

# The Powys Review

NUMBER FIFTEEN





# The Powys Review

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## Editorial

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The bracken that was uncurling on upright stems in the ditches belonged to the year 1927, but to the old cottage woman it opened upon a world where death itself was forgotten. 'Tell him, tell him,' she cried with excitement, 'that ye met Nancy Curtis in the halter-path, the girl what used to run races for they star cakes—that will bring I back to the mind o'en.'

I asked for her blessing and hurried on. How could I explain that she had given me a message to a soldier who had been lying dead in the dry soil of India already for half a century?

Perhaps there is too much of the feel of some of Thomas Hardy's poetry about these last sentences of Llewelyn's "Out of the Past", an essay describing his experience of return to his grandfather's, uncle's and father's Stalbridge in *Earth Memories* (1934), for one to say that they display typical Llewelyn Powys qualities. But they contain the sort of compression of elegy and celebration, precise human sympathy and impersonal grasp of ultimate meanings, within an overall sense that *all* earthly life is holy, that is typical of Llewelyn's writings.

1984 is the centenary of the birth of Llewelyn Powys. Celebrations of Llewelyn's birth (in contrast with those of John Cowper Powys's centenary twelve years earlier) have been modest, as perhaps befits the artistic character of Llewelyn's writings which, despite his two novels, may be said to be predominantly sketches and essays. However, the modest celebrations are at odds with the works' assertive character, their mighty celebration and demonstration of the joys of natural life. To our sorrow, we have received no outstanding critical articles on Llewelyn's works for publication in the *Review* this year. In Number 14 we republished an interesting but untypical small piece of his work, a short-story, and in this number we fall back on one of the several critical assessments by his finest general critic, John Cowper Powys. There have been celebratory lectures during the year: two interesting approaches were made to the

works by lecturers at the Powys Society Conference, University of Exeter, this year; and the "Young Poet", Kenneth Hopkins, who first visited Llewelyn in 1935, gave an invited Centenary Lecture at the Dorchester County Museum.

The work of Llewelyn Powys, superb prose stylist, deserves wider and closer study than it receives at present. We know of only one postgraduate research thesis being written on him in the whole of Europe and America! (Please, inform us if we are wrong.) The body of work provided by Llewelyn is substantial, filling some thirty volumes. We still await eagerly Margaret Eaton's publication of her Bibliography of Llewelyn's works which will direct us to scores of essays, etc., unknown except to a few scholars, and which perhaps will lead to the publication of new collections of his work. However, Malcolm Elwin long ago furnished us with a superb *Life* and Louis Wilkinson with *Letters* of Llewelyn. There have been useful additions to these in the related publications of the Ark Press and some biographical colourings-in by Kenneth Hopkins and Richard Graves. Perhaps from this year Llewelyn's readership (and so the number of his literary critics) will increase, thanks to the ministry of the Redcliffe Press, Bristol. Redcliffe have not only taken over the distribution of those cheap, paperback volumes of Llewelyn Powys provided by the old Village Press (so that, for example, *Skin for Skin*, that fine and brilliant work may be bought for only £1.75) but they have published several additional books, including *Earth Memories* with an introduction by Philip Larkin.

This number of the *Review* is given largely to discussion of John Cowper Powys's *Maiden Castle* (1937), the first of his novels completed in Wales (1935-6) but conceived, certainly begun, in Dorset during the year following Powys's final return from America to Britain in June 1934. John Cowper returned to Britain at first to live

close to Llewelyn and his other brothers and sisters in the neighbourhood of East Chaldon and Dorchester. Llewelyn of course was to leave Britain for Switzerland in December 1936, never to return before his death in 1939. 1934-5 was a strenuous time for Llewelyn; he wrote vigorously but was also extremely ill, feared to be close to death, especially in July-August 1934; and in addition he suffered the anxiety of the Dorchester court case against him (heard in January 1935) which resulted from his attempt (with friends) to prompt an investigation into a local girls' home after a girl, not the first, had run away from it and its controllers. In the last *Review* (p. 21) A. Thomas Southwood suggested that the claustrophobic and tense atmosphere and clashes of nervous and divergent personalities in *Maiden Castle* reflect the situation of Llewelyn's Chydyok (the ill man tended by several divergent and strong-minded women) at the time of John Cowper's stay in Dorset. Thus, peripheral though they are (and although illness in the novel is given to Claudius Cask, a character quite unlike Llewelyn), *Maiden Castle* has been seen to have links with Llewelyn. Dud No-man's securing of the circus-girl Wizzie's escape from her controllers is an action which uses both John Cowper Powys's long obsession with circus rings and also, as Kim Taplin shows in *The Powys Review*, Number 3, some ideas probably taken from Borrow's *Lavengro*. But, if we wish to look for further links with Llewelyn within the novel, No-man's action could be said to burlesque the notion of the knightly rescue of an imprisoned maiden which Llewelyn's sensible venture so unfortunately imitated in real life. A disconcerting burlesque or caricature is one of the master tricks of *Maiden Castle* as of large elements of Powys's major fiction, however, and if his interest in this novel was somewhat autobiographical, he was more likely exploring a more homely concern, as he and his American companion Phyllis Playter, tried out English life together in the isolated Rat's (Rat or Down) Barn in the hills not far from Chydyok and then above the grocery shop at 38 High East

Street, Dorchester, that is, the clash of male and female personality and point of view. (In this *Review*, Susan Rands directs us to this concern as a minutely and sensitively worked-out element of *Maiden Castle*.) But can we see any signs of the proximity of the "dying" but yet sunny Llewelyn in the *ideas*, or views of life, of *Maiden Castle*? To what extent should we be crying "duc-dame", or chasing will-o'-the-wisp, if we were to find traces of the essential Llewelyn Powys in his brother's novel?

We hope that there will soon be published the uncut, authoritative text of *Maiden Castle*, made possible by Ian Hughes's editing. The publication of the original, uncut text will make this ponderous, slow-moving, dialectic novel even longer. However, it will not only restore to us some of the British and 1930s sense of place which Powys's American publisher cut and blurred, but it will restore some of the balance of the novel, or the exposition of contraries, which Powys put into it. For *Maiden Castle*, full of nervous tension, is the novel in which, above the rest of his novels, Powys attempts to explore and reveal *opposite* points of view, political, social, psychic and sexual.

Whereas the action of *Maiden Castle* is precisely physically located in place, that is in Dorchester, "town of water" (p. 9), bearing the contrast of cluttered, modern rooms and the vast, windy ramparts of ancient Maiden Castle itself, the author's impulse to creation appears to have been primarily cerebral and verbal. This is already apparent in the published 1937 text where we are directed to links between names and identity, for example in the play on Dud No-man's name, such as in his identifications of himself with Odysseus who called himself 'No-one' in order to escape the Cyclops (p. 6), and with the text on his wife's grave, "GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS" (p. 21), both of which identifications show an inclination to pun in No-man which reveals both an escape from social identity and a retreat into self. Then there is No-man's father's attempt to be "more than a man" (p. 47) in taking the name of Uryen (which Ian Hughes will



Llewelyn Powys in his shelter at Chydyok during his illness in 1935, taken by Professor R. H. Mottram.

restore to 'Urien'), a name which, in light of the Blakean verbal tricks of this book, suggests that he is really nothing (Rien). This repulsive father tells his son, No-man, that 'Uryen' *should* have been his, the son's name (p. 219); the escape from the name is turned into action by the end of the novel when the son, who insists on some of his oppositions to his father, survives, unlike his father, his losses of self-illusion. It is not

insignificant in this novel about the social and psychic roles of women that almost all the women in it have feeble Christian names with diminutive endings: Nancy, Wizzie, Jenny, Lovie. The exception is Thuella who breaks out of conventional moulds: with apparent allusion to Blake's poem, she has her name shortened to "Thel".

The "Discarded Starts" to Maiden Castle (brought to us in this *Review* by Ian Hughes)

show how initiatory (if likewise superficial) was this cerebral, verbal approach to Powys's Dorchester romance. Perhaps one looks too far to see in Carter *Manley* of the Discarded Starts the opposite of Dud No-man's masculine character, but in No-man's additional pet-name of "Dub" we find an early pre-occupation with the idea of naming; and in the surname of his parents-in-law, Surd, we have perhaps a preview of Powys's (or No-man's) view that it is *absurd* to believe that identity is captured in a name (although a man's plight may be). There is a large element of casual game, incidental and indolent mental self-indulgence in *Maiden Castle*.

The atmosphere of *Maiden Castle* to some readers is often clammily morbid. Its protagonist, No-man, begins and ends in a graveyard, seeking "the meaning of death" and asking whether immortality of the soul is gained by a selfish or unselfish commitment to life. Its most powerful character with a "repulsive mortuary smell", Enoch Quirm ("Uryen") seeks to revive the ancient Powers of the dead within himself by exploiting the impotent love of people close to him: he would "put out the sun" (pp. 239-41). (In the anti-life ingredients of the novel, John Cowper presents a contrary to the impulses of Llewelyn's writings.) But, Uryen's "Power" is the very opposite of the Wordsworthian 'power', dependent on love of the green earth, which Powys comes close to invoking through No-man. The stories, factual and notional, in *Maiden Castle* are largely of escape from physical and social bonds. Ironically it is the most irritating of the novel's *dramatis personae*, No-man, who offers *readers* ways out of human suffering, primarily because of his obsessive awareness of the positive force of the insubstantial generations of humans who have admired or sympathised with cuckoo-flowers or celandines (pp. 125-8): "Blood refuses to give up its celandines" he declares against Claudius's machine-age future. (This force is given identity in pagan rituals, like Candlemas; in this *Review*, Angela Blauen draws our attention to *Maiden Castle's* play upon the forces recognised in

the Celtic calendar.) This partially Wordsworthian impulse of D. No-man in *Maiden Castle* brings him (alone) close to Llewelyn Powys's feeling for the natural world (such as the uncurling bracken stems in the quotation above), although, unlike his elder brother, Llewelyn habitually embraces human love as part of the vigorous natural life which justifies death:

'What I can't get you people to see,' D. was saying, 'is that when . . . I come on a patch of green moss on a grey wall, or catch the peculiar scent of trodden grass, I get a sensation that's more important than what you call "love", or anything else, nearer the secret of things too! It is "love" in a certain sense; but it's love of life itself and of something that comes to us through life!' (p. 353)

Here is a part-echo of that line from Wordsworth's poem, *Michael* which was always important for John Cowper Powys: "The pleasure which there is in life itself." On the other hand, Dud No-man is given the perception of an escape from human-kind (an escape interestingly not devoid of "sorrow"). As "something of a wind-worshipper" he recognises Uryen's mutterings upon Maiden Castle "—probably Taliesin's chant to the wind—" as in harmony with the "subhuman sounds" of the wind:

'This old Welsh,' he said to himself, 'must be the most primitive of all tongues. It sounds as if human inventions, human necessities, human thought even, barely entered into it; as if its rhythm were identical with the orchestration of the planet, whose only notes are the motions of air and water and its only burden the ancient sorrow of the earth. What he's muttering now must be what the spirits of space must have heard, rising night by night, day by day, through millions of ages, from an earth that as yet knew no organic life.' (p. 245)

It is nevertheless at this high moment of awareness (or nonsensical fantasy) that No-man remembers with bitterness that Wizzie had deliberately hurt his feelings by kicking his stick under their bed! No-man is able to perceive but not to go to extremes, perhaps because he is the person within the novel most in touch with the natural universe, with, for example, the daisy half-crushed

beneath his garrulous father's rump (pp. 232-3). No-man is a fuddy-duddy, awkward, dithering, pompous, patronising and self-absorbed, not likely to attract any sensible or free woman. Indeed one woman in this novel, which of all Powys's novels comes nearest to kitchen-sink drama, shouts at him, "The truth is you don't know what real feeling is!" (p. 254) Yet he holds the balance of extremes. Just as he holds a middle way between the two topical, political extremes of the novel, the Fascism of Dumbell and the Communism of Cask, so at the end we see him finding a "centre" between two large contraries of the novel: "He could not live . . . in a wild search for the life behind life . . . But neither would he close one single cranny or crevice of his mind to the 'intimations of immortality' that in this place and at this hour were so thick about him." (p. 484) To achieve this equilibrium, he will "hold fiercely to all those 'sensations' of his", clearly a reference to experiences like his encounters with moss or grass, involving his ability to love "life itself".

Can we argue, with the help of No-man's love of "life itself", that the views or ideas of life within the novel which give it what it has of grace and balance, are positively Llewelynish, albeit that they are hedged about by John Cowper's intricate, intellectual qualifications of them? If we move from reading *Maiden Castle* to some of Llewelyn's contemporary productions, we find Llewelyn by comparison absurdly simple and naive in books like *The Twelve Months*, and in his subtler works, like *Earth Memories* and *Dorset Essays*, refreshingly sane and simply close to nature. John Cowper himself made such a comparison, for example in "Four Brothers" of ten years earlier (which we republish in this *Review*), when he noted Llewelyn's "hostility to metaphysical speculation" and to "anything supernatural, mystical" which therefore narrowed his scope, made his responses to life "unporous . . . to certain shadowy intimations, which . . . have their place in the world's complicated orchestra" and caused him to express "a somewhat narrow and unholy hedonism". Dud No-man, although

he is the champion of celandines, likes to be aware of shadowy "intimations" so cannot be identified with such a description of Llewelyn's response to life, even though he could be said to share other characteristics, the obsession with man's mortality and what John Cowper refers to in "Four Brothers" as Llewelyn's constant vision of "the hungry generations' of our human race going forth to their work and to their pleasure". What in fact we might read as Llewelynish in *Maiden Castle* perhaps comes from a characteristic John Cowper sees as shared by all four published Powys brothers, "a certain simple, rustic, naive, pastoral quality". The brothers' shared enjoyment of the natural world suggests that the question of the influence or spiritual impression of Llewelyn's views in *Maiden Castle* is an irrelevance.

John Cowper Powys, of course, frequently wrote about and advocated intense natural observation, observation particularly of a combination of animate and inanimate nature, like wood and stone, as giving power, power almost of the Wordsworthian kind described in "Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey", to "see into the life of things". In his *Autobiography* (1934, p. 199) an experience "beyond sensation" derived from the sight of grass, moss and stonecrop on an ancient wall is specifically linked with his own fictive power. Such a claim is not made for Dud No-man: moss and grass may bring him near to "the secret of things", but not at the expense of everyday human life. Perhaps No-man's sensibility is contrived by Powys so that he contrasts the more starkly in his views and experience with Uryen; there are limits to No-man's "sensations" and a holding back of explication of them: in allusions to his "sensations" throughout the novel they appear much more humdrum and physical than those Powys would call "psychic" (*Autobiography*, p. 29). In No-man's fiercest and most antagonistic encounter with Uryen (at the very time when, with realistic irony, he recognises within himself that he *is* the son of his opponent) we find Dud No-man clutching at the grass

which Uryen declares a "mirage". In the two men's confrontation upon Maiden Castle, we hear No-man asserting the primacy of physical, earthly life against Uryen's "Everything's in the mind." Although both men are mocked by a passing three young men and a dog, who laugh at No-Man's "Cerne Giant club"—which of course identifies him with primitive physical forces, Dud is shown to have a "sense of proportion" but Uryen is presented as a pitiable but definitely *comic* Satanic figure. This comic view and authorial dismissal of Uryen is achieved particularly by his opposition to the sun: "he cast an almost savage glance towards the sky as if the sun were deliberately pelting him with lark-music . . . I've been the Power that's older than all this damned sunshine"!

In fact, Powys's reader has been prepared for such an interpretation at the outset of these vital few pages of the novel (235-9):

It was not only the air-quiverings of the lark that emphasised for our friend at this moment what seemed to him the shocking grotesqueness of his father's talk. The amorous absorption of a pair of white butterflies, coupled in love and fluttering helplessly among the grass-stalks, struck him as bearing yet another witness to the irrelevance of his Father's fantasies. Lark-wings and butterfly-wings seemed to join with the sunshine in *outlawing* such monstrous conceptions.

Can it be that, placed cunningly within the experience of a character who *is* capable of comprehending metaphysical experience, we are being given a defence of Llewelyn's views? Or is the "glory of life" element in *Maiden Castle* especially noticeable because it is at odds with the exceptional weight of mental and emotional pain in the novel, because it provides a streak of light alien to the work's general tendencies? We are unlikely to feel tempted to argue that Llewelyn's spirit is at work in *Wolf Solent* (1929), for example, although that novel's hero (or anti-hero) finds much solace in and through roots, grass and flowers, his final illumination and the survival of his "soul" being aided by the sight of a field of buttercups (re-

flection of Homer's "'sweet light of the sun'"), by the memory of lines from Wordsworth's poems, and even by sight of a "large grey snail with its horns extended". (And all this comes in a last chapter entitled "Ripeness is all", the view attributed to Llewelyn in John Cowper's "Four Brothers"!)

*Wolf Solent* is not without its human suffering but it lacks intense pain and frustration, and the fantasies of Mr. Urquhart, even Mr. Malakite's "erotic insanity, directed towards universal matter" (p. 345), are not potentially evil or anti-life (that is, life under the sun) as are Uryen's in *Maiden Castle*. Possibly the difference is that Powys has in *Maiden Castle* created a context, involving extremities of view, in which Llewelyn's argument for the appreciation of natural earth-life without metaphysical or mystical trappings can be, at times, given an absolute value.

Prompted by the publication of *The Early Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* in 1935, Llewelyn Powys that year wrote an essay, *The Wordsworths in Dorset* (1972). Here Llewelyn recalls asking his brother John what was "the special value of Wordsworth's poetry". John replied, he says, that Wordsworth's

greatest gift was his power of expressing the quality of patient endurance . . . and he went on to say that Wordsworth teaches us not to require beauty, or love, or passion, or glory, but to derive an old-animal sort of pleasure from the mere sensation of being alive, alive to feel the warmth of a cottage fire upon our knees, alive to feel the sun shining down upon the village street. (p. 6)

John Cowper Powys was to expand on something of these ideas in his essay on Wordsworth in *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938) where we find an emphasis on elements of Wordsworth's concerns which were of even more importance to himself, such as the nature of suffering, and the preservation of individual consciousness by means of solitude and self-sufficiency. But here, in Llewelyn's possibly simplifying essay, and in terms attractive to himself, that is of warmth and light (the fire and the



J. C. Powys outside Rat Barn (or Down Barn) in a fold of the hills a mile or so from Chydyok, 1934.

sun), we find a version of the “pleasure in life itself” which gives *Maiden Castle* its norm, its hold on a natural reality. Llewelyn’s and John Cowper’s selections of examples of rural, material life are different. We could so far generalise as to say that Llewelyn tends to notice all things that love the sun, whereas John Cowper (with his inclination to bring self-assurance to people who are unhappily eccentric, odd or on the outskirts of life—or just because the unconventional was more challenging and interesting to write about) tends to refer to natural things which are dank, misty and obscure. Llewelyn reads examples of enjoyment, John of escape and endurance. But are the two writers at base not very different, or was it in urgent consolation for his brother that John Cowper brought some simple Spring sunshine into his *Maiden Castle*?

The observation of the bravery of early flowers is a fairly commonplace and benign comfort to fellow-man, especially the bereaved or ill. (John Cowper, for example, juxtaposes the memory of “the eight petals of a celandine in a . . . ditch” with the announcement of the death of his friend, “the Catholic”, in a letter to Llewelyn (15 February 1929).) This impulse, here to cheer and entertain a brother who cannot go out for walks, can be seen in John’s letter to Llewelyn of 11 June 1936. In previous letters to Llewelyn of the same year, John describes birds, flowers, etc. seen on his walks, but in this one, celandines are noted particularly, and we might suspect through association, for in this letter John Cowper tells of his work of “cutting the cuts” imposed by Schuster’s new editor on *Maiden Castle*. Of the few passages he won’t give up, the only one he names is “five lines . . . of the obscure Old Welsh of Taliesin” with which is linked No-man’s meditation beginning, “This old Welsh” quoted above. “Blood refuses to give up its celandines”; yet in this letter John Cowper asserts in retrospect his partial but creatively important opposition to Llewelyn’s view; he asserts the “assurance”, which he says he leaves to Wolf Solent den-

uded of his “mythology”, “that the material world is not all there is”. (For apparently Llewelyn, despite the “narrow” scope of his writings, was found by John to be the most understanding reader of his works: to Llewelyn was sent the long analysis of the structure of *Wolf Solent*: 16 August 1928.) John writes to Llewelyn, 11 June 1936:

Yesterday I saw . . . the last celandines—those most spirited of all—the first to appear and the last to go when the year’s primal bloom is o’er . . .

I believe I am as concerned to see the last of a flower in its season as I am to see the first! Thus dodging the ‘flowery prime’ even while I enjoy it, and hurrying off up the road dwindling over far-off to the past, and up the road dwindling over far off to the Future—for all the buttercup dust on my shoes!

If in the game of opposites or antagonisms which is *Maiden Castle*, John Cowper Powys did fleetingly slip into the sunny idiom of Llewelyn Powys, in order to counter the destructively-based quest for the supernatural, presented in “Uryen”, it was only fleetingly. With fewer roads to go “hurrying off up”, Llewelyn can render the buttercup dust itself the more vividly: he certainly does it differently. Despite or perhaps because of their shared pleasure in country sights and sounds etc., which is a literary sympathy and more, these two brothers, widely divergent in the nature of their art, if read together usually alienate their reader from one or even both. We abstain from bringing T. F. Powys onto this roundabout, except to remark that neither his nor Llewelyn’s writings are likely to be cast aside if read on the same day.

\* \* \*

We are pleased to announce that the Powys Society of North America, founded in December 1983, is fast growing in strength, had its first formal meeting at Chappaqua, New York, in April 1984, and will gather for its Inaugural Conference, 7-9 June 1985, at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York. Anyone interested in the

Society and/or the Conference should write to Denis Lane (Executive Secretary) of John Jay College, City University of New York & 1 West Place, Chappaqua, N.Y. 10514. Coinciding by chance with the foundation of

the new Society, Harper and Row, New York, announced the publication in November 1984 of the first two American paperbacks of John Cowper Powys's novels: *Wolf Solent* and *Weymouth Sands*.



Llewelyn Powys, a portrait by Gertrude Powys (by courtesy of Lucy Penny and Gerard Casey)



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# John Cowper Powys

## Llewelyn Powys, Writer\* from "Four Brothers, A Family Confession"

(The Century Magazine, September, 1925)

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The basic inclinations lying deep down below all our divergencies—of the four of us who have so far got ourselves into print, for the nicest among us have still fought shy of such publicity—are undoubtedly explicable in terms of heredity, if not of environment.

Reared in a country vicarage; allowed to "run wild" in a large and rambling garden, with its glebe, its orchards, its terraces, its shrubberies; inheriting from one parent the stubborn tribal emotions, earth-bound, volcanic, inarticulate, crafty, of an old Welsh house, and from the other the capricious and rather morbid sensitiveness, saturated with a mania for books, of that family "out of Norfolk" to which William Cowper's mother belonged, we shall all of us, I suppose, display to the end of our days a certain simple, rustic, naïve, pastoral quality which mingles quaintly enough with our various sophisticated perversities. Our parents—*requiescant in pace!*—were both less influenced by passing fashions than we can hope to be; but they have bequeathed to us an odd mixture of conservatism and rebelliousness that lends itself better to literature than to science.

Never was there a less scientific-minded tribe. In addition to this rustic quality and this shameless lack of interest in biology, sociology, mathematics, and finance, I think it might be maintained that we all display a certain strain of humorous maliciousness capable of developing into a positive penchant for certain forms of contemplative cruelty. But to analyze the literary work of one's blood-relations is not an easy task. To analyze it in connection with one's own productions is still more

difficult. To many minds it might seem not only difficult but impossible. And yet there is a peculiar interest, a piquancy even, in making such an attempt; for, after all, there is no reason why criticism, if it is genuine interpretation, should not ply its trade at home as well as abroad.

I do not know that there is anything remarkable in the mere fact of four brothers appearing in print simultaneously, but there does seem a certain—what shall I say?—philosophical interest in an analysis of the manner in which heredity and environment blend their influences in such a case with the capricious freakishness of nature.

To begin with the youngest of the four of us, with my brother Llewelyn.

Reviewing his *Confessions*, *Ebony and Ivory*, *Thirteen Worthies*, *Black Laughter*, and the little volume in Haldeman-Julius's Pocket Series entitled *Honey and Gall*, Llewelyn's writings up to date seem to me to resolve themselves into four technical formulas or moulds of literary expression. Without undue pedantry these various genres might be arranged thus: first, the diaristic or autobiographical form; second, the imaginative or "pure essay" form; third, the biographical form; fourth, the short-story or narrative-sketch form. *Black Laughter* and the *Confessions* would fall into the first division; "Black Gods" and "Threnody", into the second; *Thirteen Worthies*, into the third; and "The Stunner" or "Spheric Laughter", into the fourth.

Among these various forms through which my brother has chosen to express himself, it seems to me that it is the first, the diaristic or autobiographical one, that lends itself most naturally to his peculiar

\*This extract begins at the beginning of the article.

turn of mind and becomes the most fully impregnated with the essence of his personality. It is indeed inevitable that this should be the case, since the most characteristic quality in Llewelyn's temperament is his power in registering an integrated banked-up, and massively simple response to every actual situation in which he finds himself.

One might say that the characteristic yeast of this writer's "whole-wheat" bake-shop, even in the cases where he uses the biographical, discursive, or short-story formula, always springs from the same integral response to the same quite definite and quite special stimulus. For it is only a certain kind of human situation—a kind purged and winnowed of everything not basically rooted in our common earth-life—that really stirs his interest; and his heart-whole, compact reaction, when his interest is stirred, is as reiterated and undeviating as it is idiosyncratic, exclusive, empiric. It goes very deep, this response of his; it goes as deep as life. But it always remains obstinately unporous to certain overtones and undertones, to certain shadowy intimations, which must be admitted, in a more objective synthesis, to have their place in the world's complicated orchestra.

Llewelyn, in plain words, is a poetical materialist with an unconquerable zest for life—for life on any terms. But an ingrained prejudice, amounting to actual hostility, toward anything supernatural, mystical, or metaphysical, narrows the scope of his shrewd and quizzical reactions even more completely than did the scepticism of his master Montaigne. The poetic element, in his materialistic zest for life, is the dominant background to every one of his impressions; and this poetic element takes a very definite form in his mind—a form that is repeated again and again, with small enough variation, in all his writings.

The note I refer to, played upon so constantly, reverberates over the whole field of his experience and keeps up a low, deep monotone, like the humming of a cosmic mill-wheel or the drone of a planetary bumblebee, always just audible out there in

the distance, but never teasingly aggressive. It is in fact his constant vision of "the hungry generations" of our human race going forth to their work and to their pleasure upon the surface of this solar satellite, and returning to their various shelters when the sun goes down, that supplies him with his chief philosophical *point d'appui*. Phrases and sentences full of this particular awareness occur in all his works, and the unconquerable dignity, offset by the grotesque tragedy, of man's life upon earth is something that never grows stale to him. "My illness," he writes in the *Confessions*, "had sharpened my wits. At night when I looked at the stars, I understood the background which belonged to our planet, . . . sailing on to extinction either by some catastrophic celestial collision or by slow senseless withering, and each man, each woman and each child destined also sooner or later to wear white stockings and be carried away to the churchyard."

In the sketch entitled "Death" in *Ebony and Ivory*, we come upon the following drastic question and emphatic answer: "What if the world does contain no purpose, but only a series of sensations for the elect, the chosen, to experience during an inconsequent transit? . . . For us the dread of death adds a tang and relish to life—to the only life for which we care. We accept these terms, we delight in them. The very pride of man indeed rests upon his mortality, for so and only so, does he appear an heroic figure under the sun."

His appreciation of Thomas Hardy in *Thirteen Worthies* contains passages that might well apply to his own work. "For Thomas Hardy writes like a countryman, thinks like a countryman, and has the imagination of a countryman. From first to last the essential element of the drama of existence has been for him nothing more than the simple spectacle of mortal man and mortal woman, passionate and bewildered, moving against a background of immemorial nature. . . . His is the deep, shrewd outlook of an old shepherd, whose native observations of life and death have

supplied him with a tough, idiosyncratic, earth-bound philosophy."

Even in *Black Laughter*, in the African jungle, the same note is struck. "Had some over-sagacious negro a thousand moons ago peered up at the night skies and come to the conclusion that the ultimate question could never be answered, and that it was man's wisest course to cease from speculation and enjoy, without asking questions, the delicate flavour of goat's milk, the grateful warmth of a fire, and the sweet delights of love-making?"

The conclusion, in fact, of all Llewelyn Powys's philosophizing amounts to the old Shakesperian acceptance of fate, implicit in Falstaff's "Mortal men! Mortal men!" and more ideally expressed in that "Man must abide his going hence, even as his coming hither. Ripeness is all."

I seem to detect four main literary influences in my brother's work, that of Charles Lamb, that of Walter Pater, that of Guy de Maupassant, and that of Lytton Strachey. But it appears to me that it is that of Charles Lamb which has sunk the deepest into his mind. And yet where he is most entirely himself is, I think, in *Confessions* and *Black Laughter*, the autobiographical or diaristic portions of his work, where not one of the above influences leaves the faintest trace. In these he appears as the insatiable amateur, the incorrigible adventurer, the life-intoxicated world-child, for whom style and questions of style must all of them fall into a secondary position compared with a certain tough and yet timid curiosity, such as makes use of the tricks of style merely as feelers or antennae to come in contact with the very skin of reality; a curiosity occupied with the actual ways of men and beasts and birds, both as he remembers them in the land of his birth and as he finds them in remote and alien localities.

My brother's unmitigated hostility to metaphysical speculation, his complete indifference to both science and politics, his vigorous championship of the pleasures of the senses against every species of idealism, result, it must be admitted, in a some-

what narrow and unholy hedonism. And yet so penetrating and tender is his sympathy with the primordial physical desires of all living things,—the sensitiveness of their skins, the hunger of their maws, the unappeased craving of their shameless eroticism,—so large and sturdy is his poetic feeling for the diurnal and perennial panorama of earth-life, one is continually haunted by the suspicion, as one reads these racy and idiomatic pages, that it is rather erudite specialists of our disordered time who are refusing "to see life steadily and see it whole" than this stubborn disciple of Chaucer, with his quirks, his whimsies, and his rock-based realism.

No one can read Llewelyn Powys's books without detecting the presence in his temperament of a most charming vein of what is nowadays entitled "infantile fixation".

Beneath his carefully hammered style, redolent of the old masters, one is aware of repeated shocks of childish wonder in him that men and animals and birds and fishes and winds and waters and the high remote constellations should be just what they are and not otherwise. One is even aware of a sort of grave and humorous amazement that it should have been permitted to him—to Llewelyn Powys of Dorchester, Dorset—to express this primitive wonder in intelligible words at all.

And along with this astonishment that pebbles should be round and grass should be green, which is, after all, nothing else than the very heart of authentic poetry, there slips in now and then a most winning note of sheer childish "narcissism"—a note that is all the more effective when it is consciously exploited. "And I, a small child," he writes in "Threnody", "drifting in and out through the tall French windows, regarded shrewdly all this and came to my own conclusions. If our days in the garden of the earth are in reality so uncertain, so brief, if there is indeed so little time for any of us to play under the black-thorn . . . then surely—" But we know well enough what these "brown Satyrs" *have to say* over the graves of their Hamadryads.

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# Ian Hughes

## A Virgin with No Name: The Beginnings of *Maiden Castle*

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John Cowper Powys finally left the United States in June 1934, and with his companion Phyllis Playter took up residence at Rat's Barn, a farmhouse at East Chaldon, some eight miles east of Dorchester. He was soon at work on a new novel, the novel that was eventually to become *Maiden Castle*.<sup>1</sup>

Powys moved to Dorchester in October, and set aside work on the new novel until he had completed *The Art of Happiness*, which had been commissioned by his American publishers Simon and Schuster. At the end of January 1935 he turned again to the novel. He made an entirely fresh start, setting the novel in Dorchester, and abandoning the original setting, which was the countryside around Rat's Barn.

The discarded first starts of *Maiden Castle*, which are located in the Bissell Collection, are of considerable interest as evidence of the novel's conceptual beginnings. They also provide a valuable example of Powys's method of composition in the early stages of a novel.

There can be no certainty that the Bissell Discarded Starts include all the sheets upon which Powys worked before he decided to set the novel entirely in Dorchester, but it does seem most probable. According to an extract from a letter to his brother Llewelyn (as quoted by Malcolm Elwin), Powys thought he had written about fifty pages before deciding to move the beginning of the novel to its Dorchester setting.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the Bissell Discarded Starts consist of 69 pages, which is a little more than Powys's estimate (though he may have had in mind only the last and longest of the starts, consisting of 44 pages, which is much closer to his estimate).

The 69 sheets can be easily arranged into five separate starts, *A* to *E*. *A* consists of nine sheets numbered 1(a) to 1(i). 1(a)

carries the heading '*Chapter 1*'. *B* consists of a single sheet, which bears no number, but is headed '*Chapter 1*'. *C* consists of two sheets, the first of which is not numbered but carries the heading '*Chapter 1*'; the second sheet bears the number '3', but its text seems to follow consecutively from that of the first sheet. *D* consists of thirteen sheets numbered 1 to 13; page 1 carries the heading '*Chapter 1*'. *E* consists of 44 sheets numbered 1 to 44. There is no heading on the first page.

All the sheets have passages that are scored out. So heavy is the scoring that it is often impossible to make out the rejected words. Most of the amendments were obviously made as the author went along, but there is clear evidence that he returned to some sections and revised them after an interval. The clearest evidence is in *E*. 11-15, where the alterations that were made as he went along can be separated from later amendments because of different inks.

Taken together, the Discarded Starts show a deliberate artist struggling to give shape to his material. They give the lie to Louis Wilkinson's absurd but widely quoted claim that Powys composed his novels in an extemporary flow, scarcely altering a word.<sup>3</sup> On most of the sheets there are nearly as many words altered as are finally allowed to stand (and the whole lot, of course, were ultimately rejected). If Powys's writing gives an impression of spontaneity, then that impression is the product, at least in the initial stages of composition, of considered rephrasing; the apparent artlessness of Powys's prose is not carelessly arrived at. To illustrate the point, an exact transcript of sheet *E*. 31 is given on the following page.

Sheet *E*. 31 indicates Powys's concern

## Transcript of E.31

~~xx~~ on calling himself No-Man. Dub Noman or  
Mr D. Noman

31

~~on calling himself Noman.~~

No-man, ~~on calling himself xx "Noman," or D.~~

Dub Noman, ~~"D. Noman" was the xxx "Dub Noman", or~~

~~or "Mr D. Noman", became the appellation~~

by which he insisted on being addressed.

the sake of

~~xxx~~ For some wilful and fantastic

~~romantic~~ \* notion, derived from the romances  
reading,

she was \* always ~~xxxx~~ in, Mary Surd

had refused to let \* him be formally-

~~christian~~ christened in Dagworthy

~~Dub: christened in xx~~

~~church,~~

formally christened, ~~in church,~~ either in Dagworthy

But or anywhere else. She had called-

calling

confined herself to <sup>^</sup> him "baby" at first, and then,

because as an infant he had a way-

a

acquired <sup>^</sup>trick of repeating the syllable "dud" --

dud, dud, dud, dud. "dud-dud",

~~du~~ "dud-dud", "dud-dud" x

"dud-dud" . . "dud-dud" he would cry  
splutter, over and over again, --

~~xx over and over~~

again, she got to call him

she got into the habit of calling him

"Duddy." and had ~~and soon~~

This harmless \* word ~~xx xx~~  
\* the village

after that "Dubby" or just

children \* soon simply "Dub".

changed to "Dubby"; and "Dubby" he remained.

