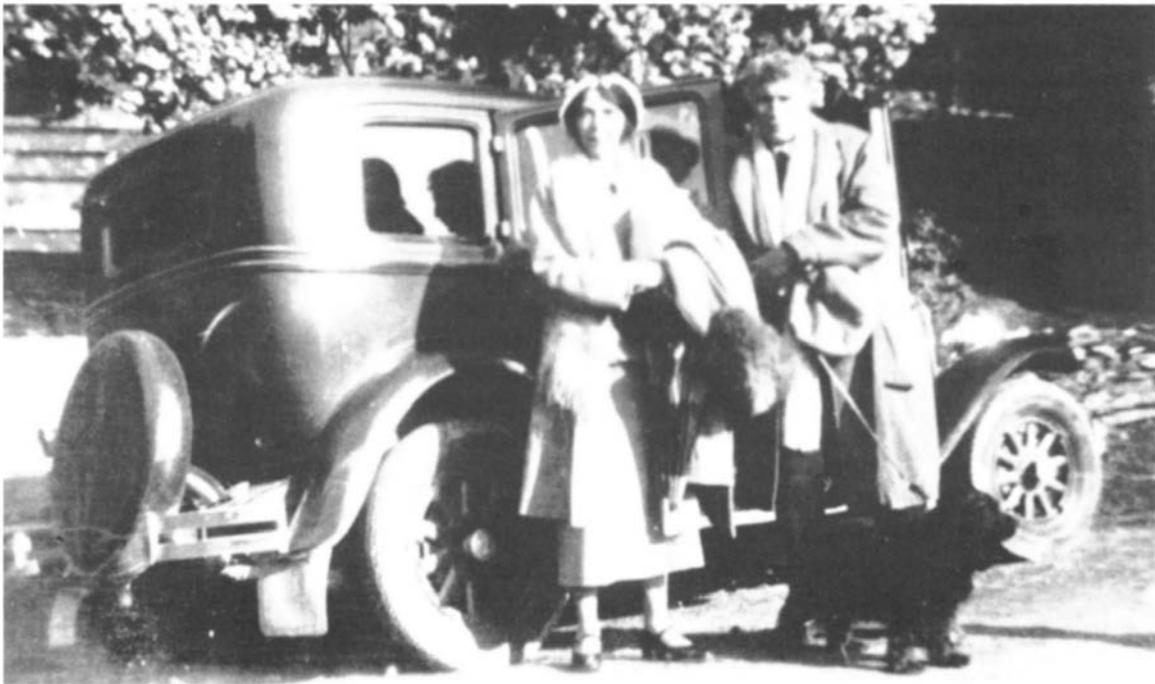
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J. C. Powys lecturing, c. 1916, and J. C. Powys and Phyllis Playter at their departure from America, 1934.
(Photographs from *The Collection of American Literature, The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University*)



The two photographs are enclosed with letters from J. C. P. to Arthur Davidson Ficke, his friend and for a time his neighbour in Columbia County, New York. The picture of Powys lecturing comes with a letter headed "12 W 12", no date. This is, of course, the address that John Cowper shared with Marian in Greenwich Village. The envelope is dated 24 Nov 1916 and has the return address "The Devonshire Lace Shop / 60 Washington Square." The letter itself, which makes no mention of the photograph, reveals Powys's unhappiness over the reception to *Rodmoor* which had been published in October 1916. The second picture is enclosed with a letter dated "28 July 1934" from "Down Barn, East Chaldon." The letters to Ficke during this period reveal John Cowper's deep concern over the ensuing court hearing of the *Glastonbury* libel case. (This note is provided by BEN JONES.)

Martin Steinmann, Jr.

T. F. Powys and Tradition

By one critic or another, and in one respect or another (and sometimes in no respect), T. F. Powys has been compared to a great number and variety of novelists and short-story writers, dramatists, essayists and philosophers, poets, and even painters.

To Boccaccio, Rabelais, Bunyan, Swift, Richardson, Fielding, Sterne, Radcliffe and other Gothic novelists, Austen, Peacock, the Grimm brothers, Hawthorne, Dickens, Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Dostoevsky, Hardy, Maupassant, Stevenson, Conrad, Lagerlöf, Jerome K. Jerome, O. Henry, Arthur Machen, Bennett, Norman Douglas, George Douglas, Saki, Dreiser, de la Mare, Wassermann, Cabell, Mary Webb, Joyce, James Stephens, D. H. Lawrence, Sinclair Lewis, Katherine Mansfield, David Garnett, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Robert Nathan, Borges, Manhood, Samuel Beckett and Pavese.

To Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, and other Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists and to Chekov and Alberto Casella.

To Lao-tzu, Plato, Froissart, Montaigne, and Robert Burton, to Overbury, Earle and other Theophrastians, and to Thomas Browne, Thomas Fuller, La Rochefoucauld, Jeremy Taylor, Schopenhauer, Amiel, Nietzsche, Frazer, Freud, George Sturt and Cecil Torr.

To Langland, Chaucer, Dunbar, Donne, Herbert, Milton, Crashaw, Traherne, Gray, Cowper, Blake, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Yeats, Edgar Lee Masters and Edward Thomas.

And to Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Arcimboldo, Goya and Stanley Spencer.

Some critics have detected in Powys, not only similarities to, but the influence of Rabelais, Bunyan, Swift, Fielding, Austen, Monk Lewis, George Eliot, Hardy, Lascel-

les Abercrombie, Caradoc Evans and John Trevena; of Greek tragedy, the Second Shepherd's Play in the Wakefield (or Towneley) Cycle, Shakespeare and Jonson; of the Bible, Eckhart, Robert Burton, Boehme, Jeremy Taylor, Pascal, Spinoza, Law, Johnson, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Freud; and of Langland, Donne and Cowper.¹

What can we say about these assertions of similarities and influences? First of all, with (as we shall see) some exceptions, they are *obiter dicta*; they are not, that is to say, supported by analysis and comparison of relevant texts. Second, we must try to get clear about the relationship between similarities and influences. To show that Powys is similar to Jane Austen, for example, is not, of course, to show that he was influenced by her. Perhaps both were influenced by a third writer—Richardson, say, or Dr. Johnson. Or perhaps both, like Darwin and Wallace, independently hit upon the same thing. On the other hand, striking similarities between two works, especially if the writer of one is known to have read the other, is some evidence of influence. Third, though we can sometimes adduce conclusive evidence of various sorts that one writer was influenced by another, we can usually show—and showing this may be more interesting—only that a writer belongs to a tradition. A tradition is a network of influences so elaborate and often so venerable that particular links are usually impossible to trace. It is, for instance, a tradition in the west to shake one's head to signify disagreement, but can we often show from whom any particular person learned to do it? The *prima facie* evidence that there is a tradition is striking similarities in the work of writers who—because all were, for example, both English

and highly literate—could have been links in a network of influences.

I begin by suggesting—and here I can do little more than suggest—that Powys belongs to certain linguistic and literary traditions and go on to show how he was influenced by some particular writers or works. In doing this, I shall keep in mind that, as W. I. Carr reminds us, Powys belongs to an unbookish tradition as well, and this tradition interacts with the others: the traditional customs, beliefs, and, above all, speech of rural Dorset. Powys's "achievement was", Carr writes, "carried out in absolute isolation from everything except his Dorset experience and the singular list of writers who positively fed his imagination".²

Powys is, for one thing, in a tradition of rural simple speech untouched by the boilerplate of journalism or by the smart talk of either Oxbridge, Bloomsbury, or suburbia. As H. Coombes puts it, no one "excels him in his mastery of the simple style that expresses the complex man".³ In this respect, Powys was like his father. "No talk . . . could have been simpler than that of the Powys dinner table", writes Louis Wilkinson, who first visited Montacute shortly after the turn of the century. "The father rarely used words of more than three syllables, and he preferred those of one or two . . . Any language but the simplest was to him an object of suspicion and contempt". Wilkinson's account of his first meal at Montacute is instructive:

'Llewelyn [said the father] tells me . . . that he showed you our church this afternoon.' He spoke slowly and clearly. 'What do you think of our Montacute church?'

I wanted to make an intelligent and discriminating reply. I did not know that what was required was brief but unqualified praise. I struggled, used long words, grew more and more hotly confused, repeated myself, went on too long. When I had finished, the silence was terrible. Then, 'We think,' said Mr. Powys, 'that it is a very pretty church.'⁴

Like his father, Powys simply did not know the meaning of many modern clichés and

vulgarisms, and those meanings he did know he disliked. When he heard the Brontë sisters spoken of as "those overworked ladies'", he thought the expression referred, not to their being the subject of too many critiques and biographies, but to the drudgery of their keeping house at Haworth Parsonage ("Well,' he said, 'I expect that old father of theirs . . .').⁵ In the second draft of *Mr. Tasker's Gods*, he removed the expression *the Mater* from the mouths of the odious Turnbull brothers because, though it belonged there by the most modest realistic standards, "Even in inverted commas he couldn't bear the public school, the upper middle class flavour of that particular expression".⁶ He even rejected *khaki* in favour of *sandy coloured* for describing soldiers' uniforms.⁷

In his use of the Dorset dialect⁸ in much of his dialogue, Powys is in a tradition that includes Barnes and Hardy and, more generically, numerous others; Burns and Joyce among them. Most conspicuous are his use of nominative pronouns where Standard Southern British English requires either objective or demonstrative ("for we to do'", "to see I'" "they [those] boys'" —*Mark Only*, pp. 8, 8, 61, resp.⁹); his use of pronouns not found in Standard at all ("thik [that] merry maiden'", "on she's neck'", "for 'ee [you] to speak'" —*Mark Only*, p. 11; "see en [him]'", "name en [it]'" —"Hester Dominy", *The Left Leg*, pp. 173-74); his use of *be* for the whole of the present indicative ("I be digging'", "We baint all dead'" —"Abraham Men", *The Left Leg*, pp. 300, 302, resp.); and his use of the periphrastic *do* ("I do know'" —"Hester Dominy", *The Left Leg*, p. 212).

In his use of archaisms, Powys is in a tradition that goes back at least as far as Spenser, was enormously strengthened by the Authorized Version, and includes among many others Milton, Bunyan and Wordsworth. Powys's use is occasional and unobtrusive. But it serves as a subtle clue to his allegorical intention—sometimes merely as a hint that he is not a naturalist or even a realist, as a reminder that *The Pilgrim's*

Progress is also a work of literature and that Powys's work is one of its kin; sometimes as a clue to the key to the allegory, as in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*.

There are mildly archaic words that suggest Nashe, Greene and Dekker and even Chaucer: "Was ever a village so *gulled*?" and "his lovely bride must know him as a *rogue*, a liar and a *knave*" (*Captain Patch*, pp. 11-12; my italics here and below).

There are words still current but used in archaic senses. A good example is *naughty* (and *naughtiness*), used in the sense "Morally bad, wicked" (*New English Dictionary*, sub *naughty*): "He accused her of *naughtiness*, or all wickedness" (*Unclay*, p. 159). And at least once Powys invokes the archaic sense by using an epigraph: "'Besides, who could have thought that so near the king's palace there should have lurked such *naughty* ones?'" (the epigraph, from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, to *Mr. Tasker's Gods*, p. [iii]). The naughty ones lurking near Shelton Vicarage are naughty, if ever anyone was, in the archaic sense of the word.

And there are archaic constructions. One example is use of the forms of *to be* (instead of those of *to have*) to construct the perfect tenses: "Darkness *was* come" (*Fables*, p. 172), "life *is* begun" and "it *was* fallen" (*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, pp. 203, 309, resp.). Another is use of archaic inflections: "'a cloud of sorrow overshadoweth her'" (*Fables*, p. 13) and "who can tell whom the wind loveth?" (*Captain Patch*, p. 258). Still another is use of *a* as a prefix for participles: "Then it was that reality, that foe to joy, was sent *a*-packing" (*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, p. 120). A fourth example is an archaic syntactic pattern that places the latter part of a compound subject after the verb: "the evening had come *and darkness*" (*The House with the Echo*, p. 199), "the evening was come *and darkness*" (*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, p. 60) and "Little children, in times past, had ventured, *and old men*" (*Unclay*, p. 64).

In his economy of words and his assuredness of tone, Powys is in a tradition that

includes both the whole history of the English novel and an established code of manners and morals that exists quite apart from literary traditions and novelists' personalities. Consider this passage from *Mark Only* (pp. 39-40):

Mr. Beggwell . . . was a tall and not an unkindly man who had once won greatness, and intended, and with reason, never to forgo the outward honour of his deportment. As to his inward welfare, he knew that nothing either on earth or in heaven would ever make him forget that he had once won the first prize at the Royal Show for the finest red mangel, the same red mangel that still showed its glory, though dimmed a little by time closing its natural waterways, upon the sideboard at the farmer's house in Dodderdown.

Or consider this passage, from "The White Weathercock": "Mr. Thursby[']s] . . . manners were everywhere, they even ran into worship. Mr. Thursby ordained himself minister, he worshipped stocks and shares" (*The House with the Echo*, p. 11). This is the ironic tone in which Jane Austen, for example, "places" minor characters: "Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured the children; and these were their only resources" (*Sense and Sensibility*, ch. 7).

In his use of symbolism,¹⁰ Powys is in the native tradition of allegory, fable, humours, "characters", and caricature that runs from Langland, Chaucer, and *Everyman* through the seventeenth-century Theophrastrians, Bunyan, most eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English novelists, most English dramatists of every century but ours, and many eighteenth and nineteenth century essayists. Surely this passage, from *Unclay* (pp. 83-84), which introduces the miser James Dawe, includes Joseph Hall and Thomas Overbury among its literary ancestors:¹¹

A miser is aware of certain great truths. However far he runs forward, he always knows that he never really leaves the same spot. Nowhere does he see anything that he can call his own. He is altogether an unbeliever in concrete fact. If he does not take care

to save more, he will have nothing. Of all earthly pleasures, a miser's are the most sure. He is certain of earthly content, for he has only to gain one penny in order to be happy.

To take—in order to hide—is his wish. He hides his money by putting it out to breed.

A miser's joys never fail him; he pretends he has little, then he counts his bags. From every man's estate he takes something. From not spending himself, he gains by the waste of others.

He not only hoards money, but saves days and years too. A miser usually lives to be very old.

Where another would see nothing, he sees a great deal. A little coaldust in a shed, a despised heap of small sticks—these he sees as a fine estate. Nothing escapes his wary eye. He will not pass by the smallest nail, or piece of string. What other people throw away, he could live upon. He lives by adding one to one. He is a fine leveller.

Turning from traditions to particular influences, perhaps the best way to begin is to show what writers or works could have influenced Powys—that is, what writers he read.

From external evidence—evidence not in his writing itself¹²—we know that Powys read or probably read a great diversity of novelists, dramatists, writers of nonfiction, and poets.

Rabelais, Cervantes, Bunyan, Defoe, Richardson, Marryat, Reade, Kingsley, Dostoevsky, D. Clinton Robertson's *The Percy Anecdotes*, Hardy, James, Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and other children's novels, Conrad, Bennett, Maugham, Garnett, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Margaret Kennedy and O'Flaherty.

Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, Ford, Wycherley, Chekov and Maeterlinck.

Plato, Epicurus, Lucretius, Seneca, the Bible, Josephus, Eckkart, Luther, Montaigne, Boehme, Burton, Taylor, Baxter, Culpeper's *Herbal*, Spinoza, Law Swedenborg (but not until 1942), Wesley, Boswell, the *Harleian Miscellany*, Lamb, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, J. A. Cotter Morison, Leslie Stephen, Doughty, Nietzsche, *The Crimes of Christianity*, Frazer, Freud, James

Gifford, T. E. Lawrence, *A Treatise on the Survival of the Human Personality*, "books about tortures inflicted by Eastern potentates", and the *Times Literary Supplement*.

Homer, Chaucer, folk ballads, Shakespeare's sonnets, Donne, Jonson, Waller Watts, Crabbe, Wordsworth, Southey, Keats, Barnes, Christina Rossetti, James Thomson (born 1834), *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, and *The Oxford Book of Scottish Ballads*.¹³

Powys's oral comments on some of these writers and works are revealing. He once listed Rabelais, Richardson, Montaigne and Scott as his favourite authors¹⁴ and Culpeper's *Herbal* and Law's *Serious Call* among his favourite books.¹⁵ Crabbe had given him "greater pleasure than any other writer".¹⁶ Waller's "Go, lovely rose" was his favourite lyric.¹⁷ He admired Boehme ("Signatura Rerum . . . is a good book to read") much more than Plato ("that flighty one").¹⁸ He was "delighted with Donne's sermons".¹⁹ He found Wesley's *Journal* "intensely human" ("John Bunyan would have called him a cock of the right kind"). He liked "best to read of actual moving, working life; of ships as Conrad writes of them".²⁰ He liked *TLS* very much.²¹ Of Bennett, he ambiguously remarked, "A very honest fellow he seems to be. I shouldn't at all mind sitting down beside him. Or even sitting down on him".²² *Robinson Crusoe* he disliked,²³ and he couldn't finish reading Kingsley's *Hereward the Wake*.²⁴ He once acknowledged the influence of the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Paradise Lost* on his work;²⁵ on another occasion, the influence of the Bible and Schopenhauer and of Luther, Montaigne, and *The Percy Anecdotes*. Books, he said, "have played a vital part in all the crises of my life. The Bible, of course, from the beginning . . . Then came Schopenhauer". A phrase of Luther suggested the theme of "Christ in the Cupboard", "a passage in Montaigne . . . finally turned my thoughts and habits to a life of contemplation" and *The Percy Anecdotes* was "a grand source for

suggestions'".²⁶ And in his social life Jane Austen was influential enough for him to take the "mantle" of Mr. Woodhouse as his "camouflage".²⁷

Powys's adopted daughter, Theodora ("Susan"), has written a fascinating account of his reading from 1934 to his death, in 1953—a period, however, after he had pretty well given up writing.²⁸ The writers she mentions are listed above, but she adds particular works that he read or recited to her: Jonson's "Hymn to Diana", for instance, and "The Ballad of Chevy Chase", "Otterborne", a song from *Cymbeline* ("Fear no more the heat o' the sun"), and the shepherd boy's song in the Valley of Humiliation ("He that is down need[s] fear no fall"). And she gives valuable details about the circumstances surrounding his reading: sitting outside in summer, "he would pretty certainly have Barnes with him"; out walking, he carried "his little leather-bound edition of the [Shakespeare's] Sonnets"; "We read through two or three of Scott's novels in a winter", eventually reading most of them; and they read *The Oxford Book of English Verse* "from cover to cover".

Internal evidence—from his writing itself—shows Powys's reading to be even wider than the external suggests. His work is full of references to and quotations from a great variety of writers in a great variety of genres.

Fabulists and novelists: Aesop, Lucian, Malory, Rabelais, Cervantes, Bunyan, Defoe, Swift, Le Sage, Richardson, Voltaire, Fielding, Sterne, Austen, Hugo, Gaskell, George Macdonald, Samuel (*Erewhon*) Butler, Hardy, Conrad, Wells and John Cowper Powys. Among the novelists, Sylvia Townsend Warner is a very special case: he dedicated both *The Left Leg* and *Kindness in a Corner* to her; he wrote the Foreword to her *A Moral Ending and Other Stories*, his only published piece of literary criticism; and she wrote the Foreword to *The Key of the Field*.

Dramatists: Euripides, the Second Shepherd's Play, John Still, de Vega, Shakespeare, Jonson, Wycherley and Congreve.

Philosophers: Socrates, Plato, Marcus Aurelius, Bacon, Berkeley, Kant and Nietzsche.

Religious writers: the Bible, St. Augustine, Luther, Hooper, Latimer, Knox, Calvin, Hooker, Taylor, Baxter, Fox, Law, Wesley, John Woolman, Paley, Newman, Joseph Smith and Charles Hadden Spurgeon.

Historians: Thucydides, Plutarch, Suetonius, Tacitus, Froissart, Agnes Strickland, Froude and Henry Thomas Buckle.

Scientific writers: Burton, Darwin, Huxley, Frazer and Freud.

Essayists: Gellius, Erasmus, Montaigne, Dr. Johnson, Lamb and Pater.

Poets: Homer, Anacreon, Lucretius, Virgil, Lucan, Dante, Chaucer, Thomas Proctor's *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, Campion, Donne, King, Quarles, Herbert, Milton, Crashaw, Lovelace, Dryden, Young, Thomson (born 1700), Gray, Cowper, Goethe, *Mother Goose*, Crabbe, Blake, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Henry Kirke White, Byron, Keble, Keats, Longfellow, Tennyson, Robert Browning and Arnold.

Powys's work, moreover, contains many references to other famous beings, both real and mythological, that he probably met in his reading: among many others, Phryne, Philip of Macedon, Menecrates, Alexander the Great, Vespasian, Caligula, Canute, Lady Godiva, Pope Innocent III, Tamburlaine, Jack Cade, Edward Coke, Cromwell, Roger Williams, General Fairfax, James II, Hogarth, John Wilkes, Gladstone and William Eugene ("Pussyfoot") Johnson; and Europa, Leda, Empedocles, Cupid, Psyche, Daphnis, Chloe, Zeus, the Minotaur, Proserpine, Pluto, Midas, Circe, Bacchus, Ulysses, Satan and Pope Joan.²⁹

Powys's reading was, then, vast. He was, it seems, like the Reverend Silas Dottery, who "spent nearly all his life in reading": "His books were his pleasure; all other pleasures in the world he mistrusted" (*Kindness in a Corner*, pp. 172, 68, resp.). Curiously, he spent much more time in reading poetry and nonfiction—philoso-

phers, religious writers, historians, scientific writers, and essayists—than he did in reading fiction. But, though he wrote little, if any, poetry, he did, of course, write a great deal of nonfiction of a sort, almost all of it early on: notably, *An Interpretation of Genesis*, the still unpublished “An Interpretation of the Book of Job”, *The Soliloquies of a Hermit*, and (according to Wilkinson) an unpublished essay on Bunyan. And, as we shall see, many of the pervasive themes in his fiction have their germs in some of his nonfiction.

Which of the many writers and works that Powys read influenced his writing, and how? Striking similarities between two works are, I have said, evidence of influence, especially if the writer of one is known to have read the other; and some striking similarities between Powys’s work and his reading have been pointed out.³⁰ Here, however, I want to focus on the evidence provided by some of the references to and quotations from other writers. The writers referred to and quoted influenced Powys’s work by (if in no other way) simply being referred to or quoted there. Had they never lived and written, Powys’s work would be different from what it is. Let’s examine some of the literary uses to which Powys puts his references and quotations: first three kinds of systematic use, then his incidental uses.

One of his three kinds of systematic use is his allegorizing of other works much in the way that Joyce allegorizes Homer’s epic in *Ulysses*. Powys’s favourite work to allegorize is, of course, the Bible. In *Mr. Weston’s Good Wine*, for example, there are one-to-one correspondences between the light wine and love, the dark wine and death, and Mr. Weston and God; and, in *Innocent Birds*, Aunt Deborah, Madder Hill, God’s gift, Solly, and *A History of America* correspond to Moses, Mount Sinai, the deliverance of the Israelites, Joshua, and the Books of Moses, respectively. But Powys also allegorizes other works. In “The Shut Door”, for instance, he allegorizes the Second Shepherd’s Play (in turn, a parody of the story of the birth of Christ).

Of the second kind of systematic use there is only one example: his systematic distortion of Genesis in *An Interpretation of Genesis*. In it, he rejects Christian ontology and eschatology. The Truth has God’s role. Far from creating man in *His* image, God was created by man in *His* image; and there is no personal immortality, only the immortality of fame and of race. Here are the germs of the otherworldly themes that dominated both Powys’s personal life and his fiction: the evil of action and work, of getting and spending, the goodness of the passive life of contemplation, and the supreme goodness of death, the better of Mr. Weston’s good wines. Here also, as in the fiction, are the conflicting this-worldly themes of the supreme goodness of life, of creation and existence.

Of the third kind of systematic use there is also only one example: his systematic but not allegorical use of Jane Austen in *Unclay*.³¹ And this use I want to examine in some detail.

For the Reverend Francis Hayhoe, in *Unclay*, Jane Austen and God, her novels and the Bible, divide the world between them:

All the doctrines expressed by the Church of England were true to him, and every word written by Jane Austen he believed to be almost as necessary to salvation. And so—by bringing Amos and Emma together, and considering their observations upon mankind—Mr Hayhoe learned to love others more than himself.

He felt for those who had never known the loving-kindness of the Church of Christ, and he shook his head compassionately over those who had not read *Mansfield Park*.

From the Church, Mr. Hayhoe garnered and stowed away enough humility to last any man a lifetime; from Jane, he learned that it is better to listen than to look. The Church graciously permitted him to love God as much as he wished—and Jane Austen allowed him to see into, and approve—though not all of them—the ways and habits of many a pleasant young lady, and more than one sober or frolicsome young gentleman (pp. 10-11).

He once sent the Pope a sermon pointing out "the many errors of Rome" and expected him to reform his church and allow every priest to marry a "a poor Miss Taylor" (p. 11). When he first visited the prostitute Daisy Huddy to read her the Bible, he found that he had brought with him, not the Bible, but *Northanger Abbey*, which "he supposed would do nearly as well" (p. 12). When John Death, who is death, informed him, "I belong to God", Mr. Hayhoe reflected that one "who has read his Bible and acknowledges to whom he belongs, might have read other books too, and have heard of Mr. Collins" (p. 24). When John Death asked him whether he had given young Susie Dawe a Bible, Mr. Hayhoe replied, "I gave her *Sense and Sensibility*, . . . blushing deeply" (p. 41). Upon another visit to Daisy Huddy, intending to bring *Persuasion*, he brought the Bible; and, as a result of listening to him read the book of Joshua, Daisy hung a scarlet thread from her window ("I shall never trust myself again", Mr. Hayhoe said; "I am always showing people the way to go wrong . . .") (pp. 46-47). To repair this damage, he took *Pride and Prejudice* with him upon his next visit to Daisy ("Who would not wish—as soon as Mrs. Bennett was mentioned—to hear more of her?") (pp. 149, 154), and he wondered whether Jane Austen would protect him from Daisy's charms if God was absent (p. 145). So thorough was his propagation of Jane Austen that her characters became familiar even to Daisy's sister, Winnie, who enquired, "'bain't I the one to know what Mr. Darcy were after thik Lizzie for?'" (p. 262). And John Death, who, through Mr. Hayhoe, had also come under Jane Austen's influence, told Joe Bridle that Mr. Hayhoe,

would always affirm that a peaceful hour, spent in reading the *Watsons*, can give a greater happiness than a whole night with a Helen or Laïs, and now [after tasting love] I am inclined to agree with him. I remember well that in our conversation we both regretted an act of providence that compelled that book to be so nearly the last of them (p. 313).

In *Unclay*, then, Jane Austen and God—at once a duality and a unity—help figure the familiar Powysian theme of love and death. Jane Austen is love, God death; and between the two of them they thus divide the two good things of this world. But, as John Death told Priscilla Hayhoe, "I kill, and Love gives life, but in reality we are one and the same" (p. 324); and, as Death's remarks to Bridle imply, Jane Austen's novels and God's Bible each encompass all of life. The apparently ironical collocation of novel of manners and Bible shocks the reader into awareness of another dimension of the former; Powys "has suggested", William Empson rightly observes, "that Jane Austen puts not merely a profound but positively a macabre irony into the primness of her language and her themes",³² and this awareness helps the reader grasp the theme of *Unclay*.

And irony—real or apparent—is also characteristic of most of Powys's incidental uses of reference and quotation. Several of Powys's titles—among them those of "The Left Leg" (from *Mother Goose*), "Abraham Men" (from *The Anatomy of Melancholy*), "Christ in the Cupboard" (from Luther), *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (from *Emma*), "Nor Iron Bars" (from Lovelace),³³ and "The White Paternoster" (from Chaucer)—are references or quotations, in the first two instances supported by epigraphs; and the relationship of title to work is often ironic. In *Emma*, for example, Mr. Weston's good wine made Mr. Elton tipsy and caused him to propose to Emma; in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, however, it is not love only, but death; and—a further irony—there is no love lost between Mr. Elton and Emma anyway. Oftentimes the irony works the other way: instead of the reference's having less stature than its context it has greater:

Mr. William Crowle knew his place and understood his position.

He had no need to study any such learned book as *Man's Place in Nature* in order to find out what he was.

Mr. William Crowle knew what he was (*Black Bryony*, p. 83);

although there is a suggestion that Huxley shares some of Mr. Crowle's hollowness. Sometimes the irony lies in a disparity between the tone of the reference and the tone usually thought appropriate:

However much and however humanely the Creator of the world may regret His misplaced confidence in a creature endowed as John Milton has it—though John Calvin thought otherwise—with free will, which means, we suppose, the right to do or not to do, He still permits time to go on (*Mark Only*, p. 43);

or,

A few days later, when the donkey was feeding contentedly and philosophically, considering in the manner of Bishop Berkeley that the moor could never have had an existence unless he had been there, the mother rabbit stepped out of her burrow and thus addressed the ass (*Fables*, pp. 67-68).

Sometimes the irony takes the form of meiosis: quotations are part of a ludicrous understatement. In *Unclay*, for example, the miser James Dawe, by describing his daughter's aphrodisiac properties in exact Anglo-Saxon terms, is trying to sell her services to Mr. Mere, who has in mind (Dawe well knows) a sadistic orgy that in the originality of its violence, would give even the Marquis de Sade a nasty turn. But the narrator invokes Keats and Campion to characterize Dawe's remarks:

A good seller need be no poet, in order to dispose of what he has in stock. James Dawe was no polite talker; he did not trouble himself to say that "beauty is a joy for ever," nor did he say, "there is a garden in her face, where roses and white lilies blow [*sic*]." he said other things than that (p. 107).

As we have seen, Powys systematically uses the Bible by allegorizing it. But his work is, of course, full of incidental uses.³⁴ Among the most effective; often supporting his systematic use, is quotation without quotation marks—sometimes in the narrative, sometimes in dialogue: "At last Henry knew that the monster from below, the immortal beginning and ending of man's

nature, *the first and the last*, was before him" (*Mr. Tasker's Gods*, p. 302, cf. Isa. 41: 4, 44: 6, 48: 12; Rev. 1: 11, 17, 2: 8, 22: 13; my italics here and below); "*He is despised*, and I will add, if you have no objection, he is *rejected of men*," "*the valley of the shadow* is passed in a moment", and "Mr. Meek would see himself, though in *a glass darkly*, inviting her to stay and rest with him upon the hay" (*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, pp. 36, 109, 152, resp.; cf. Isa. 53: 3, Ps. 23: 4, 1 Cor. 13: 12, resp.). Here, too, there are often ironies. In the first quotation from *Mr. Weston*, for example, there are ironic collocations not only of characters in a modern novel with biblical characters—Michael, Mr. Weston's assistant, with Isaiah and Luke Bird, the despised one, with Christ—but also of biblical language ("rejected of men") with modern educated idiom ("I will add, if you have no objection").

This essay has been largely given to showing Powys's debts to a remote past—to showing that his work belongs to antique, unfashionable, and, alas, often misunderstood traditions. But I must conclude it with a qualification. Unlike his contemporaries as he is in most respects, Powys is remarkably like some of them in his awareness of some of the insights that anthropology and psychoanalytic theory have made explicit into such things as myth and ritual, their origin, manifestations, and meanings.

I say "awareness" because, when his fiction first began to appear, though critics detected in it the influence of Freud, he had not yet read Freud and probably not Frazer.³⁵ His knowledge of their insights, therefore, either came (like Hardy's) from first-hand experience in rural Dorset³⁶ or was picked up from secondary sources. Later, however, he read and admired both Freud and Frazer and, it seems likely, other psychoanalysts and anthropologists.³⁷ In 1934, he wrote to Wilkinson that a recent volume of Freud's lectures is "a wonderful book, a book of the highest value";³⁸ later that year he told Richard Heron Ward, who was then gathering materials for *The Powys*

Brothers, that “the really great philosopher, and perhaps the greatest of them all”, is Freud;³⁹ and, according to Wilkinson, he believed “that Freud’s discoveries have brought about as profound a change in human thought and feeling, conscious and unconscious, as Galileo’s or Darwin’s”.⁴⁰ Frazer preempts the opening lines of “The Tithe Barn”: “That the beginnings of theology have grown up from one root,—that is, simply fear,—is well-known to all who have read ‘The Golden Bough’” (*The Tithe Barn and the Dove and the Eagle*, p. 5). And, though there are no other passages that refer so explicitly to Frazer or Freud, Powys’s works from “Hester Dominy” to “God” refer to or describe a variety of anthropological or psychoanalytical phenomena.

Sympathetic (or homoeopathic) magic:

Miss Pettifer never forgot any person, whether dead or alive, who in times past had insulted her. She did not make clay images of them to stick pins into, because she could never have got a near enough likeness to please her taste, which was practical. Instead of doing that, she wrote their names, in a determined and practised hand, in her prayer book—that wasn’t too small a one. She would also mix them, in a sacramental way, with her fried bacon for breakfast. Miss Pettifer had a happy appetite, as a healthy lady of sixty, which a very English mind, would be likely to have. And she liked fried bacon. And in order to make it taste the better, even though it might sometimes be a little burnt, she would put her enemies between the rashers and bite them too (*Innocent Birds*, pp. 93-94).

Quasi-totemism:

Squire Kennard was a merry gentleman who loved his jest. He connected every person he saw with some animal or other. He believed his housekeeper to be a wise kind of goose, and he saw the horse in Mr. Dunell. He fancied Dark Eliza to be a timid black cat with one eye, who could climb trees. And Mrs. Topp was an owl with a white beak (“Abraham Men”, *The Left Leg*, p. 261).

Phallicism:

Often in the country a young farmer’s son, whose parents are rich, is so fattened and reddened by praise and good living that he becomes a sort of man-god, spruce and verdant, and worshipped by all.

Young Simon Cheney, though possessed of quite a large share of unpleasant maxims and manners, was certainly set up in Mockery—his red, youthful face puffed and plumed with gross conceit, his light-coloured hair brushed and curled by his hard-worked mother, who continued even when the boy was twenty to tend him at bedtime—as a fine Phallic symbol for the young ladies to admire and for Mr. Caddy to talk about (*Mockery Gap*, p. 51).

The sacredness of certain trees:

The [oak] tree was an ancient one, and its leaves, that whispered in the moonlight, could tell many a tale of what had happened underneath the boughs of some great and kingly ancestor. There the blood had been shed of many a young girl, dying to pacify the wrath of an angry god, the garlanded priests using their sharp knives, after they had taken tolls of the victim in the orthodox manner (*Mr. Weston’s Good Wine*, p. 96).

Death and rebirth of fertility gods:

“Every autumn God dies, and in the spring, He is given a new place in the lives of men, and is born again” (*The Two Thieves*, p. 204).

Ritualistic murder:

Each guardian of the temple is slain in his turn, the victor becomes priest in his stead (*Unclay*, p. 115).

Kinship of the sacraments:

An old crazed woman . . . muttered that she had forgotten to buy any rice . . . to fling at the bride [who is not a bride but has just been buried] (*The White Paternoster*, p. 187).

Ritual:

Mr. Tolly regarded this sort of ritual [hoeing the roots of Mr. Beggwell’s favourite mangel] in the same kind of way that a priest of old did the service of Amen Ra, and would kneel

beside the root and cautiously pull out all the little weeds with his fingers (*Mark Only*, p. 164).

Ambivalence:

This second time in the space of five minutes he [Luke Bird] had wished to be as brutal as the Mumbys, and when he saw the fierce dog spring upon the tired hare, the dog had only done what he wished to do to Jenny Bunce.

He would have done worse than the dog. The greyhound had left the hare dead upon the grass, but Luke would have torn Jenny limb from limb in an excess of love (*Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, pp. 197-98).

