

# The Powys Review

NUMBER SIXTEEN





# **The Powys Review**

**Editor**

Belinda Humfrey

**Reviews Editor**

Peter Miles

**Advisory Board**

Glen Cavaliero

Ben Jones

Ned Lukacher

**Correspondence, contributions, and books for review may be addressed to the Editor, Department of English, Saint David's University College, Lampeter, Dyfed, SA48 7ED.**

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# Theo Dunnet

## John Cowper and Littleton Powys: Cambridge in the 'Nineties, and a Wedding

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To H. Sholto Searle Parker

Thro' many paths, by many differing ways,  
Some perilous and steep, some smooth and plain  
Together we have wandered—once again  
We meet where the soft wind more sweetly strays  
'Mid heavy-fruited orchards and ripe corn  
Than when it kissed the maiden flowers of Spring—  
Break, O my friend, the fond environing  
Of present things and dear delights unborn  
And tread with me the sweet ways of the Past  
A little while; too soon the masked years  
Lay bare their faces to the gaze of time  
But precious-burdened Memory can outlast  
All pleasures, can forestall all future tears  
And prove a golden and Elysian clime.  
"Jack"

This signed poem in John Cowper Powys's handwriting is inside the front cover of a copy of his *Odes and Other Poems* (London, 1896). The book is in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in Sir Hugh Walpole's "Nineties" collection (Walpole e. 581); he "bequeathed to the library his collection of books and manuscripts relating to English authors of the last decade of the nineteenth century" (*Bodleian Library Record*, vol. 2, no. 18, pp. 40-41, 1942).

I was intrigued as to the identity of H. Sholto Searle Parker and resolved to find out who he was. After several months of looking through the works by and about the Powys family, checking various bibliographies and generally going around in circles I was no closer to my elusive friend. It then occurred to me that he might have been at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge with John Cowper, so I started searching through the Cambridge University Calendar from the late 1880s and in one for 1894-5 (Fig. 1) I

came upon the name Parker, Harry Sholto Searle a few names down from that of Powys, John Cowper. J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses 1752-1900* (Cambridge, 1940-1954) provided more information about H. S. S. Parker and subsequently the information on many of his and John Cowper Powys's contemporaries.

After more research I traced H. S. S. Parker's eldest son and arranged to meet him in London on 28 November 1984. Mr. W. S. Parker was very helpful and we had an interesting conversation. He lent me his copy of *The Rottingdean School Magazine*, vol. X, no. 4, March 1921, which carried an obituary of his father who had died on 1 March 1921, from which the following is taken.

Harry Sholto Searle Parker was born at The Grange, East Barnet, Herts. on the 20th. April 1872. He went to King's School, Canterbury where he was four years in the school cricket XI, of which he was captain his last two years, and he was also a member of the rugby XV. In 1891 he gained an open classical scholarship at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He played in the Freshman's and Seniors' matches, and as showing the standard of cricket in those days, it may be noted that among those playing in these matches were F. S. Jackson, C. M. Wells, and K. S. Ranjitsinhji.

On leaving Cambridge he was an assistant master in several schools before going to Rottingdean as assistant master in 1902. He was headmaster, in partnership, April 1911-July 1916 and sole headmaster from July 1916.

Mr W. S. Parker also showed me his father's photograph album with many group photographs of his father's Cambridge days at Corpus Christi College between 1891 and 1894, as well as his school days at Canterbury



- CLARKE, Alured George, b. 17 Aug. 1873—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1892. Rugby XV Dec. 1893. Entered the Church.
- CLARKE, Charles Erskine, b. 10 Feb. 1871—d. 8 Mar. 1926. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1889. Gravediggers March 1893.
- CLATWORTHY, Hugh Edward, b. 10 April 1872—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1891. Chess Club March 1894, 3rd year 1894. Entered the Church.
- COBHAM, John Lawrence, b. 12 May 1873—d. ? Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894, Rugby XV Dec. 1893, 3rd year June 1894. Entered the Church. Archdeacon of Totnes 1933-1947.
- DAWES, Alfred Wilkinson, b. 23 Sept. 1871—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894, 3rd year June 1894. Entered the Church.
- ELWIN, William Hedger, b. 8 May 1873—d. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct 1891. Rugby XV Dec. 1893, 3rd year June 1894. Entered the Church.
- FISHER, Frederick Anstice, b. 17 July 1871—d. ? Admitted Corpus 7 July 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891. Entered the Church.
- FRAZER, Norman Lewis, b. 22 April 1873—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1892. Chess Club March 1894. Schoolmaster and headmaster. Author *English history illustrated from original sources*, etc. etc.
- HARMER, Rev. John Reginald, b. 11 Aug. 1857—d. 9 March 1944. Admitted Kings 1877. Gravediggers March 1893 and March 1894. Librarian Corpus 1891-95, Dean 1893-95, Bishop of Adelaide 1895-1905, Bishop of Rochester 1905-30. Editor, *Dr. Lightfoot's Unpublished Works*.
- HODGSON, John St. Barbe, b. 25 Nov. 1872—d. 20 Sept. 1926. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1891. Fireflies June 1894, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894, 3rd year June 1894. Schoolmaster.
- HUMPHRYS, Llewellyn Winter, b. 28 Nov. 1871—d. ? Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894 (Hon. Sec.), 3rd year June 1894. Solicitor.
- KOELLE, Constantine Philpot, \* b. 29 Nov. 1862 at Constantinople—d. circa 1943. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894 (Pres.), Gravediggers March 1893 (Hon. Sec.) and March 1894, Rugby XV Dec. 1893 (Hon. Sec.), Chess Club March 1894 (Pres.), 3rd year June 1894. Entered the Church.
- LANG, Henry Astell, b. 12 March 1874—9 June 1915. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1893. Rugby XV Dec. 1893. Entered the army. Major, Worcs. Rgt., mentioned in despatches, killed in action Gallipoli.
- LEWIS, Gerald Williams, b. 20 April 1872—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1892. Gravediggers March 1894, Chess Club March 1894, Small group circa 1893-4.
- LEWIS, Robert Walter Michael, b. 29 Sept. 1866—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1899. Gravediggers March 1893 (Pres.). Entered the Church.
- LINGLEY, Arnold Gale, b. 26 July 1870—d. 4 Nov. 1947. Admitted Corpus 30 Sept. 1890. Gravediggers March 1893. Entered the Church.
- LYON, Thomas Henry, b. 28 May 1869—d. 25 Jan. 1953. Admitted Corpus 30 Sept. 1890. Gravediggers March 1893, Small group circa 1893-4. Architect. Fellow C.C.C. shortly after 1914-18 war and was in 1920 appointed the first director of design at Cambridge University School of Architecture, a post he filled until his retirement in 1936. (*The Times*, 26 Jan. 1953, p. 8.)
- MANSFIELD, Charles, b. 16 Dec. 1870—d. ? Admitted Corpus 30 Sept. 1890. Gravediggers March 1894, Chess Club March 1894. Schoolmaster, headmaster, then entered the Church.
- MARCY, William Nichols, b. 17 Oct. 1873—d. Feb. 1947. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1892. Rugby XV Dec. 1893. Private tutor Eton, and in education in America under Rev. J. C. McKenzie.

\*J. C. Powys spells this name correctly in *Autobiography* (p. 176); R. P. Graves, *The Brothers Powys*, 1983, spells it incorrectly (p. 29).



Fireflies November, 1891  
Back row standing, Left to right: R. S. Paterson, E. Withers, J. C. Powys, R. Mayall, F. N. Reckitt, F. A. Fisher.  
Seated, Left to right: J. L. Cobham, H. S. S. Parker, R. E. L. Townsend (on floor), C. P. Koelle, L. W. Humphrys, B. S. Matthews.



The Gravediggers March, 1893

Back row standing, Left to right: J. C. Powys, A. G. Lingley, H. S. S. Parker, C. E. Clarke.  
 Seated, Left to right: Rev. J. R. Harmer, C. P. Koelle (Hon. Sec.), R. W. M. Lewis (Pres.), Rev. C. A. E. Pollock, J. Calvert.  
 Seated on the ground: T. H. Lyon.



Rugby XV December 1893

Standing Left to right: W. H. Elwin, A. H. Swann, J. L. Cobham, G. H. Todd, W. N. Marcy, J. S. Pegg, J. C. Powys, S. Bourne, H. Lang, Dan Hayward.  
Seated, Left to right: L. C. Powys, C. P. Koelle (Hon. Sec.), R. S. Paterson (Capt.), H. S. S. Parker, A. G. Clarke.  
Seated on the ground, Left to right: E. J. S. Athawes, E. A. Titley, J. A. Stevens.

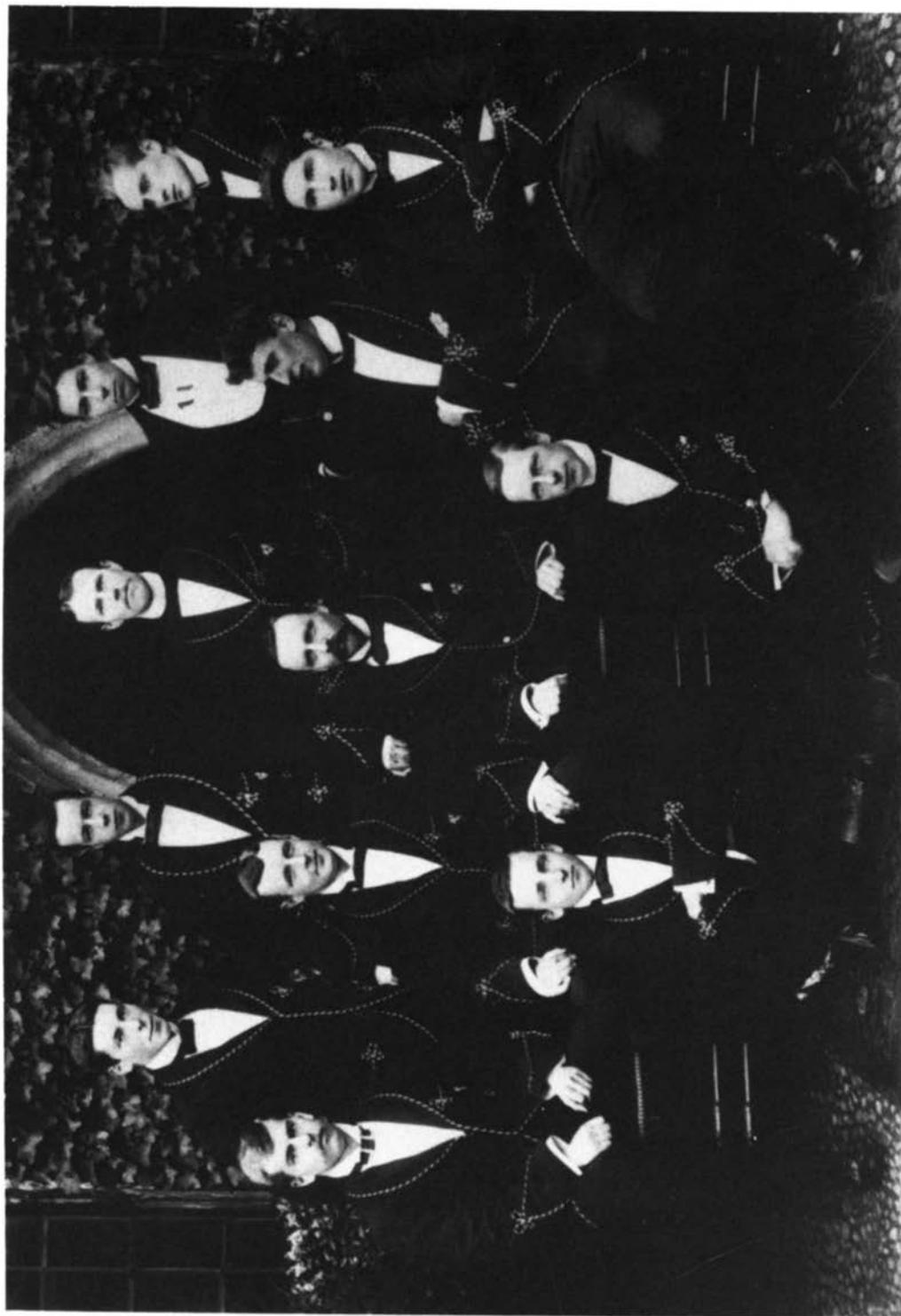


The Gravediggers March, 1894

Standing, Left to right: B. S. Matthews, Rev. C. A. E. Pollock, E. C. Pearce.

Seated, Left to right: C. Mansfield, H. S. S. Parker (Hon. Sec.), J. C. Powys (Pres.), Rev. J. R. Harmer, C. P. Koelle.

Seated on the ground, Left to right: J. A. Stevens, G. W. Lewis.



Chess Club March, 1894

Standing, Left to right: N. Frazer, H. E. Clatworthy, C. P. H. Reynolds, H. S. S. Parker, E. J. S. Athawes.  
Seated, Left to right: F. N. Reckitt, B. S. Matthews (Hon. Sec.), C. P. Koelle (Pres.), C. Mansfield, J. C. Powys.  
Seated on the ground, Left to right: J. A. Stevens, G. W. Lewis.



Fireflies June, 1894

Standing, Left to right: J. C. Powys, A. W. Dawes, J. L. Cobham, O. Williams, J. Marshall, J. St. B. Hodgson.  
 Seated, Left to right: H. S. S. Parker, L. W. Humphrys (Hon. Sec.), C. P. Koelle (Pres.), B. S. Matthews, R. S. Paterson.  
 Seated on the ground, Left to right: E. Withers, F. N. Reckitt.



Cricket group June, 1894  
 Standing, Left to right: G. H. Todd, Dan Hayward, E. W. Michell (rear) F. S. Smith, G. F. Tendall,  
 L. C. Powys, F. G. Masters (rear), J. A. Stevens, E. A. Titley, J. S. Pegg, S. E. Lea.  
 Seated, Left to right: E. Withers, J. P. Candler (Hon. Sec.), H. S. S. Parker (Capt.), B. S. Matthews,  
 J. St. B. Hodgson.



Cricket XI June, 1894  
 Standing, Left to right: Dan Hayward, F. G. Masters, L. C. Powys, J. S. Pegg, G. F. Tendall.  
 Seated, Left to right: E. Withers, J. P. Candler (Hon. Sec.), H. S. S. Parker (Capt.), B. S. Matthews,  
 J. St. B. Hodgson.  
 Seated on the ground, Left to right: J. A. Stevens, A. E. Titley.



Third year June, 1894

Back row standing: Cannot trace any names.

Front row standing, Left to right: F. N. Reckitt, 3rd in pince-nez R. Mayall, 7th W. H. Elwin, 9th A. W. Dawes.  
 Seated, Left to right: L. W. Humphrys, H. E. Clatworthy, E. Withers, C. P. Koelle, H. S. S. Parker, B. S. Matthews, J. St. B. Hodgson, W. Crockett(?),  
 J. L. Cobham.

Seated on the ground, Left to right: R. E. L. Townsend, J. Marshall, J. C. Powys, O. Williams.



Sidney Dance May Week 1894  
J. C. Powys seated next to first woman from the left.  
H. S. S. Parker far right standing.



Card players circa 1893-1894  
 Left to right: L. C. Powys(?) H. S. S. Parker, not known, E. J. Athawes.



Group circa 1893-1894.  
 Leaning against ivy covered doorway L. C. Powys.  
 1st from Left sitting E. J. S. Athawes, 3rd from Left sitting H. S. S. Parker, on ground G. W. Lewis, 4th  
 from Left T. H. Lyon, 5th F. N. Reckitt.

- MARSHALL, J. (possibly Hugh John), b. May 1872—d. 22 June 1950. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies June 1894, 3rd year June 1894. Entered the Church.
- MATTHEWS, Basil Septimus, b. 28 July 1872—d. ? Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894. Gravediggers March 1894, Chess Club March 1894 (Hon. Sec.), Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894, 3rd year June 1894.
- MAYALL, Reginald, b. 14 May 1872—d. 14 Oct. 1944. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891, 3rd year June 1894. Entered the Church. Served in the Great War 1914-1919, mentioned in despatches.
- PARKER, Harry Sholto Searle, b. 20 April 1872—d. March 1921. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894. Gravediggers March 1893 and March 1894 (Hon. Sec.), Rugby XV Dec. 1893—holding rugby cap for 1891-2-3, Chess Club March 1894, Sidney Dance May 1894, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894 (Capt.), Card players circa 1893-4, Small group circa 1893-4, 3rd year June 1894. Schoolmaster then headmaster.
- PATERSON, Robert Stanley, b. 12 March 1873—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894, Rugby XV Dec. 1893 (Capt.). Called to the bar 1897, also partner firm of chartered accountants.
- PEARCE, Edmund Courtenay, b. 17 Dec. 1870—d. 13 Oct. 1935. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1889. Gravediggers March 1894. Dean C.C.C. 1901-1914, Master C.C.C. 1914-1927, Bishop of Derby 1927-1935.
- PEGG, John Stanton, changed surname to PEGGE 1911, b. 24 April 1874—d. 15 Oct. 1944. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1893. Rugby XV Dec. 1893, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894. Entered the Church.
- POLLOCK, Rev. Charles Archibald Edmund, b. 3 May 1858—d. 13 Aug. 1944. Admitted Trinity 1877. Gravediggers March 1893 and March 1894. Fellow C.C.C. 1882, Mathematical lecturer 1882-1919, Dean 1895-1901, Senior Proctor 1911-12, Bursar 1913-28, President 1921-28.
- POWYS, John Cowper, b. 8 Oct. 1872—d. 17 June 1963. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894, Gravediggers March 1893 and March 1894 (Pres.), Rugby XV Dec. 1893, Chess Club March 1894, Sidney Dance May 1894, 3rd year June 1894.
- POWYS, Littleton Charles, b. 25 April 1874—d. 27 Sept. 1955. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1893. Rugby XV Dec. 1893, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894, Card players circa 1893-4, Small group circa 1893-4. Schoolmaster and headmaster. Author *The Joy of It* and *Still the Joy of It*.
- RECKITT, Frank Norman, b. 24 May 1872—d. 20 Aug. 1940. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894, Chess Club March 1894, Card players circa 1893-4, Small group circa 1893-4, 3rd year June 1894. Architect. Served in South African War 1900, and the Great War 1914-19.
- REYNOLDS, Charles Percy Herbert, b. 24 June 1869—d. 1944. Admitted Corpus 1892. Chess Club March 1894. Entered the Church.
- STEVENS, James Algernon, b. 2 Oct. 1873—d. 11 Dec. 1934. Admitted to Corpus 1892. Rugby XV Dec. 1893. Gravediggers March 1894, Chess Club March 1894, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894. Served in the Great War 1914-1919, O.B.E. Chief collector customs Burma 1913-1921. Chief collector customs Bombay 1921-1925.
- SWANN, Arthur Henry, b. 19 Aug. 1868—d. 4 Dec. 1930. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1892. Rugby XV Dec. 1893. Entered the Church.
- TITLEY, Edward Addison, b. 13 July 1875—d. Oct. 1924. Admitted Corpus 1 Oct. 1893. Rugby XV Dec. 1893, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894. Solicitor.
- TODD, Gavin Henry, b. 1874—d. 1943. Admitted Corpus 1893, Rugby XV Dec. 1893, Cricket group and Cricket XI June

1894. (Athletics "blue" 3 miles 1894, 1895). Schoolmaster.

TOWNSEND, Robert Edward Laurence, b. 31 Jan. 1874—d. 2 March 1918. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891, 3rd year June 1894. Entered the army and retired in 1905. Served in the Great War 1914-1919.

WILLIAMS, O. (possibly Edward Osborne), b. 23 April 1872—d. 13 Aug. 1927. Admitted Corpus 29 Sept. 1891. Fireflies June 1894, 3rd year June 1894. Entered the Church.

WITHERS, Edward, b. 13 Oct. 1873—d. ? Admitted Corpus 1891. Fireflies Nov. 1891 and June 1894, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894. Schoolmaster.

HAYWARD, Dan. Rugby XV Dec. 1893, Cricket group and Cricket XI June 1894. Corpus Christi College groundsman.

The people above were all in the photographs in which John Cowper or his brother Littleton appeared. Below is a list of some of them who also appear in other sporting photographs in the album which have not been reproduced.

Rugby XV Dec. 1891.

H. S. S. Parker and R. E. L. Townsend.  
Cricket XI June 1892.

J. St. B. Hodgson, A. G. Lingley (Hon. Sec.), B. S. Matthews, H. S. S. Parker, E. Withers.

Rugby XV Dec. 1892.

L. Calvert, A. G. Clarke, J. L. Cobham, C. P. Koelle, H. S. S. Parker, R. S. Paterson.

Cricket XI June 1893.

E. J. S. Athawes, J. Calvert, J. St. B. Hodgson, B. S. Matthews, H. S. S. Parker, E. Withers.

(Some like B. S. Matthews, R. S. Paterson, J. L. Cobham and John Cowper's friend from Sidney Sussex, W. E. Lutyens were also involved in athletics (Fig. 2).

THE GRANTA. NOVEMBER 25TH, 1893.

SIDNEY.

These sports came off last Monday. Lutyens did not run in the long distance events. He ran in the 100 Yards and in the Quarter, and got second in both. The Quarter was a handicap. Lutyens ran very well in this event, being just beaten (7½ yds.) in 51 2-5th secs. The sprint was also fast. The Strangers' race went to Batchelor, with 12 yards start, in 21 2-5th secs. Attlee seemed off colour. Chief details:—100 Yards Race—1, H. M. Smith; time 10½ secs. High Jump—1, W. H. Branscombe; 4 ft. 10½ in. Putting the Weight—1, E. M. Corner; 31 ft. 1 in. Hurdles (120 Yards)—1, W. H. Branscombe; 2, W. E. Lutyens; time, 19 2-5th secs. Long Jump—1, R. J. Castley; 19 ft. 1 in. 440 Yards Handicap—1, G. P. Greenhill; time, 51 2-5th sec. 220 Yards Handicap—1, W. E. Lutyens (scratch); 2, S. P. Greenhill (22 yds.); time, 23 min. 3-5th sec. Two Miles Handicap—1, W. B. Heycock (100 yds); N. A. F. Worthington (scratch); time, 11 min. 10 sec. Final Heat—1, E. Batchelor (Caius), 12 yds.; 2, F. H. E. Wigram (Trinity), 12½ yds.

CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE.

These Sports took place on Tuesday and Wednesday, November 21st and 22nd. G. H. Todd ran very well indeed on the first day in the mile, and fairly well in the Three Miles, on the second day. Matthews ran well in the 100 Yards. The Strangers' Race (300 Yards Handicap) produced a magnificent race, FitzHerbert, with 1½ yards start, just beating Lewin by half-a-yard, in 31 4-5th sec. Both men ran beautifully. This is the best time ever done at Fenner's, for the distance. The amateur record is 31½ secs. Chief details:—First day—100 Yards Race—1, B. S. Matthews; 2, R. S. Paterson; time 10 4-5th sec. High Jump—1, B. S. Matthews; 2, W. N. Marcy; 4 ft. 10 in. Half-Mile Handicap—1, A. H. Swan (30 yds.); 2, S. P. Davis (25 yds.); time 2 mins. 10 secs. Throwing the Hammer—J. L. Cobham, 70ft. 6 in. One Mile Race—S. H. Todd; time 4 mins. 44½ secs. Long Jump—B. S. Matthews, 20ft. 10½ in. Strangers' Race (300 Yards Handicap)—1, W. FitzHerbert, Trinity Hall (1½ yds.); 2, C. H. Lewin, Trinity (scratch); won by half-a-yard; time 31 4-5th sec. Second day—120 Yards Handicap (final heat)—1, W. N. Marcy (scratch); 2, R. S. Paterson (1 yard); time 12 4-5th sec. Quarter-Mile—1, B. S. Matthews (penalised 8 yds.); 2, S. Bourne; time 56½ secs. Three Miles Race—1, G. H. Todd; 2, S. Bourne; time 17 mins. 3 secs.

Fig. 2

The one formal group I cannot find any information about is the Fireflies. The archivist at Corpus, Mr George Barlow has told me he can find (to date) no trace of the Fireflies; he also asked Dr Patrick Bury (author, *The College of Corpus Christi and of the Blessed Virgin Mary: a history from 1822 to 1952*, Cambridge, 1952) who also had no knowledge of them. All the people in both photographs of the Fireflies were admitted to Corpus on 29 Sept./1 Oct. 1891. They were all new to Cambridge life and may within the first few weeks have organised a small dining club or similar social group and when they went down in 1894 so the Fireflies faded away.

The Gravediggers, who were they and what did they do? Bury tells us that "One of [Arnold Joseph Wallis's] first acts was to help bridge the gulf between dons and undergraduates by founding the Gravediggers, the play-reading society which still survives". (Bury, p. 229) ". . . having come into being probably about 1879. They met to read plays of Shakespeare, often taking two meetings to finish a play, and it was not until October 1906 that they began to widen their scope so as to include other authors." (Bury, p. 104)

The other Corpus society that John Cowper belonged to was the Chess Club. "Foremost among them in social prestige was the Chess Club or 'Cheeser'. This august body soon departed from its early austerity. After 1881 more than one game of whist was allowed and, although for some years a chess-board figured solemnly in the annual photograph, the club's pretence of living seriously up to its name was soon abandoned. By 1892 the club, which had evolved its handsome jacket at least two years earlier, was ordering two dozen packs of cards with the Corpus Arms, and whist was king. The minutes, too, grave or gay, show that it had become a much more convivial society than in the 'seventies.'" (Bury p. 103)

Littleton in *The Joy of It* (London, 1937) asks "And where are all those members of that exclusive club, the Chess Club, that used to be photographed with such regularity in their dinner-jackets braided with the college

colours? Where are the other members of the Gravediggers, those students of Shakespeare? How has fate treated them?" (p. 98)

In *Autobiography* (p. 162) John Cowper mentions "there was the athletic set, divided again among themselves into those who favoured football and those who favoured rowing. I fell into the hands of the rowing ones".

Mr George Barlow from Corpus in a letter to me dated 8 Feb. 1985 says, "I think I mentioned that J. C. P. was a member of the Chess Club and there are two photographs of him in a group. Members were restricted to 12, it was selective in its members who were usually athletes of some kind. So this suggests he had some claim to athletic prowess." He goes on to say that he "can find no reference to his membership of a boat — not did Dr Bury have any recollection. The Boat Club records are fuller than those for any other sport."

So much for sport and rugby and yet we have a photograph of him with the Rugby XV of Dec. 1893. Far from shunning the athletic set, John Cowper in his time at Cambridge seems on the evidence of these photographs to have consistently spent a fair amount of his time with some of the sporting fraternity.

