

**JOHN COWPER POWYS**

**AND THE ART OF THE NOVELIST**

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## CHAPTER ONE

## APPROACHING POWYS

## I THE NECESSITY OF OPPOSITES

The response of a reader upon first encountering a novel by John Cowper Powys is likely to be confused. Certainly my own was compounded of many contradictory but powerfully felt elements. This thesis has its origin in this divided response, which seemed to me to raise important questions not only about the nature and quality of Powys's own work, but about the proper scope and character of the novel as a genre, about why we read novels, and how they enlarge our understanding.

Much of my ambivalent reaction arose from what I felt to be bizarre contradictions in the novels themselves. Powys's range is immediately impressive; his books' dramatic scope includes the grandly cosmic and the minutely inanimate. There is a similar breadth of human experience; his characters enact a public, often political life, and are chased to the remotest retreats of introspection. Powys's grandeur and his cheerful use of fantasy would indicate a valuable refreshment of the naturalistic form of the novel. But at the same time, Powys can seem an author of extreme narrowness, writing out of an intensively individual sensibility, whose concerns seem to have little to do with the commonality of men. He returns again and again to a choice few preoccupations, such as the landscape and society of his childhood Wessex, arcane Welsh mythological researches, a hatred of science and vivisection, and an escape from the human altogether to an immersion in the life of nature. As a stylist, Powys writes with superb lyric breadth and

sense of cadence, as well as appalling wordiness. There is perceptive realism in his treatment of the minutiae of social relation, alongside whimsical make-believe and a strange blindness to ordinary verisimilitude.

Powys greatly admired Walt Whitman, who wrote "I contradict myself; very well, I contradict myself." The comparison with Whitman is helpful; like Whitman, Powys can initially present what an American reviewer of Owen Glendower called a mixture of "the impressive and the goofy" (1), and in neither writer can we sift through the work to separate individual, whole successes and failures. Their work is obstinately of a piece, their virtues and vices inseparable and on a grand scale. Both Whitman and Powys relish large philosophical speculations, and relate their stupendous generalities to an absorption in the details of the natural world; their abstractions always originate in the experience of the senses. The work of both reads like spontaneous effusion, yet Whitman polished his "barbaric yawps" over many years, and Powys as we will see also wrote with care. The apparent exhibitionism of both is more accurately a subtle repertoire of disguise; self-confession in one place distracts from reticence in another. Finally, both Whitman and Powys show a certain freakishness in relation to their contemporaries, seeming to sustain little helpful comparison with them. A hundred years of Whitman criticism has been unable to reach reasonable agreement about his work; Powys criticism too, less noisily, has failed to reach settled conclusions.

Until recently, the puzzled first-time reader of Powys would have found little to help him resolve his difficulties. Many eminent critics placed John Cowper Powys beneath serious consideration. For

F.R. Leavis, Powys was a "genius manqué". Reviewing an adulatory critical book, Leavis wrote, "There is then, only one Powys, just as there is only one Brontë" (2), by which, of course, was meant T.F. Powys and Mr. Weston's Good Wine. In mentioning this brusque disparagement, I do not wish to offend the memory of a great critic, but merely to indicate how Powys has stood outside most serious discussion of the art of the novel, and that his central concerns have invited ridicule.

Down to the present day, works of reference have preferred not to examine too closely such a clearly odd writer. Brief mention has meant quick dismissal. Martin Seymour-Smith's Guide to Modern World Literature offers simple misinformation disguised as considered judgement: "John Cowper Powys's best book by far and away, is his Autobiography (1934); this should be read in conjunction with the American edition, The Art of Happiness, which differs considerably" (3). These two books are, of course, entirely separate works.

From Powys admirers, there has been a considerable body of writing on the Powys family, mostly biographical, very interesting to those already at home with the central works, but daunting to the uninitiated. The word "uninitiated" is appropriate, for a disconcerting result of these reminiscences has been that, while they testify to the great impression made by the Powys family, and especially John Cowper, on those who met them, they have tended unintentionally to foster the impression of a closed circle of devotees, with John Cowper Powys as the most abstruse of "cult" writers - a kind of Rudolf Steiner of the novel.

Work of critical importance, to which this thesis is indebted, began in 1964 with Professor Wilson Knight's The Saturnian Quest. Professor Wilson Knight traces the symbolic and visionary elements in Powys with the depth of insight and breadth of intellectual scope characteristic of his great critical work. His book is the product of many years of imaginative involvement with the novels, and friendship with their author. Professor Wilson Knight is however at home with many aspects of the work which readers have found difficult, particularly Powys's interest in occultism, and The Saturnian Quest is itself a formidable book. Dr. Glen Cavaliero's John Cowper Powys, Novelist (1973) suggests a more general approach, and is an excellent discussion of Powys's achievement in a broadly humanist perspective, treating with caution the place of philosophical speculation in the books. To these works must be added Jeremy Hooker's John Cowper Powys in the "Writers of Wales" series, which is especially valuable for its study of Powys's symbolism.

For Professor Wilson Knight, Powys is a seer. Dr. Cavaliero shows how the novels can be read with profit alongside those of Lawrence, James, or George Eliot, for their intelligent and sensitive insight into the observable and shared world of human actions and feelings. There are implied here two different views of the task of the novel, indeed views of reality, to each of which Powys has something to contribute. Powys himself was a restless philosophical enquirer into the nature of "reality", and wrote many purely philosophical books in this spirit of curiosity. But it is in the novel that this "quest" - a potent Powysian word - is followed most urgently. This kind of enquiry is not one which the English novel has often undertaken. For models, one must go abroad, as Powys did, to Goethe or Dostoevsky. In his fiction, we see Powys both fashioning

and exhibiting his beliefs, and under these uses the shape of the novel undergoes some extraordinary transformations.

The title of this thesis, John Cowper Powys and the Art of the Novelist, requires some comment, as his work extends beyond the confines of "the novel", and Powys himself did not think of his writing as "art". Dr. Peter Easingwood, in his thesis A Critical Study of John Cowper Powys has argued persuasively for the necessity of seeing the corpus entire. It is true that genres meant little to Powys, and he allowed them to fade into each other. Morwyn is a fable compounded of novel and philosophy, after the manner of Candide. In Homer and the Aether, a "walking commentary" on the Iliad, novel and literary criticism are mixed. Powys's philosophical books are deeply pictorial. Poetry, ascribed to the character of Taliessin, illustrates the philosophy of Porius, while Wolf Solent is punctuated with Jason Otter's verse. But the vastness of the output imposes discrimination, and we may follow Powys himself, who wrote, "from my own point of view the fiction I have written is worth much more than my lay-sermons" (4). There is also a real distinction of quality between the novels and the non-fiction (apart from the Autobiography), in that a reader is likely to be sufficiently impressed by Wolf Solent to want to read The Meaning of Culture, while a progression in the opposite direction is much less probable. But there is much in Dr. Easingwood's claim that "Powys's genius is distinctively not that of a novelist" (5). His novels are only part of the expression of a more generally directed creative energy, although they are the best of his work.

As for "art", the word for Powys smacked of formalism and preciosity. For the catch-phrase "art for art's sake", Powys

substituted "art for life's sake". It seems relevant that while Powys rejected the word "art" applied to his writing, he used it of his life; two of the "lay-sermons" are called The Art of Happiness and The Art of Growing Old. But Powys's rejection of "art" does not mean a reliance upon spontaneous prose. He examined his work critically, although technical or aesthetic considerations were not uppermost in his mind. Rather the art of his novels is the consequence of the art of his life, and his cunning and craft in his view of himself and the world are mirrored in a similar craft in the novels.

Writing of "The Loose and Baggy Monsters of Henry James", a category which would certainly include A Glastonbury Romance, R.P. Blackmur states a belief "that in the novel, as elsewhere in the literary arts, what is called technical or executive form has as its final purpose to bring into being - to bring into performance, for the writer and for the reader - an instance of the feeling of what life is about. Technical form is our means of getting at, of finding, and then making something of what we feel the form of life itself is..." (6).

Powys's art is in such a deep relation to his feelings about the form of life, which he found to be a phenomenon of unfathomable complexity and plurality. This is not a simple correspondence between an untidy world and untidy novels; rather there is a most thorough-going connection between what Powys tries to say and his way of saying it. His books are as they are through internal necessity. It is not that he brought an antique technique to modern themes, and that his books would be better had he learned from Joyce, and moved more in the society of his literary contemporaries. Powys did, in fact, learn a great deal from Joyce,

and was widely read in the literature of his time, but wisely absorbed only what was suited to his individual genius. A Powys novel, however weirdly, makes its own statement, and is not a flawed something else. This thesis explores and demonstrates this fundamental integrity, and shows how apparently bizarre aspects of Powys's work can be understood in relation to its total purpose.

At the end of the day, as with Whitman, many contradictions will remain. Powys would sign his letters "container of contraries", and if a phrase can provide a entry to his work, that phrase is "the necessity of opposites", an idea which he considered the key to Wolf Solent (7). Powys's art is extremely inclusive in its attempt to gather together contrary elements; out of such collision, in fact, his distinctive vision is attained.

The notion of art as a creation of harmony out of opposing forces is an old one, as Dr. Johnson recognised in discussing the eighteenth century conception of "wit".

But Wit...may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of discordia concors; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they (the metaphysical poets) have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs and their subtilty surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and, though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.  
(8)

Johnson's ideal is one of harmony. Powys is different, and seeks less the merging of opposites than their collision and the recognition of their interdependence. Powys described his philosophy under the title The Complex Vision:

For the consummation of the complex vision is a meeting place of desperate and violent extremes; extremes, not watered down nor modified nor even "reconciled," certainly not cancelled by one another, but held forcibly and deliberately together by an arbitrary act of the apex-thought of the human soul. (9)

Ecstasy comes from a similar collision:

This queer expression, "having an ecstasy," what does it really mean? What are the ingredients that compose them, the atmosphere out of which such ecstasies arise? ...I think they always come, just as everything living does, out of duality, out of the energizing of opposite poles of existence..." (10)

Continually in Powys we are made aware of opposite poles of existence. His philosophy is always conscious of the need to include in its scope every aspect of man's being. In Wolf Solent we have the relationship between private fantasy and social reality, in A Glastonbury Romance, there are the claims of belief and scepticism, imaginative flight and objective truth. Throughout Powys we see the conflict between aspiration and the limitations of the personality, between the importance of memory and the need to live in the present, between corrosive despair and a passionate love of life.

In choosing to write of such extremes, Powys's inclusiveness is really a heightened kind of selection, which attempts to picture wholeness through an awareness of multifarious and far-removed



areas of life. The experience of ecstasy, arising "out of duality" is important: there comes a fleeting moment when totality is apprehended. His work is finally directed, in Porius, to such a perception of wholeness. In that the shape and craft of the novels is conditioned by this end, we are justified in talking of Powys's "art".

## II THE ART OF READING - "SPIRIT ENCOUNTERING SPIRIT"

If we are to read Powys's work well, it is important to understand what he thought the function of literature should be. Powys had his own ideas about the relationship between author and reader and the place of reading in the life of the individual, which profoundly influenced the novels he wrote.

Powys's characters often enact a descent into the archaic and primitive. The novels as a sequence begin with the modern world, and move back through an evocation of the many-layered past of Glastonbury, through mediaeval Wales, to the Dark Ages and, finally, to the timeless. There are hints of ancient mysteries and vanished gods, even of pre-human consciousnesses. In thinking about the fundamentals of literature, Powys similarly returns to the primitive roots of language:

Magicians have never been able to control their angels or their demons until they discovered their names. The origin of all literature lies here. A word is a magic incantation by which the self exercises power - first over itself and then over other selves and then, for all we know, over the powers of nature. (11)

But those who know anything of human nature know that it is by means of the condensation of mental images around some particular pivotal point that new life is given to things. Such a pivotal point is a name. A bird, a flower, a star, while it is un-

named, is for the human mind endowed with only half of its possible reality (12)

Deep in the oldest traditions of the human race dwells the secret of the magical power of names. Only by knowing the names of demons were such beings controlled; and the legends which indicate the mystery and secrecy which hung about the names of certain of the gods bear witness to the same strange potency. If one named a supernatural personage by his true name one did not conjure or invoke him in vain. (13)

Language, therefore, has to do with magic, with the control of angels and demons (whether of the self or the outside world), and with the creation of life. This incantatory aspect of language is normally a poet's preoccupation, and Powys is often easier read in the light of a poetic rather than novelistic tradition.

"Names" are important in Powys. In Porius names have an independent existence as an inner reality which needs to be called forth by event. The precociously perceptive Gunta, when asked "Is that your name?" replies, "I don't know. It's what everyone calls me". (14). The mare Brithlas wins the name "Valkyrie" in battle, after the habit of the respected forest people, whose "custom it is to keep horses, and children too, unnamed until they win names for themselves" (15). In Maiden Castle Enoch Quirm changes his name to Uryen as an expression of his inner identification with a Celtic god. At an even more primitive level, "naming" was active in Powys's life from early childhood, in the creation of secret languages and of a private or family world where objects and experiences were named and given symbolic meaning. The Autobiography records this family culture, with its "Freedom Stone" on the road to home, consecrated to the school holidays (16). Such childhood rituals are doubtless very common; among the Powyses (as with the Brontës and their imaginary

"Gondal" world) they persisted. "But as a family," wrote John Cowper, "we were all extremely slow in mental development and such achievements as we subsequently arrived at were the achievements of invincible childishness prolonged into maturer days." (17). Indeed this feeling for ritual intensified with Powys's later years and his retirement from public life, as the close of the Autobiography and the letters from Wales show. We read of him on his daily walks endowing hills, stones and trees with names. In the novels, too, symbolic objects are named and given identity, a tendency particularly strong in Dud No-Man of Maiden Castle and Sylvanus Cobbold of Weymouth Sands. Wolf Solent interprets the world around him by creating symbols: the individual moves in a mythological landscape of his own creation.

This is one side of Powys, but although his imagination tends towards the mythological and ritualistic, such gestures of belief are not necessarily supported by actual belief. There may not be the faith which normally gives such an imagination its stability. Powys's "magic" is therefore tentative and exploratory, aspiring to the authority of "naming", but not always attaining it. He tries to give articulate expression to the mysteries of life, and hence to understand such mysteries. This attempt to "name" the unknown is the basis of narrative in Powys; his novels illustrate a battle for self-mastery.

The sequence of Powys's books, and the progress of his life, show that his struggle for interpretation was finally successful. At the same time, there remains much which is inexpressible, and this is why Powys has the habit, so annoying to the tidy-minded, of asserting that there are about us grand significances, if only we could understand them.

The philosophical books often record a failure to articulate the "intimations" which were so important in Powys's life:

Standing upon some old stone bridge where the moss grows green and untouched on the curve of the dark arches above the water, one often feels that there is a silent unspeakable secret hovering about such places that no writer has ever really caught. Perhaps there are things that cannot be caught; but, if they ever are, it will be by a mind that has made of such memories a rich, dim background, a background full of supernatural power that has the strength to push back, if not to obliterate, the crude pressure of modern preoccupations. (18)

This area of unshaped experience is the chaos out of which the author, like Milton's God, shapes new worlds. The essential stuff of literature surrounds us:

We all move to and fro in a fluctuating mist of pseudo-verbal, pseudo-sensory images. These images are nothing less than the protoplasmic world-stuff of every kind of literature. Men of genius give shape to these floating nebulae, to these hovering simulacra, until some palpable organic form swings free in space. What has been once snatched out of the 'casing air' now moves through that air on its own orbit. Limbo is thus ravished; new 'worlds' are created; . . . and upon the ambiguous coasts between mind and matter the wave-curve of beauty is petrified in mid-descent. (19)

In his love of barely understood extremes of the world, Powys often "ravishes Limbo". There is a concern with the sub-human, and minute movements of nature, as well as with the super-human and astronomical immensities. At the human level too Powys loves to study intractable areas of experience. There is the psychology of visionary experience in A Glastonbury Romance, the disordered perception of Wolf Solent, and prolonged enquiry into the nature of

fantasy and ecstasy. There is special attention to parts of life uncredited in daily social existence, and to material usually considered beneath or beyond literary treatment. These are aspects of life which challenge our ordinary understanding, which need to be mapped and "named".

To "ravish Limbo" is a god-like ability, and Powys delights in the total creation of a world. His first experience of "world-creation" was with a childhood aquarium:

This aquarium was an intense and unique pleasure to me. I think it satisfied in some profound manner my desire to be God, or at least a god, and there is undoubtedly something about watching the movements of these restless beings, as they swim in and out of the stones and weeds from which you have created their world, that gives you a mysterious feeling of excitement. Yes, it is as if you "possessed" in the way I fancy the First Cause must possess his aquarium, these darting, silvery, rose-tinged aboriginals of our human organism. My satisfaction lay very much in the thought of what a complicated world of hills and forests and glades and gorges I had made for these fish, and how large and infinite it must seem to them - while to me it was so small, and every plant and pebble so carefully chosen! (20)

In Powys, the world often appears as an aquarium, the created hobby of a more or less disinterested deity. Fish too are invoked as essential symbols of life. The novels exist as their author's "aquaria", and the major works each establish a world in miniature, in the claustrophobic richness of the Wessex of Wolf Solent, and particularly in the microcosms of A Glastonbury Romance and Porius.

Powys's view of "creation" is therefore astonishingly literal. It is a view which tends naturally to a certain amplitude, and to fantasy and the historical novel, where the created fictional "world" can

achieve a considerable degree of autonomy. But this view also colours Powys's attitude to the present world around us. One of the many phrases from Wordsworth which Powys repeatedly recalls is from "Tintern Abbey".

... all the mighty world  
Of eye, and ear, - both what they half create  
And what perceive ;

Powys modifies these lines slightly into a belief that 'our own soul half-creates and half-discovers the general spectacle of things which it names "the universe"' (21). So even the naturalistic novel becomes the portrayal of a world deeply impressed by the personality of the observer-author. We can see this in Powys's own novels with a contemporary setting, and in his admiration for a subjective interpretation of the world in the modern novels he read, such as Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage:

Lovers of Miss Richardson's books recognize that like all great writers she really and truly creates a completely new world out of her own temperament, even while what in her deepest honesty she feels - and that is the paradox of all genius - is that she is simply expressing the truth. (22)

The book is a "world", but this world is also the child of the subjective "world" of the mind of the author. The sense of the uniqueness of every individual's vision of things is strong in Powys: "Every living organism - it is the fatality of our identity - has its own peculiar universe, not quite like any other..." (23). This means that the artistry of a book becomes less important than the glimpse of the author's mind which the book brings. Powys writes of

the gulf there is between writers whose "art" is always being felt and writers whose creative energy is always carrying them away. For the catholic-minded there is a special pleasure in both; but I think the latter kind has this advantage, that you feel that the personality behind the work is larger and greater than any particular thing he does. The "artists" at this job seem indeed to have a clear motive behind their work. And they do what they want to do and have their reward. (24)

The pleasure of reading is therefore the creation of a relationship with the mind of the writer, at a level of understanding above the everyday:

All intimate and intense reading is a kind of secret dialogue between the ~~writer~~ <sup>author</sup> and one's own soul. After a long, furtive, impassioned, Platonic love-affair with Goethe, — or Walt Whitman, or Keats, or Lamb, or even the translunar Emerson, what a contrast it is when we fall back upon ordinary casual fooling with our less exciting friends! (25)

This is why Powys's literary criticism is not about individual books, still less genres, but authors. Even when writing about Homer and Shakespeare, he uses the text as evidence for the mind of the creator. Such an approach is alien to modern practice, but is not simply a reversion to "biographical criticism", and is a natural consequence of Powys's conception of the relationship between author and reader.

Although the pleasure of reading involves a deep imaginative absorption in the subjective world of another, this exercise is not the denial of the reader's own personality, but the creation of a "dialogue", "spirit encountering spirit". Literature "flings us back more deeply than ever upon our selves" and our response to its stimulus is "the evocation of our own originality" (26).

Powys's originality was certainly evoked by his reading; his literary criticism does not offer an objective survey of the writer under discussion, but is a record of Powys's own rich experience as a reader. If reading is a dialogue between two imaginations, Powys gives us both sides of the transaction (\*). There are implications here for the reading of Powys. If he at times seems to belabour his audience with his own personality, he does not expect the reader to absorb passively, but to test what he reads against his own experience of life. Powys assists such a response by confessing his "radical subjectivity", and withdrawing into "suspended judgement" when the reader expects a didactic conclusion. (27) This is particularly true of A Glastonbury Romance with its plethora of "miracles".

Although Powys's style is obviously influenced by the oratorical flourishes of the lecture platform, one of the results of his belief in a close relationship between author and reader is his intimacy (and Powys's lectures were thought disconcertingly intimate by some audiences). In The Meaning of Culture, as quoted above, reading is "intimate and intense", its dialogue is "secret", a relationship with an author "furtive" and "impassioned". Powys is always conscious of reading as practised in privacy and silence, and writes less for a general literary public than with an awareness of the singleness of the individual reader; in the philosophical books he often imagines this reader retreating from the demands of society to the seclusion of a book.

The matter of Powys's novels is influenced by what he thinks is of importance to people in their privacy. Solitary experience is explored in great detail. Aspects of social life which receive their due in the world at large and in the conventional naturalistic novel

(\*) He is nonetheless capable of distinguishing between these two sides. Most of his criticism deals with established classics, and attempts to revive an authentic personal response to the familiar. But there is an interesting exception in Rabelais; Powys felt that Rabelais had been misrepresented in contemporary (1948) popular



are taken for granted, or, as with the economic realities of Wolf Solent, examined with the aim of estimating their effect upon the inner life. Powys seeks to redress the balance between the demands of Wordsworth's world of "getting and spending" and the needs of the interior personality. According to Lady Rachel in A Glastonbury Romance, poetry fights for the inward against the outward:

"What's Poetry if it isn't something that has to fight for the unseen against the seen, for the dead against the living, for the mysterious against the obvious? Poetry always takes sides. It's the only Lost Cause we've got left! It fights for the ... for the ... for the Impossible!" (28)

Powys's novels continually fight for lost causes, reversing the judgements of the world at large. In Wood and Stone he consciously sets out to show the strong and "well-constituted" defeated by the weak and "ill-constituted". Wolf Solent and Maiden Castle demonstrate interior survival through the apparent collapse of personal happiness, while the deluge of A Glastonbury Romance and the failure of Owen Glendower's fight for an independent Wales only affirm the values ostensibly conquered. Literature is anarchic and subversive, and shows what can be done by a minority of one. For Powys, a second-hand bookshop is "a powder-magazine": "It sets the prophet against the priest, the prisoner against society, the has-nothing against the has-all, the individual against the universe." (29)

In this discussion there is the recurring idea of literature as a weapon. There will be much to be said about didacticism in Powys's fiction. For the moment it is important to notice that literature's qualities are for Powys not primarily aesthetic, but for use. He aims at 'the direct application of our scriptures to the smallest detail of our domestic lives. We want, as Walt Whitman says, to decoy the Muse to our hearth, till we get her installed "amid the kitchen-ware".'

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*opinion, and also in Urquhart's translation. The first three sections of Powys's book - a life, a summary, and a selection from the five books in his own translation - are intended to clear Rabelais from these misunderstandings. Powys restrains his own intimate reactions until the fourth section, "An Interpretation of Rabelais".*

(30) Powys "used" his reading in his own life, and it is clear that Rabelais helped him in his acceptance of inner contraries, that his appreciation of Pater encouraged his absorption in a life of "sensation" and that Homer gave a sense of the sacramental to his daily habits. Powys lacked a sense of the self-consciously literary, and could easily translate his experience of reading into the experience of other senses:

Mr. de ——— would recite to me his favourite lines from the older poets, lines that smelt, if I may say so, like those old pieces of furniture in Penn House ante-room. (31)

Browning remains in fact the one single great author for whom I cherish a venomous and malignant hostility. My feeling is personal, and physical. I feel towards him as a woman might feel towards a man who has made unprovoked and unpleasant advances to her. In fact I feel as if in his super-masculinity Browning makes such advances to all his readers. (32)

Books carry the memory of the circumstances of their first reading: Powys read Goethe's Werther on a barge journey, and associated it thereafter with the smell of tarpaulin.

And I link up the lament for Fidele: "Fear no more the heat o' the sun, nor the furious winter's rages," with a certain arid and empty enclosure, just behind the Hove railway station, near which - it is forty years ago, reader! - used to stand a most melancholy little ginger-pop booth in which I used to refresh myself. (33)

Such associations can be merely sentimental, but in Powys's distrust of the picturesque, and the extension of such feelings into unusual areas of experience, there is a fidelity to keenly observed sensation which indicates an unusual integration of reading and living. Powys's conjunctions compare interestingly with Eliot's famous remarks on "dissociation of sensibility" in "The Metaphysical Poets":

When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the sound of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.  
(34)

In Powys, insight is produced by the collision of extremes, the "necessity of opposites", and the simultaneous apprehension of usually far-separated areas of experience. This means that the novels often break conventions of decorum, but also that they offer a particularly comprehensive picture of the totality, which is the destination of Powys's use of his "opposites".

While Powys's union of literature and life adds to the energy and conviction of his novels, it can paradoxically make them more bookish (though the same might be said of the metaphysical poets). When in A Glastonbury Romance he writes of "the cool-rooted fragility of lilac-coloured cuckoo flowers" (35), the reader may feel that Powys knows his Keats better than his flowers. But the very artlessness of the quotation indicates that the experience of "Ode to Psyche" has been mingled with natural observation before the writing of the novel. Powys feels no embarrassment at the mixture. There is a great deal of quotation and echo in Powys, but the effect is rarely owlsh. He is not trying to parade his wide reading. His quotations are often significantly resonant of their sources, and also bring with them the memory of the meaning which we know those sources held in Powys's imagination. Such cross-reference shows him appropriating literature to life, then back to literature again.

What is difficult about Powys's views on the function of literature is their disarming simplicity. In maintaining this

simplicity, he tries to stay close to the most primitive pleasures of reading works of the imagination. He takes old attitudes and presses them to extravagant excess. We often talk, in loose fashion, about a novelist creating a "world"; with Powys's belief in half-creation and half-discovery, this metaphor is not so far-fetched. The novelist creates a world in miniature within what Powys went so far as to call "Nature's over-novel" (36). Similarly, many Victorian novelists address their audience with an affectionate "dear reader"; Powys is more thorough, transforming this kindly companionship into intense intimacy.

This simplicity does not mean that Powys is in any sense a primitive; he uses these fundamental attitudes, taking them for granted in all his books, as a basis for extremely complex novels. He hopes, through such simplicity, to anchor his far-reaching speculations with firmly held and felt convictions about the seriousness and imaginative intensity of the art of reading. Powys at first seems to show a mixture of naivety and pretension. In fact, he eschews the safe middleground of fiction, and reaches above and below orthodoxies of the novel.

### III THE ROOTS OF THE NOVELS

In one of his rare statements on his own work, Powys wrote:

My writings - novels and all - are simply so much propaganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life. It is the prophecy and poetry of an organism that feels itself in possession of certain magical secrets that it enjoys communicating. And, by the way, I certainly feel conscious of conveying much more of the cubic solidity of my vision of things in fiction than it is possible to do in any sort of non-fiction. (37)

Here Powys decides on fiction as his favoured medium, but behind this choice lie impulses to "philosophy", "prophecy", and "poetry". The novel is valued for its closeness to the solidity of the world, but is also a kind of synthesis which can draw upon springs of inspiration which normally find their issue in other forms. In examining the shaping of Powys's novels, it is useful to note their expression of his poetry and philosophy, and then to consider exactly what kind of novel Powys was trying to write.

His earliest literary ambition was expressed in a vow made even while at Sherborne Preparatory School to devote his life to poetry. Powys's verse was only gradually displaced by his novels; he continued to publish poetry until 1922, and there are sporadic poems in his output until his last decade. His poems show a harmony of style with the novels; Jason Otter's poems in Wolf Solent and Ned Athling's in A Glastonbury Romance are close in language to the surrounding prose. In all Powys's verse there are close parallels of theme and purpose with the novels, but there is also a dilution of power. In matter, Powys's work is of a piece: the opening poem of his first book, Odes and other Poems (1896), harks back to his original vow of poetic vocation made between the stars and the urinal, and expresses the conjunction of extremes so important in his work as a whole. The poet hopes to learn from Pan.

To shape a music manifold and free  
'Mid star-proof shades and deserts darkly mute,  
And e'en in Nature's dross and refuse see  
The footprints of a veiled Divinity. (38)

In lyric, such a hope seems unexceptional. But Powys translated this quest into prose fiction, with startlingly more trenchant effect.

Powys, on his own admission, is a conventional poet, but many of the distinctive topics of the novels - in particular the livingness of all things, and the value of meticulously observed sensation, are kindred to the matter of "The Prelude", "Tintern Abbey", Keats' Odes, or Arnold's "Resignation". P.J. Kavanagh has written of Powys's animism in A Glastonbury Romance.

This is no more than Wordsworth did in his poems but then the English never believe poets mean what they say. Novelists they call to account. (39)

It is right that Powys should be called to account, and there is in his movement towards the novel a desire to translate his insights into the medium which imitates most closely the affairs of daily life. He is again installing the Muse "amid the kitchen-ware". Powys wanted his books to be impressed with "the teeth-marks of reality" (40). Thomas Hardy, weary of being called to account by an insensitive public, maintained the integrity of his work by withdrawing into the more covert medium of verse. Powys moved in the opposite direction, attempting to startle in prose with what is ordinarily acceptable in verse. He evolved for his purpose too, a lyric prose style which imitates the incantatory aspect of poetry.

In Powys's philosophical books, there is a similar softening of impact, comparable to the mildness of the verse. But here he does not echo the orthodoxies of academic philosophy; Professor Joad's review of The Art of Happiness exposes Powys's weaknesses here (41). Most of Powys's philosophy was written for his United States public, and shows the influence of many short-lived quasi-religions which flourished in America at that time, with which Powys shared many a lecture hall. As the churches weakened so Christian Science,

Theosophy, and a multitude of "mind-cure" movements flourished. In the Autobiography Powys remembers his early flirtation with Theosophy - with Annie Besant's The Seven Principles of Man, and E.P. Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism (a Theosophical, not strictly Buddhist book). Powys's undergraduate "prophetic denunciation" entitled "Corpus Unveiled" implies some knowledge of Madame Blavatsky's Isis Unveiled.

This enthusiasm for Theosophy was quickly exhausted, but Powys recalls it with humorous affection, and while theosophical doctrines may have contributed little to the views of his maturity (though some, such as the idea of the universe as a collection of innumerable personalities, clearly left their mark), what Theosophy did give him was a vocabulary - "vibration", "aether", "inert matter". Here is Annie Besant, using a quotation from Madame Blavatsky as her first paragraph:

The Monad ... is, first of all, shot down by the law of evolution into the lowest form of matter - the mineral. After a sevenfold gyration incased in stone, ... it creeps out of it, say as a lichen. Passing thence, through all the forms of vegetable matter, it has now reached the point in which it has become a germ, so to speak, of the animal, that will become the physical man.

It is the Monad, Atma-Buddhi, that thus vivifies every part and kingdom of nature, making all instinct with life and consciousness, one throbbing whole. Occultism does not accept anything inorganic in the Kosmos. The expression employed by science, 'inorganic substance', means simply that the latent life, slumbering in the molecules of so-called 'inert-matter', is incognizable. All is life and every atom of even mineral dust is a life, though beyond our comprehension and perception, because it is outside the range of the laws known to those who reject occultism. (42)

This is a philosophical landscape whose colours Powys later remembered when attempting to describe his view of the universe - a view which is emphatically his own.

Of all his work, Powys's philosophical books are most closely linked with his life as a lecturer. They are aimed at a popular readership, and attempt to apply "philosophy" to the ordinary life. Here again, he is very much at home in early twentieth century America. William James quotes from R.W. Trine's In Tune with the Infinite, published in its twenty-sixth thousand in 1899:

The time will come when in the busy office or on the noisy street you can enter into the silence by simply drawing the mantle of your own thoughts about you and realizing that there and everywhere the Spirit of Infinite Life, Love, Wisdom, Peace, Power and Plenty is guiding, keeping, protecting, leading you. This is the spirit of continual prayer. One of the most intuitive men we ever met had a desk at a city office where several other gentlemen were doing business constantly, and often talking loudly. Entirely undisturbed by the many various sounds about him, this self-centered faithful man would, in any moment of perplexity, draw the curtains of privacy so completely about him that he would be as fully inclosed in his own psychic aura, and thereby as effectually removed from all distractions, as though he were alone in some primeval wood. (43)

Powys's premises are different: there is no "Spirit of Infinite Life" in his work. But the tone of his writing is the same, and a contemporary New York advertisement from Powys's publishers confirms the connection (Ill. 1). An extract from A Philosophy of Solitude shows how completely Powys is at home in this company, with his invocation of the common man, and his contemplative rhapsody (echoing, in this case, Whitman's "Passage to India"):





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—ESSANDESS.

BECAUSE IT MEANS



me

THERE'S a young woman who runs a bookstore in the east forties. She read a copy of *The Art of Happiness* by JOHN COWPER POWYS before it was published, liked it better than any book she had read in two years. It meant *Me* to her. Since publication date she has sold it to 72 people, saying in effect:

"I think this book will make you enjoy life more than you have. Its price is \$2.00. But I don't want you to keep it if after reading it you don't agree with me. In fact I want you to return it to me so that I may refund you not \$2.00, but \$2.50."

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The publishers believe *The Art of Happiness* is so popular because:

1. People are so deeply immersed in their own everyday life—in the thousands of duties and drudgeries and bits of routine that they have taken for granted—that they want a book which makes them stop short and wonder what it is that makes them happy or unhappy.

2. There is no other book we know about which analyses the very stuff of which happiness is made. Mr. Powys does not speak in generalities and Pollyanna-isms, but discusses the way people live in the actual world of food, fire, cigarettes, love-making and reading newspapers.

3. *The Art of Happiness* is not only extremely personal. It is provocative and stimulating as well, the sort of book you want to read aloud to your dearest friend.

All of which, boiled down, goes back to what the young woman in the store in the east forties said: "Because. It Means *Me*."

The Art of  
Happiness  
BY JOHN COWPER POWYS

SIMON AND SCHUSTER • PUBLISHERS • NEW YORK

Come! Let us bring this matter down to the most practical reality! You are at home in your own house or flat or hotel or lodging house, as the case may be. Your family, for the moment, is out, or is happily occupied, and your own work for the moment is over. You look at the clock. Yes! you have half an hour entirely at your disposal before any living human soul has any claim on you again.

This is your opportunity; and you seize it with avidity. You leave the house; you walk along the quietest pavement in your neighbourhood ...

As you walk along - with your eyes on the ground - you think of the whole strange rondure of this terraqueous globe and the spirit within you voyages with it through immeasurable space. It is twilight perhaps; and all around you there is that indescribable blue light which, like the blue robe of the Mother of God, the city wears at this season and this hour. But you still keep your eyes upon the ground; for you can feel the presence of that blue light in a certain mystical taste. (44)

Here Powys is attempting to make a generalization from an intensely personal experience. When substantiated by the "cubic solidity" of fiction or autobiography, such exemplars take on power. Wolf Solent's soliloquies on his walks, or Sylvanus Cobbold's daily rituals, are superior to this example of Powys's preaching because in the novels "philosophy" is rooted, as Powys believed it always should be rooted, in the particular life of the individual.

It is evident that Powys valued the novel over verse or philosophy for its realism. Yet he chose to call his novels "romances", suggesting the least realistic forms of prose fiction. The term "romance" calls to mind three kinds of writing. There is the mediaeval tale of chivalry, the historical novel made popular by Walter Scott, and the light love story of the woman's magazine. To the first two, Powys acknowledges a deep debt. Yet even to the third, he gives a respectful nod.(\*). Such literature arouses in its readers the enthralled fascination which for Powys was the soul of reading.

(\*) For the "occult destiny" Powys associated with his early lectures on Arthurian legend, see *Autobiography*, pp.284-5. For Scott, see *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson*, p.263 - and for Norah Lofts, see p.196 of the same collection.

But before romance is a literary genre, it is an aspect of life itself. Powys defined romance in an article called "The Ballad Element in Poetry":

The thing is completely and fatally possessed by those aspects and objects and associations of common human life which are independent, by reason of their deep natural necessity, of all changes, of all fashions, of all novelties, of all progress. .

It fulfils in this sense one of the fundamental purposes of all true poetry; that, namely, of sinking down to the unchangeable and the recurrent, down to what might be called the perennial continuity of the basic pebble-stones of life's river-bed.

It is not to any metaphysical or spiritual unity that it thus sinks down, through the flowing waters of change. Its 'eternal' is not the eternal of any mystical over-soul. It is the 'eternal' of the common inveterately familiar incidents of the punctually repeated ways and days of men upon the earth in wet and in shine, in darkness and in light.

Powys lists the subject matter appropriate to romance:

Race, place, love, hate, birth, death, the seasons, the elements of nature, the obscure border-lands of race-memory, youth and age, separation and reconciliation, wander-lust and nostalgia, these are surely its chief preoccupations. To these we must add, as the 'stage-sets' of its evocations, such among the tools, utensils, ornaments, furniture, garments, such among the domestic and farm animals, their housing and their fodder, such among the grains, the meats, the wines of man's habitual nourishment, such among the growths of garden and hedgerow wherewith the heart is made glad, as have been especially consecrated and hallowed and idealised by the associations of uncounted generations. (45)

I have mentioned Powys's interest in unmapped extremities of human experience - his desire to "ravish limbo". The simplicities he invoked in the name of "romance" offer a contrasting sense of stability. In

portraying the basic unalterable conditions of life, uncluttered by novelty, romance represents a deeper form of realism than that of the naturalistic novel, which depicts the changing aspects of human society.

In defining romance as a view of life, Powys appeals to a sense of tradition. In discovering what kind of "romance" - as a book - he was trying to write, it is therefore useful to examine the writers with whom Powys felt he belonged, particularly as his novels have been thought the product of a licentious individualism.(\*). This is not to examine the sources of the books, although favourite writers are used very liberally as sources, but to study Powys's own ambitions. He always disclaimed originality for his work, and wanted to reproduce in his audience the kinds of pleasure he gained from his reading:

I am an incorrigible bookworm with a desperate mania for trying to write the sort of long romances I have always loved so intensely to read. (46)

Powys compiled frequent (and not always consistent) lists of "favourite authors". His lists show catholicity, and a strong awareness of the classic. But two very different kinds of writer are there, and the influences of these two kinds exercise opposing pulls on the direction of Powys's writing. The tension between these two forces accounts for a good deal of his apparent confusion of aims, but it is also a tension which contributes to his breadth of dramatic scope.

The first group consists of authors of epic and romance - Homer, Malory, the Welsh tellers of legend, and Walter Scott. With them for the moment is the mock-romance of Rabelais. As Powys conceived romance, there is an especial value upon a regression to

(\*) See, for instance, Richard Church's review of Maiden Castle, in The Times Literary Supplement, 27th March 1937.

the archaic. This Powys valued in his life as well, in his return to the Wales of his forefathers, and his imaginative absorption in his racial inheritance, illustrated by the novels' gradual withdrawal to an atavistic past. But there are two kinds of archaism in Powys: one is a descent into the past of the community, in his love of the most ancient of literatures, and the other is a regression to recapture, in the way of Wordsworth, the imaginative powers of childhood. The Wessex novels explore the landscape of childhood association, and in his last decade Powys embarks upon a "second childhood" of fairy-tale adventure. Both regressions draw him to Scott, whose novels describe a vanished past, and were also the staple of Powys's childhood reading.

The second group of favourite authors comprises modern novelists who explored the inner condition of men, as opposed to their social relations - Dostoievsky, Proust, Dorothy Richardson, Pater. Obviously, the imaginative territory of all these writers is much wider than their label suggests, but it was their inwardness which Powys admired. These are novelists "of the nerves", expert in the description of fugitive states of consciousness, fascinated by the play of the mind.

To begin with the archaic. In The Meaning of Culture Powys writes of the basic function of literature to provide "simply a heightened sense of the grandeur of the epic of human life upon earth" (47). This Powys found in Homer, where he emphasizes not grandeur of incident but a sharpened awareness of "majestic simplicities". This recalls Powys's definition of romance. Of the Homeric way of taking life, he wrote:

By its continual process of selection, together with its parallel process of reducing to nonentity all the drift and rubble that it does not select, it enables us, without idealizing anything, to take each successive experience of the most normal day in a peculiar and special manner, and under a particular light.

Each of the experiences it selects, reducing the rest to automatic unconsciousness, is of a definite sort, of the sort that by natural necessity has been repeated in the lives of men for thousands of years.

The use of water is the first of these. Never in Homer is the act of washing the hands before a meal allowed to pass unrecorded. Then the meal itself is never partaken, according to Homeric ritual, without some kind of offering to the Immortals "from men who eat bread upon the earth." (48)

Powys's Homer is not the classical model of the eighteenth century, or Arnold's high-principled sage. Powys finds no morality in Homer beyond the rule of chance and fate he also found in the world at large. He would have agreed with Auerbach's description of Homer's "calm acceptance of the basic facts of human existence, but with no compulsion to brood over them, still less any passionate impulse either to rebel against them or embrace them in an ecstasy of submission" (49). Powys praises Homer's earthiness, seeing him as "more realistic" and "more natural" (50) than any other writer. He stresses the virtues of a simple prose translation as appropriate to the stark quality of Homeric language, with its imagery drawn from the daily life of farmers and herdsmen.

In Homer and the Aether, the "walking commentary" upon the Iliad written in Powys's last years, the Aether - Homer's inspiration - speaks of giving the artist power to detect the hidden lives of the elements and everyday objects. All Powys's novels try to express a sacramental dimension to daily life, such as Powys found in Homer.

As George Steiner has pointed out, Powys "seizes at the merest edge of transcendence in material things; but unlike Plato, he never despises the husk, the quiddity of matter" (51). In The Meaning of Culture, "the soul of Nature dwells upon her material surface rather than in any 'spiritual' depths" (52). Here Powys allies himself with Whitman, not the Transcendentalists, and he frequently disparages Emerson's term "over-soul". In A Glastonbury Romance, Geard's Easter Mass is celebrated with a decanter of port and a cottage loaf, stressing the sacrament's outward accidents, in harmony with the earthiness of Geard's religion. Although the action of Powys's books is frequently mental, a strong grasp of material actuality preserves the novels from airiness. This is Powys's response to Homer's "realism", particularly strong in his depiction of domestic life. Wolf Solent stirring his porridge, the Otters' home at Pond Cottage, Sam Dekker's attic, John Crow's room in Northload Street, are all rendered with a loving eye for physical precision. The simpler the home, the sharper the description, and in Porius the chambers of Ty Cerrig, or Cadawg's cave, are even closer to this aim of physical immediacy. The close of Wolf Solent shows Wolf, after the book's predominantly mental conflicts, finding a new personal stability in the reality of the physical, and the simple difference between being alive and being dead. It is Homer that comes to Wolf's mind:

'Enjoying the sweet light of the sun ... deprived of the sweet light of the sun,' these phrases from Homer rang in his ears and seemed to express the only thing that was important. (53)

In Homer, all is plain; in Arthurian and Welsh legend, all is mysterious. Powys never wrote specifically about Malory or Welsh legend, and here his occasional desire to cover the tracks of his imagination is active. What is clear is that Powys revelled in a

literature both majestically simple in incident, and deeply arcane in significance. His uses of Grail legend in A Glastonbury Romance and of Welsh myth in Maiden Castle and Porius show, I feel, the influence of commentators upon the originals, such as John Rhys and Jessie Weston, more than the stamp of the originals themselves. The still wide diversity of opinion on the implications of Celtic and Arthurian symbol aroused Powys's speculative instincts. The Grail in A Glastonbury Romance retains elements of Christian interpretation, is influenced by Jessie Weston's writing on fertility ritual, and is finally a peculiarly Powysian symbol of wholeness. In due course we will see something of Powys's Celtic sources, and in each case note that the journey through Powys's imagination from source to novel is an extremely circuitous one. He is content, or careful, to allow the latent power in the symbol itself to cast its old aura (\*).

A genuine symbol, or ritualistic image, is a concrete living organic thing carrying all manner of magical and subtle associations. It is an expression of reality which comes much nearer to reality than any rationalistic system can possibly do. A genuine symbolic or ritualistic image is a concrete expression of the complexity of life. It has the creative and destructive power of life. It has the formidable mysteriousness of life, and with all this it has the clear-cut directness of life's terrible and exquisite tangibility. (54)

Powys was always ready to express his devotion to the literature of his childhood; Walter Scott is his model of the novelist as entertainer. A New York newspaper interviewed Powys while A Glastonbury Romance was being written: "The one thing in his writing that all critics have missed, Mr. Powys said today, is his literary godfather. His inspiration is Sir Walter Scott" (55). Powys saw himself as a "story-teller" (56), claiming "a certain Sir. W. Scott Pure Romantic Naïve Historicity" (57), hoping to write "a shelf-full

(\*) Powys's faith in the inherent power of ancient symbols would seem to encourage a Jungian interpretation. However, I feel that this would not be a justifiable procedure for the literary critic unschooled in the specific disciplines of analytical psychology. Amateurs in this field



of first-rate romances" (58). Here is a respect for sheer narrative energy and fluency, and a desire to engross the reader. For a modern readership, which may well no longer find Scott either energetic or fluent, there is a paradox in that Powys is now furthest from popular taste where he thought he was closest to it. Powys is like Scott in his leisurely, obtrusive narration (Glastonbury is told by a "chronicler"), his pictorialism and relish for crowd scenes, and his punctuation of narrative with swift melodrama. Angus Wilson relates the battles of Porius to Rob Roy (59).

The young Powys devoured not only Scott, but his swarms of Victorian followers, such as Harrison Ainsworth - whom another early admirer, Anthony Powell, quite justly finds "now altogether unreadable". Typical of the romance of his childhood is La Motte Fouque's Thiodolf the Iclander (60), which Gerda avidly reads in Wolf Solent. This improbable adventure of Viking times moves with alarming haste from Iceland (which is heavily wooded) to Provence, North Africa, Bulgaria, and Constantinople. Here is the true model for the tales of Powys's second childhood - Up and Out and Real Wraiths. Most significant of all is La Motte Fouque's sylph-like "elfin" heroine, Malgherita, an extreme of female passivity, invariably removed from the action in a swoon. We have Powys's own account of his obsession with such heroines in his youth, a fantasy which also invaded his life. In Powys's novels, the demure, virginal heroine of historical romance, such as Lucy Ashton in The Bride of Lammermoor, is transfigured into the tantalisingly mysterious provoker of the Powys hero's desires - Philippa Renshaw, Christie Malakite, Nineue. There is possibly no stronger example of Powys's astonishing ability to translate his literary experience into his life.

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*can produce an air of profundity at little expense of effort; professionals tend to tell us - most interestingly - more about analytical psychology than about literature. Nonetheless I believe a Jungian would notice the progression in Powys's novels from the threat of destructive, over-*

These are Powys's "primitive" inspirations, in the sense that the literary pleasures they represent are the fundamental ones of narrative and world-creation. We have imaginative enthrallment, a fascination with external incident, drama which tests collective loyalties. The world of fiction is a spacious one, and literature has a bardic quality. Matthew Arnold's distinction between a literature of "great actions" and what he slightly called "the dialogue of the mind with itself" (61) is useful here. Powys attempts a "great action" only in Owen Glendower (and obliquely in Porius), and in his work it is better to speak of simple actions. The novels do not often have a bardic spaciousness, but they do have a strong regard for the archetype. The essential simplicity of the love triangles in Wolf Solent and Porius, the experience of love and loss in Weymouth Sands or in Sam Dekker and Nell Zoyland in Glastonbury, or the mother and son relationship of Wolf Solent, show Powys's attention to commonality, the stuff of "romance".

But now we have Powys working in a very different direction, exploring the recesses of introspection. In Dostoevsky, Proust, Dorothy Richardson, Pater, external action serves to fuel a chiefly inward drama. Our focus of attention is less on what happens than on how incidents affect the minds of the characters. In Dostoevsky, action is indeed cataclysmic, but it is employed sparingly, and its explosive effect arises from the intensity of mental state before and afterwards. Percy Lubbock wrote of Dostoevsky, "Drama is there pushed into the theatre of a mind" (62). Powys's reaction is similar: Crime and Punishment gave him "the overpowering intimation that you do not have to go outside the mind in order to find God and the Devil" (63). Here is "the dialogue of the mind with itself". We have a transformation of dramatic values: seemingly insignificant external

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*whelming unconscious forces (such as the sea in Rodmoor), through symbols of psychological quest (the Grail) to images of wholeness (the quiescent, but animate lichen-covered rocks of Powys's late books).*

events prompts inner events of great importance - a feature most obvious in Proust. Although Powys did not use the term, Joyce's idea of "epiphany" is valuable here. Wolf Solent uses "epiphanies" as turning points in its narrative. Morris Beja defines epiphany as a "sudden spiritual manifestation, whether from some object, scene, event or memorable phase of the mind - the manifestation being out of proportion to the significance or strictly logical relevance of whatever produces it" (64). Powys delights in such incongruities. From the Autobiography, we have his excitement at his schoolboy copy of Euclid, or his ecstasy at the stone wall at the back of the Fitzwilliam Museum. There is Wolf Solent's vision of the face on the Waterloo steps, or his final exultation in the field of buttercups.

Epic and old romance demand a certain agreement among their audience as to what constitutes a "great action". A modern novelist, like Powys, often feels deprived of the stable religious and social references which once nourished a collective literature. He is able, or forced, to create his own scale of spiritual and dramatic values from his own experience. Powys is endlessly fascinated by such private "worlds", but like many other modern writers - Arnold among them - he regrets the decline of the old literature, and attempts to enjoy its surviving features.

As a novelist of the mind's privacy, Powys is very un-English, owing little to the native tradition of the social novel. In this context alone, I would like to think of the English novel as primarily about behaviour. Characters are motivated by inner conviction, but their inward lives are subjected to scrutiny in terms of what they actually do. Jane Austen's clergymen must gain respect through the exercise of their piety within an accepted social milieu which novelist, other

characters in the book, and reader alike recognize as real and important. In Middlemarch there is a sane and admirable moral centre, which points a harmony between self and society. The happiness or misery of the human being is charted in his or her relationships with others. The most studied vice is hypocrisy. We are concerned with central and important matters such as the happiness of family life, and the growth of the individual in professional life. This is not to suggest that such novelists are wanting in psychological depth, or uncritical of their societies, but to notice a stress upon humanist values which would make Alyosha Karamazov seem at best unreal in an English novel of Dostoievsky's time. With Notes from Underground it is simply impossible to make meaningful comparison.

Of English novelists, Powys is closer to Emily Bronte; F.R. Leavis called Wuthering Heights, with no hint of disparagement, "a kind of sport" (65). Many of Powys's central interests - his concern with intense feelings which find no issue in action, his interest in consciousness operating above and below the customary intensity of apprehension, and his attempted cosmic perspective, can seem sportive in comparison with the English tradition, whether we consider this tradition at its greatest in George Eliot or Jane Austen, or at a lower level of achievement.

His sense of social reality is not weak: the Wessex of Wolf Solent, A Glastonbury Romance, and Weymouth Sands is often achingly real, and gains in vigour from Powys's frequently oblique description, which creates a solid society through a study of telling detail, collecting neglected minutiae of manners and environment. But it is true that Powys gives substance to his society, only to show how the inner lives of his characters escape and operate

independently from it. He is fascinated by the discrepancies between mental life and behaviour, and delights in revealing the bizarre beneath the outwardly ordinary. Wolf Solent is an apparently slight story of infidelity and failure; Wolf's clumsy exterior hides a turbulent mental drama. A Glastonbury Romance is a whole gallery of such characters. Owen Evans is an outwardly benign, eccentric antiquarian; not for a thousand pages does the world gain a glimpse of his strange inner life. Powys heightens the discrepancy by calling him "Mr. Evans" throughout. Euphemia Drew, Angela Beere, and Tilly Crow are comparable studies of inward strangeness. With all Powys is generously compassionate, and we find him using that most "social" of genres - the small town novel - to show the private, non-social variousness of people.

Powys's interest in apparently eccentric characters comes from a belief, which he shares with Dostoevsky, that human beings are invariably more curious than they appear. Dostoevsky was, of course, fascinated by the stranger stories of daily newspapers; tales of murders and grotesque outrages reappear undigested in his novels. He justified his interest in these surfacings of the morbidity of men:

What most people regard as fantastic and lacking in universality, I hold to be the inmost essence of truth. (66)

A Dostoevsky novel often seems to take an ideal human extreme and work inwards from it - to ask what makes a man a murderer or a saint. Extremes in this sense are rare in Powys, though we have Owen Evans and Sam Dekker, and he is closer to the Dostoevsky of the short novels, Notes from Underground, White Nights, The Double, where the turbulence of the mind is perhaps even more acutely realized in a smaller, claustrophobic dramatic arena, with central

characters so appallingly negligible. But Powys agreed that the truth of human nature was to be found in extremes, and found Dostoevsky a novelist of psychological realism:

His characters, at certain moments, seem actually to spit gall and wormwood, as they tug at the quivering roots of one another's self-esteem. But this fermenting venom, this seething scum, is only the expression of what goes on below the surface every day, in every country.

Dostoevsky's Russians are cruelly voluble, but their volubility taps the evil humour of the universal human disease. Their thoughts are our thoughts, their obsessions our obsessions. Let no one think, in his vain security, that he has a right to say: "I have no part in this morbidity. I am different from these poor madmen." (67)

Dostoevsky is a novelist of talk. Powys himself adapted The Idiot for the stage in 1922. Powys's characters too are "cruelly voluble", and are frequently, like Wolf Solent, led astray by their tongues. More seriously, as in Dostoevsky, characters express themselves, like Sam Dekker and Uryen Quirm, in lengthy philosophical disquisition. We must be sufficiently interested in what they are saying not to notice that people rarely talk like this. The conflict of ideas is part of the drama.

Both Powys and Dostoevsky raise the issue of the place of ideas in fiction; in his criticism of Dostoevsky, Powys admires particularly those parts of the novels which can be abstracted for their philosophical significance - the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, the Life of Father Zossima, Ivan Karamazov "returning the ticket". Most readers would agree with George Steiner's admiration for Dostoevsky's remarkable fusion: "we cannot separate philosophical interpretation from literary response" (68). But V.S. Pritchett finds

Powys's characters bowed down by philosophy: "They have to carry a haversack of Powys ideas on their backs" (69).

Miriam Allott sees the successful embodiment of ideas in fiction as a triumph of the novelist's art:

In the end we recognize the true novelist by the strength with which his realization of the actual world and of human individuality triumphs over his abstract speculations, his oddities and his opinions, his puritan concern with the utile. 'Never present ideas except as a function of temperament and character,' writes André Gide, and the greatest didactic novelists, the finest preachers and teachers, from Fielding and Richardson to Forster, Camus and Mauriac, are those who find their originating impulse in their capacity literally to 'embody' or 'incorporate' ideas. We can always distinguish a novelist's 'moral fable' from the abstract thinker's. Jonathan Wild and Hard Times are novelist's fables, Rasselas is not. (70)

Powys saw an articulate philosophy as essential to an enjoyable novel and wrote to Dorothy Richardson in 1932, criticizing The Waves for not having one, and listing his criteria of good fiction (\*):

What does anyone really want - any bookish person - in a story? Characters that are real and solid and exciting; humorous and tragic, but above all thick and real - An absorbing narrative - not necessarily a plot but something in the way events happen that corresponds to the old childish thrill of hearing a story. And finally some sort of contemplative philosophy in the author pervading the whole book -

Those are the Three Incomprehensibles of my Athanasian Creed of Fiction.

1. Characters real and exciting
2. Narrative real and exciting (in's own way)
3. Some sort of philosophy. (71)

(\*) With Powys's voracious enjoyment of reading, it is very rare to find him criticizing anything at all adversely. What he disliked, he ignored. Tolstoy seems a significant gap. Apart from Virginia Woolf,

Powys's love of philosophy is combined with a distaste for abstraction. His most sustained attempt at relatively orthodox analytical philosophy, The Complex Vision, sees image-making as possibly inescapable in any philosophical study:

It is probable that even the most rational and logical among us as soon as he begins to philosophize at all is compelled by the necessity of things to form in the mind some vague pictorial representation answering to his conception of the universe. (72)

In Wolf Solent Christie Malakite reads Leibnitz, Spinoza, and Hegel with a frankly representational imagination:

'I regard each philosophy, not as the "truth," but just as a particular country, in which I can go about - countries with their own peculiar light, their Gothic buildings, their pointed roofs, their avenues of trees - But I'm afraid I'm tiring you with all this!' (73)

Powys's favourite philosophers were those whose thought is soaked in image, such as Nietzsche.

I have examined two seemingly opposed impulses in Powys's novels, one pulling towards "romance" with its drama of visible incident, the other encouraging a tense, inward Dostolevskian drama "of the nerves". The third requirement of "philosophy" would seem to arrest the development of any drama at all. Miriam Allott cites Rasselas as the "moral fable" of an "abstract thinker". Such works do not rank high in Powys's enthusiasms. But one book he admired immensely was Pater's Marius the Epicurean, which is only marginally

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*only Aldous Huxley and Elizabeth Bowen are mentioned with any sharpness. These writers are called "clever"; "airy" and "cynical" are also terms of opprobium.*



a novel, but is clearly not the fable of an abstract thinker, in that sense impression and the inseparability of thought from image and feeling are of its essence. Nonetheless, Percy Lubbock wrote, "In Marius ... the art of drama is renounced as thoroughly as it has ever occurred to a novelist to dispense with it." (74) Marius describes the growth and refinement of a philosophy of life, like the narratives of Wolf Solent and Porius. Powys's "cult of sensations" is very like Pater's "life of various yet select sensation". So does Porius recall Marius in its philosophical debate. Walter Scott valued periods of cultural transition as preferred settings for historical novels; both Porius and Marius include discussions of the rival merits of rising and declining religions - Christianity, Stoicism, and Epicureanism in Marius and Christianity, Druidism, Mithraism, and a whole variety of local cults in Porius. Philosophy in Powys is an active engagement with, and interpretation of, the dealings of everyday life. Like poetry, it is installed "amid the kitchen-ware". In the novels, it is impossible to separate Powys's ideas about life from his display of life; Powys's beliefs about the influence of natural objects cannot be disentangled from Wolf Solent's experience within the novel. If we remember Powys's rejection of pure philosophy for the "cubic solidity" of fiction, we can see that he is not injecting philosophy into the existent body of the novel. Like Dostoevsky, Powys often begins his novels from a philosophical "idea" rather than a conception of character or situation. Wood and Stone began with an idea, the struggle of the "Will to Power" against the "Will to Sacrifice". Powys chose to write a novel,

feeling that, as in all these matters, where the elusiveness of human nature plays so prominent a part, there is more hope of approaching the truth, indirectly, and by means of the imaginative mirror of art, than indirectly, and by means of rational theorizing.

The whole question is indeed so intimately associated with the actual panorama of life and the evasive caprices of flesh and blood, that every kind of drastic and clinching formula breaks down under its pressure. (75)

Realism is therefore not sacrificed when Powys's novels enact a philosophical drama. The realism of the novel tests the philosophy, in imitating the conditions of real life.

Powys wrote that A Glastonbury Romance aimed to convey "a jumbled-up and squeezed-together epitome of life's various dimensions" (76). I have described the very different traditions at work in Powys's novels to show his inclusiveness. There is an attempted concentration upon both inner and outer event, upon the general and the minutely specific, upon the high simplicity of the ancient and the involved psychology of the modern. Powys tries to picture, at the same time, the crumb on the plate, the plate on the table, and the table in the cosmos. It is not surprising that his novels should sprawl, with bizarre shifts of dramatic focus; but sometimes the unresolved clash between heterogeneous ambitions produces a juxtaposition and stimulating contrast, more interesting in its incongruity than many a more disciplined work of art is in its success. We are reminded of Powys's belief in the experience of ecstasy originating in "the energizing of opposite poles of existence". In attempting an "epitome", Powys found a model in Rabelais, of whom he wrote:

I think that like Walt Whitman he thought with his intellect, with his reason, with his senses, with his soul, with his spirit, with his skin, blood and bone, and with all his most imponderable instincts, intuitions, urges, feelings, sensations, intimations at the same time. (77)

Rabelais, according to Powys, integrates experience. This is a healing art, and Powys praises Rabelais's saving influence in the Autobiography. Rabelais, a doctor, related his writing to his medical practice, in the prologue to his fourth book (as translated by Powys):

... many unhappy people, pining in actual illness and misery or desolated by some hopeless tendency to worry and thus drive themselves into sickness, have by reading these books of mine outwitted their depression, passed their days in good heart, and taken to themselves new life and fresh hope.

... in what I've written I've not been thinking about anybody's praise or any kind of glory but have simply been impelled to write in order to provide all the relief and assuagement I could for people that I've never seen and upon whom I've never had any change of practising my art of healing; (78)

Powys, who in his work practised the art of healing upon himself, at his best promises a similar vision.

I have written of Powys's divergence from the English novel of the nineteenth century. This was partly a result of his absorption in the classic and the very old, but even of his favourite novelists, the most important were foreign, apart from Dorothy Richardson - who is shockingly neglected, Pater - whom few would call a novelist, and Walter Scott. And Walter Scott, of course, conquered Europe to an extent never achieved by Jane Austen and George Eliot. His influence at home has spread itself almost entirely within the historical novel, and Powys (with the partial exception of Owen Glendower) resists classification inside that genre.

Powys was deeply attached in his life and work to the Wessex of his childhood, and his adopted Wales. In this attachment, there is the temptation for us to regard him as a regional writer. Powys believed that all great art was at once local and universal; his culture

was European, and his writing deserves consideration within such wide terms of reference.

In the scale of his books, the scope of his subject matter, and his assumption of the classic, Powys's pretensions are enormous. If he does not prove to be a very fine writer indeed, he will be lost, for he must be debarred forever from the secure reputation of a minor writer of modest accomplishment.

#### IV WRITING FOR DELIGHT

One of the central reticences in Powys's account of himself concerns his thoughts about his own novels, and their process of composition. A novelist's letters often provide a glimpse of his "workshop"; Powys's rarely do, and there is very little to help us in the Autobiography either. This silence is partly a result of his resolve "to strip myself of any pride in my lecturing and my writing" (79), but there is more to Powys's reticence than humility. His lack of comment on his experience as a writer joins the several significant omissions in his confession, where the existence of such a gap suggests the very importance of what is concealed. The most obvious such gap in the Autobiography is the absence of women, including his mother and his wife. Confession becomes a peculiar form of self-protection, and although arguments from silences can be dangerous, I believe we can detect in Powys's evasions central energies which needed to be kept from the scrutiny of the outside world. In Maiden Castle, Uryen Quirm publishes his "life-illusion" - his sense of inmost identity - and this publication kills him. Powys wrote of "the groan of an outraged beast, that rises from the depths of our nature when the peculiar essence of what we are, our particular life-illusion, is

fumbled at, scraped at, and lugged out of its hiding place as if at the end of a hook." (80)

Powys's silence about his own work is very like that of Scott, to whom Powys shows a remarkable resemblance in his way of writing. Like Scott, Powys wrote under severe stomach pain. His work is a victory of imaginative effort over physical discomfort. (One result of this fight against pain is the frequent sharpness of Powys's description of physical sensation.) According to E.M.W. Tillyard, when Scott had finished a novel, "he did not recollect one single incident, character, or conversation it contained". Tillyard also comments on "the vehemence with which Scott composed and the completeness with which he shed, one could almost say disowned, the children of his brain, once they were born" (81). This is very like Powys, who never, after Wood and Stone, returned to read his own books. Powys's books are the products of the imaginative energies of their time of composition, for better or for worse. Again, Powys's art is "art for life's sake", which means that after the very early novels we are only marginally conscious of "artistic" progress, but very conscious of a development of matter and thought. Each Powys novel establishes an imaginative world of its own. At the end of Powys's life, artistic management almost vanished. The deep imaginative breaths which produced the major novels were exhausted. The unity of a Powys novel is one of imaginative span, and by the late 1950s, this span, although broader than ever in fantasy, could not be sustained over the long "romance". Powys's art, again for better and for worse, is defined by his imaginative energies.

The beginning of a novel was described by Powys in a letter to his sister Marian:

I have written to Lulu to beg him send me some guides of Weymouth and Portland and local maps and this he has done and I have been studying them for several days with the utmost nicety for I propose to write my next story about Weymouth and the way that lends itself best - or so I fancy - to my method of writing a story is to begin with the people's houses and the names of their houses, then go on to the people themselves in regard to their names alone and thus having got the place and houses and names of the houses and people and streets and lanes and alleys and public houses and every stick and stone that can claim a name I then devise some very loosely constructed mythological or mystical or philosophical General Idea and then let the story tell itself without any sort or any kind of plot. (82)

Again one is reminded of the magic power of names. Dostoevsky is reported to have kindled his novels from similar tiny sparks; according to George Steiner, in Dostoevsky's notes "we can see the lists of names and places that novelists appear to use as formulas of incantation to conjure up the tentative daemons from whom characters evolve" (83). But such a practice would seem peculiar to writers who believe their craft has something to do with the "conjuring" of "daemons". Powys, who thought of his writing as "thaumaturgy", is with Dostoevsky in this group. It would be hard to imagine Jane Austen or Trollope working in the same way; Mansfield Park evokes brilliantly the life of the English squirearchy, but does not "conjure up" the genius loci of Northamptonshire. Powys noticeably begins with the non-human; man grows out of his context of race and place, which act among the imponderable agents which influence activity and feeling.