The subconscious, the unconscious, and the collective psyche:

The inward appearance in this town girl is a troubled sea of waves and tides, tides and waves that form deep whirlpools. They tear down wisdom, these tides; they torment innocence; they burst holy vessels; they cast

innocent thoughts to the dogs ("Hester Dominy", *The Left Leg*, p. 155).

and

It was proper that a solitary female preacher of a sadly stricken and outworn faith should stand there so wistfully in the moonlight, drawing out from the subconscious and deep-rooted vegetation the thoughts that twined and twisted around the fossilized feet of the older gods whose upper bodies have long ago been dissolved in dust (*Black Bryony*, p. 17).

Powys belongs to antique traditions. But "after all", as R. C. Churchill puts it, he "is a man of this century, and approachable, provided we do not lose sight of literary standards, on the one side by psycho-analysis and on the other by anthropology";⁴¹ and that Powys should successfully fuse such diverse traditions is one mark of his genius.

NOTES

¹Space does not permit documentation of these assertions of similarities and influences, compiled from examination of more than three-hundred articles, reviews, and books from 1916 to 1982; but I welcome specific enquiries.

²"T. F. Powys: A Comment", *English*, 15 (1964), p. 9.

³T. F. Powys, Barrie and Rockcliff, 1960, p. 121.

⁴Louis Marlow [Louis Umfreville Wilkinson], *Welsh Ambassadors*, Chapman and Hall, 1936, pp. 4-5.

⁵Ibid., p. 94.

⁶Ibid., pp. 93-94.

⁷Malcolm Elwin, *The Life of Llewelyn Powys*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, p. 173.

⁸My authority on the Dorset dialect is Bertil Widén, *Studies on the Dorset Dialect*, Lund: Gleerup, 1949.

⁹All references to Powys's works are, as here, given parenthetically and are to the first English editions.

¹⁰See also my "The Symbolism of T. F. Powys", *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 1, No. 2 (1957), pp. 49-63; and "Water and Animal Symbolism in T. F. Powys", *English Studies*, 41 (1960), pp. 1-6.

¹¹Cf. Hall, "The Covetous", *Characters of Virtues and Vices*, 1608; and Overbury, "A Covetous Man", *Characters or Witty Descriptions of the Properties of Sundry Persons*, 1614.

¹²Among the external evidence I count the interview, "Why I Have Given Up Writing", *John*

O'London's Weekly and the Outline, 36, No. 915 (1936), pp. 146, 152.

¹³Again, space does not permit documentation. See my note 1.

¹⁴David Garnett, "T. F. Powys", *The Borzoi 1925*, New York: Knopf, 1925, p. 88.

¹⁵Coombes, p. 162.

¹⁶"Why I Have Given Up Writing", p. 149.

¹⁷Elwin, p. 94.

¹⁸Gerard Casey, "A Double Initiation", *Recollections of the Powys Brothers: Llewelyn, Theodore, John Cowper*, ed. Belinda Humfrey, Peter Owen, 1980, p. 171.

¹⁹Sylvia Townsend Warner, "Theodore Powys and Some Friends at East Chaldon, 1922-1927: A Narrative and Some Letters", *Powys Review*, No. 5 (1979), p. 19.

²⁰Coombes, p. 161.

²¹Theodora Scutt, "Theodore Powys, 1934-1953: A Continuation", *Powys Review*, No. 10 (1982), p. 44.

²²Sylvia Townsend Warner, "Theodore Powys at East Chaldon", *Recollections*, ed. Humfrey, p. 130.

²³Scutt, p. 45.

²⁴Alyse Gregory, "The Character of Theodore", *Recollections*, ed. Humfrey, p. 147.

²⁵Elizabeth Muntz, "T. F. Powys: A Few Recorded Memories", *Recollections*, ed. Humfrey, p. 142.

²⁶"Why I Have Given Up Writing", p. 149.

²⁷Muntz, p. 141.

²⁸Scutt, pp. 44-47.

²⁹Yet again, space does not permit documentation. See my note 1.

³⁰Belinda Humfrey points out a striking similarity of another kind: "Theodore's descent from John Donne, who rehearsed lying in his shroud, shows itself in an absolute way in this novel [*Kindness in a Corner*, ch. 36] in which Sexton Truggin persuades some old people to rehearse lying in their graves" ("Introduction: Three Brothers", *Recollections*, ed. Humfrey, p. 16).

³¹Mr. Solly's relation to Mackenzie's *A History of America*, in *Innocent Birds*, might be counted as another example. But, so far as I can discover, Mackenzie's book is a product of Powys's imagination.

³²*The Structure of Complex Words*, Chatto & Windus, 1951, p. 306.

³³For this use of Lovelace, I am indebted to Ian Hamilton, "T. F. Powys and the Bible", *Powys Review*, No. 4 (1978-1979), p. 51.

³⁴Cf. Hamilton, pp. 44-54.

³⁵"Why I Have Given Up Writing", p. 149.

³⁶Cf. Ruth A. Firor, *Folkways in Thomas Hardy*, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1931. Cf. also the rituals in neighbouring Devon described by Cecil Torr in *Small Talk at Wreyland*, abridged ed., Cambridge University Press, 1926, e.g. pp. 15-16.

³⁷"Why I Have Given Up Writing", p. 149.

³⁸Marlow, p. 205.

³⁹*The Powys Brothers: A Study*, John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1935, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁰Marlow, p. 205.

⁴¹"The Path of T. F. Powys", *Critic*, 1 (1947), p. 29. Cf. F. R. Leavis, review of Ward, *Scrutiny*, 4 (1935), p. 318; and Ward, pp. 83-143.

The Age of Fantasy

Patrick Parrinder

In May 1907 a periodical was launched in London with the title of the *New Age*. Edited by A. R. Orage, it lasted until 1922 and played a key role in public discussion of the arts during what we now regard as the great age of literary modernism. Modernism, as a period and an international style, receded a long time ago. We have entered another new age—an age as yet unnamed. 'Post modernism', a fashionable term of the 1970s, shares the logical shortcomings of its predecessor (for what are we to say of a modernism no longer modern?) and is, besides, little more than a chronological conception. I wish to propose an alternative description of the characteristic style of our age: a description based on Fantasy.

Fantasy, a word with a long history, has recently emerged as the name of a loosely-conceived literary mode or genre. This application is of commercial origin (as in the *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*) and almost certainly reflects the disappearance of any authorised belief in the supernatural. The philosopher Herbert Spencer once claimed that barbarism and superstition, having been eradicated by advancing civilisation, take on a new kind of social utility as the subjects of pleasing tales. This was certainly true of beliefs about witches, monsters, ghosts, wizards, devils and the like. When science and material progress made it impossible for these to be taken seriously they found a home in popular literature, from penny dreadfuls to the more sophisticated nineteenth-century romances. Romance had its ardent and self-conscious defenders—notably Robert Louis Stevenson—but their attempt to return to simple and timeless verities of narrative involved, all too obviously, a preference for childlike over adult reading experiences. In

adult fiction, dominated by the conventions of realism, apparently supernatural events were assigned to the area of the 'paranormal' which could always be explained away in terms of psychic delusion.

The present 'return of the fantastic', as it has been called, takes two forms. Interest in the occult as a source of knowledge has never died out, but its manifestations such as theosophy, witchcraft, transcendental meditation and other forms of exotic religion have been more overt in the last two decades than at any previous time in the twentieth century. So have its more frivolous corollaries such as the cult of UFOs, drug-taking, and popular astrology. (The language of star-signs is now indulged in as an almost universal superstition by people under forty.) Occult beliefs and practices were certainly part of the mental furniture of writers in previous generations, though more of poets than of novelists. A newer development is the commercial exploitation of formerly private dreams and fantasies, which has spread from advertising to pornography, satire, and other forms of mass entertainment. Billion-dollar horror and science-fiction movies satisfy a double taste for wish-fulfilment and for a mild dose of the occult; and these ingredients are abstracted and served up in isolation from character and story-line, in a manner that would have been incomprehensible to classic Hollywood.

Fantasy, as a psychological concept, is intimately bound up with desire. An Age of Fantasy is necessarily one which has seen great changes in public attitudes to desire and its alleviation. In *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch observes a general abandonment of ideals of historical continuity and social improvement in

American life. Their place has been taken by narcissistic forms of self-assertion, as if the individual and his or her desires were the only tangible reality. Similar if less far-reaching changes have occurred in our own culture, at a literary as well as a popular level. Terms like 'sincerity', 'maturity', 'decency', and 'humanity', once the cornerstones of a critical vocabulary, have now fallen into disuse. An essay like George Orwell's examination of seaside postcards could no longer be written today. In 1941 the people who bought seaside postcards and those who read about them in the pages of *Horizon* belonged to two different worlds. Today we should have to say that, at most, they represent alternative—but ultimately interchangeable—lifestyles. No doubt this cultural homogenisation is a gain, of a sort. Yet our very obsession with the word 'lifestyle' illustrates the extent to which our classless, consumerised culture takes for granted the inevitability of narcissism.

So far I have said nothing about contemporary fiction. Its tendency is so overwhelmingly towards the fantastic that detailed exemplification would be superfluous. What is more urgent is to formulate an appropriate critical response. In fiction, as in culture more generally, the symptoms may be interpreted as those of decadence. Yet the concept of an Age of Fantasy implies that wholesale resistance would be futile. Whatever our inherited liberal, progressive, materialist, or just common-sense prejudices may say about it, a new age can only grow out of the decadence of an old one. Some literary critics and theorists are already committed to ideals of hedonism and textual 'freeplay'—in other words, to a critical power-struggle without standards. The majority have welcomed some of the new manifestations of fantasy while trying hard to draw boundaries and limit its encroachments. (Perhaps that is the function of criticism when faced with any new movement.) The way that they try to limit it is by privileging one mode of fantasy at the expense of the others.

We have been taught to regard fantasy as

self-indulgent, wish-fulfilling, escapist. We ourselves live in a society which pampers the majority with material goods and fulfils many of the wishes which tormented previous ages. Among these wishes is the desire for vicarious participation in a life of tragedy, nobility, heroism, and significant passion. This desire is met at a sophisticated level by the widespread availability of the literary classics, and at a cruder level by popular fiction, cinema and television. The heroic heroes and villainous villains of popular fiction are felt to be 'escapist'; yet if what they offer is identification with modes of experience beyond our everyday lives, then it is something we all need. For this reason, criteria must be found according to which some escapes are more acceptable than others—whether on grounds of ethics, politics, psychology, aesthetics, or even linguistics. Hence most of the confusion in books about fantasy. Some would confer a privileged status on science fiction and utopian writing; others, on the Gothic; others on writers of allegorical fantasy such as C. S. Lewis or Tolkien. There is a school which advocates the so-called 'pure fantastic', in which the text is left open to either a supernatural or a psychological explanation of the events. Finally, there are propagandists for experimental modes of literary fantasy such as the 'New Wave', the *nouveau* and *nouveau nouveau roman*, and postmodernism.

Much of this criticism is not only ideology-laden but is an outcome of the urge to censor and to legislate. Literary critics are not alone in this, since groups such as educationalists, feminists, and anti-racist campaigners have recently attempted to discredit some of the traditional modes of children's fantasy. At best, the critic may take us a little beyond the insights of his or her particular blindness. A case in point is Christine Brooke-Rose's recent study *A Rhetoric of the Unreal* (Cambridge U.P., 1981). Brooke-Rose endorses Tzvetan Todorov's notion of the 'pure fantastic', a logical category which perhaps works better in French than it does in English. Her

analyses favour the 'complexity' and 'subtlety' of postmodernist writing as against the fully-presented unreal worlds of narrative romance, or what she calls 'the marvellous'. Support for certain literary movements and tendencies against others is perhaps what even the most rigorously abstract analytical approach comes down to—since, in this area, distinctions which seem logical and compelling from one point of view may be more or less nebulous from another. (For example, Brooke-Rose concedes that a single explanatory sentence at the end of a story might transfer it from the 'pure fantastic' to the despised category of the marvellous, or vice versa.) Nevertheless, this is an unusually stimulating book of its kind, which joins a general assessment of present-day fantasy to abstruse applications of critical techniques (no less than a hundred pages on *The Turn of the Screw*).

Brooke-Rose concludes, more or less, with the proviso that 'ultimately all fiction is realistic'. This sentiment has a tried appeal to anyone whose intellectual formation took place before the Age of Fantasy became epidemic. Can we go on using 'realism', the name of a style or mode, as the inevitable synonym for an art of instruction or truth-telling? There may be good reason to expect a 'return of the realistic' sometime in the future, but it will not be yet. When it comes, it may have to learn from the strategy of the Victorian novelists, who fed off the Gothic romances while simultaneously disowning them. "In those days I was young", Jane Eyre informs us, "and all sorts of fancies bright and dark tenanted my mind; the memories of nursery stories were there amongst other rubbish". Charlotte Brontë's realism depends upon the construction of a fictional Jane Eyre whose mind was once tenanted by fantastic rubbish, but is so no longer. The story tells of her young (and rubbishy) days, and tails off smartly when they are over. Is *Jane Eyre* 'ultimately realistic', or ultimately fantastic? It is a question of our point of view.

A return to fantasy is just as capable of

revitalising fiction as is a return to realism. English fiction, especially, stands to gain from it. British novelists do not figure very prominently within the international canon of postmodernist fiction, a fact that has been noted with much wringing of hands. They are, however, in the forefront of twentieth-century fantasy. It seems to me that it is the general revival of fantastic narrative, rather than the modernist fiction of Proust, Faulkner, and Joyce (*Finnegans Wake* as ever is a special case) which provides the work of the postmodernists such as Pynchon, Vonnegut, Brautigan, Barth, and Barthelme with their most useful context. At their best, English fantasy writers do not ask to be judged by the criteria of experimentalism, nor by those of ability to produce a pleasing story. (There are always plenty of new writers who can meet this traditional, and fundamental, need.) They should be judged by their ability to use fantasy reflexively, in that, while inviting us to identify with the alien and exotic, they are able to probe unsuspected facets of our own individual and collective identity.

In contrast to the thickly-ramifying realistic novel, fantasy fictions are often episodic and short. By their nature, they invite reduplication. The danger, seen in such brilliant writers as J. G. Ballard and Angela Carter, is perhaps that of remaining bound by a too-easily identifiable set of themes and variations. Often these are of psychic origin, despite Todorov's view (apparently endorsed by Brooke-Rose) that the 'pure fantastic' began to decline once its themes were taken over by psychoanalysis. There is good reason for the continuance of psychic fantasy, even from a point of view which endorses the claims of science in general, and the pretensions of psychoanalysis in particular. The mental troubles for which people seek psychoanalytic help themselves seem to be changing over time. (Lasch quotes expert evidence for the belief that narcissistic disorders have now taken the place of the classical neuroses analysed by Freud.) Writers may also choose to probe

the connections between popular fiction and entertainment and narcissistic fantasy. “‘You’re nothing but the furious invention of my virgin nights’”, says heroine to hero at the end of Carter’s *Heroes and Villains*, while Ballard used to speak of “inner-space fiction”.

Fantasy fiction is concerned with our social existence, as well as with our inner disorders and psychological states. In the realistic novel there is, among other things, a tradition of social commentary, of cultural and material concern with Carlyle’s “Condition-of-England Question”. Social identity, however, is constituted as much by legend and mythology—whether inherited or contemporary, in Roland Barthes’ sense—as it is by their cultural and material foundations. The costume-drama of past and future, in which exotic settings serve as a

backcloth for essentially contemporary characters with contemporary problems, is presumably no more than a vehicle for the narcissism described by Lasch. Nevertheless, themes of historical legend and future destiny may be used to enrich our sense of who we are and to remind us of continuity. Such themes include the post-disaster novel which—according to one contemporary—every English novelist has to write. Survival may be regarded either as a hope for the future or as a fact about the present; and survival, as we see in the Arthurian romances and the Robin Hood legends, is as much a matter of imagination and belief as it is of ‘realism’. In an Age of Fantasy the “Condition-of-England Question” and its associated social commentary in the novel might well be replaced by the question of the “matter of Britain”.

Elizabeth Barrett

“The Borderland of the Miraculous”: Romance and Naturalism in John Cowper Powys’s *A Glastonbury Romance*

If the rural tradition in English literature has not yet received the amount of scholarly attention it deserves, such literature presented in the mode of romance has been condemned to an even greater oblivion. Not surprisingly, given this critical bias, the novels of John Cowper Powys—whose romances do not even pretend to realism such as those of Scott or Forster do, for example—are unsufficiently read and praised. Certainly, the literary establishment’s ignoring of Powys is based to a certain extent on the fact that the quality of his work is often uneven. But as is so often the case with writers of rare ability—and in conjunction with the rural tradition one thinks particularly of George Eliot and Hardy—the whole proves to be a much greater thing than the sum of its parts. In the case of Powys, and in particular with regard to *A Glastonbury Romance*, the greatness of the whole is integrally connected to the fact that the work is the product of a mind whose genius is that of a romancer.

Frye’s study of the structure of romance has done much to illuminate some of the reasons for the critical prejudice with regard to the mode. Part of its rejection as serious literature has to do with its “curiously proletarian status”, with the fact that no special intellectual, cultural, or spiritual equipment is needed in order to understand its meanings.¹ Another reason for the dismissal of romance ironically has to do with the fact that its structure is essentially vertical—hence hierarchial—and that the social hierarchies it reveals are presumed as being inherent in the human imagination. The upper stratum of society reinforces its position at the top of the hierarchy by creating tales of romantic endeavour and establishes, as well, on the level of imagin-

ative archetypes, spiritual ascent or attainment as something concomitant with the existing social model. The *hoi polloi*, through its pattern of seeking wish-fulfillment, projects itself into the romance, and thus into an elevated social and spiritual condition, through the mechanism of the birth mystery.

All of this accounts for Raymond Williams’s dislike of the mode. In *The Country and the City*, which is both an important book and a very problematic one, romance and fantasy, in a rural context, are dismissed in a single paragraph. The dismissal is particularly damning because it assumes that romance is not worthy of a more prolonged process of critical inquiry. Speaking of Georgian literature, for example, Williams argues that it “used rural England as an image for its own internal feelings and ideas” and the implication here is that the external reality of the hardship of country life is conveniently overlooked. He goes on to say:

There was much of this oblique elaboration in the period, from many seemingly different sources. There was that uncritical, abstracting literary anthropology, within which folktales and legends became part of an unlocalised, unhistorical past, or the uncritical interest in myth, which made the land and the people a scene and characters into which anything could be projected, with or without the inclusion of scraps of a classical education. There was an extraordinary development of country-based fantasy, from Barrie and Kenneth Grahame through J. C. Powys and T. H. White and now to Tolkien. There was the abstract and limiting definition of ‘folk-song’ which in Cecil Sharp was based on the full rural myth of the ‘remnants’ of the ‘peasantry’ and which specifically excluded, as not of the ‘folk’, the persistent songs

of the industrial and urban working people, who did not fit the image but who were continuing to create, in an authentic popular culture, what it suited this period and this class to pretend was a lost world. It is then not only that the real land and its people were falsified; a traditional and surviving rural England was scribbled over and almost hidden from sight by what was really a suburban and half-educated scrawl.²

Although there is much that is valuable in what Williams says, there are a number of points upon which he deserves to be challenged. Least important is the categorization of Powys as a Georgian. More significantly, there is a lack of precision in Williams's charges and it is difficult to know where one indictment leaves off and another begins. For example, is Powys as a fantasist guilty as well of presenting an unlocalized and unhistorical past? Surely, nothing could be more particularly localized in *A Glastonbury Romance* than Glastonbury and its environs. This is an important point and one I want to return to later. Moreover, although his use of history depends for much of its resonance upon the legendary aspects of his material, Powys's vision of romance transforms the historical past. Rather than “projecting” the past into the future in a manner which celebrates its hierarchical nature (such as Carlyle does, or Evelyn Waugh in that most English of romances: *Brideshead Revisited*), he “recovers” it in the form of community—a community which as it exists in his text implies a shift in the “focus of interest from heroes and other elements of narrative toward the process of creating them. The real hero becomes the poet”.³ Powys takes this process of establishing what one might call a fictional democracy one step further in his utterly modernist emphasis on the fact that everything the poet-hero encompasses with his imagination is of equal value.

And what does that adjective “extraordinary” mean? Without question, fantasy involves the extra-ordinary, a fact of which Williams is well aware, but in this context his use of the term appears not descriptive but pejorative. Williams seems to be

dismissing all rural literature which departs from a realistic mode. Indeed, his emphasis is upon the discrepancy he establishes between the fantastic (or romantic) expression of an elite culture and the realistic representation that arises from “an authentic popular culture”. What is not at all taken into consideration is the point that Frye argues: that the artifacts of popular culture are, whether we like it or not, usually developed around the structure of romance.

Indeed, Powys makes us question the whole idea of what romance is and why it works particularly well in conjunction with the realistic attributes one normally associates with the rural tradition. As a novelist he is particularly well-equipped to show how romance is both contiguous to realism—or more precisely, its extreme form of naturalism—and contingent upon it. Thus, his comment, for example, that his family read “Jane Austen for the romance” is illuminating, not only with regard to what it says about the Powys clan, but more importantly for what it offers to an understanding of Austen herself. However, the critic who quotes the above anecdote indicates that all too prevalent attitude towards romance in general. He calls the remark “unbelievable” and adds: “surely there is no other intellectual family of whom this could be seriously said!”⁴

There are a number of ways, in *A Glastonbury Romance*, in which Powys realizes his romantic material. I want to focus upon four of these, and it should be emphasized that each of these fictional strategies depends for its meanings upon its relation to all of the others. The essential aspects of Powys's development of his romance are: the use of the child (and of the child in the adult) as a significant medium of perception and experience; the idea of place and its inherent powers of centripetal force; the development of a fluctuating perspective; and the function of language in its naturalistic, figurative and dialectal manifestations.

As Frye has noted, “fairy tales are for children” and the more overtly romantic

literature of the nineteenth century is that in which the imaginative life of children and adults plays a prominent role: one thinks of Blake, Wordsworth, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, and Lewis Carroll.⁵ The realistic tradition, on the other hand, assumes that the norm of fictional life is the more overtly socialized world of the adult: Jane Austen and George Eliot come particularly to mind. If the novelists's angle of vision is closer to the child's, it is going to be both less conventional, insofar as social behaviour is concerned, and more conventional, insofar as it deals with archetypal structures of the imagination. It will be, as well, more violent, more uncontrolled (and behind this deliberate lack of control lies a good deal of unrealized and immature sexual energy)—in short, more natural. Indeed, as Powys has one of his characters say: "I sometimes feel as if there were something babyish in going on with the old country themes, with the old love and death themes".⁶

Powys is, as Cavaliero has noted, "not only the champion of the solitary man . . . but the compassionate analyst of the immature".⁷ Some of the most effectively realized passages in *A Glastonbury Romance* are those concerning the antics of the Robber Band and their adversarial, and usually humorous, relations with the adult world. Bert Cole—the "giant mushroom"—is a memorable character indeed as, E. M. Forster argues, "flat" characters so often are. They move unchanged "through circumstances which give them in retrospect a comforting quality and preserves them when the book that produced them may decay".⁸ Forster's comments about the comforting quality of characters such as Bert (and his archetypal genitor ex-Mayor Wallop) are genuinely insightful. Indeed, comfort in *A Glastonbury Romance* is usually provided by, and for, the immature—and the immature includes of course more than those who are chronologically young. There is an enormous amount of displaced anxiety in Powys's novel and the prevalence of these spots of comfort is indicative of the extent to which he perceives that the

romance associated with childhood offers the only real escape from the often intolerable pressures of the adult world. Thus we get a quasi-maternal figure appropriately named Mother Legge, presiding over a scene of supernatural enchantment, whose room is likened to a "nursery" and whose guests are "frightened children" (511, 494).

Emotionally romance can be wearying: witness bloody Johnny Geard's tendency to fall asleep at the most socially inopportune times. At times, the controlled equanimity of the adult world is desirable such as when Bert, thoroughly frightened by Abel Twig's admonition to "Be off" and by his frustrated sister's slaps, begins to howl. As he shrieks, he lies flat upon the ground: a piece of shrewed psychological realism as anyone who has ever observed a screaming child will know. It is not until he is re-introduced physically into the upright position of the adult world that he recovers his psychic balance: "once in a perpendicular position the child's interest in the surprising scene around him made him forget his disgrace" (182, 191).

Bert of course arouses no intrinsic interest as a potential hero of romance, although in his mycological attributes he hints at an affinity with a rather fantastic natural environment of an Alice in Wonderland variety. His unheroic personality suggests a contrast to the much more psychologically subtle character of Nelly Morgan—or Morgan Nelly as Number One calls her: simultaneously endowing her with the enchanting abilities of a Morgan Le Fay and stripping her of all fixed social, or patronymic, status in such a way that, renamed, her identity becomes open to redefinition. However, both Bert and Nelly suggest that Powys as a romancer has a much more intense and complex idea of childhood than does, for example, a realist like George Eliot. Tottie Poyser (who at least resembles young Cole in her physical stolidity) has a definite function in *Adam Bede* but it is, in fictional terms, a mechanical one, allowing Mrs. Poyser to display her capacity for natural affection. When

Powys's authorial eye is focused on Nelly—a difficult job considering the rapidity with which she moves—her personality *at that moment* is strong enough to absorb wholly into itself all of one's interest in the other characters that inhabit this voluminous novel.

Philip Crow, her father, recognizes this when the two of them argue bitterly about whether his new bridge will replace the old Pomparles Bridge:

It was not a sign of Philip's littleness but of his greatness that he could get so vehement in a dispute with a little girl. Napoleon would have done so; so would Alexander the Great; so would Nelson, so would Achilles. Most modern rulers would have laughed at her and retorted with some quip too ironical for her to understand. (760, 729).

Philip's sensitivity here is interesting for it indicates Powys's refusal to divide the people in his fiction into “good” and “bad” characters. Contradiction is assumed to be an inherent part of what it means to be human and consequently Philip the industrialist, the enemy of the Grail, possesses as well a heightened awareness of the interaction between the human and the natural world. Nature for him is charged with electricity—from the illuminated caves at Wookey Hole to the mechanized sky represented by the buzzing airplane which hovers over the text as a whole. Nevertheless, because he is human, he has a capacity for sensuous and emotional perception of a very subtle sort. The child in the man is never far from the surface.

When Philip first speaks to her, Nelly's reaction is one of panic and she clings “tightly to the poplar trunk with both her thin arms”. Here we see the closeness of the child to the natural world and the childish (or not so childish) belief that nature can protect one from the dangers inherent in social relationships.

It was thus Philip found his only child when he reached the tree. Her forehead was pressed against it and her fingers were frantically clutching at the bark. He began to speak caressingly the moment he approached her,

for he was touched by the look of those thin arms; and when he reached the tree he did what was perhaps the wisest thing he could have done, he sat down with his shoulders against it, so that the back of his cap almost touched her clasped hands.

...

‘I know who you are child,’ said Philip . . .

There was no reply; but he caught a faint sound over his head which indicated that she'd unclasped her fingers.

‘If you'll come and sit down here for a minute and talk to me, I'll give you a penny.’

There was no reply to this either; but the surface of the poplar tree served so well as a whispering gallery that he could hear her talking in a low murmur to herself. This was an old psychological device of Morgan Nelly's; and it was a way to exchange thoughts without the overt shock to one's shyness of officially addressing a stranger or being addressed. The stranger listened—indeed if he was wise he listened in silence—and Nelly acted as chorus for both. (755, 724).

The passage is characteristic of Powys in a number of ways. It also shows how well he can write when he restrains himself from cosmological excesses. Significantly, the variety of tree is named and Powys's attention to naturalistic detail parallels the same intense focus on psychological nuance. It matters not that the tree is a poplar (although it does matter that it is one which grows in the Glastonbury region), but that its identity is taken so fully into account. In much the same way, it is not the fact that Philip is wearing a cap that is significant but that the authorial voice locates this cap so precisely in relation to Nelly's clasped hands.

The magical qualities of the authorial presence are such that they can manifest themselves inside Philip, inside Nelly, or inside the tree itself. Certainly, the authorial personality is, for the most part, omnipresent. Inhabiting Philip, it hears the faint sounds of Nelly's relaxation; inhabiting Nelly, it looks on Philip as a “stranger”. At times, however, this presence deliberately removes itself from the scene, and

consequently from any knowledge of what passes, saying of Philip for example: “*if* he was wise he listened in silence” (my emphasis). This moment of pulling down the shades, as it were, on an action essentially private, suggests that this personality is infinitely flexible: if it can inhabit at will any aspect of the fictional world, it must have also the ability to absent itself momentarily, confident in the belief that enough narrative energy has been generated to keep things moving.

Nevertheless, the chameleon-like authorial presence is a curious aspect of *A Glastonbury Romance*. Its behaviour can be quite unpredictable—quite fantastic in fact, as when it turns away from a scene it has previously inhabited. It can also manifest its presence in places that, realistically speaking, are impossible, such as when for example it asserts without a trace of self-consciousness, that a Scotch fir and a holly tree have been in love for “a hundred years” (820, 786).

The intensely romantic Powys universe vivifies every character, every object, every aspect of the natural world, with the attributes of personality. Indeed, Nelly voices the author’s creed as a whole when she affirms, in opposition to some unnamed teacher, “Glaston be a person, like I be” (1044, 998). The tree which Nelly clasps while encountering the immense significance of her father—the source of *her* identity—becomes itself a medium of communication between father and daughter, between botanical and psychological truth. It is as if some essence of poplar-ness draws them both to the spot.

The phenomenon of place—the power of *genius-loci*—is crucial in *A Glastonbury Romance*. Sometimes the centripetal force which is generated is associated with some aspect of the natural world; at times it brings together the natural and the social; and occasionally Powys invokes it to bring into being a purely psychological consciousness.

Powys’s creation of centres of centripetal force re-focuses our attention to the whole question of what is important in the modern

novel. For all of his use of fantasy, legend and romance—recalling his nineteenth century predecessors from Scott to Morris—*A Glastonbury Romance* is very much the work of a twentieth century consciousness. In a scene depicting the power contained in a bowl of bluebells, for example, the flowers absorb all of the reader’s attention and exist in their own right as a collective manifestation of a single personality:

On this table was a huge bowl filled with an immense tightly packed mass of bluebells. The gorgeous blueness, a deep Prussian blue mingled with blotches of purplish colour, rose up like a thickly packed cloud of almost opaque essence out of this bowl of heavy-dropping blooms and expanded till its richness of tint attracted towards it and seemed utterly to absorb all other coloured things in the room. (526, 507)

This passage has no symbolic value; the fact that the flowers are in Elizabeth Crow’s kitchen suggests no special meaning; their being picked by the Robber Band is not intended to hint at some esoteric knowledge; their being at the centre of a scene involving gossip of a highly romantic nature between Sally Jones and Tossie Stickles has no particular significance. What is important is the heavy texture of enchantment, a kind of magical density that can draw within its radius what Powys, in his more cosmological moments, calls “eidola”—an atmosphere charged with human and naturalistic consciousness. As far as this power can reach, which in this case is limited to the confines of Miss Crow’s tiny house, it has the capacity to draw together the disparate personalities that are present: Tossie and Sally, Miss Crow, Mat Dekker, Tilly and Philip Crow, Rachel Zoyland, and Ned Athling—certainly an eclectic congregation as Powys’s congregations usually are. Moreover, the almost palpable “thickness” evoked by the flowers brings into the assembled company the personality that, more than any other, infuses the text as a whole: Mr. Geard whose nature, as Powys says, is “about ten times as *thick* as most men’s” (457, 442).

There is a certain perverseness in the relationship Powys establishes between the text and the reader: one's expectations are being continually subverted. Those bluebells demand all of one's attention because they are not expected to, any more than Miss Crow's tea-party is expected to achieve the harmony it does. Consequently, a number of “big” scenes are developed which conversely attract attention only long enough to refuse to hold it. In this case, the centripetal force that is so much a part of Powys's fiction-making is balanced equally by a power that can only be called centrifugal. Young Tewsey's catching the “girt chub of Lydford Mill” (766, 734) is a good example of this twofold movement towards and away from some centre of consciousness. One expects the scene to be important because, in the first place, the narrative voice ensures that we notice the spot where the fish is caught—under the Cold Harbour Bridge: “there was, as a matter of fact, no geographic section of the environs of Glastonbury that had not been so often the stage of portentous human encounters” (764, 733). There is also a relentless, if sometimes reluctant, movement of the characters present towards the chub, as if the authorial presence were hovering above them all, pulling the strings of various puppets called Sam Dekker, or Rachel Zoyland, or “the surveyor from Evercreech”. And the fish itself resonates with a very obvious symbolic significance in this novel concerned so overtly with Arthurian romance and Christian mythology.

Although the centripetal force in the scene is genuine—it does manage to pull together a varied and rather uncomfortable group of people—it does not continue to exert its magnetism. Unlike the bluebells, the fish offers no real centre of personality. What is important here is Powys's conveyance of a feeling of the subtle and *fluctuating* nature of personal relations. Thus the prefiguration, in the form of the chub, of Sam's forthcoming vision of the Grail carries with it an awareness that the revelation, when it comes, is to be no more

important and no less important than the kiss Nelly places on Tilly's shoulder (916, 877), or Cordelia pulling down the blinds (1079, 1030), or Abel Twig and his cow Betsy floating at the novel's end in a state of suspended animation.

When the narrative voice tells us that a place is of geographical significance, it becomes the voice of didactic instruction: a kind of stage direction devoid of real emotional meaning. The reason for this is twofold. In the first place, Powys has been insisting throughout that meaning is found where one least expects it—such as in the sound of Nelly's fingers on the poplar trunk, which exists just out of sight of the events surrounding the chub, as an invisible but not inaudible chorus in the wings. There is also, however, the suggestion that Powys has become rather bored with his authorial manipulations and as his interest in the scene subsides he turns away rather abruptly, leaving his characters to begin “hurriedly to escape from one another” (768, 737). Certainly the major interest in these events lies, for the reader, more in their form than in their content. Powys's use of a vertical perspective allows for a fascination, if rather detached, examination of the converging and diverging movements of this rather hostile group of human creatures.

The third kind of centripetal force is one that concerns itself with the more purely psychological meanings of place. As place becomes more wholly an aspect of human consciousness, it becomes even more imbued with the aura of romance. In the particular example I am thinking of—dinner time at Jimmy Bage's—the romantic elements seem overwhelmingly demonic:

Preparations had evidently been made for what in the Bage menage passed for supper, for every object in that miserable room—the walls of bare stone, where patches of soot and grease and undecipherable and nameless stains alternated with greenish mould and oozing damp, the small smoky wood-fire under a great iron pot where steamed the most watery concoction ever wrung from the twice-boiled bones of a skinny rabbit, bare wooden chairs with their seats full of holes, a

broken water-jug on the smoke-darkened chimney-piece,—seemed to group themselves round a piece of newspaper laid flat upon the table on which rested the half of a loaf and two small salted herrings. (971, 929)

The malevolent force in this sordid scene imbues the bread and herring with a repulsion and attraction which parodies implicitly any miracle of the loaves and fishes. And yet, paradoxically, Powys surrounds the inanimate and yearning objects in the room with their own "borderland of the miraculous". Another personality emerges from the gloom: that of hunger itself. However, the intensity of authorial feeling (and Powys in general demonstrates to an unusual degree the power of understanding the psychology of deprivation) performs its own kind of transformative act. The Bagges' suffering is not dispelled—even the Glastonbury commune is powerless against defeat of this order—but the centripetal movement generated by these bits of food reaffirms Powys's continuing struggle against what he calls "the illusion of dead matter", an illusion he sees as "the most formidable expression of evil which we know; [which] can only be destroyed by the magic of the creative spirit whose true 'opposite' is not hatred, or cruelty or violence or destruction, but the motiveless power of a deadly obscurantism".⁹

There are two major aspects of Powys's animation of dead matter that should be taken into consideration and both are very much indicative of just how naturalistic a romancer he is. The first has to do with the establishment of perspective and the degree of distance between the authorial presence and the social or natural material under observation. The second concerns the naming of what is seen—in order to vivify the inanimate it must be seen clearly—and, as one would expect from a naturalist, the emphasis is on a process of categorization which is extremely precise.