Littleton writes of going up to Cambridge, "At last October came and up to Cambridge we went together, John for his last year, I for my first. Throughout that year we saw very little of each other. At Cambridge John's ways were not my ways, nor his thoughts my thoughts, nor (with two or three exceptions) his friends my friends." (*The Joy of It*, p. 96) Yet we now have conclusive proof that they at least shared many acquaintances.

Then: "In 1895, my second year, the Lent races were not rowed; for it was the year of the great frost, which lasted all through February and for the first week or so of March, and the river was ice bound. It was a bad term for work, but such a term for skating there had never been. Every one maintained that each day was bound to be the last for that delightful sport, and the chance must not be missed. I remember how

with C. A. E. Pollock, who alone of the dons of my time is still a Fellow of the college, and Clayton Greene afterwards of St. Mary's Hospital, and Gavin Todd for many years a housemaster at Sedbergh, I skated down the river to Ely. Todd was not satisfied with the exercise that gave him and skated back again, a much more adventurous journey." (p. 100) Of cricket, he tells us there was "as much cricket as the heart desired, played largely on our Corpus ground which, carefully nursed by Dan Hayward, was one of the best in the 'Varsity" (pp. 100-101).

Of Harry Sholto Searle Parker with whom he must have spent a considerable time between 1891 and 1894, John Cowper makes no mention in *Autobiography*. The hastily penned poem circa 1896 is all I found, but then Littleton in *The Joy of It* after telling of his failing to obtain two teaching posts writes:

But the gods were looking after me. During the summer a great friend of mine H. S. S. Parker, who was afterwards Headmaster of Rottingdean School, came to stay with me at Montacute; he was always popular at home with everyone, and was greatly approved of by both my father and mother. He was a good cricketer and he and I used to play cricket of some sort or other almost every day. One of these matches happened to be on my old school ground at Sherborne. In this match among others playing was D. E. Norton, Headmaster of King's School, Bruton. Now it chanced he was looking out for a master to take the classics of his fourth and fifth forms, and he asked me whether I could give him information about a man who had applied for the post. I told him I scarcely knew the man, but that my friend Parker knew him well and could tell him everything he wanted to know. Parker's report was not a particularly favourable one. In a few days' time I had a letter from Norton asking me whether I would consider taking the post, and expressing his desire to see me on his return to Bruton. In due course I paid him a visit, had a most pleasant lunch with him and his gracious wife; and he then and there offered me the appointment which I most gladly accepted. And so it came about after all that games had played a useful part in my education; for my first appointment was

due to a casual meeting of two cricketers on my old school ground at Sherborne. (pp. 102-104)

\* \* \*

In 1896 John Cowper Powys got married to Margaret Alice Lyon. This is referred to by H. P. Collins in *John Cowper Powys, Old Earth Man* (London, 1966) as "the marriage which he has always allowed to remain something of a mystery" (p. 30). Nowhere has there been a description from family, friends or researchers until now. Two other photographs in Harry Parker's album are of this wedding which took place in 1896.

Mr Alfred Lyon retired to Ilsington, Devon from Manchester in 1864, bought an old farmhouse, and set himself up as a country gentleman, with an eye to the mineral deposits under his land. His daughter Margaret Alice, by his second wife Fanny, was baptized at Ilsington on 24 April 1874 by the Rev. J. S. Shields, curate. Alfred Lyon died in November 1898.

The Ilsington Church Register records that the couple were married on 9 April 1896; the entry is:

"1896. April 9th. John Cowper Powys, full age, bachelor, gentleman of St. John's Lewes, son of Charles Francis Powys, clerk in Holy Orders.

to

Margaret Alice Lyon, full age, spinster, of Ilsington daughter of Alfred Lyon esquire."

Mr Dick Wills of Narracombe, Ilsington very kindly supplied me with the above information and also the two transcriptions below.

#### Marriage of Miss Margaret Lyon.

Ilsington was en fete in celebration of the marriage of Miss Margaret Alice Lyon, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lyon of Middlecott, with Mr. J. Cowper Powys, son of the Rev. C. F. Powys of Montacute Vicarage, Somerset. The church was artistically decorated, and it was crowded by friends present to manifest the affectionate regard in which they held the bride; while outside triumphal arches had been erected in honour



of the wedding. Guests were hospitably entertained after the service by Mr. and Mrs. Lyon and in the evening bonfires were lit at Middlecott in celebration of the happy event. The bride's wedding dress was of ivory Venetian satin, trimmed with antique lace, and she wore a wreath of orange-blossom and veil. Her bridesmaids were Miss F. C. Lyon, sister; Miss Powys, sister of the bridegroom; Miss Hale, Miss Nellie James and Miss Edith James. They wore dresses of pale blue silk alpaca with floral design, trimmed with coffee lace; scarf of white silkmerveilleux, white straw hats, trimmed with white satin ribbon and daffodils, and carried bouquets of daffodils. The bride was given away by her father and Mr. Littleton C. Powys, brother of the bridegroom was best man. The Rev. T. Hale, vicar of Ilsington; the Rev. C. F. Powys, father of the bridegroom and the Rev. W. E. Lutyens of Portsea officiated. During the service a hymn specially composed by the bridegroom was sung. The bride's travelling dress was of violet corduroy cloth, with Louis quatorze coat, vest of chine silk in tone of

mauve, trimmed with ecru lace. She also wore a black picture hat, trimmed with black ostrichfeathers and chine ribbon.

This was copied by Mr Wills from a newspaper cutting book which belonged to his aunt, Miss Daisy Braim Wills of Narracombe, Ilsington. Narracombe adjoins Middlecott and the Wills and Lyons were friends for many years. Unfortunately I have not been able to identify the name of the newspaper.

The following is an extract from the diary of Alfred Lyon of Middlecott.

April 9th. 1896.

Maggie my daughter and Mr. J. C. Powys were married at Ilsington Church at 2-30 p.m. There were a great number of people present. The Rev. Hale, Rev. Powys and Mr. Lingley read the marriage service. We had the Bovey [Bovey Tracey] Bandsmen this afternoon and they played until dark. We had about 40 visitors at the house.



Standing between Littleton and Alfred Lyon(?) in the small group picture is, I think John Cowper's sister Gertrude. In the larger picture back row centre is the Rev. C. F. Powys. Gertrude is standing over her mother's left shoulder. Seated on the ground on Littleton's right is E. C. Pearce and on his left T. H. Lyon.

The Rev. W. E. Lutyens was curate of Portsea, Hants., between 1895-7; C. P. Koelle was curate there between 1894-6 (Venn).

But a great event came into my life at this time, namely my first encounter with Bernard Price O'Neill, my best and life long friend. I owe my friendship with Dr. O'Neill entirely to my marriage. Without my marriage I should never have known this man of unique genius. (*Autobiography*, p. 259)

O'Neill is possibly standing next to the Rev. C. F. Powys or maybe second from right.

"... and Dr. Pearce, my son's uncle by marriage, was in the lodge." (*Autobiography*, p. 160) "Dr. Pearce, who had married in 1899 Fanny Constance [Margar-

et's bridesmaid] daughter of Mr. Alfred Lyon of Middlecott, Ilsington, Devon, and sister of Mr. T. H. Lyon, the architect, . . ." (Bury p. 153). When E. C. Pearce, Bishop of Derby died in 1953 the "Rev. Littleton Powys (nephew) attended [the] funeral service in Derby Cathedral Wednesday Oct. 16 1935" (*Times*, 17 Oct. 1935, p. 17).

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jane Burrige for reproducing the photographs for me, Mr Dick Wills of Narracombe, Ilsington, Devon, for providing information about the wedding, Mr George Barlow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, for diligently searching Corpus archives, Mr Jim Brister for general help and encouragement as well as other members of staff at both the Bodleian and the Radcliffe Science Library. I would also like to thank my wife and daughter for putting up with hearing nothing but talk of the Powys family for the last few months. Also Mr Gerald Pollinger of Laurence Pollinger Ltd. for permission to reproduce the poem by John Cowper Powys to H. Solto Searle Parker. Lastly I would like to dedicate this article to Mr William Searle Parker in memory of his father Harry Sholto Searle Parker without whom none of this would have come to be written.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Littleton Powys's photograph album is in the Corpus Christi College Archives. It included rowing, athletic and rugby photographs containing many of the people mentioned previously.

A photograph album of the Chess Club is also there, again containing names already familiar. T. H. Lyon was Pres. Lent 1893, L. C. Powys was Hon. Sec. Oct. 1895 and Pres. Lent 1896. It contains one or two more photographs with J. C. Powys.

The 400th Meeting of the Chess Club was held on Friday 30 April 1897 at the Lion Hotel, Cambridge. L. C. Powys's card is signed by many of the members including J. S. Pegg, H. S. S. Parker, E. J. S. Athawes and J. P. Candler. H. S. S. Parker proposed a toast to "Present Members", the President responded.

The Rowing Club Minutes: T. H. Lyon was cox many times and served on the committee; J. L. Cobham, F. N. Reckitt, C. P. Koelle, H. E. Clatworthy and L. C. Powys are mentioned.

On Littleton's days at Corpus, there is a letter to Mr (now Dr) Bury in answer to a question about his grandfather which contains the following (dated 12 Aug. 1950, Sherborne), "I am afraid I was very idle but very happy during my Corpus days, but I knew I was wasting my time—but that did not prevent me from having a remarkably happy life."

John Cowper Powys left Corpus with a 2nd class History Tripos in 1894 (Historical Register of the University of Cambridge to the year 1910). For this he would at that time have largely worked on his own.

43 To H. Skelton Sarah Parker

This many paths, by many differing ways,  
Some perilous and steep, some smooth  
and plain  
Together we have wandered — once again  
We meet where the soft wind more sweetly  
strays  
Mid heavy-fruited orchards and ripe corn  
Ran when it kissed the maiden flowers of  
Spring —  
Breath, O my friend, the fond environing  
Of present things and dear delights unborn  
And tread with me the sweet ways of the Past  
A little while; too soon the marked years  
Have <sup>lay</sup> bare their faces to the gaze of Time  
~~But~~ <sup>But</sup> precious-burdened Memory can outlast  
All pleasures, care foretold, all future tears  
And prove a golden and Elysian clime.  
"Jack."

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# Glen Cavaliero

## John Cowper Powys: Space Traveller\*

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### I

Of the many spots with literary associations to be found in Cambridge (Milton's mulberry tree, for example, in the Fellows' Garden of Christ's College, or Erasmus's tower in Queens') one place still remains unvisited by the majority. It is the stretch of ancient wall beside Coe Fen, where John Cowper Powys received a solitary, momentous epiphany.

I observed, growing upon this wall, certain patches of grass and green moss and yellow stone-crop. Something about the look of these small growths, secluded there in a place seldom passed, and more seldom noticed, seized upon me and caught me up into a sort of Seventh Heaven . . . It is impossible for me to describe it! And yet I never see the least patch of lichen, or moss, or grass, in the veinings of an ancient rock but something of the same feeling returns. Not, however, quite the same; for *that* impression, that vision of 'Living Bread', that mysterious meeting-point of animate with inanimate, had to do with some secret underlying world of rich magic and strange romance.<sup>1</sup>

The creation of a vast literary universe out of a tiny, elusive semi-sensation is an achievement Powys shares with Marcel Proust. A minute prompting draws the writer inward, in Proust's case to the world of memory, in Powys's to that of pre-memory, but in both cases to "infinite riches in a little room". For Powys's attitude to a threatening world was to absorb it into himself. By cultivating sensation he appropriated his physical surroundings for his own, made what happened to him become what he was. The call of the lichen on the stone

was a call to a participation in external nature which he was to interpret as reciprocal. The imagination could create the materials which determined its nature and activity.

But also, for the valetudinarian Proust as for the nervously dyspeptic Powys, inspiration was furthered by their walks along familiar roads and footpaths. In *Autobiography* the latter enquiries rhetorically how he is to express his debt

to that dull, flat, monotonous, tedious, unpicturesque Cambridgeshire landscape? How those roads out of Cambridge—and it seems as if all my most heavenly roads have been out of, rather than into somewhere—come back to my mind now! . . . And not only these in their large aspects, but every swamp-pool, every rushy brook, every weedy estuary, every turnip-field, every grey milestone, every desolate haystack become part of my spirit.<sup>2</sup>

Roads out, gateways in: Powys's literary work relates outer to inner space, the world of physical actuality to the mind's imaginative interpretation of it. One classic instance occurs in the account of Wolf Solent's walk with Gerda through the meadows beside the River Lunt; but examples can be found throughout his novels, and are the very stuff of which they are made. Powys, through relating objective to subjective experience, demonstrates that either is an aspect of the other. But the realisation of such a reconciliation was to be half a lifetime's work, and punishingly won.

Powys was no scientist; but it was technology rather than research (always with the stipulation that there should be no experiments on animals) which aroused his hostility. Being aware of how microscope and telescope together demonstrate the relativity

\*A revised version of a paper read to the Powys Society, 1984.

of human consciousness of space, he would, one presumes, have appreciated Kathleen Raine's description of the natural sciences as "an escape into beauty".

The stars in the great sky and the smallest particles bear a resemblance often observed; as the sky extends into infinite spaces without, so the microscope is the way by which we may enter spaces within, no less vast . . . The microscope too presented the living plant as a series of appearances—of worlds, one might say—among which that seen by the naked eye is but one we call more real than the others only from familiarity and because of the form of our organs of vision.<sup>3</sup>

An attention paid both to minute particulars and to the immeasurable bounds of outer space is a distinctive feature of John Cowper Powys's imagination.

## II

Powys wrote his fourteen novels in a wide variety of places and under a number of different psychological conditions. The first five were the product of personal unhappiness, of uprootedness and an excessive, and barely profitable, mobility; they come from an unstable background, being written in trains and hotels, in the often tense atmosphere of his home at Burpham, in Patchin Place, even at a holiday resort on Lake Otswego:<sup>4</sup> he who was to create a hero called No-Man began his literary career in No-Where (and ended it in Dunnowair). Space in plenty was available, but it was space without significance. To counteract this we find an excessive concentration on spatial enclosure in his first novel, *Wood and Stone*. Here the home village of Montacute ('Nevilton') is presented in welnigh suffocating detail: heavy soil, thick woods, humous atmosphere provide no room in which an individual can breathe. Under these conditions space becomes hostile, dangerous. *Wood and Stone* is Powys's most literal, naturalistic novel, at any rate where scenery is concerned.

It is this moisture, this ubiquitous dampness, that to a certain type of sun-loving nature

makes the region so antipathetic, so disintegrating. Such persons have constantly the feeling of being dragged earthward by some steady centripetal pull, against which they struggle in vain. Earthward they are pulled, and the earth, that seems waiting to receive them, breathes heavy damp breaths of in-drawing voracity, like the mouth of some monster of the slime.<sup>5</sup>

The description is analytic in a faked scientific way, and, rather than employing a subjective use of a metaphor, falls back on simile to make its effects.

In *Rodmoor* the landscape is as exposed as that of *Wood and Stone* is claustrophobic; but it proves no less threatening to its inhabitants. The introspective Adrian Sorio, whose world is solipsistically determined, is unable to face the challenge of the empty marshes and the sea.<sup>7</sup> The town of Rodmoor is not drawn from a 'real' place (though both Aldeburgh and Orford come to mind); rather it is an imaginative distillation in the manner of one of the 'Imaginary Portraits' of Powys's admired Walter Pater, and thus symbolises a spiritual condition in a way that Nevilton does not. The two novels complement each other: in the one, the land absorbs moisture, in the other, the sea devours the land. The one describes the seat of parental authority, the other the place of holiday and freedom; but a contrasting literary methodology in *Rodmoor* still only issues as another story of the self *versus* external space. And the sea, which in *Wood and Stone* is a symbol of liberation, in *Rodmoor* is a killer.

*After My Fashion*, Powys's discarded novel, eschews mythologising. The descriptions of Sussex and New York are an effective blend of factual reportage and subjective interpretation; but the novel by-passes the central Powysian preoccupations by treating its spaces as settings for its story, rather than as controlling elements within it. (To this extent, though in negative terms, it indicates Powys's true achievement.) And in neither England nor America is there room for Richard Storm: once again the hero perishes, this time in a landscape not so much hostile as indifferent. And in *Ducdame*,

where Powys exerts all his descriptive powers in a magical Pateresque evocation of an idealised Dorset-cum-Somerset of woodland, water-meadow and manorial village, the human story does not grow out of it. This is a novel in which the setting is as much the predominant feature as in *After My Fashion* it takes a secondary place.

But in *Wolf Solent* Powys successfully breaks free. The theme of the novel is essentially the same as that of its three predecessors, but here it works towards a muted but positive conclusion. The landscape becomes fused with the protagonist's consciousness, instead of threatening it or illustrating it or setting it off. 'It is my body which has saved me,' Wolf realises; and the book is mediated through the sense impressions of that body which, in every aspect of its experience, articulates itself through its owner's consciousness. The landscape thus combines tactile and visual actuality with the subjective and commemorative aspects of interior vision.

Though the sky was overcast, it was overcast with such a heavenly 'congregation of vapours' that Wolf would not have had it otherwise. There were filmy clouds floating there that seemed to be drifting like the scattered feathers of enormous albatrosses in a pearl-white sea; and behind these feathery travellers was the milky ocean on which they floated. But even that was not all; for the very ocean seemed broken here and there into hollow spaces, ethereal gulfs in the fleecy whiteness; and through these gulfs was visible a pale yellowish mist, as if the universal air was reflecting millions of primrose-buds! Nor was even this vaporious luminosity the final revelation of those veiled heavens. Like the entrance of some great highway of the ether, whose air-spun pavement was not the colour of dust, but the colour of turquoise, there, at one single point above the horizon, the vast blue sky showed through. Transcending both the filmy whiteness and the vaporious yellowness, hovering there above the marshes of Sedgemoor, this celestial Toll-Pike of the Infinite seemed to Wolf, as he walked towards it, like some entrance into an unknown dimension, into which it was not impossible to pass! Though in reality it was the background of all the clouds that surrounded

it, it seemed in some mysterious way nearer than they were. It seemed like a harbour into which the very waters of the Lunt might flow. That incredible patch of blue seemed something into which he could plunge his hands and draw them forth again, filled like overflowing cups with the very ichor of happiness. Ah! That was the word. It was *pure happiness*, that blue patch!<sup>7</sup>

The passage begins with external observation and inventive similitudes, and then moves through imaginative creation (the Toll-Pike of Infinity) to a transformation into emotional fusion with "It was *pure happiness*". It is a paradigm of what hereafter was to be Powys's creative achievement as a novelist.

### III

*A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* were written at Phudd Bottom, the secluded house in Up-State New York which was the first place Powys was able to transform into his own. (How he did so is recorded in the final chapter of his autobiography.) The first of them is one of the supreme novels of place, ranking in this respect with James Joyce's *Ulysses*. But whereas the Dublin of that novel is constituted of myriads of sense-impressions, sounds, smells, voices, local dialects, local history, local detail, all linked together in a dispassionate linguistic autonomy of mimesis, parody and verbal play that amount to an on-going corporate consciousness, Powys's Glastonbury is a portrait of spiritual phenomenon, a town in which a vast, ever-interacting cosmos of psychic entities informs a particular place and time, dissolving all specific manifestations of reality in a sense of boundless relativity. It is a place in which all is possible, in which no one structure of myth predominates, and no one system of belief assumes control.<sup>8</sup> Powys's Glastonbury, though no less carefully mapped out and recorded than is Joyce's Dublin, is a town made out of spirit; but 'all the same for that', it would be equally true to say that it portrays a spiritual

universe comprised of matter. The final image of the flood is appropriate: in this novel the characters do not confront their destiny, they swim in it as in their element. The consistent use of bathos and anti-climax undercuts all expectation that man will be contrasted with, or severed from, his background. Indeed, from *Wolf Solent* on, 'background' is a concept irrelevant to Powys's fictional world.

In *Weymouth Sands* the 'objective' spiritual universe of Glastonbury is replaced by the private, individual worlds of the various characters, united through their common source and progenitor, the town of Weymouth in its physical actuality. The underlying comedy of the book is revealed in the way in which the 'real' town supports and renews the lives of its inhabitants when their dream worlds, with all their ideals and illusions, collapse in a series of private tragedies: in this novel failure is translated into a renewed dependence on physical sensation, the immersion of the individual self in the world perceived and known by its various senses. The novel confirms the insight of one of the characters that

these simple things had a significance beyond all explanation; that they were in truth the outward 'accidents' of some interior 'substance', that belonged—by a strange law of transubstantiation—to some life of his that was independent of the humiliations of his ordinary existence.<sup>9</sup>

Powys's next novel, *Maiden Castle*, was written under unusual conditions. Begun in Dorchester, following his return to his native country in 1934, it was completed at Corwen in North Wales in 1936. It is a novel written initially *in situ*, and thus without the retrospective impulse, whether of nostalgia or of self-exorcism, which had generated the settings of its predecessors. In *Dud No-Man's* appropriation of the Dorchester in which he lives for the scene of his self-identifying historical novel, Powys is perhaps commenting on his own previous use of particular landscapes and places for fictive ends. But past and present are in conflict in *Maiden Castle*, which is full of a sense of

collision between the historical and mythological interests of Dud and Enoch, and the claims of other people who share the same physical world but not those particular concerns and intuitions. Both Dud and his father are defeated; the harmony achieved by *Wolf Solent*—both the man and the book—is here broken up. The maiden castles of the male protagonists are overthrown by the cloud castles of the aerial Wizzie (still maiden where her lover is concerned) and the actual maiden Thuella, painter of clouds. But if in this book the interior space is separated from the external one, a balance is maintained: if Enoch founders, Dud goes soldiering on, the very real earth woman Nancy Quirm being the one with whom his future seems assured.

#### IV

In *Corwen* Powys gave himself to a place and a landscape which, unlike Phudd Bottom, already had an immemorial past, one on which he was not free to impose his own mythology. He had to learn *Dud No-Man's* lesson for himself. For all the subjective, self-referential qualities that have earned *Owen Glendower* disfavour as an exploitation of Welsh history for personal ends, it none the less remains Powys's most de-personalised celebration of the operation of space in time. Its greatness in part arises from its epic quality, in its acute sense of duration, of the poignance of small passing events remembered after the passage of time; but this effect is gained not by a sweep of continuous narrative, but by a concentration on particular times and places, upon trivial scenes and moments: it is through the microscope that the vast perspectives of the telescope are here presented to us. But impressively organised though the novel is, in its command of detail and its impressions of landscape, the sense of the subjective realisation of space and time which it conveys is, for Powys, relatively conventional. This is nowhere more apparent than in the final paragraphs. Meredith, seeing a solitary stag, is reminded of a host of

kindred impressions from the misty shores of memory. A broken grey wall with a solitary mountain ram nibbling the grass beneath it; the outstretched branch of a wayside pine upon which as a child walking with his father he had seen a great buzzard taking its rest, red-brown as the branch beneath its folded wings . . .<sup>10</sup>

and so on through an eloquent catalogue of sights and moments. But however eloquent, the details are arbitrarily chosen, for Meredith is but a minor character and as a result his memories seem imported for rhetorical effect. The distinctive Powysian note is, for once, obscured, by the un-Powysian organisation of the prose.

But in *Porius*, as its author well knew, he found his world, and, with it, a literary mode for its expression. In the Dark Ages Powys exploits a time which is free from the conditioning of pre-existent historical record, but to which he can give both its own traditions and its religious and mythological dimensions. The objective and the subjective, the external and internal realities, can co-exist in the world of the novel, which is itself unverifiable as being either fact or fiction. And within this elaborately plotted and organised fabric, structured formally by its seven day chronology and thematically by its inbuilt alchemical symbolism,<sup>11</sup> the figure of Myrrdin Wyllt embodies both time and space in his dual functioning as Merlin and as Cronos. By the novel's end he is seen as the spirit of life itself, the saviour of 'Innumerable weak and terrified and unbeautiful creatures',<sup>12</sup> whom the world of 'civilization' overlooks. His is the embracing spatial physical reality of which all are conscious, as against the divisive, subordinate reality of laws and creeds.

The portrait of Myrrdin is reflected in, and not merely contained by, the novel's method of composition. Edeyrnion is not a place mapped out; it is inseparable from the consciousness of its inhabitants. The novel's space is revealed through the sense impressions of those who move about in it; and it is presented as if already familiar, with the result that its readers feel similarly engulfed

(an experience not all of them find agreeable.) But there is a perfect fusion between content and technique. Even in its mutilated state *Porius* is evidence of the logical and triumphant progress of Powys's imaginative artistry.

## V

The perspective attained in *Porius* helps towards an understanding of the four fantasy novels, *Morwyn*, *The Inmates*, *Atlantis* and *The Brazen Head*. If *Owen Glendower* and *Porius* in their different ways portray space in the context of time, of historical event, these books exhibit an awareness of time in the context of space. In *Morwyn* and *The Inmates* time is engulfed in space; in the former the underground caverns of Hell arrest its inhabitants in a Dantean immobility; while in *The Inmates* the inhabitants of Glint endure a still more arbitrary confinement. In *Atlantis* and *The Brazen Head* time slows down, becomes almost stationary. In the latter, narrative is seconded to the role of dramatising the movements of consciousness; while in both novels the long, unfolding sentences accommodate a multitude of outlooks and possibilities. A characteristic example from *Atlantis* is the response of Nisos to the eyes of Atropos, oldest of the Fates.

The sensation they gave him was that the sky above Ithaca and indeed above all the isles in all the bays and seas and straits and gulfs of the land of the Achaeans, together with the interiorly receding depths of all that land itself, the depths, in fact, of all the solid elements that composed the rocks and sand and earth and soil of which that land was composed, had that pair of eyes as *their eyes*, and were even now, those remotenesses of sky beyond limit, and those staggering recessions of terrestrial matter beyond limit, gazing at him in a positively ghastly intensity while they informed him that the real deciders of his fate and of the fate of the old hero at his side, and of the fate of Eione, the ideal loveliness of whose perfect form had been for him the living background of the whole of this wild ride, were not the Fates nor the Gods nor the

sublime obstinacy and cunning of Odysseus, but, as Atropos herself had just admitted, the inescapable pressure of pitiless Necessity and the motiveless antics of causeless Chance.<sup>13</sup>

The eyes of Fate (the determinant of time) are depicted as the eyes of the totality of space; they are then related to the past and to the movement from past to present, only to focus on ideal heroism and beauty, human absolutes that are under the sway of necessity and chance, two concepts which in human terms would seem to contradict each other, but which in their teleological sense are complementary. Through its structure and logical movement, the whole enormous one-hundred-and-eighty-nine-word sentence enacts the evolution of its meaning.

In *The Brazen Head* this process is elaborated through repeated instances of epistemological acrobatics, with fact turning into fantasy and even back again. A comment on the ways of nature illuminates Powys's own fictional procedures.

