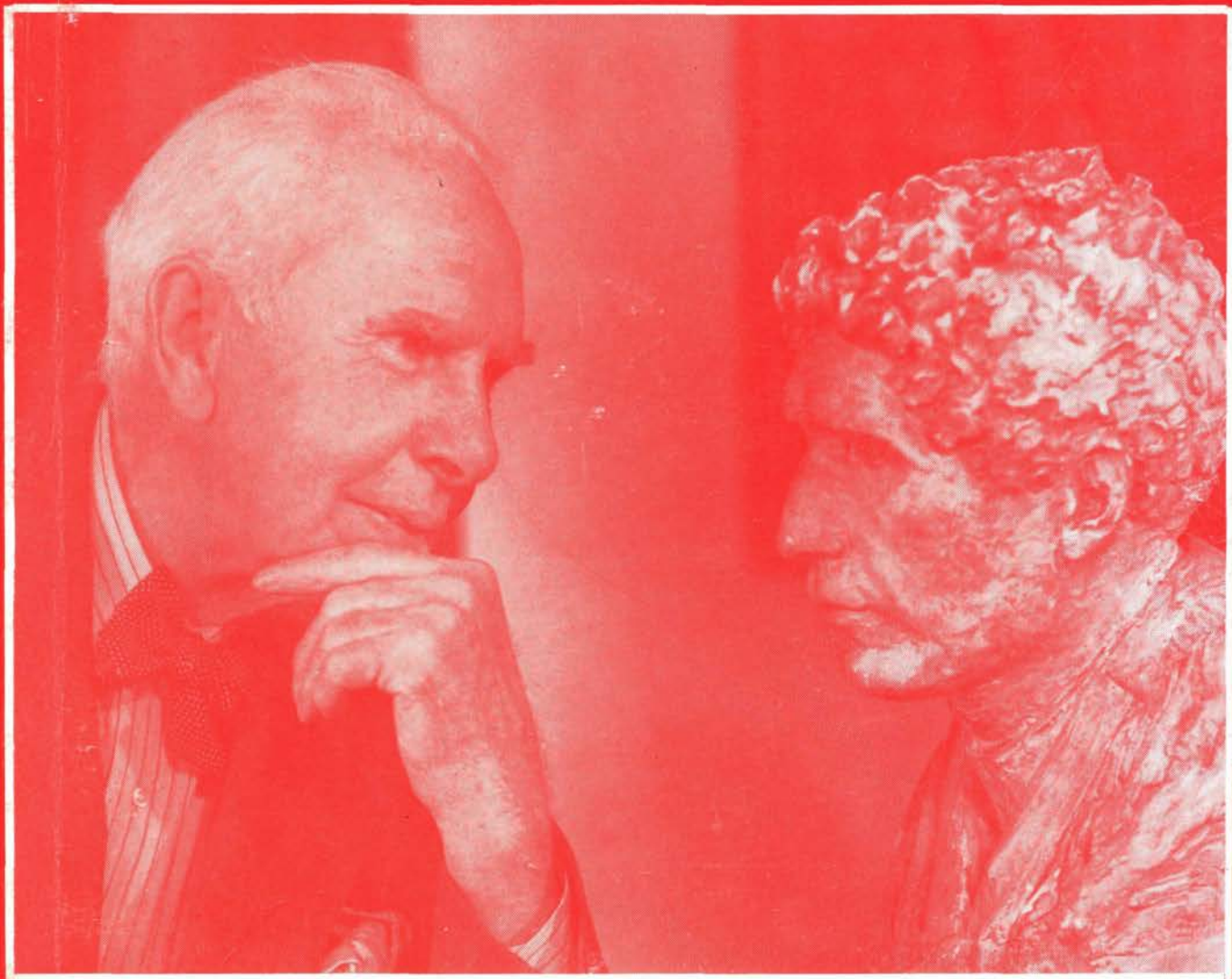


The Powys Review

NUMBER SIX



JOHN COWPER POWYS & THE MAGICAL QUEST

Morine Krissdottir

This lucid, scholarly and fascinating study of John Cowper Powys's 'visionary' novels examines them from a totally new angle. It demonstrates to what a major extent they were the outcome of his personal philosophy and how much that, in turn, drew on his exceptionally catholic reading in legend, myth and occult lore.

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Editorial

John Cowper Powys's years in America, 1905 to 1934, are still largely undocumented. This appears to be a matter for regret, though some will always consider that Powys's own vigorous renderings of his American experience within the final three chapters of his *Autobiography* (1934) are all the revelation we need. The gap in our knowledge has been narrowed by the publication of the late Malcolm Elwin's edition of *Letters to his Brother Llewelyn, 1902-1925* in 1975, since when Powys scholars and readers have been anxious to receive the second volume from the Village Press. Some information, directed towards the writings rather than the life, was given in a selection of extracts from John Cowper's letters to his brother Littleton of 1927 to 1934 (in an appendix to *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, University of Wales Press, 1972), indicating how informative will be the eventual publication of a selection (Powys is repetitive in letters!) from the complete collection to that brother. With these and Alistair Tilson's edition of the letters to Theodore Powys, now in progress, we should have at least a narrative of John Cowper Powys's "thirty years of train-life and hotel-life" and other life in all but two of the American states. (Some future biographer may be busily employed in tracing the newspaper and other records of those thirty years of itinerant lecturing.)

The two short essays about America contributed by Powys to American periodicals, thus for an American readership, and now reprinted in this *Review*, were published in 1927 and 1935, that is, towards the end and after his time there. They have been selected from his three known descriptive essays about America because they survey his own total experience of that country. (The third essay, "The American Scene and Character: A Resident Alien to Alien Critics", published in *Century*, December

1927, though based on personal recollection, is more an objective comparison of the merits and faults of American and European people.) The first essay, "Elusive America", March 1927, begins with an account of what Powys expected to find in America, envisaged in a Liverpool coffee shop as he listened to Sousa's "Stars and Stripes" and awaited his first voyage across the Atlantic. It is, of course, with this memory that he later was to begin the "America" chapter of *Autobiography*, only to pursue it very differently. The essay describes his twenty years' search for some real approximation to his imaginary America. "Farewell to America", of April 1935, postdates the *Autobiography*, apparently written after his final departure and during his year's residence in Dorset before his retirement to Wales in the summer of 1935. It gives a concentrated and completely retrospective analysis of the effects of America upon him, an expansion of his reference to the "improvement in (his) character" a few pages from the end of *Autobiography*, but again different and much more outward-looking.

In "Farewell to America" Powys refers to his close friends, Theodore Dreiser and Edgar Lee Masters, as "the greatest novelist and the greatest poet of America today" and in *Autobiography* they appear as "the two greatest Americans of our time". Brilliant personal portraits of them are given in the early part of "The War" chapter of *Autobiography*, and he lectured and published on the works of both. But Dreiser appears to have been the most important giant among Powys's friends: this number of the *Review* is given to him. In *Autobiography* (beginning, "Dreiser and I are both Magicians"), Powys himself provides a vivid analysis of the similarities and differences between himself and Dreiser, based on the image of the wrestling "game of wrists" which they often enjoyed

(to the discomfort of the spectator, according to Miss Phyllis Playter), neither making "the other kneel".

Dreiser was only a year older than Powys, but he reached his height as a novelist years before Powys. They first met in October 1914 (John's letter to Llewelyn about this is more enthusiastic and illuminating than the retrospective description in *Autobiography*). This was only a few days before Powys's first prose work, *The War and Culture (The Menace of German Culture)*, was published, his first book of critical essays, *Visions and Revisions*, and his first novel, *Wood and Stone*, appearing in the February and November of 1915. By the time of their first meeting, Dreiser had already published *Sister Carrie*, *Jennie Gerhardt*, *The Financier* and *The Titan*. Powys's review of Dreiser's semi-autobiographical novel, *The 'Genius'*, in November 1915 appeared only a month after that novel's publication, curiously already defensive. (The publisher withdrew the book from the market in 1916, after the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice banned it as immoral.) Powys published his third novel, *Ducdame*, early in 1925, the year of Dreiser's completion and publication of his hugely successful *An American Tragedy*, and his own success as a novelist came when Dreiser's reputation and inclination to write prose fiction were declining.

Perhaps sometime someone will write a detailed study of the interaction of the two novelists, but from a surface view their friendship does not seem to have been influential in any way on their fictional works. Apart from their important, shared concern for the poor and oppressed (in which, of course, Powys's interest in the structure of American society seems flimsy compared with Dreiser's involved, intense documentation), their manner of life and views seem very different (to begin, one has only to oppose *War and Culture* with Dreiser's pro-Germanism). But, no doubt, their friendship was important as a balance (the fault of our cover photograph, ordered by Dreiser (see page 21), is the difference in head sizes), for the comfort of knowing another literary genius, and for the stimulation of difference: the latter was one of the gifts which America itself gave to the alien John Cowper Powys. It is John Cowper Powys as an affectionate critic of America and Dreiser who concerns us in this *Review*. With gratefulness for the various generous help of Mr Jeffrey Kwintner, Mr Gerald Pollinger and Ms Marguerite Tjader in providing texts and photographs, we are able to include some of Powys's criticisms of Dreiser's work which cover the thirty years of their friendship, that is from the review of *The 'Genius'* to the Introduction to *Notes on Life* written in the year after Dreiser's death in 1945.

Peter Easingwood

John Cowper Powys and America

Judging by Powys's comments in the *Autobiography*, America played a large part in his development. In fact it is necessary to consider Powys's experience there to understand the point of view from which most of his best work stems. It was in America that he first became known to a wide audience, and it was rather through his lectures than through his books. This affected his whole subsequent literary career and the way he saw himself as an author.

Powys first lectured in America in 1905, and soon made it his main commitment.¹ His previous lecturing work for the University Extension authorities in England had been more than competent, and had covered a wide range of English literature, with special emphasis on Shakespeare and the nineteenth century. The two volumes of verse he published in the eighteen nineties suggest a variety of influences, not fully absorbed: Hardy and Yeats stand in the foreground, but Poe, the Pre-Raphaelite poets, and even Meredith, whom Powys never particularly admired, seem close at hand. The unpublished work on Keats possibly represents his most significant imaginative investment at the time, since Powys's development was also in so large a part to depend directly on his appreciation of classic authors. However, his letters to Louis Wilkinson and Llewelyn Powys show that he had radical doubts about his literary future, and this period of doubt and readjustment leads towards the later fulfilment of his style and vision in America.

Powys recalls that, when he set out for America, he felt "devoid of any conviction in religion, morality, politics, aesthetics and all philosophical problems", and

uncertain about what he could reveal to "these far-off hordes of 'articulate-speaking' Americans" (A 440). His response to this challenge is best embodied in the *Autobiography*, which reaches a close with his retirement in America, as he contemplates returning home for good. This and other records suggest that Powys made a remarkable impression in America. Often he felt that his life there had become merely an arduous, self-imposed task which cut him off from older and dearer associations. But this participation in the American scene determined the strength of the *Autobiography* and of the other main writings which flow from the same creative effort.

The problems of exile and return were to



become familiar to a later generation of American writers. But Powys hardly seems to follow in the path of any generation, and his experience of exile is unique. He first made his acquaintance with the America of the Progressive Era, the "confident years" of Van Wyck Brooks. His position in relation to American cultural life can be judged by the fact that to Theodore Dreiser, who was "often beyond friendship" as F. O. Matthiessen observes, Powys became "the friend he valued most steadily through the years"; and he was to become one of the early defenders of Dreiser's fiction. In the *Autobiography* Powys is surprisingly reticent about some of the persons and places he knew: Isadora Duncan, Edward Arlington Robinson, Edgar Lee Masters, the Chicago Little Theatre, Greenwich Village. What emerges most strongly from his account of these years is rather the lonely intensity of his commitment to travelling and lecturing over the length and breadth of the United States. His writings reveal that, in response to the reality of America, he found it necessary to develop certain inner resources. These essentially represent the conditions of an exile which was to lead to such a strange, hybrid literary production as *A Glastonbury Romance*.

Gertrude Stein speaks, in *Paris, France*, of every writer's need to have two countries, one being wholly or partly in the imagination. Some such imaginative transaction seems to have been necessary to Powys, quite apart from the practical reasons he had for choosing to work in America. The change was vital to him, as the *Autobiography* demonstrates. Its most pronounced effect was to confirm and develop in him a habit of consciousness which opposed contemporary reality with an inner world of its own creation. The energy of Powys's writing was always to depend on his cultivating a certain imaginative remoteness. At the same time, his chosen career could not but make him feel acutely the tension between his imaginative pursuits and ordinary experience.

Powys became a critic of American society, though his vision was eccentric. He describes environments which produce a kind of nausea found also in Dreiser, Dos Passos and Thomas Wolfe. This is the "American horror": an intangible but very real source of dread which seems to characterise a phase of American civilization (*A* 577-79). Powys connects these feelings, in retrospect, with the War. He was not a pacifist, however; when horrors of any description presented themselves it was in his nature to take sides, and his hope for social change inclined him to accept both World Wars as necessary. Sometimes he directly confronted social issues, as when he spoke in defence of the imprisoned socialist labour leader Eugene Debs. He was capable of deliberately antagonizing a fashionable audience. He says that he preferred proletarian audiences, and especially those made up of Jewish, Catholic or Communist minorities. Above all, he identified himself with all outcasts needing protection from "the brutality of the normal" (*A* 516). Before such audiences as this he tested his confidence in the appeal of great literature. For example, he came to feel that lecturing on Dostoevsky, whom he first read in Vizetelly's translation on one of his early transatlantic crossings (*A* 445-6), was a special kind of obligation. The Russians, he believed, "broke up the rural simplicity of American taste at the turn of the century", before it had been affected by such native influences as Dreiser or Mencken (*A* 511). Powys's sense of obligation was even more specific, however. Dostoevsky, he argues in *Visions and Revisions* (1915), "reveals just what one hugged most closely of all—just what one did *not* confess!" (*VR* 182) The reader of Dostoevsky experiences a "curious nervous relief" from his books: "They relieve us, as well as trouble us, because in these pages we all confess what we have never confessed to anyone" (*VR* 184). The aims of these lectures, therefore, were dramatic and therapeutic:

I began to grow aware as I went about this

continent that I was really performing a definite rôle in America, a rôle where I had no rival. I mean I was attracting to myself like a magnet all the neurotic unhappy ones, all the lonely ones, all the *misfits*, in the whole country. I became the acknowledged enemy, and I hope I shall always remain so, of all the well-constituted and successful, as these opposed themselves to the failures and the abjects and the ill-adjusted. (A 500)

This imaginative identification with the rejected explains much of the unorthodox fascination of Powys's lectures as described by Henry Miller and others. Miller first heard Powys at one of his Labour Temple lectures, on Second Avenue in New York, and immediately found his sympathies engaged: "All the authors I was then passionate about were the authors he was writing and lecturing about. He was like an oracle to me".³ Powys himself seriously considered, looking back, that he had achieved something extraordinary in his lectures: "a thing in the history of the platform—if not of the stage—that will not soon occur again" (A 450). He had found a method of interpretation which enabled him to communicate with a vast audience—the audience that Whitman had imagined for himself—about literature and the life of the imagination.

Powys's mental dialogue with Whitman was intensive: essays on him appear both in *Visions and Revisions* and *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938), and his name is likely to recur wherever Powys reviews his main literary sources of inspiration. The points of attraction and correspondence are numerous. Powys admired Whitman for his firm democratic emphasis; for the pluralistic outlook revealed in his poetry, to which William James, another favourite author, also responded; for his optimism, so unlike Browning's: "It is the optimism of a person who has seen the American Civil War. It is the optimism of a man who knows 'the Bowery', and 'the road', and has had queer friends in his mortal pilgrimage" (VR 210). There are certainly moods in Whitman which invite an easy-going, loose-knit companionship. But

Powys valued Whitman essentially for the more reserved and enigmatic qualities of *Leaves of Grass*. In his earlier essay he stresses that it is upon the poetry itself, rather than the public image of the man, that we must concentrate. His own appreciation of the structure and texture of Whitman's verse is quite close and exacting, and one of the most interesting points in his relation to America is that he is so capable of adopting Whitman's angle of vision.

To say this is to raise questions about Powys's style of appreciation, since his essays are often idiosyncratic. In both essays there are long passages evoking the atmosphere of Whitman which run the risk of looking like pseudo-poetry in themselves. The essay in *The Pleasures of Literature* begins with a discourse on the "multiverse" as conceived by Whitman and William James, and this has all the danger signs of digression and irrelevance. Still, I think, there is unusual force and concentration in Powys's regard for his subject. The following passage, for example, illustrates two closely-related qualities of Whitman's verse at its best: the way in which it has the power of redeeming what are apparently the least auspicious aspects of humanity and nature; and the way in which the coarsest material facts of existence are forced to yield the suggestion of endless possibilities in life:

... we learn from him how to let our human ego flow forth like a disembodied vapour through the heaps of grey stones and dusty weeds, through the disordered scatterings of wayside rubble, through the rain-soaked palings and broken shards, through the tidal drift and flotsam; in fact, through all those backwaters of matter that he loves to call the 'measureless float'. He can isolate when he wants to—who better? the lilac in the doorway, the lonely bird in the sea-swamp, the solitary star above the horizon; but what he prefers to concentrate upon are the things neglected by other poets, the things that have hitherto seemed in their essential nature to be the extreme *opposite* of the poetic. And he loves to see these casuals and castaways and

transients of the workshop of life thrown accidentally together in large, loose, vague heaps and neutral accumulations; for not a bank of them, not a murky pool of them, but sinks down and away, into other dimensions of mystic being,

Melange, my own, the seen and the unseen,
Mysterious ocean, where the streams
empty! (PL 461)

From Whitman Powys learned the expressive power of even the most blank and negative of American appearances. Powys obviously feels especially close to Whitman at such points, and can also enjoy the variety of experience represented in Whitman's poetry. Yet in this Powys never loses his own identity: his freedom of expression, the independence of his enjoyment of Whitman, is not really in question. One feels that he has adequately measured his own indebtedness in this case, as well as in the case of other favourite authors. The intimacy with Whitman is certainly a response to the subtlest appeal that Whitman makes to his reader, and perhaps Powys even approximates to the ideal reader whom Whitman himself envisages. But behind all Powys's comments on Whitman lies a personal tension which we learn to recognise.

Such a case of literary influence as his relationship with Whitman is essential to Powys's development and whole way of thought, yet it also evades discussion. Powys's impressions of the American scene are more deeply coloured by Whitman than by any other influence, but such allusions as occur in the *Autobiography* are of fleeting intensity. A passing reference like the one at the beginning of the penultimate chapter of the *Autobiography* is more crucial than at first sight it may appear. Powys broods again for a moment on the subject of Whitman's optimism, and reaffirms his confidence at least provisionally:

... I confess much of his hope—that 'Larger Hope' that Llewelyn always laughs at—seems

to me too good to be true. But *it is what I like*—that universal host of sentient entities, all possessed of immortal souls, all struggling unconquerably with the obstacles of matter, all following, not 'One God', but 'after the Great Companions'! (A 542)

The Introduction (1955) to *Visions and Revisions*, and the Introduction and Conclusion to *The Pleasures of Literature*, show how such an author could become for Powys a way of taking life, part of the drama of his own consciousness. The ability to use literary sources with such a deliberate personal emphasis is one of his finest gifts. With Whitman in particular he learned to enjoy an imaginative companionship which opened him to the experience of America, and positively helped him to find a footing there.

The kind of consciousness revealed in the last three chapters of the *Autobiography* shows how the American years were decisive in Powys's life. He describes himself still as a man with problems of mental adjustment, the ironies of which are by this stage in the book well appreciated by readers who have responded sympathetically to the humour and ruthless intensity of his previous self-analysis. It is even possible to see him as representative of twentieth century Western man in his struggle against the forces of madness which he acknowledges within himself. Resemblances between Powys's imaginative preoccupations and Jung's psychological theories have been pointed out,⁴ and Powys himself was not unwilling to recognize this affinity. Certainly we gather, from the wide insight Powys commands into psychological and religious matters, that his time in America proved a harrowing experience. Though he chose to have nothing to do with the forms of psychoanalysis which became available during his lifetime, Powys endlessly debated and fought within himself over the sadistic nature of his own uncensored imaginings. His confession of the vice of sadism has generally been considered exaggerated and absurd: it involves the usual minor misdemeanours in childhood,

and, later, morbid fancies of a carefully unspecified kind. Yet this insistence on facing the worst of himself, including the humiliating and petty things, is one of his strengths. The same strain of feeling applies in his interpretations of Dostoevsky and Edgar Allan Poe, where he seems intuitively sure of his ground and in touch with underlying desires and sensations. If Powys appears unbalanced on the subject of sadism it is because his scruples are excessive; his sensitivity may seem, to the reader convinced of his own normality, merely morbid. Nevertheless the dread of communicating anything infectious or damaging from this darker part of himself exercised his conscience for years, and it became the one point of honour with him never to do so. Eventually he was able, in America, to transform this horror, the implications of which are more far-reaching than one might immediately think, into a more benign condition. Even so, he knew his mind to be capable of being "hurt, and raped, as you might put it, by its own *accidental thoughts*" (A 633).

In his lectures Powys was able to organise and dramatize his own deeper feelings, and thus be of help to others. The last three chapters of the *Autobiography* describe the typical composition of his American audiences, the kind of contact he believes he made with them, and his frequent journeys across the United States. In this career Powys was fulfilling an ideal. Whitman himself had earnestly considered this possibility, though he was never to travel or lecture so extensively.⁵ It was quite in accordance with the ideal that Powys, since he was not invited to the principal academic institutions, came to feel at home as an interpreter of classic literature equally in the Cooper Union, New York, and in remote midwestern and western communities. He felt uniquely in touch with the repressed longings and anxious cares of individuals likely to hear him, and always the thought of the cruelties instituted by society is ready to attach itself to his reminiscences. The charms of old New Orleans, for example, are compromised by this:

It would sound more appropriate in this chronicle of my life if I could assure you that I always left New Orleans with reluctance. But the truth is I always left it with alacrity and relief! Why was this? Well! I will tell you. To me to whom the worst devils that dwell in mortal nerves are not unknown it was enough to hear one single story of *what was possible* where the institution of slavery was unchallenged, to make me feel I were better in Kansas City, in Denver, in Des Moines, in Omaha, than in this lovely hot-house of ambiguous legends. (A 519-20)

Some of the other places he describes in the same passage are more like the American Arcadia he sometimes seems to be searching for, but he is never wholly at rest. Like Whitman, whom he criticises most uncompromisingly on this point, he is determined to articulate the problem of good and evil, but he differs from Whitman in respect of the latter's unquenchable optimism and "his telluric celebration of the evil along with the good" (PL 472). Beneath Powys's optimism and his view of the therapeutic value of culture lies a strong sense of irremediable suffering.

The same undercurrents of feeling are present in the philosophical writings which are the product of the lecturing years. *A Philosophy of Solitude* (1933) represents a more generous and carefully organized extension of Powys's vision than the perhaps more widely known *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930). Chapter headings such as "The Self Isolated", "The Self Realized", or "The Self at Bay" recall the defensive position taken up in *In Defence of Sensuality*, but the theme of solitude expands in the "Contents" to cover "Rousseau and the Voluptuousness of solitude", "the elementalism of Wordsworth", and a variety of other topics, including the wisdom of Laotze, which seems to remind one that the original context is American not English. The Introduction specifically refers to the American setting in which the book is written. In a land where "the Megalopolitan temper assert[s] itself to the limit" (DS 8), Powys also finds "a nature unhumanised, virginal, prehistoric" (DS

12). This region of "elemental events", to which he had in fact by that time retired to write, was once the territory of the Mohawks. Powys pointedly contrasts the nomadic culture of this tribe with that of "these Pueblo tribes so dear to D. H. Lawrence". Again, perhaps a distrust of the Lawrence of *The Plumed Serpent* is evident when in the *Autobiography* he writes: "when it comes to Indians I prefer heroes who worship, as my father taught me to do, a Great Spirit whose breath bloweth like the wind, to artistic tribes who worship Quetzacoatl and his feathery snake" (A 548). The observation is humorous and sceptical, but it connects with the visionary aspect of Powys's own work. Although their views on the actual New World are often widely different, both Lawrence and Powys entertained the idea of the New World as one of the most powerful impulses of their writings.⁶ *Rabelais* is the book in which Powys enlarges most fully on the nature of this imaginative quest, bringing together Rabelais, Whitman, William James, and other authors in order to illustrate his view of the destiny of Western civilisation. The idea of "a world built upon a different plan" (PL 660) is quite central to other works, and forms the basis of his fiction in its major phase. This Utopian idealism naturally emerged strongly during the course of his American experience, if only to come into conflict with it. His social thought is much weaker than his social conscience, and Powys usually only prescribes for the individual who wishes to try to create for himself a new imaginative environment. But sometimes a prophetic and apocalyptic, albeit ironic, strain enters his writings, and he is deeply roused:

The cruelty of the Southerners—and by no means only of what are called White Trash—to this noble race, I must leave to the Jesus Christ of Michael Angelo's Judgement, that Jesus whose coming these Africans themselves await with such passionate and perhaps not ineffective faith. I always think of that Christ with His hand raised to smite as being the Judge—and a Jewish one too!—before whom these cruel devils will one

day have to stand. Meanwhile these Americanized Africans, the only imaginative Christians left on earth, except for a few far scattered Catholics, 'go *inching along*, like the pore inch-worm, waiting for Jesus to come!'

He will come, my friends. *He will come*. I found *that* out during those fifteen years of travelling in American trains and staying in American hotels . . . How this black race did redeem humanity for me as I moved about their adopted home! (A 508)

With Powys, a literal response to the New World and the dream of a New World still remained close, despite his harshest impressions. They are closest together during the time of his residence, just referred to, in Upstate New York.

The final chapter of the *Autobiography*, "There's a Mohawk in the Sky", represents the most crucial phase of all in Powys's imaginative life, and his most concentrated deliberation on the theme of the New World in relation to his own happiness and self-fulfilment. Forced to be at variance with the self of the past in so many of the earlier parts of the book, Powys is now more able to reconcile the conflicting elements of his character in view of the broad aims and satisfactions of his life so far. He sees this chosen area of Upstate New York as satisfying a very deep craving for a particular kind of landscape and way of life. This is linked with the genesis of the major fiction from *Wolf Solent* onwards. The time of his stay at Phudd Bottom exactly coincides with the extraordinary renewal of creative energy in writing which makes retirement and old age his most prolific and ambitious period.

More than ever, at this point, the American scene challenges Powys to a renewed activity of the imagination. His appraisal of particular aspects of the surrounding landscape is, even for him, unusually scrupulous and exacting. He describes how all these little observations fit in with the rhythm of his daily life. As far as walking, that symbolic activity and most characteristic exercise, is concerned he enjoys new freedom:

I can walk in this region if I can overcome the physical obstacles, in any direction, all round the compass! And my neighbours don't get in the least annoyed when they see me forcing myself over or under their fences. For the first time in my life I could, starting from my own door-step, walk on my two feet *wherever I pleased*. (A 622)

The relief of this, and the significance of the statement, can be measured by the amount of nervous energy the fictional hero Wolf Solent puts into his exploratory walks, or by Powys's accounts of his own habit of going on arduous walks in the places where he stopped to lecture. In Wordsworthian fashion, Powys is keenly aware of the physical basis of all his perceptions, and a connoisseur of the kinds of imaginative pleasure which belong to a special place and time. It is on the evocation of landscape, more than anything else, that his novels always depend.

The picture at Phudd Bottom is not completely Arcadian, however. In another context Powys spoke of the "stoicism" he acquired in America, and even acknowledged a debt to the realism of Dreiser and Masters, by whom, he declared, "my imaginative weakness has always been strengthened and hardened".⁷ He clearly recognized the realism of Dreiser in particular as a powerful analysis of American conditions, though it hardly coincided with his own aims and methods in fiction. It is a strange thought that *A Glastonbury Romance* was written at Phudd Bottom, stranger still that *Wolf Solent* was written while travelling on American trains. Powys saw the same America as Dreiser, responded generously to Dreiser as a man and as an author, but devoted himself to subjects which have less and less to do with realism, with America, or with the twentieth century. Nevertheless, there is in the *Autobiography* little sign of the "imaginative weakness" of which he is prepared to accuse himself. The retreat to Phudd Bottom intensifies his concern that "as St. Paul says . . . 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together'" (A 464). In the fiction, the realization of

this fellowship of suffering brings Powys closer to Hardy than to Dreiser: "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!"⁸ But in some way Powys saw all his creative efforts as an attempt to redeem this underlying misery, and perhaps his strongest insights arise from this tension in his work.

The peace of mind gained at Phudd Bottom is therefore hard-won and precarious. Images of trial and suffering are as central to the experience which the *Autobiography* conveys as metaphors drawn from the stage. Yet Powys also has the sense of having reached a vantage point in his career. This is indicated near the end by an often quoted but tortuous metaphor, which seems distantly to evoke both the presiding spirit of the author of *The Last of the Mohicans* and the Stonehenge scene in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*: "But now when from this resting-place, this ledge, this slab of stone, in the wavering Indian trail of my migrations and reversions, 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*" (A 652). The sentence certainly reflects the unusual and highly composite shape of his career and education in life so far. It all seemed very curious to Powys at least.

The old territory of the Mohawks, with its powerful elemental appeal, and the congenial character of the more recent Dutch settlements, provides Powys with a landscape with approaches the ideal in his meditations. The close-knit texture of his thought reveals above all a commitment to "that poetic sense of *human continuity*, of the generations following each other in slow religious succession, which is what the mind pines for, if it is to feel the full sense of its mortal inheritance" (A 617). It is the commitment which generates the structures of landscape and feeling in the novels from *Wolf Solent* to *Porius*. In the

Autobiography these preoccupations emerge with Wordsworthian deliberation and intensity. Powys considers the wild flowers of the locality as they appear in their seasonal order; specifies the requirements which, like Nietzsche, he makes of the soil and rock formation of an ideal dwelling place; adopts Wordsworth's practice of giving names to places; and establishes connexions with all kinds of natural phenomena.

The mood of the chapter is deeply coloured by the memory of his father, still the touchstone against which he tests his own values. Recollections of England break into the American landscape with emotional force. The constant re-ordering of impressions originates from deep within:

The country here has the very look of the old romances that I love best. Those who love tapestry say its hills offer the same enchanted vistas as did the mediaeval backgrounds to the castles of the Gothic North. It is more like England, this district of upper New York, than any landscape I have yet seen in the whole of America. It is like Shropshire. It even makes me think of my native Derbyshire. Thus has the wheel come full circle and I am at Shirley again! (A 617)

Believing that "I certainly have realized my identity in these New York hills", he wholly accepts this impulse from within, even though "there are always risks of one sort or another when people let themselves go to the limit in the attempt to be themselves" (A 629). Nowhere is he more frank about himself, his imaginative pursuits, and the difficulty of reconciling these with ordinary experience. Yet he still feels, at this late stage, that he has a large imaginative territory left to explore. The chapter is a turning point and a revelation: a crisis centred on American soil and arising from American experience.

Powys is characteristically an exile, both in fact and in imagination, and the fruits of this can be seen in his writings. His is a strange condition, and its strangeness is sometimes surprisingly overlooked. Powys himself contributed some notes on the im-

portance of his exile as a condition of writing.⁹ But the whole subject remains difficult to investigate. One reason for this is the scarcity of biographical information about this, the most active period of Powys's life. Another reason is that there is a current tendency to try and naturalise Powys: to see him primarily as a Wessex novelist following Hardy; or, after his move to Wales, as an Anglo-Welsh writer. Yet, while Powys's own sense of tradition is strong in so many directions, it is not easy, nor desirable, to assimilate him to any single tradition. He is an author of unusual range and power; he is also, crucially, an author who helps his readers to recognize and adjust to the facts of cultural dislocation, the absence of continuity, in their own lives. In the *Autobiography* this is the lesson he teaches from his own experience. Here and elsewhere throughout his writings one finds unusually wide human sympathies combined with a view of culture which always stresses the need for variety rather than uniformity of taste. He constantly emphasises "the cultured person's innate predilection for combining extreme opposites in his thought and taste".¹⁰ Powys's opportunity to devote himself to enjoying and writing about a rooted attachment to any particular place comes late. His principal essays on culture, *The Meaning of Culture* and *A Philosophy of Solitude*, are worked out against the background of what Whitman called "the open road", and he speaks unashamedly of providing for "our present-day hand-to-mouth occasions" (PL 659).

We can see from this American background, as Powys describes it in the *Autobiography*, how his theory of culture came to make such a large allowance for the isolation and despair of the individual in modern society. He addressed himself especially to those in his audiences who understood or suffered from such feelings. And the Powys who returns to England from America is himself a figure not only, as is often said, quite alien to modern British literature, but more deeply alienated from contemporary life. One im-

mediately senses this from the novels, from their peculiarities of tone and setting. The reader feels the shock of the encounter with Powys's heavily subjective emphasis, through a strangeness of atmosphere which does not correspond with accepted reality. Increasingly, from *Wolf Solent* (1929) to *Maiden Castle* (1936), what we know as reality is displaced by an imaginative vision. The Welsh novels *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius* (1951), for all their careful historical documentation, are still more the product of a mind essentially given to introspection and fantasy. Powys chooses to distance himself from contemporary society; deliberately sets himself in opposition to it.

Through the grey-green world of *Wolf Solent*, the landscape of which relates so closely to that of Powys's youth as described in the *Autobiography*, and through the Dark Age forest of *Porius*, where Powys was treating a landscape he could see from his Corwen door-step in North Wales, we ex-

plore the possibility of an imaginative retreat from present reality. We are confronted by an alternative world, or an alternative way of looking at things. The invitation made to the reader by this tense and exploratory form of fiction, which Powys prefers to call "romance", is really an extension of ideas about culture and the pleasures of literature which he expresses in other books: ". . . 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" (A 642). This fictional development has a counterpart in the "Mohawk" chapter of the *Autobiography*, which incorporates not only the visionary landscape, but the grim struggle between good and evil in nature, and the ultimate conviction that the powers of evil are fighting a losing battle. It is in America that this imaginative quest takes shape, though eventually it brings Powys home.

Notes

My abbreviations within the text refer to the following London editions.

A *Autobiography*, 1934.

VR *Visions and Revisions*, new ed., 1955.

PL *The Pleasures of Literature*, 2nd ed., 1946.

DS *In Defence of Sensuality*, 1930.

¹Derek Langridge, *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement*, 1966, provides some information on Powys's activities as a lecturer.

²*Theodore Dreiser*, Westport, Connecticut, 1976, pp. 171-172.

³*The Books in My Life*, London, 1974, p. 135.

⁴See *Autobiography*, A New Edition with an Introduction by J. B. Priestley, London, 1967, p. xiii,

where Priestley makes the connexion between Powys and Jung.

⁵On Whitman's position see F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, New York, 1941, Book Four, Chapter XIII, 3 "Oratory".

⁶See David Cavitch, *D. H. Lawrence and the New World*, New York, 1969.

⁷See Langridge, p. 136. He quotes from "Farewell to America", *Scribner's Magazine*, 98, 1935, pp. 210-207.

⁸*Wolf Solent*, 1929, p. 11.

⁹Preface to *Wolf Solent*, 1961.

¹⁰*The Meaning of Culture*, 1930, p. 19.