Place is vital in Powys; the four mature Wessex novels comb almost systematically the ground of childhood association. There is a Weymouth novel, a Dorchester novel, a Glastonbury/Norfolk novel, and a Sherborne/Yeovil novel. Owen Glendower and Porius mingle the real Wales of Powys's observation with the mythical Wales of his imagination, a land which grows naturally out of the mythic preoccupations of the Wessex novels. Working on A Glastonbury Romance in America, Powys pinned an ordnance survey map on his wall, and there exists a large scale map of Glastonbury with the houses of the novel's characters added in Powys's hand.(\*). The first editions of Ducdame and Wolf Solent included maps as their frontispieces. Powys regarded the town itself as the central character of Glastonbury, and interviewed himself in an American magazine as follows:

Why is it such a long book? Why is it so crowded with characters?

Because a long book is the kind I like to read; and because a great many characters, by thickening out such a book, convey the impression of a convincing world, of many dimensions, in which it is possible to fancy yourself moving about freely and recognizing houses, streets, gardens, lanes, alleys, people and things, down to the least stick and stone.

What is the main idea of A Glastonbury Romance?

The main idea is a life, not a theory or a speculation, and in this case the life of a particular spot on the earth's surface. ... The main idea was to isolate a spot on the surface of the earth, a spot known to the author from his boyhood, and to write a story about this spot, making the spot itself the real hero or heroine of the tale ...

Who is the hero of the story?

Glastonbury itself. The story is concerned with Glastonbury's struggles against both Chance and Fate.

(\*) This map is reproduced in Dante Thomas, A Bibliography of the Writings of John Cowper Powys, 1872-1963, p.39.

How can a mere place, or region, have a personality?

I cannot tell. But I know that it has one! (84)

Here Powys is both creating a new world, and drawing upon the mysteriousness of the world we see, tapping springs of insights whose meanings are uncertain for him. He described Dostoevsky's art as an "inscrutable mediumship ... for the 'over-novel' of Nature herself" (85). Again in Dostoevsky there is an extraordinary passage in which Powys grants an almost mystical quality to the act of creation itself. It is the moment of artistic transformation which draws essential reality out of things:

... real reality exists at its intensest and most exultant just before it loses itself in the wood, or the stone, or the music, or the metal, or the paint, or the masonry, or the plough-land, or the embroidery, or the whitewashed doorstep, or finally in fictional persons, male or female, who gather up into themselves the whole divine comedy of the human race ... (86)

"Thaumaturgy" and "mediumship", together with the length and energy of Powys's novels, immediately invite the charge of self-indulgent authorship, even of automatic writing. Adverse critics have seized upon the description of Dud No-Man's frenzied composition in Maiden Castle as a likely model of Powys's own writing habits; the meticulous care of the Henog of Dyfed or Owen Evans with his Vita Merlini might be cited against this example. Powys did enjoy his writing, and recognised that his pleasure in it was necessary for the workings of his imagination. As A Glastonbury Romance grew at a disconcertingly exponential rate beneath the pen, its American publishers took fright, and demanded immediate retrenchments. Powys wrote to Marian:



The cutting process has begun over my book ... 650,000 words to be reduced to 425,000 words!

There's 'cutting' for you, my love! And not so nice a sound in my ears as the sound of Rogers at the mowing-machine, with Pippard pulling the string!

But, mind ye, I'm not blaming the Publisher; for that were a silly thing to do; as it remains a clear fact that the general public cannot afford to buy more than a certain amount and if I'm to live by my Pen it is the general public that must be induced to buy! Of course, you'll say that I ought to think of length as I write. But I don't know about that! It may be that it's best for more to write a huge amount at top speed - and then cut afterwards. Write for Delight and Cut for Ducats were then the motto and a good one I think; For of "art" I shall never take much heed! (87)

Powys did work fast, but a description of his daily routine in Wales shows that his novel-writing was confined to about three hours each evening (88) after a day's reading, letter-writing, and walking. For Weymouth Sands he went to bed for four hours every afternoon, writing "quietly in complete un-interruption" (89). So, although he worked in concentrated spurts, such bursts were anticipated by prolonged periods for thought. Powys's most speedily written novel, for its length, was A Glastonbury Romance, where we find him writing at a rate of some five manuscript pages a day, or about 1,250 words. Given a daily session of three hours, this is about four hundred words an hour. This is by no means the afflatus of Thomas Wolfe, let alone the relentless march of Trollope.

Powys described the progress of Glastonbury in unusual detail to Marian for the entertainment of her son, "who is so kind as to take an interest in the statistics of writings reached" (\*). In August 1929, Powys visited Northwold and Glastonbury, while reading Malory and other Arthurian material. In January 1930, he was still reading Grail

(\*) Powys's "statistics," when assembled, look like this:

20th April 1930  
17th July  
30th July

Glastonbury begun  
p.100 (MS)  
p.150

literature, and he did not begin actual composition until Easter Day, April 20th, 1930. The beginning was slow; by July 17th, only one hundred manuscript pages had been written. Thereafter steady progress was maintained until June 29th 1931, when he paused to begin cutting the first part. This work occupied him until July 30th, when he wrote, "I am now finishing the Final Chapter of my Book and then I am going to work backwards: for I have about three or four more to write before it's done ... but I could not wait to finish it: for I had an inspiration about The End!"

Clearly the second part, too, grew beneath the pen. On September 12th Powys was half-way through "The Iron Bar", with "The Grail" still to be done. Sam Dekker's Grail vision was therefore the last chapter of Glastonbury to be written. On October 5th Powys wrote to Melrich Rosenberg of Simon and Schuster that the completed manuscript would be ready "at the end of the week", but there were further corrections during October, and not until November 5th was the book sent to the publishers "save the last three pages which I am keeping back to make extra good". Powys was unsuccessful in "praying" that Glastonbury would not exceed two thousand manuscript pages. Economic reasons persuaded him to contain Weymouth Sands within six hundred printed pages, but only after rewriting.

Discarded sheets of Glastonbury show major revision, with Powys exercising selection of his choice of effects. Elizabeth Crow's love for Mat Dekker is originally a consuming passion, but is only hinted in the published book, in accordance with Miss Crow's restrained temperament. Her grotesque death scene planned at first is replaced by a serious but not fatal heart attack - a piece of artistic

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26th October	p.500
8th December	p.680 (expected length of 1,600 to 1,700 MS pages)
7th February 1931	p.1,040 (expected length of 2,000 pages)
23rd February	p.1,180

tact, for her death would seriously distract from the feverish forward motion of the chapter, which is powered by Owen Evans' compulsion to see the fall of the iron bar. Miss Crow's death scene also largely reproduces in feeling Miss Drew's loss of self-control when confronted with her separation from Mary Crow. Powys describes his "old maids" lovingly, and never more so than when their cultivated social exterior fails them; but in this case he restrains himself in the interests of the larger shape of the novel (90). Similarly Powys moderated his cosmology and paranormal agents; at first Owen Evans is given "a guardian angel, the spirit of an old great-aunt from the wilds of Pembrokeshire who had rocked his cradle, but had not been dead long enough to lose interest in his fate" (91). All these changes are for the better and show Powys gradually subjecting his material to his control. He did not obey the first promptings of his imagination - and was amused by his own meticulousness:

... the first nineteen chapters of Glastonbury will present the appearance of a section of Madam Bovary, so scrupulously and carefully will they have been worked over! (92)

There was small-scale revision, too, with stylistic alteration on almost every line. Letters show Powys confident of the overall direction of the book, as expressed in his letter to Marian above, but anxious about detail. If he is involved in the creation of "a life", this life is brought to birth through an exactness in countless minutiae of description. In letters to his brother Littleton (93), Powys is worried about the times of twilight at different periods of the year, and wonders whether a Clifton Blue butterfly would be plausible in Glastonbury on Midsummer Day. He is not sure about his seasonal plants, "a somewhat weak point"; Powys was no more a botanist than Wordsworth.

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12th March	p.1,300
14th March	p.1,330
20th March	p.1,380
11th May	p.1,630 (expected length of 2,300 pages)



A Glastonbury Romance was revised during its initial composition. It is not proper to speak of first and second versions, for its revisions are part of Powys's primary creative impulse. Ben Jones (94) has shown how Wolf Solent underwent important changes before publication, and how these revisions are less the modification than the fulfilment of Powys's original intentions. They show Powys's determination to achieve a satisfactory resolution for Wolf's divisions, and how his writing is exploratory, in that earlier, unfruitful paths to a solution are discarded in the course of composition.

Purely technical revision was, however, impossible; revision had to be fresh creation, as a letter to Dorothy Richardson shows. Here we can also see Powys's respect for the criticism of Phyllis Playter:

She won't let things past: that are carelessly written from the top of my brain; and under her inspiration I am still rewriting the beginning of my new romance about Weymouth, Portland, Upwey, and Chesil Beach. The idea of re-writing a whole chapter at a time always seems far worse than the reality turns out to be. In the course of the actual doing of it I find myself driven to make it interesting to myself by breaking up the surface (that simply by being there has grown tedious to me) and digging down to a deeper level. So revision ceases - directly I start on it - to be revision, and becomes I know not what kind of going about with a hazel-wand, looking for places to dig for new springs! (95)

But Powys did "shed" his novels, and there would come a point where the creative spirit, once exhausted, could not be revived in the cause of a completed work. Maiden Castle suffers from hasty revision, undertaken by Quincy Howe of Simon and Schuster with Powys's approval:

But I must tell you that he is cutting the book with really extraordinary sagacity. Only in a small percentage of cases have I had to re-insert what he cuts out. Had I been commanded to cut the book myself I couldn't have done it better and I think I could almost say in certain cases I think the passages he cuts are well out; for as you know I am terribly voluble! Only in one or two cases has he cut out what I regard as really important and those I have carefully put back. (96)

At times, however, Powys's enthusiastic acquiescence appears to have been extremely casual; connecting passages demanded by the new version survive (97), scribbled on torn sheets of blue-lined writing paper, spattered with bird-droppings. There is carelessness evident in the published book. For instance, in the manuscript version, there is no time-lapse between Chapters One and Two. Dud and Thuella walk from Dorchester High Street and hold a long conversation in a station waiting-room before moving to the circus field. This conversation is excised completely from the published version, and Chapter Two opens "outside the circus-field" (98). Nonetheless, over the next two pages, Dud and Thuella's departure from the station and walk to the field survive intact.

Porius was the novel most severely mutilated by revision, causing Powys much pain. About a third of the book was removed, purely for economic reasons. Here there was no fresh creation in Powys's new version; large sections simply disappeared with the most apologetic of connecting links. Clearly Powys had no heart for the task. The complete text, whose publication is now recognised as important, is used for the reading of Porius in this thesis.(\*)

I have quoted extensively from Powys's letters when they refer to his writing, for his remarks are all the more valuable for their

(\*) *Glen Cavaliero's statement (John Cowper Powys, Novelist, p.185) that "the surviving fragment" of Porius is "impossible to reincorporate into the book as it stands" is made with reference to the photocopy of the missing portions of the Library of Churchill*  
in

rarity. Their tone is frequently casual and self-deprecatory, and in this there is much of Powys's defensive self-mockery. But there can be no doubt that attitude to his novels was deeply serious and determined. Within his self-deprecation, there exists a solid inner pride, and indeed his self-mockery allows him to indulge this pride while seeming to escape the charge of vanity. In the Autobiography he writes of his early "copy-cat" poetry:

But though there was nothing in "Odes and Other Poems" to justify it, and though "Odes and Other Poems" might have remained even unto this day my sole printed claim to originality, I knew then, just as I knew twenty years later, when I had not published anything else, that I was, in some way impossible to prove, a great and for all my cringings and propitiations a terrifyingly formidable genius!

On what did I base this opinion, or conceit, if you prefer? On nothing. I mean on nothing outside the silence of my own thoughts and feelings. (99)

Powys wrote his novels with such an inner assurance, and devised his habits of writing to suit his individual genius. His habits left scope for spontaneity - yet his flow could be governed by control and retraction when the need arose. For the common impression that he was a careless writer, Powys's own feints are partly responsible, but the impression is a false one.

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*College, Cambridge. The complete typescript of an uncut version, with correction in Powys's hand, is in the Library of Colgate University, and is described by Joseph Slater in Powys Newsletter, 4 (1974-5), published by the Colgate University Press. Dr. Slater, and I, and all those who have read this version, all agree that the publication of a full Porius would reveal the novel as one of Powys's finest.*

## Chapter One

## Notes

- (1) Harry Thornton Moore, rev. of Owen Glendower, The New Republic, 14 Apr. 1941.
- (2) F.R. Leavis, rev. of The Powys Brothers, by Richard Heron Ward, Scrutiny, 4, No. 3, Dec. 1935, p. 318.
- (3) Martin Seymour-Smith, Guide to Modern World Literature (London: Wolfe, 1973), p. 203.
- (4) A Glastonbury Romance, p. xiv.
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## CHAPTER TWO

## EARLY FICTION

## I BEGINNINGS

Powys's Autobiography is written out of the achievement of a highly personal harmony. Its tranquil close describes Powys's life in his Catskill retreat, but behind him are many years of inner dissension, "nervous misery", unhappy phobias, inarticulate elations. The indulgent, ironic tone of the book is a result of his new balance within himself. Powys senses that his life is only beginning:

when ... I look back at the path behind me and the path before me it seems as if it had taken me half a century merely to learn with what weapons, and with what surrender of weapons, I am to begin to live my life. (1)

In the first three novels, Wood and Stone (1915), Rodmoor (1916), and Ducdame (1925), we see Powys choosing these weapons, rejecting many of the more usual worldly forms of struggle, and experimenting with his own techniques of survival. They were written through some of the most trying years of Powys's life as recorded in the Autobiography, and are consequently turbulent in drama, passionate but unsteady in vision. Their protagonists are overtaken by madness and suicide, enacting Powys's failure yet to provide satisfying resolution. Powys liked to compare both his Autobiography and A Glastonbury Romance with Faust: the early novels, and particularly Rodmoor, have something of the fervent instability of Werther. But though Rodmoor has this giddy, youthful quality, Powys, "slow in mental development", wrote it at the age of forty-three.

These early novels should be read in the knowledge of the restlessness of Powys's external life, and of his long literary apprenticeship of which the three published novels are the iceberg's tip.

Powys's nomadic American years are sometimes regarded as a purely circumstantial imposition upon a naturally settled personality. Dr. Cavaliero contrasts his wanderings with Lawrence's:

... what was the result of an intense inner restlessness in Lawrence was the necessary result of Powys's career as a lecturer, and when the latter was able to do so he settled down instinctively. (2)

It is true that Powys was often unhappy in his travels. His letters to Llewelyn are full of longing for England, for his brothers and sisters, for a relief from his exhausting journeys made especially painful by his agonizing ulcers. But there was a great deal of "inner restlessness" in his choice of career, as Powys admitted:

I suppose my craving for change is really not so much a desire to be somewhere, as to be somewhere else. (3)

Powys's conversion from itinerant lecturer to Catskill or Welsh countryman indicates a change of inner condition, which can be traced in the developing conviction of his personal philosophy in the novels. Powys's acknowledgement of his "craving for change" comes from Confessions of Two Brothers (1916), a book which compares interestingly with the Autobiography. In the later work, distance and humour prevent book and reader from being smothered by intensity of conflict. In the Confessions Powys is much less able to dramatize himself with detachment. The impression is of self-enclosed vision,

short-sightedness, hesitancy. Powys was conscious of powers within him, as yet not fully articulate. Between Wood and Stone and Rodmoor he wrote to Llewelyh: "But I must write - something - anything. Enormous visions stir the waters of my mind - huge, wavering, obscure." (4)

Powys's first novels are haunted by the unrealizable; behind the published work is a mass of unpublished writing - some unfinished, some destroyed. Uncertainty led to experiment; in the thirty years up to 1925, Powys attempted a wide variety of forms. There is a large quantity of verse, an "unprintable romance", even two plays. There is "writing for the papers", a dreary activity to which both John Cowper and Llewelyn resorted at moments of desperation. We have Powys's own word for the low quality of his work in his earliest Sussex period: "such imitative banal cliché-silly 4th form school boy sentimental stuff as ever you did see!" (5) Surviving stories "written for the papers" in 1909, published as Romer Mowl and Other Stories, are no better than Powys judged them. They are laboured imitations of Poe. As late as 1919, between Rodmoor and Ducdame, there are twenty stories, of which "none were any good and I've chucked them away" (6), and in the following year Powys attempted a Sussex novel a San Francisco novel - all indications of a still struggling, unfulfilled talent.

Confronted by failure and frustration, Powys's conscience smarted at his awareness of time lost, a feeling apparent as early as 1907: "half-way through my life and no books written, no cause advocated, nothing done" (7). In 1913 there is "shame and remorse" at his lack of achievement (8), but also a conviction of latent power: "The Devil take me if I don't ever write anything good! I know I could! I know I could! I know I could! (9)



Why such inner confidence? Robert Gittings has noted in the juvenilia of Keats and Hardy isolated pieces which embody in little the excellence of later work. There is the same phenomenon in Powys's story The Hamadryad and the Demon, "published" in a hand-written family magazine in 1902. The genial tone of this little animistic fable is quite unlike the agonized Gothicism of the early novels, and recalls the airiness of Forster's later Celestial Omnibus stories, or the light fantasies of Saki. But there is this difference, that where these latter jeux d'esprit are clearly the holiday work of writers committed to the portrayal of social relations, in Powys's story the centre of felt reality is unavoidably in the magic of nature. The tale is set apparently in contemporary Lincoln: there is a scene of dismal factory life to underline an inner flight from industrialism. But the story is really about the power of spirit and of personality discoverable in the inanimate. Richard Lovel falls in love with a tree spirit, Rachel Rye with a carved demon in the cathedral. The church exorcises the spirits of tree and stone, but the thwarted lovers outwit authority to find their lost magic in each other. The story's seriousness is veiled by a curtain of fancy, an early example of Powys's self-protective mockery; his family readership responded with appropriately good-natured horror: "O! That way madness lies."

The hamadryad of the title is Powys's first "sylph" figure, an embodiment of essential femininity. Throughout his life Powys was captivated by such ideal figures, glimpsed fleetingly in actual girls. The hamadryad is a remarkable precursor of the owl-girl Blodeuwedd in Porius - a creation of fancy and of magic, unattainable, and described in the "golden" terms characteristic of Powys's ultimate hopes:

Just as a golden tint mingled with the brown of her body, so a reminiscence of soft green shadow lurked about the waving of her hazel-coloured hair. Her lips red as autumn berries and full of the drowsy warmth of rain-scented woodland banks, her eyes like shadowy pools of amber-tinted water, her low forehead and small oval chin, all partook of the freedom and purity of the untrodden woods. (10)

In later Powys, a vision of the eternal feminine obliterates transient, utilitarian concerns. When this ideal is imaginatively embodied in a real woman, human relation is difficult, as we see in Wolf Solent. Richard Lovel's response to the hamadryad is as if to the claim of an absolute:

"This beauty," he thought, "is not the beauty of human goodness. It is something primitive - unspeakable - something so far down into the root of things that it has passed beyond Good and Evil. I can neither understand its meaning nor reward its devotion!" (11)

Understanding the meaning and rewarding the devotion of this trans-personal, primitive femininity is the main task of Porius, written fifty years later. The Hamadryad and the Demon gives us some clue as to the nature of Powys's faith in himself.

## II WOOD AND STONE

In The Hamadryad and the Demon, the two lovers, accused by their relatives of weak-mindedness, triumph over the orthodoxies of church and society. Their victory is a matter of imaginative assertion, but in the Noah's Ark world of this lightweight fable, it is easily enough achieved. In Wood and Stone there is a similar opposition, this time enacted within an ambitious microcosm of a recognisably real society. As with the later Glastonbury, Powys

chooses the village of Nevilton to depict a survey of human life in many dimensions - economic, political, religious, emotional. There are the claims of society, and also the demands of personal autonomy. The novel is about aggression: Powys sets out to depict the struggle of the "well-constituted" against the "ill-constituted", Power against Sacrifice, Pride against Love. He hazards that "the true secret lies in some subtle and difficult reconciliation between the will to Power and the will to Love" (p. viii), but for the moment his sympathies are with the "ill-constituted". Like the rest of Powys's work Wood and Stone attempts to redress values in the world. The weak and unassertive do indeed win out in the novel, but Powys's inner resilience, so apparent from Wolf Solent onwards, is as yet unformed. There is much resentment of the terms of worldly struggle, and the book's resolution is rigged. As in the mature Powys, aggression and withdrawal are by no means unambivalent qualities; there is valuable aggression, and malicious withdrawal. But this ambiguity in his opposing forces clouds rather than enforces Powys's argument.

The "opposites" are set before the reader in an explanatory preface, and also in the novel in the two hills dominating the village of Nevilton. These hills are the "stone" and "wood" of the title: Leo's Hill is the larger, a "brute mass of inert sandstone" (p.3) associated with pre-historic Gods and the "mythology of power". Its quarries yield the power of material riches. Nevilton Mount is a slighter, overgrown mount of Christian significance, where The Holy Rood of Waltham was discovered.

The predatory associations - astrological and zoological - of Leo's Hill are shared by the hill's owner, Mortimer Romer, whose

name derives from a hated bully of Powys's schooldays. He is described as "grizzled and ruddy"; in terms of the planetary influences which somewhat ponderously govern the book's action, his star is Jupiter, prefiguring Powys's opposition of Jupiter to Saturn. Romer uses his political and economic power to subdue the village to his sway. His power-lust has a quasi-sadistic basis, an early example of the influence of the erotic upon unexpected areas of the personality, a theme common in later Powys:

The main eccentricity of the erotic tendencies of this remarkable man lay in the elaborate pleasure he derived from his sense of power. The actual lure of the flesh had little attraction for him. What pleased him was a slow tightening of his grip upon people - upon their wills, their freedom, their personality. (p. 22)

There is a similar mental sadism in his daughter Gladys, in her vicious teasing of her "companion" Lacrima Traffio, and her protracted coquetry with the vicar, Hugh Clavering, whose enslaved dependence upon the power of Gladys's classical beauty is closely examined by Powys as a pathetic example of the division between flesh and spirit.

Powys is most interested in the Romers' victims, the characters of "wood" whose lack of self-assertion leaves them vulnerable to the aggression of others. Maurice Quincunx is a secular contemplative, usually seen working in his garden, Candide fashion. He expresses a pessimistic philosophy, tinged with Schopenhauer in contrast to the Romers' "Nietzscheanism" expounded in Powys's Preface (\*): "I've undergone what that German calls 'the Great Renunciation'. 'I've escaped the will to live', says Quincunx (p.229). There is also the painfully sensitive Lacrima Traffio who loves him,

(\*) *It can be objected that the Romers' "Will to Power" is a perversion of the real Nietzsche. Powys here shares the misconceptions current until the revaluation of Nietzsche after the second world war. A crude interpretation of "The Will to Power" was*

and who proves a natural victim for Gladys Romer's wiles. These two characters Powys calls "pariahs", and analyses their psychologies as illustrations of a type.

The sufficiency of these neat opposites is challenged by the stonemason brothers Luke and James Andersen, portraits respectively of Llewelyn Powys and John Cowper himself. Gladys Romer meets her doom through collision with the strong will of Luke, who has "as much in him as herself of that stone's tenacity and imperviousness" (p.50).

Luke loves the stone he carves; his sunny and well-tempered self-assertion shows a genial aspect to the hardness of a stone which is consistently characterised throughout the book as "evil". In the novel's Nietzschean terminology, Luke's amorous, cheerful spontaneity is "Dionysian". While Powys's portrait of Llewelyn is a tribute of affection, there is an element of envy for his brother's less anxious temperament. Luke's insouciance rebukes the novel's conflict of inhibition and aggression.

This conflict is most disastrous in Powys's self-portrait, James Andersen. James is oppressed by a sense of evil in the stone of Nevilton. He associates it with "houses of tyranny, of wretched persecution" (p.205). He recedes into madness, into a belief that the spirit of the stone is invading his soul, and is eventually killed by a fall into a disused quarry.

In James Andersen's madness and death, the argument of the novel draws back into inarticulacy, indicating Powys's inability to find a suitable imaginative resolution. This death shows how

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*popularised by the activities of Nietzsche's unpleasant sister, who once gave Powys tea in her Weimar shrine. According to Powys in The Pleasures of Literature (pp.540-69), Nietzsche is a "spiritual sadist"; the "Over-man" is a "leonine symbol", recalling the stone of*

the central opposites of Wood and Stone enact dramatically Powys's inner dissensions, making the landscape of Nevilton a geographical model of an inward psychic struggle - a skill which Powys was to develop fully in Wolf Solent.

The whole subject of aggression is a charged one for Powys. In Wood and Stone there is a clear support for the values of passivity, and the sensitive temperaments of the "pariah" characters. But this desire for withdrawal is complicated by other factors. Dr. Easingwood believes that Powys's scruples throughout his work about the depiction of physical violence show a deep unresolved anxiety (12), and here there is evidence of Powys's confessed but problematic "sadism". This is a veiled aspect of Powys's psychology, but the early novels offer a good deal of insight into it. In 1952, Powys wrote:

In regard to "Wood and Stone", ... I recollect so well going through certain moral tensions ... to which I can clearly see our younger writers, both male and female, are airily and lightly immune. How far ought I ... to allow myself vicariously to enjoy the wickedness of my wicked characters when they are feeling genuine delight in genuine wickedness? I will only say here that neither in the case of "Wood and Stone" or "Rodmoor" did I decide that it was necessary to resist the temptation to enjoy vicariously the wickedness of my wicked characters. (13)

Powys goes on to define this wickedness as "cruelty". The reasonable conclusion is that in Gladys Romer's harrying of Lacrima Traffio, or (less emotionally charged), Mortimer Romer's persecution of Maurice Quincunx, there are instances of a psychological bullying which was part of Powys himself. I have pointed out the semi-erotic characteristics which Powys gives to Romer's power-craving. There will be more of this in Rodmoor.

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*Powys's first novel. Throughout his Nietzsche criticism, Powys identifies himself and the reader with ordinary mortals against the claims of "Higher Men" and "Over-Men".*

Powys's inner distress lies deeper than the distinction between passivity and cruelty. Dr. Cavaliero suggests that the opposing "mythologies" of power and sacrifice may have been presented to Powys by the contrasting characters of his parents. I feel that this is not only true, but that the conflict of Powys's temperamental inheritances from each of his parents is the crux of Wood and Stone, and that the novel attempts to resolve the two. Wolf Solent in a different way analyzes the opposition of maternal and paternal influence upon its central character. Writing to his sister Marian, Powys connected his inner division with his parents:

It is the war in me of what I have of C.F.P. with what I have of M.C.P. Neither will let me give myself up to the other. (14)

In 1907, John Cowper had written to Llewelyn, complaining of his unstable temperament. Aggression and withdrawal war within him; the hackneyed phrasing indicates that neither extreme is an expression of his real self:

I am getting a bit ashamed of it. It is strange. Why can't I get into a quiet, wise gentle and pitiful mood - why can't I get into a ruffling swash-buckling dicing desperado Nietzschean mood - why O why must I needs be in both at the same time ... O who will deliver me from the body of this death? (15)

In the Autobiography, Powys associates his loved but formidable father with the monumentality of stone; he is a man of "volcanic pleasure", "massive", a climber "up trees, up walls of ruined castles, up sea-cliffs, down the sides of quarries, among precipitous rocks" (16). While writing Wood and Stone, Powys wrote to Llewelyn of "our Leonine progenitor" (17).

Mrs. Powys, as described by Louis Wilkinson, is a clear illustration of "the mythology of sacrifice":

She was a romantic, sensitive, melancholy and morbid woman, indeed of William Cowper's blood. It was her qualities that made her children's genius, and the qualities of her children's father that gave it power to act, and fused it with the strange cruelty by which it is so often controlled. It needed the mental masochism of the mother, the repressed ferocity of the father, to produce Wolf Solent or A Glastonbury Romance ...

Mrs. Powys hated success. She hated, with secret intensity, well-constituted people, or even people whose health was too good. When Llewelyn developed consumption and was determined not to die of it, she was far from friendly to his insistent will ... "These young men," she said, "seem to want to live forever." (18)

There are traces of John Cowper's mother in Powys's self-denying, pious women - Mrs Seldom of Wood and Stone, Mrs. Renshaw of Rodmoor, the Princess Euronwy of Porius. But the self-imposed martyrdom of these characters arouses irritation, even hatred in those around them. Indeed there is more "repressed ferocity" in their withdrawal than in the stone-hard solidity of Powys's inheritance from his father.

We see this ferocity in the "Pariah" characters of Wood and Stone. Despite Maurice Quincunx's boasted "Renunciation" he is deeply dependent upon human sympathy and his private income. He does not "renounce" the Romans; he hates them. In Powys's "Pariah" type there is something of the impotent resentment of Dostoevsky's Underground Man:

Mr. Quincunx was a true Pariah in his miserable combination of inability to strike back at the people who



injured him, and inability to forget their injuries. He propitiated their tastes, bent to their will, conciliated their pride, agreed with their opinions, and hated them with demoniacal hatred.

As he pulled up his weeds in the hot sun, this particular morning, Maurice Quincunx fantastically consoled himself by imagining all manner of disasters to his enemies. (p.85)

Here there is vicious passivity, just as in Luke Andersen there is legitimate assertiveness. The ambivalences of Powys's ambitious theme in Wood and Stone receive their acknowledgement, though not their resolution. As it is, Maurice Quincunx survives with his pleasures in daily sensation intact, in a conclusion which is similar to that of Wolf Solent.

After all it was something to be alive still, something to be still able to stroke one's beard and stretch one's legs, and fumble in one's pocket for a "Three Castles" cigarette! (p.699)

But this placid survival is only achieved through the intervention of characters who are not engaged in the novel's dualistic battle. The "pariahs" are saved by the machinations of Francis Taxater, the worldly-wise Catholic theologian, and of Ralph Dangelis, the American millionaire to whom the struggle of the two Nevilton hills is "of but trifling importance". (p.122)

There is in fact a rebellion against the conditions of this dualism; the mental/geographical landscape of Nevilton is claustrophobically cloying and sinister, as Vennie Seldom feels:

The feeling of autumn in the air, so pleasant under normal conditions to human senses, seemed to associate itself just now with this dreadful glance she had had into the basic terrors of things. The whole atmosphere about her seemed to

smell of decay, of decomposition, of festering mortality. The pull and draw of the thick Nevilton soil, its horrible demonic gravitation, had never got hold of her more tenaciously than it did then. She felt as though some vast octopus-like tentacles were dragging her earth-ward. (pp.685-6)

The "pariahs" long to escape from this hideous rankness. Lacrima Traffio yearns for her Italian homeland, and indeed the whole novel, written shortly after Powys's visits to Spain and Italy, is pervaded (in the way of Nietzsche and Goethe) with a desire for a Mediterranean land of "passionate feeling". Luke Andersen's "Dionysian" temperament is associated with the Mediterranean, and Maurice Quincunx is stirred to action by the appeal of the little Italian circus girl Dolores, just as Wilhelm Meister was stirred by the little Mignon and her song of "Kennst du das Land" - a source Powys was to expand upon in Maiden Castle.

The most persuasive image of release is that of the sea. There is a delightful chapter, darkened for the reader by knowledge of James Andersen's death, in which Luke Andersen and his girl friends free themselves from the dank, heavily-charged landscape of Somerset, and escape to the Weymouth sea-side. At the end of the book, too, the "pariahs" run away to the sea, and Vennie Seldom sits on the shingle beach in final contemplation:

How strange this human existence was! Long after the last block of Leonian stone had been removed from its place - long after the stately pinnacles of Nevilton House had crumbled into shapeless ruins, - long after the memory of all these people's troubles had been erased and forgotten, - this same tide would fling itself upon this same beach, and its voice then would be as its voice now, restless, unsatisfied, unappeased. (pp.712-3)

Powys, in his preface, sets forth Wood and Stone as a collusion between fiction and philosophy. A book of pure philosophy is rejected because "rational theorizing" fails to do justice to "the elusiveness of human nature". (p.viii). He hopes to be faithful to the "evasive caprices of flesh and blood," and to avoid the "premature articulation" of an over-simplified moral. Powys does indeed sacrifice didactic clarity for the sake of fidelity to his vision of human behaviour. In this sense the solutions to his grand opposites must await later novels. In Wolf Solent his protagonist is purged of the ingrained malice which characterises Maurice Quincunx's withdrawal, and it is interesting to compare Mortimer Romer with Powys's next capitalist quarry-owner, Dog Cattistock in Weymouth Sands. In Wood and Stone the stone of Nevilton itself aggressively threatens in alliance with the powerful Romer, and there are hints of a cosmic malevolence, which drives James Andersen into madness. But in Weymouth Sands, Cattistock's depredations are an outrage upon the stone of Portland which for Jobber Skald is an element to be handled with reverence. In Powys's last years, stone is obscurely animate, placid and nobly enduring, possibly the most cherished of elements.

While Powys, in the symbolism of Wood and Stone, may be dealing with the "clumsy categories" he hoped to avoid, there is nonetheless much to admire in the novel. Dr. Cavaliero justly admires Powys's use of landscape: "What Powys is moving towards is a portrayal of man as himself a part of nature not only in his physical sense but also in his imaginative intuition". (19) There is also his use of the novel as a forum for inner debate, in a quest for the solution of inner divisions. This self-healing has to be striven for; there is much of Powys that is rapt and quietistic, but this does not mean that he is

an undramatic writer. There is little sense of a Wordsworthian primal cleanliness of vision; inner serenity has to be attained by cunning and determination, and by the articulation of inner dissension. The "Will to Power" may be set against the "Will to Love", but in both there is the common factor of "Will".

Wood and Stone is timorously dedicated to Thomas Hardy. Powys confesses his daring in attempting a Wessex novel after Hardy's great example, but is at great pains to protect himself from suspicion of imitation. Powys inevitably pays tribute in his use of landscape, in Wood and Stone and throughout his work. One can compare the Blackmoor Vale in Wolf Solent with Tess, Powys's Maiden Castle with Hardy's in A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork, Weymouth Sands with the Budmouth of The Well-Beloved. How could any descriptions of these scenes be independent of Hardy? But a larger view of the two novelists shows them to be not as close as their common Wessex background would suggest. The societies they describe are vastly different. Powys describes the middle class, and his characteristic milieu is the small town. There are no farm labourers at all in Powys, and only three farmers - of whom two, John Goring and Mr. Manley, outrage with their coarseness the middle-class delicacy of those around them, while the third, Ned Athling, is more poet than farmer. In Powys we are in a society of clergy, schoolmasters, minor gentry, shopkeepers, servants. There is none of Hardy's working-class intimacy with rural manners.

More importantly, the world-outlooks of Powys and Hardy are poles apart. Powys never remotely aims at tragedy; characteristic of his protagonists is the kind of perpetual self-renewal so painfully absent in Hardy. Hardy is a supreme novelist of disillusion, while the

mature Powys acknowledges the fertility and resilience of the imagination. Although there are illusions constantly checked in Powys, there is the possibility of magic. If Wood and Stone, with its brooding planetary purposes, seems close to Hardy, this is because the possibility of magic is still a long way off.

### III RODMOOR

If the shadow of Hardy looms sometimes too nearly over Wood and Stone, Powys's dedication of Rodmoor (1916) "to the spirit of Emily Brontë" arises from a more spontaneously felt affinity. Many of the qualities of Rodmoor are close to Wuthering Heights. There is a strongly dramatic tale of the extremes of passion, while the solid realism of setting both heightens the book's extravagances, and makes them more believable. There is a pervasive influence of environment upon character, but men's fate devolves through their native passions: they are not puppets of the gods. Lastly, there is a concern with the dark relationship of love and cruelty, and Rodmoor is the second and last book where Powys allows himself to "enjoy" the wickedness of his evil characters.

In Wood and Stone, the notion of escape beckoned in the attraction of the sea. The large perspective of the sea at Lodmoor soothed temporal anxieties, belittled too-human problems, and brought relief from the clogged heaviness of Somerset. In Rodmoor (\*) the North Sea alarms with its formless sterility, while the inland wind brings an occasional reminder of kindly fertility and the consolations of normal human life. Where the "pariahs" of Wood and Stone escaped from humanity, Adrian Sorio of Rodmoor has escaped too far, and seeks the restoration of an oppressed spirit. So Powys

(\*) The name "Rodmoor" may also have been suggested by Rodmell in Sussex. Powys once thought of living there: "I can now so clearly see that house in the low flat marshes near the Sussex Ouse," he wrote to his brother Littleton (Essays on John Cowper Powys, ed.

does not reverse his symbolism, but presses further the polarities of Wood and Stone and the implications of a flight into the world of imagination, which has now become frightening for fear of what might be found there. Rodmoor is therefore a novel of courage.

Like Wolf Solent, Adrian Sorio flees the city, but in the country finds not pastoral retreat but a confrontation with his inner dissensions at their sharpest. Adrian is in search of recovery from a mental breakdown in New York, and destitution in London, and pins his hopes upon his love for Nance Herrick, whose emphatic femininity is "symbolic of the restorative virtue of the Great Mother herself". She seems to promise "restoration on any terms, at any cost, to the kindly normal paths out of which he had been so roughly thrown" (p.12).

Nance Herrick's sound instincts are however challenged by the morbid influences of Rodmoor. Adrian falls in love with the epicene Philippa Renshaw, and the misanthropic manias of his New York days are encouraged by the nihilistic Baltazar Stork. Nance's sister, Linda, is enthralled by the callously sadistic Brand Renshaw.

As with Wood and Stone, the conflicts of Rodmoor are those of Powys himself; in the Renshaw family of Rodmoor Powys depicts the forces, both dangerous and of potential imaginative value, which debarred him from the "kindly normal paths" of the run of humanity. These forces are specifically the nihilistic, the sadistic, and the attraction of the epicene.

In writing of Wood and Stone I mentioned Powys's mother in connection with "The mythology of sacrifice". Mary Cowper Powys

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*Humfrey, p.341). If Rodmell seemed sinister to Powys, his instinct has been confirmed by events, for Virginia Woolf drowned herself there.*

died in the summer of 1914; her death involved Powys not only in grief, but in remorse at his treatment of her, and a recognition of the strength of his maternal inheritance. In March, 1914, on hearing of his mother's cancer, he wrote to Llewelyn, anticipating a feeling of guilt:

I am afraid, my dear, you and I will have to go through some moments of remorse - I fear it! Good Lord! 'Wicked and mad'? To condemn her for being that! To prefer the firm, the capable, the wise, the sane - the Mrs Phelipases of the world - to such an Incarnation of the Eternal In Vain! But you'll say I'm revenging my conscience upon you! No, no! Lulu mine, her blood be on my head, for it was my black blood too -and I went over, a cursed traitor to the Night's Plutonian shore, and carried favour with the Sun - Her enemy! ...

It is that look of her eyes - those terrible brown eyes - that we shall see once and again, my friend! My feeling for her is strange, when I try to analyse it - not exactly 'love' or exactly 'pity' - but a curious sort of desperate signalling, as of two people from another incarnation being swept apart without having really touched hands! (20)

Roland Mathias in his book on Powys's poetry has written of the influence of Powys's mother upon Wolf's Bane, published six months before Rodmoor (21). This book is indeed pervaded by grief and a sudden realization of affinity:

I only loved you after you were dead;  
For only then I knew  
What an accomplice in her travail-bed  
Life had in you. (22)

Wolf's Bane, like Rodmoor, is full of the sea and its offer of oblivion, and there is the aetherial, "translunar", twilit, rain-drenched atmosphere Powys associated with his mother.

This maternal inheritance is worth dwelling upon at such length, for the sturdy "elementalism" which Powys inherited from his father is so memorable from the Autobiography, and the Mary Cowper Powys in him has been eclipsed in consequence. It is important for Rodmoor, because the novel is Powys's confrontation with the less earthly aspects of his nature, and with his mother within him. It tries to resolve by articulation the inner turmoil aroused by her death.

In Rodmoor, Mrs. Helen Renshaw is a portrait of Powys's mother:

She seemed in some strange way to resent any lifting of the heavy folds of the pall of fate and with a kind of obstinate weariness, to lean to the darker and more sombre aspect of every possibility. (p.437, cf. note 18 above)

Nance Herrick's response to Mrs. Renshaw is complicated; she finds her touching and appealing in her devotion to romantic poetry, but reacts with mute and bitter fury to her "emotional perversity" (p.262). Nance suspects her of "some strange and unnatural link with the dead which made her cold and detached in her attitude to the living". She is "a votary of moonlight and shadows", "unsympathetic towards the sunshine and towards all genial normal expressions of natural humanity" (p.438). There is in Nance a mixture of tenderness for her frailty, and rebellion against her self-imposed martyrdom.

Around Mrs. Renshaw are grouped the characters whose influences drive Sorio to madness - her children Brand and Phillipa, and Baltazar Stork. Baltazar is the illegitimate son of Mrs. Renshaw's dead husband, and no blood relation, but between Mrs. Renshaw and Baltazar there is a deep mutual affection, and he



is the only person who unreservedly loves her. What is also noticeable is that the viciousness of the Renshaw children is related to the peculiarities of their family background. "We're an evil tribe," says Brand, "and especially are we evil in our relations with women" (p.400). Mrs. Renshaw has been caught in the toils of the family, but also perpetuates its perversity. We do not have an arbitrary curse upon the family, but a strain of viciousness renewing itself through psychological reaction within the family. Brand is terrified - the only fear in his life - at the possibility of his mother discovering his vices, but his fear is based on a dim sense of deep reciprocity:

For some basic and profound reason, inherent in his inmost nature, it was horrible to Brand to think of his mother knowing him. She might suspect and she might know that he knew she suspected, but to have the thing laid quite bare between them would be to send a rending and shattering crack through the unconscious hypocrisy of twenty years. (pp.278-9)

Phillipa harbours a complicated resentment of her mother's emotional tyranny:

I hate her still, I hate her because she has a morbid, sentimental mania for what she calls the sensitiveness of young girls. (p.115)

Brand suspects Philippa of actually contemplating murder. The power of Mrs. Renshaw is heightened by the emphasis upon "The Mothers" throughout Rodmoor, as expounded by Dr. Fingal Raughty:

"Women who've had children," he went on "are the only people in the world who possess the open secret. They know what it is to find the ultimate virtue in exquisite resignation. They do not only submit to fate -they joyfully embrace it.... Goethe was the fellow to understand these things, and you know the name he gives to the unutterable secret? The

Mothers. That's a good name, isn't it? The Mothers! Listen, Nance! All the people in this place suffer from astigmatism and asymmetry. Those are the outward signs of their mental departure from the normal. (p.345)

Nance Herrick, although much younger than Adrian, is of a strong motherly nature, and she pits her influence against that of the Renshaws. "The maternal instinct" is "always the dominant note in her emotions" (p.354). Her "natural sanity and sense of proportion" (p.171) are allied to a strong will and a faithful spirit. She shows decisiveness in moving to Rodmoor, and fortitude in refusing to allow its sinister aspects to defeat her. She is the only character aware of and able to cope with economic realities, and is constant in her love for Adrian, and for her sister in resisting the morbid jealousies of Rachel Doorm. She has the imagination to cable Adrian's son Baptiste and bring him to England, although her efforts are overtaken by events. But she has few allies. Fingal Raughty has "a bottomless fund of natural goodness" (p.158), and the priest Hamish Traherne encourages Nance in her love for Adrian and her Christian belief. But Raughty and Traherne comment on the action rather than take part in it. Traherne in particular has little pastoral effectiveness; his faith, buttressed by a pagan Epicureanism, is barely sufficient to sustain his own stability, and he has none to spare for his parishioners.

The characteristic atmosphere of the Rodmoor landscape, which powerfully pervades the book and underscores action and philosophy, has been noted by all critics. The "spring" of regeneration which Adrian seeks is blighted:

Yes, some alien influence was at work, and the Spring was ravished and tarnished even while yet in bud. It was as if by an eternal mandate, registered when this portion of the

coast first assumed its form, the seasons had been somehow thwarted and perverted in the processes of their natural order, and the land left, a neutral, sterile, derelict thing, neither quite living nor quite dead, doomed to changeless monotony. (p.28)

This power in this landscape influences humanity, in opposition to Nance's protectiveness and Raughty's belief in "The Mothers":

The sea - the sterile unharvested sea - had from the beginning of the world, been the enemy of woman! (p.372)

The human enemy of woman in Rodmoor, and the book's most sterile, nihilistic character, is Baltazar Stork.

Cicely Hill has noticed Baltazar Stork's descent from Sebastian van Storck in Pater's Imaginary Portraits (23). Pater's story is set against a sea-eroded landscape similar to that of Rodmoor. Van Storck, a personable young man of outstanding intellectual abilities, erects with passionless and faultless logic a nihilistic philosophy, which leads him coolly to his death: "For Sebastian at least, the world and the individual alike had been divested of all effective purpose" (24). In Rodmoor Baltazar is a cold, cynical aesthete, whose "delicate and dainty appearance" conceals "and egoist of inflexible temper" (p.58). "I alone," Baltazar says, "have the key of escape" (p.183). Indeed he has. His despair assumes an image in his mind:

Baltazar's hand remained upon the child's shoulder and he listened as he walked, to his chatter; but all the while his mind visualized an immense, empty plain - a plain of steely-blue ice under a grey sky - and in the center of this plain a bottomless crevasse, also of steely-blue ice, and on the edge of this

crevasse, gradually relinquishing their hold from exhaustion, two human hands. (p.293) (\*)

Powys comments on Baltazar's perception of things with unusual authorial emphasis:

There was not the least tinge of insanity in the vision.

What he was permitted to see, by reason of some malign clarity of intellect denied to the majority of his fellows, was simply the real truth of life, its frozen chemistry and deadly purposelessness. (pp.366-7)

Baltazar is the true negative pole in Rodmoor, his role not at first apparent because his influence is covert. Baltazar does very little, until his calculated suicide, but his malice is infectious. He is responsible for bringing Adrian to Rodmoor, and advises him to visit the Renshaws. He consciously encourages Adrian in his dangerous manias, preferring to drive his friend to madness, rather than have him marry Nance Herrick. Nance is terrified of his "malign clairvoyance" (p.285); she contrasts her fear of him with the more straightforward threat of the explicitly vicious Brand Renshaw:

With Brand there was quite simply a strong magnetic attraction, formidable and overpowering, and that was all, but she trembled to think what elements of complicated morbidity Baltazar's overtures were capable of arousing. (pp.148-9)

Brand's viciousness is real, and Adrian Sorio's belief that "the essence of life is to be found in the instinct of destruction" (p.11) likewise tends towards death, and is drawn out by the influence of the Rodmoor sea. But even in Brand's sadism and Sorio's philosophical frenzy there is an energy absent from Baltazar's chill nihilism. In The Complex Vision Powys makes a careful distinction between "an

(\*) *Pater's Storck has a similar vision of the North-west Passage: "Sebastian, in effect, found a charm in the thought of that still, drowsy, spellbound world of perpetual ice, as in art and life he could always tolerate the sea."* (Imaginary Portraits, p.96).

active destructive force" which is "a perversion of creative power, not the opposite of creative power" and the opposite of creation, which is dull, inert "malice", "that which resists creation" - the philosophy of Baltazar Stork (25).

Baltazar however recognises the motion of Adrian's philosophy towards his own despair:

To make a "philosophy" out of a struggle to reach the ultimate horror of that "frozen sea," how lamentably pathetic it was, and how childish! (pp.367-8)

Brand Renshaw too recognises the link between his half-brother and himself, when he confesses his vices to Hamish Traherne:

Tassar can no more get away from me than I can get away from him. We're bound together for life, my boy, bound together by what those black pools mean and what that sound - you wouldn't think you could hear it here, would you? - never stops meaning. (p.192)

"That sound" is the tossing of the sea; "those black pools" are, in Rodmoor and throughout Powys, a figure for the sadistic instinct.

Sadism is pervasive in Rodmoor, but Powys's discussion centres less upon the moralities of human relationships, although we see dark forces threatening these relationships, than upon sadism's permeation of the whole inner life. Powys wrote in Suspended Judgments: "The way a man "makes love" is always intimately associated with the way he approaches his gods, such as they may be" (26). A viciousness is most obviously present in the relationship of Brand and Linda Herrick. Linda is a natural victim; as with the Renshaws, perversity

has descended through the generations. Linda's mother died of a "long nervous decline" (p.2), and Rachel Doorm, whom Linda's mother had supplanted in Captain Herrick's affections, taunts Linda as "the child of her terror" (p.258). A deep magnetism draws Brand and Linda together, potent even before they meet. It is Linda's fear of the sea which first excites Brand's passion; he baptizes her with seawater, making of her fear "a bond between us ... which none of them shall be able to break" (p.96). As a love-token, Linda wears a sharp fir-cone next to her skin.

There is a more refined, mental sadism in Philippa, who is the androgynous fulfilment of a boy/girl vision which had troubled Adrian even before his departure from London. This vision is connected with a passage from Remy de Gourmont:

"Rose au regard saphique, plus pâle que les lys, rose au regard saphique, offre-nous le parfum de ton illusoire virginité, fleur hypocrite, fleur de silence." (p.17)

In Suspended Judgements (1916), Powys writes of this piece as "that amazing poem addressed to the rose, with its melancholy and sinister refrain which troubles the memory like a swift wicked look from a beautiful countenance that ought to be pure and cold in death" (27).

Philippa especially shows how closely dangerous and visionary elements are bound together in Powys's imagination. The power of her role as a fulfilment of Adrian's fantasy is apparent. She is in that sense a portion of him. She is also part of the magic of nature; she escapes from Oakguard at night, to release her identity upon the

trees and grasses with whose nocturnal mystery she holds a strange communion, like some sinister dryad. But her viciousness is clear: she encourages Brand to pursue Linda (pp.55-6), and derives exquisite pleasure (like Gladys Romer in Wood and Stone) from teasing her when she is caught (pp.234-5). She draws out a latent violence in Adrian himself; Nance notices a new brutality in his love-making (pp.81-3). There is a disturbing scene between Adrian and Philippa in a fenland windmill (pp.321-2). Adrian recognizes that his attraction to her is entirely "to what is dangerous and furtive" (p.236).

The sadism of Rodmoor is contagious, not only through the generations, but from character to character within the book. Powys may have in mind The Possessed. It passes from Philippa to Adrian, and from Brand to Linda, who maliciously taunts Nance with her loss of Adrian's love (p.150). All, including Nance, are driven to stratagem and bullying to secure their ends.

Yet, despite these "morbidityies", Rodmoor concerns itself very little with ethical behaviour. The tale deals with the hearts of its characters, which are often not apparent from their deeds. Baltazar, unquestionably the most sinister of all, is in fact alone in showing some benevolent interest in the lives of the population at large; he has helped an unemployed youth find work (p.416). His malice works under a cloak of friendship and urbanity. When moral decisions are required, Powys is aware of the ambiguous consequences of various courses of action. In protecting Linda from the viciousness of Rachel Doorm, Nance is compelled to leave the older woman to a lonely death. Brand, when confronted with Linda's pregnancy, protests with reasonableness that saddling Linda with such a husband as himself is no way to ensure her future happiness. The novel proceeds less by a

series of drastic actions than by a flow of unconscious influences; Powys shows ideal forces, and the inner life of the imagination, imperceptibly governing the everyday. There are powerful changes of mood and atmosphere, most remarkably in Nance and Adrian's excursion to Mundham. The trip begins in a key of renewal and escape, as the lovers leave the sterility of Rodmoor for the lively market town. There is a cheerful tea, a visit to the abbey. It is the influence of scenes of urban desolation, the frustration caused by an erroneous guide-book, and the annoyance of tired feet, which tilt the pair towards an opposite extreme of gloom, and this chance shift of mood is a turning point in the book, fixing Adrian upon his descent into madness.

Ultimately Powys chooses the dangerous stimulus of the life of the imagination, the pull of the unknown sea, and the temptation of the epicene. In Rodmoor this leads Adrian to reject his instinct of self-preservation and his love for Nance. Adrian had prepared to accept Nance's protection "on any terms, at any cost", but this cost turns out to be too high.

It is appropriately an act of violence which precipitates this end. Adrian's inner violence has hitherto been surfacing slowly in his relations with Nance and Philippa. Elsewhere he is extremely squeamish about the violence in nature itself; he rescues moths from flames, fish from nets, and feeds his pet owl on cake. Confronted with Brand's open viciousness, he strikes Brand with a heavy stick, and loses his reason (p.401). In his madness, he believes he has killed Nance, and in a sense this is true, for he has departed from the "kindly normal paths" of her ways, and crossed over to the side of Philippa. He believes in his madness that it is Philippa who has pushed him to murder.



Hitherto Rodmoor has benefited as a novel from its clear focus upon Adrian's imagination. After Adrian's mental breakdown the reader's sympathies are entirely with Nance and her efforts to win back Adrian's sanity. Adrian - like James Andersen, Powys's self-portrait in Wood and Stone - has descended into inarticulacy, and Powys cannot describe his vision further.

It is not that Powys loses faith in his hero. Adrian's final barge journey with Philippa, and their death, are rendered in exalted tones of fulfilment. Philippa quotes The Phoenix and the Turtle:

"Death is now the phoenix' nest  
And the turtle's loyal breast  
To eternity doth rest.

"Leaving no posterity,  
'Twas not their infirmity,  
It was married chastity."

(pp.453-4)

The precise nature of this fulfilment is unclear. But what Powys indicates is that the end of his hero is involved, not with the restoration offered him by Nance, but with the pull of the more dangerous aspects of his imagination. Powys chooses this unknown quality of imagination in preference to security.

What of the "white light" which Adrian conceives as the glorious end of his "philosophy of destruction", and which his exultant death seems to point towards? Professor Wilson Knight compares this light to "the 'Nirvana' of Buddhist philosophy", and to the enjoyment of "not-being" later advocated by Powys in The Art of Happiness (28). But the ecstatic dissolution envisaged by Sorio is a long way from the quiet repose of death in late Powys, where

consciousness seems to lapse gently in a dissolution among the elements themselves. "Nirvana" too is consistently refused by Powys both before and after Rodmoor. In Lucifer (1905), Pan replies to the Buddha with an obscene gesture, and Satan finds in India "hateful spiritual air", praising Pan for his "signal of defiance high/and deathless war!" (29). In The Complex Vision (1920) "The oriental conception of "Nirvana" is no more than a soothing opiate administered to a soul that has grown weary of its complex vision and weary of its irreducible personality" (30).

Sorio's desire for absolute destruction is really what it plainly means - a frenzy to escape the necessary intertwinings of contraries which are already implicit in Powys's view of life in Rodmoor. The achievement and power of Rodmoor are not in its end, but in Powys's confrontation with the forces which drive Sorio to it, and in his recognition that his growth as a novelist will not be achieved by avoiding it. Powys chooses the powers of the imagination against the consolations of adaption, although he is not yet sure where these powers will lead him. He chooses the inheritance of his mother, and, like those of the kingdom of "The Mothers", not only submits to fate, but joyfully embraces it. In letters to Llewelyn, when chided for his perverse cerebralism and wayward imagination, John Cowper retorted

I am the son of Mary Cowper, my friend ...

I may be perverted degenerate, a semi-lunatic, but what you call my rhetoric, my meretricious rhetoric, is to me the direct natural inevitable expression of what thrills me. (31)

All the "morbid" elements of Rodmoor appear transmuted in later novels. In 1952, Powys described this transmutation, in which

he purged his enjoyment of his characters' wickedness; his "sea-change" is eager to escape from conventional categories:

..... the chart recommended neither the orthodox nor the heretical course as the best sea-course for my particular temper but on the contrary, though I was writing prose, a purely poetic one. (32).

#### IV DUCDAME

In Ducdame (1925), Powys broaches this "poetic" solution. The explicit viciousness of Rodmoor is muted, and the Powys hero, Rook Ashover, embarks upon the creation of a sustaining imaginative life. The inner liberation which he craves is conceived as

some unearthly Limbo - some Elysian Fourth Dimension - out of Space and out of Time - where everything was, as it were, painted with gray upon gray; and where large and liberating thoughts moved to and fro over cool, wet grass like enormous swallows, easily, naturally, without any effort; (p.264).

This "Fourth Dimension" is only envisaged at a few high points in the novel; it arises out of, and is an extension of, Rook's pervasive response to the lush and luxuriant Dorset landscape in which the novel is set. This exceedingly "poetic" landscape has pronounced otherworldly characteristics, as at the very beginning of Ducdame, where Rook surveys the "cold unearthliness" of the moonlit countryside:

The empty white road, the bridge over the river, the wide water meadows beyond the river, all lay before him transformed, etherealized. The liquid luminosity that filled the air seemed to emanate from something remoter and more mysterious than that round silvery disc floating in the high zenith.

Everything seemed insubstantial and dream-like. Shapes and shadows! Shadows and shapes! All the familiar things were distinct enough in that diffused pallor. But they seemed to him withdrawn, remote, intangible; as if he were regarding them from some solitary tower. (p.2)

Ducdame describes Rook Ashover's attempt to pursue life as a series of such "sweet solitary sensations" (p.303), and the forces which threaten this life. These forces are both internal and external, and are opposites familiar from Rodmoor.

There is the power of the destructive instinct, symbolized by the nihilistic vicar of Ashover village, William Hastings. The desire for oblivion is a consequence in Rook of a loss of faith in the sustenance of his imaginative life. Rook is already alienated by temperament from the common visions of purpose in human life - work, marriage, religion. Only a firm loyalty to his particular inner world can prevent him falling into a void of meaninglessness. On the other side is the "creative" energy of the Ashover "life-urge", which demands of Rook a son to continue the family line. This "life-urge" is largely an external influence, pressing the claims of class and family, but is nonetheless implanted in Rook's conscience, and calls upon him to discipline his inner life into a pattern of "nature" as it is commonly understood. For most of the narrative Rook asserts his own course between these extremes, yet at the end it is his horror of the "life-urge" which throws him into a desire for death.

The powers in the novel are given supernatural aspects; thought penetrates ideal regions, as with Rook's "Fourth Dimension". The Ashover "life-urge" has its ghostly spokesmen in the voices of the dead from the family tomb. Of William Hastings' nihilistic "Book of Destruction" Powys speculates "Is there, perhaps, a power of

destruction in human thought capable of projecting its magnetism beyond its own realm of immaterial ideas?" (p.45)

The thoughts of the inhabitants of Rook's "Fourth Dimension" are "made of memories and of hopes, never of logic or of reason" (pp.264-5). Hastings' book is a work of demonic logic. His universe is mechanistic, and his book points to "the unwinding of the clock" (p.367). For Hastings' unsuitably young and tender wife, Nell, the book is a product of a "monstrous thinking machine" (p.47). As with Pater's Sebastian van Storck, the application of logic without the quality of imagination leads to nihilism. Hastings is significantly set apart from the Dorset landscape which is at the centre of Ducdame. He is a Londoner, with his philosophy a result of an unhappy metropolitan childhood, and he experiences one of the scenes of preternaturally sinister urban desolation which Powys with some strain inserts into his market towns. Bishop's Forley is the only glimpse of barrenness in the prevailing lushness of Ducdame, so different from the forlornness of the Rodmoor fens. There are hints of a supernatural opposition between Hastings' book and the Ashover "life-urge". When the Ashover "life-urge" moves towards fulfilment, progress on the book is retarded, and the prophecy of the clairvoyant Betsy Cooper, "Till book be burned no child'll be borned", is realised, in the sense that Lady Ann's labour pains begin at the moment when the manuscript is consumed by flames.

In Rodmoor, even the tenderly supportive restoration offered to Adrian Sorio by Nance Herrick was ultimately unacceptable. The Ashover "life-urge" is a much clearer threat to Rook's personal independence. Although part of nature, and encouraged by the spirits of buried Ashovers, this power represents the fertility of nature

confined to narrow bounds of legitimacy. Its symbols are dull and inert, such as the "mouse-coloured dust" (p.5) of the family graves, and its appeals are to the values of society - social standing must be maintained, possession of Ashover property perpetuated. The errant Rook must be persuaded into social adaption.

The continued life of Ashover blood is not seriously in doubt: "Ashover immorality" has spawned numerous bastards. "I daresay I've got plenty of other relations hidden away somewhere if the truth were known", hazards Rook (p.68).

Of these illegitimate offspring, we see the octogenarian Corporal Dick - who has in turn possibly fathered the idiot boy Binnory Drool -and the hideous "half-beasties" who are Rook's half-brothers. It is in the caravan where these grotesque Ashover progeny live that Rook is given his vision of "Cimmery Land", his "Fourth Dimension", from the crystal ball of Betsy Cooper. Powys credits these distorted Ashovers with intuitive powers, foreshadowing later novels where wisdom is reached through horror and ugliness.

The experience which Rook gains from this aberrant strain of his family is contrasted with the numbing conventions of the orthodox line: Rook walks from Betsy Cooper's caravan to his mother's birthday picnic and its brittle, malicious social badinage. His family discuss matters of "breeding" and "manners" - the social values which have robbed Rook of his plebeian mistress Netta, and trapped him in marriage to his cousin, Lady Ann:

Rook's mind at that moment sank down into a veritable gulf of misery. He saw himself for the rest of his life having to deal with this strong, capable, high-spirited woman, for

whose personality at that moment, although she was the mother of his child, he felt not one single shred of love, but rather something that bordered very closely upon sheer hatred. (p.268)

Ann Ashover is given the nickname "Missy Sparrow-Hawk" - a predatory bird in contrast to Rook, the scavenger. Her warm-blooded, athletic nature finds expression in hunting and energetic walks with a large Newfoundland dog - an attitude to the natural world very different from Rook's rapt contemplation. Like Nance Herrick, she is a natural mother, responding to the contact of the earth in her pregnancy. The highly bred daughter of a line of diplomats, she schemes for social correctness, and finds an ally in Rook's unyielding mother. The two women conspire together over a silver and Meissen-decked tea-table in Mrs Ashover's third floor retreat. Ann is only unsettled by the dark side of the Ashover family: the idiot Binnory is capable of browbeating her into tears, and although she attempts to freeze Betsy Cooper with a disdainful, patrician tone, the old woman's prophecy rings in her ears.

Rook chafes under her dominance, but she is "baffled and beaten" by Rook's death. Despite the birth of an Ashover heir, Ann's life, we are told, is indelibly scarred.

What Powys indicates in Rook's suffocation in his marriage is that even should his hero escape Hastings' nihilism, the normal "life-urge" - or, in Rodmoor, Nance Herrick's "kindly normal paths" - are not for him. Wolf Solent, the middle-class drop-out, and the tramp figures of subsequent Powys heroes, are to shed responsibilities of social conformity, just as they are debarred by temperament from society's consolations.

Before his entrapment by Lady Ann, Rook has charted his own course independent of orthodoxies. In defiance of his mother, Rook had brought Netta Page to live with him. It is this relationship in which Rook finds genuine happiness; Netta, a second-rate actress, the cast-off mistress of a major-general, is as submissive as Lady Ann is dominant. Netta satisfies the prime instinct in Rook's love-life - the instinct to possess:

The truth was that the peculiar "formula" or illusory "symbol" of his especial kind of sensuality had always implied a very definite relation between himself and the object of its attraction, a relation according to which it was necessary for him to feel entirely independent and detached from the other person; necessary, in fact, that he should feel himself to be stronger, more formidable, more integrated than this other. (p.305)

Rook compares his relationship with Netta with his marriage to the formidable Ann:

His "love-making" with Cousin Ann had always been of a very light and a very superficial sort, from his side of the encounter; just because the strength of her nature precluded that protective or possessive thrill which his vice demanded; and now that he found himself actually married to her, nothing that her brilliance or her beauty or her grand manner could achieve gave him the faintest sensual pleasure. (p.305)

The morality of Rook's "vice" is notably absent from discussion. Netta, happy in Rook's "possession", only leaves Ashover out of a misguided notion of selflessness implanted in her by the designing Lady Ann. Powys, pointing out Rook's unhappiness when "possessed" by Ann in much the same way as Rook had possessed Netta, merely asserts the need of relationship to answer the individualities of temperament.