Out of the confusion which she seems to prefer to any orderly workshop, Nature seems anxious to thicken out the drama she has inaugurated by creating ironic commentaries upon her own doings, whose choruses are not so much the expression of approval or disapproval as of humorous recognition, and produce the effect of a faint orchestral accompaniment, an accompaniment that reaches us from extremely far away and possibly from a sphere totally different from our own.<sup>14</sup>

Astronomical distance has begun to haunt Powys's imagination. Confronted with the horrific otherness of outer space as against his own solitary identity, Albert of Cologne comforts himself with the thought of Time

that can reduce Space by measuring the segments of it, Time that can remember backwards to wherever man has been or might have been, Time that can imagine forwards to wherever man will be or could be, Time that's our friendly and customary home, Time that belonged to our fathers before us and will belong to our children after us, Time that clothes us as with familiar raiment and nourishes us as with bread and wine, Time

that gives us a bed to sleep on, Time that gives us a tent to cover us and fire to warm us . . .<sup>15</sup>

In this evocation, time and space (as we experience it) are as one. The metaphysical question has been refused. But unlike his Albert of Cologne, Powys would not allow himself to be lulled to sleep by such comfortable considerations.

## VI

*The Brazen Head* was the last of Powys's novels, and was written at his final dwelling place in Blaenau Ffestiniog, that remote slate-quarrying town seemingly upheld by the surrounding mountains. Up and away—Powys was seeking refuge from the accessibility of Corwen; and in this simplest of dwellings he retired completely into his world of fantasy. The stories about outer space which he wrote there in his extreme old age cannot properly be designated novels: they are works *sui generis*, of total, unabashed imaginative implausibility.

But if implausible, they are not wholly irresponsible. In the earlier fantasies the reader is made to feel that anything can happen; in these final stories anything does. They are the reverse of serious science fiction, since it is of their essence that they should laugh at any notion of logical physical plausibility; nor are they systematic ideological fantasies in the manner of David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* or C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra*. They are what their author said they were, works of second childhood, a term he was prepared to take seriously. Improvisatory nonsense tales with a core of intellectual and philosophical questing, they describe mental journeys directed inwards, in terms of space travel directed outwards. They are pure fiction, in which space rather than time becomes the controlling preoccupation. By now Powys was more concerned with what we are than with what would happen to us. He was close enough to what would inevitably happen to himself.

Wild and weird though they are, the stories do have their individual characters

and themes. *Up and Out* disposes in cavalier, imaginatively brutal fashion of the concept of absolutes; the regions of outer space are annexed for the human imagination, and thus affirmed to be its products. *The Mountains of the Moon*, moon-bound and tranquil, works towards a harmonising of opposites: it is the most hopeful of the tales. *All or Nothing*, the longest and most systematic of them, goes back to childhood worlds at Morty-Montacute in Dunnowair in the county of Foghorn: out of this obfuscation the young travellers leap into a series of space adventures which return them finally to the new worlds they discover within themselves. *You and Me*, equally fanciful and one of the most amusing of the series, explores the mutual dependency of ideas of good and evil; but the fact that the parts of God and Devil are *played* by Um and Mo emphasises the provisional nature of even those absolutes as humanly understood. *Real Wraiths* abandons all links with earthly reality: the protagonists are ghosts, and King Hades becomes the soul of the universe, another form of interiorisation and return to roots. In *Two and Two* there is a return to dualities, through the elemental quartet of Ignesco, Aquaticus, Aera and Terra, who put themselves in the hands of the characteristically undogmatic enquirer, Wat Kums.

The final three stories<sup>16</sup> are more disorganised, and have closer links with traditional folk and fairy tales. *Topsy-Turvy* depicts a private world, animistic, partly autobiographical. It is the most personal of the tales. *Cataclysm* returns us to empty space, in which a blissful freedom from restraint as two boys and a girl happily propel themselves through empty space is ended brutally by an encounter with a giant: the roving child's imagination is thus finally checked by the re-emergence of the punitive father. *Abertackle*, in which complete imaginative disintegration is already in sight, at least contains the prescription governing all these stories. 'I have learned to walk on air with the aid of a stick and I am now setting out with the intention of walk-

ing round the sun and the moon.' The concept of space has been finally interiorised.

It is not easy to read these books in the spirit of carefree irresponsibility with which Powys wrote them. The rationalising mind will not be stilled. But the humour of many of them is engaging, and G. Wilson Knight's account of them as essentially comic is as helpful an approach as any.<sup>18</sup> But they do have a serious preoccupation: they reflect the crisis of self-identity when confronted with the prospect of annihilation or (arguably worse) the withdrawal of every contingent activity that makes life meaningful. *Empty* space preoccupies Powys; he has a horror of dark holes, of the void, of being swallowed up by nothingness experienced as a state (though oblivion he finds a welcome prospect, as the eloquent portrayal of it in the opening of *Homer and the Aether* makes clear). The terror of both enclosure and exposure that marked his first two novels is replaced by terror of that total emptiness which at once defines the self and which takes away from it every reason for its existence. In this confrontation Powys's last tales resemble the novels and plays of Samuel Beckett; but where Beckett becomes more and more inward-looking as he pursues his course, Powys seeks ever more distant horizons. 'Up and Out' is his motto. His imagination moves from earth in the early novels, through water in *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands*, and fire in *Maiden Castle*, to air, a purging and refining into flight.

But his world of space is peopled—with quaint inventions reminiscent at times of those of Hieronymous Bosch, with embodied ideas, with small children, elderly ladies, animated furniture and all the bric-a-brac of nursery fears and nursery humours. All these are specifically defined objects, quite simply *there*: gone are the velleities and subtle shadings and delicate intuitions of the early novels. In a bizarre way we move in a world of certainties. The very loss of consistent perspective and proportion only underlines what is both Powys's meta-

physical discovery and the root of his philosophical serenity—the discovery that the worlds of telescope and microscope are aspects of a single apprehensible reality. In his final works space is contained by man

who inhabits it. The statement is a paradigm of the world's relation to God, according to the theology of that very religion in flight from which John Cowper Powys's imaginative journey had originated.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography* (1934), 1967, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Raine, *Farewell Happy Fields*, 1973, pp. 116-117.

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Dr Charles Lock for information about the movements of John Cowper Powys during the production of his early novels.

<sup>5</sup> *Wood and Stone*, 1915, p. 326.

<sup>6</sup> Not dissimilar confrontations with landscape are to be found in the contemporary novels of Eden Phillpotts and Mary Webb, most notably in the latter's *The Golden Arrow* (1915). A more positive treatment of the theme is a feature of G. Wilson Knight's novel, *Klinton Top*, first published in 1984, though written in 1927.

<sup>7</sup> *Wolf Solent* (1929), 1964, p. 151.

<sup>8</sup> A recent example of a multi-dimensional portrait of a town, in this case a fictitious place, is the Ennis-

tone of Iris Murdoch's *The Philosopher's Pupil* (1983).

<sup>9</sup> *Weymouth Sands* (1934), 1963, p. 39.

<sup>10</sup> *Owen Glendower*, 1940, p. 937.

<sup>11</sup> See Morine Krissdottir, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, 1980, pp. 127-170.

<sup>12</sup> *Porius*, 1951, p. 681.

<sup>13</sup> *Atlantis*, 1954, p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> *The Brazen Head*, 1956, p. 335.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 271.

<sup>16</sup> These stories are to be published early in 1985. A further, much shorter tale called "Shillyshally" was published in 1961 in the American magazine, *Between Worlds* (Vol. I, No. 2). See Dante Thomas, *A Bibliography of the Writings of John Cowper Powys 1872-1963*, Paul P. Appel, Mamaroneck, N.Y., 1975, p. 120.

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# N. L. Rothman

## A Spiritual Tragedy\*

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WOLF SOLENT. *John Cowper Powys*. Simon and Schuster. \$5.00.

(*Book League Monthly*, Vol. II, No. 6, Autumn (1929).)

No one who has heard John Cowper Powys deliver one of his inspired lectures on Hardy, the words seeming to pour from his lips in torrents of eloquence, the while he paces up and down the length of the platform like a man possessed—no one who has heard this could fail to anticipate the flavour of Hardy in a novel from Powys's pen. One understood that he was writing such a book, and one awaited it with an intellectual breathlessness, hoping always for some reassurance that the old novel, the novel of Meredith, James, Hardy, has not breathed its last. Now the book has appeared, and the reassurance. We know, now, that the great tradition has not ceased but only halted, waiting for the strong, wise hand and the civilized pen to take it up. Wielded by Mr Powys, the form of the novel assumes again its ancient strength and breath, its accustomed beauties.

. . . *Wolf Solent* is essentially a tragedy, a tragedy of a very subtle sort and vastly divergent from any of Hardy's novels of frustration. An examination of this divergence will reward us, I think, with an understanding of just how much the disciple has borrowed from the master, and just how much of his own genius has gone into this book to make it a uniquely personal triumph.

\*We republish this review in celebration of the New York publishers, Harper & Row's 1985 paperback publication of *Wolf Solent* and *Weymouth Sands*. In Spring 1984 there was published a Dutch translation of *Wolf Solent* (Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam), intended as the first of a series of translations of J. C. Powys's works.

Hardy, in such studies as those of Jude Fawley and Clym Yeobright, and Powys, in the book at hand, have dealt similarly with the dissolution of a man's soul, or his will, or his power to assert himself. It is in the causes of dissolution that we perceive the divergence, and at this point Powys moves definitely away from the prophet of Wessex.

Hardy's folk have struggled always with their environment, and failed. Hardy's people have been always the helpless pawns of chance and circumstance, and of a grim Fatality that was as consistently unaware of their existence as is a heel of ants upon which it treads. One felt, in Hardy's books, the towering of the scene above the actors, until the heath itself came to dominate the puppets that wandered, for a fleeting moment, upon its dark expanse. Powys, on the other hand, traces his tragedy to a diametrically opposite source. His *Wolf Solent* is no obscure Jude, but moves powerfully, commandingly, through the very scene that clutched at Jude and halted his progress. Solent is a superior mind, moulding rather than moulded by his circumstances. The people about him fall easily and naturally into secondary rôles; he becomes almost immediately the central figure about whom whirl the tempests and complexities of life at Dorsetshire.

The causes, then, of this man's disintegration are not circumstantial, but personal. He is betrayed, not by exterior forces, but by interior ones. His is no actual physical defeat but a far subtler, more terrible one—his deepest mental resources slip away from him—his inner life fades—he dies a psychological death, suffers a spiritual degradation. The presentation of this defeat in all of its gradual stages is the terrific task which Mr

Powys had set himself, and in its successful accomplishment he has given us what must be one of the great novels of this decade.

Regarding for a moment the purely psychological aspect of this book, we must observe the presence of that rare phenomenon, the description of something the description of which has never been completely ventured. Solent, in his passage through life, has developed within himself a retreat from surrounding discords and inconsistencies. Faced with an unbearable situation, an insurmountable fact, he could sink into himself, lose all awareness of time and proportion, bathe his hurts in a reassuring coolness. This mysterious trick of moving above the immediate scene, so inadequately summarized here, he termed his "mythology". It will be recognized, gratefully, I think, by those who have similarly experienced this retreat from reality, although it is likely to be considered pure tosh by most others. It is in the loss of this faculty that Solent meets with tragedy. Very much like a hound robbed of his scent, he finds himself lost in a maze of act, cause, and effect, with which he cannot cope in any ordinary way because he is no ordinary man. He has never been a cutter of Gordian knots, and when he is bereft of his mystic power for analysis he is

at once helpless to act, a vague spirit questioning itself in a material world. Just how this spiritual debility comes upon him cannot and must not be briefly told. So masterfully, so artistically is this developed, that when we leave him contemplating his cuckoldry with the thought: "Well, I shall have a cup of tea", the terrible significance of this man's disintegration continues to weigh upon us long after the last page is turned.

It is only hastily that I can comment upon the more obvious virtues of the book. The care which Powys has lavished upon his minor characters is richly rewarded in the warmth and vitality of their behaviour. They are the same, homely, English folk we have come to know through Hardy. If anything, they are too finely drawn, too sharply characterized, so that they seem more like Dickens's caricatures than Hardy's balanced portraits. For Powys's prose there can be nothing but unrestrained admiration. Easy, effortless, apparently unconscious of its movement, it is the unhampered expression of a man who writes for no audience but himself. This is a writer quite independent of trends and tendencies, with his own inner eye fixed always upon the final judgement that time may pass upon his work. I venture to say he need not fear that judgement.

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# Paul Roberts

## Becoming Mr Nobody: Personality and the Philosophy of John Cowper Powys\*

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My writings—novels and all—are simply so much propaganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life.

I almost feel inclined to apologise for beginning with such familiar and often-quoted words; yet it seems important to do so because I believe that, however often we may repeat them, we have never quite taken them seriously, as if in some way unwilling to believe that Powys could really have meant exactly what he said. If we *had* taken them seriously then surely more attention would by now have been paid to the development of his philosophical ideas which, both for their own sake and as informing the structure and development of his fiction, have an enormous amount to offer. Their neglect has, I believe, hidden from us certain vital clues as to the way in which Powys's ideas and art developed, particularly in his later years in Wales.

It is easy to believe, if one reads only, perhaps, a few of the major philosophical works, and these in isolation or out of chronological order, that Powys's ideas, if they changed at all, which in itself some critics have doubted, developed only slowly and by a process of gradual evolution. Each book, it may seem, simply offers a refinement of what has gone before or turns the focus of his attention on to some new area of discussion. It is easy to see a steady progression in the books, from the academic formality of *The Complex Vision* (1920) to the relaxed and colloquial expositions of a work such as *Mortal Strife* (1942), and to believe that this represents merely a loosening and a mellowing in the expression of ideas which, fundamentally, have not changed.

\*A paper read to the Powys Society, 1983.

And yet I am convinced that if one reads all of the philosophical books and pamphlets, in order of publication, from *The War and Culture* (1914) to *In Spite Of* (1953), one can not help but become aware that enormous and radical changes had taken place, changes which have yet to be fully explored and whose implications, both for philosophy and literature and, more importantly, for the lives of ordinary people, have still to be appreciated.

Why is it, for example, that as late as *The Art of Happiness* of 1935 Powys was still addressing himself to an audience limited to those he liked to call, borrowing a phrase from Nietzsche, "the ill-constituted", those whom he regarded as, like himself, somewhat neurotic and world-weary sceptics, withdrawn from the mainstream of society, whereas he was to write in *In Spite Of* that any useful philosophy ought to be made "applicable to everybody"?<sup>2</sup> Why is it that that most familiar of his ideas, the "life-illusion", virtually disappears after *The Art of Happiness* (1935)? And why is it that those qualities of "Truth, Beauty and Goodness" which Powys regarded as fundamental in 1920 are later replaced by the apparently less impressive, but infinitely more human qualities of "Humour, Humility and Kindness"?

I believe that if we are to trace these developments and changes we must begin with an examination of that sad, dark book *Confessions of Two Brothers*,<sup>3</sup> published in New York in February 1916.

These were difficult and extremely unhappy times for Powys, as his letters to Llewelyn bear witness: "This is a dark epoch in my days . . . a dark and horizonless epoch"; ". . . the greyness and dreariness of

these present days of my existence are beyond words",<sup>4</sup> he wrote in January of that year; and later he was to add: "I feel as sad as the devil. [I have] . . . a queer sense of unutterable depression and an indescribable loathing of my existence as a lecturer".<sup>5</sup>

He sorely missed Llewelyn, who was then in Africa, and from whom the war seemed to have separated him even more completely, and he was suffering from severe financial problems. The war itself certainly depressed him and, in addition, he had been suffering extreme ill-health and had recently undergone the first of his major stomach operations. As a result of all of this Powys seems to have suffered a temporary loss of faith in himself and his personality.

In one less completely convinced of the supreme importance of the individual personality this would have been bad enough, but for Powys, who was later to write, "We have reached the conclusion that the Secret of Nature is to be found in personality",<sup>6</sup> it was something very near to a living hell. This was especially so since he had, until that time, always been very sure of his own power and strength. Even while he was being tormented at school by the other boys, he remained according to his brother Littleton "full of his own importance",<sup>7</sup> and in his book *Welsh Ambassadors* Louis Wilkinson, speaking of John in 1900, says "He was twenty-eight and unknown . . . But he had complete faith in his genius."<sup>8</sup>

Indeed the very idea of *Confessions of Two Brothers*, in which John Cowper had originally intended that all six of the brothers were to write "confessions", each exploring his own character, shows the importance Powys placed on personality. To lose faith in this way must, therefore, have shaken Powys's confidence to the core. The extent to which this really was the case is indicated in the warning Powys gives his readers of his *Confessions* not to take what he writes entirely at face value, for even John Cowper could not, for once, be sure that what he wrote was what he meant and believed. The reader, he says,

must be on the lookout for indirect betrayals and unmaskings. He must follow me suspiciously, guardedly, furtively. He must be prepared for that invincible human trick of using language to conceal rather than to reveal.<sup>9</sup>

He even seems unsure that he still *has* a personality of his own, for he speaks at length of being "possessed" by the personalities of others:

what floats through me is the withering, devastating breath of every commonplace person and object, and thought, and belief, and ambition, that our wretched race has ever evoked.<sup>10</sup>

I am sometimes, it would seem, literally 'possessed'.<sup>11</sup>

Whilst this sort of "possession" had at other times been regarded as a strength which gave Powys unique insights into the nature of other people, it is here seen as something "withering", something which threatened the integrity of a personality he already felt to be under attack from every angle.

In his essay "A Touch of Caricature",<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Hooker refers to John Cowper's "faculty of self-creation", and it has frequently been said that Powys was his own greatest creation; but here, feeling weak and vulnerable, he seems to be attempting to create a personality with the toughness and worldly cunning to withstand the pressures laid upon him. The personality which emerges, however, is quite different from that which he projects anywhere else. Many of the attitudes he adopts, and often the tone of voice he uses, seem strangely uncharacteristic, as if he had indeed become "possessed". Who, for example, would ever expect to hear John Cowper claim that:

In poetry I can see the world transfigured, and learn the secret of that exquisite lie which would make me believe that the commonplace itself is wonderful and charming—if only one looks at it from a certain angle. I confess I have never been able to find this angle. But it is a relief to be told that it is there.<sup>13</sup>

The cynical, world-weary tone of that last sentence in particular seems quite out of character. And again, speaking of himself he says: "I sometimes feel as if I were a dead body, galvanized temporarily into performing the necessary functions of existence"<sup>14</sup>—which issues strangely from the pen of such a disciple of sensations.

At the same time he seems to be attempting to slip away from under the pressures of life by adopting a negative attitude:

I want to be liberated from everything that 'sticks out', from everything that calls attention to itself by its colour, its form, its challenge.<sup>15</sup>

"The dead are to be envied . . ." he says, and he seeks to lose himself beneath the surface of "the gentle river of oblivion".<sup>16</sup> Indeed it may be that an illuminating comparison could be drawn between the philosophy of John Cowper, at this stage in his life, and that of T. F. Powys, from whom he often seems so very different.

That a mental breakdown was a real possibility is clear from the very tone of the book, which often seems to be the despairing cry of a mind at the end of its tether. The novel *Rodmoor* (1916) in which the main character, Adrian Sorio, is recovering from a breakdown, with its bleak, almost expressionistic qualities and the devouring, inescapable presence of the sea as its background, seems an apt metaphor for Powys's mental condition at the time.

I believe that it is possible to regard Powys's philosophical explorations over the next forty years as an attempt to "heal" his shattered and disintegrated personality. Certainly his desire for unity at the time of *Confessions* can be seen in his dismissal of Pluralism when he writes that, "the indissoluble unity of the world of which we form a part is borne in upon me as an axiomatic necessity of my consciousness."<sup>17</sup>

Let us now turn to *The Complex Vision*, written and published in New York in 1920, to see how Powys first set about attempting to bring himself into what he regarded as a proper relationship with that world of

exterior reality which he called "the objective mystery".

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Powys begins *The Complex Vision* with the assertion that life consists of the individual "I am I" facing the "objective mystery" completely alone. No doubt it is significant here that he visualises both as solid, exclusive and opposed entities since he felt himself to be in conflict with the universe. This "I am I", which is the name Powys gives to the essential self, half-discovers and half-creates its own universe from the "objective mystery", the dark unknown which surrounds it.

The central question of the book, however, is: how are we to discover the *reality* of this "objective mystery"? What, in fact, *is* reality?

Powys claims that we normally hold distorted or biased views of reality because we view the universe from a perspective dominated by only one mental faculty or impulse, for example, the Reason or the Imagination. Since this bias is based in temperament, and since everything ultimately stems from the nature of the individual personality, we will devise philosophical systems, either Idealistic or Materialistic, which reflect this distorted view and which must, therefore, leave us unsatisfied. As Powys had already said in *Confessions of Two Brothers*:

If I am convinced of anything in this world, I am convinced of the presence, in every philosophical system, of the original wish, or will, or temperamental bias, of the individual philosophizing.<sup>18</sup>

None of these philosophical systems, because he sees them as based in only one sort of perception is convincing to the sceptical Powys who, rather than adopting a dogmatic view, prefers to believe that "anything may be true".<sup>19</sup>

Powys sees the "I am I", the essential self, which he also refers to as the "soul", as consisting of eleven elements which he lists as: Reason, Self-Consciousness, Will, The Aesthetic Sense, Imagination, Memory,

Conscience, Sensation, Instinct, Intuition and Emotion.<sup>20</sup> And, although such a drawing of distinctions is typical of his taste for philosophical analysis at all times, it is perhaps symptomatic of the disintegration of his personality that he is able to list them in this way. He then argues that to see the universe properly and without illusion we have to bring all eleven of these attributes together into what he calls a “rhythmic harmony” or the “*Complex Vision*”. When, on rare occasions, this balance is achieved Powys believes we attain what he calls “the apex thought”, which he visualises as the point of a fiery arrow piercing the darkness of the unknown, the “objective mystery”.

The relationship between the individual “soul” and the “objective mystery”, which it was so important for Powys to establish at this time, is dominated by the two contradictory impulses which he calls “Love” and “Malice”. Love is the creative, forward moving, life-enhancing, libertarian spirit, whilst Malice, though not an actively destructive force, since destruction is merely a perversion of the creative spirit and not its true opposite, is the spirit of inertia, that death-embracing and possessive spirit which obstructs the impulse of Love, and which Powys regards as the true manifestation of Evil.

Powys believes, however, that inasmuch as we are living, individual personalities, engaged with the world and constantly, inevitably, changing we represent at least a partial victory of Love over Malice and cannot, therefore, ever become completely Evil, although we may at times succumb to the impulse of Malice. This seems, to some extent, to be what has happened to Powys himself, although he was exerting all of his creative genius to overcome it. This essential optimism, the belief that it was still possible to overwhelm the Malice which had invaded his soul is suggested in the poem, “The Daughter of the Sphinx”, which appeared in the collection *Mandragora* (1917). Powys describes his mind in the poem as:

... a plain with blackened stalks,  
And the crumbling stones of a buried city,  
Where hooded desolation walks.

However, having felt the pity of the Daughter of the Sphinx, he believes that he can now:

... watch the kite sail by,  
And the long, long shadows among the stones,  
And the blackened stalks and the empty sky,  
And the wind-blown dust of ancient bones  
With strange exultant serenity,  
And across that plain which is my soul,  
Soft incense-clouds of healing roll . . .<sup>21</sup>

And this half-buried optimism is reflected in Powys’s belief that ultimately, in the very long term, Love must be victorious. However, he reminds us that existence depends upon a constant struggle between these impulses and that if one were to completely overcome the other both Time and Space would cease to exist.

We must take sides in this universal, dualistic struggle and ally ourselves either with Love or with Malice and in doing so we must take up positions with regard to the three fundamental areas of being: Beauty, Truth and Goodness. In order to do this Powys suggests that mankind needs a visible image to represent the ultimate states of Beauty, Truth and Goodness, and this image is found in the figure of Christ, although it is a Christ divorced from organized religion. In this figure of Christ, satisfying because it is human rather than divine, Powys sees the vision of the “immortals” made manifest and, I would suggest, just the sort of completely integrated personality in harmony with the “objective mystery”, which he required.

*The Complex Vision* is an important and monumental book and there are many important aspects of it which I have not discussed here. Yet, whilst it is certainly a book which deserves more attention, it is also somewhat academic and is unlikely, I feel, to be of much real, practical use. That Powys was aware of this is clear from the letters he wrote to Llewelyn in late 1919, when the book had been written but was not

yet published: "I already react from this damned philosophy of mine. It is a mythological tour-de-force . . . but sometimes I think I ought to destroy what I no longer believe in . . ." <sup>22</sup> Later he wrote of it as ". . . that scholastic compendium of hawering". <sup>23</sup> In the end I am inclined to agree with Kenneth Hopkins when he writes that: "*The Complex Vision* is, in its complexity, nearly as remote as the metaphysical systems of rationalized purpose it is supposed to replace". <sup>24</sup>

In 1923, two years after meeting Phyllis Playter, Powys published the first of a series of five short philosophical works which were to span the next five years; years during which he was also to publish *Samphire*, arguably the best of his collections of poetry and the novel *Ducdame*, both works which exhibit considerably more artistic control than he had previously displayed. No doubt the influence of Llewelyn, who was with them in New York at this time, was strong, but it can be no coincidence that it was during these early years of his relationship with Phyllis Playter that Powys began to produce his first indisputable works of genius.

Of these five short philosophical works the most important is certainly *The Art of Happiness*, the first of two works (1923 and 1935) to share this title. This is a remarkable and extremely under-rated little book and in it we hear, for the first time in his philosophical works, the characteristic and unmistakable voice of John Cowper Powys. The tone is far more personal, idiosyncratic and relaxed than that of *The Complex Vision* and although many of the basic ideas are the same as they had been in 1920 they are here, at last, beginning to take on a more familiar shape as Powys sets about finding the most effective ways of gathering and weaving together the separate strands of our fragmented personalities.