Marguerite Tjader

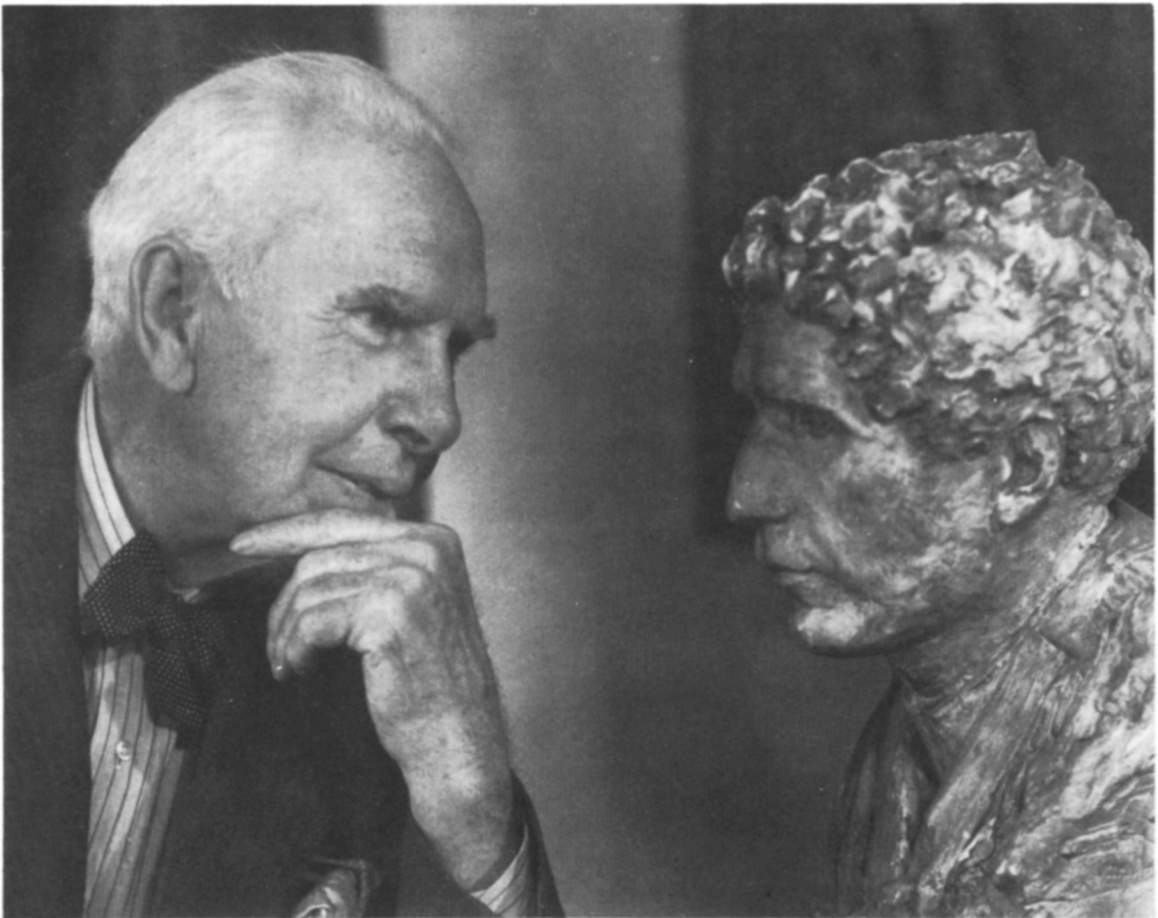
John Cowper Powys and Theodore Dreiser: A Friendship

It has been my privilege to observe the friendship between these great men who, by affinity of mind and spirit, stimulated and gave joy to one another.

Powys first met Dreiser when he was in New York in 1914, to lecture on literary figures. In a letter to the critic Mencken in Philadelphia, dated November 3, 1914, Dreiser says: "I am told that one, John Cowper Powis, an Englishman is to lecture on me there next week—also here and in

Chicago."¹ (Dreiser did not even know how to spell Powys's name, at the time.)

Soon after this time Dreiser was being berated in the press because of his novel, *The 'Genius'* and Powys had come to his defence, declaring that he had encountered no other American writer like him. After this, they exchanged letters, and later, in a letter to Arthur Davison Ficke, dated Nov. 29, 1915, Dreiser writes: "Powys is here. Because of your early attack on my style I



went to hear him lecture on Walter Pater. He humbled me completely of course."

Soon afterwards, Dreiser and Powys became good friends. Again, in a letter to Mencken, dated Sept. 23, 1916, Dreiser tells that Powys was helping him draft a protest to be signed by many prominent writers protesting against censorship proceedings against *The 'Genius'*.

In 1919, after Dreiser had almost been killed in a traffic accident in New York, Powys wrote: "Theodore, my friend, don't die on me, for how the devil could I endure this country without its only distinguished man of letters?"²

At that time, Powys invited Dreiser to a lecture he was giving on Spengler's "Doom of Western Civilization", writing: "I can always tell things to anyone else better in a lecture than in private talk".

Indeed, I can testify to Powy's extraordinary power as a lecturer. It seems unbelievable that this untamed and passionate spirit came to the prim girl's school which I attended. (I must pay tribute to Miss Spence, the principal, who dared to turn him loose in his electrifying interpretations of the Brontë Sisters, or of Dostoevsky. As he evoked the dark genius of the Brontës, the wind over the moors, his own intensity mounted, his handsome head, his tall, gaunt frame in a black don's gown with arms stretched sometimes like wings of a raven, projected some very essence of life, of literature. When speaking of Dostoevsky, there was something agonizing in the way he brought to life the tormented soul of Raskolnikoff in *Crime and Punishment* or of Dmitri in the *Brothers Karamazov*. Then with the love of an arch-angel, he could present Alyosha or Sossima or the tragic heroine of Tolstoy's *Resurrection*.

I remember that at that time there was a controversy over the Virgin Birth, in an Episcopal Church of the city, and suddenly during a lecture, Powys flailed out, raising a black wing: "They don't dare open a window in their stuffy lives", he challenged, "That window we should always leave open on the unknown." Certainly, he was no

religionist, but he believed in the supernatural, psychic phenomena, unseen forces, even those verging on the demonic. I sat in my seat, trembling, shaken by the force of these ideas, of the possibilities of literature sweeping over one like great music, but most of all by this personality of a kind that hypnotized and exalted.

So it was when I met Dreiser ten years later, in October 1928, and he came to call on me the first time. I sensed that here was a personality of somewhat the same kind. Feeling strangely challenged, I reached for a slim volume of Powys's poetry, *Samphire*, which had just come out, and said: "Here is someone I would rather know than anyone in the world. You probably never heard of him". It was then that Dreiser uttered the word *Jack* in such a tone that I could sense his affection even before he began to tell me about their deep friendship.

At that time, Powys had a small, cold-water flat on the tiny square, Patchin Place, in Greenwich Village. He preferred this to steam heat and kept his fire going briskly in an old blackened hearth. He wore heavy English tweeds and always carried a gnarled black-thorn cane. The two men walked together or talked, when they had time. There is little record that they saw each other often, rather their affinity was something time-less. Powys has expressed their mutual affection in his *Autobiography* (1934):

I used to be aware—I always am aware—of surging waves of magnetic attraction between Dreiser and myself, waves which certainly are not homosexual, for neither of us has the remotest homosexual tendency, but which seem super-chemical and due to the diffusion of some mysterious, occult force through the material envelopes of our physical frames. The truth is, Dreiser and I are both magicians. We are two lamas who, while understanding black magic and the ways of black magicians, prefer for reasons rather to be concealed than revealed, to practise white magic . . .³

In another connection, he said: "All my life I shall at intervals call up the fascinating personalities of Dreiser and

Masters and bless my stars that it has been my destiny to know such men and name myself their friend."⁴

In a long letter to Dreiser's biographer, Robert Elias, Powys wrote:

The cosmic magnetism in Dreiser, call it an influx of the supernatural even—is the dominant thing about him that fascinated me.

I recall so well Dreiser saying once to me that he was aware of *two* currents, (planetary and cosmic) of magnetic force from *outside* the world, one hot and the other very death-cold.⁵

A reflection of the thought of both men is found in a paragraph which Dreiser had copied from Powys's *Autobiography*, to include in his *Notes on Life*, adding a comment of his own. He filed it under *Myth of the Individual Mind* (but it is not in the published volume).⁶

Powys:

That there is a vast, chaotic element in life must be admitted and that one of the most powerful among the immortals who preside over our fortunes is the great Goddess Chance, cannot be denied. But there is also a curious pressure among the experiences that befall us; experiences that our character moulds in their occasion which, for all this play of Chance, has an underlying tendency, a *verifiable direction*, a motion, a drive, through all the twists and turns of accident, toward some *implied* fulfillment in accordance with some deeply involved *entelechy*.

Dreiser:

How about the drive toward mythology, romantic speculation—the impossibility of reaching the mass entelechy. And remember, *Nature*, not man, makes the mass. And the mass may and may not (and this by the will of nature, not man) be irradiated by any true knowledge of actuality or any "verifiable direction".

This leads into Dreiser's life-long speculation upon the question of free-will. Did he believe in many spiritual forces, or just an all-powerful, guiding Force? What was this Goddess Chance? Or was there

simply the God, Nature? He pondered about this for the rest of his days and some of the results are in the *Notes on Life*. Of such stuff were his conversations with Powys.

From Patchin Place, Powys moved to a small farmhouse-cottage in a valley near Hartsdale, New York, about a hundred miles from the city. With his fascination for odd words, he named it Phudd Bottom. He had found an ideal companion in a small, frail woman from Kansas, who had a lovely, haunting face. (Perhaps his heroine in *Wolf Solent* had some of her quality?) Dreiser and his wife, Helen, when they were at Mt. Kisco, often visited Jack and Phyllis there, and they made a happy foursome. But Powys longed for his native land, and they sold the house at Phudd Bottom in 1934, much to Dreiser's regret. Powys always remembered the beautiful Helen of those days, who drove the car (which none of the others cared to do) and had a disarmingly charming smile and chuckle. They also admired Nick, the Russian wolf-hound who always came along and chased the rabbits in the valley.

Dreiser did not see *Jack* again until he stopped to visit him, on his way home from Barcelona, in 1938, but they exchanged letters, and Powys wrote a tribute to Dreiser's book *Tragic America* (1931)—which shows his appreciation of that other Dreiser, the political warrior; he raises the work to a place of historical importance. I would like his comment to stand here. It is all the more interesting because Powys was not himself an activist, nor in any sense, politically-minded, being a supreme individualist, a writer on a deeper level of psychic interpretation.

I have read through with intense interest this advance copy of *Tragic America*, and let me hasten to tell you that I regard it as an epoch-making book.

That you, our Arch-Individualist, the creator of *The Titan* and *The Financier*, should have been driven by your study of facts to penetrate so deeply into the folly and the wrong of the unrestrained course of the individualistic doctrine is, it seems to me, one of the most significant things in our time.

And that you should not only have diagnosed the evil so clearly, but even suggested a drastic remedy for it in the establishment of some sort of intelligent authority, able to correct this great abuse in the interest of a real equity in our organized society, is surely an event of no small importance. God! I could most gravely say: As a resident-alien of twenty-five years' experience of this country, so often puzzled and bewildered by what I have seen, I have found this book of yours more illuminating and revealing than anything else I have ever got hold of dealing with these difficult and complicated matters—and such a saying would be less than the truth. So far, it seems to me, the 'artistic' rebels against the status quo have had more emotion in their protests than *hard facts* or than searching generalizations *backed* by hard facts. But this powerful book of yours, packed so full of irrefutable statistics, and supported by direct, first-hand evidence, is exactly what these dark times called for.

People like myself, whose economic and financial experience—and insight, too!—is necessarily very limited, will be able to get out of this formidable volume the solid weight of evidence to support their spontaneous instincts and natural reactions. I predict for this book a really momentous place in the history of our time.⁷

A letter that Powys had written Dreiser in the middle thirties, just after his return to Britain, described his first staying place, Rats' Barn in Dorset, and his preparation for a move to a small flat in the town of Dorchester nearby.

September near East Chaldon is about the best of all months in England—warm, hazy, misty, windless, enchanted weather—heavy mist over sea and land in the early morning, and then misty, sometimes, all day.

As I write this now on my couch, Phyllis has gone with the village carrier to Dorchester to see about the papering and painting of our flat, and putting in a sink. I can hear at this moment the moaning sound like that of a great sea beating on the light stuck on the Shambles Rock because of the fog.

I relish well going over the hill in the early morning, making a dark track as the cattle

do, through the heavy, whitish dew, to get gorse-prickles and furze sticks and thorn sticks and elder sticks to light our fire. (It's pretty primitive.)⁸

On his way to Spain on the S.S. Normandie in 1938, Dreiser had found Jack's sister, Marian on the boat, with her son, Peter. They were on their way to visit Jack who had now moved to Corwen in Wales and urged Dreiser to stop off on his return trip. After a most disheartening experience in Barcelona, Dreiser was glad to do so. Marian and Peter were still there when he came, and Peter remembers the happy reunion of these two wild spirits.

Dreiser told me that he had found Jack in a small stone house with Phyllis and the dog, *Very Old*—an ancient, uncouth spaniel who would sulk, slink or simply disappear until *Jack* called to him. Then he would come like a shot from under some bed or table. But he never paid attention to any other person.

Jack was living as simply as any retired Welsh farmer. His luxury was the long walk which he took each day, with one of his huge, gnarled canes and *Very Old*. Usually wrapped in a rough greatcoat or tweed cape, Powys was the unforgettable figure he had always been to Dreiser. Their walks together, at various times in the past, as now, partook of the nature of some earthy, pagan or mystic rite. A fellowship of two Satyrs, half-Gods stalking upon low shoulders of Olympus.

Dreiser related that once when they had been walking together on a mountain near Los Angeles, *Jack* had suddenly stopped and exclaimed over some tiny wild-flowers, and swore that they were like some that grew on the English moors—the very same. To Dreiser, they looked quite ordinary, but to *Jack* they were rare, fragrant, of infinite importance and delight. He was excited by them as if he had discovered gold, said Dreiser, so deeply moved, because they stirred in him the love of his own country, his native heath.

Now, in Wales, as they walked over the lanes, coming quickly out of the little town

into rich country-side, full of legend and meaning for Powys, he began to tell Dreiser of his forebears; this was the land from which they sprung. Yes, he would show Dreiser the very place where some of them had lived and died, or passed into the spirit world . . . For he sensed that some of them were still here on the moors at night.

They passed into a beautiful, wooded section—over some stretch of a familiar estate—when, suddenly, they were stopped by the gentleman-owner, and told they were trespassing!

Powys explained with his best eloquence, who he was, how his ancestors had lived here, and that the man with him was Theodore Dreiser, the greatest American writer, visiting him for this brief day. But the owner only glowered the more fiercely, and ordered them off, like a pair of old tramps!

Dreiser was hugely amused by this incident and told of it with tears of laughter in his eyes. What he treasured most out of his whole unhappy trip to Europe, was this visit to *Jack*, to see him with Phyllis and *Very Old* and his ancestors hovering near-by; as near contentment as such a great spirit, earth-bound, can come. Perhaps never after that visit, did Dreiser have such equal fellowship.

A few months later, he wrote to Powys from California.

Glendale, Cal.
April 12, '39.

Dear Jack, Dear Phyllis . . . Together in your little house—I think of you two so much and wish all good things to befall you. I see Corwen and the heather-carpeted mountain above, and the valley and the river—and know you have as good a world as anywhere. The felicity of a true, mental companionship! To how many in any century, does that come? If one has ever experienced it,—even the memory of it is sustaining . . .

Love and enduring fortune to both of you,
T.D.º

Here is an extract from a letter from Powys, in Corwen, November 21, 1945.

Dreiser you old devil and most darling friend. Am thrilled and so you can imagine is 'Kansas' [Phyllis] at getting this morning this unexpected picture or photo* . . . Benevolence and amusement in your expression—not a shade of patronizing. It was an inspiration of yours to have this photo made or picture or whatever we are to call it. P and I are proud to have it and regard it as significant and symbolical of our relations to a profoundly occult and planetary point. It is not black magic nor is it white magic but it is a picture of a subtle reality. It represents exactly to an astonishing depth the relations between you and me. It shows the real nature of the link and the attraction that is EROTIC but not sexual or homosexual at all! It is like an erotic link between two creatures of the Cosmos or of the multiverse—as William James said he preferred to call it (and so do I). One creature, YOU (to take terrestrial analogy), belonging to the giant sloth or mammoth type and the other to the bird type. Then if we go into some ancient museum of old idols with a modern wing devoted to scientific conceptions of queer images of half-Gods, YOU would belong to this 'new wing' as Being or demigod or idol representing cosmogonic, elemental forces of an atomic (voluntarily explosive) electric, magnetic, chemical energy, whereas I would be at the end of the corridor of very ancient idols such as are dug out or excavated from prehistoric ruins . . . And do you know, my dear, as I made you start back once in 8th or 9th Street by saying, you thinking I must be a kind of 'Cake-eater'! whereas it was a super-sexual, planetary EROTIC recognition!º

At the time of Dreiser's last visit to New York, in 1944, he had just received a long letter from Powys, and took it along to read it to Edgar Lee Masters, who was to meet him for dinner at the old German restaurant of Lüchows.

When we were all seated in an alcove, Dreiser took out the letter which was written in that strange concentric way which Powys used to juxtapose certain sentences

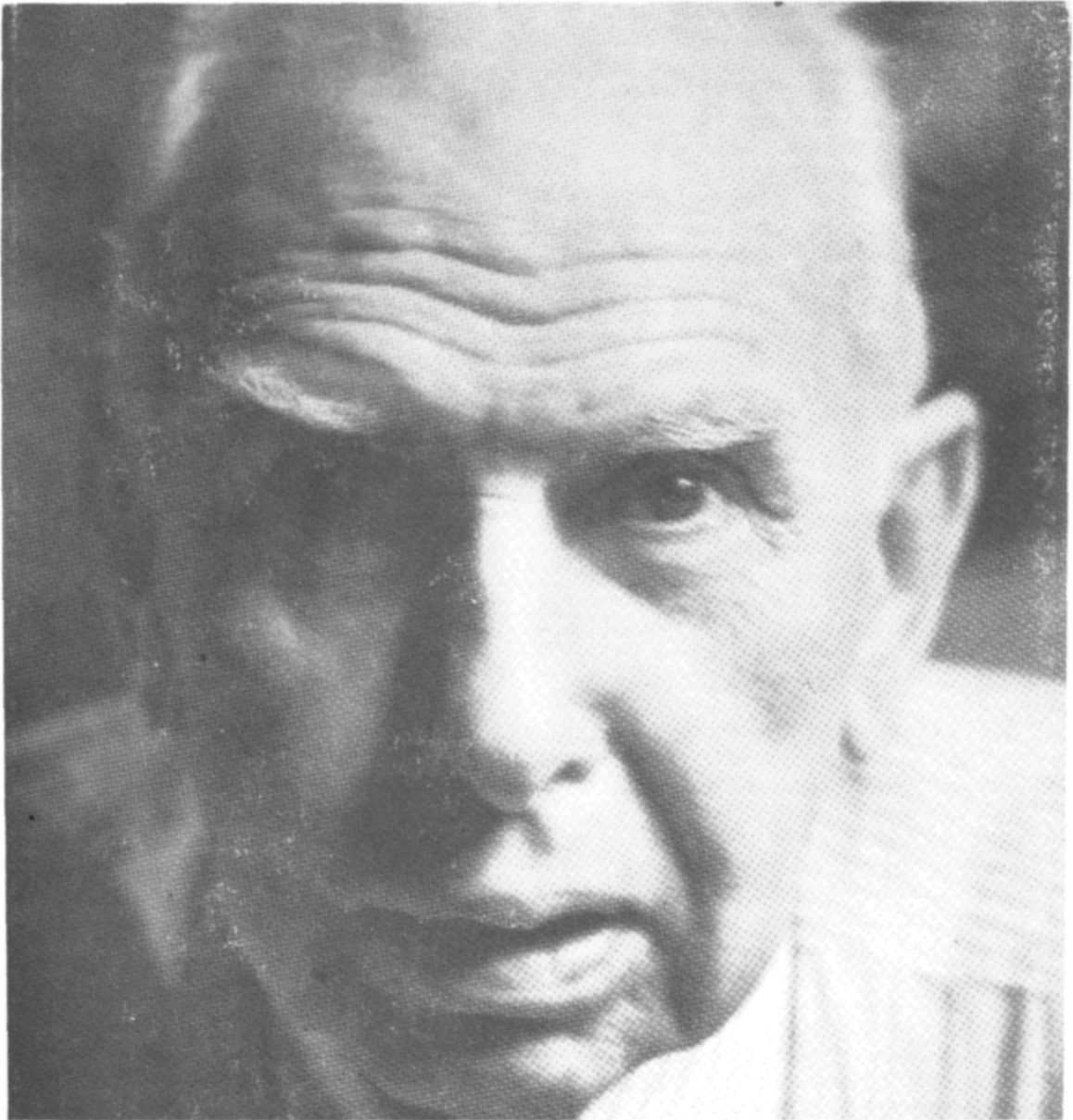
*The photo must have been one taken by Lotte Jacobi, on this last visit. It was used for the cover of my book, *Theodore Dreiser, a New Dimension*. [Or was it the photograph of Dreiser with a bust of J. C. P., reproduced in this *Powys Review*? Ed.]

and ideas, in a circle or in slanting lines bringing out a certain richness and intricacy of his thoughts . . . He said he was translating Rabelais into his native Welsh, and also starting a new book about Dostoievsky. Then he evoked their old friendship with Masters, in a line ending, "You and Dreiser, we three who are closer than lovers with exactly the same amount of reverence and affection".⁹

Powys knew about Dreiser's great project

of writing the philosophy of his life, and had read many of the *Notes* which Dreiser had written, as well as his earlier essays in *Rub-a-Dub-Dub* (1920). They had had many discussions as to the mysteries of existence, the psychic forces of which each was so constantly aware. So Powys always encouraged Dreiser to go on to complete this new work and eagerly consented to write an *introduction* for it.

By the following June, Powys had started



Theodore Dreiser: photograph by Lotte Jacobi

writing his *Introduction*. After Dreiser's sudden death, *Jack* had written to Helen the following letter. It shows his deep concern lest some press or editor should get hold of the *Notes*, and contort them in some way. He knew how Dreiser's work had sometimes been injured by well-meaning editors. The two letters speak for themselves. I was particularly glad for his reaction to Dreiser's last novel, *The Bulwark* (1946), "that Quaker book", expressed at the very end of his second letter.

Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire
N. Wales
June 28, 1946

My most dear Helen;

How your Phyllis & John do love these exciting and beautiful letters from you. Phyllis and I were & *are* still I can tell you *very thrilled* over this grand resolution and determination and fixed project of yours to get these 17 *essays* and these casual *notes* for some philosophical book, printed and published as soon as possible!

If I were you—(for Phyllis and I are deeply concerned with your most naturally paralysed and dazed and numbed and petrified state). *Protem* We don't think you must let it last any longer—We think, O so strongly, that you must burst these bands and strike out boldly for his spirit and his influence and his glory without end, and his effect for GOOD untold on the world and on the individual souls throughout all time—

We think you would be wiser *not* to get any help at all from anybody *except the publishers you select* and their appointed official editors—*No Body else!*

And for God's sake my dear girl and P. joins O so gravely with me here—Do *NOT* put these precious things in a University.

The world doesn't want, posterity doesn't want some *other person's views on him* or *views on his philosophy!* Or this *other's* attempts to give these notes a *rounding off* to suit *his* or *their* alien ideas!

The world—or rather thousands and thousands of *Individuals* in the world—want to *have in their hands Dreiser himself* his own notes however fragmentary! and *then* each

individual can form *his own notion* of what Dreiser (your Theodore) *meant*.

Phyllis and I (if we were you Helen dear) would get hold of the publisher and *nobody else* and make your arrangements with him or them, *alone*—And don't bring anybody else into it! Persuade him to publish all these finished essays in one volume and *with them* all these scattered fragments and these notes—such as you quote here in this letter—Yes, yes, certainly! Just these notes or these single words in a list as you put them here. Strength and Weakness, Myth of Responsibility, The Factor called Chance, Necessity for Contrast, Necessity for limitation, Necessity for Secrecy, Courage and Fear, The Problem of Knowledge, Theory that Life is a Game, Problem of Death. Yes, let the publisher print a *couple of pages* of these, at the end of the finished essays, entitling them "*From Dreiser's Note-Books*". I am absolutely certain that such a book—edited by you *alone*, Dreiser's Philosophy edited by Helen Dreiser would satisfy all of us individuals (1000's of us! who are so stirred by his terrific elemental, multiversal, mysterious planetary genius—in a way we *shall not* be—and could *never be* if you brought in anyone else, even if the person were very clever and quite a thinker!

We Want Theodore and his Helen and *No Body else!*

Yours as heretofore and as hereafter—
We feel that Quaker book of his was *first rate!*

O how tender he was to all his characters in it!

Ever your loyal and faithful and affectionate
Jack and Phyllis'

As a matter of fact, Helen did not feel capable of editing the tremendous file of the *Notes on Life*. She entrusted the work to a young scholar who undertook to do just what Powys had feared. Not understanding Dreiser's essential way of thinking, which was not academic or logical, according to most organised philosophies, but rather, literary and spiritual, this scholar tried to press the whole work into an intellectual mould completely alien to its purpose, which was to ask questions, arouse speculation and propose vast concepts without hide-bound conclusions.

His new outlines can be found in the

University of Pennsylvania files of *Notes on Life*. Unfortunately for him, but fortunately for Dreiser's work, he became ill and died at a premature age. When I approached Dreiser's work, it was with my old respect and love of his thought even if it were not always easily comprehensible. Fortunately, I found this letter of Powys's to Helen in the Dreiser file, and also his *Introduction*, which now stands in the volume published by the University of Alabama Press.

So I felt that Powys, whom I also so deeply admired, was beside me as I struggled to bring clarity into this editing of Dreiser's *Notes*, and to let Dreiser be himself, in all matters of style and originality of thought, no matter whether, on the surface, some might seem to be obscure. They deal with matters beyond easy expression, and some critics and readers have already seen their import. As time goes on, the work is sure to gain in acceptance and the University of Alabama may be increasingly proud of its publication.

As Powys said in his *Introduction*:

In his novels, from the first to the last, as indeed in every scrap and fragment he wrote, Dreiser is a thinker, and a thinker moreover with a living growing philosophy of life, that had he lived to be a hundred, would have

remained incomplete and unfinished. And this is the case because his philosophy was the expression of his ever growing and developing personality.

I have not encountered, and I doubt whether anyone who reads these lines has encountered, a human personality to whom the word 'cosmic' could be as appropriately applied. I purposely use this word here to convey in a rough, casual, and popular sense, the volume and magnitude of his nature. Philosophically speaking, the word is far too orderly and carries with it too much of the notion of the systematic to suggest his special habit of thought. He was too personal to have ever possessed, or even desire to possess, a rounded-off and completed system of the universe. As with Walt Whitman; his world, strictly speaking, was not a universe at all. It was a multiverse. Dreiser *required* a fluctuating, wavering margin of the ragged-edged and the un-limited; and his imaginative view of real reality was still in process of creation. As Walt Whitman says of himself, he 'contained multitudes'.¹⁰

So, from start to finish, there was a remarkable understanding between these two spirits, one might almost call them prophets in their daring and in their speculations, braving the heights and depths of possible experiences and putting them into language.

Notes

¹*Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, ed. R. H. Elias, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959. Unless otherwise indicated quotation from Dreiser's letters come from this work.

²Unpublished letter in University of Pennsylvania files.

³*Autobiography* (1934) 1967, pp. 552-553.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 554.

⁵Robert Elias, *Theodore Dreiser: Apostle of Nature*, Alfred Knopf, 1949, p. 199: the letter referred to *The 'Genius'*.

⁶It can be found in the University of Pennsylvania files.

⁷The letter was published as a pamphlet in 1931 by Liveright, the publisher of *Tragic America*.

⁸Powys's letters to Dreiser are in the files of the University of Pennsylvania.

⁹University of Pennsylvania files.

¹⁰*Notes on Life*, University of Alabama Press, 1974, pp. xi-xiv.

Norman Bryson

Universe and "Multiverse": John Cowper Powys as a Critic of Dreiser's Fiction

There can be little doubt that to John Cowper Powys, Theodore Dreiser the man was a figure of vatic power, a mage or wizard whose very person emitted a nimbus of astral energy—what Dreiser might have called "actinic rays".

There is no gainsaying it, although to orthodox pietists, ecclesiastical fanatics, and vindictive moralists, Dreiser appeared as a ramping materialist; to those who really knew him he was an awestruck mystic, a thunder-struck medicine-man of cosmogonic television . . . what, I think, made Dreiser unique was the presence in him of some terrific psycho-magnetic force for which there is at present no adequate name . . . Some would call it spiritual. I prefer to use the simpler expressions 'magnetic' and 'psychic'. But whatever it was, it radiated from him like what theosophists call an *aura*.¹

Nor does Powys hesitate to ascribe this 'psychic' or 'magnetic' quality of Dreiser the man to Dreiser's writing. Even Dreiser's most complicated documentary realism, with its enumeration of what Powys saw as "heavy furniture, tasteless ornamentation, and 'trig' costumes", its detailed "Balzacian" inventorising, has always behind it, Powys claims, *another* background which is that of the universe as a whole, the unitary sum of all phenomena, in which Powys is able to hear the transcendent hum of "om . . . om . . . om . . .", "the systole and diastole of our unfathomable life-dimension".¹

Powys is not, of course, alone in finding transcendent or macroscopic order and scale in Dreiser's work: of the many commentaries on Dreiser which explore exactly this subject, one might perhaps single out the fine studies by Asselineau,

Friedrich, Furmanczyk, Lundén, McAleer, Thomas and Vivas.² Evaluations may differ, concerning Dreiser's tendency to set his narratives within cosmically enlarged panoramas and frames, his faculty of "cosmogonic television": what is an indication to one critic of the presence of the true philosopher-novelist, may to another critic be proof that part at least of Dreiser's mind is simply primitive. But the degree of consensus is striking: for the majority of critics, and we must suppose for most readers, Dreiser is the "Supernatural Naturalist" *par excellence*.³

Where Powys breaks with the consensus, and produces what may be an essential component of the analysis, and one which has been largely omitted by the Dreiser critics, is in his perception not only of Dreiser's habit of finding uniform and universal patterns in phenomena (a habit of which Powys is certainly aware) but of Dreiser's refusal to think *exclusively* in terms of the *Om* of monism.

To expect a cohesive, logical, rounded-off 'corpus' of philosophic thought or any definite metaphysical system from a mind like Dreiser's is like asking for apples from a Scotch fir . . . Where is the 'system' of Pythagoras, or Heraclitus, or Da Vinci, or Montaigne, or Rabelais, or Goethe, or Nietzsche, or Walt Whitman? Indeed it is not concealed from some among us that logical and rounded-off systems of thought like that of Spinoza, and, even more so, of Hegel, are in their essence contrary to the evasive reality of life and nature.¹

Not everything in Dreiser's fiction, Powys insists, fits into intelligible pattern. His vision is "television"—he sees his characters and his plots from an exalted

position, across a vast spectacular distance, and because of that distasteful vision he is able to see *more* pattern than is evident to the characters themselves, caught in the thick of things, or to those readers temperamentally unfamiliar with the shiftings into panoramic scale which Dreiser so often employs. But Powys's Dreiser is capable of more than this: precisely because of his enlarged, wide-angle panoptic vision, or, to use Powys's own metaphor, because of the number of "Dimensions" Dreiser inhabits, the world he sees is less universe than "multiverse".

There *had* to be with him, to satisfy a certain primeval and elemental chaoticism in his nature, a dark abyss of unformulated, unfathomed, unregulated, uncharted, illimitable *welter* round every separate dimension of the multiverse he apprehended . . . And it is this awareness in him that adds so special an atmosphere of vibrations, reaching us from far away, to those descriptions in his novels of the decline and fall of certain unlucky persons with the particular sort of fatal weakness in his characters that seems to excite some mysterious sadism in the wanton concatenations of blind chance.¹

In the universe of the *Om*, all phenomena interpenetrate and fuse into a single entity; in the "multiverse"—and Powys insists on the word—phenomena collide, concatenate, move according to a chance that is blind because no human mind is able to perceive in all Dimensions at once. For Powys, this awareness in Dreiser of the aleatory, of hazard, of the reign of randomness, is as important as his sensitivity to the great systole and diastole of being. Powys concedes that Dreiser is a monist, behind whose minutely detailed and circumstantial plots, there unfolds the Plot of Being, the grand design in which Dreiser so intensely believed, and which he so intensely sought, that he would renounce fiction for the scientific mysticism of the "Notes on Life". But for Powys Dreiser is also the creature of the multiverse, unwilling or unable to force the elusive

complexities of life into the grid of enclosed, hermetic thought-systems.

If we were to follow in the direction in which Powys points us, towards a Dreiser of *bricolage* and multiple dimensions, the strangely dis-unified, fissile nature of many of his novels might perhaps become more intelligible to us; and as a tentative step along that path, this essay explores two novels which I believe are particularly well-suited to analysis in the terms Powys outlines: *Sister Carrie* (1900); and *An American Tragedy* (1925).