When the beautiful

~~till Dorothea~~ Dorothea descended on

~~the scene like a goddess xxx xxx~~

Dorothea ~~xx~~ them like a being from

~~she~~

from a diviner air, ~~xxxx she came~~

~~xx~~

~~xxx xxxx~~ <sup>^</sup> as a matter of fact from Tunbridge Wells

Clapham -- and it was revealed

to her that her ~~xx~~ to her by

a morbid \* her apologetic

Tithonus was not only a

bastard Tithonus that he had

was not only a

with the matter of names, which was to become one of the thematic strands of *Maiden Castle*. As Glen Cavaliero has pointed out, "Names play an important part in the book's texture, especially nick-names. At the centre is Dud No-man, a bastard who, on discovery of his bastardy, adopts this name of his own invention as an expression of his loss of identity."<sup>4</sup>

The idea of namelessness is present at the outset: the first sheet of the first start clearly announces it (for the sake of readability, here and in all further quotations from the Discarded Starts, the standing text only is given, with spelling and punctuation normalised):

A(a) It has not often happened, even in the most primitive times, for a man to have no name. Such, however, by a singular concatenation of circumstances was the misfortune of a lean, hook-nosed, untidy individual of about forty who on a September afternoon of the present era found himself accosted, as he ascended a hill not far from the town of Dorchester, by an elderly farm labourer.

It is reasonable to conclude, then, that the idea of namelessness was the conceptual starting-point of the novel, although by itself it is insufficient to provide a primary theme. What that primary theme might be is suggested elsewhere in the Discarded Starts.

Start A continues with a character sketch of No-man, and introduces two further thematic strands of the eventual novel, No-man's detachment from other human beings and his feeling of being threatened by persons of gross virility:

A(a) The labourer who thus accosted the man without a name was sitting sideways on a heavily built horse. The man in question was neither a tramp nor a gipsy, though there was something about him that, with a little roughening of his attire, might have suggested either of these affiliations. Nor was he a foundling, or a waif, like the unfortunate hero of *L'Homme qui rit*. He was, as a matter of fact, a respectable shop-assistant from the ancient Roman town of Durnover, at present enjoying

A(b) a belated holiday in a cottage built a century ago as an integral portion of a

spacious farm barn in a lovely valley of the Dorset downs. But respectable as this nameless person was, there had been, throughout all his forty years, only two modifications of his singular anonymity. When he was a baby he used to give vent at frequent intervals to the humble syllables 'Dud-dud', and this led to his mother calling him Duddy; and finally, when he had been married to a lady a good deal younger than himself and had lived with her for a year in his parents' house at Swithold, she had acquired the presumption to use at his expense the disparaging monosyllable Dub. It was, however, long before the appearance of this young lady that Dud-dud's mother revealed to him the fact that his father was not his father, but that in plain English he was a bastard. It was this news that made Dud-dud into a nameless one, for in a fit of pride he refused any longer to be called by

A(c) his mother's married name. Nor would he consent to relapse upon her maiden name, which was taken from the old-world town of Tewkesbury. He acquired the misanthropic habit, whenever he was forced—as we all are sometimes—to put a label on himself, of calling himself No-man. But if Dud-dud had been led by his malicious pride to detach himself from the human race by becoming No-man when he still had, to all intents and purposes, a mother, a father, and a wife, he was, at this later epoch of his life, for all his conventional respectability, as completely detached from normal human interests as when he had idled away his youth under their care. His employers found this detachment of his exactly suited to their purpose. He never drank. He never went out with girls. He never quarrelled with the customers or made inconvenient alliances with them. He never gossiped. He never took sides over politics. He never discussed religion. He even refrained from telling people what they ought, as intellectual persons, to read. He sold Miss Braddon with as much gusto as Miss Stein

A(d) and Edgar Wallace with as much aplomb as D. H. Lawrence. Detached as Dud-dud showed himself, however, in his role as assistant bookseller of Watt Street, it would have been obvious to anyone who observed this present encounter with the carter of Mole that it was an extremely distasteful one to him. This fact—for the man

did not lack the wit to detect his feeling—in place of causing the carter any distress, caused him apparently no little satisfaction. There are continual encounters of this sort in our human world, when neither class nor education nor position nor intellect makes the least difference and when one human eye looks into another human eye and proceeds to prod the beast in the cave. Thus, from the back of his big horse, with his great boots dangling a few feet from the bookseller's nose, the carter of Mole poked mercilessly at poor Dud-dud through the narrow slits in their two skulls. The rascal managed it so cleverly that every word he addressed to his lubberly great horse had in some sideways way the effect of lambasting Mr No-man.

The rest of Start *A* continues the unequal interview between No-man and the carter. Starts *B*, *C*, and *D* are alternative versions of the meeting. In those three starts the carter is given the name 'Manley' (a name that Powys had already used in *Wolf Solent* for the heavy-jowled owner of Willum's Mill, who has a bull-like voice and a habit of casting looks of jocose and jeering brutality at sensitive and vulnerable persons).

Although *Maiden Castle* contains no character like the carter of the Discarded Starts, the attribute of coarse manliness is very much present in Enoch Quirm, making No-man most uncomfortable but strongly attracting Wizzie Ravelston.

It is in Start *E*, however, that Powys begins to develop the character and history of No-man in a way that manifestly prefigures their presentation in *Maiden Castle*. The first twelve sheets introduce the lone figure of No-man returning through an empty landscape to Nettle Hut, an isolated cottage that he has rented for a few weeks' holiday in late August. No-man proceeds in a mechanical, half-conscious manner and seems detached from his surroundings. Having entered the living room of the cottage, a room bare of furniture except for a table and an armchair, he stokes up the fire and places his kettle on it to make tea.

He stares into the fire as he waits for the kettle to boil: 'What he saw most of that time in the red glow of his crackling sticks was not the jeering face of that carter on the

back of the great brown horse, but three graves under a wall.' (That passage suggests that a version of the encounter with Carter Manley was to be inserted near the beginning of the narrative.) Then follow several pages dealing with No-man's wife Dorothea, his mother Mary Surd, and his stepfather Aaron Surd, all of whom have died some four years previously. They are clearly precursors of Mona, Cornelia, and Aaron in *Maiden Castle*:

*E. 16* As he stared at his fire now, waiting for the kettle to boil, his mind kept brooding upon every detail of his visit yesterday to that churchyard. 'Aaron Surd and his beloved wife Mary Surd'—he saw exactly how those words looked on the bigger stone. 'Dorothea Surd, née Swallow' was on the smaller stone, and he could remember how the word 'Dorothea' had a whole line to itself, and how an invisible snail had left a little glittering track over the lower part of the 'D'. His father had been the organist in Dagworthy Bub and also in a more important church at Datchery, five miles away. He himself had been, while his father lived,

*E. 17* not only not a bookseller. He had been nothing at all. At least he had been nothing at all since he left Maumbury Agricultural College. But though his parents had indulged him in his extreme unwillingness to work for his living, they had protested against his bringing a wife into their home. But he had overridden their protest, and until they, as well as Dorothea herself, fell victims to a strange epidemic that visited the place one autumn, he knew a couple of years of almost unruffled contentment. [. . .]

There are persons born into this world, though they are certainly rare, who have a psychic power for manipulating human nerves so as to create an aura of well-being. Such a person was Dorothea. As he called her up now, with his fingers gripping his bony knees and his nostrils inhaling the

*E. 18* sweet wood-smoke, it was with a very singular feeling. In some curious way, just as he had respected her too much while she was alive to feel ordinary passion for her, so now he experienced too much gratitude to her to feel the poignancy of her death. He knew very well that she had entered their life in Dag-

worthy Bub like a supernatural being, and like a supernatural being had carried off Aaron and Mary with her when she went away; and now, when he thought of those three graves, he thought of his father and mother with a tenderness that was enhanced by their homely faults, by their eccentricities, by their moods of weakness and rebellion. [But] above all *he thought of them as dead*, whereas of Dorothea he thought as if she had never died at all, but was just as strong, just as ethereal, just as wise now as when she had bestowed upon the three of them those two paradisiac years.

*E. 19* Dorothea Swallow had been an extremely fair woman and had possessed that sort of transparently fair flesh that endows a person at certain moments with an unearthly look. It was of one of those moments, now, that Old Corvey's assistant, as the lid of his kettle began to jump up and down and clouds of steam began to pour from its spout, found himself thinking—thinking with no wild longing to have her back again but with a strange, almost religious feeling that she was protecting him still, and indeed that she had never, in the sense his mother and father had, died at all! Neither he himself nor his mother or father could have been called humble-minded, but what he remembered now, as he stared at these burning logs, was the way all three of them had treated Mrs Surd the younger, née Swallow, as being of a different stuff from themselves. The man's cheeks were already hot from bending over the fire, but

*E. 20* he felt them grow perceptibly hotter as he recalled certain occasions when—he willing and she willing, as Homer would say—he had desired to consummate their marriage but had been held back from it, as though that transparent flesh of hers were actually the flesh of a creature higher than mortal men! He was an ardent though not a very scholarly reader of the ancient classics, always giving them a twist in the direction of his own case, and he never touched the stories of Tithonus or Peleus or Orion or Endymion but an odd sensation, at once queasy and exalted, stirred in the pit of his stomach. 'Why did I let her die a virgin?' was in fact a sentence that had for many years been hovering about the threshold of his consciousness. This daring cry met too great a psychic barrier in his deeper being ever to be

*E. 21* articulated, but a subtle diffusion of this cry, if one can speak in such terms, kept mixing with all he felt about Dorothea. Had the shade of either of his parents suddenly materialized now before him by this smoke-blackened hearth, he would [have] gone cold all over and have felt, 'Can the dead come back?' But had the soft calm face of Dorothea appeared and fixed its grey eyes upon him, he would have taken it as a natural part of his life, as no more than a palpable but illusory embodiment of the idol of his daily thoughts.

Several elements of those pages will be immediately familiar to readers of *Maiden Castle*: the unconsummated marriage; the benign wraith-like nature of the dead wife; and, perhaps, most strikingly, the peculiar personality of No-man.

Before the *E* narrative introduces the crucial element of No-man's name and identity, there is some comic business concerning No-man's kitchen rituals. As in *Maiden Castle*, No-man assigns names and personality to his cooking utensils, and talks to them; he has two kettles and a saucepan, and he calls them Mob, Bob, and Chittery-Bob.

After finishing his simple evening meal of bread and butter washed down with tea, No-man reflects upon his name and the mystery of his illegitimacy:

*E. 28* His cogitations had in fact touched upon a matter that always tickled him when he thought of it. He thought of his name, or, to speak more correctly, of the singular concatenation of events that had made him unique in this personal label. He recalled the momentous occasion when after

*E. 29* some trifling altercation with Aaron, who had closed the door in a huff, his mother had shut her book as abruptly as Aaron had shut the door, and bending forward towards him as the volume lay on her lap, had removed her spectacles, and in a low intense voice had uttered the words: 'I always said it would come to this.' The youth had enquired (it was during one of his later holidays from Maumbury) what she meant by 'this'—for Aaron's explosion had seemed to him a very innocent one—and a broken stream of startling revelations had followed. His mother ex-

plained to him, with the natural hesitation of a virtuous and reserved woman, that, though he was *her* son, he was not her husband's. He was, in plain speech, a bastard. It was in vain then, and in vain on many later occasions, that he implored her to tell him whose son he was, if he wasn't 'Father's', but this information had never passed her lips. She had apparently gratified some long-suppressed grudge against her husband in that crucial moment, but further than this nothing could induce her to go. 'Don't 'ee speak of it, Dub,' she would say. 'I've sinned enough in telling 'ee of it.' And there

*E. 30* he was forced to let it rest. But of course, being the brooding and introspective lad he was, it didn't really rest. He thought of it every day and every night. It seemed a monstrous thing in his mother not to tell him more, and he punished her—though, it is true, rather unconsciously than consciously—by drawing closer to the unwitting Aaron. Did his 'father' realize he wasn't his son? He never knew; but he began to feel a queer sense of guilt towards the abstracted musician, and indeed he got into the habit, after that, of blowing the organ for him in the darkening chancel of Dagworthy Bub. It was not, however, only because, like Edmund in *Lear*, he could ring the changes on 'bastard', 'bastardy', and 'base' that a wry smile still twitched his lips as he rose and moved to the fire, fumbling in his pockets for a cigarette. He gave up calling himself, thinking of himself, or signing himself 'Surd' after he buried his parents and his wife. In his gloomy humour, when he first became a shop-assistant in Swithold, he insisted

*E. 31* on calling himself No-man. Dub No-man became the appellation by which he insisted on being addressed. For the sake of some wilful and fantastic notion, derived from the romances she was already reading, Mary Surd had refused to let him be formally christened either in Dagworthy Bub or anywhere else. She had confined herself to calling him Baby at first, and then, because as an infant he had acquired a trick of repeating the syllable 'dud'—'dud-dud . . . dud-dud' he would splutter, over and over again—she got into the habit of calling him Duddy. This harmless word the village children soon changed to Dubby; and Dubby he remained. When the beautiful Dorothea descended on

them like a being from a diviner air, and it was revealed to her by her apologetic Tithonus that he had

*E. 32* not only no right to the name Surd but actually was that rare thing in a civilized community, a man without a name, she forced his mother to reveal the origin of the word 'Dubby', and, after she learnt it, her own private name for him was always Dud. [. . .]

*E. 33* In fact a very scandalous thought, and one that rather shocked his complacency a little, came into his head as he smoked cigarette after cigarette while the twilight deepened about his window. Dub No-man was a man who shamelessly indulged his most outrageous thoughts. So, though this particular one did strike his mind as inconsistent with his banked-up emotional cult, he allowed it full consideration. What came into his head was that he had been much more himself and had been secretly a great deal happier since the deaths of the three persons who had made up his outward existence. Giving free rein to this impious and inhuman thought, he softened the blasphemy of it by telling himself that he was by nature, as well as by destiny, a bastard and a bachelor. 'Don't go and curse me now,' he said [. . .], addressing the brick to the right of the grate. 'You are my precious Doll and always will be. But I'm a funny one, and was no more meant to be married to you than I was meant to blow the organ for Aaron Surd.' [. . .]

*E. 36* But though his feelings at this moment, when he was doing what it always so scared the superstitious persons in ancient history to do, were surrounded by overtones and undertones of faint uneasiness, they were also, even in their actual self-congratulation, much more involved than the mere blunt thought, 'My life suits me damned well, and I'll jolly well stop anything from ruffling it!' Dub No-man was, for example, convinced that the spirit of Dorothea never ceased to hover about him; and he was convinced too that it did so out of no insensate passion but out of the tender pride it took in protecting him, directing him, and driving away demons. When he indulged the monstrous and wicked thought 'I'm glad Dorothea is dead', or the not less impious and unholy thought 'I'm glad I'm an orphan and I'm glad I'm a bastard', he need not have regarded

*E.* 37 his attitude as quite as unpardonable as he did, for, though it was a simple and natural attitude—for, after all, Dub No-man, like any other Dub, had to consider number one first—it was, like all simple attitudes belonging to living organisms, of a *rich* simplicity; that is to say, though simple, it was not obvious. It was indeed both very difficult to define and dyed deeply in the grain with its unique idiosyncrasy. The white slenderness of Dorothea had not persuaded him to meddle with her virginity, and he was glad enough, now, that it hadn't—for how could he, in his life at Corvey's shop, have coped with a child?

That last sentence hints at what was to become one of the major ironies of No-man's situation in *Maiden Castle*. No-man is unwilling to take on the conventional responsibilities of family life. In *Start E* he is glad that he did not consummate his marriage with Dorothea because, if he had, he might have been left with a child to look after. In *Maiden Castle* he takes Wizzie Ravelston as his mistress, but evades consummation with her, as he had earlier evaded consummation with Mona. Wizzie, however, already has a child, who is illegitimate like No-man himself. The child's father is the coarse but virile Old Funky. The irony is further compounded by Wizzie's attraction to Enoch Quirm, another coarsely virile figure, who has been revealed as No-man's father. (And there is surely an element of father-seeking in Wizzie's infatuation.) At the end of the novel, the irony is neatly rounded off by Wizzie's escape to America (thus casting off her parental responsibility) and by No-man's decision to remain in Dorchester (as much from inertia, one feels, as from deliberate choice), in close proximity to the child Lovie.

One further element in *Start E* is of some interest, and that is the introduction of the character that was to become Nance Quirm in *Maiden Castle*. As No-man sits in Nettle Hut, enjoying his solitude and congratulating himself on his freedom from all personal involvement, a stranger arrives:

*E.* 42 . . . the steps renewed themselves; and this time they were quite clear and quite close.

Dub No-man stood motionless in the middle of the room, staring at the porch. Then, in a second, a woman's figure presented itself in the entrance, obscuring the sky and making one blot with the gorse bushes. The woman, though she must have seen him standing there, lifted her right hand and tapped gently on the open door. Her long arm became a thin bent stick, stretched across the framed picture of the outer world. 'What is it?' he said sharply; and then, instead of moving a step, his whole body grew rigid. There was something about this person's sudden appearance that completely destroyed his self-possession. His soul had come up so near the surface in his recent introspection that the intruder had caught him stark naked.

*E.* 43 'May I come in? I'm not very well. It's—it's nothing—but if—if I could have—a glass of water—it would be a mercy!' While these expressions fell weakly from her in a husky voice, the woman belied both tone and words by stepping forward boldly and resolutely into the room. 'Of course—I should think so—certainly—I am so sorry,' Dub blurted out. 'Here! Sit down here, while I get it.' Thus speaking, he took her by the sleeve of her faded brown jacket—a garment more suited for December than August—and propelled her towards his armchair. He then hurried into the kitchen, picked up an empty glass, rushed out with it, and, returning from the tap, gave it to the woman. She drank it greedily, and then—her mouth and chin still wet—she handed the glass back to him with a smile.

*E.* 44 'Thank you a thousand times,' she sighed. 'I'll be all right now.' The smile that illuminated her ravaged countenance as she spoke made her look almost young. But she was clearly about Dub's own age, that is to say about forty. She was a woman with a long thin neck and a long white face. Her eyes were small and of a pale hazel colour, and she wore spectacles. The latter she now proceeded to take off and to wipe with the edge of her jacket. Then she pushed some stray locks of her hair, which were of a weather-bleached pallid brown, securely under her knitted cap, and, replacing her spectacles, smiled at him for the second time.

And there the Discarded Starts finish. But those final sheets indicate that the character

of Nance and the establishment of an uneasy bond between her and No-man were already occupying Powys in the earliest stages of composition. Although Nance stands in the shadow of Wizzie and Thuella for much of *Maiden Castle*, No-man's first involvement with another person in Dorchester is with Nance Quirm; and in the closing paragraphs of the novel No-man and Nance stand hand in hand beside Enoch's grave. Then No-man determines that he "must be decent to Nance"; and the closing words of the novel are: ". . . he went to meet Nance."

How many more elements in the complex pattern of *Maiden Castle* were already in Powys's mind at the time of writing the Discarded Starts must remain a matter of conjecture. The Starts contain nothing of the Urien theme, nothing of Wizzie Ravelston, nothing of Thuella Wye. Indeed, there is nothing of Dorchester or of the symbolically crucial Maiden Castle itself. Most probably the idea of using Maiden Castle as a symbolic centre of the novel did not develop until Powys had been living in Dorchester for some time and had become fascinated by the progress of the Mortimer Wheeler excavations, which attracted considerable public interest from 1934 to 1937.<sup>5</sup> The metaphysical speculations of Enoch Quirm would undoubtedly have appealed to Powys as an apt counterweight to the archaeological investi-

gations, enabling the author to make of the Maiden Castle theme a symbolic analogue of the primary theme of interference with maidenhood.

If, however, the Discarded Starts scarcely hint at the rich complexities of the completed novel, they do provide evidence that the author had the primary theme clear in his mind from the outset: the novel was to explore problems of identity (for parent and offspring) that may be consequent upon illicit but normal sexual relations, while it would also explore the possibility of sustaining sexual relations that do not interfere with maidenhood. Enoch Quirm's call for "sterile passion" and No-man's fear of committing himself to a conventional sexual relationship with its concomitant responsibilities are present in embryo in the Discarded Starts. In *Maiden Castle* problems of identity and sexuality are intertwined; and in the Discarded Starts one can see how the author is working towards the primary theme of the novel even in the matter of establishing the protagonist's name: if 'No-man' implies lack of identity, 'Dud' implies impotence; and it is the unravished bride Dorothea who has chosen that first name—Dorothea who was obliged to die a virgin so that Dud No-man could keep to himself his privately created identity by refusing to yield up, as it were, his own maidenhood.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For a detailed account of the textual history of *Maiden Castle*, see my article "A Poor Ragged Maiden", in *The Powys Review*, 12, 1983, pp. 17-25.

<sup>2</sup>Malcolm Elwin, "Prefatory Note", *Maiden Castle*, 1966, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Louis Wilkinson, "Preface", *Letters of John*

*Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, ed. Louis Wilkinson, 1958, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup>Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist*, Oxford, 1973, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>See R. E. M. Wheeler, *Maiden Castle, Dorset*, Oxford, 1943, pp. 2-3.

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# Susan Rands

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## *Maiden Castle: Symbol, Theme and Personality*

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“Above all, it is a study of the destructive powers of feminine emotions”, concluded my stepfather, Malcolm Elwin, in his preface to the 1966 Macdonald edition of *Maiden Castle*. Try as I might, I have not been able to find much within the novel about these putative powers. On the contrary, it is the male characters of *Maiden Castle* who would fail any ordinary test of compatibility.

The hero, Dud No-man is impotent, his father, Enoch Quirm is mad, Ben Urgan is a rapist and blackmailer, Teucer Wye is a desiccated Platonist supported by his daughter, Roger Cask is a Communist, Dunbar Wye is a Fascist, and from Mr Cumber, the successful man of affairs, “all the vibrations quivering forth into that pleasant room from all these soft feminine bodies, and from the fabrics that concealed and revealed them, fell away, as if in the presence of some non-conducting chemical substance from the man’s iron-clad virility.” (213; 225)<sup>1</sup> Mr Cumber precedes Robert Graves’s “swordsmen of the narrow lips” but they are indubitably two of a kind, while the minor male characters in *Maiden Castle* are lechers. No wonder all the affection of the heroine, Wizzie, is for her old horse, the partner and support of her highly trained skill and daring.

When she goes back to the circus to fetch her daughter, Lovie, “‘Suppose I stayed here,’ her heart whispered, ‘and rode him again to-night? And rode him to-morrow and never stopped riding him till we were both dead!’” (284; 296) As she imagines herself doing this she compares her other feelings, mere fondness for Dud, and hatred of Funky. Later in the novel Wizzie is referred to as a “natural daughter of the earth-goddess Ceridwen” (353; 364) whom Frazer,

Rhys and Graves have all identified with Demeter; there are classical associations of Demeter with horses, and several such associations of Rhiannon, another version of Ceridwen, in the *Mabinogion*; and to-day, feminine involvement with horses is even more real and prevalent; thus, as so often, Powys’s imagery mingles myth with realism.

When Wizzie begins to feel attracted to Enoch, she thinks him “*like my old horse*”. (362; 373) The scene where she finds her horse again is one of the most moving that Powys ever wrote, not only because of the affection between them but because of the pathos of Wizzie’s pride struggling so valiantly against the dictates of her heart. This seems to me a fine example of a particularly feminine dilemma; our hearts often lead us where there is an overwhelming threat to our identity as persons; conversely where our pride leads it is often difficult for our hearts to follow. This, I think is what feminism is about. Wizzie is lucky in that both her heart and her pride were in her work but she is unlucky in that Old Funky spoilt it for her. At the same time she is lucky to be found by Dud and his friends who give her back her self-respect and therefore a chance of recreating her life as she would wish it to be. *Maiden Castle* is a wonderfully feminist novel.

Fifty years ago Powys used the word in much the same sense as that in which it is bandied about to-day: Jenny Dearth is described to Dud by her sister Thuella as a “feminist”; Dud need not be alarmed; “she is not a social worker”. (61; 73) Jennie had what she considered “the most—pure and—spiritual friendship” with Roger Cask; “we were equals. He always listened to what I said . . . We were like one person”. (296; 308) But when Roger gets the idea that a true

Communist must work with his hands, and instead of doing good deeds, takes a job in a coal yard, Jenny is so angry that she will have nothing to do with him. The hard work, unsuitable to his constitution, combined with her anger, make him ill. Jenny and Claudius are two characters for whom the story ends well; it is notable that a state of equality and mutual respect is fully established between them before the rift that ends when their physical relationship begins.

The extent to which men and women see things differently simply because of the difference in sex is shown by the different reactions of Dud and Wizzie to Teucer Wye's hysterical outburst against the heedless Thuella.

Wizzie's view was that the old man's clever and lovely daughter was sacrificing her chances of being married in order to keep a tiresome and fussy old gentleman from becoming a pauper . . . 'I hate silly old men like that . . . *He's* a gentleman of course, and the other's a poor man, but . . . He made me think of old Funky!'

Dud felt outraged by this remark. It was not the first time that Wizzie had shocked him by revealing a point of view staggeringly different from his own, but this confusion of values struck him as abominable. It gave him a sense of a gulf between them that he could see no way of bridging. (171; 183)

This seems to me to be one of the main themes of *Maiden Castle*; that there is a gulf between the sexes that there is indeed no way of bridging except through all that is symbolically represented by the heraldic head. To Dud it represents "that Faustian 'desire' to penetrate and enjoy—even in forbidden directions—the huge mystery of the Cosmos" (6; 18), the desire, it seems, that men and women usually hope to gratify by the enjoyment of each other's sexuality. When the story begins, and Dud has only known his mother, not his father, there is only one carving on the bed; Dud's impression is that it was to his mother "some symbol of her concealed past" (5; 17); this fits with the instinct that parents have, not exactly to hide, but certainly not to reveal their sex-lives to their children; and many adults, as

Dud does later, wish that their parents had confided in them more.

Before Enoch gives him the second head Dud "dallied" several times with the "wild fantasy" that "Enoch Quirm had been his mother's unknown lover", and was repelled by the idea; and Enoch gives him the head before telling him that he is in fact his father. It seems to me that this is a psychologically accurate portrayal of the sequence in which many of us comprehend the reality of our fathering, whether late or soon.

As far as Dud's own libido is concerned, as distinct from his parents', and their effect on him, he "obscurely linked his mother's bed post demon with Malory's *Questing Beast*". (102; 114) The impression given is that he consciously identifies himself with the good knight Sir Palomides whose quest was the beast, and as "he tried to recall the obscure arguments, drawn by Professor Rhys from an gnomonic allusion of Taliesin's, that identified this *Questing Beast* with the ambiguous word 'Dor-math', meaning the Door of Death", we realise that it was to follow "evermore", but never to catch the Beast, that appealed. (103; 115)

The complications arising from human sexuality are as old and far-reaching as our life on the planet. In this novel both man's life on earth and his intense creativity, seem to be symbolized by the earthwork of Maiden Castle. This is Dud No-man's impression of it.

Towards this object, towards this low-lying and yet grandly rising mass of *fossae* and *valla*, this man-made promontory of earth in an expanse of natural earth, this man-made city of turf in an expanse of natural turf, this Titanic erection of the demented mould-warp man, heaved up between the roots of the grass and the highways of the winds, the narrow road led as directly and undeviatingly as if this vast Polis, for so the classical geographer designated it, this mystical City of Dunium, had been an antediluvian monster—a monster compared with whom Leviathan himself were but a fieldmouse—whose long straight dragon's tongue lay supine as a strip of seaweed so that the Beings it intended to swallow might advance at ease along it, un-

deterred by any distraction from advancing to their doom.

Dud stared in fascination at the great earth-monument.

From this halfway distance it took all sorts of strange shapes to his shameless mind. It took the shape of a huge 'dropping' of supermammoth dung.

It took the shape of an enormous seaweed-crusted shell, the shell to the fish called Kraken, whom some dim motion of monstrous mate-lust had drawn up from the primal slime of its sea-bed.

It took the shape of that vast planetary Tortoise, upon whose curved back, sealed with the convoluted inscriptions of the Nameless Tao, rested the pillar of creation.

But above all as he surveyed that dark-green bulk rising at the end of the long, narrow road he was compelled to think of the mysterious nest of some gigantic jurassic-age bird-dragon, such as in this May sunshine, he could imagine even now hatching its portentous egg. (218; 230)

The last fancy of Dud's is near enough to a huge magnification with a body added of the "grotesque head of heraldic carving" on Dud's bed of which he asks, "was it a lion's head, a bird's head, a dragon's head, or a human head?" (5; 17) All these questions could justifiably be asked of several prehistoric monsters' heads, and it seems to me that Powys might have been inspired to imagine Maiden Castle as the nest of such a monster by seeing the hand and arm of one which may be seen in the Dorchester Museum.<sup>2</sup>

While Powys, living in Dorchester at 38 High East Street in 1934-5, began writing his novel about a hero with the same address, Mortimer Wheeler began excavating Maiden Castle.<sup>3</sup> He found the three horned bull, Taurus Trigonarous, referred to by Enoch Quirm, and he found a chalk model of a Neolithic headless torso; they are both to be seen in the Dorchester Museum; but the woman's head, and the "eyeless, earless" beast head with which, in the novel, the torso formed a group (372; 383), were Powys's invention as symbols for his theme. Sitting round Dud's catalytic bonfire on Midsummer's Eve, having seen this "discovery", Wizzie and Thuella have sudden

insights into the reasons for their unhappiness, and their angry grief is vented on Dud although he is in no sense really the cause; but to Wizzie he "actually looked as if nothing would please him more than for them all to leap upon him and throw him into those red embers". (376; 388)

It is time to look closely at the personality of this strange hero: he is an historical novelist writing about Mary Channing who was burnt in the Amphitheatre in Dorchester early in the eighteenth century; she is supposed to have murdered her brutal husband so that she could live with her lover; society dealt very harshly with her.

A constantly recurring theme in Powys's work is his feeling for the unhappiness of women, especially those who suffer for love. He was greatly impressed by the fate of Margaret in *Faust* and of Blodeuwedd in the *Mabinogion*. In *Maiden Castle*, Dud Norman says about Mary Channing, "'I'll make her so pitiful . . . I'll describe her judges and her husband and the cruelty of those onlookers so piercingly that I'll burn this crime into the bones of Wessex. *I'll do what they did to her, only the other way round!*'" (248; 262) In *Porius* Powys carries this theme further when Myrddin Wyllt turns the owl back into a beautiful girl; there the owl seems in a sense to be Teleri but it derives from the owl that Blodeuwedd was turned into, and also the bird with which Margaret in *Faust* identifies herself in the sad, half-mad song that she sings in the dungeon. In *Maiden Castle* it is the desire to right such wrongs that makes Dud look as though he would like to be a sacrificial victim on his own bonfire.

His name is very provocative; Malcolm Elwin has said that he was called No-man to avoid libel. This may have been the germ of the idea but Powys makes infinitely more of it. In a long angry speech Wizzie says three times to Dud, "You're not a man" (428; 440) because in various ways he does not behave as most other men would. He is detached, calm and kind when they would be involved and angry. One of the reasons for this is that he has "such an outrageous imagination" that he can bear shock with

“equanimity” (267; 280); for example, long before he knows it to be so, he has imagined that Enoch is his father, and that Wizzie has had a child by Funky.

Even more remarkably, very early in the story, he imagines himself “finding out that this man at the door was the living incarnation of his mother’s ‘Questing Beast’.” (133; 145) Note the phrase “at the door”. That the Questing Beast may be identified with the Door of Death has already been implied. Thus what Dud calls his imagination seems to have been a sort of clairvoyance.

It was, I think, largely because of Dud’s very unusual personality that the wheel of Wizzie’s fortune turns so quickly; only someone who stays uninvolved would allow her to act out her troubles as Dud does. In one year she turns from a girl almost insane from the traumas she has suffered into a kind, sensitive and self-possessed young woman who has strong impulses to help other unhappy people, not only Enoch to whom she is attracted, but Claudius, when he is ill, and Teucer Wye, when he is about to throw his beloved books into the fire. The kindness of the sisters Jenny Dearth, and Thuella Wye, help to bring about this change but so does Dud’s detachment.

Several commentators have noticed Powys’s interest in marginal states of being. Professor Wilson Knight has said that he did not think of life or death but of the hyphen which was one becoming the other.<sup>4</sup> “No man is an island” wrote Powys’s ancestor, John Donne. I think this is another hyphen that interested Powys, the state of not being completely attached or detached from our fellows, and the extent to which being one or the other is a condition of manhood. The question is often in Dud’s thoughts, while his ability to enjoy alone, and so much, his own sensations, is a great grievance to Wizzie.

Dud’s impotence is in the tradition of all priests who served goddesses in Classical and pre-Classical times; in a modern context it leads the women to reveal their thoughts and feelings beyond the point where, had he been other than he is, he would have stopped them or they would have stopped them-

selves, whether in the love relationship he attempts with Wizzie, the flirtation with Thuella, the social relationship with Jenny, or the friendly one with Nance. All four open their hearts to him; “his new mania for dissecting women’s souls” is surely satisfied. (140; 151)

As an historian Dud has a lively sense of the phases of man’s life on earth but he is also very much a man of his own times. In a recent edition of “Bookmark” on television, Simon Winchester and his fellows, “to avoid yet another programme about George Orwell”, looked back fifty years to 1934, the year Powys returned from America to England for good, and began *Maiden Castle*. They said it was a time characterized by sexual fantasies and a sense of style. *Maiden Castle* is, par excellence, about sexual fantasies, and the manners and modes of thought and action with which very different men attempt to come to terms with the women in their lives.

When the story opens, Dud’s sexual fantasies have been dominated by images of his wife who has been dead for ten years, and with whom, in the single year he was married to her, he never consummated the marriage. Is not this the very nature of a fantasy, that it is about something that is not and never was, but that has a powerful place and influence in one’s mental landscape?

Powys recognized with every sympathy the existence of fantasy, but with an instinct much deeper he rejected it as a basis for action. Dorchester’s rivers and underground waterways symbolize the free-flowing of Dud’s emotions when, in attempting to “set his dead free” and to enter a relationship with the very lively Wizzie, he lifts “a great sluice-dam in his emotional fate.” (61; 73) Alas, his attempts are barely successful. When he writes “Mona” across Dumbell’s remarkably good sketch of the newly disinterred figure (possibly Ceridwen) from Maiden Castle, we realize that his libido, in spite of all his conscious efforts towards Wizzie, is still attached to Mona. (382; 394) Whereas hers, which was formerly inert because of her sufferings, is now alive but is in no way directed towards Dud.