He begins the book by referring once again to that important Nietzschean concept of the "well- and ill-constituted", the notion which had been the basis of his first novel *Wood and Stone* (1915). Powys says

that although the "well-constituted" enjoy "A trick of personal temperament (which) pushes them off full-sail; either towards the happy islands of optimistic idealism or towards the austere rocks of pessimistic materialism", <sup>25</sup> they are not alone in enjoying revelations of the truth. The "ill-constituted", of whom Powys feels himself to be a representative, also have something of value to add from their view of the world. Theirs may not, and probably *will* not be the sort of approach to life which steers, galleon-like across the open seas or which pounds along the highways but will be a more hesitant, indirect and sceptical view which approaches life along its own secret paths and hidden ways. As Powys puts it:

But what I would like to indicate just here, is that a certain tentative, irrational, timid, hesitant scepticism has the power sometimes of calling up, out of deep mysterious places, a vision of the universe that commits us neither to an all-seeing God nor to an all-knowing science, a vision that is confused and infinitely perplexing, but touched all the same by the beauty that no idealism can reach or materialism destroy, the beauty that belongs to the ambiguous look—unspeakable, unutterable—which crosses sometimes the countenance of Nature itself! <sup>25</sup>

Such a view of life is hardly one designed to encourage worldly success, which will depend on a positive, forward thrusting, certainty and a commitment to one view, but then such confidence is likely, as Powys reminds us, to crush "a thousand delicate and tenuous growths". <sup>26</sup> He criticises Idealism because, whatever its particular manifestation, it depends upon a belief in some supreme Divine Consciousness. But in a universe in which all that we can be certain of is that *we* exist, what evidence, is there of such a Divine Consciousness? And if such a thing *did* exist what difference would it make? The sensation of suffering is not lessened or happiness increased because we believe they come from a Divine Consciousness. What *seems* to be reality is what matters, not what might possibly be reality according to some absolute standard.

The world is the world; whether it spins itself forth of its own volition out of incredible nothingness or whether it is willed by a divine-demonic dreamer—the world is the world; and we know well enough what *that* is!<sup>27</sup>

What, on the other hand, might a Materialistic system of philosophy have to offer such a sceptic? The trouble with a Materialist view is that it assumes that “our familiar stellar universe, unbounded both with regards to space and . . . time, is the sum total of all that exists”.<sup>28</sup>

Powys points out that these ideas of infinite time and space are not likely to be of much use in actually helping us to live our daily lives because they are so completely unimaginable, they paralyse the mind with their vastness and for all practical purposes become “no-time” and “no-space”, the ever-present Now. And as he complains:

To round off such a meagre representation of three quickly exhausted dimensions with the mere cypher of infinity does not make the thing so very wonderful; it merely makes it annoying and tantalising, like an algebraic equation!<sup>29</sup>

And just as a sceptic cannot bring himself to believe in the existence of a Divine Consciousness so he cannot bring himself to accept the view that the physical universe is all there is, since even the briefest introspection reveals this to be false. The very fact that we are able to distance ourselves from the material universe sufficiently to be able to speculate upon it is evidence that part of us at least is outside of it. Powys finds himself quite unable to accept such a “lean, un-mysterious system of things”.<sup>29</sup> The trouble is that both Idealists and Materialists want to be able to explain everything, to round everything off and to make everything certain, whilst Powys wants something which is closer to his magical and poetic conception of life. As he put it in *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938):

the logoi of those primitive Soothsayers, who were half-poets and half-prophets, are psychologically more valuable to us than the elaborate systems of technical philosophy

that seek to round off what refuses to be rounded off, and to eliminate contradiction and paradox from what seems made up of these ‘knots of contrariety’.<sup>30</sup>

It was in mythology rather than in religion and in poetry rather than in science and in a certain approach to life rather than in a systematic philosophy that John Cowper believed the sceptic could find a way to happiness.

In *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant* (1928) Powys states that “. . . the true essence of life is not a fact at all, far less a fixed reality. It is a point of view, an attitude, a mood, an atmosphere, a mental and emotional process.”<sup>31</sup> And again in *The Secret of Self Development* (1926): “The master-current in all true self-culture is, and always has been, the *poetic* view of things”.<sup>32</sup> And as far as the Idealistic view is concerned he says in *The Religion of a Sceptic* (1925):

To regard religion as mythology does not make it less important. It gives it a new and lovely glamour. It restores to it the enchantment which it possessed at the beginning when its dogmas had not yet lost their natural poetry in the laboratory of theological speculation.<sup>33</sup>

Powys sees reality not in a closed Materialist or Idealist view of the universe, but in: “Life—the real living, teeming magical chaos of things”.<sup>34</sup>

Again and again he comes back to his fundamental assertion that, whilst the possibilities of existence are endless, all that we can actually be certain of is that our personalities exist and that the sensations we experience also exist. Therefore, our philosophy must start from this point and no other and any more dogmatic view of reality is not only based on poor foundations but will also, ultimately, limit the possibilities of life to those compatible with it; whereas the sceptical view which Powys represents is willing to believe that “anything may be true”. In fact Powys claims that “only the thinnest, filmiest screen separates the dream-life we are now living from another,

a different dream-landscape, of larger, lovelier, more gracious outlines”<sup>35</sup> and it is this more generous, spacious and tolerant universe that Powys wishes to liberate from beneath the blanket of a furtive and taboo-ridden determinism, either Materialistic or Idealistic, under which it is hidden.

But how is the sceptical individual to achieve happiness through such a philosophy? First of all we should not feel duty-bound to face up to what people call ‘the real world’, by which they usually mean the unpleasant side of life. The narrow, the sordid and the unhappy are no more real than the noble and the beautiful. Since we are the half-creators and half-discoverers of our own universe we should make use of the greatest of the weapons we have at our side in the search for happiness; the fact that we are able to control our thoughts and control what enters our minds. Happiness will come sooner, he suggests, to those who have learned to look not only at the “mud-swamps” of reality. Indeed this power of choosing what we will remember and what we will forget was to become a cornerstone of Powys’s philosophy. Our memories, if we allow them, become so overwhelmed with recollections of pain and cruelty, of meanness and suffering that it becomes impossible to achieve happiness. At the same time he believes that by concentrating and dwelling on evil we gather it to ourselves and lend it form and strength, whereas in cultivating happiness we increase the store of potential happiness available for others to share.

“Why should these rare and transporting moments be regarded as less significant than ‘work’ or ‘heroism’ or ‘self-sacrifice’ or ‘benefitting the race?’” asks Powys. “How do we know? . . . Perhaps every time we say ‘I am happy’ the mystical vibrations of what we feel create new worlds, full of amazing living creatures!”<sup>36</sup>

But only in a quiet, calm and ordered life will we be able to appreciate these supreme and rare moments of happiness and be ready to enjoy them when they do occur. Therefore, Powys encourages his nervous sceptics to develop certain routines and rituals which, whilst they may in themselves have

no great significance, calm and quieten the mind and open its doors to the approach of happiness.

And so here we have, in essence, the philosophy which John Cowper Powys was to expound and develop over the next five to twelve years before his retirement to Wales.

It would seem that Powys identified two main elements to this healing *Art of Happiness*: first, the nurturing of the “life-illusion”, which seeks, as John Cowper would put it, to “shore up and bank up” and to integrate the individual personality and, secondly, the careful selection and construction of the universe we choose to regard as our own and an attempt to integrate the individual personality with this exterior universe by sinking down into one’s sensations, that is, one’s experience of this world. Powys’s next two philosophical books, *The Meaning of Culture* (1929) and *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930) deal each in turn with these two major elements of the philosophy.

It is characteristic of Powys that he prefers to use familiar words in unfamiliar ways rather than to adopt technical or specialist jargon and this is very much the case in *The Meaning of Culture* in which “culture” refers in turn both to what we usually think of as the ‘high culture’ of art and poetry and also, with equal importance, to what, in *The Secret of Self Development* Powys had called “self-culture”, that is the development of one’s personality and “life-illusion”. Here, in *The Meaning of Culture*, Powys discusses those various areas of cultural experience, such as literature and religion, which may be called upon as means of developing one’s personality.

In *In Defence of Sensuality*, in addition to much valuable discussion of the relationship between the individual and society, Powys explores the various techniques which one might employ in order to sink this integrated personality into one’s experience of the exterior world, which Powys describes under the general term “sensations”, therefore establishing a proper relationship between the “I am I” and the “Not I”.

It is easy to see how these “life-tech-

niques” have evolved in order to enable Powys, and those like him, “the ill-constituted”, to cope with that disintegration of personality and the feeling of a dislocation from reality which he suffered so acutely.

In *A Philosophy of Solitude* (1933) Powys extends his work in this direction by exploring the relationship between the individual and society and concludes that those he represents are not only temperamentally anti-social but that, in order to allow their philosophy to develop, they need to cultivate solitude, which is the word he uses here to represent not living apart and in isolation from social groups but maintaining one’s basic independence from them, and this is something he believes can even be achieved in the teeming streets of a large city. The only company likely to enhance one’s happiness is that of a small group of like-minded and like-tempered friends. Even love must be regarded with caution since it often “founders on the rocks of possessiveness” and what, if we are lucky enough to find it, we ought to value more highly is an intimate friendship based on the equality of each partner and respect for their own particular “life-illusion”:

happiness is not to be gained by a conspiracy of clinging bodies, but by the fraternisation of proud and lonely intelligencies.<sup>37</sup>

It is in the second of the two books entitled *The Art of Happiness*, published in 1935 when Powys was sixty-three, that we can begin to detect the first stirrings of what I have referred to as the second revolution in Powys’s thought. It is in this magnificent book that, in addition to an extremely important discussion of the relationships between the sexes, Powys first really begins to explore the full implications of a notion that has been present in his work from the very beginning. This is the idea that there are levels of existence which we can, and naturally *do* experience which go beyond the merely human levels which we might regard as sub- and super-human. The super-human aspect of this belief has been exposed as early as 1920 in the concept of “the immort-

als” which he developed in *The Complex Vision*. Although, however, Powys had always attached enormous importance to the inanimate and to less developed forms of life, it was not until *In Defence of Sensuality* that he fully explored this area of sub-human experience through what he called the “ichthyosaurus ego”. As he says in that book:

Among [the identities that surround you]. . . there will be many—such as rocks and stones and trees and fish and birds and reptiles and beasts—that are obviously sub-human; and there will be a few, though infinitely rarer—such as a vague consciousness of spiritual forces—that seem to be super-human. Now when you try to analyse the contents of your deepest and most individual self, it is my opinion that you will find there a great deal of the primordial passivity of rocks and stones and trees and also, at rarer moments, certain fleeting feelings that seem to connect you with the super-human.<sup>38</sup>

It is natural, therefore, that in *The Art of Happiness* Powys should attempt to devise techniques whereby these extremes of personality can be exploited in the search of happiness. These techniques, which Powys calls “The Panergic Act”, “The Ichthyian Act” and “Decarnation” amount largely to a sinking away from or a rising out of our normal human level of existence but the implication which Powys was later to draw from them, that every entity on every level of existence has elements in common with every other form of being, was to lead on to the next stage in his philosophical development, although the central importance of “personality” had yet to be challenged.

In 1935 John and Phyllis moved to Corwen in North Wales and were there to establish his first permanent and stable home since his days in Montacute almost sixty years earlier. It was here, during the next seventeen years, that his philosophy was to reach its full-flowering in *Mortal Strife* (1942), *The Art of Growing Old* (1944), *Obstinate Cymric* (1947) and *In Spite Of* (1953).

A sense of continuity, both personal and

historical, and of stability and permanence had always been important to Powys (probably for the reasons we have already explored) and having settled in Wales, the land of his ancestors, he could at last feel that he was where he belonged, and this in itself must have gone a long way towards achieving the integration of his personality with the outside world which he had been seeking for so long. Here at last his spirit could relax. And it was now that he discovered what he liked to call "The Secret of Jesus", the idea which was to radically change his philosophy.

Equality had always been a fundamental principle for Powys, not only in its more conventional forms of equality of race, class and gender, although he was a fierce advocate of these, but equality for all living entities, the human, the sub-human and the super-human. Such an idea had been implicit in his earlier writings but it seems that only in the security which the sense of having returned to an ancestral homeland gave him did it fully develop into the notion of total equality.

In *Mortal Strife* Powys writes that:

since all these living entities belong to the same Dimension, belong to a Dimension wherein 'to enter life is to enter war', it seems on the face of it that St. Paul must have been right when he links so closely the soul of a man with all these other souls 'groaning and travelling in pain together until now'.<sup>39</sup>

If all living entities are equal, what right have some to feel superior to others: the landlord to his tenant, the vivisectionist to his victim or the intellectual to the uneducated? Again Powys writes:

Every soul is different from every other soul but in the aspect of it where the question of greatness lies there is no difference at all. Beneath the things where heathen snobbishness finds *all the difference*, beneath strength, beneath intellect, beneath force, beneath magnetic energy, beneath the power of power, Jesus sees the soul. And he sees each separate soul as an individual fountain of the eternal spirit.<sup>40</sup>

This should not be taken to imply that Powys had allied himself to the Church but

that, just as in *The Complex Vision* he had seen in the figure of Christ the embodiment of those essential qualities of "Beauty, Truth and Goodness" he now saw him as the symbol of a new revelation of truth, the truth of equality which in turn must lead to the cultivation of *Humility*. For if we accept this concept of equality we must agree that, "Below [the] outer qualities there is no difference. Everybody is a Nobody; and every Nobody is God."<sup>40</sup> Our attitude to one another inevitably changes, for with this humility is mingled an unconquerable pride, not the pride of beating others in competition or of trying to be better or more important than others but the pride of self-assurance, the pride of an integrated personality. We gain tremendous personal strength from such an insight and, as Powys comments, the "art of yielding . . . is possible only to the strong".<sup>41</sup> Now we have the strength to regard others with sympathy and a tender humour never before possible. No longer in conflict or competition, we can afford to treat them with kindness and consideration. Indeed the three most important qualities for Powys in his later years were not the cultivation of the "life-illusion" or "the complex vision" or even happiness but "Humility, Humour and Kindness", for personality, as Powys had always regarded it, is no longer important. Happiness comes and goes as it will. None of this is important. All we must do is to be ourselves and do what we can to help others be *themselves* and force ourselves to "enjoy", that is to mingle and lose ourselves in our ordinary, everyday lives. All of this is possible because Powys has now achieved what his philosophy set out to achieve, a complete and secure personality no longer at odds with the universe. And at last—at the age of eighty—he is able to smile and forget that tortured, self-conscious intellectual of *The Confessions of Two Brothers* and simply enjoy being the joyful Mr Nobody with a happiness founded in that "secret of Jesus" of which he wrote as follows, in *Mortal Strife*.

. . . I can say this about it with absolute certainty, that it makes us feel in harmony

with all living things *and superior to no living thing*.

This also can be said about it, that it evokes the most magical sensation of happiness we are capable of enjoying; a sensation which gives us a feeling of delectable unity with the soil or dust or road or pavement under our feet, with the grass at the edge of the road, with the ugliest, sorriest, forlornest, wretchedness masonry in sight, as well as with the wind that blows warm or cool, salt or fresh, upon our face, whether from between the walls of the town or through the trees of the lane.

Now you may call this feeling by many names. What it really amounts to is the condition of being in harmony with every living thing and superior to none. Its strength depends on the fact that the happiness it brings is untroubled by our usual worries, which are always connected with possession or position or rivalry, and with the question as to how we are regarded by others, whether with love and admiration or the reverse of

these . . . And finally, the feeling of which I speak brings with it a vague impression of permanence. I will not go so far as to roundly declare it brings with it an intimation of immortality, but I will say this, that it provokes the feeling of vistas and horizons and long far-away memories, such as seem to belong rather to the generations of men than to any individual man, and as much to our fathers before us and our children after us as to ourselves.<sup>42</sup>

Considerations of space have forced me, in this discussion of Powys's philosophical quest for harmony, to oversimplify much and to ignore altogether many important books and ideas. But, with due humility, I remind myself that, in the words of T. J. Diffey, "Powys speaks so directly to his readers that the services of a commentator are not needed",<sup>43</sup> and I would, therefore, simply urge you to turn again to these magnificent and much neglected books.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography* (1934), 1967, p. 641.

<sup>2</sup> *In Spite Of* (1953), Village Press, 1974.

<sup>3</sup> *Confessions of Two Brothers*, Manas Press, Rochester N.Y., 1916.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters to his brother Llewelyn*, Vol. 1, Village Press, 1975, pp. 194-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>6</sup> *The Complex Vision* (1920), Village Press, 1975, p. 365.

<sup>7</sup> Littleton Powys, *Still The Joy Of It*, Macdonald, 1956.

<sup>8</sup> *Welsh Ambassadors*, Chapman and Hall, 1936, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> *Confessions of Two Brothers*, p. 11.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Belinda Humfrey, ed., *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1972.

<sup>13</sup> *Confessions of Two Brothers*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>20</sup> *The Complex Vision*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> *Mandragora*, (1917), Village Press, 1975, p. 27.

<sup>22</sup> *Letters to his brother Llewelyn*, Vol. 1, p. 265.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Hopkins, *The Powys Brothers*, Phoenix House, 1967, p. 64.

<sup>25</sup> *The Art of Happiness* (1st version, 1923), Village Press, 1974, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> *The Pleasures of Literature*, Cassell, 1938, pp. 7-8.

<sup>31</sup> *The Art of Forgetting The Unpleasant* (1928), Village Press, 1974, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> *The Secret of Self Development* (1916), Village Press, 1974, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *The Religion of a Sceptic* (1925), Village Press, 1975, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> *The Art of Happiness* (1923), p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> *A Philosophy of Solitude*, Jonathan Cape, 1933, p. 107.

<sup>38</sup> *In Defence of Sensuality*, Victor Gollancz, 1930, pp. 7-8.

<sup>39</sup> *Mortal Strife*, Jonathan Cape, 1942, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>43</sup> *The Powys Review*, No. 2, Winter 1977, p. 27.

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# Morine Krissdottir

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## G. R. Wilson Knight: “Master in Discernment”\*

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O my dear Professor there will never be another plunge into the depths of my soul like this of your super or subter or inter penetrating eyes!<sup>2</sup>

I had been immersed in John Cowper Powys’s strange world for some years before I encountered Wilson Knight’s article “Cosmic Correspondences”. Later I read *The Saturnian Quest* and realised I was indeed in the presence of a “master in discernment”.<sup>2</sup> In his conclusion to that book, Knight explained, “I have been blazing trails in a virgin forest; it is pioneer work . . .”<sup>3</sup> Since then he has written a number of other pieces about Powys: the most important among them “Cosmic Correspondences”, “The Kundalini Serpent”, “Lawrence, Joyce and Powys”, “Mysticism and Masturbation”, “The Ship of Cruelty”, and more light has been shed on Powys’s dark forest. Despite many more recent books and articles on John Cowper Powys, most of them sensitive and some perceptive, no one has approached the inner centre of Powys’s multiverse so nearly as Knight has done. In this article I should like to speculate briefly on the reasons why I think this is so and then to explore the significance of his intuitions.

\*Editor’s note. An appreciation of G. Wilson Knight’s critical writings, including his explanatory writings on J. C. Powys, is long overdue. For some readers, including the Editor of *PR*, perhaps Knight’s most valuable recent critical observations have been of Powys’s humour and sense of the absurd as displayed from *Wolf Solent* to the last stories (as in “John Cowper Powys as Humorist”, *Contemporary Review*, Feb. 1973, and elsewhere); here is certainly a matter of sympathy between Powys and Knight, and we hope that, prompted by GWK, the subject of JCP as comic-novelist will soon be critically examined.

Richard Knight (as he now prefers to be called) was, of course, “a writer of subtle insight and imagination” and “a penetrating critic”<sup>4</sup> long before he began to write about Powys. His method of analysis had been perfected and the themes that have most engrossed his imagination—creativity, evil, consciousness—explored in earlier books: for example *The Starlit Dome* (1941), *The Christian Renaissance* (1933), *Christ and Nietzsche* (1948).

But I believe he was able to utilize his techniques and intuitions so tellingly when he turned his “penetrating eyes” on Powys’s work because, despite differences in age, upbringing, training and personality, they were, in certain fundamental respects, very much alike. As the newly-published *Letters* makes clear, Powys himself soon recognised this:

You & I, my dear Knight, are certainly very like each other . . .<sup>5</sup>

I have read enough . . . to find out how *exactly* the quality of your thought & imagination suits me & goes along on parallel lines with my own thought & imagination. *We sure are a pair* . . .<sup>6</sup>

The second reason why Knight has been a trail-blazer while we have stumbled behind is that he and Powys approached the art of criticism in similar ways. Referring to Knight’s *Christ and Nietzsche*, Powys writes:

Our method is really the same only we steer of course . . . *on our own steam or with our own chart* . . . What you & I, my dear Professor, use is our own particular ‘*soul entire*’ and not any specialized portion of it!<sup>7</sup>

Wilson Knight calls this method of using the “soul entire” to understand an author,

"literary interpretation", and he has only contempt for "judgements" that "arose from and appealed to the prisoned mentality of twentieth-century scepticism".<sup>8</sup> Knight has never made the mistake of trying to cram Powys into whatever narrow theory of the modern novel is popular at the moment, or to box him into a cupboard full of analytical tricks.

The percipient Ron Hall once remarked to J. C. P. that "the more you write the farther you get from writing". Powys was delighted and replied, "I should like that on my tombstone".<sup>9</sup>

Knight has always realised that Powys's books were not so much novels as propaganda for his magical view of life and Knight has plunged bravely, one might say nakedly, into that underwater world.

In the first chapter of *Neglected Powers* he explains his method of "literary interpretation". He sees it as using, initially, the same imaginative forces that create a piece of poetry. He uses his total imagination in the Coleridgean definition of that word to reveal "the key symbol or theme in poem, drama, life-work, or personal life which, once recognized, throws the rest into focus".<sup>10</sup> He describes this approach further in *The Saturnian Quest*:

One sees suddenly, as from dissolving clouds, a new structure of inner meaning, which might also be called a 'heart' or an 'essence'; it is something which, once seen, is unquestionably there, and which moreover seems to render other effects harmonious by throwing them into new, centripetal relevance.<sup>11</sup>

I am reminded of those beautiful lines from *The Cloud of Unknowing*:

By love he may be gotten and holden; but  
by thought never.

Wilson Knight is one of the most thoughtful and learned critics I know but for him "love", the imagination, the use of the "soul entire" is sovereign. The subordinate role of the "philosophic or scientific intelligence" is "to feed the imagination".<sup>12</sup> The critic's "intelligence" has another role—to

link that "key symbol or theme" to other authors, other religions, other mythologies, other attitudes of mind, so that the reader can better understand how what seems to be mysterious or quixotic or arbitrary in a writer actually has reverberating correspondences with other writers and even other worlds. One might say that the interpretative critic's "soul entire" flies to the centre of the maze; then his "intelligence" patiently shows the reader the way, reassuring him that the path is quite easy once he reads the clues correctly.

Meanwhile, the philosophic or scientific intelligence . . . is well enough equipped—and this discovery is my main contribution—to approach the symbolisms of established literature, provided that this intelligence is used in correct imaginative subjection. It will then find the mysteries not so intransigent after all.

Such a use of the intelligence does not *reduce* the poem to philosophy. If interpretation tells us that the dome of 'Kubla Khan' corresponds to the 'eternal dimension', this is not to turn a specific symbol into an abstract concept. Rather, *a link has been made* [italics mine] with discursive thought, with the abstracting intellect which rules so much of our waking existence, so that we can henceforth read the poem with a richer awareness of its content and a full intellectual collaboration . . . Often such a collaboration is needed to perceive the poem's unity, or the unity of a great writer's life-work . . .<sup>13</sup>

I have quoted this long passage because despite their respect for him, many more conventional critics are puzzled by Wilson Knight's unorthodox approach. There are two difficulties which must be overcome before the reader can fully appreciate this "interpretative writing".

First of all, the reader must accept, almost as an act of faith or a gut feeling, that these symbols of themes are indeed the "keys" to the mystery. Secondly, this method tends to presuppose a reader as erudite as the critic. Nor does it make matters easier that Knight's "philosophic or scientific intelligence" tosses out "interpretations" that are sometimes cryptic and often as allusive as Powys's denser writings. Knowing that the

dome of Kubla Khan corresponds to the "eternal dimension" does not illuminate the reader who does not appreciate the multifarious implications of the "eternal dimension". I have often felt there is a real need for someone to interpret Wilson Knight's "interpretations",—someone to act as a guide dog, so to speak, who will lead the mazed reader back to the guide.

Such is my respect for both his imagination and his intellect that I have never had any hesitation in accepting totally Knight's insistence that the three inter-related "key themes" of Powys's work are sadism, masturbation and bisexuality. But I suppose to the outraged reader who has revelled only in Powys's immense outpourings of nature mysticism, these "themes" must appear to reduce his novels to the level of soft porn.

But these themes in Powys's writings cannot be ignored or glossed over. The "obscenities" (which term Knight uses "to cover a wide range of sexual perversions in fantasy or practice") are "prerequisite to poetic vision", to "the spiritualities". And he says their acceptance, equally, "may be a prerequisite to any rich poetic understanding".<sup>14</sup> If Wilson Knight is correct in his intuitions then these themes, obscene as they may seem, are the foundation stones of Powys's creative life. So he relentlessly rubs our noses in them, metaphorically speaking. But then he goes on to show the reader who can follow him how they are linked to universal themes in the philosophy and mythology of all ages and races.

In a letter to Knight written in 1957 Powys clearly states, "Nobody but you has brought into an analysis of me as a writer the one essential thing—namely that I was born a sadist."<sup>15</sup> Powys insisted that his central obsession was sadism and from the age of 3 until the age of 80 he had indulged in sadistic fantasies. Knight points out that in his novels Powys never treated sadism as the result of some fault in character and upbringing but rather as an evil "directly reflecting and responding to that side of the creative process, or great 'First Cause',

which is responsible for the manifest cruelties of the cosmic scheme."<sup>16</sup> The theme of sadism was his way of exploring the inexorable presence of evil in the world.

In "Mysticism and Masturbation" Wilson Knight links this key theme to the writings of Colin Wilson, to the Renaissance myths of Faust and Don Juan, to Pope, Nietzsche and Eliot in order that the reader can become aware of its universal significance. He could have used as tellingly Jungian theories or eastern religions, for as he would be the first to admit, this is a *pattern*—the monomyth of creative life that can be traced in all its many variations in all ages. Put most simply, it is the story of Eden, of the Fall, of man's attempt to regain that lost Golden Eden. The Golden Age was the Original Unity when all dualities of light and dark, good and evil, male and female, man and nature were fused in blissful unconsciousness. Creation is the fragmentation of that unity and the beginning of conscious awareness in man. Myths and religions tell the story of that lost Eden and adumbrate the way in which it can be regained. Many psychologists and poets see this myth reenacted in every human being. The child is born with memories of that unity with the natural world but as he becomes conscious of his individual self, his uniqueness, nature becomes other. All halves of the dualities which the conscious mind now rejects as threatening also become "other" and are suppressed. To find a second childhood, to regain a lost golden age, the rare individual attempts the perilous job of assimilating those rejected aspects of their whole selves. It is a journey to the underworld, a journey to the centre of the maze, a journey to Selfhood. This conscious ego that rejects so much, is only part of the larger Self that resides in man. The other parts lie in shadow, in the unconscious, and are those instincts, those "obscenities" that the spirit of the time and the ego rejects. To achieve wholeness these must be consciously realised and assimilated, or else the ego, broken off from the ground that nourishes it, remains rootless and lifeless.