It has long been recognised, and in particular since Katope's influential work on Dreiser's debt to Herbert Spencer, how highly formalised and architectonic *Sister Carrie* is.⁴ The twin arcs, of Carrie's rise to fortune, and of her protector Hurstwood's decline, are plotted with an accuracy almost geometric. So symmetrical are the double curves that one is in fact able to pinpoint the exact moment in the narrative at which the arcs intersect and pass (in Chapter 35). The portentous chapter titles, the studied authorial ironies woven into the lines Carrie delivers in her theatrical performances, the formal review of all the book's main characters in the novel's final coda—all these indicate, at the least, a determined authorial foregrounding, insisting at all times on the visibility of the textual surface.⁵ There is an *excess* of openly presented narrative patterns, and of markers encouraging the reader to attend to those patterns: for Katope it is excess for which means of recuperation must at once be found, by reading the text as a secret roman à clef whose key is supplied by the Spencerian laws of "evolution" and "dissolution". These, Katope maintains, are responsible for the "primary architectonic element in the novel":⁶ it is Spencer's *First Principles* which provides the original blueprint of rising and falling arcs; and by going back to Spencer's text we will be able to recover, or de-code, the book's true inner design. Katope's reading is ingenious and at times wholly convincing; it is still an indispensable aid for those

seeking to reconstruct Dreiser's intellectual world. Yet the question which such demystifying or decoding reading as this must suppress — committed as it is to a policy of treating non-closure within the text as a defect which the act of criticism is there to make good — the question which the de-coder can never directly address, is simply: Why did Dreiser, having written his roman à clef, throw away the key? Katope is altogether persuasive when he takes as his subject the genesis of *Sister Carrie*, and the importance of Dreiser's reading in Spencer, as source of the novel's strange geometry. The same analysis is altogether less than persuasive as an account or reflection of what it is like actually to read that disquieting, shadowy novel. To be sure, the book's double plot rises and falls in curves nothing less than pristine; yet the cause of that transcendent geometry is precisely what the text never discloses. In Powys's word, "vibrations" seem to enter the fictional world from far away, from an off-stage, an *hors-jeu*, an undisclosed Dimension of the "multiverse". We are as struck by the arbitrariness, the absence of origin for the novel's insistent geometry, as we are struck by that geometry itself. The strangeness, the absence of supplied rationale for its overarching order is the text's principal enigma; and although a criticism with closure as its goal will feel tempted to banish enigma with code-breaking explanation, the absence of explanation, the absence of explanation for the novel's mysterious macro-patterning is more appropriately left by the reader as he finds it and as it stands. And in fact there is a force within the text which will already be leading the reader towards suspicion of the architectonic order: the plot, which moves forward chaotically, in random motions for which "wanton concatenations" is exactly the right phrase. A few examples may stand for many. When Carrie is first looking for work in Chicago, she acts on information found on a piece of newspaper that chances to blow around her leg in the street; her career in the theatre begins with a role which comes her way because both of her lovers,

Hurstwood and Drouet, happen to belong to the same lodge of the Elks, which by chance decides to mount a production and is in sudden need of an actress; and her rise to stage celebrity results from a felicitous extemporisation which happens to find favour with the capricious New York audience: a stroke of luck that prompts even the reviewer to comment on "the vagaries of fortune". Similarly the reverse in Hurstwood's fortunes begins by a sheer hazard, when a family friend catches sight of him riding in the park with an unknown lady, and begins to ask awkward questions about his fidelity as a husband; he takes to crime when he comes across an unusually large sum of money in the safe of the club he manages, a safe which, moreover, is discovered to be faulty; and the last of his money disappears in two games of chance. The supremacy of accident at the level of plot acts to negate, or at the least to render problematic, the architectonic patterns visible at other levels of the text's construction. If those patterns stand for a higher or ultimate order, it is an order whose nature remains obscure, and which seems to enter human life from an area outside both the experience of the characters, and the scope of the book's explanations. To be told by Katope that these forces are none other than the Spencerian laws of "heterogeneity" and "homogeneity" does little to banish our confusion. Such clarification should, if it is to be genuinely de-mystifying, come to the reader directly from the text. As the text stands, and as most readers will probably register from their own experience, the novel juxtaposes a geometry of extraordinary precision (and equally extraordinary absence of origin) with a multiplicity of local accidents and throws of the dice, random motions which cause the plot to swerve and twist at every turn. Multiverse: a phenomenal world which, viewed locally and in detail, displays few calculable probabilities; and which, seen in cosmic panorama, in "cosmogonic television", reveals patterns as regular as their origin and purpose remain unknown, and apparently unknowable.

Powys's insight into the Janus-like nature of Dreiser's work—facing one way on to order and inevitability, facing another way on to randomness and unpredictability—becomes particularly valuable when applied to the novel which continues to bewilder and confuse even its most enthusiastic, and articulate, admirers: *An American Tragedy*. At one level, it is a text committed to explication: at the centre, the appalling event of murder; and surrounding that centre, a tangle of casual lines, coming together, separating, interweaving, re-inforcing: a Gordian knot which the novel seeks to untie.

Sister Carrie had taken up the story with its central character already in mid-career: of Carrie's life in Columbia City, prior to her departure for Chicago, nothing was told; she entered the text fully formed. In *An American Tragedy* the aim is total biography. Of the three books which make up the novel, the first, dealing with the hero's childhood and adolescence, has as its unique *raison d'être* a strict parallelism to Book Two, which deals with the events surrounding the murder itself; parallelism which aims to establish, by symmetrical anticipations, all the factors—social, economic, and 'psychological'—which lead Clyde Griffiths to the crime of murder. Thus Clyde's adolescent infatuation with Hortense Briggs to which the infatuation leads, pre-figures his later, more deeply irresponsible relationships with the heiress Sondra Finchley, focus of Clyde's material aspirations, and with the unfortunate Roberta Alden, whom he discards and will eventually destroy, once he discovers in her an obstacle to his desired alliance with the Finchley family wealth. When Clyde runs away, in Book One, from the scene of the automobile crash in Kansas City, this instinctive reaction of flight prefigures his running away, in Book Two, from the scene of the crime. Once the reader has discovered this device of portent and fulfilment, the first two books take on the character of typological exegesis: when it is clear that an event in Book One is being given unusual emphasis, we can be sure that in Book Two the event will be repeated

and transformed; in Book One its existence is incomplete and potential; only when subjected to the transformative repetition does it become, in retrospect, fully itself. While many of the symmetries between the first and second books seem purely formal, that is, non-generative of clear meaning (and it is by excessive deployment of the mirror-structure that Dreiser ultimately destroys the project of explanation), the insistence that the reader first be taken through Clyde's childhood and adolescence, in meticulous Dreiserian detail, before the hero comes anywhere near the events of the crime, indicates what amounts almost to a mania to explain: *everything* must be explored; no incident is too trivial to recount if it contains within itself the least germ of the impulse which will eventually flourish into homicide. Clyde's social ambition as an adult is traced back to the sense of social disgrace he feels in childhood when compelled by his evangelising parents to testify in public to their eccentric faith; the taste for luxury and self-indulgence which attracts him towards the social group around Sondra Finchley is traced back to its origins in the wonderment and greed he feels before the Aladdinish splendours of the Green-Davidson Hotel, where as a lad he worked as a bell-hop; his passivity before events is seen to derive from his family's habitual resignation before God's Providence. 'Psychological' interpretation of the motivations and psychic undercurrents at work in Clyde and leading him on, inch by inch, towards the inevitable crime, would be redundant: the text is such interpretation already. Dreiser, like Zola, is trying to present general laws from which to predict human behaviour, or at least this particular human's behaviour: given a certain defined stimulus, Clyde will respond in a certain, pre-determined way.

This theoretical bias behind the writing of *An American Tragedy* accounts for the sense of dryness, detachment, and reductiveness which characterises the prose throughout. While many commentators have been distracted by the absence of

stylistic charm in the text, and have tended either to defend or to attack the prose, depending on their attitude towards literary grace, the essential feature of the text's style must surely lie in its relentless reference to causal structures and to large-scale paradigmatic structures. Indeed, it is almost as though the prose of the first books were suffering from one of the two types of aphasia Jakobson describes: the writing is in the thrall of metaphor (although the eventual and global quality of the prose, once we have also considered Book Three, would seem to be a curious pulling apart of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes).⁷

An American Tragedy seems to be an even more rigorous roman à thèse than Katope's *Sister Carrie*. Dreiser gives himself, and his reader, little scope for manoeuvre: although Book One seems episodic and lacking in particular direction, and although its sense of detail is so acute it is hard for the reader to believe that such attention to minutiae is anything other than an indication of refusal to pattern, once the reader enters Book Two it soon becomes clear that information placed in the preceding book as innocent or gratuitous, now becomes retrospectively activated as portent; just as the new information, still presented in the guise of reportage, is in fact realisation of the portent. Growing in explanatory ambition, the second book incorporates into itself an impressive array of determinist equipment. Thus whenever the narrative touches on sexuality, a curious set of terms of which the most conspicuous is "chemism" alerts us to the presence of ideas lately imported from Vienna.⁸ A further set of terms centred on the concept of "involuntary motion towards light" marks Dreiser's appropriation of the work of Jacques Loeb on "heliotropism", an influence unmistakable whenever Dreiser describes attraction between the sexes⁹: thus Clyde experiences the charms of one of his female acquaintances as "something heavy and langorous, a kind of ray or electron that intrigued and lured him in spite of himself"; introduced to Sondra Finchley,

Clyde at once perceives "a newer luminary—he could scarcely see Roberta any longer, so strong were the actinic rays of this other". When the narrative touches on the nature of decision or choice, a further set of distortions appear: arrangements must be binary. Early on, Clyde needs fifty dollars to buy Hortense Briggs the coat she had admired. This is precisely the sum Clyde's mother needs to help her daughter Esta: the number has been chosen by Dreiser to establish a balance between passion on the one side and duty on the other, a balance tilted in favour of passion not by any decision on Clyde's part, but because desire is, in Hobbes's phrase, the "last appetite".

In Deliberation, the last appetite, or aversion, immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is what we call the will; the act, not the faculty of willing . . . will therefore is the last appetite in deliberating.¹⁰

The same abolition of the faculty of conscious decision-making is seen again in Book Two, when the mature Clyde is placed at a mid-point between the attractions of his two women: Roberta Alden on one side, representing obligation, frugality, and the Law; Sondra Finchley on the other, representing indulgence, luxury, and desire. So attached is he to this theory of binarism and of the externality to the self of Appetite that Dreiser is quite prepared, even in the climactic murder scene, to interrupt narrative continuity and to jeopardise the momentum of the fiction by inserting a section of dramatic psychomache: the Appetites gather round Clyde and tempt him from the outside, as hallucinated voices; the desire to kill appears in the guise of an evil genii.

An American Tragedy would seem therefore to be what *Sister Carrie* so oddly refused to become—a rational, scientific account of human fortunes, massive in its overall design, minutely crafted in its detail. The range of Dreiser's eclecticism is certainly extensive: it is hard to think of another writer who would juxtapose, in a single work of fiction, the emergent discipline of Psychology, speculations on

the significance of involuntary appetitiveness in plant and insect life, and a neo-Hobbesian theory of the will; there seems little that Dreiser will not do, to ensure that the event at the centre of his many-stranded, multiply determined text, will seem wholly inevitable. Yet it is at this point that Powys's comments on Dreiser's multiverse, his refusal of "rounded-off systems" and "cohesive, logical...Philosophic thought", become most pertinent. For having spent two infinitely painstaking books describing the inevitability of the murder, Dreiser perpetrates an act of weird iconoclasm: he has Roberta die at Big Bittern Lake by what a coroner's jury would be fully entitled to describe as misadventure. Though Clyde has cause, and will, and strength, and means to commit the murder, at the last moment Roberta's death is precipitated by none of these, but instead by a series of rapid local mishaps with only tangential relation to the enormous structure of explanation Dreiser has created. Clyde's crime consists less in action than in failure to act: Roberta, who of course cannot swim, is startled by an expression in Clyde's eyes (but an expression not particularly charged with actinic energy: at the moment best suited to Loebian treatment, Dreiser casts the heliotropic motif aside); she rises in the boat, loses her footing, falls into the lake, and drowns. Clyde, it is true, does nothing to help her; but to any juror or jurist, it is clear that refusal to rescue from drowning is a quite different order of crime from premeditated murder; just as to most readers of the novel, it must seem little short of bizarre that at the moment of convergence of all the determinants, Dreiser invokes the concept of accident.

One of the most interesting, and I believe best-aimed, critiques of *An American Tragedy* emerged a year after the book's publication, in Lexington, Kentucky, entitled *Was Clyde Griffiths Guilty of Murder in the First Degree?*¹¹ It is a legalistic enquiry and sets out only to find the answer to its limited question; its relevance to criticism is that it indicates the degree to which Dreiser's text, so far from supplying the

reader with a complete and veridical account of the murder and its causes, in fact leaves him in a state of suspension, with a series of questions on his lips.¹² Dreiser decides, and with all the impact of such eleventh-hour timing, that there are simply, and always, other factors—minute swervings in the trajectories of matter which no human mind can foresee: variables and unknowns which cannot be included in the project of knowledge, unexpected angles of incidence, freak kinetic conditions, all those incremental deviations from paths and orbits which Lucretius described as *clinamen*. If none of these unpredictable, last-minute complications had entered the narrative, the text would certainly have been monistic and monolithic: not the *Om* of the universe's great systole and diastole, perhaps, not a mystical merger of the self in the Flood of Being; but a hard-edged, technical monism, which would define the self as a material system open to the same rational enquiry, quantification, and experiment, as any other phenomenon in a universe moving according to fixed and intelligible laws.

The text's penultimate suspension of grand explanatory structures does not in itself invalidate the overall quest for a global account of the death at Big Bittern Lake. After all, Clyde's hesitation, his strategy of letting Roberta die rather than of taking her life by his own hand, exactly accords with what we know of his history, temperament, and habitual reflexes. Faced with equal binary choices, Clyde characteristically follows the path of least resistance: just as his stance before the tawdry delights of the Green-Davidson Hotel had been one of passive wonderment, so he is passive at the moment of crisis; just as his reaction to the automobile crash in Kansas City had been to run rather than to face the consequences, so he retreats from his desire to kill Roberta into the safe refuge of watching her die. One might even argue that Dreiser's inclusion of *clinamen* complements and finalises the global determinist patterns. But it is not, in fact, in the confusion and haze of Roberta's

death that the real assault on the project of explanation occurs. As with *Sister Carrie*, we must attend to the novel's overall design. *An American Tragedy* is a triptych. The first two books form Dreiser's most inclusive attempt, within fiction, at explanatory pattern-making: the flux of life has been subordinated, with unprecedented thoroughness, by a discourse totalitarian in scope. Why, then, does the novel not end with the second book? Why does this triumphant structuration not terminate at the moment of its absolute victory? The first book presents the events which have moulded Clyde's personality, the habitual pattern of his action: the second book shows that action moving closer and closer to its own entelechy, the murder of Roberta: but the third book makes no advance on the existing story, except to present Clyde's long-deferred execution. The final section lacks even the quality of suspense. The evidence brought forward by prosecuting and defending attorneys merely repeats information the reader already has. There is no question that Clyde will be acquitted, since he has left in the wake of the crime a mass of unambiguously accusatory clues. Book Three fails even to clarify the nature of Clyde's guilt or innocence, which even at the end of the novel remains problematic. It makes no polemical plea on Clyde's behalf against the legal system which sentences him: no authorial comment intervenes to criticise the machinery of judgment.

The justification for the presence of Book Three lies, I think, elsewhere: lies, finally, in Powys's concept of "multiverse". Throughout the first and second sections, Dreiser has been considering the different systems—behaviourist, Loebian, Freudian, 'Hobbesian'—whereby Clyde's actions may be understood. By the end of Book Two, his analysis is complete; and what Dreiser does then is effectively to hand the case over to the public domain. Here, the events are sifted through once more by legal counsel, the prosecution and the defence, using now the categories and vocabularies of Law: two further interpretations are advanced into the text. These interpretations are not the

author's: his case already stands. But they are admitted into the text, and are themselves textualisations of the crime as valid or as invalid as Dreiser's own. What Dreiser is doing through his inclusion of Book Three is recasting his fiction in anti-monistic form. The text as a whole becomes an assemblage of different versions of the same events, seen through the reticulated screens of differing interpretative systems. It is not a question of Dreiser's true account being falsified, at the trial, by jurisprudence. Dreiser himself did not invent Clyde or imagine the murder. As was well understood at the time of publication, Dreiser's account in the first two books is a reconstruction of a real event, the Grace Brown—Chester Gillette murder case of 1906.¹³ He makes no claim to definitive interpretation; he has declined the privilege of creative, thus omniscient, authorship. The novel is therefore a collection of interpretations: Dreiser's; the opposing cases for the prosecution and the defence; the verdict of the jury; supplementary commentaries from the press, included verbatim in the text; the view of Clyde's mother; the view of the death-row priest. All these are incorporated into the text; yet no overview is allowed to curtail their insistent multiplicity.

The text embodies, alongside the desire for transcendent pattern, the recognition that although such patterning may reveal or construct a universe, it may also act as hindrance to our understanding of the indeterminacies and inconstancies, the relativity of viewpoints and polymorphous dimensions of the multiverse. The narrative often seems overdetermined, or inversely to contain a design so elusive as to be almost undetectable at the level of local reading. Many of the "epic" symmetries, parallelisms, and doublings appear purely formal.¹⁴ It is hard to justify the cyclic format of the opening and concluding chapters (which form a Joycean knot) except as a framing-device—nowhere else does the novel use circular, rather than binary, design; just as it is hard to account for the physical resemblance between Clyde and his cousin Gilbert Griffiths, a

resemblance repeatedly stressed by characters and author alike, but which seems to halt just this side of signification. It is understandable that of all directors it was Eisenstein who expressed most interest in filming the novel: the architecture of *An American Tragedy* often seems to be formalist montage, whose purpose is to impart a sense of epic order to the story, while leaving the semantic implications of that order understated or unstated.¹⁵ Many of the parallels between the first and the second books indeed point towards unambiguously clear implied meanings. But not only is the type/antitype design invisible as the first book is actually read ('recollection' being a more accurate description than 'anticipation', of such retroactive devices), a certain critical training is required, not to mention an unusually retentive memory, for the pairings and couplings to be fully recognised. Moreover, the devices Dreiser uses to unite the first and second books fail to carry over into the third, where Dreiser has surrendered the responsibility for pattern-making to the court and to the newspapers. In this third section, the divisions of the text hardly belong to fiction at all; they merely repeat, isomorphically, the subdivisions of the Trial:

selection of jury
 opening pleas
 examination of the witnesses
 cross-examination
 examination of the defendant
 calling of further witnesses
 final pleas
 charge to jury
 deliberation in the jury room
 verdict
 final statement of defendant
 pronouncement of sentence.

There has been a shift through ninety degrees away from the high-level paradigmatic writing of the first books: now the text is all syntagm, and the

principal mode of relationship between events simply that of contiguity. If the first two books of *An American Tragedy* are a history, the last is a chronicle—Dreiser has reverted from novelist to newspaperman. And journalism, the novel's final mode, is a genre well-suited to the anti-monistic, anti-systematic position the text also contains: a form of writing which masks and denies its ideological structuration, which seems to have no authorship, which divides the text by purely arbitrary criteria, and which specialises in description of the rule of *clinamen*. Journalism purports to be the world before it has been ordered; in *An American Tragedy* it is the world which cannot be ordered.

An American Tragedy is the text which most clearly illustrates the contradictory impulses within Dreiser's psyche. Part of his mind apprehends the world in terms of grand unities: the life of the American financier is continuous with the life of all predatory organisms in creation;¹⁶ the evolution of social systems is only an extension of the process of growth and mutation visible at the level of the cell.¹⁷ The fiction which grows out of this aspect of Dreiser's mind is committed to epic forms, to montage, to totalitarian narrative geometry, and to the great cause of a demystifying materialism which will bring to the randomness of human life the intelligibility of scientific law. Yet his mind also mistrusts this yearning for the One, for monism, for the great *Om*: the macro-structures of his fiction are given unnatural visibility at the same time as they are rendered enigmatic, or denied clear origin, or are simply abandoned. Ultimately the desire for unified theory will lead Dreiser away from fiction altogether, into scientific mysticism; a mysticism which is, however, always subverting itself and deferring indefinitely the moment of synthesis and closure. In his Introduction to the *Notes on Life* Powys indicates the reasons why Dreiser's project could never reach its conclusion.

Notes

¹I confine my quotations from J. C. Powys to the latest and most accessible of his criticisms of Dreiser: the Introduction to *Notes on Life*, ed. M. Tjader and J. J. McAleer, University of Alasama Press, 1974, pp. x-xiv.

²R. A. Asselineau, "Theodore Dreiser's Transcendentalism", *English Studies Today*, Second Series, Bern, 1961, pp. 233-43; G. Friedrich, "Theodore Dreiser's Debt to John Woolman's Journal", *American Quarterly* 7, Winter 1955, 385-92; W. Furmanczyk, "Theodore Dreiser's Philosophy in *Notes on Life*", *Dreiser Newsletter* 3, Spring 1972, 9-12; R. Lundén, *The Inevitable Equation*, Acta Univ. Upsaliensis, Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia 16, Uppsala, 1973; J. J. McAleer, *Theodore Dreiser: an Introduction and Interpretation*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968; J. D. Thomas, "Epimetheus Bound: Theodore Dreiser and the Novel of Thought", *Southern Humanities Review* 3, Fall 1969, 346-57; E. Vivas, "Dreiser, an Inconsistent Mechanist", *Ethics* 48, July 1938, 498-508.

³See J. D. Thomas, "The Supernatural Naturalism of Dreiser's Novels", *Rice Institute Pamphlets* 46, April 1959, 53-69.

⁴C. G. Katope, "Sister Carrie and Spencer's First Principles", *American Literature* 4, No. 1, March 1969, pp. 64-75.

⁵See P. Williams, "The Chapter Titles of *Sister Carrie*", *American Literature* 36, Nov. 1964, 359-65; and S. L. Tippetts, "The Theatre in Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*", *Notes and Queries*, March 1966, pp. 99-103.

⁶Katope, op. cit., p. 65.

⁷R. Jakobson, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances", *Selected Writings of R. J.*, The Hague: Mouton, 1971, pp. 239-59.

⁸See E. Moers, *Two Dreisers*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1970, pp. 256-70.

⁹See J. Loeb, *The Mechanistic Conception of Life*, ed. D. Fleming, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964; and E. Moers, *Two Dreisers*, pp. 240-55.

¹⁰Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Chapter 6; Fontana edition, London, 1962, p. 95.

¹¹By A. Levitt.

¹²See the list of questions in Moers, *Two Dreisers*, pp. 285-88.

¹³Dreiser's transformation of the Brown-Gillette source-material is discussed in E. Greenberg, "A Case Study in the Technique of Realism: Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*", Diss. New York University, 1936; and in J. F. Castle, "The Making of *An American Tragedy*", Diss. University of Michigan, 1952. A rather more lurid reconstruction of the case than Dreiser's novel is presented in C. Samuels, *Death Was the Bridegroom*, New York, 1955.

¹⁴See J. C. Wentz, "An American Tragedy as Epic Theatre: the Piscator Dramatization", *Modern Drama* 4, 365-76.

¹⁵See S. Eisenstein, *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. J. Leyda, New York, 1949, esp. pp. 96-103; S. Eisenstein, "Un projet: l'adaptation de *An American Tragedy*", *Revue des lettres modernes* 5, Summer 1958, 88-97.

¹⁶See M. Millgate, "Theodore Dreiser and the American Financier", *Studi Americani* 7, 133-46.

¹⁷See Dreiser to George Douglas, Jan. 26, 1935; in *Letters of Theodore Dreiser*, ed. R. H. Elias, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959, II, 718-19.

John Cowper Powys

Theodore Dreiser

(*The Little Review*, Vol. II, No. 8., November 1915)

In estimating the intrinsic value of a book like *The 'Genius'* and—generally—of a writer like Theodore Dreiser, it is advisable to indulge in a little gentle introspection.

Criticism need not always impose itself as an art; but it must at least conform to some of the principles that govern that form of human activity. The worthlessness of so much energetic modern criticism is that it proceeds—like scum—from the mere surface of the writer's intelligence. It is true that all criticism resolves itself ultimately into a matter of taste;—but one has to discover what one's taste really is; and that is not always easy.

Taste is a living thing, an organic thing. It submits to the laws of growth; and its growth is fostered or retarded by many extraneous influences. In regard to the appreciation of new and original works of art, it belongs to the inherent nature of taste that it should be enlarged, transmuted, and undergo the birth-pangs of a species of recreation. In the presence of a work of art that is really unusual, in an attempt to appreciate a literary effect that has never appeared before, one's taste necessarily suffers a certain embarrassment and uneasiness. It suffers indeed sometimes a quite extreme discomfort. This is inevitable. This is right. This means that the creative energy in the new thing is getting to work upon us, unloosening our prejudices and enlarging our scope. Such a process is attended by exquisite intellectual excitement. It is also attended by a certain rending and tearing of personal vanity.

One is too apt to confuse the existing synthesis of one's aesthetic instincts with the totality of one's being; and this is a fatal blunder; for who can fathom the reach of *that* circumference? And it is of the nature of all syntheses to change and grow.

Yet, on the other hand, nothing is more ridiculous and ineffective than the kind of hand-to-mouth criticism which attempts to eliminate its own past, and to snatch at the glow and glamour of a work of art, as it were '*de vacuo*', and out of misty clouds. If one wishes to catch the secret of true criticism; if one's criticism is to be something more than a mere howl of senseless condemnation or yawp of still more senseless praise; one must attempt to do what Goethe and Saint-Beuve and Brandes and Pater were always doing: that is to say, to make every use of every tradition, *our own*, as well as that of classical authority;—and then carry all this a little, just a little, *further*; giving it the shudder and the thrilling interest of the process of organic growth.

Without tradition, the tradition of our own determined taste and the tradition of classical taste, there can be no growth. Oracles uttered in neglect of these, are oracles '*in vacuo*', without meaning or substance; without roots in human experience. Whether we are pleased to acknowledge it or not, our own gradually-evolved taste is linked at a thousand points with the classical taste of the ages. In criticising new work we can no more afford to neglect such tradition than, in expressing our thoughts, we can afford to neglect language.

Tradition *is* the language of criticism. It can be carried further: every original work of art, by producing a new reaction upon it, necessarily carries it further. But it cannot be swept aside; or we are reduced to dumbness; to such vague growls and gestures as animals might indulge in. Criticism, to carry any intelligible meaning at all, must use the language provided by the centuries. There is no other language to use; and in

default of language we are reduced, as I have said, to inarticulate noises.

The unfortunate thing is, that much of the so-called 'criticism' of our day is nothing better than such *physiological gesticulation*. In criticism, as in life, a certain degree of *continuity* is necessary, or we become no more than arbitrary puffs of wind, who may shriek one day down the chimney, and another through a crack in the door, but in neither case with any intelligible meaning for human ears.

In dealing with a creative quality as unusual and striking as that of Theodore Dreiser, it is of absolutely no critical value to content ourselves with a crude physical disturbance on the surface of our minds, whether such disturbance is favourable or unfavourable to the writer. It is, for instance, quite irrelevant to hurl condemnation upon a work like *The 'Genius'* because it is largely preoccupied with sex. It is quite equally irrelevant to lavish enthusiastic laudations upon it because of this preoccupation. A work of art is not good because it speaks daringly and openly about things that shock certain minds. It is not bad because it avoids all mention of such things. An artist has a right to introduce into his work what he pleases and to exclude from his work what he pleases. The question for the critic is, not what subject has he selected, but how has he treated that subject;—has he made out of it an imaginative, suggestive, and convincing work of art, or has he not! There is no other issue before the critic than this; and if he supposes there is,—if he supposes he has the smallest authority to dictate to a writer what his subject shall be;—he is simply making a fool of himself.

There is an absurd tendency among some of us to suppose that a writer is necessarily a great writer because he is daring in his treatment of sex. This is quite as grotesque an illusion as the opposite one, that a great writer must be idealistic and uplifting. There is not the remotest reason why he should concern himself with sex; if he prefers—as did Charles Dickens for

instance—to deal with other aspects of life. On the other hand there is not the least reason why he should be 'uplifting'. Let him be an artist—an artist—that is the important matter! All these questions concerning 'subjects' are tedious and utterly trifling.

In *The 'Genius'* Theodore Dreiser has achieved a very curious and a very original work. In doing it he has once more made it clear how much more interesting the quality of his own genius is than that of any other American novelist of the present age.

The *'Genius'* is an epic work. It has the epic rather than the dramatic quality; it has the epic rather than the mystic, or symbolic, quality. And strictly speaking, Dreiser's novels, especially the later ones, are the only novels in America, are the only novels, as a matter of fact, in England or America, which possess this quality. It is quite properly in accordance with the epic attitude of mind, with the epic quality in art, this reduction of the more purely human episodes to a proportionate insignificance compared with the general surge and volume of the life-stream. It is completely in keeping with the epic quality that there should be no far-fetched psychology, no quivering suspensions on the verge of the unknown.

Dreiser is concerned with the mass and weight of the stupendous life-tide; the life-tide as it flows forward, through vast panoramic stretches of cosmic scenery. Both in respect to human beings, and in respect to his treatment of inanimate objects, this is always what most dominantly interests him. You will not find in Dreiser's books those fascinating arrests of the onward-sweeping tide, those delicate pauses and expectancies, in back-waters and enclosed gardens, where persons, with diverting twists in their brains, murmur and meander at their ease, protected from the great stream. Nobody in the Dreiser-world is so protected; nobody is so privileged. The great stream sweeps them all forward, sweeps them all away; and not they, but *It*, must be regarded as the hero of the tale.

It is precisely this quality, this subordination of the individual to the deep waters that carry him, which makes Dreiser so peculiarly the American writer. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why he has had a more profoundly appreciative hearing in England than in the United States. It was so with Walt Whitman in his earlier days. To get the adequate perspective for a work so entirely epic it seems necessary to have the Atlantic as a modifying foreground. Americans—so entirely *in it* themselves—are naturally, unless they possess the Protean faculty of the editor of Reedy's *Mirror*, unable to see the thing in this cosmic light. They are misled by certain outstanding details—the sexual scenes, for instance; or the financial scenes,—and are prevented by these, as by the famous 'Catalogues' in Whitman, from getting the proportionate vision.

The true literary descendants of the author of the *Leaves of Grass* are undoubtedly Theodore Dreiser and Edgar Masters. These two, and these two alone, though in completely different ways, possess that singular 'beyond-good-and-evil' touch which the epic form of art requires. It was just the same with Homer and Vergil, who were as naturally the epic children of aristocratic ages, as these are of a democratic one.

Achilles is not really a very attractive figure—take him all in all; and we remember how scandalously Aeneas behaved to Dido. The ancient epic writers, writing for an aristocracy, caught the world-stream from a poetic angle. The modern epic writers, writing for a democracy, catch it from a realistic one. But it is the same world-stream; and in accordance with the epic vision there is the same subordination of the individual to the cosmic tide. This is essentially a dramatic, rather than an epic epoch, and that is why so many of us are bewildered and confused by the Dreiser method.

The 'Genius' is a long book. But it might have been three times as long. It might begin anywhere and stop anywhere. It is the *Prose-Iliad* of the American Scene; and, like that other, it has a right to cut out its

segment of the shifting panorama at almost any point.

And so with the style of the thing. It is a ridiculous mis-statement for critics to say that Dreiser has no style. It is a charming irony, on his own part, to belittle his style. He has, as a matter of fact, a very definite and a very effective style. It is a style that lends itself to the huge indifferent piling up of indiscriminate materials, quite as admirably as that gracious poetical one of the old epic-makers lent itself to their haughtier and more aristocratic purpose. One would recognize a page of Dreiser's writings as infallibly as one would recognize a page of Hardy's. The former *relaxes* his medium to the extreme limit and the latter *tightens* his, but they both have their 'manner'. A paragraph written by Dreiser would never be mistaken for anyone else's. If for no other peculiarity Dreiser's style is remarkable for the shamelessness with which it adapts itself to the drivel of ordinary conversation. In the Dreiser books—especially in the later ones, where in my humble opinion he is feeling more firmly after his true way,—people are permitted to say those things which they actually do say in real life—things that make you blush and howl, so soaked in banality and ineptitude are they. In the true epic manner Dreiser gravely puts down all these fatuous observations, until you feel inclined to cry aloud for the maddest, the most fantastic, the most affected Oxonian wit, to serve as an antidote.

But one knows very well he is right. People don't in ordinary life—certainly not in ordinary democratic life—talk like Oscar Wilde, or utter deep ironic sayings in the style of Matthew Arnold. They don't really—let this be well understood—concentrate their feelings in bitter pungent spasmodic outbursts, as those Rabelaisian persons in Guy de Maupassant. They just gabble and gibber and drivel; at least that is what they do in England and America. The extraordinary language which the lovers in Dreiser—we use the term 'lovers' in a large sense—use to one another might well make an aesthetic-minded person howl with

nervous rage. But then,—and who does not know it?—the obsession of the sex-illusion is above everything else a thing that makes idiots of people; a thing that makes them talk like Simple Simons. In real life lovers don't utter those wonderful pregnant sayings which leap to their lips in our subtle symbolic dramas. They just burble and blather and blurt forth whatever drivelling nonsense comes into their heads. Dreiser is the true master of the modern American Prose-Epic just because he is not afraid of the weariness, the staleness, the flatness and unprofitableness of actual human conversation. In reading the great ancient poetic epics one is amazed at the 'naivete' with which these haughty persons—these gods and demi-gods express their emotional reactions. It is 'carried off', of course, there, by the sublime heightening of the style; but it produces just the same final impression,—of the insignificance of the individual, whether mortal or immortal, compared with the torrent of Fate which sweeps them all along.

And the same thing applies to Dreiser's attitude towards 'good and evil' and towards the problem of the 'supernatural'. All other modern writers array themselves on this side or that. They either defend traditional morality or they attack it. They are anxious, at all costs, to give their work dramatic intensity; they struggle to make it ironical, symbolical, mystical—God knows what! But Dreiser neither attacks morality nor defends immorality. In the true Epic manner he puts himself aside, and permits the great mad Hurly-Burly to rush pell-mell past him and write its own whirligig runes at its own careless pleasure. Even Zola himself was not such a realist. Zola had a purpose;—the purpose of showing what a Beast the human animal is! Dreiser's people are not beasts; and they shock our aesthetic sensibilities quite as often by their human sentiment as they do by their lapses into lechery.

To a European mind there is something incredibly absurd in the notion that these Dreiser books are immoral.

Unlike the majority of French and

Russian writers Dreiser is not interested in the pathology of vice. He is too deeply imbued with the great naive epic spirit to stop and linger in these curious bye-paths. He holds Nature—in her normal moods—to be sufficiently remarkable.

It is the same with his attitude towards the 'supernatural'. The American Prose-Epic were obviously false to reality if the presence of the supernatural were not felt. It is felt and felt very powerfully; but it is kept in its place. Like Walt Whitman's stellar constellations, it suffices for those who belong to it, it is right enough where it is—we do not want it any nearer!

Because the much-tossed wanderer, Eugene Witla, draws a certain consolation, at the last, from Christian Science, only a very literal person would accuse the author of *The 'Genius'* of being a convert to the faith. To omit Christian Science from any prose-epic of American life would be to falsify the picture out of personal prejudice. Dreiser has no prejudices except the prejudice of finding the normal man and the normal woman, shuffled to and fro by the normal forces of life, an interesting and arresting spectacle. To some among us such a spectacle is not interesting. We must have the excitement of the unusual, the shock of the abnormal. Well! There are plenty of European writers ready to gratify this taste. Dreiser is not a European writer. He is an American writer. The life that interests him, and interests him passionately, is the life of America. It remains to be seen whether the life of America interests Americans!

It is really quite important to get the correct point of view with regard to Dreiser's 'style'. The *negative* qualities in this style of his are indeed as important as the positive ones. He is so epical, so objective, so concrete and indifferent, that he is quite content when the great blocked-out masses of his work lift themselves from the obscure womb of being and take shape before him. When they have done this,—when these piled-up materials and portentous groups of people have limned themselves against the grey background,—he himself stands aside, like some dim

demiurgic forger in the cosmic blast-furnace, and mutters queer commentaries upon what he sees. He utters these commentaries through the lips of his characters—Cowperwood, say, or Witla—or even some of the less important ones;—and broken and incoherent enough they are!

But what matter! The huge epic canvas is stretched out there before us. The vast cyclopean edifice lifts its shadowy bulk towards the grey sky. The thing has been achieved. The creative spirit has breathed upon the waters. Resting from his titanic labour, what matter if this Demiurge drowns, and with an immense humorous indifference permits his characters to nod too, and utter strange words in their dreams!

The carelessness of Dreiser's style, its large indolence, its contempt for epigrammatic point, its relaxed strength, is not really a defect at all when you regard his work from the epic view-point.

There must be something in a great cosmic picture to take the place of the sand and silt and rubbish and rubble which we

know so well in life, under the grey sky! And these stammered incoherences, these broken mutterings, fill in this gap. They give the picture that drab patience, that monotonous spaciousness which is required. Symbolic drama or psychological fiction can dispense with these blank surfaces. The prose-epic of America cannot afford to do without them. They suggest that curious sadness—the sadness of large, flat, featureless scenery, which visitors from Europe find so depressing.