And this at a time when their social togetherness was much greater than usual; they were "united against the outer world as if they were the most passionate of lovers". (380; 392) Thus Powys shows intentions, sensations and the social situation all at odds with each other. He heightens by means of symbolism serious and secret aspects of being.

All the first half of *Maiden Castle* is told through the person of Dud; all the second through Wizzie until the last few pages after she has gone to America. In the first half we are told of Dud's feelings and fantasies about Wizzie, and in the second we learn of Wizzie's feelings, how Dud annoys her and how attracted she is to Enoch Quirm. At the same time we are aware that Enoch's interest in Wizzie, and much greater interest in Thuella Wye, is very strange; he hopes to "break through" as he calls it, on Thuella's thwarted attraction to Wizzie.

Thus the three main characters of *Maiden Castle* are living in a world of fantasy. Wizzie's, it seems to me, is perfectly normal; she has not the experience to know why the relationship with Enoch is impossible, and does her best to act upon the compassionate attraction that she feels, an attraction probably based, at least partly, on their similar, very traumatic early lives.

Dud's fantasy world is rather less normal, as is indicated by its non-consummation and by its vivid historical perspective.

All the way back to the town, as he walked by the side of his silent parent along the Weymouth Road, the posthumous restitution of Mary Channing obsessed his mind. In some wild fantastic manner he linked the dead woman's personality with Wizzie's, linked her poisoned husband with Old Funky, linked himself with the dim figure of the equivocal gallant for whom she killed him. (248; 260)

And Enoch's fantasy world is quite mad; but, as Dud says to himself when his father has finished explaining his ideas of Welsh myths, the Eleusinian Mysteries, and himself as the re-incarnated God Brân, "I don't feel . . . as if you were out of your wits; yet no one else, listening to all this, would think otherwise.'" (243; 255)

The reason Dud does not feel that his father is mad is that the explanation he gives makes perfect sense given the temperament he was born with, the circumstances of his early life and his uneducated but intense interest in myth. The provenance of the personalities in Powys's novels is always brilliantly apt. Enoch tells Dud,

'Cornie and I . . . were cousins. We were both precocious and we were inseparable. You must understand, lad, that in Wales class distinctions, while more tenacious in blood, are less dependent on money. Cornie and I were both orphans, brought up by an aunt at the lodge of the park-gates of the very place where in the old times our ancestors had lived.

'When this woman died your mother was sent away to some distant relatives in Shaftsbury. Me these people didn't want or couldn't have; so I was boarded out by the parish guardians, first in one place and then in another. As I say, I was a precocious child and no doubt a difficult one. I don't think I [was] unkindly treated but I missed Cornie so much that I grew more and more secretive and unhappy. The end of it was, when I was about ten, I ran away, the word "Shaftsbury" being my single hope.

'I fell in with a group of tramps from our parts bound for the south, who made use of me in various ways and when finally they took different roads we had already drifted into Dorset. Cajoled by the way I talked, one of these derelicts, with hopes of something to his advantage coming of it, stuck to me, though I often tried to give him the slip, till we did eventually reach the place.

'Here my companion got into trouble for something or other, I was taken away from him, and an old childless couple called Quirm legally adopted me as their child. Cornie's protectors, for they made enquiries about them, had left the town by that time, and no one knew where they'd gone; and it wasn't till we'd both grown up, and she'd become Mrs Smith, that fate brought us together.

'I got a job where she lived and we were soon lovers. At that time, my lad, I was crazy about women. Cornie wasn't the only one and we had miserable scenes. In the end we had a terrible quarrel by the side of that very bed you've got in your room. I lost all control of myself—but I won't go into that—but the

end of it was I left her and went away.' (229-30; 241-2)

There is much here to remind one of Heathcliff. But whereas Heathcliff vents his unhappiness on other people Enoch develops an enormous fantasy world from which he hopes "on the pain of the world where love turns to hate and beats against the walls" (240; 252) to "break through". Poor Enoch. He knows too well that, in Coleridge's words, "To be wrath with one we love Doth work like madness in the brain." It must have been after his last quarrel with Cornelia, and because of the rootlessness of his life, that he began to build his fantasy world. Yet he still knows, so long afterwards, that Dud, and other people, will probably view his ideas as "all fantasy and illusion", and when they are printed in Cumber's newspapers he loses faith in them himself, and is left with nothing but the head that was on the bed he shared with Cornelia. As he wakes from the first sleep after his breakdown he mistakes Wizzie for Cornelia: "'Cornie,' he murmured, 'I forgive you. You forgive me. That's enough, isn't it?'" (462; 475)

All the men in *Maiden Castle* represent aspects of three different phenomena; they embody interests and trends predominant in the 1930s; they embody very different personal attitudes to the creative urge; and the attitudes to it that belong to various periods of history. Old Funky is the embodiment of the perennial lust for sex and money at its lowest level; most appropriately he is the circus master who comes round each year. The realistic picture of Old Funky out in the wind and the rain, beating at the door of Glymes to get in to have his "dockymint" signed, is a variation of Enoch's "where love turns to hate and beats against the wall". Old Funky's perturbation when torn between the conflicting demands of lust and money is analogous to Enoch's agony between love and hate. Just as Enoch has the good and positive quality of being able to heal the sick, Old Funky can love, care for and amuse his child Lovie; he is also a most patient and successful trainer of talent.

Similar dichotomies exist in the characters of the other two men, Claudius and Teucer. Claudius, is a latter day type of Roman. The Romans were an orderly, technologically advanced people; Claudius is primarily interested in aeroplanes and in harnessing the disorderly variety of human nature to some greater all-embracing common cause or good. Created in 1934 he was a Communist but probably he would not have been one now. This idealist becomes ill, nearly to death, for love of a woman; he is also the only one of the four main male characters to want a woman in anything like the usual way. Teucer Wye is a Platonist who hopes that familiarity with the master will meet any emergency. But the "Discovery" on Maiden Castle greatly excites him, and prepares him for his part in the plot. It is he who persuades his daughter Jenny to live with Claudius as his wife. Any of the other characters might have done it but it is the dessicated, old Professor of Classics who has the humanity and the courage. If there is any aspect of *Maiden Castle* that strains credulity it is the extremes of personality traits within the male characters; it will be interesting to see whether the uncut version bridges these gaps in any way.

Dud himself represents the eighteenth century through his interest in Mary Channing. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are represented by his waste bin and kettle! Kingships and the hierarchies of power never interested Powys; it was the common lot of man, whether prince or pauper, that concerned him. It is not just as an expression of Dud's neurotic nature that he calls his rubbish bin Henry VIII, and his kettle the Royal Martyr; it is also symbolic of a general and feminine disenchantment with male priorities; the waste bin and the kettle, two vessels which women only, traditionally and continually, use many times a day, are called by the names of English kings who particularly abused their royal and masculine prerogatives.

Dud's idea of himself as the good knight Palomides is not the only reference to the Middle Ages; he refers to his rescue of

Wizzie as a daring Quest; he felt like a "haggard knight-at-arms" . . . on the verge of his great adventure" yet "he did not feel the remotest serious temptation to relinquish the quest." (65; 74)

With Enoch embodying Welsh myths and legends which putatively derive from the Stone Age, and Maiden Castle itself looking like a Jurassic bird's nest, there are few periods of history that are not represented in the novel. Obviously Powys wishes to show the clash of male and female temperament as inherited from long human history.

Maiden Castle is not only a huge symbol of what the novel is about, it plays a realistic part in the story. It just could have been, according to the state of our knowledge still, all that Enoch Quirm thinks it was, the city of a nobler civilization. And one does get, just as Dud and Wizzie do, a sense of pleasure in one's personal identity, and a sense of freedom, when visiting Neolithic, and Bronze and Iron Age sites; they are good places in which to take stock. There is to my mind nothing supernatural about Enoch's ability to predict what the wind is going to do (243; 255); constant familiarity would have given him a sixth sense; the wind would not exactly 'follow him home'; he would leave when it started to blow from behind him. Powys is no dealer in the melodramatic, titillating aspects of the supernatural but he does give credence to a sixth sense which is very much more highly developed in certain unusual people than in most of us.

It was not until fairly late in his life that Powys decided on *Maiden Castle* as the title of his Dorchester book. There is a secondary symbolism, often implicit but not expanded, in which Maiden Castle represents womanhood forever vulnerable and yet forever defended against the male assault. This theme is made realistic in the description of Wizzie feeling increasingly joyful as she climbs Maiden Castle, both outstripping Dud and ignoring the lecher following as closely as he dare. (347; 359)

The story of *Maiden Castle* covers exactly a year from 2 November, All Soul's Day. The first half related through the thoughts and activities of Dud No-man is about illus-

ions and the second, related through Wizzie, is about reality. Dud thinks that he could make Wizzie happy and finds that he cannot; Wizzie thinks that she could have a loving relationship with Enoch and finds that she cannot; Enoch thinks he could make others believe in his ideas, and finds that he cannot; Claudius thinks he could be a manual labourer and finds that he cannot; Jennie thinks she should hold out against Claudius's foolishness and finds that she should not; Thuella thinks that she is self-sufficient and finds that she is not; Teucer thinks that reading Plato is both a life in itself and proof against life's problems and finds that it is not. Only Nance seems to have no fantasy to lose or disillusion to survive.

For her, perhaps, there is the biggest change of all: her mad, smelly husband dies. Thuella's impression is that she regards him as "a repulsive animal to whom in some way she's hopelessly committed." (196; 208) This tallies with what Nance herself tells Dud six months after she first met him; "things that made him shiver through the very bowels of his being"; but "she uttered other words . . . that proved to him that at the bottom of her heart she loved Uryen still" (260-2; 272), in spite of the probability that his personality and ideas played a part in the death of her son. But mainly on this occasion Nance is pouring forth her love for Dud. Cruelly he stops her by referring to her dead son; at once regretting it, he softens the blow by adding "'We're bound together now for life, my dear. I felt we were when we first met. I had a presentiment . . . I know you, Nance for what you are, and you shall know me. This love-business passes away anyhow, Nance. We can begin where most couples leave off.'" (261; 274) Dud is probably using these words to get himself out of an awkward situation but six months later they become more true than it seems likely that he meant or expected. For Nance, the gentle realist, the outcome is probably all that she would have wished.

I cannot agree with Kenneth Hopkins when he says that the characters of *Maiden Castle* are "left with nothing".<sup>5</sup> In every case, their living conditions and psycholog-



John Cowper Powys above Corwen, c. 1935—6.

ical states are much improved; Jennie and Claudius, who were estranged, and living apart, are blissfully re-united; Teucer Wye who was living with his younger daughter, who irritated him beyond bearing and whom he irritated to the same extent, goes to live with his other and favourite daughter; Thuella who had felt thwarted and miserable living with her father escapes to America with Wizzie whom she loves. Wizzie herself whose life with Dud was only bearable because of the attraction she felt for Enoch, has hope of a better life in America; although she has to leave her child and her old horse behind there is always the possibility of coming back to them or sending for them if circumstances allow. Enoch, who was unhappy beyond bearing in life, is now dead. Dud, although he loses his girl and although his novel is rejected, understands himself better, and determines upon a viable mode of behaviour.

Though Dud does not meet his father until a year before Enoch dies he gets to know him much better than the mother he lived with for so long. The characteristics Powys endows her with are very interesting; to her son it seems that she lived her individual life with "intensity", with intensity which "grasped life's most symbolic essences" (9; 21) and it was her "everlasting pleasure . . . to be perpetually embroidering, in carefully selected wools, flamboyant covers for everything that lent itself to be covered" (7; 19); judging by such an obsessional occupation it seems as though she didn't survive her disturbed childhood and broken affair with Enoch all that much better than he did.

Dud keeps only one of her tapestries, "the picture of a stately manorial gate, ornamented with *two* heraldic heads (7; 19); this subject is the clue; Dud's mother made tapestries of her own life just as Helen of Troy did. The tapestry that Dud keeps covers the ottoman in which he stores his manuscripts, his own versions of life's "symbolic essences". Powys's novels resemble tapestries, or William Morris designs, with complicated patterns and changing juxtapositions of themes and images, based

on selected natural observation. There seems to be a hint here that he thought something similar himself. Writing to Llewelyn on 17 January 1936 he said that his Dorchester book was "far more deeply and obstinately and indurately made up of me wone antick notions and chin-digging obstinacies . . . than any other".<sup>6</sup>

These "obstinacies" and "notions" form the "centre" to which Dud commands himself at the end of the novel to "hold fast"; they are also the centre where the plot begins. Each of us has his own centre; as W. H. Auden says,

The centre that I cannot find  
Is known to my unconscious mind;  
I have no reason to despair  
Because I am already there.

This "something" is our hitherto un verbalized consciousness to which Powys had perhaps greater access than any writer before or since. It may be no co-incidence that V. S. Naipul's book about his father is called *Finding the Centre*. *Maiden Castle* is pre-eminently about our sexuality, and the complex, awkward and ineradicable part it plays in our lives; an influential factor in this is the manner of our conception, our fathers. Dud is fighting against a new revelation when he says, "fathers are nothing." (161; 173)

John Donne's lines (in his "Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"),

Thy firmness draws my circle just  
And makes me end where I begun,

are to his mistress but they would be at least true about our genetic inheritance and individuality. The last part of *Maiden Castle* is called "Full Circle". T. S. Eliot's lines in *Four Quartets* (albeit that they are intended to have a larger reference than I give them) describe the journey:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

"I am . . . what I am," says Enoch Quirm, quietly just before he dies, "So it's all right." (471; 484)

"The whole history of the European novel", said Mike Kundera to Philip Roth as reported in the *Sunday Times* on 20 May this year (1984), "is a gradual unveiling of secrets: how man behaves and why, what he privately thinks and feels. That's why great novels have always been shocking. They've revealed what people didn't want to know or think about their lives."

Perhaps the greatest revelations of *Maiden Castle* are Wizzie's turbulent feelings and sensations. As a highly trained and successful public performer she is much more self-conscious than lesser mortals; the effect that she has upon the group of friends, all more or less stuck on the merry-go-rounds of their neuroses, is liberating. At the same time their habit of introspection rubs off on her, and she takes stock of herself and her feelings as she has never had a chance to do since she was a child, bound as she had been to the routine of the Convent, and then to her circus training.

Wizzie is not a particularly admirable person but she is wonderfully normal; her reactions to all the trying circumstances in which she finds herself are exactly what is to be expected. When she feels whether Old Funky's heart is beating, she feels the pulse of life as none of the other characters do; she is aptly called "a natural daughter of Ceridwen". She is surprised and delighted when she find herself happy as she was as a child before her mother died:

'when I played with my doll's house on the landing where the blue vase stood, as if everything was yours and you belonged to every-

thing; to the stones outside and the chairs and tables inside, and the playthings in their boxes and the fires in their kitchens, and the cats on their rugs and the canaries in their cages and the pots on their kitchen-ranges! It's like the air and the warmth in the air knowing about you, and everything being nice because of that, and because of the rooks cawing and because of those milk-bottles being outside that door! It's the quietness of it, with those crowded houses listening to every step, and the pavements hot with sunshine and the roads all still, enjoying themselves; enjoying a little peace.' (332-3; 344)

This memory of childhood happiness is a notable step in Wizzie's progress towards recovery of her equilibrium.

It is easy to understand how Powys came to write in *The Art of Happiness* in 1934 that we are not born happy, but have to work for happiness; and probably it was not difficult for him to create for *Maiden Castle* a hero rather like himself. But how a man of sixty two, neurotic, highly educated and physically clumsy, realized and portrayed so brilliantly the feelings of a girl of twenty-one, normal, uneducated, physically wonderfully well co-ordinated, surpasses understanding unless it be by genius. Peter Ackroyd, writing about Virginia Woolf in the *Sunday Times*, 24 June this year, said that she had "an almost clairvoyant ability to enter another's consciousness and look round to see what it contained"; Powys seems to me to have this ability to a much greater extent.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Page references in parentheses within my text refer to *Maiden Castle*, Cassell, 1937; Macdonald, 1966. The Picador 1977 edition follows the pagination of the 1966 edition.

<sup>2</sup>Powys refers to gazing at Jurassic Age bones in museums in *Morwyn* (1937), Village Press, 1974, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup>R. E. M. Wheeler, *Maiden Castle*, Dorset, Oxford, 1943.

<sup>4</sup>G. Wilson Knight, "John Cowper Powys's 'The Ridge': an Interpretation", *The Powys Review*, 13, 1983/4, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup>Kenneth Hopkins, *The Powys Brothers*, 1967, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup>*Letters of John Cowper Powys to His Brother Llewelyn*, ed. M. Elwin, 2 vols., Village Press, 1975 and 1982, II, p. 209.

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# Angela Blaen

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## *Maiden Castle* and the Celtic Calendar

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John Cowper Powys's awareness of the Celtic calendar is obvious from the structure of *Maiden Castle*, as a casual glance at the contents page will demonstrate. However a more detailed consideration can reveal the influence which the folkloric nature of the dates he includes has on the overall plan and the ancient Celtic character of the novel.

There are several traditional British calendars—the two natural rural ones, that is, the agricultural and pastoral, and the official British Christian calendar. All have associated folklore customs and all can overlap. The agricultural calendar can be illustrated by the still existing quarter days—Lady Day (25 March), Midsummer (24 June), Michaelmas (29 September) and Christmas (25 December). The pastoral calendar is the surviving version of the earlier Celtic calendar, which was marked by fire ceremonies: Imbolc (1 February) was probably a lambing festival and is now Christianised into Candlemas Day (2 February); Beltane (1 May), when the sheep could move onto new grazing, now linked with Whit Sunday; Lughnasad (1 August), now transposed into Lammastide, was the time when shearing was over and markets were held to sell stock; Samhain (1 November) saw the slaughter of surplus stock and marked the beginning of the Celtic month of the dead, later being linked to Martinmas, All Souls' and All Saints' Day and Guy Fawkes' Day. Both the agricultural and pastoral calendars preceded Christianity but became Christianised, although some of the surviving customs associated with the earlier pagan ceremonies demonstrate how uncomfortable the marriage can be.

The Celtic quarter days were all marked by fire festivals and the year began, as does *Maiden Castle*, with winter, starting at the

beginning of November. John Cowper Powys is obviously aware that this is the Celtic month of the dead—Dud No-man's pilgrimage to the cemetery on All Souls' morning and his return there with Nance at the end of the novel is no coincidence nor is the reference to the cemetery's yew trees. The yew is the Celtic tree of death and Dud is "gratified" by their number and aware of their power:

"How black these yews are!" he thought, as he moved between them. "Dark green flames, with separate up-struggling fire-tips, but all one underneath."<sup>1</sup>

The link with flames is significant but the description of his reaction to the trees is particularly interesting as it is so similar to the effect Uryen first has on him and it is appropriate that that impression is also connected with the date:

Vague, nebulous, darker than the darkness, the man's lineaments wavered, fluctuated, solidified, and then faded away. But even as they faded Dud's original impression of the fellow's eyes returned upon him. They were devoid of every kind of expression. They were part of the feeling he had just now, they *were* that feeling, that the whole place, with his whole day, All Souls' Day in Dorchester, was unreal . . . (107)

The Celtic theme is stressed throughout the novel, for example in the implicit parallel between Dud and the nearby Cerne Abbas Giant. Powys takes pains to stress the importance of Candlemas, mentioning the date on many occasions. The Celtic festival of Imbolc has become our Candlemas. The British St Bridget or St Bride is traditionally linked to sheep rearing<sup>2</sup> and to Candlemas as a fertility and fire goddess and ceremonies are recorded of her being invited into homes

on 1 February, the day dedicated to her, and a lighted candle being left for her. This links her to the Roman Februa, mother of Mars, for whom candles were lit at the beginning of February, while they were also being lit to ward off evil spirits.<sup>3</sup> The Christian ceremony celebrates the purification of the Virgin Mary, for whom candles were similarly lit, but it is obvious that the Christian Church borrowed earlier customs for its ceremony and that Candlemas has pagan origins connected with fire.

It is therefore appropriate that Powys should use such a date to help develop the strange pagan life-illusion of Uryen in the novel. It is on Candlemas Day that Uryen believes pre-Christian powers have come to life at Maiden Castle. On the same day we are told twice of Uryen's "*semimortuus*" look (235; 246), echoed later by Dud's description of Uryen's "dead-looking eyes" (338), taking up the significance given to them earlier on All Souls' Day (above) which is linked to Dud's belief that Uryen is a "corpse-god" and "*rex semimortuus*" (116).

Powys also creates a ritualistic cyclical framework for his novel by telling us that at Candlemas Day it was three months since Dud No-man had arrived in Dorchester. It is the day when Dud feels compelled to visit Maiden Castle although "he wondered vaguely what it was that kept bringing Maiden Castle into his head this Candlemas morning". (139) Not only is Powys showing that Dud's instinctive inner life is being activated on this day but he stresses that external ancient forces are involved; he takes the idea one step further and gives the day itself a sinister personality:

this low-pulse Candlemas Day—was it not conspiring, with the subtle tragedy of what he was doing himself . . . (139)

Continuing the imagery he likens the day to a "soul between two worlds" since it "hovered between winter and spring". (158)

Later at Uryen's house on Candlemas Night, the supernatural aspects of the day and of Uryen himself are again stressed. As Uryen returns from Maiden Castle a wind

sounds through the house and Nance tells the gathered company that the locals consider "the noises followed my husband when he moved here from Shaftsbury". (157) Dud anticipated some kind of revelation in the morning and his expectation is fulfilled as Uryen reveals to him that he is his father. Powys implies that Uryen's otherworldliness is connected with this disclosure since, like the other powers Uryen believes come to life at Candlemas, he experiences a form of regeneration, his personality is given a new earthy dimension with the knowledge of fatherhood. Dud, far from pleased, is however "spellbound" and aware that the revelation "would bring them fatally and finally together". (190) Again the connexion of Uryen and death is mentioned. Throughout the events of Candlemas Day, images of birth, life, death and procreation abound, as if stressing the universal nature of Dud's experience with Uryen. By placing such symbolism and events within Candlemas Day, Powys is able to suggest powerful connexions with a ritualistic time between winter and spring (also death and life, darkness and light) and create a supernatural dimension to the plot and characters.

Again stressing the importance of the Celtic calendar in the novel's structure, he tells us that on 5 May, "just three months after" (201) the Candlemas event, that is, at the next fire festival date, Dud is again involved in thought connected with ancient forces:

As he stared out of the window turning the motions of the rooks . . . into the beatings of his thought against the mystery of custom, he began wondering in what direction, through what psychic cracks and crannies, all the stored-up retribution for these ancient wrongs was now, this very day finding its outlet. (487)

The connexion between "mystery of custom" and supernatural influences on human life through "psychic cracks and crannies" is a key element of the novel, and is highlighted by the calendar references. That this is intended is further supported by the introductory verse from the Celtic *Red*

*Book*, indicating it as his source for the name Uryen.

Not surprisingly Powys makes full use of the supernatural possibilities offered by May Day as well as including the traditional sensuous character of the day. On 5 May Thuella and Dud have a conversation by the pond off Lovers' Lane, an experience which Dud finds pleasurable erotic in accordance with his impotent, almost totally cerebral, form of "erotic rapture" (229) and which he links to their meeting on All Souls' Day, thus enforcing the cyclical structure. Later in the day he suggests to Uryen that they walk to Maiden Castle and Uryen agrees but adds, "it's not the exact date I would have chosen," presumably implying it is not May Day. (231) This possibly stresses the May Day or May Eve significance more than if the "right" date had been used and also

prevents an over-regulated application of the calendar. Once at Maiden Castle the two men again discuss their relationship (233) and the powers Uryen associates with Maiden Castle (235) and his "*semi mortuus* look" is mentioned, each factor thus linking the day to All Souls' and Candlemas. Furthermore during the discussion Uryen's revelation of parentage at Candlemas is paralleled by his disclosure that he believes himself to be the reincarnation of a mythical Celtic hero.

The novel ends "Full Circle"—as the last chapter is called—at Uryen's grave in the cemetery at the beginning of November but, like Piers Ploughman, Dud is still travelling. Some issues have been resolved but he is aware of a need to "move on" while holding on to the centre (496), presumably that of the circle or cycle Powys has created.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle* (1937), Macdonald, 1966, p. 30. Subsequent numerals in parentheses within my text refer to pages in this edition (and the Picador, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>Anne Ross, *Everyday Life of the Pagan Celts* Batsford, 1970, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup>Ad de Vries, *Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery*, North-Holland Publishing Co, 1974, p. 80.

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# John Cowper Powys

## The Magic of Detachment

(*The Aryan Path*, October 1933)

Real Detachment begins when we think of our soul as a wayfarer from a far-off country, lodged for a while, "hospes comes-que corporis", "guest and companion of the body", among the tribes of men and upon this satellite of the voyaging sun.

In the spirit of a visitor to this whole Cosmos we thus think of the "I am I" within us, in large measure alien, though not unsympathetic to the traditions of this astronomical Hostelery of our temporary sojourn, in large measure alien, though not hostile, to the customs, ways, habits, mythologies, of the human race into which, by some cosmic chance or cosmic law, we have come to be born.

Scrutinizing its planetary surroundings it grows aware of the possibility of a certain illuminated happiness, of a certain ecstasy even, that it can reach, and help other sentinencies to reach, by various detached ways of handling all these things. It soon indeed arrives at the conclusion that one of the chief causes of personal unhappiness in this world is the soul's lack of power of detachment.

At any given moment of night or day there are qualities, essences, emanations, adhering to the chemistry of the primordial elements around us, calculated to fill us with a thrilling ecstasy. But it is only by detaching ourselves from almost all of the idols of the market-place that we can be thus transported. These qualities, inherent in the various substances around us, need not reveal what is loosely and popularly known as *beauty*, unless you are prepared to take that word in a very comprehensive sense. It is enough that they are what they are, in a perfectly ordinary, natural, normal way.

Thus for instance it is not necessary that the section of road, or mountain, or desert

over which we may chance to be travelling as we experience this mysterious ecstasy, should be in any particular fashion remarkable. If when we look down at our feet we see dust or sand or gravel or earth-mould, it is entirely unnecessary that it should be beautiful dust, beautiful sand, beautiful gravel, beautiful earth-mould! The "I am I", inhabiting its clothed-upon skeleton, in contact through its senses with dust, sand, gravel, earth-mould, air, fire, water, if it uses its mind in a certain particular way can feel from the mere touch of these primeval things an incredible vibration of mystical happiness.

It may indeed be said that the first step in our approach to the only secret of happiness that does not fail us as we get older, is not an ascending step, but a descending step. And Detachment is necessary from the very start in this descent which is also an ascent; yes! we have to detach our soul from everything that exists in order to learn the art of creating existence and of dispensing with existence. And we have to begin with our own body. Only by detaching ourselves from our bodies can the magnetic currents of life-to-life that reach us from these inanimate things be saved from troubling hindrances and gross impediments.

By detaching the soul from the body I do not mean leaving the body. The detachment I speak of consists in a motion of the mind by which the mind feels itself to be independent of the body even while, like a hand in a well-fitting glove, it is still intimately and inseparably wearing the body. And just as the mind, to get the full effluence of the life-to-life flowing into the soul from earth, air and water, must make the interior motion of freeing itself from the body while it still wears the body, so the particular

phenomenon of earth and rock and sand and water and vapour and fire that we are contemplating at the moment must be detached from its claim to form part of any pattern of beauty and must be regarded in its integral texture, colour, smell, sound and taste as a unique essence, itself, *itself alone*, just as our own soul is a self alone!

To give a practical and concrete illustration of what I am hinting at, in this first step to the art of detachment, consider for the moment that you are sitting on a large stone by a rapid stream, with your feet on the margin of a slope of smaller stones, past which the water flows. And now what are the present hindrances to any calm happiness of contemplation offered by your existing circumstances? Your body is a little uncomfortable. Well! if you have not acquired the trick of detaching your mind from a slight discomfort of your body, you are certainly handicapped at the start. Then you are teased by the fact that the water that flows before you where you are seated is not beautifully checkered by sun-splashes or sun-flakes falling through over-hanging foliage as are the same river's waters a little way below.

In the other direction too—so you now begin teasing yourself with aggravating comparisons—there are much more comfortable stones to sit upon, and these smaller stones by the water's edge are sprinkled by exquisite moss or interspersed by delicate grass. The restless craving for beauty of the poet in us would be driving us on, up the stream, down the stream, ever in search of lovelier spots, of more perfect natural pictures. But a Being who is beginning to understand the secret of Detachment remains where the accident of his wayfaring has led him to rest. Enough for him is the mere primal fact that water—that miracle of miracles—flows by, at his feet, clear and fast, that the stones beneath it gleam with the broken lights, darken in the shadows, gather about them the mysterious suffusion of the aqueous twilight, have the impenetrable aloofness simply of being what they are, fragments of the sub-structure of our

earthly home, parts and parcels of the primordial virginity of matter.

Suppose the sun to be setting as we sit alone by this flowing water and by these naked stones, the sensuous exigency of the poet would be fretting for the clouds to be touched with some special glory; but the soul in us that is acquiring the secret of Detachment would find in the pure fire of the great orb itself a living fountain of that life-to-life, that breath of the "inanimate" going out to the "animate", and *vice versa*, which is the ultimate reciprocity of our present world.

The beginning of the art of Detachment is the isolation of the central identity within us. It matters not how you name this inner Self. Call it the soul; call it the breath of life; call it the mind, the consciousness, the "I am I" of our inmost being. The name is nothing.

"Feeling", as Goethe says, "is all in all. The name is sound and smoke, obscuring heaven's clear glow".

But once arrived at the feeling of the detached "I am I", it matters nothing whether you call this feeling "Soul", "Self", "Mind", "Consciousness". To use it, to practise with it, to train it, to discipline it is the essential thing. It grows more and more of an integral entity—whatever it is and wherever it comes from—as you concentrate upon it or as, if you will, it concentrates upon itself. To use it, to work it, is the thing! It grows in the practice thereof. Its reality lies in its interior motion.

The grand advantage, from the viewpoint of personal happiness, of this art of Detachment, lies in the escape from restlessness and from unfulfilled desire which it offers. In the simple instance I have given above, of a living man crouching on a naked stone above flowing water, and detaching his mind from any fretting, chafing desire to change a position thus given him by the accident of the way, it can be seen how the soul can enjoy the material world around it by a process of austere simplification.

Let it not be supposed that I am advocating any self-punishing puritanism in all this,

or any auto-cruelty, or asceticism for the sake of asceticism. The natural test of all these tricks of the mind is the test of great creative Nature herself—namely the simple feeling of happiness.

If the Detachment I am describing does not, very soon after the tension of the initial effort, bring you a flood of happiness, you may be sure that something is wrong and that you are on the wrong path. Such happiness cannot infallibly or invariably be procured; but by the art of Detachment and by a drastic simplification of the relations between the Self and the Not-Self it can be procured in a constantly increasing measure.

Returning for a moment to my imaginary man or woman seated on the stone by the water, suppose as you contemplate this water, feel this stone, and gaze at the great orb of flame going down in the West you are aware of no answering flood of happiness—what then? But are you at the end of your resources? That is the whole point. Not until you have exerted your *will*, or what used to be called “will”, to the utmost of your strength, have you a right to cry out in the popular American slang, “Nothing Doing!”

All mortal creatures, men and women along with the lower animals, experience moods, under certain conditions, of exultant, flowing, luminous, thrilling happiness. Such happiness—what Wordsworth calls “the pleasure which there is in Life itself”—is surely the most wonderful and desirable thing in the world! Put anything else, out of all mortal experience, in the scales against it, and it will out-weigh all. When such happiness flows through you, transforming, illuminating, inspiring your whole being, you feel at once that you are in touch with an “absolute”, with something absolute any way, if not with *the* absolute.

Now the whole and sole purpose of the art of Detachment is to supply a practical technique for the attaining of this rare mood.

The great thing is to begin with the deliberate isolation of the soul without teasing ourselves to prove the soul’s “existence”. To “exist”, to be “real”, to be “true”

adhere like varying tones and colours and odours to the soul’s creative life; but the soul’s life has many aspects; and among those which are nearest the centre of its revolutions are certain magical powers that though they only “exist” in the imagination are more precious and more alive than “reality”. All these logical conceptions of solid, outward, unmalleable, inflexible, unporous objects, “marching”, as Walt Whitman says, “triumphantly onwards” are conceptions from which it is necessary for the soul to detach itself.

But it is in relation to individual human beings that Detachment is most necessary of all. The wise man spends his life running away. But luckily he can run away without moving a step. We are all—men and women alike—teased by the blue-bottle flies who want to lay their eggs. These are the people who have never learnt and never could learn the art of detachment. They are blue-bottle flies—as my sister Philippa says—and they want to lay their eggs; and they can only lay their eggs in carrion. Not one of us but has carrion in him, carrion in her; and the buzzing blue-bottles, among our fellows, smell this afar off, and fly towards it, and would fain settle upon it and lay their eggs.

Here indeed, here most of all is it necessary to exercise the very magic of Detachment, that magic that makes it possible for you to be in one place—like the man seated on the naked stone by the flowing water—and yet to be in the heart of the flaming sun at the circumference of the divine ether. For if you fail to exercise the magic of Detachment upon the blue-bottle flies who infest your road they will really lay their eggs—the eggs of the maggots of civilization—in your soul. And then you will believe in the justifiability of vivisection; in the sacrosanct importance of private property; in the virtue of patriotic war; in slaughter-houses, in brothels, in slavery, and in the great, noble, scientific, gregarious, loving, human, undetached art of—Advertisement.

Rousseau was right. It is only by detaching yourself from human civilisation that you can live a life worthy of a living soul.

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# John Cowper Powys

## Egotism and Impersonality

(*The Aryan Path*, June 1934)

That great and mysterious pulse of ultimate life—that planetary rhythmic beat—that balance of the unseen tides—forward, backward—advancing, retreating—of the systole and diastole of the world—how can it be named? And the moments of magical harmony that it brings to our total being, to our body, soul and spirit subsumed in an unspeakable unity, how can they be named? These feelings are far more than pleasure, far more than joy, far more than delight. To call them by the tranquil word “Peace” would give to many minds too negative an implication. To call them by the exciting name “Ecstasy” would imply something too disturbing, too—what shall I say?—too violent. In my present discussion I will confine myself therefore, after the cautious traditions of the countryside, to the most simple and primitive word in our language, and I will call this mysterious feeling by the plain name of *happiness*.

Happiness of this rare and precious kind is, I have recently come to think, the real purpose, the real nature-inspired elixir of life—though so often obscured and confused and beguiled and betrayed—of all organic, and perhaps of all super-organic, entities! It has often come into my mind to think that there has been some mistranslation, some misinterpretation undergone, in those translated versions of the ancient books of wisdom such as I have been able to get hold of, where indifference is spoken of as if it were “indifference” to *happiness* equally with “indifference” to the grosser forms of pleasure and pain. How could what is called by our Western Saints “the Beatific Vision” be beatific at all, if a person “only saw, *not felt*”, as Coleridge says of his magical light in the sky, how “beautiful it was”? What, I mean, would such a vision

be, if it were merely something *recognized* by the lonely intellectual power, rather than something in the attainment of which all that we are, our body, our soul, our spirit, found ultimate fulfilment?

