ABSTRACT

Development of Style in the Writings of John Cowper Powys 1915–1929.

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Between 1915 and 1929 J.C. Powys wrote five novels, Wood and Stone, Rodmoor, After My Fashion, Ducdame, and Wolf Solent, and two unpublished plays, Paddock Calls and a dramatisation of Dostoievsky's The Idiot. To each of these seven works a single chapter is devoted. In addition, three short chapters fill in biographical details and bridge chronological gaps; their subjects are Powys' unpublished writings, his work as a dramatist, and his contacts with modernism. The latter chapter provides biographical support for the main critical contention of the thesis, Powys' central place in twentieth-century literature.

Each chapter describes the biographical context in which the novel or play was written, before proceeding with a textual analysis. The critical aim is to demonstrate Powys' technique, his consciousness of aesthetic and formal questions, and his style. Powys' ideas and beliefs are discussed only with reference to his style and form of expression. The broad development from Wood and Stone to Wolf Solent is seen and analysed in terms of an increasing sophistication of technique. Particular stress is laid on Powys' treatment of his protagonist's self-consciousness, culminating in the formal solution of Wolf Solent.

As literary history, apart from placing Powys among contemporaries such as Joyce, Pound, Mann, Faulkner and Dreiser, the thesis shows the influence on Powys of Henry James, Turgenev, Hardy and others. The most important and most widely recognised influence, of Dostoievsky, is examined from critical and biographical angles.

Incidentally to its main purpose, the thesis provides the most detailed biographical record, to date, of Powys' life in these years. Contemporary documentation has been used whenever possible, and extensively; much of it, mainly correspondence, is unpublished.

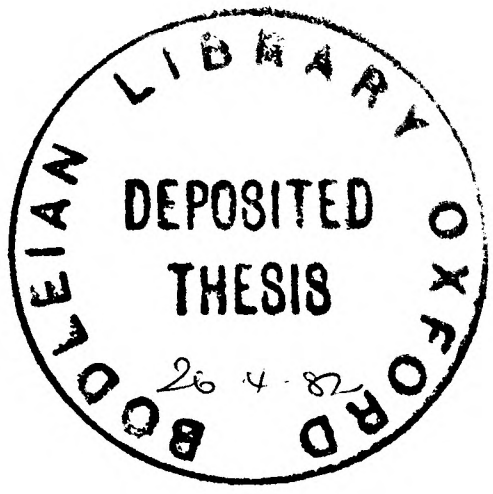
DEVELOPMENT OF STYLE

IN THE WRITINGS OF

JOHN COWPER POWYS 1915-1929

(DPhil 1982)

CHARLES J. S. LOCK



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ERRATA

p. 41, ll. 29-30.
For: Don't think I'm mad or ill because of being with a Doctor. I'm neither -
read: Don't think I'm mad or ill because of being with a Doctor.
I'm neither -

p. 42, l. 22.
For: acquaintance of former times who was lodging
read: acquaintance of former times who, apparently coincidentally, was lodging

p. 54. p. 54 is not missing but numbered p. 55; all subsequent pages are therefore wrongly numbered.

p. 96, l. 8.
For: question. There's more in it
read: question. It's very interesting the way he lights his pipe. There's more in it

p. 110, l. 21.
For: almost completed:
But all the same
read: almost completed:
I've got to get this book off my hands and then I hope to try my luck with a novel, shorter as well as better than those other two.
In January 1930, while on a lecture-tour of the mid-West, John wrote to Llewelyn in a depressed mood. He had still not begun to write his third novel:
But all the same

p. 129, l. 24.
For: that in all this reckless
read: that in all this chaotic litter and in all this reckless

p. 149, l. 2. New paragraph to begin.

p. 218, l. 30.
For: somebody's life. But perhaps
read: somebody's life. They dub along without significance.
But perhaps

Notes, passim. Each numeral should be raised one line above the note to which it refers. All notes, and entries in the Bibliography, should end with a full-stop.

pp. 284-88, passim.
For: R.,
read: R,

p. 292, note 100.
For: Megapolis read: Megalopolis

p. 294, note 10.
For: Life of Ll.P. read: Life of Llewelyn Powys

p. 299, note 3.
For: Ll. Powys read: Llewelyn Powys

FOREWORD

This thesis takes for its subject the five novels and two plays known to have been written by John Cowper Powys between 1915 and 1929. There are other writings which have not survived, or of whose survival we are ignorant. Three years ago only four novels from this period were known and available; research uncovered the two plays, and the unexpected publication of After My Fashion in 1980 was a benefit that disturbed the flow of research. Having suffered from such vagaries it is hoped that this research will clarify the extent and nature of Powys' writings in these years.