Well! Thus it remains. If one is interested in the "urge—urge—urge", as Whitman calls it, of the normal life-stream as it goes upon its way, in these American States, one reads Dreiser with a strange pleasure. He is no more moral than the normal life-stream is moral; and he is no more immoral. It is true the normal life-stream does not cover *quite* the whole field. There *are* back-waters and there *are* enclosed gardens.

There was a Europe once. But the American prose-epic is the American prose-epic.

John Cowper Powys

An American Tragedy

(*The Dial*, Vol. LXXX, No. 2., 1926)

The fact that Theodore Dreiser's new novel seems likely to leave many readers repulsed and many critics confounded does not detract from its value. Its cold Acherontic flood pursues its way, owing little, if anything, to the human qualities that disarm, endear, or beguile, owing nothing to the specious intellectual catchwords of the hour. The pleasure to be derived from it is grim, stark, austere, a purely aesthetic pleasure, unpropitious to such as require human cajolery in these high matters.

To use the expression 'objective' with regard to it is only illuminating if what one means is that the writer's energy is so powerful that his vision of things is projected to a certain distance from himself; to such a distance, in fact, that there are no trailing and bleeding fringes left to tug at his vitals or to hinder him from taking up his load and going on his way. In this sense the book is certainly a planetary projectile. It lives, if it lives at all, by its own revolution on its own axis. Its creator has written no *apologia*, no consolatory interpretation, on the sky of its orbit.

But what chasms and crevasses, what dark cavities worse than lunar craters, have we to enter, in order to geologise and botanise among the lava-cracks and the grey mosses of this scarcely congealed metallic microcosm! One reads somewhere that certain aboriginals of North America used to murmur of mysterious presences they named *manitou*, *wakanda*, *orenda*. The Bantu Africans whisper too of an invisible essence called *mulungu*. These primordial emanations do not appear to have been exactly divine or exactly diabolic. Rather do they present themselves as diffuse magnetic dispersions, thrown off by the motions of primal Matter, as it stirs in

its sleep, groping forward from the inanimate towards the organic. Some such *orenda*, some such *mulungu* seems to be the motive force and indeed the subject-matter of *An American Tragedy*; only in this case the mysterious effluence is given off rather by psychic than by physical forces. But to catch, out of the "palpable obscure", these secret stirrings and to follow them in their furtive motions a writer has to break many rules of language.

Perhaps the *Introibo ad altare* of any scrupulous initiation into the Dreiserian cult is to put one's finger upon the "blind mouth" of the historical method and wash one's hands clean of all rules, standards, conformities, traditions.

An American Tragedy certainly justifies its title. It is not merely American in its external stage-sets and the superficial idiosyncrasies of its characters. Plenty of American novels offer these allurements and yet remain as much afloat and deracinated as drifting seaweed. This extraordinary creation is American in its bones and blood and entrails. It is American in the heave of its breath, in the swing of its stride, in the smoke of its nostrils. Its Atlantean shoulders are American; so are its portentous buttocks. Its solemn wink, its shameless yawn, its outstretched nonchalant limbs, all betray the sardonic sentiment, the naïve brutality, the adamantine stoicism of that organized chaos whose event is 'in the hands of God'.

The greatness of this work lies in the fact, among other things, that it covers so much ground. Some of the most arresting of Mr. Dreiser's contemporaries are vigorous and convincing enough when on their own particular native soil. But where these 'localists' lose their plumage is when they

leave home and like all ill-advised migratory birds settle and chatter upon alien roof-tops. No one except Dreiser seems strong enough to swallow the whole chaotic-spectacle and to disgorge it into some form of digested brain-stuff. His alone is the sprawl and the clutch, his alone the gullet and the stomach, competent to make away with such a cantle! On their own immediate ground these other writers can be suggestive enough. Off their ground they are nothing at all. But to be off the American ground of Dreiser's saturation you would have to take ship; and even then you would be miles out at sea ere that voice of Polyphemus fell upon silence or that Cyclopean eye, along with the light-ship of Sandy Hook and the search-light of Alcatraz, sank below the horizon!

An American Tragedy begins in Kansas City, the geographical navel of the land, moves thence to upper New York State, and terminates with the execution of its hero in Sing-Sing; but the psychic chemistry, of which it captures the *mulungu*, has its body and pressure in every portion of this country, and needs no map nor chart. This would hardly have been the case had what interested Dreiser most been those particular idiosyncrasies of our common nature that require a local habitation for their richest efflorescence. His Ygdrasil, his occult World-Ash-Tree, straddles its roots from coast to coast; finds nourishment as easily from the sands of Arizona, as from the red soil of the Carolinas; and it can do this because its roots are not really in the earth at all but in a vast diffused life-illusion, rising up like a thick mist out of a multitude of defrauded souls. This accounts for the fact that *An American Tragedy* is so lacking in what is soothing and healing to the mind, so sombrely naked of the kind of charm which pastures upon old usages, grows sweet and mellow upon the milk of ancient fields. Bell-hops, store-keepers, drummers, lawyers, sheriffs, politicians, factory-owners, factory-managers, factory-hands, stenographers, policemen, ministers, waiters, crooks, doctors, newspaper-men; all these, together with

their counterparts in the residential sections, are perpetually throwing off, from Portland, Oregon to Portland, Maine, from Duluth to Miami, a cloud of invisible eidola, airy images of their grosser desires; and these are the filmy bricks of which Dreiser builds his impregnable dream-world.

It needs something thaumaturgic in a writer to enable him to separate this *mulungu* of accumulated life-illusions from the rest of the cosmic spectacle. But what Dreiser has done is nothing less than this; and we are compelled to accept as reality the "grim feature" thus starkly presented; although we cry to it in our dismay—"Hence, horrible shadow, unreal mockery, hence!" For it is as if, in Dreiser's work, *America itself*—the "commensurate antagonist" of the old civilisations—*saw itself* for the first time; cast a sly, shrewd, exultant, inquisitive look at itself; and turned away with a sardonic shrug.

Why is it that agriculturists and seafaring people play so small a part in Dreiser's books, though both Witla in *The 'Genius'* and Clyde in this story find their friendliest sweethearts in a farmhouse? Is it not because the doom is on him to recreate just that particular life-dream which cannot co-exist with any close contact with earth or sea? The traditions of earth-life and sea-life surround the persons committed to them with all manner of magical encrustations such as have the power to reject and ward off that garish hubbub, that crude hurly-burly, of an existence dominated by 'modern improvements'.

The very fatality of this spectacle, as Dreiser half discovers and half creates it, is something that sets its rhinoceros-horn, rampantly and blindly against all that is quaint, delicate, subtle in human nature. And yet throughout those scenes in the Kansas City hotel, throughout the coarse duplicities of the boy's first infatuation, throughout the scatter-brained jovialities in brothel, wine-shop, and automobile, throughout the rough-and-tumble on the frozen river—so like a picture by Teniers or Jan Steen—throughout those pathetic

struggles of Clyde and Roberta to outwit the vulgar respectability of Lycurgus, New York, one grows increasingly conscious that, rank and raw as it all is, there is something in the relentless and terrible *gusto* of the author's relish for what he is about which rises to the height of a monstrous sublimity.

It seems a strange use of the word 'realistic' to apply it to this stupendous objectification of the phantasmal life-dreams of so many tin-tack automatons of a bastard modernity; but when one grows aware how Dreiser's own Deucalion-like mind murmurs, weeps, laughs, and gropes among them, a queer oppression catches at the throat and a kind of grim hypnosis—as if a beast-tamer were luring us into his cage of snouts and tails and hungry non-human eyes—makes us almost ready to cry out, in kindred delusion, 'It's the truth! It's the truth!'

An American Tragedy is the other side of the shield of that "plain democratic world" whereof Walt Whitman chanted his dithyrambic acceptance. And we may note that just as Whitman took ordinary human words and made them porous to his transcendent exultations, so Dreiser has invented a style of his own, for this monody over the misbegotten, which is like nothing else in literature. I think it is a critical mistake to treat this Dreiserian style as if it were a kind of unconscious blundering. If it is unconscious it certainly could find a very sophisticated defence; for who is not aware to-day of many recondite craftsmen who make use of the non-grammatical, the non-rational, and even of the nonsensical, to most refined aesthetic results?

It is much easier to call Dreiser naïve than to sound the depths of the sly, huge, subterranean impulses that shape his unpolished runes. The rough scales and horny excrescences of the style of *An American Tragedy* may turn out to be quite as integral a part of its author's spiritual skin as are the stripes and spots and feathered crests of his more ingratiating contemporaries.

The subject of the book, this tragedy that

gathers and mounts and accumulates till it wrecks the lives involved, is the tragedy of perverted self-realization, the mistaking of the worse shadow for the better. All are shadows; but the art of life is still in its infancy when we make the mistake that this poor Clyde Griffiths made. But, after all, such in its own day and place was the tragedy of Macbeth; such, with yet insaner convolutions, the tragedy of Raskolnikoff. One has to take refuge in a different world altogether, in a world that has vanished with the philosophy of the ancients, to find an ignoble mistake of this kind unworthy of the ritual of Dionysus. Certain it is that with the exception of the unfortunate Roberta, not a character in this book wins our deeper sympathy. Clyde is pitiable, if we renounce all craving for mental and moral subtleties, but we pity him as we would pity a helpless vicious animal driven to the slaughter-house, not as we pity a fully conscious human intellect wrestling with an untoward fate. And yet the book produces a sense of awe, of sad humility, of troubled wonder. How has this been achieved?

No one but Dreiser, as far as I know, could take a set of ragamuffin bell-hops, scurvy editors, tatterdemalion lawyers, greedy department-store wenches, feather-weight society chits, "heads without name, no more remembered than summer flies", could thrust into the midst of these people an ill-starred, good-looking weakling like Clyde; and then, out of such material—surely more uninspiring than can have ever been selected by the brain of man or artist—set up a colossal brazen-ribbed image, which the very wild geese, in their flight over the cities of men, must suppose to be fathom-based upon reality!

To taste the full flavour, the terrible 'organic chemical' flavour, like the smell of a stock-yard, which emanates from this weird book, it is necessary to feel, as Dreiser seems to feel—and, indeed, as we are taught by the faith of our fathers—that the soul of the most ill-conditioned and raw-sensed of our race, gendered by man, born of woman, has a potentiality of suffering equal with the noblest.

Thus in place of the world we know there rises up before us Something towering and toppling and ashen-grey, a very *Balaena Mysticetus* of the abyss, riddled with devouring slime-worms. And we ourselves, so great is this writer's power, become such worms. It is a formidable achievement, the creation of this 'empathy', this more than sympathy, in the case of such unfortunates; and to have brought it about is, say what you please, a spiritual as well as an aesthetic triumph. To watch the death-hunt of the faltering Clyde is to watch a fox-hunt in the company of some primordial Fox-god, who knows as you cannot know, both the ecstasy of stealing into the hen-roost and *what it is* to feel the hot breath of the hounds following your flying tail!

Balzac used to throw his protean magnetism into the urge of the most opposite obsessions, becoming sometimes an angel and sometimes a demon; but Dreiser does something different from this. He over-shadows his herd of hypnotized cattle in the totality of their most meagre and petering-out reactions, meditating upon them in an ubiquitous contemplation that resembles the trance of some 'astral body' of iron and steel and paving-stone, some huge impalpable soul of the inanimate, yearning in sombre tenderness over its luckless children. And yet it is not really out of the elements of the earth that Dreiser—moving like some vast shepherd of Jotunheim-flocks, among his rams and ewes—erects his sorrowful sheep-fold, but rather out of the immaterial hurdles and straw of their own turnip-tasting dreams.

The portion of the story that deals with the murder itself is so imaginatively heightened as to cast a Janus-like shadow backwards and forwards over the rest of the book. What the boy sees and hears as he sits in the train that is bearing him towards his victim; the "supernatural soliciting" that calls to him out of the air; the spasm of panic-stricken weakness that distorts his purpose at the supreme moment; his convoluted doubts, after the event, as to his actual guilt; these passages, like the dark waters of the lake where the girl is drowned,

possess so much poetic porousness and transparency that they make the earlier and later portions of the work seem like an opaque face, of which they are the living and expressive eye.

Dreiser has always been a mystic. Only a mystic could capture the peculiar terror of *Matter become a ghost to the mind*, as he captures it, so as to be a veritable confederate with the Chthonian divinities. Only a mystic could ponder so obstinately upon the wretched pulse-beats of a scamp like Clyde, till they respond to the rumble of Erebus, till they rise and sink in ghastly reciprocity with the shadow-voices of Typhon, of Loki, of Azazel, of Ahriman!

We can protest—and here, as I pen these lines in the very hotel where Clyde served his transients, I do most heartily protest—that there are aspects of human nature entirely obliterated from this gregarious shadow-dance. But such protests must conform to aesthetic intelligence. *An American Tragedy* is the tragedy of only such aspects of mortal consciousness as can get themselves objectified in such a psychic panorama. An artist, a mystic, a prophet if you will, must be allowed to *isolate his phenomena*. Dreiser's phenomena are not lacking in their own inherent contrasts. Compare the letters of Roberta, for example, so poignant as to be almost intolerable, with the baby-talk in the letters of Sondra, so intolerable for the very opposite reason! Sondra is one stage further removed from nature than Roberta; but the genuineness of her infatuation for Clyde is not lost in her queer jargon. Infatuated young persons, of both sexes, do babble in this unpleasant way when they are devoid of all critical alteregoism. Like some gigantic naturalist studying the twitchings and turnings of a crowd of shimmery-winged dung-beetles Dreiser has been put to it to invent human sounds such as shall represent the love-cries and the panic-cries of these husks of inane rapacity.

Had any of his rampaging bell-hops, his crafty lawyers, his sly department-store ladies, his bouncing society-chits, shown too marked a tendency to emerge into a

more appealing stratum of consciousness, a certain formidable unity of 'timbre' would have been lost to the book, a consistency of rhythm broken, a necessary pressure removed. Composed of everything that prods, scrapes, rakes, harrows, and outrages an intelligent organism the environment, to which these creatures of Dreiser's contemplation respond, itself mingles with their lamentable response. It is out of this appalling reciprocity of raw with raw, that the mass and weight and volume of the book proceed. And this accumulated weight—so terribly mortis'd and tenon'd by its creator's genius—has its own unparalleled beauty, as pure an aesthetic beauty (almost mathematical in the rigidity of its pattern) as the most purged and exacting taste could demand. Thus is brought about through the mediumship of this omophagous intellect, the only escape from the impact of a certain horrible dream-world which a lost soul can find; the escape, namely, of giving to the Chimaera itself the lineaments of a work of art. To the unhappy wretch by the wayside whom Zarathustra found with a snake in his gullet was uttered the magic formula—"Bite and spit!" This is what Theodore Dreiser has done and the result is *An American Tragedy*.

In *Plays Natural and Supernatural* this same author bestowed an articulate voice upon that thundering ox-bellow of the

American Locomotive (so different from the thin whistles of European trains) which, reverberating across the continent, sounds the modern tragic chorus to so many broken-hearted vigils. In this same book there reaches the brain of a patient under laughing-gas a monstrous voice, repeating the syllable Om! Om! Om!

Such, it seems to me—that moan of the freight-train as you hear it in the night and that *other sound* which few have the ears to hear—is the only adequate commentary that can be made upon the temptation and crime and punishment of Clyde Griffiths, bell-hop of Kansas City! Not for nothing has this unique book gathered itself about the mystery of evil.

Every imaginative writer is doomed sooner or later to become a scape-goat; doomed to take upon himself, in a strange occult fashion, "the Sins of the World". And as one ponders upon the figure of Dreiser, moving in sombre *bonhomie*, humming and drumming, across the literary arena, one cannot fail to note that he also has had to balance that pack upon his shoulders.

His vision of things blames no one, lets no one off, reduces all "benevolence and righteousness" to sorrowful humility; pitiful, patient, dumb. For at the back of the world, as he sees it, is neither a Devil nor a Redeemer; only a featureless *mulungu* that murmurs forever "Om! Om! Om!"

John Cowper Powys

Dreiser

(From "Modern Fiction", Ch. 3 of *Sex in the arts: a symposium*, ed. J. F. McDermott and K. B. Taft, 1932; within this chapter Powys also discusses, in turn, Proust, Joyce and Lawrence.)

The contribution made by Theodore Dreiser to the sex consciousness of our era seems less easy to weigh in the balance, or estimate with any exact precision, than that of our first-rate writers. And this is because the peculiar genius of this unique figure in American letters springs from the man's colossal wholeness of self-assertion.

Most writers' personal lives can be separated from their work, or rather their work, considered as so much exterior craftsmanship or occasional inspiration, can be disentangled from their lives, as something that they have consciously projected. But in Dreiser's case we are always left with the feeling—whatever of his we may read—that the man behind the work is much greater than anything he has ever written or conceivably *could* write. That he should write at all—whether vast realistic novels, or autobiographical sketches, or dithyrambic celebrations of passing moods—seems so much more of a premeditated, objective achievement than that he should walk or breathe or eat or talk. The singular wholeness of his extraordinary identity surrounds, with an invisible psychic circumference, the centrifugal energy of his being; and each of his separate writings is, as it were, a Parhelion, or Mock-Sun, a dark spot or a luminous spot upon the steady halo of his familiar personality.

That much too "staled and rung upon" word "Cosmic", applicable to Whitman, and in a measure to Tolstoy, is the only word really congruous with this quality of "wholeness" in Dreiser.

His very playfulness, unlike that of other, cleverer writers, remains the mastodon-playfulness of some vast fragment of primordial world-stuff, hugely relishing its

aeonian escape from the pressure of the life-urge, and basking 'pro-tem' in fathomless inertia. And it is from these spells of planetary relaxation that the indolent rub-a-dub-dub" and "rum-ti-dum-ti-dum" of his literary lapses (the hummings and drummings of some great, drowsy, nebular bumblebee) rise and sink so often. Capable of treating literature—that human-too-human laborious cult—with an abysmal indifference Dreiser certainly is, and what, with a wide allowance, might be called his 'style' is simply the name we are forced to give, for lack of a better, to his complete contempt for style.

The miraculous convincingness of his shoddy, shabby, tatter-demalion, catch-as-catch-can characters, so heart-breaking in their reality, is the result of his turning upon these poor ephemerae the cyclopean eye of a non-human cosmic curiosity. Without admiration and without normal pity, he does these pathetically ordinary men and women the honour of being taken more seriously and with more passionate interest than such poor dogs and lamentable bitches have ever been taken before or ever will be taken again.

To the eye of an auto-ruinous and entropic universe the psychological subtleties of people, their strutting conceits, their pinch-beck grandeurs, their theatrical gestures, are on a level with the preoccupied motions of beetles in the grass or of flies on the ceiling; but the wonder, after all, does remain that these terrestrial Lilliputians are living organisms at all—each one struggling to go up, up, up, and most of them being thrust down, down, down!—and into the heart of every organism, not because it is beautiful or clever or even pitiful, but simply because it is *there*, simply because it has

undergone the inescapable tragedy of being born, just as we see it, so weak, so helpless, so unimportant, Dreiser gazes, with a numb, dumb, hypnotic stare of sombre astonishment.

Now when the phenomenon of human sex is treated from the viewpoint of the dark suns in sidereal space, it cannot be expected that the difference between Platonic yearnings and bestial clasplings should bulk very large. What does, however, bulk large in Dreiser's erotic passages is the sex urge itself, that half-physical, half-psyche magnetic attraction which none of us escape and which resembles so closely the mysterious thermo-dynamic thrusts and pulls which are perpetually creating and destroying our chemic-atomic, radio-active world. His books are full of this sex urge; and it is always treated by him as something completely outside the control of conventional human valuations and traditional tribal imperatives.

And it is because this sex urge is reduced by him to such a blind-overpowering, elemental force that he uses it, exposes it, and presupposes it, with such a liturgic monotone of exclamatory recognition! The wholeness of his nature and its massive telluric responses to cosmic stimuli is illustrated by the way he writes of sex. He hails this mighty urge in himself with exactly the same shameless relish with which he greets it in others. Why not? This thing is indeed the tyrant alike of the evil and the good; and Dreiser shows that you have only to see it at work to know that it is more powerful than any system of human valuations or distinctions yet invented by mortal custom.

The dominant 'motif' of Dreiser's books is the tragic opposition offered by economic pressure, social conditions, and public opinion, to the free flow, backwards and forwards, between people, of this primeval sex magnetism; and the fact that his lovers are permitted by him to indulge in so much 'baby-talk', as the phrase is, and to deluge each other with such splashings of primeval sentiment, is only one indication the more that what interests him is not the

psychological convulsions of sex feeling in any particular human being's nerves, but the great flood of unconquerable eroticism, as it seethes and foams and leaps over every barrier, in all the children of men alike. And just as the particular angle from which he views sex permits his lovers to brim over in rippling baby-talk and in the spontaneous gibble-gabble of bird-beast courtship, so it relieves him from the necessity of debouching into abnormal pastures. All Krafft-Ebing, all Freud-Jung-Adler-Brill is condensed in every radiating atom of stardust and in every light-vibration from the Milky Way. The most normal ache of the heart, the most natural sinking of the pit of the stomach, the most commonplace nervous excitement in the engines of generation, any one of these things is witness enough to the presence of the universal Love-Tide.

In that curious play called *The Hand of the Potter* Dreiser deviates for once into the realm of homicidal perversity; but it is a question whether any of these various erotic perversions, sadism, masochism, homosexuality, Lesbianism, can be rendered *from within*—that is to say, with the intimate, imaginative, secretive ecstasy *felt* in the description—unless the author has more of the bitter-sweet poison of inverted proclivities in himself than a cosmic soothsayer of Dreiser's temperament usually has.

There is something more Goethean than Casanova-like in the free unblushing manner in which Dreiser monologizes about his loves; and, as in the case in *Wilhelm Meister* and the *Autobiography*, we feel that what sex excitement is really doing, for this self-revealing Faustus of the Modern City, is rather the stimulation of his psychochemic responses to an overshadowing mystery, a mystery that seems to him as remote from human lust as it is remote from human virtue, and to which he must react, if he reacts at all, with the dark taciturn *wholeness* of his nature, than to set him composing psychological disquisitions upon the difference between the microcosm 'man' and the microcosm 'woman'.

But as he has gone along upon his enigmatic and explosive way it is inevitable that Dreiser should have influenced our contemporary American scrupulosity with regard to sex. His sombre and towering prestige, and the titanic obstinacy with which he has shouldered his course through so much obloquy and detraction, entail such influence. And his weight has been entirely and faithfully thrown on the side of moral freedom!

The fact that his characters are plain, simple people, the fact that he has himself been persecuted by Americans for the honesty of his writings, the fact that he loves America and *is* American, as no other American of our time except Mr. Masters could claim to be, all these things have made his well-known championship of the freedom of personal life from interference in the matter of sex no negligible element in the history of our time.

It is his very consciousness, unsleeping and unwearied, of the grim pressure of certain dark, inscrutable forces upon our days, that has made his influence, in a very deep sense, rather a mystical than a hedonistic one.

His grave, sombrely-brooding awareness of the essential irrationality of life, its blind, chaotic confusions—like the cracking and grinding of vast ice-floes in an Arctic night—tends, in the large issue, towards a tragic responsibility rather than towards any airy gallantry!

It is noticeable that the younger generation in their handling of sex find it easier to imitate the superficial aspects of the sardonic realism of Joyce, or the richly-

charged pan-psychism of Lawrence, than to attempt the task of competing with Dreiser. Nor is the cause of this far to seek. The one grand trick of creative genius which never can be imitated is the power that comes from that particular kind of *Wholeness* to which reference has already been made. Between such 'wholeness' of nature and an author's literary output there often intervenes a deliberate barrier of style. This 'style' can be copied and reproduced; whereas that weight of personality which Dreiser so carelessly reveals as being behind his unsifted, unwinnowed, unpurged use of words, is something beyond all copying.

It is a thing worthy of note, and not without its esoteric significance, that there are a great many 'unliterary' people who are intensely moved, and most touchingly stirred, by Dreiser's way of handling sex. Such people, immersed in the absorbing practical transactions of our machine age, find the sensuous intricacies of Proust, the crushing bizarreries and burlesquings of Joyce, the wild "dim black-guardism" of Lawrence, totally outside their experience. It is to Dreiser alone, among the greater writers of our time, that they can turn, for a reflection in a mirror of genius the normal feelings that harrow them and exalt them. In Dreiser alone the dark, occult penumbra of sex passion, the stooping down of their midnight flights across the cosmos of huge inexplicable wings, give a disturbing and thunderous background to familiar, everyday human struggles; struggles after the simple satisfaction of love, of lust, of power-thirst, of pleasure-hunger, of the natural, pent-up ache to share a lonely bed, with someone who really cares!

John Cowper Powys

Introduction to Theodore Dreiser's *Notes on Life*

(Dated August 31, 1946; Published by the University of Alabama Press, 1974)

Was Theodore Dreiser a great novelist? Was he a great artist? Was he a great Thinker? And if he were all these things was it the greatness of his personality that accounted for this pre-eminence among other writers of our time? It seems impossible to treat any problem of this sort without being confronted by all the teasing entanglements of word definitions. But if we are not scientists or professional metaphysicians we just have to plunge ahead using ordinary words in their ordinary sense, adding something of our own, no doubt, to the popular meaning here and there, but not wasting our reader's time by defending, or even explaining these additions.

The sympathetic reader, for whom we are writing, will naturally pick up his oar with us and pull forward whether against the wind of popular opinion or with it.

We know pretty well what we mean by a 'great artist' in regard to painting and sculpture and probably in regard to music and play-acting, but I fancy most honest readers will confess they've had their moments of confused difficulty when applying the ticklish and tricky word 'art' to literature. The difficulty is due, I expect, to the fact that by using words rather than the simpler mediums of colour, form, sound or gesture, we have in the sphere of immediate sensation moved further away from reality, while in the sphere of mental association, we have moved nearer reality.

Now the mystery of human personality, followed by its kindred mystery, the difference between one personality and another, remains the important thing in the case of everything we call art; but it seems to me that more emphatically than

anywhere else, except perhaps in the case of the clown, the mystery of personality dominates the written word.

And we have, I feel, every reason to be suspicious the moment we hear critics separating the concept 'art' from the concept 'personality' and especially so when the conclusion arrived at is not only that there is such a thing as impersonalized or what they call 'objective' art, but that such art is superior to the commoner kind where the author's personality reveals itself in every line.

It is impossible to deny that there are a few supreme writers—such as Homer and Shakespeare and Cervantes in his *Don Quixote*—who become 'medium' writers for the human race itself; but in their case the mystery of their private selves is swallowed up in a larger mystery, a mystery that makes it only too easy for the debunkers of human genius to deprive them as individuals of the glory for which they cared so little, a mystery for which the tiresome word 'objective' remains totally inadequate and that—like the deity to his worshippers—is more rather than less than personal and might even be called super-personal or multi-personal; while these 'objective' artists are sub-personal to such a point that from their work even the very magic of the inanimate seems to have been expelled.

In his novels, from the first to the last, as indeed in every scrap and fragment he wrote, Dreiser is a thinker, and a thinker moreover with a living growing philosophy of life, that had he lived to be a hundred, would have remained incomplete and unfinished. And this is the case because his philosophy was the expression of his ever growing and developing personality.

I have not encountered, and I doubt whether anyone who reads these lines has encountered, a human personality to whom the word 'cosmic' could be as appropriately applied. I purposely use this word here to convey in a rough, casual, and popular sense, the volume and magnitude of his nature. Philosophically speaking, the word is far too orderly and carries with it too much of the notion of the systematic to suggest his special habit of thought. He was too personal to have ever possessed, or even desire to possess, a rounded-off and completed system of the universe. As with Walt Whitman, his world, strictly speaking, was not a universe at all. It was a multiverse. Dreiser *required* a fluctuating, wavering margin of the ragged-edged and the un-limited; and his imaginative view of real reality was still in process of creation. As Walt Whitman says of himself, he "contained multitudes". There *had* to be with him, to satisfy a certain primeval and elemental chaoticism in his nature, a dark abyss of unformulated, unfathomed, unregulated, uncharted, illimitable welter round every separate dimension of the multiverse he apprehended. For the world within himself as he felt its pressure when he sank into himself was a multiverse rather than a universe. His personality mellowed, grew gentler and tenderer, as he grew older but it never lost a certain destructive, explosive force. This force, however, was not a catalytic power. It did *not* remain integral and intact while it effected startling and significant changes in all with which it came in contact. It evoked such changes; but *it* also changed. He had moods, quests, obsessions, possessions, re-possession, revelations, intimations, superstitions, psychic avoidances, occult attractions, atavistic repulsions, together with strange primeval proclivities and weird elemental aberrations.

There is no gainsaying it, although to orthodox pietists, ecclesiastical fanatics and vindictive moralists, Dreiser appeared as a ramping materialist; to those who really knew him he was an awestruck mystic, a thunder-struck medicine-man of

cosmogonic television. I have met in my day and time various remarkable men of genius, including among others, Charlie Chaplin and Thomas Hardy; but what, I think, made Dreiser unique was the presence in him of some terrific psychomagnetic force for which there is at present no adequate name. This force was both creative and destructive. Some would call it spiritual. I prefer to use the simpler expressions 'magnetic' and 'psychic'. But whatever it was, it radiated from him like what theosophists call an 'aura'.

Like Fyodor Dostoevsky, Theodore Dreiser was the sort of realist whose most ghastly, lurid, murderous, bloody-pooled, spider haunted, cobwebbed background had *another background* behind it, that receded into a different kind of horror and a different kind of redemption, and the same is true of the massive Balzacian appendages of worldly glory he loves to depict; heavy furniture, tasteless ornamentation, and 'trig' costumes. Behind even this we can hear the great pulsing "om . . . om . . . om . . ." of the systole and diastole of our unfathomable life-dimension!

There was in Dreiser's soul something akin to his power, both for creation and destruction, of this breaking up the atom which perturbs so many. In whatever sphere his mind functioned it carried with it our nuclear severance and a sort of psychic-fuse capable of causing a series of violent explosions among the mental-elements of the 'status-quo'. His imagination was ceaselessly experimental and explosive. One weird cosmic world followed another, expanding the bubbles, under the demiurgic impulse of his electricity-charged cloudy ponderings.

From the Vulcanian smithy of his brooding fancy all manner of "Lost Atlantises Regained" rose up. Out of the protoplasmic ooze of ultimate being they rose, conceptual worlds moving upon inconceivable orbits, and plunging into gulfs of unimaginable chaos! To expect a cohesive, logical, rounded-off 'corpus' of philosophic thought or any definite

metaphysical system from a mind like Dreiser's is like asking for apples from a Scotch Fir. Some of the deepest thinkers in the world have resembled him in this and have had no system to offer. Where is the 'system' of Pythagoras or Heraclitus, or De Vinci, or Montaigne, or Rabelais, or Goethe, or Nietzsche, or Walt Whitman? Indeed it is not concealed from some among us that logical and rounded-off systems of thought like that of Spinoza, and, even more so, of Hegel, are in their essence contrary to the evasive reality of life and nature.

There was something in Dreiser's cosmogonic personality that not only responded in a manner that was almost terrifying to the elemental mysteries of our Dimension but that seemed to respond to Powers and Forces beyond our Dimension. And it is this awareness in him that adds so special an atmosphere of vibrations, reaching us from far away, to those descriptions in his novels of the decline and fall of certain unlucky persons with the particular sort of fatal weakness in his characters that seems to excite some mysterious sadism in the wanton concatenations of blind chance. And if these malign elements in a chaotic multiverse strike the haunted sensitivity of Dreiser's mind as actual demonic forces hunting down the weak and the unwise and the ill-constructed, so also in some manner, only in a reversed direction do certain other forces in nature, not less beyond the level of the ordinary material sequences of cause-and-effect, inspire with a sort of monstrously super-human cunning Dreiser's successful free-lances and anti-social pirates.

His mind was predominantly attracted by the chemical changes and mutations of the elements. It was not only that such chemical phenomena haunted him. They obsessed him. They were a mania with him. He was always seeing humanity in relation to the mysterious movements and transformations of the various atomic and electric events and occasions and energies and impressions, apprehended by our

senses and worked over by our conscious minds, we accept as the palpable shapes and textures of the visible world.

For Dreiser the psychic world and the physical world were never divided. He was always seeing mountains as men and men as atoms, and men and mountains and atoms as transitory bubbles in an unfathomable flood of Being, of which there was neither beginning nor end, and where reality was always turning into illusion and illusion into reality!

In his own words—and when he is in these cosmogonic moods his words gather to themselves a particular kind of rhythm that makes us think of both Whitman and Melville—"transmutation of personality is positively the outstanding law of life—so much so that even the mountains and plains, to say nothing of the cities and the hamlets, change men—transmute them from one thing to another. Thus the Himalayas, being unlike any other mountain range for size, change those nearest them. For, unlike any other mountain range, they present jagged undulations of enormous height, and they seem to speak to men in deep tones, although occasionally they speak with the roar of their avalanches. And yet at the same time they so loftily ignore man as something puny and unimportant. And they have nurtured and made sure the most important of humble men on our globe. In fact, their overpowering effect has made many men too humble, so that even today they try to efface themselves from an earth looked down upon by clouds that sit on the thrones of Gods".

It is strange to think that this great occult spirit, so constantly haunted by that planetary awe in the presence of the insoluble mystery of life which Goethe regarded as the essence of all poetry and all religion should have been spoken of by many as a 'materialist'. If such he was, it was in the sense of turning so concentrated an eye upon 'matter' that 'matter' beneath that gorgonian stare, turned into something uncommonly—even uncomfortably—like 'spirit'! You would hardly expect a mind so

obsessed by the chemistry of things to speculate after the following fashion; but these, again are his own words, and with these I will bid my old friend farewell, at least, as we say, *pro tem* :

“For, if when you die the atoms or electrons of which you are composed, should disintegrate, which would mean that they would change into pure energy, and if,—and this is a purely speculative idea of my own—this energy should, for some

reason coagulate as a force, you would, thereby, become an immense power or unit of energy—assuming that thought is a phase of energy, which many now believe—although bodiless, of continuing to think—imagine the possibilities of observation, conclusion, interest—assuming that there were endless other such disembodied and yet *thinking* units of energy to be observed by you!—perhaps even confer with! Imagine!”

John Cowper Powys

Elusive America

(American Mercury, Vol. 8, March 1927)

Generalizations about this country have so often been superficially patched up by bewildered perfunctory travellers that there is naturally a prejudice against them, and this is especially true of the opinions of wandering Englishmen; but having saturated myself in the American Scene for a couple of decades and having journeyed during that time into every region of the country I feel that I have a right to claim to be an exception to this rule. The generalization which I am anxious to make clear in what follows is one that has behind it a much weightier mass of conscious as well as unconscious impressions than it is the privilege of most strangers to receive. I am calling it 'the embodiment of my imaginary America', for it is something that only quite recently has taken palpable form; though it is now more than twenty years since the premonition of it first hovered before my mind.

I well recall the occasion when this premonition first presented itself. It was just after my original invitation to visit this continent. While waiting in Liverpool for the departure of my boat, I sat one evening, drinking such coffee as that city affords, in a pseudo-oriental resort entitled the Kardomah Café.