As Heraclitus maintained, and in this point was followed by Hegel, it is out of the clash of opposites, out of the transcending of contradictions, that the balance-point between warring forces which we call “the Truth” emerges, becomes, exists, establishes itself.

And this law of the transcending, or if you will of the subsuming of opposites, applies to the psychological equally with the physical, to the spiritual equally with the psychological.

What we call *egotism* is that excessive, unbalanced, disordered discordant self-assertion which more than anything else causes the unhappiness of our Western World today. It is this “egotism” of a number of unbalanced individuals, which when it flows together, in the evil itch to assert oneself at the expense of someone else, in the evil itch to gloat over the discomfiture of someone else, in the evil itch to triumph over the weakness or over the strength of someone else, becomes so formidable, that I have got into the habit of calling “crowd-consciousness”. This “crowd-consciousness” I have come to regard as one of the most objectionable of all the evil psychic phenomena that we are oppressed by today. And it is very powerful; for it is the inverted, the evil side of that transporting power of widespread human feeling that can work miracles.

My own instinct tells me however, though in this I speak humbly and tentatively, that *even at its best*, even when it works miracles, this crowd-consciousness is not a holy thing.

We all know how quickly, at a touch, at a breath, at the wink of an eyelid, this miracle-working power can *turn into its opposite*, and commit the most abominable and shameless crimes!

No! If I am not mistaken, it is never the noblest human emotions that are projected, externalized, hypostasized, in the feelings of the crowd.

And now, having shown, as well as I can, that what I mean by "egotism" is a foolish, ungracious, greedy itch to assert our crudest and least considerate desires at the expense of anyone who comes near us, let me indicate, as far as I am able, what, in this particular essay, I mean by "impersonality".

From the cautious and tentative experiments in human nature—principally in my own—which I have so far been able to make, and I am an extravagant, and perhaps even an heretical, believer in the magical power of what we call the will to change our character completely, I have arrived at a shrewd inkling, I trust under the suggestion of good rather than of evil, that *impersonality*, as its extremest implication comes to be emphasized, over against the extremest implication of *egotism*, is not, any more than its opposite, a desirable thing.

It is the *Tao*, it is the mysterious way of all balances, that I am fumblingly and gropingly seeking; and I seem to hear the voice of Kwang Tze, that most whimsical and poetical disciple of the great Laotze, whispering to me, on the long-drawn wind of this northern twilight, that the Tao must not be called the Impersonal any more than it must be called the Personal! It is, in fact—at least so I seem to learn from studying the writings of Kwang Tze—some indescribable Nameless that transcends both personal and impersonal.

Words are, however, in their living splendor and their organic complexity so slippery, so tricky, so treacherous, so much like phosphorescent water-snakes, that a person, catching at one faint clue and then at another, to these Eleusinian Mysteries, is forced to use each word as if it had a margin, a penumbra, a thin curve of the unrevealed portion of its lunar circumference, that ex-

tended a good deal further than the word's ordinary significance.

Putting the matter clumsily and crudely, and without that subtle, scarcely-discernible lunar penumbra, in which, at least to my Celtic mind, the truth can alone be found, where the word "impersonality" conveys something quite as different from the nameless Tao as the word "egotism" itself, is in what I might perhaps be allowed to call its *scientific* content. Scientific knowledge always claims—though its claim is often an extremely questionable one—to be "impersonal", that is to say, to be free from those distorting, perverting, and deluding subjectivities, with which human passion prostitutes the virgin purity of objective truth. Mathematics is certainly, I fully admit, impersonal; "but so much the worse", thus in my Faustian nature I am tempted to cry out, "for impersonality!" Impersonality as the supreme clue to a cosmos, whose motive-force seems so essentially a *living*, and hence, of necessity, since mathematics is the science of the dead, so essentially a non-mathematical force, appears to my mythological mind especially unsatisfactory.

Is it not the "impersonality" of the materialist-determinist view of the system of things that lays its cruel icy finger, like John Keats's cold-hearted philosopher in "Lamia", upon the creative and living impulses which even the most idolatrous of our mythologies somehow manage to suggest?

I regard therefore this psychological antinomy, "egotism"—"impersonality", not as a cosmic struggle between good (impersonality) on the one side, and evil (egotism) on the other, but as an Hegelian contradiction. I regard the opposition of these two things as resembling the opposition of "Being" and "Not-Being", which, while in themselves they are less than nothing and are indeed totally unreal, find their reality in the concept "Becoming". In the same way I regard egotism and impersonality as a contradiction of two extremes that in themselves are meaningless abstractions but that find their "truth" in a third concept, corresponding to this Hegelian "Becoming".

And what, thus stated, is the ideal that

subsumes or transcends the opposition of egotism and impersonality? It must be, it seems to me, like "Becoming", an essentially *imperfect* concept; for a perfect concept must of necessity lift the whole issue into the region of the Absolute and thus, at a stroke, clean out of the sphere of our intelligible verbal categories. What the philosopher Croce so well says about *Imperfect Virtue* applies here. He says that the very essence of Virtue lies in its imperfection, in other words, in the condition of its *living growth*, and that Perfect Virtue, *ipso facto*, would cease to be Virtue at all! What we must look for, therefore, in the relativity of our present human state, is some ideal that, while transcending both "egotism" and "impersonality", retains the living principle of growth in both these extremes. Let us see what can be made of this. Is not the living principle, distorted and depraved in "egotism", the nobler concept of *egohood*; and is not the living principle, frozen and petrified in "impersonality", nothing less than *sympathy*, the feeling with, the rejoicing and the suffering with, other entities?

Our two words now are the word *egohood* with its centripetal implication, and the word *sympathy*, with its centrifugal implication; and our philosophical problem is to find some single word that will bring these two, with all their mysteriously wavering under-life and over-life, into one comprehensive ideal.

Such a word is, unfortunately for me, not to be discovered in the English language. Shall I be misunderstood if I make use of the phrase, "the Larger Self"? We are all in the habit of talking rather loosely about our "lower" and our "higher" self. Now what I mean to imply by my expression "the Larger Self" is obviously not the same as either of these. "Larger" carries with it a somewhat different connotation from either "lower" or "higher".

Now if we return to our original words egotism and impersonality, whose hopeless and irreconcilable characteristics we are striving to overcome, it will, I think, be clear that what is wrong with both these extremes is their deadness. They are both, in their

opposite ways, when you carry them to their logical limit, descriptions of the state of death. And in their death-truth, like our metaphysical Hegelian parallels, they turn out to be identical. Nothing is more egotistic than a corpse. It sympathizes with no one. It gives nothing to anyone. It makes way for no one. It is a ghastly and pitiful burden upon the hands of all. But nothing, also, is more impersonal than a corpse. This we feel unhappily enough, when, under the murderous logic of a deterministic materialism, the vast mysterious life of great Creative Nature Herself becomes one appalling "Golgotha and Mill of Death".

But "egotism" contains somewhere within it the quickening principle of a legitimate "egohood", and "impersonality" can be interpreted in two very different ways. It can be interpreted according to that fantastic and entirely false conception of the Inanimate which the old-fashioned and let us hope totally discredited materialistic theories upheld. This is the lower view of "impersonality". But "impersonality" can also be interpreted in a deeper and more spiritual way, as something not lower, but higher, than what we commonly know as "personality".

We are thus in possession, if there is any cogency in my present line of argument, of two residual concepts, which we have arrived at by eliminating the logical death-extreme from both "egotism" and "impersonality". We are in possession of the living principle of "egohood", and we are in possession of a mysterious Something, that, though different from "personality", is richer and fuller than what we vulgarly mean by this word. But I cannot help being led on to the conclusion that in what I have called, for want of a single word, "the Larger Self" both these residual essences find their realization and truth.

We have all heard the story of Plato's having visited the Orient, and may it not be that that blending of erotic egohood with ideal impersonality which is so striking a peculiarity of his habits of thought represents a *rapprochement* between East and West? Certainly in all the tantalizingly

obscure and hopelessly scattered myths of my own Welsh ancestors, particularly in connection with the Legend of the Grail, a hesitant and tentative "third way" does almost seem to present itself to me, a way less "impersonal" than the way of the East, and less "egotistic" than the way of the West.

Would not one of the results of even the most childish glimpse of our mortal affairs from an extra-mundane view-point be a negation of the silly Western notion that

progress in science implies progress in wisdom? And might not such a glance—none the worse perhaps for being childish—help us to recognize, as the Greeks and the Welsh seem to have recognized long ago in their kindred mythologies, that there is a way by which the Self can get the good both of Nature and Sex and yet not relinquish its ultimate awareness of belonging to a level of Being and of Life outside the whole turbulent arena?

R. G. Felton  
To J. C. Powys

That sun or hand-warmed pebble  
on your bedside table is all  
that signifies, has ever counted  
in your consciousness, your mind's  
grasp of minutiae in flux,  
has enabled you to say nothing matters  
to you or us; yes, we see  
you now, through the small window,  
guess that your're reading Homer,  
or writing on paper held so  
firmly on the board whose value  
rests in the touch; your long bony  
fingers grasp your pen and our hearts  
as ivy roots the bones of some men,  
but not yours, dust scattered  
by the sea wind on Chesil Beach.

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# David Goodway

## The Politics of John Cowper Powys\*

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In "The Problem of Powys", a magnificent review article which deserves to be widely known, George Steiner refers to John Cowper Powys's politics as "bizarre".<sup>1</sup>

The first reference of which I know to Powys expressing any specific political view comes from the Court House years in Sussex (1896-1902, it would seem)<sup>2</sup> and the *Autobiography*. "It was here . . . that Littleton and I had a fierce quarrel about Home Rule for Ireland. I was in favour of it. He was doubtful of its wisdom. It was the *tone* in which he was doubtful that annoyed me, however, not the doubt itself; and taking him by surprise I rushed at him like a madman and flung him into the ditch." Littleton had "sneered at the Irish Party in Parliament . . ."<sup>3</sup>

In 1932 Powys wrote in a letter to Littleton: "You are an emotional Conservative. I am an emotional Radical. And as it was when we rolled in that ditch between Cooksbridge & Court House (over the question of Ireland) so in a sense I fear it will be to the end of the story."<sup>4</sup>

If his readers were asked to state what they considered "the politics of John Cowper Powys" to have been throughout his long life, my assumption is that most would be content to settle for this self-description as "an emotional Radical".

In the review of 1975—of Powys's *Letters* to Iorwerth Peate—George Steiner actually writes: "They give clues to his bizarre politics: 'I'm [sic] an *odd* Tory since my favourite poet is Walt Whitman.'" But Steiner is playing false in this brief quotation. What

Powys in fact says is: ". . . as I have explained at length in my most long-winded & serpentine manner in my essay to a volume of my friend Huw Menai's new poems [that is, *The Simple Vision*] . . . I am *not* good at obscure modern poetry, in these things I'm *old-fashioned*. In fact in *Poetry* I'm a Tory, whereas (tho' I am an *odd* Tory since my favourite poet is Walt Whitman) whereas in philosophy & morals & social questions I'm the extreme opposite of a Tory!"<sup>5</sup>

And, indeed, in the very next letter to Iorwerth Peate, 9 March 1945, Powys provides a relatively clear statement of his political philosophy:

. . . my quarrel with the Catholic church and the Greek church and the Anglican church and with all the Nonconformists too is hopelessly temperamental instructive intuitive & both super- & sub-rational and is exactly the same quarrel I have with the rationalists and with the vivisection scientists. In plain words in spite of an almost morbidly Christian conscience which I have to restrain as I restrain my vices purely for common sense reasons of legitimate self preservation & sanity—my attitude to all these questions is essentially agnostic and heathen & indeed *pluralistic* as opposed to *monism* of every sort, the sort of pluralism W. James wrote of . . . My pluralism is a temperamental intuitive preference for the Many over the One—and for a certain Anarchy in things over One Cosmos and One God and One Christ. I like absolutely free speculation in these things and *I like to question* not only the *existence* of God—the *desirability* of following Christ—the *value* of the moral order (like my brother Llewelyn *the only, thing wh.* I feel & know to be evil wicked and wrong is *dire mental & physical cruelty*)—the *value* of the Family etc. etc. etc. Like you I reluctant at the tyranny of the Church as well as at the tyranny of the new totalitarian state—But its destined to

\*This is a slightly revised and extended version of a paper delivered to the Powys Society on 1 September 1984. I am most grateful to members for their stimulating comments, several of which have been incorporated in the following text.

come, I think and we libertarians were wise to try and humanize it ere *and as* it comes! But nobody will be able to stop it! And it'll be agreeable to see it sweep away *Class Privilege* etc etc etc I shall enjoy *that* part of it & I'm sure you will too. Yes, I fear we shall have to pay the price; but it'll be a malicious pleasure to see the *great ones* pay it as well as the rest of us!<sup>6</sup>

The politics of John Cowper Powys were, then, anarchist. He was, as he says to Peate, a "libertarian". To men and women of the Left this reads "libertarian socialist", or as a gentle euphemism for the harsh and much-abused political position of being an "anarchist".<sup>7</sup>

Powys is not using the word "libertarian" in the conventional dictionary definitions: of *either* (1) "One who hold the doctrine of the freedom of the will, as opposed to that of necessity" or (2) "One who approves of or advocates liberty".<sup>8</sup> (This latter meaning enjoys today frequent use in the context of "civil libertarian".) E. P. Thompson, our outstanding contemporary sage and prophet, has recently declared for "libertarian Communism";<sup>9</sup> and it is this kind of usage, with reference to the philosophy of classical anarchism, with which I am concerned—and in which Powys was initiated—not the restricted definitions of lexicographers.<sup>10</sup>

I make no claims to originality in maintaining that Powys's politics were anarchist.

In his remarkable "chart", *The Saturnian Quest*, Professor Wilson Knight—surely still Powys's closest, most attentive reader—says of the *Autobiography*: "Powys's social gospel, like Christ's, though never anti-social, is, so far as externals go, anarchic". When he reaches *Obstinate Cymric* Wilson Knight refers to Powys's "pluralistic and anarchistic philosophy". And of the "Fifth" or "new" "gospel" expounded in Powys's *Rabelais*, he observes: "Anarchy is the political equivalent".<sup>11</sup>

More explicitly, T. J. Diffey states: "In political philosophy Powys is a philosophical anarchist. In the person of Paul Trent (*A Glastonbury Romance*) but primarily in his own letters, Powys shows an intelligent

awareness of anarchist literature, and a personal commitment to philosophical anarchism."<sup>11</sup>

For two decades, however, Powys was a sympathiser of the Russian Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

On this Armistice night . . . I must confess to feeling a fiercer and more fermenting surge of malicious hatred for my well-to-do bourgeois compeers than I have ever felt before or since. The sight of such patriots . . . was one of those sights . . . that gave me a further jerk along the hard and narrow road that leadeth to Communism.<sup>13</sup>

In the summer of 1919 Powys delivered a series of lectures in San Francisco. "To hear his lecture on Bolshevism the ballroom of the St. Francis Hotel was crowded with the richest and most fashionable residents of the city . . . Tossing 'common sense' to the winds, he talked of the things that were in his heart: of Russia, the war, the oppressed, of the man who had but recently become a convict in a federal penitentiary [Eugene Debs, the American Socialist leader]."<sup>14</sup>

In his 1930 "Preface" to James Hanley's *Men in Darkness*, Powys wrote: "the latest and most sophisticated school of young modern writers has thrown in at least its aesthetic lot with *the masses*. It is the last and latest clue that the most original and imaginative minds in art feel compelled at this moment to follow, this pursuit of the hitherto undiscovered aesthetic possibilities of life in the mass. Can we dare to hazard the notion that it may be the future itself, in communication, if with *anything existent*, with the instincts of artists, which is throwing out electric waves of a great actual change about to take place, whose outward manifestation may be already visible above the horizon in Russia?"

*The Complex Vision* of 1920 contains a final chapter on "The Idea of Communism". Yet Powys's complex vision of pluralism, individualism, personal liberation and a multiverse is incompatible with Russian Communism's—with any form of Marxism's—monism, ideology of proletarianism, Hegelianism and "block-universe" philosophy.<sup>15</sup> Powys, with his

formidable intellect and deep personal insight, not unnaturally, appreciated some, at least, of the problems involved.

To a considerable extent, this book of mine, the 'Autobiography' of a tatterdemalion Taliessin from his third to his sixtieth year, is the history of the 'de-classing' of a bourgeois-born personality, and its fluctuating and wavering approach to the Communistic system of social justice: not however to the Communistic philosophy: for I feel that the deepest thing in life is the soul's individual struggle to reach an exultant peace in relation to more cosmic forces than *any* social system, just or unjust, can cope with or compass.<sup>16</sup>

From the late-1930s this particular philosophical and socio-political tension is resolved; favourable references to Soviet Communism largely cease; Communism and Fascism are viewed as *almost* equally abhorrent dictatorships; and anarchy takes over as the ideal.

Why was this? What had happened to lead Powys to undergo a fairly major change in his cosmic outlook? (Or, to be exact, in his articulation of it?)

My answer is surprisingly simple. First, in 1936 Powys resumed contact with the great American anarchist, Emma Goldman. Then, in July 1936, the Spanish Civil War broke out—the nationalist uprising was countered by widescale popular resistance, resistance which, in total, constituted the "Spanish Revolution" in which substantial areas of Spain came under the control of the workers and peasants. Catalonia, in particular, experienced the first (to date, only) successful anarchist revolution: that is, anarchist theory was put into practice successfully and continued to operate so for a significant period of time. Third, Powys being in correspondence with Goldman, who paid lengthy visits to Spain during the Civil War, was in the exceptionally unusual position of receiving details of these events both from Goldman and *direct* from anarchist Spain. This was a standpoint from which almost all outsiders were excluded. Readers who are at all conversant with what was going on in Catalonia, and especially Barcelona, in 1936-7, are likely to be famil-

iar with George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*. This was a book turned down (before a word of it was written!) by Victor Gollancz because of Orwell's anti-Communism and which when published by Secker & Warburg achieved an astonishingly poor sale.<sup>17</sup>

Emma Goldman had been born in 1869 in the old Russian Empire and emigrated to America in 1885. Her heyday was in the United States from 1906 down to the end of the First World War. Her influence was as much cultural as political. Van Wyck Brooks considers that "No one did more to spread the new ideas of literary Europe that influenced so many young people in the West [of America] as elsewhere—at least the ideas of the dramatists on the Continent and in England—than the Russian-American Emma Goldman". In 1914 she published *The Social Significance of the Modern Drama*, "the first book of the kind to appear in English".<sup>18</sup>

Henry Miller always claimed that meeting Goldman and hearing her lecture in San Diego in 1913 was the "turning point", "the most important encounter" of his life: "She opened up the whole world of European culture for me and gave a new impetus to my life, as well as direction." It appears it was Goldman who was the formative influence on the youthful Henry Miller, that of John Cowper Powys being secondary:

Leaving the hall after [Powys's] lectures, I often felt as if he had put a spell upon me. A wondrous spell it was, too. For, aside from the celebrated experience with Emma Goldman in San Diego, it was my first intimate experience, my first real contact, with the living spirit of those few rare beings who visit this earth.

Powys, needless to say, had his own select luminaries whom he raved about. I use the word 'raved' advisedly. I had never before heard any one *rave* in public, particularly about authors, thinkers, philosophers. Emma Goldman, equally inspired on the platform, and often Sibylline in utterance, gave nevertheless the impression of radiating from an intellectual centre. Warm and emotional though she was, the fire she gave off was an electrical one. Powys fulminated with the fire and smoke of the soul, or the depths which cradle the soul.

(It is worth noting, in view of what is said below, that Ben Reitman, Emma Goldman's companion, sold Miller not only the first book of Nietzsche's he was to read, but also *The Ego and His Own* by Max Stirner.)<sup>19</sup>

In 1919, during the post-war anti-radical hysteria—the “Red Scare”—Goldman, her lifelong comrade Alexander Berkman and 247 other “alien radicals” were deported from America to Soviet Russia. She rapidly became a rebel in this second man-made “paradise”; and in 1921, after less than two years, escaped with Berkman from Russia. In the 1920s and 1930s Goldman was “nowhere at home”, barred from the States, Russia and then the Netherlands (for speaking out against Nazi Germany); but she acquired British citizenship through a marriage of convenience.<sup>20</sup>

On 1 January 1936 Emma Goldman wrote to John Cowper Powys from London. (She had been given his Corwen address by their mutual friend, Maurice Browne, founder of the Chicago Little Theatre.)<sup>21</sup> She was hard up, wanted to earn money by lecturing in England and sought his advice: “Would you mind ‘divulging’ your secret?”<sup>22</sup>

Aware of his reputation in America as a writer but above all as a lecturer, she obviously expected—and for long continued to believe—Powys to enjoy the same esteem and pull of a wide group of influential friends in his home country which he did across the Atlantic. Of course, he did not.<sup>23</sup>

Goldman was in a comparable position. In the States she was a “household name”, but in Britain Emma Goldman was scarcely known. After thirty years' familiarity with America, though, Powys was clearly flattered both by Goldman's initial approach and by her continuing correspondence with him.

“I was so honoured & pleased to get a letter from you . . . I have the greatest admiration for you.”<sup>24</sup>

“Everyone in America of course knows the name of E. G.—& all Americans of every class (now between 25 & 35 or even 30 & 40 years of age) remember your name from their childhood—one of the *great names of*

*history* along with Kropotkin & Bakunin and Tolstoy—as a champion of human and individual liberty on moral spiritual & philosophical lines.”<sup>25</sup>

“Everyone in America from President to truck-driver, from the great magnates to the hotel bell-boys knows ‘Emma Goldman’! You are a *Household word* over there like all the great American figures that have caught the popular imagination. And I am perfectly ready to confess that I derive and get a real *snobbish thrill of proud delight* (intellectual snobbishness anyway!) to be actually named her friend by the famous ‘Emma’!”<sup>26</sup>

Emma Goldman's attempt “to break through the British reserve”<sup>27</sup> in a lecture tour came to nothing; and on 28 June 1936 her beloved Alexander Berkman, an invalid and in pain after two operations, committed suicide. At the age of 67 this formidable, indomitable woman had reached the lowest point in her tumultuous life. Then, beginning on 17 July, came the military rising in Spain; and Goldman threw herself into the struggle of the Spanish anarchists against fascism and for a libertarian society.

On 18 September Powys wrote:

“How extremely moved and stirred I am by this news of yours that you have been called to go to Spain (when all others are fleeing from Spain!) to give the support of your courage & character and wisdom & the authority of your famous name to this struggle of your comrades in arms: & that you are actually (with all your years & griefs & infirmities upon you) going to answer this invitation! . . . I do greatly value the fact that you have put my name on your ‘mailing-list’ so that I have the privilege of reading these eloquent letters of yours to the Comrades of your cause.”<sup>28</sup>

In Barcelona she was welcomed by a mass meeting of 10,000: an extraordinary contrast to her reception in Britain.<sup>29</sup>

In January 1937 Goldman returned to London where she remained until June 1937. During the autumn she spent another seven weeks in Spain. In January 1938 she was back again in London.<sup>30</sup>

In London she opened a propaganda office for the CNT/FAI [Confederación

Nacional del Trabajo/Federación Anarquista Ibérica] and attempted, in a great variety of ways, to mobilise moral and material support for the Spanish anarchists. She organised what can only be described as anarchist “front” organizations (by analogy with the numerous Communist—and Trotskyist—“fronts” of the twentieth century): in 1937 there was the Committee to Aid Homeless Spanish Women and Children and in 1938 the English section of the Solidaridad Internacional Antifascista (International Anti-Fascist Solidarity) or SIA. Powys allowed his name to be used as a sponsor for both bodies, donating 10s. to the latter when, after the failure of *Morwyn*, as he admitted to Goldman, he was “hard-pressed . . . from a money point of view.”<sup>31</sup>

The SIA was the more important of these two bodies. Among the other sponsors were Llewelyn Powys, W. H. Auden, Havelock Ellis, George Orwell, Herbert Read, Rebecca West, Reginald Reynolds and Ethel Mannin (the treasurer). John Cowper Powys wrote a long message to be read at a “combination evening” in April 1938 and, a day or two later, an article, “The Real and the Ideal”, for the English anarchist journal, *Spain and the World*.<sup>32</sup>

From early on Goldman had been responsible for the English language edition of the *CNT-AIT-FAI Boletín de Información*<sup>33</sup> and this, of course, Powys received in North Wales: “I do read all these ‘Information Bulletins’ from [Barcelona] with the most intense interest.”<sup>34</sup>

In 1942 Powys objected to Louis Wilkinson’s pro-Soviet arguments: “O why haven’t I old Emma at my side to *put you wise* on Stalin & the Communist Party! I tell you, with Emma’s help for 2 years I got every week, in English, the Anarchist Bulletin from Catalonia . . .” (He then called himself “a parlour-pupil of old Emma’s Anarchism”.)<sup>35</sup>

But one indication of “bizarre politics” is his explanation to Wilkinson: “My Anarchist Bulletins from Barcelona were always addressed ‘Corwen, Monmouthshire’ but the County Police here know me as I always subscribe to their Police-Ball”! Another is

that his alternative source of information about the course of the Spanish Civil War was the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>36</sup>

It was these two years of weekly anarchist bulletins, read “with the most intense interest”, which, in particular, made a considerable impact on Powys. His receipt and perusal of them leads to my confidence that, in his letter to Iorwerth Peate in 1945, in calling himself a “libertarian” he would have been using the word as a synonym for “anarchist”.

After a third visit to Spain during the autumn of 1938, Emma Goldman left Britain for Canada in 1939. On 14 May 1940 she died in Toronto, aged 70.<sup>37</sup>

The correspondence between Powys and Goldman ceased only with her death. On 8 June he wrote: “I’ve just had a letter from old Emma Goldman (rest her heroic soul) to tell me she got both my letters, but only the last but one could she follow when it was read to her; and the last, well, she was past all that, and now she is dead.”<sup>38</sup>

40 or so letters survive, principally in the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam. I find them fascinating reading. Goldman’s and Powys’s preoccupations and personalities—activist and solitary, extrovert and introvert—are diametrically opposed. Everything makes for a unique conjunction. And Goldman’s letters are as good as Powys’s, even, in their different way, better.<sup>39</sup>

From mid-1936 until January 1937 Powys was writing *Morwyn*. He then immediately turned to *The Pleasures of Literature*.<sup>40</sup> This book is spattered with references to “anarchy” and anarchism—as are all the non-fiction works of the 1940s.

In his answer to a *Wales* questionnaire of 1939, he described himself as “an anarchistic individualist”. In *Mortal Strife* (1942) he committed himself to the “social ideal” of “Philosophical Anarchy”.<sup>41</sup>

“. . . the intention of Evolution will always be found on the side of the Community which is most libertarian; for in the heart of every ‘common or garden’ man you will find, if you hunt long enough, the guileless integrity of an Ideal Anarchist”. “. . . the

Libertarian Utopia . . . is the heart's desire of all ordinary people . . ." And so Powys is able to equate "the Catalan anarchists" and "the old-fashioned British Liberals and Trades Unionists": for making the clearest stand against the Fascist assault on "the ordinary person and his independence".<sup>42</sup>

"Anarchy", "anarchist", "anarchical", "anarchistic" become for Powys terms of overwhelming approval—in great contrast to their customary pejorative meanings. For example,

" . . . the divine anarchy of the soul . . ."<sup>43</sup>

" . . . the power of the lonely, equal, *anarchistic* individual . . ."

" . . . the real, living, mysterious, anarchical Multiverse . . ."

" . . . the unphilosophical, irreligious, anti-social, anarchistic *Embrace of Life* . . ."

" . . . the chaotic, pluralistic, anarchistic Shakespeare . . ."<sup>44</sup>

And in his unanarchistic belligerence during the Second World War:

"Let those old Pirate-Anarchists of Britain take to their Seven Seas."

"I think Churchill is far more of a sound, far more of a proper man—I won't say 'common or garden' or 'democratic' man, I'll say more of a *proper man*, of a 'honest cod'—far more of a live-&-let-live, well-meaning, un-fanatical, un-cruel, kindly & honest personality—in a word, far more of an *anarchist* than Cripps and all these popular-crazed pin-headed Daily-Worker-Propagand Prof. Haldane austerio-types!"<sup>45</sup>

This outpouring is to some extent pre-figured in *Visions and Revisions* and *Suspended Judgments* of 1915 and 1916 respectively. Most strikingly, Powys referred to his revered John Keats not only as "a born 'Pluralist'" but also "an anarchist at heart—as so many great artists are . . ."; Rémy de Gourmont was described as "a spiritual anarchist" and as "proudly individualistic, an intellectual anarchist free from every scruple"; and, above all, the "voluptuous anarchy" of Rousseau, "a true 'philosophic anarchist'", is rhapsodised.<sup>46</sup>

One problem is the extent to which Powys

really did understand the theoretical tenets of anarchism.

On 15 June 1938 he wrote to Goldman: "O how [I] would like to see your friends in Catalonia emerge from this war victorious and really at last create an absolutely new experiment in social life and government free from politicians and dictators—a country *really free*, and one that would realise all those hopes that we all had at the *beginning* of the Revolution in Russia! . . . I suppose they would *have* to have some sort of centralized authority elected directly by the syndicates to deal with exports and imports etc etc and for the settling of the division of the profits of the whole district's *production* and exchange with other districts in Spain & other countries—What problems will emerge so as to give the people at the same time livelihood *and* liberty!"<sup>47</sup>

Goldman replied bluntly: "You will forgive me, I know, saying that there is a contradiction in this very first paragraph. It is wherein you speak of a 'country really free' and yet seem to think that government is necessary to maintain this ideal. Unfortunately freedom and government do not mix harmoniously. At least I know of no government, no matter how democratic or progressive, that has ever granted real freedom."

"Another mistake you are making, dear friend, is in your belief in the need of 'centralised authority'. That is precisely what the Spanish Anarchists do *not* want. Their whole idea is based on federated relations in all walks and purposes of social life and activity. I am taking the liberty of sending you a copy of *Anarcho-Syndicalism—Theory and Practice*, by one of our most brilliant men, Rudolf Rocker. It will explain to you better than I can in a letter that the whole concept of government, centralised authority and all that go with them in the way of curtailing real freedom, is wrong and inimical to any social system as conceived by Anarchist thought and ideology. It will also give you an idea of how far removed the aim of the Spanish Anarchists is from the profit element in production and distribution."<sup>48</sup>

Yet in *The Art of Growing Old* (1944) Powys could still write:

Let [the individual] be as anarchistic as he pleases; as long as he obeys the laws and earns an honest living he has a perfect right to be as critical of his own government as of any other. He has a right to criticize the whole idea of government; as long as, while the laws are the laws, he obeys them.<sup>49</sup>

Was Powys, then, really an anarchist? I think he was. Is it possible to be specific about the kind of anarchism in which he believed? Yes: there are two anarchist positions to which it may be plausibly maintained that he adhered.

First, it can be said, he was an "individualist anarchist" (or "anarchistic individualist"). Individualist anarchism assumes that "the individuals who make up society should be free and equal, and that they can become so only by their own efforts and not through the action of outside institutions . . . This is an anarchism for intellectuals, artists, and eccentrics, for people who work alone and like to keep themselves to themselves".<sup>50</sup> The most extreme form of individualist anarchism, egoism, was expounded by Max Stirner in *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* (Leipzig, 1845), usually translated as *The Ego and His Own*. Stirner rejects "such abstractions as morality, justice, obligation, reason, and duty, in favour of an intuitive recognition of the existential uniqueness of each individual . . . This is an anarchism for poets and tramps . . . It is anarchy here and now, if not in the world, then in one's own life".<sup>51</sup> Stirner must have influenced Nietzsche and certainly anticipated much of twentieth-century existentialism.

Powys was familiar with Stirner's famous book; and links it to two of the authors he most esteemed: Dorothy Richardson and Montaigne.

The chances are . . . that . . . it will be left to some more reckless and daring thinker than any produced by our generation to do full justice to the new gospel of the art of life which these nine volumes [of *Pilgrimage*] contain . . . a whole new way of taking life is revealed here for those who have the wit to

catch its drift . . . They contain the seed of a new philosophy of the senses, indeed of a new philosophy of life. That crude, disagreeable and yet suggestive book, Max Stirner's *Ego and Its Own*, might have inaugurated this philosophy. It missed its aim, as did also the works of Walter Pater, by a certain curious distance, on account of his masculine scrupulosity and his masculine fastidiousness.<sup>52</sup>

It is, indeed, hard to overrate the moral and philosophical importance of the particular kind of egoism advocated by Montaigne.

It is *the Ego and Its Own* of Max Stirner; only in Montaigne's case this super-individualism is mitigated by his reverence for the Laws of his Country, by his love of the old traditions, by his hatred of innovation, and by his profound distrust of the insane logic of that dangerous tyrant, the human reason.<sup>53</sup>

In *Mortal Strife* Powys writes:

Modern apologists for religion are marvellous deft at constructing artificial navel-strings! Thus the poor escaped free anarchistic soul—the 'Ego and Its Own'—mustn't be allowed to breathe its deep happy breaths in the dark, sweet, natural spaciousness of that divine loneliness, from which sex and love and birth enticed it into bondage!<sup>54</sup>

Second, there is philosophical anarchism: the "social ideal" of "Philosophical Anarchy". Philosophic or philosophical anarchism is the standpoint that anarchism, that society without state or government is to be desired, is the *ideal*, but that it is not really practicable, at least not at the present.<sup>55</sup>

This is Powys's attitude in *Mortal Strife* and *The Art of Growing Old*:

. . . although it seems hopeless, as things are now, to accept the bold and spirited anarchist doctrine that if the State were abolished the people could after one grand revolutionary uprising, run the world for themselves, we can at least recognize that the whole trend of Evolutionary Democracy is towards this happy consummation."<sup>56</sup>

. . . the pearl-white *samite* of the sacred gonfalon of that Palace of Anarchy towards which, whether in the Past or the Future, the needle of our compass turns.<sup>57</sup>

To Louis Wilkinson he wrote in 1939: "the Anarchist Ideal . . . is of course the

perfect one . . .” “Of course really . . . the truth is that the Anarchists alone are right. But the worst of *that* is that they are too good to be true.”<sup>58</sup>

Anarchism for Powys is what he calls in his *Spain and the World* article of 1938 a “Postponed Idea”:

Pacifism to-day . . . seems to have fallen into the category, along with the policing of the world by the League of Nations, of what one might call *Postponed Ideas*; ideas that the moment’s pressure renders inopportune . . . A sympathetic and cynical person might well be pardoned for thinking that not only no ideology . . . but no *idea* even, is worth the present sufferings of the civil population and of the refugees in Catalonia; but it does after all remain, even if the first really self-respecting and completely free life for the working people of the world were bombed into annihilation, that something more than an idea, a *living experience*, has come into being, to which, when humanity has disillusioned itself of these murderous and childish ideologies of efficiency, it can at last return.<sup>59</sup>

He adopts a position somewhere between philosophical and full-blooded anarchism in his statement on post-war reconstruction—extremely revealing as his only concise, detailed socio-political blueprint and reprinted as an appendix to this article—as also in a letter of 1942 to Louis Wilkinson:

. . . the only revolutionary party I have felt sympathetic to is that of the Catalonian Anarchists & Anarchist Syndicalists . . . I think the doctrines of anarchy . . . are the very best we have yet evolved. But ’tis all, alas! still a doctrinaire abstract philosophy, for the Fascists ended it in Catalonia as soon as it started—but I’d love to see it started (if only as an experiment) once again—in *one* country or province or county!<sup>60</sup>

I want finally to make a link between Powys’s anarchist politics and one of the myths central to his great novels: that of the Golden Age.