Powys makes no apology for what he calls in his *Autobiography* his love of "acting God". With regard to the difficulties of being himself, he says:

One of my chief risks has come from my mania for endowing every form of the Inanimate with life, and then worshipping it as some kind of little god. This was indeed that very mania for 'bowing and scraping' to idols that may father so especially reprobated. But a much worse risk than this was the trick I fell into in my solitary walks of playing God in my own person.¹⁰

The animation of Powys's fictional universe is closely related to his treatment of perspective and the power in his scenes of centripetal movement is connected to the distance established between the authorial viewpoint and the object focused upon. *A Glastonbury Romance* concerns itself with three, quite distinct, imaginative territories which are located sequentially along a vertical axis. At the top and bottom—consistent with Frye's understanding of the mode—are the realms of romance. The middle level is by far the most realistic and the characters who, for the most part, inhabit it (although they are certainly capable of imitating motions of ascent or descent) are the work's more conventionally "round" figures. Whitelake Cottage, Miss Crow's house, the Dekkers' vicarage, and John and Mary's room in the house on Northload Street are scenes of the kind of psychological drama that one expects from a more realistic genre. Usually in dealing with this middle range—with the Geads and Evans hovering at the edges—a range which is largely middle-class, although Lord P. fits in here as well, Powys's own perspective is mediated in accordance with the unwritten laws of literary proportion.

When he allows himself, as he often does, to focus his attention on the more purely romantic elements of the story, he presents the reader with a much wider swing in perspective and the view tends towards two extremes. The first is from the top—Powys acting God—and this perspective allows one to see, for example, the carefully choreographed movements of the characters towards and away from Tewsey's chub; we get a similar scene of extended verticality with the bird's-eye view of the audience

assembling at the Pageant: a point of view given a kind of symbolic actuality in the figure of Mr. Geard, with his disciple, young Steve Lew, sitting on top of Glastonbury Tor. And it is not only the view of the far-away social world that Powys focuses upon. Both the mechanical sphere—in the shape of Philip Crow’s airplane—and the natural are taken into account. Indeed, at times nature is scrutinized in a way which reinforces the author’s imaginative, almost magical, intimacy with the object of contemplation. This symbiotic relationship removes both the perceiver and the perceived from the more mundane middle order of reality; “Another tree of the same species, equally enormous, grew a stone’s throw further on; and these two gigantic living creatures, whose topmost branches were already thickly sprinkled with small, gamboge-yellow leaf buds, appeared to be conversing together, in that golden sun-haze, far up above the rest of the vegetable world and where none but birds could play the eaves-dropper” (115, 127-8).

The bottom level of Powys’s vertical structure is equally the stuff of romance. At times, it suggests the rather conventionalized realm of enchantment: *A Glastonbury Romance* is full of the sub-terrestrial (a sexually charged Philip taking the appropriately named Persephone down into the Wookey Caves, for example) and the submarine: the aquarium in Dekkers’s “museum” is a model for the human context in the work as a whole, with what Powys calls the “Invisible Naturalists” watching every move in this aqueous world. Even more important, is the emphasis on the view from what can only be called an entomological perspective. Indeed, the preponderance of insects in the novel is remarkable.

Glastonbury’s bugs (in contrast to the more conventional images of romance wildlife such as harts and hounds) are the repositories of a special kind of consciousness. Even the lice that John Crow envisions escaping from Tittie Petherton’s body as she is immersed in Chalice Well are endowed

with two sorts of language: one having a “rude rural intonation” and the other possessing “beautiful vowel sounds” (736, 706). There are times, such as in this linguistic fantasy, where Powys skirts the ridiculous and his angle of vision becomes so odd that it occasionally verges in its unorthodoxy on the silly. However, even at its most fantastic, this entomological reality depends for its substance on the author’s ability to view the natural (and human) world with a most exacting precision. The care with which the insect in question is examined suggests the mode of perception of one who is either a naturalist or a child—for the child’s distance from reality is so much less than the adult’s.

[Paul Trent] stopped to take breath and found that he was gesticulating furiously with his free hand right in front of Miss Crow’s face, and that Miss Crow had shut her eyes tight, as if she were in the process of being shampooed, and that in his eagerness he actually emitted a small globule of white sputum which now adhered to the black frill of Miss Crow’s maternal but maidenly bosom.

Around this anarchistic spittle, a minute yellowish fly, attracted by the smell of humanity and dreaming perhaps that one of the old-fashioned Glastonbury markets was about to commence, hovered with pulsing and heaving desire. (1042, 996)

This passage is particularly Powysian in the intensity of its focus and in the comic incongruity of its juxtapositions. There is a continuous narrowing of perspective; from the gesticulating hands to the tightly squeezed eyes, to the bosom, to the fly, and the function of this spasmodic compression is to concentrate the energy in the scene’s living material within the body of the insect itself. Moreover, as Powys asserts in his *Autobiography*: “Grant life, and you have *some* form of consciousness. Grant *any* degree of consciousness, and you have an unpredictable and indeterminable element of creative will”.¹¹

The consciousness of the fly throbs with its own kind of imaginative creativity and in its hunger for the sustenance offered by an

old-fashioned market it reaffirms the humanity that acts as the source of its bounty. Indeed, the lustiness of its life-enhancing greed recalls no one so much as Nell Zoyland's baby. Powys is fond of this kind of incongruity: the sensory, almost tactile, association one makes between the dense mass of bluebells and the thickness of Johnny Geard's personality has been noted already; there are imitations (and all of these relationships are oblique) of some psychic connection between the squeezing of Miss Crow's eyes and Dave Spear, at the time of the reading of Canon Crow's will, "squeezing spasmodically" on a loaf of bread (43, 61). But we are not required to force these connective patterns, or to read significant structural meanings in these links. Their function is twofold: it reveals the shudder of contraction that accompanies social unease, as if the organism in question were some kind of snail retreating into its shell, reaffirming an identity untainted by contact with the hostile world; and it reveals as well the inter-connectedness of all living things—all personality—and Powys's insistence that the insignificant be celebrated for the life it contains.

Characteristically, some representative of the insect world moves across the page when the representatives of the human world are feeling some tension. The yellowish fly, in fact, seems to establish a degree of rapport between Trent and Miss Crow—rather like the poplar tree does between Nelly and her father—but Trent has still has his troubles as odd man out in the Glastonbury commune. Or, to put it more simply he, like almost all of Powys's people with the exception of Mr. Wallop, is lonely. Miss Crow is lonely, too, with the insistent loneliness of one who sees her approaching death. Red Robinson, so full of "'ate'", spits in anger and contempt but his "spittle only fell on the back of a small snail that was travelling across a dock-leaf" (166, 175). Again and again one is presented with an acute observation of the insect life which seems to absorb and carry away some portion of human pain. Powys has something of Mr. Geard in him (certain-

ly the reverse is true): an almost physiological response to suffering, which is then partly displaced by focusing intently upon some tiny, *moving* member of the animate world.

In the process of "giving names to the anonymous" Powys realizes the multiple personalities that make up his fictional universe and then places those personalities in a specific, local context.¹² His concern with precision is evident from some of the letters written to Louis Wilkinson during the period in which *A Glastonbury Romance* was composed and published:

2 May 1930

I have got an Ordnance Map of Bridgewater & the Quantock & one of Wells & the Mendips; but Glastonbury is just at the edge between these two so that it is rather hard to deal with them together. I have nailed up the one that has Glastonbury on it behind the stove on the wall of this room.

5 January 1931

I have two Ordnance Maps of Somerset. I hope there won't be any mistakes!

21 May 1931

What I find difficult as I talk of twilights so often is to remember *when* twilight *begins* in March—in April—in May etc etc etc. I am worse at that than even at the order of plants which is also somewhat a weak point!

19 March 1932

But it'll be what you find mistaken and wrong over the Nature descriptions, that will be the greatest help to me for I may be able to change it for future editions . . . Would for instance anyone see a Clifton Blue at Glastonbury on June 25, St. John's Day, Midsummer Day?¹³

A model for a structural perspective on the novel as a whole suggests itself in the image of a highly particularized map of Glastonbury and its environs. Powys's imagination, however, transforms the physical reality of Somerset in such a way that his representation of this fictional territory constructs itself out of a topographical material which appears almost to breathe under its surface. He derives, as

well, a hypnotic pleasure in pronouncing the names of English places, a pleasure shared by Mr. Evans:

Recovering himself from his secret thoughts, as they came nearer and nearer to the end of their journey, Mr. Evans murmured to his companion such words as ‘Havyatt’ and ‘Edgarley’. He nodded his head, too, towards a great level expanse of low-lying country which extended southward, on their left, as they approached their destination. In connection with these dark fields he uttered the syllables ‘Kannard Moor’ and ‘Butt Moor’. He further indicated that Baltonsborough and Keinton Mandeville lay on the other side of these water-logged pastures. (95, 110)

Although the repetition of rural place names reinforces that streak of natural realism that runs through Powys’s novels, its ultimate function belongs to the realms of romance. An indefinable linguistic reality exists, self-contained, in the sound of these names and the act of apprehending sensuously these syllables conveys a sense of the spirit of place. As Evans is well aware, this kind of identification is associated with incantatory magic and the community named (whether natural or social) exists, for the moment, outside the boundaries of time. The healing quality in such naturalistic enchantment—and the idea of healing is crucial to *A Glastonbury Romance*—restores equilibrium to the unbalanced personality. Kannard Moor or Havyatt become as important as contributors to the magical atmosphere as Chalice Well or the tower on Glastonbury Tor.

Healing magic is also part of the animal—or more precisely the ichthyological—world. When Sam Dekker sees the Grail in the form of a fish in a chalice, it is important that the fish be identified precisely. His anxious question, repeated four times,—“Is it a Tench?”—forces us to assume that emphasis on precise classification in no way swerves away from the spiritual significance of the Grail itself but, instead, reaffirms its meanings.¹⁴

Nevertheless, although Powys uses

realistic naturalism in the service of romance, there is a profound awareness of things as they are in themselves. We see this single-minded concentration on the object under scrutiny in his love of “fetich-worship”, and his “bowing and scraping” to the little gods, and in his realization of such attractive—and stupendously flat—characters as Bert Cole and Mr. Wallop. Thus, the tench itself—because it is a tench and not some other species of fish—becomes the repository of any amount of Arthurian enchantment. Its precise identification provides a revealing moment of absolute security in a world dominated by flux.

The linguistically precise observation of the natural world, which is so much part of Powys’s development of romance, has its counterpart in his use of figurative language, particularly with regard to his handling of simile. Indeed, he uses simile far more than metaphor, as if the naturalist in him demanded a certain amount of holding back in the construction of imaginative associations. The categorical aspect of his mind—and here one thinks of those “Naturalist-priests” the Dekkers—yearns after the stability represented by a system of detailed classification. Thus: A can be placed (often incongruously) beside B; but A is not B.

Such precision with regard to the ordering of categories of fictional experience can be most effective. When the simile works—and it does not always do so—the impression one gets is that no other terms of comparison will do. What seems incongruous is revealed as particularly appropriate. Often the association is naturalistic: most of the characters in the work are described in animalistic terms. However, Powys’s figurative naturalism is frequently incongruous as if a “conceit” of this kind offers him an escape from the too rigorous control exerted by the demands of simile.

Humiliation gnawed at his midriff like a rat at a thick sweet-smelling board in an old barn. (551, 531)

The face of Isaac Weatherwax was a large,

flat sunburnt expanse, like an ancient map of some 'Terra Incognita'. Arranged at traditional distances in this expanse were eyes and nose and mouth. There were also various excrescences of a less usual kind, 'mountains', one might say, in this sun-scorched moon, to which Mr. Weatherwax was wont sometimes to refer, as 'these here bugg-uncles what do grow out of me cheeks'. (201-2, 209)

These passages are similar in that in each case the simile is stretched to contain an association that conveys an element of surprise. Both figures of speech (although the second is more extended and moves cautiously "one might say" into the metaphorical) are also remarkably precise and impart a concreteness of expression that firmly anchors the novel to a naturalistic reality. Moreover, despite the difference in tone—the mountains of the moon simile/metaphor is structured around the principles of caricature, a sub-genre if one can call it that of which Powys was particularly fond—each figure of speech has the power of generating its own centre of centripetal pull. Making itself curiously animate, it establishes its linguistic identity as something quite separate from the character to whom it is attached.

There is, as well, one other form of imaginative language whose function is chiefly romantic: Powys's version of rural dialect. However, a certain amount of critical debate has arisen with regard to the effectiveness of his local speech. Collins, for example, argues:

generally John Cowper's rustic dialogue, though amusing, has the general weakness of his peasants in being too quaint, too patronizingly presented, and out of line with the twentieth century and the realistic mood of the novel's psychology . . . John Cowper, in spite of his somewhat sentimental championship of the working-classes—the rural working classes especially—does unintentionally betray them. They talk stagy Wessex [Somerset in *A Glastonbury Romance*] and are rather decoration than an integral part of the human scene: they are hardly to be taken seriously as thinking men and women. All this is related, of course, to John Cowper's

unwillingness to face the realities of changed life in the English countryside.¹⁵

Cavaliero calls this dialect a "decidedly mannered 'Mummerset'" thus recognizing—I think correctly—that it is not intended to be an accurate representation of rural language. He comes to Powys's defence by calling its use "excellently managed" on the grounds that characters such as Weatherwax and Abel Twig are "never *merely* humorous but have other attributes as well".¹⁶ Indeed, the ways in which Powys uses speech to develop his romance are pervasive. Frye says: "the use of special language, often with a large amount of the antiquated in it . . . helps to enclose romance in a glass case in a verbal museum . . . Synthetic languages, however absurd they often sound, do seem to belong to romantic decorum".¹⁷ Invariably, if one reads romance as if it were realism, misunderstandings arise.

Freed of the constraint of expecting such members of rural society as Number One and Number Two to be rendered realistically, one is allowed to understand that their language is a source of imaginative enchantment. When Abel Twig entertains his nieces, he displays a skittish enjoyment as he improvises the forms of hospitality:

'Tis here, my dears! 'Tis here I steps over,' he cried, waving to his dainty nieces to follow him and hurrying along the edge of his domain till he reached a place where the top-rail was non-existent. 'Here's the place, my precious ducks, 'tis only to lift up your pretty skirts a trifle so's not to get rust on 'en. 'Tis here, 'tis here, my sweethearts! Up she goes, and over the hurdle! Here! 'Tis here I goes in and out!' (182, 190)

One of the functions of a flat character is to develop some aspect of itself to an exaggerated degree: indeed, to caricature its own and other's attributes. Often this imaginative excess is linguistic—one has only to think of Dickens's Mrs. Gamp. However, Number One's speech not only caricatures certain aspects of his Somerset dialect, but exaggerates its rhythms in imitation of the finicky daintiness of Lily and Louie Rogers.

Indeed, Abel's welcome captures precisely their mincing tones: “'Tis here I goes in and out!” Such mimesis is never derogatory but reveals instead, on the part of Twig and indeed on the part of Powys himself, a genuine pleasure in the act of creative reproduction.

The realism in the visit of Twig's nieces is concerned with the fact that a rusty gate will not open. The romance of the moment suggests an emphasis not on a garden gate but rather on the act of entering into a world which lies on the other side. Backwear Hut is a comic island in time—reinforced by its proximity to the Lake Village home of “they ancient British funny men” (179, 187)—and to enter its environs is to be spellbound. Significantly, this place of enchantment lies wholly outside the social world of Glastonbury and Old Twig's cottage suggests the same concentration of magical powers that one associates with the dwelling places of a number of the other characters who speak the dialect of romance: Penny Pitches's kitchen; the Bagges' hovel; Mother Legge's drawing room; Elphin Cattle's tower bedroom.

These domestic “spots of time” also exert a centripetal force. Indeed, *A Glastonbury Romance* is full of ceaseless movement to and from various *loci* of power. The town itself seems to have no centre, and if one follows Powys's example and looks down on the fictional map that is the novel (usefully aided by an ordnance map of the area), the spots of romance seem as beads strung on a necklace.

Despite this cumulative aura of romance, Powys's eulogy for the dying magician reveals a humanity deeply rooted in the claims of the earth. He says of Bloody Johnny:

He had never been a fastidious man. He had got pleasure from smelling at dung-hills, from making water in his wife's garden, from snuffing up the sweet scent of those he loved.

He had no cruelty, no culture, no ambition, no breeding, no refinement, no curiosity, no conceit. He believed that there was a borderland of the miraculous round everything that existed and that ‘everything that lived was holy’. (1171, 1117)

Powys's humanity is not sentimental. The habit he has of matter of factly noticing every aspect of the natural world—of investing all he sees with personality—ensures that even the hierarchial structure of romance must bow to the claims of the ordinary. The grand spectacles are never allowed to steal the show. When Bloody Johnny raises the dead (if he does), this miracle has its counterpart, at the end of the chapter in question, when Lord P.'s erotic life is momentarily revived as he follows Clarissa Smith and her young man after they leave Mother Legge's “other house”. Owen Evans's suffering on the cross generates its own kind of healing power, when Dr. Fell is able to see as he sits beside his patient's “bare rope-bruised ankles . . . a little bird deliberately alighting upon the topmost twig of the stunted hornbeam. ‘It's a Lesser Whitethroat’ he thought to himself” (634, 609). Throughout *A Glastonbury Romance* there is this psychological naturalism at work taking into account the young, the old, the displaced, the lonely, the unlovable, the sick, the tormented—and surrounding them all with the “borderland of the miraculous”. As Cavaliero says: “Powys, far more a genuine countryman [than Forster], portrays the unseen as an organic extension of the seen, and finds in the very structure of nature itself the guarantee of values which protect the individual from a threat to his identity”.¹⁸ In doing so, he ensures that the structure of nature is intimately bound up with the structure of romance. Both console man for his separation from himself, from others, from the natural world. Ultimately, both heal.

NOTES

¹Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 23.

²Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Chatto and Windus, 1973, p. 258.

³Frye, p. 178.

⁴H. P. Collins, *John Cowper Powys: Old Earth Man*, Barrie and Rockliff, 1966, p. 7.

⁵Frye, p. 41.

⁶John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance*, John Lane, 1933, p. 548; Picador (Pan Books), 1975, p. 528.

⁷Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, p. 3.

⁸E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), Penguin, 1976, p. 74.

⁹The passage is from Powys's *The Complex Vision*, Dodd, Mead & Co., 1920, p. 269, and is quoted in Cavaliero, p. 5.

¹⁰John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography*, John Lane, 1934 (and Macdonald, 1967), p. 629.

¹¹*Autobiography*, p. 625.

¹²*Autobiography*, p. 643.

¹³Quoted in the appendix to Belinda Humfrey, ed., *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1972, pp. 326-31.

¹⁴Powys's choice of the tench—a "queer fish gifted with the gift of healing" (751)—suggests that his source may have been the complete angler himself: Izaak Walton, who calls the tench "the Physician of fishes".

¹⁵Collins, p. 73.

¹⁶Cavaliero, p. 165.

¹⁷Frye, p. 110.

¹⁸Cavaliero, p. 179.

Tony Head

Method in the Madness: Sublimity and Bathos in the Major Novels of John Cowper Powys

The Lord gives beef, but us must go to the Devil for sauce . . . (Wolf Solent)

I

The fact that Powys's vision is all-inclusive is fast becoming a critical truism. His scepticism is total; which means he is sceptical even of scepticism. For Wolf Solent every material substance has importance,

an importance which perhaps material substances really *did* possess, if all were known.
(WS, III, 48)

Again, when Sam Dekker reaches for 'The Unpardonable Sin',

Mr. Evans jerked his arm away but in such a manner as to make it appear that he did so by accident. He *might* have done it by accident; for here he was, fumbling helplessly as ever, with his precious key!
(*A Glastonbury Romance*, IX, 249)

Wanting to believe the unprovable, Powys credulously qualifies his scepticism.

The desire for blance in evidence here pervades Powys's work. When Sylvanus Cobbold talked to God,

he never called himself 'I' or 'me' or 'your servant' or even Sylvanus; he always called himself 'Caput'. But even this was not enough; for, since the Absolute was Everything, it was necessary to place the lowest function of his body side by side with the highest. Thus to the word Caput, in speaking of himself to God, what must this fantastical being do but add the word 'Anus', which had the double advantage of indicating his spasmodic body-shame, and, incidentally, of rhyming with Sylvanus.

(*Weymouth Sands*, XI, 381)

This is Powys's dualism at its simplest, and later put to more humorous effect in Sylvanus's argument with the classics teacher Magnus Muir, who only catches from Sylvanus's final muttered retort certain sounds which remind him of two particular Latin

words; an ingenious irony enhanced by our knowledge that Muir would be equally bemused if he realised that these were the very words he *had* heard. It is one of those occasions on which Powys suggests that the natural language of human thought is the language of madness. Hence, also, Philip Crow's scheming as, full-stretch in the bath, his "sponge became the hill above Wookey where he intended to mine for tin and his knees became jagged fragments of this precious alluvial deposit"; hence Owen Glendower's struggle, during political discussion, to keep his mind from the "absurd problem" of whether the shuffle of Father Pascentius's sandals "would *sound the same* on Catharine's mat as it did on the bare floor".

Yet so ingrained is Powys's dualism that it punishes the inattentive reader. In Wolf Solent's vision of "A yellow man-beast" (WS, VII), Powys is careful not to divorce Wolf's imaginative faculties from Nature's capacity to be "More than natural":

Wolf stopped dead-still and gazed at what he saw, as ever more nearly and more nearly *what he saw became what he imagined*. This was what he wanted! This was what he sought! (VII, 150)

There is a particular subtlety here in the distribution of verbs in the clause I have emphasized. It allows for the reading that what Wolf saw became what he was at that moment imagining *of its own accord*, and also for the reading that what he saw became what he imagined *as a consequence of* his imaginative absorption. In other words, what he saw and what he imagined have become one, but the cause of their union is given an ambiguity which a reversal of the verbs "saw" and "imagined" would deny.

Nature, in that case, would be deprived of its influence on the human imagination; the fusion would be mere coincidence. The two exclamations following this clause tend to support the ambivalence, the first suggesting the power of human imagination, the second the power of natural revelation.

It is from such a deep-rooted sense of equilibrium that what I call the "sublimity" and "bathos" in Powys's work arise. By "sublimity" I mean not only a moment of exalted narrative grandeur but also one of psychological import, of poignancy or pathos. By "bathos" I mean an effect which undercuts "sublimity".

The two are not, however, strictly antithetical. Bathos, certainly, implies a pre-existent sublimity; sublimity does not imply a pre-existent bathos. The picture could be further complicated by irony, which can, but not always does, imply bathos; whilst bathos can, but not always does, imply irony. What is apparent, however, is that irony is the vitalizing ingredient of many of Powys's most sublime pieces. When Wolf Solent, for example, having achieved spiritual ablation through rigorous self-analysis, returns from his walk to find Gerda philosophically disturbed and sexually responsive, Powys sets the ensuing scene in pathetic relief with the final sentence in the chapter:

But—even so—what those thoughts of hers had been, that he had interrupted by his return, he knew no better now than when first he had entered her room and blown out her candle. (*WS*, XIII, 294)

An emotive, sympathetic prose is characteristic of Powys when portraying the communicative deficiency of human beings, especially in moments of physical intimacy. When Larry spiritually seduces Perdita, in *Weymouth Sands*, his thoughts and feelings are given an appropriately excitable and inarticulate prose. Then, placidly, Powys reveals his self-deception, but taking no sentimental liberty. A human truth is stated in a tone that is gently rhetorical, to enhance its poignancy. There is no attempt to rationalize, for fear of trivializing sentiment.

As a more extensive example one might cite the passage in chapter twenty of *Owen Glendower*, in which Tegolin visits Rhisiart in captivity. Having elicited our sympathy for Rhisiart with the revelation that Tegolin has already done what has hitherto been only conditional, that is, "going up into the armourer's bed", a shift in emphasis follows, as Powys develops his point about their mutual ignorance, revealing in Rhisiart a level of emotional impotence and redeeming Tegolin of a previous implication of shameless sexual indulgence. (This implication, of course deliberate, occurs when she relates "very rapidly" her tale, a passage in which the syntax and grammar appropriately mimic a child 'spinning a yarn', whose truth is often obscured by eagerness of delivery. The passage is seen to be true in retrospect, but carries an element of dubiety in its narrative context.)

Tegolin's 'redemption' is achieved when we are told how the armourer

had rallied her the next morning about the candle-grease with which the stairs were sprinkled; but she didn't confess to him how many times she had descended, before the final blind rush that took her to the top.

(*OG*, XX, 837)

Their mutual ignorance, maintained throughout the passage, is finally set in its emotional perspective by the delicately-achieved sense of Rhisiart's gratitude, when Tegolin, seeing his silent tears,

knew that whether he understood or not the price she'd paid he accepted the life she'd given him.

The sense of effortless aplomb in the composition of this entire scene arouses suspicions of Walter Allen's claim that Powys's romantic prose is "always rhetorical, written as it were with all stops out".¹ On closer inspection passages like this are revealed as commendably careful in narrative construction and tonal control, their effectiveness emerging from an economic sense of the ironic.

Any writer, of course, can use one irony to set up another; it's just a sleight of hand

by which to conjure fictive rabbits. And Powys, predictably, could not avoid producing the occasional white elephant. His treatment of a similar incident in *Wolf Solent* and *Maiden Castle* reveals a disparity in his method.

Wolf Solent, walking across the fair-field, the influence of his dead father seeming physically to weigh upon him, nearly trips over a dead rabbit. Dud No-Man, walking down Maiden Castle, feeling the influence of his newly-found living father, discovers the body of a rabbit in the last stages of decomposition.

The former passage, with its characteristic Powysian imputation of animacy to the inanimate, is more sinister. The rabbit is "half-skinned" only, "half-eaten", and one of its "glazed, wide-open eyes" is "fixed" upon Wolf with "a protesting appeal". Wolf stoops down "mechanically" (the word is psychologically apt, suggestive not only of habitual familiarity but of mental anaesthesia). He then "placed it among the young dock-leaves and the new shoots of hedge-parsley", and Powys is content to leave it at that.

Dud, however, usually derives a peculiar satisfaction from ritual burial, which includes the rather childish and pompous gesture of making a cross over the dead animal. But as he

stooped down for this pious act, Nature, as if unsympathetic to such proceedings, brought it about that his gorge rose to a pitch of actual retching, so that although the rabbit got its obsequies, such as they were, he himself was denied any sort of ritualistic satisfaction.

(*MC*, VI, 247)

The passage contributes nothing in either a narrative or psychological sense. Powys steps forward fully conscious of, and confident in, his peculiar humour of irreverence, then retreats to hide behind the real culprit, "Nature". However endearing, there is something reckless about this boldness, and something about its obtrusive flippancy, which makes one feel it is the kind of authorial control that degrades its object. An intentionally humorous bathos has

resulted in rather flat, clownish jeering. Built on the same syntactical foundation, but more fastidious, more appropriately affected in its diction, how much more convincing a bathos that while Richard Gaul delightfully contemplates his view of the sea,

Nature, as though impishly consistent in turning a philosopher's pleasures into a victory of matter over mind, brought it about that the author of the 'Philosophy of Representation' had to hurry off with incontinent haste to the lavatory upon the landing beneath him. (*WeyS*, IV, 100)

II

Powys's conception of Nature is well illustrated by a comparison of a passage in *Wolf Solent* with one in *Anna Karenina*, for their similarities may shed some light on George Steiner's claim that Powys's novel is "the book in the language to rival Tolstoy".²

Wolf, sitting "among the tall uncut grasses", spiritually anguished,

bowed his head over his knees and watched the climbing of a tiny beetle up a bending stalk of grass. 'To the universe' he thought 'it matters no more whether I leave Gerda for Christie than whether that beetle reaches the top of that stalk!' (*WS*, XI, 265)

On realising that he can't leave Gerda:

'Damn!' he muttered to himself, as he watched the beetle turn back resignedly within an inch of the stalk's point, and begin a patient descent. 'Damn! It's just pure weakness and habit!'

Levin, lying in "the uncut grass" (*AK*, Pt. 8, ch. 12), weary and elated, bends a grass-blade to facilitate the journey of a beetle. In Tolstoy's use of the motif, Levin never integrates the beetle fully into his consciousness. His physical movements, as the syntax of the passage implies, are mechanical and subordinate to his mental processes. He is conscious of what his body is doing, but is not concentrating on it. His self-interrogations are broken only once (in parenthesis) by his awareness of the beetle flying away. Tolstoy perhaps uses it as a

symbol of Levin's spiritual freedom; Levin perhaps sees it as such. There is a danger in insisting on a significance Tolstoy never intended.

By contrast, Powys has Wolf himself symbolize the beetle. The creature *doesn't* reach the top of the stalk, but Wolf doesn't leave Gerda, and it is his observation of the beetle's retirement which prompts his own impatient resignation.

Further, Levin is hardly *aware* of his physical surroundings. The contributory effect of Nature to his joy is obvious, but "This feeling that was so delicious that it seemed to him incredible" is established *before* he enters the forest. Powys, however, makes Wolf a part of the natural landscape, sitting "with his back against that stile and the pugent smell of herb-Robert in his nostrils", whilst yet portraying Nature as an independent entity. Straining to see Christie's window in the distance, Wolf is blinded by the sun and annoyed at "this refusal of Nature to humour his mood". The sun emphasizes his loneliness:

For the first time in his mortal days this great diurnal spectacle seemed to his mind half-fantastic; as if this were not the real sun, the sun he had known all his life, that was descending; nor the earth he had known all his life that was thus hiding it from his eyes.

Again, there is a balance of natural revelation with self-delusion. The role of the sun as adversary is later re-asserted:

It resembled, as he looked at it, a vast fiery tunnel, the mouth of some colossal piece of artillery, directed full against him. With screwed-up eyelids he returned the stare of this blood-red cannon-mouth.

Tolstoy does not give the sun such attention; he mentions merely "the heat".³

Here, as elsewhere in Powys's work, Nature is seen as a self-sufficient entity and equally man's antagonist as his spiritual bed-mate.

The characteristic of Powys's view of Nature which distinguishes him most clearly from his contemporaries is his consistent awareness of the excremental. It is typical

that Wolf Solent's cottage is opposite "a foul-smelling ditch, the receptacle of sewage from an adjoining pig-yard!", though this is never the excuse for trivial humour. Likewise, Sam Dekker's awareness of the Absolute at the very moment he gives Abel Twig his enema is not the occasion for frivolity: Powys attentively ensures Sam's recognition of the significance of these two extremes of his experience.

By tonal contrast, in his description of Sylvanus kissing the "neglected" cow-droppings, Powys's language perfectly affects exasperation in the very act of assertion, as if tempting critical disapproval whilst rendering critical analysis superfluous.

It is this awareness of the excremental element in nature that Powys frequently uses to qualify his own carefully-established sublimity. In *Owen Glendower*, Rhisiart and Catherine lie in the mist beneath an oak:

'Aren't you ever going to kiss me goodbye, Rhisiart?' The words were followed by the descent of a couple of faded oak-leaves which fluttered down upon that phantom face; and, immediately afterwards, certain whitish-coloured bird-droppings descended into the centre of that heap of clothes.

'Love me once more Rhisiart, and then we'll go.' (OG, XVI, 592)

One wants to say that this is Powys 'sending up' his own romanticism with a stroke of realism. Yet 'send up' won't do, so fleeting is the 'stroke', and the 'realism' is apparently unnoticed or ignored or accepted without comment by his characters. It is merely another indication of his refusal to believe that truth is one-sided: to have had oak-leaves falling without bird-droppings would have been to present a biased view of nature. In Powys's heavily rhetorical passages he was unable to avoid the dogmatic; but here—and it is a hallmark of his best prose—the incontrovertible fact of the occurrence is quietly subordinated to an affected interest in describing its object, so that the reader, now invited to exercise his imagination by the deliberate adjectival vagueness of the description, has accepted

the assertion almost without noticing, and certainly without a sense of the author being assertive.

A more elaborate example of this aspect of Powys's vision is when Johnny Geard, in King Mark's Chamber on Easter night, hears a voice from the hearth crying "Nineue! Nineue!" (typically, the explanation that it was merely the wind is also offered). He then hears another noise, "without any ambiguity *this time* . . . It was an unmistakable sound; but it was anything but a romantic sound. It was infact the sound of a man making water". Powys then employs his familiar voyeur motif, and the sounds, of first a man, then a woman, lead Geard to philosophize about their eternal quality, about "the everlasting pissing of Mr. and Mrs. Bellamy".

The movement is uniquely Powysian, from Geard's initial terror, through the stroke of bathos to philosophical speculation, and then to the colloquial ridicule of the metaphysic; and this on a Christian festival in an Arthurian setting. The physical presence of the Bellamys serves as a further reminder that Powys's romanticism is not unbridled.

III

As a champion of the individual Powys believed that the essence of "real reality" is best discovered by the creation and cultivation of a personal religion. Even the vivisectionist Dr. Brush tells himself:

Really wise people spend their lives in forgetting 'God's truth', which is the horrible reality, and creating a truth for themselves. *That is the wise life.* (*WeyS*, XII, 439)

This is precisely what Johnny Geard does. On Easter morning he performs 'mass' kneeling in the garden, gobbling chunks of bread, gulping mouthfuls of wine and repeating "Christ is risen". Powys uses the scene to make his point that even the formal, ritualistic aspects of religion become ultimately private. (A few minutes later, of course, Geard develops hiccoughs.)

The range of religious attitudes and

idiosyncrasies in Powys's fiction is vast, even within the confines of Christianity. Enoch Quirm prays by immersing his head in a basin of water; Mr. Round has his 'Jesus' days and 'God' days; Master Brut's Jesus isn't that of historical Christianity, just as Geard's Christ is different. Wolf's 'mythology'; Rodney Loder's 'essences'; Owen's 'exteriorizing' of his soul: all are manifestations of their private religions.

But this individualization of religion is not seen as a necessarily alienating or destructive force. Sam and Matt Dekker's separation owes primarily to their mutual feelings for Nell. In their reconciliation, glimpsed by Geard on the flood-waters of Glastonbury, Powys is refusing to allow their mysterious natural link as father and son to be destroyed by the impositions of either a conventionally doctrinal or morally ascetic Christianity. Similarly, Owen's and Broch's differences, best defined in their discussions of pain, are never allowed detrimentally to affect their deep-rooted friendship.

In *Wolf Solent* Powys fuses the sublime moment of Mr. Malakite's death with a moment of what might be called 'doctrinal bathos'. The old bookseller has tried three times to utter a word which due to "A wave of atavistic sentiment rose-up in Wolf's throat from countless centuries of Christian unction" as 'forgive':

With a convulsion of his whole frame the bookseller jerked himself to a sitting posture. Spasmodically drawing in his legs, like a frog swimming on its back, he kicked off every shred of clothing . . .

'Forget!' he shrieked. (*WS*, XXIV, 595)

Another death, that of the nurse in *Owen Glendower*, shows Powys exploring the visual possibilities of bathos. Father Rheinalt has been hastily summoned from fishing to perform absolution. Broch has taken control of the situation and, characteristically enigmatic, has convinced the dying woman that St. Peter has come:

'The Fisherman himself!' she murmured.

'He's sent the Fisherman himself!'