I am as a rule unsusceptible to such music; but I remember on this occasion receiving a curiously insistent vision of what I was to encounter in the new hemisphere from the playing of a well-known popular tune. It was Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever". How shall I express what I caught in that unsophisticated music? It was the presentiment of a mood rather than of people or places. And yet, in a mysterious way, both persons and scenery entered into the impression. But the mood was the chief

thing and the easiest to describe at this distance off. It was a mood at once sentimental and sardonic, at once wistfully fatalistic and recklessly adventurous. It was chaotic to the point of an exultant nihilism; and it was resigned with a sort of ecstasy of resignation that seemed to absolve all human helplessness from the consequences of grim Necessity.

Thus in a Liverpool coffee-shop there came to me my first premonition of my peculiar America. Once visualized, in this absurdly casual way, all manner of hints, fragments, morsels, suggestions, drawn from indiscriminate reading, rose in support of the thing. I recalled certain queer isolated passages in Goethe, in Blake, in Dostoievsky, and in other great mystics, for whom America was rather a symbol than an actuality.

What I envisaged was indeed as far removed from the iridescent dreams of an over-confident immigrant as from the ponderous statesmanlike appreciations of a Lord Bryce. And fantastic though it may sound I am still inclined to think that my occult conception was nearer the truth than either of these.

I received the impression of a land of extreme contrasts, a land where nature was prolific, but untamed; full of fabulous riches but blighted in some way by a mysterious curse; thwarted, bewitched; intersected by regions of a sinister barrenness, desolate, forlorn, sterile. And against this chaotic and littered background I visualized the figure of my elusive American. I saw him as a lean, humorous, drifting personage; facetious but melancholy, fatalistic but free from any bitter cynicism; a spendthrift, a wanderer, a gambler, generous and nonchalant; possessed, moreover, of some vast secret

rapport with nature—with that disordered landscape whose formless untraditional poetry touched a similar strain in his own perverse yet patient soul.

He was no Lincoln, my American, but he was further—oh, much further!—from any remotest resemblance to the sly, pragmatic Franklin.

II

It has been with this preconception in my mind that I have been engaged, up and down this land, for the last twenty years, upon a sort of psychic foray, an aesthetic quest, searching everywhere for some palpable realistic embodiment of my lodged and rooted *idée fixe*.

It is hard to capture, under its shifting Protean disguises, that mysterious thing hidden in any integral fragment of civilization which Aristotle would call its *entelecheia*. But over and over again during these long years I have found approximations to this imaginary America of mine. I have found them in every quarter, in every climate between the two oceans. And at last—after so many foreshadowings—I have discovered, in concrete actual presence, what has haunted me all this while in a thousand teasing hints and glimpses and suggestions.

And where, geographically speaking, do you suppose my Simon Pure America has incarnated itself? Nowhere else than in the home-country of that famous typical American, Mr. Will Rogers!

Let me hasten to give it as definite a local habitation as I can. It is in the Southwest; but to call it *the* Southwest would be, I think, to give a wrong impression; for as far as I am concerned I would not extend it either to New Mexico or to Texas.

Roughly speaking, the region which I have in mind includes Southern Missouri, the southeastern corner of Kansas, the northern portion of Arkansas, and the whole of Oklahoma. There are many minor varieties of natural scenery within the borders of the district thus outlined; and there are many

minor variations from the prevailing standard of life in those parts; but there is sufficient identity underlying these divergencies to make this particular locality a recognizable unit, and to give it, compared with all other portions of the country, a marked individuality of its own.

Certainly the two great schools of the State of Oklahoma, the University and the Agricultural College, have a character utterly different from all other educational institutions that I have ever seen; a character that most happily lends itself to the nature of their surroundings. Large, airy, grandiose buildings, playing freely in haphazard confusion with all the historic styles of academic architecture, offer to these Southwestern boys and girls a spaciousness of culture as unconventional as it is comprehensive.

All the tedious restraints of scholastic custom seemed absent; and yet I could not detect any relaxing of the will to acquire knowledge. Culture seemed indeed to be pursued with a kind of passionate naïveté, with a sort of wilful exuberance, such as the youth of our race has not displayed since those turbulent poor scholars of the great mediaeval schools listened to this or that Mystical Doctor.

But the scholastic culture in these Southwestern schools had a swing, a gaiety, a liveliness, I might almost say a wantonness,—Plato brought into the circle of Will Rogers's lasso—which was a salutary spectacle to a veteran Chautauqua lecturer.

Not much midnight oil could be burnt in these purlieus; for an air of increasing contact with earth and sky seemed to pervade both faculty and students. And well might this be so; for these great brick buildings rose straight out of the aboriginal prairie; scents and murmurs of which flowed in through windows and doors.

In Oklahoma City itself, which they tell me rivals Tulsa as an amazing centre of big business, the tone of practical enterprise, which in other parts of the country creates the impression of something implacable and forbidding, seemed to me tempered by an element of adventurousness,

untrammelled, reckless, friendly, which offered to all those things in life which do not contribute to commercial success a large and spacious toleration.

I stumbled in Oklahoma City upon the best private library I have seen in America and upon the most philosophical discourse I have ever heard; and I well remember meeting, on one of those red-coloured clay roads, a tramp drifting feebly and vaguely towards Arkansas, who was, of all human beings it has been my fate to encounter, the least adapted to what they call the struggle for existence.

At an out-of-the-way little railroad stop I was introduced to a lethargic individual in overalls who was occupying his time gravely and philosophically contemplating the passing of freight trains. All around him stretched the typical landscape of that fortunate region—prairie plains broken by green uplands and green gulleys—and there my American stood, like some rural Socrates, stalwart and dreaming, lost in a semi-vegetable, semi-mystical trance!

They introduced him to me with some facetious jest at his expense, the purport of which puzzled me; but the lucky man himself speedily explained it. "I'm knowin' how to keep," he said, "and I'm knowin' how to spend; and thanks be to the Almighty for both keepin' and spendin' . . ." I forget how many hundreds of dollars a day—they always count their riches in Oklahoma by the day—his oil brought him; but I left him in pious discourse with two of the most incompetent looking farm-hands I have ever seen in any country.

One of these same farm-hands I had an opportunity of talking to myself later in the day. He was Shakespearean in his God-given folly.

And what a background it was for such quaint human types, this prairie that stretched to such far horizons, with its peculiar entanglement of glaucous stalks and pale-flowering weeds, the buffalo-grass of the old tradition!

The broad dirt highways diminishing in noble perspective across the rolling hills, straight as Roman roads, carried as their

landmarks in place of milestones casual groups of cotton-wood trees, a tree that seemed to me possessed of all the sensitiveness of the aspen combined with a rooted sturdiness beyond any poplar trees of England or France.

Cotton-woods gradually became for me, in that Southwest, a sort of mystic formula of what I discovered in the character of those places. Their foliage was in a sense languid, transparent, meagre, insubstantial. One could see the indented bark of the trunk *through* this feeble umbrageousness, just as though the lackadaisical indolence of many a retired oil-man one could see the lineaments of a sly, tough, adventurous tamer of horses.

Extremely characteristic too of this astonishing region were the rain-ponds. These pools of incredibly clear water of a bluish tint contrasted curiously enough with the thick gamboge-yellow of the rivers and creeks. Over these rain-ponds which, because of some especial quality in the soil never seemed to drain away, I used to note—forever darting and crying—a peculiar thin-legged swallow-winged bird, the local name for which seemed to vary, as I tried to catch the syllables from the farmers' children, between kildeer, kildair and kildee.

Between this landscape, as devoid of sublimity as it is devoid of prettiness and the peculiar type of people who by some secret law of nature gravitate to its protection, a strange affiliation prevails. Littered, chaotic, casual, this particular portion of the country lends itself to all that is thriftless and negligent in human nature. Here life lingers, meanders, lies back upon itself. But with all this it has a certain curious kind of poetry which separates it as completely from the traditional picturesqueness of Europe as from the lavish beauty of the tropics; a poetry that has found its expression only now in these most modern days.

Grown weary of crude, harsh realism, grown weary of conventional romance, modern American poetry has a mania for something extremely simple and extremely

bizarre; something childish but at the same time evasive, illusive, hard to define. In the Southwest as nowhere else in this country, side by side with the gaunt derricks of the oil-fields, all these qualities which particularly appeal to the childish-sophisticated demands of modern poetry, the shrinking and sensitive nerves, the fatalistic resignation, the furtive gipsy-like subtlety of people for whom something else than success in life is the dominant impulse, find their unexpected refuge.

Perhaps the thing that most of all enables this happy quarter to offer such curious liberation to those elements in human nature which are either crushed out or exploited to material ends in other districts is the fact that a sort of fairy-story atmosphere prevails here; where all men become travellers in search of treasure, and all treasure is bestowed not in accordance with the usual laws of cause and effect, but by pure chance and the fabulous vagaries of fortune.

The projection of desperate mechanical inventions into a prolific wilderness that is forever struggling to reassert itself must of necessity offer a background to life that develops certain human qualities at the expense of others. Increase the formidableness of man's contrivances—abolish everything that is neat, trim, orderly, tidied-up, rounded-off—and you get a world where there is a certain yield, a certain give, to the laws governing human conditions. This yield, this give, this vulnerability in the very armour of destiny itself, compensates for all the frayed edges, all the trailing débris, all the litter.

And it is surely this that gives to the unconscious mind of your average Southwesterner a furtive resilience, a drifting casual relish for life on any terms which is as entirely different from the sad fatalism of the Orient as it is entirely different from the weary stoicism of Europe.

III

I remember once as I stumbled through a wood of scrub-oak somewhere in the foothills of the Ozarks how after passing many a weedy mine-head and many a deserted pit covered with brambles I entered into a long conversation with a man who had just driven his family in a wagon from Texas to Arkansas. He had a basket of berries of some sort on his arm which he ate as we talked. I think I have never met so guileless a man nor one endowed with such congenital feebleness. Patient, whimsical, quiescent, he guarded in the midst of his aimless life a low-toned shameless humour as full of matter as was that of the ex-libertine in the Forest of Arden.

My America is not an Eldorado for Puritans. It is an Alsatia for philosophers. My American is not of necessity either rich or poor, either a knave or a fool. He is a man like the rest. But he is a man who has the good luck to live in a world where two and two *can* make five; and this gives both to his pleasures and his sufferings that feeling of *bon espoir y gist au fond* which I caught on the face of that berry-picker in the Ozarks.

John Cowper Powys

Farewell to America

(*Scribner's Magazine*, Vol. XCVII, April 1935)

My *adieu* to America is charged with the burden of the gathered-up memories of thirty years—just half of the three-score years to which I have now attained! Yes, thirty years is a big fragment, a considerable cantle, out of a person's life; and the years from thirty to sixty cover moreover what is generally known as a man's prime.

For good or for evil, then, my human output, both as a speaker and writer, has already been achieved, and achieved in the American milieu and under the American influence. But, however this may be, what have I got from my thirty years in America? Certainly no "modest competence" as one friendly newspaper puts it, wherewith "to live out my days at peace in my native land"!

No, I am not in the position of an Englishman returning from the exploitation of far-off 'natives' to live and die in comfort at home. It is much rather as if—aged sixty-two—I find myself, save for a certain measure of literary reputation, fated to begin my whole life over again from the ground up.

But what have I gained from my thirty years of life in America if I have not gained money? Well, to try and analyse this is precisely the subject of the present sketch.

There is no doubt that with all the unscrupulousness and the anti-social brigandage wherewith so many Americans exploit their simpler and less predatory companions, and in spite also of the universal esteem that the possession of riches excites, there is a real spirit of social equality in America. Rich men are respected in America, and we admire them, for having, by their energy and cunning and their lively geniality, obtained what we would all like to

obtain; but we do not feel in any way different from them.

Save among certain small circles in Boston and Philadelphia and Charleston and New Orleans—the old aristocratic centres of historic culture—there is fundamentally no difference of class in American life at all, none of that irrevocable cleavage between those who have gone to a particular kind of school, or those who have been brought up with particular privileges, and the rest of us, such as we suffer from in England.

It was my lot to know America ten years before the war and for twenty years after the war, so that I have seen her in her reckless pride, in her abnormal prosperity, as well as in her puzzled adversity, angry bewilderment, and the beginnings of a completely new epoch of her history.

Have I been what they call *Americanized*? I do not think so; not at any rate in the particular physical senses in which that phrase can be employed. My accent, though certainly not what they call an 'Oxford' one, has remained, in spite of living all these years in America, unmistakably English.

But in certain much subtler ways I cannot help feeling that I *have* been Americanized, or at any rate immensely affected by my life in America.

The larger part of this influence has taken the form, if I am not mistaken, of the release of tendencies already within me, rather than of the imposition of new tendencies from without. But this is of course the most vital method in all intellectual and spiritual education. If, as Goethe says, outside influences do not draw forth a response from your own deepest nature, they remain nothing to you.

I think, as so often happens with Englishmen, who tend in their own island to grow gnarled and crotchety and perverse from too close contact with one another, the mere fact of moving about in a larger country, where the very horizons seem more extensive, compels you to wrestle with the world with the free unrestrained force of your whole being. A human soul struggling in detached desperation against the universe tends to treat its fads and its fancies, its crotchets and its manias, with less absorbing pre-occupation.

Few foreign visitors, indeed few native commercial travellers, know the length and breadth of North America as well as I. What strange scenes, what queer vignettes of the way, come floating back into my mind as I write! My feeling at present is that I shall never return, that I shall lay my bones—or rather someone else will—in the land where I was born and under the sovereignty to which I have never renounced my adherence. But who can say, in a world like this, “I will do so and so”, or “I will *not* do so and so”? If I have learned anything in all these turbulent years it is the wisdom of sinking down into the present, like a plummet into a deep sea, and letting past and future, like the scriptural Mercy and Truth, “kiss each other” and settle their receding mysteries over my submerged head.

But for the moment—a moment that seems to me now likely to stretch itself out to the end—I am minded to bid a long farewell to all these exciting scenes.

A long farewell, for instance, to the proud city of New York, that air-hung, sea-washed, weather-white Megalopolis, with its two millions of intelligent Jews and its thousands of club-swinging Irish policemen. Majestic in their polished towering facades, those up-town commercial palaces, with the gay exclusive shops at their feet, remain in my mind as the supreme challenge of hard, unsympathetic matter, raised up in obedience to the dictates of a haughty and extravagant commercialism, and defiantly directed towards all subtler human values. This up-town district, with its cloud-aspiring

architecture, glittering shops, palatial hotels, sumptuous cars, returns upon me as the realm of the rich mistresses, the richer wives, the petted daughters, the reckless salesmen and saleswomen, the insolent doorkeepers, of those magnificent gamblers who labour, after their fashion in the pleasanter purlieus of the yet more mountainous office-buildings, where Wall Street plays her ambiguous game.

I used greatly to prefer this ‘down-town’ section to that other. The rich men of Manhattan, engaged in their predatory sport, exhaled, to my thinking, a more agreeable, a more natural, a more affable aura than that which emanated from their proud harems and colossal picture-palaces in the residential quarter.

But as I kiss my hand in everlasting farewell to this dazzling wave-washed marble-frocked cosmopolitan baggage, ‘kept’ by these industrious rogues, this iridescent harlot of the nations, to whom all the mountebanks and all the peddlers of the world flock with their antics and their wares, this tireless courtesan with her white skin, her cold eyes, her dazzling tiara, her trailing unwashed skirts, it is really neither of the ‘up-town’ nor of the ‘down-town’ districts of Manhattan that I think most. It is of that intermediate region, that Alsatia of artistic pimps, that Grub Street of literary panders, that Bohemia of ‘creative work’ and no less ‘creative’ play, which radiates, like the dim spokes of a dusty wheel, north and south, east and west, from the famous square, where the double images of the Father of his Country—supporting the ‘standard’ of the questionable ‘event’—gaze sphinx-like up the great Avenue.

For it was within five minutes’ walk of this, now almost historic, square that in the top-floor-front of a house in Patchin Place I used to hear the Jefferson Market clock-tower tell the hours.

Perhaps, as I have tried so often to explain, the sweetest and deepest sense of silence, “silence eldest born of all divinities”, that I have ever known, came to me as I lay, half-awake and half-asleep,

between nine and ten of a Sunday morning, staring at the tops of the ailanthus tree and listening to the far-off sounds of the boats on the river.

Greenwich Village, like Chelsea in London and like the Left Bank of the Seine in Paris, resembles God, in that it is a circle whose circumference diminishes and increases according to human volition! But Patchin Place is unquestionably near its centre; and in Patchin Place—where it was my good luck to live for five years—I met some of the most interesting and singular human beings I have ever known. May the mysterious Tao of the great-little Kwang-Tze, then, as still, my chosen household god, hover, with the waving of those ailanthus boughs—his own favourite branches because of their Taoistic freedom from self-assertion—forever over that room and over him who inhabits it and over all those who shall enter into it!

Thirty years of wandering about the United States have rather deepened certain prejudices of mine than lessened them. My personal happiness was so mysteriously increased by my contact with the mellow natures and musical voices of the coloured race that I was always finding myself uneasy and disturbed in those southern states, where, to regard these people as human beings, with rights and sensibilities like our own, is to be a suspected and detestable interloper, “who does not understand the Negro Problem”.

I understood only too well “the Negro Problem”; at least those aspects of it which belong to the bad red blood, the same under all skins, wherein flows the natural selfishness and cruelty of our common human heart.

And if my prejudices—or, as I would myself put it, my instructive conscience—stirred within me over the Southern attitude to Negroes, another aspect of my nature was always being ‘rattled’ by the puritanical and illiberal temper which I so often encountered in New England. This disturbance, this feeling of human indignation in the presence of ideas so different from those of Socrates mounted up to an angry outburst of moral wrath

when I contemplated the proceedings of the magnates of Massachusetts in the affair of Sacco and Vanzetti.

My personal farewell to America contains certainly no grain of regret at never seeing the ‘aristocratic’ South again or ‘cultured’ Boston again; and I confess, too, that it is an immense relief to me to say good-bye forever to the Pacific Coast.

How differently I feel to the City of New York, how differently to the whole expanse of the great State of New York! When I finally gave up lecturing and settled down to the quietness of a country life I did so under the psychic aura of the ghosts of the proud Mohawk nation, and surrounded by descendants of the great Dutch families who colonized the banks of the Hudson River.

It is curious that as an Englishman I should be driven to say such a thing; but my personal feeling is that the ethnological strain in America which has been least corrupted by the insidious elements in the soil and climate and atmosphere is the Holland-Dutch strain, and my instinct about this is borne out by the fact that the present President—in my opinion second to none in the whole roll of the chiefs of the nation—has, of course, just as Walt Whitman had, a line behind him of Dutch ancestors.

But it is not only towards New York City and New York State that I “raise”, as Walt Whitman would say, “the perpendicular hand” in a deep-felt affection of emotional farewell—I feel the same about Philadelphia and about Reading and Lancaster and York and Wilkes-barre and Williamsport and Harrisburg and Altoona and many another town in the Quaker State. To every portion of New Jersey also I wave an affectionate *adieu*. No state have I been happier in, from the borders of Rockland County to the ‘board-walk’ of Atlantic City! Trenton for instance will always remain one of my favourite capital-cities. She is indeed, to my taste, one of the mellowest and friendliest of all the old-fashioned repositories of the liberal American tradition.

But with the exception of the State of New York and the City of Philadelphia my most tender farewell to this huge weird chaotic country where I have been so happy and so unhappy must be—and will ever be until I die—to the Middle West.

This is the real America, this is—let us hope!—the America of the future, this is the region of what may, after all, prove to be, in Spenglerian phrase, the cradle of the next great human 'culture'.

It is in the Middle West—I am not speaking of Chicago, because to my Taoistic mind, a sinister aura must always emanate from animal-slaughter on so stupendous a scale—that there seems to be growing up, in spite of all the simplicities of those barbarous 'Main Streets', and in spite of all the perversities of those drabs, rogues, cheats, degenerates, philosophers, whores, bankers, imbeciles, editors, and drunkards, described by our great poet in *Spoon River*, a human temper and a human attitude to life that is really a new thing in the world.

It is significant that both Dreiser and Masters, the greatest novelist and the greatest poet of the America of today, come from the Middle West.

New England used to be the mouth-piece for American expression. The cleverest young American writers of our time—those who are experimenting most boldly with forbidden subjects and with new tricks of manner and style—come from the South, where the mere presence of the wicked lynching-spirit seems to evoke a sadistic magnetism all its own. I confess to being at once tempted and repelled, attracted and repulsed, by this ammoniac smell of psychological bedlam-wine, but when the cruelty of its aura deepens and I get sounds as if from a vivisection-laboratory, I turn from the whole thing with a sick distaste. The great Middle-Western writers, though it must be admitted that like Homer they nod now and again, depend for their effects on the cubic solidity of the reality they handle, while these fantastical writers from the South pulse and throb and jerk spasmodically in some queer mental region

where reality is forever appearing and disappearing, like a drowning goblin spitting bloody flukes.

Visitors to America who cannot feel the enormous difference between the spiritual and emotional tone of the Middle West and that of the rest of the continent are unworthy to cross the borders of Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Iowa, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas. And what will be the psychic essence of this new Spenglerian culture which according to my geographical divining-rod may refresh the jaded over-civilized spirit of the human race? In the first place, let me say at once, it will realize the prophetic intimations of some of the greatest discerners of spirits. It will realize Rousseau's idea of what the syllables 'America' might come to mean for the human race. It will realize what Goethe meant by this same "word of liberation" when he used it in *Wilhelm Meister*. It will have a mystical correspondence not easy to analyse with the spirit of Soviet Russia; for although the Middle West is temperamentally as remote from the theory of Communism as any land on earth, it holds so passionately to the great Rousseauish idea of what might be called 'the equality of all souls' that it evokes in the very heart of capitalistic America one of the most singular moral phenomena that it has ever been my luck as an observer of the *animula vagula* of perplexed humanity, to catch on the wing.

In Ruth Suckow's work the Middle West becomes more articulate than in any other writer, but quite independently of this autochthonous Iowan I did manage as I went about to catch *some* revelations of its secret.

As with the Russians—and there is a singular resemblance between the great Russian horizons and these Middle Western ones—you feel in these parts as if it were natural and inevitable to call people by their 'first names'. The rich drawing accents of their speech even, not melodious with the full-throated languor of the South, yet not in the least 'Yankee', remain, though my ear could never really catch

exact tone of those broad prairies-sounds, full of a heart-to-heart insouciance, a non-chalant affability, which, like the sun-baked door-yards of those ramshackle dwellings, levels human consciousness to a certain homely acceptance of the common lot that gathers dignity from its mere simplicity, and solemnity from the mere presence of its vast-stretching background.

The cold of the winters, the scorching heat of the summers, all these "extremities of the skies", along with the devastating fury of the monstrous winds, do indeed level down, and we must admit it and make the best of it, to a majestic monotony, to an over-whelming commonplaceness, to a staggering ordinariness, all those passionate subtleties and sharply cut distinctions, which for fastidious spirits are the salt of life upon earth. But life goes on, and what you come at last to feel is, after dwelling with these sublimely ordinary people, that by the relinquishing of the aesthetic values and the levelling out of all intellectual refinements there comes into existence a certain bare drab dusty primordial human grandeur (a grandeur not exactly poetical, but one that draws its weighty essence, all the same, from the "old essential candors" of human experience).

In old market-towns, in old and new college-towns, throughout Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, I tore my heart—such as it is—to pieces, and stretched my intelligence—such as it is—to the breaking-point to disturb all this titanic commonplaceness with "thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls", or with thoughts beyond the dusty monotony of those blistering suns and interminable horizons.

But I went on doing this only to discover that in exchange for the spasmodic eruptions of the "perilous stuff" of the spirit that I stirred up I received all manner of earth-born intimations of the drawing of a new temper. I received intimations of a new attitude in the world, wherein certain tremendous human simplicities, sometimes infinitely genial and friendly, sometimes infinitely stark and grim, gather the power to shake themselves free of all 'fine shades'

and of all subtle nuances, the power to be *just what they are*, not without reserves, for they are too close to Nature, the mother of all reserves, for that, but without the posturing, gesticulating, elaborating, embroidering with which the demons of artistic cleverness trick up the solemn and tragic lineaments of our common destiny.

The vast Jewish population of New York City is in my opinion the best arbiter of literary judgment in America; and so intensely intellectual is this ancient and impassioned race that they are much less victimized by the artistic fashions of the hour than are the groups and cliques of the modernistic Gentile youth. I suspect it is by the intellectual Jews, more than by any other readers of books in the country, that the great Middle-Western figures of Dreiser and Masters are kept alive in a due and rightful appreciation.

But while our newest young men, led by the feverish Southerners, have turned from Dreiser and Masters, just as the French Dadaists turned from Anatole France, the young Jews of New York City continue passionately interested in these great men from the Middle West.

And I too—closely allied, as most Englishmen are, with the moving tents of Israel—also continue interested in this sort of imaginative realism, a realism stark and grim and simple, but totally impervious to literary fashions.

Alas! I know only too well that my own work has much more in common with that of these morbid young Southerners than with that of either Dreiser or Masters. I am feverish and hectic and evasive and perverse, where these great Middle-Westerners keep their heads; yes, and keep too, as the elder of them almost savagely insists, the unchristian clarity of the ancient classics. The secret of the Middle-Western spirit, this royal commonplaceness, this miraculous ordinariness, this heroic goodness, too un-mystical to be called Christian though as full-fleshed and as four-square as Fra Lippo Lippi's angels, took on its first outline and shape through Dreiser and Masters.

But Dreiser and Masters are at once too individualistic and too comprehensive to concentrate their whole mind upon what I am alluding to now. Ruth Suckow, just because she deliberately narrows her sphere, comes nearer it. But in my humble opinion as a reverent and fascinated observer, no writer has really yet—no! not Vachel Lindsay or any other—fully articulated this new way of taking life, this reserved-genial, animal-religious, unmythical-pious, moral-profane 'culture', so totally unsophisticated, so close to nature, and yet so profoundly initiated as if by some terrestrial revelation, into that particular aspect of Saint Paul's mysterious *Agapé* which emphasizes, not only the 'equality of all souls', but the sin of brooding on those negative thoughts that cast an evil eye upon the roots of life.

As I thus wave my farewell to America I cannot help recording what seems, at least to some deep vein of superstition in me, to be a definite occult influence exercised upon my nature by the psychic aura, diffused through that whole vast land, from the life of the aboriginal Indians.

And there were other definite influences too, that of the coloured people for instance, and that, as I have been trying to make clear, of the mysterious spirit of the Middle West. To these I must add—though perhaps they will seem incongruously joined together—my growing respect for the revolutionary youth of America, largely Communistic, and my constantly revived respect for the Roman Catholic Church. Finally it is impossible for me to help adding to this list of the various psychic vibrations that follow me back to my native land, that emanating from the pragmatist personality of the liberal-minded gentleman in the White House.

But what—when I come to turn whatever psychological powers of analysis I possess upon my own character—what I have definitely and palpably added to my own moral stature from all these various and in many cases contradictory influences is a more subtle matter. I would say I have acquired the art of a particular kind of

stark and rather grim stoicism. And although it is true that I have found the neurotic and reckless Southern school of fiction-writers, most of them so young, rather a temptation to me and what might be called a distintegrating force, because of its influence upon my own too natural morbidity; my imaginative weakness has always been strengthened and hardened by the more solid, less bizarre realism of Dreiser and Masters. Robinson Jeffers, on the other hand, though dwelling so far from the South and dealing with the elemental powers in a manner much more congenial to the stronger side of my nature than anything I could ever get from the South, remains, in his way, a temptation too! In plain words I have more than enough of non-humanity, or anti-humanism, or elemental lust in my nature to need any stimulus along *those* lines!

What my morbid nerves most need is just what I have been able to get from America as a whole, this especial sort of stark stoicism, which, like a vast continental 'Salt Lake', so many formidable American writers, as different from each other as Whitman from Melville, have at moments tapped.

Primarily I think it springs from the American sense of the instability of everything, a sort of Heraclitean awareness of the universal flux that both the wise and the stupid feel. This awareness encourages the nomadic mania of all Americans.

As far as England itself is concerned, though, as I have hinted, we Britishers are forever shooting off to remote places to get more elbow-room for our personal peculiarities, our temperamental tendency is to accept as inevitable, and make the best of, whatever 'location' or state of life it may be to which fate has called us.

But Americans treat their destiny in a more profane and less resigned manner—they reluctant at regarding themselves as 'called' to any particular 'state of life'. They 'get a move on'—they pull up their stakes and are off and away! What they have in their mind to discover they hardly know themselves. Money with them is a

mere symbol of the power to be moving somewhere.

And this nomadic instinct in Americans is encouraged by the conditions of their life. It is not only the well-appointed city apartment full of the latest improvements that lures them on. It is not only their passion to be on the road in the latest invention among automobiles. Nature herself with her terrific extremes of hot and cold takes a hand in it. The truth is, nature is much less under control with them than with us; and none of the works of their hands sink deep into her bosom or arrive at a permanent understanding with her. Energetic though the Americans are, and though their architectural achievements are so awe-inspiring, one never feels that their houses, their bridges, their piers, their pavements fuse themselves with nature, as do our own less stupendous erections. They seem barely to scratch the surface of their intractable native elements. The sky seems always so much further away than with us; while their villages and farms seem perpetually invaded by the unredeemed wilderness and the unconquerable jungle.

How should Americans not have a tendency to move on to 'some place else' when their household gods sink such shallow roots into the soil and they themselves have only to intermit their labour for a few short weeks to find their hard-won cosmos overrun by chaos?

In England there has taken place during the last thousand years a singular truce between man and nature. Nature in England is like an immortal pet, upon whose spine the hair may start up at the presence of a stranger, and whose aged teeth may snap, while with the familiar inmates who understand her ways she remains grandly and sublimely harmless.

But it has been this very sense of impermanence, this very sense of being separated from nature by an unpassable gulf that has endowed your average American with the stark stoicism of which I speak.

Ultimately Americans are much harder and grimmer than we English are, though

we are calmer, tougher, and far less strung up. American humour is more cruel than ours and their slang more ferocious. Their slang indeed is much nearer bed-rock than ours. *Our* slang is part of our 'protective colouring', part of that artful and elaborate play-acting, by which under adverse conditions we 'save our face'.

English resistance to fate is an ancient and complicated tradition, as with the Chinese. It has become in the long course of history a kind of secular ritual, I might almost say a conventional drama. Yes, it is our best evidence of *propriety* to 'carry on' as though our tragedy was merely 'a bit of an annoyance'. Yes, we English always keep up our optimistic play-acting, our 'cheerio' tone, as if to fool God himself into thinking we feel no more than a pin-prick when he shoots at us with his worst arrows.

But the stoicism I have learned from America is quite a different thing. It hits back at God; and instead of diminishing the magnitude of the divine blow, it sardonically exaggerates it, and then proceeds to condense and drag down this exaggeration in some laconic piece of profane gallows-wit at the expense it might seem of Omnipotence itself. Well have I come to know the tight-lipped American mouth, drooping at the corners, the mouth shared alike by trappers in the Rockies and by stock-brokers in Wall Street, the mouth with an expression as if nothing short of catastrophic repartees to fate had opened it for years!

My own mouth has not grown habitually like that yet, but I fancy sometimes it turns that Indian-at-the-stake-look upon its enemies!

But I have learned from America something much more definite than just this grim delight in a profane stoicism, this delight in being at odds with the universe like a spiritual gangster and of saying to myself, like Satan—"What though the field be lost, *all is not lost!*"

I have learned the further secret—ane this I regard as of the utmost importance—of being able to fall back upon the great basic elements of the planet

wherever I may be, and in spite of the particular things that would fain pound and grate and harrow every pulse of my peculiar nature. You see I never trod the side-walks of any American town, from Portland, Oregon, to Shreveport, Louisiana, or from Fargo, North Dakota, to Fort Worth, Texas, without walking and walking till I reached some strip of parched grass or some stump of a wretched tree.

And it was in these eternal walks about the towns of half a hemisphere, that I acquired the mental habits of isolating myself as a perambulating skeleton-shape moving betwixt zenith and nadir. Though like the people of the Middle West, and like Jean Jacques Rousseau, and like Dostoevsky, I religiously believed in the 'equality of all souls', I preferred the society of such among them as were disembodied, such among them as reached me only through their thoughts. Nor did I greatly worry as to matters of geographical nomenclature. I would say to myself *not* "this is Bowling Green, Kentucky", or "this is Columbus, Ohio", but "this is the surface of the earth upon which I, an anonymous individual, am walking in time surrounded by space."

In England—and I feel it particularly as I look round me after my return—every man, woman, and child is surrounded by a dense, though subtle, medium, a medium made up of old traditions, old habits, old customs, old laws, old prejudices, old injustices, old oppressions, old wrongs, old protests against wrongs, old resignations under wrongs, old panaceas and anodynes for immemorial if not irrevocable wrongs. As each man, each woman, each child, gazes at you through this legendary medium, you feel as if the individual's personal power and personal value was as nothing compared with the power and value given him by this vaporous medium, which, with its diffused distillation of old habitual customs, old respects, old distinctions, old venerations prevents us from catching with any clear outline the stark lineaments of his personality.

Superficially of course the standardizing methods of America militate against the

self-assertion of powerful and eccentric personalities. But what is this standardization? It is the expression of the psychology of the mass-instinct working through the individuals that compose it and deriving a human satisfaction from the contemplation of vast numbers of energetic and friendly people, acting just as we ourselves are acting, and not one of them making any petulant claim to be regarded as essentially different from the rest. American 'standardization' is in fact, when you come to analyse it, the outward and visible materialization, under democratic idealism, of that passionate wish to bring people to a common level, to lift them up and pull them down till they can pass under the same yoke in the service of the nation, which, under communist idealism, we see today actually dominating Russia.

When however I look round me in my native land I am conscious of the fact that there hangs about every English person I meet a sort of airy chrysalis or emanation of invisible light-rays, which represents, not so much their own personal weight, or value, or power, or formidableness, or dignity, or heroism, or nobility; as some legendary *simulacrum* of these things clinging about the inherited idea of their position in the social fabric, whether they be tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, rich man, poor man, farmer's son, thief.

The amount of touchy awareness that I carried with me to America in 1905 would fill a volume, if I had Proust's inspiration or Henry James's genius. But my thirty years of acquaintance with the railway stations of America have changed all this. I can still—in the interest of pure analysis—discuss these English niceties but I am no longer touchy about them. I don't care. And not only don't I care, but I am bold where formerly I was diffident.

All this I owe to America and I like to think I especially owe it to those perpetual walks to escape from the pavements of Kansas City, of Saint Louis, of Cleveland, of Cincinnati, of Denver, of Des Moines, of Buffalo, of Detroit, of Pittsburgh, of Boston,—I never needed to 'escape' from

the old brick side-walks of my favourite Philadelphia—for it was in these walks that my life-illusion of myself as a perambulatory skeleton, a skeleton isolated from the competitions of humanity, if not from humanity itself, took what may easily prove to be its last and lasting avatar.

It is risky to boast; and I won't go so far as to say that English class-distinctions mean absolutely nothing to me any more; but they certainly have lost their power to make me skip and dance and utter ferocious maledictions. And the same thing applies to people's praise or blame, admiration or contempt, and their estimate of my mental qualities. I am far prouder than I used to be; but it is Indian pride. It is pride in myself as an anonymous human-skeleton, stalking up and down the face of the earth, adjusting its spirit to the necessities of life and death, and giving itself up to the most thrilling of all sensations, the sensation of sharing the little, evasive, casual waftures of mystic happiness, coming on the air in a doorway, on the sun-rays in an old barn, on the moon over a turnip-field, on the wind across a bed of nettles, and of sharing these *with the forgotten generations of the dead*.