Powys realised that to become whole, to become a creative power, he must descend into the shadows of his own mind and, moreover, accept the dangerous, sadistic fantasies which, freed, floated to the surface. He realised, says Knight, that these instincts which came from "the roots of the psyche", were "the raw materials of art".<sup>27</sup> But they are by definition dangerous instincts; they threaten to swamp the daylight reason of man. They are the cruel, brutal, sadistic aspects of Nature, of the First Cause, buried in our own Selves. As Knight says, the "experience of sadism" is "a submission to the invasion of natural instincts hostile to man"<sup>18</sup> and is an inevitable concomitant of the attempt by Powys heroes to achieve union with nature and the non-human. This is the central struggle of the Powys-hero.

But how does the individual or the artist handle the dark cruelties if he accepts them as an aspect of himself? Powys was adamant that they must never be wilfully acted out. But if these unconscious forces can be tapped and assimilated, they can bring to the underworld diver a sense of release, completion, and magical powers.

For Powys the mechanism of assimilation of the sadistic fantasies that welled up from the unconscious was masturbation. With the publication of his letters to Llewelyn and to Knight we have confirmation of what Wilson Knight has known for many years: that the basis of Powys's "solitary world of sexual fantasy"<sup>19</sup> was neither heterosexuality nor homosexuality, but "life-long masturbation".<sup>20</sup> This knowledge allowed Knight to explore the implications of this obsession and to draw brilliant conclusions which, however much the Powys reader or critic has repulsed or decried them before, he must now attempt to come to terms with.

Masturbating while indulging in "cerebral orgies of sadism",<sup>21</sup> was not, for Powys, simply to obtain sexual release. It was, first of all, an attempt to accept and *thereby render powerless* his own particular "evil" darkness, and, in a much larger, even

magical sense, to heal the evil that wells up into our world consciousness.

The young, he said, should be deliberately *taught* to indulge their more dangerous instincts through imagination accompanied by a self-directed sexual activity; so turning evil into sex-play, tragedy into comedy, demons into angels.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, masturbation was a technique whereby Powys attempted to reunite his conscious "I am I" with his unconscious instinctual nature which he equated with the natural world. Colin Wilson writes:

What is so interesting about Powys is that he deliberately set out to cultivate 'multi-mindedness', to pass out of his own identity into that of people or even objects . . . It was an attempt to soothe his mind into a state of quiescent identity with the 'psychic ether', with the vast objective world that surrounds us . . . Powys never lost his power of summoning a strange ecstasy.<sup>23</sup>

Glen Cavaliero suspects that what makes Powys's world "displeasing to many people" is the omnipresence of "what D. H. Lawrence stigmatises under the label of 'sex-in-the-head'." Cavaliero makes the acute remark: "the extraordinary reveries to be found in his novels are but an extended sexual awareness."<sup>24</sup>

Readers who revel in Powys's lyrical evocations of the English landscapes are not so willing to accept that they may be descriptions of long-drawn-out love-making between a man and trees and earth and stone. But as he said in an agonized letter to Llewelyn in 1923, "I grant the 'onanism', . . . but these things may have more mysteries and wonder in them than you guess."<sup>25</sup>

By means of auto-eroticism, whether physical or cerebral, he hoped he could at the same time diffuse and accept the evil in himself that echoes the evil aspect of the First Cause, reunite himself with the natural world where in a long-ago Golden Age all were merged, and, lastly, and perhaps most importantly, release a creative power in himself that would equal the creative force

of the magician Merlin, even, perhaps, the force of the Creative First Cause Itself.

It is this connection of masturbation and sadism with creativity and magic that is perhaps most difficult to understand. In *Powys and the Kundalini Serpent*, Knight attempts to make one of his "links" to show what immensities are subsumed under that ugly word "masturbation".

The links are not arbitrary. Wilson Knight and others have given sufficient evidence of Powys's reading in the esoteric and occult religions and mythologies of the world. And even if chapter and verse of specific knowledge cannot be supplied, it is a basic premise of Knight's theory of art that the truly creative author draws images out of his unconscious which have the strange, persuasive vitality that signals truth, even if the reader cannot totally understand.

Wilson Knight explains what the Kundalini serpent is, how it operates and what its function is. In Hindu and Buddhist teaching we are told of a power in men, like a coiled snake, lodged at the base of the spine, a little below the sex organ, which, when aroused by certain techniques, rises upward to the mind.

The Kundalini technique, according to Gopi Krishna, is of central importance. It "is the real cause of all genuine spiritual and psychic phenomena, the biological basis of evolution and development of personality; the secret origin of all esoteric and occult doctrines".<sup>26</sup>

The Kundalini process is described as follows:

The main median nerve extends through the centre of the spinal column. Around it to the right and left, like serpents, coil the other two. The latent mystic fire force associated with the physical sexual force of the body is the Serpent Power, personified as the sleeping goddess, Kundalini . . . She represents the feminine or negative aspect of the universal force of the cosmic mind . . .

Roused from her slumber, she slowly uncoils and ascends up her double-coiled path to the brain psychic centre, represented by the personification of the masculine or positive aspect of the universal force. Here in union

with her Lord, The Divine One . . . there results the phenomena of mystic rain . . . The whole body is recharged with psychic power.<sup>27</sup>

Knight comments:

Sexual energy is involved. The process is 'connected unmistakably with the sexual parts', the 'sublimated seed' being within the 'radiant energy', the reproductive organs supplying the 'raw material'. The contiguity of sexual and Kundalini activity is a purposely designed arrangement. Prof. Hillman tells us that 'A reorganization of the sexual impulse' is needed for a change in consciousness. The Kundalini area is supposed to be in the region of the coccyx, anus and prostate and the transformation of sexuality is the 'major opus as in the discipline'; though exactly how the anal and sexual are coordinated remains rather mysterious: we may remember the conjunction of 'excremental' and 'sexual' functions in Powys.<sup>28</sup>

That touching scene in *Glastonbury* of Sam bent over the behind of the old man suffering from piles, coming so soon after his Grail vision, reminds me of the malapropism, "that rainbow must contain all the colours of the rectum." Mysterious indeed; but totally convincing.

For the reader who is steeped in eastern religious esoterica, Knight's "link" illuminates much of what is mysterious in Powys—for example, his emphasis on the anal, the excremental, the ugly; his descriptions of "vicious" love-making; his magicians' technique for gaining power. But perhaps for those less conversant with these ancient traditions, a less erudite and less enigmatic explanation might be helpful.

In certain specialized branches of Taoism, Buddhism and Hinduism, there was present the belief that the sexual act was not primarily for procreation but a means of attaining immortality. For example, the sexual mysticism of the Vajarayanists was based on the belief that every person has in him a feminine element and a male element which reside in two nerve channels that run along either side of the spinal cord. The aim of their techniques was to overcome this

dualism by effecting a "mystical marriage" in the brain between the two opposites.

The practitioner reunites the split in himself by joining in *imagined or real sexual* embrace with a female partner. If the partner is real, it was considered necessary to prepare the woman properly by kissing and fondling her, thereby arousing and activating her "Yin" essence. (Suddenly so many of the love scenes in Powys's novels which to a "normal" person seem "vicious" or "perverted" assume a new significance.) Some texts represent the female partner as an image evoked by concentrated meditation and the union with her as a spiritual one—that is, Powys's "cerebral masturbation".

The female energy acquired from the woman blends with the male energy acquired by activated but unshed semen into a powerful new essence called "translated semen" which breaks through the separate channels, opens up a new a-sexual nerve channel which reaches the head, and the practitioner achieves a state of bliss.

There is a similar Taoist discipline of "making the semen return". The semen which is "translated" because it must remain unshed is visualized as a sun and a moon. The "sun and moon" are raised along the dorsal column until they reach a certain spot in the brain where they unite and duality is overcome.

Behind these esoteric practises of sexual mystics lies the constant theme of Eastern spirituality, namely that by philosophical reflection, contemplation, and psycho-physiological techniques, a chosen few can succeed in rising above all dualities, good-bad, male-female, light-dark, by realising a *coincidentia oppositorum* in his own body and his own spirit.

Interestingly, Tantrism compared the creation of the "translated semen" in the adept's body with the formation of the embryo in the uterus. Some texts refer to this semen as a *yvān-chên*—a small child. Possibly this is what Knight is referring to when he writes:

The act is *creative*: just as normal sex-union

makes a child, this union with instincts jetting from the greater cosmos makes a personality. This is, as *In Spite Of* told us . . . the way to "a new self-created self" whereby we are one with our opposite.<sup>29</sup>

The western psychotherapist, Jacobi, uses similar imagery to describe a new level of psychic integration. A man must,

discover the contrasexual element in himself and to fecundate it, thus rounding out his personality . . . If the 'bodily child' is born of the first form of relationship, the fruit of the second is the 'spiritual child'. That is why we can observe that creative, spiritually productive people are often congenitally endowed with a relatively large share of contrasexual features that they are 'hermaphroditic' by psychic constitution . . .<sup>30</sup>

The "homunculus" image only occasionally appears in Powys's novels, but a related image, the bisexual being or the androgyne, plays a crucial role in his mythology.

Again, Knight links this key symbol to religions and cultural traditions so as to assist the reader's "intelligence, if not imagination", to see the connection of the "obscenities" to the "spiritualities".

The daylight imagination needs an ideal to balance the more repellent indulgences and this from Plato . . . to the stream of youthful figures, boys or girls disguised as boys, in drama and poetry ever since, will function as what I call 'seraphic' persons. They are close to, and yet independent of, sexual instinct; they bisexually symbolize the fusion of all opposites; though human, they link us to spirit spheres.<sup>31</sup>

The seraphic being or androgyne recurs throughout history and appears in virtually all philosophical systems. It obviously has great numinous power. This being is not a decadent who is equally heterosexual and homosexual. Rather he is a symbol or vision of the perfect man, an evolving type of humanity in which a fusion of the sexes will produce a new, unpolarized consciousness. But as well as being a symbol of a future complete being, the androgyne is also the image of the perfection of the primordial state. The way to achieve wholeness, the

prerequisite to reaching the original Golden Eden is to attempt to achieve a similar union within oneself, to imitate the self-making of the Original Being.

Thus the simple act or idea of masturbation became for Powys a Tao, a Way, to acceptance of his own evil, a way of overcoming his sense of duality, a vision of a lost golden age, a way to tap the immense and magical power of the unconscious, and, not least, the font of his creativity.

Colin Wilson has made some interesting observations on the relationship of sex and magical powers, sex and creativity, which reinforce much of what Knight has said about Powys. In *The God of the Labyrinth* he writes, "Sex gives us a glimpse of a concentration of mind that would make us god-like if we could command it in other spheres."<sup>32</sup> The theory is that sexual excitement, if long drawn-out and unreleased, will build up "until it can be used to transform the mind."<sup>33</sup> Sexual excitement, properly channelled, is a means of "contact with the hidden powers of the unconscious."<sup>34</sup>

And in this unconscious world reside all the powers of second sight, pre-vision, telepathy, divination.

The knowledge of his "roots", his inner world, is important to man at this point in evolution, for he has become trapped in his image of himself as a thinking pygmy. He must somehow return to the recognition that he is potentially a 'mage', one of those magical figures who can hurl thunderbolts or command spirits.<sup>35</sup>

Powys knew all about "that formidable daimon"

which . . . can be reached somewhere in my nature, and which when it *is* reached has the Devil's own force . . . I mean the power of rousing a peculiar excitation in yourself as you confront the Inanimate, an exultation which is really a cosmic eroticism . . .<sup>36</sup>

Wilson Knight thinks Powys deliberately set out to break through his narrow consciousness into an intense awareness that he was part of the consciousness of everything. With this cosmic consciousness, achieved through sexual ecstasy, he

becomes a magician, he becomes a creator, he becomes self-created.

As Bog said to the Cerne Giant, "life is much more complicated than we normally suppose".

I believe that Knight's discussions of sadism, masturbation and bisexuality are his most important contribution to Powys criticism. In this article I have separated his three "keys" in an attempt, however mistaken, to make Knight's "interpretation" a little more accessible to squeamish readers. In doing so I am aware that I have done damage to his tightly woven tapestries. Of course these themes are inseparable, all part of the central mystery of creativity and wholeness. It is Knight's patient probing of the "obscenities" that has revealed again and again how well he understands the "spiritualities".

That may indeed explain why his Powys criticism has not always received the recognition it deserves. He provides the answer himself:

We can suggest that the obscenities are its [poetic creation's] *roots* and the spiritualities its *flowering*. Both these counter, and seem to threaten, the rational mind-structure of our society . . . When worked up into imaginative and, to that extent, conventionalized structures . . . we accept them, provided that we are not faced with a close-up which shows us their roots and their flowering. Both these, and especially—strange though it be—the flowering, strike fear. We are at ease only with the half-way substances of generally accepted viewpoints and values: these we abstract and attend to. We discuss the psychology of Leontes while ignoring the resurrection of Hermione.<sup>37</sup>

Knight hopes that his "interpretative criticism" will help a reader find that "the mysteries [were] not so intransigent after all". He wants to help him read a poem or a play or a novel "with a richer awareness of its content and a full intellectual collaboration". It has achieved this for me; I hope that by reviewing some of his more difficult intuitions I have encouraged other Powys readers to approach and explore the insights of this "Master in Discernment".

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Robert Blackmore, ed., *Powys to Knight: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to G. R. Wilson Knight*, Cecil Woolf, 1983, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup>G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest*, Methuen, 1964, p. 122.

<sup>4</sup>*The Letters*, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>8</sup>G. Wilson Knight, "Poetry and Magic", *Neglected Powers*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup>"The Old Man With the Praise", *The Powys Review*, No. 9, 1981/1982, p. 79.

<sup>10</sup>"Poetry and Magic", *Neglected Powers*, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>*The Saturnian Quest*, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup>"Poetry and Magic", p. 21.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>15</sup>*Letters*, p. 80.

<sup>16</sup>"Cosmic Correspondences", *The Times Literary Supplement*, 11 October, 1957. Reprinted in the *Letters*, p. 123.

<sup>17</sup>"Poetry and Magic", p. 30.

<sup>18</sup>"Mysticism and Masturbation", p. 159.

<sup>19</sup>Glen Cavaliero, "Phoenix and Serpent", *The Powys Review*, No. 2, Winter, 1977, p. 57.

<sup>20</sup>*Letters*, p. 68.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>22</sup>"The Ship of Cruelty", *Neglected Powers*, p. 220.

<sup>23</sup>Colin Wilson, *The Occult*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1971, pp. 65-66.

<sup>24</sup>"Phoenix and Serpent", p. 57.

<sup>25</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Letters to his Brother Llewelyn*, Vol. 1, Village Press, 1975, pp. 325-326.

<sup>26</sup>Gopi Krishna, *Kundalini*, quoted in Knight, "Powys and the Kundalini Serpent", *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. 233, July/August, 1978, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>29</sup>"Mysticism and Masturbation", p. 165.

<sup>30</sup>Jolande Jacobi, *The Way of Individuation*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1967.£. 45

<sup>31</sup>"Mysticism and Masturbation", p. 192.

<sup>32</sup>Wilson, *The God of the Labyrinth*, Granada, 1971, p. 229.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 214.

<sup>34</sup>Wilson, *The Occult*, p. 57.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>36</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography*, Bodley Head, 1934, p. 531.

<sup>37</sup>"Poetry and Magic", pp. 30-31.



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# John Cowper Powys

## D. H. Lawrence\*

("Modern Fiction", Ch. 3 of *Sex in the arts: a symposium*, ed. J. F. McDermott and K. B. Taft, 1932: the last section, following discussion of Proust, Dreiser and Joyce.)

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The two Englishmen who have made the greatest contribution to the problem of sex-life in modern times are unquestionably Havelock Ellis, who fortunately for us all is still active and alive, and D. H. Lawrence, whose too early death we are still lamenting. The first to do justice to certain great forbidden worlds, like those of Nietzsche and Casanova, Havelock Ellis has done more to liberate the minds of his English contemporaries from sex taboos than any other writer; but it was left to Lawrence to turn his own personal nerve-song and nerve-dance into a veritable Metaphysic for the Incontinent. From *Sons and Lovers*, his first book, to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, his last book, Lawrence has boldly and heroically followed the cult of what he calls his "dark gods".

The two books of his, however, from which it is perhaps easiest to deduce the dominant principles of his doctrine are *Kangaroo*, the book about Australia, and *Studies in Classic American Literature*, the book about Hawthorne, Melville, and Poe. In the former of these he invents a Jewish protagonist whose habits and ideas represent the traditional view of Love—Love Spiritual, Love Sentimental, Love Possessive—against which he is making war; while in the latter he uses the White Whale of Melville as a symbol for this same enemy. His idea seems to be that the old-fashioned view of Love to which we Anglo-Saxons have so long done obeisance—hypocritical or sincere—a Love founded on our race's savage possessiveness, sublimated by mediaeval chivalry and by passages from the writings of St Paul, has grown to be some-

\*We republish J. C. Powys on D. H. Lawrence in recognition of the centenary of Lawrence's birth.

thing crippling and cramping for the human spirit.

As against this traditional conception of Love—and it must always be remembered that Lawrence is an Englishman fighting against English metaphysical compromises; for Anatole France would be as sceptical of the new Laurentian 'Love' as of the old 'Pauline Love'—he advocates a "dark god" cult which is nothing less than an apotheosis of a certain kind of lust. Of what kind of lust? Here indeed we reach the crux of this singular writer's daring doctrine.

Certainly not of any easy, furtive, indolent, hedonistic self-indulgence. Disciples of Lawrence very quickly discover that where the burden of Jesus weighs on us like a lath of wood, the burden of Lawrence weighs on us like a bar of iron. The lust he eulogizes, in fact, as worthy to take the place of the love we have been taught is in reality a formidable gathering together of our heathen self-reliance and independence and the shameless use of the curved claws of our taciturn and intractable ego to make a wholesome clutch upon our sweet friend-foe!

This friend-foe in *her* turn—for in most of his books, *Women in Love*, not the less, Lawrence is speaking from the masculine viewpoint—allows this 'hit-and-run' game to take place in the open, in full sunlight, in clear air; and when the masculine claws prove themselves—in this towering-tourney of equal eagles—as we are assured by Lawrence they will, the stronger and more deadly, *then* with an intoxicatingly sweet submission, bringing heavenly delight to both, the feminine eagle cries 'Conquered!' and they both sink down upon their rocky eyrie!

And as with normal heterosexual relations, this refreshing, this wholesome, this *en plein air* battle is not to be avoided or glossed over, but to be relished to the fullest measure and carried to the utmost limit, so in abnormal homosexual relations the same struggle goes on, resulting in an armed neutrality, if equality is preserved, or in an honourable and life-giving feudal relationship of noble master and noble servant.

But it is not so much the final issue—for this may prove, and indeed must prove, of very varied elements—as the frankly recognized conflict itself, full of the joy of battle between the enamoured protagonists and hardening them and strengthening them both in the use of their war-nerves, that is the important thing.

Let a hundred years go by and other fashions of love and loving take the place of ours, and other love-doctrines prevail, what writer of our generation will at that time, and for those people, most entirely represent our era—call it the era of the Great War—in the handling of erotic complications?

Representing the English-speaking race, one would say without a moment's hesitation—D. H. Lawrence.

All the peculiar tricks, gestures, posings, reposings, maskings, unmaskings, curiosities, manias, phobias, dementias, idealisms, illusions, disillusionings, fantasias, introversions, madnesses and explanations of madness, with psychoanalysis tugging at us from one side and behaviourism from the other, that our age enjoys and suffers from, can be found at large, and yet saturated with his own particular spiritual flavour, in the work of D. H. Lawrence.

And what have been the influences that have affected Lawrence himself? Well! There is something of Nietzsche, something of Whitman, something of Edward Carpenter, in the tone he adopts. That curious wild, liquid-sobbing, weeping-laughing love lyricism that seems to be akin to the flowering of the sap in spring-sorcerized vegetation, suggests the terraqueous incantations of Walt Whitman, his "tears, tears, tears" of the night-figure upon the sands, his sag-

ging moons heavy with tragic dews, his "liquid" trees, his full-bosomed, apple-bearing earth.

One special tendency of our Great War mood in its treatment of sex is paramount in Lawrence: what might be called the erotic anonymity of all his fictional characters. One forgets their names, these puppets of his, one forgets their plots, their backgrounds, their dramas, their separate opinions. One almost forgets—and this is peculiarly characteristic of Lawrence—*their very sex*. Through them all, as through patient and responsive reeds, this proletarian Dionysus pipes his enthralling rhapsodies. The dark gods! One may be sure that to any pleasure-loving profligate of a lighter, gayer, less mystical age—of the eighteenth century, for instance—the service of these dim exacting angels of lust would be as gloomy and responsible as religion itself!

And responsible and gloomy in many ways, in spite of his wild jestings and rhythmic exultations, Lawrence certainly is. It is the first time, perhaps, in all literature that erotic sensation *has been taken so seriously*, though it has frequently, our being as we are, been made a desperate and antinomian quest.

This seriousness, this passionate and intense gravity in Lawrence, compared with the mischievous light-hearted naughtiness of other epochs, mounted up at the last, possibly under the pressure of his illness, to a prophetic and oracular tone that drove all Rabelaisian humour, as it drove all ironical malice, totally off the field. Lust, in becoming so grave a cult, not only ceased to be lechery, it became a kind of portentous priggishness. In *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, where it is a mistake to suppose that the self-satisfied young workingman, who ousts the woman's cold-blooded, war-maimed husband, is sadistic in the brutality in which—in *flagrante delictu*—he bullies her into using those old Preparatory-School monosyllables usually associated with the walls of jakes and lavatories, this particular tone of physiological priggishness reaches a point

that to a Celtic mind is comical and to a Latin mind simply barbarous.

We have all made the mistake—in fact, it is one of the ways in which posterity will recognize our generation—of assuming that this eminently moral way of being libidinous *ex cathedra* is the same thing as being what we are accustomed to call ‘pagan’. Nothing could be further from the truth. Anything less ‘pagan’ than the feverish and frantic gravity with which Lawrence goes to work to transform his “dark gods” into a New Religion could hardly be imagined. One has only to turn over the pages of Apuleius, no very hard-boiled pagan, to find this out. And yet, though it is easy, from an irresponsible profane viewpoint, to make sport of all this, our psychoanalysis-bewitched era has undoubtedly achieved certain deep and permanent insights for the eroticists of our race. And among us all no one has dived deeper into these sub-Atlantean secrets than D. H. Lawrence.

The masculine ‘soul’ in women, the feminine ‘soul’ in men, the appalling undersea battle that goes on between these ‘dark’ souls, scrabbling ‘below the belt’ and wrestling in the half-conscious if not in the sub-conscious Cave of the man-eating Mothers, these things have never been described with such poetic eloquence, never been made so exciting to the mythological mind as they are here.

Born Jacobin as he is, D. H. Lawrence creates an imaginary labouring-man, an Adamic primitive to set against his finicking and funky aristocrats, just as Whitman erected his imaginary Democratic-man, to set against his degenerate Europeans; and just as with Whitman’s “symbolic male”, there is a vein of something savage, intolerant, and coarse in the hirsute eroticism of this ideal figure. It is true that the horned violence of Lawrence’s ideal male—so intractable, truculent, unpersonable—is less narcissistic and self-satisfied than Whitman’s and far less purely physiological. Lawrence’s “dark gods” imply, in fact, a deep spiritual transmutation of mere physical desire into something that becomes

the spear-head of the person’s whole subterranean being.

In its stoical and almost ferocious stripping off of the trappings of our bourgeois civilization, Lawrence’s athletic and proletarian Eros might, one feels, serve many of the purposes of the great Russian Proletcult. But Englishman from the Midlands as he is, his poetic prejudice against industrialism and machinery makes this “figure against the sky” of his erotic dreaming more anti-social than any dictatorship could possibly tolerate; and it has been this anti-social element in him, this misanthropic Return to Nature, that always led him to hanker after the free ranch-life of Mexico and New Mexico, vast spaces and horizons, where his “dark gods” encounter something reciprocal and corresponding in the solitary eagles and serpents of the descendants of the Lost Atlantis.

It is a far cry from Staffordshire and Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire to the altars of Quetzalcoatl, just as it is a far cry from his early lyrical poems to the sexual savageries of *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*; but any real devotee of Lawrence—and as with most mystical prophets he tends to excite as much hatred as he does love—will feel that his too brief and stormy life possesses a real tragic unity, as if Euripides had written the drama of a defeated and lacerated Dionysus. Far removed, as we have hinted, is the ‘paganism’ of Lawrence from the fresh-blowing classical winds of Homer, or the wet seashells and dewy flocks of Theocritus, but if one does force oneself to link him up with the race who knew Eros, the true lover of Psyche, as he was, it is to some of the strange moods of the author of the *Bacchanals* that one would turn for a parallel.

A poet, first and last, it has been left for D. H. Lawrence to lend to those insatiable searchings into the underworld of spiritualized lust, which is one of the glorious maladies of our age, an age already passing away, a dark magical beauty full of disturbing and troubling overtones, full of motions and murmurs of things that have no name!

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## Letters to the Editor

---

A note in memory of Eve Elwin, 1906-1984

When Malcolm Elwin was alive, I used to correspond with him on authorship problems, as he was a member of the Society of Authors when I was Joint Secretary. I also met him once or twice at meetings of the West Country Writers' Association at Exeter and elsewhere. But I never knew Eve until after Malcolm died in 1973. From then onwards we were regularly in touch by letter and telephone, and when my wife and I were able to drive over to Putsborough Sands from our home near Taunton.

Eve was one of the most dynamic women I have ever met, intensely interested in literature and life, with a generous heart and a keen sense of humour. We got on famously. There was so much to talk about, some of it outside my ken, because Eve was deeply versed in English literature of the last hundred years, had strong likes and dislikes, and had known well most of the writers who were Malcolm's friends.

The Powys brothers were a subject of common interest. Malcolm had, of course, corresponded with Llewelyn's widow, Alyse Gregory, from 1944 till her death in 1967, and this led to correspondence and friendship with all members of the Powys family. Eve and Malcolm visited John Cowper and Phyllis Playter several times, both at Corwen and Blaenau Ffestiniog; and in the summer of 1955 they spent a memorable day at Chydyok with Alyse and other members of the family—and slept the night in Llewelyn's shelter. The accounts Eve and Malcolm wrote to their friends of these visits make fascinating reading. After Alyse moved to Morebath, she often stayed with the Elwins at Putsborough, and they would visit her for the day. Eve found great affinity with both Alyse and Phyllis, as all three were American, and shared many aspects of the America of their youth. In a letter to Louis Wilkinson, shortly after Eve and Malcolm's first visit to Corwen, John commented on "the immediate *rapport* . . . of two American Femines".