(*OG*, XVI, 579)

At which point the monk, rod still in hand, is summoned from the threshold, "five mud-smelling fish hung round his neck and his legs slimy with pond-weed". But here Powys is careful to alleviate the emphasis on his own ingenuity and strikes a sympathetic equilibrium by noting how Rhisiart finds the moment more religiously stirring than the Midsummer Day Mass and is convinced "that he would never again behold a dead face so imprinted with the certainty of redemption".

Johnny Geard's last exposition to the people of Glastonbury memorably encapsulates both Powys's philosophy and technique. It concerns the "souls of micro-scorp insects":

'You often hear people say' he went on, 'that insects have no souls. Now what Christ came and told me this very night is that *every insect*, down to the smallest mite, microbe or bacillus, has an immortal soul. It must have been about half-past two last night that the Master told me about insects having souls. I know it was about then, because I'd heard the Church clock strike two. And I asked him if worms, and such things as slugs and snails had souls. "Every Jack one o' them, Sonny" he said, "every Jack one o' them".'

(GR, XXX, 1136)

The apparent triviality of subject-matter at a moment of crisis (Young Tewsy has already informed him that "Flood be rushing down 'igh Street, your Wash'p!"), the irrelevant digression about the time, the colloquial language of Christ—Powys humorously qualifies his own perfectly serious metaphysic, which Geard continues to expound by relating Christ's explanation that these souls

though perishable in relation to the visible, are imperishable in relation to the invisible.

Later Geard reveals that,

Only good can come, my dears, from every embrace. It matters not at all from what cups, or from what goblets, we drink, so long as without being cruel, we drink up Life.

Powys's ethics in a nutshell. But he now has his expositor tire of his own discourse,

peter out mid-sentence and proceed to cap the scene with a stroke of outrageous mundaneness:

Shamelessly then, in front of all, he lifted himself up a little in his chair and broke wind. Then, with unabashed aplomb and scarcely covering his mouth with his hand he yawned portentously.

'Any questions for me, my dears?' he muttered in a voice still half-strangled by his yawning. (1138)

This sort of writing, uniquely John Cowper's, accounts in part for his capacity to polarize critical response. Martin Seymour-Smith has complained that Powys "mixed realism with pretentiousness without ever really succeeding in examining the latter".⁴ This, presumably, is a case in point, the "realism" being Geard's behaviour, the "pretentiousness" his subject-matter (unless it's vice-versa). But such sweeping accusations of carelessness or facetiousness proceed from ignorance of Powys's technique and insensitivity to his charm (though 'charm', despite the tonal perfection required for its accomplishment, has always been a quality too readily overlooked by contemporary critics).

The confident ease with which Powys consistently blends the bathetic and the sublime, and, in this instance, the effortless avoidance of the dogmatic, seem to me, far from being 'pretentious', to be a guarantee of sincerity, as well as a measure of special literary skill.

IV

Powys's awareness of antitheses is, then, central to his vision, and the process of oscillation between them is one of his salient characteristics as a novelist. It is seen at its most extensive and sustained in 'The Pageant' in *A Glastonbury Romance*. The chapter, which forms the climax to Volume One, repays careful reading. It is a remarkable demonstration of Powys's refusal to see any event in a single light. The variety of personal attitudes towards the proceedings is all-embracing and no single one prevails;

no one person or aspect of the Pageant is merely ridiculed.

Powys is fastidious in qualifying his effects. The Passion Play itself is given a "subliminal unity" by the grief and power of Persephone's acting as the Madonna. This, a heavy irony anyway, is promptly undercut by the "nervous blundering" of the Marsh girls playing the other two Marys (typically, some of the audience think it a stroke of modern art).

Likewise the symbolical sublimity of the Play—the final utterance of Evans, as Christ—is overshadowed by the fact of his real collapse and the consequent narrative urgency of pacifying the crowd now surging up the hill. Here, Powys produces a moment in which the sublime and the ridiculous are superbly fused. The Middlezoy foreman, still dressed as King Arthur, ascends Pilate's rostrum and, prompted by Crummie Geard, addresses the mass through a megaphone:

'The Mayor wishes to assure ye all that the gentleman be only fainted. The Mayor thinks best for Pageant to end here and now. The Mayor thanks ye all for coming, especially those of ye what come from far. The Mayor hopes ye'll all come to Glastonbury again. The Mayor—' There was a pause at this point while King Arthur bent his head to catch his prompter's words. Then raising the megaphone again—'The Mayor gives ye all the Blessing of the Living Christ!'

The foreman came carefully down the creaking wooden steps with the megaphone under his arm. (*GR*, XIX, 629-30)

The fictive "madness" has its narrative "method", for the crowd, become individuals again, disperses.

One of the outstanding demonstrations of the technique I have been illustrating is provided by a passage in *Owen Glendower*, when Owen, feeling "his stomach turn sick at what he saw", first spots Adda lying on the floor in a pool of blood:

His face beneath the torch-light was of a death-pallor but his eyes were wide open and Owen could see he knew him at once. Indeed his lips murmured his name.

(*OG*, XIV, 491)

From this delicate pathos to the practical reality of the situation and the revelation of Adda's wound, inflicted by the sword of Eliseg (with deliberate irony, the very weapon "he had insisted on preserving"):

The Prince saw at once that this abominable weapon had been deliberately thrust through the old gentleman's rump.

Having observed that Adda's "thin form in its grey clothes made with the sword that pierced him the shocking image of a bleeding cross", Powys alters his tone, so far pitched mid-way between the sympathetic and the sardonic, to give Adda's revelation of the noble motive of his mission a prose of appropriately heroic rhythm. This leads merely to the pathetic irony that the inflictors of his wound were actually reluctant to do it, but succumbed under threat from a superior.

The 'individuality' motif appears, as Tegolin, The Lollard, Broch and Owen, all caught in the same event, in the same moment of time, fall back upon their private thoughts in an interlude of profound tranquility. Adda continues to relate how the wound was designed only to pierce his flesh . . . "And I walked—*like that*—till your people found me".

Rawlff's enthusiastic affirmation is fiercely rebuked by Owen. There follows a masterly stroke of psychology:

But the old man seemed glad to have this corroboration of his words. 'I did—didn't I, lad?' he repeated. 'I walked—a long way—putting all—my life—to shame!' He paused and the men about him, and that one girl whose hands were tending him, drew the long relieved sigh that human beings draw when they know the worst. (492-3)

Bathos has shaded gently into pathos. The next paragraph uproots it:

But the worst was yet to be spoken as far as the proud old antiquary of Dinas Bran was concerned. 'I couldn't hold back' he muttered in a low terrible voice. '*And my dirt's on the sword of Eliseg.*'

To counteract this definition of his humanity Adda's nobility is quickly re-asserted,

and a priest arrives to perform absolution. But the narrative sublimity of "Father Pascentius commenced a deeply-intoned Latin psalm" is qualified by its subordinate clause—"to which the prostrate man paid no more attention than if it had been the tolling of the bell". When the priest goes to fetch the Last Sacraments, Walter Brut seizes his opportunity:

'Jesus', he groaned, while the guileless earnestness of his imploring countenance held the old man's attention. 'Jesus was humiliated worse than you! O think of it, my father, think of it, my dear lord. Think of *His* humiliation!' (494)

The Lollard's eager sincerity is undercut with Nietzschean incision:

But nothing save an infinite despair was in the flickering smile with which the old man responded. 'Jesus was God', he muttered. 'What's that to me?'

Broch then steps in bluntly:

'Listen, man' he whispered, so that Adam alone could hear. 'I'm going to pull out that bit of rusty iron; and then you'll be dead . . .'

The humour of Broch's ensuing volubility is presented along with the subliminal significance of his expression, for "those deep eye-sockets into which the dying man was staring seemed full of the blood and excrement of the whole world suddenly became *holy!*"

Several delicate touches enable Powys to round off the episode poignantly when Adda becomes aware of Tegolin's presence, her hair brushing his cheek. Powys does not narrate the climactic moment so as to avoid trivializing its pathos. But he does relate a remark of Rawlff's ("who alone hadn't turned away"): "Who'd have thought that the Crow had so much blood in him!" (495)

The passage calls for closer attention than can be given here. Its consistent, and often subtle, shifts in tone and attitude provide an excellent example of Powysian balance, in which the author weighs his heavy Celtic romanticism against abominably cruel realism and the painful personal irony of a man who has desecrated his own idol.

One of the dangers of Powys's method is that its intention of rendering the author impartial can become increasingly obtrusive in relation to its usage; which is severely to test a writer's credibility, as well as strain the reader's patience. A constant presentation of antitheses does create the difficulty of *placing* the author, and one might reasonably object that such a method is too blatant a manifestation of his obsession with his impartiality, that his predominant concern is with what the reader will think of his relation to his material rather than with what he is saying *through* his material.

Obviously, any author who feels the need to draw attention to his own impartiality is easy prey for critical talons. Where Powys evades serious scathing is in the credibility of the fictive content of his ironies, or, more accurately, the creation of conditions in which the incredulity of the reader is tempted and then humorously rebuffed; and also in his calm assurance in the effect of this method. Any seeming implausibility in this method is not an attempt to undermine our rationality; Powys is simply showing that man is not rational.

Powys wrote:

A human story, to bear any resemblance to the truth, must advance and retreat erratically, must flicker and flutter here and there, must debouch at a thousand tangents.

(*Autobiography*, VI, 237)

It is in his concern to capture this "truth", in his blending of incongruities, in his representation of the invisible, the inaudible, the intangible, which he refused to believe did not in some form exist, that Powys so firmly challenges critical presuppositions. He conveys both the significance and the irrelevance of his 'sublime' and 'bathetic' components, their comic as well as tragic substantiality. In his total 'Shakespearean' scepticism, Powys portrays what it is not only to be human, but to be alive in a living world; which is to have one's sensibilities enriched and to feel that "happiness that often madness hits on, which reason and sanity could not so prosperously be delivered of".

NOTES

Page references are to the following editions: *Wolf Solent (WS)*, Jonathan Cape, 1929; *A Glastonbury Romance (GR)*, John Lane, 1933; *Weymouth Sands (WeyS)*, Macdonald, 1963; *Autobiography*, Macdonald, 1934 (1967); *Maiden Castle (MC)*, Cassell, 1937; *Owen Glendower (OG)*, John Lane, 1941 (and Picador 1978).

¹Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, 1964, pp. 48-50.

²George Steiner, *Language and Silence*, 1969, p. 264.

³All quotations are from the Constance Garnett translation.

⁴Martin Seymour-Smith, *Who's Who In Twentieth-Century Literature*, 1976, pp. 290-291.

Ben Jones

Who Converted Gaffer Barge?

Among the many signs flashed to Wolf Solent as he recovers from the loss of his “mythology” is the face of the “great, hulking lubber-head called Gaffer Barge”.¹ Wolf calls on Barge to deliver a message to Gerda, and he is “staggered” by Barge’s responsive smile of “sheer, innate sweetness and goodness” (Cape, p. 589). Later, as Wolf returns to Preston Lane, the smell of the pigsty mysteriously brings to his mind “that incredibly beautiful look, of sheer, native goodness, on the face of Gaffer Barge” (Cape, p. 594). Barge’s smile has a recuperative effect on Wolf: it “surged up from the depths to greet him when he was in his worst danger of being swamped by ‘reality’” (Cape, p. 594).

When Wolf, near the end of the novel, visits his father’s grave, he enjoins “old Truepenny” to celebrate their meeting “with a private little curse at God” (Cape, p. 626). But just as Wolf “articulated this catapult of malice against the unknown First Cause . . . without any apparent reason, he suddenly bethought himself of the boy Barge” (Cape, p. 626). It is Barge who signals to Wolf that forgiveness is still possible. “Barge would never curse God”, Wolf tells himself, but then Wolf reasons that he is different from Barge, he is not innocent, he knows more than Barge, he knows too much (Cape, p. 626).

These passages should be enough to establish the significant rôle that schoolboy Barge plays in Wolf’s recovery.² Granted, the imagery of gold is part of the illumination coming to Wolf, but the Age of Gold, with its heathenness, is invoked both through the image of nature *and* the image of the human. Barge is the human sign of retained, and perhaps retrievable, innocence. This innocence, if not com-

pletely recovered, is at least recognized by Wolf when his suspicions about the dark events of Dorset begin to disappear (Cape, p. 632). The dissolution of his paranoia is closely associated with the resurgence of his body, indeed something “more than his body”:

His body? No! It was more than his body! Behind the pulse-beat of his body stirred the unutterable . . . stirred something that was connected with the strange blueness he had seen long ago over the Lunt meadows and more recently at the window of Pond Cottage . . . something, too, that was connected with that heathen goodness that came so naturally to Gaffer Barge.³

It is the “heathen goodness” of Barge that to a considerable degree moves Wolf towards his reconciliation with the world. Powys makes it clear that it is not a reconciliation through “faith”. Just after he envisions Tilly-Valley’s victory over Urquhart, a victory through “faith”, Wolf declares himself instead for Barge’s “inborn goodness”:

No! He would *not* yield! The inborn goodness of Barge . . . a thing natural and inevitable as the rising of the sap in the tree . . . was stronger than all the ‘white magic’ in the world. (Cape, p. 634)

The “white magic” is Tilly-Valley’s. Several lines later, we are told, Wolf “felt a longing to ask Christie what *she* thought about the difference between the ‘goodness’ of Barge and the ‘faith’ of Tilly-Valley” (Cape, p. 634).

In the midst of the illuminations of the “floating sea of liquid, shining gold”⁴ Wolf purges his mind of the “supernatural struggle going on in the abysses” (Cape, p. 640), and here, again, Gaffer Barge returns to Wolf’s reviving mind: “Air and earth

mould, clouds and a patch of grass, darkness and the breaking of light . . . Ay, it is enough! And with this as my background, why can't I be as *heathenly* 'good' as Gaffer Barge?" (Cape, p. 640; my italics). In the golden sea he restores his will, rejoins his father, and remembers Wordsworth, and here, too, is Gaffer Barge. Wolf is now able to make his affirmation: "'If I can't enjoy life', he thought, 'with absolute childish absorption in its simplest elements, I might as well never have been born!'" (Cape, p. 641). He decides to live.

But what a staggering blow it is to discover in the Macdonald text of 1961 (and the Penguin Modern Classics which follows it) that Gaffer Barge's "heathenly" goodness has become "heavenly": ". . . why can't I be as *heavenly* 'good' as Gaffer Barge?"⁵ It is, perhaps, a type-setter's error, but it is not an insignificant one. Barge's innocence is not, by any count, "heavenly". Powys deliberately places

Barge in the narrative to move and to pace Wolf's reconciliation to the natural and human worlds. The sign of "heathen" goodness, the face of Barge, confirms this reconciliation, and Barge's face is the sign that counters the dread of the face on the Waterloo steps.

So, who converted Gaffer Barge? Not John Cowper Powys, we hope, in a late moment of piety. There seems to be no thought of heaven, whatever it might mean, in his Preface (dated Christmas, 1960) to the Macdonald edition: ". . . no consciousness of mine will continue after my last breath" (Macdonald, p. vii). Could it have been an editor at Macdonald's? If so, why change only the one, the final, "heathen"? The galley proof of the Macdonald edition may show something. Perhaps a mere accident, but not an accident that should go unnoticed, or uncorrected. The ending of *Wolf Solent* is heathen, and heathenly Barge helps make it so.

NOTES

¹John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1929, p. 589. The Cape edition was published in July 1929. Cape follows the New York edition by Simon and Schuster of May 1929, although it corrects some mis-prints (see Note 3, below).

²There is another conspicuous reference to a barge, just perhaps worth noting. One of the lowest points for Wolf occurs at the very end of Chapter 22, "The Quick and the Dead". Both he and Gerda seem broken, he by Urquhart's cheque and she by "Weevil's brown suit". As they try to get to sleep Wolf wonders: "Shall I say good night to her before I let myself go to sleep? No; better not! Better just hold tight to her . . . and drift on in our barge—down, down the stream . . . drift on in our barge" (Cape, p. 546). Not much later, Gaffer Barge appears. A resonance?

³In the Simon and Schuster edition, and the Garden City edition that follows it in 1933, the final clause reads, nonsensically, ". . . something *to* that was connected with that heathen goodness that came so naturally to Gaffer Barge" (my italics).

⁴The illuminations of the "floating sea of liquid, shining gold" are both immediate (the field of buttercups shining in the light of the setting sun, pp. 638 ff.) and recollected ("he realized that long ago, at Weymouth, he had had an extraordinary ecstasy from the sight of the dancing ripples of the wide bay turned into liquid gold by the straight sun-path"; p. 640).

⁵*Wolf Solent*, London, Macdonald, 1961, p. 611; and the Penguin Modern Classics edition (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1964), p. 631. Simon and Schuster, like Cape, reads "heathenly" (pp. 961-62).

G. Wilson Knight

John Cowper Powys's "The Ridge": an Interpretation

I take "The Ridge", composed of alternating lines, many looking roughly like the hexameters and pentameters of Latin 'elegiacs', as Powys's most compacted and comprehensive attack on the ultimate problem: death. To assist our understanding it will be helpful to adduce correspondences with his attempts elsewhere. The subject was one of primary concern throughout his literary life.

Death is handled well in both *Rodmoor* and *After My Fashion*; in the first as dissolution into sea and cosmic whiteness and in the second as blissful annihilation, both accompanied by a loved one's voice. If that satisfies us, it is there done better than in later works. Apparently he was still uneasy, since he returns to the problem continually. In his extended discussion of it in Chapters VII and VIII of *Mortal Strife*, he tells us that we cannot possibly conceive of what is to happen at death while we are constricted by time and space (1942 ed., VII, 113). In the Preface to the second edition of *Wolf Solent* he is definite that he himself does not for himself desire survival; and once he told me that, though he used to believe in it, he had not done so since Llewelyn's death. In the late spiritualistic fantasy *Two and Two* a living Jesus paradoxically appears saying that he as a person is now quite dead and so will everyone else be, "souls" included (XIII, 79). In *Real Wraiths*, the title signifies a pleasurable near-dissolution into an Ariel-like, elemental, freedom (IX, 54-5, 58).

Why "the ridge"? In *The Mountains of the Moon* the hero climbs up to a ridge dividing the known face of the Moon from the mysterious other side, which is to be directly associated with death (see my *The Saturnian Quest*, with references, VIII, 112). A girl Helia, daughter of Sun and Moon, comes from the darkness to join

Rorlt in a happy union. Happier than what happens in the twin story, *Up and Out*, where the people, and God too, find the unexpected new dimension a cheat and soon dissolve.

In "The Ridge" Powys, as hero, is climbing up, and as he ascends he hears the Wind, so vividly present in his lyric "Wayfarers" with its repeated Soul's counsel of "Follow the Wind". The Wind there leads to the "City of God". In "The Ridge" it is less decisive. It has no purpose and leads to "nothing" and is anyway not the same as "the air", any more than the "mystery" of living bodies created from "nothing" is the same as the elements which compose them. The thought is developed: man is a body with a "ghost" or "spirit" inserted, the elements being transformed into "marvels new".

But such claims are countered by revulsion. He has already told us, "I carry a horror within me"; he is like lower life-forms, midget creatures, and he imagines all life revolting from God's 'love', "hate" and "law". Zeus "conquered Time" and so enslaved and perverted life.

He is struck by fear: "What on earth will befall me when I get to the top of the ridge?" There is expected a sudden *happening* at death, as in *Mortal Strife*: "When we are dead, life and death, according to this present dimension, cease; and something else substitutes itself for them" (VII, 113; VIII, 135). Why, he asks, does he "aim at the crest"? "To be at the Death of God", he answers, "is my single quest". He preserves, however, hope that, though "God and the Universe" deny it, he will find his "love" there.

"Quest" recalls the Questing Beast of *Maiden Castle*, where it is associated with

the Welsh "Dor-Marth", meaning the Door of Death (III, 102-3). God's death sounds uncompromising enough; though while "God" remains undefined, we cannot be sure of the total meaning. Nietzsche in the Introductory section of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* announced that God was dead; and yet his book's primary emphasis, in "The Seven Seals", is his invocation addressed to the "Lady Eternity". Moffat's translation of the Bible uses "the Eternal" to denote Jehovah, or Yahweh. Our terms are inevitably confusing. We may say that "God" in Powys normally stands for a Being of order and control in a single universe; and in opposition we have Powys's more generally favoured belief in a "multiverse"; well defined by the philosopher Om at the end of *The Mountains of the Moon*, who indeed says that whether or not we survive will be a matter of individual choice.

The climber preserves hope, with his eye "on the ridge", that he will find his "love" again, like Rorlt in *The Mountains of the Moon*; his "other", his soul-mate. She it was who originally inspired his hatred of God; she, born of a tree-elemental, yet her soul sinking far deeper into the rock. The rock; Powys loves the half-life and "semi-death" of the inanimate, which brings him a strange assurance and promise, discussed in *The Art of Happiness* (1935 ed., I, 42-3). So too he favours all marginal impressions such as swamp, mist and twilight (my *Neglected Powers*, VI, 199). In a letter to me of 6 November 1957 he says that his greatest pleasure is that, not of sleep itself, but of *going-to-sleep* (see also *A Glastonbury Romance*, XXIV; 1933, 788; 1955, 755); like the dissolving into death of *Rodmoor* and *After My Fashion*, a pleasure not of life or death nor even life-death, but of the hyphen. This is why he responds to the "semi-death" of the inanimate.

Now, as he concentrates on his transition to the ridge, he suddenly exclaims: "What in the Mystery's name"—he cannot well say "God's name"—"is that Tint?" In that "ineffable tincture" there is sight of some ultimate mystery. It is "soft as a buried

urn", like a "last year's nest"; "brown" like a sword "bedded" in "the ooze". Impressions are partly reassuring yet "dubious", marginal.

Why should a "tint" be an ultimate mystery? In the *Autobiography* we hear how Powys used to send out his healing thoughts "like coloured angels"; (VIII, 373 630), which, though coloured, are "invisible" spirits (XII, 638). The use of colour is well known in spiritual healing. Correspondingly, Powys admired painting. In a letter of 7 August 1954 to Henry Miller he referred to it as "that greatest and nearest to nature of all the arts", which is "beyond words, beyond music, beyond touch, taste, sound or smell". And again on 2 February 1956, "the greatest of all arts is *not* literature at all" but, except for the very greatest poetry, "painting". So in "The Ridge" the ultimate is, not God, but a colour, an "enchantment" he shares with "midges and maggots". In *The Mountains of the Moon* the philosopher Om tells us that space is more ultimate than Time; lower life-forms cannot conceive of Time, but they all have dealings with Space. In *All or Nothing* we have space personified as a Space Monster. The sky and infinite space are Powys's central assurance. Contemplating them Powys feels impervious to the possibility of even a planetary disaster (*In Spite Of*, VII, 207, VIII, 237).

So here, "sharing this enchantment" with "midges and maggots", he now enjoys a "more than wonder", a "merge" and "fusion", "the losing myself in a colour", a blending of opposites, bells heard through thunder, smelling frankincense, blood on angels' wings. Somehow this enchantment is known to all life-forms, however diminutive. Powys's concentration in this poem on lower and minuscule life-forms appears to be one with his beyond normality intuition. And yet it does not involve any senses but "sight". Sight of a "stain" associated with "super-submersion", and "a golden drop that's beyond all the hope of men". This colour somehow means an utter reversal of illusory values, God's plan, God himself,

*The Ridge**

John Cowper Powys

CANTO I

Aye! What a thing is the passing of Cronos, the angular-minded,
 Dragging us all along, leaving us all alone,
 Leaving such fields un-furrowed, such corn-shocks unbanded,
 Flying sometimes like a bird, sinking sometimes like a stone!
 What was that Age of Gold long ago that one of the Muses
 Put into Hesiod's head prone on his face with his sheep?
 And which of them was it? Aye! But his spirit refuses
 Just as of old to say what goddess disturbed his sleep.
 She comes to me too this Muse who found Hesiod sleeping
 To me as I climb this hill and leave the wood for the world,
 But like that old farmer-sailor her name I am keeping
 Locked in the bin of my heart, shut in the keel of my hold.
 As I climb I can talk aloud like the Heedless Blurter of China
 Chanting without reserve my *De Profundis* of truth
 Caring not if my voice has the major-tone or the minor,
 Or if it murmurs in age what it should have shouted in youth—
 Or if its tones resemble the leaves of a garden suburban
 That refuses to sigh like a swamp, that refuses to rear like the sea
 But insists that a man goes as mad in a bowler as under a turban
 And that hearts that can bleed over wine can break over tea.

As I climb I can think aloud without rousing the fury
 Of those who wish that all souls but their own were dead;
 Don't they know that each man in himself is a judge and a jury,
 And we all have webs of spiders under our bed?
 I know myself as a toad when they swear I'm a dragon
 I know myself as a midge but they swear I'm a wasp,
 I could say such things—but get me a tag to tag on
 To prove that I'm a prize slow-worm and not an asp!
 But I'm wriggling and shuffling now whatever they call me
 Up through the autumn wood to the mountain land;
 And though it is easy enough for me to meet what appals me,
 I carry a horror within me that few can withstand.

And I find the sheddings of larches when first they start falling
 Suit my saurian nature as a drug to my fear;
 With the greenness of spruce I can sweetly lotion the mauling
 I got when I burst from Bedlam to come up here.
 Gold the rent ceiling through which the azure emerges
 A floor of gold is the ground—on gold I am setting my foot.
 Yet these are the same larch needles that when the sap rises and surges
 Burst like an emerald dew from the tree top down to the root.
 And the fungus scarlet-red that had only death-dots on their faces
 Lie all spongy and white, wrinkled, dissolving and done.

'What's left', all cry as I leave the wood, 'that nothing erases?'
 And the bog-moss groans to the gorse: 'Only the earth and the sun.'
 But surely at last there'll reach us some world-destroying convulsion
 With fire roaring above, with fire roaring below,
 Systole and diastole, in fatal embrace and repulsion
 Till, through a burnt-out void, the winds that lead nowhere blow—
 'Nowhere, you say?' cries a thin small wind like a mouse through a door-chink,
 'Where is your somewhere pray towards which I *could* lead?
 We winds are the leaders to nothing, I tell you, from nothing we shrink
 Than to be slaves to a something of which we've no need.
 The winds I would have you remember aren't the same as the air that projects
 them
 Any more than the waves, flames and sand of your mother the earth
 Are the same as the living bodies whose purpose protects them
 In creating from nothing at all the mystery of birth.
 Fire must feed on something and I am one something that feeds it,
 Feeds it with me as fuel, dissolves it in me as flame.'

'But of your mother the air, little wind, that you cleanse and she needs it—
 You and your mother, small wind, are you not the same?'
 Then as through the boards of a hutch by all rabbits deserted
 The little wind shrieked in my ears: 'No more than *you* are the same—

You, bone of a body with ghost of a spirit inserted—
 As the air, water, fire and earth you call by your name!
 'I yield, little wind, I yield! There are things that transforming
 Other things are themselves transformed into marvels new,
 And the foetus warmed in the womb is more than its warning
 And the atoms are less than me and the air you come from than you.
 I yield, little wind', I murmured. 'Yourself and the air and the motion
 That whistled you out of her depths to trouble the land and the sea
 Are no more really the same than I am the same as the potion
 Of electrons and photons and mesons that make up the body of me!'

So I boasted. But hearing these voices and all these mysteries sharing,
 I creaked like a crab in a crack, I swished like a snake in the grass,
 I gaped like a village-fool or bedlam-idiot staring,
 I yawned like a newt in a pond, I brayed like a dazed jack-ass.
 For the corpse of a man and a fly have the same preposterous issue,
 Parasites eating men, parasites eating flies;
 And small as *these* creatures are, so sweet is their tissue
 To parasites smaller still they're the Milk of Paradise.
 Suppose we all uttered together, we men and maggots and midges,
 One appalling howl from each body and heart and head,
 Would not the scoriae caves and all of the glacial ridges
 Echo with: 'Curse it—and die!' Echo with: 'Happy—the dead!'
 'And what will you cry?' croaks the mud. 'And what will you wail?' scrapes
 the gravel.
 'When the ripples roll on', laughs the sand, 'at Jupiter's nod?'

'You will hear in due course, my friends, when the hour comes to unravel
 The skein of our quenchless hate for Matter and Life and God!
 Those are the wicked spells wherewith 'nepheligeretay' Zeus
 Has, since he conquered Time with bolts more stupid than stone,
 Fooled and enslaved and perverted to his own incredibly base use
 Everything that had life from a midge to a mastodon.
 Matter engenders sex and sex spends its strength in devising
 Shrines for the sacred three, Matter and Life and Home;
 But a wave, a wave, a wave in the vast dim gulf is arising—
 Wait! Only wait! Only wait! It will sweep them away in foam!
 Whisper it whisper it whisper it, to each thing that has being!
 Whisper it to the bugs, whisper it to the fleas!
 Tell it to things so tiny they have no eyesight for seeing
 To things that scabble and scratch, to things that tickle and tease
 The Word has gone forth through Space, yet no man wrought it or brought
 it,
 Through Space and the stars in her roof, through Space and the seas on her
 floor,
 And all things in fire, earth, air, and all in the seas that have caught it:
 'Shake off God's love and God's hate and God's unnatural law!'
 Where are the ancient gods? Let them come in their black clouds and white
 clouds!
 O how they rise from the depth! O how they dive from the height!
 And the dead come gibbering back to enjoy themselves in their night-shrouds,
 And the prophets dance in their joy and the soothsayers whirl through the
 night!

And what in me says 'I am I', this silly old John as they call me
 Edging my way uphill, bracken behind and in front;
 I, the brother of fleas and of gnats. What on earth will befall me
 When I get to the top of the ridge and have borne the brunt?
 A skeleton topped by a skull and arms like a windmill in working
 And the soul of a baby louse, and the heart of a hound,
 Watching the dead-brown bracken, how some of it shivers in shirking
 The treacherous lash of the wind and some of it soaks on the ground.
 But keeping my eye on the ridge, an eye that can see from its socket,
 For an eye can be rusty and dead like a key in a swinging door,
 I tell myself there's a hope—though God and the Universe mock it—
 That when I have reached that ridge I shall find my love once more.
 For the wretchedest thing alive has its own mysterious 'other'
 Its other that answers its howl, its other that answers its groan,
 Its other that's nearer to it than brother or father or mother,
 Its other that out of a million worlds is for it alone.

John is my name, old John. It's a name not unknown in man's story,
 And yet I'm not Prester John or John who cuddled with God
 Or Son-of-the-Piper John who could only play in his glory
 'Over the Hills and away', nor am I the royal sod
 Who swore we might 'Have the Corpus' of every man he imprisoned,
 Nor John of the Cross, nor John of Thelema nor that Jack Straw;
 I am the Common John, the John unbedizened,
 The John who can eat dry bread and sleep on the floor.
 John is my name, old John, and there's one particular reason
 Why I should climb up here and aim at that crest.
 I'm playing a trick on no-one; I'm plotting no treason;
 To be at the Death of God is my single quest.

I had a true love once but they took her away for thinking
 Thoughts against God and for making me think the same.
 But in my dreams she comes back and now life is sinking
 Perhaps she'll come back for good. I've forgotten her name.
 Born of an ash-root she was, a tree-clemental,
 But her soul went deeper down than the tree-sap goes:
 Into the rock it went, the rock occidental,
 Where deep in a mineral bed the River Kaw flows.
 'Ridge of all ridges!' I groan, while I watch a cloud-chain like a cincture
 Sinking down on the ridge, stretching from east to west,
 'What in the Mystery's name, is that Tint, that ineffable tincture,
 Soft as a buried urn, dim as a last year's nest?
 Brown as a blade of bronze that the waves of the ocean have rusted
 Bedded deep in the ooze, sheathed in a chasm of silt;
 What is that dubious tint, with those gluey shadows encrusted:
 Like tar-beads in fir-bark? Was a sword plunged there to its hilt?'

I share, I share the enchantment with midgits and maggots, the wonder,
 The more than wonder, the merge, the solution, the fusion, the fling,
 The losing myself in a colour that's like hearing bells during thunder,
 Or smelling frankincense, blood on an angel's wing.
 Do you think my enchantment's not shared by every minutest amoeba?
 That the dung-beetle doesn't feel it, as he pushes his way through
 the dung?
 But this colour's not hearing or smelling or feeling either, mein lieber,
 It's the sight, it's the sight of the stain that covers the bung,
 That covers the mouth of the bung, the bung of super-submersion,
 The bung of a golden drop that's beyond all the hope of man.
 And what if the colour up there should mean an utter reversion
 Of all the illusions of life and the whole of God's plan?
 What if it were the colour of God's extinction,
 The colour of Matter's end and the final sweep
 Of all we know to a vortex of indistinction
 Of all we are to a sleep within a sleep?

What is the Night-Mare Life were the Dapple of Sancho
 Thrown off the buttocks of God and herself plunged down
 Into what's hid by Life, as the Prophet Blanco
 Tells us the stars are hid by that other clown?
 Howl, scream and shriek! You madmen from every quarter!
 You're now proved right and all the sane proved wrong!
 Let Hobdance foot it now with the hangman's daughter!
 And Mahu pipe while Modo beats the gong!
 Up to the ridge, old heart! Let come what may come!
Alla kai empes! 'All the same for that!'
 Let all the gods like Puppet-Players play dumb!
 'Dead—for a ducat dead!—a rat! a rat!'

CANTO II

All of a sudden ice-cold as a polar bear-skin
 Grey mist fell upon me shutting me all around;
 Without was a world of wonder I had no share in
 Inside was the grey cold grass and a whispering sound.

Moss and gravel and naked whistling heather,
 Withered bracken, whinberry, foliage wet.
 I felt like a beast that had come to the end of its tether,
 Like a last red flush in the west when the sun has set.
 'Infinite darkness', I thought, 'before of myself I am conscious.
 Infinite darkness', I thought, 'after I'm done for and gone!
 I am washed from the hands of existence even as Pontius
 Washed off the blood of Jesus and hurried on.
 There's not a louse in the sacred beard of Moses
 But yields to the same annihilation as I.
 There's not a worm in the poorest of Sharon's roses
 But has its hour like me and like me must die.
 I can see the path and I'm still alive and climbing;
 Is it nothing to be alive and be able to climb?
 The labour of lifting the feet and the labour of rhyming,
 Is not their power the art of marching in tune with Time?'

But what are the things on which this rhythmical marcher marches?
 Stalks of heather so old that they look like bone;
 Leaves of bracken bent into filagree arches,
 Beds of emerald moss and pillows of stone,
 And little opaque pebbles like eyeless sockets
 And crumbs of gravel the colour of mouldy bread;
 And roots of old dead thorns like exploded rockets,
 And whinberry leaves that are turning a curious red.
 And like cut curls from the beard of an aged Titan
 Wisps of lichen under the stalks of ling,
 And ferns so green that trampling can only heighten
 Their greenness into something beyond the Spring—
 But what is this? I climb and in tune with my climbing
 I tread the little mosses beneath my feet—
 And I rape the virginal words to round off my rhyming

**The Ridge*, written in about 1952, was first published in *A Review of English Literature*, January 1963.

Tom Copeman Hart

A Printer and a Powys

I met John Cowper Powys only once, in Cardiff in 1940. We corresponded from 1938 to 1955, mostly during the war years. The link between us originated in my work in printing and publishing; but I soon found that it was characteristic of J. C. Powys to stray into other areas, relevant or not, in his correspondence and he wrote about his work as a writer, his life at Corwen, and my family. To put the correspondence into context, I must briefly say why I was in South Wales before the war, and how the correspondence began.