His descriptions of the Golden Age are spare; but I have long been struck by the extent to which his vision is akin to that of the creators of social utopias. More especially, he seems to think that the Golden Age is

within the reach of ordinary humankind. It is a state of innocence, a paradise, from which humans have fallen, but which can be recovered on earth, in the course of human history.

“ . . . we may be sure that the Justice of the Age of Gold will return . . . ”

“The sleeping-place of the Age of Gold is in the depths of every human heart; and to this must all revert. Bloody religion and bloody science are not forever. At the bottom of the world is pain; but below the pain is hope”.<sup>61</sup>

The Age of Gold is not something which will only be attained in a life after death or with the coming of the Millennium. It is, therefore, a secular vision; and, I would suggest, that it is the Golden Age which he envisages as the consummation of, as the ideal embedded within, his philosophical anarchism.<sup>62</sup>

. . . the greatest effect of the [Second World War] is to shake us back into the primeval fellow-feeling of the Golden Age. This fellow-feeling is far-older than Christ or Buddha. It is that prehistoric humility of the ancient paradisiac anarchy, the lapse from which still lingers in our race’s memory.<sup>63</sup>

And Powys’s two types of anarchism, individualist and philosophical, are conjoined (as I believe they should be) when he writes: “My claim is that the natural way, the intended way, the Utopian and Golden-Age way, of enjoying life is by a cult of the sensations.”<sup>64</sup>

## APPENDIX

. . . As to your excellent questions about the new order, I am too absorbed in reading over, and over for my own private culture, certain poetical and philosophical books; and in writing romances and lay-sermons and psychological-moralistic hand-books for individuals of my own rather anarchistic and rather solitude-loving type (with a mania for the inanimate and for the elements) to be anything but ignorant about world economics and politics.

But on two or three special and quite particular topics I do feel *very strongly* and in fact am

both an ardent missionary and a fierce crusader. I will put these down in the order in which I feel their importance:

1. I would like to see the abolition of Vivisection and the discrediting and total debunking of the present fantastic tyranny of physical science.

2. I would like to see the complete destruction of the Franco Regime in Spain; and the establishment of Catalonia as an independent commonwealth with anarchistic tendencies.

3. I would like to see a very complete but entirely bloodless revolution all over the world by which distinctions of class and inequalities of property and money were brought to an end without the suppression of free thought, free speech, free press, free books, free discussion and free art.

4. I would like to see Big Business and Capitalistic Private Initiative threatened and taxed and harried and bludgeoned into good behaviour; but I would like to see sufficient individualism left to stop the government from becoming a Dictatorship.

5. I would like to see the nationalization of land, mines, water, electricity, railways, and above all of BANKS.

6. I would like the attainment by the manual workers of those values of freedom from worry, of personal leisure, of liberal education, of development of individual taste, of love of solitude, etc., etc., which we associate with the best aristocracies: in fact I would like to see a general *leveling up*.

7. I would like to see some scheme invented by which all men and women, in all communities *were forced to share in the business of government*; and forced to learn how to take such a share!

8. I would like religion kept out of schools, and out of education altogether; and left entirely to private *initiative*.

(Donald Brook, *Writers' Gallery: Biographical Sketches of Britain's Greatest Writers, and their views on Reconstruction* (London: Rockliff Publishing Corporation, 1944), pp. 110-11).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 May 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Perceval Graves, *The Brothers Powys*, 1983, pp. 40-1, 48-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography* (1934), 1967, pp. 249-50, 277.

<sup>4</sup> Belinda Humfrey, ed., *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, Cardiff, 1972, p. 333.

<sup>5</sup> Iorwerth C. Peate, ed., *John Cowper Powys: Letters 1937-54*, Cardiff, 1974, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Iorwerth C. Peate, "John Cowper Powys: Letter Writer", *Review of English Literature*, vol. 4, no. 1 (January 1963), p. 39. It is this transcription from which I have quoted rather than that in the *Letters to Peate*, p. 54, since its punctuation makes better sense.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Nicolas Walter, "About Anarchism", *Anarchy*, no. 100 (June 1969), p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*.

<sup>9</sup> *The Poverty of Theory & other essays*, 1978, pp. 380-4.

<sup>10</sup> *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, vol. 2, Oxford, 1976, does contain one, possibly two, examples of this meaning of "libertarian" as further illustrations of definition (2).

<sup>11</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest*, 1964, pp. 63, 75, 86; John Cowper Powys, *Rabelais*, 1948, p. 307.

<sup>12</sup> T. J. Diffey, "John Cowper Powys and Philosophy", *The Powys Review*, no. 2 (Winter 1977), p. 34. On the other hand, his tracing of Powys's anarchism back to a University Extension syllabus of 1902 with

its synopsis of Ruskin's *Unto This Last* must be rejected (Diffey, p. 39 n. 104; Derek Langridge, *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement*, 1966, p. 38). For Powys's anarchist views, see also John A. Brebner, *The Demon Within: A Study of John Cowper Powys's Novels*, New York, 1973, esp. pp. 186-9; C. A. Coates, *John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape*, 1982, pp. 153-5; Cedric Hentschel, "Introduction", *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Sven-Erik Täckmark*, 1983, p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 598.

<sup>14</sup> Ruth Le Prade, ed., *Debs and the Poets*, Pasadena, 1920, p. 64.

<sup>15</sup> Powys follows William James in opposing "multiverse" with "block-universe".

<sup>16</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 626. This passage would almost certainly have been written in 1934.

It may well be objected that the foregoing overlooks Powys's contribution to the cause of Sacco and Vanzetti (which John Hodgson, "Springtime Out of Winter: John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* and Spengler", *The Powys Review*, no. 9 (1981/1982), p. 35, views as an expression of his "philosophical anarchism". See pp. 36-8 for John Cowper Powys, "Sacco-Vanzetti and Epochs" and "The Moon Over Megalopolis".) Certainly the Italian-Americans Sacco and Vanzetti were anarchists, but their trial, the legal arguments, their sentencing and ultimate execution (1920-27) appalled

and outraged progressives of all shades, from Communists to liberals (see, for example, Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager and William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Growth of the American Republic*, New York, 7th edn., 2 vols., 1980, vol. 2, pp. 411-12, and, in general, Louis Joughin and Edmund M. Morgan, *The Legacy of Sacco and Vanzetti*, Princeton, N.J., 1978 (pp. 313-14 and 324 for the *Lantern* and Powys)).

<sup>17</sup>Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Penguin, 4 vols., 1970, vol. 1, pp. 312, 319, 406, 600; George Woodcock, *The Crystal Spirit: A Study of George Orwell*, Penguin, 1970, p. 103.

<sup>18</sup>*Makers and Finders: a History of the Writer in America, 1800-1915*, vol. 5: *The Confident Years, 1885-1915*, 1952, pp. 217-18.

<sup>19</sup>Lawrence Durrell, ed., *The Best of Henry Miller*, 1960, p. 384; Richard Drinnon, *Rebel in Paradise: A Biography of Emma Goldman*, Chicago, 1961, p. 164; Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life*, 1963, pp. 135, 147, 333-4. But see Kingsley Widmer, *Henry Miller*, New York, 1963, pp. 176-7; also Jay Martin, *Always Merry and Bright: The Life of Henry Miller: An Unauthorized Biography*, 1979, pp. 38-9.

<sup>20</sup>Drinnon, *Rebel*; Richard and Anna Maria Drinnon, eds., *Nowhere at Home: Letters from Exile of Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman*, New York, 1975.

<sup>21</sup>See Maurice Browne, *Too Late to Lament: An Autobiography*, 1955, pp. 134-5, 317.

<sup>22</sup>International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam: Goldman Archive, Emma Goldman (EG) to John Cowper Powys (JCP), 1 Jan. 1936, XIX 3 P-Z. The correspondence between Goldman and Powys largely survives in the Amsterdam Institute, Goldman having preserved carbons of her typed letters. Mr. E. E. Bissell owns 11 top copies, with enclosures, of Goldman's letters to Powys and where this is the case reference is made to his collection. Otherwise the relevant file number of the Goldman Archive, Amsterdam, is merely given. (Several duplicates are located at the New York Public Library and the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, but the originals of these are in Europe.)

<sup>23</sup>By 1938, however, she could write "I am also sending you a copy of a message sent by John Cowper Powys, probably better known in America than in his own country . . ." (EG to Comrades of "Vanguard" "A libertarian communist journal", New York, 21 April 1938, XXVII B). For Goldman's early acquaintance, even friendship, with Powys, see Emma Goldman, *Living My Life* (1931), New York, 2 vols., 1970 reprint, vol. 2, pp. 569-70, and EG to JCP, 7 Feb. 1936, XIX 3 P-Z).

<sup>24</sup>JCP to EG, 3 Jan. 1936, XIX 3 P-Z.

<sup>25</sup>JCP to EG, 9 Feb. 1936, XXXV.

<sup>26</sup>JCP to EG, 4 Feb. 1938, XXVIII B.

<sup>27</sup>EG to JCP, 1 Jan. 1936, XIX 3 P-Z.

<sup>28</sup>JCP to EG, 18 Sept. 1936, XXVIII D.

<sup>29</sup>Drinnon, *Rebel*, p. 302.

<sup>30</sup>Robert W. Kern, "Anarchist Principles and Spanish Reality: Emma Goldman as a Participant in the Civil War 1936-39", *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 11, nos. 2 and 3 (July 1976), pp. 242, 245-8; David Porter, ed., *Vision on Fire: Emma Goldman on the Spanish Revolution*, New Paltz, N.Y., 1983, p. 14; EG to JCP, 29 May 1937, XXVIII D; EG to JCP, 14 Jan. 1938, Bissell Coll.

<sup>31</sup>JCP to EG, 17 Jan. 1938, XXVII B.

<sup>32</sup>The latter was reprinted, without explanation of its origins, in *The Powys Review*, no. 3 (Summer 1978).

<sup>33</sup>Drinnon, *Rebel*, pp. 302n, 305. The AIT was the Association Internationale des Travailleurs: in this context the Spanish section of International Workingmen's Association, the Anarchist International belatedly established in 1923.

<sup>34</sup>JCP to EG, 2 May 1937, XXVIII D.

<sup>35</sup>*Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956*, 1958, pp. 103-106, 110-111. See also p. 39.

<sup>36</sup>*Letters to Wilkinson*, p. 45; JCP to EG, 30 March 1937, XXVIII D.

<sup>37</sup>Drinnon, *Nowhere at Home*, p. 273; Porter, p. 14; EG to JCP, 21 March, 17 June 1939, Bissell Coll.; Drinnon, *Rebel*, pp. 311-13.

<sup>38</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Letters to Nicholas Ross*, 1971, pp. 24-5. On 17 February Goldman had suffered a stroke (Drinnon, *Rebel*, p. 313).

<sup>39</sup>I am hoping that it will prove possible to publish an edition of this two-way correspondence.

<sup>40</sup>Malcolm Elwin, "Prefatory Note" to *Maiden Castle*, 1966, p. 8; Graves, p. 285.

<sup>41</sup>*Obstinate Cymric*, Carmarthen, 1947, p. 133; *Mortal Strife*, 1942, p. 167.

<sup>42</sup>*Mortal Strife*, pp. 18-19, 33, 83-4.

<sup>43</sup>*The Pleasures of Literature*, 1938, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup>*Mortal Strife*, pp. 156, 178, 194, 211.

<sup>45</sup>*Mortal Strife*, p. 174; *Letters to Wilkinson*, p. 111. Powys received at least some issues of *War Commentary*, from November 1939 *Spain and the World's* successor, which "old Emma used to make them send me before her death in Canada . . ." (Reginald Reynolds, *My Life and Crimes*, 1956), p. 208). Powys would have been no more able to stomach *War Commentary's* principled opposition to the war than anarchists could have tolerated the jingoism of *Mortal Strife*.

<sup>46</sup>*Visions and Revisions: A Book of Literary Devotions*, (1955), 1974 reprint, pp. 139-40; *Suspended Judgments: Essays on Books and Sensations* (1916), n.p., 1969 reprint, pp. 86-90, 93, 97, 233-4, 249-253. See also n. 54 below. De Gourmont was, as it happens, associated with the French anarchist movement in the 1890s (Jean Maitron, *Histoire du mouvement anarchiste en France (1880-1914)*, Paris, 2nd edn., 1955, pp. 131, 137 n.6, 449); and Rousseau was a major precursor of anarchism (see James Joll, *The Anarchists*, 1964, pp. 30-1).

<sup>47</sup>JCP to EG, 15 June 1938, XXI.

<sup>48</sup>EG to JCP, 16 Aug. 1938, Bissell Coll. (printed in Drinnon, *Nowhere at Home*, pp. 270-73). Cf. John Cowper Powys, *Letters to Henry Miller*, 1975, p. 52.

<sup>49</sup>*The Art of Growing Old*, 1944, pp. 176-7.

<sup>50</sup>Walter, p. 173.

<sup>51</sup>Walter, p. 174.

<sup>52</sup>*Dorothy M. Richardson* (1931), 1974 reprint, p. 32.

<sup>53</sup>*Pleasures of Literature*, p. 329. Cf. *Suspended Judgments*, pp. 23-5.

<sup>54</sup>*Mortal Strife*, p. 206. See also *Art of Growing Old*, pp. 136-7.

The first English-language edition of *Der Einzige und sein Eigentum* was published in New York by Benjamin Tucker in 1907. It appeared in London in 1912, was republished in New York the following year and by 1918 had entered Boni and Liveright's "Modern Library of the World's Best Books". Powys knew the book from this period, the decade of its greatest impact on English and, especially (I would hazard), American readers. See Louis U. Wilkinson, *The Buffoon* (1916), 1975 reprint, p. 407, the novel in which Jack Welsh is notoriously a portrayal of Powys. I do not know how to interpret Chapter 13 of *The Buffoon*; but it is clearly closely related to the chapter on Rousseau in *Suspended Judgments* (1916), in which Rousseau's "anarchy" is favourably contrasted to—is regarded as "far more dangerous" than—that of "a genuine and logical anarchist, such as Max Stirner" (pp. 89-90). Mrs. Isobel Powys Marks, daughter of A. R. Powys, remembers that around the time she was aged eight there was a book on her father's shelves which she took to be THE EGG AND HIS OWN SISTER (this would have been in about 1914). Later she came to realise that the spine really read THE EGO AND HIS OWN—STIRNER. She does not consider that her father would have bought the book: it would have been either a gift or left unintentionally by a visitor.

For Stirner, in addition to *The Ego and His Own* (currently available, still in the 1907 translation, under the title of *The Ego and Its Own* and the imprint of the Rebel Press, London), see R. W. K. Paterson, *The Nihilistic Egoist: Max Stirner*, 1971; John Carroll, ed., *Max Stirner: The Ego and His Own*, 1971 [a controversial abridgment]; John Carroll, *Break-Out from the Crystal Palace: The anarcho-psychological critique: Stirner, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky*, 1974; John P. Clark, *Max Stirner's Egoism*, 1976; Paul Thomas, *Karl Marx and the Anarchists*, 1980, esp. chap. 3.

James Joyce was greatly influenced by anarchist writings, particularly those of the American individualist Benjamin Tucker, the conclusion being that the "political label . . . of 'libertarian' comes closest to describing his position" (Dominic Manganiello, *Joyce's Politics*, 1980, chap. 3 and pp. 148-60, 202-34).

I propose to explore further John Cowper Powys's individualist anarchism in another paper.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Walter, pp. 172-3.

<sup>56</sup>*The Art of Growing Old*, p. 197. It is of some interest that Ethel Mannin treats *The Art of Growing Old* as a Utopian work in her *Bread and Roses: An Utopian Survey and Blue-Print*, 1944, see esp. p. 109.

<sup>57</sup>*Mortal Strife*, p. 122.

<sup>58</sup>*Letters to Wilkinson*, pp. 54, 56.

<sup>59</sup>"The Real and the Ideal", *Spain and the World*, Supplement, May 1938 (reprinted in *The Powys Review*, no. 3, p. 79, although I favour the above version at a point where there is a misprint in the original).

<sup>60</sup>*Letters to Wilkinson*, p. 105.

<sup>61</sup>*Morwyn* (1937), 1974 reprint, pp. 241, 320.

<sup>62</sup>See, notably, *Porius* (1951), 1974 reprint pp. 274-7.

<sup>63</sup>*Mortal Strife*, p. 221.

<sup>64</sup>*Mortal Strife*, p. 168.

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# Jack Barbera

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## A Powys's bridal night and Stevie Smith

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Stevie Smith was an ardent admirer of the writings of John Cowper and Llewelyn Powys. In enthusiastic reviews of Llewelyn Powys's *Love and Death* and his posthumously published essay collection, *A Baker's Dozen*, she repeated the claim that contemporary literature was indebted to the Powys family. And in reviews of four of John Cowper Powys's books, she questioned why he was not thought more of, calling him a genius, a "blessed old prophet of the everyday magicalness of human life". That he wrote in English, Stevie said, was a source of pride. Not content to celebrate him in reviews, she has the protagonist of her novel, *The Holiday*, in a discussion of instinctuality (as opposed to intellectuality), say that John Cowper Powys has the fullest feeling of its pleasure, "the fleering humble cold fish that he is, the wily old pard of the rocks and stones, the Welsh carp in his British pool." John Cowper Powys found Stevie's reviews of his work penetrating, and wrote to tell her so in the early 1950s, also praising *The Holiday*, and the poems and drawings in her book, *Harold's Leap*.<sup>1</sup>

In *Not Waving but Drowning*, the poetry volume which followed *Harold's Leap*, Stevie Smith included a four line "Homage to John Cowper Powys", which praised the eldest Powys brother for his slyness, wisdom, honesty and depth, and noted that he may be thought a fool by Monsieur Poop—her name in an earlier poem ("Souvenir de Monsieur Poop") for an old fogey pundit. But, however heartfelt Stevie's sentiment, "Homage to John Cowper Powys" is not one of the poems in which her strengths as a writer are manifest. Ironically, prose she did not admire, written by yet another Powys, did inspire such a poem.

In 1956 Littleton Powys's autobiography,

*Still the Joy of It*, was published. He told, in part, of meeting Elizabeth Myers in 1943, when he was "a lonely widower of sixty-nine" and she "a little-known writer aged thirty". They married in Hampstead on October 7th of that year and, according to Littleton, their marriage was "like one prolonged honeymoon" until Elizabeth's death from tuberculosis three and a half years later. Contributing to her happiness in those years was the success of her first novel, *A Well Full of Leaves*, published about a month before her marriage and "received everywhere with acclamation".<sup>2</sup> One of the approving reviews, in fact, was written by Stevie Smith who, in the November 1943 issue of *Modern Women*, called the book "bravely unusual". But writing to her friend, John Hayward, Stevie questioned the latter part of the novel, and sent up a passage in which Elizabeth Myers describes blood "quietly" streaming into the handkerchief of her tubercular protagonist.<sup>3</sup>

Given her admiration for the Powys family, and her familiarity with Elizabeth Myers's first novel, Stevie must have read Littleton Powys's autobiography with some interest. Certainly she was fascinated by a sentence in which he described the night of his wedding: "Our wedding night coincided with the most spirited German air raid that had been experienced in London for a long time; and the confusion was increased by a very large fleet of our own bombers passing over London on their way to Germany at the same time" (*Joy*, 34). This account became part of Stevie's eleven line poem, "I Remember". Perhaps only she would have introduced "I Remember" during poetry readings as "a happy love poem".<sup>4</sup> In this spirit, in a letter written to a friend on 20 November 1956, she enclosed the poem

along with other newly written ones to show, she said, that if she could not manage *à deux* love, she could at least "have a boss shot at a general feeling of warmth & affection" (*MA*, 303).

"I Remember" does express affection, or at least its speaker does, but it is dotty, having a funny sad tone characteristic of many of Stevie Smith's best poems. Its speaker tells of his wartime wedding night when, at the age of seventy-three, he reclined with his young tubercular bride as German and British airplanes crossed overhead, engaged in reciprocal raids. The bride then asks "Harry" if the airplanes ever collide, and he replies that he doubts that "it has ever happened, / Oh my bride, my bride."<sup>5</sup> The poem's humour is of the sort one critic has called Stevie Smith's "gleeful macabre". It arises in "I Remember" from Stevie's rhymes ("seventy-three" with

"t.b.", for example, and "collide" with "bride"), and her artful presentation of incongruities: old groom and young bride; wedding couple and bombers; crossed flight paths; the tender coming together below and the imagined explosive collision above.

When Derek Parker presented a radio programme about Stevie Smith in 1970, he included a BBC Archive recording of the poet reading "I Remember". Stevie wrote on 27 July to thank him for the programme. She confessed that, except for some rhyme and a slight change in wording, the poem is almost a transcript of Littleton Powys's description of his bridal night. What fascinated her about the passage, she said, was the way Littleton's banal and pompous language gave such horror to his description. She hoped, Stevie joked, that Littleton's ghost did not turn green at the applause which followed her reading of the poem.<sup>6</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For Stevie Smith's review of Llewelyn Powys's books see: *Life & Letters To-day*, 22 (July 1939), 138-39; and "Farewell To Dorset", *John O'London's Weekly* 45 (29 August 1941), 342. For her reviews of John Cowper Powys's books see: "New Novels", *World Review*, NS 42 (August 1952), 70-72; "New Novels", *Observer*, 31 October 1954, p. 7; "Books of the Year", *Observer*, 23 December 1956, p. 6; and "Powys and Homer", *Observer*, 8 March 1959, p. 22. The passage from *The Holiday*, Virago, 1979, is found on p. 124. The cited letters of John Cowper Powys to Stevie Smith were preserved after her death by her friend, Helen Fowler, and eventually were delivered to Smith's literary executor.

<sup>2</sup>Littleton C. Powys, *Still the Joy of It*, Macdonald, 1956, pp. 33-34, hereafter cited as *Joy*.

<sup>3</sup>For Stevie Smith's letter to John Hayward see *Me*

*Again: Uncollected Writings of Stevie Smith*, ed. Jack Barbera and William McBrien, Virago, 1981, pp. 285-86, hereafter cited as *MA*.

<sup>4</sup>She called it that, for instance, during her BBC Third Programme broadcasts of 4 March 1957 and 4 October 1963. A script of the former is owned by the McFarlin Library, The University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S.A.; and a script of the latter is owned by the BBC Written Archives, Caversham Park, Reading.

<sup>5</sup>*The Collected Poems of Stevie Smith*, Allen Lane, 1975, p. 336. Stevie's poems, "Homage to John Cowper Powys" and "Souvenir de Monsieur Poop", can also be found in this volume, pp. 278 and 137.

<sup>6</sup>Letter of Derek Parker to William McBrien, 19 September 1979, in the possession of Professor McBrien.

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# Bryn Gunnell

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## T. F. Powys in his time

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In most surveys of modern literature T. F. Powys either does not appear at all or is merely mentioned in passing. He stands alone, in the same way as Mervyn Peake, and is unclassifiable. Critics find him disconcerting and complex because he deals, as a visionary, with human permanencies and not with social conduct, the basis of most of our fiction.

Powys is a modest writer; he never makes categorical statements and so often appears inconsistent. He does not pretend to be either a moralist or a poet, though he is often both, and he can be grave and mocking by turns. He has none of the garrulous self-indulgence of John Cowper and has never become the object of a faddish cult.

R. C. Churchill concluded his monograph, *The Powys Brothers* (Writers and their Work, 1962) with these words: "But writers who have never been in fashion cannot logically be accused of becoming out of it." Being fashionable is no criterion of merit, but it is remarkable that a writer who had so much in common with his great contemporaries should have been so consistently overlooked.\*

Powys's best work—*Mark Only, Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and *Fables*—was written between 1924 and 1931, the period of *The Waves*, *A Passage to India*, *The Plumed Serpent* and *Point Counter Point*, yet, while these books were widely apprecia-

\*A distinct gap exists between Powys's reputation at home and abroad. Six of his works have been translated into Italian, five into French and two into Russian. In Italy, *Il Buon Vino del Signor Weston* can be found on supermarket bookstalls, even in provincial towns! *Soliloquies of a Hermit* and *Fables* were first published in America and, probably because American fiction is more concerned with metaphysics than with manners, he has a considerable following there.

ted, Powys remained in abeyance or was branded as old-fashioned. Indeed, critics have always been content to impale him on a phrase and leave it at that. Dylan Thomas's sneer—he said that Powys wrote "Biblical stories about old sextons called Parsnip or Dottle"—could be compared with Thomas Love Peacock's summary dismissal of Wordsworth in *The Four Ages of Poetry*: "Mr. Wordsworth picks up village legends from old women and sextons". Dylan Thomas, let it be noted, obviously imitated Powys, in a rather facile way, and, in atmosphere, *Under Milk Wood* strangely resembles *Hester Dominy*.

Referring to Virginia Woolf in his *Three Cheers for Democracy*, E. M. Forster wrote: "Still, to belong to one's period is a common failing; she made the most of hers." Far from being a common failing, no writer can really help being influenced by his own times, and Powys is no exception. Of course, his attitudes to life were formed before the First World War, but he was sensitive to the economic and social changes that followed it. One must remember, too, that Powys, like Forster, was born a Victorian. Their intellectual development was in many ways similar for they were both affected by the same emancipatory currents of thought, by Samuel Butler, William James and, particularly in the case of Powys, Nietzsche.

It is pertinent, anyway, to ask whether Powys responded deeply, or at all, to the ideas that were prevalent in his time, for he lived in voluntary isolation and disliked the superficiality of urban life, though he did possess both a radio and a gramophone, much to the disgust of his thoroughly anti-modern brother, Llewelyn.

We know from Louis Wilkinson's *Welsh Ambassadors* that Powys had read and

greatly enjoyed some of Freud's works, and he must have heard about Einstein and the theory of relativity as Mr. Bunce's "Time be stopped" seems to indicate.

One thing at least is clear: Powys sets the scene of his novels and stories in the twentieth century. The Ford car in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* was "by no means a new one", and we are told the precise date of Mr. Weston's arrival at Folly Down, 20 November 1923. The tensions and soul-searchings of the post-war period rise to the surface in all his early books. He is openly and harshly critical of established beliefs concerned with religion, patriotism and social convention—and in his desire to sweep away "the old moods", as he calls them in *Soliloquies*, he often reveals the highly unorthodox and at times antinomian side of his character. (All the Powyses were what John Cowper called "lid-lifters", and Theodore the anarchist of the family.) There are some bitter allusions to the First World War in *Soliloquies*, *Mr. Tasker's Gods* and some of the early short stories, notably in "Benjamin Jim" (*The House with the Echo*), and Fred in *Innocent Birds* is a tragic victim of the drift from country to town that took place in the 1920s. Powys attacks social injustice unsparingly, though with a lack of subtlety, in *Mr. Tasker's Gods*:

Mr. Turnbull had received that morning a dividend, larger than usual, the reason for its extra value being that in the town where the works were—and in the works was a portion of Mr. Turnbull's money—there had been much distress among the poor, and the factory could hire female labour at a very low price. The babes in the town died in vast numbers of a preventable disease, the most preventable disease of all, simply starvation. The out-of-work men stood at street corners and said 'bloody' a great many times, this particular word denoting a mighty flight of imagination like the sudden bursting of a sewer.<sup>1</sup> (48)

Powys knew country people inside out. He lived among "full-fed, greed-haunted soul-starved farmers" (he had been a farmer himself) and "work-worn labourers,

scraped almost to the bone by their toil", (MTG, 223) men who, as Llewelyn Powys pointed out in his essay on the Tolpuddle Martyrs (*Dorset Essays*, 1935) "have possessed less of the soil they cultivate than any peasantry in Europe". Powys's novels are about workers, but they could hardly be considered as proletarian, nor is he portraying a peasant community in the spirit of *A Scots Quair*. He is an allegorist, transforming local into universal through poetry, and his world, though it resembles, is not the world of everyday.

Like many of his contemporaries, Powys develops the theme of the natural man and woman. His approach to the question of woman's place in society is quite in keeping with the growing liberality of the twenties. Mr. Weston admits that women are "of some importance" to his trade. (42) Women assert their independence, in fact, and, as a sign of emancipation, adopt fashions which are both practical and uninhibited. Townswomen began to have their hair bobbed in 1918: "Perhaps you are not aware, Nicholas, that I am a young woman, perhaps you fancy me to be a young boy because my hair is cut short." This is Alice Grobe teasing her husband. (190)

Mr. Turnbull, the vicar in *Mr. Tasker's Gods*, is afraid of the American girls he has seen in a picture paper: "They were tall girls and looked as if they knew what kind of earth they were treading on, and what kind of helpmate they had in a man." (20)

Powys's women are healthy-minded, active and purposeful—one thinks of Alice, Tamar and Jenny—and they are liable to revolt if misused, as Susie Dawe in *Unclay* eventually does. Miss Neville and Rose in *Mr. Tasker's Gods* set up house together, after Mr. Neville's suicide, in defiance of the narrow, hostile villagers: "Thus the golden bond that must at last chain all rebels together, whatever their habits of life, was cast around these two women." (267)

In her *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1936) Stevie Smith laments that people never seem to be able to enjoy sex as they find it: "Some people take sex like it was a constitutional exercise, some people take it like it was a

conflict. Some people have to mix it up with a lot of talk, explaining and arguing and declaiming, and some people take it like it was all hatred and cruelty."

Love in Powys is a natural act with no social opprobrium attached to it since it only concerns those involved. Particularly in the case of Jenny Bunce and Luke Bird (WGW), it is a wholesome relationship in which each partner completes the other and breaks out of the prison of self. At the time when his works were published, Powys's ideas about sex did not impress the public so much as D. H. Lawrence's for the simple reason that sex does not dominate his outlook on life. Whereas Lawrence stakes everything on sex—becoming angry and frustrated when it fails—Powys sees it as just one aspect of the natural man. He does not over-estimate sexuality, nor does he refine it out of existence as Forster and L. H. Myers tend to do. His attitude is one of commonsense and tolerance, and, unlike most modern writers—with the exception of Henry Miller and Henry Green—he sees love, in all its forms, as the only thing which can make our lives tolerable: "Love is the only thing in the world; all else is weariness and wormwood." (WGW, 182)

Love is Powys's great positive, and if our faith in love seems outmoded, it is because much of what we read today is infected with a bogus heartlessness which is merely another way of masking our emotion, another symptom of our deep-rooted puritanism.<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

When we were all of us quite natural beasts of the earth, we were able to take and enjoy the life near us; but being grown into men, we have got into the bad habit of looking forward, and by looking forward we quite lose the present. (*Soliloquies of a Hermit*, 42)

To Powys, losing the present means renouncing the one possible way of living, for it is in the present that we act and enjoy. Powys's profound respect for life includes a recognition of its limitations; he knows that we cannot

'To Nature's self  
Oppose a deeper nature.' (*The Prelude*,  
XII, 159-60)

Underlying his whole attitude to man's condition is the conviction, based on experience, that men can live wisely if they will hold fast to present joy—the message of the author of *Ecclesiastes*:

Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. (IX, 7)

Powys's view of life is cosmic rather than social or psychological. He is firmly opposed to the dehumanizing aspects of modern technology and, with equal firmness, he refutes the Christian assertion that men should be pure spirits. Though he greatly admired Jesus, he found his self-denial both excessive and unnatural, and that is why he calls him "the sad stranger" in *Soliloquies* (135). D. H. Lawrence had similar feelings, and in *The Man That Died* he shows us a Christ who is painfully aware that his life has been too spiritual.

*Mr. Weston's Good Wine* symbolizes a return to nature as it was before the Fall. This is borne out by the choice Mr. Weston offers the villagers: they can either have life or eternity, and they choose life, with all its drawbacks.

Powys is a writer with no illusions. He describes suffering and brutality because he hates these things with a deep, restless hatred, yet at the same time he never ceases to praise the beauty of the world and of the senses. As Lionel Trilling says: "The novelist expresses . . . his coexistent hatred and love of the life he observes. His inconsistency of intellectual judgement is biological wisdom."<sup>3</sup> Powys possesses plenty of "biological wisdom". He considers natural man squarely and never judges him from a moral point of view, but he does condemn, simply by exposing it, any human situation that has its roots in unnaturalness. He asserts the rights of the individual against all institut-

ions—and these, paradoxically, are often Christian—which have been set above personal values. Powys's concern is to assign to man his natural place in the world, a place which is there for the taking but which he persistently ignores. In a sense he is an eighteenth century thinker, a Rousseau looking for equilibrium in an accepted reality, not for some way of surpassing reality as known at any moment.

Powys shares Lawrence's hatred of all the bourgeois beatitudes, but in his basic beliefs he is much closer to E. M. Forster. Lawrence is by nature eschatological, whereas Forster and Powys do not look forward to the millennium or expect great changes in human nature. Lionel Trilling, in his study *E. M. Forster*, has this interesting comment on the eschatological point of view:

Most of us, consciously or unconsciously, are discontented with the nature rather than the use of the human faculty; deep in our assumption lies the hope and the belief that humanity will end its career by developing virtues which will be admirable exactly because we cannot now conceive them. The past has been a weary failure, the present cannot matter, for it is but a step forward to the final judgement, we look to the future when the best works of man will seem but the futile and slightly disgusting twitchings of primeval creatures: thus, in the name of a superior and contemptuous posterity, we express our self-hatred.<sup>4</sup>

Powys faces with absolute honesty the facts of existence as we have to live it:

The world is always rain-swept and sun-cracked, soaked with salt mists and splashed with mud; and our lives at the best are broken and threadbare, while death ever clings to life, slowly devouring it. That is how we are made; and always the moods of God fill us with madness, for that is how He is made. (*SH*, 76)

Powys attacks privilege and the Establishment as fiercely as Lawrence and Orwell, but, where they tend to attack on principle, or with a certain personal animus, Powys merely includes oppressive authority in a more general criticism of all that is unnatural or inhuman, foreseeing, as he once wrote, a time when "A mob of machine drivers

will rule" and "Every hour will be lived by mankind in talk, nothing but talk."<sup>5</sup>

All the writers of the interwar period had to face the problems of industrialism, the all-powerful state and the rapid depersonalization of life. Some reacted in an extreme way: Ezra Pound turned from the hideous present to the 'perfect' past; T. S. Eliot, terrified at the prospect of a sag in bourgeois domination, became a doom-monger, while Lawrence sought consolation from remote places and 'untouched' cultures.