What I owe to my thirty years of train-life and hotel-life in the New Hemisphere is nothing less than a plunge into chaos with its accompanying loss of all the traditional securities of our English Cosmos.

For after all there is such a thing as too much order, too much respect for old habits, many of which—considering the selfishness of our common human nature—are bound to be packed with convoluted injustices. I have seen of course, in the America I am leaving, things far more patently abominable, things far more deliberately cruel, than anything I can imagine happening here in my native land. There is no need to give particular examples of this; for such things “cry to heaven” from all over the United States.

The psychology of the South for instance is always approximating to the brutal attitude towards the Negro Question of what Southerners call ‘White Trash’; and

though there *are* Southerners who feel differently, many quite educated persons down there have a point-of-view fundamentally the same as that of these morbid ‘nigger-baiters’. The brutality of the police all over the country, but especially in the great cities, is as shocking to a civilized person's nerves as the equal brutality of the gangsters and kidnapers upon whom they make war, while the unscrupulous thefts of the bankers and the great monopolists are only rivalled by the reckless ‘coups’ of the bandits who break open their safes. Public opinion in America, though easily worked up to a murderous frenzy over any sort of sex-crime or passion-crime, takes the embezzlements of their wealthy rascals as something humorously inevitable, and the brigandage of their outlawed gunmen as something heroically spectacular.

Intensely individualistic though America is, I feel clearly, as I bid her farewell, that I have learned from her many of the lessons that I should have learned—as an ‘educated’ Englishman—were I bidding farewell to Russia. Out of all the countries in the world it is, I fancy, only in Russia and America that one feels the real pulse of the creative future of humanity.

We English are naturally eccentric. It is easy for us to become obstinate and ascetic reformers of normal human weaknesses. But with all our eccentricities we are deeply afraid of one another, distressingly conscious of the opinions of our neighbours, and made embarrassingly uneasy in the presence of traditional authority.

What I have brought back from the hotels in Hoboken, in Baltimore, in Boston, in Jacksonville, in Cedar Rapids, in New Orleans, in San Diego, in Albany, in Buffalo, in Saint Louis, in Topeka, in Pittsburgh, in Rochester, in Saint Joseph, in Santa Fé, in Denver, in Philadelphia, as well as from looking out of the train on the waters of Salt Lake, or on the windings of the Susquehanna, or on the strangely coloured deserts of Arizona, is something more formidable than mere eccentricity. I have learned to fall back upon the elements

as craftily as a red man, to think of religion all the time as obstinately as a black man, to keep my own affairs to myself as shrewdly as a Quaker, shamelessly to express myself and profoundly to conceal myself just as Whitman used to do, and above all to grow more and more stark in my acceptance of myself in my ultimate loneliness as a queer 'guy'. Farewell to America!

But a certain proud grim humour, as 'unsquared' by the devils as it is 'unsquared' by the angels, that I have learned over there I shall go on hugging against the inmost ribs of my being until the day of my death. I have learned from the aboriginals of America and from the coloured people of America and from the stoical farmers of America that it is possible to detach yourself with an indifference that might be regarded as cosmogonic 'slickness' from the whole 'Triad', as the old Welsh Bards would call them, of the three 'great curses' of modern existence: the superstitious obsequiousness in the presence of science, lending itself to such a monstrous crime against our conscience as vivisection, the superstitious obsequiousness in the presence of public opinion, destructive of the individual soul, and the superstitious obsequiousness before the material universe, blighting to the experiments of the spirit. I know the abominations—who better than I?—of the great Republic to which I am kissing my hand farewell, I know the weird, ghastly, appalling feeling that comes upon you so often in America when you get a sensation of sick terror in the presence of the work of men's hands. Such works often strike me as so garish and so artificial compared with the ways of nature as to evoke that peculiar shudder that turns human flesh into 'goose-flesh' when it is confronted by objects that have a shocking reality and yet seem to have so little connection with the normal realities of life that they resemble the sight of a corpse extended at length in a well-appointed bath, or the sight of an advertisement of some toilet article scrawled across an altar-front.

And yet, in a sense that is really abysmal, you drink up, as you cross those titanic expanses, the sense of a positively dizzy freedom, freedom not only from political human traditions and social human traditions, *but from the human point of view itself!* Yes, this is the gist of the matter; this is the crux; this is the rub. I can never, never, *never* repay the debt I owe America in the inmost penetralia of my soul. For the enormous mass of the soil of America has itself poured into me a formidable kind of super-magic—not 'black' nor 'white', but beyond them both! It is as though the excess of magnetism, exuding from a continued contact with such an enormous segment of planetary matter as this huge continent supplies, turns a person into a sort of cosmogonic medicine-man. The salt water, washing the cliffs and pebbles and sands of my native land, acts, on the contrary, it may easily be, as an electric 'transformer', diverting, modifying, mitigating, diluting, the magnetism of the earth-substance.

But with its sky above your heads so much further away, and its earth-surface below your feet a thousand times more overpowering, continuous contact with America isolates a person from the nuances of human society, paralyses and numbs and atrophies his more fussy social and normal antennae, till it really does *de-humanize* him a little!

For even if the crimes committed in America are a thousand times more violent, more numerous, more appalling, than those committed in England, even if the attitude towards cheating and lying and stealing in America is far more recklessly and childishly indulgent than in England, even if existence in America is a wild chaos compared with the orderliness of England, it still remains that you can sink your soul down behind the desolate litter, the ghastly realism, the mad idealism, and the Panurge-like cynicisms, till it touches a hidden spring of the purest, simplest, shyest water of life, a spring that is not only hidden, but is, in a true sense, *inland*.

Ned Lukacher

Notre-Homme-des-Fleurs: *Wolf Solent's* Metaphoric Legends

I

In a letter of 16 August 1928 to his brother, Llewelyn, John Cowper Powys discusses the conclusion of the soon-to-be-published *Wolf Solent* (1929) in terms which, I believe, constitute the basis for a new reading of this novel. John Cowper's remarks in this letter provide, if you will, a legend (in the sense of a motto or inscription) by which to read the language of metaphor and the narrative structure of *Wolf Solent*. He tells Llewelyn that he had imagined an alternative ending in which Urquhart dies on Redfern's cadaver during a frightful storm and where all the lovers are separated. He compares this hypothetical conclusion to those in *King Lear* and *The Possessed*, and argues further that such an ending would be the result of having carried "the general movement of the book—which gravitates around Urquhart's necrophilia and Wolf's mythology" to its inevitable finale. John Cowper thus implicitly suggests that the conclusion he finally did adopt succeeds somehow in thwarting "the general movement of the book".

By permitting Carfax to substitute himself for Wolf at the end of the book like a crafty old scapegoat for the rich fleece, by permitting the cynical vision he has of Urquhart's obsessions to prevail upon the edifice of Good and Evil constructed by Wolf, I avoided the danger of any forced catastrophe, of any stroke of artificial and theatrical thunder.¹

It seems to me that Powys here implies that Carfax mediates the expiatory conclusion towards which Powys sees the novel moving by somehow insulating Wolf and Urquhart

from sacrificial death. Wolf doesn't drown himself in Lenty Pond, and Urquhart is preserved from a fatal exhibition of his necrophilic desire for Redfern's corpse. Carfax becomes a slightly artificial *deus ex machina* through which Powys avoids a thunderously artificial "catastrophe" in his novel. The lack of reference to Malakite's death suggests that it was not aesthetically offensive to Powys. Malakite, however, is (more than Wolf or Carfax) an outcast of long standing whose death fulfils the self-destructiveness of his desire. Carfax had always seemed to Wolf a figure of "almost legendary glamour".² His detached "cynical vision" of morality and sexuality provides a counterpoint to the sexual obsessions of Wolf and Urquhart. Carfax succeeds in demystifying Wolf's "mythology" and in relieving his trepidation before the "abysmal form of evil" to which Wolf is led by his suspicions of Urquhart's homosexual necrophilia. The legend of "the rich fleece" and "the scapegoat" will enable us to delineate more closely the form and the metaphors which constitute this demystification. Wolf's experience in the field of Saturnian gold will make of "the rich fleece" a golden fleece. Wolf's Nietzschean moment of creative forgetfulness, his experience of "a mellow spaciousness of watery gold" (586) beyond Good and Evil thus becomes the metaphoric and narrative strategy through which Powys preserves his novel from "forced catastrophe" (which he himself implies is immanent in the "general movement of the book"). The novel's conclusion resists interpretation largely because John Cowper Powys resists, or rather dissimulates, the "general movement" of his own narrative. The *averted* sacrifice is the structure which inhabits

the ambivalent irresolution of the novel's conclusion. If Carfax demystifies Wolf's obsessions about the aberrations of Urquhart's homosexuality, if he reduces those aberrations "to the paltry level of a feeble old bachelor's fantastic self-deception" (591), he also at the same time dissimulates the sacrificial violence which is immanent in Wolf's mythology. Wolf's "comic tragedy" (560) is, in other words, a calculated evasion of the very forces and desires which the narrative generates.

Carfax is crafty indeed, for he manages to accomplish all the things Wolf would have liked to do himself. He dismantles the edifice of evil that Wolf built around Urquhart; he saves the waiter, Stallbridge, who is the living incarnation of the face of injustice and guilt that Wolf first saw on the Waterloo steps; he enables Gerda to recover her gift of song; he furthers Jason Otter's career as a poet; and finally, he saves Christie and Olwen from a financial crisis by buying (at a handsome price) the books in Malakite's shop. The collective pressures of these problems threaten to drive Wolf from a sense of failure to suicide. Carfax is a clever scapegoat, because he knows how to avert the sacrificial ritual itself. In so doing he preserves Wolf, who throughout the novel is the chosen victim, "the rich fleece". As Ann Solent's former lover, Carfax is for Wolf a father-figure. But Wolf's attitude towards him is torn between idolatry and hatred. For no apparent reason, Carfax causes Wolf to feel a pulse of "crazy violence". (585) In its ambivalence, Wolf's attitude recalls his attraction/resistance to the memory of William Solent. We will see in Wolf's fantasized mutilation in Carfax's presence (595-96) a covert allusion to an oedipal crisis with which, like his role as a scapegoat, Wolf struggles throughout the novel.

At the conclusion of the novel Wolf foresees "a new Mr. Urquhart, a Mr. Urquhart in an old age of dotage". (605) The Squire's supposed necrophilia has become for Wolf nothing more than "fantastic self-deception"; and with the

dissolution of his suspicions about Urquhart vanishes the "supernatural struggle going on in the abysses". (611) That mysterious aperture in Redfern's grave, now no longer a sign of necrophilic passion, becomes merely a means by which Urquhart discovered how shallowly Mr. Torp had dug the grave. Wolf's imaginary scenario is dispelled when he learns from Roger Monk that nothing more than the reinterment of Redfern's corpse has transpired. I believe that the discountenancing of Wolf's fervid imagination serves to emphasize the importance of his fantasies while at the same time failing to explain their real nature. Wolf in his role as "the rich fleece" is spared because he overcomes a dualistic morality and the supernatural struggle between Good and Evil that it engenders. But surely more is at stake here than Wolf's quasi-philosophical opinions. What do Good and Evil mean to Wolf that his whole being should be shaken by paroxysms of doubt and indecision whenever he ponders moral questions? The legend of the fleece and the scapegoat will enable us at least to approximate an answer.

Wolf experiences a sort of parodically premonitory vision of the tragic conclusion which Powys never wrote when he imagines Urquhart "stark naked, with a protuberant belly like Punch or Napoleon, kneeling in the dead of night, while a storm of rain lashed the windows, before the altar of a small dark, unfrequented edifice". (35) When he tells Wolf about the mass he requires Tilly-Valley to say every morning at the King's Barton altar, Urquhart appears "as if he possessed a pair of sacred horns". In their first encounter Wolf senses "antipodal" forces in Urquhart that suggest to Wolf "a glimpse of monstrous human lineaments behind the heavy rumble of a particular clap of thunder". Wolf already suspects a homosexual liaison between Urquhart and Tilly-Valley. Later, after he has met Tilly-Valley, Wolf is certain that there is a "ghastly reciprocity" (133) between the two men. What must be emphasized here is that Wolf's response to the "antipodal" forces of Evil is synonymous

with his fear of homosexuality. Moreover, Wolf spontaneously envisions this fear of what he regards as morbid sexual aberration through the metaphor of the scapegoat's "sacred horns". It is this identification of homosexuality, evil, and the scapegoat that provides the catalyst which will transform Wolf's "mythology".

The sacred sacrifice of the scapegoat is Wolf's metaphor for the realization that the First Cause is Evil. Both Wolf and Urquhart are, however, scapegoats whose sacrifice can be averted. Carfax's intervention and Wolf's concluding "Saturnian" vision are the means by which that violence is mediated. They are the protective defenses against the unrestricted passions which begin to emerge when Malakite attempts to seduce Christie. And it is the dying Malakite who tells Wolf to "Forget". (576) Ramsguard, Blacksod, and King's Barton seem rife with scapegoats. William Solent and his friend Malakite literally suffer the fate by which Wolf and Urquhart are only figuratively marked. What Wolf forgets is his dualistic mythology and its potential self-destructiveness. Wolf, as we will see, does experience a simulacrum of sacrificial violence just prior to his golden vision.

To say that *Wolf Solent* is a novel fraught with homosexual intrigue is not necessarily to imply that Powys was particularly concerned with Wolf's latent homosexuality. That Wolf should immediately perceive the spirit of universal malice within every suggestion of homosexual, or lesbian, love he witnesses does, however, suggest that his mind seems eager to place interdictions barring his participation in such desires. Homosexual necrophilia is certainly one of the most extreme transgressions of civilized morality that Powys might have chosen to mark the extreme point beyond which Wolf's imagination could not proceed. Neither his father's "scandalous depravity" (2) nor Malakite's incestuous obsessions can unnerve him as much as does the thought of homosexual necrophilia. The spectre of "inner malice" is a measure of Wolf's resistance against his identification

with such an extreme passion. His anxiety over his acceptance of payment from Urquhart for the completion of "The History of Dorset" likewise expresses his reluctance to become in any way implicated in (even a simulacrum of) a homosexual contract. In the following passage, which will illuminate this anxiety, Wolf describes Urquhart's withdrawal from the cricket field after Wolf has replaced him as umpire during "the school-treat".

Mr. Urquhart's back, as Wolf followed it with his eyes at that moment, seemed to him to resemble the back of Judas Iscariot on that popular picture entitled "Pieces of Silver", of which there used to hang a cheaply coloured reprint in his grandmother's house at Weymouth. It did more than stoop with its usual aristocratic bend, this back. It sagged, it lurched, it wilted. It drifted towards that bench of heedless spectators as if it had been the hindquarters of the Biblical scapegoat, driven forth into a wilderness whose desolation was not material, but psychic. The neat clothes that hung upon it only accentuated the ghastliness of this back's retreat. (382)

The rather uncanny, return-of-the-repressed, effect that Urquhart's symbolic role as expelled scapegoat has upon Wolf must be read in light of Wolf's discovery, immediately preceding this scene, of "that mysterious aperture in the side of Refern's grave". (381) Urquhart's drunken musings about Redfern's corpse seem to confirm Wolf's suspicions a few pages later: "It falls off . . . it falls off . . . the sweet flesh! . . . The lips . . . the lips . . . where are his lips now?" (409) But the literality of our reading of Tilly-Valley's comment, "I think he [Urquhart] loved him [Redfern], remains rigorously irresolvable. To accept money is, for Wolf, to become "Redfern Two". That Wolf should think of the painting, "Pieces of Silver", is therefore no accident. In Wolf's allusion to the painting, Judas, not Christ, is the scapegoat. In light of the fact that it is Wolf himself who accepts the money, his juxtaposition of Judas and Urquhart seems somewhat misleading.

Wolf's misprision reveals an identification with, rather than an opposition to, Urquhart. The Judas/Urquhart analogy dissimulates the ambivalent desires with which Wolf is struggling. To accept Urquhart's money becomes synonymous with the acceptance of the same desire Wolf and Tilly-Valley think they see enacted during the midnight excursion to Redfern's grave by Urquhart, Monk, and Mr. Round. Redfern's role is considerably complicated when we recall that not only was he an object of desire for Urquhart, Jason, Monk, and Tilly-Valley, but that he had also courted Gerda. As he envisions Redfern's face in Lenty pond, Wolf recognizes that they are doubles in whom the same desires are dovetailed.

In the *Autobiography* Powys recounts how "profoundly" affected he was as a child when his grandfather took from his pocket a "handful of silver [pieces]". The sight of "all that shining silver, emerging from a pocket actually related to me",³ becomes in *Wolf Solent*, not a Proustian reminiscence, but a frightful spectre of submission to illicit desires. Wolf's gesture at returning the cheque does, of course, fail, but not before the crumpled slip "rolled down between his [Urquhart's] legs". As Wolf replaces the cheque in his pocket, he has "a sensation of sickening shame, as if he had been caught stealing a piece of silver from the communion-plate" (484). Wolf's anxiety-ridden mythology is coined in silver. He will exchange these silver pieces for gold at the novel's conclusion.

Powys reminds us in the scene immediately following Wolf's foiled gesture that Wolf, like Urquhart, is a scapegoat. Now that Wolf has accepted payment from the scapegoat he too is marked as the sacrificial victim. Wolf learns from Miss Round "that every Urquhart what's lived at House since Noll Cromwell's reign has drove some young man into Lenty Pond". Wolf's reply echoes Powys's characterization of Carfax in the letter to Llewelyn.

All villages have these legends . . . Besides . . . who knows? . . . I may be such a crafty

scapegoat that I'll bear the burden without turning a hair. (487)

In a sense Wolf is quite accurate inasmuch as he bears the burden on a psychological rather than a physical level. What is sacrificed is not his life but the particular constitution of his identity that he calls his "mythology". What he must rid himself of is all memory of his participation in that mode of consciousness where the distinction between licit and illicit desires originates. The golden visionary moment in which Wolf overcomes his silver "mythology", "without turning a hair", in no way negates aberrational, or illicit, desire: "The furtive coil and the sex-clutch; yes, a spasmodically jerking, quivering, ego-nerve, pursuing its own end—that was what was behind everyone!" (613) It becomes instead an amoral erotic substratum from which every mode of sexual expression emerges. Wolf learns to accept "that kindred obliquity" with "passionate perversity" (386) that he had for so long resisted.

He learns, in other words, to acknowledge without trepidation his participation in (what Powys elsewhere calls) "Saturnian sex".⁴ This involves a complete acceptance of, and reverie in, the myriad forms of sexual aberration without fear of a universal malaise. The apogee of "Saturnian sex" is the characteristically Powysian habit of imagining oneself a girl. Powys especially admired this imaginative capacity in Wordsworth, Shakespeare, and Dostoevsky. When Wolf glimpses an expression of lesbian desire on Miss Round's face as she gazes raptly at a younger girl, he is moved to "the very core of his consciousness". (386) But his "mythology" resists this imaginative projection into the lesbian's desire. As a result, the experience leaves him "teased and troubled", in "a kind of inward fury". Wolf's struggle is against the newly emerging impulses of his imaginative desire. In this particular corner of Dorsetshire Wolf has surely found numerous variations of "passionate perversity" with which he might identify. Had

he continued to resist his imaginative identification with aberrant sexuality the sacrifice could not have been averted. One could argue that Wolf's struggle is against becoming a proper Powysian according to the Saturnian model proffered in the *Autobiography* and *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930). Powys's objective in *Wolf Solent* and *In Defence of Sensuality* is to undo "that fearful but profoundly alluring Manichaeism of the Spirit which from the beginning of time has troubled with its accursed duality our essential nature".⁵

It is important that we avoid the temptation to consider "Saturnian sex" a narcissistic regression to the stage of polymorphous perversity. Powys conceives of it, I believe, not as a pre-oedipal regression, but as a movement beyond the entire oedipal mechanism. He alludes to the problem in the *Autobiography* when he writes, "A person can be influenced by his father without having the opposite of the Oedipean Complex".⁶ This passage occurs in the context of an attack on orthodox psychiatry, in which Powys argues that the creative imagination should never be reduced to pathological labels or infantile fixations. In the character of Wolf, Powys demonstrates how porously receptive and how helplessly mimetic imaginative desire really is. So much so that familial influences, though important, do not possess any special hierarchical privilege. Desire is constantly remaking the models it has internalized. Powys's ironic play with the Oedipal scenario of classical Freudian theory in *Wolf Solent* is most evident in his transformation of the Freudian father, who enunciates restrictions and interdictions, into a reckless nympholept.

Regarding the autobiographical impact of Powys's relation to his father upon the depiction of Wolf's resistance against the nympholeptic ethic of William Solent, I might note that in the *Autobiography* Powys once calls his father an "exiled Wolf".⁷ Charles Francis Powys is, of course, prominent in John Cowper's reflections. It is interesting, if inconclusive, to consider how the death of his father in

1923 may have effected the coming into being of John Cowper's greatest imaginative achievements. Wolf protests to the hallucinated skull of his father that it is the world "made of mental landscapes" that is alone important. The skull responds that "life is beyond your mirrors and your waters". (312) The dualistic, narcissistic, world of Wolf's idealist pantheism is transformed, when threatened with the release of self-destructive violence, into a pluralistic multiverse of materialist pantheism. Wolf's foreclosure of his father's vision is overcome at the novel's conclusion. The father here represents not the oedipal process and its Manichean oppositions, but an amoral materialism immersed in the excrescences of biological life ("the slime of snails", etc.) and the aberrations of sexual desire. Oedipal injunctions of the either/or variety are undone rather than enforced by William Solent.

Powys's mother and all memory of her are absent from the *Autobiography*. In *Wolf Solent* the mother is a figure of constant attraction; and Wolf even experiences "an obscure reversion to those forgotten diurnal nourishments" of intra-uterine bliss. (291) Many of Wolf's ecstatic moments of idealist pantheism suggest the immersion of a thinking foetus in amniotic fluid. Such ecstatic moments are, however, more confining than liberating. Despite the inadequacy of his mother's world, Wolf remains loyal to her. Ann's practical, utilitarian sexuality is the obverse of William's radical desublimation. Recall that late in the novel Wolf recognizes that his mother's world is "parallel with his 'mythology'". (524) Though Wolf throughout the novel remains deeply attached to his mother, his ordeal is to discover in the memory of the father an alternative to her rigorously demanding edicts. But it is a discovery which is medicated and refracted through the "passionate perversities" of contemporary Dorsetshire. Wolf must move beyond the oedipal structure but without falling into the equally reductive position of an anti-

oedipal structure. Wolf discovers within himself, and between himself and others, desires which he cannot attribute to his mother and father. "Beyond his mother, beyond his father" Wolf discovers first "life's engines" and beyond them the vision of the eye of a wounded snake: "that cranny, that slit, out of which life protested against its infamous enemy!" (354) That enemy is at once death and the spectre of a sadistic "spasm of the old tyrannous lust" (441) within the First Cause. Only at the novel's conclusion will Wolf be able to take solace in the existential materiality of life's desiring energies, and to realize that regardless of its lustful and morbid aberrations, living desire is preferable to death. In his grotesque version of extreme unctio Malakite (in Wolf's words) "had confused William Solent with God!" (576) Though Wolf must internalize the previously foreclosed identity of his scapegoat father (whose name, we recall, is "a byword of scandalous depravity" (2)), he must continue to resist extreme excursions into the realm of nympholepsy. While he moves beyond "protective maternal strength, the most formidable of all psychic forces" (186), he must also (and in this he is unlike his father, whose death is a public humiliation) "bear the burden [of the scapegoat] without turning a hair".

During this period when he possesses the hallucinatory power to conjure up the figure of his father's skull, Wolf is most fearful of the malice immanent in desire. Through his Hamlet-like, schizophrenic soliloquy with this emblematic death's-head, Wolf has intimations of a desire not tainted by fear of death. But when he loses his "mythology", his "life-illusion", he is no longer able "to visualize the skull under that mound". The skull's aura as a fetish object is dispersed into nature at large. Immediately following his recognition of his lost power Wolf has the "sensation of being an integral portion of this wide *somnolent* [my emphasis] landscape!" (505) The anagrammatic submersion of the name Solent in "somnolent" suggests to me that Wolf has already successfully begun to internalize the mediated

memory of the father. The adjective "solent" according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a somewhat archaic word for the repetition of once familiar habits. Cast in the role of a returning native, Wolf's frequent experience of uncanny sensations of *dejà vu* are not particularly surprising. Powys's play with the name Solent suggests that the uncanny effects of repetition constitute the very condition of Wolf's existence. That the name-of-the-father is covertly inscribed in *Lenty Pond* and the "somnolent landscape" also suggests a profound affinity between his identity and the physical universe.

I have briefly summarized some of the essential points of what I believe is Powys's critique of orthodox psychoanalytic theory in *Wolf Solent* in an attempt to clarify the psychological forces which operate upon and define the role of the scapegoat. My primary interest, however, is in the series of visionary experiences that befall Wolf as he parts company from Carfax and walks back to Blacksod. In the metaphorically dense chapter entitled "Ripeness is All" Powys symbolically depicts Wolf's movement beyond the silver "mythology" of oedipal anxiety and his avoidance of sacrificial expulsion. Wolf's loss of the crystalline separateness of his "mythology" is expressed through a simulacrum of sacrificial violence to which Wolf imaginatively subjects himself. It occurs as Wolf, unnerved by the proximity of the ever-ominous slaughterhouse, and by Carfax's cynicism, imagines himself a victim of mutilation.

And then, for the infinitesimal part of a second, there arose within him an awareness of bleeding pain, followed by thick darkness smeared with out-rushing blood. (595-96)

He describes the aftermath of this gruesome operation as "the bloody stump of an amputated limb". For reasons which will be explicated in the course of my reading of "Ripeness is All", I regard this simulacrum of physical violence as a symbolic act of castration. That symbolic castration is, in Freudian theory, the means through which

the son succumbs to the law of the father and thus resolves his oedipal complex, suggests to me that Powys's critique of psycho-analysis intensifies in this concluding chapter. Carfax simply finalizes the movement towards the dissolution of Wolf's "mythology" that had been initiated by William Solent, Jason, Urquhart, Malakite, and others. Through Carfax's intervention Wolf is permitted to undergo the sacrifice on a purely psychological plane. Carfax's presence is for Wolf the final blow. No longer can he flee to the "mythology" at the centre of his soul. He now feels "as though it [his mind] were a multiple thing and lacked a centre". More interestingly perhaps, his soul becomes "like a thousand globules of quicksilver [my emphasis]". (601) He will soon exchange these pieces of "quicksilver" for a new mythology founded on the absolute standard of gold.

Through his visionary appeal to the gold standard Wolf is able to reconstitute "his soul, cut into pieces by his recent humiliation". (600) What he experiences is "an actual 'resurrection' of his body" (601) in which what was once aberrational becomes universal.

The golden ornaments, tissue upon tissue, leaf upon leaf, covering the dead in the tomb of Agamemnon, the golden pilasters of the halls of Alcinoüs, the golden shower that ravished Danaë, *the golden fleece that ruined Jason* [my emphasis], the cloud of gold in which Zeus embraced Semele, the golden fruit of the Hesperides, the golden sands of the Islands of the Blest—all these things, not in their concrete appearances, but in their platonic essences, made his mind reel. (610)

"Saturnian gold" is Powys's metaphor for Wolf's release from a Manichean psychology. It is not a little ironic that at the very moment Wolf overcomes his "mythology" his mind reels with mythologized images. All the images which Wolf envisions are figures of either radical transformation, fulfilment, or death. In that sun-saturated field of buttercups, that sea of liquid gold, Wolf becomes a golden

fleece beyond good and evil. The reference to the ruin of Jason, the questing captain of the Argos, is also, I believe, a dissimulated allusion to Jason Otter's pessimism. Jason and Wolf are, to some extent, both products of Powys's autobiographical self-projection. Wolf's pagan determination and energy are in marked contrast to Jason's sombre self-involution. Wolf glimpses the "figure of the Absolute seen in the Apocalypse . . . a Super-substance" while Jason sorrowfully declares that "'no one feels Him except moles and worms'". (556) Powys implicitly favours Wolf's extravagant gestures towards a sort of Nietzschean brand of philosophical paganism over Jason's "'tragic experience of the world'". (45) The Saturnian vision ruins both Wolf's earlier identity and the grim alternative of isolation without illumination that Jason Otter practises. Jason's description of his poetry as "'no better than the tunnels of moles and worms'" (556) suggests to me that perhaps he dwells inordinately upon such interminably elusive aberrations as the necrophilic aperture in Redfern's grave.

Surely the transforming vision of Pater's Marius on the Sabine hills and Swinburne's "golden" reverie in "A Nympholept" are not far from Wolf's vision of the golden *super-substance*: "the magnetic heart of the world rendered visible!" (610) While his imaginary castration severs Wolf from the mirror-world of purely mental landscapes, it also marks the threshold to a more resistant structure for the imagination. He will henceforth "limit" his will "to 'forget . . . enjoy'". (611) He claims, now in unison with his father, that the physical universe "is enough!" The golden mist through which Wolf sees Monk trimming Redfern's grave (610) resurrects the body and the material world as it frees them from the tyranny of the mind. No longer confined within the self and its memories, Wolf can now merge outward, through the body, and into what is genuinely elemental. Wolf's nympholeptic materialism is founded upon a castrating moment of creative repression. "The furtive

coil and the sex-clutch" remain in Wolf's new ontology, but they no longer induce fear and trembling. Here, as in Freud's similarly paradoxical formula, symbolic castration enables sexual desire to attain fulfilment.

Though Wolf was reluctant to accept pieces of silver, he is quite pleased to take payment in gold. The appeal to an absolute standard leads, I believe, beyond gold, and beyond the psychoanalytic bedrock of castration. It leads finally to Saturn, the first deity to reign over men. The classical myth of Saturn provides the context within which Powys's metaphors in "Ripeness is All" should be read. First, there is the reference to "the golden sands of the Islands of the Blest". (610) This is an allusion to Saturn's exile following his deposition by his son Jupiter. Saturn is, of course, the deity of the Golden Age during which the first men lived in effortless plentitude. Second, Wolf calls this "mellow spaciousness of watery gold" the "field of Saturn". (612) The allusions to Saturn and to "Saturnian gold" (612) are particularly *à propos*. According to several classical accounts, Saturn (or Kronos as the Greeks called him), famous as the castrator of his father Uranus, is himself castrated by his usurping son Jupiter/J Zeus.⁸ Wolf "felt as if he were an appointed emissary, guarding *some fragment* [my emphasis] of Saturn's age flung into the midst of Blackstod". (610) That "fragment" is Saturn's severed phallus. What links Saturn's castration to Wolf's castration is the figure of Jason's Hindu idol, Mukalog: "And then he suddenly remembered that it was into this very field that he had flung Mukalog. What a shining mausoleum for that little demon!" (609) for Wolf Mukalog was the fearful incarnation of aberrational desire. For that reason he had long kept Urquhart's cheque wrapped around the idol. Now, of course, the idol and the desire he embodies for Wolf are transformed and redeemed by Saturnian gold. For Wolf symbolic castration becomes the protection against real castration; and castration becomes the metaphor for the perilous

threshold of negativity, violence, and death through which desire and the imagination must emerge. The myth of Saturn's Golden Age, his castration, and exile held a powerful attraction for Powys. But nowhere in his work, not even in *A Glastonbury Romance* or *Porius*, is the Saturnian mythus more densely metaphoric than in *Wolf Solent*. In "Ripeness is All" Powys constructs a remarkable synthesis of the legends of the scapegoat, the golden fleece, and Saturn. It is a synthesis which succeeds in preserving "the rich fleece" by overcoming the negativity which would lead imaginative excesses towards a desire for self-destruction.

II

A golden aura surrounds more than Saturn's field of buttercups and sunlight. Gerda's "sweetness" makes everything Wolf looks at seem "as if it were seen through a diffused golden light, like that of the pictures of Claude Lorraine". (62) And of course there is the yellow bracken which is the emblem of Wolf's seduction of Gerda (149). The attraction she holds for Wolf is most prominently figured in her voice and her remarkable "blackbird's song" which express "in the sphere of sound, what amber-paved pools surrounded by hart's-tongue ferns contain in the sphere of substance". (89) Wolf's reflection in amber clearly prefigures his immersion in "liquid gold". More remarkable is the analogy between the *reddish* "hart's-tongue ferns" which surround the fetish site of Gerda's voice and Redfern himself. Gerda's whistle is for Wolf what Redfern's cadaver is for Urquhart: an absolute standard of passionate desire. After she whistles for Wolf the first time, he notices a change.

She had lost something from the outermost sheath of her habitual reserve; and like a plant that has unloosed its perianth she displayed some inner petal of her personality . . . (90)

Flower-strewn rhetoric is of course pervasive in *Wolf Solent*; and here the

metaphor for the emergence of desire is derived from floral reproduction. The "perianth" (from the Greek *peri*, "around", and *anthos*, "flower") is a protective sheath which falls away prior to dissemination and fertilization. For Gerda fertilization will not occur; she is (as the villagers prophesied) sterile. The surging of desire within the perianth both excites and paralyzes Wolf's desire; Gerda's beauty "absorbs with a kind of absoluteness the whole aesthetic sense, paralyzing the erotic sensibility". (91) The perianth is here displaced but not actually shed. Desire in *Wolf Solent* is always mediated, insulated, or paralysed. The perianth at once reveals and conceals the object of desire. In *Wolf Solent* the vegetable fabric of flowers is the figure of man's most intimate participation in organic life. Powys's metaphoric uses of flowers are as diverse as the varieties of botanical life to which he refers throughout the novel.

Powys's flowery rhetoric adorns and protects "the rich fleece". Bluebells, cam-pions, buttercups, asters, lobelias, hawk-weed water-lilies, etc., enfold and in so doing prevent Wolf's experience and identity from the destructive energy of (what Powys elsewhere calls) "a certain abysmal rapport with the elemental powers".⁹ "That strange vegetable flesh" (234) is what prevents Wolf from an unchecked fall into the interminable abyss of self-dissimulating mirror-images. The doubling of "mental landscapes" can, if unchecked, endanger one's exploration of the sensations, the traces, of earlier planetary life, to which the imagination and the will can gain access. The Powys of *In Defence of Sensuality* "broods now with the infinite sensual thrill upon that other abysmal mystery—the texture of plant-petals and plant-leaves." He would merge "himself in it, becoming identical with its shy, evasive, inscrutable passivity".¹⁰ Wolf's numerous identifications with the material world also attain their most primordial substratum in the world of flowers.