I became a printer because, having been pipped at the post for a job in the Northamptonshire County Education Office for which the headmaster of my school had sponsored me, rather than settle down for another year at school I opted for the family printing business in Kettering and learned the trade there and at what was then the Leicester School of Arts and Crafts. 'Crafts' was the operative word as far as I was concerned. Good workmanship was an aspect of the job which was firmly impressed on me from the start and which was to become decisive as the years went by. And the printed word, 'the art preservative of all arts', was the revered product, linked with accuracy and unimpeded legibility, and with the almost sacred concept of freedom of speech and publication. I became in those early years a rather self-consciously meticulous printer with a set of standards which to this day get in the way of my reading of slipshod typography. Not for nothing were my father and his brother—who as master printers impressed these standards on me as I learned the trade—descended from a line of Scottish Congregational ministers.

But at least as important in my feeling for the spoken, written, and printed word was

my contact at Kettering Grammar School with the senior English master, Edmund Kirby. As is testified by H. E. Bates in his autobiography, *The Vanished Years*, Mr Kirby had a benign influence on the literary tastes and linguistic skills of generations of Northamptonshire boys from the time of his arrival at the school in 1919, battered by the late war, to the time of his retirement forty years later and even after that, for he never ceased to be active in the town's literary circles. I have kept in touch with him, and more than fifty years after leaving school I visited him and his wife at their home in Barton Seagrave.

I spent the first six years of my working life as a printer with this family business in Northamptonshire—from 1927 to 1933. The last thirty were spent in Colchester (where we now live) and in London. In between were an eventful twelve years in Wales—from 1933 to 1945—concerned with a healthy mixture of academic, literary, and commercial print plus some elementary learning of the Welsh language and, as I was deemed to be unfit for military service, a spell in the local Home Guard. ('What did you do in the War, daddy?' 'I helped to defend Penarth Golf Course.')

As an Anglo-Scot from the East Midlands, I was an unlikely innovator in the field of Welsh publishing. Nevertheless—it was at about the time of Munich—a friend in the Welsh office of the League of Nations Union showed me some old copies of *The Welsh Outlook*, then defunct, and suggested that it was time to think about a new magazine to replace it, in English, but dealing with specifically Welsh affairs and including the work of Welsh writers. As I was working in an old-established Welsh printing and publishing firm, my friend

thought I was well placed to take an initiative. The important thing, we agreed, would be to find the right editor.

1938-39 was not, as it turned out, the most propitious moment to launch a new magazine. But I thought the idea worth pursuing, sounded out my firm on their reactions, and began to probe around for a likely editor.

One of my first contacts was with Llewelyn Wyn Griffith, a civil servant and a poet, and editor of the *Proceedings* of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion. He was too busy to become involved himself. However, he made a strong plea for an approach to Gwyn Jones, then established as lecturer in the English Department at University College, Cardiff, and building a reputation as scholar and writer with a number of critical and fictional works to his name. (Later, he was to become a professor at Aberystwyth and then back at Cardiff.) Gwyn Jones, it transpired, had been thinking about a journal of the kind suggested and readily agreed to join in the discussion. After an initial look at the prospects we called together a group of people who had expressed interest.

The outcome of this meeting was a manifesto over a number of eminent names for circulation to possible subscribers, and an approach to a Cardiff advertising agent in the hope of raising a little capital. A company was set up to publish the magazine and to seek subscriptions and advertising revenue. *The Welsh Review* was launched, in a handsome green covered quarto format, set in Caslon Old Face type, in February 1939.

As the Editor said in his first editorial, "For more than ten years there has been talk in Wales of a journal for the English-speaking Welshman, and now, suddenly, here it is". As to its purpose, the Editor said, *inter alia*, "The Welsh-speaking Welsh have their newspapers and journals; the English-speaking Welsh have not—and decidedly they should have . . . Welsh ought to be the first language of all us Welshmen—but it isn't, and most are afraid it never will be . . . Our prospectus said . . . that the

WELSH REVIEW although conducted in English will recognise the unique importance of the Welsh language and the distinctive national culture inseparable from it". The Editor went on to stress his intention to "safeguard and interpret that language and culture" by all means available to the journal.

The *Review* did not survive long enough to see the whole of its stated aims achieved. Even now the recognition of the importance of the Welsh language, as of any cultural matter where political and economic expediency is at stake, seems as remote as it was in those last few pre-war days of 1939—some would say even more remote. There were in any case criticisms of the whole effort: such a publication in English, it was said, could only delay the advance towards a Welsh-speaking Wales.

In his second editorial Gwyn Jones was discussing Air Raid Precautions in the light of the threat "to terrorize and mass-murder innocents", a threat which he contrasted with "men of but moderate destruction" like Genghis Khan and Frederick the Great. In April I contributed an article on the obstacles to peace which sadly still seems to have some relevance to our own situation. The October Editorial opened thus: "As I write these words the peoples of half Europe are at war . . ."

The stringencies of war pressed heavily on the young and unsubsidised journal. The issue of November 1939 carried a "late announcement"—that issue would be the last, at least for the time being. Publication was in fact resumed in a more modest format in 1944 and continued until, in the issue dated Winter 1948, Gwyn Jones finally announced suspension of publication. "We should," he said "have been ten years old next February, and have published thirty numbers altogether"—no mean achievement, in the face of the financial and distribution problems (some wholesalers ordered far more than they could sell and returns were coming in six months after publication).

The achievement is the greater when the wide selection of illustrious contributors is

remembered. W. H. Davies, Huw Menai, Reynolds Stone, Kate Roberts, Ernest Rhys, Geraint Goodwin, Idris Bell, R. M. Lockley, John Petts, George Ewart Evans, Emyln Williams, Margiad Evans, Thomas Jones, Glyn Jones, Hugh MacDiarmid—all these contributed during 1939. Llewelyn Powys wrote on “Welsh and English” in the May issue. His article ended with these words: “The blood in my own veins is so mixed that in spite of my two names I cannot brag of being a Welshman as much as I would like. Let this be as it may, I find that as the years gather it is to the Welsh manner of approaching life that I am most drawn.” Before the end of the year Llewelyn was dead and the *Review* in suspense.

But to go back: one day in late 1938, before our launching date but when the editor had gone far to getting his material for 1939 mapped out, a letter arrived on my desk marked on the envelope “Private and confidential”, the words heavily underscored. It was addressed to me as secretary for *The Welsh Review* but it was about editorial matters so I passed it to Gwyn Jones. One of the sentences read “I fancy the editor doesn’t much care for my kind of letter”. It was signed J. C. Powys.

For some years I had been an interested reader of Theodore, Llewelyn and John Cowper Powys (in that chronological order). As I then saw myself as an embryo writer of short stories, I had found T. F. Powys of special interest. The style of Llewelyn was a revered model. But it was *Glastonbury*, and still more the *Autobiography*, of the senior brother that swept me away on a flood of enthusiasm. To receive a letter from this Homeric person was a surprise of the most dramatic order. I did not know then that, as its writer was to say in a letter to his brother Llewelyn on 9 May 1939, “John’s Works are in the pockets of thousands of young men.”

Both John Cowper and Llewelyn had been asked to write for the *Review*. Llewelyn’s contribution arrived punctually from Davos Plaz. John, from Corwen, sought guidance as to the kind of subject he should deal with.

Gwyn Jones asked me to reply to John’s first letter. I wrote in December and his reply came dated 25 January 1939:

Please pardon my belated reply to your letter of *last year*! But I was thinking over the sort of ‘contribution’ I’d best make to the *Review*: and I put off replying . . . till I had come to a conclusion.

What I would *like best* to write wd. be an essay—and it wd. be a provocative one enough!—on the whole question of *Anglo-Welsh Literature* replying but not unsympathetically (and yet not altogether mildly or tamely) to Mr Saunders Lewis’s denial that such a Monster could exist! I’ve lived for nearly 4 years in N. Wales now and have been patiently reading the *Brython* with the aid of a Dictionary for nearly a year so that I am in rather an exceptionally good position to write in defence of Anglo-Welsh Literature having Elena Pugh the Eisteddfod Gold Medallist for the Welsh novel as my good friend *here*, and Huw Menai, the great Rhondda poet *in English*, as my friend in the South—So I really do know a little of both sides in this nice controversy—the mere existence of which is a proof of how much alive the Principality is! . . . If this topic is already pre-empted for your first 2 or 3 numbers I’d love to write on the *Mabinogion*. But *that* wd. take me longer to do of course.

Gwyn Jones agreed to the first suggestion, Anglo-Welsh literature, one of the *raisons d’être* for the *Review*. The outcome was an essay of some 3000 words under the title “Welsh Culture” in the issue of June 1939; it was reprinted in *Obstinate Cymric* (1947).

The reference to Huw Menai, “the great Rhondda poet”, was to be echoed by a poem by Menai in the first issue of the *Review*, February 1939, called “As time the sculptor . . .” In a letter acknowledging payment for this poem, Huw Menai expressed his very deep affection for Powys and said he knew John would not be happy until they could meet again. In a postscript to his letter of 31 January 1939, Powys said, “Oh but I must just add how highly I think of your 1st No.—and *how greatly* I admire Huw Menai’s poem. I fear the poems in the *next* number won’t thrill me as much”.

To jump forward a few months, one of the contributions to the May issue of the *Review* was a translation by B. J. Morse of Rilke's First Duino Elegy. Morse had translated the other Elegies, and we printed them privately for him later. Powys made a series of comments on the May issue, culminating in these words on the Rilke: "But I confess I *grudged* from the bottom of my heart and from the uttermost dregs of my critical intuition about what is and isn't poetry in me—this poem of *Rainer Maria Rilke*! It is exactly worthy of being attacked with violence and unscrupulous savagery and spleen because my feeling against it is part of an instinct that the very spirits of the vasty deep have put into me—namely that this Rainer Maria Rilke is as *much over-rated* as our own author of *The Shropshire Lad*!

Over-rated,

over-rated,

over-rated—is what *he* is!

Yes! I deeply grudge the entrance of this particular *Fashionable Cult* for Rainer Maria Rilke (I'd like, but I mustn't of course, to play upon this poet's name in a style à la James Joyce!) into this splendid *Welsh Review*. But perhaps you'd better keep this for your own private ears—but I like to play the role of your one single absolutely frank reader!" (This letter was marked "Confidential" but I am sure that forty years on I can be released from his injunction. Just as his "Welshness" was a highly charged emotion (compare Llewelyn's restrained confession of his attraction towards "the Welsh manner of approaching life" with John's claims to Welshness in the chapter "Welsh Aborigines" in *Obstinate Cymric*), so his attribution of merit as between Huw Menai and Rilke was based on an emotional rather than an intellectual judgement—nothing wrong with that, of course, where poetry is concerned.)

In his letter of 31 January he had referred for the first time in our correspondence to "my present big new venture which is nothing less than an Historical Novel on Owen Glendower! I am half-way thro' it. It *may* turn out to run to a thousand printed pages—so you see I've got my job cut out!"

On 16 March his ms. had got "as far as page 1290 of my Owen—I think I'll entitle it just simply '*Owen—ân Historical Novel*'—how does that strike you? I don't want it to be mistaken for a 'History' or a 'Study' or something! as it might be if I called it '*Owen Glendower*'"—which of course is precisely what it was called. Who persuaded him to go against his own judgement? On 10 February he had written "I'm filling a gap this evening in our Corwen Cymrodorion Programme by a *lecture* on Owen. Whether this'll have a good or a bad effect on my *Novel* I can't tell—probably none, either way". On 15 February he reported on this lecture: "I enjoyed my lecture on Owen; and *some* anyway of my audience, I could *see*, did! I think it has a certain almost morbid—well, anyway a Circus interest—to my audiences now, that I can carry it off *without teeth* . . . for since I live entirely on liquids I have no need of these tribulations . . . but long practise at lecturing must have made me *use my teeth* in speaking much less than most people do!"

At about this time we began to discuss the possibility of his coming to Cardiff to lecture. He had been to Bridgend, through the good offices of Mr Benson Roberts, during November 1938. On 15 February he said he would like to come to Cardiff: his fee would be ten guineas and he would pay his own travel expenses; but that lecture did not materialise before I left Cardiff in 1945 (though he did drop in at Cardiff on his way to Bridgend for a second lecture there in 1940), and hearing him lecture was to be one of my unrealised ambitions.

The birth of the *Welsh Review* almost coincided with the death at Roquebrune of W. B. Yeats. The event was commemorated by a poem in our March issue by O. E. (Oliver Edwards). The closing lines of O.E.'s poem were,

Mind says: 'Never mind'.

Heart says: 'Agony'.

In a letter of 10 March our "one single absolutely frank reader" found the issue "interesting and arresting from cover to cover . . . the poetry wasn't half—not half—as experimental as I dreaded; and I liked

very much that poem to Yeats—save that *agony* seemed to me far too strong a word for any death save of a lover or a child or one of two old people. I cannot believe that this poet or writer felt agony. The shock of so strong a word was injurious I think to the poem which was a moving one to me”.

As I have said, Llewelyn’s article, “Welsh and English”, appeared in the April issue. In July there was a review by Gwyn Jones of *Love and Death, Glory of Life, and The Book of Days of Llewelyn Powys*. A line drawing based on a photograph of Llewelyn had been produced to accompany this review, but we were doubtful about its ‘likeness’ and I sent it to J.C.P. for his opinion. On 16 March he commented thus: “What I wd. do if I were Editor of the Review is ‘Print and let it go!’ Whether Llewelyn himself wd. say *just that* I cannot tell! Of course it *isn’t* his *expression*. I have the photo before me here from wh. ’twas taken and the eyes are not at all widely open, but rather *screwed* up under *very heavily drooping eyelids*. But your ‘Mr S.’ has got the ‘ensemble’ of it *so very well*—the nose and the beard and the forehead and hair; he’s got *absolutely right*. I would say most decidedly ‘Print’ & if Llewelyn grumbles I’m prepared to *take the blame*. Yes not only ‘if I were Editor’ but *as I am* Llewelyn’s elder brother I’m strongly in favour of printing it. But I’m a very bad adviser in these things being so terribly slap-dash, over-riding, & un-scrupulous; whereas Llewelyn is just the opposite! But he’ll only see the *fait accompli*! Well, you’ll have to give the casting vote. But I’d risk it if I were you!”

In fact we did not risk it.

On 19 May J.C.P. reported, “I come up like a diver from the sea of five centuries so have I got absolutely carried with the surge and silt and shells (and sea-monsters unheard!) of 1400-1412”. On 5 June he was “so absolutely immersed in my ‘Owen—an Hist. Novel’ as I *hope* the Publishers will let me call it—that I confess I haven’t yet even opened the June Number to see how my article looks! I’m rushing at top speed to try to finish it in time to get it out ‘in the Fall’ as

we say over there but I’m beginning to doubt if I can . . . the *longer* my book gets—*any* book I write—the better it gets! I am born Long-Winded and only begin to believe in my own characters when I’ve written a thousand pages (anyway of my own long-hand scrawl) about them! So it does seem crazy to spoil the book by cutting *the end short* when it keeps getting better and better. I’m so heavy and clumsy and stilted and ponderous at the start . . . that if the Publishers *are* going to *cut* I want to make it impossible for them to have the heart to cut at the end . . . I wish to heaven they wouldn’t cut at all . . . I certainly *am* enjoying the writing of this book; and the freedom from peril of *Libel* is so wonderful!” (A contributory cause of his shortage of money in those years was presumably the result of the *Glastonbury* libel case. He told me later, when we met in 1940, that he had more than forgiven the Welsh judge who had presided over the libel case because of that particular judge’s liberal attitude to Welsh Nationalist conscientious objectors.)

On 10 September he found the *Review* still improving: “‘as good as the Dial’ as I’ve grown used to say (ever since the ‘Dial’ ended), as the highest possible praise for a Magazine!” As I had nothing to do with the editing of the journal I can say that I shared Powys’s high regard for the standards achieved as a result of Gwyn Jones’s editorship during its all too short existence. I doubt if any other available editor in the Wales of that time could have achieved as much.

On 31 October, “You’ll smile to hear that I *still* am writing my ‘Owen’! I am *tired* of saying ‘it’ll be finished by the end of this month’ so now I’ll content myself with saying that ‘Touch Wood’ and ‘D.V.’ and ‘in spite of Hitler’ it *will* be finished!” Not until Boxing Day 1939 was he able to say “I’ve written *Finis* at last on *page 2000* in my long hand of ‘Owen’.”

That same letter of 31 October also contained further generous comment on the *Review*, then, alas! as part of what seemed to be the obituary of the brief achievement. “*I am so sorry*. With many others I shall

miss—miss it as much as any Periodical that has died and is now a Hallowe'en ghost since the New York '*Dial*' . . . finally edited by my sister-in-law Alyse Gregory.

"Well! you were the one, Mr Jones told me, *who first thought of this Review* so I cannot help writing to you and sending a sort [of] invisible Wreath of *Black Roses* for its grave and a hope of its *Ressurrection* [sic].

"And now leaving the matter of the Review & letting the dead bury its noble dead, I do want so much to know whether you and your wife—to whom if you please give my grateful remembrance, if you can use that word for a lady you have only *imagined!*) are all right; & what is happening to you in these dark days. You'll smile to hear that I *still* am writing my 'Owen'!"

I like to think that the *Welsh Review*, whatever else it did or failed to do, gave some kind of stimulus to J.C. Powys at a time when he was struggling with his "Welshness". There were others far better qualified than I to extend and add to this stimulus, especially scholars whose works on the old Welsh texts were a valuable source of material for him. I was involved as a printer with a number of such works published by the University Press Board, then in the scholarly hands of Jenkyn James at the University Registry in Cardiff. The authors concerned included such giants as Professor W. J. Gruffydd and Professor Ifor Williams, of whose *Canu Aneurin* I sent Powys a copy, as well as *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn* by Ifor Williams and J. Ll. Williams. On 20 November 1939, after I had given him some impressions of these men, he wrote, "Nothing—I tell you *nothing*—(for I'm a regular *Boswell* grown old) pleases me more than descriptions . . . of great men! I could listen for hours to all your descriptions of these celebrities who are *real* celebrities to a bookworm like me as is not the case with other kinds! But [I] must and will wait till I know a *bit* more Welsh before being introduced to any of them! I wasn't so timid of Mr Gwyn Jones [who had been to see Powys at Corwen] because he was (comparatively speaking) a young man—& besides *his* scholarly achievements (in Norse) are totally

outside and beyond my reach and *also* because being a fellow historical novelist we had so much to discuss of a *craftsman-technical* kind, that knocks the *Boswell*, in my old skull, *out*; and substitutes another type of person altogether!"

As to the *Gwaith Guto'r Glyn*, on Boxing Day 1939 he "opened it at the Xmas gathering of No. 7 & No. 8 Cae Coed. For my American lady's mother and aunt live next door an incalculable blessing to me for I no longer see my lady pining for lack of proper food and unable to make wh. I fancy few ladies *can* make to *cook for herself* . . . 'Tis the necessity of *the Man's* being fed that keeps most menages going & I of course live on milk and have nothing to eat save a bit of stale white bread—to my strong tea! or waiting the best of the day as she used to do when we lived in Dorchester trailing thro' the streets to find 'a place to eat'! and at once gave all my 3 American ladies—as I did for the best years of my life!—a Lecture on the Place-Names mentioned by friend Guto! . . . Corwen coming in again and again."

Powys referred several times to the difficulties he was having with the Welsh language. I was well placed to send him copies of some of the books he needed, as I have said, and he was extravagantly grateful in his acknowledgements. On 4 January 1940 he said with characteristic exaggeration "I certainly shall owe to you . . . more than to anyone else the step-ladder which I need for my next step in Welsh. I am slowly getting on with *reading* Welsh though speaking it and understanding it spoken *are still beyond me*." What progress he made later I do not know, but I imagine he remained inept at speaking the language of his—or some of his—fathers. "I have no ear for music", he said in the same letter, "and I can't imitate sounds because I don't really *hear* them properly. 'Twas the same in America. I lived there (with many trips home) for 30 years but kept my 'English brogue', as they call it over there, unimpaired. Why? Simply because I didn't *hear* the *American 'brogue'*! I heard *English*—I could *just* catch the *Darky* talk in the South. But the difference between Boston and

Chicago and Chicago and Denver was simply nothing to my unmusical ears!"

During March 1940 he wrote at length about an impending visit to South Wales which would bring him through Cardiff on the way to Bridgend where he was to lecture on Shakespeare and where he and Phyllis Playter were to stay with Mr Benson Roberts. After the Cae Coed address he wrote "I won't put the date because it's an unlucky one . . . but the day is Wednesday and the month is March". Bad luck was perhaps in the air. We had hoped that Miss Playter and he could meet my wife and me in Cardiff on the way to Bridgend. In the event neither my wife nor Miss Playter was able to be in Cardiff. "I am so sorry" he wrote, "I shall not meet your lady. But since I wrote I've had 2 pieces of bad news: so this is the 3rd. *Three bad tidings*. My Owen has been turned down by Casells as too long for these days of shortage of paper and I won't cut it though no-one I confess as yet has *asked me* to do so!—but I keep telling everybody (whether they ask me or not)—I won't I won't *I won't cut it*—and it's nearly 400,000 words! that is about 1000 printed pages I fancy. But I *think* they'll take it in *New York*. 2. My lady has to go to London to her *American Dentist* so she cannot come with me. We shall start together as far as Shrewsbury and come back together on Thursday (D.V. D.V. D.V. *Touch Wood!*) but I shall start at 9 am from Corwen *but on Monday 1st* (instead of Friday 30th). And they say I reach Cardiff at 2.37". And he had not even written that fateful date at the top of his letter! He was sceptical about what 'they' said. However, we duly met at Cardiff General Station on Monday 1 March and spent the afternoon together. For lunch at the Station he would have no more than a glass of milk and a poached egg, of which he ate only what could be conveyed in a tea-spoon; and even that was more than his 'normal' diet as described in his Boxing Day letter.

I had arranged for him to meet Dr Iorwerth Peate at the National Museum of Wales where I was almost the proverbial fly on the wall listening to their conversation, in

the course of which Powys said that a certain book by another author had long boring passages and that similar passages were to be found in his own work—a good book, he said, had to have boring passages. He admitted with pride that he himself was nothing if not long-winded and sometimes boring. His refusal to cut 'Owen' was fully in character. In an earlier letter (4 April 1939) he was "delighted to learn about my long-winded article not being cut but appearing altogether en masse in the June number [of the *Welsh Review*] for there's no doubt my qualities as a writer *require length* and there I'm just the opposite to Llewelyn! He's a regular stylist, like those old writers he uses so aptly".

In June 1940 both north and south Wales were feeling the effects of the intensifying air raids. Some friends of ours living in Cardiff had sent their children to Canada for safety, and we were considering the possibility of doing something similar with our two children. I asked J.C.P. what he and his 'American ladies' would advise. He prefaced his reply with an account of air raid precautions in Cae Coed: "Yes and not only is Miss Playter with me but next door to us two aged *American ladies* her mother and aunt (who is getting on for eighty) have despised the idea of leaving this country tho' bombarded by their Consul. We have our 'little arrangements'—towards wh. I am the dedicated getter of *sand* for an anti-incendiary scoop and I procure this—wh. gives me a lovely excuse for a walk by the river . . . I wd. have if I were you no alarm about the *treatment* of a child in Canada or America—whereas in this country—But you'll have to be prepared for their being *changed for life* by the New World".

He then passed on Phyllis Playter's advice—"Not to do it unless you feel *very sure* you want to. She says it's like marriage and unless you have an impulse *over all* to get them off—better *not* do it".

By a coincidence, as I transcribed this in 1981, I read in the *Observer* a review of a book describing this very phenomenon of sending children across the Atlantic for safety. The review began thus: "In the brief

period between late May and late September 1940, something over 16,000 children were sent abroad . . . Most went to Canada and the United States . . . Then, on September 17, a boat . . . was torpedoed in the Atlantic, with almost a hundred children on board . . . Most were killed; almost immediately the government suspended all such overseas evacuation."

I am glad to say we kept our children with us. One of our friends' children was badly savaged by a dog in Canada. Our only immediate loss at home was a small cupressus shrub burned by an incendiary bomb—to the intense anger of my wife Dorothy as she attacked the flames with sand. Many, like those in the shipwreck referred to in the *Observer* review, which happened at about the same time, were less fortunate.

A letter from Powys dated 20 April 1942, acknowledging a Welsh book I had sent him, with which I enclosed a note saying that I was ordering *Owen Glendower* (published at last), contained this injunction: ". . . for heaven's sake my dear friend *don't* 'ee get one, now; for I am *sending* you one as a *gift of gratitude* for all you have done for my *Welsh education*." *Owen* duly arrived, in the Bodley Head's photo-litho reproduction of the American edition, not far short of the feared 1000 printed pages, and inscribed "on St Mark's Day, April 25th, 1942".

From time to time I would send him a book in Welsh of the kind I knew he valued, and back came his letters of thanks, reporting on the progress of his writing, and enquiring about each of the members of my family. In spite of his work, and his health and increasing blindness, not to mention his duties as gatherer of anti-incendiary sand for Cae Coed, he could always find time to correspond at some length and with real compassion with the not inconsiderable number of people like me who would, by most busy and distinguished eminences, have been brushed off with a formal acknowledgement.

On 22 March 1943 he had "finished a book on Old Age for J. Cape, and one on Dostoevsky for Staples & Staples, 2/6

paper-bound", both of which we acquired and enjoyed, especially the *Dostoevsky*.

On the lateness of that spring of 1943, he reported that "I have so far only seen growing wild Celandine, Primrose, 1 violet not a purple one but the paler kind, lots of Dog-Mercury, 1 Stitchwort—*only today!* Potentilla or wild strawberry plant (I'm not sure which it is), Dandelion, Coltsfoot, Daisy". A late spring perhaps, but less arduous (at least as regards climate) than the winter of 1407-08, of which in the "Argument" at the end of *Owen Glendower* this minute observer of nature recorded that there was "the worst winter for a hundred years. From December to March the country was covered with snow; and the merles, mavis, fieldfares, plovers died off by the thousand". There was no exaggeration in what J.C.P. had said earlier: "I come up like a diver from the sea of five centuries . . ." Living in Corwen, near the Berwyns and other haunts of the Glendower family, the journey of 500 years through time had been no great difficulty for this "Welsh aboriginal".

By 12 February 1944 he was welcoming news of the impending revival of the *Welsh Review*. His own chief worries, he said, "are of the financial kind owing [to] the publishers keeping their paper for best sellers & owing to my inability to catch the mysterious secret of *how* to become a best-seller or even a *second* best one!"

Later that year, when it became more realistic to think about such things, we debated at home whether to stay on in Wales after the war, or whether we should move back into England. Most of our friends seemed to think there wouldn't be all that much difference; but I had to consider the special needs of my job which included, if I stayed, a much more serious effort to become Welsh speaking. There were strong arguments for doing just that. But events decided otherwise. A more or less chance contact resulted in a decision to accept the management of a smaller printing firm, and we moved to Colchester in June 1945.

I had had a long letter from J.C.P. dated 19 February 1945 acknowledging a copy of

Hanes Llenyddiaeth Gymraeg by Thomas Parry, printed by my Cardiff firm for the University Press Board. He would add it to his collection of works “in this grand and ancient tongue of our ‘old and haughty nation proud in arms’ as Milton says”.

In my letter to him I had said something about hopes for a saner world after the war. He was moderately pessimistic on these matters—as most of us have become since. “Alas!” he wrote, “under our Triumvirate Triumphans with its spheres of very very doubtful ‘influence’ there does not seem much sign of that ‘Federation of the World’ of which you and I find it hard not to think! But the little nations may have a chance to make at least *a few shrill and angry voices heard* at San Francisco in April according to what we read. O I agree heartily in every single word you say in your letter . . . The best thing about Russian Communism—and I fancy we’d better all begin adjusting our minds to *some* sort of Communism—for after all tho’ it *is* so Jesuitical and opportunist and tho’ its public propaganda is so awful—it *does* give an equal deal to mortal men of *every colour of skin*—which is more than our pharisees of *lip-liberty* are ready to give! *And lots of Jews are communists*—and if the House of Israel isn’t individualistic in its thinking and feeling what race is?”

I wish now that I could remember “every single word” I said in my letter. Like so many others, I was actively thinking then of some form of international authority, some way of ordering financial and economic activities which would limit the factors making for war. With all his commitment to attitudes which would make the ills of the world acceptable, Powys was surprisingly *au fait* with constructive attempts to prevent rather than cure those ills. But I fancy he would have been less surprised and disappointed at the failure of those attempts than I have been; though I suspect we would not have disagreed about the obscenities of nuclear mega-death.

In a postscript to that letter of 19 February 1945, he referred to his book on Rabelais, then in the press, as “what is

called an ‘ambitious’ work”. He hoped our move to Colchester, for which he tried to find a modern Welsh translation, would not end our correspondence. But inevitably we communicated less frequently. My involvement in the printing of books in Welsh, including translations of works from the period he was interested in, had been one of the main threads of our correspondence, and this was severed by our removal from Wales. Also, and more significant, I had become very conscious of his failing eyesight and accepted that I had no right to trespass on his resources.

“Forgive this scrawl”, he wrote in November 1946, “. . . but I’ve only got *one eye* now and have to guard it like the eye of Polyphemus himself for my books.” Another reference to his health on 5 December: “1000 thanks my friend for your good sympathy over my cataracted eye—but the left one seems very strong and in good form . . . It’s such a relief to me to be cured (largely by Olive Oil and Parafin liquid) of my gastric trouble which had kept me ill for a year—that this old eye-business is a minor matter”.

My excuse for the letter which evoked his reply of 27 November 1946 was a disaster which followed during the year after our move to Colchester. My wife Dorothy died tragically in August 1946 and in due course I wrote to J.C.P. and told the story—with some diffidence for I knew he would reply at length. He did, and with wisdom of a depth that was of the utmost help in those circumstances. He had discussed the event with Phyllis Playter, “my lady here with me who like yours has had mental trouble and bad crises in her time [and] says that the faithfullest and truest way you can show your love, and I can I think see just what she means, is by *not putting her in the wrong* by letting your life go to pieces because she rushed on death and left you . . . if you pick up and pull yourself together and *re-normalise* your life you do the very very kindest thing you *could* do for her; for you *‘let her off’*, so to say, *from feeling so terribly in the wrong.*”

This was when he was preparing *Obstin-*

ate Cymric for Keidrich Rhys and the Druid Press. "My essay", he said, "is on 'my philosophy up to date under Welsh influence' . . . And I explain in this essay that my main idea at this epoch of my life (74 last October) is to have faith that I can *force myself* to enjoy life", and there followed an inventory of the elements "of these Berwyn moors" which he used in his ritual of enjoyment, rejecting all religion, and in the process getting rid of remorse: "naked and unashamed as I came into the world I just *force myself to enjoy what fate or chance has thrown round me!*"

He expanded on his technique for acquiring a philosophy based on "*natural heathen common sense* . . . avoid 'Xtian Love' like *the devil!* for it carries with it this accurst 'hate of evil' which is *more evil* than any 'evil' itself that I've heard of!"

Towards the end of this longest of the letters I had from him, he said "I would talk freely about your wife's killing herself—Above all things don't let it be a dark secret. Say to your son 'when your dear mother took her life' and so forth. For myself . . . I admire her courage with awe and reverence."

That letter, and the support of friends, and the demands of my job, and in due course my second marriage (to Felicity Graham-Brown whose husband had gone down with a torpedoed troop ship in the Mediterranean), helped me back to normality. Part of that normality was the birth of a son, Stephen to Felicity and me. J.C.P. had persistently asked to be kept informed of events, and our son's birth seemed to be an event which would show him that I had taken his advice.

On the "Eve of New Year's Eve" 1949, ten years after our correspondence began and after I had told him of my marriage, he wrote—"O my dear friend your letter is a real comfort and relief to me. I rejoice in your happy marriage to your Felicity. What a lovely name of happy omen! This is the first time I've ever heard of anyone having a real live lady called by this lucky name!"

Our son Stephen Copeman Hart was born on 18 January 1950. In spite of the stated misgivings about writing to J.C.P., I told him of this important stage in the 'renormalisation' process and his salutation of 20 January opened with a large "Hurrah! Congratulations to you all! . . . May your wife and yourself live to see the initials 'S.C.H.' become *FAMOUS*. And so it will be by a *Druid's* decree! . . . The Good Powers be with you and your wife and with hers and with yours and with Stephen!"

He wrote in July 1951 about, among other things, the new publishing arrangements he had made with Macdonald—"for the Bodley Head seemed glad to get rid of me and S & S in New York have no place now for my sort of work."

He had referred earlier to "a Poem in Hexameters and Pentameters [sic] entitled '*The Death of God*'" which I had thought might be produced by a private press I was involved in. But his books for Macdonald had of course to take precedence, and I assume they would have had first refusal of this poem. "I don't see . . . *how* I am to keep my promise to you"—in fact there was no promise—"about that Death of God Poem. As you can easily imagine with my penchant for dying deities God seems to *die in prose* in every book I am writing for Macdonald—and if I make him die for you also the Old Devil may rise from his Death Bed and compose in thunder: 'the Death of Powys!'"

For our 1954 Christmas card we used a wood engraving by our friend John O'Connor, and one went as usual to J.C.P. It evoked the penultimate word we were to have from him—"This little engraving with the half-open gate and the holly in the foreground and the ivy leaves and the bird make up the sort of vignette I know so well in this neighbourhood."

The very last word was on a postcard dated the "Eve of Xmas Eve" (1955): "All the Invisible Lords be with you!"

Charles Rogers

Recollections of a Montacute Boot Boy

(Charles Rogers was born in Montacute in 1894 and has spent most of his life in the village. These are his recollections of the Powys family.)

The Reverend Charles Francis Powys was Vicar of Montacute from 1886 to 1918 and was a very honest and worthy man. Although not gifted with eloquence, he was able to preach a well-reasoned sermon, closely written and never short. There was always a good congregation and a full choir to help make his services interesting and worthwhile. His large family helped him in his pastoral work and supported him at his various meetings. He never neglected the chance of visiting the sick and elderly of the village, but he was at a disadvantage since he could scarcely ever think of anything to say, so that embarrassing silences fell during many of his calls. He used to visit an old lady in her eighties who lived with her spinster daughter, herself approaching middle age and a very expert glove-maker who could stitch the leather very quickly. On his visits, the Vicar would watch her at work, fascinated by her speed and skill. Usually, her Mother would be seated at the table shearing off the rough edges of the leather or turning the gloves right way round from inside out, poking the fingers and thumbs with a polished, tapering stick, keeping a sharp eye out for "hop" stitches before smoothing the gloves flat and piling them in half dozens. But, on one particular visit, the old lady was nowhere to be seen and when the Vicar asked for her, he was told that, "Mother have a-took to her bed and don't get up these last few days." Somewhat perturbed, the Vicar asked if he might go up to see her. He cautiously climbed the twisted, creaking stairs and found the old lady with eyes half closed, very still and pale. She didn't greet him, as was her wont, with a word and a smile. Not wishing to disturb her, the Vicar knelt down by her bed asking if she would say the Lord's Prayer with him. Her lips

moved in a very quiet whisper. He stood up again and, as quietly as he could, made his way downstairs again, saying, "She *is* poorly!" He resumed his seat and sat in silence watching the gloves being stitched. During his long silences, he had a habit of rubbing his hands down over his knees which made his trousers of dark broadcloth shine like silk. After ten minutes or so of agonising silence, a strong voice came from the top of the stairs, "Is 'er gone? Did 'er lef' I a shillin'?" The Vicar grabbed his hat and gloves and hastily replied, "I was just going . . . and I *have* left a shilling!"

In his last years before retirement, Mr Powys was rather hesitant and forgetful, but he was always a good Vicar and a gentleman.

Mrs Powys was a very dutiful, quiet-spoken lady and how she managed to achieve all the things she did was a marvel. She managed to bring up her eleven children and keep them together as a family without ever losing her standing.