We talked of many authors and friends, some of them "west country" by birth or association—among them, Ernest Martin, Denys Val Baker, Henry Williamson, Negley and Dan Farson, Gilbert Phelps, Oliver Stoner, Louis

Wilkinson, and Waveney Girvan, the latter the business man with whom Malcolm launched *The West Country Magazine*. We talked too of some of the authors who had written Introductions for *Macdonald Illustrated Classics*, which Malcolm had edited—Janet Adam Smith, J. B. Priestley, Compton Mackenzie and Daphne du Maurier. Looking around the magnificent library that Malcolm had started to collect while an Oxford undergraduate in the early twenties, was an almost numbing experience. Of particular interest to me, as an archivist, however, was the massive collection of letters written to and by Malcolm—and sorted and put into order by Eve's daughter, Sally.

I never read any of Eve's novels, but I did read the typescript of the life-story of herself and Malcolm, and found it fascinating: not only the intrinsic interest of the events described, but the skill in character drawing, and the natural flow of words and images which compelled you to read and go on reading, and moved you in its spare but vivid account of Malcolm's death. I hope one day it will be published as a tribute to Eve's qualities as a person and a writer.

*Victor Bonham-Carter*

Reviews do tend to balance each other out; and since my book *The Brothers Powys* has now received virtually every kind of review, from the appallingly bad (*Books & Bookmen*, April 1983) to the wonderfully good (*The Guardian*, Thursday 31 March 1983), I am no longer surprised by anyone's reaction to it, whether extremely friendly, or extremely hostile. By presenting the Powyses as clearly and directly as possible, I have attracted some of the same passionate feelings for and against that they themselves have always excited. It seems that some people cannot distinguish between the biographer and his subject any more clearly than others can distinguish between actors and the parts which they play in popular television series.

The lack of balance seemed at its most extreme in that infamous review in *The Times* (Thursday 7 April 1983) headed "A bunch of nutters". Many people found it astonishing that a paper of record should deal in so flippant a manner with a serious work about a distinguished literary

family, and I gather from the Literary Editor of *The Times* that this review attracted a great deal of correspondence. I am grateful to *The Times* for having had the belated decency to print Professor Wilson Knight's representative letter of reply on Tuesday 19 April, 1983.

From readers of and contributors to *The Powys Review*, one might reasonably expect a more balanced judgement, and I am grateful to Cedric Hentschel for his lengthy and thoughtful review (PR14). His remarks about the nature of a possible additional chapter I found particularly valuable. But may I reply to a point he makes a little earlier in the review, especially as it is one which has also been made elsewhere? He writes (p. 83):

The last phase, 1940-1963, is covered in barely more than twenty pages. One senses that, by then, Mr. Graves was spurting to the finishing post—or else that he was running out of the space allotted by his publisher.

May I assure Mr Hentschel that it was not a question either of spurting to the finishing post or of running out of space, but of exercising artistic control over the shape and balance of the book. I had to do more reading for that last chapter than for any other chapter in the book; and had I been writing a life of John Cowper Powys alone, I would have had a great deal more to say. But I was writing a triple biography, and with Llewelyn dead, and Theodore's best work done, I felt that it would have seriously unbalanced the book to have, say, two lengthy chapters largely devoted to John. Whether I was right or wrong is of course a matter of opinion.

Frederick Davies's letter (PR13), as you may imagine, I found less welcome. To suggest, as Mr Davies does, that my selection of facts about John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter was "fortuitous", and that in writing about John I could "only shuffle [my] index cards and hope for the best" could be taken as an extremely damaging slur upon my professionalism. However, Mr Davies also comments that "somebody who did not know J. C. P. cannot hope to convey any idea of the living man". So instead of regarding Mr. Davies's comments as a personal attack, I must I suppose understand that he regards all biography as a hopeless endeavour unless it is based upon personal knowledge!

Mr Davies also contends that "nowhere in it is there any recognition that Powys's personal habits, idiosyncracies and non-conformist views

may be the products, or even the essential foundation, of the extraordinary power and quality of his imagination . . ." Presumably Mr Davies had not read pages 244-245 in which I make the point that JCP's apparently eccentric behaviour was "generally in accordance with the philosophical beliefs and the code of conduct which he had set down in *The Complex Vision* and elaborated in such works as *The Meaning of Culture*".

Well, enough is enough; and we are all grateful to Mr Davies for the first-hand information about JCP and Phyllis which is such a valuable part of his letter.

Richard Perceval Graves  
11 Canonbury  
Shrewsbury  
Shropshire SY3 7AH

After long thought, I have decided to ask you to print this letter for me, or else many people will be in a misunderstanding. It is about certain quotations in Mr Richard Graves's book, *The Brothers Powys*. In his book he quotes from another, purporting to be by me, called "A Portrait of T. F. Powys", the typescript of which was sent him by my father, Count Potocki of Montalk.

Now a long time ago, when my father was staying with me in Dorset, such a book was proposed by him; I told him that I had no time to spare in which to write it, and indeed I had not, so he said he would "ghost" it for me. He chose the title; a few chapters were written (at least about 20 pages were written; I don't know if he used chapters) and that, to my belief, is as far as it went. Dr Marius Buning tells me that he read some of these pages when he called on us in Dorset, but I have never read it. I would be much interested to do so. The point I'd like to make is that this book from which Mr Graves quotes is supposed to be a thing written and completed by myself, T. F. Powys's adoptive daughter, so that it would be quite safe to use it as a reference; and this isn't so at all. It wasn't as far as I know ever finished, nor did I write one word of it as far as it went or even read it to make sure I was correctly quoted. I'm afraid that at that time I didn't take the idea of writing a book (any book) at all seriously.

I should imagine that what has happened is that my father finished the book himself in

France after I had returned to England in 1967, writing from memory and surmise; and presently sent it to Mr Graves thinking that it might end up by getting published and might do me some good. I appreciate this thought, but under no circumstances will I sail under a false flag. I'll take neither praise nor blame for someone else's virtues or failings, nor do I want anything to do with a fake even if it's a masterpiece of its kind, however well-intentioned the efforts to force ownership on me.

And also a good deal of what is written in "A Portrait of T. F. Powys" must indeed be surmise, for Count Potocki never knew any of the Powys brothers; therefore as reference the thing is totally suspect. I do not doubt that it's well written, probably far better than I could do; but the point is that I did not write it. I wish it to be known that I did not write it. I hope I make myself sufficiently clear.

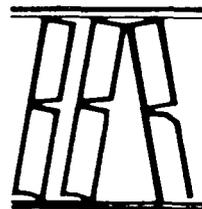
I would like to make it plain that all this is no fault of Mr Graves; I suppose my name is on the typescript that my father sent (it must be, surely) and why should he suspect it? He could hardly ask me about it as he (like many other people) had no idea at that time where I was. I don't know that it's precisely anyone's fault; it is simply a canard, and the sooner it is corrected the better.

*Theodora Gay Scutt*  
Hountsmoor Farm,  
Henley,  
Buckland Newton  
Dorchester, Dorset

With the approval and active co-operation of The Dreiser Trust, the University of Pennsylvania and The Powys Estate, I am endeavouring to locate the letters between John Cowper Powys and Theodore Dreiser. We have found most of those written to Dreiser but are still missing about sixty written to Powys. This may be because John Cowper disposed of them when he moved from a larger house to a smaller one at Waterloo Place. Any help or clues, and especially copies (which would be paid for) of letters, would be appreciated.

When we find the letters we can look for an editor. We have a publisher, so we have the cart before the horse on this occasion!

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## Reviews

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*Klinton Top*,  
G. WILSON KNIGHT.

Redcliffe Press, 1984, £3.50 (paperback).

In his preface to this first publication of G. Wilson Knight's novel *Klinton Top*, the author tells us that it has to be read "in both manner and subject" as a 1926-7 composition; an indication that it has to be put into the context of the fictive conventions of the time, when popular novels charged with sentiment and passion within rural settings constituted a more accepted genre. Indeed Wilson Knight himself in the same preface fairly takes the wind out of the sails of any prospective critics of the novel by saying that "romantic indulgence and sentimentality" and a "pervading atmosphere of tragic gloom" are the main criticisms that can be levelled at it. By the same token his offer of a favourable interpretation involving its treatment of nature as an active agent in the story, and its extraordinary ending, describing a "spiritual experience rare, if not unprecedented, in serious fiction" is a fair pointer to the novel's quality.

The year of its composition, 1926—when the author was a young schoolmaster at Dean Close School, Cheltenham—is also indicative of the fact that the novel is a young man's book, and a first attempt. As such, it can not avoid the flaws of an apprentice work; the story (which on a purely narrative level is simple enough) is somewhat prolix; the characterization sometimes stereotyped (Colonel Rainsford, for instance), and the dialogue not always convincing (especially, I find, between Helen and Diana). However, from the point of view of pure narrative technique, *Klinton Top*, for a young man's book, has its merits; the format of the novel is nicely balanced, with a clear purpose to each of its four parts (and epilogue); and within these four parts the narrative is carried along with a gripping clarity and verve. The author's descriptive style is so lucid as to give what Angus Wilson (in a quotation on the cover of the book) describes as "the extraordinary evocation of the houses and the surrounding country" of the novel's setting.

These aspects of the novel are of course important in order to make it the "good read" that it is, but in a sense they are peripheral to what I



G. Wilson Knight, 1927

have called the novel's quality; for it is as a description of a wholly personal, intense and *interior* experience that I find the novel moving. The experience described is that of Peter Wentworth, who as a young boy living with his grandfather at a mansion in a small village, witnesses the horrific drowning of his brother in a frozen pond. As he grows older, and after the death of his grandfather, he withdraws more and more into himself, becoming a melancholy recluse. When he meets Helen, the elder sister from a neighbouring house in the village, he falls in love and is brought out of his depression by the power of that experience. But it turns out that she is already secretly married to a soldier, and when her husband finds out about the liaison, he returns to take her away and to "thrash" her lover. The story is on the point of ending with the deaths of both Peter and Helen's soldier-

husband, but in the manner of Shakespeare's late plays, veers off onto another plane altogether, where the hero's spiritual regeneration transcends the insoluble nature of the tragedy.

The intensity of the story, its romanticism and its pervading "tragic gloom" have antecedents. I find parallels with Emily Brontë, with Hardy and with Powys. The interpenetration of the moods of the natural landscape and the motions of Peter's mind are Brontëan in effect, whilst the fatalistic nature of the personal dilemma within a context of the "casualty" of natural forces is Hardyesque. And then of course there is Powys; but whether indeed the author had read John Cowper Powys by the date of the book I am not to know, although the influence of both Hardy and Brontë on John Cowper's early novels goes without saying. In addition, *Ducdame* was published the year before the writing of *Klinton Top* and I find interesting similarities with the doom-laden theme of that story, the evocative atmosphere of its old houses, the counter-juxtaposition of opposing forces at work, and the pared-down landscape symbolism of Ashover House, its church, village and river.

The descriptive power that Wilson Knight employs in exploring the romantic intensity of the love between Peter and Helen is superbly handled; this and so much more about the nature of Peter's personal crisis rings true. His confrontation, for instance, with Mr Courtland, the vicar of Lymbrook (in Chapter 26), has the authority of an authentic encounter in which, despite the justness of Mr Courtland's remarks and his compassionate response, there are no easy answers to be provided, when the hero's vision of events is born out of the cauldron of his own passionate will and his hope beyond hope to have the ideal realized. At the same time as acknowledging what that hope means, we can also see—as Mr Courtland does—the selfishness behind it; and because this is at the heart of the insolubility of the tragedy, it becomes for Peter a lynch-pin by which the personal victory at the end will be achieved.

By the same token, it is one of the measures of the author's skill that he can show a realistic moral development in the other characters of the story. Helen, for instance, after being introduced to us in an unfavourable light as a social flirt, seemingly carrying her heart on her sleeve, deepens in relief as the love she experiences with Peter broadens her capacity for response and allows us to see the best in her. Other characters



G. Wilson Knight, 1984

act as useful foils to the two protagonists; Mrs Hurst provides homely relief, but she too suffers a "sea-change" in the wake of the love that Peter has found. We feel then that her motherly affection can only thrive on his unhappiness and won't allow for a fuller person, as her husband recognizes in Chapter 25. The same kind of development can be seen in Mrs Rainsford who is helpful as long as things remain quiet, but is a dangerous woman when the status quo is upset.

The backdrop to all this drama is "Klinton Top" itself—a ragged, bare hill above the village, surrounded on its slopes by woods and marshes and on the further side, hidden from view, the pond in which Peter's brother was drowned. The topography of the novel is exact and significant (a map is conveniently provided); and while its delineation is intended to give greater imaginative realism to the story, its profounder purpose is to counterpoint the tragedy. The weather, the moods of the hill, the character of the landscape, all play their part in reflecting the storm at the centre of the hero's psyche;

to a point where, I suppose, it becomes pertinent to ask how far this is a subjective reflection or an "active agent".

As a description of a powerful experience, *Klinton Top* is a dramatic and truthful statement. In novelistic terms it is flawed, but its gripping and lucid plot, carried along on an energetic narrative wave, makes it, for all that, exciting reading.

PETER FOSS

*Thomas Hardy's English*,  
RALPH W. V. ELLIOTT.

Basil Blackwell, 1984, £22.50.

Hardy's fiction in the New Wessex edition fills sixteen volumes. Hardy also wrote nearly a thousand poems; *The Dynasts* and *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* (dramatic poems of some 720 pages); a two volume autobiography; miscellaneous prose; stage adaptations from his fiction; and at least seven or eight volumes of recoverable letters. In *Thomas Hardy's English* Ralph W. V. Elliott has reasonably concentrated on what was written for the public, but he has also held on to the freedom to make points about it by reference to Hardy's more private writings. By this means he has kept the length of his book down to a reasonable span, and given it some semblance of "shape"—a far from easy task when dealing with such diverse materials.

In the 1930s Dr Rutland gave a searching account of Hardy's reading; in the 1940s, Edmund Blunden culled all kinds of glimpses of Hardy's mind at work on many things; in the 1960s, Dr Beatty examined the architectural notebooks exhaustively: since, countless writers have "proved" Hardy's interest in almost everything under the sun. Professor Elliott knows how to use his luck—he has sieved with discrimination and cast the husks aside. His survey shows the phenomenal wealth of knowledge Hardy could rely on Victorian readers having, knowledge that by the end of the twentieth century has toppled over the horizon. Victorians, Hardy as much as any, learned as much as they could wherever they could, and a writer who does not hoard knowledge in this way would soon "dry up". I wish, therefore, that Professor Elliott had not brought in the ugly

word "autodidact". It has a belittling effect: one writer has implied that Hardy was something of a bumpkin because he was denied the benefits of a university education; the writer who dropped this pearl had, of course, received all the benefits of a university education. The same kind of impertinence makes baneful the many dubious annotated editions of Hardy's works. To be fair to Professor Elliott, he has used the word sparingly and treated sensibly the things covered by the good old motto "learn whatever you can".

More than halfway through the book the author writes, "Better justice would require a concordance" (p. 254). A computer concordance would be no difficulty. The computer, however, would know nothing of Professor Elliott's delight in "finding out for himself". The book fits into the Language Library series—to which Professor Elliott has already contributed a book on Chaucer—which seeks to be scholarly without trailing readers through the successive sludges of linguistic terminology. This throws a heavy burden on the sheer narrative skill of the writer. Occasionally a list might have helped readers who find that they have to hop, skip and jump with Professor Elliott's enthusiasm if they are to get the best out of his book. But the enthusiasm is catching. It often enables Professor Elliott to find "good" explanations for what in the past has been called "bad" in Hardy's writing.

At the outset there may be a certain amount of wasted space. It might be useful to have set down the conflicting opinions about Hardy's writings of a score of critics. In effect, however, they "do not speak the same language", and so there is no yardstick. Eliot's foolish dicta certainly help no one. The only thing one learns is that well known critics have made wildly contradictory remarks about Hardy's writings, and that some of them have contradicted themselves. Professor Elliott then settles down to deal with Hardy's own identification of the strands of his life, "the professional life, the scholar's life, and the rustic life", and examines Hardy's performance in the terms of each. He begins with "the rustic life", and this may well be the most important part of the book. All the same, the strands are not always clear cut. When he moves on to "the professional life", Professor Elliott discusses the influence of the 1611 Bible and the old Book of Common Prayer. Our forbears made these writings—and one is tempted to add *The Pilgrim's Progress* and, more doubtfully, parts of

Milton—so much their own that their language seems to have been absorbed into the dialect. Marty South is a dialect speaker. Yet Hardy's dialect notation in the paragraph that closes *The Woodlanders* (it is too long to quote in full) is very slight. In eight lines Hardy gives Marty "e" for "you" three times. Then, very deftly, he slips in an archaism that some would call dialect or "sub-standard": "for you was a good man, and did good things". The liturgical cadence of the whole is inseparable from the dialect. As "scholastic" language, the Prayer Book and Bible perhaps need a chapter to themselves.

"Dictionary" words other than the Churchy ones can not be separated from those dealt with in the section entitled (by Henchard) "Acres of Words", either. But the section shows how much Hardy was a bookworm, and that Professor Elliott is an adept at finding usages that Hardy picked up from architecture, the arts, the sciences, philosophy and the society small-talk of his time. He can trace back to Old English many of Hardy's epithets. This is useful, but a few cautions are needed. William Barnes knew Old English as Hardy did not, and Hardy might have picked up the usages from Barnes. It is quite true that many of Hardy's lines fulfil the alliterative requirements of Sievers. However, was not Swinburne drunk with alliteration, and does not Hardy owe much—much more than Professor Elliott allows—to Swinburne? Beyond this, are not some of the features of Old English poetry really features of poetry rather than of Old English? Before the Anglo-Saxons settled for "whale-track" and similar metaphorical compounds for "sea", Homer had called the Mediterranean "wine-dark" and so forth. After all, Hardy's mother—was there already a Moule at work?—bought him Dryden's *Virgil* for his ninth birthday.

"Tapestries of Rhetoric" is a section that shows Hardy's liveliness in switching constructions by analogy with other parts of speech, and that very seldom—if ever—does Hardy write without his ear on sound and cadence, and his eye on sequence. For Professor Elliott's purposes, it might have been well to linger over for special discussion "The Temporary, The All", the stunning prelude to Hardy's first book of poems. Only in *The Dynasts* and *The Famous Tragedy* did Hardy again press so near to the "brink". Typically, the daring harmonizes—or risks a calculated discord—that appears at once both old and new. The means may be Swinburn-

ian, archaic, or words derived from nineteenth-century scientific changes that have gathered still more momentum since Hardy's time. But the distinctive texture is Hardy's own.

This last kind of usage, the adoption of words from what we have come to call technology, Professor Elliott deals with in a section called "The Technician". Hardy gave this word a distinctive meaning: the "technician" deals with techniques in, for instance, writing, and is not a technologist. But the word never rooted firmly, and this brings us to the patient overseer of the whole book. Savage Vikings made fun of many words coined by Barnes that did not root. "Wirespell" did not; how awkward it is that we can no longer "wire" in times of stress and haste. Professor Elliott gives over a third of his book to Barnes. And Barnes the linguist overflows into "dictionary" words and other parts of the book for he is by no means only a dialect source. Professor Elliott is too well read to fall into vulgar source. One writer actually says Barnes promoted such words as Skeat scoffed at by using them in his poetry. In the face of such misunderstandings, therefore, it may be that Professor Elliott does not always put all his weight of learning against them. How could Barnes, recording a disappearing dialect, think of doing so by importing coinages into the poems? Moreover, Barnes held poetry in such high esteem that he never "tried out" such coinages as "wirespell" or "wheelsaddle" in his plain English poetry, either—note the uneasiness of the standard English speaker with such words: they become (or became) "wire", "cycle", or, in desperation, "bike". Barnes's diagnosis was usually sound, but he could not always hit off a masterword such as "birdlore". Professor Elliott says Barnes tempted Hardy to write in Celtic and Persian measures. Whereas Barnes studied Arabic and Celtic literatures, however, and both translated and worked their poetic ways into his own poems, Hardy was interested in the forms not because they were Celtic or Persian, but because he was impressed by the poems Barnes wrote in them.

One misunderstanding, indeed, Professor Elliott does fall for. Hardy, who did so much to help Barnes's poetry with the public, became obsessed with his own "copyright" to use the word "Wessex". In a recent lecture, I showed that Hardy was not even the first writer of a "Wessex" novel. But obsessed Hardy was, and contrasted himself with Barnes who, he said, was "Dorset emphatically". Barnes said that the

dialect of his dialect poems was spoken "with little variation" in Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon. One could stretch it even further afield. But—"Dorset emphatically"? Yet because Barnes chose to write poems about the places seen in and recollected from, in Wordsworthian phrase, "early childhood", everyone seeks to tie him to the parish pump. Hardy justified limiting himself to Wessex in terms that are equally valid for Barnes.

In 1956 I began to lecture on the influence Barnes had had on Hopkins and Hardy. The idea was hardly new. Since, N. H. Mackenzie and James Milroy have written on Hopkins and made the same point. Now Professor Elliott has done the same service for Barnes in his book on Hardy's language. The witness of these three is more telling, perhaps, than any I can give from my own position. Either way, after Professor Elliott's thorough scouring, there can be no doubt that the case has been made. It goes to the very heart of the growth of English poetry over a hundred years or so. Most of us know Eliot's

our concern was speech, and speech  
impelled us

To purify the language of the tribe

in "Little Gidding", and Pound's perky injunction "Make it new!". It is perhaps odd that Eliot's words were simply taken over from a poem in praise of Poe, whom he said he could not understand. Poe was praised for giving:

un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu.  
(Mallarmé, "Le Tombeau d'Edgar Poe")

The word "purify", of course, has many tints. However, before "Little Gidding" was Bridges's Society for Pure English. Before Mallarmé was Barnes. Dialects, he wrote, "would give valuable light to . . . that increasing class who wish to purify our tongue". That was the Barnes of the 1830s and 1840s. He belongs with the Rasks, Thorpes, Kembles and Bosworths. In Barnes's earlier life, purification lay in Teutonizing. The writings associated with Wycliff, he said, gave a truer idea of the English pure and undefiled of the fourteenth century than did the writings of Chaucer. Hopkins (born in 1844) understood this. Furnivall (born in 1825) did not, although Teutonizing became a hobby in which he would brook no rivals. In Hardy's and in Hopkins's time, the main burden of the task had shifted, so it was easy enough for

the Skeats to snigger. I should dearly have liked to have heard and watched the reactions of members to a paper read for Barnes before the Philological Society on "The Language of the Stone Age".

With the ground cleared, the way was ready for Hardy and Hopkins; and it is the great merit of Professor Elliott's research that he links Hardy's English to its time. Hardy comes, after Barnes, to a well worked field, and uses it in all kinds of new ways to attain new yields. Perhaps I am sorry Professor Elliott did not use Pound's well known exchange with Hardy—Pound was so much more child-like and charitable in his responses than Eliot—and I think Swinburne, and even Shelley, offered Hardy more than Professor Elliott allows. But it is ungracious to ask for more at the end of a feast. To any who now—like George Moore long ago—say that Hardy could not write, the only answer is the one Hardy, on his death bed, gave to Moore:

Heap dustbins on him! They'll not meet  
The apex of his self-conceit—

which, with its juxtaposition of such words as "dustbins" and "apex", neatly summarizes the command of the acceptable range that Professor Elliott claims for and shows to have been Hardy's.

BERNARD JONES

*John Masefield: Letters to Margaret Bridges,*  
Edited by DONALD STANFORD.

Carcenet Press, 1984, £6.95.

Little attention has been paid to Masefield's varied writings—as poet, war-historian, novelist, or "little theatre" dramatist—for at least three decades. Like W. H. Davies he is best known today for a few poems once read in a school anthology. The scrupulously researched but low-key biography of him by Constance Babington Smith (*John Masefield: A Life*, 1978) fills out the picture but, free of any close discussion of his writing, it left unanswered the crucial question: "What made him tick?". For me, at least, the 1930 experience of rapt enjoyment while reading the new Poet Laureate's earlier works—especially *Salt-Water Ballads*, *The Widow in The Bye Street, Nan*, *The Battle of the Somme*, and *Reynard the Fox*—was echoed

mockingly as the dutiful laureate verses appeared in *The Times* during the strenuous decades after VJ day. They were too anodyne, too remote from our immediate post-war concerns. It is only since Masefield's death (1967), which coincided with my involvement with the life and work of his exact contemporary and friend, Edward Thomas, that I have begun to understand why, in pre-war days, Dylan Thomas was such an enthusiastic advocate of Masefield's dedication to the twin causes of verse-speaking in schools and amateur dramatic societies. A companionable man, carefully concealing an unusually wide range of searing experiences, who, after youthful hardships at sea and in the U.S.A., was trained as a journalist on Scott's *Manchester Guardian*, Masefield was a natural communicator. Suddenly he could turn aside from the ordinary, expected statement and reveal his quality as guide and mentor: "Trust your instinct more than your thought . . . It is a decision of your whole nature, an act of you. That can only be revered and respected". "We do not live in any land of Trapalanda, but right here and now, with men and women of flesh and blood and all manner of roughness and loveliness, working on each other to some end of justice and medicine for each of us, wise and good in the main, though strange enough."

Alas,

We hated, fought and killed, as separate men;  
Now all is merged and we are in the grass,  
Our efforts merged, would we had known it  
then.

All our lives' battle, all our spirits' dream,  
Nought in themselves, a clash which made  
a gleam.

And knew, as we know, that the message  
meant  
The breaking off of ties, the loss of friends,  
Death, like a miser getting in his rent,  
And no new stones laid where the trackway  
ends.

...

But knew the misery of the soaking trench,  
The freezing in the rigging, the despair  
In the revolting second of the wrench  
When the blind soul is flung upon the air,  
And died (uncouthly, most) in foreign lands,  
For some idea but dimly understood.

I have discovered in recent poetry readings to small, frequently disadvantaged groups, that

this Masefield—like W. H. Davies, Idris Davies, R. S. Thomas and Edward Thomas—is welcomed as an interpreter of the aspirations and puzzlements of poetry lovers to whom critical exegesis is a closed book. The concept of a "People's Laureate" need not fade away in the care of Ted Hughes.