As will be seen, Powys did not start writing in 1915; Wood and Stone is the result of many years of attempting to write a novel. The early drafts need to be examined in detail, and, together with Powys' early life, they constitute a little-known and perplexing area which could be the subject of another thesis. 1929 is the terminal date, not because Powys reached a plateau of consistent achievement in that year, but because Wolf Solent is his first indisputably major novel. Much familiarity with the earlier novels has not inclined me to challenge that valuation. In Wolf Solent Powys' interest in technical experimentation finds its fulfilment, without establishing a model for subsequent books. In these fifteen years, taken from the middle of Powys' life,we see the development of a writer with an intensely complex mind, through the experience of war and exile, of America in the 1920s, and of modernism in

literature.

Biographically, this thesis endeavours to establish the course of Powys' career as a writer through these years. Later writers, including Powys himself after the event, have seldom been relied upon, and as often as possible evidence is drawn from contemporary letters and documents. Powys' letters to his brother Llewelyn have been largely used, together with his letters to Frances Gregg and those to his sister Marian. These are the three most important groups of correspondence for this period of Powys' life, and their publication, in scholarly editions, is awaited. Much attention and close scrutiny has been given to The Idiot and Paddock Calls, the two unpublished works under consideration. It has been important to establish as accurately as possible what Powys wrote, and when, and to see these plays in the context of an incipient career as a novelist. No more than incidental attention has been paid to Powys' poetry of these years, partly because this has been treated by others, more importantly because the poetry seems to be a dead-end, at least peripheral to his main achievement. Powys' critical essays and philosophical books are drawn on only insofar as they elucidate the novels and plays.

Critically, one of the aims of the thesis is to display Powys as a major writer, contemporary with Joyce, Pound, Mann, Dreiser, Faulkner and others. Without pretence of being comprehensive I hope that the extended treatment of Powys' attitude to Dostoievsky will put on firmer ground the often noticed, little analysed, question of influence.

A concentration on literary history should supplement, as well as acting against the excesses of, those interpretations of Powys which stress his mythical, magical and occult concerns. Writings about Powys often lead one to think that here is a prophet and a visionary, but not a great writer. I have deliberately excluded, almost entirely, any discussion of Powys' vision unrelated to the manner of its expression.

Powys' vision has been promoted to the detriment of his technique as a writer, of what is representative, of what links him to his great contemporaries. It is primarily as a writer, not as a visionary, that Powys will gain a public. One trusts that criticism has some standards, measures of quality, which can discriminate among writers and which are ineffectual in matters of prophecy. If Powys is a prophetic writer he will survive, like Dostoievsky, Goethe, Blake or Isaiah, on the strength of his manner, not of his matter. Goethe's notion that a great man is linked by weakness to his age is double-edged; for without that weakness, without a common bond, some service to the quotidian, visionary and prophetic power can only be esoteric and waste.

"Style" is a concise term for that which Powys has in common with his contemporary writers. I have not rigidly defined the concept, nor have I made thorough application of stylistic analyses. Many people are happy to praise Powys while apologising for his style, which is either the result of a narrow definition of style or a critical irresponsibility. If one asserts that Powys is a great writer one is obliged to widen the notion of style until

Powys is embraced. By concentrating on the words rather than on verbally disembodied ideas one finds that Powys is accessible to the same criteria by which we judge his major contemporaries. By attending to the external facts of Powys' life, and to the textual surface of his writings, this thesis hopes to present a sensibly limited Powys, not absurdly magian but plausibly human.

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The kindness of those who knew Powys and those who possess manuscripts and other material has been great and unfailing. To talk of the past with Lucy Penny and with Phyllis Playter has been a true privilege, enlightening far beyond the specific answers to my queries. I am deeply indebted to Gerard Casey, and to the late Mary Casey, for much encouragement and hospitality. Peter Powys Grey made a most generous loan of the typescript of The Idiot, as well as providing information about Powys' life in New York.

Oliver Wilkinson lent the typescript of Frances and Jack, without which a thesis on this period would have been severely impoverished. Prof.R. L. Blackmore made my visit to Colgate University pleasant and rewarding. Gerald Pollinger, of Laurence Pollinger, Ltd., lent the typescript of After My Fashion in advance of publication, thus relieving a frustrating situation. Jeff Kwintner of the Village Press lent the proof of Paddock Calls, and a large miscellany of useful material; here, beyond the personal debt, one must express a sense of deep obligation to the Village Press whose reprints of Powys have made life so much easier for the student. E. E. Bissell was exceptionally generous and hospitable in giving me access to the riches of his collection. In my dealings with all these people no division was made between business and pleasure, scholarship and hospitality; research was transformed into something other than dust and drudgery.