It seemed that, as a family, they were never happier than when they were walking the hills and fields of Montacute, exploring all the nooks and hollows of Ham Hill and St. Michael's Hill. The Squire had given them leave to go where they wished on his estate—a privilege not extended to any other residents. Oftentimes they roamed along the streams and the brooks as far away as Ilchester and Limington and nothing of interest escaped their keen eyes. Often we would hear their excited chatter, four or five of them together, as they started out on their adventures, their walking boots and shoes making much noise on the stony roads and paths. On Sundays they would dutifully go to church for the morning service at 11 and the evening one at 6.30. One memory which



Charles Rogers at 15 in 'Little Gulley' Montacute.



The Rev. C. F. Powys with daughters Gertrude and Marion on the Vicarage tennis court.



The Vicarage (now called 'Park House') Montacute, 1981.

made a deep impression on me was of John Cowper, the eldest son, reading the Lesson on a Sunday morning. Although, as a chorister, I attended Church regularly, I have never heard the like. A tall, thick-set, lumbering figure, with a noble head and crinkly hair, dressed in sober colours, with a black cloak over all, he seemed to be a being from another region. Standing as far back from the great Bible as the platform allowed, he held the eyes and ears of the whole congregation with his great dramatic and eloquent interpretation of the story of David and Goliath, delivered in a strong, clear voice which transported old and young alike back to those remote biblical days and lives. I am quite sure that nobody present remembered anything else about the service and never forgot John Cowper Powys.

I was much too young to encounter or to speak to Littleton, the second son, but I knew of his prowess as a sportsman and especially as a cricketer. When he and Gerard Phelips, second son of the Squire, were home on holiday, the village team offered them a game and great interest was stirred. Each of them failed with a low score in a needle match which we lost against a Yeovil side. Littleton was a splendid Head of Sherborne Prep. School and always a great gentleman.

Of Theodore and Bertie, I knew little, but sometimes saw them at Church or in the street when they were on vacation. In a group together, the Powys sons all looked alike, with the same statistics of height and breadth and all with noble heads and features. I was lucky that I could sometimes



St. Catherine's Church, Montacute.

of a Saturday morning, go to the Vicarage with my Uncle, Herbert Rogers who was gardener to the Powyses for many years. I used to try to help him to clean a dozen or more pairs of boots and shoes, often after they had been worn on muddy rambles around the district. No small job to start the day. It was here that I came to know and like Llewelyn who at that time was in the early throes of T.B. He used to sit in the sun in the yard at the back of the Vicarage, wrapped in woolly garments and with a shawl round his shoulders. He would get me to talk to him as he paused in his reading or writing. I have to thank him for giving me my first love of good books. At ten or eleven, I was lent books which I could not really understand, but soon mastered. One of the first was Hardy's *Tess*. I never forgot anything about this story and have re-read it several times since. It is still to me one of the greatest novels. I always regarded Llewelyn as the nearest thing to a Greek god, with his fine head covered in golden curls, his Classic features and ruddy complexion—my favourite of them all.

My first memory of Will Powys is of a tall, rangy lad, standing on the top step of the hayloft at Abbey Farm next to the Church. A brown owl perched on his shoulder. He was more of a country boy than any of his brothers and had the happy knack of being able to make friends with birds and animals. After several years at Abbey Farm learning to be a farmer, he went to Kenya and developed a vast sheep farm. When he served in the army in the First War, Llewelyn stood in for him. Will came to see me on a visit to Montacute and wrote to me on several occasions. He was always interested in village happenings and made a recording of the church bells which he played on special occasions. When he died, the bells were rung specially in his memory.

And now, a little about the gracious ladies of the family. Gertrude, the eldest, was the one who helped her mother most in running the house full of healthy, young people, mostly outdoor lovers, who were always



Charles Rogers at Myrtle Farm, Montacute, 1982,
(Age 88)

hungry and always in need of care and attention. Gertrude was an artist of great talent and used to get some of the old ladies of the village to come to the Vicarage to pose for her in their bonnets and shawls. Several people still living in the village have pictures by Gertrude. Gertrude had studied at the Slade but could never find time, I suppose, to paint regularly. There was quite a strong Temperance Society in the village and Gertrude was Secretary and a prime mover. In the winter months she organised entertainments in the School. I always seemed to have a leading part in the sketches, once, I recall, as the Mad Hatter, and I always had to sing a song or two. These little diversions helped to break the tedium of long, dark winter evenings before the advent of radio and television, motor cars and the cinema. Marion, whom we all knew as "Miss May", was a beautiful girl with fine features, dark, crinkly hair and a soft, caressing voice. These two were, I believe,

the only two members of the family with any knowledge of or regard for music and, when required, either would deputise as organist at the Church. Every Tuesday evening during the winter these two held a clay modelling class in the Vicarage laundry where the lads of the village were taught something of the art, producing sufficient plaster casts for an exhibition in the Spring. For many years I kept a horse's head, fern leaves and a pouter pigeon , but never got as

far as busts—though some did. The two sisters also took Sunday School classes. "Katie" was somewhat different from the other girls. She was rather highly strung, but had, I believe, hidden talents.

The youngest sister and last surviving child, Miss Lucy, lives quietly in Dorset. She writes wonderful letters and still remembers and talks about the wonderful life of the family at Montacute Vicarage all those years ago.

Letters to the Editor

Two Obituaries

GILBERT TURNER

It was a mutual love for Dorset where they spent most of their early lives and a mania for Wales and the Welsh that brought John Cowper Powys and Gilbert Turner together.

Gilbert died on February 10th this year. he was born in Bournemouth in 1911 and was educated at Bournemouth School. On leaving school he took up a position with Bournemouth Municipal Library progressing from branch Librarian to Assistant Reference Librarian before leaving for a post at Twickenham. It was during this period that I first met him. At that time (1938) Teddington came under the Twickenham authority—I was then Librarian of the Paint Research Station which was next door to the Public Library and part of my lunch hour was spent browsing amongst the shelves. It was Gilbert who led me to the shelves where there was a selection of the works of the Powys Brothers.

He spent the war years as Librarian at Chelsea and it was during this period that he became acquainted with John Cowper then living in Corwen and he spent many of the long nights of fire watching duty typing the manuscript of *Dostoevsky*.

In 1946 he was appointed Borough Librarian at Richmond upon Thames and in the re-organisation of local government in 1964 he was appointed Chief Librarian and Curator of the new London Borough of Richmond upon Thames where he remained until his retirement in 1973. He was an accomplished musician and was responsible for the commencement of the Record Library in the Borough and for the opening of the Orleans Gallery by the river at Twickenham.

Although brought up a Methodist he was converted to Catholicism and took the confirmation name of David in response to his deep love of Wales. It was by this name that many of his friends knew him. He learned the Welsh language at an early age and was an accomplished Welsh speaker. On his retirement he moved to Pwllheli in the Lleyn Peninsula and from there he continued his great friendship with Phyllis

Playter to whom he paid tribute in *The Powys Review*, 10. His friends will remember him with affection as a kind and generous man.

ALBERT S. KRICK

Readers of John Cowper Powys's *Letters to his Brother Llewelyn*, Volume 2, will find mention of his near neighbour in Hillsdale, New York, Albert Krick, who died on April 23rd 1983. John Cowper and Phyllis Playter always spoke of his great kindness to them during the years they lived at Phudd Bottom, 1930-1934.

DERRICK STEPHENS

May I offer some observations and comments on Richard Percival Graves's *The Brothers Powys*?

During the last few years of his life, I visited John Cowper Powys almost every Sunday and, each visit, spent an average of five hours in his and Phyllis Playter's company. I was with him for four hours on the day before he died.

Until now I have tried to observe a certain reticence about the very many hours I was privileged to spend talking to John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter, and listening to him reciting poetry or reading aloud to me from his own books. A short incident will explain why.

It was known his financial circumstances were extremely poor. I was asked by George Steiner, on behalf of others also concerned about this, to ask J. C. P. to sign the documents necessary for his receiving a Civil List Pension. When I came to explain to J. C. P. and Phyllis what the documents were, Phyllis, for the only time during our more than twenty years' friendship, lost her temper. I had betrayed their friendship. They had never accepted charity and never would. She refused to listen to my attempts to explain it was not charity. J. C. P. sat there looking as frightened as I felt.

When Phyllis reappeared, having made some tea, the matter was not referred to again. But when I came to go, she made a point of saying something which I took to be, not an apology,

but an attempt to heal any hurt her very sharp words may have caused me. She said, "During our long time together, Jack and I have sometimes given our friendship to people who have hurt us deeply by writing about our life together. I know, Frederick, that that is a thing you would never do."

Since those moments a year last March when I stood beside Phyllis's coffin in Bangor Crematorium, I feel I am now no longer bound to keep silent; especially when I see John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter misrepresented in print.

By misrepresentation I mean a fortuitous selection of facts which give a distorted representation of the truth. The misrepresentation in Graves's book is not deliberate. The book is well-researched. But somebody who did not know J. C. P. cannot hope to convey any idea of the living man. He has no paradigm to guide him. He can only shuffle his index cards and hope for the best. In this case he has achieved the worst.

The chief disservice of Graves's book is the effect it will have on those in eminent positions in the literary and academic worlds who dislike or misunderstand Powys. It will serve only to increase their dislike and confirm them in their prejudices.

This has been evident in the tenor of a number of reviews of the book, especially that in *The Times* headed "A Bunch of Nutters". It would be interesting to know how *The Times* would label Dostoevsky or Gogol in similar circumstances. *The Times* would probably consider Gogol well-qualified for 'Nuttership' merely on the grounds of one his most minor eccentricities: that of methodically tearing off pieces of bread, when at dinner, rolling them into little balls, and throwing them at the other guests—or putting them in his glass as a sign he was displeased with the wine.

I once asked Powys which great writer he would most liked to have met. He replied instantly "Gogol". I asked why. Because he loved "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" more than any other books, Powys replied. Probably as good a reason as any for one "nutter" to admire another "nutter"!

And this is where Graves's book fails as a biography: nowhere in it is there any recognition that Powys's personal habits, idiosyncracies and non-conformist views may be the products, or even the essential foundation, of the extraordinary quality and power of his imagination, and that they are of little importance *except* where

they may be of help in understanding the nature of his imagination.

In this respect two vital points about Powys's personal life are not mentioned at all in Graves's book. First: John Cowper's admiration for Dostoevsky and his own susceptibility to attacks of epilepsy. Phyllis told me that for many years, during his travels across America, J. C. P. had to carry on him tablets and written instructions, in case he had an epileptic attack while on a train or in a street in a strange town. After she met him the attacks decreased and after about 1930 ceased altogether.

Second, and perhaps this is deliberate on Graves's part, there is no mention of J. C. P.'s "out-of-body" experiences and the extent to which he could accomplish these voluntarily. Dreiser's experience of Powys's ability in this respect, as recorded in Dreiser's *A Traveller at Forty*, is given no mention.

And the extraordinary circumstances which led to my first meeting with John Cowper Powys lead into those psychic realms which Powys himself warned me as being dangerous and best avoided.

Points such as these, Powys's epilepsy and his psychic powers, which have some bearing on the nature of his imagination, are omitted, yet many unnecessary points are made much of. Far too much of the book is a chronicle of banal, gossipy incidents. Their introduction throws no light on the achievement of the three brothers. The parts of the book dealing with Llewelyn and Theodore are even more distasteful than those about John Cowper. I met Phyllis's great friend Gamel Woolsey twice and understood why Phyllis was so upset when Alyse Gregory's accounts of Gamel's relationship with Llewelyn were published. Graves's "blow-by-blow" account of this relationship turns it into copy for *The News of the World*. But *The News of the World* would have improved on a style so tediously dependent upon "And in the meantime . . .", "unfortunately . . .", "Before long . . ." etc.

But the dead can no longer protect themselves by recourse to the law of libel. And Graves is careful to avoid another matter, since the protagonists are still alive. But he cannot resist giving veiled hints.

No meaningful comparison is made between the three brothers, a comparison which could have resulted in only one conclusion: that, of the three brothers, John Cowper was the one to whom the word "charlatan" could be least applied.

Nor is there any examination of the motives which impelled the three brothers, motives which are rooted in their childhood and their parents, the Reverend Charles Francis Powys and Mary Cowper Powys. A comparison with the three Sitwells and their parents, Sir George and Lady Ida, would have been fruitful.

My pleasure in finding that Graves amply acknowledged the influence of Phyllis on John Cowper's work was spoilt by the triviality of "Although Phyllis was no great beauty, he had been very much struck by the originality of her mind" (page 151). Even in her old age it was strikingly obvious how beautiful Phyllis must have been when she was young. And "no great beauty"! This is indeed fourth-form essay standard.

Another minor point: from the numerous references in "Acknowledgements" to *The Powys Review* one is given the probably correct impression that Graves's book could not have been written without much recourse to *The Powys Review* and to the books on the Powys brothers published by the Editor of *The Powys Review*. Why then the following dismissive reference at the end of the book (p. 360): "There are many critical articles in the valuable *The Powys Review*, but these are, as one would expect, of uneven quality"? As who would expect? Mr. Graves?

It is all too clear from his book that the contributors to *The Powys Review* have a far wider and deeper knowledge of the books by the Powys brothers than Mr. Graves has. May we look forward to some of those contributors providing us with separate and more definitive biographies of John Cowper, Theodore and Llewelyn Powys?

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Editor's Note. A review-article on The Brothers Powys will appear in PR14.

LLEWELYN POWYS'S "YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL POETESS"

When Llewelyn Powys was in his last years and experiencing Davos Platz and Clavadel in Switzerland, he and Alyse Gregory met a certain Madeleine Walker who lay in hospital, under-

going treatment for tuberculosis. She was a bright, amiable and intelligent Irish girl and Llewelyn formed a friendship with her, largely, it seems, based on their mutual literary and philosophic interests.

I have not been able to trace and pursue any references to Madeleine Walker in biographies or memoirs, but recently I obtained copies of *Rats in the Sacristy* and other works that Llewelyn had given to Madeleine and the copy of Llewelyn's book of essays is inscribed as follows:

For Madeline Walker from Llewelyn Powys to help her to remember the occasion of their first meeting (March 26th 1939) at Clavadel and as an offering to a young and beautiful poetess.

Llewelyn drew the rays of the sun around the word "Madeleine" and then he wrote the first eight lines of Blake's *London*, underlining the phrase "mind-forged manacles"—the implications of which are very interesting to a reader of Llewelyn's work. The rest of the page is covered in long quotations from *Wolf's Bane* and he prints in capitals "God have mercy on all lovers".

The young and beautiful poet intrigued me and I discovered that she had published poems in journals during the Thirties. I located, for example, a beautiful and technically brilliant sonnet with some masterly imagery such as:

But words, remembering beauty, are but miles
To measure moonlight, or a net to keep
The secret of the red sun's loveliness.

Madeline's intelligence, wide reading and creative ability clearly interested Llewelyn and I know that a correspondence between Alyse Gregory and Madeleine developed for a while. A copy of Alyse's book of essays, *Wheels on Gravel* that I possess is inscribed "To Madeleine Walker with love from Alyse. December, 1939", with the quotation:

'But lo you, death, which is common to all, the very gods cannot avert even from the man they love, when the ruinous doom shall bring love of death that lays men at their length.'

Llewelyn only knew Madeleine Walker for a short time, but Madeleine described to me, before her death very recently, the impact that Llewelyn made on her and it was obviously one of those first meetings which are cordial, joyful and communicative of immediate rapport,

despite the great differences in their backgrounds.

Somewhere in existence there must be other writings of Madeleine's and perhaps in some published work on the Powys brothers she may be mentioned in some way. I would very much like to locate such information.

One thing I do know: Madeleine burned some of her poems, having considered them somehow unimportant to her. But the Ankh that Llewelyn gave her in 1939 is now a treasured possession of mine.

Madeleine Walker was born in Clones, County Monaghan, in 1916. Her T.B. in the 1930s meant that her very promising academic career was cancelled abruptly, and this after she had gained first place in national scholarship examinations for Eire! She married a doctor and settled in Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire. Her profound religious faith perhaps made her earlier literary work appear insignificant, as was the case with Donne. However, I believe that she had real poetic ability and further knowledge of her work may even reflect something of the brief friendship she had with a man whose concern for originality and whose deep sensitivity certainly influenced her in some ways. Possibly Madeleine Walker's impact on Alyse Gregory is important for Powys students too? There is a great deal yet to learn about her, I feel. The areas of philosophic and lyrical expression that Llewelyn wrote about in his last years are perhaps the ones that impinged most deeply on his "young poetess". Certainly there is a possibility of some biographical work here: for instance, in Ethel Mannin's account of her visit to Clavadel, there is no mention of Madeleine, but he had many visitors, I believe, and had a definitely gregarious side to him. The society of writers in Davos at the time would have been stimulating: Ignazio Silone and other Italian writers had connections for instance.

I should be grateful for any help in this enquiry, and especially in tracing any other writings of Madeleine Walker.

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JOHN COWPER POWYS'S POEMS—WORK IN PROGRESS.

No two editorial enterprizes are identical. Sometimes a poet such as Hardy does his best to destroy all drafts and keep only fair copies. At the opposite extreme, a poet such as John Cowper Powys often left not only several drafts, but covered each with alternative wordings and sometimes crossed out ALL alternatives. Sometimes a draft will 'fork' into two (or more) distinct poems that still derive from the same original impulse. In general, one would say that it is best to write about editing after the editing has been done. But in editing J. C. Powys's poems a few words now might well entice from their burrows other drafts and even completions of what at present seem only to be fragments.

An instance of just such a set of untitled verses has been tentatively called 'Long John'—the phrase comes from the fragment. As it stands, J. C. P. would certainly not have printed the piece. But the phrase reminds one that he was an unusually tall man, and we might reasonably wonder if the tallness made him feel awkward as a boy, and if it helps to account for the record he gave of his schooldays in the *Autobiography*. Be that as it may, the presentation of the fragment just might—one so much hopes it will—bring to light the whole of which it is but a part.

There is yet a further reason for not discarding the fragment. In the late poem, "The Ridge", one finds a long obsessive section that hammers home the multiversity of the name "John". Tennyson used to put himself into the frame of mind for composing by wandering about reciting to himself his own name: 'Alfred Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson . . .' It is unlikely that the words 'Thomas Hardy' could be put to such use, but 'John Cowper Powys, John Cowper Powys, John Cowper Powys' is very much an incantatory group, and one might at least keep the possibility open.

The most distinctive lesson that one learns from working at the texts is J. C. Powys's tirelessness in drafting and re-drafting, and in inserting alternatives in all the drafts. This lesson can also be followed in the growth of poems that attained print, and it disposes for ever of the silly nonsense that J. C. P. never went over his own writing. He was not satisfied until he had filled in with ink or pencil as much of the paper as he could, and this word mania probably makes editing in the sense in which one speaks of editing Hardy's poems 'impossible'. Poets do

not write with the intention of making an editor's task easy. The habit of filling the sheet with 'scribble' can be deceptive. One such 'impossible' sheet may have—embodied within it—a quite straightforward poem. I appeal, therefore, to any one who has such a sheet or sheets to let me know so that justice can be done to J. C. Powys's poems as a whole. The quality of a poem cannot be judged by the 'neatness' or 'fairness' of the manuscript copy, and it is essential that nothing should be allowed to slip through the net. So far there has been little time for contributions to come in from America, but one hopes that before long they will begin to arrive.

As for the work that needs to be done upon the texts themselves, one may as well begin at the beginning. Most readers will recall that J. C. P. gave as his 'first' poem the verses called "Corfe Castle":

At Corfe Castle when the light
Has vanished and the shades of night
Steal o'er the ruins grey
There is a dungeon from light of day
Where now a grisly Spectre holds his sway.
Among the shadowy ruins groping creeps he
And when he hears a fearful shriek up leaps he
And sees another Spectre of the night
A Bogy that surpasses him in height.
Then there commences such a fearful fray
As was ne'er seen by the broad light of day.
Then morning breaks and both dissolve in air
And nothing's left but the old castle fair!
(*Autobiography*, 1934, p. 68)

This poem J. C. P. said in 1934 that he wrote at the age of 10 or in his 10th year, and Roland Mathias amusedly,

noted . . . besides the expected inability to master a length of line as well as a paired rhyming scheme (with an aberration in line 3, 4 and 5), a genuinely inventive, Amazonian, rather than merely feminine, pair of rhymes in "creeps he . . . leaps he." Never again was he so athletic in his search for rhyme.
(*The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk*, 1979, p. 19)

For "Amazonian" rhyming one might again look to "The Ridge" later. However, when in 1962 J. C. P. was asked by Neville Braybrooke for his first verses for the anthology *The Wind and the Rain*, here is what was printed:

At Corfe Castle when the Shades of Night
steal over the Ruins grey
There is a dungeon far from the light of day

Where now a grisly spectre holds its sway.
Among the shadowy ruins groping creeps he
And when he hears a frightful yell up leaps he
Gives such a shriek that echoes hear the sound
And make the Mighty Castle loud resound.
There stalking slowly on in Twilight dim
He turns a corner and in front of him
He sees another spectre of the Night
A Bogy that surpasses him in height.
Then there commences such a fearful fray
As ne'er was seen by the bright light of day
Then Morning breaks and both dissolve in air
And nothing's left but the Old Castle fair.

(*The Wind and the Rain*, 1962, p. 281)

Here were 15 verses instead of the 13 of 1934. How, then, does one arrive at the most likely original text?

When J. C. P. wrote the *Autobiography*, he was in America, and it is hard to believe that he carried a copy of his first verses with him. He must, therefore, have quoted—or improvised—from memory, and no one can blame him if his memory faltered over schoolboy verses written nearly fifty years earlier.

However, the version printed in 1962 bears with it the information that the "poem [was] composed whilst walking round Corfe Castle by John Cowper Powys aged twelve." (*The Wind and the Rain*, 1962, pp. 13-14). The likelihood that the 1962 version of the poem carries more authority than that of 1934 seems clear enough. J. C. P. was back in Britain, and probably both the text and the date of composition had some manuscript authority not to be had in 1934. However, Mr Mathias's remark, "inability to master a length of line",² would still apply. But can one seriously believe that a boy eager to write poetry should suffer from any such disability? It is much more likely that it was one of the first characteristics of poetry that he set out to "master". Without seeing the 1962 manuscript, therefore, but making allowance for the fact that J. C. P. reached his ninetieth birthday in that year, some re-working seemed not out of place. Holding by intuition and the sound of J. C. Powys's voice, the following is put forward as the likely form of the original of 1884:

AT CORFE CASTLE

When the Shades of Night steal over the Ruins
grey
There is a dungeon from the light of day
Where now a grisly spectre holds its sway.
Among the shadowy ruins groping creeps he

And when he hears a frightful yell up leaps he
 Gives such a shriek that echoes hear the sound
 And make the Mighty Castle loud resound.
 Then stalking slowly on in Twilight dim
 He turns a corner and in front of him
 He sees another spectre of the Night
 A bogy that surpasses him in height.
 And there commences such a fearful fray
 As ne'er was seen by the bright light of day
 The Morning breaks and both dissolve in air
 And nothing's left but the Old Castle fair.

Punctuation has here been left as in the 1962 printing. All that has been done is that the first three words of that version have been raised to form the title of the poem. What remains disposes of Mr Mathias's doubts about J. C. Powys's 'numeracy', and leaves a more believable twelve year old's set of verses than those printed in both 1934 and 1962. Still to be considered is the wisdom of sorting out the punctuation. From the many manuscripts of the poems pored over, it would seem that an editor of J. C. Powys's poems cannot shirk the duty of 'regularizing'—in some measure, at least—the punctuation.

"At Corfe Castle", as it now becomes, is an important poem because it was the poet's "first attempt". But it is not a "masterpiece", and it is hoped that the adjustments advocated raise no serious objections. They serve to show the extent of absorption in a poet's mind and work that is called for in an editor.

With poems of J. C. Powys's maturity, of course, one might take a different course. For instance, how much effort should an editor make to 'complete' poems that 'tailed off' inconclusively? Dogmatism is no guide. It seems unreasonable to leave as 'fragments' poems that can be moulded to completion, even if the ending is feeble. Much, of course, hangs on how incomplete the particular poem is and how feeble the ending. Bricks should not be made without straw. But if the poet's own words can be wrought into an acceptable ending, it could be held a dereliction of duty to leave them unused. Following the words intently, one can sometimes even change a word, or even add a word that the poet left out. Such adventurousness offers hostages to fortune, and should be used only with great caution and after 'total

immersion' in the ways of the poet's mind. In that way only can one be reasonably sure of not crudely 're-writing' for the poet, which would amount to unwarrantable interference. One has to consider, also, the edition upon which one is working. If there is room for an *apparatus criticus* there is no problem. Emendations of the text can be explained fully in notes. It is less easy to indicate them fully in a shorter collection.

For any success in editing, one relies heavily upon the good will of such people—and their friends—as trouble to read this 'report on work in progress'. Consequently, one is bound unashamedly to plead and beg for information that could lead to finding still more of Powys's poems. No one should be deterred by modesty into supposing that 'he must surely have got *that* piece, anyway'. 'He' may have got it—but then 'he' may NOT. Duplication, even, is a positive service. It may bring to light significant variations of a known text. With J.C.P. variations can be so great that, as already noted, one impulse may lead to different poems. Again, the search for *uncollected* poems covers poems—such as "At Corfe Castle", for example—that have been printed, but not collected in one of Powys's collection of *poems*. To those who have already afforded help I am lastingly grateful, and ask any one at home or abroad who has materials that could help in the completion of the task to write to me. J.C.P. was open handed with his manuscripts, and it would not be surprizing if they turned up from America, or Kenya, South Africa or New Zealand, as well as from Europe and the British Isles.

All letters will of course be answered. It is of the utmost importance that all should now be safely gathered in; I have the uneasy feeling that certain poems may have slipped away in the twenty years since Powys died, and if this surmise has anything in it I can only redouble the force of my plea for information now. Later may well be too late.

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Reviews

John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape,
C. A. COATES.

Macmillan, 1982, £20.00.

C. A. Coates has taken John Cowper Powys's "obsession with landscape and nature and his long struggle to embody his response to them" as the theme of her book. She sees this as "his central preoccupation", and in paying special attention to *Wood and Stone*, *Ducdame*, *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands* and *Porius*, she demonstrates the importance of the theme and goes some way towards drawing out its meanings and implications. Although *John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape* is not as systematic or as exclusive in its concerns as its title may suggest, it is all the more attractive—price and typographical mistakes excepted—for this. It is a useful book, which should provoke thought and argument. Coates's major achievement is her treatment of Powys's psychological realism.

When in *Wood and Stone* Clavering fights his way through the undergrowth on Nevilton Mount he associates with his thoughts "certain queer purple markings which he noticed on the stalks of the thickly grown hemlocks". Coates comments that this is "a random association, certainly far less artificial and literary than any 'symbolic' natural object, and far more psychologically accurate. Lacking any artistic qualities, or symbolic importations, the queer purple markings of weeds become important because the eye falls on them at a moment of stress. This almost random associative process is not derived from Hardy". This is the best of her subject. She writes well of landscapes of the mind, too, especially in *Wolf Solent* and *Porius*, the novels on which she writes best, and indicates the relation between inner and outer landscapes that forms the deep metaphorical structures of the major novels. But she is most original in discussing "this almost random associative process", and her close examination in one chapter of *Wolf Solent* of what she further describes as Powys's "special quality, a fidelity to the moment-by-moment working of certain mental/physiological processes (not always thoughts in the strict sense) which have never been caught so exactly", probably comes as close as any critic could to capturing the life of

Powys's writing at its most original. Coates writes with the same sustained insight of Porius's apprehension of the "stubble-mist".

One effect of her success in this respect is to give a more than usually specific meaning to the "stream of consciousness" as Powys renders it, and therefore, incidentally, to relate him as an innovator to the established experimental modernists from Henry James to Virginia Woolf. Another is to bring out his psychological realism, his ability to render apparently odd states of mind and processes of consciousness, and apparently strange, largely unspoken, relationships between individuals and between the individual and the circumambient universe, from dust-mote or urinal to the stars, that are in fact ordinary, everyday, the invisible and silent dramas inside and around people. As Coates says of *Wolf Solent*, obviously speaking for herself, but speaking for other admirers of the novel too: "It has a very powerful effect on the reader, enabling him to be aware, perhaps for the first time, of the space between himself and the rest of the world and to understand a little of the drama that peoples this space".

It is in this sense, rather than merely in length, that Powys's great novels are spacious, and it is their "space" that liberates. This is the space of Powys's tolerance, his inclusiveness; the world (in words applied to *Porius*) of a "formidable protector of the imaginatively eccentric, the emotionally weak, the mentally disturbed, the nervously deranged", or rather the multiverse, the space of many private worlds which take the place of deadening and constricting versions of reality and show the self-enclosed or isolated, the tormented or self-tormenting, how common, how ordinarily human, are their peculiarities and secret shames, their fears and desires. In the novels after *Wolf Solent*, it is a space animated by the pervasion of numerous non-human consciousnesses as well as human consciousnesses, and in this respect it is a child's world, which reverses the fall from a world in which everything is alive, and malleable to will or imagination, to a world reduced to the measure of conventional vision and adult egotism. This is one way in which Powys appeases what Glen Cavaliero has called "the yearning child within the man", thereby forfeiting his claim to that "maturity" which a dict-

atorial moralism has used to define what are, and are not, worthwhile novels.

Awareness of Powys introduces another dimension into arguments about the nature of reality. I think it does him no service, though, to disregard the limitations of his psychological realism. The space of a Powys novel is not, of course, the space of *Middlemarch* or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*; but while this is its gain in one direction, it is its loss in another. In so far as the Powys novel has a social space it either belongs to characters whose privileged or deprived positions place them outside or at the edge of society, or is a tissue of Powysian relationships; it is not the space of social interaction, in which society is not merely a set of external pressures, but a common world intimately affecting personal identity. I think Coates indulges in special pleading when she writes this about Powys's Glastonbury:

Of those critics who object to the vagueness of the workings of this society, one could enquire what is the real texture of their relationship with such a society. Is it not rather composed of their reactions to buff envelopes on door mats, or stray bits of gossip about leading personalities, or vague head-shakings about the way things are going, than a thorough knowledge of the mechanics of local government?

In the space of a great social novel, by Eliot or Hardy or Tolstoy, for example, there is no question of the reality of society being only either individual reactions to such details, or "knowledge of the mechanics of local government"; there the social and the personal interpenetrate, and the characters are historical beings. For all societies are of course historical, and most of the great European novelists are marked by their historical sense. But Powys's mythological sense was always stronger than his historical knowledge—as was inevitable, given his distance, as an exile as well as temperamentally, from the actual societies which he recreated in his own image. The structures of his major novels are therefore essentially poetic, metaphorical, rather than embodiments of a social space. I think it equally distracting from his achievement to blame him for not being socially realistic or to claim that his psychological realism convincingly embodies a social world.

Coates is right, I am sure, to compare Powys's and Hardy's uses of landscape near the begin-

ning of her book, and right to distinguish between them—no good can come of the kind of remark with which Francis Powys concludes his foreword to *After my Fashion*, where he describes Powys as being "of the same mould as Hardy, perhaps even greater". Their moulds were not the same, they were widely different; to suggest otherwise is to betray that innocence of history which characterizes much criticism of the Powyses, presumably because of the encouragement they give to the myth of "timelessness". (On the other hand, such is the crude sense of history that marks much of the fashionable historically conscious criticism, that it is well that Powys writings discourage that kind of approach.) In writing of *Wood and Stone*, Coates says that Powys "does not discriminate, as Hardy does, between what the characters imagine about the landscape and what the novel uses as images for it". True, but then Powys had a freedom which it was Hardy's strength, in his circumstances, to deny himself; as there is no real tragedy anywhere in Powys, so there would have been no tragedy in Hardy if he had allowed his characters the liberty of a sympathetic world—which would have belied both his vision and his age. She goes on to claim that, in Powys, "the connection between man and landscape or woman and landscape is more powerful and personal than Hardy shows", and to compare Goring's source of brute strength in the clay and mud of his farm with Tess of the d'Urbervilles' kinship with the landscape of which she is, nevertheless, *not* the "occult representative". Goring's contact with the earth is a very rudimentary form of the great theme that will culminate, like so much in Powys, in *Porius*, with the identification of Myrddin Wyllt with the powers of rock and mist. But it should also be said that the different power of Hardy comes from his recognition of necessities which Powys, in his different circumstances, did not have to face. Coates writes interestingly of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, but an even more relevant comparison would be between *The Return of the Native* and the exile's return which pervades Powys's Wessex novels both as theme and in his own backward-looking spirit. The at-oneness with his surroundings that Clym feels on Egdon Heath is evidently a literary source of Powysian identifications of character and landscape, but Hardy's understanding of what is humanly possible for Clym in the circumstances of his time and his world, as well as Hardy's view of nature, both delimits the reality on which

Clym's feelings are based, and distinguishes between the novelist's and the character's ways of seeing. As for Tess, she belongs to a society from whose laws there is even less chance of escape, and that escapism which is a virtue in Powys, would have been a cruel mockery to her; which is to say—to adapt a phrase from David Jones—that Hardy had to live history as Powys did not, and his realism is based on a recognition of human possibilities consequent upon this. There is, however, another point at which Hardy and Powys are close. Coates sees Powys's use of vivisection as a symbol of evil as trivial beside the horrors of modern history. In a sense she is right—mass suffering inflicted on human beings cannot be equated with suffering inflicted on animals—but in another sense I think she underestimates the importance for Powys of this theme. Hardy combines St Paul and Darwin in his perception of the oneness of all sentient life, which he sees as a state of universal suffering. It was because Powys too saw the oneness of life, that he felt the horror of vivisection both in the suffering it caused and as an assault by science on life itself. He saw it not as worse than the scientific extermination of human beings but as of the same demonic order.

Powys is to my mind not a lesser but a greater writer when seen in his proper terms. This means seeing him not only as a novelist who could afford a much greater freedom in his treatment of the connection between man and landscape than Hardy could, but also as a novelist of loss, who had nothing like the kind of belonging to a place and a society from which Hardy wrote, a belonging shown as much in Hardy's social unease and in his quarrel with his society as in his celebration of people and place. When in his old age Powys described *Wolf Solent* as "a book of Nostalgia, written in a foreign country with the pen of a traveller and the ink-blood of his home", he spoke a truth that is relevant to all his novels, wherever they were written and whatever their settings. *After my Fashion* is the crucial novel for understanding this. Returning to England after twenty years, Richard Storm comes to feel there is "something essential" in England, "something that belonged both to the earth and the race". His "vision of things" is closely associated with "some sort of intangible emanation" proceeding from "the home of one's people", and he determines to let this vision "evoke its own method of expression" in his poetry. The failure of Storm's life may be seen, partly, as Powys's failure in this novel, and

generally at this stage of his writing, to let *his* vision evoke its method of expression, and therefore define the vision. All the following major novels do however succeed in this, but *After my Fashion* is particularly interesting for its association of this vision with England and "home", and its relation of these in Storm's mind to the great disturbance of the First World War. We may then see Powys more clearly in the history he *did* live, as a spiritual as well as social exile, a writer who, like Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney, and D. H. Lawrence, struggled to find and affirm the spiritual tradition of a homeland at a time when the attempt inevitably involved great strains and contradictions. There is in all these writers a kind of baffled Englishness, and the enormous burden of feeling they lay on nature and landscape is in part displaced feeling, looking for the continuities of a tradition that has broken down; in the cases of Lawrence and Powys in particular it is also, I think, in part displaced religious feeling. For Powys, the places of his childhood became channels for the sense of belonging deep in place and time, and to a people, that the actuality of places like Glastonbury, Sherborne, Dorchester and Weymouth could not have carried in the 1920s and 30s. Later, his channels were the history and mythology of Wales.