Powys does not share their nostalgia for something lost or missing—the inhabitants of Folly Down choose life as it is—nor does he hate the present or wish to destroy civilization as we know it: "'... it is hard,' said Mr. Hayhoe, 'to find a modern poet who is not in love with destruction.'" (*U*, 158)

Powys is not a writer with a purpose and he does not follow a fixed course: "If a man is sincere, he will change his opinion with every mood, at least about the things that belong to the spirit." (*SH*, 50)

He is a poet, concerned with the doings of that "forked oddity", man, but equally with the great disregarded company that surrounds him, for life is full of signs and "any creature that he may meet, or any brook or hill, will express God's meaning in fair picture-writings that may easily be understood." ("The Only Penitent", *GET*, 188)

Basically Powys's view of life is that of a Taoist: "The centre of life is always near; it is only the outer parts that are afar off and hard to understand." (*SH*, 78) In *Soliloquies* he refers to a certain "mystic stupidity" that is necessary if one is to be in tune with the world. The tone of his mature work is distinctly Taoist: he is humble, though not easily deceived; humorous; ironic, given to self-caricature and serious in his simplicity. Luke Bird, talking to himself, clearly expresses the Taoist idea that what we are always looking for outside ourselves is really within:

'And if any man, other than Mr. Grunter, actually believed that so mysterious a personality as the soul existed as his own, all our lives would be freed from care, no cruel deed

would be done, no harsh word spoken, and all would regard the wonder within them as their real being and feel themselves as only the outward garment, the cover of this hidden mystery.' (*WGW*, 179)

Powys trusts our natural faculties and tends to let the mind alone. He believes that, as individuals, we can achieve fulfilment—though “never fill the cup fuller than our manhood will hold” (*SH*, 103)—so long as we do not meddle with the Tao, with what wills to become, and this he calls “growing ourselves”. He knows “the fierce agony, the vast joy of passion”, but he prefers “A time of quietude that is full of the right contentment”. (*WGW*, 101) He has a deep faith in naturalness, and naturalness, he feels sure, can be found at home; there is no need to uproot oneself and go in search of the exotic. Lawrence, too, knew this, but could not live up to it: “Men are free when they are in a living homeland, not when they are straying and breaking away.”<sup>6</sup>

In a letter from Coxwold, Sterne wrote: The great Error of Life is, that we look too far: we scale the Heavens,—we dig down to the centre of the Earth, for systems—and we forget ourselves. Truth lies before us; it is in the highway path; and the ploughman treads on it with his clouted shoon.<sup>7</sup>

Powys, writing in his Dorset village, took note of that highway, and of the ploughman, and made them universal. Like Mr. Bunce, he “viewed the world with a local eye, and that a deep one.” (*WGW*, 186)

*Point Counter Point*, every page of which reflects the ethos of the nineteen-twenties, is full of the intellectual’s bitterness at the loss of simplicity:

The obvious that the intellectual gets back to, if he goes far enough, isn’t of course the same as the obvious of the non-intellectual. For their obvious is life itself and his recovered obvious is only the idea of that life.<sup>8</sup>

This is the problem that Powys faced very early in *Soliloquies of a Hermit*:

I feel the emptiness, the unutterable emptiness of all the thoughts in the world; and I hearken to the remote sounds of the sea. I wonder why we can ever leave the simple

clearness of our lives in order to crawl into the underworld of mystery. (68)

In another passage in *Point Counter Point*, Huxley says:

People want to drown their realization of the difficulties of living properly in this grotesque contemporary world, they want to forget their own deplorable inefficiency as artists in life.<sup>8</sup>

Against this defeatist attitude of baffled and superficial intellectualism, Powys stands like a rock. He retained an immediacy towards life which most of his contemporaries lacked—Huxley expects us to rehearse life, not live it—and his answer to all the mental pother of *Point Counter Point* would probably have been, in Mr. Dunnell’s words: “Hook be sharp and green grass do want en, that be the way of the world.” (*Abraham Men*, *LL*, 310)

Modern literature presents life in a way which refers back to the individual and one of its major themes is man’s isolation. Characteristically, it is the terrible loneliness of God—and of John Death—which appealed to Powys’s imagination, but his main characters, too, Mr. Neville, Mark Only, Mr. Grunter, Luke Bird, Nicholas Grobe and Mr. Hayhoe, are all lonely figures. His country people do abide by certain codes of their own making, yet their solidarity is tenuous and the only time they really get together is at the village inn; here, as in Joyce, drink makes them forget their conflicting interests for a while and acts as a catalyst. To the menfolk of Folly Down “the drugged, solid air of the Angel Inn parlour” is a refuge from harsh reality, “And the blue smoke of Mr. Mumby’s pipe, rising in rings, proved that life thus lived was happiness, and that all those stars, together with their Creator, were but a monster depravity in the black sky.” (*WGW*, 110)

The failure to understand and connect is clearly brought out in the scene in *Black Bryony* when the villagers solemnly watch the vicarage burn down without raising a finger to help. Powys does not lament the fact that we are usually cut off from one another—in fact, he accepts it as part of our

condition—but he does point out that our isolation is based on a curious paradox:

Every one desires that one day something will happen that will exalt him above his neighbour in the eyes of the world.

This hope knits together the hearts of all people, though by means of this very desire each hopes to be grandly separate. (*MG*, 148)

Powys's work encompasses the whole of life. His treatment of duration closely resembles the methods used by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. The whole action of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* (written 1924-1925) takes place in one evening. *Ulysses* was published in 1922 and *Mrs. Dalloway* in 1925. The three writers use flashbacks and analyse sensations and memories (Mr. Grobe lives entirely in the past) but whereas the stream of consciousness theory was applied analytically to the lives of individuals in Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in Powys it is applied to life itself in a universal, synthetic way. Joyce attempted to exhaust all the possibilities of character portrayal by going ever deeper into consciousness: the reader lives the character from inside. Powys's characters are simple and their individuality is more the result of contrast within the group but, although the analysis of each is succinct and often caricaturish, it lends itself to universal application. Powys's strength is his inspired directness and what John Cowper Powys called "a stark universality that resembles that of Dürer".<sup>9</sup>

In Powys the emotions always come singly, separate and whole, as the art of allegory demands. He frequently makes use of monologue, however, to reveal a character's state of mind, and though he does not attempt to show man discovering his personal values through constant self-examination, he is perfectly aware of the value and applications of introspection:

Time moves sullenly while a girl wishes and waits. Each moment that might be precious to her—were he but come—mocks her and passes by. Duration—that many-headed beast, gives her no comfort. She hears a step. That moment smiles, the others pass on, unthinkingly. (*U*, 203)

Powys is as conscious an artist as Joyce, yet without any trace of pedantry, and the only comment on the writer's art to be found in all his works is made with dry humour: "The proper unfolding of an idea in a novel is a far more important matter, and is seen so from heaven, than a mere battle between wandering tribes." (*WGW*, 183)

His gift for finding universal significance in trivial incidents and everyday objects—"I love a broken chair that is worn through to the wood; it is a chair that can tell its own tale" (*SH*, 6)—has close affinities with Joyce's capacity for insight as outlined in the theory of epiphanies:

First we recognise that the object is one integral thing . . . Its soul, its whatness, leaps up to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.<sup>10</sup>

By using generalities, spiced now and again with some pithy comment, Powys has been able to give a very broad tableau of human life. Like Shakespeare he touches upon almost every aspect of human conduct, without forcing himself on to us, and he has a deep feeling for the symbolic act. He worked out his own method, and had faith in it:

All things that happen . . . are only the scenes out of one play, presented a little differently perhaps, but with always the same players. And the play that is acted *allegorically*, to a finite mind, is everlasting. ("When Thou Wast Naked", *GET*, 85)

Disliking dogmatism in any form, Powys naturally chose allegory as his vehicle, for in allegory there can be no assertion: we simply become involved, as in a folk tale, in a dramatic pattern which mirrors the lives of men. How striking it is, for example, that Bunyan, for all his strong feeling, never actually preaches; he shows everything through parable.

Powys was, in the true sense of the word, a maker, yet, in her essay on her contemporaries, Virginia Woolf does not know of him: "The most sincere of them will only tell us

what it is that happens to himself. They cannot make a world, because they do not believe that stories are true."<sup>11</sup>

Powys not only makes a world, he also gives us a first rate story.

As Virginia Woolf points out, the fiction of his period is characterized by an almost fervid attachment to the value of self-expression, but Powys is not primarily interested in himself or in self-definition as Lawrence, Hemingway and Thomas Wolfe are. In a sense, he achieved the stasis in art towards which Joyce was working and his method, at its most mature, is the very antithesis of confession. There is no exploitation of personality in T. F. Powys. In him we find rather the dramatisation of the soul, the human lot.

In the literary period of the 1920s and 1930s, Powys is the only allegorist, though he had an eminent predecessor in H. G. Wells. *Joan and Peter* (1918) is strongly flavoured with deified humanism, and *The Undying Fire* (1919) which Wells rightly considered "one of the best pieces of work I ever did" (*Experiment in Autobiography*, 1934) is a point for point allegory based on the Book of Job.

Rex Warner's *The Aerodrome*, which appeared in 1941, is intended to be an allegory, but as he fails to create convincing life through which he can express his theme, the result is thin and artificial. Mervyn Peake's *Mr. Pye* (1953) is, it seems to me, a very watered-down version of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* which simply serves to show how unique the original work is.

So far, then, it has proved impossible to produce variations on Powys's themes. Tarjei Vesaas, the Norwegian novelist, is closer to Powys in feeling than any other modern writer, and his medium is allegory, but I have no evidence that he was aware of the existence of the quiet man of Dorset.

William Golding, of course, resembles Powys in some respects. The isolated worlds he creates are microcosms of human life and, like Powys, he is concerned with man's relationship to the universe and to himself. Golding, though, writes in a dry, intellectual way which is quite unlike Powys's poetic,

humane and often humorous approach. Where they do come together is in their attitude to evil: both recognise it as something which has entered human consciousness and which has to be reckoned with, and this willingness to acknowledge the power of evil may be one of the reasons why their work has often met with a puzzled reception (the same applies to Mervyn Peake whose trilogy contains two riveting personifications of evil—Steerpike and Veil). In the main, English novelists have always been inclined either to treat evil as an unfortunate and remediable lapse or to ignore it altogether. Quite the opposite is true of the great American writers; their strength, and that of the Russians, and of Conrad, who has been misunderstood for this very reason, resides in their refusal to brush evil aside.

Powys has escaped popularity because he does not offer a stock-in-trade of moral principles; on the contrary, he forces us to re-examine our own ingrained ideas. Above all, he destroys the comfortable notions we have about God yet, at the same time, he is acutely conscious of what for brevity one might call loosely old religious views and in this he resembles Thomas Hardy who was always attempting to kill the idea of God in himself and replace it with new 'scientific' views. (Hardy's unresolved dilemma appears very clearly in two of his poems, "God's Funeral" and "The Oxen".) Powys was not attracted by science; instead he evolved a highly personal view of the world which contains strong elements of Taoism.

It is helpful to consider Powys in relation to the atmosphere of scepticism which prevailed after the First World War. H. G. Wells maintained that those who cling to the idea of an emotional attachment to a personal God are "frightened people who want to be told that they need not brace up to the grimness before them."<sup>12</sup> Julian Huxley's scientific humanism permeates the 1920s and Powys obviously shares his impatience with established religion as expressed in *Essays of a Biologist*:

When they (men) worship God as absolute and as a person, they cannot help making deductions that lead them into absurdities of

thought and conduct: they deny or oppose ideas derived from the study of nature because they conflict with what they believe to be immutable truths, but are in reality conclusions drawn from false premisses: they tend to an acquiescent and obscurantist spirit in the belief that such moral and intellectual laziness is 'doing God's will', when that will is in reality their own personification of cosmic direction.<sup>13</sup>

Any view of God as a personal being had become untenable; Christianity was considered as one mystery cult among many, and there was a strong desire to see morals emancipated from the bonds of dogma; above all to see love as a source of happiness and stability, not of guilt. These tendencies are apparent in Aldous Huxley's essays and in the works of Norman Douglas. Lawrence, too, throughout his life, waged war on Christianity which he saw as a kind of mental bullying:

That strong one, ruling the universe with a  
rod of iron  
has sickened us thoroughly with rods of iron  
and rulers  
and strong men.  
The All-wise has tired us of wisdom.<sup>14</sup>

He was tired of "a god with one fixed purport. Gods should be iridescent like the rainbow in the storm."<sup>15</sup>

And Powys in *Soliloquies* wrote:

God must come out of his heaven, the devil out of his hell, and Christ out of the soul, into the light of the sun. Let the terrible Gods come down from on high. If they have prepared a future life for us, let us prepare a present life for them. (71)

Lawrence and Powys are, however, different from their contemporaries in that they rise above mere cobweb-clearing, Samuel Butler style. They are agnostics, but agnostics with an acute sense of otherness—a paradox expressed by Whitman:

I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least.  
(*Song of Myself*, 11. 72-3)

Both are, in fact, religious men in the broadest sense, deeply concerned with man's

relation to the universe and with the interrelatedness of all living things. Lawrence writes of the Brangwens: "earth and sky and beast and green plants, so much exchange and interchange they had with these, that they lived full and surcharged."<sup>16</sup> And here is Powys describing a man's awakening to the wonder of living naturally:

He had learned to know by sight . . . all the winter creatures who lived in Enmore. His ears had grown accustomed to the sounds of the elements. He had breasted the winds upon the hills until he was beaten almost to his knees by their violence. He had trodden the March ice in the woodland pool; he had watched the snipe rise where the brook ran icebound in the low meadows. He had risen as it were from a doleful eternity of labour, from the mad longings of a stifled love, into a clean world of cold rain storms, of simple sheep, and wide free lands. (*Hester Dominy*, LL, 204)

We tend to think that God must be to some extent understandable and in some way like ourselves: Spinoza said that a community of triangles would worship a triangular god. According to his or her personal problems, each character in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* sees God in a different way. To some he is loving or fierce, merciful or cruel and, in each soul, he works as he is expected to work. Mrs. Vosper, for example, who believes only in a God of wrath, dies a violent death, while Luke Bird who, after a great struggle, comes to believe in a God of Love, is united with Jenny Bunce.

Here is a passage from the story called *The Dog and the Lantern*: "Evidently the Godhead could change easily. He might be a lantern, He might be Shepherd Poose, He might be a fire." The dog has been searching for the one God but, after witnessing so many bewildering changes, he despairs and dies. Powys accepts the idea—a very Taoist one, incidentally—that energy works in multiple and contradictory ways; earth sometimes seems to be spirit, and spirit earth.

"Man is a collection of atoms through which pass the moods of God" (*SH*, 9)—this is all that we can say. However we live,

we shall always be treading on the brittle surface of chaos, but that should not disturb us for, as Powys points out:

“There was no way that could go nearer to the great mystery than another, but all life bent that way, as to the great, the living sun.” (*Black Bryony*, 134)

It was T. F. Powys's revolt against his narrow upbringing and the more punitive aspects of Christianity that made him an

artist. A man with a pagan temperament, he was always haunted by the idea of God, and his conclusion, one feels, is that, paradoxically, God is what we turn away from into life. There is a strong vein of anarchism in Powys but—perhaps because he wrote in a quiet, sober style—his contemporaries failed to see it. Above all, his work is a passionate reckoning with life as we have to live it.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The following editions of T. F. Powys's works are referred to by page numerals in parentheses within my text. *SH*; *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, Andrew Melrose, 1918. *LL*; *The Left Leg* (contains *Hester Dominy* and *Abraham Men*) Alfred Knopf, 1923. *BB*; *Black Bryony*, Chatto and Windus, 1923. *MTG*; *Mr. Tasker's Gods*, Chatto and Windus, 1929. *MG*; *Mockery Gap*, Chatto and Windus, 1925. *WGW*; *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, Penguin Books, 1937. *U*; *Unclay*, Chatto and Windus, 1931. The short stories quoted appear in *God's Eyes A-Twinkle (GET)*, Chatto and Windus, 1947, except where otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup>It may well be that our negative and often inhuman attitude to love is a Freudian legacy, and it is interesting to see how Ian Suttie attacks Freud's conservatism in *The Origins of Love and Hate*: “the traditional attitude is so deeply ingrained in Freud's and Adler's outlook on life that they cannot admit the existence of love as other than a prudent avoidance of the anger of others.” (Penguin Books, 1963, p. 63)

<sup>3</sup>*The Liberal Imagination*, Secker & Warburg, 1951, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup>*E. M. Forster*, 1951, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>P. Riley, *A Bibliography of T. F. Powys*, Hastings, 1967, p. 62.

<sup>6</sup>*Studies in Classical American Literature*, Secker, 1933, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup>*Letters of Lawrence Sterne*, Oxford, 1927, p. 235.

<sup>8</sup>Huxley, *Point Counter Point* (1928), Chatto & Windus, 1954, p. 442; 443.

<sup>9</sup>*Autobiography* (1934), Macdonald, 1967, p. 355.

<sup>10</sup>*Stephen Hero*, Cape, 1944, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup>*The Common Reader, First Series*, Hogarth Press, 1945, p. 302.

<sup>12</sup>*Experiment in Autobiography*, 1934, p. 673.

<sup>13</sup>*Essays of a Biologist*, Chatto & Windus, 1923, p. 288.

<sup>14</sup>“Spiral Flame”, *Pansies*, 1929.

<sup>15</sup>*The Plumed Serpent*, 1926, p. 53.

<sup>16</sup>*The Rainbow*, 1915, p. 9.

#### CORRECTION

We apologise for attributing the translation of Rolf Italiaander's “An Award to J. C. Powys” (*PR* 14, pp. 54-57) to Elmar Schenkel. The translator, to whom we express gratitude, was Mrs Sheila Scheer-Cockbaine of Friburg University.

## Simon Barker

### Embroiderers of Tales

*Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1980*,

Edited by RAYMOND GARLICK & ROLAND MATHIAS.

Poetry Wales Press, 1984, £3.50 (paperback).

Writing in *Planet* in 1971 of the need to adopt bilingualism as the linguistic model for the Wales of the future, Raymond Garlick lamented that the material which could present the role of the English language in Welsh life not as a problem but as an advantage was unforthcoming, with the result that "The vast majority of people in Wales, having passed through the schools, sees no relevance to itself in a verbal culture in English. It leads its own vigorous, distinctive, national life in the English language, but education has stimulated no taste for the verbal icon of experience, which might make it aware of its richness and individuality, savour it, assess it, criticize it". As a statement of intent this article has a significant relationship to this new and important anthology, and it contributes to its overall shape and purpose. *Anglo-Welsh Poetry 1480-1980* has a dual focus: it brings together "verbal icons" of Welsh life as experienced through the English language, with the underlying purpose of redressing what the editors describe in their introduction as "a curious failure to examine the positive and creative role, historical and contemporary, of English as a language of Wales. In schools, by and large, it continues to be presented as the language and literature of anywhere but Wales".

The manifesto for this volume is Raymond Garlick's "Seventy Anglo-Welsh Poets" published in *The Welsh Anvil* in 1954 and expanded into his *An Introduction to Anglo-Welsh Literature* (1970, 1972), where he sought to establish an Anglo-Welsh poetic tradition that stretches back

five centuries; and Mr Garlick has been a tireless defender of the title "Anglo-Welsh" to describe that part of the national literature of Wales (as distinct from the regional literature of England) which uses English as its language of creative expression. Both Garlick and Roland Mathias are distinguished contributors to this tradition themselves, as poets of considerable achievement, and they have long been recognised and respected for their contribution to English language writing in Wales and as builders of bridges between that and the Welsh-language writing community. As co-founders and as editors of the now *Anglo-Welsh Review*, and as lecturer and former headmaster respectively, there is no one in Wales more suited to the task they have set themselves.

The anthology brings together one hundred and twenty-four poets, forty-two of them writing before the present century. In terms of its scope and range of selection it is of course unequalled; the editors have not simply brought together some of the best of Anglo-Welsh poetry, they have also sought to suggest something of its breadth. In his lecture "Is There an Anglo-Welsh Literature?" (in reply, thirty-one years later, to Saunders Lewis's lecture of the same title in 1938) Raymond Garlick argued the necessity, in T. S. Eliot's words, "to sweep the distance and gain an acquaintance with minute objects in the landscape with which to compare minute objects close at hand". The selection therefore attempts to do justice to individual poets whose work is of little enduring value but who the compilers feel made significant contributions to the development of Anglo-Welsh writing as such. As a matter of historical importance this aim is valid and useful, although it also accounts for the uneven quality of the writing selected. At least three poems in this anthology—Dannie Abse's "A New Diary", Garlick's "Ancestors" and Ruth Bidgood's "All Souls"—are explicitly

concerned with naming and commemoration, and this anthology is as much about what Garlick calls in a different context "the humble names / in the registers", or what Ruth Bidgood describes as offering "speech to the nameless, those / who are hardly a memory".

The title of the selection comes really as a wolf in sheep's clothing, raising the question not so much of whether there is an Anglo-Welsh literature, but of what it can be said to consist. For the title presents what is no more than a barely established (and either generally disregarded or hostily disputed) hypothesis, and a particular political ideal, as established literary fact. In *An Introduction to Anglo-Welsh Literature* Raymond Garlick cites Professor G. Barraclough's dictum "The history we read, though based on facts, is, strictly speaking, not factual at all, but a series of accepted judgements", and applies this to certain statements about Anglo-Welsh literature to reveal its truth. A few pages later he makes the suggestion that "The whole aim of a bilingual education and a bilingual society must be to present the two languages and cultures as complementary". This is not the place to argue the importance of that particular ideal, but rather to assess how far this may have confused the compilers' literary judgement. For it seems to me that they are attempting to concretize a political aim into literary history, by arguing from their model of the future and projecting this backwards into the past. This is not to impute any particular slur on the integrity of the compilers; at a minimum it is an acknowledgement of what Anthony Conran described in his seminal *The Cost of Strangeness* (1982) as "such a field of total politics", that any statement about Wales as a living thing is by that token political whatever the conscious intention.

This anthology falls naturally into two quite distinct and separate parts, divided at around 1900, between which the editors have chosen not to distinguish substantially. In the second edition of his *Introduction*, answering the charge that the writers he had chosen to discuss were no more than Anglo-Welsh literary antecedents, Garlick stated

that they were writers "in exactly the same sense as twentieth century ones are". As this is the implicit assumption governing the choice of material for this anthology it is necessary to give it some attention here in order to evaluate that choice. The claim is of course manifestly untrue. As the editors point out in their introduction here, more than half of the forty-two poets writing before the present century were Welsh-speaking, and at least a third wrote primarily, and at their *best*, in that language. Until the end of the nineteenth century English was largely the language of the Welsh gentry, until the effects of enforced secondary education in English became firmly entrenched after the founding of the County Schools in 1895. From the Act of Union in 1536 ("No person or persons that use the Welsh speech or language shall have . . . any office . . . unless he or they exercise the English speech or language") until the founding of the County Schools, English was the language of the professional classes, and of power. Of those writers represented here who are known primarily for their work in Welsh, among them Ieuan ap Iwan, Morris Kyffin, Morgan Llwyd, Williams Pantycelyn and Iolo Morganwg, the crucial difference between them and the contemporary Anglo-Welsh writer is that the language of their creative activity was a matter of *choice*. The English verse of these writers is secondary to their Welsh writing and usually inferior in quality (M. Wynn Thomas's recent addition of a splendid monograph to the "Writers of Wales" series brings this point home quite clearly in *Morgan Llwyd* (1984); and more importantly their use of English is often the use of (for creative purposes) a foreign language which they are experimenting with in an attempt to write English poetry along established models.

Of the remaining poets in this section, among them John Dyer, their work is the product of an English classical education which, even if Wales is used as a backdrop for their work, is a contribution to unhyphenated English literature. Only Herbert and Vaughan go even part way to



hymns in English of Williams Pantycelyn are also of interest. Had the compilers been less single-minded in their pursuit of this question of tradition, space could have been allowed for Gerard Manley Hopkins, who is the only really important omission from this volume. Hopkins was not of course an Anglo-Welsh poet (although his claim to inclusion is stronger on purely racial grounds than some of the poets represented; "I have always looked on myself as half-Welsh" he wrote to his mother in 1874), but his importance for writers such as Huw Menai, Glyn Jones, Dylan Thomas and Anthony Conran alone justifies his inclusion here in so far as he made a particular kind of attitude to Wales and to the Welsh language a fertile ground for poetry. Conran has even gone so far as to suggest that Hopkins made it possible for Anglo-Welsh poetry "to stop being a poor relation of English middle-class versifying" and in another place that "with *The Wreck of the Deutschland* may be said to have begun the modern Anglo-Welsh movement".

Of the recurring patterns and natural affinities (rather than evidence of continuity of tradition) between these writers and the poetry of this century, Raymond Garlick and Roland Mathias have provided a lucid account in their introduction, and the latter's critical writings elsewhere are of central importance in an attempt to place these writers within an unfolding and developing line. The quality of the best of this poetry more than justifies the editors' claim that "No one, whichever his mother tongue, has a full entry into Wales and its national heritage who is ignorant of Anglo-Welsh poetry", and this could be validly extended to maintain that no one desiring an acquaintance with British literature of this century can afford to be ignorant of it either. Answering the charge of "regionalism" R. S. Thomas has pertinently remarked, "What is this but another name for 'blood transfusion'? The ageing body of English literature will stave off death so long as new blood continues to flow into it". Given the peculiar circumstances of the history of the English language in Wales, it

is fitting that this anthology should be geared towards use in schools and colleges, although the absence of any notes at all makes it virtually impossible to use, as also for the reader outside Wales. The writers here each occupy a place somewhere on the sliding scale between John Cowper Powys's statement in *Obstinate Cymric* (1947),

the Welsh language, with all who use it, can be compared to the Mother-Church after so many of her restless and adventurous spirits had gone over to the Reformation. We Anglo-Welsh writers resemble the Anglican priesthood. We steal from, we borrow from, we *subsist upon* the Mother-Church; and, though we have lost or rejected the concrete symbols of continuity, to outsiders we are still "christians",

and the editorial policy of the now extinct (but much needed and foolishly under-supported) cultural forum *Arcade*,

We start with the premise that there is a Welsh experience—by now the dominant experience—which can only be felt and experienced through the medium of English. . . . There is no sense of dependency in this: not on the Welsh-language cultural expression on one side; nor on the mass-produced London television culture on the other.

Any attempt at homogeneity in representing this work is belied by the poetry itself, although ramifications of John Benyon's fine poem "Back Garden", ending

Nation's apart, they could not find  
The country of the heart

suggest one line of interpretation, bringing together Glyn Jones's lines,

An object has significance or meaning  
Only to the extent that human feeling  
And intellect bestow them

with John Tripp's "Welcome to Wales": "We are not sure who we are, but the search / goes on". Finding that country of the heart, through a feeling intelligence, defines the motivation for much of this writing. One of the most striking things about Anglo-Welsh poetry is also the quality, in our post-Christian age, of its religious poetry, sug-

gesting that this is not a redundant source for meaningful, intelligent writing after all. The landmarks in the first flowering of this tradition are Idris Davies, David Jones, Alun Lewis (whose "The Jungle" is something of a *tour-de-force*), Glyn Jones and Vernon Watkins. Something of a change in direction is signalled in the poetry of R. S. Thomas, the effect of which can be gauged by a comparison of the bathos of Dudley G. Davies's,

Carmarthen hills are green and low,  
And therealong the small sheep go  
Whose voices to the valley come  
At eve, when all things else are dumb

with Thomas's "The Welsh Hill Country",

Too far for you to see  
The fluke and the foot-rot and the fat maggot  
Gnawing the skin from the small bones,  
The sheep are grazing at Bwlch-y-Fedwen,  
Arranged romantically in the usual manner  
On a bleak background of bald stone.

The kind of change of direction R. S. Thomas made possible points the way to the writings of Harri Webb, John Ormond, Raymond Garlick, Meic Stephens, John Tripp, Emyr Humphreys and others.

It is entirely appropriate that the central pages of the anthology should fall open at R. S. Thomas, who is represented by more poems than any other single writer here, testifying not simply to his importance as a poet but to his central significance in the development of Anglo-Welsh writing. If his importance can be felt both in the kind of poetry he enabled a release from and in shaping a mature poetry of political sentiment and commitment, his influence is also one from which some of the later writers have sought to break free, as shown in Peter Finch's "A Welsh Wordscape", T. Harri Jones's "Back?" and John Dressel's "Dai, Live". But for the English-language poet in Wales R. S. Thomas is someone one either takes along with one in some measure or attempts to knock over; there is no possibility of circumvention. As one poet collected here writes in another place, "You can hardly be an English poet of Wales and not

be constantly aware of the radiation-risk that emanates from R. S. Thomas".

I must confess to finding the choice of R. S. Thomas's poems greatly disappointing, most of them being the already over-anthologized pieces. Of the fourteen poems chosen only four date from his writing since 1972, and collectively they go no way at all to redress the fashionably one-sided view of his writing, recently given publicity in Dai Smith's book *Wales! Wales?* (1984), where he provides for Smith, like R. S. Thomas's St. Paul, "somebody / who it is easy for us to kick against" rather than a stimulus to a serious attempt to come to terms with his writing. R. S. Thomas is a complex poet and there are few poetic utterances that do not find their antithesis in his writing. The choice of poems here confirms a nagging feeling on several occasions in this anthology that John Davies's "How to Write Anglo-Welsh Poetry" could, with suitable adjustments, be renamed "How to Anthologize Anglo-Welsh Poetry",

. . . juggle names like  
Taliesin and ap Gwilym, weave  
a Cymric web. It doesn't matter what  
they wrote. Look, let's not be naive . . .

Spray place-names around. Caernarfon.  
Cwmtwrch. Have, perhaps, a Swansea  
sun marooned in Glamorgan's troubled  
skies; even the weather's Welsh, see.

This of course raises the question of how far "Anglo-Welsh" is a restrictive label, but controversies of this kind have been evaded rather than met in the introduction. As far as R. S. Thomas is concerned, I find it difficult to conceive of an adequate treatment of the dynamics of this poet's attitude to Wales that does not include "Abercuawg" and "The Small Country", both from *Frequencies* (1978), and were this not precluded by the cut-off date, "Minor" from *Between Here and Now* (1981).

More latterly it is often the work of the women poets which I find gives the most satisfaction, especially Sally Roberts Jones, Ruth Bidgood and Gillian Clarke. Gillian Clarke is one of the few writers of recent

years to be gaining the notice her poetry deserves outside Wales. Jeremy Hooker is represented too by some very fine poems here. Emerging poetic voices seem to be rather thinly spread at present, although I respect the kind of political poem for which Nigel Jenkins is working out a style. Robert Minhinnick has some of his best poems included; although it is Mike Jenkins whose work will be most interesting to see develop, drawing some of its inspiration and energy from that re-examination of Welsh history associated with the names of Gwyn A. Williams, Dai Smith and Raymond Williams.

This anthology, then, elicits decidedly mixed responses. But it is unlikely to be equalled in its range, and it is to be hoped that it will put into much wider circulation a still too little appreciated body of writing, and also stimulate the reader into following up the work of some of the individual writers included. It is regretted that this last task is made unnecessarily difficult by the omission of the publication dates of all the volumes published this century. Full credit must go, however, to the Poetry Wales Press, which in a short space of time has established itself as a leading publisher in Wales, both innovative in its range and exemplary in its standards of production. The appearance of an anthology of ap-

proaching 400 pages in an attractive paperback edition priced at £3.50 is as welcome as it is remarkable. A poem of one of the compilers admirably sets the tone of this anthology, Roland Mathias's "Laus Deo", the last in his sequence "Tide-Reach":

The water is hard in the well  
 But it never fails:  
 The clifftop fields are infinite salt  
 When the gales flock and pummel  
 Roof and farmstack and holt:  
 But the worm speaks well  
 Of the earth, the pheasant  
 Is heavy with praise in the lane:  
 The sea-birds, for all their grieving,  
 Gamble and dive at the nape of the storm:  
 And man embroiders his tales.  
 Hard hands have not kept it, this puissant  
 And sacred endeavour, nor high  
 Heads either this old domain.  
 It is one engrossing work, this frail  
 Commerce of souls in a corner,  
 Its coming and going, and the mark  
 Of the temporal on it. It is one  
 Coherent work, this Wales  
 And the seaway of Wales, its Maker  
 As careful of strength as  
 Of weakness, its quirk and cognomen  
 And trumpet allowed for  
 The whole peninsula's length.  
 It is one affirmative work, this Wales  
 And the seaway of Wales.

SIMON BARKER

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## REVIEWS

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*Burning Brambles: Selected Poems 1944-1979*,  
ROLAND MATHIAS.

Gomer Press, 1983, £6.75.

Glyn Jones, in his book on Anglo-Welsh writers, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (1968), remarked of Roland Mathias that he was "a poet who has never seemed to me to have had anything like his true measure of consideration", and thought that the reluctance of a wider audience to accept the appeal of his poetry went with the "impression of opacity or incomprehensibility" which some of the poems certainly gave. Referring to the fact that Mathias was historian, critic, and editor as well as poet, he suggested that the strenuous and intellectual aspect of his poetry, its "contempt for what comes easily", was nevertheless its integrity, its "wholesome brilliance". The range and determination of Mathias's interests were shown during the sixteen years when he edited *The Anglo-Welsh Review*. He has himself said that he wanted in that journal "to create a sort of spectrum of the Arts in Wales, including regular articles on painting and music . . . and having reviewed books in and from other disciplines which seemed not incompatible with a central interest in the arts" (*The Lonely Editor: A Glance at Anglo-Welsh Magazines*, University College Cardiff Press, 1984). One thinks also of the perceptive critical mind at work in what he has written on David Jones, Dylan Thomas, and Seamus Heaney. And there is the Headmaster!