Never had he been more aware of the miracle

of flower-petals, of the absolute wonder of this filmy vegetable fabric, so much older, just as it is so much more lovely, in the history of our planet than the flesh of beasts or the feathers of birds or the scales of fishes. (234)

For Wolf, as for "the ichthyosaurus ego" of *In Defence of Sensuality*, this primal vegetable flesh constitutes the genuinely arousing element in human flesh as well. Wolf, who is once figured as a "mad botanist" in pursuit of "filmy growth" (95), resembles Powys's depiction of Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *In Defence of Sensuality*. (This book is, in fact, dedicated to Rousseau's memory.) Powys recalls Rousseau's later years when he became interested in botany: "Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau he [the ichthyosaurus ego] will 'botanise' and live rapturously in his mystic-sensuous feelings".¹¹ As in Rousseau's *Émile* and his late *Rêveries* and *Écrits botaniques*, the botanical metaphor in *Wolf Solent* and elsewhere in Powys's work is intended to moderate and refine the spirit. Powys's botanising in *Wolf Solent* and *In Defence of Sensuality* is a strategy by which, "in this day of the revival of real pessimism, to be the Pangloss of the only possible optimism, the optimism of the great Rousseau!"¹² Wolf's opposition to Jason exists on the same register. Jason's overly sensitive eyes lack "protective filaments" (46) which could have shielded him from a "tragic" experience of the world. (45) Wolf's attraction to "filmy, phantasmal screen[s]", (604) like his "acceptance of something monstrously comic" in life (277), protects him from the same melancholy pessimism which afflicts Jason.

I believe that Powys intends us to read *Wolf Solent* by the legend of the flowers. I see in the following passage a suggestion that writing, like the living voice, is itself enclosed within the folds of the perianth. The immediate context is Wolf's state of mind as he reflects whether his desire for Christie belies a covert and uncontrollable impulse.

"Am I going to begin snatching at the soul and body of every girl I meet down here?" With the cluster of stitchwort still illuminating his thought, as a flower-scroll illuminates a monkish script, he now struggled desperately to justify himself. (207)

Wolf's desire is impelled towards "the furtive coil and the sex-clutch" (613), the "snatching at the soul and body"; and the writing, which is *Wolf Solent*, is enclosed by the marginal legend of the flowers. The perianth-like "flower-scroll" of *Wolf Solent* defers meaning and interpretation much in the same way it defers desire. Powys's floral rhetoric succeeds in averting the sacrifice of the scapegoat but only at the price of a critical avoidance of determinate meaning. The legend of the flowers illuminates as it simultaneously surrounds and enfolds the text and the readings that it generates. The legend of the flowers enacts on the level of

interpretation what the legend of the scapegoat performs within the novel's narrative structure. On both levels there is a calculated withdrawal of meaning and a self-protective refusal to be coerced into a determinate representation. Powys's metaphoric language in *Wolf Solent* follows a diastolic-systolic pattern of emergence and withdrawal. The "phallic serpent . . . craftily forcing its way forward" (140), like "the phallus of an unknown god" into which Wolf figuratively transforms Glastonbury hill (388), presses against, and withdraws from, "that strange *vegetable flesh*" without ever penetrating it; because to penetrate the plant sheath of the perianth is to invoke that violent "stroke of artificial and theatrical thunder". Powys's flowers of rhetoric propitiate that violence as they at once incite desire and prevent its consummation.

Notes

¹I refer to the French translation of the letter in *Granit* (issue devoted to J. C. Powys) 1/2, 1973, pp. 223-25. Because the original of the letter has not been published, my translation is from the French.

²*Wolf Solent*, Macdonald, 1963, p. 586. All references are to this edition.

³*Autobiography*, Macdonald, 1967, p. 47.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵*In Defence of Sensuality*, Gollancz, 1930, p. 236.

⁶*Autobiography*, p. 275.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁸See my study of the ancient and modern forms of this legend in "K(Ch)ronosology", *Sub-Stance* (forthcoming).

⁹*In Defence of Sensuality*, p. 118.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 193.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 188.

Jack Clemo

Mappowder Revisited

The old Powys lodge is barred to us:
Fable and litany have gone from it
Since I alighted, young, warm from a dusty car,
And met the hermit at the lounge window. I touch it now.
Gravely, knowing he died here, calm in a russet-leaf fall,
Rebuking our century.

I could see behind him the arched doorway,
Slightly blurred but accessible to me
Even without guidance. My inward eye,
Which had borne so much Venus-white pit-glare,
Welcomed the portal dusk, the rich bursting
land.

Intense rural smells are still the same—
Horses, thatch, the immoderate summer perfume
Of banqueting trees and flowers . . .
There was a feast, a crest of prevision,
A veil rent amid the mixed odours.
I had long cherished, from a different angle,
His picture of a God, who was not Pan,
Moving among the virgins.

In this hour of vindication,
When the lodge is too bitter-sweet,
We pass on to the churchyard,
Small and mellow, just a few steps up the lane.

I bend over the Powys tombstone:
Smooth curve of the carved book,
Rough inscription, meaning only a marriage
And two deaths.

We are reverent, feeling the pulse
Of a marriage and two lives;
And for us, as for that strange hermit,
The heart is in the pew, the cool humble station
Which means listening and communion
Till a sunshaft finds the golden Cross.
Gaze on the mystery, as he gazed
After his pen dried, and you have the clue
To my presence again in Dorset.

I would not return with the gleam unfulfilled,
For a poet's debauch of nostalgia and lamentation.
Sitting beside my partner in Powys' pew,
I share the great silence
Of earth at evening and heaven timeless—both
totally real.



T. F. Powys and Jack Clemo, at the Lodge, Mappowder,
1950.

Peter John Foss

Llewelyn Powys: Towards a Reconsideration

“Eternity is in love with the productions of Time!” (Blake)

Of the three Powys brothers, it is Llewelyn who has received the least attention from the critics, and when that attention has been forthcoming it has generally been slight or over-critical. My hope in this short, and necessarily preliminary essay, is to redress the balance slightly, in that I believe Llewelyn Powys's writings offer a more valuable contribution to the literature of a certain genre than has hitherto been acknowledged.

Llewelyn Powys at his best presents the reader with a version of the 'redemption of physical reality', in that his essays and stories are startlingly fresh recreations of incident and phenomena. His style is powerful, pertinent and unflinching, frequently subtle, always rich, and often euphuistic, a combination which alone distinguishes him as unique among twentieth century writers. One may indeed carp at the extravagances of diction, the phraseology and syntax gleaned from reading widely in seventeenth century literature; one may object to a philosophy which seems on the face of it unjustified or shallow; but when the literature is taken for what it is, it is found to be in the main honest, passionate and desperately relevant to the human condition, and expressed in passage upon passage of exceptional beauty. For this fact alone, Llewelyn Powys deserves to be read.

It is my contention that the medium of Powys's writing, which is essentially poetic and meditative, is so formulated as to bring the reader into a close harmony with its particular method of contemplating and resolving the various issues raised. The writing becomes a kind of communion, both in itself and in its reaction upon the

reader. The effect is, to say the least, sobering; and it is this kind of relenting involvement which renders it possible for the reader to enact the conditions of the writing—conditions which are based upon an ironic contemplation of man's life and its place within the scheme of Nature.

Llewelyn Powys did not set out to be a philosopher, and he can by no means be said, like Blake, to have invented a "system". He was by birth and upbringing a man who enjoyed in the fleeting moment of physical experience, in the 'food of the senses', in the countryside, games and companionship, and all those aspects of day-to-day living which we associate with a carefree childhood spent at Montacute Vicarage, and the epicureanism with which he was labelled in his later life. Circumstances forced him to become a valetudinarian and a contemplative. In a very real sense, which is hard for most of us to appreciate, Llewelyn was continually placed in a position so as to contemplate the immediacy of his own death, and it was this that made him the 'seer', not the 'philosopher'—the guru who even exploited the position to create a kind of alter-ego, the "dying poet". But the writings, especially the early ones, were, none the less, sincere; and I believe that it is the way in which Llewelyn Powys experienced personally the thoughts and sensations incorporated in his writings, and then was able to cull a kind of ultra-meaning out of a sense of oblivion, and invest it with joy and praise, that renders him deserving of our regard both as man and writer.

Llewelyn Powys's writings pose important questions about the validity of a certain type of literature—particularly prose literature which aspires to be poetry. Much of this type of literature is purely descrip-

tive. There are accurate and objective descriptions of Nature, for example, in the pages of Kilvert or Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journal*. Such descriptions become mingled with mysticism in Richard Jefferies, a trait in English writing that has not yet received its due. Hardy also engages in an extraordinarily individualistic recreation of the 'spirit of place' in his novels—passages which are not always in themselves particularly well-written, but which are usually related to a larger scheme, and also idiosyncratic in their own right—very much the observations of a man "who used to notice such things". In a similar way, Llewelyn Powys would bring to bear an intensely individualistic slant on to his descriptions of places and scenes. But Powys did not need to relate them to plot or to characters in the framework of a story. His descriptions were of a purer type—as often as not a series of images set within a sentence-cadence which has the quality of music, and conceived as a form of meditation. As such, we are faced with an art-form of specialised purpose and limited length—in fact, the length, we might say, of

a prose-poem. We are also confronted with an ideal within the verbal structure which is not unlike the iconic significance of the poetic image. By this I mean that the intention of this type of writing is ultimately to reproduce for the reader an equivalent of experience taken out of the context of time, invested with significance, memorialised and perfected through the medium of sound and image. On the one hand we have the dramatic voice of a prose sentence—what Robert Frost once referred to as "the speaking tone of voice somehow entangled in the words and fastened to the page for the ear of the imagination"; and then we have the visual images conjured to the mind's eye through the prose descriptions—sometimes intimate and particular (thistle-down and buttercups and stones and insects), and sometimes universal and mythic (the sea, the sky, the moon). And added to this, there is a third ingredient, the sense of 'meditation', moving from concrete to abstract, and conveyed in a graver, more serious intonation, with an awful awareness of 'first and last things'—the vast timescale of the Universe, and the insignificance of human endeavour. It is when these ingredients are combined within the formal design of a prose-poem-essay, and given the multifarious suggestions, contradictions and resolutions of a thinking mind at work, that we arrive at a literary form which is extraordinarily powerful and moving.

Let me illustrate these techniques by looking at one particular essay by Llewelyn Powys, "The Pond" from one of his finest collections, the *Earth Memories* of 1934. This essay is, in my view, a masterpiece of the type of literature which I have been hinting at. But it is necessary for us to appreciate the limited framework of the form from the outset. We are not dealing here with a story—the 1200-odd words of the piece would hardly support such a thing. Neither are we dealing with straightforward natural description (there is in fact very little detailed description of the location, its flora or fauna). Neither is this natural philosophy, science or theology (and yet fragments of these studies do in fact seep in). The reading of the essay turns out to be



tantamount to undergoing an experience which defies the definition of its form. But it has become patently clear what it is. Llewelyn Powys never side-steps the issue. His essay which describes a moment of revelation by the side of a downland pond, an "hour of grace", is of course itself a kind of unveiling; it partakes of its subject-matter by its method of disclosure. By the end, we know full well that we have been present ourselves at a kind of revelation, and the feeling we are left with is, or should be, one of awe and wonder.

"The Pond" begins ordinarily enough. There are indications of direction and setting in the opening lines, which are composed of short terse sentences balanced on caesuras: "A mile from my cottage, there is a small pond." "Except for the old shepherd, nobody knows of it." There is an emphasis on insignificance, because in fact the insignificant has to be revealed as the ultra-significant. In the fifth sentence, for instance, "only a common pond" and "surface water" are in contrast to, and also qualified by, the fact that the pond is "enchanted". It is the same pond, and the statements are in apposition. And then in the next sentence we find the technique is one of staggered disclosure, which suits well with the hushed, tentative effect which the writer wishes to create. There are, in fact, five subordinate clauses, delineating place and time and purpose, before the phrase "a whisper as to the secret of life" gives the sentence its object. And here at last is the nub. "The Pond" turns out to be none other than a piece of writing about the "secret of life". Such a thing naturally has to be invested with a sacramental awe—and even the use of the passive voice in the following sentence adds to this delicacy and distancing, augmented throughout by alliterative use of 'f' in "felt on folded twilight flowers found" and the imagery of the qualifying expressions, "dry butterfly periods" and "presence of dew".

The second paragraph introduces us to an image of the progressions of the seasons and the cycle of Nature. In loitering by the pond's edge throughout the year, the author has observed the changes of the surface of the water and its teeming life. Men-

tion of "the dabbling unrest of the newts" brings to his mind man's far-off ancestors, because lizards are close descendants of the Saurian life of the Earth 300 million years ago. Llewelyn Powys does not quite put it like this, however. His angle is far more extraordinary and relevant. The newts themselves are described as "ancestors"—our "ancestors"; so that the man at the side of the pool and his own far-off ancestor, the newt, are brought together in a quite real way at the same point in time and place.

It is the newt, "privileged to experience the forgotten rhythm of saurian life", who is presented to us as a living image of man's own distant ancestry, so that the Permian Age of 300 million years ago is actually here in the present moment. This remarkable turn of perspective in Llewelyn Powys, which is both surreptitious and potent, is a part of the implied aim of all his writings which, for want of a better description, is to convert time into Eternity. (I shall come back to this point later.)

The next stage in the evolution of life, as it were, is that tadpole should turn into frog, and that the frog, "a diminutive yellow-green basilisk", should be picked out of the water and put onto land. The bestiary of the next three paragraphs gives us a run-down of species, from amphibian, fish and insect to bird, mammal, man and then to God. These paragraphs delay the revelation which we, the reader, know is the object of the essay, and prepare us for that moment by instilling into us a sense of wonder and watchfulness. Creatures are not mere creatures, though it is the object of the writing to show them as amazing and various in their own right. But to do this, they are also described in juxtaposition to another fabulous world. The frog is described as a "basilisk" (for visual reasons), and then later given richer meaning by its association with the "whelp of a hippogriff". A seagull is spoken of in terms of a cherubim, which takes the whole analogy one step further from the fabulous into the celestial. And indeed this has been prepared for by references to the "miracle" and "mystery" of life.

Paragraph four begins with the age-old image of a man sitting by the margin of

the sea, meditating on his existence. "Congregated beaches" is a phrase rich with Miltonic echoes, conveying the idea of countless motes collected over eons of time and brought together from the four corners of the world to make this one stretch of sand. (Is there also an echo of 'corrugated' giving us a clear visual image as well?) We remember Blake's perception:

To see a World in a grain of sand,
A Heaven in a wild flower;
To hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an Hour.

In the second sentence, the ants call for special mention. They are some of the smallest of visible creatures, and consequently there is emphasis on diminution ("cheap", "grass seeds"), but also on their strange urge to build structured worlds in the same manner as man ("galleried citadels", "laws of a civil polity"). The reminder is one which is richly ambiguous, since such systems in man are mere vanity, and yet when seen through the mirror of the least of creatures, are brave and wonderful. The named butterfly, on the other hand, is a delicate "painted lady on a scabious", living only for the moment and excelling by far even the fabulous world of man's imagination—in this case, the "faery world". In the next paragraph, the mundane mammal,—a solid downland cow—is indeed a nothing, a ghost, silently lumbering into the dark abyss of the pond as though walking out of its allotted span of evolution. The image is tantalizing, even frightening. The pond has indeed become "enchanted"—so "enchanted" as to swallow life; or is it that it harbours the source of life and death? The final sentence would seem so: "It is a mirror that reflects God's moving shadow".

This line is certainly the most enigmatic in the whole essay, and has something of the manicheistic view of God that we find in T. F. Powys's writings—God with "His hating moods, His loving moods, His cruel moods", the Hound of Heaven. There are two ways perhaps in which to regard this sentence. Either the pond is a mirror

reflecting the sky and the clouds—and it is the sky and the clouds which harbour God, in this case present only as a shadow. Or the pond is in itself the revealer, the illuminator of something divine, albeit a dark-divine, perhaps indeed the "Divine-Diabolic Soul of the First Cause". It is significant that Llewelyn Powys the atheist should mention God at all in such a context as this essay, rife as it is with Powys's conviction that earthly existence is a biological imperative devoid of a meaning beyond the Earth, and certainly not dependant on the beneficence of a personal God. Still, the line is there, and God has been, as it were, summoned to our attention as a possibility if not the 'primum mobile'. But He is only a shadow, which is a kind of negation, and it is interesting to see the first interpretation of the image—that of a mirror reflecting an unearthly divinity—as suggesting Powys's own guilty infatuation with the idea of God as the Creator which undoubtedly obsessed him all his life. However, the fact remains that the pond has now become a kind of sacred well, in that life spawns from it and is metamorphosed in it (tadpoles to frogs, as well as sauria to man). It holds mysteries which belong to an absent world—the ghost of a cow; and it is also a reflector of the divine. It comes as no surprise therefore that the water of the sacred pond should also be a drinking-place for a creature as common-or-garden as a hare. But it is the hare that is the revelation!

Paragraph six sets the scene. Short simple sentences present a picture of repose and anticipation. "All was silent, all was expectant". The hare is 'revealed', and it is described as a messenger. But a messenger of what? Are we back to the problem of the 'other world', the World of God? of the Unearthly? of the unrevealed? In a way we are, because the whole essay has been built upon the strange paradox that the earthly is unearthly, that the real is in fact fabulous, that God is not in the sky but in the pond. In his *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, T. F. Powys has said that there is "more of God in a chair, and God often rests by the side of (a) roller . . ." It is very much the same with Llewelyn, without being stated as

a fact. The truth is implied through the process of unfolding which is the special form of the essay. Just as Time is made into Eternity, so it is necessary for the Mystical to be made manifest in ordinary natural objects.

After a paragraph devoted to the cautious and delicate movements of the hare "nearer and nearer" to the pond, we, the readers, are taken nearer and nearer to the moment of grace. There are doubts on the way: "Was she actually intending to drink? Was it possible that I should see her lower her soft brown chin to the water within ten yards of me?" But we are not to be rushed; the preparation for the sacramental moment has to be accomplished by stepping back from the minuteness and uniqueness of the incident to see it as it is within the framework of an overpowering cosmos. Of course, this moment is a mere "inconsequent second"—a speck of time overhung by a moon which, seemingly ageless, is itself only a part of a vaster dimension both of time and space. The sacred moment is also a dark moment—night-time has come and the moon "hung in an utter calm". In Llewelyn Powys's writings, the moon is always an ambiguous image. One of his earliest essays, called "Treachery in the Heavens" (*Ivory*) is about the diabolic, perfidious nature of the moon, to whose account he lays the perversity and tensions in his own nature. And yet, as so often in Llewelyn, the image is beguiling and attractive, and his response is one of love as well as hate. "How beautiful she is, and yet how I hate her!" he says. We will remember that in *Skin For Skin* he compares his mother's nature to that of the moon's—"who ever loved sorrow rather than joy". So the moon is suggestive of the dread and the awe that is also inspired by holy and unearthly things. It is, after all, described as a "spy" which had looked coldly on the molten planet as it spun in space. Engendered life is described as a "trouble", and man, when he had raised himself out of the dust, had only "cried out" to the stars. Man is a "distraught" being, stumbling through "lucky grass", and able "for a few scattered moments" to

dream about the outer rim of the universe. This picture of man's dominion on earth is, on the face of it, unpromising, despite man's resolution and adroitness. But man, who to Llewelyn Powys is primarily animate dust, "impassioned clay", is ennobled by his capacity to enjoy the physical world through his physical senses. The truth of this last paragraph is one which is concerned with momentary time grasped from the flux of matter as it passes us by. The messengers appear at last to be of the earth, of time and of physical reality; and yet through the agency of our experiencing their coming to us, we are given an insight into "immortal movements upon our planet" . . . Is the mystery, then, empirical?

In the last paragraph another shift of perspective occurs which has the devastating effect of modifying the "truth" that has just been expressed. This "truth" is now spoken of as a "rapture"—which puts it on a par with a reverie or dream from which he has been "awakened"; and we are drawn back from it to the very reality of the moment by the side of the pond. We realize then that the act "of grace" for which the whole passage has been a preparation has not yet taken place. The foregoing "rapture" is virtually denigrated to near-sententiousness, near irrelevance (though that is putting it too strongly since it still stands). But the plainness and concreteness of the moment about to be described takes the foreground stage and alters our awareness of what the "truth" is. The lustral water is indeed "enchanted" because it has become the mythic source of life. It connects tadpoles and sauria and man and God. It is both an archetype and an imperative, a symbol and a fact. It is also palpably there, both a unique "locus" and an ordinary pond, a place singled out from countless identical ponds along the downs, and yet invested with this ultra-significance. It is now present before us on the page. The final sentence fulfils the purpose of the essay; just as the ritual act at the rim of the pond puts the seal on its own empirical purpose. It is a sacrament, a confirmation. "It was the hare drinking."

What I wanted to show in this examination of one essay in the substantial

output of Llewelyn Powys, was the very special type of literature that Powys wrote, and to give some idea as to how we should approach it. In a very real sense, the form of the essay, its reading on the page, is part of its meaning. Its combination of concrete images and abstract exposition, its narrative fluctuating between realistic description and "religious" meditation, its pattern of short and long sentences, simple phraseology, and elaborate, oftentimes abstruse, diction, its gradual forwarding and retreating, its pauses and the sonorities of its rhythms, are all part of a purpose which makes the silent instilling of the words an act partaking of the author's sense of wonder, celebration or regret at the loss of things past.

By concentrating on one essay, I have of course left a lot unsaid about the art of Llewelyn Powys. He was an immensely subtle and far more complex writer than he seems at first reading. His works make use of techniques that are intimately relevant to a study of the best of literature; and those techniques are part of the organic exploration of themes that obsessed him all his life, because they were basic to his apprehension of the world around him and the part he was compelled to play in it. His writings are full of a sense of the fluctuation of antithetical states of being, and those "contrary states of the human soul" which constitute the paradox of human existence. It was not fortuitous that his first book emphasised this opposition in its very title, *Ebony and Ivory*, just as his last great work was called *Love and Death*. This understanding of the contraries in human life gave to Powys's writings their urgent ten-

sion and profound ambiguity, added to which was the feeling that if life was meaningless, let us make meaning out of that meaninglessness, let us construct for ourselves the Eternity that is denied us. The transcendence that is often intimated is essentially mystical, and yet always 'of the earth', because Powys was a lover of physical reality.

His attachment to the earth and its casual purposes puts him in the tradition of our ancient ancestor-worshippers. His pantheism looked beneath the grave, but never into an after-life; it was essentially totemish and primitive. He loved the dust of which his body was made. But it is his art that survives, and through his art he was able to redeem the physical reality in what can only be called its magical iconic equivalent. Like a painting that pins for ever the perfection of a moment in space and time transfused through imagination and acquired skill, and made ultra-real, his writings are able to give us the moment in its mythic context rather than in its temporal context. And it is important to realize that Powys was forced to do this. Unlike John Cowper Powys, he was not a born writer or a born storyteller. Were it not for the circumstances of his illness, I doubt whether he would ever have had the leisure, or even the inclination, to write. Instead he would have enjoyed life more actively and more compulsively, without the urgency of contemplation he was forced to adopt. As such, he became a writer. As such, he became Llewelyn Powys "the dying poet". As such he became the creator of his own myth. And as a result we have gained the timelessness of his art.

Letters to the Editor

In his letter to the Editor (*P.R.*, 4, p. 85) Gerard Casey refers to the widely spread rumour that T. F. Powys was "very reluctant to publish and was only persuaded to do so by his brother John and his friend Sylvia Townsend Warner." Now there is ample evidence that this is entirely wrong: not only was Powys very eager to see his stories printed, but he was bitterly disappointed when publisher after publisher rejected them. In this short space I can only mention a few facts showing how hard he tried to find a publisher in both the United States and England. No doubt he received encouragement from his brother John, but it should be remembered that his first meeting with Sylvia Townsend Warner took place in March 1922 only.

As early as 1905 John and Louis Wilkinson had taken a few stories to America but failed to have them published. Here is Theodore's reaction: "Keep the stories as long as you wish, and if they do not succeed this last time, I shall understand that they are either too wise or too foolish for this generation." (*Welsh Ambassadors*, p. 71). In 1913, Frances Wilkinson typed three stories by Theodore (*Old Women*) but could not sell them either (see *Welsh Ambassadors*, p. 168). With the publication of *The Soliloquy* in the States Powys's hopes were revived and his correspondence with the Wilkinsons in America and literary agents in England shows his now almost frantic efforts to have his writings printed. In 1916, in order to have *Mr Tasker's Gods* taken by Arnold Shaw he went as far as to give the Wilkinsons leave to revise the manuscript without consulting him—"don't bother to ask me"—, and that meant "making any exclusions even to cutting out whole chapters here and there." Until 1922 Powys never stopped submitting manuscripts to publishers in England, among which were the never-to-be-published *Amos Lear*, *Father Adam* (not the play but a short novel), and *Hindcliff Tales*. When *Abraham Men* was finally accepted by

Chatto & Windus together with *The Left Leg* and *Hester Dominy*, it had already been turned down by four English publishers.

There is no doubt that Powys hoped his stories "might bring him in an honest penny" but it is clear from several letters to various correspondents that his bitterness was not due to financial disappointment only. Claiming that T. F. Powys was not interested in publication contributes to give a wrong impression of a man who, I think, was not so humble as is sometimes suggested.

MICHEL POUILLARD
Aix-en-Provence,
20th August, 1979.

Conversations with Theodore, 1931. Review No. 4

In spite of the footnote questioning the year of the above *Conversations* I think internal evidence points to the *Conversations* from April 17th onwards being made in 1931 as in the title.

On May 1st Theodore says "I am writing a short story making God to be a top hat." This is one of the three stories in *The Two Thieves* called "God". It was written in 1931 and I have a corrected proof date-stamped May 18th 1932. I feel certain that Theodore could not be writing it on May 1st and the proofs be dated May 18th of the same year.

On May 1st Llewelyn wrote "...he turned out to be the father of the boy who brings coal up to the White Nose". Llewelyn left White Nose for Chydyok in November 1931, so he was at White Nose on May 1st 1932.

The Life and Times of Anthony à Wood was being worked on during the Spring of 1932 and was published by September 1932, so I think it possible he was reading

for it in April 1931, soon after his return from America.

I have a copy of the typescript and the first two Conversations are separated from the rest by a row of stars. Is it possible they belong to the year 1930, or do they belong at the end of the typescript in 1931. They are dated July so could well follow the last

entry in the typescript which is dated June 13th?

E. E. BISSELL
Birchfield,
Ashorne,
Warwick.
28th September, 1979.

Reviews

Always Merry and Bright / The Life of Henry Miller / An Unauthorised Biography, JAY MARTIN.

Capra Press, Santa Barbara, 1978 and Sheldon Press, 1979, £8.95.

The problems of researching Henry Miller's life are formidable, not least because of the apparent clues being so much there for all to see in that sequence of quasi-autobiographical novels (or quasi-fictional autobiographies). From "the old neighbourhood" of Williamsburg to Greenwich Village to Paris, from *Tropic of Cancer* to *Sexus*, who knows not Henry ("Val") Miller?

Readers may suspect—and Jay Martin clearly did—all that truth-telling, all those extravaganzas and memories, to be a gigantic smoke-screen. Not so much lies about sexual prowess as a larger project altogether, in which the created self in the works might wholly replace the life of the creator lived outside the writing. Martin rightly cites in his very first paragraph a discarded fragment of *Tropic of Capricorn*, where Miller, "applying Miguel de Unamuno's words to himself", speaks of creating "*the legend where I must bury myself*." This can mean different things, and all at once, but one is that autobiography can screen and conceal.

Miller's project can tempt a biographer into seeing his task as essentially one of uncovering. Martin has hit upon a near-mechanical procedure to facilitate this, and to arm himself against confusing the "legend" (Miller's writings) with the "life":

in this book I have derived Miller's life through . . . a manner at once more immediate and more objective than printed works or interviews can offer. I have tried to write almost as if no previous printed work

concerning Miller existed. Indeed, my biography is based almost exclusively upon the vast collections of manuscript material residing in twenty-three libraries and also in private hands....Wherever possible, I read the printed works . . . in their original manuscript versions, an exercise which demonstrates conclusively how misleading the final printed version can be.

"Can be" or *is*? Can also be *less* "misleading" about the *life* of the author (but was not in this case?). The description begs many questions and finally, even when one has read the result—finger compressed in the source notes—one is asked to take a great deal on trust. For why should I believe that Miller's early drafts, *Crazy Cock*, *Moloch*, et al, are authorities to be believed for biographical data over published versions? I have Professor Martin's prefatory attestation, and I may presume cross-checks with those disparaged interviews (and with the writings of others, printed or in manuscript for preference), but otherwise I have only those twenty-three libraries and private hands.

However great the biographer's desire to reverse his subject's process, and to protect himself from inattention, Martin properly suffers from a return to the repressed: "I also wanted to follow him just a little into his legend...." And faced with this *temptation* he seems rather to throw the sponge in: "my biography is, as it must be, a symbolic rehearsal of the facts of Miller's life". Beyond even that "symbolic rehearsal" (whatever that is), it is suggested that what we read does not impose any pattern of the biographer's own: "I submit not to what I think, but what the materials made me think". Don't blame me: this is the story which the material of biography presents. A curious mixture of pride and humility then, and perhaps one which in its particular balance is either a mirror image of the Henry Miller who emerges from the

biography or a version of that Henry Miller transposed into another key.

What Jay Martin has added to the life of Val Miller in the writings is what Richard Bridgeman added to the picture of Gertrude Stein in his admirable *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, namely anxiety. This anxiety about himself, his place, his role, his relationships, his achievement, Miller himself localised only in *Nexus*, in describing the harrowing loss of self-esteem when Val's wife Mona (sc. June Smerth/Smith) takes up with Stasia (sc. Jean Kronski). The unequal ménage à trois—foreshadowed so strangely at the end of *Sexus*, led up to at the end of *Plexus*—is the whole subject of the third novel of Miller's trilogy, and sustains a note of corrosive self-doubt as nowhere else in Miller's oeuvre. Jay Martin would have us believe, and it is hard not to go along with him (and one presumes all that "hundred thousand pages of manuscript material"), that the paralysing self-doubt of *Nexus* was partially present throughout Miller's life, or at least up to the California years.

The result of this view has a curious effect on one's sense of the writings. With something of a pang one at first tends to relinquish the "always merry and bright" Miller of Martin's title, the hero of the *Tropics*. One begins to wish that *Martin's* Miller had found his way into those books (or perhaps not been subtracted from their earlier versions), so that an element of personal, *inner* struggle might have been present—self-doubt in combat with ego—and not just, say, the struggle of the cipherish (if highly sexed) protagonist with the "cosmococcic" world of urban zanies, that belated update of Sherwood Anderson's "grotesques" and H. L. Mencken's "boobs". Perhaps Miller's inner struggle for self-mastery had to be ignored for the books to be written at all, but one now craves for the better, the *ultimate* Miller work, in which there would have been some sustained acknowledgement that the callous and even brutal side of the picaresque hero was related to inhibitions of which the self-same character as narrator

not only affects ignorance but implicitly denies. There is the moment in *Capricorn*, when our hero rifles the handbag of Maxie's sister Rita, having humiliated *and* satisfied her sexually, and the narrator comments that someone had to pay—in loose change, that is—for all the unwritten books. The motive comes as a surprise: sex and literary creativity have seemed analogous, not compensatory. The barriers to achievement seem all external, and all finally subsumed in the constant flow of Dionysiac energy which treats them as objects of derision. An absurd world, but all too easy.

One now reads into the *Tropics* Martin's anxiety-ridden Miller. One does this less by imputing anxiousness to the character than by imagining a narrator unable to set matters in a more complex light—that inability itself part of the continuing difficulty of the writer. And in a curious way this new way of reading Miller passes from condescension to absorbed interest and even to a warmer sympathy than was mustered under the aegis of adolescent dirty-bits hunting, or of the New Criticism, or of post-feminist (post Millett, anyway) macho-guilt.

There is a danger, of course, that the Miller of Martin's biography can replace altogether the Miller of the writings, and for that we have partly Jay Martin to thank/blame, for in fact, and despite five hundred pages of writing, he has not really gone far enough into the "legend". Just as it seemed crazy to find the biographer in his preface tying one hand behind his back, refusing the "evidence" of the writing ("legend") as and for the "life", so one is left to mourn that under that banner he has denied himself *any* analysis of the published writings in their relation to the life and as writing. Much of the reader's struggle to reorient his sense of the writings might have been guided by this analysis, and its absence leaves one wondering if the present biographical construct could stand up to it.

If Martin is strong on the haunted aspect of Miller, his prose is less so when it comes to creating the energetic, not to say, priapic aspect. And it can't be a question of the censorship which the *Tropics* breached and

which *Sexus* (except in France) hardly needed to. Perhaps the language is quoting without acknowledgement from those manuscripts, perhaps we are to assume they are leaking through onto the biographer's page, but it still comes as a disappointment to read:

It excited Henry to see the colored silk pulled tight against her transparently white skin just below *her big bush*, its hairs already so moist they were *plastered* on her belly and legs.

Or to read that Henry "kept right on fucking his head off". There are rather, for a time, too many of these throw-aways, which are an artificial attempt to inject into the biographical picture some of the energy which is so abundantly, so overpoweringly there in the published "legend". Interestingly, this linguistic parody is confined to Miller's early years, to his relationship with Pauline Chouteau ("the widow"), and Martin thankfully just lets it lapse. But it cannot disguise the absence of any real gusto in his Henry Miller, and we are left to wonder whether Martin believes gusto a compensatory endowment created in the writing alone or whether it existed otherwise in the life. (Friends don't testify to gusto here, but then they are not levied on to prove a deficiency either). Perhaps the cards are sufficiently on the table when the biographer writes: "There is no doubt that Henry's experience with sex had been maimed from the start by his mother, who alternated between treating him with coldness and overattention".

In the "legend", it is true, Val Miller hardly needed to overcome obstacles to "come through". When *Nexus*, where for the first (published) time he needs to, ends with him off to Paris, there was *Cancer* already published: the victory was, we might say, not only assured but taken for granted. *Cancer* is celebratory, if over a struggle the dimensions of which we had not known. *Black Spring*, which followed it in order of composition and publication, has always been felt charming: certainly its memories of Miller's childhood and youth appear there at their most serene. The im-

pression is, and it is the same in both the writings and the biography, that Paris did provide what Henry in fantasy required of it before he was ever there. Also, that *publication* itself nourished Miller's ego, just as being taken seriously by those he respected as artists warmed his marrow. This need for regard seems confined in the writing to Miller's pre-publication years—here his meetings with Powys, Bernard McFadden, his listening to W.E.B. DuBois' lecture matter (one of the thin trickle of Miller's pre-1930s publications was in DuBois' *Crisis* magazine). After Martin, it is hard not to see the pattern being repeated later—here the role of Alfred Perlès, and of Anais Nin. (He made a need into a way of life, of which *The Books in My Life* is a kind of unconscious parody.)

What such regard and even praise fed was an ego which, however much in need of an almost ontological security, had harboured and treasured a secret fantasy of its omniscience if not omnipotence. From the early 1940s Miller seems to have become convinced of his guru-status, of his role as a dispenser of divine wisdom. He would give what he had not found. That he never went absolutely over the edge—so far as an outsider can see from his biography—is something we have to be grateful for. He must have been very trying, though, as an acquaintance, and all his long-term relationships seem more based on having survived a shared past experience than on current involvements. For the latter it is a story of "many marriages", which makes painful reading. Late Miller in love seems less the old satyr than Fitzgerald's Dick Diver, falling for every pretty young girl he sees. In so many ways, much of Miller's life from the 1940s seems posthumous. *The Rosy Crucifixion*, wherein he put in the time between *Capricorn* and *Cancer*, adds to this effect even as it held Miller to his proper subject, his early self. But if *Sexus* is an ugly misfire—and probably the only one of Miller's works which is pornographic in anybody's society—*Plexus* and *Nexus*,

while sifting over old ground, command respect. A great wound was finally touched, perhaps cauterised. It was what you paid for that night of wonder, when Henry met June ("Mona") at the dance-hall and altered his life irretrievably—the great symbol of mystery in Miller's writings, which *Capricorn* circles like a moth around a candle. It was the clue to much more, and what that more was, is here.