To my joint supervisors this thesis owes most. I am extremely grateful to Professor John Bayley for his initial confidence in the work, and his lasting encouragement, and to Dr. Glen Cavaliero for his support, interest and comprehensive knowledge of all things Powysian.

To Lyolya, my wife, whose advice was invaluable and whose inspiration was constant, this work is dedicated.

CHAPTER I

WOOD AND STONE

To those, like John Cowper Powys, who are fluent with words, language offers temptations. To apply to a writer's style the word "facile" is not only to comment on its ease but to blame it for insincerity. It is difficult to trust those who have no difficulty in writing, whose words carry no assurance of being in some measure controlled and constrained by ideas sincerely held, completely meant.

It would be obtuse not to call the style of Powys' early poetry "facile". As an "arch-imitator"[1] Powys produces echoes of Milton and Keats with extraordinary ease, both through rhythm and consistency of diction, as in these lines from his first published book, of 1896:

> O daughter of Demeter, yet once more
> I touch my lute to hymn those virgin tears
> Shed while the wailing of thy sweet compeers
> Proclaimed thee borne to Pluto's sullen shore...[2]

Powys was later to claim that that there was "a pathetic sincerity of emotion behind the prim phraseology,"[3] but one accepts that as an apology in hindsight; the author of Wolf Solent and A Glastonbury Romance wishes to impose retrospectively "sincerity of emotion" on all his earlier writings.

The linguistic falsehood of Powys' poetry is most evident in his long poem, Lucifer, written in 1905, otherwise entitled "The Death of God", in which we find God awaiting his own destruction:

> "Angels and Archangels and ye my Saints,
> Hear now my words; if we must fall,we fall
> Not by the craft of Satan, or by the wiles
> Of vine-crowned Dionysos, or the power
> Of Buddha seated by his Indian stream -
> By Fate pre-fixed we fall."[4]

In spite of its heavy-handed theological wit this is a passable imitation of Milton, which poses the question of legitimate language, one of the questions at the core of the modernist sensibility. Put bluntly, if Milton could make God argue, why should an imitator not do the same, however much his beliefs may differ? The temptation of language, the facility of imitation, leads to semantic irresponsibility.

However rich their evocative and imaginative power, words like "Angels and Archangels" cannot be employed unquestioningly in modern literature, or even in common usage. For some modernists language should be purified, stripped of its semantically redundant vocabulary, but that is a theoretical ideal that is seldom attained. One can make concessions to semantically invalid, imaginatively potent words, and assure the reader of an essential respect for truth,by various strategies of irony and distance. Powys provides no such assurance in his poetry, nor is it to be fully achieved in his fiction until Wolf Solent.

The absence of "sincerity of emotion" was frequently observed in Powys himself, quite apart from his writings. Both his closest brother, Llewelyn, and one of his closest friends, Louis Wilkinson, constantly criticised Powys for his insincerity, his posing,and his charlatanism.[5] Among the most interesting of these criticisms is one by Llewelyn, concerning John's use, in speech, of excessive, unjustified

vocabulary. When Nelly died, aged fourteen, in 1893, John, as the eldest child, had to break the news to the others, and over twenty years later Llewelyn remembered his words:

> The next day as the rest of us were sitting under the shade of the Portugal laurel on the lawn, my brother, J.C.P., came to say that she had been taken away by the angels. I know now that it was only the way he put it, that really he does not believe in angels and never did. [6]

Llewelyn's salutary realisation, of the distinction between John's way of putting it and his belief, would be of great benefit to Powys' readers, both those who are rationally hostile and those who are unreasonably enthusiastic. Antipathy and adulation, both wrong attitudes, arise from taking seriously the First Cause, the Grail, Saturnian Gold, as if Powys himself believed in the reality of such emanations, hypostases, spirits and things.