Donald Stanford's modest, economical, and meticulous edition of the poet's unpublished *Letters to Margaret Bridges (1915-1919)* should renew interest in Masefield's work and give the reader a fuller understanding of the poet's attitude to the horrors of war as seen by a civilian who had also been a hospital orderly (in France, Gallipoli and, again, France). These affectionate letters, with numerous stark descriptions, were written to a younger friend of the Masefield family, Margaret Bridges, a daughter of the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges. Masefield's sixty-six letters, almost forty from France in 1917 and about twenty from the U.S.A. in 1918, are supported by five from her, five poems written by Masefield during the period 1915-1918, and a final hitherto unpublished poem by Margaret's sister, Elizabeth Daryush.

After a long spell of hospital canteen work in French base camps during 1914-1915, which was terminated by a serious pulmonary illness, Margaret spent the last half of the war with the Forestry Commission in Wales and the Welsh Border. After the war she married an Oxford philosophy don, nearly twice her age, and died of tuberculosis in 1926. (Robert Bridges's long philosophical and quickly reprinted poem, *The Testament of Beauty* (1929), was an exercise in consolation undertaken by the eighty-three-year-old poet after her death.) During Masefield's second spell in France, his family moved house to Boar's Hill above Oxford and, through friendship with Bridges, Masefield's new home received numerous distinguished visitors from the world of politics, the university, the stage, and literature. (The casual mention of such names in these letters throws a new light for me on the newspaper coverage of the rival claims of Masefield and Kipling to succeed Bridges as Poet Laureate in 1930 which I found so fascinating as an avid unemployed reader moving from one newspaper to the next in the well-stocked Reading Room of the Pontlottyn Workmen's Institute. Apart from the then acceptable egalitarian quality of his earlier writings, Masefield, I now see, was clearly well-known to the so-called "great and good" who are consulted on such occasions.)

Such private interests apart, I am most grateful to Donald Stanford's edition of these letters because they present the poet and the man without artifice or barrier. In them Masefield talks—sometimes chats—to his correspondent, and to us the privileged listeners. His concern for, and advice to, Margaret is avuncular but never distant: he frequently adopts the right tone of slang used by his own daughter (then at school) and keeps Margaret well-informed about the minor domestic details of her parents' existence. His views on the conduct of the war, his own painful first-hand researches of the Somme battlefield, his meetings with senior soldiers or severely wounded survivors, gain in force precisely because they are embedded in personal family chat. Margaret was herself no stranger to war-time casualties, at home or abroad, and Masefield feels free to describe for her, with clinical descriptions, the hideous relics of the earlier battles as readily as he records the strange beauty he had rediscovered during his two long lecturing tours in the U.S.A. He interlards his opinions on the best-sellers sent to her with first-hand gossip about official doubts and reactions to the Russian Revolution. We have inherited a stereotyped view of the gulf that separated the greedy, warmongering Great War civilian from the altruistic iconoclasm of the front-line soldier-poet. My own necessary background reading during the last fifteen years has suggested that a generation of middle-aged men, like Masefield, do not fit easily into this view.

Nothing gives us more of the quality of Masefield—and so underlines the empathetic tone of the five poems in this book—than the two concluding letters in which he states the pros and cons of other people's attitude to Margaret's decision to marry a much older Oxford don. One recalls that he was never a conformist, that from boyhood he cherished a wilful independence of action and learned much from his consequent mistakes, especially at sea and as a low-paid worker in the U.S.A.. As a practised journalist he knew how to argue a case and present both sides without the cold detachment of forensic skill. It is this Masefield, I believe, that new readers of these letters will wish to rediscover, and especially so through his poetry. A judicious selection of his poems would do much for his reputation at the present time.

R. GEORGE THOMAS

*The Slumber of Apollo: Reflections on Recent Art. Literature, Language, and the Individual Consciousness,*  
JOHN HOLLOWAY.

Cambridge University Press, 1983, £15.00.

The sub-title describes this stimulating book quite accurately. It is concerned with art, literature, and language, and with the way in which they seem to have become more intense but "narrower" during the last hundred years or so. This, says Professor Holloway, is a shift from a conception of life as "Apollonian" (Nietzsche's term) to something more limited. Apollo is "slumbering", as the title says, because the assumptions and habits of largeness, comprehensiveness, fullness, thoughtfulness, and contemplation, have given way to a more precise, limited, and intense experience.

This is an interesting and helpful idea. Professor Holloway hedges it about with a number of qualifications, admitting that he is "chancing his arm", but this is not really necessary; it is clear from the outset that this is an adventurous rather than a "safe" book. What makes it successful is not so much the idea, good though that is, but the detail. All kinds of things are considered: painting, comic strips, slang, the languages of politics and sociology, literature. Within each area, too, the range is considerable: in the first section on pictorial art, the argument moves from Piero della Francesca through Rembrandt to Dubuffet and Malevich. The twentieth-century artists affirm freshness, immediacy, and excitement: "how far that is", comments Professor Holloway, "from what Rembrandt and Piero della Francesca thought a man had it in him to affirm!"

The exclamation indicates a curious feature of this book. Professor Holloway insists throughout that he is a dispassionate chronicler of movements, an historian of ideas, and he is certainly precise and scholarly throughout. But a certain sadness will keep breaking in. It occurs in the lively and original section on cartoons, in which the fully-drawn, short-story-like cartoons of Du Maurier are succeeded by the stylized, rapid-impact comic strips of the twentieth century, in which conflicts and social nuances are simplified and codified. Similarly with the language of politics; although here Professor Holloway is on stronger ground when he maintains that we should not regard the language of the present day as a decline: "sonorous

vacuity", he remarks acidly, "has been a part of politics for longer than the period surveyed here". Even so, he detects a shift, towards a concern with the complexity of facts rather than a concern with the mind that comprehends them. And when it comes to slang, there really does seem to have been a decline, from Victorian inventiveness and plenitude to the minimal and utilitarian. A section as good as this makes it a matter of regret that Professor Holloway did not put religion on his agenda. It is such an important element in the "largeness" whose passing he deplores that it really should have been included: not just the changes in Biblical translation, or from the *Book of Common Prayer* to the *Alternative Service Book*, but the language of twentieth-century hymns. What has gone wrong between H. F. Lyte and John Ellerton on the one hand, and the modern hymnologists on the other? Why is the Victorian hymn-language human, and twentieth-century hymn-language parsonical and inert?

Instead, there is some fairly predictable questioning of the language of social psychology. To point out that Tolstoy is richer than such stuff is too easy. But the book recovers its balance in the final three chapters, which are about literature. Here the arguments are convincing and fingertip sensitive to the qualities of the written work. Still Professor Holloway maintains that he is chronicling a process and not lamenting a decline, but his own hand is evidence against him here as elsewhere: the titles of the chapters, "The Passing of 'Largeness'", "The Poetry of the Wilderness", and "Consciousness Beleaguered", make this clear. At this point, in fact, Professor Holloway, after snorkelling away for most of the book, surfaces as a true romantic. He is concerned, for instance, with the loss of something between Shelley and Hardy, and with Hardy's vision of the limitations of human conduct (and of his own anti-heroic nature in the poems). He applauds the poetry of the wilderness (Gary Snyder) and the painting of the Australian aborigines in the outback; and he writes about Edwin Muir in a way which recalls the insight of Kathleen Raine. For both Holloway and Raine, Edwin Muir is a poet who maintains the richness of the human imagination against a threatening world, armed with all the anti-mythological materialism of the age. Like Kathleen Raine, Professor Holloway is defending ancient springs in this book. He is careful not to say so, but he is, and it is an honourable position for a Professor of English

to find himself in. All he needs to do is to come out and say it more openly.

J. R. WATSON

*George Orwell: The Search For A Voice*,  
LYNETTE HUNTER.

Open University Press, 1984: £18.00 (hardback);  
£5.95 (paperback).

Criticism of Orwell used to be concerned with the general question of what "sort" of writer he really is. Since his novels often contain materials and perspectives which shift into documentary, whilst his reportage often shades into fiction, and, since he wrote in a variety of modes for different occasions and readerships, his commentators have felt obliged to offer some defining literary identification for his work. Seeing Orwell whole and steadily means engaging with unresolved paradoxes and contradictions. Intellectuals (as Orwell himself noted) hate disorder, so making sense of so problematic an author has more than once proved their Dunkirk: critical agility has turned defeat into victory. Lionel Trilling called him a "figure". John Wain considered him a writer of polemics. Some have assessed him primarily as a novelist who strayed into journalism, whilst others, mistrustful of fiction as a means to knowledge, have judged his documentary writing as his most significant work. Finding the definition which is sufficiently embracing was best achieved by Raymond Williams. He called Orwell a "writer". His brief study in 1971 (one of his three accounts of Orwell, incidentally) was careful not to "aestheticize" his subject, an overriding temptation with so manifest a stylist. Rather, he was all too aware that the conflict of literature and politics, to be "Inside the Whale" or not, was the central impulse of this writer's work, and that it bore no easy resolution. Declaring Orwell a writer, while emphasizing this was a complicated social and cultural phenomenon, opened up new lines of enquiry, one of which was an interest in Orwell's concerns with literary strategies. And one of these, the exploration of narrative voice, is the basis for this latest discussion of Orwell's style.

Ms Hunter's argument, if argument is not too dignifying a term for the diffuse focus of this badly written book, begins from the premise that Orwell's works in their entirety are to be seen as

a continuing and conscious attempt to achieve what she calls "positive stance". This occurs when there is a combined, co-operative activity of reader, writer and text. She assumes that it was Orwell's distrust of the dualisms of rationalist thought which motivated his experimentation with genre, and she views his career as steadily moving away from an "authoritarian stance of information" towards what she calls a stance of "interactive discussion". This last means books which call into play an active reader in positive reading, one who is undominated by the text's authority, but who, in contrast, can come to his own judgements. In her scheme of things, satire is a limited and excluding genre, but allegory includes and refuses domination. She then proceeds to work through fiction and non-fiction alike. She identifies different types of narratorial voice in both, and proposes that our identification and recoil from such voices, as well as from the protagonists in the fictions, direct our interpretations. It will be readily agreed that different narratorial self-positionings do lead to different sorts of works, and that consciousness of such differences can refine our notions of genre and of style. It is also true that Orwell's narrators have often been the subject of considerable debate in attempting to establish meaning. There is, moreover, despite the presence of the consistent univocal prose style running through his works, considerable variation in how we respond to his narrators. The very troublesome narratorial voice of *Burmese Days*, for instance, is rather different from the distanced voice of *Animal Farm*, and different again from the voice of the essays or the double narrators Ms Hunter locates in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.

Yet despite some excessively intricate studies of stance as created through narration, Ms Hunter appears to offer nothing that has not been said before about Orwell. Her conclusion about *1984* seems to be no more than that we recognize it as a satire, and having done so, it makes us think and do otherwise since it does not contain within it a proposed alternative. What satire ever did? She argues at one point: "Although if read as fantasy it presents a perverse, neurotic, depressing and limited view, if we read it as an allegory of political fantasy, it is not only more enjoyable, but the writing enacts the possibility of a political alternative". This seems itself a perverse reaction to what is a total vision of a totalitarian society. Her analysis of *The Road to Wigan Pier* seems to say much

what Williams said, which is that the narrative in Part One is a preparation for the commentary in Part Two. Her conclusion about *Burmese Days* seems little different from Terry Eagleton's callow denunciation of Flory and Orwell because they failed to transcend the private life. Only by making a revolution could they have offered a proper evaluation of imperialism.

As for her other judgements, they tend to fall into two types. They are either assertions unbacked by any evidence: "Orwell is neither for the private individual nor for any oligarchical state . . . but instead he suggests another form of collective humanism". Or else they are assertions determined to make a connection between language and reality and in the process ride roughshod over our normal sense of thought. On the narrator in *The Road to Wigan Pier* she observes: "Class war is a matter of prejudice not simply of money, and what is more important than questions of finance, culture or economy, is the matter of stance". What is meant by "stance" here is not clear. Does it mean a literary device? Does it mean the author's or the narrator's attitude? Is it also implying that the realities enclosed and denoted by such abstract terms as economy or culture are less substantial, less meaningful than the literary conceit effected by the writer? No wonder Orwell grew irritable with "intellectuals" who turn everything into something inside their own heads.

Eliot once remarked that "good writers write their own times". Nowadays the depressing obverse is more likely to be true. *Bad* writers are written by their times. Ms Hunter's analysis is completed from within a particular modern pre-occupation which demonstrates the latter more than the former. The purpose of reading texts in formalist ways (I presume this is what is going on here) is to disclose a greater sense of meaning, both of the nature of the artefact, and the moral meaning such analysis reveals, but in such a way that this adjudication privileges neither. Criticism which attends merely to form is pointless aestheticism; criticism which ignores rhetorical form is simply ideology. One of the prevailing contemporary theoretical strategies to overcome this division, and from within which most adjudications are now offered, is to view the text as enactment of meaning. This at one stroke appears to abolish the old dualism of form and content. The text as enactment is further affirmed by such theories which attempt to abolish the division between critic and text. When texts are enactments rather than state-

ments, surface meaning is relegated to a minor position. Old-fashioned rationalists, still clinging to dualist thought, regard language as an authoritative object, generational of common meaning, circumscribed, and occupying a public realm in which there exists some public agreement on signifier and signified. For the non-rationalists, this is replaced by an endless realm of secondary revision, or rewritten texts of active readers free to make of books what they will by making them over. This is not done by attending to surface meaning (how unimportant, after all, that people who offer dissent in totalitarian states should be tortured in Room 101), but by revealing the concealed which lies in rhetorical devices and plays, textual subversions and self-consuming tropes of language structures.

This book does not offer any self-critical examination of its own procedures which, at bottom, uphold this deconstructivist position. But, then, the author is so deeply locked within it that she probably does not regard it as needful of explanation. It would have greatly helped her analysis if she had, since it would have clarified what it was she wanted to discuss. As it is, having acceded to the abolition of the old dualisms, and crediting Orwell as a forerunner of such abolition, she never quite makes up her mind what it is she really wants to talk about: genre, language, fantasy, satire, allegory, or what. Practitioners of the deconstructive, and rightly, stress the need for rigour and precision, though clarity is not one of their strongest virtues. Ms Hunter's criticism is mostly conducted in the higher reaches of the obscure. She may have had some very interesting things to say, but one can never be too sure.

Narrative voice, after all, is only one aspect of writing, and there is no reason why selective discussion should, or could, provide total explanation. One of this book's starting points is to ask why Orwell wrote in so many genres. Ms Hunter does ponder this question, but she does not suggest that his unconfident journeyings from type to type might be found not in literary analyses of texts, or in relations between the texts of one author, but in the social formation of writers. Writers are historically determined, as is language. What she offers is the retrospective fallacy that Orwell was consciously satisfying modern critical theory of narrative stance.

There are also other intriguing aspects of the famous Orwell window-pane prose, but these, along with any historical conditions, are

ignored. She has very little to say about Orwell's diction ("beastly" did get a mention, though), or his recurrent metaphors, or his writerly tropes as cultural formations. Nor does she have much to say about Orwell as imitator of others' styles.

She also fails to observe one or two of the simpler academic decencies of scholarly discourse. She has a habit of citing a critical name, in one instance Victor Gollancz (not indexed), in another Jacques Derrida (indexed), without making it clear what it is of theirs she is either objecting to or agreeing with. "Other in allegory is closely allied to the concept of différance [unitalicized] in the work of Jacques Derrida" she informs us. Fine for an audience who know the master's work intimately, but if he is to be cited in support of an argument, then a little elaboration is necessary. As for Gollancz, she disagrees strongly with him, but what of his introduction to *The Road to Wigan Pier* she specifically finds so wanting, I fail to discover.

Leaving aside the small matter that Ms Hunter and her editors have great difficulty with prepositions (or is this a creative misreading of grammar?), this book needs a thorough pruning. Several passages require reading several times. Some defeat comprehension. This does not make for "active positive" reading, but for irascible negative response. One unexpected benefit of the looseness of expression is that it provides the only moment of humour in a book whose subject can be very funny in his bitter ironies. Her comment on *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* reveals an awesome pun: "When Gordon Comstock and Rosemary finally make it . . . sex is the one means of communication that gets through to each one". Does it not usually when people are making it?

This book defeated me, and I wish it had not. Whatever Orwell's faults as a writer, he is, perhaps even because of them, consistently, and on many fronts, one of the most interesting of modern writers. Ms Hunter and I would agree on that, as well we might that his seemingly simple prose is nothing of the sort and that it conceals as much as it reveals. We would agree that he is particularly interesting on "writerly" matters. But it is difficult to welcome this book, except to those already committed to the new academic confusetalk of the post-Barthes literary era in which distinction between text and critic, or reader and writer, has been abolished. Perhaps to require of academic books that they occupy a public arena is to be bound to a nostalgia for an academy that disappeared years ago. Better to

accept that most critical books end up like Flory; desperate, isolated and demented.

ALLEN SAMUELS

*Criticism and Critical Theory*,  
Edited by JEREMY HAWTHORN.

Edward Arnold, 1984, £6.95 (paperback).

These are stirring times for literary criticism. That once innocent pastime has at last begun to recognize that if it expects to be taken seriously—as a subject of study in higher education or, indeed, as a reason for cutting down trees to publish critical writing—it had better follow other disciplines into the twentieth century and become self-conscious about its own assumptions, values and practices. The result has been extraordinarily invigorating. The pleasure of reading remains undimmed, but the additional pleasure is increasingly becoming available of acquiring a vocabulary which makes it possible to analyse the sources of the first pleasure. Dedicated romantics still maintain that we murder to dissect; diehards continue unremittingly and exclusively to pursue that critical chimera, the author's intention; but for the rest of us new theories of language are facilitating forms of discussion which offer excitement well in excess of the "I liked it"/"I didn't" exchanges that so many of us grew up with.

The result of the new theories is not, of course, consensus (when was criticism ever consensual?), but strenuous and often heated debate, not only between ancients and moderns, as a recent *TLS* reviewer classified them, invoking Swift's satire at the expense of the moderns in *The Battle of the Books*, but also—and equally vehemently—among the moderns themselves. And the debates are not simply about literary criticism (when was literary criticism ever simply about literary criticism?), but about meaning and subjectivity and history and politics. The starting-point of structuralist and post-structuralist theories is that meanings themselves are not inside our heads waiting for words to label them, but that on the contrary meanings are learned when we learn language. Meanings, in other words, are culturally and linguistically relative, and in learning them we also learn values, the values of our culture. In learning the difference between democracy and dictatorship (or, for

that matter, between literature and pulp-fiction), the western child simultaneously learns the difference between good and evil. Literature is a rich repository of the meanings, singular and plural, of our culture, past and present. And recent criticism sets out to identify the ways in which these meanings have come to seem natural or obvious or universal not only to authors but to their readers.

So far there is (a degree of) harmony in the modern camp. But not for long. What does "the family" mean: to a Thatcherite? a feminist? a psychoanalyst? How might critics of these three distinct persuasions analyse the role and the social relations of the family as they are identified in the novels of the 1840s or the 1930s? And so the debates begin: between different readings of the same text, different ideas of what the project of criticism ought to be, different commitments and priorities, different assessments of the interests served by a particular way of reading.

The purpose of *Criticism and Critical Theory*, one of two titles to launch the new series of Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, is to offer a representative selection of the critical positions currently available. This may have been over-ambitious for a volume of 146 pages, especially when the editor's liberalism compels him to provide space for the ancients. R. A. Sharpe is one of these. Although "interpretation" is best when it's individual or personal, he argues, *meaning* is already given in the words of the text, and is to be understood as the meaning the words possessed for the work's original audience. Some of the authoritarianism of the ancient position creeps in here: "we cannot wreak destruction on the work of art by permitting its meaning to vary in time". This "we" is misleading. Some of us find it very hard to believe that we can easily recreate the meaning(s) of, say, *Richard II*, available to (a) the Earl of Essex, who wanted it performed at the time of his rebellion; (b) Queen Elizabeth, who refused to have it performed, and said, "I am Richard II", and (c) an Elizabethan gardener, who might have taken a special interest in some of the imagery. It is not obvious to me that we can or should put completely out of our minds, by an act of will, the knowledges that come precisely from living at a different moment. These range from a recognition of the uncanny parallels between Shakespeare's Richard and the unfortunate Charles I, to insights derived from psychoanalysis or political theory. When Sharpe goes on to discuss the

features “we” admire in interpretation, he similarly leaves me out.

Deconstruction, the version of post-structuralism derived from the work of the philosopher, Jacques Derrida, features prominently in this collection in essays by both ancients and moderns. P. D. Juhl, though he is not in sympathy with the moderns, has read some of them. Juhl has no patience with deconstruction’s refusal to identify meaning with intention, and catches out Paul de Man, one of its major American practitioners, in some intentionalist lapses. Iain Wright is also briskly dismissive of the more extravagant claims of deconstruction, this time because Derrida and his Yale admirers erase history. Oddly, Wright accepts the common American identification of post-structuralism with deconstruction, thus himself erasing the work of Michael Foucault, which is both post-structuralist and profoundly historical. Wright, with many explicit reservations, invokes Hans-Georg Gadamer who, recognizing that there are difficulties with “the facts”, approaches history by way of a middle ground between objectivism and subjectivism. He might have been better advised to turn to Foucault, who repudiates the whole theoretical framework of knowledge as either subjective or objective, and thereby takes account of those elements of Derridean theory which are hardest to resist. Foucault’s influence is notable by its absence from this collection as a whole. But then so is that of the Marxist theorists, Louis Althusser and Pierre Macherey.

The worst essay must be the first. If I’d been the editor I should have been tempted to tuck this one away in some dark corner, in case it should deter readers from tackling the rest. In the first place, it’s offensively chummy, overflowing with “we’ve already seen”s and “let us see whether”s. And in the second, it’s hopelessly ill-informed. Here is a sample:

critical high-flyers, especially those influenced by French thinkers like Claude Levi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, abandoned even the genteel pretence of looking for the *meaning* of the text, and began, in the name of freedom and critical creativity, to *boast* that they were misreading!

The unwary reader might be forgiven for construing from this jovial assertion that the work of these four French thinkers authorized the folly of the “high-flyers” in question, and also

for thinking that all four held more or less the same views. Later the essay states that, despite their claims to differ from each other, they do really all think that reading is “a process of negotiating tensions, ambiguities, ironies and paradoxes”. That is just wrong. And their claims to differ are very well-founded.

Ironically, this first essay is on “misreading”. The author’s position is subjectivist, so perhaps he thinks it’s all right to make up views and attribute them to famous people. The bulk of the essay is a defence of the author’s own book on *Paradise Lost* against a hostile review by Patrick Cullen. I haven’t read the book, but I’m afraid my money’s already on Cullen.

Things take a turn for the better, however, with John Corner’s valuable essay on cultural studies. A useful inclusion, this, since the impetus to change in literary theory has come to a large extent from cultural studies, though Corner modestly doesn’t mention the fact. Barbara Hill Rigney offers a (not uncritical) tribute to Virginia Woolf as a feminist writer and critic, and in the process makes some fruitful distinctions between different kinds of feminist critical commitment. Terry Lovell discusses *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* as novel and as film, as novel-into-film; and Christopher Butler reaffirms the pleasures of post-modernist fiction.

The collection also includes an excellent essay by Colin Mercer analysing the network of history, discourse and subjectivity of which literature is both the effect and the location, producer as well as product. Mercer argues that literature and history are not best seen as distinct from each other, foreground and background, inside and outside. On the contrary, signification is an integral part of history. Maud Ellman, meanwhile, employs the strategies of deconstruction at their most elegant to reveal the absence of Blanche the Duchess from her own *Book*. The poem, she proposes, is a paradigm case of the ultimate absence of woman from the discourse of love.

Despite all these good things, I am left with a puzzle. What sort of audience does this book address? Some of the essays are frankly elementary. Others demand considerable familiarity with the terms and sometimes the details of recent theory. Some seem slightly marginal to the current debates, more appropriate to an academic journal than to a (popular?) paperback. The collection as a whole is perhaps a little

eclectic for the specialist, and a little esoteric, at least at its best, for the beginner.

Finally, two small cries of linguistic anguish. The introduction proclaims the overwhelming importance of feminism for recent criticism: three of the essays use sexist pronouns throughout. Secondly, do we really have to settle for "Keats' poems" and "Yeats' Byzantium"? Does anyone actually *say* those things? Where was the editor . . . ?

CATHERINE BELSEY

*Fiction as Truth: Selected Literary Writings by Richard Hughes,*

Edited and introduced by RICHARD POOLE.

Poetry Wales Press, 1983, £9.95.

Poor Richard Hughes! His reputation is encumbered with three burdens, any one of which would make an author groan: early success, an ambitious novel-sequence truncated by death, and a sailor's pointed beard. As Hughes himself confessed in 1938, "Perhaps one of the worst misfortunes which can befall a book is a sudden wide success: because that success is often due to something more or less irrelevant which comes to cause the main theme of the book to escape notice. This happened with my first book, *A High Wind in Jamaica*." Despite half a century of writing poems, plays, novels and stories, the tag "author-of-*A High Wind in Jamaica*" stayed with Hughes until his death in 1976. It is at once an accolade and a dismissal, and persists to this day: a sort of posthumous admonishment from his publishers for not writing more books as "accessible" and instantly popular as this first novel.

Publishers, and supposedly the common reader, also love trilogies; quartets they like a little less, and duets not at all. When *The Fox in the Attic* appeared in 1961, a long sequence was envisaged. When *The Wooden Shepherdess* was finally published in 1973 (and Hughes the century's age), it was described as "the long-awaited second volume of a trilogy". The hoped-for third volume was never written, and this is always referred to as something tragic and disappointing. But Hughes joked about this fact, giving the year 2020 as the date of completion, when he would be aged 120. He never intended to write a trilogy or any other definite

number of volumes, only a single novel which would appear in parts. By the time he was preparing *The Wooden Shepherdess* for publication, it would have been with the almost certain knowledge that no more of *The Human Predicament* would appear and that it would have to stand complete as it was.

There is, too, the persistent misunderstanding of what Hughes's books are actually about. It exasperated him that people thought *In Hazard* was "about a storm", and it is that beard which somehow symbolizes the apprehension of Hughes not as a novelist but as a sailor, a man-of-action who happened to write about his experiences. *A High Wind in Jamaica* is similarly "about" children and *The Human Predicament* "about" the rise of Hitler, practically a history book. But Hughes is a profoundly serious artist and, as he makes plain in the essay quoted above, his interest is not in the meteorological or historical setting, but in his protagonists' reaction to it.

This new selection of work by Richard Hughes, then, is welcome for several reasons. It gives, firstly, an invaluable and exciting view of Hughes musing on and, we can see in retrospect, wrestling with himself about his own fiction. This insight into how Hughes regarded literature in general and his own work in particular will hopefully contribute toward correcting the misapprehensions which surround him. It is, too, a significant addition to the canon of his works. Many of the items in this selection of essays, introductions, lectures and broadcast-texts have been hitherto difficult or impossible to lay one's hands on. The volume ends with a four-page listing of works by Hughes of which the editor, Richard Poole, writes, "this is by no means a complete bibliography . . . [and] limits itself to English first editions". It is, nevertheless, the first published bibliography and—however modest—is an important contribution in itself to the study of Hughes, as a point of reference and the basis for future bibliographies.