Netta's return to Ashover with religious principles which prevent her reunion with Rook forces him to accept the limitations of his temperament, having enjoyed its expression. Netta's assertion of independence shatters Rook, although she loves him still. Rook can make no real answer to this breaking of their relation:

If there had been anything definite in his mind he could have dealt with this blow more effectively, have found an antidote for its smart. He was standing before her there, pleading angrily and helplessly for something that had no shape, no substance, no form. He was pleading with her to have pity upon his life-illusion, pity upon his soul's inmost self, pity upon the utmost reflection of himself before himself which lay in the abysmal mirror of his self-deception as the sky lies in a mirage of water above arid sands! (p.395)

Ducdame marks the first appearance of the idea of "life-illusion", which is crucial to Wolf Solent. Rook's "life-illusion" - the idea of his identity as it appears before himself - "implied his freedom from every sort of responsibility, except the responsibility of being a good son and a good brother" (p.384). This is the Powys hero as drifter, "so indifferent to what he did, so indifferent to work, to ambition, to any purpose in things at all". (p.169)

While Wolf Solent is the purest novel of the Powys-hero as drifter, in Ducdame there are extended passages which explore this ranging consciousness. Dr. Cavaliero and Dr. Easingwood both rightly admire Chapter Nineteen of Ducdame, which most foreshadows the manner of the later novel. A little further on in the book is an example of Rook's inner life drawing its quality from chance experience:

What wind there was - an almost imperceptible breath from the east - reached his senses across this cornfield; and the smell of the ripe ears, like a quintessential airy diffusion of the bread of life itself, passed into his veins and increased the heathen exuberance of his blood. For the first time since he had seen that white swan's neck curving so provocatively at Comber's End, Rook immersed himself in the great undertide of the world's sensual life. All sorts of passing impressions, selected at random out of the things he had seen that day, conspired together to push him on into this fatal humour. The blue lobelia was there, the yellow wasps were there, the rusty nails in the scraps of cloth against the hot brick wall were there, the tonic fragrance of the fir trees; and now this sense of the bounty of the gods in the "living bread" of the generations! (p.341)

There then comes over Rook "the old mysterious acceptance of life upon the earth". The experience is typically Powysian. It arises from an absorption in nature, but rejects the pretty with its "rusty nails in the scraps of cloth", it is quite unmystical in its self-sustenance, and its completeness within the terms in which it is cast: the experience is "heathen", and its "gods" are if anybody's Homer's. It grows from an assembly of "passing impressions, selected at random", and while their selection may not be important, it is essential that there should be more than one. Diverse stimuli are collected to produce a moment of ecstasy: Powys analyzes ecstasy in the Autobiography, we remember, as a collision of diverse elements. In its own self-fulfilment, the experience involves no questions of anterior cause, and calls to no subsequent action. In fact, Rook's ecstasy of acceptance is superseded by despair once again in the course of the novel, but this in no way invalidates what has been. It is most decidedly the experience of a "drifter".

Powys asserts a positive value in such apparent lack of purpose. As his novels increasingly subject this way of life to

unhappy blows of chance, and to the temptations of premature certainties, we realize that this "drifting" entails a strong inner resilience, and is the expression of a very delicate inner poise. In Duccame, William Hastings, in the toils of his demonically purposive book, wonders at Rook's apparent philosophical advantage: "But how could a person so casual, so formless, so evasive, be as close to the open secret as one who was concentrated and knit together, with a deep hard purpose in his mind?" (p.291)

The Powys hero's "drifting" not only illustrates his own cast of mind, but becomes the model for Powys's practice as novelist and autobiographer. The books become more diffused and minute: instead of the stupendous oppositions of "Power" and "Sacrifice", "Destruction" and "Creation", we have a desire to erect philosophical structure from the ground up, from the chance perception of feelings and natural objects such as is found in the experience of Rook Ashover.

Rook is not able to sustain his vocation as a man without responsibility. His life-illusion is crushed by his separation from Netta and his marriage to Ann. He craves "drowning in these vast inhuman elements that obeyed no master and had no purpose or object or obligation" (p.426), dimly hoping that the "Cimmerian" land - the "Fourth Dimension" seen in Betsy Cooper's crystal ball, will be found beyond death. This "Cimmery Land" is "the land where folks do live like unborn babes" (p.264), reminiscent of the pre-natal vision accredited in the "Immortality" Ode. From this land comes the ghost of Rook's unborn son, who receives Rook's declaration "that all Life asks of us is to be recognized and loved" with a sweetness implying confirmation (p.310).

But it seems that Rook will not find the visionary landscape beyond the grave that Wolf Solent will find this side of it, for Rook dies at the hands of the philosopher of Nothingness, William Hastings. Rook's imaginative life has not proved strong enough to resist the pull of despair, and he and Hastings are united in death: Hastings survives his murder of Rook only briefly, as a speechless human cipher.

The end of Ducdame is not with Rook, but with his brother Lexie, another portrait of Llewelyn Powys. There was a similar survival of the sweet-tempered life-loving brother in Luke Andersen of Wood and Stone. Like Rook, Lexie is a lover of "sensations", his love for the simple conditions of existence heightened by his approaching death from tuberculosis. In contrast to the turbid course of Rook's love-life, his love of women is indulged "on a simple natural earthy basis" (p.58). He is last seen riding a painted horse on a circus roundabout in the company of Nell Hastings, whose romantic nature will, we feel, find a natural partner in Lexie after the frustrations of her marriage with Hastings and love for Rook. Lexie's balanced personality seems to suggest that, with a steadier mind, all Rook's troubles could have been avoided. But set against the deep affection between the two brothers, this conclusion is not a jealous one.

Another, more ambiguous sequel is in the career of Hastings' murder weapon, the garden rake "Lovejoy", christened so by Binnory Drool from the maker's name on the handle. The rake is carried off victoriously and shown with pride to Rook's deformed relatives, the "half-beasties". Rook's spirit apparently survives more in this object than in the son he has fathered:

Thus is happened that while the Squire of Ashover and the Priest of Ashover became less and less endowed with the

illusion of personality, the rake "Lovejoy" gathered to itself more and more of the ambiguous value. (p.444).

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I have described the early novels with an eye to Powys's inner development, and to the definition and deployment of the forces of his imagination. It is at this level that they are most powerful. As self-sufficient works of fiction, they are weak, but their faults - like the faults of the mature Powys - require little analysis, for they are on the surface for all to see. The drama of Wood and Stone is particularly stiff-jointed, though Powys has achieved much greater fluency by Ducdame; one can compare the juddering stage mechanism in the scene of James Andersen's death with the real narrative excitement which accompanies Netta Page's flight from Ashover and Rook's vain pursuit.

Rodmoor and Ducdame are smothered in "atmosphere". Rodmoor is loaded with a thick Gothic impasto, and a character such as Brand Renshaw, of real significance to Powys's imaginative life, descends into lamentable Victorian villainy with his cries of "Bah!". Ducdame is indiscriminately "poetic", its natural description - careful, and sometimes beautiful - is tediously botanical. The evocations of seasonal change which open so many chapters are repetitious, haunted for the reader by the mocking echo of the asterisked paragraphs in Cold Comfort Farm.

In Ducdame, too, it is not yet clear that Rook's unprofitable daydreaming is, for the reader, to become anything else. Powys's pre-occupation with reverie is to await its full justification in later novels.

It is nevertheless appropriate that Powys's first heroes should die in their novels. While their deaths do represent inner failure, Powys's vision is always to be coloured by an awareness of "death in life", the "rex semi-mortuus" of Celtic mythology. In 1917, Powys published his poem "Saturn":

Did ever the winds with so indrawn breath  
 Wait and listen, and listen and wait?  
 Did ever life come so near to death  
 And remain so wistful and passionate? (33)

In "Saturn" the poet sees the return of the god from his tomb, but the vision turns out to be illusory.

In the same volume, Mandragora, is "The Saturnian", from which comes Professor Wilson Knight's epigraph for The Saturnian Quest :

Ah, I must follow it high and low,  
 Tho' it leave me cold to your human touch!  
 Some starry sorcery made me so;  
 And from my birth have I been such. (34)

Keats' "Hyperion" is a clear source for Powys's "Saturnian" theme. But the poem "the Saturnian" points to a "starry" influence which would appear to precede the literary. Powys certainly paid attention to his horoscope; his waywardness, he hazards, might be laid down to "the Moon 'in trine' with Venus" (35). He would also have found Saturn powerfully in the ascendant.

In Suspended Judgements, Powys praised Verlaine's "Poemes Saturniens", and his enthusiasm for Verlaine remained alive in the 1940's, when he again made efforts to obtain an edition of the poems. The "Saturnian" temperament is very much active in the early novels, but bound in its melancholic aspect as described by Verlaine:

Or ceux-la qui sont nés sous le signe SATURNE,  
 Fauve planète, chère aux nécromanciens,  
 Ont entre tous, d'après les grimoires anciens  
 Bonne part de malheur et bonne part de bile.  
 L'Imagination, inquiète et débile,  
 Vient rendre nul en eux l'effort de la Raison.  
 Dans leurs veines, le sang, subtil comme un poison,  
 Brûlant comme une lave, et rare, coule et roule  
 En grésillant leur triste Idéal qui s'écroule.  
 Tels les Saturniens doivent souffrir et tels  
 Mourir, - en admettant que nous soyons mortels,  
 Leur plan de vie étant dessiné ligne à ligne  
 Par la logique d'une Influence maligne. (36)

## Chapter Two

## Notes

Wood and Stone (New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1915, and London: Village Press 1974).

Rodmoor (New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1916, and London: Macdonald, 1973).

Ducdame (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., and London: Grant Richards, 1925, and Village Press, 1974).

The Village Press and Macdonald editions of these novels are reprints of the first American editions, preserving the pagination of the originals.

- (1) Autobiography, p.652.
- (2) Glen Cavaliero, "Phoenix and Serpent: D.H. Lawrence and John Cowper Powys", The Powys Review, No. 2 (Winter 1977), p.51.
- (3) Confessions of Two Brothers, p.93.
- (4) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, 1902-1925, p.135.
- (5) Letters to Clifford Tolchard, p.12.
- (6) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, p.279.
- (7) *ibid.*, p.36.
- (8) *ibid.*, p.110.
- (9) *ibid.*, p.133.
- (10) "The Hamadryad and the Demon," The Powys Newsletter, No. 2, 1971, n.p..
- (11) *ibid.*.
- (12) Peter Easingwood, "A Critical Study of John Cowper Powys," Ph.D., Leeds, 1976, p.456.
- (13) "My First Publication," Mark Twain Quarterly, IX, No. 2 (Winter 1952), p.22.



- (14) Letter to Marian Powys, August 1919, MS.
- (15) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, p.35.
- (16) Autobiography, p.15.
- (17) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, p.144.
- (18) "Louis Marlow," Welsh Ambassadors: Powys Lives and Letters (London: Bertram Rota, 1971), p.5.
- (19) Glen Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys, Novelist, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p.24.
- (20) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, p.145.
- (21) Roland Mathias, The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk: John Cowper Powys as Poet (London: Enitharmon Press, 1979), pp.94-5.
- (22) Wolf's Bane, p.104.
- (23) Cicely Hill, "Life, Death, Books and Heroes: A Study of Ducdame and Rodmoor", a paper read to the Powys Society, 8 November, 1975.
- (24) Pater, Imaginary Portraits (London: Macmillan, 4th edn., 1901), p.110.
- (25) The Complex Vision, p.35.
- (26) Suspended Judgements, p.210.
- (27) *ibid.*, p.250.
- (28) Rodmoor, 1973, Preface, n.p..
- (29) Lucifer, pp.111-2.
- (30) The Complex Vision, p.76.
- (31) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, p.328.
- (32) "My First Publication," p.23.
- (33) Mandragora, p.78.

- (34) *ibid.*, p.63.
- (35) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, p.326.
- (36) Verlaine, Poèmes Saturniens suivi de Fêtes Galantes (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1961), pp.21-2.

## CHAPTER THREE

## WOLF SOLENT

The first sentence of Wolf Solent declares Powys's new confidence in plunging directly into the mind of its central character:

From Waterloo Station to the small country town of Ramsgard in Dorset is a journey of not more than three or four hours, but having by good luck found a compartment to himself, Wolf Solent was able to indulge in such an orgy of concentrated thought, that these three or four hours lengthened themselves out into something beyond all human measurement. (p.1)

The whole novel is an "orgy of concentrated thought"; Wolf's mind is the measure of what happens, and in the opening chapter Powys shows a new mastery of a language of introspection. At one level, the chapter is conventional enough; the protagonist travels to the scene of the novel, allowing Powys the leisure to present to the reader Wolf's past life in brief, and the topography of Dorset. In technique, it compares with scores of novels, though most notably with The Idiot, where we see Myshkin about to plunge into the claustrophobic intrigue of St. Petersburg. But at another level, the chapter is extraordinary. Wolf's "orgy of concentrated thought ... lengthened ... beyond all human measurement" is an accurate foretaste of how, in Wolf Solent, Powys manipulates the relations between inward and outward time and event, making the novel a depiction of an individual struggle to achieve a balance between inward and outward reality.(\*). Instead of the impedimenta of plot, we have a procession of thoughts which accompanies the movement of the train:

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(\*) The "blend of outward and inward vision" which Dr. Cavallero (p.31) finds in Rodmoor is apparent in all Powys's work. But in Wolf Solent the relationship between outward and inward is in a state of crisis, and becomes the very subject of the novel.

Soon the train that carried him ran rapidly past the queer-looking tower of Basingstoke Church, and his thoughts took yet another turn. There was a tethered cow eating grass in the churchyard; and as for the space of a quarter of a minute he watched this cow, it gathered to itself such an inviolable placidity that its feet seemed planted in a green pool of quietness that was older than life itself.

But the Basingstoke Church tower substituted itself for the image of the cow; and it seemed to Solent as though all the religions in the world were nothing but so many creaking and splashing barges, whereon the souls of men ferried themselves over those lakes of primal silence, disturbing the swaying water-plants that grew there and driving away the shy water-fowl! (p.5)

This sequence of non-causally related thought-images is typical of the way impressions succeed each other in Wolf's mind. Images approach the eye, to be interpreted by free association as the private symbols of an inner reality. Such seemingly chance impressions become the counters in the book's thematic interplay. The symbols are convincing for the reader, for they are created from the experience of Wolf himself, not heavily imposed upon the book by its author, and it is Powys's achievement in the first chapter of Wolf Solent to present this imagination, at the same time receptive and interpretative, working at great intensity. Powys creates what Wolf calls "the charmed circle" within which the drama of the novel is to take place. That Powys presents Wolf's "free association" complete, creating an illusion of lack of selection, only adds to the book's verisimilitude. Wolf's thoughts mingle and collide, creating conjunctions which are sometimes significant, sometimes not. It is the novel where Powys's manipulation is least in evidence, a pond (the metaphor is appropriate) into which the reader may dive for most various treasure.

Wolf Solent is the culmination of Powys's first period; we have his final engagement with the lure of nihilism and self-destruction. Themes and characters from earlier work reappear, differentiated and re-ordered. The irredeemable misanthropy of Maurice Quincunx in Wood and Stone is relegated to the perimeter of the drama in Jason Otter, while Wolf's own "malice" is a central issue of the book. The nihilistic aspects of Adrian Sorio and William Hastings appear in Squire Urquhart, who physically resembles Hastings with his "Napoleonic paunch" (479). This nihilism is to Wolf a temptation, which he overcomes. But the development of technique separating Hastings and Urquhart is striking, and shows how much better the mature Powys is able to clothe symbol with the realism of fiction, and replace melodrama with symbolic gesture. Henry James criticized George Eliot's characters as creations of her "moral consciousness", and the same might be said of Powys's earlier symbolic characters; they are born of a need for symbolic figures. In Wolf Solent the characters preserve their symbolism, but also attain considerable realism. William Hastings wrote an unlikely philosophical work on an abstract destructive force, Urquhart's book is still an expression of inner sterility, but his cynical "History of Dorset" is much more complex in its significance. Similarly, where Hastings was required literally to murder Rook Ashover, Wolf's employment as Urquhart's secretary more economically indicates submission to a wasting force. As if to underline the parallel, we see Wolf survive where Jimmy Redfern, his predecessor in Urquhart's employ, died in mysterious circumstances.

Powys's greater fluency in interior monologue allows choric characters to disappear; there is no need for the commentary of a Francis Taxater, Fingal Raughty or Lexie Ashover. The discussion

proceeds within the framework provided by Wolf's own imagination. Powys as narrator scarcely obtrudes. Part of this gain can be ascribed to Powys's strict adherence to Wolf's point of view - what he called "straining" the novel through Wolf's consciousness. But this point of view does not entail the uncritical identification of either Powys or the reader with Wolf, any more than is implied by Dostoevsky's study of Raskolnikov's consciousness in Crime and Punishment. Distance is vital, and, like Crime and Punishment, Wolf Solent is about self-deception.

This distance is important in spite of Powys's self-projection in the character of Wolf, which he acknowledged in his 1960 Preface:

Writing a preface to this book entitled Wolf Solent is like writing a commentary on my whole life as it was, as it is, and as it probably will be, before I die. (p.V)

Wolf's cast of mind is that of Powys himself, and Powys draws upon his family for other characters in the novel - upon Theodore Powys for Jason Otter, and upon his sister Marian for Wolf's mother (\*), but the incidents of the novel are wholly fictional. Wolf Solent is self-exploratory, but not autobiographical. It is also profoundly self-critical. In The Complex Vision, Powys claims that "supreme artists" attain true vision through becoming "a sort of living sacrifice or victim of self-vivisection" (1). While the pains of this self-analysis are most obviously present in the Autobiography, we will find that Wolf Solent is also an exercise in "self-vivisection", no less extreme for its elements of humour and self-mockery.

Wolf Solent was written with care. Wood and Stone and Rodmoor were written in a matter of months; Ducdame took possibly

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(\*) "I have an idea that you will like my picture of you as Mrs. William Solent in my new book ..." (Letter to Marian Powys, 25th May 1926, MS)

only slightly longer. The writing of Wolf Solent occupied Powys, at the least, for just under three years. On January 25th 1926, he wrote to Marian of his "as yet only a third finished story", but anticipated its fairly speed completion - "I fear it will be still unfinished at the end of March". On 20th November, 1927, he wrote again "Slowly am I writing the closing chapters - very slowly - I seem unable to hurry it - but I am very interested in it which is the chiefest thing ..." On 18th July, 1928, he wrote of his plan "to go right through my novel again for the second time for I have brought my carbon copy with me" (2).

The revisions of Wolf Solent are not merely stylistic, but concern the novel's prime direction. Ben Jones, in a paper, The Disfigurement of Gerda, has written of the six excised chapters, replaced in the published version by Chapter XIX, "Wine", where, in the earlier draft, Gerda's beauty is ruined by a fall on a rusty nail in her back yard. In the final version, her disfigurement is symbolic; she loses the "miraculous power" of imitating a blackbird's song which had first excited Wolf's passion (p.392). Such a revision away from a drama of externals to a drama of delicate symbolism is characteristic of the moderation of Wolf Solent, which at times seems to promise melodramatics, only to tease the reader by avoiding them. The "abominable evil" of Squire Urquhart is revealed as minor "senile perversity", Wolf's furious argument with his mother is revealed as a game. Wolf sets out to drown himself in the Gothic and mysterious Lenty Pond, but finds the water cold and uninviting. He philosophically stirs the surface with his stick, a gesture of "Resolution and Independence" recalling Wordsworth's leech-gatherer, in a poem which Powys greatly admired.

There is no strongly dramatic action, such as Powys had attempted in earlier books, and was to return to in Glastonbury. In 1960, Powys stressed the book's philosophical debate, and the theme of "opposites":

What might be called the purpose and essence and inmost being of this book is the necessity of opposites. Life and Death, Good and Evil, Matter and Spirit, Body and Soul, Reality and Appearance have to be joined together, have to be forced into one another, have to be proved dependent upon each other, ... (p.V)

Powys manages to present such a process, here expressed as somewhat dizzy abstraction, as convincing fictional drama. Wolf begins as a person of ill-balanced development. Absorbed in an "inner reality" of his own creation, he is forced to test this reality against a modified view of his own nature, and of the world around him. Convinced of his self-image as an agent of universal good in a battle against evil, he must accept a more modest role of the self in a world of ambiguous moral values. Long dominated by his mother, he returns to the land of his father to realize another part of his psychological inheritance.

According to Donald Davidson, a perceptive early critic of the book, Powys called Wolf Solent a "psychic map" (3). The phrase is apt in several ways. The book is a guide for Powys himself through uncertain psychological territory, bringing to disordered and semi-conscious mental states the clarity which comes with articulation; it is the resulting "map" brought home after a period of self-exploration, and as such is part of the healing process which for Powys was part of the function of literature. But the word "map" is also appropriate to a novel which deals with a survey of one



consciousness within a limited geographical area, exploring the relationship between the two. Wolf's mentality is depicted in landscape imagery, and Powys's depiction of Wessex passes through Wolf's interpretation. It is the study of the relationship between man and nature in physical, mental and spiritual aspects. At times Wolf feels intentional forces at work in the natural world around him, just as he feels an animal and vegetable identity within himself. The human and the non-human merge together in a continuum so intense that at times it is difficult to know the dividing line between Wolf's contemplation of his inner "landscape" and his interpretation of his surroundings. Powys in his Autobiography (4) acknowledges his reading of A.P. Sinnett's Esoteric Buddhism, which asserts the unity of all nature, and suggests a continuing evolutionary spiral of development through "The Planetary Chain", whereby inert matter grows to manhood, and man returns to matter (5).

Wolf realizes his relationship with the non-human through a mental device he calls his "mythology":

It was as if he had been some changeling from a different planet, a planet where the issues of life - the great dualistic struggles between life and death - never emerged from the charmed circle of the individual's private consciousness.

Wolf himself, if pressed to describe it, would have used some simple earthly metaphor. He would have said that his magnetic impulses resembled the expanding of great vegetable leaves over a still pool - leaves nourished by hushed noons, by liquid, transparent nights, by all the movements of the elements - but making some inexplicable difference, merely by their spontaneous expansion, to the great hidden struggle always going on in Nature between the good and the evil forces.

Outward things, such as that terrible face on the Waterloo steps, or that tethered cow he had seen at

Basingstoke, were to him like faintly-limned images in a mirror, the true reality of which lay all the while in his mind - in these hushed, expanding leaves - in this secret vegetation - the roots of whose being hid themselves beneath the dark waters of his consciousness. (p.8)

This watery landscape suggests Wolf's amphibiousness - his life in both the human and sub-human worlds, and his adaptability to circumstance (Llewelyn in his letters called John Cowper a "salamander"). Elsewhere in the novel Wolf sees his detachment from humanity as "reptilian"; his lusts are "saurian", an alder-root becomes an image of himself as a "smooth phallic serpent of vegetation", and he sees himself as an "uprisen hooded serpent". He is an "ichthyosaurus", an idea Powys was to expand in In Defence of Sensuality. The image is of cold-blooded life, of animals who respond physiologically to their environment, who try to camouflage themselves against it, and who belong to an earlier stage of evolutionary development, confirming Wolf's deep sense of atavism. (\*) The animals that Wolf calls to mind are largely insect-gathering, capable less of muscular aggression than of insidious poisonous malice. They conceal themselves until provoked. The snake is also untrammelled by the obligation of mammals to rear their young and is recognised by Wolf as of phallic significance. Wolf, resenting maternal domination, and finding in his marriage to Gerda a social and familial obligation, uses the snake as a picture of himself untied by human responsibilities. When Wolf eventually finds responsibility forced upon him, his flight from the human grows into a hatred of all mammals:

But, oh God, oh God! I wish I hadn't taken this two hundred pounds, and I wish Mr. Malakite wasn't going to Weymouth tomorrow!

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(\*) The saurian and tropical features of Wolf's "mythological" landscape were influenced by Powys's experience of Louisiana. He wrote to Marian from New Orleans, on December 1st 1925, at about the time Wolf Solent was begun:

He lifted his eyes from the wet stubble and let them roam at large across the green expanse of the great vale. And there swept over him an immense loathing for the furtive indecencies of human life and beast life upon the earth. 'It would be so much better,' he thought, 'if all men and all beasts were wiped out, and only birds and fishes left! Everything that copulates, everything that carries its young, how good if it vanished in one great catastrophe from the earth, leaving only the feathered and the finned!' (p.413)

This loathing is only the culmination of an attitude to life which is from the beginning "inhuman". Ironically, it is on the morning when he is to meet Gerda for the first time that Wolf lies in bed, considering his ingrained habit of "fetish-worship":

It was a worship of ... all manner of inanimate little things; the 'souls' of all those strange, chemical groupings that give a living identity to houses, towns, places, countrysides ....

'Am I inhuman in some appallingly incurable manner?' he thought. 'Is the affection I have for human beings less important to me than the shadows of leaves and the flowing of waters?'

...No! Whatever this fetish-worship might be, it certainly was different from 'love'. Love was a possessive, feverish, exacting emotion. It demanded a response. It called for mutual activity. It entailed responsibility. (pp.42-3)

Wolf Solent describes this "inhuman" temperament in its relationships - or the failure of its relationships - with two women: the classically beautiful Gerda, whom Wolf marries, and the sylph-like Christie Malakite, whose attraction for Wolf is partly spiritual, but has also its distinctive physical dimension.

From its beginning, Wolf's relationship with Gerda is one of predator and prey. After his first meeting with her, he contemplates her capture with impersonal desire. She excites an "insatiable

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*"In the parks are incredibly enormous great ever-green oaks - some twenty feet I should say in circumference and hanging from their branches that queer lichen-moss which no-one can believe in until they see it for it is like old old seaweed hanging from the arches of some submarine city under the water.*

craving" (p.62); Wolf's first reaction to her is her perception of a "beauty so startling that is seemed to destroy in a moment all ordinary human relations" (p.58). She becomes in Wolf's imagination Helen of Troy, a wood-nymph, a dryad, Daphne, Syrinx, Atalanta, a hunted oread. The excitement of the chase is an essential part of Wolf's pleasure.

This chase continues after their marriage.

Then he bent down, kissed her into consciousness, laughed at her scolding, and with one resolute swing of his arms lifted her bodily from the bed, set her on her feet on the floor, and hugged her to his heart, struggling and indignant. The warmth of her body under the childish white nightgown she wore, buttoned close up to her chin, gave him a rough, earthy, animal ecstasy. He had already discovered that it was more delicious to hold her like this, he himself fully awake and dressed, and she as she was, than under any other circumstances. A pleasant element of the unhabitual and the predatory sweetened for him that particular embrace. 'Don't!' she cried, struggling to push him away. (p.212)

Powys shows an ability to credit Gerda's outraged feelings, and we recognise this scene as one of violation in domestic disguise. But it is a measure of Powys's distance from Wolf that his pursuit of Gerda is also extremely comic. Wolf's bewitchment is real, but Powys humorously emphasizes his withdrawal from his surroundings:

Drugged and dazed with the Three Peewits' ale and with these amorous contemplations, Wolf sat on beneath that picture of Queen Victoria in a species of erotic trance. (p.62)

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*I went to a place where there were enormous alligators too as old and motionless as the trees - funny brainless-looking things - great saurian lizards of the prehistoric slime - through whose heads thoughts must pass at the rate of one to two or three weeks-comatose and hushed they stay for hours thinking the thoughts of the slime - thoughts that are no thoughts, souls that are no souls - anima-non-anima."*

For the reader, the collapse of the Solent marriage is implicit in Gerda's first seduction at "Yellow Bracken", a lyrical scene which is also heavily ironic, with Wolf in the grip of his predatory pursuit, while Gerda responds with a mixture of coquetry and simplicity:

'Shall we try that as a shelter?' he asked. The words were simple enough. But Gerda detected in them the old, equivocal challenge of the male pursuer; ... she began to speak; and since silence rather than words had hitherto been the link between them, the mere utterance of any speech from her at all was a shock strong enough to quell his impetuosity.

'Did you like me directly you saw me, that day in our house?' (p.144)

Powys continues to emphasize the mutual isolation of the two:

... so this man and this girl, whose relation to each other could never quite be the same again, remained distinct, removed, aloof, each standing like a silent bivouac-watcher, guarding the smouldering camp-fire of their own hidden thoughts. (p.151)

Wolf is not simply oblivious to their lack of common bond; their remoteness from each other heightens the quality of his private experience:

No casual words of easy tenderness should spoil the classical simplicity of their rare encounter! For classical it had been, in its arbitrariness, in its abruptness, in its heroic defiance of so many obstacles; as he had always prayed that any great love-affair of his might be. (p.151)

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*In his Autobiography (p.596), Powys claimed to "loathe tropical foliage", which reminded him of the oppressive American summer. This "mythological" landscape is both seductive and sinister, as is appropriate to Wolf's "cherished vice".*

Gerda immediately challenges Wolf's assumptions about their marriage: "I don't think your mother will want to live with us". But for Wolf, domestic fantasy has succeeded sexual fantasy:

But Wolf had already formed a very definite image in his mind of the enchanted hovel where he would live with this unparalleled being, free from all care. (pp.152-3)

During the couple's absence, Gerda's younger brother, Lob, has ominously cut deep incisions in the massive walking-stick carried by all Powys's heroes, cherished almost as emblems of their individuality, and serving alternately as weapon and crutch.

The delicate charting of the divergent paths of Wolf and Gerda is one of the great strengths of Wolf Solent. Powys maintains his irony in his description of a fascination which is nonetheless never rejected as absurd, while the Solent menage to the outside world appears in the light of broad comedy, as in Gerda's catastrophic tea party (Chapters X and XI). The social comedy of Wolf's marriage will be important in discussing the collapse of his "mythology".

There is a very different treatment of fantasy in Wolf's relationship with Christie Malakite. Wolf's attachment to her combines sexual attraction with spiritual sympathy. He sees her as "hieratic" and "virginal", like "some withdrawn priestess of Artemis" (p.76) with "a figure so slight and sexless that it resembled those meagre, androgynous forms that can be seen sometimes in early Italian pictures (p.71). It is with Christie that Wolf confronts the contradictions of his own inner life; Christie's attraction for him operates at the deep level of feeling where his "mythology" lies, and often she appears almost as a creature out of Wolf's interior watery

landscape. Christie is associated with sub-marine greenness, and becomes a "water-nymph" (p.72) who disturbs Wolf's deepest nature:

Nothing, he now knew, in his life with Gerda had stirred the earth of that mystic bed. But here, in the centre of that bed, was a living, breathing plant, making everything around it enchanted and transparent by the diffused loveliness of its presence. (p.232)

Christie shares Wolf's 'inhuman' characteristics as "some sort of half-human personality ... some changeling out of the purer elements" (p.210). But despite this deep mutual response, other aspects of Christie prevent their closer union. She warns Wolf, "You must be prepared to find that I haven't a trace of what people call 'the moral sense'." (p.208). Christie, although speaking to Wolf's deepest nature, exists outside the "dualism" which Wolf's "mythology" has entailed. It is ultimately Christie's refusal to join in Wolf's "mythological" game which hastens the collapse of his life-illusion. Christie is associated with many aspects of his Dorset life which Wolf finds most threatening. She is the daughter of a sinister father, Malakite the bookseller, and has been forced out of grim necessity to live with the memory (and possible survival) of her father's incestuousness. Her necessary association with her father's dubious shop renders her insensitive to Wolf's scruples over completing Urquhart's book. To Wolf's suggestion of a deep instinct for evil in Squire Urquhart, Christie replies:

"My mother used to tell me ... that all angels could turn into demons, and all demons could turn into angels." (p.472)

But Wolf is understandably not eager for his dualism to be disturbed. He imagines that the loss of his "mythology" will mean

despair. This despair is embodied in "the face on the Waterloo steps", seen by Wolf upon leaving London for Dorset. The face is an incarnation - as Angus Wilson has pointed out (6), significantly urban - of the phrase "to meet one's Waterloo":

... a mortal man, against whom Providence had grown as malignant as a mad dog. And the woe upon the face was of such a character that Wolf knew at once that no conceivable social readjustments or ameliorative revolutions could ever atone for it - could ever make up for the simple irremediable fact that it had been as it had been! (p.3).

The face is recalled by the expression of the morbid poet, Jason Otter, who "curses God", and who is a picture of pathetic suffering sensitivity. Jason is the man without "life-illusion", stripped of the protective skin which Wolf wears in his "mythology".

Powys's rendering of Wolf's mental life, and in particular of his "life-illusion" and its loss, is an astonishing testimony to his ability to enter states of mind which are nigh pathological, and yet emerge on the other side. The phrase "life-illusion", from The Wild Duck, refers in Ibsen to a severely debilitated psychological state. The cringing, drunken Molvik is "inoculated" with a "life-illusion", and comes to see himself as "daemonic": "But for that, the poor harmless creature would have succumbed to self-contempt and despair many a long year ago." (7)

For Powys, illusion is an ambiguous quality. In A Glastonbury Romance, Geard is to preach "lies, magic, illusion" as the starting point of "new life", and "illusion" is to be an important attribute of "Annwn", Powys's "other dimension". As for "life-illusion", Powys in the Autobiography and A Philosophy of Solitude (8) refers to its



supportive value. But in Powys's most authoritative novelistic statements on the matter, "life-illusion", with its self-dramatization and vanity, must go. This happens in Wolf Solent, and the idea is firmly scotched in Porius.

We have seen how Wolf's life-illusion depends upon an avoidance of responsibility and relation, and also upon a belief in his own goodness, as opposed to the evil he sees around him. This "evil" has very little to do with conduct, and is examined in terms of essence and atmosphere. It is entirely Wolf's creation, a force in the "charmed circle" of his consciousness, but which can be projected upon almost anything in the outside world. Wolf finds evil in modern technology, but also in the Dorset landscape, washed by the rain of the hideous Hindu God, Mukalogo. There is a mysterious evil in Urquhart, and in old Mr. Malakite.

Wolf makes few attempts to sound the mystery of Urquhart's evil. When he does so, the answer is connected with "malice":

Vague intimations concerning some sort of inner malice, that was beyond all viciousness, rose up within him as his mind's deepest response. Hunting irritably for some gap in the hedge by which to escape, he tried to define this inert malice. Was it an atavistic reversion to the primordial 'matter,' or 'world-stuff' - sluggish, reluctant, opaque - out of which, at the beginning of things, life had had to force its way? (p.387)

This is the "inert malice" which is the root of all evil in The Complex Vision, and which Powys defines as "a kind of dull and insensitive hostility, a kind of brutal malignity and callous aversion" (9). It is the malignity of Baltazar Stork.

In the early Wolf Solent of the "mythology", it is noticeable that there is no strong concept - or intuition - of good to balance this strong intuition of evil. Good consists almost entirely of Wolf Solent justifying himself, as his mother protests with vigorous realism (pp 460-1). In fact we can discern a good deal of "malice" in Wolf himself, and his "mythology" is at the same time an escape from the recognition of this malice, and an expression of it.

In The Complex Vision, Powys writes of the consequences of uncontrolled "intuition". One passage appears to prefigure Wolf Solent's condition:

The temptation to allow the intuition to absorb the whole field of consciousness is to certain natures almost irresistible. And yet, when intuition is divorced from the other aspects of the rhythm of life, its tendency to what might be called "the passion of identity" very easily lapses into a sort of spiritual sensuality, destructive to the creative freedom of the soul. Woe to the artist who falls into the quagmire of unbalanced intuition! It is as if he were drugged with a spiritual lust.

To escape from self-loathing, to escape from the odious monotony and the indecent realism of life - what a relief! How desirable to be confronted no longer by that impassable gulf between one's own soul and all other living souls! How desirable to cross the abyss which separates the "something" which is the substance of our being from the "something" which is the substance of the "objective mystery"!

And yet, according to the revelation of the complex vision, this "spiritual ecstasy" is a perversion of the true art of life.... This "passion of identity" offered us by the vice, by the madness of intuition, is not in harmony with the great moments of the soul. (10)

The word "spiritual" in Powys tends to carry unpleasant overtones, pious, unreal, abstracted from the life of the imagination founded on the senses. Wolf's "mythology" offers him just such a

"spiritual ecstasy" as mentioned in The Complex Vision, and is finally dismissed by a "great moment of the soul" at the end of the book. Wolf is also consumed by a "passion of identity", fascinated by the significance of being Wolf Solent, while his "mythology" provides him with "escape" from "self-loathing", "odious monotony" and "indecent realism" - all horrors which he must confront in the course of the novel.

We can discern the beginnings of the collapse of Wolf's life-illusion in the incident which led to his arrival in Dorset. Wolf regards his "mythology" as a guarantee of his stability:

'My life has been industrious, monotonous, patient. I've carried my load like a camel. And I've been able to do this because it hasn't been my real life at all! My "mythology" has been my real life.' (p.9)

Wolf is not strictly accurate here, for on at least one occasion his inner defences have collapsed:

He was telling his pupils quite quietly about Dean Swift; and all of a sudden some mental screen or lid or dam in his own mind completely collapsed and he found himself pouring forth a torrent of wild, indecent invectives upon every aspect of modern civilization. (p.2)

This performance is his "malice-dance". As we will see, Wolf's opposition to modern civilization is not quite so simple, and his "malice" conceals unease. We also learn that Wolf "hid, deep down in his being, a contempt that was actually malicious in its pride for all the human phenomena of worldly success". (p.8). This again is self-deception. In the last chapter, we will find that Wolf's attitude to the worldly Lord Carfax is very far from contempt.

Wolf comes to recognise the vein of hidden malice within himself when writing Urquhart's book:

Some of his sentences, when he revised them in cold blood, struck him as possessing quite a Swift-like malignity. He astonished himself by certain misanthropic outbursts. His habitual optimism seemed to fall away at such times, and a ferocious contempt for both men and women lay revealed, like a sullen, evil-looking, drained-out pond! (p.453)

Urquhart's misanthropic work becomes Wolf's own. Urquhart is barely interested in the contents of the completed book. And there is, of course, beneath Wolf's aversion to the dubious stock of the Malakite bookshop, his own surrender to the appeal of Malakite pornography.

Parallel to such inner challenges to Wolf's inner dualism runs a growing sense of a moral indifference in the cosmos itself. Early in the book, such cosmic unconcern is inevitably "evil", and Wolf's sense of oppression brings him to see the image of Mukalog in the source of warmth and light itself:

The sun was so low now that he could look straight into its great red circle suspended above the roofs of the town. It resembled, as he looked at it, a vast fiery tunnel, the mouth of some colossal piece of artillery, directed full against him. With screwed-up eyelids he returned the stare of this blood-red cannon-mouth; and as he fronted it, it seemed to him that a dusky figure took shape within it, a figure resembling Jason Otter's abominable idol. (p.251)

Wolf Solent is Powys's first attempt at a theodicy - a task continued in Glastonbury and Weymouth Sands. Despite the book's remoteness from Christianity, in Wolf's attempts at self-justification

there is something of the evangelical temper within which Powys grew up, and which also led to his forbear William Cowper's irrational conviction of damnation - an incident Powys would often recall with pity and rage. Wolf Solent's conclusion is in part an exorcism of this cast of mind. But Wolf Solent remains a post-Christian exploration. The traditional appeals of Christianity are not seriously examined, they simply strike no answering chord within Wolf himself:

... it occurred to him as curiously significant that the syllable 'God,' so talismanic to most people, had never, from his childhood, possessed the faintest magic for him! (p.293)

God is dead, or dying:

He told himself that every church-tower in the land overlooked a graveyard, and that in every graveyard was a vast empty grave waiting for the 'Jealous Father of Men' who lived in the church. (p.5)

The natural world in which Wolf absorbs himself, with his identification with inanimate and vegetable matter, is also a continuum, not a hierarchy, and has no place for Christian or monotheistic structure. Concentration upon the subhuman involves the dissolution of human perspectives in a living universe necessarily indifferent to Man's claims to pre-eminence, and to his morality:

'To the universe,' he thought, 'it matters no more whether I leave Gerda for Christie than whether that beetle reaches the top of that stalk! (p.250)

Wolf frequently identifies himself with such tiny motions of nature. His smallness is emphasized by frequent comparisons with astronomical vastness. The isolation is painful, and Wolf craves

... some immortal creation of Chance, such as he could worship, wilfully, capriciously, blindly. But he stretched out his arms into that darkness in vain. His voice might have been the voice of a belated rook on its way to Babylon Hill, or the scraping of one alder-branch against another above the waters of the Lunt, or the faint infinitesimal slide of tiny grains of gravel, as some minute earthworm in the midst of the empty little path at the top of 'The Slopes' came forth to inhale the spring night! (p.123)

These physical immensities, inconceivable to man's mind, throw back Wolf onto the only reality holding meaning for him, which is mental:

Millions of miles of blue sky; and beyond that, millions of miles of sky that could scarcely be called blue or any other colour - pure unalloyed emptiness, stretching outwards from where he sat - with his stick and coat opposite him - to no conceivable boundary or end! Didn't that almost prove that the whole affair was a matter of thought? (p.10)

Challenging such airy speculations is the skull of Wolf's father in Ramsgard cemetery, with whom Wolf holds imaginary conversation. This grave is evoked in vivid tones of physical decomposition; William Solent's life and death call upon his son to accept man's earth-bound nature as reality. "Life is short," Wolf imagines his father's skull saying, "and the love of girls is the only escape from its miseries." (p.241) The last words of William Solent on his deathbed, "Christ! I've had a happy life!", and of his friend, Mr. Malakite, "Forget!", are carried away by Wolf as cries of victory. Significantly both are conscious rejections of the Christian hope - Wolf's father's cry is a contradiction of the clergyman at his bedside, Mr. Malakite's a denial of Wolf's suggested "forgive".

Christie Malakite too accepts a finality: her favourite book is Urn-Burial, and an extract from Browne stands as a bitter epitaph to Wolf's failure to consummate their love:

'But the iniquity of oblivion,' he read, 'blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity .... In vain we compute our felicities by the advantage of our good names, since bad have equal durations, and Thersites is like to live as long as Agamemnon.' (p.446)

Wolf's dualism is threatened by another grave - that of King Aethelwolf in Ramsgard Abbey, through whose glass top Wolf attempts to peer by the light of a match, to see nothing but blotches and reflections "that bore no human meaning" (p.308). With the progress of the novel, Wolf comes closer to "the centuries of calm, irresponsible repose that weighed on that royal coffin" (p.505) "King Aethelwolf was at rest, staring up at that fan tracery. It only needed an adjustment ... and he could be as much at peace in life as that king was in death!" (p.614).

The "mythology" is an attempt by Wolf to impose meaning on the world and his place in it. It preserves him from "the futility of the commonplace". Powys's range, and Wolf's, extends from the cosmic to the diurnal; with the collapse of Wolf's "mythological" interpretation of the universe, the "commonplace" breaks in. This experience is particularly shattering as, for both Wolf and for Powys, the commonplace is usually far from futile, but imbued with a deep reassurance of significance in a rhythmic continuity Powys called "Homeric". Wolf Solent had attained this sense of a heightened continuity in the early days of his marriage with Gerda:

The fact of living here with Gerda under conditions identical with those of the Blacksod carpenters, bricklayers and shop-assistants, threw into beautiful relief every incident of his life's routine. Preparing food, preparing fires, the very floor-scrubbing wherein he shared, took on for him, just because of this absence of the deliberately 'artistic,' a rarefied poetical glamour. (p.214)

Powys's description of an early morning in Wolf Solent's household radiates a keen enjoyment of ordinary physical sensation. The sequence of the narrative, through Wolf's rising from bed, leaving Gerda still half-asleep, to his making of tea downstairs, a short walk outside, breakfast, and a trip to the back-yard privy, follows precisely the early morning of another great sensualist, Leopold Bloom, and reads like a Powysian gloss of that section of Ulysses.

Powys's pre-occupation with the fine discrimination of sensual impression recalls his affinity with the late nineteenth century Aesthetic movement. Powys's first slim volumes of verse, published in 1896 and 1899, are highly redolent of Swinburnian romanticism. One of Powys's favourite writers was Pater, whom he praised in Visions and Revisions for the intensity of his experience of sensation; there is a clear reminiscence of Pater's "hard, gem-like flame" in Wolf Solent's frequent description of his soul as a "little, hard, opaque, round crystal". Wolf's "sensations" are not connected with commonly accepted aesthetic objects, but his delight in drinking tea, eating bread and butter, and smoking cigarettes is similar in both quality and intensity to des Esseintes' enjoyment of his more expensive pleasures.

Deprived of any metaphysical explanation of existence, or of a private substitute for such a framework, Wolf becomes subject to the



"nausea" of meaninglessness, and indeed Woolf's experience is astonishingly similar to Roquentin's "nausea" in Sartre's novel. He exists in a world of no values, which affects the visual perception of the character, and in that the novel follows Woolf's point of view, also affects Powys's narrative perspective. No seen object seems more important than another; small experiences become oddly portentous, while normally significant experiences cease to seem so. What might be called the ordinary hierarchies of daily life are distorted. Everyday objects assume an oppressive physical actuality, imposing a sense of being without a parallel sense of meaning, causing an inner disintegration in the mind of Woolf himself. This is the dark underside - or necessary opposite - of Woolf's cult of "sensations". As Powys wrote in the Autobiography, "When you are half-crazy, you have the Devil's own genius of minute observation" (11).

He looked down at the tiny gutter at his feet between the asphalted pavement and the road. The lamplight shone upon this gutter, and he observed a torn piece of newspaper lying in it - a headline of the Western Gazette - and just tilted against the edge of this headline he saw an empty greenish-coloured tin. He could even read the words upon that torn bit of paper - printed in large, heavy type. 'France distr... land.' 'France distrusts England,' he repeated to himself; and then 'Lyle's Golden Syrup.' He could read that, without reading it! Much sweetness had he, in his time, watched Gerda imbibing from such a greenish-coloured receptacle!

'Does Mattie make 'em give Olwen her "golden syrup" out at Pond Cottage? This is reality,' he thought. (p.347)

The detritus which confronts Woolf is, importantly, urban. Every novel is selective in its portrayal of scene and background; in Wolf Solent Woolf's changed perception of the world is underlined by a shift of descriptive focus in the novel itself. In Jude the Obscure, Jude's frustrations are reflected in a setting which emphasizes the

decay of rural England, the decline of craftsmanship and the growth of speculative building. The enduring tombstones of Weatherbury or Mellstock are replaced by the eighteen-penny iron crosses of Marygreen churchyard. A corrupt society is condemned in the debased artefacts it produces. In Wolf Solent we see a similar transition from the mellow market-town rurality of Ramsgard to the raw commercialism of Blacksod. Wolf is himself committed to the past; modern technology is a part of the "evil" he attempts to fight. As Wolf's "mythology" breaks down, and the objects of his life around him lose their sacramental significance, his nature magic fails him, and Wolf is pitched into the waste-land of Blacksod.

In his Autobiography (Chapters VI and VII), Powys records his deep mental disturbance during his first years in Sussex. Some commentators, such as H.P. Collins, have questioned the seriousness of this recital of neurotic terrors and obsessions; it is certainly the section of the Autobiography where Powys's "acting" and delight in self-caricature are most in evidence. But there is no need to doubt the simple truth of what Powys says, and we can note how what he experienced in terror in those years later reappear as creative forces, as when we compare his panic-stricken fear of changing sex with his later reverence for Tiresias in Morwyn and Porius, or how his horror of excrement later appears as a pole in his "necessity of opposites". It is useful to compare Powys's Southwick crisis (and in addition his susceptibility to the horror of life in American cities) with Wolf Solent's descent into Blacksod.

In his youth, Powys's life had been exclusively rural, or spent in market towns of beauty, while socially - however non-social the Powyses might seem - his place was secure and acknowledged as a

son of the clergy. Upon leaving Cambridge, however, Powys found himself living above a grocer's shop amidst the "ramshackle dinginess" of the peculiarly desolate suburbs which stretch along the south coast, and forced to eke out his already lively cult of natural objects behind gasworks and among building plots. Powys's erotic obsessions (where barriers of class of course did not exist) were unleashed. There were shady "back alley retreats" and Malakite-like shops. This section of the Autobiography is peopled with tramps and madmen, met on terms of equality, and Powys himself appears for the first time as the tramp-figure which is to become familiar.

Powys called his Autobiography "the history of the 'de-classing' of a bourgeois-born personality" (12), and his contempt for social distinctions is obvious. But, while snobbery may initially seem a somewhat sub-Powysian matter, I do not think that Powys found the transition from clergyman's son to tramp automatic, or that Wolf Solent slipped into Blacksod with equal ease. This social change is very important in the collapse of Wolf's mythology, and in Wolf's changed attitude to the world.

Powys has been criticized for his lack of social realism; Angus Wilson's defence of his portrayal of the provincial society of the 1920's is definitive. (\*) Professor Wilson believes that Powys is so secure in his view of society, that he is able to move on to other things. While this is true of Powys, it is not true of Wolf Solent, and it is Wolf's social insecurity which leads to some of his strangest behaviour. In the Autobiography, Powys tells of his ever-present fear which prompts obsequiousness and self-abasement before the aristocracy and the proletariat (13). Wolf Solent, who is effectively cuckolded by one of each, experiences similar fear and is likewise

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(\*) This is in Powys Review, No. 1, Spring 1977. Professor Wilson relates Powys's society to his own childhood experience. Some objective confirmation, for what is worth, can be found in Yeovil and District Guide (Yeovil: Snell and Sons, 1931) which shows the town

mawkishly obsequious, the reason being that in Wolf's imagination, representatives of both classes hold power which he lacks.

At the beginning of the book, we see Wolf descending the social ladder, becoming the Powysian tramp-figure. By birth he belongs to the upper middle classes; his father had been, before his dissolute end, history master at Ramsgard school. Selena Gault is a Ramsgard headmaster's daughter. Wolf eventually comes to teach the "tradesmen's sons" of Blacksod Grammar School, and Powys firmly emphasizes the social gulf between the two schools.

We have noticed Wolf's "malicious" contempt for worldly success. Even before meeting Gerda, Wolf pines for the security which tempts him in the "jerry-built houses, each exactly like the other" of proletarian Blacksod. In Powys's description there is relish and mockery:

He surveyed these little houses and gardens - doubtless the homes of artisans and factory-hands - with a feeling of almost maudlin delight. He imagined himself as living in one of these places, and he realized exactly with what deep sensual pleasure he would enjoy the rain and the intermittent sunshine. (pp.56-7).

This dream, become actual, turns out to be somewhat more complicated. In part, the dream is a product of his "malice" towards worldly success, and an attempt to conquer the snobbery he is quite capable of recognising within himself. He retreats with shame from his snobbish concern with the appearance of Urquhart and Lovelace at the Ramsgard horse-fair, to an absurd self-satisfaction with his liaison with the humble Torp family; "I'm glad the old man is as he is!" (p.182). Wolf's snobbery surfaces even more clearly at the end of the book, in his mixture of reverence and hate for Lord Carfax. Once again it is a matter of "malice":

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*only beginning its commercial expansion. Horse carts and motor cars exist in equal numbers. The guide exclaims with proud surprise, "Practically the whole of the houses in the town are supplied with gas*

How queer this malice within him was! It made his pulse literally thud with its crazy violence. It gave him a savage, animal-like desire to dig his chin, in a tumbling, tossing wrestle of hate, into the flesh of Lord Carfax. (p.585)

Wolf's hatred springs from self-contempt and humiliation; his pride has taken a blow: "So this 'lord from London' took really not the slightest interest in him! Anxious to help his mother, to help Jason, to help Mr. Stalbridge, the great man had evidently found Wolf himself tedious and uninspiring!" (pp.587-8). Fully aware of Lord Carfax's attraction to Gerda, and of Gerda's charmed response, Wolf contrives that Carfax should arrive home before him. Wolf's final cuckoldry is engineered by himself as the depth of his self-humiliation - the result of his malice, and his shame at a failure which has more than a touch of worldliness in it.

What is perhaps more surprising, is that we find exactly the same behaviour before Bob Weevil, Wolf's proletarian rival. Angus Wilson has noted the real rancour in Wolf's attitude to Weevil, who "faintly threatens the society in which Wolf Solent is able to be a satisfactory drop-out but maintain all his feelings." (14). This is true; Bob Weevil is of the modern age. Dressed "at the very top of Blacksod fashion", he belongs to a new working-class which unlike the Torp family has no respect for Wolf's gentility. Thus, like Carfax, he is uninhibited by class-consciousness. Carfax and Weevil are both able to act with the personal independence which Wolfs desires for himself, and Wolf regards them with a mixture of reverence and malice.

Wolf is faintly attracted to Weevil, in the same way as Squire Urquhart is; but more significant is Weevil's irresistible magnetism as

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*and water from the public undertakings, and many houses are supplied with electricity." A department store urges buyers to shed conservative habits and "furnish out of income," an advertisement Gerda Solent might have heeded. As for Ramsgard/Sherborne, both Wolf and his mother exclaim at the remarkable preservation of the town they knew twenty-five years before.*

Wolf's rival for the attentions of Gerda. In this struggle Weevil has many advantages; he can offer Gerda relaxed companionship where the stuffy Wolf cannot. We see Weevil triumphant in difficult social situations, unabashed by his vulgarity, where the scrupulous Wolf is struck dumb by inhibition and self-consciousness. Wolf's attitude to him is one of envy from the beginning, where Wolf craves a glimpse of a gross photograph of Gerda astride a tombstone but is held back by his sense of social dignity. "I really can't join in libidinous jesting with the Blacksod populace just at present!" he thought to himself. 'But there's plenty of time!.' (p.66). Wolf's lechery is in fact of the same order as Weevil's; but Weevil can express it, where Wolf cannot. "I must propitiate my rival", Wolf says to himself, and this he does throughout the book. Weevil is never thrown out of the house, always invited to supper. Far from attempting to dismiss Weevil from his mind, Wolf finds that his desire for Gerda is actually enhanced by Weevil's presence (p.263).

As with Carfax, Wolf's sense of Weevil's superior capability leads him virtually to engineer his own cuckoldry. After an argument with Gerda, Wolf leaves the house, with Gerda calling after him, "You'll be sorry for this!" This Wolf interprets as an indication that she will turn to Bob Weevil for company. Wolf is quite right, but as if to be entirely sure of his approaching humiliation, Wolf "led by a sudden impulse that he made no attempt to explain to himself" (p.474) actually visits Bob Weevil at his home, where, over lunch, he learns that Gerda has invited Weevil over for the day "as Mr. Solent was away and she felt lonely". While waiting in the Weevil hall, Wolf surveys the vulgar, nouveau riche furniture with snobbish horror and "malice" - which he projects upon the furniture itself - and subsequently trots off to King's Barton, the completed "History of Dorset" under his arm, secure of his cuckoldry.

The Wolf Solent of the "mythology" asserts "I'll live in my own world to the end". But we have seen that his boasted self-sufficiency conceals its very opposite. Despite his claimed independence, his every thought and action illustrates a pre-occupation with his appearance before others which becomes virtual paranoia. Wolf feels that the mysterious intrigues of King's Barton, the tap-rooms of the Three Peewits and the Farmer's Rest conspire against him - to drive him possibly to his death. Any chance encounter is enough to stir up his horror at the imaginary "malice" directed against him, which is a reflection of the malice in his own soul:

The words of an unknown farm-labourer he had met on the road repeated themselves in his brain as he turned up his collar against a merciless downpour. 'Blowing up for rain, Mister!' and Wolf's mind turned these harmless words into a vast non-human menace, directed against him by some malignancy in the very system of things. (p.427)

It is significant that Wolf loses his mythology a moment after flinging the hated idol Mukalog into the field behind the pigsty. Mukalog is a symbol of malice. Wolf views the loss of his mythology as a catastrophe, but it is in fact from the death of Mukalog, and the loss of his mythology, that his restoration comes.

Dr. Cavaliero has noted how the changing symbolic associations of Lenty Pond comment upon Wolf's changing mental states. At first the pond is sinister and associated with suicide. The innocent aura of the bathing scene at Lenty challenges Wolf's dualism, while the pond eventually sheds its aura of Gothic mystery and evil.

Throughout Wolf Solent water is the element of the unknown or the unconscious, a lake across which the conscious mind moves in varying degrees of danger:

... and it seemed to Solent as though all the religions in the world were nothing but so many creaking and splashing barges, whereon the souls of men ferried themselves over those lakes of primal silence, disturbing the swaying water-plants that grew there and driving away the shy water-fowl! (p.5)

Conscious thought is a boat journey over water, the boat often in danger of sinking:

.... but the keel of every human vessel had a leak ... it was only a question of chance .... just pure chance .... how far that leak would go .... (p.74)

As his "mythology" gives way, and Gerda unwillingly surrenders to Bob Weevil, so Wolf sees their barge out of control:

'Well, there it is!' he thought. 'Life has scotched her just as it has me .... Well, we must get on somehow. Shall I say good night to her before I let myself go to sleep? No; better not! Better just hold tight to her ... and drift on in our barge - down, down the stream ... drift on in our barge!' (p.520)

The subaqueous imagery of Wolf's "mythology" is a descent into such depths in the imagination. But real submergence is feared; it is the water of Lenty Pond which Wolf sees in Christie's mirror at his moment of worst failure. (p.443) From Lenty Pond comes the slow-worm of Jason Otter's poem, who curses God (p.253), and for Wolf's father, who also curses God, reality is "at the bottom of your pond" (p.312).



But Lenty Pond is also a source of regeneration, prefigured by the catching of a great perch, on the day when Wolf's attempted return of Urquhart's two hundred pounds rebounds unhappily upon him. Later, in A Glastonbury Romance, the catching of the "Chub of Lydford" precedes both "the raising of the dead" and also, according to Owen Evans, the union of opposites sought by the Fisher Kings of Celtic legend (15). Sam Dekker's Grail vision includes the world-fish, Ichthus, swimming in the chalice. For Wolf Solent, the perch from Lenty Pond is "the best symbol of the unutterable there is!", and recalls for him "a certain inland pool, near Weymouth backwter, where he had once hooked a small specimen of this particular fish, which his father had made him throw back again" (p.485). It was at Weymouth that Wolf's "mythology" was born; now, upon losing his mythology, he once again gains a glimpse of a transcendent symbol. Jessie L. Weston, in From Ritual to Romance - a book Powys greatly admired, writes of Fish symbolism:

So far as the present state of our knowledge goes we can affirm with certainty that the Fish is a Life symbol of immemorial antiquity, and that the title of Fisher has, from the earliest ages, been associated with Deities who were held to be specially connected with the origin and preservation of Life.

In Indian cosmogony Manu finds a little fish in the water in which he would wash his hands; it asks, and receives, his protection, asserting that when grown to full size it will save Manu from the universal deluge. This is Jhasa, the greatest of all fish. (16).

Wolf calls his new life, begun in the field of buttercups behind the pigsty, "an adjustment". And it is in some ways little more than that, rejecting as it does the more obvious reversals the rejection of his "mythology" would seem to entail. It is not an emergence from

fantasy to reality; Powys continues to assert the private nature of reality, and as we have seen Wolf's life-illusion was shattered because it was a symptom of Wolf's continual reference to and dependency upon others. Only now does he secure his independence.

Nor do we have a moral awakening. Wolf has come to realize the cruelty of his treatment of Gerda and Christie, but his regeneration refers entirely to his inner life. It is not so much that Powys outrages moral expectations, but that there is simply no scope for such a transformation in Wolf's relationships; here, I think, Powys is making a serious statement about the form of life as he saw it - that moral awakenings belong to the patterning of art. For Wolf, the future is an acceptance of his nature. Christie and Olwen, now happy at Weymouth, belong to the past. Gerda has recovered her blackbird song on the lap of Lord Carfax.

There is no distribution of blame, either to Wolf's possessive idealism, or to Gerda's coquetry and pride in her social elevation from Torp to Solent, until now she attracts the attentions of the very aristocracy. Gerda especially is an innocent quite separate from the analysis of good and evil which Wolf has taken upon himself.

Wolf's vision of "sheer, innate sweetness and goodness" (p.562) comes from the schoolboy, Gaffer Barge. Here is a being totally without malice. His name seems significant in a book where so many characters have symbolic names. Boats in Wolf Solent are rafts of security, the religions of the world "creaking and splashing barges". In Rodmoor Adrian Sorio was carried to a death, then seen as redemptive, in a river barge, while Sam Dekker in Glastonbury will find his vision of the Grail in a barge on the river Brue.

The vision of simple goodness is now before Wolf's mind; but this does not mean it is attainable, for Wolf's innocence is past, and Wolf Solent has described its loss. Nonetheless his malice is purged. He comes to rely upon a simple physicality, and faith in the experience of the senses, which dissolves his hatred:

'Enjoying the sweet light of the sun ... deprived of the sweet light of the sun,' these phrases from Homer rang in his ears and seemed to express the only thing that was important. Carfax taking Gerda upon his knee, Urquhart begging Tilly-Valley for the Sacrament, his mother borrowing from Mr. Manley, Roger Monk trimming Redfern's grave - all these human gestures presented themselves to him now through a golden mist, a mist that made them at once harmless and negligible, compared with the difference between being alive and being dead! (p.610)

There is only one evil which remains - that of modern technology. This is not an illusory evil, and Powys's work continues to fight it.

Dr. Cavaliero has expressed qualms about the end of Wolf Solent, with its dissolution of Wolf's previous self in an ecstatic, but purely mental new beginning. The authenticity of this new beginning begs substantiation. Many readers feel similar doubts at Levin's final conversion in Anna Karenina. Both Powys and Tolstoy leave us with an open end.

But I feel that both writers do offer a novelistic close as well as a personal beginning, for in Wolf's ecstasy in the field of buttercups, all the symbols which have conducted the novel's argument, Mukalog, King Aethelwolf, and the Waterloo steps face, reappear in rich counterpoint, and attain genuine resolution. If we

wish to test further the Powys-hero's experience, we can examine Wolf Solent's near-successor - John Crow in A Glastonbury Romance. John Crow resembles Wolf physically, and has the same cult of "sensations". But he is far less tortured. He is quite devoid of social self-consciousness and snobbery, and the only "malice" in his character is directed towards the Holy Grail. Because of this lack of response to the magic of Glastonbury, he is almost ignominiously despatched to Norfolk, to live in circumscribed happiness. The most radical transformation in Powys's next novel is in John Crow's relationship with Tom Barter. Barter, like Bob Weevil, is a man of the people -quite unintellectual and without Powysian introspection. His life is dominated by his quest for women. But instead of being rivals, John Crow and Tom Barter are intimates, and it is Mary Crow who feels excluded.

Wolf's final philosophical position is a modest one. But it contains much potential, and despite Wolf's stress on physicality is not a retreat to materialism.

'But it isn't all there is!' he said to himself as he approached Preston Lane. 'The whole astronomical world is only a phantasm, compared with the circles within circles, the dreams within dreams of the unknown reality!' (p.606)

There are guesses about this "unknown reality" in Powys's next novel, and in Wolf Solent there is a hint of the direction which Powys's thinking is to take. Wolf Solent's new freedom brings with it power in place of propitiation: "he seemed to visualize the demiurge of the universe as so much diffused sub-conscious magnetism submissive to nothing but commands ... commands rather than prayers!" (p.601).

After Wolf Solent Powys projects two different aspects of himself upon contrasting characters. There are the sceptical, cunning, withdrawn "salamander" figures, resembling Wolf Solent in their psychological retrenchment - John Crow, Magnus Muir, Dud No-Man, even Porius. And there are also the magicians - Johnny Geard, Sylvanus Cobbold, Enoch Quirm, Myrddin Wyllt - who take upon themselves the exploration of a "multiverse" of limitless resource, Wolf Solent prepares for both.

Many aspects of Wolf Solent illustrate Powys's pre-occupation with the pairs of opposites mentioned in his 1960 preface. The book's motion is pendulum-like, underscoring Wolf's indecisions. We have the contrast of Ramsgard and Blacksod with its social significance, the double claims of Gerda and Christie, of Wolf's mother and his father. The book's moral centre is the necessity for the recognition of the co-existence of both good and evil impulses in the personality. There is the need for spirituality to be anchored upon the apprehensions of the senses, and the recognition of the claims of both fantastic speculation and realism in approaching the world.

But opposites are less surely conjoined in the philosophy of Wolf than in the practice of Powys as author. He shows himself a master at meeting the contrasting demands the novel makes upon him, distributing the claims of sympathy the different characters make upon the reader with sympathetic and moral clear-sightedness, creating a private reality for Wolf himself alongside a solid reality of society and landscape.

Wolf Solent exists on both a naturalistic and a symbolic level - the relationship between these two planes itself being a central

concern of the novel. As Powys's most restrained novel in external drama, it is his richest in symbolic interplay. Its symbolism is not schematic; we have symbols, not signs, which accumulate their significance during the course of the book. The relationships of each symbol with another cannot be exhausted rationalistically, for they grow and operate in a way resembling more the workings of dream and fantasy than the artistic deployment of resources. The submarine atmosphere of Wolf's mythology, for instance, merges with Wolf's image of himself as a worm in his father's skull, which in turn is linked to the worms and snails which Wolf observes on his frequent walks, who assume phallic significance as Wolf's emotional entanglements become more complicated. Such richly-textured profusion works by suggestion and association, like symbols in life, and, in imitating life, Powys is a creator of novels of psychological realism, not of fables.

Wolf Solent is an inward novel, but Powys's irony and distance from his central character separate his work from early, claustrophobic experiments in self-consciousness such as Knut Hamsun's Hunger. Powys is always further on than Wolf himself, and the novel is the "self-vivisection" of what we feel to be a past identity. Here Powys's "acting" is prominent; present Powys enacts past Powys as Wolf Solent. The "actor" strain ran deep in Powys himself, and was by no means confined to the lecture platform or the novel. He acted to himself. In the Autobiography he extends the idea of "all the world's stage" to imagine the self as both performer and audience (17). On his visit to Italy he remembers acting "John Powys visiting the Fountains of Rome". Powys, the man, apparently at times felt the strain of this self-consciousness. "I will I will I will I will be natural ere I die!" he wrote to Henry Miller (18). But

whatever its consequences for the private Powys, this insidious dramatization of himself to himself was undoubtedly the making of the novelist. Powys, in the character of Wolf Solent, can act and caricature himself, to himself and to the reader. Wolf Solent even acts to himself; Wolf stirring his porridge is a studied performance of Wolf the domesticated Blacksod husband:

He pushed open the iron cover of the stove and jabbed with his poker at the fire inside. Then he took up a wooden spoon and stirred the contents of an enamelled pot of porridge that stood there, moving it aside from the heat. A thrill of satisfaction ran through him when he had done this, and he rubbed his hands together and made a 'face,' drawing back his under lip in the manner of a gargoyle, and constricting the muscles of his chin (p.211).