Coates makes several useful comparisons and contrasts between Powys and other writers. By far the least satisfactory of these is the contrast with Richard Jefferies, whose "nature-mysticism" is misrepresented by brief comments and selective quotations, and of whom she writes: "There is a sense in Jefferies' rather artful, consciously 'beautiful' style with its absence of humour, of a contrived effect, of an aetherealising of experience. He remains God-haunted". While this is superficially applicable to a small part of Jefferies, the implication that Powys was somehow less "God-haunted" is, I think, wrong. To pursue this, however, might only lead to an argument over the use of certain words. For Coates's book often brings to light the ways in which Powys not only quarrelled with his father's religion but transubstantiated it into his own philosophy and ritualistic practices. He was certainly more haunted by Christianity than Jefferies was (though in both there is a good deal of Hulme's "spilt religion"), and if this isn't also to be "God-haunted", I don't know what is.

Her comparison of Powys with the Aesthetes, and with Pater in particular, is valuable, and she

usefully makes the point that one difficulty of assessing Powys arises from the number of traditions with which he has affinities—not only in his lifetime, as with Aestheticism, Georgianism, and Modernism, for example, but in the centuries of European humanism. I am largely in agreement with her when she notes his kinship with the first-generation Romantics. This is not, however, a connection that can be illuminated without consideration of the historical context. Her own valuable comparison between Powys and Arthur Machen suggests the necessary corrective to ahistorical treatments of Powys's Romanticism. For although she doesn't mention the Celtic Twilight, Powys and Machen are equally representative of the dissolution of specific cultures and societies—especially in Wales—into inner or mythic landscapes and atmospheres, and of historical time into a mythic past. This owes far more to Matthew Arnold than to Wordsworth, and it is the movement, arising from social and cultural displacement, which must provide the context for Powys's long identification with Wales and for his Welsh novels. It may seem tiresome for me to quarrel again with an assessment of *Owen Glendower* which stresses its historical veracity, but it should be understood that in a country with such a strong corporate sense as there is in Wales, where mysticism is traditionally neither vague nor exclusively personal but relates to the fellowship of the living and the dead, and a localization of the sacred, Powys's "mythology of escape" has to be seen for what it is—a projection onto Wales of something in Powys that illuminates him but obscures the otherness of Wales. Indeed, with regard to the sense of the other defined by Martin Buber, I think we would benefit from more scepticism about the effects of the Powysian mode of "becoming" other people and things, with its tendency to pervade the multiverse with himself.

John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape is a provocative book, as I hope I have shown without obscuring its nature and qualities. It has not been written as an introduction to Powys. Had it been, it would doubtless have been differently organised, with more spacious considerations of *Weymouth Sands*, *Maiden Castle* and *Autobiography*. But it will serve as a good introduction, not by virtue of the extent of its coverage of the writings, but on account of the centrality of its concerns, and because of its manner, and spirit. It is a notably unpretentious book, written with an attractive candour and

modesty, which at once signals that a person is there, responding to Powys, learning from him, questioning, interpreting, criticizing. Nor is it feebly "balanced"—Coates is clear about Powys's greatness, but she is partial, emphatic about her preferences. She has, above all, the wisdom of common sense. It is possible to make Powys sound very weird indeed—a number of literary journalists together with apostles of "maturity" have been doing it for years, and some of his admirers have made a contribution. There *are* strange passages in his thought and writings, but these are not the staple or the essence of his work. He is profoundly sane, and Coates brings out his sanity.

JEREMY HOOKER

Is Modern Marriage a Failure? A Debate,
BERTRAND RUSSELL and
JOHN COWPER POWYS;
with an introduction by
MARGARET MORAN.

Warren House Press, 1983, £9.75.

It was their only encounter and an improbable one to boot. On the evening of Friday 13 December 1929 at Mecca Temple in New York City, before a packed house of approximately 2,000 listeners, Bertrand Russell and John Cowper Powys debated the question, "Is modern marriage a failure? Resolved: that the present relaxing of family ties is in the interest of the good life". Russell took the affirmative and Powys the negative. Both men were born in the same year; were contemporaries at Cambridge University; opposed traditional organized religion; were prolific writers; eventually settled in North Wales a few miles from each other; and enjoyed remarkably long lives. Aside from these coincidental facts, their ancestry, personalities and beliefs were quite dissimilar.

Having distinguished himself early in his career in philosophy and mathematics, Russell was shocked out of his ivory-tower complacency by the horrors of the First World War. By 1929 his scholarly credentials and controversial reputation were firmly established. In America, where he had made several lecture tours to raise money to support his progressive school, he was known as a proponent of rationality and the scientific method and as a social and political propagandist. Although Powys was not as well

known as Russell, he was, of course, no stranger to American audiences. His first lecture tour of America occurred in the winter of 1905. He returned there in 1910 where, for the next twenty years or so, he made his living chiefly by lecturing. During this period of his life, oratory was his major claim to fame, and his performances on stage were electrifying. Intuitive, visionary and mystical, Powys was only a philosopher in the non-professional sense. In *The Meaning of Culture*, published in the same year as the debate, he slighted the importance of the new logic of Russell and Whitehead and argued in favour of applied philosophy. Emerson, Pater and Proust, for example, he considered to be of greater inspiration and more valuable to one's individual growth than Hume, Kant or Spencer.

For Russell, the debate was an opportunity to air his notorious opinions on a variety of related subjects. His *Marriage and Morals* which had just been published in October by Horace Liveright became an overnight sensation. In 1940, primarily due to the views expressed in *Marriage and Morals*, he was judicially pronounced unworthy to be Professor of Philosophy at the College of the City of New York and was deprived of his lectureship. A decade later, the same book was cited when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

In terms of his personal life, Powys was scarcely in a position to defend the virtues of conventional marriage. Moreover he had not discussed the subject in any depth in his novels or critical essays. In retrospect, Russell's track record with women was so disastrous that from a practical point of view, he was even more unqualified to comment on marriage than Powys.

The day of the debate was especially hectic for Russell. It was the final day of his tour. He had to obtain a sailing permit, pay his income tax, sign contracts with two publishers, and settle accounts with his literary agent. The debate with Powys was the least of his worries, he told Helen Thomas Flexner, a cousin of his ex-wife Alys Pearsall Smith. Once the debate was over, Russell hurried from the lecture hall and boarded the boat back home, five minutes before they raised the gangplank. In spite of the fact that such debates gained Russell much adulation and money, he regarded them as frivolous exercises in intellectual sparring. Two years before meeting Powys, he casually remarked to Max Eastman after their confrontation: "Anyone who takes these debates and lectures of ours seriously must be an idiot".¹

Powys admitted to his brother, Littleton, that the debate with Russell had been "a fiasco: & not really amusing".² Although Powys had prepared himself by reading *Marriage and Morals*, what he had not anticipated was that Russell was an extremely capable speaker who combined logic, rhetoric and wit in order to convince and to entertain an audience. Russell's opponents complained that his objective was merely to win a debate regardless of the tactics employed. Whereas Powys drew applause for his charisma and sincerity, Russell regaled the audience with exaggerated analogies and clever arguments and received both laughter and applause in return. Helen Bevington, a writer primarily of light verse, attended the debate and reported on it in the following way: "We went to hear Bertrand Russell speak in Town Hall in debate with John Cowper Powys on the question 'Is Modern Marriage a Failure?' Yes, indeed it was, Mr. Russell assured us, winning each round by shattering argument and logical proof. While he demolished the institution, I sat on the edge of my seat, wholly persuaded he was right . . .".³

The Russell-Powys debate was first published in 1930 by the Discussion Guild, the organization which sponsored the debate. According to the director and sole owner of the Guild, Morris S. Novik, who currently lives in Manhattan and who has corresponded with me, the edition probably consisted of 1000 copies and was sold mainly by subscription to Guild members. Copies of this edition are so scarce however that the foremost collector of Russelliana in the world does not have a copy of it and he has never seen it listed in a book dealer's catalogue. Powys's side appeared by itself in 1966 in Derek Langridge's *John Cowper Powys, A Record of Achievement*.

With the exception of jottings published in the *Little Review* of Powys's lectures on Dostoevsky and James, this debate is the only fully recorded example of his public speaking which is known to be extant. Quite obviously, the debate needs to be read in its entirety if it is to be properly understood and appreciated. Due to its near unavailability to readers, Kenneth Hopkins of the Warren House Press decided that an English edition was needed. He has passed along to me the following information which no doubt some future bibliographer will find intriguing: publication date of this first English edition was 21 April 1983; 250 copies were printed, 200 of which are for sale; the first 26 copies are lettered and are for presentation, the first 6

going to the Russell Estate and the next 6 going to the Powys Estate; the next 200 copies, numbered 1 to 200, are for sale; the remaining 24 copies, numbered 201 to 224, are to be sent to copyright libraries or are to be used for review purposes. In time it is quite probable that this first English edition will become even more scarce than its American counterpart.

This review would be incomplete without a few words on Margaret Moran's introduction to this new edition. Her footnotes are misnumbered, but her commentary is informative and incisive. Quoting from Russell's unpublished correspondence and alluding to important references of Powys's corpus, she successfully contrasts the characters of both men and provides the exact historical context of the debate's occurrence.

CARL SPADONI

Notes

¹Quoted in Eastman's "Two Bertrand Russells", *Great Companions: Critical Memoirs of Some Famous Friends* (Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1959), p. 195.

²To Littleton C. Powys, 14 October, 1930, in Appendix I (b), *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, edited by Belinda Humfrey (University of Wales Press, 1972), p. 326.

³Bevington, *A Book & A Love Affair* (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), p. 72.

Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse,
J. A. W. BENNETT.

Oxford University Press, 1982, £17.50.

There is a special poignancy in the posthumous appearance of this work shortly before the Pope and the Primate signified their intent to heal an age-old wound by embracing in Canterbury Cathedral. In the view of J. A. W. Bennett, had the fifteenth-century Church taken note of that "supreme English testament of Christian faith and practice" *Piers Plowman*, "England might still have been a Catholic country". Langland's insight, as Bennett expounds it, was that the love of God manifest since the Creation found its ultimate expression in the human suffering of the incarnate Word, and required a concomitant generosity by the rich to the poor.

The key to Bennett's survey of passion-poems lies in the "passability" of Christ as human

being but not as God. For centuries, poets could not imagine God suffering as powerless victim. In a hymn of Ambrose, Christ ascends the Cross; in those of Fortunatus, He hangs there as a king. In the latter's *Pange lingua* and in the eighth-century *Vision of the Rood* the warrior-prince submits but it is the Cross that suffers pain and runs with blood. In the high Middle Ages, poets conceived of Christ as "lover-knight" longing for the human soul as in the *Song of Songs*. The Bonaventuran meditative tradition led to a cult of the divine lover's sorrows and wounds in countless English passion-lyrics and icons. Metaphysical poets continued to identify with the Crucified, but the Cross thereafter fades out of secular art until revived indirectly in *Adam Bede* and directly in the poems and paintings of David Jones, whose *Anathemata* represents the "liberation of theology—from academic patterns and worn stereotypes, and vain repetitions".

As a distinguished Cambridge professor of medieval literature, Bennett naturally writes with most authority and insight on Old and Middle English poems from the *Vision of the Rood* to Dunbar's *Bludy Serk*. While he expounds these in relation to their scriptural and liturgical rather than their historical context, he traces a development from the early projection of pain and grief upon the Cross itself to their location within the breasts of Christ, the Virgin, and, just before the Reformation, their internalization by the poets. In his five chapters on passion-verse from the sixth to the sixteenth century, Bennett blends densely allusive exposition with a lucidity and naturalness of tone exactly suited to the "intelligent Christian reader" he has in mind. His liberal quotations, parallel Old and modern English text of the relevant portion from the Rood-poem, and reprinting of the *Bludy Serk*, enable the non-specialist to follow the commentary.

It is to be regretted that time did not permit the author to re-work his chapters between the superb exposition of *Piers Plowman* and the concluding discussion of David Jones. Steeped as were Herbert, Donne and Crashaw in medieval traditions of spirituality from Augustine to Ignatius, their treatment of the Passion has been more coherently discussed by Patrick Grant, who has also suggested that the repudiation of kingship calls into question the whole hierarchical cosmology underlying Christian epic and devotional lyric. To expound post-Reformation devotional poems without

reference to social change is to treat them as isolated phenomena.

This is precisely what happens in Bennett's brief and inconsistent study of Evangelical hymns. To cite but one example, he finds in "Rock of Ages" an echo of a late medieval Latin lyric, but misses the quite different theme and intention, the assertion of the Calvinist case for total dependence upon grace, against the Arminian doctrine of the Wesleys (whom Bennett lumps with the Evangelicals). Its regrettable eccentricity makes sense within the social context of the early-capitalist era, as R. H. Tawney showed long ago. It would have been more germane to Bennett's argument to trace a line from the monastic through the Moravian to the Wesleyan hymns, which he rightly but too briefly acclaims as true successors to the medieval masterpieces.

Haste, rather than a reluctance to consult non-Catholic sources may have been responsible for the gaffe of citing David Jones as authority for what is common knowledge among hymnologists and Augustan scholars, that the original second line of "When I survey the wondrous Cross" was "Where the young Prince of Glory died". Even on Catholic poets, however, the later comments are sometimes sketchy. Thus the reappearance of the knightly Christ in "The Windhover" needs to be set against Hopkins's characteristically Ignatian structure in other poems and his internal realization of the Descent into Hell in "I wake and feel the fell of dark".

The experience of a lifetime sustains the learned author through his opening chapters, love and a shared faith through the concluding one. Noting that "the more agnostic and sceptical an age, the greater the human appeal of 'the one who was touched by the feeling of our infirmities'", he bases his whole study of David Jones upon the similitude between the battlefields of Flanders and the drama upon Calvary. While Grant, among others, has better conveyed the Celtic and Arthurian element in Jones's poetry, in a brief but excellent portion of *Six Modern Authors*, Bennett manages within a mere ten pages to give an astonishingly detailed and balanced impression not only of the *In Parenthesis* and *Anthemata* but of the *Vexilla Regis* and other paintings. He succeeds largely by dealing in depth with a single episode of the *Anthemata*, "Sherthursdaye and Venus Day". He traces its classical and scriptural allusions, verbal parallels between the "axile-tree" of the Cross and the *eaxle-gespan* (intersection of

heaven and earth) in the *Vision of the Rood* and, of course, the echoes of the Good Friday liturgy. Before doing so, however, he has recorded the "language of signs" common to the poet, as a veteran of the First World War, and the Roman soldiery.

Bennett's estimate of Jones's powers and intention strikes a reviewer claiming no expert knowledge of that poet-artist as eminently just. In the *Anthemata*, Bennett declares, Jones was "reviewing Western culture in the light of the Christian creed as embodied in Christian liturgy", but with by no means flawless scholarship or memory, and upon the basis of technical achievements by Joyce and Eliot. Thus "The Waste Land blossoms like the rose" and "Ulysses' keel grounds in a Welsh cove". One wishes time had allowed Bennett to substantiate more fully his claim that Jones "wrote for the listening ear", as this would have demonstrated a further kinship to Hopkins, another poet more difficult to read than to hear.

If the middle portion of *Poetry of the Passion* reveals the need for a more comprehensive account of the relationship between medieval and post-Reformation passion-lyrics, the earlier chapters represent not merely a much-loved scholar and teacher at his best, but a notable advance in our understanding of the Rood-poet, Langland and the Scottish Chaucerians. Let his final published words conclude this review: "The deepening and revivifying of Christian belief is not always achieved by theologians and philosophers. It is sometimes entrusted to poets: to a Dante, a Langland, a David Jones".

LIONEL ADEY

Musil in Focus,

Edited by LOTHAR HUBER
and JOHN J. WHITE.

Institute of Germanic Studies,
University of London, 1982, £5.95.

These ten "Papers from a Centenary Symposium" are based on lectures delivered in November 1980 at the Institute of Germanic Studies and Birkbeck College. That Robert Musil's centenary was also commemorated in Vienna, Berlin, Madrid, Warsaw and Rome reflects the growing reputation of a difficult but rewarding writer whom some critics do not hesitate to compare with Joyce and Proust.

If Musil's image in Britain is relatively well

defined, this is above all due to the labours of Eithne Wilkins and Ernst Kaiser, whose three-volume translation of *The Man Without Qualities* (1953-60) has made his principal achievement accessible in English. Encomiasts have included Frank Kermode and Anthony Burgess; and some Anglo-Saxon admirers have argued, in support of Musil's claim on our attention, that the Austrian temperament, including a penchant for "muddling through", is singularly akin to the British. Accordingly we ought to find his style and outlook more congenial than the mood and manner of many German novelists. Recently—the ultimate accolade that can be bestowed in our shoddy age—*The Man Without Qualities* has been transmogrified into a Brechtian musical. The enterprising John Retallack has however transferred his hero, Ulrich, from the Vienna of 1913, but dimly aware of the approaching cataclysm, to the doom-laden Berlin of 1983; he thus insists on the universal implications latent in the original theme.

Opening the discussion, Martin Swales considers the relationship between narrator and hero in the early novel, *The Perplexities of the Pupil Törless*. With a writer such as Musil, who tends to dominate his characters like the master of a puppet-show, that relationship might appear unambiguous. Moreover the narrator's authority is emphasized by his frequent resort to "discursive commentary". As the tale advances, however, there are subtle shifts of balance. The two voices, the hero's and the narrator's, begin to coalesce. *Törless* is a profound study of a puberty crisis which goes beyond mere "sexual turmoil"; at this critical juncture the whole personality is under challenge. It would seem appropriate that, as a maturing adolescent, the hero should develop to the point "where he can be the narrator of his own experience".

Osman Durrani analyses that enigmatic novella *The Apogee of Love*. Superficially a story of squalid adultery, it has been variously interpreted. Musil himself saw it as a pioneering work of Expressionism, so fraught with meaning that it deserved to be placed under glass and studied a page or two at a time. Like so much of his work it is unanchored in time, both harking back to Dostoevsky's thesis of fulfilment through self-degradation and pointing forward to the ideal reader of a permissive future who "will see in indiscriminating physical intercourse the realization of man's social potential".

Martin Esslin examines Musil's two plays, in which the characters are attracted now to the violent and often criminal milieu relished by Wedekind—a comparison Musil however resented—now to that "aristocracy of Beauty and Spirit" favoured by members of the George Circle. This wrenched spectrum proved almost unmanageable to present on stage, and it is hardly surprising that the less viable of these twin experiments should have been called *The Enthusiasts*. Musil was more suited to be a drama critic than a dramatist, and if his own plays have abiding worth, it is chiefly for the light they indirectly shed on his great novel. In an apt exercise in self-awareness, he once summed up *The Enthusiasts* as "a fog of spiritual matter lacking a dramatic skeleton". Yet Esslin is right to claim that "Musil anticipates much of the dramatic theory and practice of the Absurdist".

In his "Musil and the Writer's Task in the Age of Science and Technology" Hans Reiss seeks to repair an omission in his book *The Writer's Task from Nietzsche to Brecht* (1978). Musil is presented as one of the great synthesizers. Like Nietzsche he deplored the fragmentation of modern culture and sought to combine the rational insights obtained from his scientific training with the revelations that flowed from intuition; and like other synthesizers he found that his efforts to reconcile Science with Art, *Verstand* with *Seele*, often resulted in paradox. Musil was even obliged to question the fruits of the Enlightenment and the blessings of Democracy. Amid so much uncertainty, he felt it was the writer's duty to experiment, to delineate not merely proven but also potential truths and so entice the reader with the prospect of future "utopias".

Friedbert Aspetsberger reflects on that "other state" (*der andere Zustand*) to which Ulrich and his sister aspire. This appears to be a heightened degree of perception which is less likely to elude the individual who turns his back on society; peasant life "might be seen as representing the petit-bourgeois variant" of this enhanced state of awareness. Some cloudy parallels are mooted between the motivation for Ulrich's quest and certain sublimated aspects of the National Socialist creed flaunted in the writings of Josef Wenter and Josef Nadler. Musil himself drew the portrait of a chauvinist in the figure of "Hans Sepp", but Aspetsberger rejects the suggestion of any "intentional affiliation" with National Socialism. It is indeed inconceivable

that so anti-collectivist a thinker as Musil could have been seduced either by fascism or its socialist mirror-image.

J. P. Stern addresses himself to the task of defining Musil's concept of reality and establishes a welcome frame of reference by commenting on some other German and Austrian writers of the period: Hesse, Thomas Mann, Rilke, Benn, Hofmannsthal and Doderer. He observes that a "strange notion" of reality, prominent in the literature of the 20s and 30s, seemed to deny relevance to the merely mundane. Thus the reality of everyday existence came to mean the "unreal", while true reality lurked behind the surface of things. Hofmannsthal caught this idea succinctly: "He who grasps the highest unreality will fashion the highest reality". It is tempting to toss into this wide-ranging discussion Franz Werfel's suggestive term *Entwirklichung*. In a lecture given to the Kulturbund in Vienna in 1931, Werfel warned against that "draining of reality" brought about by the opposed yet complementary ideologies of Russia and America. Like Aspetsberger, Professor Stern detects analogies between the search for reality in literature and the search for reality in politics. He concludes with an evaluation of that "flawed glory" *The Man Without Qualities*.

Two pervasive aspects of Musil's masterpiece—eclecticism, and the role of satire and irony—are explored in depth by Carmen Lavin and Lothar Huber. Eclecticism is an awkward term. Having examined its multiple definitions—the *New Encyclopedia Britannica* would seem to serve us best—Carmen Lavin shows how Musil employed eclecticism to produce an impressive range of "aesthetic effects". Lothar Huber, too, has to wrestle with his terminology; he stresses that the co-existence and interlinking of satire and irony are "strongly suggested by Musil's many shifting statements". *The Man Without Qualities* is so saturated with these devices that it is difficult to define the "uneasy relationship" between them. Dr Huber extends his enquiry in the direction of Musil's alleged cynicism, though it may well be argued that the "mirroring" of Ulrich in the murderer Moosbrugger also strikes a much deeper note: the interpenetration of violence and non-violence in modern society is, after all, one of Musil's uncomfortably accurate prophecies.

Uwe Baur reviews "Sport and the Subjective Experience of Physical Movement in Musil's Work" against the background of the "Golden

Twenties", a period when physical fitness came to be seen as a panacea for social ills and sporting activities assumed an ever wider international role. They thus left their mark on contemporary politics and were given full coverage in the press. Nor did they escape the notice of men of letters. Musil was aware of these phenomena and their collectivist implications. He had himself chosen to engage in "the aristocratic and conservative sports of the time" such as tennis and fencing. Significantly, he detected parallels between the art of fencing and the style of the novel. He was one of the first to discern the dangers inherent in spectator sports and in the exploitation of physical training to further paramilitary aims. In his subjective experience, however, he explored areas which recall D. H. Lawrence's obsessive preoccupation with the unconscious, discovering through bodily prowess "prelogical and highly erotic layers of the personality".

As with all writers of substance, Musil's diaries and notebooks are indispensable aids in studying the genesis and content of his works. Philip Payne submits Frisé's two-volume edition of 1976 to a searching appraisal and contends that Musil's own running commentary on the shaping of his ideas is "of more use to the scholar than whole bookshelves full of secondary literature". By identifying human models and the sources of quotations—Musil is a highly allusive writer—Frisé has shown "the extent to which *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is actually a critical anthology of some aspects of contemporary intellectual history".

In the judicious introduction to his colleagues' papers, John J. White, while welcoming the inclusion of contributions from Austria, mentions that this is the first book-length account of Musil's work to be published in Britain. The recent revised edition of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* has made it necessary to overhaul the English translation—a task undertaken by Mrs Sophie Wilkins. This implies not only adding fresh material but removing certain imperfections. (Why, for instance, speak of "bobbies and thieves", when every child knows the name of the game is "cops and robbers"?)

Musil in Focus conveys much of the idiosyncratic flavour of a richly-stocked if at times bizarre intelligence. The famed ambiguity and aphoristic style, so attractive to the academic anatomists, may irritate as well as stimulate: "A Man without Qualities consists of qualities without a man"! Amid the swelling tide of

specialist studies even these ten essays would not claim to exhaust the many-layered meaning of Musil's magnum opus. Since German literature is not noted for its humour, perhaps this pronounced Musilian quality might have borne fuller investigation. What perhaps is chiefly lacking—and this is odd in view of the Austrian involvement—is a proper treatment of the Austrian dimension. Despite sporadic references to “historical contextualization”, little attempt is made to define Musil's stance as an Austro-German in the cultural and political spheres, two areas almost inextricably intertwined in his novel. It is true that in *The Broken Eagle* (1974) C. E. Williams reconnoitred this important terrain; but more needs to be done to explore the absorbing interface between the fantasy world of “Kakanien” and the actuality of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as it neared its tragic end. Musil's lavish use of irony and self-irony did not preclude an attitude towards the land of his birth described by Dr Williams as “affection not wholly untinged with patriotic fervour”. It is an attitude not wholly unknown in Britain.

CEDRIC HENTSCHEL

The Uses of Obscurity: The Fiction of Early Modernism,
ALLON WHITE.

Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, £12.00.

In 1922 Conrad wrote to Richard Curle: “Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work”. White sets out to suggest some intelligent answers to the difficult question: why does the novel, that popular form, become so conspicuously “difficult” towards the end of the last century? This is a study of the “obscurity” of Meredith, Conrad and James which has the great merit of refusing to see the new difficulty in purely formal terms, and which relates it to “symptomatic” reading (the term is Althusser's) as well as to such factors as audience, and conditions of authorship.

Obscurity, argues White, contains desire, but frustrated and “blind” desire, and Modernism attacks the coherence of representation for this reason. What he gives us, in effect, is a series of “psychobiographies”—the ugly term is mine, not his—but conducted on the whole with such

tact that he is as close to the John Bayley of *Uses of Division* as he is to Althusser. The fascination of these three writers for White is that their texts may be vexed by a dim awareness of what we might call their own “unconscious”—but that the resulting tensions between secrecy and revelation do not merely enrich the readings they entail, but create the conditions in which such readings can occur.

The treatment of Meredith is exemplary. Wallis's painting of the dying Chatterton in the Tate used the young Meredith as a model. Shortly after this, Wallis had an affair with Meredith's wife and she bore Wallis a child. The painting was thus a public and exceedingly painful emblem of Meredith's humiliation, and White is eloquent about the possible connections between this and that ambivalence about heroism and shame which runs through Meredith's work. He finds in Meredith—and in what Gillian Beer called the “savagely gnomic” within his work—those sudden and fantastic trips into metaphor which are increasingly one-way journeys—a paradigm of early modernist loss of faith in language and communication. Meredith's achievement is to portray shame more sensitively and extensively than any other writer, despite the pressure within shame itself to remain always unarticulated. White is good on Meredith's feminism too.

The essay on Conrad discusses the ways in which Conrad makes a virtue out of mystery and a rhetoric out of enigma. Imprecision in Conrad is nearly always over-productive, and threatens to devalue itself. White is excellent about the ways in which *Heart of Darkness* both courts and holds at bay the exposure of its own dark heart. Conrad invests heavily in obscurity because his fiction depends on secrecy. “A penetration to the enigmatic demand behind the words betokens the internal disintegration of the fiction”. He is good, too, on Conrad's women, half Mata Hari, half Eternal Eve, custodians of the mysteriousness of existence.

I am less happy about his treatment of James. White is surely right to find in him an affinity between the enigmas of sexuality and the play of “signification” (a word used by White as a critical placebo). Clearly too there are elements of the voyeuristic in James; and the peripety of many of his plots, as Graham Greene pointed out some decades ago, is the sudden awareness of a sexual relationship which is experienced as a betrayal: Hyacinth Robinson watching Millie show off a dress to Sholto; Isabel slowly under-

standing the significance of the fact that Osmond sprawled in a chair while Mme Merle stood; Maggie seeing in the Prince and Charlotte's standing close on the balcony another such sign. I think he overplays the connections between James's real fear of vulgarity and sex. Why thus restrict James's fear? Obliquity, of a less dismaying kind, is still today the dialect of the educated classes, and there are parallels between James's obliquity and Woolf's resolute vagueness, for example. Moreover the prudishness in *The Ambassadors* about the sources of the Newsome fortune is a prudishness about the exact sources of *money*, a prudishness which James as a second generation *rentier* must have experienced at home. Lastly, White's account of *The Princess Casamassima* is unjust. This splendid novel centralizes the gap between the "exquisite" patina of manners and the feral sexual and financial secrets they conceal—what James in his scenario for *The Ivory Tower* termed "the black and merciless things which lie beneath the great possessions". And it is untrue to suggest that James lacked the necessary social indignation to power this novel. His letters of the period (and some of the pieces in *English Hours*) are full of it.

But my chief reservation about White's good book lies in his treatment of realism in the introductory chapters. It ought to be possible by now to celebrate the Moderns without condescending to their predecessors. American critics can—as J. Hillis Miller in *Fiction and Repetition* recently showed. According to the currently fashionable fairy-tale, the Victorians believed in the "soul" while we believe in the "unconscious". Truth was enthroned, the novel was inert and formally unself-knowing, language was entirely "referential", prose was wholly "perspicuous". And all plots move towards the celebration of some publically knowable truth, albeit sometimes of a disenchanting kind. The novel can thus be an "autumn journey" (or a "romance of disillusionment") but a journey it must be.

This, taken too far, is credulous and legislative cant. Not to see that the endings of Victorian novels are often self-consciously conventionalized and *comic* (*Northanger Abbey* for example) is to adopt a literal-mindedness far more dire than that which White ascribes to our ancestors. This higher credulity goes with much historical special pleading. Freud, as Walter Kaufmann shows in *Discovering the Mind* was, despite his "mechanistic" theorizing, merely one great thinker within the Romantic Movement, deriv-

ing from a line of thinkers going back via Goethe to Plato. Freud himself acknowledged that the Eros of psychoanalysis came out of Plato's Eros.

Thus White's version of literary history enshrines exactly such an autumn journey or "romance of disillusionment" as he ascribes to the Victorian hero. He refers to Freudian "knowledge" and "knowledge" of sociological notions of ideology (p. 125). For all his claims about the death of Truth which lies behind Modernism, White clearly believes that he has the new Truth on his side (the Truths of Freudian wisdom, *Marxist* pieties, ethical relativism) as much as did his great-grandfather. "Nostalgia for the old dispensation is useless" he informs us, with a bracing "rigour" and a wise "objectivity". If novel criticism is not to proceed from one kind of (Leavisite) provincialism to another (post-Freudian) provincialism—but one more shrill and tendentious because it is convinced that it has "science" on the side of its would-be bravely unillusioned Dejection Ode—then it is to the Platonic Eros rather than the Freudian that it might now turn. It was Plato, after all, who first wrote about the duplicity of writing, and the ambiguity of spirit.

PETER CONRADI

Eliot's Compound Ghost: Influence and Confluence,
LEONARD UNGER.

Pennsylvania State University Press, 1982,
£8.70.

Leonard Unger's book is full of self-confessed hobby-horses. One particular favourite is A. C. Benson's book *FitzGerald*, and in particular a quotation in that book from the clearly unreadable poem "Segismund": time and again Unger returns to this fragment as a "source" for the second section of "The Waste Land". Another, shorter-odds, favourite is "Omar Khayyam", and its suggested influence on the whole of Eliot's *oeuvre*. But yet other mounts set off in pursuit of still further "sources" or "echoes": Unger uses the words almost interchangeably. I find it revealing when we are offered "sources that are echoed" (p. 66); we are entitled to more rigorous thinking.

I don't have space to deal with each individual

“source” or “echo”; and I wouldn’t want to deal with each, even if I had the space. The kinds and levels of correspondence offered are often of that uneasy kind where an author’s hobby-horse is at full gallop, but the spectators are uncomfortably untransported: all we see of the race is the hobby-horse vanishing into the mist. I’d be prepared, myself, to dismiss “Segismund” from all further consideration; everything in it seems more strongly resonant in other works. Similarly, the argument (taken up from Melchiori) that D. H. Lawrence’s “Preface” to the American edition of *New Poems* is a direct source of “Burnt Norton” is woefully unproven; the suggestion that the twice-used word “heaves” in Lawrence provokes Eliot’s “*Erhebung*” is characteristic of the level of correspondence detected. Continually I found myself wishing that Unger would get beyond the local, proven or unproven case, and approach the heart of the matter: Eliot as a poet who uses echoes, influences, sources, allusions. In the end (pp. 93-114—the end of a shortish book) Unger does: not always interestingly. But he argues that (for example) the significance of the phrase “a handful of dust”

is not so much whether Eliot was or was not aware of borrowing (or stealing) the phrase from one or another or all of the earlier writers, but the fact that here again the source is one and many, the echo has that extensive resonance which so often and so characteristically marks Eliot’s poetry. (p. 100)

The argument can, however, be carried further than Unger chooses to carry it. Eliot’s extensive quotation, borrowing, echoing, in a poem like “The Waste Land”, serves to remind us of the cultural context in which he writes and in which we read. He is aware of his place in tradition, he reminds us of it, he roots himself in it. But there is, too, a level of reference to a culture which (like music) is “heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all, but you are the music / While the music lasts”. And one of our tasks as readers is precisely not to track down, to annotate, to discover sources; aware of echoes, we do not know them, do not elucidate them. Eliot’s poetry continually removes us to the echo-chamber of our own culture, as he quotes and alludes. Shakespeare, for example, becomes a half-remembered jingle in “The Waste Land”: and that is an aspect of our own cultural predicament—to be the heirs of so much that we fail to recognize, but whose language flows

continually into our thinking and feeling. Instead of Spinoza, we read Eliot, and become aware of the smell of our culture: we feel our thinking.

Unger wouldn’t develop such an argument: he has too much invested in the processes of source-discovery, even if, at the very end, he offers a theory that theory is itself a dead-end: that our experience of the poetry is what matters. This comes oddly from a critic who has more than once (or twice) shown himself interested in source rather than poetry. He toys with the suggestion that Joyce, as much as Milton, may be the one who dies “blind and quiet” in Section III of “Little Gidding”, and suggests (characteristically on horse-back again) that “it could even more readily mean FitzGerald” (p. 99). What either Joyce or FitzGerald would be doing in a passage of poetry rooted in the contemplation of seventeenth-century English history Unger does not even pause to consider.

I’m interested by the book, in spite of everything. It makes me think about Eliot; it provokes me: in the end, it makes me value Eliot more. Yes: but only just.

JOHN WORTHEN

The Art of Life: Dorothy Richardson and the Development of Feminist Consciousness,
GILLIAN E. HANSCOMBE.

Peter Owen, 1982, £12.00.

Gillian Hanscombe begins her study of Dorothy Richardson’s work with a discussion of the problems faced by all women writers. It is perhaps because she attempts to cover so much ground in the brief space of an introductory chapter that she lapses into vague and untenable generalizations. “Artistic aspiration” she says “induces conflict in women”, a conflict which arises because the “demands of art as they have been understood” are opposed to those made on a woman in her position as wife and mother. The strangely assorted list of artistic requirements, “technical competence, confidence, discipline, ambition and tough mindedness” is so abstract (ambition *for what?*) that the argument seems vacuous. Hanscombe argues that because of this conflict women artists have been driven to deny “normative femininity”. This is a weak basis on

which to construct a theory about the radical difference between male and female writers, as is evident when we recall that many of Dorothy Richardson's male contemporaries could be considered equally distant from the equivalent "normative masculinity".

We are offered the choice of reading Richardson's works "as novels", that is to say "considered according to the same canons of taste and judgement as are the novels in the mainstream of English fiction", or alternatively of judging them as "female novels". The status of those "canons" and that "mainstream" has been a matter of contentious debate for some time now, and failure to recognize this leads Hanscombe to oversimplify the interesting problem of Richardson's neglect in comparison with the great deal of attention and praise accorded to Virginia Woolf's work. Her notion that this disparity arose because Woolf strove to write "pure" fiction does not seem an adequate response.