There are, as with any new work, criticisms which can be made. The design and lay-out of the dust-jacket are very poor. The title-page *verso* gives Hughes's year of death incorrectly as 1971, but a single typographical error is almost a cause for congratulation these days. More seriously, there is the question of the bibliographic purity of the text. In his introduction the editor writes, "I have been conscious that differences exist between what was written for the eye and what for the ear; but I have contented myself with making only such cuts and alterations as

seemed desirable". I find this sentence quite alarming. In a selection such as this which includes much obscure and previously unpublished material, it is essential that the reader have absolute confidence in the text, especially if it is not reproduced *literatum*. In his introduction to Nabokov's *Lectures on Literature*, Fredson Bowers gives over three thousand words to explaining how, in what circumstances and for what reasons he has edited the text. This may seem a pedantic and tedious task. It is, but then that is an editor's lot. Whilst Mr Poole has much less space at his disposal, and whilst I am sure all additions, alterations and elisions were reasonable and necessary, it really is essential that they are seen to be so. All this being said, Richard Poole and Poetry Wales Press are to be congratulated for the very great service they have done in preparing and making available these writings.

Collections of reviews and other minor writings are often the least impressive or interesting pieces in an author's work. Novelists commonly seem to treat them as holidays from "real" writing, perhaps because they are undertaken for money rather than from internal motivation. Otherwise conscientious writers often disappoint one by the clichés, generalizations and sheer sloppy writing in such work which they would never allow themselves in their fiction. Not so Richard Hughes. Every one of these pieces is beautifully written and put together and, consequently, the whole volume is actually very enjoyable to read. For such a heterogeneous collection there is a remarkable consistency in the quality of the writing from the earliest item, "Preface to his Poetry" (1921) to the latest, "Fiction as Truth" (1970). Particularly delightful is the delicate irony he directs at those with whom he disagrees. A dextrous example of this is his argument against parochialism in Welsh literature, delivered in an address to the National Eisteddfod of 1931 ("The Relation of Nationalism to Literature").

Despite the variety of their subject and origin, all the pieces in this volume are inspired by a common concern for language and its correct use: from the most straightforward way to the most complex and profound, as a medium of art. At the simplest level, they show Hughes's deep respect for the meaning of words. Again and again he uses a word then adds a rider, gently reminding the reader of its precise sense. "Fiction", he tells us, "derives from a Latin word used of a potter shaping a bowl". "*The Waves*", he writes, "is a masterpiece in the strict

sense (the piece of work which admitted a mediaeval journeyman among the 'masters')". Joyce Cary makes us love the unpleasant characters in his novels with Charity, "not Charity in the sense of 'making allowances', but in the noblest, the full Pauline sense of total empathy". And so on. It is for the abuse of vocabulary that Hughes criticizes William Faulkner (like one craftsman chiding another for not taking care of his tools), referring to "his intoxication with words . . . an idolatrous obeisance before words he only hazily understood and sometimes had flatly misunderstood".

There is also a recurring concern with language as a medium of communication, whether in the Liturgy of the Church of England or in the use of metaphor and mathematical symbolism in scientific treatises. In several of the essays Hughes reveals a fascination with how the different media used for storing and transmitting information over the millennia have altered the perception of language and, consequently, the perception of "reality". In "The Voice and the Pen", for example, he reacts to the Radio Revolution just as McLuhan reacted thirty years later to the Television Revolution, only without the showmanship. And in "The Novel behind your Eyes" (1955) we find Hughes discussing the difference between an author's and reader's perception of the same text in a way which (as Richard Poole notes in his introduction) prefigures the structuralist analyses of Barthes and others in the 1960s. Without, it might be added, using abstruse diagrams and some of the ugliest neologisms ever glued together.

Language too, it can be seen, has an almost holy, artistic function for Hughes. In "The Writer's Duty" he explicitly compares this duty to the ways of "the Maker", in that he makes himself known through his creations and by posing riddles to men rather than by providing answers. In the reviews of writers whom Hughes admires, it is plain that to him they have the almost divine function of using language actually to create the world (and in such a way that it is recreated every time the book is read). In an enthralled review of *Mrs Dalloway*, for example, he writes, "to the reader, London is made for the first time (this will probably surprise him) to exist. It emerges, shining like crystal, out of the fog in which all the material universe is ordinarily enveloped in his mind". These words were echoed thirty years later in the opening of *The Fox in the Attic* where the enigmatic figure of Augustine emerges from the mist.

Richard Hughes has never been truly fashionable (apart from a period in the early 1930s). The first edition of *The Fox in the Attic* has still not sold out. He does not appeal to the adolescent mind, like D. H. Lawrence. He does not represent a picturesque period in social history, like F. Scott Fitzgerald. He does not typify (let alone hold a membership card to) a particular literary movement, like Joyce. Hughes himself had a place in his hearts for unfairly neglected, unfashionable writers, as essays on John Skelton, George Borrow and W. E. Henley indicate. He even comes to the defence of Virginia Woolf, before the days of Bloomsbury-mania, in a review of *A Writer's Diary*: "those who are totally out of sympathy with writing and living of her kind may find a dose of it a useful corrective to the Genius of the Age. It is sensible of dogs to eat an occasional blade of grass".

To all who admire Hughes's work, and especially to all dogs, this blade of grass is earnestly recommended.

PAUL BENNETT MORGAN

*Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews 1970-1981*,  
JEREMY HOOKER.

Carcenet Press, 1982, £8.95.

At a time when a number of excellent pioneering critical studies are being forced into samizdat-style circulation because they have been unable to find a publisher, can there be any justification for a book such as Jeremy Hooker's *Poetry of Place*, which does not contain any new material but collects previously published criticism, as the sub-title (*Essays and Reviews 1970-1981*) makes clear? Alternatively, at a time when much of the best critical writing takes the form of individual essays, review articles and even reviews, which are easily overlooked and lost sight of, and when far too many book-length critical studies emanating from the academic publishing houses are manifestly lower-second or third rate, isn't there a strong case to be made for collections such as *Poetry of Place*, provided that the overall quality is high?

Another question immediately prompted by the contents of this book is whether *Poetry of Place* possesses, or purports to possess, an inner coherence even though the twenty items it contains were not originally written as part of a wider

whole. The title, which appears on the jacket prefaced by a definite article in the incorrect form of *The Poetry of Place*, suggests both thematic and generic unity, whereas the descriptive sub-title points in the direction of an amorphous ragbag. However, on the jacket the sub-title is reduced to the single word, *Essays*, which gives the completely misleading impression that the book contains related essays on a strictly circumscribed literary topic. Other features of *Poetry of Place* conspire to give a form of cohesion to what might appear from the contents page to be no more than an assortment of critical ragtags and bobtails.

Hooker prefaces his collection with a short introduction in which he outlines some of his major preoccupations as both poet and critic (the significance of place, the meaning of culture, the shaping spirit of history, the definition of Englishness) and therefore tries to impose a unifying overview. At the other end of the book is a bibliography, which is totally unexpected in a collection of essays and again implies interconnectedness. The way in which the individual items are titled (except on the contents page) conforms more to the labelling of chapters than to that of entirely separate essays and reviews. What on the contents page is "Matthew Arnold: On the Study of Celtic Literature (1978)" becomes "On the Study of Celtic Literature" in the body of the book, and this pattern is followed throughout, the date of first publication and the name of the author under consideration being deleted except where the latter is unavoidable as in the essay entitled "English Auden". The effect of this is to create a subliminal sense of integration even though some of the shifts from one essay or review to the next are most abrupt, such as the one from Hooker's review of Heaney's *North* (1975) to a short assessment of John Cowper Powys in his centenary year (1972) in the light of Louis Marlow's 1936 book about the Powys brothers, *Welsh Ambassadors*, reprinted in 1971.

Yet another way of attempting to overcome the disparateness of the collection is by suppressing details of the sources of the essays and reviews except in the acknowledgments, and even there the relevant part is deliberately vague. Hooker states that most of the contents of *Poetry of Place* first appeared in the *Anglo-Welsh Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *Planet*, and *Poetry Nation Review*, but there is no indication here or elsewhere about which of these magazines particular essays and reviews appeared in. Consider the sixth "essay" in the book, entitled "Landscape of Fire". This is a review of Philip Pacey's

*Charged Landscapes*, published by Enitharmon Press in 1978, but the name of the book is not mentioned until almost halfway through the review, and to find out the publisher and the date of publication you have to consult the bibliography. For the date of the review itself, turn to the contents page, but not even the acknowledgments name the source. Why couldn't all this useful information have been laid out after the title? This pretence that a review for a magazine is not really a review but an essay in a book is irritating and smacks of that all-too-familiar form of snobbery that treats articles and reviews in non-academic literary magazines as literary journalism and essays in academic periodicals and books as literary criticism. Even if the publishers' primary concern was to present pages of pristine cleanness untarnished by introductory notes or footnotes, they could have overcome the problem by including a detailed table of all this material instead of having it scattered unsatisfactorily and incompletely between acknowledgments, contents, and bibliography.

To labour all these presentational aspects of *Poetry of Place* in the way I have been doing, instead of concentrating on the substance of the essays, is, paradoxically, a means of coming to terms with that substance: is this a book with an underlying thesis, however submerged, or not? If not, the order of the essays is very puzzling: it follows neither the chronology of the writers discussed nor the sequence in which they were written. But even if there is a thesis, the order remains puzzling. Why are the three essays on David Jones grouped together while the two on Edward Thomas are separated by nine items? Why are the essays on the four novelists dealt with by Hooker placed in a bloc at the centre of the book, flanked on either side by poets? Symmetry? Variety? Any suggestions?

If there is a unifying factor in *Poetry of Place* it is to be found more in "place" than in "poetry", since four of the twenty essays and reviews are devoted to fiction, one is about Matthew Arnold's lectures on Celtic literature, and two ("Living in Wales" and "An Autobiographical Essay") are essentially personal although they introduce literary issues. In his introduction, Hooker claims that behind all his writing is a conviction "that images of a false unity imposed throughout Britain by a national or Anglo-American 'centre'—in fact, a consciousness and the institutions supporting it—are the principal causes of dull or conventional vision as far as the actual and

potential life of particular places and the problematical reality of modern Britain are concerned". This is inevitably the assertion of a quiet dogmatist, claiming a form of objective authority for what is patently a subjective response. For Hooker, "place" is a word that resonates with connotations, of geology and history, myth and legend, human endeavour and labour, as his own poetry reveals, and he is unusually sensitive to its manifestations in the work of others. Not every essay in this book is centrally or even peripherally concerned with place, but it is such a major preoccupation for Hooker that he responds to its reverberations like a geiger counter does to radioactivity. This explains why "English Auden" is so refreshing, because he elucidates important elements in Auden's work, especially during the 1930s, that are frequently overlooked in the narrow pursuit of psychology and politics, Freud, Groddeck, and Marx. One would not expect a critic who has devoted himself so much to David Jones and John Cowper Powys to be on the same wavelength as Auden, but Hooker sensitively analyses the tension between *déraciné* poet and cultural environment that led Auden to search for reality not by digging deeper and deeper into his roots in the manner of David Jones, but by honestly confronting the existential condition of angst-ridden alienation and restless cosmopolitanism.

Hooker is most at ease with writers possessing a visionary or "religious" apprehension of the world, and nearly a fifth of the book is about David Jones, especially *The Anathemata*. There is some degree of overlap between these three essays and also between them and Hooker's other published treatments of David Jones, but such duplication is easily overlooked because he is at his most persuasive here. Many readers find David Jones ranging from very difficult to totally impenetrable, yet Hooker has the knack of pointing out well-defined paths through the dense forest and of showing the light, or *lux eterna*, at the end of the tunnel. What is most impressive about Hooker on Jones is his clarification of the broad cultural, historical, social and national issues while not losing his grasp of the poetic detail, the arrangement of the words and the implications sparked off by Jones's verbal juxtapositions. This trio of essays forms the hard core of the book, and indeed its main justification.

On the evidence of this collection, Hooker is more surefooted in writing about poetry than about prose, although he is prone to make questionable generalizations (meant seriously, not

used as rhetorical provocations), a conspicuous example being his sole incursion into American poetry, "To Open the Mind". In this short piece on Charles Olson and projective verse, Hooker himself warns of the danger of making generalizations about the differences between English and American poetry even as he is making one himself. In analysing poetry, Hooker is as absorbed in matters of technique and form as in what used to be called "content", and is concerned to elucidate how a poet bodies forth his vision through the structures and methods he chooses. In writing about fiction, however, Hooker unfashionably foregrounds "content" and "vision" rather than the issues that have pre-occupied structuralists, post-structuralists, reader-response theorists, narratologists, and their ilk in recent years. Two of the novelists discussed by Hooker—John Cowper Powys and T. F. Powys—receive little attention these days, and the other two—Emyr Humphreys and Raymond Williams—have never received much detailed consideration, so Hooker is able to make his case for each of them without becoming involved in the academic in-fighting that surrounds John Fowles, for example, or Iris Murdoch.

Hooker's advocacy of John Cowper Powys is well known, and in "Welsh Ambassador" he makes a short, balanced plea on behalf of a novelist he regards as a neglected giant and unequivocally calls "a great writer". The much longer essay on T. F. Powys, whom he describes as "a moralist and a metaphysician", communicates Hooker's own enthusiasm and the reasons for it; but if, as Hooker admits, J. C.'s writing can drive even a sympathetic reader to exasperation and revolt, what responses can T. F.'s quirky whimsicality provoke? To say that T. F. expresses "his vision in the forms of modern English fiction" is far too vague to be other than an emotive gesture of approval, and it is precisely at this point that T. F. is most vulnerable to hostile criticism. What are these "forms of modern English fiction"? What precisely is Powys's relationship to them? These issues require much more analysis.

Hooker uses Hardy as a touchstone in his essays on T. F. Powys and Raymond Williams. When referred to at all, Williams's fiction tends to be treated as an adjunct to his tendentious pseudo-sociological theorizing and critical writings, so Hooker is to be applauded for taking the fiction on its own terms for once. His explanation of why *Border Country* is superior to its sequels (*Second Generation* and *The Fight for*

*Manod*) carries conviction, but a closer examination of the flat, unexciting language of *Border Country* might have caused him to think more than twice before likening it to the work of Hardy's maturity.

Despite its high points, *Poetry of Place* is too uneven to rank as a distinguished collection of criticism, but as a symptom of the literary times it is certainly significant. In its post-imperial sleepwalk, England has increasingly been forced to look within, to reconsider its identity, to redefine its role, and this has encouraged new forms of traditionalism and conservatism in art as in life. In this sense, the heartland of Britain might be said to be catching up with the Celtic fringe. Domicile in rural and nationalistic West Wales has sharpened Hooker's awareness of these developments, which, despite resemblances, have to be distinguished from Little Englandism and sentimental nostalgia. *Poetry of Place* does not possess a unifying thesis, but with its anti-materialistic, anti-utilitarian, anti-pragmatic, pro-visionary, pro-imaginative leanings it does exhibit an underlying ideology, a toughened, modernized, far from naive version of conservative romanticism.

PETER LEWIS

*The Taliesin Tradition*,  
EMYR HUMPHREYS.

Black Raven, 1983, £10.95.

What is most extraordinary about Wales is that, despite the overwhelming power of its eastern neighbour, it survives at all. How has this happened without independent military or political power? In his recent book exploring the almost miraculous survival of the Welsh identity, Emyr Humphreys looks for some continuity, some constant factor in Welsh history. What has been present throughout, he asks? His answer is the Welsh poetic tradition, what he calls "the Taliesin tradition" after the influential sixth-century poet, Taliesin of Rheged. The thread that runs through Welsh history is made of poetic language.

While it is true that there are still, today, poets writing in the original strict metres, Emyr Humphreys's own version of history shows that there have been times when this tradition went, as it were, underground. The thread has not always been clearly visible. Historians generally agree

that the great period of the bardic tradition came to an end some time in the seventeenth century. Gwyn Williams in *An Introduction to Welsh Poetry* places this change at roundabout the end of the Tudor period:

The end of the sixteenth century is as good a point as any to divide the old from modern Welsh poetry . . . House poets kept on after this time were museum pieces rather than an integral part of a living society.

In his splendidly detailed *When Was Wales*, Professor Gwyn A. Williams comes to the same conclusion: "A poetic culture which had been buoyant and innovatory as late as Henry VII, stammered and disintegrated and retreated into folklore."

It is interesting to see how Emyr Humphreys deals with this problem for he doesn't allow it to affect his general thesis. He argues that, with the decline of the strict metres, the poetic spirit entered folk poetry (*canu gwerin* and *penillion*) and, in particular, the freer range of religious prose. After the sixteenth century the spirit of Taliesin changed its shape and moved from the poets to the preachers. Later on, in the nineteenth century, it changed once more into the new shape of politicians. This, then, is not another book about the Welsh poetic tradition, indeed not a book of literary history at all. Emyr Humphreys believes (and I think in the end, it is a matter of belief) that the poetic tradition encapsulates a powerful spiritual quality. One form this takes is that of a creative force, generated to begin with by the poets, but sustained in more recent times by other "artists" like preachers, politicians, architects and so on. He calls this force the "Taliesinic spirit" which enabled the Welsh identity to change its shape in times of crisis, adapt and survive. Put so baldly this theory sounds fanciful and I find the book unconvincing on this level despite the story's remarkable personalities and the ingenious ways by which their lives are connected. (Emyr Humphreys is an outstanding novelist and his skill is evident in the vivid portraits with which the book is crammed.) I am not sure that this is a theory that could ever be satisfactorily demonstrated. Even so the method used is too circumstantial, perhaps too imaginative. Here is an example:

Taliesin the shape-shifter takes many forms. Dylan Thomas's great-uncle was a noted Welsh poet in his day. His name was Gwilym

Marles and his poetic effusions bore a distinct resemblance to the muse of the Reverend Eli Jenkins. He was more important as a Unitarian minister of a small church in Cardiganshire which faced persistent persecution, and as an advocate of democratic and religious liberty. Taliesin in his later manifestation seems to have had a particular affection for this little congregation. The rule-book of the Welsh Unitarians was drawn up by no less a Taliesinic spirit than Iolo Morganwg, the late eighteenth-century universal genius of Glamorgan, literary forger and inventor of the *Gorsedd* of Druids and much of the pomp and circumstance of the modern *eisteddfod*. The rule-book was taken to Wisconsin, along with the druidic lore, by Richard Lloyd Jones, an earlier pastor of the Cardiganshire Unitarian flock of Gwilym Marles. He and his sons brought up the young Frank Lloyd Wright who, in the fullness of time created his own Taliesin, West and East.

Much more important in this book than the discussion of the poetic tradition is Emyr Humphreys's description of the way in which myths based on the values of Taliesin have been used and reused in the Welsh struggle for survival. The "Taliesinic spirit" is above all a myth-making one. The aristocratic values of unity and courage against the odds so idealized by the early poets were seized on by the monk Gildas who, while castigating his own age in *The Ruin Of Britain*, looked back to a golden age of Roman-British civilisation. From Gildas developed the idea that the whole of Britain belonged to the Cambro-British. Subsequently Welsh princes, in their struggles against each other and others, were able to use Gildas to claim the whole island as theirs.

The most influential of all the "histories" of the islands of Britain was written by the Breton, Geoffrey of Monmouth, in the twelfth century. His *Historia Regum Britanniae* created the myth of Arthur, a Celtic super-hero who was supposed to have routed the Saxons, whose exploits generally outdid Alexander's, and who died with the promise of resurrection. This "once and future king" became the focus for the most potent survival myth of all in Wales. By the end of the thirteenth century, there were already three translations into Welsh from the original Latin.

So the groundwork had been set for some striking acts of survival. Henry VII drew on this myth when he named his first son Arthur. He

was reviving the dream of a Welsh ruler of the whole of Britain. But myths are not reality. That the Welsh paid a severe price for living by such myths is the major insight of Emyr Humphreys's book. The Arthurian myth kept Welsh national hopes alive but whenever it was evoked it never did the Welsh any good. The Tudors built their position on it but the consequence of their persistent use of it was to subordinate Wales and the Welsh to the English nation state. A similar development occurred when another Arthur-figure appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. Lloyd George can be seen as a sort of mixture of Arthur and his Welsh wizard-adviser Merlin. He also hoped to help Wales by ruling Britain. Emyr Humphreys argues that in the end he did little for Wales but served England well.

Although it is not a lesson the author explicitly draws, it seems from the evidence of this book that looking to the past hasn't always brought the Welsh benefits. The Arthurian myth has helped to forge identity but it has also encouraged subordination. Even the seemingly harmless activity of reviving interest in old manuscripts which began in the eighteenth century and was accelerated by the fanatical dedication of Iolo Morganwg to what he believed was Europe's oldest literary language had its dire consequences. The impetus it gave to the eisteddfod movement led to greater anglicization and sterility later on in the nineteenth century. It also aroused the interest of the English educationalist, Matthew Arnold, who proceeded to gut the Welsh literary tradition for its "Celtic Magic" which could be used as a spiritual medicine, an ancient cure, to revive the flagging English imperialist state. And, more recently, the extraordinary loyalty to the English royal family displayed by some Welsh socialists like Viscount Tonypanody probably has its roots in the specific Welsh adoration of King figures like Arthur.

This is a book about survival. Is it optimistic about the future of the Welsh identity? The end of the book is quiet. The last twenty years are passed over relatively quickly. The "Taliesinic spirit" today is seen to be most alive in Cym-

deithas yr Iaith Gymraeg. These active fighters for the language are the descendants of the early poets. Emyr Humphreys puts his faith in the young and in the guilt of those Welshmen who have lost the language and who, driven by this are striving to create a fresh identity. But what of today's poets? The surprising aspect, given their earlier importance, is that they are hardly mentioned. Apart from Saunders Lewis, twentieth-century Welsh poets barely figure, and when they do appear in the book's last paragraphs, their effect seems too generalized, and even too ethereal to be of much potency. The power of Taliesin seems to have been stronger in the past than it is in the present. That such should be the case is not to be unexpected from a writer who believes: "It is always the past rather than the present that offers the best hope for a future".

This book has been written when once again the past is very much with us in Wales. In recent months there have been two long television series on the subject and an amazing number of books about Welsh history have appeared (by Jan Morris, Dai Smith, Gareth Jones, Wynford V. Thomas, Prys Morgan and Gwyn A. Williams). All this activity may have to do with our present period of rapid industrial and social change. In a depleted present, it is customary to look to the past for a way forward. *The Taliesin Tradition* may be the most useful of all these recent books. It has the poetic power of a personal vision. Its accuracy in a sense is not important. What is significant is its *use* of history. Emyr Humphreys's story creates a new myth of how a small group has survived. It shows how individuals (and it is unbelievable how many of these are related in some way), through their creativity and ingenuity, overcame terrible difficulties. In most contemporary history individuals are reduced to dots on the horizon, at the mercy of those foreground forces of economics, religion and so on. Above all, Emyr Humphreys's achievement has been to make history human. He has rescued us from the helplessness of impersonality.

CARY ARCHARD

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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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CARY ARCHARD is editor of *Poetry Wales* and Director of Poetry Wales Press.

CATHERINE BELSEY is a lecturer in English at University College, Cardiff. She is author of *Critical Practice* (1980) and *The Subject of Tragedy* (to be published by Methuen in 1985).

GLEN CAVALIERO, a member of the Faculty of English, University of Cambridge, is the author of *John Cowper Powys, Novelist* (O.U.P., 1973), *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900-1939* (Macmillan, 1977), *A Reading of E. M. Forster* (1979), *Charles Williams, Poet of Theology* (1983).

THEO DUNNET is a librarian who since 1975 has worked in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and its dependent library, the Radcliffe Science Library.

PETER FOSS, recently returned to Wales from teaching in the University of Venice, is currently engaged in research on Llewelyn Powys. He is author of *Poems for Peckleton* (1980) and *The History of Market Bosworth* (1984).

BERNARD JONES, presently Fellow, University of Southampton, is editor of *The Poems of William Barnes* (1962), *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Glyn Hughes* (1970) and *Romer Mowl and Other Stories by John Cowper Powys* (1974). He has also published numerous articles on nineteenth and twentieth-century writers.

MORINE KRISDOTTIR recently returned to Britain as a free-lance writer after a career in psychology, first as a practising therapist, then as a lecturer in Environmental Psychology at the University of Guelph, Ontario. Her various publications include *Shielding: People and Shelter* (1977) and, somewhat reflecting her initial qualification, a Ph.D. in English Literature, *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest* (1980).

PETER LEWIS lectures in English at Durham University and is a member of Yr Academi Gymreig. He has edited John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and published a book about the work. He has also edited *Poems '74*, *Papers of the Radio Literature Conference 1977* and *Radio Drama* (1981).

PAUL BENNETT MORGAN is on the staff of the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth. He is a regular contributor to *The Nabokovian*, and has recently contributed an essay to the Université Paul Valéry *Festschrift* on Nabokov. He also recently completed an architectural history of *Plas Bronwydd*.

PAUL ROBERTS has recently been engaged in post-graduate research in education and is now a secondary school teacher in Cheshire.

ALLEN SAMUELS lectures in English at Saint David's University College, Lampeter.

R. GEORGE THOMAS retired as Professor of Medieval English at University College, Cardiff in 1980. He has published books, monographs and articles on the Icelandic family and historical sagas and on twentieth-century poetry, including that of Edward Thomas, Dylan Thomas, and R. S. Thomas. He has edited Edward Thomas's *Letters to Gordon Bottomley* (1968) and the *Collected Poems* (1978). He contributed *Edward Thomas* to the Writers in Wales series (1972), and his study of Edward Thomas based on letters, notebooks and unpublished memoirs is due to appear in the near future.

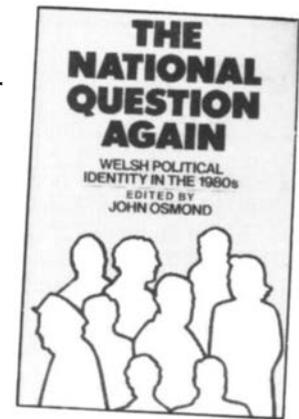
J. R. WATSON is Professor of English at the University of Durham. He is the author of *Picturesque Landscape and English Romantic Poetry* (1970), *Wordsworth's Vital Soul* (1982), and the forthcoming *English Poetry of the Romantic Period, 1789-1830*. He is also editor of *Everyman's Book of Victorian Verse*, of a Casebook on Browning, and of an edition of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

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