There is a self-conscious delight in this scene which is not present in its source - Leopold Bloom preparing Molly's breakfast tray. There is rich physical pleasure in Bloom, but in Wolf this pleasure goes to the head, and becomes articulated as part of a conscious philosophy of life. Wolf Solent is as much about self-consciousness as about consciousness, which indicates why interior monologue is a much more appropriate technique for Powys than the "stream of consciousness" which some critics have wished upon him.

Powys's multiple selves indicate a romantic pre-occupation with the idea of self-hood, but in his self-vivisection Powys is also a stringent critic of such romanticism. Wolf Solent considers the perils of self-exaltation, and Powys is always conscious of the possible vanity in the self-projections of his novels. Wolf Solent had imagined himself as William of Deloraine and Hector. Such heroics are rejected. Wolf is also cuckolded twice, fails Christie Malakite, and bungles his suicide; but self-pity, and anti-heroics, are rejected as well.

In Wolf Solent, Powys is no teller of marvels. The book's metaphysical and dramatic scope is modest; this is a period of retrenchment and control in Powys's approach to the novel. Such retrenchment is also evident in the progress of Wolf's character. Powys, as narrator, indulges in no metaphysical speculations, and asserts few supernatural correspondences. Wolf Solent inhabits a world which he variously interprets, where he must chart his own destiny, but whose fundamental meaning is hidden from him. Possibly the best model for this world in the novel itself is the chapter "A Game of Bowls". Wolf's fortunes are at their lowest ebb; in vain he seeks an understanding of the secret scandals which, he believes, surround him. The initiates of these mysteries are playing bowls on the green before Wolf's eyes. The chapter is a miniature of the comedy typical of Wolf Solent. Wolf is frantically worried about his own survival, and invests the quiet scene with a portentousness it does not really deserve. The players weigh carefully the bias of their bowls; their throw is a mixture of calculation and chance, its outcome governed by inscrutable laws. Wolf speculates on his own future: "Was there any portion of his identity, compact, self-contained, weighted with inward intention, like the 'bias' of this bowl?" (p.328). The end of Wolf Solent is an acceptance of these forces of "chance" and "necessity", the forces which govern the game of bowls, and which Powys would often call in Homer's words "ananke" and "tyche". This assurance proves, in Powys's later work, a starting point for further exploration.

I am neither snake nor lizard,  
I am the slowworm.

Ripe wheat is my lodging. I polish  
my side on pillars of its transept,  
gleam in its occasional light.  
Its swaying  
copies my gait.



Vaults stored with slugs to relish,  
my quilt a litter of husks, I prosper  
lying low, little concerned.  
My eyes sharpen  
When I blink.

Good luck to reaper and miller!  
Grubs adhere even to stubble.  
Come plowtime  
the ditch is near.

(19)

## Chapter Three

## Notes

Wolf Solent (London: Macdonald, 1961)

- (1) The Complex Vision, p.23.
- (2) Letters to Marian Powys, MS.
- (3) Donald Davidson, "Analysis of John Cowper Powys's Wolf Solent," Creative Reading: Discussions in Current Literature, Aug. I, 1929, p.9.
- (4) Autobiography, p.252.
- (5) A.P. Sinnett, Esoteric Buddhism (London: Chapman and Hall, 3rd edn., 1888), p.48.
- (6) Angus Wilson, "John Cowper Powys as a Novelist", The Powys Review, No. 1, Spring, 1977, pp.17-18.
- (7) Ibsen, The Wild Duck, Act. 5, in Eleven Plays of Henrik Ibsen, trans. Archer (New York: Modern Library, n.d.), p.105.
- (8) Autobiography, p.6, A Philosophy of Solitude, pp.82-3.
- (9) The Complex Vision, p.34.
- (10) *ibid.*, pp.93-4.
- (11) Autobiography, p.596.
- (12) *ibid.*, p.626.
- (13) *ibid.*, pp.141-2.
- (14) The Powys Review, No. 1, p.17.
- (15) A Glastonbury Romance, pp.773-80.
- (16) Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance, (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday Anchor 1957), pp.125-6.
- (17) Autobiography, p.122, p.294.
- (18) Letters to Henry Miller, p.60.
- (19) Basil Bunting, Briggflatts, III.

## CHAPTER FOUR      A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE

### I      ROMANCE AND NOVEL

The financial successes of Wolf Solent and The Meaning of Culture gave Powys the economic ability, and the confidence in his powers as a writer, to retire from lecturing. Wolf Solent explored the private consciousness of one character; written in trains and hotels all over America, it suggests a private retreat from the public world. A Glastonbury Romance, written in remote upstate New York, creates a public world from the seclusion of a private retreat. Like Powys's lectures, the book has a showman's zest; the Powys "circus" leaves the lecture-hall for the novel. The inner victory at the close of Wolf Solent also allows Powys to open out into a more ebullient book. Where Wolf was embattled in a world he could not change, Geard of Glastonbury challenges reality and moulds the world to his own vision.

A Glastonbury Romance is not only vaster in scale but more idiosyncratic in its demands upon the reader. In particular the mixture of what for the moment must be called either fantasy or visionary mysticism with contemporary naturalism makes us wonder how such a monster is to be read. Everything that is most stimulating and most annoying in Powys centres upon his breaches of decorum.

This is how the eighteenth-century novelist, Clara Reeve, distinguishes "romance" and "novel":

The romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things. The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen. The Novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves. (1).

Powys's master Walter Scott maintains a similar distinction between the romance, which is "a fictitious narrative in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents" and the novel, "differing from the romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society." (2).

A Glastonbury Romance clearly contains elements of both, and it is this dual purpose which has puzzled the public. E.M. Forster writes of the peculiar difficulty of understanding the novels of those he calls "prophetic" writers, where a non-naturalistic purpose exists alongside a depiction of the world we see:

... all novels contain tables and chairs, and most readers of fiction look for them first. Before we condemn him (the 'prophet') for affectation and distortion we must realize his view-point. He is not looking at the tables and chairs at all, and that is why they are out of focus. We only see what he does not focus - not what he does - and in our blindness we laugh at him. (3).

But even this oblique approach is not very helpful with A Glastonbury Romance, for its "tables and chairs" are in obsessively exact focus. It is impossible to dissolve Glastonbury into allegory or symbolism. Its "uncommon incidents", whether visions of the Grail, of King Arthur's sword, or raisings from the dead, are inseparably bound up with the portrayal of the daily life of the town.

This assembly of conflicting elements is very important in Powys, and severs him forever from any helpful comparison with other modern romancers, such as Carroll, Peake, or Tolkien. Powys's fantasy does not take place in a separate "down the rabbit-hole" world. He uses the presence of an accurately evoked contemporary reality to confront the real conceptual and imaginative difficulties posed by accounts of visionary experience, and it is only when these questions have been raised that he is able, in Morwyn, to go "down the rabbit-hole", confident of the significance of this departure from the everyday world.

The effect of this strange duality in the book is similar, as Timothy Hyman has suggested, to the paintings of Stanley Spencer, where the villagers of Cookham rise from their graves on Resurrection morning, dressed in their pinafores, print-frocks and Sunday church-going suits. There is an interesting comparison with Tippett's opera The Midsummer Marriage, where the Fisher King of Grail tradition appears as a suited businessman, and the scenes of transformation from the Hanes Taliesin are ritually enacted in the bemused presence of a mechanic and his secretary girl-friend. Perhaps the nearest approach in contemporary fiction is the conundrum of John Fowles' The Magus, but in comparison with Glastonbury, The Magus is a wily game, contrived by the author to provoke and baffle. John Fowles claims to be more aware than most contemporary writers of the elements of contrivance and manipulation in all fiction; John Cowper Powys is similarly conscious, but where the games of The Magus close off avenues of interpretation, Powys is inclined to open up speculation.

But the most significant aspect of these comparisons is that all these artists deal with the important question of the intersection of what we see as a literal reality with what we think of, vaguely, as a mythical reality. We are accustomed to recognize the existence of both, to move with ease in the former, and to respect the latter - though to be very uncertain about what we mean by it. In talking of the Holy Grail, as symbol, allegory, dream, metaphor, we use words very far from the actual experience of a Grail vision - whatever that may be thought to mean. The order of experience to which the Grail belongs needs to be mediated for us through interpretation. A Grail vision is quite acceptable within Tennyson's internally consistent imagined world, for we know that this world exists at a remove from our own. We can enjoy the experience offered by Prospero's island, Titania's Kingdom, or the simpler fantasy of Middle Earth, but we demand a clear dividing line between the enchantment and the reality, where Prospero sinks his book. The transition from naturalistic to mythical experience is a hard one, and I do not believe that Powys found it much easier than most of his readers. Nonetheless, A Glastonbury Romance is about this borderland.

Powys, Stanley Spencer, and Tippet all depict these two realities in violent juxtaposition, and have all been accused of pastiche and foolishness. In his poem Matlock Bath, John Betjeman, likewise accused of pastiche, sees the Day of Judgement descending upon a sedate spa town. The town is described with the quaint capital letters of a Ward and Lock guide book; the earth moves on the last day with the simplest literalness:

In this dark dale I hear the thunder  
 Of houses folding with the shocks,  
 The GRAND PAVILION buckling under  
 The weight of the ROMANTIC ROCKS,  
 The hardest Blue John ashtrays seem  
 To melt away in thermal steam. (4).

The conjunction of the two modes of apprehension is violent and absurd, as in Glastonbury; like Powys, Betjeman realizes the absurdity, so there is a good deal of self-mockery, as in Glastonbury. But the poem is nevertheless a serious one. Betjeman is a poet of religious conviction who constantly finds his faith challenged by the opacity of the material world. He forces us back upon the question of how our vision of a Judgement Day can be understood compared with our ordinary experience of the eye whether at Matlock Bath or in Cookham churchyard, and how our understanding of spiritual or paranormal experience is to exist within everyday Glastonbury. These artists have tackled the problem in brutal confrontation; a degree of failure may be necessary, for the illustration of incongruity and disunion is part of their intention. A Glastonbury Romance is a mythical drama enacted without the customary literary decencies of discreet symbol and allegorical hint. But Powys's tactless provocation may startle the reader to good purpose; in comparison, hazy tales of self-discovery - set, like Hesse's, in the cosily remote Orient - may seem rarefied and evasive.

An early adverse review of Glastonbury complained, "the tone of the novel is decadent" (5); this is true, in the sense that Powys's strangeness would not be so marked, were the culture and literature of his time more at home in their treatment of the marvellous. The monster battles of Beowulf are played out against the background of a recognizably contemporary society. The apostles and saints of mediaeval art wear contemporary dress. Glastonbury is odd in its time and place, but it need not be eternally so. The waste land which

the Grail quests of Glastonbury return to vigour is in fact just the contemporary culture and landscape which appear to have no indwelling "numen". In the Autobiography Powys writes of "the American horror": "It has a wraith-like quality, it has a death-like quality, it has about it some queer ultimate desolation of emptiness, but with all this, and here lies the paradox of its shuddering horribleness, it is brand-new, spick-and-span, and strident." (6). Powys compares this horror to "the most vividly realized spiritual desolation of T.S. Eliot's Wasteland". This is the landscape of what in The Complex Vision is called "The Illusion of Dead Matter," confronted in the detritus of meaninglessness in Wolf Solent.

Yet the unease felt by most contemporary writers in approaching the numinous is felt by Powys, for Glastonbury is speculative rather than visionary. There is no suggestion in the Autobiography, his letters, or accounts of him by others, that Powys himself experienced the transcendent in the manner of Blake, or Geard of Glastonbury. A Glastonbury Romance is the novel of a failed mystic, by which I mean that its mysticism does not arise from personal conviction but is an extrapolation from the "intimations" which certainly did mean a great deal to Powys. It is a survey of widely varied forms of religious experience, with commentary and hazarded interpretation.

But before A Glastonbury Romance is an examination of religious experience, it is a tale, and Powys was eager to advertise the variety and excitement of his novel. Simon and Schuster, in their pre-publication announcements, quoted an interview Powys conducted with himself:



Why I have the whole life of a community on my hands; with housewives, lawyers, doctors, chemists, innkeepers, procurers, clergymen, servants, old-maids, beggars, madmen, children, poets, landowners, labourers, shop-keepers, an anarchist, dogs, cats, fish, and an airplane pilot ..... There are no less than six major love affairs, one murder, three births, two deaths and one raising from the dead ..." (7).

In its evocation of the whole life of a community, A Glastonbury Romance certainly recalls to its profit the solidity of novels of small town life as otherwise different as Main Street and Trollope's Barset series, with their sense of cross-section. But Powys, who expressed no great fondness for Sinclair Lewis or Trollope, adds to his description of society a close attention to landscape and vegetable life, and an evocation of genius loci surpassing in concentrated devotion even Hardy's Wessex.

This concentration is partly a result of Powys's sensitivity to locality, and of his belief that the greatest art is both intensely local and universal. But in A Glastonbury Romance the town itself assumes the character of a psychic force, gathered and expressed through its history. "How can a mere place, or region, have a personality?" asked Powys, and replied, "I cannot tell. But I know that it has one." (8). Glastonbury, with its varied mythological traditions, is naturally a particularly suitable place for Powys to explore religious life from an undogmatic viewpoint, and he draws upon the legends of Joseph of Arimathea, of Arthur, and of Celtic fertility religions, before exploring even further back to hazard the influence of the pre-historic Glastonbury lake-dwellers. According to Mat Dekker "the deepest-rooted superstition here, if you could compel Glastonbury Tor to speak, would turn out to be the religion of the people who live before the Ancient Britons; perhaps even before the Neolithic Men." (p.120).

Powys several times connected his book with Faust. Interviewing himself in Modern Thinker, acting as Goethe and Eckermann in one, he asked, "What is the main idea of A Glastonbury Romance?" Goethe's reply to this question asked of Faust is well known:

"Do you suppose ... that a thing into which I have put the Life-Blood of all my days is able to be summed up in anything so narrow and limited as an Idea?" (9).

Powys similarly rejected a brain-spun summary of his novel:

The main idea is a life, not a theory or speculation, but in this case the life of a particular spot upon the earth's surface. (10).

Powys also wrote:

I have dared to follow my admired master Goethe in gathering up and driving forward, as he does in the second part of Faust, a vast crowd of mythological influences toward a quite definite mystical and philosophical end. (11).

Faust begins in the visible world - in Saxony, with a very earthly Gretchen - and penetrates ideal regions, and a vision of the Eternal Feminine.

Glastonbury too begins with the local and particular, and ends with the Eternal Feminine in the goddess Cybele. Whether these ideal regions are authentic is, however, another matter.

## II      GEARD AND HIS NEW "CULTURE"

Most at home in this landscape where the everyday opens upon the supernatural is Glastonbury's "master of ceremonies" and Mayor, Johnny Geard - a man for whom the "visionary" is, quite simply, reality:

By this time the towers of his New Jerusalem, thus built to the Glory of the Blood, where rising clear and crystalline to his view, piling themselves up, buttress upon buttress, rampart upon rampart, beyond his wife's windowbox of begonias! Castles of crystal, islands of glass, mirrors and mirages of the invisible, hiding-places of Merlin, horns and urns and wells and cauldrons - hilltops of magic -stones of mystery - all these seemed to Bloody Johnny's brain at that moment no mere fluctuating, undulating mind-pictures, but real things; real as the cracked wood of the old windowbox, real as the indented frown upon Megan's forehead! (p.163).

Although Geard shares aspects of Powys himself in his pleasure in the senses and his showmanship, he is no incarnation of the author, and Glastonbury is not a tract for his particular religion. The actual doctrines of this religion, if any, are not sharply delineated, for Powys is less interested in doctrine than in a personal response to life. Geard is an ambiguous figure; he appears relatively late in the novel, after a welter of contradictory rumour and gossip, and disappears into his individual vision of the Grail in its mysterious "fifth" shape. We see him most often through the eyes of his critics, in particular through the sceptical commentary of John Crow. We are made aware of the theatricality of Geard's evangelism, and even of the possibility of its complete charlatanry. Powys refuses to authenticate Geard's "miracles" with authorial approval: the boy who is "raised from the dead" is known to suffer from epileptic seizures, while one scene deliberately excised in the revision of the book shows Dr. Fell confirming Geard's miraculous cure of Tittie Petherton's cancer (12). Powys fulfils his stated aim to "steer just this side of the occult." (13).

But these are not the standards by which Geard wishes to be judged. This kind of "objective truth" is attacked by Geard at the opening of his Saxon Arch:

"People say these things are lies ... People say we must have the naked Truth in place of these lies. Now what the Spirit and the Blood command me to tell you is this, Any lie," he shouted, "I tell you, any lie as long as a multitude of souls believes it and presses that belief to the cracking point, creates new life, while the slavery of what is called truth drags us down to death and to the dead! Lies, magic, illusion - these are out names we give to the ripples on the water of our experience when the Spirit of Life blows upon it." (p.891).

While John Crow's denunciation of Geard's religion, and Geard's spirited defence of "Lies, magic, illusion", are both distinctly aspects of the essential Powys, Geard's speech harks back to Powys's reading of Goethe:

When I read what the shrewd old Goethe says about not destroying the essential Illusions, I feel a grim satisfaction in noting that sly world-child knew well enough that they were illusions. (14).

Of his visit to Weimar, Powys remembered, "Never, I fancy, has Goethe received such admiration from an introverted Celt as I offered to him then" (15). Goethe's Weimar is, I think, a very likely model for Powys's Glastonbury - a small town-state under the political ministry of a visionary genius who, for all his other-worldliness, also has a strong physical nature. Geard, sitting in the cosy stuffiness of Cardiff Villa with his knitted socks and protuberant stomach, or consuming without visible effect large quantities of brandy in Mat Dekker's study, is a splendid portrait of a mystic en pantoufles, and for Powys a Rabelaisian unifier of opposites. But he

is not so very far from Goethe, the prophet of the Eternal Feminine, with his graceless peasant wife.

Just as Glastonbury as a novel carefully avoids categories of good taste, so Geard's faith is quite non-intellectual, and is populist and sentimental in its appeal. His beliefs are both obscure and simple, and frankly anthropomorphic: healing Tittie Petherton's cancer, he imagines "a picture in the Sunday School at Montacute, representing Our Lord in the process of being baptized in the Jordan!" (p.707). His Easter Mass, celebrated with a cottage loaf and several tumblers of port wine at the bottom of the Cardiff Villa garden, emphasizes the sacrament's outward accidents, and the Incarnation and physicality of Christ. There is a sacramentalism throughout Powys, as in Wolf Solent's identification of small material objects with the forces of his inner life. For Geard this sacramentalism becomes a literal investment of spiritual power in the material:

"Little inanimate things," he thought, "can become great symbols, and symbols are - No!" he thought, "bugger me black! That's not what I mean at all! ... Certain material objects can become charged with supernatural power. That's what I mean." (p.456).

Despite Geard's evangelical language, there is little other connection with orthodox Christianity. In particular he carries no awareness of evil or sin, so prominent in the mind of Owen Evans. His Christ is both a constant companion and a power to be exploited, but harks back to no Godhead. His altar on Chalice Hill is mysteriously connected with an ancient Bronze Age fertility god (p.1070).

"Master be with me," prays Geard, "Give me strength to change the whole course of human history upon earth!" (p.442). This prayer points to the vast spread of ideas which underlies the conception of his character. Powys described Geard as "a prophetic visionary, anxious to rouse into being the beginnings of a new "Culture" - in the mystical Spenglerian sense - towards which all the western nations might draw, for a fresh growth of life." (16). The apparent megalomania of this ambition is offset by the humour of the novel. In fact the book runs the risk of seeming a toy, rather than falling into the inflation of Spengler's The Decline of the West. Nonetheless A Glastonbury Romance is soaked in Spengler. The "method" of the novel involved, said Powys, "the use of physiognomic observation -as Spengler names it - as against scientific observation;" (17).

What does all this mean? According to Powys, Spengler's "greatness is rather that of a poet than a logical thinker" (18). There is certainly much in Spengler's imaginative sweep to tempt Powys. Cultures rise and civilizations fall, in Babylon, Rome, Egypt, Pataliputra, Mexico, Peru, and the destiny of them all is the same:

Man becomes a plant again, adhering to the soil, dumb and enduring. The timeless village and the "eternal" peasant reappear, begetting children and burying seed in Mother Earth - a busy, not inadequate swarm, over which the tempest of soldier-emperors passingly blows .... And while in high places there is eternal alternance of victory and defeat, those in the depths pray, pray with that mighty piety of the Second Religiousness that has overcome all doubts for ever .... Only with the end of grand History does holy, still Being appear. It is a drama noble in its aimlessness, noble and aimless as the course of the stars, the rotation of the earth, and alternance of land and sea, of ice and virgin forest upon its face. We may marvel at it or we may lament it - but it is there. (19).

Spengler is concerned with the changing "world-outlooks" of different eras, the cyclic awareness through which men see the world. The change which Geard initiates is likewise less of policy than of consciousness. Fundamental is Spengler's interpretation of the rise and fall of civilizations in terms of seasonal rotation, which in The Decline of the West is less an analogy than a mystical intuition:

Here indeed are colours, lights, movements, that no intellectual eye has yet discovered. Here the Cultures, peoples, languages, truths, gods, landscapes bloom and age as the oaks and stone-pines, the blossoms, twigs and leaves - but there is no ageing "Mankind." ... These cultures, sublimated life-essences, grow with the same superb aimlessness as the flowers of the field. They belong, like the plants and the animals, to the living Nature of Goethe, and not to the dead Nature of Newton. I see world-history as a picture of endless formations and transformations, of the marvellous waxing and waning of organic forms. (20).

Glastonbury enacts a seasonal cycle, but does not fully embody a Spenglerian rotation of growth and decay. Rather Geard's religion is the birth of a "Springtime" culture out of the "Winter" of the twentieth century. For Spengler, the twentieth century is in the depths of such a winter; civilization has culminated in the megalopolitan city, as it has done before, in Rome, in Babylon, in Tenochtitlan:

In place of a type-true people, born of and grown on the soil, there is a new sort of nomad, cohering unstably in fluid masses, the parasitical city-dweller, traditionless, utterly matter-of-fact, religionless, clever, unfruitful, deeply contemptuous of the countryman and especially that highest form of countryman, the country gentleman. This is a very great stride towards the inorganic, towards the end .... (21).

Just as the destiny of every "Culture" is "Civilization", so the end of every "Civilization" is nihilism:

This is a matter not of mere political and economic, nor even of religious and artistic, transformations, nor of any tangible or factual change whatsoever, but of the condition of a soul after it has actualized its possibilities in full. (22).

This is where Spengler believes the West stands now, and from where Powys takes off. Nihilism has already been sounded in his work. For Spengler, the city now decays, and in the de-civilized desert, "the Second Religiousness" begins. The path to this next phase is "from Skepsis": "Men dispense with proof, desire only to believe and not to dissect" (23). The first heralds of "the Second Religiousness" are not unlike John Cowper Powys himself. Spengler discerns them in 4th Century Rome, and today:

And, over and above this, there were the numberless charlatans and fake prophets who toured the towns and sought with their pretentious rites to persuade the half-educated into a renewed interest in religion. Correspondingly, we have in the European-American world of to-day the occultist and theosophist fraud, the American Christian Science, the untrue Buddhism of drawing-rooms, the religious arts-and-crafts business ... Materialism is shallow and honest, mock-religion shallow and dishonest. But the fact that the latter is possible at all foreshadows a new and genuine spirit of seeking that declares itself, first quietly, but soon emphatically and openly, in the civilized waking-consciousness. (24).

Eventually, there is "a deep piety that fills the waking-consciousness."

It starts with Rationalism's fading out in helplessness, then the forms of the Springtime become visible, and finally the whole world of the primitive religion, which had receded before the



grand forms of the early faith, returns to the foreground, powerful, in the guise of the popular syncretism that is to be found in every Culture at this phase. (25).

How like Geard of Glastonbury this is. There is the same popular syncretism, and the revivification of the primitive through charlatanry - charlatanry, because it is only through acting "as if", that the rationalism which has shaped as well as limited the "Winter" world-outlook can be outwitted.

Spengler is popularly "a pessimist", because he envisions the collapse of the West. In a 1929 article on Spengler, Powys lyrically anticipated the "fellaheen culture" which will follow the decay of civilization,

when we shall wander amid grass-grown cities that have lost their wealth, amid remnants of scientific mechanisms that have lost their inventive secret; and human existence returning, for thousands of years, to a patient historyless monotony of a natural struggle with the elements, will attain the mystic wisdom of the Second Righteousness! ... Is such a speculation as this - such a prophecy as this - too good to be true?" (26).

This then, is a Golden Age, to which Geard points. I think the lineaments of its "world-outlook" can also be discerned in the "physiognomic observation" which Powys claimed to be the "method" of Glastonbury. The Decline of the West attempts to project itself out of the point of view of the civilization of its time, to see "the world-as-history" as opposed to a linear progressive history leading up to the present. Spengler tries to write, not as if surveying the world from Germany in 1918, but as if he were God. He compares the "local and temporary values" which control ordinary history to the

Ptolemaic system, his own view to the Copernican. Powys too, in Glastonbury, writes as if he were God, surveying his created world just as he did his childhood aquarium. For Spengler, the "eye perfectly free from prepossessions" is Goethe's:

For him, the world-as-mechanism stood opposed to the world-as-organism, dead nature to living nature, law to form. (27).

There is an opposition of "the number-based, un-mystical, dissectable and dissected "Nature" of Aristotle and Kant, the Sophists and the Darwinians, modern physics and chemistry, vis-à-vis the lived, felt and unconfined "Nature" of Homer and Eddas, of Doric and Gothic man." (28). The study of this latter view of Nature is called "Physiognomic" as opposed to "systematic" (29), and "the systematic spirit, narrow and withdrawn ("abs-tract") from the sensual, is an autumnal and passing phenomenon belonging to the ripest conditions of a Culture" (30).

It is clear that Powys, in attempting "physiognomic observation," aims at penetrating the life of things, rather than describing them from a practical, or even human point of view. Hence the talking trees, the animate winds, the thoughts of the earth. Powys is trying experimentally, to change the descriptive foci of the "Winter" world-outlook, to write out of the "Springtime" culture which Geard promotes. Of the springtime in classicism, Spengler writes:

The unlimited multitude of antique gods - every tree, every spring, every house, nay every part of a house is a god - means that every tangible thing is an independent existence, and therefore that none is functionally subordinate to any other. (31).

We see this in Powys too, in his strange impartiality of minute observation, apparent in Glastonbury, but most fully developed in Porius, where people and insects and fungi really do seem to exist on a curiously equal footing, as Geard had preached in his last sermon at the "Rotunda".

As for Geard, he turns out to be a God, but this is an altogether distinct plane of meaning in Glastonbury, and will be discussed in relation to the novel's mythological dimension.

### III VARIETIES OF RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

Geard has a prophetic role, but he is no ideal for emulation. His experience is enclosed, unapproachable, and other characters of Glastonbury must attain or fail their individual Grail visions through the fatality of their own natures.

The main symbol of the power of Glastonbury, the Holy Grail, is therefore of shifting meaning. The Grail is sometimes Christian, but more often Powys follows John Rhys in connecting the Grail with ancient Celtic Cauldrons of Rebirth, and Jessie Weston in linking it with Vegetation Myth. That these interpretations were hotly opposed to each other in the academic world of his time disturbs Powys not a bit; he exploits all of them, as the value of symbols such as the Grail is in their undogmatic suggestiveness:

If we do select for our symbol such a form, such a shape, such a gesture and such a name, as history may offer, we shall at any rate be always free to keep it fluid and malleable and organic. We shall be free to plunge it, so to speak, again and again into the living reality which it has been selected to represent. We shall be free to extricate it

completely from all its accretions of chance and circumstance and material events. We shall be free to extricate it from all premature metaphysical syntheses. We shall be free to draw it from the clutches of dogmatic religion. We shall be free to make it, as all such symbols should be made, poetical and mythological, and, in the aesthetic sense, shamelessly anthropomorphic. (32).

Powys exceeds Weston in attaching personal erotic significance to the Grail and its quest; for Weston the sexual symbolism of the Grail and the Lance is secondary in a ritual enacted to ensure the fruitfulness of the land. For Powys, a Grail quest belongs to the individual. Glastonbury itself is charged with sexual energy:

All lovers who have ever visited the place will know at once what is meant by this. None approach these three Glastonbury hills without an intensification of whatever erotic excitement they are capable of and whatever deepening of the grooves of their sublimated desire falls within the scope of their fate. (pp.783/4).

The Grail itself has aphrodisiac connotations, but its most constant characteristic is its transcendence. Geard calls the Grail "a little nucleus of Eternity, dropped somehow from the outer spaces upon one particular spot." (p.458).

For Owen Evans the Grail is a miracle-working healer, for Sam Dekker it is a transcendent confirmation of his mystic life which liberates him from the necessity of self-denial, for Geard it is a fulfilment glimpsed in death, and for Mary Crow, in her female passivity, the Grail has no representational form. But common to all the characters, including those who do not see the Grail, is the motive of struggle. In contrast to the ruminative characters of Wolf

Solent, the people of Glastonbury live to strive for the attainment of a vision.

This struggle also belongs to those who oppose themselves to the "superstition" of Glastonbury. Philip Crow lives to expand his commercial empire, and to see Glastonbury a prosperous industrial town, his ambition symbolized by his new bridge over the Brue. Dave Spear and Red Robinson are sustained by visions of a communist Utopia and revolutionary revenge. Paul Trent works towards an anarchic society, which still will leave room for individuality. Although some of these aspirations may run counter to the Grail's main purposes, they are analogous quests, and Powys delights in exposing under-currents of personal longing and weakness which baffle these materialist characters' ambitions. Of all the protagonists of the novel, only John Crow contends for no Grail vision, and his case requires special examination.

In relating the quality of religious experience less to doctrine than to the feelings of the individual, Powys is close to William James. He acknowledges what he felt to be the excessive influence of James in a letter to Llewelyn in 1907 (33). James's The Varieties of Religious Experience, which Powys most admired, and which caused him to miss his station on a railway journey, defines its field of reference as

... the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine. (34).

A Glastonbury Romance is Powys's Varieties of Religious Experience. It is from James that Powys drew his frequent phrase

"the multiverse", and in James he found a powerful ally in his speculations on polytheism, "which ... has always been the real religion of common people, and is so still today" (35).

James delights in finding material for his study of religious experience in unlikely, or intellectually despised corners. Bizarre evangelical fervours are set beside St. John of the Cross, the "mind-cure" movement, Theosophy, Whitman's pantheism, Tolstoy and Bunyan. Powys resembles James in his fascination of the testimony of cranks and outcasts, describing with sympathy their experience as lived, without judgement. In James, religion serves the needs of the individual:

... I do not see how it is possible that creatures in such different positions and with such different powers as human beings are, should have exactly the same functions and the same duties ... If an Emerson were forced to be Wesley, or a Moody forced to be a Whitman, the total human consciousness of the divine would suffer ... So a 'god of battles' must be allowed to be the god for one kind of person, a god of peace and heaven and home, the god for another. We must frankly recognise that we live in partial systems, and that parts are not interchangeable in the spiritual life. (36).

Religion, in Powys and James, is for use (37), reminding us of Wolf Solent's final power to command, not supplicate, supernatural powers (38), and Powys's own similar belief expressed in his Autobiography. (39). Geard, too, issues commands, not prayers (p.707). If judgement is to be made upon the different religious experiences encountered in Glastonbury, it will be on similar criteria. How far does a character's religious life satisfy the need of his whole personality? (\*)

(\*) cf. Michael Greenwald's discussion of the subjective and imaginative aspects of Powys's philosophy, with its debt to James, in "Powys's Complex Vision," Essays, ed. Humfrey, pp.57-83.

In The Religion of a Sceptic Powys writes from a similarly anthropocentric standpoint:

For ultimately, as our average sceptic knows perfectly well, it is the human race which has invented the figure of Christ and all the mysteries connected with that figure ... Our Christ will be neither the mystical Son of Heaven of orthodox theology nor the sympathetic philanthropist of heretical hero-worship. He will be a natural and veritable god, a creation not of piety at all, still less of philosophy, but of poetry and the imagination. (40).

But to find in man's imagination the origin of usually transcendent powers is not a devaluation. These powers are not the less strong:

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. (41).

"Glamour" and "poetry" at first seem superficial attractions, but the "poetical" for Powys stretched beyond the literary or picturesque to express, in ways necessarily semi-articulate, the forces of magic and the mysterious (42). Powys described as "poetical" those constant and enduring aspects of human life and the natural world which aroused in him "intimations"; the poetical is therefore connected with man's mythological and religious instinct.

Powys's emphasis upon personal vision means that orthodox beliefs are rarely fully satisfactory. Mat Dekker, the vicar of Glastonbury, although described with respect and sympathy, fails to quell his longing for his son's mistress Nell through recourse to his

solid Anglicanism. He dreams of offering the sacramental Cup to her, but in his dream the Cup is transformed into the silver bowl of the procuress Mother Legge, identified by Owen Evans as the heathen Grail of fertility religion (pp.758-9). Mat Dekker is a victim of the division between flesh and spirit, disunion suffered pathetically by Hugh Clavering in Wood and Stone, and emphatically healed in Géard's religion.

It is a division healed by his son Sam Dekker in his own way. Sam Dekker's story turns upon two of the most striking incidents in the novel, the chapter "Consummation" describing his ecstatic union with Nell Zoyland, and his Grail vision, achieved after months of self-denial, in illustration of Powys's belief that "the strongest of all psychic forces in the world is unsatisfied desire." (p.126).

The chapter "Consummation" also deserves consideration as a lyrical interlude in the novel, and an example of Powys's use of incantatory prose to describe a state of rapture - a rhetoric so markedly absent from the modern novel, and pervasive in Glastonbury. Powys emphasizes the archetypal character of the union of the two lovers, so different from the nervous, individual love-making of John and Mary Crow. From their union, in his most omniscient fashion, Powys draws general conclusions about the nature of love. The passage ends with the lovers in satisfied sleep, and a rhapsodic "dying fall" typical of Powys's chapter-endings:

The sleep of consummated love has indeed nothing in the world comparable to it except the sleep of mother and child.

As these two slept, the shapeless moon sank down over the rim of the Polden Hills. As these two slept, little gusts of midnight air, less noticeable than any wind but breaking the



absolute stillness, stirred the pale, green leaf-buds above many a half-finished hedge-sparrow's nest between the Queen's Sedgemoor and the Lake Village flats. Here and there, unknown to Sam Dekker or any other naturalist, a few among such nests held one or two cold untimely eggs, over whose brittle blue-tinted rondure moved in stealthy motion these light-borne air-stirrings pursuing their mysterious journeys from one dark horizon to another. Drooping over the rich, black earth in Mr. Weatherwax's two walled gardens hung motionless the heads of the honey-sweet jonquils and the faint-breath'd narcissi, too heavily asleep in that primordial sleep of green-calyxed vegetation, deeper and older than the sleep of birds or beasts or men, to respond, even by the shiver of the least petal among them, to these light motions of the midnight air. The sensitised earth-nerves of that portion of the maternal planet upon which these beings lived responded, as she swung forward on her orbit, to the sleep of her numerous offspring by a drowsy deliciousness of her own in the arms of the night, enclosing them all in those interstellar spaces and comforting them all with a peace greater than their peace. (pp.312-3).

This passage illustrates many features of what can be both admired and disliked in Powys. The lulling, rhythmic prose, with the Keatsian langour of "honey-sweet jonquils and faint-breath'd narcissi", attempts the consciously "poetic", the restoration to prose of the verbal magic which made A.E. Housman's beard bristle as he shaved. Powys's "bête noir", Robert Graves, could read it as conforming to the worship of "The White Goddess". The style is suspiciously opiate, and even if a reader does not find it immediately over-rich, he suspects a trick; he begins to wonder if such a passage means anything.

The experience of the characters here is of contented unconsciousness. Everything else is an overlay from Powys himself, who does not move among his characters, like another human being, but gazes down upon them, like a god whose insight detects the non-

human processes of nature. A descent into non-human layers of being in sleep is common in Powys, but here the authority of the passage very much depends upon how far we can believe in Powys's poetic penetration. The forces and imagery which he deploys are, however, very well suited to character and situation. The birds' nests remind us of Sam's passion for natural history - but with a note of pain, for egg collecting is an interest which has hitherto bound Sam and his father together. His love for Nell now causes a rift between them stressed here geographically by the reference to the Vicarage gardens. The eggs too are "untimely", hinting at what we later know to be true - that Nell is now pregnant with Sam's child.

The perspective is cosmic, including the orbit of the planet and the minutiae of the natural world, and disregarding human concerns. The experience of ecstasy in Powys is often associated with a personal identification with the vegetable and a heightened awareness of stellar space. There is a displacement of human personality, the idea embedded in the Greek root of the word "ecstasy". In this passage the movement of the moon and of the world through space recalls Sam's elation earlier in the chapter, where, walking while Nell prepares their love-feast, he feels the influence of the moon upon himself and the vegetation about him, with the motion of the earth heightening his expectation;

The dark earth beneath him seemed to him then like a vast, wild-maned horse, upon whose broad back he was being borne through space. (p.307).

The scene is finally felicitous in its place in the novel, an example of the careful way in which Powys interleaves the various stories of Glastonbury so that they comment upon each other. The

following chapter begins with an immediate recoil from "Consummation", as Persephone Spear sits in a hotel room in Taunton, sickened by the touch of a man.

The energy which Sam invests in his love for Nell is subsequently transferred to his Christ, whom he conceives as "a lover" (p.538). This Christ is unorthodox and Manichaeian; like Blake's Christ he is "like Lucifer - only he's not evil ... at least not what I call evil. But He's the enemy of God." (p.815). In his self-sacrifice and ascetism, Sam becomes the victim of a dualism, loathing the sensual and unredeemed world of matter and possession. "We are all scales, scurf, scab, on the same twisting, cresting dragon of the slime. The tide of life itself is evil!" (p.820). Christ enters the world from without to "redeem Matter". In attempting to share the sufferings of Christ, Sam comes to an acquaintance with physical pain in undertaking the life of a manual labourer, and to an acquaintance with evil in the squalid slum of the Bagge family.

The religious experience of Glastonbury is pluralistic, its parts not interchangeable. Powys supplies some connections himself, authorially comparing Geard with Sam, Sam with John Crow or Owen Evans. However, Sam does move closer to Geard's earthy spirituality in his Grail vision, a most characteristically Powysian union of opposites combining the visionary with the gross and excremental. Its significance is discussed by Professor Wilson Knight in Neglected Powers (43), but it is worth adding that even this "union of opposites" has a complementary earthy vision in the subsequent scene, tender against all possible odds, in which Sam administers an enema to the aged Abel Twig. This scene again, in a fashion which in context is not grotesque, involves a symbolism of lance and cup. For Sam, Christ is now "in matter" (p.943).

The other character who attempts to share the sufferings of Christ is Owen Evans, who tries to exorcize his sadism through playing the part of the Crucified in Geard's passion play. Bearing in mind Powys's rejection of self-punishment throughout his work, it is right that this attempt should fail; as the Vicarage gardener, Isaac Weatherwax, puts it, "'tis not by tormenting folk that good parsnips be growed" (p.598).

It is perhaps true that Evans' lonely, self-lacerating guilt is too self-abandoned on Powys's part. It is crudely expressed, but undeniably powerful. Evans glimpses "a remorseful sadist" from one of the streets of Glastonbury:

He imagined her ... slowly torturing herself to death; and this by a process that Mr. Evans completely understood. It was a process of pleasure-killing. He knew the part played in this process by everything in the woman's room .... He could hear the ticking of the clock which she wound up so carefully every night; although it was the ticking of this clock more than anything else that she found intolerable. (p.253).

This is the necessary opposite of Powys's "cult of sensations", the sacramental absorption in the pleasures of the senses enjoyed most fully in Glastonbury by John Crow. Evans exists at odds with such pleasures, involved in his clumsiness with "perennial struggles with the inanimate" (p.248).

"There are endless occasions when I loathe Nature. I think the truth is that God is outside Nature ... altogether outside ... creator of it ... but often loathing it as much as I do! I feel sometimes that Matter is entirely evil ... and that to cleanse our minds we must destroy its power ... destroy ... its power." (p.260).

It is therefore appropriate that "The Iron Bar" which excites Evans' sadism is to be aimed at John Crow, Evans' natural opposite, despite their friendship.

Why so much talk of "matter"? I do not believe that this discussion of the status of "matter", indulged at such length by Evans, Sam Dekker, and John Crow, is at all irrelevant. It is the crux of the book - how far the obstinately, crudely visible world can be illuminated from within, as it is for Geard.

Evans looks for redemption from his vice in his Celtic researches, through which Powys mediates the significance of his novel in relation to Celtic legend and Grail romance.

But this redemption is only ambiguously achieved. Evans chooses for himself two "Grail messengers" - Mad Bet, herself a sadist, who invites Evans to pursue his vice to its conclusion, - and his wife Cordelia, who attempts to restore him to the path of normality.

His end is between these two extremes. He witnesses the fall of "The Iron Bar" which is the focus of his obsession, but not in a mood of sexual excitement, for his wife has successfully assaulted the walls of his vice from the outside, and pitted her meagre charms against the mysterious force luring him up to Glastonbury Tor.

This scene is all the more touching for its rarity in Powys's work. Evans achieves a partial salvation, not through sinking into himself, the usual destiny of Powys's characters, but through his wife's intuition and courage, an incursion of the sane, and of what in his case is the salutary and normal.

Evans' vice is purged, but that purgation has involved the death of Tom Barter. Evans is last seen, suddenly white haired, still fruitlessly studying Malory for his real redemption. The subject of sadism is not yet a closed one for Powys, and indeed the "Harrowing of Hell" which Evans desires does not take place until Morwyn.

Geard, Sam Dekker, and Evans exist on one side of the borderline in A Glastonbury Romance between those who have access to or faith in the supernatural, and those who have not. This is the barrier Powys is attempting to surmount in Glastonbury by placing visionary experience in an everyday setting. What he forces us to recognise is that if we are to allow the possibility of such visionary experience, it is precisely within such everyday reality that it must take place. But this does not make the communication between the two modes of apprehension any easier, as Sam realizes when he tries to spread the news of his vision around the town:

There came over Sam just then a desire to laugh aloud. That no one in this town could be brought even to listen to what he had seen seemed like a crazy dream. He felt as if he were living in two worlds at the same time, and one of them, by far the less real and by far the more absurd, was trying to convince him that the other was a fantasy. (p.965).

The border between these two areas is crossed and re-crossed by Powys as a novelist, but of his characters, there are those who remain permanently on the side of the material world. Powys discusses his characters' susceptibility to supernatural intimations in terms of racial inheritance. Powys saw himself as a product of three different races: the Welsh, through his name and traditional descent from the ancient princes of Powys, the West country, through his father and his youth, and the East Anglian, through his mother. Geard

as magician, Evans, Sam Dekker the young man divided between rebellion against and love for his West Country clergyman father, are all recognizable Powysian personae, as is John Crow, whose scepticism is ascribed to his East Anglian or "Danish" ancestry. Powys uses different characters in the book as spokesmen for the different, often conflicting strains within himself.

John Crow's scepticism, which surves his vision of King Arthur's sword, acts as a counterweight to Geard's faith. That the two characters should be associated, able to exploit each other's skills, is apt, for they are complementary figures, between whose types a dialogue is to continue in Powys's world to the end. In Maiden Castle, Dud No-Man, another sceptical survivor, is to recognize the magician-like Uryen Quirm as his father; the rapprochement is completed at the end of Porius, where Porius climbs Y Wyddfa to release Myrddin Wyllt from imprisonment.

John Crow's resemblance to Wolf Solent is marked physically, and in his practice of a "cult of sensations" and a philosophy resembling Wolf's "escape or endure"; but A Glastonbury Romance is a point of rest after the tortuous introspection of Wolf Solent: John Crow's survival skills are practised, he maintains his happiness, and does not change in the course of the novel. His rebellion against middle-class orthodoxy is less idealistic and romantic than Wolf's; where Wolf was embarrassed by his bourgeois background, John Crow cynically exploits it. He views his employment as Geard's publicity agent with as little respect as Wolf held for his researches under Urquhart, but without Wolf's conscientious scruples. Unlike Wolf, he is free from social self-consciousness.

But Powys's picture of John Crow, while affectionate, is finally critical. His cunning self-preservation is also self-limitation, and his unamenability to his vision of King Arthur's sword has a hint of anxious self-protection:

All the way back to his little office John's thoughts kept hovering around that startling episode of the milk-white sword with the dark handle. "I don't care what they do; I don't care what signs and omens they fling down; I don't care how much I infuriate them ..."

In the depths of John's consciousness something very lonely and very cold began to congeal itself into a little, hard, round stone. "I am myself," he thought, "I am myself alone." (p.370).

Geard does erode John Crow's defensiveness; Crow recognizes aspects of Geard's philosophy which are close to his own earthiness, and has sufficient insight to predict Geard's suicide. His final judgement is equivocal.

John's hatred of Glastonbury and its traditions was betrayed to the end by his incorrigible interest in psychic problems. Mr. Geard's mysticism had always influenced him more than he was willing to admit; and in any case he was a temperamental heathen rather than a materialist. He was quite as sceptical of materialistic explanations as he was of the occult occurrences that gave rise to them. (p.1046).

John's final departure to his native Norfolk is treated dismissively; his refusal to respond to Glastonbury has been a denial of spiritual possibility.



#### IV SOCIETY

The characters hitherto considered - John Crow, Owen Evans, Sam Dekker - even Geard - have solved in privacy individual questions of their relation to the cosmos. Their quests have been introspective, dealing with supernatural agents, but not with other people. Other people have impinged upon their lives, but have had to be removed, like Nell Zoyland. Geard leaves his family to realize his vision in death. At best, others can be welcomed in a companionship which does not lessen a conviction of personal isolation. The relationship of John and Mary Crow, though happy, brings no communion. This continual absence of relation is consequent upon Powys's view of human nature. His characters are formed by inner sensation and private passion. Their response to each other is governed by processes beyond their control, and by chance, a force partly represented in Glastonbury by the book's remote cosmological rulers. That human relations in Glastonbury, as much as in Wolf Solent, are bedevilled or favoured by such inscrutable agents means that Powys's characters are most themselves when alone. The book's memorable scenes are of solitude - Evans' obsessional guilt, John Crow's secretive cunning, Cordelia's psychological release in the rain, Geard at night in Mark's court; even the industrialist Philip Crow is recognized most individually in his moments of reflection. Powys's omniscience and curiosity delight in observing his characters in moments of weakness and private truth-telling, probing beneath the social surface to find hidden motive and ironic discrepancy between behaviour and inner life.

This discrepancy can often be richly humorous, as when the people of Glastonbury assemble in the Abbot's Tribunal, apparently to

hear Geard announce his plans for the pageant, but each with the more important private intention of catching a glimpse of the person they love (pp.334-5). Elsewhere the contrast is moving, as in Miss Drew's concealed passion for Mary Crow, or the domestic torture which underlies Dr. Fell's professional life. We have the stark contrast, surely most credible, between Owen Evans' bumbling, innocuous exterior and his tormented inner life.

Here Powys reaps the rewards of his often criticized "omniscience". "How can the author know?" Glen Cavaliero wants to ask of a passage full of earth and vegetation in restless activity, similar to that at the end of "Consummation" (44). There is perhaps a justifiable unease at Powys's idiosyncratic, god-like survey of natural forces; he is on surer ground playing God with his characters, who are after all legitimately his own creations. "Omniscient" is perhaps not a good word here, for there are hundreds of novels which are technically "omniscient", but very few which uncover the mental hiding places of some fifty characters. Powys takes his place among the "invisible watchers" around the town of Glastonbury: the author is less "omniscient" than a voyeur.

There is literal "voyeurism" in the Autobiography, but a more pervasive "voyeurism" in Powys the man: Dorothy Richardson's biographer (though not, I think, Richardson herself) found it repellent:

John asked her to "pour out" her thoughts and feelings to him. He wanted to know everything, including what went on in her mind at night as she lay next to Alan. (45).

This concern with the hidden life means that Powys is better at describing people than societies. That the individual life is all that

matters is taken as axiomatic, and Powys depicts his political characters, who see themselves as active agents in social issues, as mainly self-deceiving.

But there is a more thorough and elusive strangeness about the society, the whole physical world of Glastonbury. It is not that there are insufficient motor cars, but that the cars are somehow Powysian. Roland Mathias complains that the characters do not have proper economic lives (46). But there is not one character living on the kind of vague private income which supported the cast of Ducdame, and the action of most novels, after all, takes place out of working hours. The society of Glastonbury is minutely particularized: it is not Roland Mathias's "unrealized smudge". What in fact happens is that everything is "John Cowperised" - viewed in terms of "sensation". Cigarettes, halfpenny buns, railway engines, fires and shops are never simply "there", but are re-created through the author's imagination which overshadows the book, enjoying the spectacle like one of its own Powys heroes, rubbing his hands and clasping his bony knees over the continuities of life. Nothing is taken for granted, everything is a source of surprise. Powys, we feel, responded to the world by assimilating it to himself. "Posts, palings, hedges, heaps of stones" he writes of his walks at Cambridge, "- they were part of my very soul." (47). Hence the intense livingness and atmosphere of so many of the Glastonbury domestic interiors; they are in an intimate way part of the author himself. But hence also the terrible implausibility and mawkishness where the novel demands something other than Powysian awareness - as when the Sherborne School cadet force comes to the relief of the flooded town. That such lapses are also part of Powys's "soul" is why the fiercest enthusiasts of the novels are able to be so indulgent towards them.

But Powys is excellent when it comes to the individual within society, though the middle focus of social observation is sacrificed for the sake of a delight in minutiae of social behaviour. Just as in his characters' private lives a totality is created out of small sensations, so in Powys it is the small social movement which speaks loudest:

It is the little thing, the unrehearsed gesture, the catch in the breath, the droop in the lip, the start of surprise, which really reveals. We may analyze ourselves in volumes and remain undiscovered; and then - by a yawn, a tilt of the head, a sob of exhaustion, a flash of hate - we are betrayed and unmasked for ever. (48).

The application of this very personal method of selection produces a picture of social behaviour very convincing in detail, but off-centre, idiosyncratic in total effect. Powys is excellent in subtle delineation of social class (which Geard significantly overrides), poor in the creation of a convincing social milieu of broadly accepted relations, into which characters may lapse when they are not strictly important.

In a sense, there is no diminishing perspective, in which minor characters recede away from major. Powys is incapable of conceiving a peg. The most fugitive appearances are made suddenly memorable, and Powys presses this technique to humorous extremes, as in the momentary glimpse of a "surveyor from Evercreech" "who was hoping for the death of his father-in-law in order to inherit four Jersey cows" (p.733). The Evercreech surveyor, the Nietzschean young man at Wollop's stores, Nancy Stickles, and many another vignette, suggest that the novel could extend without any necessary limit to include any aspect or inhabitant of Glastonbury. Powys's whole

concern is suddenly focussed upon such people, and there is the feeling that the imaginative territory of the book extends beyond what has been written down. There is no fixed "point of view", in either technical construction or philosophy. Technically, that a writer should briefly shift the point of view to a flock of sheep is almost a practical joke on Percy Lubbock. But it is a practice of peculiar imaginative integrity, for the pluralism of Powys's philosophy is imitated in his narrative.

Typical of Powys's outstanding successes, incidental to the main thrust of the novel, but dwelt upon with loving care, are his "old maids". There are two in Glastonbury, Elizabeth Crow and Miss Drew. Both have young women in their charge, but where Miss Crow is indulgent to the love affair of Lady Rachel and Ned Athling, Miss Drew is feverishly jealous of Mary Crow's projected marriage to her cousin John.

Miss Drew is a Victorian survival:

The cook's name was Louie Rogers. She was only a year older than Lily and as a rule Miss Drew called her Louie; but when upset by the spectacle of the world's disorder she always called her Rogers. It had been her mother's as well as her grandmother's custom to call their cooks by their surnames and Miss Drew reverted to it as a sort of invocation of these thin-lipped, tenderly stern women, whose miniatures were on her writing-table. The mere utterance of the word "Rogers" seemed to Miss Drew to bring back decency and respect to human intercourse. (p.121)

This passage is concise and dense, very appropriate for Miss Drew in its clipped stateliness. It is also benignly humorous on Powys's part. It is not so very far removed from Forster.

Here is another passage, from D.H. Lawrence's The Virgin and the Gipsy, with another household where a young girl's love life is thwarted. The house is less genteel than Miss Drew's, though close to the late Victorian stuffiness for which Powys reserves his own mixture of love and rejection. Lawrence's household is simply horrible:

The rectory struck a chill into their hearts as they entered. It seemed ugly, and almost sordid, with the dank air of that middle-class, degenerated comfort which has ceased to be comfortable and has turned stuffy, unclean. The hard, stone house struck the girls as being unclean, they could not have said why. The shabby furniture seemed somehow sordid, nothing was fresh. Even the food at meals had that awful dreary sordidness which is so repulsive to a young thing coming from abroad. Roast beef and wet cabbage, cold mutton and mashed potatoes, sour pickles, inexcusable puddings.

Granny, who 'loved a bit of pork', also had special dishes, beef-tea and rusks, or a small savoury custard. The grey-faced Aunt Cissie ate nothing at all. She would sit at table, and take a single lonely and naked boiled potato on to her plate. She never ate meat. So she sat in sordid durance, while the meal went on, and Granny quickly slobbered her portion - lucky if she spilled nothing on her protuberant stomach. (49)

Lawrence's Granny is a tyrannous monster. Miss Drew is tyrannous too, but her sternness is a result of her lonely and unloved life. She loves her "companion" Mary Crow with an emotion only unleashed when confronted with Mary's marriage. Here Powys distributes his sympathies with care. There are the claims of the love of John and Mary, and Miss Drew's equally moving passion. Characteristically for Powys, each love is "perverse" in its own way.

Both Lawrence's Granny and Powys's Miss Drew are drowned in final floods which, like the flood of Genesis, serve to reveal the truth about people. In Lawrence, Granny's death is grotesque:

.... they saw the short but strange bulk of Granny emerge in the hall, away down from the dining-room door. She had her hands lifted and clawing, as the first water swirled round her legs, and her coffin-like mouth was opened in a hoarse scream.  
(50)

Miss Drew's death is reported in the one sentence of her distraught servant girl:

"Miss Drew couldn't leave her things, Sir," ... (p.1095)

Lawrence is all repulsive exultation; in Powys there is a minute glimpse, barely noticed in the tumult of the novel's closing scene, of a harsh but vulnerable old woman, pathetically and irrationally attached to her Dresden china and French clocks.

Of course, what is missed is Lawrence's passionate directness, his clarity of conviction. But the endless qualifications and divided feelings of Powys have their own maturity.

Powys is excellent at the kind of close focus we find in his portrait of his Miss Drew, and good too at withdrawing to visualize his ~~whole~~ creation as a whole. His description of the Glastonbury Pageant shows how he constructs a large scene in both perspectives, with the narrative darting wasp-like through the audience and also withdrawing to Geard, who surveys the whole spectacle from the top of Glastonbury Tor.

But Powys falters when he deals with the most purely public aspect of the novel - the Glastonbury Commune. In writing a novel of mixed genre, he had less difficulty with the book's religious discussion. A character can move into paranormal experience and back without affecting others: Powys deals in private realities. With the Commune, he deals with political realities which require witness, and it is astonishing to see Glastonbury's secession from the economic life of the nation provoking so little reaction from the outside world, while at the same time pilgrims flock to hear Geard from all parts of the globe.

Nevertheless Powys's treatment of his Commune is in concord with the rest of the book - it is on the borderland of the real and the ideal. Just as Powys tries to link the Holy Grail with the world we see, he tries to bring News from Nowhere to bear upon the borough council. There is a political element in the wholeness of Geard's vision, although delegated to other characters for its realization. Powys is wise enough to leave the commune only partially fulfilled, and this envisioned state of liberty never expands into the inertia of most fictional accounts of social utopias.

It is at first surprising that Powys held any political views at all, and it is true that his argument is weakened by his belief that the attainment of liberty is merely the removal of hindrances that hamper the growth of a full personal life conceived in non-social terms, as the anarchist Paul Trent begins to realize:

A doubt came into Paul Trent's mind, different from any he had ever felt, as to whether his inmost ideal - this thing that corresponded to the word liberty - was enough to live by. Wasn't it only the gap, the space, the vacuum, the hollow and empty no-man's land, into which the fleeting nameless essence could flow and abide? (p.1000)



But there is evidence that Powys's political opinions were held with some fierceness. His "philosophical anarchism" is certainly in harmony with the individualist, pluralist view of the world expounded in his writing. The American anarchist, Emma Goldman, recalls in her memoirs Powys's refusal to lecture in a hall in Chicago which had denied its platform to Alexander Berkman (51). He subsequently spoke at a memorial ceremony after the Sacco and Vanzetti affair in 1928, and contributed financially and with his article on Spengler to the American radical paper The Lantern, as well as to the English anarchist magazine of the late 'thirties, Spain and the World, where his essay is given a title as if from the nub of Glastonbury - "The Real and the Ideal".

But Powys's discussion of politics is the prime example of his disconcerting tendency to bring each subject he touched into a charmed circle of Powysian ideas. His articles have a stranded, stray look in their political monthlies. The same is true of the political discussion of Glastonbury. There is much that is psychologically persuasive, as in Red Robinson's sublimation of personal hate into political belief and sexual revenge. But just as the town of Glastonbury economically isolates itself from the rest of the country, so Powys's politics fail to comment on the world at large. Much of this remoteness can be ascribed to his absorption of politics into the larger concerns of Glastonbury, to its association with Geard's religion, and to Paul Trent's symbolic stature as a visitor from the Scilly Isles, important to Owen Evans' Welsh studies. But if Powys insists that political life have a religious dimension - an idea not intrinsically absurd - he merely denies himself contemporary comment in order to illustrate his own particular vision of wholeness. But this does require that A Glastonbury Romance retreat some way into the shadowy world inhabited by William Morris.

This implausibility remains, even though Powys is closer to the actual history of Glastonbury in his description of its political life than anywhere else in the novel. In the early twentieth century, as now, Glastonbury was a meeting place for cultural and political experiment, some of it highly eccentric. Between 1914 and 1926 the socialist composer Rutland Boughton organised a series of festivals, designed to transform Glastonbury into a kind of English Bayreuth, devoted to the performance of his cycle of music-dramas, Arthur of Britain. In 1913, just before his arrival in Glastonbury, Boughton wrote:

Our dramas necessitate the building of a place which Buckley has fitly forenamed the Temple Theatre. That theatre we are intent on making the centre of a commune. There have been many communes and they have failed - for lack of a religious centre. Our theatre supplies that. It shall grow out of the municipal life of some civically conscious place if we can get such a place to co-operate with us. Failing that, a new city shall grow around the theatre. (52).

Boughton's aesthetic theories have a perfervid, Powysian ring:

If an artist is to do true production work on the spiritual side, he must live a true life on every side, developing not only the craft of his art, but his physical and intellectual faculties as well. And if these faculties can be developed in immediate intercourse with Father Sky and Mother Earth, so much the better. They are the original source of all energy on this planet, Pictures painted and symphonies composed under such conditions have a solar force behind them. (53)

Boughton's festivals were closely involved with the life of Glastonbury; local singers and dancers were employed, and the festivals divided the opinions of the townspeople in the same way as Geard's pageant. That they met with national recognition, and the support of prominent figures such as Shaw, suggests they were not entirely the work of an isolated eccentric.

Boughton's experiment does not make the commune of A Glastonbury Romance any more credible. There is an example here of the novelist's dilemma, that while the improbable may be made to seem probable in fiction, the originally probable may not be as convincing. But the example of Boughton does emphasize that Powys's talk of socialism is of craft-socialism, in the tradition of Morris and Edward Carpenter. The Glastonbury commune turns away from Philip Crow's huge dye-works to craft workshops. In Rutland Boughton's ideal of "a self-supporting community of artist-farmers", there is a much clearer pre-figuration of the development of Powys's political thought from the Glastonbury commune to the forest-people of Porius, than is to be found in the study of orthodox industrial socialism, which Powys discusses as a form of state tyranny.

The disentangling of A Glastonbury Romance into various strands of meaning is a task which falsifies the book; with the casualness of his old age Powys called the novel "a jumbled-up and squeezed together epitome of life's various dimensions" (p.xiv), and one of its great strengths is its picture of the interdependence of man's religious, cognitive, passionate and political natures. In this sense Glastonbury shows a very satisfying wholeness: "a proof of what far-removed opposites in Nature the mind of man can reduce to an imaginative unity" (p.321). This unity is not doctrinal; Powys wrote of his novel's "acceptance of our human life in the spirit of absolutely undogmatic ignorance." (p.xvi)

## V THE MYTHOLOGICAL DIMENSION

This spirit of ignorance would not be divined by a reader coming to the opening paragraph of Glastonbury for the first time. It

is true that Powys imposes a cosmology of his own devising upon the action of the novel, with a dual-natured First Cause, and the Sun and Moon as lesser divinities governing the lives of men. It seems a very long way from the modest position of the end of Wolf Solent, with its acceptance of an isolated human individuality within an unknowable cosmos, to this:

At the striking of noon on a certain fifth of March, there occurred within a causal radius of Brandon railway station and yet beyond the deepest pools of emptiness between the uttermost stellar systems one of those infinitesimal ripples in the creative silence of the First Cause which always occur when an exceptional stir of heightened consciousness agitates any living organism in this astronomical universe. Something passed at that moment, a wave, a motion, a vibration, too tenuous to be called magnetic, too subliminal to be called spiritual, between the soul of a particular human being who was emerging from a third-class carriage of the twelve-nineteen train from London and the divine-diabolic soul of the First Cause of all life. (p.21)

I do not think that this cosmology is intended to be taken entirely seriously. It is an example of Powys's frivolity in the presence of the cosmic, a trait which he admired in Rabelais and Homer, and which dominates the fantasies of his last years. In Mortal Strife Powys says he is "fanciful rather than mystical, and ... having a fatal tendency to be flippant where a sublime seriousness would seem the only appropriate tone." (54). It would be idle to pretend that his ironies at the expense of the First Cause are entirely successful, particularly in this opening, where on a more mundane level the 12:19 train somehow arrives by noon. Powys is trying to make play, in self-parody, with the grandiose aims of his novel. His frivolity arises from a sense that traditional reverence for the One God has become dull and staled, and is just no longer possible. In

Glastonbury the usual hierarchies of reverence are reversed, and Powys approaches with tenderness and awe small motions of the natural world, insect and vegetable life, effects of light and air which to him are invested with a greater sense of the numinous than the concepts of metaphysics. In Porius, "transference of reverence" becomes something of a doctrine.

But there is fortunately no reason for Powys's cosmology to affect a reading of the human experiences in the novel. The characters themselves are ignorant of any ruling cosmic order. The distant and inscrutable First Cause is no mystical apprehension, but in its remoteness serves to remove men from the transcendental as completely as any final void. Powys's hierarchy of powers attempts to give Glastonbury a total perspective, however dubious in its effect; these deities, in their unconcern for human fate, represent the nature of the world as Powys finds it, with its inscrutable mixture of good and evil. The cosmology of Glastonbury is used playfully and without internal consistency. The soul of Canon Crow ruminates in the grave, but Tom Barter's flies off into the heavens. A Glastonbury Romance marks the only appearance of the dual-natured First Cause in Powys's work - apart from minor asides in the Autobiography. There are no beliefs of Powys here; his examination of man in relation to the supernatural is in his examination of man's experience.

But it would be dispiriting, after reading a novel the size of Glastonbury, with its visions and miracles, to find the novelist leaving in the same state of "undogmatic ignorance" as he arrived, and I do not think this happens. In The Religion of a Sceptic, quoted earlier, Powys said that "a natural and veritable god" would be a creation "of poetry and of the imagination." "Enchantment" would return to religion, were it regarded as "mythology".

There are two statements by Powys about the relationship of A Glastonbury Romance to the worlds of Grail romance and Celtic mythology. One occurs in a letter to his publisher, and another in his "self-catechism" in Modern Thinker :

There is all the way through the book a constant under-current of secret reference to the Grail Legends various incidents and characters playing roles parallel to those in the old romances of the Grail not without various furtive dips into that world of weird ritual and mythology made so much of by T.S. Eliot in "Wasteland". It does not go to work with the pedantry of Joyce using "The Odyssey" in "Ulysses" - but there is a vague sort of parallel to all that! (55)

It has interested me also to re-create the profound symbolism of the Grail mythology and to discover it re-enacting itself in various significant groupings of animate and inanimate existence in these modern days. All this, though it will clearly reveal itself to anyone with a penchant for mythology, does not in any way interfere with the philosophy of the book or become an encumbrance to any reader's enjoyment and understanding of the conflict in it between its two main forces. (56).

First of all, Powys emphasizes that his mythological parallels are "secret", and that the enjoyment of Glastonbury does not depend upon them. It is important that Powys does not want to make his novel obscure. But a study of these parallels does, I think, lead to a stratum of mythological faith which makes his suspended judgement about the meaning of Glastonbury altogether less evasive.

Malory is not helpful. John Rhys and Jessie Weston consider Le Morte d'Arthur as a very late reworking of mythological material, and Powys too wants to regress as far as possible.

In Malory the role of magic, of Merlin, and of the Grail's spiritual significance is altogether lessened in favour of an interest in knight errantry. The whole narrative texture of Glastonbury is quite different. Its Grail quests are solitary and inward; in Malory there is a succession of dramatic confrontations, the kind of drama Powys so sedulously avoids. Geard and Philip Crow, the opposite poles of visionary and industrialist, do not even meet until the final scene.