Arguments along such lines have to be considered, but with care. It is a fact that his most anthologized poems tend also to be among his least obscure, and this may point either to the joint pusillanimity of his anthologists and readers, or to the truth that in his best work he clarifies, even going to some extent against his own grain. The latter is probably the case, but if it is, there would still be room to say that the clarities owe their sudden force to an emergence, a Sycorax operation in reverse, from the contorted trunks around them. Apart from certain difficulties of interpreting symbolic natural imagery, which are common to all poetry, the difficulties characteristic of Mathias's poems are of vocabulary and of syntax. This volume bristles with words like (and I exclude those

italicized as Welsh) escalin, gambos, perfectscope, aliforms, anchusa, hestors, milgis, tallut, tod, tripright, trug, scrallion, cruck, hopping, valletts, tarquiniad, and catabaptism. These add a relish for word-collectors, but not everyone is a word-collector, as reviewers' grumbles over similar effects in W. H. Auden, and more recently in Tom Paulin, have shown. But it is a risk the well-read or well-languaged poet has to take. Knotty or ambiguous grammatical relations, even those which one eventually sorts out, may be harder to defend. There seems to be merely awkwardness in

Suds sand hiding swish and uncover  
(*"Freshwater West"*)

or

The grey shut faces in fancy halt and shade  
(*"A Winter's Day"*)

or

The red light fades, the hard  
Lines break and pucker from the till  
Wide oceanwards, will bound to course  
And wave.  
(*"Afternoon in Water Street"*)

Sometimes we reel under a touch of the Dylan  
Thomas:

Out of a day the wastrel wind disparages  
Into a week with the hearthstone white with  
ash  
Summer goes blowing a host of idle marriages  
Simpler and wizened seed and scrambling bush  
Into the tide's reach, into the water swifter  
Running beyond the bar the daylight after.  
(*"The Lochmaben Stone"*)

More interesting and convincing are poems where a disrupted or fragmented message is part of the meaning of the whole, as in "To a Tombstone Fragment in the Garden Path", where the speaker is moved by the pathos of the fact that the broken stone, once made to mark a grave, now marks nothing, but yet still has enough, in the undated chiselled letters that remain, to preserve someone's dead daughter's language and voice. In the fine last stanza, the speaker compares her provenance, specifically unknown but generically known, with his own,



wall, belfry, druids' mound—he says very characteristically: “none of it / Reassuring”. A known and accepted and aesthetically exploited lack of reassurance is no bad flavour to take away.

EDWIN MORGAN

*T. F. Powys,*

J. LAWRENCE MITCHELL.

University of Minnesota Libraries, 1982, price unstated.

There exists, apart from the late Harry Coombes's pioneer work, written twenty-five years ago, no full-length critical study to date in which T. F. Powys's life and works are jointly described, interpreted and evaluated. To be sure, there are a few odd chapters on him in the biographies by Kenneth Hopkins (1967) and, more recently, by Richard Perceval Graves. But these hardly amount to an integrated view of the Second Brother, with whom neither biographer seems to feel much at ease. Nor is there much literary criticism to go by, apart from perhaps a dozen or so valuable articles.

Given this rather depressing situation, we can be all the more grateful to Professor Mitchell for having written a most readable and in many ways valuable brief study of this much neglected author. Besides his professional duties in the fields of philology and linguistics he is, we are told, an ardent book-collector, specializing in the work of three close friends: T. F. Powys, Sylvia Townsend Warner, and David Garnett. His study, entitled simply *T. F. Powys*, appeared in the Special Collection series of the University of Minnesota, with 250 copies signed by the author. It is an attractively published little book, only seventy pages long; its size is unusually small (6 x 4 inches), with a previously unpublished mildly pinkish woodcut on the front cover by Ray Garnett, who has illustrated a number of Powys's books.

Mitchell's miniature study has been written with much imaginative sympathy for his subject, although the reader is nowhere forced to accept foregone conclusions. The main points of interest that emerge from the chapter on Powys's life are the view that Theodore's temperamental morbidity and melancholy may well have derived from his mother's side, and that for him writing was, like for Robert Burton in the seven-

teenth century, a cure for depression, although for Powys the therapy did not succeed.

In his discussion of eight full-length novels Mitchell suggests, rightly I think, that the most fruitful approach to them is through a study of *The Soliloquies of a Hermit* which provides important clues to an understanding of Powys's deep-seated preoccupations with love and hate in human nature, and with “the moods of God” whose greatest gift to man is death, paradoxically enough. He also suggests a connection between that early work in which Powys's vision of “torn bodies, broken, buried in blood, that were a year ago very thoughtless young men” is first stated and his first two novels, much concerned with violence and death, which he began writing at the height of the First World War. Clearly, Powys saw, in T. S. Eliot's words, “the skull beneath the skin”. In discussing *Mockery Gap*, Mitchell draws attention to the typically Powysian way of handling book-titles and chapter headings and to his increasing concern with symbolism. *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, in which God is fictively represented as a travelling wine merchant, is judged to be unparalleled in modern literature and its companion novel *Unclay* to make compelling reading, in spite of certain blemishes which I for one fail to see.

In the chapter on style and humour we find some interesting remarks on Powys's handling of the Dorset dialect, used by the rural characters to offset the “high style” of the supernatural outsiders, such as Mr Weston and John Death, besides well-illustrated comments on his increasingly successful integration of biblical language with his own style.

Given the reviewer's own current bias towards intertextuality, or the presence of texts within the literary text, I was particularly delighted by the last chapter “Literary Allusions in the Novels”. It focuses on the importance of books in Powys's life and in his work and it rightly concludes that his love of books is a logical extension to love of the Book, that is the Bible (p. 63). With intertextual fragments from Bunyan, Milton and Jane Austen it is argued that such allusions are aptly fused with the rural quality of the novels, while providing alert comments on the literary worlds alluded to. Whether they are always “subservient” to the narrative development, as Mitchell suggests, is another matter, I think. They are also not infrequently used, particularly by the narrative voice, for purely stylistic reasons and add to the “literariness” of the novels. On other occasions they serve to indicate

indirectly Powys's views on the writing and reading of literature itself. But in all cases they greatly strengthen the allegorical nature of the text and the reader's response to it, forcing him time and again to search for additional meanings by means of other texts. Moreover, they are always connected with a particular novel's central metaphor, which is of necessity always ambiguous and related to love and death as the two realities in life, like the wine metaphor in *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, or the parchment in *Unclay*. To offer one brief example: even the golden coins, or "aurei", "upon which was the head of Marcus Aurelius", with which John Death pays for the drinks in that hallucinatory chapter 36 of *Unclay*, significantly called "The Best Liquor", appear to have allegorical importance. This classical allusion invites us to recall that the Roman emperor was a stoic philosopher, whose *Meditations* is one of the great documents in the tradition of philosophical pessimism, which in the companion novel is described by Mr Weston as "the best and most enduring wear from cover to cover".

Mitchell observes that the good, unworldly clergymen are devoted to books, whereas the bad, self-seeking ones are no readers of literature, as is the case in *Mr Tasker's Gods*. This is true, but I think one can even enlarge on that observation by suggesting that in fact all Powys's major, good characters, whether educated or not, are—as alter egos of the author—active readers of literature for whom literature is the wine of life, as for Carlyle. But I wholeheartedly agree with Mitchell's conclusion that Powys's distinct bent towards literary allusiveness is not a limitation, as Harry Coombes and other critics have thought, but an enrichment.

The only serious criticism of this otherwise excellent study which is to be recommended not only to whoever comes to Powys for the first time, but equally to the seasoned reader, concerns the omission in the useful mini-bibliography of the *Fables* (1929, and in another edition under the title *No Painted Plumage* in 1934), which surely belongs to Powys's major works and ought to have been mentioned and discussed. As with all good books, one would have wished for more: the account of Powys's marriage remains traditional and uncritical and, more important, his last twenty years of non-writing remain undiscussed, in spite of some interesting articles on this intriguing aspect in the pages of this journal (see issues III, IV and

VII). A comprehensive critical biography would eventually have to deal with these and related issues.

Since the book under review refers in its last paragraph to the "pleasures of the text"—which I take to be an unobtrusive reference to the late Roland Barthes' critical work—we may conclude with a free paraphrase from one of his seminal essays on this topic by suggesting that Powys's major works are both *texts of pleasure*, which content, fill and grant euphoria, since they come from culture and do not break with it, and *texts of bliss*, or breakdown, that impose a state of loss and discomfort (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), because they unsettle the reader's historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, and bring to a crisis his relation with language.

MARIUS BUNING

*Powys to Eric the Red: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Sven-Erik Täckmark*,  
Edited by CEDRIC HENTSCHEL.

*Powys to Knight: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to G. R. Wilson Knight*,  
Edited by ROBERT BLACKMORE.

Cecil Woolf, 1983, £8.50 each volume.

It can be argued that publishing an author's letters can only be justified if the letters themselves are works of art (the letters of Keats or Powys's "ancestor" William Cowper, for example), or if they shed light on his writings or on the workings of his imagination and personality.

Generally speaking, Powys's letters, with important exceptions, do not fall into either category. One could never regret his letters to his brother Llewelyn or his friend Louis Wilkinson because they do indeed, as Wilkinson says, "disclose something more of his life and his nature". The mask is thinnest in these light-dark letters and we do catch a glimpse of the "world behind". But if we read randomly from his correspondence to Wilson Knight, Eric the Red, Iorwerth Peate, Benson Roberts, Nicholas Ross etc., Powys the role-player is very apparent. It is sometimes questionable whether Powys the person is there at all.

Of course, the letters are often charming even in their repetitiveness. They can be enjoyed even as William Cowper delighted in the letters of JCP's cousin, "Johnny of Norfolk": "It was just such a letter as I like, of the true helter-skelter kind" (letter to Lady Hesketh, 23 January 1790). But too often, particularly in his later years, the letters contain but a few gems of wit and perceptiveness which burn in a waste of trivia. To continue publishing without apparent discrimination his voluminous correspondence to individual recipients will only do harm to his growing reputation as one of the great novelists of the twentieth century.

What *is* needed is a general collection of his letters. I do not agree with Professor Blackmore that there is an "inevitable distortion" in a "selected publication"; there are a number of Powys scholars who have the necessary ruthlessness—Blackmore himself is one, Jeremy Hooker another. A collection of letters to his astonishingly varied circle of friends and relatives would be a veritable kaleidoscope of style and content. It could be a glorious book; truly the "second part" of JCP's autobiography.

The latest volume of letters (those from Powys to Sven-Erik Täckmark) perhaps illustrates my concern. Thirty-five pages of chatty introduction by the editor, Cedric Hentschel; twenty-nine pages of short, repetitive letters from Powys to Täckmark; thirteen pages of notes containing facts that Powys aficionados (the only ones likely to read the book) already know or can easily find out or don't care to know; three pages of an essay about John Cowper Powys by the *editor* (surely usually not done?); two pages listing Täckmark's articles and translations and one prose-poem: together these result in an unbalanced book of bits and pieces. This slightness and imbalance would have been less marked had even part of an essay by "Eric the Red" been included. As it is we know almost too much about Täckmark's outer life and never catch a glimpse of that inward creative intensity that prompted Powys's obvious fondness for this "kindest of Vikings".

The letters of Powys to Knight are a different kettle of fish. Blackmore has firmly controlled the shape of the book with a crisp introduction, helpful but not gratuitous notes, and the wise inclusion of Wilson Knight's classic and relevant essay "Cosmic Correspondences". Some of the letters shed valuable light on Powys's more difficult intuitions: his concept of creative auto-erotism, the role of dreams in his life and

work, his thoughts about sleep and annihilation. We also learn how grateful Powys was to Knight, "for your encouragement carries me along" (Letter 39, p. 94). And with what surprise Powys gradually realizes that a "Professor" is not (necessarily) the wicked being of his father's story. He wrote to Knight on 24 May 1954:

I swear to you, my friend, that as a literary person you are as a writer of subtle insight and imagination you are as a penetrating critic you are exactly '*after my heart*' as we have come to say, tho' its an odd expression with 'after' in the sense of according to the reverence & admiration and affection I have for you—reverence towards you, admiration of you and affection for you!

All Powys's friends seem to nourish different parts of his mind and soul; Knight was the academic Powys never became, but with whom he could exchange ideas on equal terms. I suspect that was a releasing revelation to Powys.

In general, however, the letters are more confirmatory than revealing. Powys refers to Knight as a "master in discernment" and the letters now published are proof (if proof was needed) that Knight's essay "Mysticism and Masturbation" in *Neglected Powers* was based on something other than his unique ability to intuit the hidden springs of an author's creativity. We now have published letters from Powys to Knight which state explicitly what he more passionately and painfully confessed to Llewelyn years before. But is the "fact" that Powys was a masturbator of much importance? Surely the important thing is that Powys believed that auto-erotism was the key to a secret new world of self-created Beings.

Powys brilliantly creates images in his novels that comprehend this mystery of the union of the soul with the darkness of the First Cause, but he seldom analyses in his letters what he is attempting to do. So it is the *novels* we must study in order to understand Powys, and if we poor mortals still cannot understand, we have G. Wilson Knight's essays.

The letters are, then, only occasionally helpful; but the occasions are worth waiting for. Powys hoped he would have time to write "a book entitled *Second Childhood* wherein I shall show the weird strange curious mysterious magnetic psychic *understanding* that exists between *really* old people such as I am now . . . and Babies and

Toddlers and *all children* up to 4!!” (Letter 27, p. 71).

Both perhaps know the secret of a union with the earth which includes the opposites—but the dotard knows the place for the first time. The irony is that neither the child nor the very old man has the words or the desire to give away the secret. Lost in a world they don’t understand, they can only acknowledge their secret in silence.

In the Surgery waiting room we were about a dozen *adults* or even 15 and one tiny child of about 2. *It* and *I* sat gravely in the circle. Then very gravely *I* waved to it. And with equal gravity it waved back to me. (p. 71)

After all, perhaps that one haunting image makes all the trivia worth publishing.

MORINE KRISSDOTTIR

The following review by Göran Börge, of *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Sven-Erik Täckmark*, appeared in the influential Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* on 16 May 1984. It is here made available to *Powys Review* readers in a translation by Laurie Thompson. We are grateful to *Svenska Dagbladet* for permission to publish the translation. The review appeared with the title “A Great Magician”.

One of the most valuable contributions made by the publisher Coeckelbergh to the broadening of our literary horizons in the 1970s was the publication of novels by the great visionary John Cowper Powys: *Wolf Solent* (1975, original 1929) and *Dararnas dans* (1977, original *Ducdame*, 1925). It was high time the Swedish reading public had had an opportunity to become acquainted with this deeply original writer, who lived from 1872 to 1963. On the other hand, it was not outrageously late, since apart from a quite small circle of dedicated admirers, Powys was virtually unknown at home. Since the middle of the 1960s, however, a rapidly increasing circle of readers had discovered the unusual quality inherent in his novels, as well as in his philosophical and literary critical writings.

Powys was recognised by an increasing number of readers as one of the great magicians of modern literature, one of those very rare authors who create a world of their own and fill it with their extraordinary personality. Most of his books were reissued, and he was the object of several studies.

The two novels translated into Swedish revealed a mysterious poetic landscape, rich in secret significance and beauty, refreshingly unfashionable, but nevertheless more in keeping with the late 1970s than with the time when they were written. There was no follow-up, however, due to the lack of response of readers.

Powys’s patient Swedish advocate and translator “con amore”, Sven-Erik Täckmark, has even managed to produce a Swedish version of the 600-page novel *Weymouth Sands* (1934). A chapter appeared in the journal *Jakobs Stege* (Jacob’s Ladder), 1977:2; the rest is evidently waiting in manuscript form for the miraculous intervention of some publisher with a love of unusual literature similar to that displayed by René Coeckelbergh in the 1970s, but with a less pessimistic view of Swedes’ needs of such literature than Coeckelbergh came to adopt on grounds of bitter experience.

Since one ought to respect all minorities, no matter how small, “the happy few” should be reminded of the fact that most of Powys’s works are available in comparatively inexpensive English editions. One should also remember that Powys’s popular philosophical writings were translated as early as the 1930s, with the somewhat infelicitous Swedish titles *Modern själskultur* (Modern Culture of the Soul), and *Lyckans väsen* (The Essence of Happiness). Despite the titles, they are well worth reading and provide a sound basis for an understanding of his literary works.

At the present time, a series of collections of Powys’s letters is being published in England. Of particular interest is the latest, which contains his 29 letters to Sven-Erik Täckmark.

Powys was a correspondent of old-fashioned proportions: it has been calculated that he wrote no fewer than 30,000 letters. They were written with a characteristic spontaneity, and often give fascinating and entertaining insight into his richly complicated but consistently dynamic personality. This description is most appropriate to the majority of his letters to Täckmark. They span the years 1937-56, when Powys was resident in The Land of His Fathers, a region which so fascinated him with its rich mythological heritage that he began to learn Welsh.

Täckmark was only 20 when he began corresponding with his idol, who was then a man of 64. It was natural for Powys to assume the rôle of father figure to his young admirer, who had lost his own father at an early age and spent a week in Wales with Powys in 1938: he found him an odd,

versatile and passionate man, a seeker who indulged in a stubborn but unorthodox pursuit of education.

Many widely acknowledged characteristics of Powys, such as his warmth, his humour and his eccentricity, are abundantly represented in these letters. They are imaginative and wilful, occasionally relaxed and cheerful, consistently and strikingly frank, full of stimulating observations on the most varied of subjects: his linguistic studies (he read the Bible in Welsh, and one page of the *Odyssey* in Greek every morning), Wales and the Welsh, literature, philosophy, his own books in progress. The letters also contain recollections of his youth in Dorset, including memories of Thomas Hardy. Everything is portrayed in striking detail, and one has the impression of having come very close to John Cowper Powys the man.

Cedric Hentschel, who worked as a teacher in Sweden during the war and got to know Täckmark then, has provided the book with a long and very rewarding introduction.

GÖRAN BÖRGE

*Traditional Romance and Tale*,  
ANNE WILSON.

D. S. Brewer, 1976, £9.95.

This interesting but somewhat muddled (and muddling) book tries to explain why it should be that folk-tales and romances have remained so generally interesting in spite of all their absurdities and incoherence. The answer is found in the perception of a "meaning" in them that more closely resembles that of dreams than of more rational narrative structures (though it is conceded that they are organized with much more linearity than are most dreams), and is hence accessible to approximately Freudian or Jungian procedures of analysis. This rough-and-ready equation makes it essential that the gap between dream- and tale-structures should be narrowed as much as possible. In consequence (1) it is often stressed that such tales may appear "ridiculous" or "crazy"; (2) it is claimed that they have remained essentially unaltered over very long periods of transmission, and that every detail in them can thus be seen as authentically "significant"; (3) their third-person narrative is

transformed into a more "dreamlike" first-person one, by assuming the total imaginative fusion of author, hero, and listener:

as the dreamer is the protagonist of his dream, so is the creator of a story the protagonist of his story. That the listener to a story is similarly identified with the protagonist of the story must be the key to his involvement: he enters the story as the protagonist, and he does so in disguise. (p. 20: see also p. 30)

All of these assumptions are contestable. (1) Two of the three tales most elaborately investigated by Dr Wilson, *The Golden Bird* and *The King of the Golden Mountain* (Grimm nos. 57 and 92) are not only unusually ramshackle in structure, but exist in variants that are significantly less so (Bolte and Polivka, I.503 and II.318f.). Which reminds us that (2) such tales were very far from remaining unchanged, even in the later, more scholarly phase of their transmission. Propp found the Grimms' versions of some tales less "pure and stable" than those of Afanasev, while J. M. Ellis has very recently maintained that both the brothers were apt to distort "the rationale of the original tale" by constant elaboration, and diffusion of fairy-tale clichés (*One Fairy Story Too Many*, pp. 57, 64, and *passim*). (3) The composite first-person author assumed by Dr Wilson seems only likely—and even then not for all of the time—in more completely oral contexts of story-telling; in the performance of the Mwindo epic described by W. J. Ong, where, under active prompting from his audience, the narrator slips from time to time into the first person, enacting rather than describing the doings of his hero (*Orality and Literacy*, pp. 46, 161).

Not surprisingly, it is this third aspect of Dr Wilson's approach that raises most problems for the reader, especially in the exegeses of individual tales and romances that follow the extensive summarizing of their content. In these, the hero is represented as the author of his own story, deliberately contriving the events of it to achieve personal "splendour", and also transmitting through them his own deep-rooted conflicts and inhibitions, while at the same time transferring his less creditable impulses to other significant characters. For the analogy with dreaming to be complete, we should have to be able to place this author in a context as external to his day-dream as is the bedroom of the nocturnal dreamer: a cottage, an inn, wherever. But it is often difficult to be clear on this

point, and in the discussion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in particular, the point of departure often seems to be within the (Arthurian) context of the story rather than elsewhere. The immediate context of a private bedchamber is certainly a good place for fantasizing, but when Gawain conjures up images of Bertilak and his wife, he seems to be doing so from within the host's castle, not outside it:

While Sir Gawain lies in bed enjoying dalliance with the lady, he is also out in the wintry wilderness taking part in the hunt. (p. 100)

Earlier on in the story, his starting point seems very definitely within Camelot, and events are only doubtfully under his control:

The image of the Green Knight has been conjured up as a result of his own wishes . . . and yet the hero is conscious only that an exciting and horrifying adventure has come upon him from somewhere outside himself. (p. 97)

It sounds rather as if he is hallucinating, in public, at the Round Table, and that even so *childgered* a monarch as Arthur really ought to turn him over to Merlin for treatment.

Distinctions between characters become as blurred as those between places. "There are not nearly so many people involved as there appear to be", Dr Wilson comments, and in reductiveness her method goes far beyond that of Propp (who never suggested that the *hero* could take over the functions of any of his six other character-functions). It also surpasses that of the more explicitly Freudian Bettelheim, whose furthest reach of confusion is to view characters within a single tale as the id and ego (or super-ego) of a single personality (*The Uses of Enchantment*, pp. 80, 85, 91), and does this only when these characters are obviously linked from the beginning: brother and sister in Grimm no. 11, two brothers in Grimm no. 60, two Sinbads in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Jung seems to come closest in his *Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairy Tales*, where some characters are identified as the animus/anima aspects of others, but even here the integrity of some of the other characters is preserved, and there is much less stress on the conscious manipulation of events.

As might be expected, Dr Wilson's own approach works better with some texts than with others. Swamped by the sheer detail of *The Odyssey* (which had not been considered in the

original D.Phil. thesis), it works fairly well with *King Horn* (of which D. M. Hill's 1957 *Anglia* study anticipates the present one in some interesting respects). In part this is because she makes supplementary use of Propp's division into moves, though these now relate to "thought", not "events"; more particularly it is because the story's own precise charting of the hero's development broadly parallels her own view of its developing meaning:

[Fikenild] represents the hero's still lurking feeling that marrying the princess and becoming a king is an underhand deed against the reigning king . . . When this conflict is at last resolved, there is no need for yet another move: Horn's story comes to a natural end. (p. 62)

Again, her approach to romances culminating in transformation—*Lybeaus Desconus*, *The Wedding of Sir Gawen*, *Sir Gawene and the Carle of Carlyle*—is at least supported by our perception of the first two as "educative" romances, even though objective reality itself turns into subjective truth, with the real achievement seen as the hero's ability to confront mistress- or father-figures without projecting upon them monstrous stereotypes born of his own inhibitions. It is thus rather a pity that *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is mentioned only in passing, since the wife's verbal self-transformation—which quite overshadows her later physical change—would have offered an interesting comparison with Dr Wilson's equally weighty exegeses: medieval against modern; moralizing against psycho-analysing.

In conclusion it should be said that when all reservations have been made, the book has very real interest as a personal statement about these texts, and as long as we are prepared willingly to suspend our disbelief, and are not too irritated by awkward or overlong patches of writing, we shall find it a work of considerable imaginative force.

MALDWYN MILLS

*Autobiography and Imagination: Studies in Self-Scrutiny*,  
JOHN PILLING.

Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, £10.50.

Autobiography in its strict sense means "to write the history of one's own life". Yet by adding "auto" to "biography", the Romantics did more than coin a new word; they added a prefix so potent as to radically alter the neo-classical link between "bio" and "graphy", between life and writing. John Pilling's title, *Autobiography and Imagination*, places his study firmly in a post-Romantic tradition by stressing what for him is inseparable from a serious engagement with autobiography—imagination. For it is poetic imagination by which the Romantic Self collapses the neo-classical distinction between life and art, and Pilling is thus enabled to treat autobiographies as literary works which, better than mere reportage, offer insights into the individual's relationship with the world.

Any generic study has at some point to consider the thorny question of definition and in the case of autobiography the diversity of works commonly called autobiographies (ranging from Wordsworth's *Prelude* to Fellini's *Roma*) makes this imperative doubly strong. However, though Pilling is aware that each of the new critical approaches which resulted from the "big bang" of structural analysis in the 1960s have tested themselves against autobiography, his own approach is a conservative one. Thus whilst he briefly draws attention to "how intractable the whole business is" (2), he declines to engage directly with such "modish intellectual leanings" (117) and concerns himself only with what he calls "an observable species existing within the bounds of a more or less ill-defined genre" (2). Consequently his study is interested less in positing a definition than "in making particular statements about particular works of art which happen to be 'autobiographical'" (6). The question of definition is left implicit.

Pilling's choice of texts which belong to this "observable species" is governed by two criteria. The first is that they are all autobiographies of the twentieth century, and the seven works which comprise the main studies range from *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907) to Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* (1966). Through such a collection Pilling hopes certain contin-

uities may be observed, though it is also clear that this criterion allows him to deal with texts which have been largely neglected by criticism, works such as Henry James's *A Small Boy and Others* (1913) or Yeats's *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth* (1914). Pilling's book thus provides British readers with a series of introductions to many unfamiliar works, particularly since only two of his autobiographers are British, Henry Green and Adrian Stokes, and these placed in an appendix because "they may with some justice be considered as eccentric, or even minor, in relation to the other [seven] authors" (121). No reason, however, is given for the exclusion of women autobiographers.

The second criterion which defines Pilling's "observable species" (and which comprises his implicit definition) is that the autobiographers be interested not so much in recounting their life history as in formulating "an image of themselves that is not contaminated by subjectivity" (4). Thus in so far as the book presents what the sub-title calls "Studies in Self-Scrutiny", the emphasis is not on a career but on the imagination's quest to transcend the Self. However, with imagination inseparable from the Romantic concept of art, it is no surprise that all of Pilling's autobiographers are professional authors, and most are more widely known for their writing in other fields. Nevertheless, Pilling is anxious that these autobiographies be seen as "artistic objects in their own right, not just supportive background evidence for a consideration of their [authors'] better-known works" (119). By treating these texts as Literature, Pilling is able to make localized comparisons between autobiography and other types of writing.

In the seven studies which comprise the main part of Pilling's work, these two criteria, that the autobiography has been written in the twentieth century and that the autobiographer be concerned with an imaginative objectification of himself, are respectively linked to a concern for the role of the reader (a particularly twentieth-century approach) and a concern for tracing a formal or thematic unity in the texts themselves. However, it is arguable that the Romantic or post-Romantic notions of imagination and artistic unity are not as compatible with contemporary texts or contemporary notions of the reader as *Autobiography and Imagination* would suggest, and it is this I want briefly to look at now.

In terms of the reader, Pilling in his introduction draws attention to the fact that these

texts are concerned as much with writing as with the life recorded and as a result "each reader is forced, by the difficulty of the work before him, to become an active participant in the creative act" (3). That is to say, to the degree that these works are *autobiographies*, that "auto" refers as much to the self of the reader as to the self of the author, and in the same way as the author uses the writing of the book to discover facets of himself, so the reader is likewise involved in a process of self-discovery: "for both of them the [artistic] object (and the objectification) transcends the subject" (119). The movement of writing in the twentieth century, as witnessed in Pilling's book by such diverse works as *The Education of Henry Adams* and Michel Leiris's *L'Age d'homme* (1939), is towards the unchronological and fragmented text, and this movement has developed reciprocally with a new type of criticism that grants the reader precisely that freedom Pilling claims these texts call for. And Pilling is especially interesting when he is noting areas of textual uncertainty, as in Nabokov's *Speak, Memory* ("nothing less than a mystery story in which the puzzle is never solved" (108)) or in Sartre's *Les Mots* (1964) ("the reader [is] left to piece the puzzle together as best he may" (102)). We might conclude from this that the self the reader discovers is similarly fragmented and unbound by chronology, sharing the same "bifocal" vision Pilling attributes to Henry Adams, Yeats, and Sartre.

Yet whilst the texts themselves may demonstrate an instability in the notion of a unified self, Pilling's decision to treat them as imaginative works of art brings with it a certain notion of formal unity. As he writes in his introduction, when excluding from his study the diaries of Kafka and Pavese: "By contrast, in the works with which I deal, I am concerned with showing how the fragments have been artfully composed into a unity" (4). Moreover, if the works appear fragmented yet have an already coded unity within them, then the freedom Pilling grants the reader on the one hand is at once removed by the reader's function being no more than to trace a path already inscribed in the text. And whilst Pilling himself flatters the "sensitive" (17) or "intelligent" (70) reader by stating that a work such as Pasternak's *Safe Conduct* (1931) "requires its reader to penetrate it poetically" (52), he is employing the reader in his own study as a rhetorical figure for demonstrating how those works he has already defined as unified can be seen to be unified. Of course Pilling's

claim is that by re-enacting the process of the author's imaginative self-discovery the reader is being instructed to reappraise himself ("the 'critical mirror' will show him his image" (102)), but this claim is rather a displacement onto those texts of the way in which *Autobiography and Imagination* "educates" its own readers in thematic interpretation. For Pilling's main task is to demonstrate how the fragmented texts can be organized according to what he calls, quoting Stokes, "the themes of human nature" (133), and whilst he is aware that his texts often frustrate the unity inherent in his concept of "artistic object", this is only to redouble his efforts in the belief that, as he says of Henry Adams, "the art of the writer is always keeping the fragments in relationship with one another" (21). In sum, though Pilling is alive to the fact that attempts to read these autobiographies in a traditional post-Romantic way fail, he is unable to see that a more modern critical terminology, one which accepts indeterminacy as a *necessity* rather than a "puzzle" to be solved, would be more applicable. *Autobiography and Imagination* is certainly worth reading as a series of introductions to unfamiliar works, but with an inherently unstable combination of modern texts and Romantic concepts, we should be careful to read it with that distinctly modern freedom those texts grant us as readers.

ANDREW HASSAM

*Vanessa Bell*,  
FRANCES SPALDING.

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, £12.95.

This is yet another book on Bloomsbury but it is one that was needed to fill a gap and prevent our knowledge of that coterie from becoming one-sided. Vanessa Bell emerges from relative obscurity to become the magnetic central figure who was largely responsible for the foundation and management of the Bloomsbury group of friends. The final sentence of this very detailed biography ends with a phrase taken from Virginia Woolf, likening her sister Vanessa Bell to a "bowl of golden water which brims but never overflows". The phrase is taken from a letter Virginia wrote to Vanessa in April 1927 after

paying her a visit at her cottage at Cassis, in the south of France. In the same letter Virginia contrasts herself with her painter sister, telling her she finds painters and her sister in particular “more concentrated, but less amiable and lovable in their marmoreal chastity”.

The imagery Virginia Woolf conjured up to describe her older sister Vanessa Bell reveals that she thought of her as a container full of precious material, but that some strange cold power kept that fulness in check, depriving those around from an experience of its true depths. (We learn from this biography that Vanessa Bell’s favourite author was Jane Austen, and we can begin to understand why Jane Austen’s cool observation would especially appeal to the controlled life of Vanessa Bell). Many observers and admirers have tried to put into words just what it was about Vanessa Bell that appealed to them and caused such adoration: her daughter Angelica Garnett has written that “Vanessa had a kind of stoical warmth about her, a monolithic quality that reminded one of the implacable smile of primitive Aphrodite”. Leonard Woolf called her a goddess, David Garnett used the term “Madonna”, Lawrence Gowing likened her to a cathedral and Frances Spalding compares her to Piero della Francesca’s *Madonna della Misericordia*. As Frances Spalding tells us, Vanessa Bell’s early nickname, when at the age of eighteen she looked after the three younger Stephen children—Thoby, Virginia and Adrian—was *The Saint*. All the descriptions fit together and help build a picture of a woman who was like a regal statue, all of a piece, sombre, serious and full of compassion. Up to now this was only something hinted at, but Frances Spalding’s biography has filled out the image with great thoroughness and deep understanding. But for all its detailed 363 pages and fourteen chapters examining the periods of her life from 1879 to 1961, we are still in the dark about the inner depths of this Venus, saint, goddess, queen. Vanessa Bell was tall, with sensually hooded eyes and a “passionate mouth” according to her sister. She was a mixture of silence, stoicism, power, diffidence, sensuality, strength, patience, hard work and fecundity. Vanessa Bell’s monolithic quality made her the keystone of Bloomsbury, almost the controller of the magic circle of friends. Virginia Woolf’s life and character have been treated to the most punctilious dissection, including biographies and the publication of her diaries, letters and even unpublished autobiographical essays. Fry

has had two biographies, the most recent by Frances Spalding, and two volumes of his letters have been published. But until this biography by Frances Spalding, Vanessa Bell was always the object of others’ interest but never the subject. It is possible that Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry wrote letters in the belief that some might in the future be published, but Vanessa Bell in 1904, writing to Virginia about the publication of their father Sir Leslie Stephen’s biography, opined “I’m glad that I shall never be celebrated enough to have my life written”. One wonders what she would have thought of this biography which chronicles her considerable domestic and artistic accomplishments so thoroughly and with accuracy. Because her work and her life were so bound up with the painter Duncan Grant, it also raises the point that we probably now need a comparable biography of Grant, which will of course raise even more groans among those quite fed up with books about Bloomsbury.

Although married to Clive Bell, the art critic, from 1907 until her death in 1961, Vanessa Bell, for all her sensuality, passion and maternal qualities, led a virtually chaste life from circa 1914. The marriage cooled circa 1909, and after a brief affair with Roger Fry in the years 1911 to 1913, she lived with the homosexual painter Duncan Grant for the rest of her life, and set up homes with him at Charleston in Sussex and at Cassis. She allowed Grant his boyfriends, and often encouraged them to live in a *ménage à trois* with her, thus ensuring that she could keep Grant as her companion. The story is an amazing one and needed telling, especially since it puts the much trumpeted sapphist interlude between Virginia Woolf and Vita Sackville-West quite in the shade. Clive Bell was a likable fellow, somewhat shallow, seeking after material pleasure but supremely able to help others to enjoy themselves in his company. He is treated with sympathy in this book. Grant is seen as rather a selfish character, quite under the spell of his love affairs and unable to express the depth of his feelings for Vanessa when outsiders could see that was needed.

Any biography of an artist has to deal in literary terms with a body of visual work and this inevitably brings with it a measure of compromise. As Frances Spalding tells us in her preface, “Critical analysis of her work has here been limited, necessarily, so as not to impede the narrative,” and she puts forth her hope for a monograph on the whole of Vanessa Bell’s painted oeuvre. Nevertheless the small number

of analytical passages which deal with most of the paintings illustrated in the book do introduce new insights into an understanding of Vanessa Bell's work. The first chapter of the book, "Always the Eldest" (which must refer to her relationship with her sister Virginia above all else), begins by spending a good many paragraphs detailing the complicated inter-relationships of the Prinsep, Duckworth and Stephen families. Although the reader may experience a little impatience to get to Vanessa Bell, this preliminary skeleton of emotional and social relationships is useful for the later discussions on the psychological reasons for Vanessa Bell's painting. Her painting has been the subject of much reassessment since the mid-1970s; the works she did in the decade 1910 to 1920 have been reappraised and are now considered to be some of the most interesting formal experiments with abstraction this side of the Channel in those years. It is interesting that in the light of Vanessa Bell's fifty-five year painting career, Frances Spalding chooses two paintings to decorate the front and back of the dust-jacket from the same year, 1915. The reappraisal of Bell's paintings has basically followed the lines of the theoretical standpoint which she herself held and in which she was encouraged by Roger Fry and her husband Clive Bell. This aesthetic theory revolved around the notion of "significant form", a quality which Fry and Bell found only in works of art and not in daily life and which helped them to recognize quality in art. The theory of "significant form" was in essence an appreciation of large, easily apprehended volumetric shapes which echoed and comprised the inner strength of the work of art.