ARNOLD GOLDMAN

Snipe's Castle, ROLAND MATHIAS.

Gomer Press, 1979, £2.

Roland Mathias has long been an important figure in contemporary Anglo-Welsh literature. During the years of his devoted editorship of *The Anglo-Welsh Review* he provided a platform for the work of Welshmen who write in English and a sympathetic, but not uncritical, environment for its recognition and discussion. In this way, and through his own criticism, he has done a great deal to shape the development of such work. He is, moreover, a poet of distinction. His early work, collected in *Break In Harvest* in 1946, introduced his individual voice and he has continued to write with increasing power and command. It is a pleasure to welcome the present volume, in my opinion quite the best Mathias has produced.

The book is organised in three sections, the first a group of twenty lyric poems which reflect many of the poet's known attitudes and concerns, the second is the long poem "Madoc", composed for broadcasting, and the third a sequence of short poems, ten of them, written for David Harries to set to music, and called collectively "Tide-Reach".

Mathias has always been to some extent a difficult poet and I have sometimes thought it impossible for him to make a simple

statement. The poems in *Snipe's Castle*, however, although not without some typically complex passages, are more direct than those in any previous collection. It is not that his thought is necessarily difficult—although Mathias is always an intelligent and learned poet, using both qualities naturally—or that his forms are in any way unusual; rather it is his stern honesty and unshifting insistence on giving us the very kernel of his meaning that lead him into syntactical complexities which demand the reader's most rigorous attention. Such attention is rewarded often enough to make this a most satisfying experience.

We could take as an example the splendid "A Stare From The Mountain" from the first section of the book, almost a text-book example of Mathias at his best and at his most infuriating. The poem is an account of Mathias's meditation as he looks into the Usk valley, an intense and visionary account. It opens with an image so exact and complete that it takes the breath away:

As the sun slants, the best of it over,
Into the trug of Usk . . .

Nothing could be more evocative; the movement easy and precise, that wonderful "trug". But that other Mathias, who will leave nothing to chance, came on here with a long catalogue of properties which so confuse us that we are unable to place the poet when, eventually, in an opening sentence fifteen lines long and containing at least a dozen auxiliary clauses, he appears on Yscir mountain:

As the sun slants, the best of it over,
Into the trug of Usk from the summary
West, masking the struts, the wicker rents
With plush, with a stuff of shaded
Greens gentling the upper, thistly fields,
The thicker bush of forest, ploughland
Cuts of red already stiff in their winter
Folds, tricking the human aberration
Into the same still life, a whole
Kindred lit with the right intensity,
Painted safe to a fortunate choice

Of colours, I stand on Yscir mountain,
 Head above wind level, hearing the north's
 Voice at my nape, putting the frozen
 Questions that the poles demand.

But once there, thank God, he creates a moving and personal statement with something approaching economy. He convinces us utterly of the wonderful visionary quality of his observation of a fat pony "natured white" which stands between himself and the sun and, so outlined, is "marked with redemption". Mathias's vision is essentially tragic:

... I look involuntarily, all
 Of a sudden in need of a gleam
 Lining my own shadow. But nothing there
 Satisfies ...

His only consolation lies in looking down the valley, where he sees smoke drifting up from the rubbish-tip:

The town, taken by sun and arked,
 Burning its pages from the Domesday Book.

And we are reminded again that he is by nature and training a historian, and by temperament a religious man. If he sees no personal redemption for himself, at least he sees himself as part of the history present all about him and he realises that his predicament is both personal and general.

It is those unexpected and direct statements, very revealing for one of Mathias's rather reserved poetic manner, that I find especially moving. Often they reveal the point at which the pressure of the poem began, just as in the lines already quoted we are suddenly made aware that in an idyllic world "nothing there/Satisfies". In poem after poem Mathias creates the natural world with almost unflinching sensitivity and love, and in language which is itself a declaration of sensuous delight, rich in texture, often unusual in vocabulary; but his essential message is that among those fields and with those people, he is alone and without comfort. The friction between the

strength and controlled pleasure of the writing and the stark bleakness of the message creates a most moving situation. In "Porth Cwyfan", for example, after a passage of typical description, we hear the sudden, despairing cry:

... I can call nothing my own ...

and we are entirely unprepared for it. Again, in "May-Trees Climbing", his late return to a scene of summer memories does not elate him; he is "diminished" and clings to "what is left of courage".

It would be wrong, of course, to suggest that this is the only view of Mathias's world that we are offered. "In The Swiss Jura" opens with the poet and his daughter talking "without check" as they walk along. Indirectly we learn of the poet's love for his daughter, of his unwillingness that she should leave him and his stoical acceptance of the situation. Yet all this is done glancingly and almost amusingly, and we can admire the curious learning of a man who will invoke Prince Gwythyr, "for whom the ants/Are valiants" and sternly number them for us, "All emmets, pismires (red truculents moreover)", as a little ploy by which he can almost hide the intensity and seriousness of his wish to make the world small enough for his daughter never to be too far away.

Again, there are a number of poems in which Mathias adopts the mask of a historical person in order to examine what might be an obsession of his own. He has done this before, and it is one way in which he faces the fact of his Welshness—and in this book he seems to be stating the fact of his nationality with almost every line he writes, implicitly and explicitly—since he can examine the situation of the Welshman under attack because of his Welshness. And there is also the very beautiful "Snipe's Castle", a finely-wrought poem which I very much admire, and in which one can't help associating Roland with the "quiet bird" itself. Here form, meaning, and the sly admiration of the poet for the shy, enduring bird, all combine to make a splendidly unified poem.

It is Mathias's concern for Welshmen under attack for their nationality that seems to inform the verse of "Madoc", a poem which is based on the belief that Prince Madoc left a band of his followers in America in the twelfth century. These Welsh people later became the Mandans, a tribe of Welsh Indians who existed until they were wiped out by smallpox in 1838. I remember hearing the poem when it was broadcast in 1972 and rather liking it. It does not, alas, read as well as I had hoped. It lacks dramatic intensity and the voices are very much the same. It does, of course, contain some fine lines, and often whole passages command my admiration, but the poem as a whole does not succeed.

We are left with the ten poems which together form the libretto for David Harries' cantata and which constitute the last section of this book. These ten linked poems seem to me to be among the finest Mathias has written; they are relatively simple and direct, but deal with profound matters. I would guess that the discipline of writing for the composer, so that the verse must be almost immediately grasped, has been a rewarding one, making the poet strip his lines to the essential statements. (Something of the same quality is found in "Snipe's Castle" and for a rather similar reason. In that poem Mathias is speaking directly to the bird. It might be that he is one of those poets who should always be very aware of his audience.) The poems have a historical basis, are very free and varied in tone, and again are so made that they allow Mathias to invoke Welsh people and Welsh problems. They vary in quality, of course, but for the last of them, "Laus Deo", I have unreserved praise. Any man who can write this well deserves our approval:

The water is in the well
 But it never fails:
 The clifftop fields are infinite salt
 When the gales flock and pummel
 Roof and farmstack and holt:
 But the worm speaks well
 Of the earth, the pheasant
 Is heavy with praise in the lane . . .

And in this final poem he makes his final and finest statement about Wales and his awareness of it:

. . . It is one
 Coherent work, this Wales
 And the seaway of Wales, its Maker
 As careful of strength as
 Of weakness, its quirk and cognomen
 And trumpet allowed for
 The whole peninsula's length.
 It is one affirmative work, this Wales
 And the seaway of Wales.

LESLIE NORRIS

A Reading of E. M. Forster,
 GLEN CAVALIERO.

Macmillan, 1979, £10.

A book which challenges the application of the word "spinsterly" to E. M. Forster's work with the common sense remark that "unmarried women are not the least selfless or valuable members of the community", commands this reviewer's respect and liking. Such good sense is not the least of its good qualities. The critic's range of literary reference is as wide as his sympathy, and it is used with similar precision and discrimination. Like the majority of Forster's modern critics, Mr. Cavaliero has scruples about putting Forster among the "greats" but he has no doubts about Forster's classical standing (his favourite term of reference here is, understandably though qualifiedly, Jane Austen) and any list of the authors with whom Forster is compared in this book contains enough of the unexpected to be stimulating. Henry James, M. R. James, Saki, J. M. Barrie, Max Beerbohm, George Macdonald and Arthur Machen provide unusual and illuminating points of reference among Forster's earlier contemporaries. Amongst his coevals D. H. Lawrence and both the Powys brothers are

used to evaluate the seriousness of Forster's commitment and his contemporaneity. Ivy Compton-Burnett and "Elizabeth", Joseph Conrad and E. H. Young, James Joyce and Nancy Mitford, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Delafield help to place particular aspects of Forster's art, both positively and negatively.

The introduction and the publisher's blurb suggest that this book may be a serious study of the effects of Forster's homosexuality upon his writings: fortunately, perhaps, this is not the book's main or only preoccupation. Mr. Cavaliero seeks to place his subject first in the context of the period in which his books were written, and then in the context of the sensibility of the late 1970s. It is a brief and sensitive look at what Forster may have to offer to today's readers if they bear in mind the atmosphere of Edwardian England. The brief biographical chapters are designed to persuade us that Forster (like Jane Austen?) transformed a limited experience of life into an artistic advantage, that he showed surprising individuality of spirit and that his work shows a growing opposition to the expectations of the wider society in which he grew up. Some at least of the emotional impetus behind Forster's championship of individuality may be traced to his increasing awareness of his own homosexuality, but it was also fostered by the liberalism of his education and by the strongly protestant tradition of the Clapham branches of his family. Perhaps this appreciation of Forster is most conventional in this last particular: it appears to take for granted, and to expect all readers to do so, that Forster reacted against the Christian professions and practice which he had seen around him as a young man, but that he was otherwise uninfluenced by them. The book does give us very much the humanist Forster: but it is time that we asked whether the verdict of the author in *A Passage to India*—"poor talkative Christianity"—is really the final one that most critics, including Mr. Cavaliero, appear still to think it. There is a very revealing sentence on this subject in Chapter 3: "Common to all his fiction is the

theme of revelation, calling judgement, salvation: although himself an unbeliever, Forster still worked in the psychological framework of the Christian myth". Why so confident about the mythical nature of Christianity and why only the psychological framework: had the spiritual nothing to say to Forster? The pages of *The Powys Review* may be a particularly appropriate place to ask such a question, but it is not in a book review that we can attempt to give an answer.

This apart, then, it is a book which keeps a sense of proportion, and it is also a book which does "bring out the enjoyment". Take, for example, the Edwardian analogies which are used in the fourth chapter on the early stories. They show with a trenchant delicacy of demonstration how untypical of their period are Forster's short stories in the use they make of fantasy—how far from that later nineteenth-century mode of writing about fairies and the supernatural which was so "essentially materialistic in its spirituality". (It is a quality of mind often attributed to the English: Laurence Housman's Prince Albert is made to agree that the English are very materialistic—but very romantic about their material—a combination which Forster could surely have appreciated.) It is useful to be reminded that Forster's first four published novels are pre-First World War and that they are the exact contemporaries, successively and respectively, of *The Golden Bowl*, *The Secret Agent*, *The Old Wives' Tale* and *The History of Mr. Polly*.

The point is well made in this chapter that, without help, we may miss the nuances of meaning conveyed to the middle-class society of half a century ago by the niceties of Forster's language and the carefully calculated effects of his shifts of tone. Do we, I wonder, realise without Mr. Cavaliero's help "the social differences that existed at that time between doctors and dentists"? This at least seems to have endured into our own time, if we can believe the literary evidence of an author cited elsewhere in this book, for different

reasons: Graham Greene's dentist in *The Complaisant Lover* claims to feel a similar social prejudice to his disadvantage in the 1950s. Perhaps Mr. Cavaliero should also have reminded us that Gino Carella's father is in any case a foreigner and only the equal of "the servants' dentist in Coronation Place".

Of the pre-war novels the first and the last are the ones which Mr. Cavaliero most admires for their artistic completeness, and he is right to do so. For all the appearance of slightness, *Where Angels Fear to Tread* is an even more self-assured performance than he allows. It does indeed give us a Philip who embodies "that self-protective irony which is the Englishman's defence against reality", but it shows us that irony has other and more fruitful functions too. In the course of his many and entertaining illustrations and comments the critic shows us how the irony is used to maintain a delicate moral balance. He is well aware of the deeper significances to be derived from such episodes as Mrs. Herriton's sowing of a row of peas and he has a fine eye for Forster's broader comedy. It is only a little surprising that he does not remind us of the scene at the Opera, the most richly comic piece of writing in the whole of Forster. This scene brings out clearly the ways in which Forster in all his novels uses supposed national characteristics to underline English inadequacies: through the conflict of manners he enables the favoured Englishman to continue the arrested development of his "undeveloped heart". Philip's sudden growth into true humanity as the result of the catastrophes of the story would in itself be enough to make one uneasy about the assertion that there is no satisfying resolution to it. When, in a later chapter, this novel is described as cynical, it would appear that the fact of Philip's regeneration has been forgotten.

In his studies of the next novels Mr. Cavaliero captures the bitterness of *The Longest Journey* and its probable significance in our understanding of Forster himself (his brief summaries of all the novels are models of what the critic can do

to help, without confusing, the reader); with equal success he helps us to enjoy the serious comedy of Lucy Honeychurch's redemption. Rickie Elliot refuses to recognise what his own heart says to him—that this is not altogether his own fault, simply deepens the pessimism of the story: Lucy Honeychurch is allowed and coerced into perceiving what the reader has known to be true all along, that she loves George with heart and mind and soul and body, and that she has no reason to be ashamed of any part of her love. This apparent dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, between soul and body, and also between the emotional and the intellectual is at the heart of every Forster novel. And it is this, rather than an interest in Forster's biography which will continue to give Forster's novels their fascination. Our terminology for such things will continue to change: they may be described in psychological or sociological terminology; but as long as they are primary facts of human experience they will have their archetypal interest.

If Mr. Cavaliero rightly insists upon Forster's preoccupation with the value and importance of the individual, he does not lose sight of the fact that the individual can only be himself within a wider social context, and he sees this as the reason for the success of so much of *Howards End* (qualified by the failure to enable the reader to feel the reality of Henry Wilcox as Margaret must have done). What this novel causes him to notice, more than the previous ones, is Forster's respect for the individual woman. Forster's incidental feminism is bound to seem a virtue in the 1970s and it is good that it should do so. The strength of the novel lies in the reconciliation of what seem to be opposites. On the larger scale all aspects of human nature need one another both in the individual and in society. Here is the celebrated Forsterian tolerance at work on the fabric of society through the acts of the individual—persuasively and successfully at work.

Mr. Cavaliero sees *Maurice* as a

necessary interruption to the other novels—a partially successful therapeutic exercise which had to be gone through before Forster could write his last and best novel. *A Passage to India* is a novel which attaches enormous importance to the small, symptomatic or significant incident, which may typify a life or provoke a crisis. If Ronnie Heaslop had known why Aziz' collar stud was missing would it have changed his attitude to India? If the Collector had had the moral or intellectual courage to stop the English intoxicating themselves with cant phrases at the crisis, could the crisis have been reasonably resolved? Mr. Cavaliero's appreciation brings such issues to life for us, while at the same time finding the modernity of the novel in the refusal to propose neat solutions to human problems in the face of an inscrutable universe. This is a typical contemporary reaction to Forster: it is all the more curious to find the last novel praised for its incompleteness when we recall Mr. Cavaliero's regret that there was "no satisfying resolution" to *Where Angels Fear to Tread*. Does he perhaps see a Forster who has hope for the individual but no hope for the future of the human race?

RICHARD PARKINSON

Twenty Eight Sonnets; The Last Leaf Falls; Middle Earth, GAMES WOOLSEY.

Warren House Press: 1977, £2.25; 1978, £2.25; 1979, £2.70.

There are fashions in poetry as in most other things in life, and it must often be a matter of chance as to whether any poet who holds to his (or her) own course rather than following the style current at the time will finally be judged by his own achievement and not for his position on some scale of contemporary relevance. The greatest, of course—the Powyses or the David Joneses—make their claim regard-

less, but for lesser talents it is often some almost non-poetic connection which keeps their name alive until a relatively unprejudiced judgement is possible: local pride, for instance, or the enthusiasm of a particular little-press owner.

Such a writer, it would seem, is Gamel Woolsey. American born, she came to England, where she lived at East Chaldon in Dorset and was part of the Powys circle of friends there; she married a fellow writer, Gerald Brenan, and they later went to live in Spain. It all sounds very familiar—the young American drawn to the Old World and finding her home there, and though, born in 1899, she was a little younger than the 'lost generation', the background is much the same. And yet the result is very far from the familiar, from the experimentalism of Eliot and Pound or the tough-guy stance of a writer like Hemingway.

Although she published other books, a translation from the Spanish and a volume of Spanish fairy-tales, Gamel Woolsey published only one collection of poems in her lifetime, *Middle Earth* (1931; much admired, and quoted, by Llewelyn Powys). It is a book that apparently has far more in common with the Georgian poets than with her own immediate contemporaries; the forms she uses are traditional, and the subject matter too is traditional—love, childhood, nature, loss:

Beauty is always departing from us,
With a backward look and a last proud grace;
And youth is always wearying and going,
No more to be seen in its ancient place.
(“Esto Perpetua”)

And yet, ultimately, the effect is far from traditional, and the note she strikes much more contemporary than most of the apparent modernism of the other 'between-the-wars' poets (though she was certainly aware of writers like Dylan Thomas). Equally, there is no obvious sign of her American origins; even in the poems in the posthumous *The Last Leaf Falls* which refer to her childhood and youth in South Carolina and New York, the landscape is

almost European, and the personal symbolism of castles and knights and hunters riding out in the dawn which she creates is, at the very least, an echo of European originals. Yet it is American writers whom she brings to mind, the Robert Lowell of *Life Studies*, Sylvia Plath perhaps, occasionally Emily Dickinson as in "The Soul Hunter":

The souls came crowding round me,
The bays and dappled grays,
They neighed and pranced and whinnied,
And galloped on their ways.

I cannot love men fully,
I cannot love life whole—
I only bridled Fancy,
I could not catch the soul.

Even in her symbolism she strikes a note particularly American; Gamel Woolsey's "Middle Earth" pre-dated the first of Tolkien's sagas by several years, but often she draws on the same well of tradition, partly medieval, partly Celtic, always moral (in a completely non-Christian sense), that common source which makes writers as diverse as Robert Graves and John Cowper Powys so congenial to academic American readers.

Over the centuries, of course, there have always been far fewer women poets than men, and any woman writing verse does so from within a tradition built up by male writers and therefore consisting largely of male attitudes. One result of this is that it is extremely difficult for a woman to write love poems without sentimentality, and even more difficult to write of physical love-making. (Hence, no doubt, the common tendency to concentrate on the domestic.) Yet Gamel Woolsey attempted both of these things and, I believe, with considerable success; though she wrote without creating a specifically feminine persona, as lover to lover rather than as woman to man. Nor did she write only of love as passion, for she also celebrated the relationship of friends and of family (though never of

mother and child) in the same style of equal comradeship. She was particularly aware of the need for independence in the creative artist:

Though you have altered my poor shape
I am more truly what I was.
The crystal blown to leaf and grape
Is still transparent shining glass,

You twist and shape me to your will,
I bend to all the moods that pass;
But I am proud and secret still,
And but more truly what I was.

("Immutable")

Yet, after all, perhaps her deepest theme is loss. Not merely the loss of friends, of family, of lovers, but rather a sense of the loss involved in existing at all, the fatal wound given at birth. It is this, with her stance as woman as human being rather than woman as wife and mother, that reminds one of Sylvia Plath; but Gamel Woolsey, though intensely aware of transience, is never crippled by it. She has, in the end, the power to accept, to say "Nothing is lost. Life has received its own".

Gamel Woolsey is not a major poet, but certainly she is one who merits considerably more attention than she has so far received, and Warren House Press have rendered a valuable service in making her early work available once more and in publishing her later, uncollected poems.

SALLY JONES

Llewelyn Powys, An Essay,
KENNETH HOPKINS.

Enitharmon Press, 1979, £3.75 (hardback),
£2.25 (paper).

It was Montaigne who invented the conception of the essay as a literary form and made it such a marvellous thing, his style so rich, so positive that the imagination is seized at once. Today essays are out of

fashion, but that did not happen until Llewelyn Powys had been able to weave his genius into them.

It is in the essay that his genius reached its summit, as Kenneth Hopkins reminds us in this admirable short study which his long acquaintance with the Powys family and his admiration for their work has made him so well qualified to write. Setting out to provide an introduction to the work of the man he first met in 1935, whose vision of life is of permanent significance, he performs his task with understanding, being brief, comprehensive, appreciative, but gently critical where he feels criticism is called for. He does not overpraise but omits none of the riches, stressing Llewelyn's very personal approach to life, to writing and to his own special philosophy, noting that like his famous brothers he has an acute visual awareness of natural phenomena, seeing in nature what most of us fail, to our great loss, to see, and performing the great service of teaching others "to open wide their entranced eyes". If only this could be taught! The reader can be uplifted, envious, involved—but entranced eyes are a gift, a benediction, and like genius, unteachable.

A mild criticism Hopkins puts forward is that Llewelyn did not receive the recognition he deserved because critics did not always do him justice on account of the slightly old-fashioned aspect of his prose. He also mentions certain linguistic lapses in his writing and thinks this may be because he was trying too hard. A weakness for alliteration and the far-brought word he says sometimes betrayed him "since it is no part of a sentence's job to trip the reader up in the middle".

Kenneth Hopkins shows us how Llewelyn's style took shape, tentatively, even painfully, and underlying it the developing response to the poetry and the insecurity of life, to the inevitability of death. The early essays lack the individuality of the later ones but impulses can be traced in them which foreshadow the marvellous *Earth Memories* and its successors. Everything he wrote had its roots in

autobiography. He never describes objectively, but always presents the impression made on his own consciousness.

Llewelyn wrote two novels, and the better one was "an imaginary autobiography", *Love and Death*, the story of a first love with its magical delights and tragic ending. It contains a good deal that is not imaginary, though the scene is put back to Montacute and 1907. There is now a new novel form, known as 'Faction', but one would hate to apply that ugly word to *Love and Death*. It was Llewelyn's last book with those "two realities" as Theodore called them present on every page.

In his biography *The Powys Brothers*, published in 1967, Kenneth Hopkins wrote that the idealised loved one of *Love and Death* was Marion Linton. But he corrects that here. Alyse Gregory had read his earlier book in typescript and saved him, he says, from many errors, but not this one—and it is easy to understand why. The appearance of *So Wild a Thing*, Llewelyn's letters to Gamel Woolsey and of Alyse's journal after her death in *The Cry of a Gull* made it clear that Gamel was the loved one. *Love and Death*, a moving and beautifully written book, is of enduring worth and one which, as Kenneth Hopkins says, will be read for its eloquence, compassion, insight, resignation and exultation. In it Llewelyn's maturest conclusions on life's essentials are gathered together in a prose he never excelled elsewhere.

Love and Death, his longest book, was written while he was permanently in one place and Hopkins makes the point that he wrote short pieces because he was frequently moving about. To underline this view he briefly records Llewelyn's movements and says that "biographical facts have to be remembered in assessing the nature, the quantity, the quality of an author's work . . . A man cannot divorce the circumstances of his life from the work he does, and neither should the reader". I wonder? Who would have guessed that Trollope worked in the Post Office?

Forty years ago Llewelyn gave the young

Kenneth Hopkins a copy of *Impassioned Clay* with its message that in the visible world, in the very dust we tread, everywhere is the wonder of living. The book entranced him and always on re-reading it he puts it down refreshed and renewed.

His essay on Llewelyn Powys should give a new generation perhaps unaware of this great writer, and others only partly aware, the chance of the same invaluable experience, the same chance of solace, enrichment, tranquillity and delight.

ELIZABETH HARVEY

The English Path, KIM TAPLIN.

The Boydell Press, 1979, £7.50.

Towards the end of her own wayfaring in this book Kim Taplin notes that "the image of life as a journey is so old and so pervasive that it is easy to forget it is one". So, of course, is reading a book a journey. And one would expect a book concerned as this one is with giving some account of the history and nature of English footpaths, and especially with their place in English literature to prefer Mr. Bottle's way of proceeding to Mr. Reed's, as described in T. F. Powys's "Bottle's Path". Kim Taplin quotes the relevant passage:

Mr. Bottle's greatest interest in life, other than his religion, had always been footpaths . . . Every sermon of Mr. Bottle's, that he preached in the chapel at Mockery where he lived, had some reference or other to a footpath, and he often used to say that it is upon one's own feet, walking in a lonely footway, and not upon a tarred road in an automobile, as Mr. Reed supposed, that one reaches God.

Her book is accordingly not a fast tour of selected literary landmarks but a patient following of many by-ways. If these do not lead to God (and in view of the writers quoted and discussed I would not say

dogmatically that none of them does), they are by-ways not because they are minor (and many of the writers she discusses are not), but because, as Richard Jefferies wrote of footpaths, they "go through the heart of the land", and, before the last sixty years or so, through the heart of country people's experience as well. Our paths have been truly common, linking places and by their continuity linking generations, providing stages for most of life's primary experiences (for example, the lovers' tryst at the stile), and stimulating vision in writers and artists. Their common and uncommon uses have not been mutually exclusive. William Barnes is, as Kim Taplin points out, a poet of fellowship for whom paths were ways of good company, shared with neighbours, family and friends. The more visionary Richard Jefferies and John Constable, on the other hand, depicted the cultivated and natural world as it truly was, and often as it was seen from footpaths. In the words of Ivor Gurney's "The Escape" (Kim Taplin quotes the poem but not this part of it), they knew

nor is anything done
Wiselier than the moving or breaking to
sight

Of a thing hidden under by custom

This aim of the Romantic poets, expressed by Coleridge for example, has been well served by footpaths, with their slow meandering and frequent invitations to stop and look at things near or far "hidden under by custom", but to the artist, fields or hedgerows of vision, and to the greatest artists, of vision hallowed by the touch of human custom.

It will be obvious from what I have written so far that I find *The English Path* a companionable way with many arresting views. Parts of it, especially near the beginning, I found awkward going, however. There are abrupt jumps from writer to writer of different periods which negate the historical sense shown elsewhere. There is the barbed wire fence of a serious error early on, where Kim Taplin has D. H. Lawrence walking with Edward Thomas in-

stead of Eleanor Farjeon. There are also, oddly, some slightly downgrading comments on John Clare and Edward Thomas whose poetry she obviously loves, and even a hint of that insufferable, amused, would-be common sense attitude of Stella Gibbons to Lawrence's outdoor lovers and Hardy's remorseless tragic process. But perhaps these are sops to conventionality on a journey that becomes increasingly confident as it advances deeper into the land and the literature. The few slights are certainly outweighed by the loving use of these writers, and a gift for critical analysis which is most notably deployed in a sensitive close reading of a short passage from Jefferies' "The Pageant of Summer".

From the viewpoint of admirers of the Powys brothers probably the most valuable feature of this book—and it is one for which I warmly applaud it—is that it coolly assumes the rightness of discussing the brothers alongside such writers as Clare, Barnes, Jefferies, and Hardy. Few comparative critical evaluations are made in doing this—as I intend none by noting it—but Llewelyn, T. F. and John Cowper Powys are quietly placed in one of the major contexts to which they undoubtedly belong. And, of course, it *implies* a radical critical evaluation, the detail and emphases of which it will take several generations of critics to work out and argue about: we are still at the beginning of all that. I know of no other book that makes this implication (the context of Glen Cavaliero's *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel 1900-1939* is quite different), and it is, in fact, a revolutionary act. The act of talking quietly and naturally about the Powyses in the same breath as writers long-established within a tradition, and so affirming their *belonging*. No defensiveness on their behalf, no aggression; simply an unforced placing of them in that literary landscape, various and beset with so many critical and social questions though it is, that means so much to many of us.

Of course, belonging to a tradition doesn't mean looking like a conifer in a plantation of conifers. The writers and

artists Kim Taplin writes about are a singular company: each is singular, and they comprise a company confirming their singularity. They have a common ground—the English countryside known intimately from the paths penetrating it. They share the kind of feelings Clare expressed for a stile known all his life, but then removed from its place: "my affections claim a friendship with such things". They had similar feelings to Constable's: "But I should paint my own places best—Painting is but another word for feeling. I associate my 'careless boyhood' to all that lies on the banks of the *Stour*. They made me a painter (& I am grateful) . . .". They were all friendly to such things. They never lost that closeness to the ground which children begin with, but some of them spiritualised it, others made fetishes of the objects to hand or described them in minute detail: in every instance the things have *mana*. Friendship and love for sticks and stones take many forms, and are necessarily expressed differently, within different ranges of possibility, at different times. The sense of historical shaping forces is not, as I have already suggested, one of the book's strong points, and more could certainly have been made of the social and historical factors influencing the "rural-sexual metaphor" (Raymond Williams) which Kim Taplin merely notes as a preliminary to discussing its manifestations in the Powyses' writings. But she is surely right to emphasise their extension and elaboration of the tradition at this point, and her comments on John Cowper Powys's use of sexually symbolic landscapes and excursions (as when Wolf Solent's "exploration of the countryside and his seduction of Gerda advance simultaneously") are particularly useful. If she does not go far enough along this path—and she does not, for walking as a means of intercourse with the earth mother is at the heart of John Cowper Powys's philosophy of regeneration (my words here are, of course, crude shorthand for the object of a quest which can be expressed only in symbolic terms)—then it would be

churlish to make this a criticism of *The English Path*. Indeed the book pioneers several neglected areas that lie on or alongside our common tracks.

It is a handsome book, with many black and white illustrations of paintings and etchings by Constable, Palmer, Millais, Paul Nash, Myles Birket Foster, and many others. The sort of book whose appearance and title should make it a popular gift this Christmas, but no matter if in the New Year it finds its way onto some coffee tables, as in any time of national threat or decadence images of the country seen as a lost ideal are bought and sold; for it is a path with real mud and cow-dung, not like Thomson's *Seasons*, in Kim Taplin's view, "a kind of magic carpet tour", but with the various weathers of many physical and mental landscapes. T. F. Powys was interested in

"the religion that moves with the boots of a man. The religion that makes a mark of a nail in the mud". It was how he recognised his friend in that very personal story (which I take to be fictionalised spiritual autobiography), "The House with the Echo": "I knew at once when I saw this man's footsteps that he belonged to the religion that I like, to the religion that interests me. To the religion that loves the poor". And, we might read between the lines, to the religion that loves the primary things of our world, the scarab with its ball of dung. In fact, Powys knew those he was friendly to by their footsteps, whether they made a mark on the real. So one may know a book. *The English Path* has been carefully trodden out.

JEREMY HOOKER

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

NORMAN BRYSON is a Fellow and the Director of English Studies, King's College, Cambridge.

JACK CLEMO published his first mature novel, *Wilding Graft*, in 1948, and this was followed by an autobiography, *Confession of a Rebel*, 1949, and a collection of poems, *The Clay Verge*, 1951. After becoming blind in 1955, he published a book on his religion, *The Invading Gospel*, and four volumes of poetry, the latest being *Broad Autumn*, 1975. The selection of his poems in *Penguin Modern Poets*, 6 includes one to T. F. Powys, "A Kindred Battlefield". His second volume of autobiography, *The Marriage of a Rebel*, will be published early in 1980 by Gollancz.

PETER EASINGWOOD is a lecturer in English at the University of Dundee.

PETER JOHN FOSS teaches at a Sixth Form College in Leicester.

ARNOLD GOLDMAN is Professor of American Studies at the University of Keele. His most recent work includes studies of Faulkner, Melville and the Provincetown Players. Among forthcoming work are the results of his research into the text of Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night*.

ELIZABETH HARVEY, journalist and book reviewer, worked in the B.B.C. Monitoring Service during the War and was Press Officer for the Women's interests for the Festival of Britain. She is Vice-President for the Society of Women Writers and Journalists.

JEREMY HOOKER is a lecturer in English at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth. His main critical works are on John Cowper Powys and David Jones. He has published four volumes of poetry of which the latest are *Solent Shore*, Carcanet, 1978, and *Landscape of the Daylight Moon*, Enitharmon, 1978.

SALLY ROBERTS JONES lives in Port Talbot where she was Reference Librarian. She is a poet, having published *Turning Away*, 1968, and *The Forgotten Country*, Gomer, 1977, a local historian and bibliographer, her latest production being "Women Writers in Wales in the English Language", a critic (*Allen Raine*, Writers of Wales

Series, U.W.P., 1979) and she helps run a small press, Alun Books, whose latest publication is *Choose Your Stranger*, poems by Professor Gwyn Williams.

NED LUKACHER is the Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. In 1980 he will join the English Faculty of the University of Illinois at Chicago Circle.

LESLIE NORRIS has published eight books of poetry and one of short stories. In 1980 Chatto and Windus will publish a new book of his poems, *Water Voices*, and a collection is to be published shortly by Atlantic, Little, Brown of Boston, U.S.A. He will be visiting Professor of English at the State University of Washington, his second such visit to Seattle, from March until September, 1980.

RICHARD PARKINSON, who is Senior Lecturer in English at Exeter University, has also lectured widely in Germany, France and the U.S.A. His publications include a critical study of *Edward Gibbon* under the Twayne imprint in 1973 and an essay on *Howards End* in *E. M. Forster, A Human Exploration*, ed. G. K. Das and John Beer, 1979.

MARGUERITE TJADER worked with Theodore Dreiser intermittently from their first meeting in 1928 and was his literary secretary in Hollywood throughout the last two years of his life, 1944-5. She published a novel, *Borealis*, Logos Press, N.Y., in 1930, and edited *Direction*, a magazine of the arts, 1937-1945. She has published the critical studies, *Mother Elizabeth, Herder and Herder*, N.Y., 1930, and *Theodore Dreiser, A New Dimension*, N.Y., 1965 and Kraus reprint, and edited Dreiser's *Notes on Life*, University of Alabama Press, 1974. Her *Birgitta of Sweden* will be published early in 1980 by the Paulist Press, N.Y., and a new study of Dreiser, *The Lust of the Goat is the Bounty of God*, awaits a publisher.

CORRECTION

In a footnote to Sylvia Townsend Warner's "Theodore Powys and Some Friends at East Chaldon, 1922-1927", in *The Powys Review*, Number Five, p. 18, "Bea" in the text is incorrectly identified as Beatrice George. Sylvia Townsend Warner's reference here was to Bea Howe, the novelist, biographer and autobiographer. The Editor apologises for this error, especially to Bea Howe.

THE POWYS SOCIETY

(President: Angus Wilson)

The Powys Society exists to promote the study and appreciation of the work of the Powys family, especially that of John Cowper Powys, T. F. Powys and Llewelyn Powys. Meetings are held three times a year, two in London; the third is a weekend conference in a provincial centre. Members receive copies of *The Powys Review* containing papers read to the Society and other material. The *Review* will be published twice a year.

The Membership subscription is **£7.50** a year.

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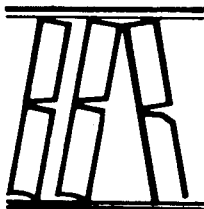
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**John Cowper Powys,
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