Powys's references to Malory are therefore incidental and often humorous. Morgan le Fay is a ten year old girl. Crummie Geard, ravishingly beautiful, and pining vainly for the love of Sam Dekker, becomes The Lady of Shalott in the pageant. "It's so stuffy in here," she complains from her barge.

More central is "The Dolorous Blow", which in Malory is delivered by Balin upon King Pellam:

And King Pellam lay so, many years sore wounded, and might never be whole till Galahad the haughty prince healed him in the guest of the Sangreal, for in that place was part of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, that Joseph of Arimathea brought into this land, and there himself lay in that rich bed.  
(57)

In Glastonbury, this incident is represented by Philip Crow's speech in the Abbot's Tribunal, after Geard has failed to appear. The scene illustrates the severe limitations, but also the suggestiveness, of Powys's parallels. As a dramatic parallel, the scene is a failure. "The Dolorous Blow" is only a momentary setback to Geard's plans. There is no reason to connect Philip Crow with Balin, or anybody with King Pellam. What we do have, however, is a hint of how Powys follows Jessie Weston in his parallels of structure and philosophy with

the overall shape of the vegetation myths of From Ritual to Romance. There are two waste lands in A Glastonbury Romance. One is the unenchanted, material landscape which Philip Crow wishes to exploit:

From the forlorn thorn stumps of Tom Chinnock's Terre Gastée at the foot of Wirral Hill the effects of this Dolorous Blow seemed likely to spread over the whole psychic landscape. Let Her labour and let Her eat, but let the Stone of Merlin remain a stone, and the Fountain of Blood remain a chalybeate spring! (p.343)

Tom Chinnock's "Terre Gastée" is a desolate patch of land where a collection of Glastonbury youths mocks passers-by with crude sexual taunts. Eliot's The Waste Land was for Powys an "emotional-sardonic rattling of the tin cans of the world's rubbish heap" (58), and there is this kind of wasteland in Glastonbury too. (\*) Just before John Crow sees King Arthur's sword, he stares into the River Brue from Pomparles Bridge; this is the river into which Glastonbury throws "old cans, old pieces of rusty iron, drowned cats and dogs, human abortions, vegetable garbage, tramps' discarded boots, heads and entrails of fishes, brick-shards, empty tobacco tins, broken bottles" (p.360). Pomparles Bridge is associated traditionally with King Arthur's Sword (\*\*); "John's eyes, roaming in search of anything that might recover the ambiguous romance that hung about the spot, fell eventually upon a dead cat whose distended belly, almost devoid of fur, presented itself, together with two paws and a shapeless head that was one desperate grin of despair, to the mockery of the sunshine". (p.357)

This then, is the wasteland - the "Illusion of Dead Matter" and the urban debris which Powys explored extensively in his first four

(\*) Powys knew The Waste Land by heart. Gerard Casey remembers him reciting it late in life - a performance rather different from Eliot's own.

(\*\*) The tradition is discussed in F.J. Snell, King Arthur's Country, pp.59-63 - according to Powys, "a very good book" (Essays, ed. Humphrey, p.324).



novels. Glastonbury is mostly about enchantment, so there is relatively little elaboration of the waste land, and the opposition of Philip Crow to Geard is a simple one of notation rather than of drama.

What then, of the forces which restore the waste land to life? John Crow's vision of King Arthur's Sword is an incident where enchantment is refused; the enchantment which is sought after is conveyed largely through Owen Evans' researches.

Here Powys relies overwhelmingly upon commentaries upon ancient texts, rather than the texts themselves. All the quotations from The Black Book of Carmarthen or the poems of Taliessin which are sprinkled through Glastonbury are easily accessible in Sir John Rhys's Studies in the Arthurian Legend, Jessie Weston's From Ritual to Romance, F.J. Snell's King Arthur's Country, and Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance by Roger S. Loomis. Rhys bases his study upon an original myth in which Arthur is a "Culture Hero", a leader of expeditions to Hades in quest of a magic cauldron, the "Cauldron of Rebirth". (59). The key text for this myth is a poem of Taliessin which Powys quotes in Glastonbury, Morwyn and Porius :

"Complete was the captivity of Gwair in Caer Sidi,  
Lured thither through the emissary of Pwyll and Pryderi."

As Paul Trent says, "Rhys, Loomis - they all quote it. It's from a very ancient Welsh poem called "The Harrying of Annwn" (60). Evans believes that "The Head of Annwn's Cauldron" in the poem refers "to that ancient heathen Grail, far older than Christianity, which redeemed ... and always will redeem ... everyone who understands it ... from ... from ... from ... from the captivity of

Gwair in Caer Sidi." (pp.807-8). While Evans' "captivity" obviously is his sadism, he feels that the poem has a more general human application; "in other words that they were all held in bond by something alien, by something external to their true, free essence." (p.812).

Jessie Weston, interpreting Grail romance as a descent from ancient fertility ritual, believes that the Grail has nothing to do with this Cauldron of Rebirth (61). But Weston's interpretation is in terms of regeneration too, and Powys feels able to borrow from both her and Rhys. The two strains do, as well, suddenly collide - rather than merge - when they come to talk of Cronos and Cybele.

The connection of Cronos or Saturn with the Celts has an ancient if not always respectable history. Rhys, Snell and Loomis quote Plutarch's account of Demetrius' journey to Britain, and the interpretation in classical language of the religion he found there. An extract appears in Glastonbury.

... there is there, they said, an island in which Cronos is imprisoned, with Briareus keeping guard over him as he sleeps, for, as they put it, sleep is the bond forged for Cronos (62)

This imprisoned Cronos, says Loomis, is the same god of life and light as Gwair, imprisoned in Caer Sidi (63).

Other classical writers, including Herodotus and Posidonius, (64) romanticized the distant Celts into noble savages, living in a primitive Golden Age of vegetarian plenty. Milton's Saturn is Celtic; the Titans appear as those

... who with Saturn old  
 Fled over Adria to th' Hesperian Fields,  
 And ore the Celtic roam'd the utmost Isles. (65)

Edward Davies' bizarre Celtic Researches (1804) (66) saw the Celts as descended from the Titans, and Keats used this idea to colour "Hyperion", where Saturn has "Druid locks", and the Titans,

Scarce images of life, one here, one there,  
 Lay vast and edgeways; like a dismal cirque  
 Of Druid stones, upon a forlorn moor. (67)

"Hyperion" is relevant to Glastonbury. The passage from Plutarch is quoted at the moment when Geard falls asleep in the cavern of Wookey Hole, while his sleeping position, with a stream running at his feet, is that of Saturn in "Hyperion". With Saturn is Thea, "a Goddess of the infant world" :

And still these two were postured motionless,  
 Like natural sculpture in cathedral cavern: (68)

Geard too has his attendant goddess, the stalagmite "Witch of Wookey", against whom he leans to rest. (pp.331-4). Geard is Powys's Saturn.

Powys's Celtic commentators disclose further mythological meaning in Glastonbury in the goddess Cybele, the Great Mother, who is hymned in the last pages of the book as the tutelary deity of all that has gone before. She is, of course, Rhaea, and Saturn's mate, part of the same most archaic stratum of mythology as Cronos. Jessie Weston is the first to mention the cult of the Great Mother and her fertility as the origin of the Grail, but Loomis expands Weston's theories:

By a strange coincidence, not only the mythical elements of the Grail legend, but also the ritual elements confused with them are accounted for by the cults of Samothrace, for they seem to supply the prototype of the Grail Bearer. The Great Earth-Mother was worshipped at Samothrace not only as Demeter and Hecate, but also as Cybele, whose original cult centre was in Asia Minor. It is known that in her mysteries a priestess bore on her head a krater (the very word from which the word Grail is ultimately derived) usually called the Kernos, to each side of which a lamp was attached - a reminder of the candles which nearly always attended the Grail Bearer. The contents of the Kernos are supposed by the best scholars to have been of a distinctly sexual nature.

Now this association of the Grail Bearer with the mysteries of Cybele is supremely significant since it is with the cult of Cybele and Attis, her consort, that Miss Weston has long since connected the Grail initiation rite. (69)

This then is the heathen grail of A Glastonbury Romance, which was hidden by Merlin, but also exists as the procuress Mother Legge's silver bowl. Mother Legge's Easter Monday party is, for Owen Evans, "the last surviving relic of some ancient Druidic custom of Religious Prostitution" (p.478). The formidable madam strikes John Crow as "a kind of mystical mother - like one of the Mothers in Faust" (p.494). The other dimension to which A Glastonbury Romance points appears to be gathering Feminine connotations: "the Mothers" of Faust are hinted by Owen Evans' Grail studies:

As all Merlin's disciples well know, there is a mysterious word used in one of the Grail Books about his final disappearance. This is the word "Esplumeoir." It is inevitable from the context to interpret this as some "Great Good Place", some mystic Fourth Dimension, or Nirvanic apotheosis, into which the magician deliberately sank, or rose; thus committing a sort of inspired suicide, a mysterious dying in order to live more fully. (pp.178-9)

This "inspired suicide", of course, foreshadows Geard's death. The sinking or rising points us to Mephistopheles' directions to Faust as he is about to enter the realm of "The Mothers";

Descend, then! I could also say : Ascend!  
 'Twere all the same. Escaped from the Created  
 To shapeless forms in liberated spaces!  
 Enjoy what long ere this was dissipated! (70)

The word "Esplumeoir" fascinated Powys from Glastonbury onwards. It turns up in Morwyn as the hiding place of Merlin, and again in Porius - where the imprisonment of Myrddin Wyllt is in its main elements drawn directly from Malory. In Obstinate Cymric, and in In Spite of it is the inner refuge of the essential personality (71). to discover "Esplumeoir" in an actual Grail romance is to see how Powys's imagination played over the surface of his material, and developed it utterly in his own fashion. The only known incidence of the word is at the end of a text now known as The Didot Perceval. The incidents of the romance as a whole appear to bear no relation to Glastonbury, but here is Merlin making his retreat:

Et lors vint Merlins a Perceval, et a Blayse son maistre, et prist congie a els, et lor dist que Nostre Sire ne voloit qu'il se demostrast au peuple, ne il ne porent morir devant le finement del siecle: 'Mais adont arai jou la joie parmenable, et je volrai faire defors te maison. j. abitacle, et la volrai profetiserai cou que Nostre Sire me commandera, et tot cil qui mon abitacle verront si le clameront l'esplumeor Merlin.'

Atant s'entorna Merlins, et fist son esplumoir, et entra dedens, ne onques plus au siecle ne fu veus. (72).

As elsewhere with Powys, a commentary upon the source appears to have inspired him more than the original. Here is Jessie Weston:

On the mysterious concluding passage I can throw no light; I do not know what the "Esplumeor" was; I doubt if any one does know .... There was certainly an early tradition of Merlin's disappearance from mortal sight, also of his continued activity under abnormal conditions: I think that the concluding passages of our text repose upon such a tradition and point to a stage anterior to the 'Enserrement' motif. Here Merlin's withdrawal is voluntary, and I cannot but think that such a form is more consonant with the dignity and importance of the role assigned to him in the pseudo-historic tradition than that of his falling a victim to the wiles of a woman, ... (73)

In a note, Weston adds: "all agree that the only meaning assignable to the word, as it stands, is that of a cage, or dark room, where falcons would be kept at the period of moulting." Clearly not a "Nirvanic apotheosis".

But I think that there is a specific aspect of Weston's interpretation which did encourage Powys's imagination - the strange notion of an imprisonment which is at the same time voluntary. There is this ambiguity especially in Myrddin Wyllt's imprisonment in Porius. Weston ascribes the content of The Didot Perceval to Bleheris (74), who in From Ritual to Romance is a Welshman of the late 11th and early 12th centuries, identified at some detail, and held to be one of the last romancers to inherit a knowledge of the original cultic character of his material (75). This man surfaces in Porius as the Henog or chronicler - "Sylvannus Bleheris". In Glastonbury, Bleheris wrote his histories in King Mark's chamber, where Geard allows himself to be voluntarily imprisoned (p.440), and from where he emerges as Merlin:

The old magic monger had vanished with his heathen Grail - so Mr. Evans said - in the heart of Chalice Hill. Well! He, Bloody Johnny, the new miracle-worker, would show the world, before he vanished, that the real Grail still existed in Glastonbury. (p.455)

It is quite reasonable that Geard should be Saturn and Merlin in one. The two characters are quite explicitly united in Porius. On the other hand, I do not think it is possible, as Timothy Hyman has suggested (76), that he is Uryen as well. It is true that Rhys's Studies in the Arthurian Legend "is basically etymology, an impenetrable shifting melange of names". Phonetic shift and scribal error are liable to turn anybody into anyone else, in a wayward surge of mythological association which Powys obviously found stimulating. But Rhys does keep his light and dark divinities separate. Powys's presiding deities, Cronos and the Great Mother, obviously have their dark sides, in Saturn's traditional baleful influence, and the Great Mother's rapaciousness. But in the mythological structure of Glastonbury, the captive Cronos is the captive Gwair - a sun-god (77).

Uryen is a dark divinity, a lord of Hades. Rhys interprets The Harrying of Annwn as "the mythic expression of the struggles of the Culture Hero to secure certain benefits for his race from the dark divinities" (78).

There is nothing of a "dark divinity" about Geard - indeed, what is difficult to interpret in his character is his straightforwardness, his confidence in his supernatural powers. Yet for Owen Evans Glastonbury is Uryen's realm of "Yr Echwyd".

"the land of Annwn, the land of twilight and death, where the shores are of Mortuorum Mare, the Sea of the Departed. This place has always been set apart ... from the earliest times ... Urien the Mysterious, Avallach the Unknown, were Fisher Kings here ... and for what did they fish? ...

"For what did these mystical Figures ... rulers in Ynis-Witrin in the time of my people ... seek ... when they fished?" The curious thing was that Mr. Evans' body seemed at that moment, while his two young hearers watched him, to grow more and more corpse-like. Those bare hanging wrists, those outstretched feet in their great boots remained absolutely motionless. It was as if his physical form had already sunk into the waters of that Cimmerian sunset-realm which he called "yr Echwyd," while some power from outside of him was making his lips move in his corpse-like face! (p.739-40)

This corpse-like aspect is that of the "rex mortuus" or "deus mortuus" which is "Mr. Evans' soul" - an appearance which becomes particularly strong when he is labouring under his obsession. In Rhys the "corpse-god" is Uthr Bendragon, one of the Uryen's congeners as a Lord of Hades (79). It is Evans, not Geard, who is Uryen, and there is a certain appropriateness of the "corpse-god" symbol to Evans' fantastic life. Here is a man who appears half-dead to the outside world, while within his mind lies a powerful realm of illusion and enchantment.

When Evans is about to climb Glastonbury Tor to witness the violent murder which holds his imagination, he tries to persuade his wife that he merely has an appointment with Father Paleologue:

"A Greek monk he is. Catholic monks are discouraged from coming here - their authorities know, by a secret tradition of scholastic warning, what the Twilight, 'Yr Echwyd,' really means, to which the Grail leads." (p.1005)

Cordelia Evans shuts out the fading light of day, the yr Echwyd, by drawing the blinds. (Is this a half-successful "Esplumeoir"?) Evans' obsession is destroyed by a combination of Geard's power and Goethean ideal femininity:



Not for nothing was this brave girl the child of Geard of Glastonbury. Roused to the uttermost her soul suddenly become a psychic force, a magnet of destruction, an annihilating ray, and the murderous instrument, summoning up page seventy-seven of that fatal book, crumbled into a pinch of dust. (\*)

Grotesque and Cranach-like though poor Cordy's naked body was, it was the body of a woman still, it was the ultimate symbol, the uttermost "Gleichnis," of life's wild experiment. (p.1035)

The "Dolorous Blow" (p.1024) of the iron bar seals Cordy's exorcism. The enchantment of Evans' vice is shattered, just as the enchantment of Uryen's Kingdom is removed by the sun-hero:

in Urien's realm Urien is a great monarch. His castles are of imposing proportions, and his country seems an Elysium; but the onslaught of the sun-hero reduces the sable chief's dimensions, levels his castles with the ground, and exposes his realm as the abode of desolation. For the name of that realm is yr Echwydd, the evening and the dusk, the twilight which is essential to the illusion and glamour on which this whole cosmos of unreality is founded. (80)

The meaning of this sinister "Echwyd" is explored further in Maiden Castle.

These Celtic researches, it might be objected, are formidably esoteric; but Powys does not intend to tax the reader's patience. He wrote of Blake:

His so-called "Prophetic Books" may be obscure and arbitrary in their fantastic mythology. I shall leave the interpretation of these works to those who are more versed in the occult sciences than I am, or than I should greatly care to be ... (81)

(\*) According to a legend quoted in the "Mark's Court" chapter, Merlin visited King Mark at Mark's Moor "and punished him there for all his misdeeds by reducing him, in the wide low chamber that runs beneath the heavy stone roof, to a pinch of thin grey dust" (p.406);

Powys's mythology, which he called "secret", exists as an undertow to a novel which is perfectly comprehensible in its human transactions. But just as there will always be readers ready to explore Blake's mythology, so there will be those unwilling to accept Powys's Celtic background as a mere impressionistic wash of colour. These readers will discover a deeper sense of authority in Glastonbury. Geard, as well as a pointer towards ideal regions, becomes a visitant from them, while the "culture" which the Glastonbury Commune fallibly portends becomes a more solid mythological conception, and the heathen Grail points towards the area of primary creative energy symbolised by "The Mothers". Evans' obsession is no longer a simple disease of the nerves. My analysis of these Celtic elements in Glastonbury can only sketch outlines, but shows how Powys is moving towards an archetypal world, while the very mention of the word "archetype" removes the novel, with its sharp collisions of visionary and actual, into the kind of safe haven of discussion which Powys is trying to avoid.

Powys's Celtic interests are not very scholarly; in later life he liked to compare himself with Iolo Morgannwg, the entertaining eighteenth century fraud to whom the modern Eisteddfod owes its pseudo-Druidic Gorsedd ceremonial (82). But Powys's treatment of his legendary material shows a mind in which mythology is a living force, and fulfils the hope Jessie Weston expresses at the end of From Ritual to Romance, that the Grail will once again become a "vital inspiration" to artists who will absorb its energies in accordance with their own genius. (83)

A Glastonbury Romance ends with "the excuse found by God when his world got beyond his control ... The Flood." (84) The destruction of Geard's Glastonbury does indeed happen in this

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*this dust is fed to herons. After spending the night in this upper room, Geard feels the force of his Christ, who is able to reduce the material world "to a pinch of dust, of thin dust, to feed the Herons of Eternity!". (p.454).*

apparently arbitrary way, sweeping aside all the developments of the novel. The necessity of this flood is best examined in terms of its simple dramatic appropriateness, and the need for a redressment of balance between the increasingly unacceptable Utopian reality of Geard's Urbs Beata, and the claims of the mundane. Already the Commune has shown signs of unpopularity - Dave Spear is barracked in the Cantles' tap-room (pp.1015-8), while Geard, discoursing to his disciples about the souls of insects, is rebuked by an unemployed Welsh miner, "tall, lean, starved, tragic" (p.1086). For visions, it seems, there is only so much room for realization this side of Geard's suicide. The end of Glastonbury has the kind of simple justification of Yeats' "Lapis Lazuli":

All things fall and are built again,  
And those that build them again are gay.

The first thing that is to be rebuilt is Philip Crow's industrial empire, which gives Glastonbury a cyclic form, like that of the Vegetation Myths in Jessie Weston. While the closing pages of the novel are a hymn to the immaterial dreams of Cybele, there is a little tail-piece "Never or Always," a final expression of doubt.

After his death, Geard is characterized by a quotation from Blake:

He believed that there was a borderland of the miraculous round everything that existed and that "everything that lived was holy." (p.1117)

This is an awareness which Powys preaches, and strives to attain, but Powys is not a natural visionary, like Geard. It is a

primitive awareness to which Powys is attempting to regress. J. Hillis Miller, in his book on five nineteenth-century writers, The Disappearance of God, has written of this change in consciousness from the primitive era to the present day. The Divine was once present in Nature, before Christianity established its presence only in Christ and in the mystery of the Eucharist. About primitive poetry, Miller has this to say:

Poetry ... was, in one way or another, modeled on sacramental or scriptural language. The words of the poem incarnated the things they named, just as the words of the Mass shared in the transformation they evoked. The symbols and metaphors of poetry were no mere inventions of the poets. They were borrowed from the divine analogies of nature. Poetry was meaningful in the same way as nature itself - by a communion of the verbal symbols with the reality they named. (85)

Miller continues to examine the further de-sacralization of matter and the word, through the Protestant reformation's abandonment of the Real Presence, comparing its new interpretation of the liturgy with the modern poetic symbolism of reference at a distance. This is a development which Sam Dekker undergoes in reverse, moving from a belief in a Christ and a Mass outside Nature, back to a Christ in matter. Powys too attempts single-handedly to reverse this movement, and to restore to primitive symbols, and to Nature, the magic they once wielded. In this retreat, Geard of Glastonbury succeeds, but the same cannot be said for Powys himself, nor for A Glastonbury Romance, which is only tentatively written out of such an awareness, and portrays Geard from outside.

One of the writers discussed in The Disappearance of God is Matthew Arnold. Powys comments on Arnold's vestigial faith:

He goes wrong again, it seems to me, in his famous definition of Religion itself as "morality touched by emotion"; and I think this error came about by the curious absence from his own nature of what, remembering his own expression "natural magic," might be called "magical awe" or "divine idolatry," the thrilling pleasure, namely, so many people feel in the mere gesture of bowing down before some tremendous mystery, even if such a mystery be no more than the sun or the moon, or the indwelling Genius of some consecrated spot, some spot made holy by the natural piety of traditional reverence. (86)

Arnold is conscious of the poet's estrangement from and longing for an animistic absorption in Nature in "Resignation", one of Powys's favourite poems:

Before him he sees life unroll,  
A placid and continuous whole -  
That general life, which does not cease,  
Whose secret is not joy, but peace;  
That life, whose dumb wish is not miss'd  
If birth proceeds, if things subsist;  
The life of plants, and stones, and rain,  
The life he craves - if not in vain,  
Fate gave, what chance shall not control,  
His sad lucidity of soul.

Miller writes of this poem:

This lesson of nature is really a lesson of despair, for though nature is to be admired for her ability to endure isolation, this calm self-enclosure, the satisfied peace of a rock merely being a rock, is impossible for man. Man's trouble is that he finds in himself no given law to direct his being. He desperately needs help from outside, someone or something to tell him what to do and who to be. Can nature do no more than bid man attempt something impossible? (87)

In Glastonbury, this "impossible" task is undertaken by John Crow. Owen Evans meets him at Stonehenge, and asks:

"Could you worship a stone?"

"I ... I think ... I think so ..." stammered John, a little disconcerted by the man's intensity. "He must be a non-conformist preacher" he thought.

"Simply because it's a stone?" cried the other ...

"Certainly. Simply because it's a stone!"

"And you call that English?" the stranger almost groaned.  
(p.98)

John commends a sinking into the inanimate to Sam Dekker, who is most deeply concerned with the division of spirit and matter:

... "my advice would be to do what hares do when they catch sight of something dangerous - that's to say, freeze. You know that word? Turn, pro tem., into the inanimate ... turn into a stump, a post, a clod of clay. Then, after a while, when things have worked themselves out, you can scamper back to your feeding place!" (p.207)

John Crow is the most "inhuman" of Powys heroes. His love is "saurian", the basis of his nature "animal-primitive". His communion with vegetable nature is without analytic meaning - it is on the "impossible" level of "a rock being merely a rock". On the river at Northwold, he catches sight of a willow shoot:

There was an imperative upon him to remember his vow about "competing." This "never competing" became identified with the slow swirl of the ditch stream as it made tiny ripples round the suspended shoot. He was allowed, he dimly felt, to enjoy his paradisiac lassitude, as long as he, this being who was partly John Crow and partly a willow shoot, kept these ripples in mind. All these phenomena made up a complete world, and in this world he was fulfilling all his moral obligations and fulfilling them with a delicious sense of virtue merely by keeping these ripples in mind; ... (pp.84-5)

But this is clearly not an authentically "primitive" state of being. It is articulate, conscious - and John Crow is also one of the most nervous and "cerebral" of Powys heroes. In expressing a sinking into the subhuman as a life-technique, Powys is much closer to Matthew Arnold considering the life of stones from outside. Does this cerebral animism make any sense at all? Powys is never at pains to disguise his cerebration. He expounds it enthusiastically. The emphasis on self-consciousness confronts us with another aspect of Powys.

In William James, there is no indwelling genius in the stones. God is more or less wherever man cares to put him. In The Religion of a Sceptic, Powys sees Christ as the creation of man, "the supreme work of art of the human race" (88). On this kind of belief, Miller quotes an essay by Ortega y Gasset:

The change from traditional literature to a modern genre like the novel can be defined as a moving of once objective worlds of myth and romance into the subjective consciousness of man. To Don Quixote the windmills are giants, to Emma Bovary Rodolphe is the fulfilment of her romantic dreams, and for Henry James the novel presents not facts but someone's interpretation of them. The ideal world still exists, but only as a form of consciousness, not as an objective fact. The drama has all been moved within the minds of the characters, and the world as it is in itself is by definition unattainable or of no significance. Love, honor, God himself, exist, but only because someone believes in them. Historicism, like perspectivism, transforms God into a human creation. And as soon as a man sees God in this way he is effectively cut off from the living God of faith. (89)

There is this faithlessness in Powys's emphasis upon religion as a form of consciousness. It is the unresolved struggle between these two awarenesses - the longing for primitive vision, and the knowledge of modern scepticism, which accounts for much of the creative

tension in A Glastonbury Romance. It is this primitivism acted from modern cerebation which, I think, has led many readers to find the novel wholly bogus, and it is the basis of Powys's "charlatanism".

When Blake looked at the sun, he saw "an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty". Those about him saw "a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea". There is very little that these two parties can say to each other, except express surprise at how different their rival visions are. Powys, in *Geard* and the response of those about him, attempts such a dialogue. Powys's sympathy with the visionary allows him to extend the bounds of the novel into areas where few would have dared such naivety; his distance from this vision should preserve his work from interpretation by the easier occultists.

There has been recent discussion of Powys as a "myth-maker"; I do not think this very helpful. If the word "myth" is to retain the value recently restored to it in different ways by anthropology and analytical psychology, it must remain the description of a collective phenomenon. Myth grows from collective roots, and is shared by a community -although it will certainly have meaning for the individual life. It must also live outside its book, if it is ever encompassed in one. Powys's creation is an individual one of romance. He draws upon the myths of the past, and reshapes them for the modern spirit, both in their significance and manifestations. But a single writer does not create a myth, and A Glastonbury Romance exhibits the freakishness of such an attempt, the assumption by an individual of creative forces normally entrusted to the accretion of centuries. But Powys, the "charlatan," knows that he has built a sham, and his sceptical intelligence looks askance at what he perhaps would like to have built in real faith.



It is not a book in good taste. The vulgarity is real, and inflated rhetoric and grandiosity produce genuine embarrassment. Nor could it be said that this embarrassment is swallowed up in the larger experience of the book: Powys sets out to embarrass and challenge, and uses the reader's blushes to point to, as blushes always point to, hidden and central areas of experience. A Glastonbury Romance can be proud of its place as a literary freak.

## Chapter Four

## Notes

A Glastonbury Romance (London: Macdonald, 1955)

- (1) Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p.47.
- (2) *ibid.*, p.49
- (3) E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (London: Arnold, 1949), p.117.
- (4) John Betjeman, High and Low (London: Murray, 1966), p.26.
- (5) E.N. Hooker, "Powys in Glastonbury," in Sewanee Review, April, 1932.
- (6) Autobiography, pp.578-9.
- (7) "The Creation of Romance", Modern Thinker, I No. 1, March 1932, p.76.
- (8) *ibid.*, p.75
- (9) Visions and Revisions, p.110.
- (10) "The Creation of Romance", p.74.
- (11) Advertisement for Simon and Schuster, in the Churchill College Press-Cuttings Book.
- (12) Discarded pages 1477 r-t, MS Colgate.
- (13) Letter to Dorothy Richardson, n.d., MS Yale.
- (14) Confessions of Two Brothers, p.125.
- (15) Autobiography, p.398.
- (16) "The Creation of Romance", p.76.
- (17) *ibid.*, p.75.
- (18) The Pleasures of Literature, p.96.

- (19) Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, One Volume Edition (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1932), II, p.435.
- (20) *ibid*, I, pp.21-2.
- (21) *ibid.*, I, p.32.
- (22) *ibid.*, I, p.352.
- (23) *ibid.*, I p.424.
- (24) *ibid.*, II, p.310.
- (25) *ibid.*, II, p.311.
- (26) "Sacco-Vanzetti and Epochs", The Lantern, Jan.-Feb. 1929, p.6.
- (27) Spengler, I, p.25.
- (28) *ibid.*, I. p.98.
- (29) *ibid.*, I, p.100.
- (30) *ibid.*, I, p.102.
- (31) *ibid.*, I, p.403.
- (32) The Complex Vision, p.234.
- (33) Letters to Llewelyn Powys, I, p.33.
- (34) William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Fontana, 1960), p.50.
- (35) *ibid.*, p.500.
- (36) *ibid.*, pp.465-6.
- (37) *ibid.*, p.483.
- (38) Wolf Solent, p.601.
- (39) Autobiography, p.632.
- (40) The Religion of a Sceptic, p.12.

- (41) *ibid.*, p.10.
- (42) The Meaning of Culture, pp.58-73.
- (43) G. Wilson Knight, Neglected Powers (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp.153-5.
- (44) *Cavaliero*, pp.66-7.
- (45) Gloria Fromm, Dorothy Richardson (Urbana: Illinois U.P., 1977), p.235.
- (46) Roland Mathias, rev. of G. Wilson Knight, The Saturnian Quest, in The Powys Review, No. 4, Winter/Spring 1978-9, p.86.
- (47) Autobiography, p.169.
- (48) Confessions of Two Brothers, p.9.
- (49) D.H. Lawrence, St. Mawr and The Virgin and the Gipsy (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), pp.173-4.
- (50) *ibid.*, pp.243-4.
- (51) Emma Goldman, Living My Life (New York: Dover, 1970), pp.569-70.
- (52) Rutland Boughton, "The Music Drama of the Future", quoted in Michael Hurd, Immortal Hour : The Life and Period of Rutland Boughton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p.33.
- (53) "The Self-Advertisement of Rutland Boughton," pamphlet, n.d..
- (54) Mortal Strife, p.103.
- (55) Letter to Melrich Rosenberg, 10 June 1931, MS Colgate.
- (56) "The Creation of Romance," p.76.
- (57) Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur, ed. John Rhys (London: Dent, Everyman's Library, 1906), I, pp.64-5.
- (58) Autobiography, p.527.
- (59) John Rhys, Studies in the Arthurian Legend (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), pp.8-10.

- (60) A Glastonbury Romance, p.807, also Malory, ed. Rhys, I, p.xxii; Rhys, Studies, p.301; R.J. Loomis, Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance (New York: Columbia U.P., 1927), p.320.
- (61) Jessie Weston, From Ritual to Romance (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday Anchor, 1957), p.74.
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- (63) Loomis, pp.322-3.
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- (65) "Paradise Lost," I, 519-21.
- (66) Edward Davies, Celtic Researches (London: the Author, 1804), pp.131-2.
- (67) "Hyperion," I, 137, II 33-5.
- (68) "Hyperion," I, 85-6.
- (69) Loomis, p.290; Weston, p.90.
- (70) Faust Pt II, Act I, Sc.5, trans. Bayard Taylor.
- (71) Morwyn, p.199; Porius, TS pp.1558-9, Colgate; Obstinate Cymric, p.9; In Spite Of, p.204.
- (72) Jessie Weston, The Legend of Sir Perceval (London: Nutt, 1909), II, p.112.
- (73) *ibid.*, II, pp.329-30.
- (74) *ibid.*, II, pp.250-1.
- (75) From Ritual to Romance, pp.189-209, p.159.
- (76) Timothy Hyman, "The Religion of a Sceptic," The Powys Review, No. 2, Winter 1977, p.47.
- (77) Loomis, p.322.
- (78) Rhys, Studies, p.246.

- (79) *ibid.*, p.116, p.257.
- (80) *ibid.*, p.259.
- (81) Suspended Judgements, p.257.
- (82) Letter to Louis Wilkinson, 9 Dec. 1938, MS Colgate.
- (83) From Ritual to Romance, p.188.
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- (85) J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U.P., 1963), p.3.
- (86) The Pleasures of Literature, p.402.
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## CHAPTER FIVE

## WEYMOUTH SANDS

## AND

## MAIDEN CASTLE

## I WEYMOUTH SANDS

By the end of 1931, Powys had written, in the space of twenty months, one of the longest novels in the language. "Laziness is Way Out of the Depression, say John Cowper Powys, a Born Idler": so, at least, reported "The New York World Telegram", which sought him out at Phudd Bottom in April, 1932. By this time Weymouth Sands was under way, written concurrently with A Philosophy of Solitude (1). In February, John Cowper had written to Llewelyn asking for guidebooks to Weymouth and Portland, and in his April interview he described his method of composition.

"The way to write a novel is first to get a map of the place," said Mr. Powys. "Then I go to work and invent houses and streets, so as to avoid embarrassment in mentioning actual places, and I make a list of names of characters, without reference to their personal qualities, just names that sound pleasing to me."

"At this stage I can start writing, bringing people into the town, letting them meet one another, having the names become embodied into persons, like spirits at a seance. I never have a plot, simply an idea which expresses itself as the story writes itself. I love to write." (2).

It is easy to see how this method produced Weymouth Sands, a novel with a large gallery of character portraits, little plot - but at the end of the book a very decided "idea" in Powys's indictment of modern science.

But Weymouth Sands is not a relaxed book; it is a work of retrenchment and substantiation, after the imaginative over-reach of Glastonbury. Powys wrote at the end of the Autobiography:

But just as Montaigne who was a master life-lover is perpetually gathering himself together to cope with Death, so, though I am driven on by a terrific "libido" to write book after book, I feel uneasy and uncomfortable if I am not making constant efforts to adjust my life-illusion and my pride to a situation starker and more simplified than I have yet known. It is towards this that I have been constantly struggling during these four years of isolation. (3).

So the charlatānry of A Glastonbury Romance is disciplined. Powys denies himself fantasy. Weymouth Sands is not "a romance" but "a novel", and the characters confront "a situation starker and more simplified." Geard won support for his new religion from the society around him; he was appointed Mayor. Sylvanus Cobbold is rejected by society, harried by the authorities, and forced to practise his mystical philosophy imprisoned in the asylum of "Hell's Museum". In the town of Glastonbury, there is a rich legendary context which belongs, however vaguely, to our collective inheritance of the fabulous. Powys showed the spirit of the town working mysteriously on the side of the Powysian quest, granting visions of the Grail. The mystery of Weymouth, while powerful within the Powys family, must be created for the reader within the novel itself, and this Powys found a stimulating task:

... one of the things that have put me on my mettle in writing this book is the challenge offered by a comparatively un-historic past. For I wanted to see how far a church that was only Early Victorian and houses, forts, and bridges that were only Eighteenth-Century -no older in fact than many erections in this country - could lend themselves, just as well as more picturesque and more ancient buildings, to these subtle



interpretations, mystic, chemic, vital, that pass backwards and forwards between human beings and their environment. (4).

Powys therefore applies his very individual novelist's eye -that of "physiognomic observation" - to modern phenomena, and the result is a picture of a society described in its "atmosphere" and neglected minutiae. There is characteristically a preoccupation with the effect upon the mind of domestic interior, and with the lives of characters who are themselves neglected - the waifs of early twentieth century Weymouth. Magnus Muir, Perdita Wane, Peg Frampton, Richard Gaul, Larry Zed, Sylvanus Cobbold, are all in their various ways on a social fringe, at odds with convention, enjoying precarious economic support in various forms of seclusion.

In a sense, there is no dynamic social centre. The successful financier, Dog Cattistock, leads a life as remote from social centrality as the rest. His partner, Mr. Frampton, never actually appears in the novel, but we are continually aware of the very absence of this "cold, cautious, crafty man of affairs" (p.90-1), as the root of his daughter Peg's lonely and frustrated existence.

In A Philosophy of Solitude, there is a rebellion of the individual against the conditions of contemporary life: "Western Civilization ... has to be mentally destroyed by the individual before any subtle imaginative life becomes possible." (5). It is because of his appeal to a "subtle imaginative life" which opens out into the possibility of the transcendental that Powys offers a quite distinctive critique of his society. He is quite different from Samuel Butler, because he does not define himself in terms of his society. As in E.M. Forster, much that is evil proceeds from brash insensitivity - we see this in Sippy Ballard. There is also the kind of claustrophobic

domestic sadism (in Mrs. Cobbold's persecution of Perdita Wane) which is characteristic of Ivy Compton-Burnett. But Powys is different from Forster in his stronger faith in the private resilience of the imagination, and in his emphasis upon a non-human context. He is different too from Ivy Compton-Burnett in the indulgence of his humour, and in his characters' ability to transcend their social situations.

What we have is a picture of life which is on a suggestive borderline, half rooted in social and material actualities, and half inhabiting a dimension of imaginative life which acquires increasing force in the course of the novel. Out of the town of Weymouth, Powys creates, as Jeremy Hooker has pointed out, one of his characteristic "borderlands" (6) between the visible world and another. The physical Weymouth is strongly present - the Georgian Budmouth of The Trumpet-Major (\*), the fishing port, the seaside holiday town - but beyond this actuality the town, in the minds of its people, is something else. Magnus Muir experiences "an impression as if the whole of Weymouth had suddenly become an insubstantial vapour suspended in space" (p.25), and this experience returns to him in bed, on the borderline between waking and sleeping:

Then while he settled down under the bed-clothes, there came before his eyes once more the spire, the clock, the statue of the king, the outline of the Nothe, as he had felt them when he sat in the cold opposite the deserted donkey-stand. And the impression gathered upon him 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 experience; independent, for instance, of whether when he went to see Curly tomorrow she made him feel silly and old. (p.40).

(\*) Weymouth Sands bears a distinct relation to Hardy's Portland novel, The Well-Beloved, from which Powys borrows names and themes - such as the struggle of the Portland quarrymen for their continued independence. At a more important level, both novels are about fantasy and idealism. Hardy's Jocelyn Pierston is haunted by a

What this "substance" is, becomes apparent as the novel follows a redemptive direction.

For Jobber Skald, Weymouth is "a sort of Limbo" (p.48). In a letter to Marian Powys, John Cowper wrote of his new novel as "inspired ... by our silent and formidable progenitor, going in and out of his mother's house in Brunswick Terrace" (7). Magnus Muir's mental life is dominated by the shade of his father; for Powys's father, his last years at Weymouth were a limbo of old age - of speechlessness and mental confusion. The Homeric souls of the departed, the "Kamontes", haunt Weymouth Sands. To them descends Jobber Skald when Perdita Wane leaves him (p.472). Magnus Muir, who lives in "Kimmeridge House", reads of them constantly, and Chesil Beach seems to him "the true shore of that great Homeric Oceanus, from whose bank the slope descends that leads to the dwelling place of the insubstantial dead" (p.551). In the asylum of "Hell's Museum", those judged to be mad assume "the same kind of sick, inert, bewildered, unearthly sorrowfulness that Homer depicts as the prevailing condition of those faint spirits, who in the realm of Hades 'no longer behold the sweet sun'" (pp.510-1). For Sylvanus, this "tragic half-life ... lies behind everything" (p.261), and his morning rituals include a prayer for all the souls of the Dead to rise to life (p.386).

The first three chapters describe four of these half-lives in meticulous detail. Powys's technique is very simple, and shows him at his most compassionate; the novel turns in its track three times to describe the evenings of Magnus Muir, Perdita Wane, Daisy Lily, and Peg Frampton in succession. All are lonely people, beset by their inadequacies, but while they are very different and isolated from one

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*private vision of ideal femininity, and this fantasy is a source of tragic inconstancy in his failure to relate this ideal to the real. In Weymouth Sands, Sylvanus Cobbold is able to nourish a similar vision from his relationships with real women, and fantasy suggests a breakthrough to another dimension. "It's through them I touch God!" says Sylvanus. Again, Hardy is the novelist of disillusion, Powys the novelist of enchantment.*

another, Powys shows a fundamental similarity in their feelings. All have suffered dislocation in their families; Perdita Wane, an orphan, has set herself the lonely task of attaining economic independence. Peg Frampton's mother is long dead, and her father neglects her. Daisy Lily's mother treats her as the child she no longer is, while Daisy prays to her dead father "as if he had been the only supernatural Being who could possibly be reached" (p.87). The weight of the past already bears down upon the young. Magnus Muir's memory of his formidable father both weakens and fortifies the son; Magnus feels shame at his own timorousness, but also a resistant solidity of elemental pride - "a childish enchantment" in "the mystery of life reduced to the most primitive terms" (p.39).

Magnus falls asleep thinking of the unhappy fate of Perdita, whom he has failed to meet at Weymouth Quay. But his final thought is of the redeeming "substance" of Weymouth. Perdita, too, frightened and lonely in her new home, appeals to the trans-human. In Jobber Skald's gesture of throwing a piece of seaweed over the Esplanade she has glimpsed "some other world" (p.49). The sound of the sea liberates her from human predicaments:

The feelings which that sound roused in her were curiously mixed. It awed her a little. It chilled her consciousness with the ebb and flow of vast non-human forces that cared nothing for human plots and counter-plots. It brought something into that fantastical bedchamber that was free and uncaught, whose very desolation was a kind of comfort, obliterating with the release of the indifferent elements the unhappy morbidities of her race. (p.58).

Peg Frampton attempts to satisfy her craving for "far horizons" at the Weymouth Backwater, now transformed by the Town Council "into an ornamental basin ... like a pond in a Public Park" (pp.91-2).

Others among Weymouth's neglected ones take refuge in the non-human: the morbidly shy philosopher, Richard Gaul, gazes out to the horizon of the sea, where the meeting of sky and sea, the visible world brought to the edge of the immaterial, brings a certain peace (p.97). Rodney and Ruth Loder, caring for their ulcer-ridden father in the "mausoleum" of Spy Croft, each have their furtive inner lives, Rodney in his "essences" -daydreams which to him are "aerial landscapes of other and much happier incarnations" (p.183), and Ruth, in her enjoyment "with passionate and proud exclusiveness" of landscape and seasonal change (p.303).

All these characters are inhibited, not only in their relations with the world at large, but with each other. The tentative "romantic friendship" between Daisy Lily and Peg Frampton falls apart. The meeting of Rodney Loder and Daisy is fraught with misunderstanding. The communion of Peg and Richard Gaul is slow and hesitant. But in their common failures, each inhabiting an isolated "world" of disillusion, they are open to the novelist's compassion, and it is as if Powys forges for them the relationships which they are unable to create for themselves. Unknown to each other, Perdita and Magnus share identical thoughts about the waves (p.17, p.40). Individual strands of private experience are woven together by Powys's imaginative vision.

Weymouth Sands is about the redemption of these inarticulate people, and the gradual justification of their dim longings. The Powys-hero, Magnus Muir, stands somewhat apart from this transformation in Weymouth - like John Crow of A Glastonbury Romance. He alone, at the end of the book, is given no promise of renewal. Instead he loses Curly Wix, and must accommodate himself

to this desertion with the philosophy of endurance he possesses in good measure. That the Powys hero is to one side of the action in two novels shows that Powys is preparing a new area of activity, in the magic of Geard and Sylvanus Cobbold. The "hero" is cautiously initiated into this dimension in Maiden Castle.

Magnus Muir also shows how Powys-heroes, while always recognizable as such, are different from each other. In Magnus, there is less a growth such as was seen between Wolf Solent and John Crow, than a quite different kind of inner life in accordance with the changed emphases of the novel. John Crow was minutely concerned with animism, and Wolf Solent too had a love of intimate natural observation. In Magnus Muir, and in Weymouth Sands as a whole, there is very little of this. Self-conscious "nature-writing", flower and insect names, almost disappear. They do not return in Powys, for the lushness of Porius is quite un-botanical. Instead, Weymouth Sands has blocks of landscape - Portland stone, chalk down, Chesil Beach, sea - and the buildings of the town. Magnus Muir's inner life is similarly "elemental", drawing its sustenance from the inanimate in its simplest forms, and from the "Homeric" human solidity of his father. Magnus' characteristic responses are to sun and sea, and to houses - Miss Le-Fleau's, Dog Cattistock's, the Wixes, and to the landmarks of Weymouth, "each a piece of his father's life" (p.282). Magnus is in even more immediate quest of his father than Wolf Solent or Dud No-Man.

His tantalized love affair with Curly Wix is a tale of January and May. Powys's narration is just as humorous, but is more detached than with Wolf and Gerda; Magnus' "life-illusion" is not so dependent upon his infatuation, which he realizes is an aberration in his monkish life. His "elemental" life, he intermittently knows, is more sustaining:

"Water and Sand," he thought, "are what I want. The inanimate, not flesh and blood. I am really happier at this minute, than I am with Curly!" (p.478).

Magnus Muir's rival, Sippy Ballard, can therefore be treated with less malice than his predecessor, Bob Weevil. With his delicate good looks, and his motor car with its "tirra-lirra" horn, he is the answer to a maiden's prayer (\*). His speech is American; he is almost one of the "clever young men" of America, part of "this tidal wave of catastrophically normal humanity" (8) amusingly caricatured in the Autobiography. But the Powys of the thirties is much more generous towards "normal humanity" than in Wolf Solent and before - no nearer to it, but more comfortable with it. Sippy Ballard may threaten Magnus Muir, but never the prime direction of the book.

It is characteristic of Powys that the magical transformation of the Weymouth beach on August Bank holiday, which enacts the town's salvation, should be observed through the eyes of Magnus, who is destined for disillusionment.

Many of the conflicts of Weymouth Sands are grim enough. The book is full of misunderstandings between the generations, domestic tyrannies, the threat of the asylum. Donald A. Cook finds it a "sad book", where for Professor Wilson Knight it is "a happy book", and for Jeremy Hooker it is "the happiest of the novels; it is filled with sunlight on water, children, wet sand and dry sand; the lost one is found again." (9). These very different judgements arise from the varying degrees of conviction readers have found in Powys's transformation of the fragmented existences of his "Kamontes" in the mood of liberation on Weymouth beach at Bank holiday:

(\*) *Specifically, the Lady of Shalott's*

*'Tirra Lirra' by the river*  
*Sang Sir Lancelot*

On the dry sand sat, in little groups, the older people, reading, sewing, sleeping, talking to one another, while on the wet sand the children, building their castles and digging their canals were far too absorbed and content to exchange more than spasmodic shouts to one another. The free play of so many radiant bare limbs against the sparkling foreground-water and the bluer water of the distance gave to the whole scene a marvellous heathen glamour, that seemed to take it out of Time altogether, and lift it into some ideal region of everlasting holiday, where the burden of human toil and the weight of human responsibility no more lay heavy upon the heart. (pp.456-7).

In attaining this "ideal region", and this is part of the discipline of Weymouth Sands, Powys invokes no Grail or extant cult; it is achieved through intensity of response to a landscape which is at the same time that of Weymouth and a topography of the inner imagination, drawing its qualities both from earth-bound solidity and imaginative reach -what Jeremy Hooker calls a "duality of elemental and aetherial atmosphere" (10). This duality is embodied in the most whole, expansive characters of Weymouth Sands, Jobber Skald and Sylvanus Cobbold, although it is balanced differently in each. The Jobber, a native of Portland, is the most obviously "elemental" of the two:

His big hooked nose, massive chin, and corrugated brow had something about them that resembled those accidental features that people in a mountainous country come to detect in the lineaments of some jagged eminence. (pp.30-1).

His ambition is to protect the stone of Portland from the exploitation of Dog Cattistock. But he is also a man of the sea, and Perdita finds in him the fulfilment of her "girlhood's imaginings about some mysterious lover who was more like a merman than a human being" (p.322).



His union with Perdita takes place under "the Clipping Stone", a huge natural sculpture resembling embracing lovers, "neither base, nor gross, nor bestial: but god-like, cosmogonic, life-creating" (p.353). At the same time their love is sealed with sea-holly, a seaweed which recalls Jobber Skald's first hint to Perdita of "some other world". Their place of meeting, on solid rock, but jutting in to the sea, "was one of those spots where Nature arrives at an extremity of contrast that suggests a sublime intention" (p.348). Their experience suggests a "Golden Age". Richard Gaul is mentioned; it is one of Powys's irritating habits to introduce imaginary onlookers when they are least wanted:

The late afternoon sun, from a western sky that looked as if it were made of one piece of unbroken gold-leaf, drew a motionless golden path across the dark-blue water, producing a curious effect of elemental opacity, and also, in the emphasis upon blue and gold an effect of some ritualistic selection. Had the philosopher of Trigon House been with them at that moment he would doubtless have recalled to their minds what Spengler says of the Magian Culture. Perdita felt that this was exactly the kind of watery floor which the sea-god of her girlhood would have crossed to reach her, and it was natural enough for a mind like hers, engraved since infancy by fantastic images, to imagine such a Being now - in reality an immensely enlarged Jobber Skald - striding away towards that far-off horizon where the wide-arching goldenness touched the dark-blue pavement. (p.352).

Sylvanus Cobbold embodies this duality, and also articulates it in a philosophy of his own, which he expounds on Weymouth beach and to his young girl-friends in the tap-room of "The Sea-Serpent" on Portland. His intimate daily rituals and literal worship of the elements have been much admired by Dr. Cavaliero and Jeremy Hooker(\*), but I feel that they, and his character as a whole, are marred by their presentation, and that his extreme childishness, and "suckfist

\* See Cavaliero, p.84; Hooker, pp.55-8

gibberish", require some introduction, lest they seem silly. Powys's "little-great" rituals at the close of the Autobiography can be understood as a culminating peace at the end of a long imaginative growth. Their healing power and significance is clear. But Sylvanus does not appear until the second half of Weymouth Sands, apart from a brief glimpse in the first chapter, and he is left until this late stage to assume the role of principal visionary.

In Mortal Strife, "immaturity" is energetically praised:

A beautiful example of the misleading folly of the intellectual class is the repulsive expression 'Infantile Fixation' used as a term of reproach. The Kingdom of Heaven is the true 'Infantile Fixation'. (11).

There is this heavenly infancy in the play of the children on the beach at the end of Weymouth Sands. For Sylvanus himself, "his peculiarities were a simple, direct, categorical way of living upon the earth, that had no connection with affectation or nonsense or silliness. In fact he regarded them as an evidence of shrewd common-sense." (p.324).

Sylvanus' foolishness is a white clowning, in distinction from his brother Jerry's black clowning. Jerry, wholly disillusioned, derives comfort from the "excremental under-tides of existence" (p.221). His foolishness he calls "'Arsiversy' or 'Heads and Tails' ... Or Devil cast out Devil." (p.331). (It had perhaps better be mentioned that the actual examples of Jerry's clowning in the novel are excruciating (pp.229-30). Powys is brilliant describing Jerry's awareness, appalling at dramatizing it). Sylvanus has his own kind of "Arsiversy" - the combination of, and reverence for, the extremes of

ding and spirit. "Unhappiness", he says, "comes from not realizing that life is two-sided. The other side of life is always death. The dead in Homer are tragic and pitiful, but they are not nothing. Their muted half-life is like the watery light at the bottom of the sea." (p.261). "Rise to life, Human Beings!" is one of his prayers (p.386), and he does raise to life one of the most movingly pathetic ghosts of Weymouth Sands, Peg Frampton.

Peg has drifted close to a forlorn promiscuity in her intense loneliness; her world-weariness finds a home in Sark House, the dingy brothel run by Jerry Cobbold's closest friend, Dr. Girodel. Here Jerry's loathing for humanity finds its natural home. Deceived by the advances of Dr. Girodel, but only saved from them because she has in fact been forgotten, Peg leaves Sark House, dismissing it forever "as an escape from her desolation" (p.238). Instinctively, she makes her way through pouring rain to the sea. But it is Sylvanus who calls her down from refuge above a fishmonger's: "Don't catch cold, little sleeper, now you've come back from the dead!" Jimmy Witchit believes that the cane Sylvanus points at Peg has magical powers. "They say he be a conjurer, Miss Framp - Peg, and that he breaks his canes like Moses and Aaron broke their rods, for to conjure over his enemies." (p.246).

Sylvanus' innocent relationships with his girls are opposed to the vicious sensuality of Dr. Girodel's. For Sylvanus, his embraces have mystical significance. The ordinary young women he loves becomes "oracles" of "The Mothers" and through them he achieves "some secret entrance to the Deathless and Immortal" (pp.271-2). But for the girls themselves he brings a fuller sense of the possibilities of this world. Peg Frampton's new vigour results in a

brief holiday on the sands, through which she comes to meet Richard Gaul. Sylvanus' influence seeps through the characters of the book "to dissolve", as Professor Wilson Knight says of Powys's humour, "conventional judgements, taboos, religious or moral judgements, or just respectability into some 'golden centre'". (12).

Sylvanus is brought into conflict with taboos and respectability, and imprisoned within "Hell's Museum". Sylvanus does not resist this imprisonment, which becomes a kind of "voluntary imprisonment" like the "Esplumeroir" of Glastonbury. Here Sylvanus enters battle against vivisection and science, whose condemnation is the culminating "idea" of Weymouth Sands. Powys wrote:

Weymouth Sands will always be personally one of my favorite books, because I have risked, through the medium of two of my men-characters, namely Magnus Muir and Sylvanus Cobbold, the left and the right rib so to speak of my own skeleton, to the expression of certain personal feelings and opinions which are so shockingly out of tune with the trend of the age that save in fiction I would have small hope of winning a convert. One of these opinions is a rooted hostility to the practice of vivisection; and another, intimately connected with this and indeed underlying it, is a profound distrust of almost every aspect of modern science. (13).

Why does vivisection occupy such a central place in Powys's moral outlook? The horrors of vivisection may be real enough, but is there not a displacement and failure of human sympathy? Himmler, as well as Powys, was an anti-vivisectionist.

The novels witness that Powys kept his human sympathies intact. Nor was his love of animals particularly sentimental. The dogs in Weymouth Sands, Morwyn and Porius are well done; they have feelings and are individual, but never anthropomorphic. Powys, in

fact, found many of his fellow anti-vivisectionists unpleasantly unctuous (14).

The reasons which would lead Powys to oppose vivisection are obvious enough. He carried his belief that benign ends should be attained by benign means so far as to object to inoculation - as being a use of disease to heal (15).

Vivisection becomes a central evil, because for Powys, it means sadism. That his own sadism was a more pervasive malice, and not exclusively sexually felt, is I think shown in the teasing viciousness indulged in Wood and Stone and Rodmoor. The few actions of conscious "sadism" which are confessed in the Autobiography are towards animals. We remember how "malice" is the fundamental evil in The Complex Vision and in Wolf Solent.

There are two kinds of vivisection in Powys. One is a passionless quest for objective knowledge, and the other is an impassioned expression of sexual sadism, most implausibly described in Morwyn. In Weymouth Sands, Dr. Brush of "Hell's Museum" performs the former kind, though there are moments when the curtain of his "de-personalized personality" parts, and his torture of animals appears as a redirection of an inner self-torture and a malice towards the world at large.

"Objectivity" is distrusted in Powys. The denial of personal and emotive values allows evil to seep in unperceived. There will be much of this in Morwyn. In Weymouth Sands, Dr. Brush's cultivated impersonality is defeated by Sylvanus Cobbold's intensely conscious personality. The scene is bolstered by a curiously Powysian discussion of psychoanalytic method, but Powys's dramatic situations are as ever more convincing than the odd terminology by which he occasionally tries to justify them.

Throughout his work Powys derides the concept of the Unconscious. By this he does not mean that there is nothing beneath the conscious awareness of the mind. He rather objects to Freudian determinism, the notion that the we less live than are lived. Every aspect of the self is capable of being harrowed by self-examination, and there is thus a faith in individual insight, and the self-exploration of which his novels are an illustration, as opposed to the subjection of the inner self to the theories of an outsider. Sylvanus Cobbold is well-advanced in such self-examination; Dr. Brush is not, and hence Sylvanus is able to reverse the roles of patient and doctor. Sylvanus knows more about Brush than Brush does about Sylvanus.

Such analysis, and indeed all the explicit scientific discussion of Weymouth Sands, is somewhat superfluous. Powys's intuitions precede their analysis, and we do not need Powys the theorist to explain why the landmarks of Weymouth have a life of their own, because Powys the novelist has already convinced us that this is so.

This superfluity in fact extends over all the "plot" of the book. "Hell's Museum" is the ultimate threat of a political system which enforces social conformity. This system is allied to commercial tyranny; Dog Cattistock supports Brush's experiments from his vast wealth. For Jobber Skald, Cattistock's exploitation of the Portland quarries proves him an enemy of the deepest instincts of nature:

As the water dashed over the side of the boat drenching his thighs, the outrage done to the actual stone itself of his native promontory tore at his heart. The Dog was an enemy of everything sacred in life! That Portland stone, ever since the far-off Viking invasion that had landed the Skald family among

these Celtic stone-slingers, had been something to be handled reverently, piously, and in fear of the gods. (p.70).

Hence the Jobber's murder-lust. But Powys, we feel, is not remotely interested in entering into this spirit of vengeance. The Jobber abandons his conspiracy in favour of his love for Perdita, but no other course has ever seemed plausible. In The Meaning of Culture Powys wrote:

Fight the world for others, if you will; but the moment you begin fighting for your own most subtle ideas your ideas will grow infected. The poison of angry self-assertive controversy will enter into them, and, even if you win, you will find your flag stained with the enemy's impure blood. (16).

Such a belief is built into the end of Weymouth Sands; because it is also for all purposes built into the beginning, Powys is no combattant.

His enemies are more surely discredited from within. They become victims of charity. The tyrannical capitalist and scientific system turns out to be no system at all, but a product of small desires and greeds -Cattistock's miserliness, Ballard's ambition, possibly Brush's neurosis. These are ingredients as small and human as the dreams which haunt Weymouth's misfits and failures. There is the distinction between the evils of a society, and the fallible individuality of the people who control society. This fallibility means that the victims of society can make their escape.

According to Sylvanus' discipline, Marret Jones, "Mr. Cobbold says Summat New be come into world," ... "and He do say this Summat be the Holy Ghost!" (p.148). This something new turns out to

be Dr. Mabon, who appears on Weymouth Beach at sunset on August Bank holiday. Jeremy Hooker has pointed out that he is a Celtic God, and in Rhys and Loomis he is a congener of Gwair, the sun-god captive in Caer Sidi, who is now released -as Owen Evans of Glastonbury had hoped (17). The preceding day has been ruled by the sun, and the careless joy of holiday. For Magnus Muir, his immaterial, ideal Weymouth has become actual. As "a specimen of a new type of personality<sup>in</sup> the world" (p.494). Dr. Mabon appears as Powys's riposte to the despair of another new type of personality in fiction - Hardy's Little Time in Jude the Obscure.

The "golden" atmosphere of this scene is dominant in spite of its many apparently gloomy ingredients. Magnus is on the verge of losing Curly. The Jobber is bereft of Perdita. Sylvanus is about to be certified insane. But its "indescribable reconciliation" (p.500) appears to redeem the dullest and most unimaginative inhabitant of Weymouth - the retired Corporal of 'Fernlands', and its influence and mood persist. Perdita returns. Imprisonment does not defeat Sylvanus, and the lost souls of Weymouth are beginning to draw together - Peg Frampton and Richard Gaul, Rodney Loder and Daisy Lily. There is not a close of emphatic joy, but cautious optimism.

Powys greatly admired Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage. Its genius, he said, lay in its depiction of the "imponderables" of life.

Dorothy Richardson, after the manner of a woman of genius concentrates her power upon pursuing the evasive but ultimate essence imprinted, one might think, upon the very air itself, by every emotional and psychic and visual promontory of consciousness. (18).



The realization of such evasive states of consciousness in relation to environment is the achievement of Weymouth Sands, as of Pilgrimage. Perdita Wane - a shabby, sensitive young woman, bent on securing her independent stability in a society weighted against the single woman, has a clear model in Dorothy Richardson's Miriam Henderson. But more important is the similarity of Powys's and Richardson's "imponderables". Here is Magnus Muir, soothed by the atmosphere of Miss Le Fleau's sitting room:

And touching him now with a faint scent of Eau de Cologne, this smooth black satin, those aged fingers, brought back endless hours when weary of his restless boy's hunt for half-understood sensuality, he had come to this woman's side. He thought of it always on grey, still autumn mornings, mornings when the scent of Eau de Cologne was not easily blown away! How this white wool and black satin flowed in with the whole character of Weymouth, its spire, its clock, its two royal statues! (p.537)

Here is an "epiphany" from Pilgrimage:

The clock struck ten. Gathering up the newspaper she folded it neatly, put it on the hall-table and went slowly upstairs, watching the faint reflection of the half-lowered hall gas upon the polished balustrade. The staircase was cold and airy. Cold rooms and landings stretched upon away above her into the darkness. She became aware of a curious buoyancy rising within her. It was so strange that she stood still for a moment on the stair. For a second, life seemed to cease in her and the staircase to be swept from under her feet ... 'I'm alive' ... It was as if something had struck her, struck right through her impalpable body, sweeping it away, leaving her shouting silently without it. I'm alive ... I'm alive. (19).

How close the two novelists are, assembling intense mental experience from chance minutiae of "atmosphere". In both the cultivation of such sensations becomes articulated as a philosophy of life. They both write of similar societies of impoverished gentility.

But Dorothy Richardson is more austere and self-consistent. If states of consciousness are what matter, her novel consists entirely of them. William James' phrase "stream of consciousness" was first used of literature in relation to her work. Powys loved Dorothy Richardson's original form, her "world of pure consciousness", her abandonment of plot. Why did he not follow the same path himself? Weymouth Sands is the one Powys novel which might have been more perfect had he done so, and its superb first three chapters show how nearly he did. I have written about why Wolf Solent's serpentine self-consciousness is best displayed in interior monologue, and how the god-like perspective of A Glastonbury Romance is justified by the book's pluralism. Weymouth Sands is about sensations and fugitive states of mind. There is a shadowy plot of revenge, and an eccentric fable of scientific tyranny, but the book's true shape arises from a development of tone and mood, in the redemption of its characters through a deepening of imaginative life.

There is much in Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage which is gloriously vivid. Its picture of the London of the 1890s is delightful, there is a thrilling observation of the intellectual currents of its time, and Richardson's self-centred "method" does not preclude the sharp characterization of other people. Yet the novel sequence declines into solipsism. The rigid application of her "method" becomes just that, and it is remarkable how Pilgrimage has been praised for little apart from its distinctive method, while Powys has been praised for everything else. Powys, in Ducdame, threatens to become solipsistic. But the untrammelled intuition of Wolf Solent's "mythology" is checked, and Glastonbury and Weymouth Sands open out and away from a study of pure consciousness to emphasize the interdependence of consciousness and matter. In this vision of a

salvation which is mental and "elemental", the social dimension is subsumed, yet Weymouth Sands is the novel where Powys's inhumanity is applied to most humane ends. The beyond-world is realized not in an "Esplumeoir" or inspired suicide, but on a Bank-holiday beach. The entry to this dimension is not through a Grail vision, but through common sensations - the sights of sun and sea. The dreams of Cybele which haunted A Glastonbury Romance are made specific and local in the aspirations of people within their small domestic longings. It is the least charlatan of the books. The self-discipline of Weymouth Sands makes for a much simpler novel, of less grandeur and intensity than either Wolf Solent or Glastonbury. Weymouth Sands is the modest beginning of another ascent which culminates in Porius, but before the harmoniousness of this last great achievement there are some strange oscillations. Maiden Castle is full of all that is errant and odd, and is the complement of its predecessor.

## II MAIDEN CASTLE

The first reaction to a reading of Maiden Castle is likely to be acute embarrassment. Embarrassment is frequently built into Powys's novels and the performance of the novelist is very like that of the lecturer. Powys writes of his "circus" tours undertaken with his manager, Arnold Shaw:

Never has there been any one at once so childishly honest and so shamelessly contemptuous of the grave pose of respectful honesty as Arnold was. O how well we suited each other! We were both more than a little anti-human, more than a little malicious to the solemnities and respectabilities of the academic and even the pseudo-academic world...

Now it was not very long before the eccentricities in our show began to have various disconcerting effects. We came to be heartily suspected, feared, disliked, detested by the usual type of ethical person, male or the reverse, who by natural proficiency and suitability for such a role, was the type who organized our various provincial lectures... These persons, preoccupied with the idea of helping the cultural interests of the community, used sometimes to smell a fox; in other words to get a faint whiff of the humorous detachment with which this mountebank and his manager regarded the whole business of lecturing.... I indulged in constant violences to good taste. I yielded to outbursts of intoxicated malice and infernal spleen. I worked myself up into such ecstasies of anger against the whole well-constituted and well-ordered half of society, that I babbled, burbled, bubbled, blurted my very soul out, in spasms and spouts of bloody foam. I was as one possessed. (20).

The whole performance was summed up by Powys's friend Maurice Browne: "the audience hated his guts - as he intended." (21). There is a designed embarrassment in Powys's very first "performance"; he writes that on leaving Sherborne, he "had become a poet", but his poetry is not his "tame and conventional" competition verse; it is "the torrent of self-accusations, of self-incriminations, of wild self-mockery" with which he embarrasses his schoolfellows into respect for him. (22).