In 1925 Vanessa Bell gave a talk on art to Leighton Park School, the manuscript of which remains. Frances Spalding has quoted from it to remind us of Vanessa Bell's aesthetic beliefs. Vanessa Bell told her audience that the artist's principal occupation is with form and that some of the greatest artists in the past had been perfectly content to discover formal relationships in pots and pans, fruit and vegetables—"Even a kitchen coal scuttle may become the most exciting continuation of curves and hollows, deep shadows and silver edges, instead of a tiresome thing to be filled with coal, or a half worn out thing that will soon need renewal". Such a phrase gives a clue to the outer composure with which Vanessa Bell appeared to get through life; she could find beauty in a line or a shadow without bothering to discover what made the line or

the shadow. However, Frances Spalding makes us more keenly aware of her subject matter by placing it in a psychological light, the first time this approach has been tried with Vanessa Bell's art. Bell did have a predilection for painting strong forms which were usually vases, pots and pans, all of them containers. Frances Spalding likens this to Vanessa Bell's own experience of motherhood, and to a yearning for a fulfilment of the unsatisfactory relationship she had with her own mother Julia Stephen, who died young.

*Iceland Poppies*, illustrated as the first colour plate and accepted by art historians of the Bloomsbury school to be the first painting in which Vanessa Bell announced her own particular talent, is given an illuminating analysis. It was painted in 1909 when Vanessa Bell was in the middle of a triangular relationship; her new husband Clive Bell was indulging in a flirtation with her sister Virginia, and Vanessa was taking it all with stoic reserve. But the painting is composed of triple forms, notably the three flowers, two of which are together and red, while one is slightly apart and white. When Vanessa Bell came to paint a large canvas in 1917 called *The Tub* (surprisingly, although it is securely dated by letters, Spalding gives it the date of 1918 in the plate caption), again the motif of three flowers is used, with two set opposite one. And again this was an example of art echoing life, since by 1917 Vanessa Bell was in the middle of another triangular relationship, this time with Duncan Grant and David Garnett. The source escapes me (could it have been one of the Sitwells?), but the quotation about Bloomsbury inhabitants being couples living in triangular relationships in squares is not only clever, but shown by this biography to be absolutely true.

JUDITH COLLINS

*The Letters of John Middleton Murry to Katherine Mansfield,*

Edited by C. A. HANKIN.

Constable, 1983, £9.95.

Nothing is more perilous than to entertain an outstanding novelist or journalist as a major prophet. This reservation might well have been whispered in John Middleton Murry's ear, for both he and his wife took their contribution to

the world a little too seriously. These letters strengthen the perception that they, Murry especially, confounded the hyperaesthetic with the spiritual, uniting them in a precarious literature-as-religion attitude. It is a pity that their correspondence has not been included in a single volume which would have cast more light on Katherine's crumbling reticence, and helped also to clarify the reasons for the exceptional odium Murry incurred. It was bitterly ironical that he, an idealist in life as in letters and an eternal Romeo, should be hounded as little better than a wife-beater. Why he never defended himself remains a mystery.

Katherine (Kathleen Beauchamp) was born in New South Wales a year before Murry, the daughter of a leading banker, two steps higher in the social scale than he, being upper while he was of the lower middle class. As was not unnatural, she entered the social world of artistic London with considerably more assurance than he. They took refuge from their introspective temperaments in complementary ways: she revealed by concealment, he concealed by extravagant revelation.

Katherine gained some reputation in the years before the First World War, notably for *In a German Pension*. A slow developer in some respects, though an enterprising editor, Murry was scarcely yet a writer. His letters at that time were those of one who has just dived into strange waters. He was *au courant* with advanced movements rather than of them: already he was the man who understood. Katherine, enduring voluntary poverty, had already acquired a "past", though almost incredibly he was not to learn of this for forty years. His prize-studded school-days as a boarder at Christ's Hospital alleviated his misery, which was almost certainly attributable to a stupid and tyrannous father rather than to the pains of genteel poverty. He emerged as a letter-writer far short of the first rank. His early confidences give little sign that he was out of the ordinary intellectually, though mercifully free of the over-reactions and near-hysteria recurrent in his storm-tossed maturity. "After all, I am only a lover," he was to persuade himself later on: "journalism is past". That Katherine was not persuaded of this was a fundamental cause of the bitterness which grew upon her and was fanned and reflected by her champions. Murry's salad-years as a temerarious journalist have been well described in Frank Lea's most admirable biography. On his school-boyish confessions to Katherine there falls no

shadow of his imminent masterpiece on Dostoevsky, but the descriptions of his multifarious activities show no interest as yet in the politics on which he wrote perfunctory paragraphs. They do however reveal a later half-forgotten enthusiasm for painting, especially modernistic painting, which qualified him to become art critic of the *Westminster Gazette*. In the higher periodical writing he sounded a new note, modest yet dignified, and great editors—Spender, Massingham—were plainly fascinated. The all-roundness of the young man embraced sports and games—he was a skilled yachtsman and batsman—and once stopped a runaway horse in the Queen's Road.

Murry could pack a formidable sentence but there was an underlying kindness detractors invariably fail to mention. He himself detested "starve-crow" criticism. His concern for the careers of other writers is perceptible over and over again in these letters. As he becomes more majestic, the apparent contrast between the man and the critic, or rather editor, startles. Readers of *Between Two Worlds* (1935), many of whom had long put their faith in him as a reassuring pilot in troubled waters, were astounded and almost shocked at his personal vulnerability. He was revealed as a leader of men who could scarcely lead himself. His irresolution, his frequent failures of will-power, his diametrical changes of mood, his seeming reluctance to sleep for two nights in the same bed, his fits of bizarre humour, his dependence on women, all of which were unblushingly confessed, in public as in private, were strange indeed in an editor who in his twenties published a novel called *Still Life* and a sonnet entitled "Serenity".

With *Fyodor Dostoevsky* Murry bounded into the front rank as a philosophic critic of literature. His romantic idealism never quite found such eloquent yet disciplined expression again. But in finding that in the tragic Slav "mankind stood on the brink of a great revelation" he verged perilously on the apocalyptic. As Katherine was to put it: "No, you are not too serious. I think you are a trifle over-anxious to assure people how serious you are. You antagonize them sometimes or set them doubting because of your emphasis on your sincerity".

Unhappily he was soon to lose his acute and affectionate counsellor. In 1917 she became seriously ill and their relationship, always precarious, grew worse. What she believed to be his insincerity filled her with "a kind of shame", and suffering sharpened her tongue. The story is an

unlovely one. His letters brim with almost childish affection and dependency, but it was precisely this dependency that galled her, craving as she did for support. His generosity of mind, which far exceeded her own, was intermittently at hazard from his one really great fault: his stinginess. All his life he imagined himself much poorer than he was, a residue probably of his narrow childhood. His letters are full of domestic finance—documents perhaps for social students of the period, but a burden for the heart-hungry grass-widow at Bandol who had been brought up to care for none of these things.

Financial anxiety could explain but not excuse the alleged subordination of his marriage to his career. But he was a compulsive slave to work and his appointment while still under thirty to the prestigious post of editor of the revived *Athenaeum* (at a mediocre salary) did not lessen his burden. He relaxed, unfortunately for conjugal peace, in passing flirtations with Princess Elizabeth Bibesco, Asquith's daughter, and Dorothy Brett, to Katherine's acute distress, which his naive and embarrassed excuses did nothing to alleviate.

The intimate letters of his prime years, the early 20s, are not those of a Chesterfield or a Cowper but they summon up vividly enough a vanished London literary world in which everybody knew "everybody"—and nobody else—and poverty went hand-in-hand with celebrity. In his brief glory with the *Athenaeum* its editor was of course at the centre. The hour was not a propitious one, production costs had soared, but under Murry and his polymath colleague J. W. N. Sullivan the outstanding literary organ of the Victorians relived, and more than relived, its past. For a brief period the Murrys were cock-a-hoop. Besides the heavier contributions, Katherine broke new ground in journalism with her lively and almost colloquial surveys of fiction.

Strangely, the most unsettled and forlorn years of Murry's adult life also saw his most vital inspired and confident literary criticism. Between the book on Dostoevsky and Katherine's death he established for himself a centre (incidentally, he proved more *readable* than any of his rivals). He aimed to assert poetry as the all-sufficing summit of human experience—a new "religion" in so far as it was wholly intuitive and anthropocentric. Almost he seemed to echo Wittgenstein's "ethics and aesthetics are one". Accepting Croce, he refined upon him. Art is intuition, but the artist "intuits"—what? Lessing had indeed an answer, if a somewhat all-

embracing one: "The Nature of Things". Creative artists *reveal*, in giving body and form progressively to more and more aspects of reality. But values? "All values," said Murry, "are moral values". Armed with this conviction, which he fathered on Aristotle and (somewhat vaguely) "the Greeks", and waving the banners of Keats and Hardy and Chekhov, he dealt his telling blows right and left from the heavy philosophers to the lightweight literary hearties of the *London Mercury*. "Give us the whole, give us the truth," he cried in his acclaiming of Hardy. The demand, implicit as well as explicit, permeates his outpourings to Katherine, whom he now regarded as his only initiate, and who could at least realise better than anybody else how much distress this embroilment in literary warfare cost him.

Cost him it did, for the masterly and courteous but quite terrible review of *Georgian Poetry* finally brought the hornets about his head. Henceforth he was a marked man. And, devoted all his life as he was to an erratic search for truth, he gave only casual snatches of his attention to self-justification. It was his cruel fate to have his confidence in his dearest ally exploited to be the most venomous weapon against him. Friends—Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, Catherine Carswell, Virginia Woolf—became his outstandingly spiteful detractors.

A. E. Housman declared that a true literary critic is "the rarest of the great works of God". Murry's restless idealism was bound to drive him further afield. But in the few years before Katherine's death shook his intellectual foundations he had demonstrably become, with one obvious exception, the outstanding critic of his day. His was a great part in the advance of culture that brought aesthetic sophistication to the universities. He was by way of being a valuable link between the previous and the succeeding generations, for he combined the geniality and sympathy of a Saintsbury with the logical insight of a Leavis. Since his time, since he and Katherine happily proclaimed the artist, the descendants of Freud have taken over and literary criticism has largely become the handmaid of psychology, often morbid psychology. Attention shifted for better or worse from the reader's reaction to the writer's singularity. But the literary essay is no longer exciting reading.

Though his old heart weakness killed him at sixty-seven he mellowed and enjoyed the home life and domestic happiness for which he had yearned so hopelessly in his letters. After several

years of striving to lay the foundations of a better society by communal farming in Norfolk and editing *Peace News* (a pacifist with many reservations), he applied his formidable all-round ability to breeding red polls and made a quite handsome fortune. This did not hinder him from publishing a masterly if slightly uncharacteristic study of Swift. He voted Tory and turned out to be a good mixer and a popular figure in the village. He wrote a boisterously funny play for the Village Hall and played the leading comic part himself into the bargain. This *jeu d'esprit* was actually taken by the BBC and broadcast to the nation. But the legend of an odious Murry is not yet dead, incredible as it may be to those who remember him. As his son Colin says, who can help loving such a man?

H. P. COLLINS

*Charles Williams, Poet of Theology*,  
GLEN CAVALIERO.

Macmillan, 1983, £20.00.

A couple of decades have passed since the publication of a number of key studies on the works of Charles Williams: Anne Ridler's stimulating overview in her introduction to *Charles Williams: "The Image of the City" and other Essays* (1958); A. M. Hadfield's pioneer biography and literary appreciation, *An Introduction to Charles Williams* (1959); and Mary McDermott Shideler's synthetic *Theology of Romantic Love* (1962). While Humphrey Carpenter's *Inklings* (1978) has presented some new biographical material on Williams and his role in the Inklings (a loose association of friends including C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien), the time is ripe for Glen Cavaliero's book-length study of the Williams corpus. Both the committed and the curious should be grateful that Cavaliero's book is such a good one.

Its title implies a close relationship between Williams's poetic and theological sensibilities: "a study of his literary gifts is therefore inseparable from a study of his theology, for it is in their interaction that the vitality of each is found" (p. ix). Chapter 1 is a brief overview of Williams's life which helpfully covers the highpoints without unduly recapitulating what has been done several times before. Chapter 2 sees the early poetry as a clue to his later work, but the poet's

imagination is not yet autonomous from "traditional religious attitudes and phrasing" (21). Chapter 3, dealing with the criticism, biographies, and plays, examines Williams's treatment of a theme that was to dominate his later work: what he called "the Impossibility"—"that something cannot be. Only it is."—as when Shakespeare's Troilus beholds his faithful Cressida play him false to Diomedes. Cavaliero sees for example in the verse drama *Thomas Cranmer of Canterbury* (1936) a personification of the Impossibility, "this opposition between fortune and nature", in the Skeleton, a ghoulish figure of providence who calls himself "Christ's back". Chapter 4 pursues this and other related themes in a discussion of Williams's novels, with unusually apt analyses of *Descent into Hell* (1937) and *All Hallow's Eve* (1945). In these novels lies "Williams's supreme originality", his imaging of "the interpenetration of physical and spiritual" (89), which he called "co-inherence". While Chapter 5 gives a competent and lucid overview of Williams's two books of Arthurian poetry (*Taliessin through Logres* and *The Region of the Summer Stars*), Chapter 6 focuses on Williams's theology, particularly *He Came Down From Heaven* (1938), his "spiritual testament" (128), and *The Descent of the Dove* (1939), "Williams's masterpiece" (137). "Not so much a theologian of a systematic kind as an alert commentator, he interprets the doctrines of the Church as so many symbols for a multi-dimensional experience of life, and does so in a manner which enhances both their credibility and their imaginative impact" (127).

There is much to admire in the method of Cavaliero's analysis. Cavaliero not only provides a comprehensive and accurate introduction to Williams's work and his themes for the reader not familiar with them, but the freshness of his analyses should also appeal to those who know their Williams well. His discussion of the novel *Descent Into Hell*, for example, lucidly and with key quotations from the text lays out the complicated relationships of setting and characters as they embody the complexities of Williams's doctrine of exchange, the idea that we can carry one another's fears, even across time. Cavaliero concludes with an ironic estimate of the novel:

The weakness of the novel remains the same as in its predecessors: the cursory nature of the character portrayal. One has only to think of the major novels of George Eliot, Conrad or Lawrence to know the difference in mature imaginative insight between them and

Williams's diagrammatic presentations. But the word 'diagram' is one which Williams himself used frequently about art, and his work is relative to that of the greater masters in the same way that theirs is to the complexity of life itself. Such concentration on determining the pattern of the web [of co-inherence] was fully in keeping with the imaginative powers that were his and no one else's.

The quotation underlines another aspect of Cavaliero's method, his willingness to face Williams's weaknesses as a writer. So, for example, he refers to "a good deal of tiresome archness" in *Poetry at Present* (24) and Williams's throwing away "so carelessly" the richness of the Tarot imagery in his novel, *The Greater Trumps* (78). Cavaliero's discussions also benefit from his placing Williams's work in a larger literary context, as when he ponders the influence of novels by Arthur Machen, Evelyn Underhill, and G. K. Chesterton, on Williams's own novels (55-60). Cavaliero's discussion also abounds in impressive concluding syntheses of particular works or themes (e.g., Williams's doctrine of the cross, 149-50) and the continual sense of an overview: "The biographies show the emergence of a style and vocabulary that comes to full flowering in *The Descent of the Dove*" (38); or "The second collection of Arthurian poems forms a commentary upon the first . . . More diffuse than their predecessors, they are easier to comprehend" (116). Cavaliero's method, then, has an admirable sophistication and scope, particularly within a 175-page book with six chapters and a conclusion.

That conclusion allows him a more expansive look at the whole Williams corpus. As a religious thinker Williams embraces what is still "a minority belief that the intellect works better when it feels" (159). While there is an "uncomfortable disparity between the grandeur of the novels' themes and the frequently trivial or reductive way in which they are presented" (161), they provide "imaginative testing grounds" for the "more wide-ranging, complex, and intellectually satisfying model of reality" (166) in the Arthurian poems. The latter's "static" and "iconographical" vision (apparently "unaware of process") and "intellectual" rather than "vital" beauty, eschew the concentration on "the fragmenting of experience" characteristic of English verse since Hardy (169). If Williams's poems "are anachronistic it is because they are ahead of, rather than behind, their time" (172).

Williams's "unique achievement", though, "lies in his approach to theology": "He saw in literature, theology and history symbols of an existence to which romantic [i.e., visionary] experience points, and it is his linking of that experience to the formulations of Christian theology which is his distinctive achievement as an apologist" (173).

Cavaliero's book, then, is an accurate, comprehensive assessment of Williams's work, which betrays the feeling intellect of its own author. Cavaliero has been "inside" Williams, and the pattern of his analysis, retaining a sense of that primary reading experience, has a lucid organicism reminiscent of the co-inherent pattern he illuminates in Williams's own work. In *He Came Down from Heaven* (London: Faber, 1950), Williams defines "glory" as more than "a mazy bright blur . . . the maze should be, though it generally is not, exact, and the brightness should be that of a geometrical pattern" (33). It is this visionary pattern, this co-inherence of creatures and the divine which even includes the "terrible good" of "the Impossibility", that Williams's work images and Cavaliero's book explores. In this sense, Cavaliero is right to say that Williams "is not one of the primary artists who creates experience, but one of the secondary ones who defines it" (172). His patterned universe has the bright given-ness of a "hard" world-view, not the heuristic indeterminacy of a "soft" world-view (as in *Job* or *King Lear*). And this makes me wonder about Cavaliero's final assessment: "If the surest standard for assessing a writer's achievement is, as C. S. Lewis has argued, the quality of reading it elicits, then Williams remains a figure to be reckoned with" (158). I think that this is true for the new reader of Williams, but I have found that the (albeit "glorious") vision of his work fades on later re-readings, except in the best passages of his writings, such as Pauline's final encounter with her *Doppelgänger* in *Descent into Hell*. If this be true for other readers of Williams, then there comes a time when he does not necessarily remain "a figure to be reckoned with". The pattern of the "glory" has been tasted and perhaps enjoyed, but one moves on to other authors. If, as has been the experience of not a few readers of Williams, the vision of his work is assumed into the reader's own believed world-view, then the reckoning with Williams becomes a matter of more than reading and literary criticism. As Williams himself comments in his study of Dante, *The Figure of Beatrice*

(London: Faber, 1943): "This is what all the talk of the 'ideal' comes to; the ideal can never satisfy until we are ideal" (63).

MURRAY J. EVANS

*Dictionary of Literary Biography, Volume 15: British Novelists, 1930-1959*,  
Edited by BERNARD OLDSEY.

Gale Research Company, 1983, 2 vols, \$148.00.

Part One of this volume of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* contains entries on thirty-three authors flourishing between 1930 and 1959. Part Two contains entries on a further twenty-six together with eight appendices. The latter mostly take the form of essays providing thematic and historical perspectives on a range of authors and works, and as such provide a counterpoint to the author-based entries. (There is also tabulation of the recipients of major literary prizes during the period, provision of a working bibliography in the field, and a listing of cinematic adaptations of work by the treated authors.)

It is immediately apparent that the term "British Novelists" has not been slimmed down to mean just "English Novelists". Irish writers (through some expansion of the term "British") are represented not only by Beckett, but by such as Patrick Kavanagh, Benedict Kiely, Mary Lavin, Michael McLaverty, Kate O'Brien and Sean O'Faolain. There is also more than a passing concern with Anglo-Welsh writers and writers with an interest in, or association with, Wales. This is accentuated by a laudable willingness to seek contributors from Wales. In Part One Belinda Humfrey writes on Richard Hughes, Roland Mathias on Emyr Humphreys, Leslie Norris on Glyn Jones, Glyn Jones on Gwyn Jones, John Pikoulis on Lewis Jones, and Mick Felton on Richard Llewellyn. Part Two includes Belinda Humfrey on Glyn Thomas, and there is also a section on John Cowper Powys by R. L. Blackmore, editor of the Colgate University based *Powys Newsletter*. Indeed (though selection is a somewhat invidious procedure), with such other contributors as James Carens on Oliver St. John Gogarty, Oldsey himself on Golding, Paul Schlueter on Doris Lessing, Jeffrey Meyers on Wyndham Lewis, Jay Halio on Angus Wilson, Paul Doyle on Evelyn

Waugh, James Tucker on Anthony Powell and Frederick Karl providing a historical perspective, the editor has throughout recruited a team with an attested commitment to their subjects.

It may then be somewhat naive to wonder how one is actually intended to use this handsomely produced publication. The iconography of the binding announces very firmly that these are reference volumes, as does the double-column format inside. But the most puritan concept of a reference-book is not embodied in these pages, for the reader is apt to become a browser at the sight of so much pleasing decoration in the form of photographs of the novelists (taken at various times in their lives), stills from cinematic adaptations and photographs of odd sheets of manuscript (including a sadly indistinct and monochrome page from Peake's *The Moccus Book*). In particular, photographs of the dust-jackets of early British and American editions of the treated novelists' works abound, and soon one begins to wonder whether these are just an indulgence, unwarrantably adding to the purchase price. Certainly there is one kind of food for thought in such information conveyed by the captions as the jaw-dropping market-price of a first edition of *The Hobbit* in dust-jacket—\$2,500. But these photographs provide more than that. Even though not all novelists follow Dickens or the late Richard Brautigan in alluding within their texts to the cover or illustration of their books, dust-jackets can still warrant attention (like Victorian book-bindings) for what they say about how cultures accommodate and assimilate new writing within existing categories of style and genre, and about how readers have been invited to read the text. Dust-jackets may often not enjoy the authority of the author, but within a reader-oriented perspective such a consideration is not necessarily paramount. Some authors, of course, have made their own presence felt in the field of dust-jackets. Wyndham Lewis's self-drawn jacket for his 1931 study *Hitler* (reproduced I, 315) achieves in hindsight a chilling rapprochement between his own characteristic graphic style and Nazi iconography which serves to compound the disturbing aspects of the text itself. Mervyn Peake, lauded in his own time as "the greatest living illustrator", actively aspired to illustrate his *Titus* books, but at the time of their first publication had only been conceded the fashioning of their dust-jackets (reproduced II, 429). Most readers of the *Titus* books will now be familiar with them in editions which incorporate Peake's

working sketches of the *Titus* characters and landscapes—but arguably those original finished dust-jackets for *Eyre* and Spottiswoode represent the most considered of Peake's illustrations of the work, and yet they have far less influence now on the reading of the *Titus* books than the sketches do. To take another instance, Evelyn Waugh followed up his "illustrated novelette" *Decline and Fall* with a dust-jacket for *Vile Bodies* depicting a crashing racing-car (reproduced II, 574). What editorial rule-of-thumb or theory of the boundaries of the text decrees that the *Vile Bodies* dust-jacket is not an integral illustration when compared, say, with the frontispiece to *Decline and Fall*? Clearly I am on a hobby-horse, and I have no idea whether the editor of the present volumes shares my addiction—but I am certainly grateful to him for allowing it free play. These photographs do have a contribution to make to the reading of texts and to an understanding of the modes of existence of particular texts. They are more than a pleasant seduction.

Ultimately it is perhaps not the photographs at all that cause me to pause over the word "dictionary", but the fact that the entries are, after all, fully worked essays presenting interpretations and value-judgements—and that the book is there to be read rather than consulted. Certainly there is a degree of useful standardization in the entries as far as concerns such matters as the recording of each author's family background and education, and there is a consistent chronological structuring of each entry. But one wouldn't consult the *DLB* in quite the same way as one might consult the *DNB*, or, say, Vinson's *British Novelists*. Some of the essays approach a length bearing comparison with those in the old *Writers and Their Work* series, or, say, the University of Columbia pamphlet series, and, like those, they offer a blend of factual information, text-description and interpretive critical survey with an eye on both coverage and canon-formation. To be pedantic then, rather more of a compendium of essays than a dictionary—a distinction which appears less petty when one considers the claim to a certain kind of authority that the word "dictionary" brings with it.

Canon-formation is most invidious when one's own interests are excluded. To the extent that this publication does imply such a process, many will be pleased at the inclusion of John Cowper Powys, and the more pleased at the devotion to his work of a longer than average essay (bearing in mind the publication's guideline that

"the length of each essay varies with the subject's importance and the amount of critical attention devoted to the author's work"). Llewelyn and Theodore, however, are left in the cold. Clearly every user of the volume will be surprised not to find some names and surprised to find others. Some (like me) will be pleased at the inclusion of Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Olaf Stapledon. The appearance of Nicholas Monsarrat as a treated author is unexpected and, indeed, slightly curious, if only because the contributor (J. Jaffe) does not appear to be able to find two good words to rub together on behalf of his author. Certainly an opportunity has been missed to focus in even more on working-class fiction of the 1930s. The section called "Political and Social Interpretations" in the bibliographical appendix does mention both Ralph Fox's *The Novel and the People* and David Smith's more recent study of socialist propaganda in the twentieth-century novel; but the section called "Criticism of the Working Class Novel" is almost wholly directed, somewhat puzzlingly, towards the Angry Young Men—and indeed begins with the remark that most "proletarian writers" began writing in the 1950s. Clearly a significant phenomenon in fiction of the period—though perhaps not one best lending itself to an author-based treatment—is underrepresented.

Turning specifically to Blackmore's essay, John Cowper Powys is presented as "a bard, a storyteller of the old oral traditions" who seeks to know whether "the material world holds the entire substance and sum of existence". Powys's "looseness of style" is sympathetically related to the energetic performances of Powys as itinerant lecturer. *Wood and Stone* and *Rodmoor* are sketched within a highlighting of their respective dedicatees (Hardy and "the spirit of Emily Bronte"). *Wolf Solent* and *A Glastonbury Romance* are presented along with the critical claims for their representing Powys's best work, while *Weymouth Sands* is described as "the brightest and most life-enhancing of the long novels". Particular attention is paid to the theme of sadism in Powys's writing and to Powys's "penchant for playing the fool in print", for which, we are assured, "he always had his reasons . . . his excesses are not inadvertent". The John Cowper Powys of the Corwen period who produced *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* (to which Blackmore accords a distinctively larger proportion of space) is strikingly

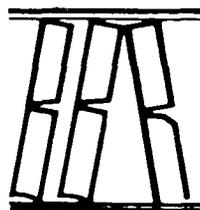
presented as one closely in touch with his contemporary world:

Powys needed no topical referents, even as Jane Austen did not speak of Napoleon and the outside world. His letters confirm, however, that he was thoroughly informed, that he read the periodicals and listened faithfully to the BBC News, and that he held firm opinions. In truth, his novels may serve as stronger commentary on the world he lived in than many that derive from the headlines of the period.

Glen Cavaliero's observation on the novels after *Porius*, that Powys wrote them "purely and simply for his own pleasure" is endorsed, and the largest claims are not made for them—though *Atlantis* is singled out for a kinder word. The situation of opinion which Black-

more outlines at the end of his piece will not strike many as unfamiliar. "It is not certain", he remarks, "whether time can honour an author who too often writes badly"; but the last word is left with Angus Wilson and his faith that there is little doubt that Powys "will stand with James, Lawrence and Joyce in the eyes of future literary critics". It is probably the largest claim made, or reflected, in respect of any of the authors treated in the two parts of this volume. Blackmore's essay may well encourage many readers to try Powys, and his contribution, in the context of this publication in particular, is thus to be welcomed. After all, these volumes will sit on the library shelves for many years to come and, in their monumentality, influence more than one generation's view of British fiction during the middle of the century.

PETER MILES



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## Letters to the Editor

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### *Ichiro Hara: A Tribute*

Ichiro Hara, John Cowper Powys's Japanese friend and formerly Professor of English Literature at Tokyo's Waseda University, died early this year at the age of eighty-two. He was a notable Wordsworth scholar, a humanist philosopher and the only authority on Powys in Japan.

He met John Cowper through Littleton Powys and Elizabeth Myers, having struck up a correspondence with the latter after reading her novel *A Well Full of Leaves*. She enthused to him about *In Defence of Sensuality*, the book which she said had given her new life.

Hara himself was deeply impressed by Powys's "earthly mysticism" and acknowledged *A Philosophy of Solitude* as a great influence in his life. He was, indeed, more interested in Powys's philosophical works than in his fiction and published translations of *A Philosophy of Solitude* and *Mortal Strife*.

Hara also produced an introductory study called *John Cowper Powys's Life and Thought*, and in 1982 published his *Cosmic Humanism: John Cowper Powys's Life-Cult*, which (but for an enlarged and revised edition of his earlier *Wordsworth Studies*) was his final work. A chapter from it—"John Cowper Powys and Zen"—appeared in Number 7 of *The Powys Review*.

The last section of this book is devoted to Hara's only meeting with Powys, during a tour of Europe in the summer of 1961. Powys had sent a taxi to meet him at Llandudno Junction and Hara records the graphic impression the landscape made upon him, with its "pyramids of slate". Powys told him that he was very pleased with Blaenau, that it looked as though it belonged to an El Greco painting, and then, gleefully, that it was "cloud-cuckoo land".

Powys was on his couch by the window as

Phyllis Playter led Hara upstairs. Hara records the "queer feeling" he had, as Powys glanced warmly at him, turned towards him and held out a hand from under the blanket, that he was meeting "a present-day Merlin".

He notes Llewelyn's 'Ankh' mounted above the door of the room; the porcelain figure of 'Black Bess' on Powys's desk; the rare sight of a Westerner eating raw egg for breakfast; and the claim by Powys that Phyllis Playter used to say she had been a Japanese woman in a previous existence.

Powys had written to Hara before he left Japan recommending him to visit Winchester, Salisbury and Stonehenge. Hara's tight schedule had made this impossible, and he recalls being conscience-stricken when seeing the look of disappointment on Powys's face.

Several years later, Hara adds, after Powys's death, he was returning to Japan from the U.S.A. and made a special diversion to England to visit these places, stimulated by Powys's advice and kindness.

I was fortunate enough to pay several visits to Professor Hara at his attractive house in suburban Tokyo. Here, against a backdrop of pine trees and paper-screens, we had many a discussion, Hara never letting his ailing condition prevent his launching himself at desk and bookshelf to retrieve an item of interest—a photograph of John Cowper, a letter from Blunden—before collapsing in his chair again, breathless but triumphant, as his maid brought another fortifying pot of green tea.

Ichiro Hara's work on Powys was carried out in comparative isolation within his own cultural and intellectual circles. He broke new ground in Japan and established a sound basis there for further interest in Powys. His translations and studies remain as a considerable achievement and, it is to be hoped, an inspiration.

ANTHONY HEAD

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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JACK BARBERA is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Mississippi. He has published numerous articles on the poetry of John Berryman and has co-edited *Me Again: Uncollected Writings of Stevie Smith* with William McBrien (Virago, 1981) with whom he is now writing a biography of Stevie Smith.

SIMON BARKER is engaged in research on R. S. Thomas at Saint David's University College, Lampeter. He has contributed criticism to *Poetry Wales*.

ANGELA BLAEN tutors part-time in English in the University of Exeter while writing a Ph.D. thesis on West Country Authors and Folklore. Her publications include *Devon's Sacred Grove* (Toucan, 1983).

MARIUS BUNING is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the Free University, Amsterdam, and the editor of the *Dutch Quarterly Review*. He has published articles on Joyce and Beckett in addition to two on T. F. Powys (*English Studies*, 1969, and *Powys Review*, 1980).

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

JUDITH COLLINS is an art historian specializing in twentieth-century art. She is the author of *The Omega Workshops* (1984), and is currently working on a book about European sculpture 1905-1915. She works regularly for the Arts Council, the British Council and the Tate Gallery.

MURRAY J. EVANS teaches medieval and Renaissance literature, at the University of Winnipeg, Canada. He has published articles on Malory's *Morte Darthur* and Chaucer's *Troilus*.

DAVID GOODWAY is a lecturer in History in the Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Leeds and author of *London Chartism 1838-1848* (Cambridge U.P., 1982). His previous publications include an article in *London Magazine*, June/July 1977, on Charles Lahr, the anarchist bookseller who was one of T. F. Powys's publishers.

BRYN GUNNELL is a lecturer at the British Institute in Paris. His published work includes *Calabrian Summer* (Rupert & Hart-Davis (1965) and *The Cashew-Nut Girl and other stories* (Paul Elek, 1974) and contributions to *London Magazine*, *Contemporary Review* and *Stand*.

ANDREW HASSAM has recently completed post-graduate work on critical theory and narratology at

the University of East Anglia and University College, Cardiff. His study of George Gissing's "autobiography" *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* will appear during 1985 in *English Literature in Transition*. His fiction has appeared in *Ambit*.

IAN HUGHES is a lecturer in English at the Normal College, Bangor. He has recently edited the uncut version of J. C. Powys's *Maiden Castle* which now awaits publication. He has published poems in a small volume, *Slate* (Arfron, 1977) and in *Poetry Wales*.

MORINE KRISDOTTIR is author of *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* (Macdonald, 1980). She has recently left lecturing in Canada to make her home in Britain and now intends to occupy her time in travelling and freelance writing.

PETER MILES lectures in English at Saint David's University College, Lampeter, and is reviews editor of the *Powys Review*. He has recently co-edited Anthony Trollope's *Framley Parsonage* (Penguin, 1984) and contributed an essay on Robert Tressell to *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, (Edward Arnold, 1984), edited by Jeremy Hawthorn.

MALDWYN MILLS holds a personal chair in English at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. He has published editions of *Lybeaus Desconus*, *Six Middle English Romances*, *Fragments of an Early Fourteenth Century Guy of Warwick* (with Daniel Huws), and a revision of the Everyman text of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. He is currently completing an edition of *Horn Childe* for Middle English Texts.

EDWIN MORGAN was Titular Professor of English at Glasgow University until 1980. His books include: *The Second Life* (1968); *Instamatic Poems* (1972); *From Glasgow to Saturn* (1973); *The New Divan* (1977); *Poems of Thirty Years* (1982) and *Grafts/Takes* (1983). His latest publication, a 51 poem sequence *Sonnets From Glasgow* (1984), is published by Mariscat Press of Glasgow.

SUSAN RANDS, step-daughter of Malcolm Elwin, on coming down from Oxford wrote for *John O'London's Weekly*, 1951-2. With her husband and children she has lived in Malaya and Germany and now farms a small-holding near Glastonbury.

LAURIE THOMPSON is Lecturer in Charge of Swedish at Saint David's University College, Lampeter. He is a committee-member of the Swedish-English Literary Translators' Association and editor of *Swedish Book Review*.

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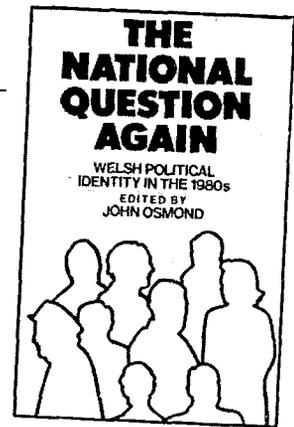
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