Hanscombe sets out to define what Richardson meant by the "feminine", to discover her views on the novel, and to explore her notion that art and life are inseparable. She claims that *Pilgrimage* demands a reading which follows "the implicit structure of the material itself". The way in which an alternative is stated and dismissed (a Marxist reading would "impose an alternative structure") does not give one much confidence in Hanscombe's method, nor are we given a very clear idea of what an "implicit structure" is.

It is Hanscombe's contention that Richardson's perception of the difference between male and female consciousness led her to experiment and to produce stream-of-consciousness writing. This may well be one of the many factors involved in the genesis of this mode, but to call Richardson its "original practitioner in English", implying that her work, because of its sense of the distinctiveness of female consciousness, holds the unique key to the development of stream-of-consciousness writing, is a falsification: that qualifying phrase "in English" points to a more complex history than Hanscombe presents us with. Richardson herself pointed out that this type of writing was developed by a number of writers working quite independently.

In Chapter One, "A Woman's Sentence", Hanscombe attempts to show a development in Richardson's style by demonstrating that there was a movement towards greater subtlety in the presentation of the interaction between the outer

world and the inner world of consciousness. The difficulty of trying to trace the development of Dorothy Richardson's style can be indicated by the fact that the final passage chosen by Hanscombe to illustrate Richardson's later style, is closely based on a short piece of lyrical prose, called "The Wind", which was written nearly thirty years earlier. Hanscombe does not mention the earlier piece, but a comparison between the earlier and later versions would have been very useful here, considerably complicating the picture of Richardson's stylistic development which is presented. In the course of her discussion Hanscombe states that "*Pilgrimage* makes little concession to artifice, thus demanding of the reader the exercise of critical intelligence in response". It is not altogether clear what is meant by a "concession to artifice". By "artifice" the writer apparently means, in the first instance, traditional plotting, which clearly plays little part in the structuring of *Pilgrimage*. (Though whether those writers who "concede to artifice" by such plotting thereby anaesthetize the reader's critical intelligence is highly debatable). The list of alternative means by which Hanscombe supposes that writers manipulate their readers' response ("interpretation, contrast and consequence") is so vague that, like the list of abstract artistic qualities cited earlier, it appears vacuous. In any case, it is simply not true that Richardson avoids, for example, the use of contrast in the structuring of *Pilgrimage*.

The second chapter, bearing the rather stark title "Men", describes the way in which Miriam, the central figure in *Pilgrimage*, "can neither enter the world of men as the female type they have created and understand nor can she enter it as one of their brethren". The alternative to marriage, Miriam's relationship with women, is discussed in the following chapter, and the theme is sensitively handled. The final chapter concentrates upon Miriam's friendship with Amabel, and the real-life relationship on which it is based. It is here that Hanscombe finds the most important material in support of her main thesis, stated earlier in the book, that Richardson's solution to her alienation as a woman in a man's world was to manipulate her personal relationships and then show in her writing the meaning of those manipulations for her own liberation as a writer. The characters in her novels are "agents of vicarious action from which the writer must desist in order to observe". The argument, which is an interesting

one, is supported by reference to the correspondence between Veronica Grad (the original of Amabel) and Richardson's sister-in-law, Rose Odle, which forms an appendix to the book.

The autobiographical aspect of *Pilgrimage* is important, and Hanscombe's discussion offers a useful insight into one limited part of the relationship between Richardson's life and her art. But the lack of any satisfactory perspective from which to examine that connection, and the restricted nature of the contrasts and comparisons with other writers, and other writings by Richardson, means that the critic fails to come to grips with the very large questions about "female" novels which she poses in her introduction. It must be added that Hanscombe's detailed readings of some passages from *Pilgrimage*, that unduly neglected work, are sensitive and just, and therefore welcome.

ALLEN McLAURIN

Henry: An Appreciation of Henry Williamson, DANIEL FARSON.

Michael Joseph, 1983, £8.95.

Henry Williamson is not so near to the Powys world as is his Devonshire—he was never quite the same man away from it—to their Wessex. But he is close to them in being uncharacteristic of his age in his great love of the stuff and substance of England, above all in his sensitiveness to our fading country scene: "The Vanishing Hedgerows". An illimitable egoist, Williamson had an impressive presence and a certain glamour. He has fascinated not only many girls but quite a number of biographical writers. And he is always eminently readable. His isolation, though he exploited it—his flair for publicity would put any Sitwell to the blush—was accentuated by a very real emotional shock from his adolescent experiences on the Western Front. The truce between the armies at the Christmas of 1914 furnished him with a focal point for his fraternal impulse, though it must be admitted he dined out on it for sixty years during which his goodwill became more and more eroded.

In his prentice days as a writer he displayed a violent hostility to all book-learning. His natural prose mastery owed almost nothing to reading; and Shelley's, Jefferies's and Hudson's appeared to be the only books he had ever

opened. He identified himself habitually with Shelley, and sometimes with Jesus. His earliest, very simple novels, *The Beautiful Years* and *Dandelion Days*, were refreshing in an urban and superficially sophisticated world; but they did also mark the limitations of the more experienced and considerable work to come. He lacked serenity, he lacked detachment, he lacked the higher creative imagination; but he had an extraordinary power of observation. He was very close to the visible world.

It was inevitable that he should find his ideal *métier* in the animal story. *Tarka the Otter*, published at thirty, was a literary event. Most animal writers hitherto had been anthropomorphic or dully zoological. In *Tarka*, and the still better *Salar the Salmon*, Henry Williamson's immediacy, his intensive observation, his easy graceful prose, stamped him supreme in the genre.

In 1928 appeared *The Pathway*, the summation of his first series of idealized autobiography. It is by far the most attractive, and indeed the best of his novels, preaching the faith and culminating in the death of his first self-incarnation Willie Maddison. Despite the absurd excess of self-pity, it brings out Williamson's lyrical powers—why was he never a poet?—and shows a new mastery of dialogue. Arnold Bennett in the *New Age* was moved to declare that if Mr Williamson's characters could talk as realistically as this, he himself was going out of business. The lyrical intensity of *The Pathway* was never quite recaptured in the long, long pages of *The Chronicle of Ancient Sunlight*.

Daniel Farson, the broadcaster and a son of Negley Farson, has given us an interesting book, though he usually seems more conscious of the Williamson legend than the writings. True, he is, like his hero, socially naive. But despite a good deal of amateurish showmanship he has a sincerity and bonhomie it is impossible not to like. With Williamson's egoism and his brutal pillorying of some of his best friends Mr Farson seems only rather faintly concerned; and he is prevented from discussing his author's family relationships by the fact that a "life" is impending from a son—not the one, incidentally, who blacked his father's eye. The present book is of course contributing to a Henry cult, but with such a personality a cult is inevitable.

Mr Farson is by no means the first to make fantastic claims for the huge sequence of self-revelations which occupied Williamson's later

years, after his abandonment of farming in Norfolk. A claim that the novelist did for England what Tolstoy did for Russia and Proust for France is quoted quite seriously. Mr Farson is almost as aggrieved as his author himself that the Order of Merit was not awarded. (Mr Farson should study what writers have *not* been honoured in this special way.)

The chronicle of Williamson's second self-incarnation as Philip Maddison is nonetheless unique in the fiction of the time, so much so as to be almost an anachronism. There is a strong naturalness amid all the triviality and although Philip with his self-obsession is never altogether attractive, and the author's resentment towards the world is destructive of really vital creation, the series is still a contribution, though a minor contribution, to the experience of the period. There is, obviously, too much about too little.

One can easily agree with Mr Farson that although the uncharted liberty of the wide open spaces was usually needed to incubate Williamson's genius, the opening volumes of the *Chronicle*, centred in the suburbs of South-East London, were far the best of the series, which deteriorated and coarsened with the writer's mounting disaffection. The early days of "Maddison's" parents, especially the very difficult father, are closely and sympathetically portrayed. The atmosphere of Lee and Ladywell at the turn of the century comes across with a fidelity which persistently recalls Gissing. In the chronicling of small beer Williamson escapes for a time the pretentiousness, the devouring megalomania that creeps like a miasma over Philip's attitude to life in his mature—or rather perennially immature—years.

It is only fair to remember that, although grievance and resentment underlay Williamson's every thought and action, he had been unjustly persecuted—not by authority—for his political or supposed political attitudes. He was in fact almost as politically naive as P. G. Wodehouse himself. It is strange that a man whose most tangible virtue was his patriotism, his passion for England, should be denounced as a traitor, or that a hater of shams and a lover of the simple things of life should be dubbed a Fascist—not yet quite the meaningless term of derogation it has since become. But Williamson did fear and hate Soviet Russia and all he felt she stood for.

Probably a good deal of ink has been wasted, and some tempers lost, by the absurdity of regarding Williamson as a thinker. His faculty of

judgement was meagre and undeveloped. But by his enshrining of the essential England he is by no means unworthy of a place in the succession of White and Jefferies and Hudson.

H. P. COLLINS

*The Will to Believe: Novelists of the
Nineteen-thirties,*
RICHARD JOHNSTONE.

Oxford University Press, 1982 £9.50.

Richard Johnstone has combined a clear and simple thesis of broad implication with a generous sprinkling of local insight and felicitous expression to produce a volume which though physically slim is certainly not thin in other ways. A pleasingly economical book which further respects the reader in its lightness (but sufficiency) of annotation, it takes on a range of writers who should now, or indeed do already, command the compliment of book-length studies in their own right, and for the most part it handles them in a way that maintains the impetus of the thesis without leaving the reader feeling that the integrity and interest of the individual authors have been sacrificed to a juggernaut. While there are frequent glances at a number of 30s phenomena and themes, at *Left Review*, reportage, proletarian writing, Mass Observation, homosexuality and "younger-generationism", six writers provide the major focus: Rex Warner, Edward Upward, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh, Christopher Isherwood and George Orwell.

The foundations of the thesis are not new; they are presented explicitly by the authors themselves and have since enjoyed a process of elaboration in studies by such as Samuel Hynes, Martin Green, Paul Fussell and Bernard Bergonzi—not to mention in "mole literature" at large. Here is the generation of young men, born before the First World War—but too young to have fought in it—public-school trained, Oxbridge educated (with the exception of Orwell), born with expectations of a stable world and instead robbed of it by the apocalypse of war. Rejecting the values of the fathers and masters who had led their elder brothers and seniors at school into war, they yet felt the vacuum which that rejection created within them, and, unable to flirt long or deeply with

nihilism, their need was to commit themselves to something in place of what they had lost, to commit themselves to some ordering belief—almost, one feels Johnstone is at times suggesting, to anything. If the tendency has been to stress a polarization of commitment in the 30s between converts to Catholicism and converts to Communism (with Catholicism running a poor second in terms of numbers and glamour), Johnstone attempts to shift the fulcrum. He stresses the psychological factor common to both categories of convert: the very need to believe—deriving from their shared background of class, education, period, Englishness and disillusionment, which serves as a deep structural link between writers of such apparently disparate politics and style as Upward and Waugh. To an extent this connection is made by stressing the superficiality of commitment among left-wing writers, their “desperate complacency”, the emotionalism of their involvement in “the cause”, the ease of their response to such romantic ideals as “the brotherhood of man”, the absence (with the qualified exception of Upward) of commitment on the basis of any cool, mature and intellectual acceptance of Marxism. In consequence one is directed to focus on the psychological process of commitment among such writers as Upward and Warner—their existing needs and the convenient satisfaction of them available in Marxism—and effectively discouraged from finding any essential significance in the fact that their commitment was to the left. Johnstone marshals his case well: Upward’s characterization of his own act of commitment as “a religious conversion” offers a metaphor only too apposite to Johnstone’s argument; Warner’s novels of the 1930s focus on the personal act of commitment, on the individual’s experience of choice, rather than on its logic or its social and communal consequences. (Yet how difficult it is to resolve the demands of the novel as a form with communicating the logic of a political position: there is strain in even the best attempts, such as the dramatized lectures in Tressell’s *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* and Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole*.) By contrast Johnstone seems to view the Catholicism of Greene and Waugh as less pointedly just the shapely satisfaction of a psychological need. It is certainly seen as having fitted the bill: Catholicism was a world away from bourgeois Anglicanism and thus managed to satisfy the will to believe without requiring a conformity to the inherited cultural forms of

belief, and, moreover, Johnstone does not allow the claims of Greene and Waugh to the purely “intellectual” nature of their respective conversions to pass unchallenged. They too are implicated, to different degrees, in sentimentality and emotionalism. Yet the tendency of the book is to leave one with a version of political commitment in the 30s as displaced religious conversion—though I am not entirely sure whether this is what Richard Johnstone intends. History does much to confirm that literary political commitment was indeed a minor fork in the road of religious search for this group—witness Isherwood’s movement to Vedanta, Auden’s return to Christianity, Huxley’s elaboration of the mystical rather than the political aspects of pacifism, and indeed the maintaining of their faiths by Waugh and Greene (with whatever qualifications) while political commitment guttered. What is perhaps lacking from Richard Johnstone’s book is an empathy with the urgencies of the 30s as historical moment, with the Wigan and Sheffield that existed outside of the pages of *Wigan Pier*, with the harsh realities of political choice in Europe, with what George Orwell was actually recognizing when he insisted that as a writer he could not ignore the public world, could not slip inside the whale. Is it just to devalue the worth of indignation and emotion in such circumstances? Orwell and Waugh certainly both sought “order”, and did so out of similar backgrounds, but it may be more important to weigh the *kinds* of order that they separately sought rather than to rest in the pleasing symmetry of the observation that they both sought “order”. In detecting the similarities of *form* between the needs of these writers, there is a danger of losing grip on a perspective which allows judgement of the content of their responses vis-a-vis the historical context. Judged by the canons of individual integrity and intellectual endeavour, a “superficial” political commitment may not show up well; seen as a movement away from a particular cultural background, and in response to a historical situation, it may show up differently. So indeed may religious commitment. Much depends on the realities of the interpreter, and it is not meant impertinently to suggest that it may be possible to exchange vehicle and tenor in the processes of metaphor in which Johnstone is engaged, and to speak not of a “will to believe” but of a “will to commitment”, whereby religious conversion might appear as a displaced version of political commitment. Should

Upward's commitment be subsumed within a religious perspective, or Waugh's conversion within a political? Johnstone inclines to the former way of seeing, but there may be room here for further debate.

Some patches of discussion appear well worn—a rehearsal of the growth of Mortmere and its part in providing a nucleus of political imagery for the 30s; a Satanist reading of *Brighton Rock*. On the other hand it is good to see Greene's self-suppressed novels of the early 30s receiving constructive attention, and also to find Cyril Connolly's writings—especially his delightful squib “From Oscar to Stalin”—put to good use. On Waugh Johnstone writes effectively and with sympathetic understanding: it's pleasing to see Father Rothschild's comments in *Vile Bodies* on the dilemma of the young taken seriously, particularly after Christopher Sykes's attempt in his biography of Waugh to devalue their significance both within the novel and within Waugh's thought at the time. Homer nods, however, in the discussion of *Brideshead Revisited* when the remark “God prefers drunkards to a lot of respectable people” is confidently ascribed to Sebastian Flyte (p. 93): the remark is in fact passed in connection with Sebastian by his brother Bridey. (Johnstone's larger point about Waugh's sympathy for reprobates is not harmed, though the blunder makes Sebastian appear more arrogant than innocent.) On a minor point, the description of Waugh's “Open Letter” to Cardinal Bourne concerning the treatment of *Black Mischief* in *The Tablet* as having “remained unpublished” is perhaps a little out of date, as the bulk of the letter (admittedly with an ellipsis and without the words that Johnstone quotes as from the manuscript at the University of Texas) appeared in Mark Amory's edition of Waugh's *Letters* in 1980. (The “printed source” to which Amory ascribes his text of the letter presumably refers to the apparently abortive Whitefriars Press printing of 1933.) The discussion of Graham Greene only perhaps dissatisfies in its selection of material. The chapter is headed “The Catholic Novelist”, and that is indeed the version of Greene the reader receives. Yet given Johnstone's overall concerns in the book, one might have expected a more even-handed attention to the political and social aspects of Greene's writings in the 30s, one extending beyond his response to the oppression of the Church in Mexico. *It's A Battlefield* makes a showing, but *The Confidential Agent* and *A*

Gun For Sale do not, while the rich fields of implication of *England Made Me* are only represented by the figure and situation of Minty the Catholic journalist. It might be argued that the tensions with which Johnstone is concerned are well represented within Greene's writing as well as in the contrast between Greene's dominant direction and that of the committed left.

With Orwell Johnstone seems less at ease than with Waugh or Greene or Warner. A quotation from *Wigan Pier* about the loss of humanity in “a world where nothing went wrong” is used as if it were a remark about existing mechanized modern society rather than, as it is, a criticism of the alienating effects of utopian rhetoric in Socialist argument (pp. 22-3). It also seems hard to include Orwell in a generalization about those who “turned away from rationalism and humanism”, finding inadequate “the pragmatic and detached approach to the problems of the twentieth century” and requiring “an ideal that would both explain all of reality, and confirm its significance” (p. 24). There are refreshing observations—of Orwell's tendency in debate to seek “the satisfying certainty” even at the risk of inconsistency and self-contradiction; of his presentation of himself as “heterosexual, meat-eating man”. Yet many will not be able to acquiesce in the view that Orwell lost faith in the existence of “objective reality”, and certainly not during the 30s. Orwell warned of the power of politics and its language to distort reality, to suppress truth. That was the striking lesson for him of the Spanish Civil War and its propaganda battles—but his response to that was to write *Homage to Catalonia* and hope that even if it did not sell it would be available in libraries, ensuring that a record of the truth, as he was confident it was, would be preserved. With *Newspeak* and Winston Smith's institutionalized task of re-writing history, Orwell certainly depicted the possibility of a scale of social and political control which might in effect demolish objective reality; but that is another thing to suggesting that Orwell himself gave way to relativism, and latched on to socialism as a way of making sense of the world. Though Orwell possessed a wise and unfashionable awareness of the potential appeal of Fascism, his movement towards socialism had the superior virtue for him of being an inevitable consequence of his experience of the world. In consequence, *Coming Up For Air* is not greatly illuminated for this reader by Johnstone's tack; discussion of it

starts off on the wrong foot with a reference to George Bowling as "a working man", indeed even associating him with the proletariat, which fudges the distinctively lower-middle-class experience (so potent politically in the interwar period) which Orwell is specifically concerned to explore in the novel. But of course Richard Johnstone is right that Orwell deserves some kind of place in his book. In seeking a rapprochement between ingrained public-school values and the "decency" of socialism, Orwell treads out his version of the path Johnstone has mapped. He also plays a part in a humorously incongruous, but movingly telling vignette that Johnstone might well have put to use: Orwell, in his final illness, making notes for an essay on Evelyn Waugh in which he described him as "about as good a novelist as one can be . . . while holding untenable opinions"; Waugh, writing to Orwell to express his admiration for *1984*, while taking issue with nearly every aspect of it—and at the same time inviting himself to visit Orwell in hospital in the company of an "Etonian socialist farmer". Such are the apparent paradoxes of British culture and politics in the twentieth century which Richard Johnstone has helped identify.

PETER MILES

George Orwell: A Personal Memoir,
T. R. FYVEL.

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982, £9.95.

It is important to note the rider to T. R. Fyvel's study of George Orwell: "a personal memoir". It is this characteristic that is most appealing about this book. A fair number of pages, especially in the first of the three sections, devoted to the period before Fyvel met Orwell in January 1940, is resumé, better read in Bernard Crick's *Life*. At times the comment here is less than incisive (e.g. on Thomas's opinion of *Homage to Catalonia*, p. 70); and there is a picking out of "plums" from Orwell's writing (pp. 40-41 provide good examples). However, once Fyvel's personal memoir starts on p. 91, the book takes off.

Paradoxically, it takes off almost autobiographically. Fyvel recounts something of his own life; but that is not only of interest in its own right, it puts into useful perspective Orwell's

life, writings, and opinions in his final decade. Fyvel's discussions with Orde Wingate and the latter's forecast of the way the Second World War would develop (pp. 94 and 101) are particularly revealing; his perspective on the Jewish State and on Nazism is a useful corrective to Orwell's point of focus; and his remarks on the power of Communists to shape opinion in the 1930s (p. 97) and their influence in book-reviewing at that time (p. 83) also stand out. Fyvel contributes a little gem from the past when describing how Frederick Warburg resisted pressure to stop publication of *Animal Farm*. (Jonathan Cape, for example, had rejected the book, despite his liking it, because "a Foreign Office friend . . . was horrified at this slur upon our gallant Soviet allies and advised rejection": we know a little better today whence such friendly advice might have emanated.)¹ Fyvel, offering a different point of view, "told Warburg how the Allied soldiers moving up from Italy had advanced eagerly to meet their Soviet comrades-in-arms only to be faced with extended bayonets" (p. 131). Not quite what the newsreels would then show us!

What strikes the reader of Fyvel's memoir of Orwell? Oddly, but very properly, one of the most memorable insights is not of Orwell but of his first wife, Eileen O'Shaughnessy. The contribution she made to Orwell's success is well known, but Mr Fyvel's sympathetic recollection of her warm personality, her devotion to her husband and her belief in his work, plus the suffering she underwent following her brother's death tending the wounded on the Dunkirk beaches, is etched far more sharply than in any other account I have read (pp. 134-8 especially). He convincingly attributes to Eileen something of the "unOrwellian" character of *Animal Farm*:

And if *Animal Farm* is a tale so perfect in its light touch and restraint (almost 'unOrwellian'), I think some credit is due to the conversational influence of Eileen and the light touch of her bright, humorous intelligence. (p. 138)

Mr Fyvel writes with direct knowledge of the inauguration of the Searchlight series of books and, without exaggeration, he brings out vividly that moment when, in 1941, "the optimistic era of the Searchlight books was in a sense already over. Our little group had broken up, we had all left Scarlett's Farm . . ." (p. 116).

Mr Fyvel tries, with some success, to get

behind Orwell's reasons for isolating himself in Jura, despite the damage that would do to his shattered health, and he is particularly good at bringing out the significance of "Such, Such Were the Joys" in understanding Orwell's character and its relationship to *1984*. Fyvel teases out Orwell's continuing attempts at self-definition. Thus, referring to Orwell's essay on Swift, he writes:

In his conclusion, he saw Swift as possessing 'a terrible intensity of vision, capable of picking out a single hidden truth and then magnifying it and distorting it'. Again, there is an element of self-definition here. (p. 189)

He is also good on Orwell's obsession with failure and his "anticipatory ear for jargon" (p. 188).

Although the third section of the book, an appreciation of Orwell's work based on a fresh re-reading, is by and large what one would expect, on a number of occasions Mr Fyvel is very much to the point. There is a nice irony in his contrasting Orwell's censure of Kipling for "writing patronizing poems about soldiers who dropped their aitches" (and perhaps Orwell did not know that General Younghusband declared he had never "heard" how the soldiers in his command spoke until he read Kipling's representation thereof), and Orwell's "own laboured attempts to reproduce Prole cockney speech" (p. 198). It is a curious fact that Orwell, so sympathetic to the ordinary working man and woman, should not, in *1984*, believe in their resilience. St Cyprian's, Eton, and Burma were less easily shrugged off, despite his descent into the abyss, than he realized.

Mr Fyvel is surely correct in his assessment of Orwell's blinkered imagination. This may, in part, have been a product of the driving thrust of his main concerns—in all conscience, needful enough—but politically it meant he homed in on Stalin's Russia and in contrast seemed almost to shrug off Hitler and Nazism; aesthetically it suggested a blind eye to art and a deaf ear to music. Fyvel is convincing because he makes plain his own "prejudice" (can that be the word in the circumstances?) as a Jew aware of what was happening to his people and because he was a sympathetic and genuine friend to Orwell and his memory. He is also adept at likening Orwell to our present concerns. Thus, Gordon Comstock's rages against the Money-God correspond closely, he argues, to

the motivation of those many middle-class

young men and women of our own time who (buttressed of course by social security) have 'dropped out' into their alternative life-styles in precisely Gordon's manner. (p. 206)

Perhaps Fyvel's most valuable contribution is to tease out what was not anti-Semitism in Orwell, but, like politics and the arts, a blinkered response. As an advocate for the founding of the State of Israel and an opponent to Ernest Bevin's policy towards those attempting to escape to what is now Israel immediately after the War, and as a friend of Orwell, Fyvel carries complete conviction. Pages 178-82 are worth careful scrutiny.

One minor error: Soviet Russia is identified with Eurasia on p. 197 and Oceania on p. 200.

Finally, one often hears asked the question, "What would Orwell say about this or that were he alive today?", about nuclear arms for example, and this question will be even more frequently asked in 1984. I could not help thinking of this when reading Fyvel's account of a conversation Koestler had with Orwell. Orwell was demanding that the Labour Government should pull out of India unconditionally.

Koestler said that on the day the British went, there would be 100,000 dead in Calcutta and a million elsewhere. To Orwell it made no difference. 'Let them kill if they want to', he said. 'It's their business'. He added: 'At least there won't be a white man's burden any more'. (p. 146)

It would be easy to bring that question and answer up to date by substituting "Northern Ireland" for "India" and "England's" for "a white man's": but with the memory of Koestler's accurate prophecy, would an Orwell-alive-today maintain that stance? Such is the danger of transposing judgements by half a century.

PETER DAVISON

Note

¹According to surviving correspondence (e.g. Orwell's covering letter when sending *Animal Farm* to T. S. Eliot, 28 June 1944, *Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters* (Penguin), iii, 207), the official was from the M.O.I.—Ministry of Information (which, looking back, appropriately inhabited Senate House, University of London, and which may have been suggestive of the Ministry of Truth of *1984*). See also Bernard Crick's *Life*, chapter 14.

P. G. Wodehouse: The Authorized Biography,
FRANCES DONALDSON.

Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982, £10.95

The subject of Frances Donaldson's biography had three loyalties, to his calling as a writer, to his wife and step-daughter, to whom he was devoted, and to his school Dulwich College, which, for a lonely boy whose parents were in the Far East, must have been a kind of substitute home.

For the rest, Wodehouse had a few good friends such as Guy Bolton, with whom he collaborated in a number of musical comedies, and Denis Mackail. Mackail was a popular novelist in his day of whose work Wodehouse thought highly; a rare approval, since from the evidence of the biography he appears to have had a low opinion of most authors of repute, living or dead.

Frances Donaldson deals judiciously with Wodehouse's reputation; he was recognized by fellow writers on his seventy-ninth birthday as "an inimitable international institution and a master humorist". She is surely fair in the matter of the post-internment broadcasts from Germany for which Wodehouse was notoriously abused at the time. Wodehouse's obstinate adherence to his French villa while war was raging seems as incongruous as Falstaff's appearance on the battlefield at Shrewsbury, with the difference that Falstaff had more excuse for being where he was. "The nub", as Bertie Wooster would say, of the writer's subsequent conduct was that the notorious broadcasts were agreed after Wodehouse's release from internment on the grounds of his age, and were not part of a bargain to secure that release. In the outcome the saddened man never returned to England, even when there was no fear of his facing prosecution by doing so. In her preface Frances Donaldson says that Wodehouse

did not willingly betray his country; he spoke no word of propaganda, he did no deal; but he did commit a technical offence of a kind a certain number of people have found difficult to understand.

When he fully realised this—and it took him some years to do so—his self-disgust made him determine never to publish anything on the subject. He wished to hear no more about it.

Frances Donaldson, who first met Wodehouse in 1921, sums it up by saying:

Wodehouse made a very stupid mistake but one that surprised no one who knew him well. He was not a very complex character but he was a very peculiar one, and only those who knew him well enough to recognise and respect his peculiarities can understand (if not entirely explain) the reasons for this mistake.

The present biography depicts an uprooted boy who grew into a shy and socially insecure man, sometimes boorish in his reaction to public encounters. There is an anecdote of Wodehouse telling his wife, Ethel, who was flat-hunting, to get one on the ground floor because "I never know what to say to the lift boy". At the same time there was the occasional spurious heartiness, evidenced in his correspondence, "with which when addressing other people, he attempted the good fellowship he did not feel". For all that, Wodehouse is described as "kind, modest and simple . . . without malice or aggression . . . He gave happiness to others as few people are privileged to do, and he was happy himself".

The extent of the happiness that Wodehouse gave to others is manifest in his work; the author described his stories as musical comedies without music. This does no sort of justice to the splendid dialogue and the uncanny gift for absurdly apt literary references, though even here Wodehouse's instinct for quotation, which in some of the later Jeeves-Wooster stories is apt to run away with him, is well exemplified in, I think, *Summer Lightning*, where John Bright's "Angel of Death" speech during the Crimean War is parodied in the description of a village concert's turbulent reception by the locals. The author comments that, at one stage, the raspberry was not actually present, but "you could almost hear the beating of its wings".

This is Wodehouse's humour at its best. At its worst it is characterized by his determination to be funny at all costs and whatever the circumstances. A letter to his friend William Townend written from America during World War I, and quoted on p. 114, shows on the surface an insensitivity to tragedy amounting to callousness.

P. G. Wodehouse was supremely the Anti-Hero as Humorist, the great de-bunker. Throughout an immensely long working life he did not falter in his "task of happiness", and we must be grateful that in his fiction he knew better than to go outside his range. When he nearly

does so, as in *Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend*—much admired by Rudyard Kipling and the author of his biography—the result has a whiff of mawkishness and patronage.

J. N. DAWSON

The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton,
Edited by BROTHER PATRICK HART.

Sheldon Press, 1981, £30.00.

Brother Patrick Hart writes in the introduction to this collection that “Merton’s true stature as a literary critic has yet to be fully appreciated”. It is doubtful, however, whether this rather odd compilation will prove its editor’s case. In the attempt at comprehensiveness he includes as appendices Merton’s early book reviews, his M.A. thesis on Blake, and two conferences given to novices at Gethsemani Abbey. The main body of the work consists of seven essays on Camus, two each on Pasternak and Faulkner, some brief introductions to twentieth-century poets in translation, a handful of essays on theology and literature, and comments on a variety of other literary topics. Some of this material is, to be frank, hardly worth the trouble it took to collect it. Even the essays on Camus and Pasternak are repetitive and have something of a *Time* magazine style.

Yet there is bound to be something of interest in even the idlest musings of a man like Merton. He was, after all, a poet of talent as well as a great religious figure. If he has the refreshing enthusiasm of a non-academic critic, he also puts his literary training to good use. His sensitivity is undeniable, and even in rather commonplace essays he has the gift of capturing essential qualities, the “open possibilities” of Joyce, for example, resistant to definitive interpretation (p. 15). His brief 1938 review of John Cowper Powys’s *The Enjoyment of Literature* is bound to be of especial interest to readers of this journal, and it is as good an example as any. He is warm in his appreciation of Powys’s introduction, “one of the most delightful and enthusiastic essays in praise of books that it is possible to find anywhere”. He notes affinities between Powys and Melville, and describes Powys’s philosophy, “or rather religion . . . a vague paganism that detests all doctrines, all metaphysics, all scientific rationalism, and only seeks

to enjoy sensuous and emotional richness wherever it can be found”. If there is Catholic disapproval here, it is surely to some extent counteracted by the closing phrases. Merton’s Catholic perspective is in fact rarely parochial. Defending Pope Pius XII against the more obvious charges in Hochhuth’s *The Deputy*, he nevertheless suggests that the play was not inappropriate as a response to the *image* put forward by that Pope!

Merton’s true significance is, of course, as one of this century’s great prophetic figures, of the stature of Bonhoeffer and Simone Weil. Both his life and his writings gave authentic Christian witness, challenging shallow secularism on the one hand and cosy institutional pieties on the other. Flashes of this greatness illuminate the book. On his areas of special expertise he speaks with great authority, on Blake as a Christian writer for example, or on the quality of T. S. Eliot’s mysticism in *Four Quartets*, “. . . distinctly sober, objective, barely hinted at in spare and traditional austerities of roses and flame” (p. 314). He writes powerfully too, as we might expect, of the way Flannery O’Connor exploits the “shocking situation . . . the radically new character of a wisdom that is ‘from above’ and is based on a Word which is an offence . . . overturning every other form of knowledge in order to bring man into confrontation with a whole new kind of destiny, a destiny to freedom in Christ” (p. 101).

Out of these diverse reflections a theology of literature could be extrapolated that Merton never had time to systematize. It is the vision of the great writer’s vocation, embodied especially in Pasternak and Camus, as a hero—like Merton himself—of non-violence, refusing to be enslaved by the language and system of either capitalism or communism. The writer in that sense, indeed, as Brother Hart points out, has the same function as that of the monk, which Merton saw as prophetic witness (p. xv). Merton knew that religious and literary values must not be confused, but he also believed the old dictum that “grace builds on nature”. For him literature provides a privileged, almost sacral, expression of the truths of human nature, which are the necessary substratum of any authentic religious experience.

THOMAS WOODMAN

PUBLICATION RECEIVED*Keltica*,

Number 2, 1983, \$5.95.

Keltica is a finely produced publication of the Society of Inter-Celtic Arts and Culture. The Society itself has among its declared aims the promotion of the Celtic languages and culture within the Celtic countries, and the establishment in North America of Celtic cultural centres and festivals. Its journal appears principally to be addressed to the many millions of North Americans with Celtic roots, whether Welsh, Irish, Scottish, Breton, Cornish or Manx. Each of the major Celtic cultures is accorded a distinct section of the journal, and the contributions under each head show a wide range of concerns, literary, historical, political and cultural in the broadest sense. The Welsh section of this issue includes Lawrence Davies on the Welshness of Dylan Thomas, and the editor, Kevin Dixon Gilligan, on two stimulating Welsh projects responding to the problem of rural depopulation: the village co-operative Antur Aelhaearn, and the language centre Canolfan Iaith Nant Gwrtheyrn. Among three poems by Tony Curtis is "Davies and His Daughters", an exploration of the cultural tensions inherent in the making of Gregynog in its heyday of Gwendoline and Margaret Davies. Elsewhere, items of interest include poems by Jack Clemo and an interview with Dafydd Iwan.

Given its audience, the pitfalls facing *Keltica* are clear. It must avoid the folksy romanticism

of the Celtic (as of any other) exile; it must avoid too uncritical an indulgence in tracing supposed Celtic sites in North America; it must be alert to whether at any point the justness of the politics it promotes modulates into the sanctioning or support of remote personal violence. That said, the political-historical contributions to this issue are among the best. They include Reun ar C'halan on "The Breton Struggle for National Survival", James Wilkie's eloquent indictment of the handling of the devolution referenda, and Andrew MacKillop on "The EEC, Energy and the Celtic Nations". These articles alone go to refute the proposition of one correspondent that "Modern Celticism is an artificial and inferiority-complex reaction"; they demonstrate shared experience and a community of interest—perhaps nowhere more convincingly than in the context of the nuclear and unemployment debates. To that extent the inter-Celtic aspirations of *Keltica* are already being justified. Much of *Keltica's* material is reprinted from elsewhere: this may be inevitable in a journal taking on the useful role of clearing-house for information about relevant events, publishers and other journals, but it is to be hoped that in the future it will print and attract more in the way of original contributions. *Keltica's* editorial address is 96 Marguerite Avenue, Waltham, Massachusetts 02154, U.S.A.

P.M.

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H. P. COLLINS, literary editor of the *Adelphi* in the 1920s, has published extensively on twentieth century literature, his work including the pioneer work in New Criticism, *Modern Poetry*, 1925, and *John Cowper Powys: Old Earth Man* (Dent, 1966).

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CHARLES ROGERS, born in Bishopston, Montacute in 1894, attended Montacute Church School until he was almost fourteen years old, was a choir boy from the age of eight, in various ways was always connected with the Powys family and with Montacute and has kept records of his early experiences in the village.

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