Maiden Castle is just such a wild performance. The book opens with an outrageous "Cast of Characters", as eccentrically named as they prove to be bizarre in behaviour. "The Times Literary Supplement" was shocked: "a flock of incredible creatures, all abnormal in thought and action" (23). In the novel itself, there is the insistent theme of "sterile love", and a modern society so thoroughly "John Cowperised" as to produce an atmosphere of wanton unreality.

In the bad taste of A Glastonbury Romance, Powys provokes and manipulates the reader's response to his purposes. Embarrassment is, of course, a telling emotion, and Powys uses it to unmask cultural evasion, and to unsettle private dignity in exploring the secret springs of individual behaviour. Maiden Castle is a more intimate book, and aims to shock less on a cultural than a personal level. "Such revelations provoke and embarrass?" considered Powys, writing of Dostoievsky. "We require embarrassment." (24).

Powys was perfectly aware of the effect of his novel. Of the cutting of Maiden Castle he wrote with satisfaction that his publishers were "leaving carefully all the dangerous passages and only cutting out what seemed to them Dull." (25). In fact, the reader's distaste is engaged in the interests of one of the novel's themes - that truth is found in the weird and repellent. Dud No-Man recoils in loathing from his first meeting with Uryen Quirm, but is forced to recognise him as his father. Maiden Castle is a book whose authenticity insinuates itself behind the reader's initial and even necessary rejection.

If Weymouth Sands disciplines Powys's view of the world by confining itself to the modern and rejecting the cultic and fantastic, Maiden Castle works in the opposite direction. We have a cultivation of the nervous, inward reality, almost to the exclusion of the visible. In Weymouth Sands Magnus Muir's ideal mental Weymouth is superimposed upon an evocation of the real town. Now we have the psychic influence of the town of Dorchester, like some disembodied genius loci, and very little else. The novel is the confrontation of the Powys hero with his dead - with his racial past, his immediate ancestry, and the surviving power of his dead wife upon his present

life. Dorchester is the town of these ghosts - Celtic ghosts, supplanted by Roman ghosts in whose spirits the modern "Durotriges" still live. The etymology of Dorchester defines the town as the place of water, but for Powys this is less the water of the Frome than of the coming Aquarian Age. Like Weymouth, Dorchester is a town fraught with apprehension of another world, on the borderland between the visible and the invisible where "the waters 'under the firmament', rose to meet the waters 'above the firmament', and Deep called to Deep" (pp. 402-3). The living meet the dead:

The "aura" of this old Roman-British town, with its layers upon layers of human memories, semi-historic and prehistoric, seemed to have a magical power over Dud's imagination. He began tapping levels in his consciousness that he had not known he possessed. (p. 112).

In describing the town, Powys selects purely those aspects which fortify this impression of a many-layered past. There are, it is true, evocations of the visible town, but these are only food for Dud's imagination; the town does not exist autonomously and for its own sake. Newspapers are sold in the streets, but less to inform the populace than to remind Dud of the continuity of the generations.

Powys would, I am sure, have called this realism. He admired the superb sense of place in Dostoevsky, the intense claustrophobia of "our town" in The Possessed which is yet achieved with the minimum of physical description. He contrasts Dostoevsky's "irresistible sense of reality" with "other realism, composed of the mere piling up of physical details" (26).

No writer one has met with has less of that tendency to "describe scenery", which is so tedious an aspect of most modern work. And yet Russian scenery, and Russian weather, too, seem somehow, without our being aware of it, to have got installed in our brains (27).

Maiden Castle attempts something of the same, and it is remarkable that Powys's desire not to repeat himself led him to surrender his great talent for "describing scenery" in favour of a more essential purpose. As in Dostoevsky, the absence of physical setting in Maiden Castle concentrates the novel upon the minds of its characters. There is a much smaller cast, with virtually no supporting roles. The dozen protagonists confront each other at high emotional pitch: there are no moments of mental repose. Dud No-Man, as much as Wolf Solent, asserts the importance of the solitary life - but on his walks broods over the conflicts of his relationships. There is none of Wolf's lyrical surrender to the reassurance of the natural world. There are scenes of great psychological tension, in Thuella Wye's tea-party, and the midsummer outing to Maiden Castle. Particularly in the relationship of Dud and Wizzie Ravelston is Powys close to Dostoevsky's spare, spoken drama of "the dimension of the nerves." (28).

Dud and Wizzie clearly owe a lot to Wolf Solent and Gerda. Again, the Powys hero is seized by romantic fantasy, which he attempts to translate into reality. Powys is now more extreme, and Dud enacts a predatory fantasy pushed to the limit of actual ownership. His purchase of Wizzie has been compared with The Mayor of Casterbridge; but the incident both circumstantially and in emotional pitch is closer to Wilhelm Meister's purchase of Mignon, drawn upon before in Wood and Stone. What Powys does is make external an inner fantasy at its most uncompromising level - and then see what happens. The All Soul's Day of the first part of Maiden Castle is Dud No-Man's first day in Dorchester; within the space of

twenty-four hours he has found himself a new home and a new girl, and the narrative races through a transformation of his life so total as can only mean wish-fulfilment. Dud recognises this unreality, climbing the stairs to meet Wizzie on their first night. It is - appropriately, as we will see - a vision of the eyes of Uryen Quirm which disturbs him.

They were devoid of every kind of expression. They were part of the feeling he had had just now, they were that feeling, that the whole place, with his whole day, All Souls' Day in Dorchester was unreal, unreal with a dissolution that could turn it to dust under his feet if he moved an inch. (p. 107).

The tawdry glamour of Wizzie's Circus is close to the seedy music-hall and pierhead theatre which enthralled Powys in the Autobiography, or the circus life which promises liberation in Ducdame and later in The Inmates. Dud's relationship with the acrobat is a life abstracted from ordinary social responsibility. There is no attempt to compromise with ordinary domestic values, such as Wolf Solent had undertaken in marrying Gerda. Instead Dud is transported by a primeval glamour, as if "some reincarnated Bronze-Age invader were selecting from among the girl-captives of the older Stone-Age the particular one that appealed to his erratic fancy" (p.81). Their irregular relationship falls into place naturally alongside the other unsocial characters of the book - the Bohemian Thuella Wye, with her professor-father fallen on hard times, the hermit-like Quirms. Only Roger Cask feels the desire to be part of the large social world, and his Communism is an absurdity.

It is the whole quality of experience represented by Dud's "cold-blooded lust" (p.271) which makes Maiden Castle for many a repulsive book. "Morbid and beastly", said "The Times Literary



Supplement." The Powysian "sylph quest" is described at length in the Autobiography; although shot through with mockery and humour, it is apparently bizarre, immature. Yet I do not believe it represents an altogether uncommon experience, particularly in its time and place. We find in Powys the exploration of a now buried vein of eroticism entirely characteristic of the late Victorian society in which he grew up. "Ally Sloper", the hugely popular pulp magazine which stirred the young Powys's imaginings, specifically caters for the kind of experience described in the Autobiography - or Maiden Castle. There is the same tantalized provocation, the fetishism, the "naughtiness" which is so excruciatingly embarrassing today. Powys is here a true late Victorian, responding to pressures in the society around him; in the novels, the sylph quest is often set against a background of appalling respectability. John Crow carries off his cousin Mary from a funeral. The kinds of feelings which possess Powys and his heroes have been little expressed in literature, and understandably so, for they are liable to be abhorred by the respectable, and despised by the iconoclasts. There is a similar note in Arthur Symonds ("La Mélinite: Moulin-Rouge" or "Intermezzo") but by and large Powys is exploring his characteristic "limbo" of the previously inarticulate.

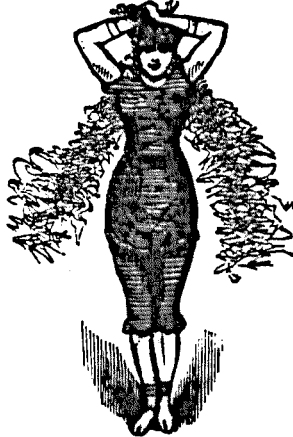
What is embarrassing about Maiden Castle is the way the sylph quest is presented. In the Autobiography and especially in Wolf Solent, there is a perspective of comedy and mockery, and the reader's moral response is controlled. Powys projects through the narrative an awareness of his hero's absurdity. In Wolf Solent, there is the same delicate control of distance and sympathy which so many readers have praised in Emma (29). Wolf Solent may be deluded, but the author is not.

# THE FOOTPRINT ON THE SAND.

A SEASIDE TALE BY SLOPER'S OWN SEA OUIDA.

THE blue waves bounded in the purple light, and the drowsy sun with bloodshot eyes slowly sinking beneath the horizon among the pillow-like clouds leered satyr-like, as might have done the bloated Roman, squatting on his throne, surfeited with gory revels, and giving the slaughter signal with down-turned thumb, which sent the victorious gladiator's reeking blade through the fast-throbbing heart of the already mangled wretch writhing in the dust, whose throat his iron heel is crushing.

The Dook Snook was wandering on the sands in his newly-purchased three-and-ninepenny sand-shoes. The true patrician was stamped upon every feature of that classic face, and he smoked a cigar which had cost him twopence. But wherefore wandered he in the shadow of the mighty cliff that rose from the rugged shingle in jagged masses, its crest o'erhung by wild grass, on which tame donkeys grazed at times, and was not the shingle likely to damage his shoes?



The Countess.

the establishment of Madame de Jones, the fashionable Popin Court *modiste*, and from that moment a deep absorbing passion scorched the Dook Snook's soul.

That face, that form, that bathing dress, belonged to the Countess, the wedded slave of the haughty Earl of Ighgate, whose income was roughly calculated at a million a minute. Alas! the Dook Snook knew not she was another's; he only knew she had a quarter of an hour previously gone round the rock, carrying the bathing-dress, and that was why he had wandered over the shingle, reckless as to the injury he was doing to his three-and-ninepenny sand-shoes.

Suddenly he starts, and the colour mantles his fair cheek. On a patch of sand he has reached, there is the distinct impression of an unclothed foot. 'Tis she! and so near at hand! Shall he proceed further or discreetly retire?

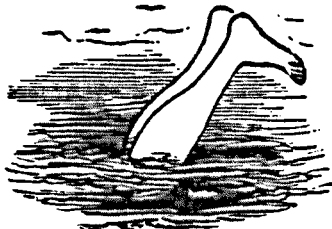
After a moment's struggle, in which a score of varying emotions contend for the mastery, the Dook Snook proceeds on his way. Ahead of him, at but the distance of a yard or two, yet hidden from his sight, he hears a dabbling sound, as though a pink-tipped toe agitates the ocean's surface.

Again he pauses, then cautiously approaches, and stretching forth his neck, peers curiously round the corner.

The dabbler is there,—it is A. Sloper with his socks off!

Afar away in the distance, with her arm in that of the Earl, is the fair object of the Dook Snook's search.

The aspect of A. Sloper without his socks is ignoble in the extreme.



The Countess's Healer.

From the crest of the cliff the evening before, a lovely vision had burst upon his enraptured gaze,—a face and form more beautiful than aught that poet's brain has e'er conceived; a form attired in the latest and most fetching of bathing costumes emanating from



A footprint on the sand.

## CRUEL.

"I FEAR," she murmured, "you are not a temperate man; and oh, Ally! I never could wed a sot."

A. Sloper rose.

"Aurora Constantia Emma Jane," he said, firmly, yet with no anger in his tone, "I never touch liquid in any shape."

"Don't you tub, then?" she asked.

Sloper responded not.



## A Jumped-at Conclusion.

It is everlasting leap year with the EFFULLEE!

[Friends at a distance kindly accept this intimation.

How different Maiden Castle is. Dud's fantasy is apparently a matter of deadly seriousness. If we laugh, it is not at the author's prompting. The seriousness of the fantasy in Dud's mind appears matched by a similar seriousness in Powys himself, with a consequent puzzlement for the reader.

Have Powys's intelligence, and the maturity of judgement shown in Wolf Solent, deserted him seven years later? This would be unlikely. What happens is that Powys sheds another of the qualities which have previously distinguished his work, just as he surrenders his evocation of landscape, in an attempt at an altogether new effect. In Maiden Castle this effect is to throw the burden of judgement onto the reader, who no longer has the help of the "mature" narrator. The novel is a kind of provocation, and the reader must cope with Dud's peculiarities just as, in fact, Dud himself must.

There are correctives to Dud's fantasy life. There is strong criticism from Jenny Dearth, but Dud does not react to her tirade:

Could our friend have "stared" just then at his own visage in a mirror he would have noticed that it had its mouth open and that a tiny dribble of saliva was descending his chin. This idiotic expression of his, combined with an unruffled air of martyred helplessness that seemed to be murmuring: "Hit me! Hit me!" was evidently, of all human attitudes, the one most calculated to drive the Friary Lane lady to distraction. (p.266)

Thus does Dud reply to his critics, and it is in an oddly, importantly similar way that Powys in Maiden Castle stares back at critics of the novel, exciting derision, retreating from mockery yet further into stubborn obtuseness. Criticism of Dud, and Powys, simply re-inforces their individual peculiarities.

But Jenny Dearth, too, is vulnerable. The one tirade which achieves its aim is that of her father, Teucer Wye, who denounces her sham Platonism, supporting his argument by throwing his beloved Plato texts into the stove (p.415). Sham Platonism is clearly not an option for Dud either.

The real counter to Dud's life comes, as it would in life, from Wizzie herself, most practically in her desertion of her lover, but also in the latter part of the novel when the point of view suddenly switches away from Dud to her. It is a device almost of brazen crudity, but it works. It is refreshing to see the Powys hero's sacramental antics through the eyes of another. Dud's rescue of the corpse of a rook becomes "a dreary affectation" (p.357). Yet it is also true that Wizzie's growing spirit of rebellion does not affect the obstinacy of Dud's nature any more than Jenny Dearth's railing. Dud experiences none of the self-questioning which Wolf underwent confronted with Gerda's infidelity. He is merely forced to endure his weakness with strength:

He made a mental resolution that never again would he let himself fret or rebel against the contrast that lay at the bottom of all. How heavenly had been that passing backwards and forwards between Wizzie and his attic! That was the whole secret; though there was not need to go as far as the old monks and monkish scholars, and make Wizzie and her ways a temptation of the devil (p.487).

If Dud's love-life is a large-scale fantasy incarnate, this is not simply countered by an unambiguous 'realism' in Wizzie's view of life. Wizzie has her independent vitality, as an accomplished circus-rider, yet her romantic longings are unformed, and, such as they are, bruised. She recalls her rape by Ben Urgan with hatred, yet also with

a certain respect for his decisive virility in contrast to Dud's impotence. She experiences a wistful desire for a lover of her own age (p.317), and even, more powerfully, love for Uryen Quirm (p.446). Her end is in romantic friendship with Thuella. Yet, even in her life with Dud, fantasy has been a part of her side of the relationship as well. She models her behaviour on the heroines of cheap romantic fiction, finding this a way of keeping Dud sweet (p.288). In front of Ben Urgan, she demands that Dud pretend they are married (p.290).

The relationship is sustained by mutual deceit. Dud conceals his knowledge that Uryen is his father, and also the visits of Ben Urgan. He conceals the survival of his dead wife Mona in the life of his imagination. Wizzie hides from Dud the existence of her daughter. Dud keeps his writing-life in his attic apart from Wizzie; Wizzie keeps her pride in her circus talents apart from Dud. Deceits produce frequent quarrels, with superb "iceberg" conversations.

In the Autobiography, Powys hazards a belief in various forms of telepathy. He is afraid that his sadistic imaginings might be transmitted to others (30), and attempts to use his mind's power for thaumaturgic purposes (31). Oddly enough, what is striking in the novels is the complete lack of communication between the mental worlds of individuals. Mutual isolation is particularly felt within the love relationship, and was explored in Wolf Solent:

And now, as their dalliance sank into quiescence, one of Wolf's final thoughts before he slept was of the vast tracts of unknown country that every human being includes in its scope. Here, to the superficial eye, were two skulls, lying side by side; but, in reality, here were two far-extending continents, each with its own sky, its own land and water, its own strange-blowing winds. And it was only because his soul had been, so to speak, washed clean of its body that day that he was able to

feel as he felt at this moment. But even so, what those thoughts of hers had been, that he had interrupted by his return, he knew no better now than when first he had entered her room and had blown out her candle. (32)

Dud is particularly conscious of this kind of isolation. Wizzie makes mock of it:

"I know what you're thinking now, D."

"Oh, for God's sake, Wizz, don't go on with this! Do let's go to sleep".

"You're thinking, like you always say, about two skeletons, lying side by side on the surface of the earth, and neither knowing a thing of what's in the other's head." (p.418)

Mutual incomprehension is built into Maiden Castle, and into Powys's vision of the human condition, apparent also in the multitude of secret inner lives in A Glastonbury Romance. In Maiden Castle, the final separation of Dud and Wizzie is precipitated by a scene which for Dud is a seal of intimacy:

"Wizz, old girl," he said. "Think of that time I first saw you in the caravan! We weren't long in understanding each other, were we?" (p.437)

Wizzie bursts into tears. Dud believes she is crying out of the fullness of their happiness. In fact, they are tears of frustration. On first meeting Wizzie, Dud had mingled doubt and hope:

"I have bought her, I have bought her!" he thought, and then he thought how the relation between them, at least as far as he was concerned, and perhaps for her too, was a far more exquisite one than if they had been ordinary lovers ... (p.92).

In that "perhaps for her too" disappointment is anticipated. "Perhaps for her too" is, in Powys's fiction, only true of John and Mary Crow.

Is this collapse of fantasy an obvious event? The mere fact of it certainly is, even more than the collapse of the Solent marriage. Yet in Powys's charting of the forces which lead to its dissolution there is a maturity of insight which is startling, and a recognition of the fantastic element in human relationships which is in its own way morally startling.

Where Maiden Castle becomes even more problematic is in the mystical hints which surround this sylph-love. They should not surprise us; most things in Powys are capable of suggesting avenues to another world - an old post in Glastonbury, a holiday beach in Weymouth Sands.

It is worth stressing what Powys has in common with Lawrence here, especially since their superficial differences are so apparent. In Lawrence we have a dark, inward descent to "the blood", in Powys we have "the nerves"; "cold-blooded" and "cerebral" are common descriptions. But "cerebralism", which Lawrence so hates, has a quite different meaning in Powys. Lawrence's contempt is directed towards the intellectual relationship, where lovers become mere friends - "pals":

The dark strong flow that polarizes us to the earth's centre is hampered, broken. We become flimsy fungoid beings, with no roots and no hold in the earth, like mushrooms. (33).

In Porius, fungoid growths are the closest of all to the secrets of nature. Powys's "cerebralism" is not intellectualism - and indeed

Powys views the intellectual relationship of lovers with blank incomprehension (34). John Crow's cerebral animism is Powys's confrontation with what Lawrence called digesting the apple of knowledge (35). For Lawrence, knowledge is often the blight on the rose of instinctual life, while for Powys, with his convoluted self-consciousness, there is no back-tracking, no way of unknowing what was once known. Hence the pressures in Powys always towards sharper awareness - in the head and the nerves, conscious, but not rationalistic.

Common to both is the belief that sexuality springs from the most important levels of the personality. For both, Puritan disgust is closer than liberal tolerance. The difference is that Lawrence descends to a subconscious, while Powys ascends to a sharpened extremity of hyper-consciousness. But we are near a religious dimension.

Powys does justify his heroes' individual sensuality with reference to mystical tradition, though this justification appears very much after the event. In Weymouth Sands, Sylvanus Cobbold's prolongation of love-making is a power "in which, they say, the lamas of Thibet are such adepts". (36). This is the "maithuna" of Tantric Yoga (37). In Maiden Castle, Dud No-man writes for Mr. Cumber an article on the old Welsh folk-custom of "bundling". (p.240). According to Rhys (38), it was by this custom of "bundling", that the Grail Knights maintained their "chastity". Dud houses his girl in the home of Jenny Dearth, whose "horse's head" makes Dud think of "the great Phrygian Mother" (p.97). As with Mother Legge of Glastonbury, there is here a rite of religious prostitution in the temple of Cybele.



Dud No-man is in fact offered an initiation into a mythological dimension which the Powys hero - especially in his John Crow incarnation - has hitherto shirked. John Crow had evaded confrontation with Geard. Dud No-man, however, is forced to recognise Uryen Quirm as his father. Magnus Muir in his mental life was dominated by his dead. So is Dud, but he is compelled to explore the implications of this absorption.

Dud's arrival in the ghost-haunted town of Dorchester is already a quest for the dead - specifically for the grave of his dead wife Mona, whose wraith has filled his imaginative life for the past ten years. (Mona is, of course, Anglesey - in Rhys, one of the Isles of the Dead (39)). It is All Souls' Day. Dud lies in bed and, like Magnus Muir, feels the Homeric dead surrounding him (p.21). But this pre-occupation with the dead is also a preparation for re-birth. Dud draws up his knees "till his skeleton under his flesh assumed that huddled posture of the as-yet-unborn in which so many ancient bones are discovered". Yet his mind is divided, and he visits the grave of his family with fear.

He had indeed an obscure sensation, as he hurried to join the woman, as if to go a single step further on this graveyard quest would really be a kind of suicide.

"Damn this whole business!" he thought. "What does it matter?"

"I'll write my books and I'll live in the present! No-man is my name and my business is No-man's business. My girl is my girl, and my mother is my mother. To hell with these graves!" (pp.35-6)

This is a John Crow-like reaction. Maiden Castle is about how far it is possible for the Powys-hero to cling to this nameless,

footloose irresponsibility. While Dud's namelessness obviously refers to his impotence, his evasive identity has a positive quality too. If in refusing to give himself a real name, Dud "had not been thinking of Odysseus's encounter with the Cyclops" (p.18), the incident was clearly in Powys's mind. Just as Odysseus's assumption of the name of "No-man" enables him to escape the Cyclops' rage (40) so Dud escapes the ordinary obligations of humanity. Names, we remember, are charms in Powys, but none can hold Dud No-man in their power. Yet there are forces which attempt to name the Powys hero, and to enchain him to significance.

Most importantly, there is Uryen Quirm, who believes himself to be an incarnation of the old Welsh Lord of Hades. That we have an initiation into a mythological world rather than a mythological drama is apparent in that he has a congener in Ben Urgan, the repulsive circus ring-master. Urgan is a variant of Uryen. "Ben", too, is the name of the underworld king, Uther Ben, the Lord of Life and Death (41). As Urgan says of his own name:

"'Ben' for Birth and Ben for Death, though in the Hin-between, as you might say, a person like me gets called all and sundry!" (p.82)

Urgan's black coat is covered with greenish mould - the mysterious green - black of Annwn.

In Wolf Solent the aged and sinister Mr. Malakite (dark green again) led Wolf to a knowledge of his father, and introduced him to his sylph-like daughter Christie. Ben Urgan sells Wizzie to Dud, while Mr. Malakite's incestuousness has its parallel in Urgan's rape of Wizzie. The other Uryen turns out actually to be Dud's father.

Uryen Quirm has a sombre, repulsive impressiveness, which comes partly from Powys's bestowal upon him of the characteristics of John Rhys's mythological Uryen: a dusky colouring, a huge head, and a crow mark on his breast. Rhys's Uryen is associated with a mystical dark-blue colour "gorlassar" - the colour of Uryen's filthy pullover (42).

Uryen Quirm has been compared with Geard and Sylvanus Cobbold, but he has none of these magicians confidence in their faith or easy converse with their powers. He is tortured by a doubt of the authenticity of his self-belief, and consumed by a desire to "break through" which he calls "hiraeth" (p.468) -a word with all the deep emotional pull for the Welsh which Powys claims for it. Quirm is in fact much closer to the earlier Uryen in Powys - Owen Evans. He shares with Evans a "semi-mortuus" aspect. There has been an intervening "corpse-man" in Dr. Brush of Weymouth Sands. The images of Uryen's faith are hideously violent. There is the "three-horned bull ... with two human torsos impaled on its horns and another one transfixed on its up-curving tail" unearthed at Maiden Castle (p.167). According to Dud, Uryen is consumed by a mysterious inner suffering (reminiscent of Evans' crucifixion), in a passage Powys refused to allow his publishers to cut:

"God! I've never realized how tragic his face is! And it's not only his dead eyes. He looks as if a part of his soul were sodden with some abominable suffering. He looks as if he's arguing with Claudius from about a fifth of his consciousness; while the rest of it hangs suspended on some colossal cross whose very enormity keeps it from being seen." (pp.168-9)

Beyond his suffering, Uryen looks to a paradisaic Golden Age, the ideal city of pre-Roman Maiden Castle, Uryen's kingdom of "Yr

Echwyd". In Rhys is quoted the triad whose outer lines form the epigraph of Maiden Castle:

Ar yr echwyd ethyw gwall  
O vraw marchawc ysguall  
A vyd vyth Uryen arall?

On the Echwyd evil has fallen  
From the dread of a savage knight:  
Will there ever be another Urien? (43)

In A Glastonbury Romance "Yr Echwyd" had decidedly sinister connotations: now it is a paradise. Powys is moving towards the golden age below hell which appears in Morwyn.

Uryen hopes to pass on his quest to his son; "Uryen" was intended as Dud's own name. Dud's father has secretly observed his son's entire career, and there is an interloper in Dud's life which is not so much a symbol of quest as its animistic instigator. This is the strangely carved bed-post, "Dor-Marth" to which Uryen supplies the pair, sealing the bond between father and son.

For Dud, this post has corresponded to deep forces in his inner life: "What most of all he seemed to detect in it was simply desire, that Faustian "desire" to penetrate and enjoy -even in forbidden directions - the huge mystery of the Cosmos." (p.18). The post assumes a significance not unlike Wolf's "mythology" (which had similarly been fostered by paternal influence): "the head itself ... had been the object round which more than anything else the brooding imagination of his childhood, playing with the notions of good and evil, had constantly hovered" (p.17).

In a passage which Powys refused to cut, Dud associates "Dor-Marth" with Malory's "Questing Beast" (p.114). In Le Morte d'Arthur the quest for this beast is passed from father to son, from Pellenore to Palomides. In Malory the beast has the mysteriousness and unaccountability which suggest vestigial myth. "Dor-Marth" means "Door of Death", and Rhys claims the "Questing Beast" as a Celtic Cerberus, whose task is also to hunt for the souls of the departed (44). For Uryen Quirm, it is through this beast that a breakthrough to another world is to be achieved (p.433). Dud is offered this quest, and refuses it.

Like A Glastonbury Romance, Maiden Castle is a discussion of the claims and nature of a possible other world, and speculates how different realities are to be conjoined in the individual life. There are three realities. There is the autonomous dimension of myth, which Uryen Quirm attempts to inhabit completely. There is the life of imagination and sensation, pursued by Dud, and there is the reality of society, which impinges upon Dud at an intimate level in his relationship with Wizzie, and is also present in the necessity of economic survival.

Each "reality" exacts its own dues; not even at the end of the novel are accounts unambiguously balanced.

To start with the social world, which appears so rarefied in Maiden Castle. I think that this is because Powys in Wolf Solent had already written his novel about the relation between the social life and the life of the imagination, and he is no longer sufficiently interested in the matter to treat it in any other fashion than dismissively. Once again Powys is shedding the talents of the past.

The outside world beyond the dream-town of Dorchester enters only twice: with Mr. Cumber, the newspaper proprietor with his imbecile family, and with Wizzie's circus.

In Wolf Solent, Carfax, the "Lord from London", was an ironic saviour, distributing financial gold among the characters of the novel in contrast to the "Saturnian" gold which Wolf had to earn for himself. But Cumber, another magnate, kills. Carfax had brought Jason Otter's poems to the press, and Jason had shed his bitterness and malice. Cumber commissions articles on Welsh mythology from Uryen Quirm, but the objectification of his "life-illusion" in cold print is the cause of Uryen's decline and death, as both Dud and Nance agree. Mr. Cumber, his daughter and son-in-law, are conceived in pure farce. They have a craziness which foreshadows the extreme eccentricity of The Inmates, and Powys shows very little interest in making them real as people who could conceivably be imagined outside the charmed circle of the novel's world. (In contrast, Lord Carfax is a very solid and plausible conception).

As for Wizzie, she has her own life in the circus, to which she returns. It is a believable one, but Dud chooses to ignore it until her desertion. Dud's relationship is enacted on his own terms.

At the end of the novel, Dud's social and worldly sustenance has vanished. Wizzie has gone. Grummer Urgan has disappeared with his savings. His novel Mary Channing has been refused by his publishers. He is prey to ulcerous pain. He has lost his father, whom he had come to half accept. In his extreme privation, he is like Wolf Solent, but is summoned more to endurance than to a vision of gold.

It remains in fact ambiguous, in the melancholy tail-piece in which Dud closes the novel, how far the burden of Maiden Castle remains with Dud, and how far it has belonged to Uryen. Dud has refused Uryen's mystical quest, just as he has refused to take the name of Uryen upon himself. Yet he acknowledges his similarity to his father.

"He and I, my dear, are ... very alike in certain things. We both live at a somewhat different level from most people. Mind you, I don't say at a higher level, but a different one. With us, if I may say so, the actual substance of our planet down to the centre of the earth, with all the elements that work on it out of space, is something - its mystery, its power for good and evil - that we can't take, as most people do, just for granted! We think of it all the time, if you get what I mean, and to him it always meant - this vast weight of matter - something separating us from the real reality." (pp.494-5)

With his father, claims Dud, he lives "more in the great cosmic forces ... than in ordinary human interests. I take these things historically ... but he took them literally" (p.495). At the same time, Dud cannot "live, as this dead man had done in a wild search for the life behind life" (p.496).

The question is, whether Dud No-Man is a Powys hero who is sloughed off at the end of the book, like John Crow and Magnus Muir, or whether in him Powys hesitantly attempts to raise Wolf Solent again after the diminution of the semi-autobiographical hero figure in Glastonbury and Weymouth Sands.

At the end of the book, Dud still has his "sensations". He promises to himself to be "decent" to Nance, and "faithful, after his fashion" to Wizzie. He refuses to close his mind to "intimations of immortality". Is this enough?

Powys's writing career after Wolf Solent suggests that it is not enough. As much as Glastonbury, Maiden Castle is concerned with the doubtful status of a "mythological reality", set against the tangibility of "matter".

Uryen, who attempts to live entirely in a mythological dimension, is defeated ignominiously by economics, and the claims of this world. The infant Lovie recognizes a kindred spirit in Uryen: "here was someone who treated existence exactly as she did, who regarded what you were pretending as the only real reality in your life" (p.319). Uryen's "Yr Echwyd", however, only becomes actual at his death.

The mysterious "yr Echwyd," of which the man was always talking, had no need now to be besieged by violence!. It was here, it was around them both, it was them both, and all their accumulated experience with it. (p.483)

This ideal dimension, became apparent, is very like the experience of Geard, but Uryen has not succeeded in attaining such experience in this life. Nor has Powys attained it in the novel. Maiden Castle itself is full of "hiraeth" on Powys's part, full of "all the defeated longing, all the baffled longing, all the forbidden longing, all the beatings against the walls" (p.468). The novel attempts the same breakthrough as Glastonbury, without the "charlatantry" of the earlier novel. But it is not successful.



There are a few indications that Powys's imagination is working at slightly less than its usual intensity. I have mentioned in Chapter One the careless revision of the book, and there is slackness in the original text too. Dud's stepfather is first called Aaron Smith, then Elijah. There are good reasons why Maiden Castle should be less lyrical in style than its predecessors, but there is nonetheless a great deal of crabbed and spiky prose:

Except for a group of elderly ladies - residents in the hotel - who regarded our friends with amused interest, the only other stranger was the gentleman who had fled from the lounge, and though their good spirits entirely destroyed the psychic harmony which this good man felt to be his privilege, thrusting between every inch of his careful person and that decorous dining-room a wedge of discord, his sufferings were lessened by the tact of the waiter who, without anything said, protected his life-illusion with every wave of his discriminating napkin. (pp.224-5)

There is writing like this throughout Powys, but it is especially noticeable in Maiden Castle, and disturbs more seriously the reader's faith in Powys's purpose, even though its strange, neurasthenic quality has a certain appropriateness to such an enervated novel.

There are two other factors which, I feel, make Maiden Castle the victim of imaginative dislocation. One is fear of libel. The suit brought against A Glastonbury Romance was settled only just before Powys began Maiden Castle, in August 1934. In his letters to Marian and Llewelyn, his new novel is haunted by a possible repetition of such an experience.

(It is) I suppose less normal and less objective than my usual calm style! - This is the result of my scare of libel and of they're wanting (their wanting I mean) to change the names as

with Weymouth - making me select madder and odder and less usual persons than the sedate and discreet and equable people I usually write of (45).

If fear of libel made the characters stranger, it also etherealised the landscape. There are extraordinary paragraphs where Powys insists that Glymes and Friary Lane have been totally demolished.

Maiden Castle is full of oddities at first reading. Deeper reading discovers even more of them. When Powys is at his best, personal quirks and fragments from the inarticulate limbo of experience are brought together to create an intensely whole vision of life. This is particularly true of the Autobiography and Porius, books which fulfil splendidly Powys's requirements of "Art", as laid down in the preface to Wood and Stone.

She must keep the horizons open - that must be her main concern. She must hold fast to poetry and humour, and about her creations there must be a certain spirit of liberation, and the presence of large tolerant after-thoughts. (46).

Maiden Castle is not a liberating novel. Uryen's desire to "break through" is only realized in death. The book itself, with its layers of Welsh academic reference, yearns to break through to a Welsh experience. Dud No-Man, too, remains in captivity. The arcane nature of so much of the material of Maiden Castle is not successfully gathered together into a vision which transcends Powysian idiosyncrasy. Rather, after Glastonbury and Weymouth Sands, there is another period of turbid inwardness comparable to the unrealized imaginative potential in the novels prior to Wolf Solent. Maiden Castle intrigues more than it satisfies, and its conflicts await their resolution in Porius.

## Chapter Five

## Notes

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8. Autobiography, p.594.
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24. Visions and Revisions, p.181.
25. The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, p.26.
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31. *ibid.*, pp.638-9.
32. Wolf Solent, p.278.
33. D.H. Lawrence, Fantasia of the Unconscious and Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p.189.
34. Morwyn, p.23, 31-3, 201.
35. Lawrence, p.147.
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38. Rhys, Studies, p.175.
39. *ibid.*, p.356.
40. Homer, The Odyssey, Bk. IX, ll. 360-420.
41. Rhys, Studies, p.256, p.260.
42. *ibid.*, p.256.
43. *ibid.*, p.257.
44. *ibid.*, pp.153-7.
45. Letter to Marian Powys, 12 April 1936, MS.
46. Wood and Stone, p.x.

## CHAPTER SIX MORWYN AND OWEN GLENDOWER

## I MORWYN

Powys's Wessex novels increasingly assert the power of the imagination to create and destroy, and to define its own terms of existence. The relations between this imaginative power and the daily social world have hitherto fascinated Powys, yet Maiden Castle illustrates the increasing strain with which his vision is confined within the naturalistic novel. The most intriguing drama of Maiden Castle is off-stage, in the mind of Uryen Quirm, to which the reader gains little real access. The novel craves fantasy, to make visible this inner landscape. Quirm describes his beliefs:

"... and what these fools can't see, and what my son won't see, is that the Power of the Underworld that our old Bards worshipped, though it was always defeated, is the Power of the Golden Age! Yes it's the Power our race adored when they built Avebury and Maiden Castle and Stonehenge and Caer Drwyn, when there were no wars, no vivisection, no money, no ten-thousand-times accursed nations!" (1).

Morwyn (1937) enacts this myth explicitly, and takes place in this Underworld, among the ghosts of the dead which had haunted Weymouth Sands and Maiden Castle.

Powys's earliest fantasy, The Hamadryad and the Demon, conceals the seriousness of its matter beneath a light, fanciful surface. In 1930 Powys wrote The Owl, The Duck, and - Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe! Miss Row! a "jeu d'esprit" about his New York apartment, seen from the point of view of its furniture (2). Morwyn too has a

note of self-protective frivolity, sometimes very inappropriate to its horrific subject. The book is short, exuberant, and often casually written - although Dorothy Richardson tactfully amended the grammar and abridged the phrasing of this bizarre little work, so different from her own meticulous novel (3).

Morwyn has been little liked. H.P. Collins dismisses the book as "one of his least happy" (4). Powys himself thought otherwise, was very disappointed at the difficulty of finding a publisher for it, and, unusually for him, complained to Louis Wilkinson about its poor reception by the reviewers. In later years, when absorbed in Porius, Powys wrote, "it suits me better than anything except perhaps 'Morwyn' (5). The link with Porius is important, for the dramatic outline of Morwyn is very much a foreshadowing of the later work.

Darrell Emmel has written a splendid interpretation of Morwyn which for the first time shows the major significance of the book within the Powysian canon (6): Morwyn is a dramatization of Taliessin's poem "The Harryings of Annwn", in which, according to Rhys, the culture-hero Arthur descends to the underworld in quest of a cauldron of great price, and returns in possession of the wisdom of this heathen Grail.

A "Harrowing of Hell" is implicit in all Powys's work. There is Wolf Solent's loss of "life-illusion", which brings about his golden vision in the field "behind the pigsty". Such a harrowing will be, for Owen Evans, the purgation of his vice, and in A Glastonbury Romance "The Harryings of Annwn" is already the prototype of such cleansing. In Weymouth Sands Sylvanus Cobbold undertakes the harrowing of "Hell's Museum". A large-scale embodiment of this quest seems due.

As Mr. Emmel says, Morwyn contains many archetypal elements common to "Harrowing of Hell" myths, and to alchemical discipline in the discovery of the "lapis"-like "Tear of Tityos" at the bottom of the world.

Undoubtedly what attracted Powys most in such a myth was the conjunction of horror and beauty, consonant with his belief in "the necessity of opposites." Such intertwined opposites are exactly what we have in Morwyn. The narrator (the "Captain") with Morwyn and his dog "Black Peter", are rescued from the pursuing ghosts of scientists, vivisectors and sadists by the spirit of Taliessin - who in his poem, "The Harryings of Annwn" had described himself as accompanying Arthur on his underworld adventure. Taliessin's boat rises up upon a wave of repulsive stench:

Out of that odious smell came this calm heroic figure, all that was most loathsome in the world seeming to give birth to all that was most god-like!

The two impressions came simultaneously. The smell was such as might have proceeded from millions of tons of decomposing fish down there at the bottom of that gulf; while the features of the mysterious Person that were now uplifted to greet us seemed illuminated by a mystic, phosphorescent glory. (pp. 137-8).

The fish is a life-symbol, and the Captain, like Wolf Solent and Sam Dekker, sees this fish in its wholeness later in Morwyn. Here the smell of decomposing fish comes from two sea-monsters locked in an embrace which is at the same time a violent struggle:

For what I saw, before I ran down in desperate panic to my girl's side, was nothing less than two mountainous Leviathans - I don't know how else to describe the Things that rose up out



of that blue-black sea - both of them trumpeting like sea-elephants, and as far as I could make out locked together in a loathsome embrace, and in that condition rending and tearing each other's flesh. It struck me at once that it was from this frightful struggle and from the rending of their Saurian bodies that this filthy smell proceeded. Their trumpeting was like an accumulated scream of appalling physical pain, and as they heaved up and down upon the surface of the water, burying themselves in each other's flesh, I received the impression that this hideous contact and this mutual immolation had been going on in this subterranean sea for thousands of years ...

... There before me, in that terrible moment of time that was being stretched to the breaking-point, I seemed to feel in the eternal embracing and eternal devouring of these first-born of the abyss the very secret of the dark, obscene, life-and-death entanglement, that old evil "knot of contrariety", out of which, as the lips of the damned had confessed, the System-of-Things was evolving its purpose. (pp. 170-2).

The Captain's reaction to this sight is to bury his head in Morwyn's lap, and the monsters' screaming "became no more than some inevitable cosmic note, some necessary Discord of the Spheres, without which the whole planetary motion from equinox to solstice and from solstice to equinox would be inconceivable" (p. 173).

Beyond this "knot of contrariety" are the sleeping place of Cronos and "the mound" of the Great Mother - "Rhea, Bona Dea, Cybele, Dindymene, Magna Mater, Titaea, Ops" (p.218). The Saturnian theme and the Great Mother theme are closely connected, as in Glastonbury and in Porius. In Morwyn, the "Great Mother" theme is the more interesting, for it is present not just as a goal but an agent in the drama itself. Morwyn opens with Faustian associations. The Captain's love for Morwyn is compared with Faust's for Gretchen (and both heroes have black dogs). The whole experience of the descent into the underworld is in fact a result of the intensity of the

Captain's love. Once again, this love exists at an enervated, unfulfilled level. Morwyn's face, a moment before the plunge into Hell, is illuminated by a mysterious ecstasy. And then there is "a crack in the order of things and a colossal bolt hurled at our little oasis of order out of the blind tumult of the outer chaos" (p.29). This is not unlike the "crack" of Sam Dekker's Grail vision, itself a result of a state of heightened awareness, such as the Captain, too, experiences climbing his Welsh mountainside.

In The Pleasures of Literature, Powys gives Goethe's "Mothers" his own idiosyncratic twist:

... I prefer to think of them as belonging to that remote human tradition of which we find traces in Crete, and even, according to Sir John Rhys, in certain queer survivals in the Welsh language, concerning some pre-historic cult of the Feminine Principle, regarded as the origin of all things. (7).

There are hints of this ancient cult by the Mound of the Great Mother in Morwyn:

I felt as if beneath that mystic Mound, sleeping its sleep until the return of its bloodless rule, when cruelty and torture would be ended and all these scientific horrors would seem monstrous insanities, lay in etherealized essence the external Well-spring of all the creative magic of femininity! (p.220).

It is curious that Powys should insist that this ancient Cybele worship was bloodless - as virtually all historians assert the very opposite (\*). Traditionally the Great Mother, the Devourer and the Sustainer, is the very "knot of contrariety" which Powys claims to have transcended. There are I feel simpler and more obvious reasons why Morwyn is a failure as a novel, but this final evasion is perhaps

(\*) There is an exception in H.J. Massingham, a friend of Llewelyn Powys, who wrote a breathtakingly simple book entitled The Golden Age (1926). In Through the Wilderness (1935) he also proclaims a belief in a literal Neolithic Golden Age, and expounds upon the transmission of a bloodless Great Mother cult from pre-historic Crete.

an apt symbol of how Powys's attempt to confront the violence within himself, and his attempt to "harrow Hell," are unconvincing.

There is yet another myth invoked: the Fertility Rite of From Ritual to Romance. When the Captain is wounded in the groin by a young vivisector, Taliessin is mysterious agitated. "He seemed to treat me as but one of the figures - in some mysterious Cosmic Rite, or Ritual, or Passion Play." (p.236). For "an amiable Captain Shandy" (p.203) to return to earth with a wounded groin seems to point to the resurrection of Uncle Toby himself. But Taliessin refers to the hurt as "the third dolorous stroke" which points the reader either to the tale of Balin and Balan in Malory, or to The Mabinogion. None of these originals appear to illuminate Morwyn at all, but Rhys does (8) in his interpretation of the dolorous strokes which lay waste the lands of the Fisher King. Jessie Weston quotes:

His loins are stricken by this bane  
From which he suffers lasting pain. (9).

The Captain is told that his wound is difficult to heal, but he returns to earth, fortified by the good words of Rabelais, and confident of the eventual righting of the world. He has explored the "Power of the Underworld" which was the ultimate truth for Uryen Quirm, and Morwyn has enacted explicitly the vision of hope that the mysterious Uryen had darkly intimated. Morwyn takes place on the twenty-first of December. Time is evidently distorted in Hell; the Captain's story is told before the end of that same December, although we are told that his stay in Hell has lasted several months. Morwyn shows the wounding of the Fisher King, the fertility deity, at the low point of the annual cycle, and gives hope of his return to vigour. Its picaresque narrative is Powys's somewhat convoluted re-

telling of the myths of his ancestors, adapted to his own psychological needs.

Darrell Emmel writes of the "obvious limitations" of Morwyn. Why, with a myth which is at the very centre of Powys's moral and fictional concerns, with so much promise of symbolic reverberation, is Morwyn so clearly a failure?

Firstly, there is the novel's simple zest. Powys obviously enjoys describing his underworld. For its visual aspects, he relies heavily upon the eleventh book of the Odyssey, upon Milton and Dante. Like Dante's Hell, Powys's has its gradations, and its famous people as moral spokesmen. There is a great deal of time devoted to ticklish questions of stage management. Is there air in Hell? How solid are ghosts? How do they communicate? There are plenty of contradictions: a vaporous ghost manages to wound the Captain with Rhadamanthus' broken staff. As with Milton, a reader bent on self-confusion can become very confused indeed. Powys clearly expects the reader to follow his own indulgent speculation. The difficulty is that there is too much relish, curiosity, and authorial high spirits for the Hell of Morwyn to generate a sense of horror in the reader.

The dramatic failure of Powys's Hell is quite naturally a consequence of a more fundamental failure in the realization of the book's moral purpose, for Morwyn in fact hardly is the confrontation with inner evil it hopes to be. The Captain is sent back to the world cheered by the words of Rabelais:

The sleeping-place of the Age of Gold is in the depths of every human heart; and to this all must revert. Bloody religion and bloody science are not forever. At the bottom of the world is pain; but below the pain is hope. (p.320).

Rabelais draws a conclusion about "the human heart" out of the drama of Morwyn, and indeed its drama promises to be a representation of the drama of Powys's inner life. Early in the book the Captain remarks "how obstinately, how fatally, we are what our passions are" (p.33). With Powys's distrust of ratiocination, Morwyn should perhaps illustrate a kind of dialectic of the passions, and the forging of a view of life such as is familiar from Powys's earlier novels.

But are the passions of Morwyn, even if truly felt by Powys, convincingly dramatized? From the evidence of the early novels, Glastonbury, and the Autobiography, I have asserted that Powys's sadism is real, but I do not believe the sadism of Morwyn is real, or that the novel represents in any way a confrontation with inner evil such as is so striking in the work of T.F. Powys.

In Wolf Solent, a moral confrontation was avoided in a fashion altogether consonant with Powys's view of life. Wolf Solent was, fatally, what his passions were. The sadism of Morwyn is however external, not within, observed and not felt. In the beginning, the Captain admits, "I am not free ... from certain aspects of this dangerous vice" (p.20). But of this identification with the damned there is thereafter nothing. The ghosts of Morwyn are a grisly spectacle, but the Captain's escape to the "below-Hell" of the Golden Age is purely a flight from an external threat. The reader experiences the travellers' rescue as a lucky physical salvation - in the best tradition of Jules Verne, but hardly a salvation from profound inner evil. Powys is much better at describing his "knot of contrariety" by oblique symbol - as with the struggling/embracing sea monsters. One suspects that he is still unable to cope in any direct

artistic sense with what, on his own evidence, was the dominating terror of his imagination.

For the psychology of sadism in Morwyn is plainly not convincing. Is it plausible that sadism should find its fulfilment in vivisection, or that vivisectors derive a principally sadistic pleasure from their experiments? Dr. Brush, the vivisector of Weymouth Sands, is a "de-personalised personality", his human sympathies withered by neurosis. While his presentation in the novel may be unsteady, the elements of his character are thoroughly credible. But in him Powys represents a character as far removed as possible from a Powysian persona - the kind of man most antipathetic to Powysian values. Owen Evans is a Powysian persona. His mental torment is quite believable though the direction of his obsession is not. In Morwyn, I believe Powys has weakened the novel's representation of inner struggle by arbitrarily connecting a temptation which he did experience within himself - the sadistic, with one which he did not - the vivisectional, and the results are absurd. Because of this deep implausibility, the novel is quite unsuccessful as a psychological metaphor, or a polemic against Powysian evils, for these evils are just not believable.

As in Weymouth Sands, Powys recognises that a change of policy with regard to science must be preceded by a change of consciousness. For Taliesin, Morwyn's father will speak with "the voice of the old objective lie, the lie that's hindered creation since it first stirred in the void! It'll be the voice of the false Law, the false Causation, the false Predestination, the false Reality - " (p.209). This is, of course, very like Geard of Glastonbury. All Powys's novels advocate a subjective interpretation of the world, and are written out

of such an interpretation, to many readers' puzzlement. In Morwyn, Socrates blames Bacon for the birth of empiricism:

But a dreadful person - I believe he belonged to your remote island - whose patronymic was Bacon turned up, and since his time everything went wrong. The soul of a wise man, the conscience of a good man, became no longer the test of the purpose of the System-of-Things. And it gets worse and worse. Oh, my good friend, you have no idea to what things I've been compelled to listen! ... They don't seem to understand that the centre of the cosmos lies in a man's soul, in a man's character, in the difference between Good and Evil as the System-of-Things reveals itself to our reason. (pp.248-9).

There is also Democritus, "the first thinker to divorce reason from conscience" (p.250). Powys's Socrates has the same targets as Blake, but a comparison between Blake and Powys shows instantly what is wrong with Morwyn:

The Atoms of Democritus  
And Newton's Particles of Light  
Are sands upon the Red sea shore  
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright (10).

That is vision, with mechanistic philosophies in one flash subsumed by (but still part of) a larger truth. there is no such brilliance in the anti-scientific preaching of Morwyn. Its Hell is well-supplied with the recent products of science - television, wireless, telegraphy, electric drills. Powys emphasises the blight of machines upon human life, just as in the 1950s he was to complain sadly of the fate of children brought up watching "telie" instead of hearing old stories (11). But Powys is over-zealous; his machines turn men into monsters, and he is weak in one area where we might expect him to be especially perceptive, in showing the minor debillitations wrought by gadgetry upon daily existence.

Morwyn, written in the form of a letter from father to son, is full of criticism of "modern cynicism and modern sexlessness" (p.19). The "new generation" has its "disillusioned lightness of touch" and "deft avoidance of mysteries" (p.173). For Powys, Aldous Huxley is the main butt among writers of the inter-war years. But here is a famous piece of "objectivity" by one of the new generation (1939):

I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, not thinking. Recording the man shaving at the window opposite and the woman in the kimono washing her hair. Someday, all this will have to be developed, carefully printed, fixed. (12).

Of course, the success of Goodbye to Berlin is in its failure to be objective; its young hero finds it increasingly impossible to stand back, disengaged from events. At the same time, Isherwood is perhaps right in now condemning his Berlin novels as "heartless". What would Powys have thought of the giggly frivolity of the sadism in Mr. Norris Changes Trains? Powys claims for himself a moral earnestness he felt to be old-fashioned. But how far this seriousness failed in its realisation can be estimated by a comparison with, say, the understanding of viciousness in Musil's Young Törless.

The most decisive step which Powys makes in Morwyn is not his move into a fantastic world. Rather it is his decision to speak with sage-like authority. Earlier Powys heroes are anxious, questing people, and the matter of their novels shapes itself around their developing consciousness. In Morwyn, and afterwards, Powys defines a mystery with authorial decision and initiates his hero into this mystery. In Owen Glendower and Porius the career of the Powys hero is the education of a young man, as if viewed in retrospect. The failure of Morwyn, the first novel of Powys-as-sage, makes possible and requires the success of Porius.



Powys's theme is not an eccentric one. Ever since the birth of empiricism, its methods have been distrusted by poets - by Blake, Goethe, and Wordsworth. Powys's contribution may not be of great value, but he is in good company.

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;  
Our meddling intellect  
Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things;  
— We murder to dissect. (13).

## II OWEN GLENDOWER

Morwyn and Owen Glendower (1941) are apparently very different books - the one idiosyncratic and wayward, and the other formidably researched, and the most public of the novels. As Dr. Cavaliero says, it is Powys's "most objective work" (14). But both books are illuminated by the later achievement of Porius, and represent alternative ways of handling Welsh mythical and historical material. Morwyn is a re-telling of a poem of Taliessin in a fashion so free as to be practically private; Owen Glendower stays close to verifiable history, yet its exactness compromises the personal, Powysian direction of the book. Powys's arrival in Wales, in fact, entailed a lengthy redefinition of his art to cope with new conditions, and in neither of his first two Welsh novels is this redefinition achieved with total success.

Owen Glendower in particular is something entirely unexpected in Powys. The novel measures itself against totally new

external criteria. Firstly, there are the objective facts of history. But perhaps even more important is that Owen Glendower attempts, or seems to attempt, to express a still living spirit of nationalism. It is the dramatization of a collective, political myth, which survives in the sense that Owen is both an historical figure and a focus for political feeling to this day. Powys closes the "Argument" of Owen Glendower with a comment about the events of history "having happened in their beauty and in their pain that there might be a song for those who come after" (p.952). This is the bardic note, where the artist becomes a spokesman for his community. With its size, and the centrality of its subject, Owen Glendower appears to stake a claim as the definitive Anglo-Welsh novel. Few readers -and particularly Welsh readers - have felt that it is precisely that. The book is too entirely Powysian. We have the letters to Iorwerth Peate to show how seriously Powys involved himself in Welsh cultural affairs, and how successfully he managed to make Wales his home. Owen Glendower shows Powys writing himself into Wales, declaring himself a Welshman. In the novel, however, it is difficult to feel that Powys speaks as a Welsh writer, and it is certain that Powys did not wish to abandon his hitherto highly personal course to become a kind of novelistic spokesman for Welsh culture. Rather he tended to identify his own course with that of the Welsh nation, and it is on the implausibility of this equation that Owen Glendower fails.

Dr. Cavaliero feels otherwise; for him Owen is a perfect integration of Powysian vision with tradition and landscape:

It is easy to understand ... how Powys, with his instinctive fellow feeling with the downtrodden and defeated, should have felt himself to be among a sympathetic people. Their very history as well as their mythology provided the perfect objective correlative for his own subjective philosophy. (15).

It is precisely this which Jeremy Hooker does not feel: "the conviction that Powys is re-writing Welsh history to make it accord with his own spiritual autobiography induces distaste" (16). Roland Mathias enlarges upon a similar thesis in great detail, believing that Powys "deliberately disregarded the body of political myth which was germane to the heart of his subject in favour of ill-connected and sometimes irrelevant strands of myth which were actually inimical to the main theme" (17). Mr. Mathias is mordant and catty. It is very easy to be witty at Powys's expense; his art has a purposeful naivety which can easily provoke retorts of cynical asperity. Nonetheless, Mr. Mathias offers the only sustained adverse criticism of Powys based upon a close reading, and he deserves a proper reply. His interpretation of Owen Glendower shows a hankering after a different kind of novel from the one Powys actually wrote. Behind his strictures lurks the ghost of the book he would seem to want Owen to be - a lively orthodox, historical novel, full of explicit political conflict and high action. The metaphysic, the Powysian "quest", he would like to see jettisoned. I would prefer the history thrown out - as it is in Porius. But first, the novel itself.

Its history is simpler than its metaphysic, but is nonetheless of a distinctly personal kind. Powys appended to the book an "Argument" intended to refresh the reader's knowledge of the history of the time. It is a curious piece of work, firstly because it is written in a restrained, expository prose quite unlike the tone of the novels or philosophical works, and secondly because it provides very little actual information about Owen and his rebellion. Instead, we have an eagle's eye survey of the known world in 1400; Powys's sweeping viewpoint reminds us that his favourite historian was Spengler. Owen's revolt is set against two European phenomena: the rise of

nationalism, and the spread of religious heresy. Powys is sympathetic to both, believing as he did in the decisive influence of landscape, language and racial descent upon personal character, and in freedom of thought. Owen thus becomes a symbol of aspirations which are not exclusively Welsh.

There are two specific sources mentioned by Powys: J.E. Lloyd's Owen Glendower (1931) and J.H. Wylie's History of England Under Henry IV (1884). Lloyd describes the career of a "national hero" from a Welsh point of view, but has no time for myth, and hopes to clear his subject from "the undergrowth of legend and error which had gathered around the story of the champion of Welsh independence" (18). In Wylie, where the central focus is upon King Henry, Owen's story appears piecemeal amid a vast narrative constructed, coral-reef like, from a myriad of documentary minutiae. For Wylie, Owen's revolt is faintly absurd, his court pretentious and his transient success only achieved because of the feebleness of the English government of the time (19).

Powys's history is impressively well-digested, and is not forced upon the reader. History is never "done into fiction", but present in a convincing narrative perspective, wherein the central action of the novel fades into a background of off-stage historical events. Dimly, but authentically in the distance are Henry's Scottish wars, and the struggle of Avignon and Rome. Wylie's history becomes a mine of vivid detail, supplying Powys with the exact forms of questioning for suspected Lollards, a heretic-burning Bishop of Norwich; Glyndyfrdwy is given authentic chimneys. Most striking of all is Powys's imaginative expansion of minimal history - the creation of fully-rounded characters from people who have survived in history as mere

names. Of the historical Rhisiart ab Owen, nothing is known except that he was Owen's secretary, and was captured by the English (20): he becomes the Powys hero. In history, Owen's children are ghostly ciphers, though Catharine's marriage to Edmund Mortimer is of course authentic. Walter Brut is kindled from the pages of an episcopal register (21), and in Wylie there is "a Franciscan Friar, from Norfolk, ... found declaring that Richard was still alive" (22). In Porius, Powys is to carry this technique to extreme lengths.

If Powys does not twist history, he pushes it to the furthest limit in the service of his vision of Welsh nationhood. In Lloyd, Owen's rebellion begins as a quarrel with Lord Grey of Ruthin over the possession of land (23). In Powys, this is a feint to cover Owen's nationalistic mission. Owen's proclamation as Prince of Wales is pushed to its earliest possible, least probable date.

But despite these researches, it is arguable whether Powys's interests are historical at all. In an historical novel, we expect an oblique treatment of historical events, which are in themselves subordinate to, though illuminated by, the experience of the characters. What is interesting is not the events themselves, but the characteristic dimension of fiction - that of personal response. Powys is possibly so oblique that all sense of the public and political escapes him. As ever, he is most interested in life's most intangible aspects, and in the freaks of chance:

It seems to a superficial eye as though the whole course of human history often depends on the turn of a hair, on the tilt of an eyelid, on the fall of a feather; but to a more philosophical mind these trifles are only the instruments of what we call fate or destiny, a force for which in our nescience we have no adequate name. (p.818).

Between destiny, which is strongly felt in Owen, and the turn of a hair, there seems to be little room for the councils of men, for the central political dimension. It is the bite of a gnat which decides the fate of the Welsh forces before the gates of Worcester. This attention to extremes has been, of course, a constant feature of Powys's novels, but Roland Mathias finds the absence of "political credibility" the most painful disability of Owen. It is quite true that much of the explicitly political discussion of the novel has a perfunctory, stylized quality - as in Owen's council at Glyndyfrdwy (pp.178-95) and that "with the exceptions of Rhys Gethin and others like Henry Don and John ap Hywel who are rapidly despatched to the periphery, Owen appears to be served by an assemblage of theological and intellectual curiosities - Broch, Pascentius, Rheinalt, Rhisiart and Walter Brut, not to mention many others who could have been of no possible assistance." (24). Military campaigns and dispositions are vague. But it is simply not Powys's concern to build up Owen Glendower as a born military leader. In fact, his whole campaign comes to be seen as a mistake. Owen's true nature is, as we will see, rather different.

On the other hand, I do not feel that the weakness of Powys's politics arises, because his talents are entirely confined to depicting individuals on their own. Crowds, as well as individuals, are subject to the less tangible forces of psychology, and Powys's fickle, volatile crowds are unforgettable. This is particularly true of the opening of the novel, where Rhisiart rescues Mad Huw and Tegolin from the bowmen of Chirk - a splendid depiction of a large mass of people, obscurely stirred by a spirit of collective cruelty. Mr. Mathias finds the scene absurdly static, although this is Powys's intention here. We have the crowd restive yet still, awaiting decisive movement. There

have been such crowds elsewhere in Powys - in the Abbot's Tribunal and at the pageant in Glastonbury. In Owen, the scene is decisive for Rhisiart's future. Mr. Mathias objects to such "individualising in the midst of conflict", although this is surely what is to be expected from every historical novelist, and what we have from Tolstoy at Borodino. But it is true that Powys is not here describing "public actions" as they are generally understood. Here in contrast, is how Powys describes a true public action - the capture of an English archer at Owen's banquet:

Everyone in the place - except the descendant of Einion - made a hurried movement to see what had happened and who had entered; and in a moment the cry rose up, "A spy! A Ruthin spy! Kill him, kill him! Throw him in the fire!"

Rhisiart saw the Abbot of Caerleon hasten round the top of the dais, as if to intervene; but Rhys Gethin was too quick for him. With a bound the man vaulted over the table, leapt down into the hall, pushed his way through the crowd, and presently his abrupt, hard voice could be heard giving hurried and drastic orders.

To see what was going on our friend instinctively climbed up upon his seat and from this point of vantage he could make out the figure, bound and helpless, and with blood streaming down his face, of a powerful, fair-haired man in the dress of an English archer.

"Kill him! Throw him in the fire!" rose a howl of innumerable voices.

"My Lord, my Lord," came the deep voice of the Abbot, "this man must be heard, lest his immortal soul -"

"He won't speak! He won't speak! To the fire with him!" (p.149).

This is lively writing. But there is nothing Powysian about it; it could have been done by any enthusiast for Walter Scott. It is what

is sometimes called "sheer story-telling". It is not necessary to go as far as Dr. Leavis in contempt of "external events", to find Powys's "story-telling" in Owen a disappointment after the minute narrative density of Glastonbury. Powys loved stories, and an element of "narrative, real and exciting" is important in all his books, freshening their introspection. Yet in Owen Glendower Powys's love of Scott does not serve him well; he imitates the favourite reading of his childhood with all its faults. This would not matter so much, were Owen a much simpler kind of novel, with no pretension beyond the level of "sheer story-telling". As it is, there is much which is impressive without leading the mind onward. The pageantry, the reader feels, exists for its own sake; Powys uses the story of Owen only intermittently for his deeper purposes.

Instead, there is a good deal of wooden mechanism. There are stock characters. Powys's beliefs about the influence of racial inheritance only carry conviction in the case of the Welsh. The French are stereotyped into posturing courtiers, and with the Italian messenger, speak absurd broken English. There is an excruciating Scots cook. A nurse is, inevitably, garrulous. The ecclesiastics, apart from Father Rheinalt, are crotchety-characters, defined by one or two mannerisms and *idees fixes* which are wearied by repetition.

Powys's fifteenth century world is both vivid and credible. It is a world created with amazing pains and exactness, and as usual, domestic interiors are superb - particularly the half-ruined Dinas Bran and Rhisiart's Worcester prison. Clothes and manners are exact. Anachronisms, in historical novels, tend to force themselves upon the reader with a prominence out of all proportion to their importance, but in Owen they are startlingly few: the bards have huge nineteenth-



century concert harps (an error Powys later admitted), and Father Pascentius anticipates Linnaean botany in his naming of plants. But doubts arise when the meaning of this painstaking re-creation is considered.

In Maiden Castle Powys almost abandoned the depiction of contemporary "manners". His interests were simply elsewhere. Owen Glendower is exhaustive on the subject of fifteenth-century "manners", and in fact the historical novel involves Powys far more intimately in the creation of a convincing time and place than the contemporary novel ever did. In later semi-historical novels, Porius and Atlantis, he solves the issue by creating a timeless, elemental landscape, with the most perfunctory of social furnishings. Owen Glendower involves a return to the kind of naturalism which he has steadily been deserting, and the collision between this naturalism and Powys's central concerns is as sharp as ever. In a sense, it is even sharper, for it turns out that fewer people object when an imaginary, if contemporary, Mayor of Glastonbury takes the form of Merlin than when a real, if fifteenth-century, Owen Glendower becomes Lord of Annwn.

It is, of course, Roland Mathias who objects most strongly to the imposition of Powysian metaphysic upon history, and there is undoubtedly a real conflict of interest. The difficulty is, that the Powysian destination is one of inner victory in outward defeat; "Over your body, Cousin Owen", prophesies Ffraid ferch Gloyw, "our people will pass to their triumph; but it will be a triumph in the House of Saturn, not in the House of Mars" (p.823). Historically, of course, Owen was hoping for a more straightforward victory. In Powys, there is the feeling that the author actually does not want Owen to win - a

feeling as if, were the rebellion to succeed, were Wales to be an independent nation, Powys would have no interest in the area.

However, though bedevilled by history, the metaphysic of Owen has its successes. First among them is the opening scene, where Rhisiart rescues Tegolin and Mad Huw. The scheme is a miniature re-enactment of Morwyn. Rhisiart is conscious of a dark fellow-feeling with the murderous cruelty of the archers, but at the critical moment falls into a trance.

And then there fell on him "like a clap of thunder and a fall of mist" a curious cessation of all movement of time. Time stopped; and something else, another dimension altogether, took its place; and in that deep time-vacuum, with an absolute naturalness - helped doubtless by the calm assumption of his horse that he was doing what he always did - he drew his crusader's sword out of its sheath and lifting it high into the air rode forward. (p.45).

Here is Powys's faith in a latent power of goodness, now depicted in simple drama rather than laborious assertion. Rhisiart's trance, it seems, is already a result of Owen's influence. Later Owen enables Rhisiart to climb down the ramparts of Dinas Bran in a state of unconsciousness:

And then he remembered how he had ridden forward on Griffin that far-off Midsummer Eve, between the bows and the spears. He'd been in a trance then, a trance of "blackness," like this time! It must have been Owen who willed him to do what he couldn't do! (p.386).

A Powysian political leader, in fact, exercises his power less through an immediately domineering presence or through ingenious policy than an exercise of an intense personal magnetism - analogous

to the power which the very homely Johnny Geard had exerted upon his audiences. Owen's attractiveness is quite different from the "English magnates" of Hereford. There is the low intimacy of his voice (p.121), the light of his eyes which has "the effect of an interior distance." For Rhisiart he becomes a saviour figure, rescuing him from the sinister ambiguities of Dinas Bran with all the appearance of a god - such as Powys clearly intends him to be.

Owen's magnetism is bound up with his power of "exteriorizing his own soul", by which his consciousness becomes detached from his body.

In what Rhisiart thought of as his "attacks," but which were more often, though not always, premeditated escapes of consciousness, he would sometimes fling his soul into what felt like a vast cool empty space, an ethereal twilight of being, altogether beyond the tumult of the world; but more often he would fling it into some quite definite exterior object-like that hollow tree into which he had cast the living body of his enemy! (p.562).

In comparison with other unusual mental dimensions in Powys - particularly Wolf's "mythology" or Porius's "cavoseniargizing" (for which Owen's habit reads like a preliminary sketch), this power is neither very vivid nor of clear meaning. Owen is eventually established as "Lord of Annwn", one of Powys's supernatural characters, but this happens more through his blood sympathy with aboriginal Welsh tradition - of which his "exteriorizing is a decoration.

According to Morg Ferch Lug in her wild prophecy, Owen is a "Brython", a newcomer among the Welsh. She asserts that armed rebellion is alien to the Welsh spirit:

"Evil is the King in London, evil and cunning; and he talks of the good while he burns and tortures. And as you fight against him, Owen ap Griffith, you will grow like him!" (p.433).

However, through the maternal line, Owen also has aboriginal blood, and it is this strain within him which wins out. On his ride to Mathrafal, Owen reveals his faith in an ancient Welsh civilisation, whose dead speak to him, and whose representative he becomes:

"Sometimes, children," he went on, "I've felt as if in the early days, in the days when merchants from Tyre and Sidon and the mouths of the Nile visited these Isles, there was a great city with granite walls and marble towers here. Iolo once revealed to me that in that book of mine - you know the one, Rhisiart? - it says that the people before the mound-dwellers worshipped the Great Serpent, and built their cities to the Great Serpent, and were wiser even than the mound-dwellers! I can't speak of these things myself. I'm sure of one thing, though - that in Eliseg's time, or before Eliseg, there were great ways leading to this place from the four quarters of the horizon." (p.415).

Once again, it becomes apparent that Powys, in regressing to the fifteenth century, has not regressed far enough into myth for his purposes. Prehistoric Wales hides almost as obscurely behind the fifteenth-century as it did behind the contemporary Dorchester of Maiden Castle.

The ancient, pacific values of Powys's Wales triumph in Owen to the extent that he feels distaste for war. His victories have in the past filled him with "irresponsible" elation (p.448), but it is the horror of a sacked Worcestershire village which causes his final fatal hesitation:

Why hadn't he stormed the city at once? He knew very well why he hadn't, though he shirked telling himself so in plain words. The savagery he'd seen in the burning of that unlucky village had bruised something in the depths of his nature; and it was this bruise, though he dodged it and avoided facing it, that had covered up that road, when they reached the cross-ways of their fate, with an impenetrable darkness. (pp.820-1).

Yet it is a more striking distaste less for the agonies of war than for its very dimension of activity which brings him to defeat.

- He hoisted himself up and listened intently to his horse; and there seemed to him something more real about the way it was cropping the grass out there than about all this marching and counter-marching; yes! more real, and with more life in it! (pp.819-20).

Such, of course, has always been Powys's response to the machinery of war and politics. Owen is scarcely more political. He fulfils certain democratic ideals: there is no formal hierarchy at his feasts, and, urged by Rhisiart and Master Young, he summons a "parliament of the commonality" (p.617). But his most potent identity is as a god who comes into his own in his "Difancoll".

Powys's "Argument" gives the growths of nationalism and religious dissent as the most important developments of the early fifteenth-century. Nationalism, in Powys, is a matter of the spirit rather than of government. So with religion. Powys is scarcely concerned with actual Lollard doctrines, but in Lollardy he really does find a historical model which suits his purposes. Where the Inquisition in Morwyn wore a slightly stray air, and was introduced without real dramatic necessity, in Owen Glendower Lollardy becomes a very appropriate symbol for liberty of conscience. The

theme reaches a fine climax in the death of Walter Brut - he is saved from the stake by Rhisiart's painless poison - in a scene which is both moving in itself, and a dramatic affirmation of the Powysian values proclaimed by Broch-o'-Meifod.

The giant nodded. "You've got it exactly, my friend! I am partial to death. I don't regard death as an evil. But I regard pain as a monstrous and unnecessary evil." (p.539).

Physical pain is often uncomfortably vivid - the imagined pains of the stake, Owen's arrow wound, or Adda ap Leurig's appalling death. But it must be said Owen is the only novel of Powys's which is pervaded by a sadism which is genuinely unpleasant. The proto-vivisector, Gilles de Pirogue, is entirely gratuitous.

It is Broch-o'-Meifod who rescues the tortured dog from the attentions of de Pirogue; throughout the novel he is a spokesman for Powys's "elemental" view of life. He appears a character more of myth than of history, and is of course Powys's invention. According to James Hanley (25), it was from the village of Meifod that the Powys family originated, and Broch is conceived very much as the great original of Powys's "Welsh aboriginal" identification. As Roland Mathias points out, he is an unlikely companion for Owen the statesman. The differences of outlook between Broch and Owen are laboured at some detail, yet they are not as significant as their similarities, and the two are last seen as the twin hermits of Mynydd-y-Gaer. Broch carries the burden of earth-mysticism which would be least appropriate to Owen himself, and the two characters both contribute characteristics to the creation of Myrddin Wyllt in Porius. Broch is capable of a projection of his soul, in a slightly different fashion from Owen:

There came at that moment such a curious expression into the countenance of Broch-o'-Meifod that both the Prince and the Lollard stared at him in wonder. The big man's face under the torch-light was transformed and his heavy lips twitched as if about to speak. But what startled and even shocked the men about him was the nature of the change that had come over him. Perhaps the best description of it would be to say that the natural human light in the man's eyes had gone out and a look had taken its place that resembled the endurance of rocks and stones and stumps. (p.455).

Compared with the Wessex novels, Owen Glendower does not offer an elaborate response to landscape and natural objects. Roland Mathias feels that Wales offered Powys "a relatively thin diet of 'atmospheric' food." That this was not so is eloquently proved by the almost suffocating "atmosphere" of Porius. The most richly evoked landscapes in Owen are the Forests of Tywyn and the moorland ride to Mathrafal, which foreshadow respectively the autumnal woods of Edeyrnion, and Porius's ascent of Snowdon. Again, we see how in Owen, Powys was writing himself into Wales; a thorough response to new landscape is inevitably the work of years. The historical complications of Owen, too crowd out much Powysian contemplation.

Yet that Powys was aiming a novel of mythical rather than historical focus is proved, I feel, by the final chapter "Difancoll". Powys's endings, of books and chapters, are always splendid, and nowhere more so than in Owen. Mr. Mathias finds "much the most imaginative and symbol-free writing" in the penultimate chapter, where Rhisiart and Walter are in prison. This is a fine scene, with Powys in firm control of narrative and character, but it is exceeded by "Difancoll", where the book is relieved of history. The rebellion has receded into the past, and Powys conveys a splendid sense of the passage of time by presenting its events through the eyes of Owen's

young grandson, Rhisiart. The historical truth of Owen's death is quite unknown, and we are in a no-man's land of legend almost as mysterious as the fifth century of Porius. Here at last Powys is able to fashion Owen as he most intimately conceived him, as Lord of Annwn, and almost an incarnation of the spirit of Wales. Owen, hidden in an "Esplumoir" (p.889) beneath Mynydd-y-Gaer, the hill outside Corwen which Powys believed (unhistorically) to be the site of an ancient Welsh stronghold, appears to step out of his time to become a prince of "primeval dignity" (p.881). With him is Broch, whose "insatiable longing for the calm of the inanimate" establishes a tone of sustained, lyrical farewell.

The blaze of their bonfire had created a circle of light and warmth in the midst of a segment of the earth's surface which at that hour seemed to be reverting to what it must have been when the old inhabitants of Mynydd-y-Gaer gazed across it, thousands upon thousands of years ago! Reverting, so it seemed to Broch, in his strange longing for the impersonal, for the non-human, to the primal supremacy of the grey slate, so unique among terrestrial formations, that familiar landscape had become during the early weeks of this sad November intensely congenial to his mind. He liked the way the grey rocks alternated with the patches of pale stubble and red bracken. He liked the way the whole landscape seemed to converge at this season towards some austere rock-bound ideal of its own secret engendering. (p.887).

Broch imagines the spirits of the past retreating to the mountains "where not only trees and grass would be left behind but all the turbulent human lives as well". Owen too, in his last moment, and in his funeral pyre, is dispersed into the landscape, to take possession of an invisible kingdom as "Lord of Annwn". Militarism is renounced in favour of a "mythology of escape" (p.889). Owen's secret hiding place, with its carvings in Druidic Ogam script, is a surviving shrine of the ancient, bloodless, matriarchal worship of the



mound-dwellers (p.924). We have here a reminiscence of the secret dwelling-place of Cronos. Owen's death is that of a god: the onlookers are conscious of "a crack in the visible" (p.925), like the "crack" which preceded Sam Dekker's Grail Vision, or the descent to the underworld in Morwyn.

Is this end, however, lyrical, nonetheless bogus? It is difficult to claim that it is adequately supported by all that has gone before, and can seem like a belated attempt to twist the novel in a Powysian direction.

All Powys's fiction from Maiden Castle onward is an attempt to create a suitable "world" in which his purposes and vision will be properly conveyed. The strict historicism of Owen serves Powys no better than the free fantasy of Morwyn; the difficulty is that the historical novel make not less but more strict demands upon the "naturalistic" art of the author. Where, in a contemporary novel, it is possible for a good deal of manners and scenery to be taken for granted, in the historical novel the whole milieu of domestic life, architecture, and society must be created from scratch materials. It is obvious that Powys enjoyed this task, and there is a lively curiosity for the life and events of the age which has its pleasures for the reader. There is a believable re-creation of a vanished world. But though Powys's fifteenth-century rings true, it has an oddly superfluous air. There is craftsmanship and competence, and of all things it is most distressing to find John Cowper Powys writing at a level of competence. In 1951 he wrote of Porius:

Personally I think it beats that Glendower book of mine hollow and I can tell you why Ben old crony because of all ages of mankind the 13th 14th and 15th centuries are to me the

most odious detestable and wholly unsympathetic - I even hate their costumes and weapons! (26).

While Powys tended to lay aside all his novels after their publication, Owen Glendower appears to be the only one in which he felt his powers had been misdirected.

## Chapter Six

## Notes

Morwyn, London: Cassell, 1937; reprinted Village Press, 1974.

Owen Glendower, Portway, Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1974.

- (1) Maiden Castle, pp.467-8.
- (2) Letter to Marian Powys, 23 August 1930, MS.
- (3) Morwyn, TS Colgate.
- (4) H.P. Collins, John Cowper Powys: Old Earth-Man, p.138.
- (5) Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, pp.33, 142.
- (6) The Powys Newsletter, 5, 1977-8, pp.11-15.
- (7) The Pleasures of Literature, pp.595-6.
- (8) Rhys, Studies, pp.120, 258-9.
- (9) Weston, From Ritual to Romance, p.22.
- (10) Blake, Poem from MS, ca 1803.
- (11) Letter to Marian Powys, 12 July 1958, MS.
- (12) Christopher Isherwood, Goodbye to Berlin (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), p.13.
- (13) Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned".
- (14) Cavaliero, p.109.
- (15) *ibid.*, p.108.
- (16) Hooker, p.77
- (17) Roland Mathias, "The Sacrificial Prince: A Study of Owen Glendower", in Essays on John Cowper Powys, ed. Humfrey, pp.235-6.
- (18) J.E. Lloyd, Owen Glendower (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), p.vii.
- (19) James Hamilton Wylie, History of England under Henry the Fourth, 4 vols. (London: Longmans Green, 1884), I, p.447.

- (20) Lloyd, p.98.
- (21) *ibid.*, p.109.
- (22) Wylie, I. p.274.
- (23) Lloyd, p.45.
- (24) Essays, ed. Humfrey, p.259.
- (25) James Hanley, John Cowper Powys: A Man in the Corner (London: Village Press, 1973), p.1.
- (26) Letters to C. Benson Roberts, p.92.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## PORIUS

## A Note on the Text

This reading of Porius is based upon the complete text of the novel, which exists in corrected typescript in the library of Colgate University, and whose discarded sheets (i.e. those complete typescript pages not used by Macdonald's in the printing of their 1951 edition) also exist in the collection of Mr. E.E. Bissell, and in photocopy in the library of Churchill College, Cambridge. The case for considering the published Porius as only a partial realization of Powys's intentions is a powerful one. Whereas A Glastonbury Romance and Wolf Solent were shortened and revised while under their initial composition, and Maiden Castle cut with the reluctant agreement of Powys himself, Porius was shortened - by about a third - purely for economic reasons.(\*).

What a study of the complete Porius reveals is a much greater concentration upon the character of Porius himself, and upon the book's mythological dimension. The closing chapters of the book - those most severely damaged by revision - lose their hurried, gnomic character, and show a greatly expanded treatment of Porius's development after his encounter with the Cewri. Much fuller information about Nineue and Medrawd allows us to discuss the significance of Myrddin Wyllt's imprisonment and release with greater assurance.

There are, of course, confusions and abridgements of plot which are explained. As published, the chapter entitled "The Milk-

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(\*) Powys's typist prepared two copies of the complete Porius. These copies were carefully corrected for typing errors in Powys's hand. There were also some small stylistic revisions. As the corrections on the two copies are identical, it seems that Powys worked on them simultaneously. One TS is now at Colgate, the other was used by Powys for his reluctant abridgement of the book. The complete sheets which were not used in this abridged version are now in Mr. Bissell's collection.

Offering" contains no milk-offering. It is a mistake to look to a complete text for easy answers to the many tangled aspects of the book's political concerns, and a Porius of a thousand pages will not be less formidable than one of seven hundred. But Porius shows Powys working at the height of his powers, and the reading public deserves a complete edition.

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George Steiner writes that "Porius is a novel one attempts, retreats from, returns to with a deepening sense of magic and authority" (1). Porius does require patience, and the reason why repeated assaults upon it may result in failure, while the book still exerts fascination, is perhaps that it makes contradictory demands upon its readers, and no one approach works. Those who embark upon a gusty Arthurian chronicle will be becalmed in oceans of introspection, while those who admire Powys's inwardness can be confused by so much Dark Age bustle. A Glastonbury Romance manipulated dramatic focus to shock the reader with a multiversal vision; in Porius Powys takes this multiverse for granted, with quiet confidence. It is as if all the different layers of this pluralistic reality are simultaneously present, and equally significant. Human political upheavals are there alongside the placid endurance of the vegetable world. Plants busily live and die, the vivid movements of the insects are of signal importance, where man is slow-moving and dull. The richness of this inclusive vision, it seems, is everything. The vision may be splendid, but Porius may be no novel, nor even romance. Angus Wilson suspects that the kind of book to which Porius points - a romance where plants and stones think and speak - is not possible. The successful reader of Porius may end in finding the

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*There is an excellent guide to the Colgate TS, with a resume of the unpublished passages, by Joseph Slater in Powys Newsletter, 4, (1974-5), published by Colgate U.P.*

book something of an impossible object, but the experience is likely to have been too vital for a cool judgement of "failure".

While, from a narrative point of view, Porius is a very chaotic novel, from a philosophical point of view it is both powerful and cogent. In emphasizing the book's "philosophy" I do not mean that the novel is valuable for any doctrine of schematically expressed beliefs which can be abstracted from it. Rather Porius enacts the world as Powys experiences it, and the book's circuitous paths, its inflations and deflations, even its internal contradictions of sympathies, are not merely ultimately acceptable aspects of the novel, but sure pointers of Powys's intention. So, although we must talk of Powys's "philosophy", we do not extract the grain of philosophy from a dramatic husk, but see an imaginatively apprehended philosophy enacted at every level of Porius, in a most thorough-going mimesis.

It is important to be very cautious about Powys's own beliefs in A Glastonbury Romance, for Glastonbury is a provisional statement, which challenges the reader's faiths and scepticisms in the same way as Powys himself tested his ideas against the truth of experience. Porius is closer to a declaration of faith, and its final note is one of assurance.

At the end of Glastonbury, the Great Mother, Cybele, was suddenly revealed as the inspiring goddess behind all the Grail quests of the book. Porius is a testimony to the power of the feminine principle in its many aspects. This is the centre of the book. The expression of this principle underlies, I feel, all Powys's concern with the "multiverse", and even his "Saturnian" vision, but it is still important to stress that we do not end with any neat unity or

monism, for there are many ambivalences in Powys's attitude to this cult of the feminine - a devotion which is as perilous as it is necessary. Porius in fact ends with the liberation of Myrddin Wyllt from the clutches of a mighty enchantress. We will end with something like a perpetual motion of contraries, and find in this another reason why Powys's "philosophy" is a dramatic and novelistic one.

In this quest for the secret at the heart of Porius, which runs alongside the quest of Porius himself, there are many illusions and mirages, which are as ever essential elements in any Powysian truth. As Myrddin Wyllt says:

But you cannot place the truth in our hands. It flows like water. It melts like air. It burns itself out like fire. It covers itself with itself like the mud with the mud, the moss with the moss, the grass with the grass, the lichen with the lichen. (p.95)

But neither is Porius an occult book. Souls, as elsewhere in Powys, are still on the surface of things, and truth to be sought in appearances. The truth is like Goethe's "open secret", or the alchemical "lapis".

The centre of all things, yet all on the surface,  
The secret of Nature, yet Nature goes blabbing it  
With all of her voices from earth, fire, air, water! (p.418)

In the Autobiography, Powys wrote of his Catskill retreat, "Yes, I have had, in "up-state" New York, what is seldom allowed to mortal man upon this earth - I have had the full unhindered swing of my personality" (2). In Wales, Powys pushed this "unhindered swing"



even further. The Autobiography describes Powys's "little-great" rituals, which infused the small details of daily life with quasi-devotional significance. Such ritualism marked Powys's Welsh life, and Porius itself was written under ritualistic conditions, as we gather from a letter to Marian, written in 1951 when Powys was waiting to receive proofs of the finished book. As ever, ritual is tempered by self-mockery:

But just as I was turning to descend being content to be hearing curlews and cuckoos in the mist I was seized by a psychic compulsion which said: "Go to the sheepfold (at the final turn S.W. towards Liberty Hall) where at a stone standing-desk for the larger stones of its walls are smooth and flat - " where the first sentence - the first page of Porius was written in 1942 Jan 18 nearly ten years ago! Well! at the Druid Stone a "Compulsion" made me, tho' tired, ascend the Purgatorial Mount till I reached the Stone Desk of Jack the Talker the Preacher the Verbose One the Arch-Welsh-Humbug. And when I got home cocksure certain I wd. find Porius what did I find? Nothing at all but an "ad" from Swan & Edgar Aunt Kate's favourite shop!!! But at Noon the Book came : A Perfect Page-Proof!!!! (3).

In another letter, Powys writes of "a sort of mossy rocky precipice with a cave I wanted to experiment with (I mean in!) in view of my Romance of Corwen in 499 A.D." (4). Most novelists will gather information about and visit the settings of their books. To "experiment with" (or "in") a cave suggests something more - that Powys is attempting a diary-like record and study of sensation and experience in as immediate a state as possible. This idea is confirmed by the novel's repeated attempts to fixate fugitive impressions of air, moisture, vegetation, light, or even more rarefied intimations, within a continually moving sense of the present moment.

The writing of Porius ended, as it began, outside:

I took my final page, i.e. ... p. 2811 in my long sprawl up to the Gaer here & snugly ensconced against the north-east wind = that deepest stone-craters in the wall or stone-chambers & waited for some sort of Inspiration in situ for my last paragraph & I really did get it! ... but I make no conjecture as to whence it came! (5).

A habit of writing "in situ" could not be pushed to a further extreme. The action of Porius only briefly takes place outside the radius of Powys's daily walks, and in the principedom of Edeyrnion Powys creates a geographical charmed circle. This spatial immediacy also balances Powys's wilder flights of fancy, while a different kind of realism is supplied by Powys's erratic but obsessive historicism.

No doubt remembering those four volumes of J.H. Wylie, Powys delighted in the "beautiful ... heavenly blank" (6) which British history in the fifth century offered him, and was eager to claim the "Porius stone" which forms the novel's epigraph as its only extant historical evidence (7). As if to assert his independence still further, Powys never even saw this stone (8). But there are other sources, and as is usually found in investigations of this kind, what seems inherently improbable in the novel turns out to be based on fact, while what is convincing is the novelist's invention. In Rhys's books we can see the dry shards of ethnology which inspired Powys's beliefs about the racial identity of the Welsh (whether 5th century or modern) as expressed in Porius and Obstinate Cymric. From Rhys comes Powys's belief that the Welsh are still predominately non-Aryan, descended from ancient Iberian tribes, and ultimately from North African Berbers. The matriarchal structure of ancient Welsh society, and the non-Aryan syntax of its language are well-attested (9).

From Welsh history, and from the Mabinogion, come names for Powys's characters, distributed apparently at random. Powys himself made no other claim than that his names were "appropriately local" (10). The historical Brochvael, for instance, was a Welsh warrior prince killed at the Battle of Chester in 616 - a character far removed from Powys's pacific bookworm. For the life of Myrddin Wyllt, Powys draws upon Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain, while Karl Hepfer mentions Henry Lewis's Brut Dingestow (Caerdydd, 1942) as a source for Porius; this book, a Welsh version of Geoffrey's History, may provide interesting material for Welsh-speaking students of Powys (11). The truth is that Powys, in fixing the action of Porius in one week in 499 A.D., and kindling his imagination with the tiniest scraps of historical evidence, is more obsessedly historical than many a historical novelist (of this period, Bryher and Alfred Duggan are possible comparisons), and yet more fantastical than the fantasists, like T.H. White, who work within the values of chivalric tradition as they have come down to us from Malory. Powys conceived the world of his novel out of a Wordsworthian process of half-creation and half-discovery.

The ostensible action of Porius concerns the Saxon invasion of Edeyrnion, and the response of the principedom to the overtures of the Emperor Arthur, who seeks to unite Britain under his leadership against the invaders. But while much of the apparent motivation of the book's actions is engendered by this military and political plot, the main philosophical direction of Porius lies, elsewhere. It is certainly this political aspect of Porius which is most faulty. Even the politics of A Glastonbury Romance did at least express a coherent Powysian social vision, but the politics of Porius run counter to, and compromise, the novel's mythological and philosophical thrust.

What, for instance, are we really to make of the Saxon invasion? It is apparently an unmixed evil; one of Porius's ambitions is to join the Arthurian forces to clear Britain of the Saxon - though it is not clear whether the liberation of Myrddin Wyllt makes this finally unnecessary. But impulses towards hatred of the Saxon, or pure admiration for Arthur, are checked and qualified. The Saxons we actually meet, Thorson and Gunhorst, are simple-minded warriors, in no way "evil". As the Emperor Arthur believes, "if only we could disarm and cajole these common soldiers of these queer Saeson, and kill off their curst chieftains, we'd have as good and as law-abiding a set of colonists amongst us as any" (p. 366). But of these "curst chieftains" we see almost nothing, and very little of the devastation the Saxons are supposed to be visiting upon Edeyrnion.

We are only intermittently aware of the pressure of war upon daily life, while the vagueness of Powys's military dispositions means that we can never be sure how near the Saxons are at any time, or in what force. As for crimes of the Saxons we actually do see, the corpses of Auntie Tonwen and Cadawg are shocking enough, but no worse than the outrages of the Cewri, whose "evil" is eventually encompassed in Porius's philosophy, and whose race is held in high mythological esteem.

As for Arthur, Powys is keen - and for adequate reasons - to undermine the chivalric myth of the Arthurian court, but it seems odd that Porius should nourish Arthurian ambitions, and wish to join the likes of Galahalt and Mabsant ab Kaw. The "clever, worldly, and subtle" Arthurians (TS p. 1381) are treated with frequent scorn. The moral centre of Porius is inevitably in the simple Golden Age virtues espoused by Myrddin Wyllt: "The Golden Age can never come again

till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to unmake themselves as I did, and leave men and women to themselves!" (p. 276). But these ideas hardly tally with the glory of Arthur, and it seems quite inappropriate that this anarchist Myrddin should be the emperor's counsellor. Preferable social values are surely best exemplified by the tribal matriarchy of the forest people, for whom both Porius and Morfydd hold deep atavistic sympathies, and whose political leaders are the three Modrybedd. And it is the Modrybedd who, out of fear of the coming empire of Arthur, actually collaborate with the Saxon in the hope of maintaining their power.

It is one of the strangenesses of Porius that its external action should be guided by such an unsteady narrative, while it is clear that Powys is not absolutely committed to this narrative's implications and devolutions. What Powys is trying to show is that there can be no unambiguously laudable political loyalty. It is understandable frustration with the ostensible drama which has led many critics to an appreciation of Porius in terms of atmosphere:

The triumph of Porius lies not in its drama but in its total atmosphere, the way in which a view of life is projected through a detailed portrayal of the mental landscape of a bygone world (12).

While much of the "drama" of Porius really is obscure, what might be called the book's "argument" is not, and excessive emphasis on the lyric qualities of Porius will produce a very partial reading. Nonetheless, a study of the "atmosphere" of Porius will lead us to an understanding of the kind of "multiversal" novel, with its connection of the cosmic with the minutely naturalistic, which Powys is

attempting. It is an atmosphere, as Dr. Cavaliero says, created from "a myriad small details, details that are in their turn related to the thoughts and feelings of the characters, so that we are made aware of the country from the inside and see it as it affects its inhabitants." (13).

These "myriad small details" are carefully chosen. There are effects of mist, light, wind, the autumnal dissolution of leaves. Of animals there are principally the enervated gnats and beetles that hover and swarm over decomposition. Of plants there are typically fungi and rootless water-growths. Of the genial processes of agriculture there is very little, while the October setting imposes its own limits, excluding pastoral cheerfulness. The "fecundity" of Porius can be compared with the "fecundity" of the opening of The Rainbow. Both Lawrence and Powys stress the togetherness of nature and man, but there the resemblance ends. In Lawrence, the farmers' relationship with the land is an assurance of stability. Man becomes simpler, his moral values more straightforward, the painful cerebralism of modern urban culture has no chance to develop. But in Powys nature challenges with deviousness and instability, giving birth in her fertility to the grotesque and the weird. "Nature is the mother of all extremes ..... She loves to bring forth monsters, abortions, and freaks" (14). This "multiverse" mocks simple human interpretation - as offered in Porius by the monisms of Christianity and Mithraism - while the closer to nature man draws, the more complex his response to the world becomes, and the more provisional his moral judgements. It is through nature's distortions and "unnaturalness" that we come to understand her ways, and Powys's landscape is therefore of a strange rankness, initially sinister and "evil". Powys dwells particularly on traditionally parthenogenetic fungi, and associates them especially with Myrddin Wyllt, who, as

both Merlin and the dethroned Cronos of the Saturnian Golden Age, is Powys's presiding magician and god.

Why shouldn't it (Myrddin's "magical peculiarity"), for instance, draw out with a double intensity the peculiar death-and-corruption smell of such an evil-smelling growth as the "stink-horn" fungus? Porius was certainly conscious of something at that moment very like the feverish, fetid, pestilential and yet morbidly sexual smell of this weird cryptogamous growth, and the odour reached him, just then, exactly as that would have done in wayward, intermittent waftures. (p. 53).

The word "cryptogamous" is not new, but derives from the Linnaean classification of fungi, "cryptogama" - an unusually botanical touch for Powys. The reproduction of fungi remains mysterious to this day. Much as Powys disliked science, recent botanical theories which place fungi in a third kingdom of their own, entirely distinct from plants and animals, are surely close to Powys's thinking. But in Porius it is traditional beliefs about fungi in folklore and classical science which hold good. Many fungi are, of course, traditionally phallic (particularly the "stink-horn" - "phallus impudicus"). Nicander described fungi as "the evil ferment of the earth", believing that "the central heat of the globe forms them by rarefying the mud of the earth" (15). Myrddin Wyllt, as Cronos, holds constant communion with the earth, his mother. Powys is aware of the sinister associations of fungi, but identifies them with the essential generative forces of the earth, a symbolism which enacts one of the philosophical purposes of Porius, which is to liberate "authority from below". Traditional evils are examined, and found harmless or positive, while true evil is found in hitherto respected "authorities from above". A similar movement was discerned in Wolf Solent. (\*).

(\*) *Hardy's sinister fungus landscape in Chapter 44 of Far From the Madding Crowd is of clear import for Porius, both in texture and context. Bathsheba runs away in horror from the sight of Troy kissing*

Powys's lyricism is capable of incantatory heights, as in Porius's impression of the identity of Myrddin Wyllt, as he holds the great magician in his arms.

In it was the dark greenness of leafy hollows and the dim passivity of ancient tree-trunks and the long endurance of rocks piled dumbly upon rocks; and yet there was in it too the fluttering of huge imprisoned wings, and the coiling of great serpents and the feverish relaxings of feline sinews, and under it all the hushed growth of green mosses, yellow funguses, grey lichens, drawing their sustenance from the innumerable nipples of leaf-mould and from the darkly-scented pores of ribbed peat, and from the crumbling rubble of sandstone. (p.59).

Frequent such litanies evoke the multiverse, much as Whitman evoked multiplicity in his lists. The physical senses are intertwined - scents are dark, growth is quiet. The prose is intimately rhythmic - nipples, ribbed, rubble. The language is unembarrassed in its "literary" quality, and there are echoes of Powys's favourite poems, - the enduring rocks of Arnold's Resignation, and the "hushed" vegetation (a favourite Powysian adjective) of Ode to Psyche. Its style is calculated (and would not "feverish tensings" be the more obvious phrase?), but its effect is stark, not precious. Natural features are simple and "elemental" - tree-trunks, leaves, moss, rocks, sandstone. There is no florid "natural description". Powys is with Wordsworth rather than Richard Jefferies, describing the power of nature through a love of her simplest aspects, not through a naturalist's study. "The real Nature-lover does not think primarily about the beauty of Nature; he thinks about her life." (16). So such a passage animates even minerals, while its pervading non-human sensuality and mention of the earth as mother connect with major themes of Porius.

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*the corpse of Fanny Robin, and is overcome by a sense of evil in nature: "But the general aspect of the swamp was malignant. From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth, and in the waters under the earth. The fungi grew in all manner of positions from rotting leaves and tree stumps,*



But the inadequacy of a reading of Porius for its atmospheric qualities can be discovered by attempting to read it - as Anthony Burgess has suggested Ulysses should be read - as a bedside book. There is too much activity. The appreciation of one scene often depends upon a lingering response to what has gone before. There is a Scott-like compulsion (which Powys frequently deflates and frustrates) to find out what happens next. Most seriously, there is too full a dramatic and philosophic shape.

Porius is a dramatic novel, and strange though its tortuous action may be, it is important to see how thoroughly Powys's disruption of ordinary dramatic values expresses his philosophy.

A novelist inevitably emphasizes in his work those aspects of life he considers important. Powys has his own ideas on what is important; like the aged Cadawg in Porius he resolves "to defy what the world deified, and to deify what the world despised" (p.336). This aim is clarified in Rabelais and Obstinate Cymric, where Powys states his belief in a "transference of reverence".

..... I resolve upon a whole-sale transference of reverence from Science, Religion, Universality, Deity, Sanctity, Holiness and so forth, to the forms of life that are immediately around me. According to this resolution, therefore, I have decided - though anything but a born comedian - to take humorously and blasphemously, or at least profanely, all the new Totems of Science, Religion and Government. On the other hand I have decided to follow Rabelais and Walt Whitman, those enemies of every Orthodoxy, and to worship with all the humility and reverence I possess every manifestation of the natural and the organic; (17).

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*some exhibiting to her listless gaze their clammy tops, others their oozing gills". (Far From the Madding Crowd, Macmillan, St. Martin's Library, 1957, p.337).*

We should be prepared, therefore, to find in Porius a prolonged examination of neglected areas of life, and a cursory treatment of aspects normally considered central. Some such "transference of reverence" is implicit in Powys's extension of the action of the novel through every level of the "multiverse", and we may regard the drama of Porius as happening on three layers - the subhuman, the human, and the cosmic. Powys's abrupt shifts from one level to another practically paralyze dramatic interest of the traditional human kind - witness the weakness of the book's political "plot". In fact this policy is pursued so determinedly that we recognise quickly that something of this sort is Powys's intention, and that Porius is written to disturb our mental hierarchies of what is significant and deserving of "reverence".

Powys's subhuman drama is particularly important here. Continually the reader is aware of midges "upon their own secret affairs" (p.329), of "somnolent insects to whom a tree was a universe" (p.578). It is true that in Porius there is no one sustained strand of subhuman action, and the experience of no single midge or beetle is pursued for more than a paragraph or two. This we have in the later fantasies. But we do have sudden diversions into the insect world especially at moments of "human" drama where such digressions would seem most out of place. When Powys arrives at a scene of "action" where any orthodox historical novelist would be dutifully kindling expectation - as when Porius slaughters twenty Saxon in as many lines, it is not the dramatic potential of the scene which interests him. Instead Rhun's dog licks a dead mare's nose,

.... about whose nostrils and eye-sockets crawled several black ants, while a tiny brown insect whose identity, had Porius tried to verify a matter of such sub-human interest in that dim light, would have struck him as belonging rather to the race of beetles than to that of flies, kept approaching the slippery surface crossed by the dog's devoted tongue and then again precipitately retreating. (p.558).

In A Glastonbury Romance, when Geard healed Tittie Petherton's cancer, Powys inserted a conversation between two lice. The sudden swoop to the insect world both belittled the importance of human transactions, "transferring reverence" to the invertebrate, and at the same time broadened the scope of the action to give a glimpse of another level of the "multiverse", and thus paradoxically to elevate its significance. If in A Glastonbury Romance we have digressions into the insect world, in Porius there is a sense of restless activity in every order of creation. The narrative careers and crawls on many levels simultaneously, and Powys undermines purely human significance by placing the subhuman most often in collaboration with the superhuman, and in contrast to the human. Animals understand and obey Myrddin Wyllt, whose power -with that of Nineue - is linked with the fertility of the earth. So too Powys describes plants as if they were animals, people with almost vegetable qualities, and animals with a regard for their thoughts and feelings which is never absurdly anthropomorphic. Porius in particular is conscious of a subhuman identity: "his mind seemed more and more able to regard everything that was happening with the sort of clouded interest from below, such as vegetable life would feel for animal life, and animal life for human life." (p.384). At times Powys's point of view resembles Porius's observation of Myrddin Wyllt, with "an interest rather of a boy in a green beetle than of a Christian in the windows of an immortal soul" (p.63). It is in fact Porius's separation from wholly human concerns, his sensitivity to other forms of life, which in the novel results in the salvation of Myrddin Wyllt, and finally demonstrates that Porius is not a human-centred novel at all.

Wolf Solent was a firmly "human" novel, its central concern was Wolf's struggle for peace of mind and for "life-illusion". Porius rejects the whole notion of life-illusion because of its self-conceit (not its illusoriness):

What I've got to do is kill this life-illusion of mine so that it can't start growing again! But what exactly is it I've got to kill? That's the question ... It's a sort of diffused conceit of yourself; that's what it is; a sort of feeling that to be what you are and to feel what you feel, makes you a person in some peculiar way superior to the people you meet. In reality of course it only makes you different. And since every creature is different from every other creature, and since, as Brother John told me, according to Pelagius there's experimentation in values going on all the time a person who wants to be wise must analyze and criticize, even while he obeys, the values he's received from the past (TS pp.1243-44).

The collapse of "life-illusion" is a consequence of Powys's belief in a multiverse, whose plurality necessarily implies "experimentation in values". In Obstinate Cymric Powys writes of a change in himself corresponding to the difference between the conception of self in Wolf Solent and Porius:

In my earlier days when reality was either devilish or divine, either attractive or repulsive, and before the appearance of the psychic nebulae that now keep tantalising me with hints and glimpses of elements that include and transcend both these simple categories, I used to visualise my 'animula vagula' as a(n) irreducible, un-splittable atom, in other words, as a miniature but impregnable fortress, into which I could escape at will. Now, on the contrary ... I have myself exploded myself into so many fragments, that they are no longer fragments, but have become aerial waves of mist through which the enemy's bullets or bombs or bolts or spears can pass without affecting me ... (18).

This passage recalls Wolf Solent hugging his "crystal" within, and the good/evil dualism of his novel. While there is good and evil in Porius, there is no transcendental battle. Rather Powys presents simple, self-evident Golden Age virtues against equally self-evident murderous fanaticism. So too the characteristic soul-movement of

Porius is outward, as he embraces the elements around him in a habit he calls "cavoseniargizing". Mist is the most powerful agent of psychic change in Porius, and is connected with Porius's tynged - his destiny. At the opening of the novel, Porius stands on the watch-tower of Mynydd-y-Gaer, staring at a mist which assumes the colour of distant stubble-fields. The mist is associated with a dimly apprehended power - as yet feared:

Porius himself ... felt that a more arbitrary and more inscrutable power than any vapour between earth and heaven had risen from the stubble of the world's past, and was threatening not only his own future but the future of the two women who ruled his life. (p.6).\*

Mist is an insubstantial power, but insidious, and a suitable symbol for the powers of the weak against the strong, whose struggle is Powys's constant theme. "This rape of a day by the weakest of her children was more significant of that spot than any other of Nature's methods". (p.5). It is a feminine mist, connected with the divine river, worshipped as a goddess by the forest people. This mist is eventually associated with the powers which force Porius's "liberation" - Pelagius, Myrddin Wyllt, and the Cewri of the Cader. Into such a mist escapes, in Porius's imagination, the Medrawd-snake, free of the possessive love of Jesus (p.146). Brochvael sees this mist thicken to image the golden cauldron of rebirth (TS p.816). It is similar, in attenuated tint, to the Saturnian gold which enveloped Wolf Solent. At the end of his quest, Porius lies on the slopes of Snowdon and tries to describe this effect of air in words:

And as he flung out his arms on both sides of him, his fingers lax and loose, and his muscles so blessedly free from the burden of any weapon or the strain of any struggle, he carelessly fished up such words as "fine-spun", "winnowed",

"attenuated", "purged", "smokeless", "vapourless", only to toss them back as wholly inadequate.

"It's this October softening the burning sun," he thought, "that fills the air with a new element, an element like a great melted pearl, through which you can see everything." (TS pp.1520-1).

Often connected with the power of mist is the south-west wind from Cader Idris, which draws Porius on to his encounter with the Cewri, and thereafter changes direction to pull him equally strongly towards Y Wyddfa.

Whether by mist or wind, Porius throughout the novel is led; there is little conscious direction in his life. His two articulate ambitions - to travel to Constantinople to help rehabilitate Pelagius, and to join Arthur to clear Britain of the Saxon - are subverted by the action of the novel. Nor do these ambitions carry much conviction, for "almost all his pleasure in existence consisted of two parallel activities - his active enjoyment of the simplest sensations of living, and his active enjoyment of the subtlest analysis of life. For adventure, as adventure, he cared nothing" (TS p.977). Although thirty years old, he retains many boyish characteristics, along with his schoolboy hunting spear. Still dominated by his imperious mother, he holds no political responsibility, and remains most closely involved with his "playmates", Rhun and Morfydd. His marriage to Morfydd is decided for him, for political reasons, and although he inherits the principedom on the death of his father Einion, it is Morfydd who is seen directing political affairs. But Powys does not posit a value of worldly maturity, and Porius's development is hardly an education, but a fulfilment of tynged. His decisive meeting with the Cewri comes about though the pull of his blood, a "weird mania" and

"nostalgic longing" which draws him on to realize his inheritance from his giant ancestors (p.390). Likewise his final role as the liberator of Myrddin Wyllt is enacted as part of the fatality of his nature. Porius barely understands what he is doing.

What we do have as the deepest indicator of Porius's nature is his habit of embracing the elements in his "cavoseniargizing". The word comes from a stone in Llanfor church, inscribed "CAVOSENIARGII", and of unknown meaning, but not far geographically from the "PORIUS" stone which forms the epigraph of the novel (19). But the existence of this stone in no way contradicts Professor Wilson Knight's interpretation of this extraordinary word by its overtones of "cave", "energizing", and perhaps "enlargement" (20). Porius had discovered this stone as a youth, when on an expedition with his grandfather, Porius Manlius, and had carried away this word, giving it a private significance. Wolf Solent had likewise discovered the word "mythology" as a child, and used it "entirely in a private sense of his own" (21). But as secret mental devices, "mythology" and "cavoseniargizing" are very different. Wolf Solent conceived his deepest self as a hard crystal. Porius's "tynged" is embodied in mist. Wolf's "mythology" was an inner motion towards an ideal reality, while "cavoseniargizing" is an outward motion towards the unidealized elements. "I fling myself into the things I enjoy", (TS p.1270) thinks Porius. His habit is also capable of change; after his meeting with the Cewri, Porius learns to include in his "cavoseniargizing" the disgusting and excremental (TS p.915). It was the challenge of the repulsive which Wolf's "mythology" failed. "Cavoseniargizing" is also quite non-religious and non-mystical:

And the whole pressure of the moment as he gave himself up to his cavoseniargizing was fragrant with the odour of pines,

was pungent with the sour-smelling mud at the roots of reeds, was aromatic with the autumnal growths between the stumps of the willows.

He had a subtle, philosophical motive in making much of this ridiculous word, and in thinking of his secret pleasure in this absurd way, for by so doing he drained it of all religious mysticism and purged it of all spiritual illusions (p.403).

Although "cavoseniargizing" is presented as a worthy end in itself, without purpose and self-justifying, it is vital to the drama of Porius in that it binds Porius to Nineue, who also appears to practise this secret habit. It is Porius's intimacy with Nineue which allows him to free Myrddin Wyllt from the tomb. "Cavoseniargizing" turns out to have a quasi-mystical significance after all; it is an approach to the multiverse and the elements which is described in erotic language, though its final meaning is less erotic than an apprehension of the femininity of nature, and a communion with the natural world through all the senses such as is found in Wordsworth:

... the first virgin passion of a soul  
Communing with the glorious universe. (22).

The experience is much closer to Wordsworth's "Recluse" fragment than, say, to the physical embrace of grass and water in Whitman's prose piece "A Sun-Bath". It is not even directly sensuous:

Could a man with the blood of the giants in him embrace air, water, and fire as though they were a cloud, and embrace them without ravishing or devouring any beautiful goddess, as he was accustomed to do with the elements in what he called his "cavoseniargizing"? (p.146).



Porius's psychological development involves a growing trust in his own perception of the world in these terms, and a new confidence in the belief of Pelagius, as taught by Brother John, that the soul of man is naturally good (Powys is historically accurate about Pelagius here). But the whole movement of Porius, as ever, transcends the individual, and presses the claims of what Powys in Rabelais calls "authority from below".

We know only too well how the sanctity of religion and the sanctity of the family have come to be closely associated with authority from above, while authority from below has been perverted to mean authority from the Devil instead of authority from the sound and good instincts of the masses of common men and women. (23).

The opposition of "above" and "below" in Powys is very important. Wolf Solent prayed in vain to the stars on the Slopes of Ramsgard, but eventually found his faith below, in the testimony of his senses and in the field of gold behind the pigsty. Nor does his earth-bound faith have the pessimism of Jason Otter's "God in the mud", for Wolf perceives "sound and good instincts" in the "native goodness" of Gaffer Barge. There are many Devils unmasked as harmless in Wolf Solent. In A Glastonbury Romance prayers to the powers above were dangerous and liable to go awry. In Maiden Castle, Dud No-Man ended by digging his stick into the earth, while in Morwyn wisdom comes from the depths.

The main "authorities from above" in Porius are the Christian Trinity, Zeus, and Mithras, of whom the Christian Godhead, as represented by His Church, is the most important. The Church does work evil, in the murder of the free-thinking Morvran, and we see something of its psychological influence in the caged, lonely devotion

of Euronwy - a descendant of Mrs. Renshaw of Rodmoor and of Powys's mother - whose piety is "an acceptance of destiny so complete as to be a kind of revenge on destiny". (p.185). While Powys unleashes plenty of rhetoric in attacking the church, there is yet a kind of parodic excess, as in the frankly humorous death of Minnawc Gorsant the priest from evangelical frenzy. Powys draws slyer amusement from the historical setting of Porius, where Christianity is only one among several viable religions. Amidst the religious ferment of Porius, a simple Pauline doctrine looks much odder than any "cavoseniargizing".

He feels that Jesus Christ has got into soul and is there instead of himself. Yes, Drom feels that it isn't Drom who does the good things he does but Jesus in him. (TS p.1094).

The finality of the Biblical revelation seems equally strange:

The lord has spoken and the lord has stopped speaking. And that's how it is! (TS p.1178).

The multiverse itself rebels against the imposition of the Christian Trinity. As Morfydd walks through the forest to her wedding, full of inner strength at having resisted the advances of Rhun, and also under the influence of the stubble-mist, she sees that even three-leaved brambles "yielded forth with equally regular periodicity to an impulse that every now and then flung forth profane and defiant clusters of five! (TS p.875). Myrddin Wyllt's number is four, and we find Powys in his letters of the 1940s preoccupied with Whitman's "Square Deific," particularly admiring "Whitman's audacity in making the Holy Ghost Feminine." (24).

"Authority from below" is elaborated into a far-flung web of association. The characteristic "atmosphere" of Porius has already been noticed, with its autumnal downward pull. Our eyes are on the forest floor, with its accumulating piles of leaves. The fungoid fertility of the earth (and fungi do not depend upon the wind for their propagation) is associated chiefly with the earth wisdom of Myrddin Wylt, but also with the Pelagian wisdom of Brother John. Brother John's cell seems to sink into the earth, in one of Powys's most extravagantly lyrical passages:

The stones of Brother John's cell descended straight and deep into that same black mud and when Porius reached them ... and touched them with his cold knuckles, it was a rough, blind expanse of stone he touched, where miniature armies of moss and tiny ferns and little round-leaved trailing plants and squadrons of grey lichen seemed in league with the swamp and the forest in their slow tireless vegetative determination to go on invading this solitary outpost of human civilization until they had swallowed it up. (p.143).

This is early in the story, and Porius is distinctly fearful that he "should be carried down into some faintly lit greenish-black underworld, where one illusion melted into another illusion and where all definite shapes and all definite thoughts sifted and shimmered and waxed and waned in a phantasmagoric mist". (p.143).

The "greenish-black underworld" is, of course, Annwn, the Welsh Hades, evoked in green-black terms in Maiden Castle, whose wisdom is also the goal of Owen Evans' researches in Glastonbury. In Porius, Annwn wisdom is connected with earth-wisdom, and the multiple green-black identity of Myrddin Wylt.

But before Porius is able to learn this wisdom, he must cope with his meeting with the most important of the earth creatures in Porius, the last surviving Cewri, "lurking in pre-historic caves and even in caverns beneath the mountain-tarns" (p.15). It is important that Myrddin Wyllt reveres the Cewri - in their honour he performs the "milk-offering" in the tent of Arthur's court. Nineue, Myrddin's enchantress, is terrified of them, and although their very existence is doubted until two of them actually appear, they are always associated with horror and evil. They are first seen carrying the half-devoured corpse of the exquisitely civilized Mabsant ab Kaw. They smell of cuttle-fish - a "devil fish" in Rabelais (25).

For Porius, his love-making with the giantess is firstly a realization of his inheritance from his giantess great-grandmother, whose name, Creiddylad, he mentally endows upon the young giantess he meets. There is also a regression in the nursery babble (no pre-Aryan Goidelic this) of the language of the Cewri, in which Porius learns Powysian life-secrets: "endure to the end", "enjoy to the end", "tread amorously the earth".

The experience is both ecstatic and hideous. Love, and the giantess's violent death at the hand of her father, follow in quick succession. Here, and in the mingled fascination and horror which Porius feels for the giants themselves, is a potent "necessity of opposites":

Horribly and beautifully he visualized it. And the beauty was reached through horror, and the horror was reached through beauty. And both the beauty and the horror came from the same causes - from the majestic stature of this goddess-giant, and from his having found her so soon after his bridal bed that no overpowering rush of passion could blind him. (TS p.974).

The power which leads Porius to the Gawres is thus only marginally erotic in the personal sense. It is a power laden with the multiplicity which Porius sensed holding the divine powers - Myrddin Wyllt and Nineue - in his arms:

He felt swept forward indeed by some vast planetary generative force that was at once sub-human and super-human and that became, as he imaged it, wide enough and deep enough to include the engenderings of beasts and men and monsters and gods. It became in fact a swirling bottomless pool, wherein there whirled round and round a terrible vortex of all the beautiful and horrible waves and eddies and groundswells of black blood and crimson blood, mingled with slime and scum and ooze and sea-weed-like hair, that cover the shoals and porches of the threshold of life. (TS p.975).

This congeries includes images in Powys which are strongly linked with evil - "bottomless pools" and "black blood" are in Rodmoor and the Autobiography associated with sadism. The broken skull of the Gawres recalls in detail the death of Tom Barter in Glastonbury; and the scene as a whole echoes the earlier novel. The blow aimed at the Powys-hero falls on another, who has intervened in order to save him.

Porius's conquest of the Gawres leaves him drained; but the giantess restores his strength out of the elements themselves, with whose identity, we feel, the Cewri are so closely involved: Porius's force returns to him "out of those elemental depths of planetary substance, substance of air, substance of water, substance of fire, substance of earth, into which, beyond and beneath the living substance of flesh, extended the great paradisiac division of male and female" (p. 518). Porius later recalls the incident as revealing to him "the terror and horror of the truth of Nature" (p. 583). Good and evil,

beauty and horror, are inseparable at the beginning of life. This is not a union of opposites peculiar to Powys, particularly if we remember Wordsworth "fostered alike by beauty and by fear", and who later in The Prelude wrote:

..... not in vain  
By day or star-light thus from my first dawn  
Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me  
The passions that build up our human soul;  
Not with the mean and vulgar works of man,  
But with high objects, with enduring things -  
With life and Nature, purifying thus  
The elements of feeling and of thought,  
And sanctifying, by such discipline,  
Both pain and fear, until we recognize  
A grandeur in the beatings of the heart. (26).

Powys goes beyond Wordsworth; his recognition of pain and fear would not be addressed to any "Wisdom and Spirit of the Universe". (\*) Powys would not talk of "purifying" with its overtones of spirituality ("purging" would perhaps be his choice). There is a stateliness in "sanctifying" and "grandeur" which is decorous: in Powys, hierarchies are refused. But Professor Wilson Knight is surely correct in characterizing much of Powys's philosophy as an "extreme Wordsworthianism".

The image which Powys stores is not of his love-making with the Gawres, but of the eyes of the two Giants' corpses staring up through the water of the lake. The memory of these submerged faces opens into "an ecstasy of life-worship indescribable in words" (p. 538). This image has appeared before in Powys. In Rodmoor the ultimate fear, which is at the same time a fascination, is pictured as "some sad sea-creature, without hope or memory or rest, ... tossing and moaning, turning a drowned inhuman face towards the darkened sky".

(\*) Nor was Wordsworth's first draft monistic:

Ah not in vain, ye Beings of the hills,  
And ye that walk the woods and open heaths  
By moon or starlight, thus from my first dawn  
Of childhood did ye love to intertwine... (1799)

See Herbert Read, Wordsworth, p.47.

(27). For Porius, "That sight and his eternally varying reactions to it would from henceforth be his voyage into another world, his visit to Caer Sidi!" (p. 538). Hell is again harrowed. Porius extends his cavoseniargizing to include his "nervous manias and horrors and terrors and morbid fears". (TS p.1011).

This ecstasy included every ecstasy he had ever had ... It was a feeling, he decided later, that embraced the whole world, as if it were something under water: something that included not only staring eyes and pieces of bone, but ourselves also, as if we lived under water and saw ourselves, and everybody else, as weeds, stones, reeds, minnows, newts, water-beetles, mud! (TS p.1009).

Fearful lakes and their exorcisms recur in Powys. In the Autobiography (28), there is the lake into which the young Powys threw a stick; the incident made him tremble for fear of the police, and the Autobiography mentions it as the original of Powys's life-long irrational terrors. There is another Derbyshire pond where lived, in Powys's imagination, a "huge pike, of preternatural dimensions." "Once - and the priceless holy terror of that occasion is with me still - I beheld a great circle of ripples rise and expand in the centre of those mud-obscured depths. For months afterwards I kept working myself into self-hugging paroxysms of sweet dismay over that circle of mysterious ripples." (29). Then there is Lenty Pond, where the slime-streaked bodies of the bathers challenge Wolf's neat dualisms. In Obstinate Cymric "the Unconscious" is a "horrible Stygian Lake, full of the spawning, breeding, writhing, moaning, hissing, biting, scrabbling abortions of unspeakable copulations" (30). Powys refuses to believe in such an "unconscious", for in his novels he shows that such a hell can be harrowed. Lake Tegid is the last of Powys's ponds where good and evil, their interdependence and necessity, are forced on his hero, although in Atlantis, Odysseus' quest takes him under the sea.

Shortly after this climax, we have an often admired poem by Taliessin, who sings of himself as a wanderer through the multiverse, unperturbed by its contradictions. The poem comments on Porius's own progress:

Air, fire, earth, water  
Are worth more than a kiss.  
Through earth's earth-quake daughter  
I ravish the abyss! (p.532).

While Porius's meeting with the Cewri has its significance within the novel's study of developing consciousness, the mysterious grandeur of the incident points to Porius's mythological identity, for the "quest" which Porius embarks on has a mythological, not a psychological end. Porius himself is dimly aware that his fate is linked with Myrddin Wyllt. "There's a link between us, a link that goes far back; and where this link operates I'm stronger than he is - and not in physical strength only!" (p.407).

Myrddin Wyllt is Cronos. The dimly broached association of Merlin with Cronos was discussed in relation to A Glastonbury Romance. Powys gives Porius a quite literally read Hesiodic cosmology. According to Hesiod (28), Kronos was the child of the heavens (Ouranos) and the earth (Gaia or Rhaea). At Rhaea's urging Kronos castrated Ouranos with a jagged sickle, which Rhaea had formed from herself. Ouranos' genitals fell into the sea, and from the foam which surrounded them was born Aphrodite. Kronos however took to swallowing his children, on learning that it was one of his offspring who was destined to end his reign. Rhaea deceived him by giving him a stone instead of the infant Zeus, and the grown-up Zeus conquered Kronos "by craft and power". The Golden Age ended, and the rule of Zeus as chief of the gods began.



We see Myrddin/Kronos, therefore, as a mighty champion of the authority of his mother, the earth, with whom he is in constant communication:

When Myrddin Wyllt doesn't know what to do, he puts his head on the earth and the underground gods tell him what to do, and he understands what they tell him and tells the emperor what to do. (p.502).

This is like Keats' Saturn:

... his bow'd head seem'd list'ning to the Earth,  
His ancient mother, for some comfort yet. (32).

The pervasive earth-fertility of Porius has been noted. The Hesiodic cosmology underscores this fertility, and is an undercurrent in the instincts of the forest people, whose celebratory "life in death cry" has in it "drops from the terrible semen of Uranus when that which is above all things was divided from that which is below all things" (TS "what time Cronos rescued the mother of us all"). (p.659).

The bond between Myrddin Wyllt and Rhaea is, however, not immutable, for, as well as betraying Ouranos to Kronos, it was also Rhaea who betrayed Kronos to Zeus. She is hence an even more powerful arbiter of destiny than Kronos. And so Myrddin Wyllt prays to the earth for help to overcome the Christian Godhead, Zeus's successor:

"You whispered to me how to overcome my father, and you whispered to my son how to overcome me, and you whispered to the Three-in-One how to overcome the Olympian. Have you grown too old, Gaia Peloria, grown too old, great mother of gods and men, to whisper to me, your son, for the second time?" (p.299).

It is on hearing the answer to this prayer that Myrddin Wyllt promises the return of the Golden Age (p.306). The striking appearance of Myrddin Wyllt, and the quality of Powys's description of him have been noticed by all critics. But as Cronos he is not necessarily the ultimate power.

It is clear that he has a powerful antagonist in Nineue. Dr. Cavaliero calls Nineue "another of Powys's 'sylph' figures, this time with distinctly sinister attributes. But Powys's handling of her character is uncertain, and her precise significance therefore hard to determine" (33). We have much more of Nineue in the complete text of Porius. She remains elusive, but not I think because of any uncertainty on Powys's part, but because her elusiveness is very important. Porius, in Arthur's tent, holds Nineue to prevent her from falling. The incident balances Porius's earlier embrace of Myrddin Wyllt, already quoted, when Porius had experienced a sense of the prophet's "multiple identity":

But with Nineue it was as if he were pressing against himself something boneless, ribless, formless; something that was a yielding image of femininity in the abstract, the resilient, lithe, magnetic, slippery Platonic Idea of all the evasive allurements in the world that are the objects of impersonal desire...

.... There was nothing of Nineue that was not deliciously capable of being absorbed. And in the absorption of Nineue even for those brief seconds there was a sensation of the unfathomable and the infinite (p.93).

We are here dealing with a being of comparable significance to Myrddin/Kronos. We are also told that Nineue is a pure-blood Ffichti (TS p.219) and that the Ffichti originally came from Annwn (TS p.1075). Nineue, Porius suspects, offers Myrddin Wyllt "the wine of Annwn", and Myrddin Wyllt calls his expected entombment his

"Road to Annwn" (pp.593,406). Nineue is obviously a powerful goddess - or "devil" (p.655) - connected with the vitally important Celtic underworld.

She remains, of course, a "sylph" - a handmaid at Arthur's court. Of Powys's humorous disregard for the solemnities of chivalric convention something has been said. But it is not a wanton demotion, for Arthur's tent has a very Powysian glamour of its own. It is "an enchanted circus of horses and pretty ladies" (p.126), the successor of the other Wilhelm-Meister-like circuses in Powys - tinselly, artificial, but of mysterious allurements. There is a recall of Wizzie Ravelston in her threadbare finery, and of Tissty and Tossty of Weymouth Sands. Strongest of all is the memory of the cheap variety shows of Brighton pier and the Philadelphia burlesque shows of the Autobiography - theatre tawdry enough, but where Powys perceived something of heavenly illusion. From Arthur's tent, besides Nineue, comes Gwendydd, Rhun ap Gwrnach's enchantress, while Porius himself is susceptible to Nineue's charms. Myrddin's devoted page, Neb ap Digon, notices with alarm "a subtle lecherous understanding between Porius and that fatal woman from whom he felt it to be his first purpose in life to protect his master" (p.551).

Porius eventually surrenders to Nineue's charms. This episode does not appear in the printed version of the novel, and critics have hitherto remarked (with relief) upon Porius's erotic "normality". But in the complete text we find him, in the cell of the late Brother John, and in the presence of Myrddin Wyllt, enjoying the "protracted caresses" characteristic of earlier Powys heroes. Their love-making is dehumanized and "procrastinating", "more like the love-making of one of the saurian monsters that his prototype Hercules was always

slaying" (TS p.1271). Their desire is impersonal, and Porius thinks of his tynged "never to know what is normally called love" (TS p.1268). Nineue, too, we are now firmly told, "cavoseniargizes", and their love-making is in fact close to this activity.

That Porius approaches this powerful feminine deity in such a way tells us a great deal about the erotic in Powys, and, much more significantly, a great deal about Nineue and Powys's beliefs about the essential feminine principle. There is a collision of the individual and universal here altogether characteristic of Powys. That the single experience has these two poles makes it possible to admit the force of Professor Wilson Knight's interpretation of the erotic in Powys, while agreeing with Dr. Easingwood that "sexuality is not wholly central or wholly conclusive in his vision of human existence" (34). This is because so much of what Powys describes as erotic, like "cavoseniargizing", would not usually be erotic in the personal sense at all. In Maiden Castle, frustrated desire was elevated to a principle of psychic insight; the conclusion was apparently very cranky and absurd. Now Porius is sexually normal, but "embraces the elements" in his cavoseniargizing, and makes love to Nineue, a "sylph", and guardian of essential femininity, in this cautious way. Porius is like Pwyll, in the Mabinogi of Pwyll Prince of Dyved, who descends to Annwn in the semblance of Arawn, its King. In Rabelais, Powys refers to "Pwyll, who spent a year of honourable chastity with the Queen of Hell and whose name means 'wisdom'" (35).

It is possible to see in retrospect how throughout Powys this citadel of femininity never falls. While "sylphs" finally elude the Powys hero, so they elude all men, to retreat even further into their mysterious femininity. The failure of the Powys hero's relationships

is most often noted, but it is also true that "sylphs" move closer to the Powys hero than to anyone else. But the final emphasis is on their own mysterious essence. Christie and Olwen retire to Weymouth. Wizzie Ravelston escapes back to the circus in romantic friendship with Thuella Wye. Morwyn (like Wizzie) leaves for America, alone but for her father, who will soon desert her.

A Quest for the Eternal Feminine is broached in Glastonbury, which Powys so often likened to Faust, and which ends with a hymn to Cybele. The Autobiography is full of frequently strange quests for the feminine, and is dedicated to Powys's mother - while women never appear in it. Porius is politically devoted to the matriarchal principles of the forest-people, who never appear in the novel. And in Porius Powys presents a vision of the "Feminine Principle" which transcends the incidental quirks of Powysian sexuality to concern itself with the creative processes of the "multiverse".

Dr. Cavaliero has noted how the women in Porius are of stronger mettle than the men (36). Porius is dominated by his masterful mother, Euronwy, and by the capable Morfydd. Einion ab Iddawc is ineffective - and devoted to the goddess of the forest-people, Ceridwen, and the Divine River. His brother Brochvael is a scholarly recluse (though he has his own inner fortitude). Of strong women, there are particularly the three Modrybedd, who bear themselves with natural dignity. One "masculine principle" to set against the dominant "feminine principle" is Rhun ap Iwrnach's Mithraism, which collapses under the pressure of his passion for Gwendydd and his attempted ravishment of Morfydd. This invasion of the feminine upon philosophic detachment is treated with compassionate humour, as with Richard Gaul in Weymouth Sands.

For the rest, we have the male thunderbolt hurler, and the male Trinity. Porius hopes to oppose Christianity with the feminine principle:

And he seemed to see clearly now that to fight this priest with anything resembling the man's own undying frenzy of love-hate would be impossible, and that the only hope, as had already crossed his mind, would be to use the feminine element in the heart of religion itself; an element that in the end could resolve everything back into nature. (TS p.1212).

This "nature", "authority from below", from Rhaea, has its priest in Myrddin Wyllt, whose most spectacular feat in the service of the feminine is of course his liberation of the owl-girl Blodeuwedd, an enchanting scene amply discussed by Dr. Cavaliero and Dr. Easingwood. It is watched in the novel by Morfydd, who finds in Myrddin Wyllt's miracle "indisputable evidence that every feminine creature in the whole world had at last found a real champion, even if he were only a magician and not a god." (p.656). At the same time, Blodeuwedd, as a spirit of quintessential femininity, is as inaccessible as Powys's other sylphs; she disappears with an "enchanted leap into the abiding heaven of the unsatisfied" (TS p.1452).

This last and most splendid performance of Myrddin Wyllt is performed under the eyes of Nineue, waiting at that moment to carry Myrddin Wyllt to his imprisonment. Throughout Porius, Powys offers contradictory evidence as to whether Myrddin is willingly held in Nineue's clutches or not. In A Glastonbury Romance the clue to Merlin's disappearance was held in the mysterious word "esplumeoir". It is Myrddin Wyllt's "esplumeoir" which Nineue prepares on the top of Y Wyddfa (TS pp.1558-9) and "esplumeoir" is also a "new-fangled Gaulish word" (TS p.1261) which the Henog of Dyfed, Sylvannus

Bleheris, uses in his "Vita Merlini". In A Glastonbury Romance Bleheris was the author of the Arthurian Romance written in the upper room at Mark's Court, which dealt with Merlin's disappearance. Jessie Weston credits the original material for The Prose Perceval (the "esplumeoir" romance) to one Bleheris. In writing of A Glastonbury Romance I mentioned that "esplumeoir" is understood to imply an imprisonment which is at the same time voluntary. What Powys indicates in the case of Myrddin Wyllt is that a devotion to the feminine principle is the same as a captivation by it. This is a paradox felt in many ways in the Autobiography, and suggested in Porius in the comparison of Myrddin Wyllt with Tiresias (p.597) who is also a man of wisdom in Morwyn.

In Porius, Powys is at pains to emphasize "the primal mystery of the differing consciousness of male and female" (pp.512-3), first apprehended by Porius at his ravishment of the Gawres. Porius even feels "as if women were not only of a different sex but of a different species" (p.583). While the gulf between male and female psychology is important throughout Powys, it is emphasized by Porius on the slopes of Y Wyddfa. Shortly before freeing Myrddin Wyllt, Porius explains to Rhun what he conceives as the nature of this ultimate difference, which exists alongside a mutual pursuit, in terms which have bearing on the paradox of "voluntary imprisonment":

I think their "mystery" forces them to try and possess us, to surround us with themselves, to draw us into themselves, to make us part of themselves - in a word to swallow us. But - and here comes the extraordinary contradiction - in their deepest selves they want us always to escape being swallowed! Therefore the thing we've got to do is never to cease running away, never to cease escaping being swallowed!

And it's our "mystery" that we are able to do this and thus to give them the undying pleasure of an endless pursuit" .....

"But, Porius," he (Rhun) protested, "isn't it we who pursue them?"

"Certainly," said the other, turning his head almost irritably to escape the sun, "certainly we pursue them, for of course there is pursuit on both sides: but the "mystery" of women is the opposite of the "mystery" of men and what suits women best is - is - ..... is to be caught!" (TS pp.1561-2).

The "mystery" of women was sounded by Porius in his capture of the Gawres. It is the "mystery" of men which Porius experiences in his meeting with Nineue on the top of Y Wyddfa. Nineue has "swallowed" Myrddin Wyllt, and attempts to "swallow" Porius, and yet it suits her deepest desires that Porius should reject her, and that Myrddin Wyllt should be freed, as is shown by her "indulgence" to Porius after he refuses her advances.

Nineue is very different from the elemental Gawres. Porius discerns in her the evasiveness of the feminine:

What she shared with the earth - with Nature, with the great Her of this present visible world - was a quite special sort of pitiless craft and cunning, with the power of using every kind of mirage, illusion, phantasmagoria and enchantment. (TS p.1576).

Who then is Nineue? A precise identification, such as we can fix upon Myrddin Wyllt/Cronos, is impossible, as Powys himself declared, writing specifically about her.

What particular pre-Homeric ancient Greek goddess we should presume to associate Nineue I have deliberately held myself



back from dogmatically declaring, since the more real the supernatural characters in "Porius" have become to their present chronicler the less he dares - that is, to speak plainly, the less I dare - associate them with any fixed academic place in any fixed academic mythology. (37).

There are obvious resemblances between Nineue in Porius and Cybele in A Glastonbury Romance. But Nineue is a sylph figure, not a mother figure. Nineue is specifically dissociated from "the teeming maternity of that Mother of all" (TS p.1576). But the solace and indulgence she offers is quasi-maternal; "a supernatural planetary indulgence totally beyond anything humanly maternal, but not impossible to associate with the boundless earth, mother of the Titans, nor impossible to associate with her who betrayed Uranus to crooked-counselling Cronos, and then again Cronos to the hurler of thunderbolts" (TS p.1577). There are hints of Demeter, and her Welsh equivalent, Ceridwen, traditionally connected with Lake Tegid. But a sylph-like earth goddess? We are confronted with what I feel is a powerful unresolved conflict in Powys understanding the power of "the feminine principle". Despite Powys's devotion to the Earth as mother, and his praise for Goethe's "The Mothers", there is a remarkable scarcity of actual mothers in Powys, and when they do appear, relations between mother and son are exceptionally thwart, as in Wolf Solent. Ann Ashover's achievement of maternity is death to Rook, the Powys hero. Mrs. Remshaw in Rodmoor and Euronwy in Porius are even faintly repellent. The Powys hero instead looks for traditionally maternal solace from the many "old maid" figures which Powys describes with such loving care. Such women are given a special share of the power which inhabits all women. It is as if actual mothers are too alarming. But even Powys's reverence for nuns, he claimed, was "connected very intimately with what the ancients felt for Demeter and Persephone". (38). Alongside such

maternal power is the ideal of the sylph; yet the two are connected, for even Morwyn gew both psychically and physically more maternal during her stay beside the Cauldron of Ceridwen. (\*)

While the feminine principle is to be revered, it is also to be feared. Porius is right to feel alarmed in the tent of Arthur's court, where "women alive, women dead, women half-alive, women half-dead, phantom-women, werewolf women, lemurs, liliths and lamias, all seemed to be crowding round him" (TS p.195). This is a fear similar to Powys's Southwick mental disturbance. To be completely devoted to the feminine principle is to be engulfed by it; it is the imprisonment of Myrddin Wyllt by Nineue. But to deny it is to fail to understand the world - like poor Rhun ap Iwrnach, whose Mithraism fails him. Porius must therefore reject Nineue's advances. This he does. Chance saves him, and so does their "cavoseniargizing", it seems, for Nineue's erotic magnetism is directed at the crucial moment towards the sun (p.675).

Only in the delicate enactment of Powys's mythological drama - the voluntary imprisonment of Myrddin by Nineue, and his release by a Porius who is close enough to Nineue, in his cavoseniargizing, to deserve such a role, and detached enough to resist her total pull, in such a balance - or tension of opposites - is the Golden Age to be attained. Once again we are forced to recognise that Powys's "philosophy" is a dramatic one.

There is another prisoner released as well, for before ascending Y Wyddfa, Porius cuts the bonds of Medrawd, brought to him as a captive. Like Nineue, Medrawd is a Ffichtiaid, from Annwn, and therefore also a character of supernatural or mythological

(\*) *Ceridwen is also, of course, Robert Graves' "White Goddess". Powys and Graves use identical Welsh sources, and their devotion to Ceridwen is comparable in intensity. While a "Gravesian" interpretation of Powys would undoubtedly be possible, it is worth mentioning Powys's antipathy to The White Goddess, whose complete text he read in 1957 (see Letters to C. Benson Roberts, p.107).*

significance. When Porius first meets him he is stricken with "supernatural terror" and "psychic goose-flesh", perceiving that Medrawd is dominated by a mastering "desire to escape" (pp.137-8). This desire for nothingness is familiar from early Powys; it is Adrian Sorio's quest for destruction, while John Brebner has correctly associated Medrawd with William Hastings' nihilism. He shares Squire Urquhart's necrophilia. Powys himself called his "secret" metaphysical; "I attribute to this strange being many of the psychological characteristics of the Goethean Mephistopheles, making him, in fact, like that "queer son of chaos", raise his "infernal fist" against the whole system of creation". (39). Medrawd (like Mephistopheles) is frequently associated with the image of a snake, and the expression of his face reminds Porius of a "rough, clumsily painted Byzantine picture":

It was a picture of the Infant Jesus playing with a snake. The little Jesus, a comically plump babe, was lovingly and obstinately thwarting the one supreme desire of his dangerous plaything, the desire to escape. This desire had smouldered into such a recoil of tragic desperation that even as a boy Porius had read in the one small saurian eye which alone was visible the shuddering resolve, sooner than not to escape, to drag the world's hope of redemption down with him! (p.138).

It is the tyranny of "love" which excites this nihilism; in Brother John's cell, Porius imagines the Medrawd-snake melting into a stubble-coloured mist (p.146). The desire for destruction is relieved by the promise of the Golden Age, and Medrawd's bonds are cut.

What of the Golden Age? Myrddin Wyllt in his prophecies identifies it with the Age of Aquarius. In Rabelais, Powys declares its imminence with the new zodiacal month:

A far-off Utopia it looks to some still; but not to all. Things may look the same to the superficial eye; but different they are. Not so far below the surface the invisible Mole of human destiny is heaving up the soil beneath our feet.

The world's great age begins anew:  
The golden years return,  
(40).

But the vision belongs legitimately to an ideal region, which Powys is always trying to bring close, thought never actual. While Myrddin Wyllt's common-sense virtues are clearly expressed in Porius, the actual features of the Golden Age do not bear much contemplation. As Powys says in Rabelais, "All final 'Landings,' all final Millenniums, all Last Apocalypses and Last Judgments are wearisome to think of." (41).

The Grail of A Glastonbury Romance was "a little nucleus of Eternity, dropped somehow from the outer spaces upon one particular spot" (42). The whole of Porius is in a sense such a descent of the timeless into time. The beginning of the book moves from the timeless down to Corwen, A.D. 499: "Eternus, Eternus, Edeyrn" (p.1) murmurs Porius on the Gaer watch-tower. Similarly, at the end Porius steps outside temporal limitation, climbing "across great yawning gulfs of time" (p.673), to enact a drama of mythic significance.

In A Glastonbury Romance there was a frank juxtaposition of the supernatural and the everyday. In Porius we have a similar collision between myth and psychological realism. What Porius thinks is often on the level of what ordinary people think; what he does is to free a God from imprisonment. This mythic aspect of Porius begs a literal reading. Both Angus Wilson and Jeremy Hooker write of

Porius in terms of dream, but I feel that in this approach there is a slight desire to interpret away the real conceptual difficulties we confront in the action of Porius. It is worth noting here the low value which Powys consistently places upon dream experience, and also the slightly wooden symbolism of Powys's dreams in Wolf Solent and Glastonbury. But it is true that in Porius, where Powys for the first time places the full burden of his drama upon mythic elements, he is now free to present psychological experience in its most chaotic and unschematized reality. The action of Porius is of cosmic dimension, but the psychological development of Porius himself is on quite a modest scale. The reader may legitimately feel that not only is Porius's quest as serpentine as "The Path of Pelagius" that winds through the forests of Edeyrnion, but that Porius at the end of the book is not very different from what he was at the beginning. In the tent of Arthur's courtiers, Porius can already conclude:

Oh, it was a mistake always to be making these rational efforts after order and uniformity when the wisdom of every creature lay in reconciling itself as well as it could to that mysterious mingling of Nature's purposes with accident and chance which is the only world we know. (p.106).

And this is essentially Porius's position at the book's close. He undergoes no radical transformation from ignorance to enlightenment, slavery to freedom, dualism to pluralism. What the drama of Porius does is confirm Porius in the course of action he philosophically advocates, material enough for a week in A.D. 499. Wolf Solent's struggle for his life-illusion is by comparison somewhat exalté, suspiciously evangelical. As I have suggested, Wolf Solent's experience, so like a "conversion", can worry readers who are similarly disturbed at Tolstoy's handling of the conversions of Levin and Nekhlyudov (especially in comparison with the lapses and

despairing re-conversions in Tolstoy's own life). What gives assurance and authenticity to Porius's mental life is, I feel, its statement within a vision of life which is no longer anthropocentric. A Glastonbury Romance discussed man's religious experience from an anthropocentric point of view - in other words, "What suits men best in religion?" The multiverse of Porius assuages such purely human concerns. Both Wolf Solent and Porius declare, on the final page of their books, that they are "Alone". For Wolf Solent this was a battle cry, and a summons to endurance. For Porius, alone - but within a multiverse composed of countless other solitary human and sub-human identities - this isolation is a point of relaxation and surrender. The novel that has gone before has tested and proved true the quality of his experience.

While this huge novel with its opaque little title is the end of Powys's "quest", and is his most monumental conception, is it therefore his finest book?

The main objection against this view is a formal one, and is that the vast raw materials of the book are not fully used up; there is not a totally sufficient relationship between the matter and its development such as there is in Wolf Solent. This is not quite the same as saying that the book is too prolix, for its length and its thickly-textured though not intricate prose are clearly especial pleasures. But there is a certain conformity of material and purpose in which Powys is not very interested, particularly in the political drama. The best counter to this objection is that it is Powys's purpose in his philosophy, enacted by his fiction, to draw consequence from a profusion of inconsequence; nonetheless I feel there is wastage particularly in the story of Brochvael.

Brochvael begins very well indeed. Powys appears to chart an alternative path to a "golden" vision; in Porius there is the elemental life, and in Brochvael the classical value of "aisima" - "decency in fate" (pp.216-7). Brochvael grows from strength to strength in spite of his advanced years, his fear of loneliness after Morfydd's marriage, and his natural timidity. He survives and changes, and acts decisively upon his discovery of Aulus's treachery. Yet finally he peters out in his passion for the sinister "Jesus-Lad" Drom, whose androgyny represents the danger of the reconciliation of opposites, as opposed to the tension of opposites pursued by Porius.

What is all in favour of Porius, is that for the first time in Powys seriousness of intent is matched by sustained seriousness of performance. The humour is all of a warm, indulgent, mature kind. One thinks of the courtship of Gwythyr and Nesta, or the attachment of Gunta and Neb ap Digon - children who are precocious yet charming. Shakespeare shows how hard to attain that combination can be. While this compassionate humour is not new in Powys, Porius is notable for its lack of authorial clowning. The stimulating absurdities and embarrassments which are built into A Glastonbury Romance are subsumed in the integrity of the imagined world of Edeyrnion. Animism falls naturally into place in a primitive society.

Certainly this imagined world has literally haunted the dreams of one poet - Gael Turnbull, who writes of a night "crying out in my sleep..."

in fear, but amazement where I was - not  
a valley between  
mountains, with boulders, bracken, straggled clouds  
down to tree top, tents, canopies, dripping guy-ropes,

banners -

and men: hulking, spare of words, their eyes  
bloodshot from urgent travel and the smoke of charcoal  
braziers, with rich brocade under their jerkins -

inhaling each other's thought as one might scent -

inmost being finding sustenance far down as plants with  
long tap-roots growing out of a shale slope -

a world

imagined, become imminent -

but not mine and blundered

into as I slept -

Powys (John Cowper) and his novel

'Porius' -

read so long ago and so ill-remembered, yet  
unmistakable -

(43)

Finally, there is the book's sense of organic growth, and its  
long refinement of a view of life and the world through experience.

In the Autobiography "the greatest event" of Powys's life in  
Cambridge is an ecstasy experienced looking at a moss-grown stone  
wall behind the Fitzwilliam Museum. The ecstasy had to do with his  
vocation as a writer.

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. In fact I actually regarded  
it as a prophetic idea of the sort of stories that I myself might  
come to write; stories that should have as their background  
the indescribable peace and gentleness of the substance we  
name grass in contact with the substance we name stone. (44).



No other novel by Powys fulfils this vision so well. (And Brother John's cell in Porius is almost a new version of this stone-wall). I believe that Powys conceived as the ambition of his art not a great showman's novel, like A Glastonbury Romance, but a work of harmony and honesty - which he achieved in Porius.

## Chapter Seven

## Notes

Porius (London: Macdonald, 1951, and Village Press, 1974); Porius TS, Colgate University Library; parts in Churchill College Library, Cambridge.

- (1) George Steiner, "The Problem of Powys", The Times Literary Supplement, 16 May 1975, p.541.
- (2) Autobiography, p.628.
- (3) Letter to Marian Powys, 6 May 1951, MS.
- (4) Letters 1937-1954, ed. Iorwerth C. Peate, p.59.
- (5) *ibid.*, pp.79-80.
- (6) Powys Newsletter, No. 4, p.8.
- (7) *ibid.*, p.5.
- (8) Letter to Marian Powys, 5 March 1951, MS.
- (9) J. Rhys and D. Brynmawr-Jones, The Welsh People (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900) pp.32, 618, 640-2; and Obstinate Cymric, pp.7-8.
- (10) Powys Newsletter, No. 4 p.10.
- (11) Karl Hepfer, "Der Mythos im Werk von John Cowper Powys," Hamburg Ph.D., 1972, p.167.
- (12) Cavaliero, p.129.
- (13) *ibid.*, p.129.
- (14) Dostoevsky, p.97.
- (15) John Ramsbottom, Mushrooms and Toadstools (London: Collins, 1953), p.13.
- (16) The Meaning of Culture, p.180.
- (17) Obstinate Cymric, p.148.
- (18) *ibid.*, pp.170-1.

- (19) J. Rhys, Lectures on Welsh Philology (London: Trubner, 1877), p.390.
- (20) G. Wilson Knight, Neglected Powers, p.158.
- (21) Wolf Solent, p.7.
- (22) Wordsworth, "The Excursion," Book I, ll.285-6.
- (23) Rabelais, p.362.
- (24) Letters to Clifford Tolchard, p.20.
- (25) Rabelais, p.207.
- (26) Wordsworth, "The Prelude" (1805), Book I, ll. 431-41.
- (27) Rodmoor, p.211.
- (28) Autobiography, p.12.
- (29) *ibid.*, p.14.
- (30) Obstinate Cymric, p.144.
- (31) Hesiod, "Theogony," ll. 155 ff., ll. 460 ff.
- (32) Keats, "Hyperion," I, ll. 20-21.
- (33) Cavaliero, p.124.
- (34) Easingwood, p.251.
- (35) Rabelais, p.339.
- (36) Cavaliero, p.124.
- (37) Powys Newsletter, No. 4, p.21.
- (38) Autobiography, p.520.
- (39) Powys Newsletter, No. 4, p.18.
- (40) Rabelais, p.397.
- (41) *ibid.*, p.354.

- (42) A Glastonbury Romance, p.458.
- (43) Gael Turnbull, "Twenty Words, Twenty Days," in A Trampoline: Poems 1952-64 (London: Cape Goliard, 1968), n.p..
- (44) Autobiography, pp.199-200.

### A NOTE ON THE LATE STORIES

In Atlantis, Zeuks takes as a key to his philosophy of life the word "prokleesis" - "defiance" or "challenge" (p.182). Another translation might be "provocation". The word is also a clue to Powys's late fiction. But it represents a light-hearted kind of challenge. Zeuks is also "the laughing man" who, like Thomas Urquhart, dies in a fit of mirth.

Of course, there has always been "prokleesis" in Powys's art. But, more than ever, the late works flummox criticism. For "The Times Literary Supplement" they are a daunting prospect: "One suspects that they will become a cult, or trial by ordeal, the last purgation of the true elect" (1). It would be a shame at this late stage to surrender Powys to the cultists, and a shame, too, to make heavy weather of books whose great merit is their simplicity.

In The Inmates (1952) Powys describes a last, perfunctory drama of exorcism. Thereafter, from Atlantis (1954) to the tiny Shillyshally (1961) his writing is the expression of a serene old age. "I find the Kingdom of Heaven in my Second Childhood," he wrote to Henry Miller, "I wish Cowper had lived to outlive despair" (2). The late stories confirm that the sense of "quest", the driving force of the earlier work, is over. There is more "action" than ever, in wild voyages through time and space, but there is also a curious stillness, the "energeia akinesis" which Powys praises in his letters, and in The Mountains of the Moon (3). Developmental drama declines; even in the comparatively large-scale Atlantis, Odysseus' journey is less a mission than, as John Toft puts it, a "periplum" (4). In In Spite Of

Powys writes: "What we want life on this planet to be is a succession of experiences, to make each of which two things alone are needed: namely, that which experiences and that which is experienced" (5). Powys's fiction increasingly tends towards this "succession of experiences". While decline of narrative stamina and control is obviously a result of old age, Powys uses his lapsing powers to realize ever more thoroughly a purposeless "multiversal" philosophy.

There is also a new clarity and simplicity. While there are plenty of strange mysteries in the actions of these books, there is no corresponding air of mystery such as there was in Porius. Mysteries are taken for granted as part of life, and there is little impulse to explore and explain them. Worlds beyond this world are made actual in the books, rather as Geard's other dimension was actual to Geard himself, but there is no interpretation for the reader. Powys's religious questionings are almost abandoned. In In Spite Of - one of the most interesting, because the most extreme of Powys's treatises - the word "spiritual" more than ever has unpleasant connotations. There is a whole chapter entitled "In Spite of Belief":

... while belief claims to simplify things and clear up things and straighten out things, what it really does is to cloud, confuse and confound with accumulations of complications one of the simplest of all human feelings, our delight in mystery. (6).

The "other people" who make life hell for their fellow mortals are always believers in something untrue, unreal, and above all invisible. (7).

So, in the stories, there is a plainness of concrete description. In In Spite Of Powys even calls himself a "materialist" as the proper name for a devotee of the four elements.

This way of taking mysteries for granted means, I believe, that Professor Wilson Knight is wrong when he finds the last tales saturated in occultism. In Spite Of has harsh words for occultism, and Powys, as in The Meaning of Culture, praises instead "the poetic sense":

It can also serve ("the poetic sense") by its human realism and by its rugged earthiness, and by its power of getting rid of the whole tricky cult of the unhealthy, the sanctimonious, and all that is referred to as "spiritual", but which at its best only represents that dubious tendency towards the occult which has come to be called "psychic" and which at its worst can only be described as a particular kind of erotic hysteria. The poetic sense can also serve us by strengthening and steadying our imaginative power. (8).

In his 1960 preface to Wolf Solent Powys asserts that consciousness ends with death. Professor Wilson Knight urges us to follow Lawrence's advice to "believe the story rather than the writer" (9). But Powys's stories show a striking lack of interest in the whole matter. The after-death experiences of Glastonbury and Two and Two are play, the ghosts of Morwyn purest allegory. In The Inmates Commander Serius-Ocius declares that the question of survival is one that "none has ever answered or ever can answer" (p.149). The mysteries of the late fiction need to be read at face value, which is much more difficult than interpreting them as allegory or mystical intuition.

The Inmates opens with a "Prefatory Note". This is the first preface since Wood and Stone (although there is an unfinished one to Porius), and arose, I feel, out of a failure of nerve, for it is an apologia for the very crazy novel which follows. The preface is striking because, like the "Argument" appended to Owen Glendower,

it is written in a cool and self-controlled style. There are four pages of rational exposition of "The Philosophy of the Demented," and then we are off into late Powys, with Mesopotamia Tickle, Professor Zoom, Mrs. Wohntscher, Morsimmon Esty, and so forth. But the preface shows that even The Inmates was written out of policy as well as self-indulgence.

This book is nonetheless Powys's poorest, and the spirit of "aboriginal levity" it advocates is elephantine. The novel is almost a Powysian One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, but fails because Powys has no interest in analyzing the relationships of power which bind inmate and warden. Nor is he able to understand madness, as opposed to the mild neurotic "manias" in which he is expert. The chapter on "Madness" in In Spite Of is one of his few callous pieces of writing. In The Inmates the asylum of Glint has a splendidly desolate institutional atmosphere, with its gravel walks, enforced idleness, compulsory meals. But though there is a beginning to the novel with John Hush's arrival at Glint, and an end in the liberation of the inmates, there is no development in between. Instead there is a sequence of set speeches from Hush, Commander Serius-Ocius, Professor Zoom, and Pantamount, each expounding some aspect of "The Philosophy of the Demented" (which is, of course, Powys's own).

The Inmates is an exception in the serenity which suffuses late Powys, and I believe that this is because the book is a hangover from Porius. After his two grandest conceptions, Glastonbury and Porius, Powys wrote two novels preoccupied with what society considers "madness", as if Powys himself were frightened at what he had done. His heroes, Sylvanus Cobbold and John Hush, are forced to practise their philosophies in asylums. In the large-scale Weymouth Sands,



this discipline is absorbed by the larger purposes of the book, but in The Inmates it is not. John Hush recapitulates many of the unsocial tendencies and neurotic terrors of Powys as a young man. There is Hush's compulsive fetishism, similar to Powys's voyeurism, which originally brings him to Glint. There are night fears, and a horrible consciousness of the self opposed to the "ink-black cuttlefish of not-being" (p.83). There is the old Southwick fear of changing sex. But these anxieties are not confronted, because for Powys they are no longer real. The implausible action and silly names of The Inmates disappear from Powys for a while, to return, purged and made genial, in Up and Out.

Atlantis is the fullest expression of the sprightly anarchy to which Porius moved. The novel's action takes place against a background of cosmic rebellion against the authority of Zeus. As in Porius, this revolt is a rebellion of the feminine, and of the underworld against "authority from above":

It is the Revolt of Women! Yes, of the Women-Slaves of the entire universe! Yes, Nisos, nothing less than that, the revolt of all Females in the cosmos against the tyranny of all Males in the cosmos! (p.80).

Elone, welcoming the insurrection of the "older gods against the newer gods," welcomes the arrival of "Anarchy! Anarchy! Anarchy!" (p.217), while for the sensitive Sixth Pillar in the corridor of Odysseus' palace on Ithaca, the elements themselves are joining the revolt:

"You must have noticed already, my dear old friend," the Sixth Pillar was saying, "how strongly and emphatically the four elements are joining in this multiversal revolt against the authority of the Olympians? ...

"To me it is clear that what is happening in the multiverse at the present moment is a revolt against Zeus the Son of Kronos by every other power in the wide world!" (p.383).

This rebellion is however only a background, conditioning and illustrating the anarchy of the book's narrative rather than providing direction. True to anarchic principles, there is in fact very little sense of overall purpose, and despite the wild and fantastic action "energeia akinesis" is the dominant note. There is an ostensible "quest", but Odysseus' journey is extremely picaresque, and its conclusion does not grow naturally out of what has gone before. There are plenty of narrative loose ends. "You will see me again," says Keto, the appalling monster of nothingness, who disappears, never to return (p.64). More seriously, the whole revolt against Zeus has an ambiguous quality. The mysterious Being who rules Atlantis has been drowned by Zeus in punishment for rebelling against the Olympians, but the monster is no ally of "multiversal" anarchy and comes to represent the tyranny of Science. The Ithacans, and the Club "Dokeesis", merely polish off Zeus' work when she (or it) is hit on the head.

It would be easy to pull to pieces the chaotic narrative of Atlantis, and its random instability does disqualify it from inclusion among Powys's best work. But this kind of criticism would miss the characteristic pleasures of the book, with its delight in scattered experience. The novel's action carries a light-hearted philosophical commentary between a moth and a fly:

"Unrecorded things are as important as recorded things," said the Fly.

"But who hears of them?" commented the Moth sadly. (p.248).

Powys makes sure that the world does hear of these things, and collects disregarded fragments and off-scourings, rather as the Dryad, Kleta, collects abandoned minutiae in her "garden". Kleta's "garden" is an assembly of meaningless debris like that which struck Wolf Solent as horrible evidence of a disordered universe:

Anyone, whether human or more than human, who turns nature into a garden is liable to find an unbelievable number of very small things that have once been parts of other things but are now entities on their own such as bits of wood, bits of stalk, bits of fungus, bits of small snail-shells, bits of empty birds' eggs, bits of animals' hair, bits of birds' feathers, bits of broken sheaths of long-perished buds and scattered insect-shards, strewn remnants of withered lichen-clusters and scattered fragments of acorns and berries and oak-apples that have survived in these lonely trails and tracks to be scurf upon the skin of one world and the chaos-stuff for the creation of another world. (p.44).

With its bland acceptance of a creation without hierarchy, Atlantis is even more thoroughly "multiversal" than Porius. All dramatic proportion is disturbed by the Fly, Myos "explaining to the moth Pyraust that every grain of dust was an actual world and that it was foolish to philosophize about the universe until you stopped talking about Etna being flung upon Typhon and talked about Arsinoë disturbing worlds with her duster". (p.128).

The narrative implications of this belief are apparent in the splendid first chapter, a beautiful progression from the most primitive forms of consciousness to the human. It is dawn. The only human occupants of Odysseus' hall are asleep. Powys begins with a

tension of "elemental vibrations", and with the rising sun; the narrative moves to the consciousness of the Sixth Pillar, to an olive shoot, to insects, until finally Tis and Nisos awake. Sub-human awareness is the simplest, but also the most sweeping: it is the Sixth Pillar who is first stirred by hints of a "planetary catastrophe".

There is a strange elemental obviousness of style in Atlantis. The book is full of stray, odd remarks so commonplace that they have never been made before. There is a curious impression of impartial, unevaluative observation:

We human beings in our crowded life are more aware of the starting-points and the arriving-points of insects than of the rapidity of their movements from point to point. (p.396).

There are simple lists of natural objects, reminiscent of the moments of thrilling, mysterious simplicity in Wordsworth which Powys loved - the "rocks and stones and trees" of the "Lucy" poems, or the starkness of "Michael".

No habitation can be seen; but they  
Who journey thither find themselves alone  
With a few sheep, with rocks and stones, and kites  
That overhead are sailing in the sky.

(10).

Powys's *Odysseus* has such powers of straightforward observation, which quite displace his attention even in his "exciting" descent to the drowned city of Atlantis:

"He seems able to note things and examine things and analyse things with as much calm and as much lively interest as if he were observing the beasts and birds and shrubs and trees and

plants and rocks and stones of a new tract of totally unknown country that we had invaded and occupied." (p.426).

The elaborate simplicity of style seems to approach the "simple prose translations" which Powys recommended to the modern reader of Homer.

This simplicity also pervades the characters of the book. Odysseus - the wanderer come home, but now ready for a final voyage - is an obviously attractive hero for late Powys. The tradition of Odysseus' further wandering past the Pillars of Hercules comes, of course, from Dante (11). W.B. Stanford and J.V. Luce compare Homer's Odysseus with Dante's Ulysses:

... he (Odysseus) is homeward-bound, centripetal, dutiful and pious. Dante's doomed hero is outward-bound, centrifugal, impious; and he is romantic, too, in the sense that the romantic hero ever yearns for new experiences in faraway lands, while the classical spirit endeavours to make the best of normal and familiar life. (12).

Powys's Odysseus, while like Dante's in undertaking further travels, is quite unlike either Dante's or Tennyson's in his lack of romantic intensity. The Wanderlust of this Odysseus is "an obsession, like the migratory passion in birds and fish and insects and even in the spawn of eels!" (p.117). He has instinctive characteristics, a "super-animal obstinacy," "more like the measured sagacity of some huge sea-lion than it was like the wily cunning of a fox" (p.353). He sheds his traditional artfulness to become "not so much complicated or subtle, as wholly unpredictable". (p.434).

There is a possible model for this straightforward Odysseus in another post-Homeric Odyssey - this time of a very simple kind. Rider Haggard and Andrew Lang's The World's Desire (1890) describes Odysseus travelling to Egypt, where he confronts and conquers a bitch goddess, Meriamun. The Autobiography (13) mentions Powys's youthful Rider Haggard enthusiasm. Meriamun is not unlike the alarming, seductive Nineue, and is also an incarnation of an "Eternal Feminine". She is not far, either, from the harpy-like (though androgynous) monster of drowned Atlantis. There is a tremulous eroticism in The World's Desire very like early Powys, and this mood is in Atlantis too, although altogether less embarrassing than in earlier Powys novels and entirely appropriate to the adolescent Nisos, Leipephile and Eione.

The "materialism" of late Powys finds expression in the philosophy of Zeuks, whose blasphemous name, a parody of Zeus, places him on the side of anarchic rebellion. He opposes Enorches, the priest of the Orphic mysteries, whose mysticism is seen as a cloak for nihilism. Enorches preaches the mysteries of Eros and Dionysos, but is countered by Zeuks' appeal to the values of kindness as espoused by Myrddin Wyllt. In Zeuks' denunciation of "celestial manias and heavenly drugs" (p.192), there is Powys's distrust of the "spiritual" and other-worldly expressed in In Spite Of. As with Uryen Quirm, a mysticism which is not rooted in the apparent world leads to death.

"Enjoyment" is a cornerstone in Zeuks' philosophy and in Powys's practice as author. The dominant note of relish survives even in the description of un-nerving phenomena, as in the waste land of Arima (p.26), or in the delicious schoolboy unpleasantness of

Enorches' curse (p.290). This "enjoyment" is shared by the elements themselves:

It was the extraordinary way in which this city beneath the waters satisfied the whole deep-breathing desire in the ultimate chemical elements of existence that they should have nothing within them to the end of their days save what in silence uttereth speech and whose speech is the speech of air, water, fire, and earth, an elemental language which in its essence is the music of enjoyment, that gave the thing its real secret. (p.428).

The thoughts and articulate philosophy of most of the characters in Atlantis are in harmony with the nature of the world as Powys projects it through his description. Because the characters feel no need to ponder solutions of the world's mysteries, there is very much less introspection in the book.

The introspection of the budding prophet, Nisos, is humorous. "Introspective is what I am!" he says to himself with pride. Powys heroes are getting younger. Porius is a boyish thirty, and after him there is a progression through John Hush and the sixteen-year-old Nisos to the youths of the Blaenau Ffestiniog fantasies. Nisos has a residual Powys hero role in the quest of Atlantis. He finds a new father in Odysseus. Together they stand on the brink of "a vast precipitous chasm" filled with "huge rubber-like sea-growths", like the dimension of Wolf Solent's "mythology". Like the "mythology", this chasm is the source and origin of life - "a vast reserve of creation-material out of which all the multitudinous formations of earth-life could be replenished, reproduced, refilled with pith and sap and blood-juice. (p.431). At the end of Porius, there is a triangle of Myrddin Wyllt, Porius and Nineue. Nisos and Odysseus similarly meet a seductive and sinister feminine creature. For no clear reason, she is an embodiment of the mission of science. For the

first time, the Powysian quest is completed by violence used in the cause of goodness - yet even here the Heraklean club acts on its own initiative, and darts from the hands of its wielders. The Powys hero shirks the final blow. The responsibility for the death of Science appears to lie with the multiversal powers themselves. All humanity joins in declaring an end to the "quest": "Come my friends, all of you, white, black, yellow, and red, let us pour out all our wine upon her and then burn her! Yes, let us burn our ship!" (p.462).

The vestigial "quest" structure of Atlantis is abandoned entirely in The Brazen Head (1956), which is a romantic comedy with pairs of lovers united at its end. This comedy is mixed with a defence of religious free thought, conducted with all the good humour which Powys's philosophy advocates, and there is also some much less successful humorous melodrama. The book is again written out of anarchic beliefs, but there is no preaching about this anarchy.

The novel takes place in 1272, exactly six hundred years before Powys's birth. In 1953, E. Westacott, an admirer of Powys, published Roger Bacon in Life and Legend. Her book, which "inspired" The Brazen Head (14), carries a quotation from In Spite Of as its epigraph. Bacon's Ilchester origins and his individualism in the mediaeval scholastic world obviously attracted Powys to him. In Westacott, his imprisonment by the ecclesiastical authorities is oddly voluntary (15), another case of "Esplumoeir". Although Bacon is often claimed as a proto-empiricist, in The Brazen Head he is seconded, inevitably, to Powysian researches in pluralistic philosophy (p.90), and parthenogenesis. While the disputants in the novel's philosophy are all obviously historical figures - Peter Peregrinus, Albertus Magnus, and Bonaventura, Powys again picks upon dust-



motes of the past: Raymond de Laon, Sir William Boncor, and even a "John" who is mentioned by Westacott as Bacon's favourite pupil, are all authentic names.

Even more than Atlantis, The Brazen Head is full of sympathy for the aspirations and feelings of the young. The House of Abyssum is a close-knit family, like that of the Powyses themselves: in the relationship between the brothers John and Tilton, the one dizzy with philosophy, the other handsome, athletic and practically-minded, Powys looks back on his own closeness to his brother Littleton. The novel is full of the tentative growth of love, and each love-affair is different. There is the delicate and precise rendering of Lil-Umbra's admiration for Raymond de Laon, and Tilton's discreet and surprising romance with Una (or Oona). In the late novels, Powys's treatment of love sheds much of its earlier esotericism. Instead there is a simpler understanding of the commonalities of human feeling, strong in the romance of Peleg and Ghosta.

As in the story of Jobber Skald and Perdita Wane, Powys describes the love of a giant for a sylph-figure who is lost and found again. As in Weymouth Sands the two characters' appearances belie their feelings: the powerful Peleg is tender, while the delicate Ghosta has tenacity of purpose. Their union in the chapter "The Jew from Tartary" has something of the of the archetypal quality of "Consummation" in A Glastonbury Romance. Again, romance is heightened by the attention of the couple to small domestic arrangements, to food and drink. But the chapter's lyricism is more relaxed, achieved without the huge expense of authorial effort sensed in Glastonbury:

"Well, my dear, you tidy up the room and get it into the shape you like to leave it in when you go out into the world; and I'll deal with the remains of our meal and clean the things."

Peleg obeyed her; and until the horizontal rays of the descending Sun thrust the angular shadow of the pine-tree's elbow almost as far as the cracks in the wet dark wall, out of which the elfin faces of the dumb progeny of the awful Horm could be imagined peering at them, the two of them kept an almost religious silence.

Nor was it only silence they shared: for as they went to and fro about their homely tasks the same thought hovered in their minds; the thought that they were both, save for this miracle of a life together which had only begun today, strangers and pilgrims in a foreign land. And this thought of theirs, as he went on tidying up and arranging, according to his ideas of a proper chamber, the whole appearance of their cave, and as she emptied and washed and dried and polished their pots and pans and dishes, did not only hover about them; it also grew deeper and more definite. (pp.151-2).

In Maiden Castle there was a long discussion of sex as power. The evil magician, Peter Peregrinus, uses sex in this way. Peregrinus frightens Roger Bacon; his magnetism reduces lives "to the level of lonely, desperate, lost souls, clinging to each other in a boundless, godless, cavernous nothingness" (p.239). In retrospect, after Peleg and Ghosta, Dud No-Man and Wizzie Ravelston seem not unlike two such lost souls. Despite their fantastic incident, Powys's last novels tend increasingly towards simplicity of experience.

The comic battle over the brazen head itself which leads to the book's denouement is governed by chance, or by Sir William Boncor falling over a badger hole (pp.191-2). Its randomness frustrates more than it amuses, and the novel does not profit from an acceleration of pace. With mention of Mother Wurzel and her daughter "called Puggie-Wuggie" there are ominous suggestions of

trials of patience yet to come. In The Brazen Head there are hints of the lucid romantic novel which Powys might have written, had the resolution of Porius been achieved earlier in his career.

The disappointing scurry which closes The Brazen Head is, I believe, partly a result of Powys's move to Blaenau Ffestiniog during the writing of the novel. Blaenau, like every other place where Powys lived, exerted a quite distinct influence upon his work. The Blaenau influence is a surprising one. The town is quite un-picturesque, starkly "elemental"; there is nothing but sky and water and rock, "the hardest granite on this planet! Think of That!" (16). Its altitude makes the place reminiscent of the little patch of earth on which the travellers of Up and Out soar into space. Powys's extremely frugal life in his tiny cottage matched the simplicity of the town. Yet the novels he wrote there are far from austere. They are airy and fantastic - a vein which, Powys felt, the genius loci of Blaenau encouraged:

... what a perfectly Aristophanic town this is! For it is indeed exactly without exaggeration like the Nephelocuccugygia, the Cloud-Cuckoo-town described in 'The Birds' of that Athenian Comedian! What a good word by the way for birds the word ornithes is! (17).

The most striking feature of the Blaenau stories is their gay irresponsibility. Powys's art of embarrassment is pushed to the limit, and again, this embarrassment has its purpose and interest. Yet, because surprise is the dominant response, the pleasure in them is not a lasting one. They do not survive re-reading. One can give these stories a recognition of delight - but hope that no-one will attempt their like, ever again.

The outrageousness of these tales is particularly effective, because there is a pervasive modern feeling that decorum no longer exists. Genres and verse forms have collapsed. What used to be obscene is no longer considered so. And yet Powys is shocking, and it is curious to see readers who can digest William Burroughs with complacency quailing before Real Wraiths. (I believe Powys would have understood Burroughs very well, and would have been appalled).

First, there are the fantastic and inconsequential narratives. There are plenty of other inconsequential books today; there are novels of loose pages in cardboard boxes, novels cut up and stuck together at random with Sellotape. But Powys is inconsequential in an unsophisticated way, writes childishly, and attempts to draw out a vein of childishness in the reader himself. Readers, of course, resent this.

There is a common literary distinction (particularly in, for instance, Clare criticism) between the "childish" and the "child-like". The "child-like" enjoys a distinct cachet of approval. There certainly is an element of the "child-like" in late Powys, which occasionally rises out of the overwhelming fog of childishness. But these are not simple stories, not for children. They are burdened with all the heavy philosophical enquiries of earlier Powys, though these enquiries are not seriously handled. Powys makes few attempts to claim a Wordsworthian lucidity.

Finally, Powys is shocking about sex. Professor Wilson Knight has written too much about this, yet his fundamental contention is sound - that Powys, in his harmless way, unsettles the reader far more effectively than many of his more obviously provocative contemporaries.

The reader's discomfiture at these stories can be an engaging experience, but there is no necessary profundity in Powys's "second-childhood". Narrative purpose and authorial maturity are not values to be thrown away - but needed they perhaps can be, and this "prokleesis", this defiance, was Powys's modest ambition in his late eighties.

Because the very last books were published posthumously, a chronology is useful here. In his letters (18) Powys described writing All or Nothing in the latter half of 1958. In January 1959 he is at work on You and Me, which was finished in July of the same year, and followed by Real Wraiths. There is no mention of Two and Two in the published letters, but it would seem to follow Real Wraiths, since You and Me is hard on the tail of All or Nothing, and there is a gap, with Powys obviously still writing, between July 1959 and the Wolf Solent preface of Christmas 1960. Stylistic reasons suggest that the minute Shillyshally (published Spring/Summer 1961) comes last of all.

There is a wit in Powys's prose which remains intact until the very end. He found the Wolf Solent preface "very difficult and elaborate" (19). Although only three pages long, and dated "Christmas 1960", Powys was still writing it on January 18th.

Writing is a preface to this book entitled Wolf Solent is like writing a commentary on my whole life as it was, as it is, and as it probably will be, before I die. (20).

That "probably" from a man of eighty-eight is charming. Powys has not yet closed his account-books, as the wide-ranging of speculations the stories confirm.

What does decay, however, is structure. But Powys manages to turn even his failing organisational powers to good use, and lack of direction becomes a matter of policy:

It becomes in fact more and more evident that, however gravely and logically we look at things, there remains in life an element of pure bedlam. (21).

Up and Out and Two and Two do have a sense of overall direction (though by Shillyshally there is not even a consistent narrative thread over nine pages). Dr. Cavaliero complains that Up and Out is nihilistic and cynical (22). Nihilistic It certainly is, but in a cheerful way. In Two and Two it is the pressure of "Nothingness" which forms and makes possible existence. Nihilism, in All or Nothing, is a vital pole in a necessity of opposites. Up and Out does not regress to the serious nihilistic threat of the earliest novels. It is simply that all options are now open. The will to self-destruction in Up and Out is another example of "prokleesis", and it is amusing to see Powys evading the customary note, expected of all modern novelists, of what is called "affirmation".

What we have is random, speculative movement:

I decided that just now what I aimed at in the inmost life-purpose of my existence was to pass through as many sense experiences as I possibly could without stopping to enjoy or to partake intimately of, any single one of them. (23).

So there are space-flights in various airships (or even on "a flying suburb") - models for the flight of the imagination. There is the pull of the moon, and particularly of its dark side. We meet a huge array of historical and mythological personalities.

The stories are not accessible to criticism, though they may answer to Professor Wilson Knight's "interpretation". Yet Two and Two is a sustained miniature of the Powysian multiverse, and is much more interesting than the others. Powys starts with the personified elements, divided into male and female, who, in a "necessity of opposites" are bound together in love and battle, like the sea-monsters of Morwyn. They are collected by a magician, Wat Kums, who obviously represents a temporal dimension, inaugurating a train of events. The characters then move into a dimension of what might be called creativity:

'This place we are in becomes in a second whatever we may decide it shall be ... The truth must be,' Kums went on, 'that we've flown into the midst of the stuff whereof all worlds, all universes, all creatures are made. And so we have only to use our imagination, and lo! the thing is done! We have created a world. (24).

Powys proceeds to "ravish Limbo" to create no less than seven different "worlds".

The close of Two and Two is arresting, because it is with Jesus. It is not a religious close. In Real Wraiths there is a good deal of rather crude blasphemy, with God dying on a beach (at Dover?), telling the Holy Ghost, in sea-gull form, to go away (25). Jesus in Real Wraiths is "a mysterious healer and preacher" (26). The religion based on his name is a dubious creation of St. Paul. But in Two and Two Jesus gathers together Typhoeus, Prometheus, and the Devil (all three, in their time, heroic Powysian rebels) along with Wat Kums and two centaurs, and envelopes them in his arms. After all those millions of words, Powys has earned the right to have his Jesus speak as plainly and movingly as this:

'I tried all the days of my life to be good and kind and to use my power to make myself and others happy, and as I lived while I lived, so I live now that I am dead, only it is henceforth in others rather than in myself that my life goes on. Yes, I am dead, and one day all you six souls will be dead like me, and one day all the world will be as dead as I am now dead; but none of this matters, none of it, none of it, none of it, as long as, till we die, we remain good and kind.' (27).



## Notes

The Inmates (London: Macdonald, 1952; rptd. Village Press, 1974).

Atlantis, (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1973).

The Brazen Head, (London: Macdonald, 1969).

- (1) "A Magician and His Multiverse", The Times Literary Supplement, 8 Feb. 1974, p.121.
- (2) Letters to Henry Miller, p.85.
- (3) Up and Out, p.214; Letters to Henry Miller, p.82.
- (4) John Toft, "John Cowper Powys's Atlantis," The Powys Review, No. 3, Summer 1978, pp.32-42.
- (5) In Spite Of, p.19.
- (6) ibid., p.225.
- (7) ibid., p.278.
- (8) ibid., p.238.
- (9) G. Wilson Knight, "Powys and Death", The Contemporary Review, 227, No. 1317, Oct. 1975.
- (10) Wordsworth, "Michael", ll.9-12.
- (11) Dante, "Inferno", Canto 26, ll.79-142.
- (12) W.B. Stanford and J.V. Luce, The Quest for Ulysses (London: Phaidon, 1974), p.189.
- (13) Autobiography, p.140.
- (14) Letters to Louis Wilkinson, p.309.
- (15) E. Westacott, Roger Bacon in Life and Legend, (London: Rockliff, 1953), pp.34-5.
- (16) Letters to Henry Miller, p.75.

- (17) Letters to C. Benson Roberts, p.101.
- (18) Letters to Nicholas Ross, p.151, p.153, p.155.
- (19) *ibid.*, p.164.
- (20) Wolf Solent, p.v.
- (21) All or Nothing, p.77.
- (22) Cavaliero, p.147.
- (23) You and Me, p.22.
- (24) Two and Two, p.43.
- (25) Real Wraiths, pp.87-8.
- (26) *ibid.*, p.59.
- (27) Two and Two, p.79.

## A CONCLUSION

Powys has been hunted back into the fifth century, and into a timeless region of fantasy. It is time to bring him back with a jerk to the present day, and to ask whether his novels answer the hopes and expectations of a modern audience. Is the course of Powys's work, for the reader, really worth tracing? In short, is he an "escapist" writer? (\*).

The question can be put in an absurd way ("What did Wolf Solent do in the First World War?"), but Gerard Casey has asked it more seriously in his article "Three Christian Brothers" (1). Mr. Casey is particularly worried by "The Saturnian Quest," Powys's revival of an extinct myth which, however valid for his personal life in his Welsh eyrie, hardly appears appropriate for the modern world at large.

Rather it is entirely understandable that a certain weariness should set in in the last two decades of a long life spent in intense creative activity and that it was permissible to let go of much and tell oneself pleasant stories: stories not to be taken too seriously. Is the world of Porius an "altogether harsher world"? Rather I suspect that John Cowper remained grimly aware that the fairytale romanticism of Porius had little relevance to the realities of twentieth century history: that the death of Christ still had a word - perhaps the only word - to say to the world of Auschwitz, Dresden, Hiroshima and the Gulag Archipelago. "Creative lies" in this world savour of mockery.

(\*) As Dr. Easingwood points out in his thesis (p.441), Powys tries to give new meaning to catchwords such as "escapism". In Wolf Solent "escape" is redefined as a necessary form of psychological resistance. "Romance" and "glamour" are other words which Powys attempts to reclaim from debased usage.

- It is certainly barely credible that Powys in 1945, the year which so hideously revealed the potential for evil in human nature, should be writing in Rabelais and Porius of the imminence of an Age of Gold. Yet it is striking that George Steiner, a critic especially disturbed by modern literature's failure to cope with the horrors of its time, remains a Powys admirer.

I believe that Powys's work represents a very close engagement with the times he lived in, and that this engagement is so strong as to prove his greatest limitation.

First of all, the work is a response to twentieth century urban life. Powys may have retreated to the country to write, but before the publication of Wolf Solent stretch over twenty years of life in American cities. I do not think the importance of these years can be overestimated. Powys's experience here is unique among English novelists. In these cities, Powys was also most peculiarly exposed - itinerant, without an identification with imaginative roots, without the support of a family. He did involve himself with literary circles in New York and Chicago, but his city is not the cultured metropolis; he was equally familiar with the grime of Pennsylvania coal towns, Ohio steel towns. Nor does this industrial landscape have the ambiguous attraction of "home" felt in the novels of Lawrence. Dorothy Richardson wondered if Powys would ever write an American novel. "Do you think I'll write about it?" replied Powys, "Sideways I always must" (2). The Wessex novels are an oblique comment upon an urban milieu, upon the same landscape and society which fostered the bleak naturalism of Powys's friend Dreiser. The "philosophies of life" explored in Wolf Solent and A Glastonbury Romance are the resistances and survival techniques of a born countryman plunged into

the city. It is this urban experience which separates Powys from the Georgian amateur, with his "echoes of A Shropshire Lad and of the effort to keep the Folk going" which V.S. Pritchett feels him to be.

Powys's decision to set his novel in the country shows no hankering after pastoral. In pastoral, perennial (but largely social) aspects of human life are exhibited, purified by simple and ideal surroundings. T.F. Powys's work might be called "black pastoral". But John Cowper's natural world is simply man's most real context. There is a conviction that human life is most true alongside and part of the rest of natural creation. The "continuum" of Powys's world means that the works of man too are part of the works of nature, which is why Powys does not need to see his heroes as hermits in a wilderness, but is happy to pursue his nature-mysticism among domesticated Wessex fields. Even the Edeyrnion of Porius is inhabited and cultivated. And memorable in the cities - or in dreary Southwick - are sorry patches of vegetation and weeds.

Nevertheless, there is in the city the threat of despair, although the American cities of the Autobiography are memorable less for their despair than for Powys's resistance to them. The urban desolation in the novels - in Mundham, Bishop's Forley, Blacksod, or the "Paradise" area of Glastonbury - is strained and extreme, and I think this is because, in these towns, Powys is really describing Pittsburgh or Scranton, Pa. Although the urban threat is generally off-stage, it is essential. Angus Wilson correctly says that, in the face on the Waterloo Steps, Powys is "moving towards Malloy and Malone, towards the person who has been, so to speak, totally alienated, has been reduced to a kind of trunk" (3). It is obvious that Powys, in Wolf Solent, moves close to this kind of figure only to draw

away, and that the sickness of spirit and much-trumpeted "alienation" which haunt so much twentieth-century literature, are evaded. The successor to Wolf Solent is no starveling nouveau roman, but the monstrous A Glastonbury Romance.

T.S. Eliot's poetic career is the restoration of fertility to a waste land. So is Powys's career in the novel, and both writers draw their symbolism from the same spring. Like Eliot, Powys perceives the sources of regeneration in a religious dimension. In both writers there is a search backwards and a claim upon old cultural traditions, and both adapted these traditions to suit themselves. Both Eliot and Powys, too, came to settle in the country of their ancestors. Yet how otherwise different the two are, with Eliot's sober intensity, and Powys's waywardness. What, I feel, produced Powys's strangeness was an awareness that vanished faiths, on their return, reappear in curious and distorted forms. Hence the play and experiment of Glastonbury. In Spengler, charlatanry is a necessary prelude to faith, and in Powys charlatanry preserves the provisional character of Powys's statements until the conclusions of Porius.

In themselves, put as statements, Powys's conclusions are nothing. "The necessity of opposites", "the multiverse" and the vitality of the feminine principle belong to those truths, which are only so far true as they are expressed under a necessity of inspiration. I have attempted to describe the progressive artistic embodiment of these "mind-staggering simplicities".

These conclusions proceed from the drama of the novels, not the expositions of the treatises. "The necessity of opposites" is a bald statement which grows out of a view of human morality in Wolf

Solent and is given a provisional mystical dimension in Glastonbury and substantiated in Porius. So with the cult of the feminine principle, with its embarrassing beginning in Powys's youth, described in the Autobiography, and its altogether different intensity attained in Porius.

The preaching in a Powys novel, such as there is in Weymouth Sands and Morwyn, superfluously follows the experience of the novel's drama. Because Powys's "philosophy" is embodied in drama, he is rarely a helpful ally in theoretical debate. In his experience of the natural world, Powys shares Wordsworthian insight; like Wordsworth, he prompts ecological discussion. But this whole discussion is part of the area of life which the reader enters when he has put the novel away, an area which the novelist informs and enriches, without taking part in himself. Like much of the best literature, Powys often suggests contemporary relevance, while refusing to be fixed by it. John Brebner has written about the allegorical aspects of Porius (4), but the Porius he expounds, with its crisis of the environment and Women's Liberation, is oddly undernourished - a smaller novel than the one Powys actually wrote. Powys's literary engagement is with the temper and spirit of his age, not directly with its events.

Powys's "Golden Age" is, however, exceptionally provocative. It is principally a picture of inner, psychological peace, but is also held before the reader as a social hope. Yet it never is made present in a novel. It is as if Powys is suggesting that Golden Ages, made real, are pernicious or fraudulent, but that the community which does not possess the image of one is in an essential way atrophied. A dead myth - the classical Saturnian story - here suits Powys better than one which might find ready echo, and mis-interpretation, in the minds

of his readers. The myth of the Christian Jerusalem would have involved Powys in lengthy discrimination between his Christianity and the Christianity of the churches. The myth of Communist Utopia had been revealed by the time of the second world war as rapacious, though in 1920 Powys had invoked it at the end of The Complex Vision. With Saturn, Powys can start from scratch. He is forced, and able, to create his own image of concord.

Dr. Easingwood mentions Michael Tippet's book Moving into Aquarius as describing - quite independently - a similar view of the task of the artist to Powys's. Tippet writes of his place in a tradition "which goes back into pre-history and will go forward into the unknown future":

This tradition is to create images from the depths of the imagination and to give them form whether visual, intellectual or musical. For it is only through images that the inner world communicates at all. Images of the past, shapes of the future. Images of vigour for a decadent period, images of calm for one too violent. Images of reconciliation for worlds torn by division. And in an age of mediocrity and shattered dreams, images of abounding, generous, exuberant beauty. (5).

Here, as in Powys, art heals by balancing and correcting the world at large. Powys has the one-sidedness of such a corrective and here his thorough response to his time becomes his limitation. The ills which he attempts to redress are often just not present in the novels. Powys writes out of and advocates a philosophy of non-aggression and receptivity.

Better to watch the ceaseless ebb and flow  
Of older powers than those of human life,  
Better to grow like grass than to pretend



With all this mortal weakness that we know,  
 Amid the element's abysmal strife  
 That action is man's proper sphere and end. (6).

The matter of the novels is not as severely limited as Powys's continual "receptivity" would seem to suggest, which only shows how Powys can carry passivity and contemplation into unlikely areas of life - into business with Philip Crow, into politics and war with Owen Glendower. Powys's treatment of such men in their privacy can be fascinating. But there is very little conflict in Powys which is not solved by a sinking inwards, and he is rarely capable of aggression in the world of action. Such aggression, in fact, is confused with his ambiguous "sadism". There is inner strength in Powys, but this strength is directed towards stoical endurance, and becomes a rock-like strength in quiescence. I agree with almost every other Powys critic that prolonged immersion in the work needs to be balanced and refreshed by reading in some quite different kind of literature.

To point out Powys's one-sidedness merely indicates that he has staked out the territory of his imagination. He does this in Wolf Solent, where the novelist with the Powys-hero comes to accept his limitations. Within his own territory, Powys is unrivalled, but, despite his "world-creation", the reader does not feel that Powys's "world" is potentially co-extensive with universal experience. This is the feeling possibly implied by the word "Shakespearian", which Professor Wilson Knight and Professor Steiner use, wrongly, of Powys.

For the first time reader there is a most obvious limitation in the style. Powys has what Coleridge called a "nimiety" - a "too-muchness". Fulsomeness and elaboration stare from every page.

Powys is often accused of pretentiousness, yet "naivety" and self-confessed "ninnyism" have a deflatory function throughout the work. A pretentiousness of restrained utterance is more common today than the volubility of a Powys, whose straightforward grandiosity puts off the truly pretentious. Powys asserts that the sublime and the everyday should be intimately conjoined. Auerbach writes that Homer is removed from "the separation of styles", "which specified that the realistic depiction of everyday life was incompatible with the sublime" (7). Powys, acutely conscious of this division, almost taunts the reader of Glastonbury with a book in which this separation is healed at the most literal level. (One might contrast Powys here with Joyce, who heals "the separation of styles" in a much more elaborate and covert way). Powys in the Autobiography writes:

Many aspects of children's days are silly enough; but how often the whole course of our subsequent history becomes an attempt to regain this sorcery, this power of finding the infinitely great in the materially small! (8).

Powys's prose brazenly attempts to reclaim this sorcery.

Yet, despite Powys's genuine lyric achievement, and the ability of his writing to achieve minute effects, there can remain a conviction that in almost any given paragraph, there could be an abridgement by about ten per-cent without real loss of meaning. Powys was perhaps lucky that no editor offered him such kindness. What of course would be lost is a distinctive flavour. The integrity of Powys's style finally depends upon the inevitable indissolubility of "meaning" and "flavour". The "serpentine" convolutions of a Powys paragraph follow the "serpentine" cunning, the qualifications and hesitations in his way of dealing with life. The endless clauses

produce a sense of cautious progressive exploration, an exhaustive mapping of imaginative country. This "flavour" is indeed part of Powys's "meaning".

I have written of Powys's "magical" view of language, and his longing for the primitive power of incantation. There is a deep love of the sounds and textures of language in his fondness for talismanic "logoi" and his love of gibberish (under which category he read and enjoyed Finnegans Wake). There is a word-gluttony in his alliteration, which becomes ever more simple in the last novels:

And then he would force his spear-head soul to make a great dive out of the depths of the air into the depths of the sea, and it can well be believed how the touch, smell, taste, sight and sound of the swirling the water-spouting, the whirlpooling, the towering and lowering, the roaring and soaring, the rumbling and grumbling, of the everlasting ocean, with both its eternal motion and its eternal identity, would satisfy to the full the insane void of his unending quest: .... (9).

Here is a very simple faith in the power of language, bound up with Powys's faith in the power of literature to change lives, less in a propagandist sense, than in the sense that the experience of reading deepens and transforms the personality. That a writer has this faith should not really need saying, except that in modern times this faith appears to be both suspect and diminished. Professor Steiner's arguments in "The Retreat from the Word" need not be followed all the way. But there is an important difference between Powys and the self-doubt felt by Ionesco, quoted by Professor Steiner:

Words have killed images or are concealing them. A civilization of words is a civilization distraught. Words create confusion. Words are not the word (les mots ne sont pas la parole). ... The fact is that words say nothing, if I may put it

that way. ... There are no words for the deepest experience. The more I try to explain myself the less I understand myself. (10).

How remote Powys is from this creeping aphasia. As Professor Steiner says, the work of Joyce is another major exception: "It marshals great battalions of words, calling back to the ranks words long asleep or rusted, and recruiting new ones by stress of imaginative need" (11). But Powys is remote from this adventurousness too. Here is his true conservatism: there is no sense in his work of language cracking. Powys may be deeply aware of the lack of communication between people - particularly between lovers in the novels - but elsewhere, although what Powys is trying to express may be fugitive enough, there is an implicit belief that with the right adjective or another subordinate clause the experience will be caught, described, "named".

Powys's conservatism was conscious. His old-fashioned length, "longueurs" and all, is designed to produce a specific kind of reading experience. He wrote vigorously to Louis Wilkinson, refusing to allow the compilation of an anthology of his work,

... for the extremely obvious reason that I wouldn't lend myself to selections from my longueurs beside Theodore's far more original personality and Lulu's peculiarly perfect art of getting a scene, a situation, a place, a person, inscribed in a few sentences.

God! no! And to have an Anthology of John's Longueurs! I say No! No! No! No. (12).

Powys goes on to mention three elaborate set pieces in his novels: "Porius in the Temple of Mithras", "Odysseus in Atlantis", and Owen Evans' crucifixion.

But my point is this - such scenes, where I am at my best, are wholly unfitted for an Anthology. Why are they? Because their power & poetry & psychology and impressiveness depend on what has slowly, heavily, gradually, often rather dully, led up to them. You must remember that I am born an Inventor of Fairy Tales.

Here, of course, is self-mockery: but also a sincere critical position. Powys deliberately denies the reader speedy gratification. The size and pace of a Powys novel become an attempt by the author to draw his audience into a certain way of reading which is in accord with his patient and contemplative way of life. For a reader actually to finish a book of the weight of Porius, out of faith that such a book, so full of the activities of plants and insects, has something serious to offer, is itself a critical act of some meaning. Hence, although it is true, as Jeremy Hooker says, that Powys as a critic "virtually ignored the relationship between imagination and form" (13), in his novels the two are intimately interdependent.

It is unsurprising that the literary world of Powys's time should not have responded to his unfashionable kind of provocation. Of his own readers, Powys wrote:

I seem to write for a minority of very individual and rather odd characters who appear to be scattered through many countries - including Wales - and certainly through all classes in such countries. (14).

There has been a great deal of speculation over the reasons for Powys's neglect, which however tells us much less about Powys than the evidence of the "rather odd characters" who did read the books. Powys has collected a readership which is sometimes called a "cult". Martin Seymour-Smith writes that John Cowper and Theodore "have

become the subjects of cults" (15), thereby relegating them to the shelves of Theosophical bookshops. There has certainly existed a readership of passionate, exclusive devotion which - as in the similar cases of Peake, Tolkien, Hesse, or Henry Miller - strikes the outsider as a ridiculous phenomenon. Is Powys necessarily a "cultic" writer?

The cult has its beginnings in Powys's lectures. The descriptions of these lectures in the Autobiography are not exaggerated. There is this irresistible, anonymous contribution to New York's Little Review, from 1915:

Congratulate me: I have become enriched now with another moment of rare beatitude, of indelible radiance. I was present at the transubstantiation of Oscar Wilde, performed by John Cowper Powys.

Was it a lecture? "Most certainly", would advise me my simple friend. What a dwarfish misnomer for the solemn rite that took place in the dark temple, the "catacomb" of the Little Theatre! I close my eyes, and see once more the galvanized demi-god vibrating in the green light, invoking the Uranian Oscar. We, the worshippers, sit entranced, hypnotized, demundanized, bewitched. The sorcerer makes us feel the presence in flesh and spirit of the Assyrian half-god, half-beast, who had the moral courage of living his life actively to the full ... the lights are on; the sorcerer is gone, but we remain under the spell of the hovering spirit.

To quote Powys is as impossible as to tell a symphony. It is the How and the What and the stage background that combine in creating the inexorable charm of that experience. (16).

Although that is an extreme example, "worship" and "devotion" have been words used by readers of the novels and visitors to Corwen and Blaenau. Powys, man and writer, has exerted an uncanny magnetism which has its disconcerting, even sinister side.

Powys has similarities with other "cult" writers. Like Peake and Tolkien, he "creates his own world". Like Hesse and (in a simple sort of way) Henry Miller, his work shapes and declares a "philosophy of life". He seems to demand followers. "Cult" is a common Powys word, always used with favourable overtones. He was fascinated by the gesture of worship, whether of Goethe or "the indwelling Genius of some consecrated spot".

But this is only one side of Powys. In the novels, such gestures are made with caution. There is a consistent maintenance of contradictions, of poise. Powys's exercise of extreme care in his writing demands a similar alertness in the reader, and the Powys who has been fostered by the cult - the saintly magician and spontaneous rhapsodizer - is a much smaller writer than the Powys of reality. Even Professor Wilson Knight diminishes Glastonbury by taking its cosmology at face value. To become a "Powysian" is a poor response to Powys. It is good to remember D.H. Lawrence's stinging portrayal of a Lawrentian in Hermione Roddice.

The cult of Powys does however arise from one of his striking qualities: his intimacy. One result of Powys's containment of aesthetic "form" within the larger forces of his imagination is that the book as aesthetic object does not stand between author and reader. Powys speaks with a peculiarly personal voice; the reader may respond with enthusiasm or with embarrassment, for this intimacy is not always a comfortable experience.

In the increasing attention now paid to Powys, many of what were once his disqualifications can be considered virtues. His "occultism" turns out to be of a mature kind, purged of premature

dogmatism. His own kind of "immaturity" - his sympathy with what Glen Cavaliero calls "the child within the man" - is no longer worrying to a generation which has ceased to be frightened by Freud. His interest in "outcast" characters is more acceptable, now that a certain Victorian social centrality is no longer expected of the novel. His independence from the fashions of his time earns respect.

Critics of various prescriptive turns of mind will be disappointed by him. He offers virtually nothing to Marxists. Powys frequently quotes a phrase of Coleridge's that "each writer creates the taste by which he is appreciated"; this is certainly true of himself. George Steiner is worried by the difficulty of estimating his final literary stature: he eludes "placement", (17). It is not the only area where Powys is evasive. But if he refuses "placement" this is no bad thing, because a writer who has been finally "placed" has lost something of his power to disturb and astonish.

Halle (Saale), December, 1979.



## Notes

- (1) Gerard Casey, "Three Christian Brothers", The Powys Review, No. 4, Winter/Spring 1978/9, pp. 14-20.
- (2) Letter to Dorothy Richardson, 19 January 1930, MS Yale.
- (3) Angus Wilson, "John Cowper Powys as a Novelist", The Powys Review No. 1, Spring 1977, p.17.
- (4) John Brebner, The Demon Within (London: Macdonald, 1973), p.188.
- (5) Michael Tippett, Moving Into Aquarius (London: Paladin 1974) p.156.
- (6) Poems, 1899, p.82.
- (7) Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, p.22.
- (8) Autobiography, pp.1-2.
- (9) The Brazen Head, p.54.
- (10) George Steiner, Language and Silence (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), p.74.
- (11) *ibid.*, p.52.
- (12) The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, p.371.
- (13) Jeremy Hooker, John Cowper Powys and David Jones (London: Enitharmon Press, 1979), p.12.
- (14) Obstinate Cymric, p.133.
- (15) Martin Seymour-Smith, Guide to Modern World Literature, p.202.
- (16) Anon., in Little Review, 1, No.11, February 1915, pp.33-5.
- (17) George Steiner, "The Problem of Powys", The Times Literary Supplement, 16 May 1975, p.541.

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