Lucifer, the work of Powys' most full of undistanced and undigested metaphysical language, was written in 1905, when Powys was in the middle of a serious quest for a true religion. His involvement with Roman Catholicism during his years at Burpham, from 1902 to 1907, was covered up and under-stated by Powys himself, in the Autobiography and elsewhere. An acquaintance, J. W. Williams, lived in Eastbourne, and became a very close friend of Powys' in these years, exercising a considerable influence over Powys' mind. Williams was a convert to Catholicism, and his one book, Newman, Pascal, Loisy and the Catholic Church, published in 1906, was an important English contribution to the development of Catholic Modernism.[7] According to Powys in the Autobiography, Williams brought him very close indeed to Catholicism:

> "The Catholic" used frequently to visit us at Burpham, and so near to the Roman Church had his convoluted metaphysic brought me, that once, when at Littlehampton in his company, I actually left him reading Pascal in an out-of-the way tavern, while I took the drastic and apparently fatal step of calling upon the local priest! I can remember now the uncomfortable sensation that seized me, as if I were an actor who had suddenly discovered that his imaginary rôle was turning into formidable reality, as I waited outside that priest's door. But the man was out; and I took his absence as a deciding omen. [8]

In fact, we gather from other sources, Powys was not merely "so near to the Roman Church" but an active supporter. According to Louis Wilkinson, Powys was in 1904 an "ardent...propagandist" of Catholic Modernism,[9] and he gave a lecture on the subject in Cambridge in 1905, which Wilkinson describes:

> After the lecture there was a discussion. "But, sir, couldn't you let us off Confession?" one undergraduate enquired, and John replied in deprecating surprise: "Ah,but would you - would you,sir? - are you sure you would really <u>like</u> to be let off Confession?" He might have added a panegyric on the luxury of self-humiliation which Confession can afford.[10]

Quite apart from the substantial intrinsic interest of this, there is much significance in the divergence between the memories of Wilkinson and Powys himself. This same lecture is described in the <u>Autobiography</u> without one mention of Catholicism. According to Powys the subject of the lecture was "what has always interested me more than any other subject, the relation between sex sensuality, in all its confused aberrations, and religious ritual."[11]

That this became one of Powys' major interests is quite evident from <u>A Glastonbury Romance</u>, almost contemporary with the <u>Autobiography</u>, but that it was not his concern in 1905

is clear from a letter from Powys to Wilkinson, discussing the arrangements for the Cambridge lecture, quoted in Welsh Ambassadors; Powys' choice of title was "Catholic Humanism" or "The Church of the Future". [12] Furthermore, in Confessions of Two Brothers, written in 1916, only ten years later, Powys makes a larger admission of his interest in Catholicism:

> It seems to me that I am meeting Atheists every day; that is to say people who are not endowed by nature with faith or with the religious sense. For myself I can only say that, however deeply I search my heart and soul, I do not find the remotest trace of these interesting gifts. Nor do I feel as though I had permitted such instincts to perish in me through lack of cultivation. I do not feel as though they had atrophied from disuse. I feel as though they had never been there. I certainly cannot remember them; though I can remember very vividly certain disgustingly hypocritcal attempts I made at various times to pretend to myself that they were there.[13]

In the Autobiography Powys presents a very different self from this, not an atheist, not devoid of faith or the religious sense, but one whose understanding of these "interesting gifts" is otherwise derived than from the Catholic Church. In short, what actually happened to Powys in 1905, and how he wrote about it in 1916 and 1934, suggests that his attachment to Catholicism had been embarrassingly close, that early in his life he had entirely lacked that open, imaginative, sceptical philosophy for which he was later renowned.

One can only suggest, without sufficient evidence for proof, that Powys' disentanglement from Catholicism was his making as a novelist. It was the beginning of that emancipation of the imagination, which culminates in the

Wessex novels, in which Powys does not believe in angels or the Grail, and is not thereby deprived of their imaginative incorporation in words, in fiction. The crucial years which mark Powys' withdrawal from Catholicism, and from the assumption that one religion, or one philosophy, should be sought out exclusively, are from 1907 to 1910, roughly. In 1907 John replied to Llewelyn's question about his religious position:

> You ask whether I am Catholic Atheist or Atheist Catholic. Well you shall hear the last bulletin from the firing-line.... I think in plain words I am more on the side of Theodore and Bernie [O'Neill] and the Archangel [Louis Wilkinson]... rather than on the side of Walter Pater and the Catholic and Father Tyrrell....[14]

Although he has moved away from Catholicism towards the agnostics and atheists among his friends, Powys still sees uncertainty as a provisional position from which, eventually, one will find certainty. Later in the same letter John writes:

> How dreadfully receptive we are - how can we find our real line and true bent. But I will let you know by degrees how my ideas clear up and solidify. I think I begin to see by comparing my moods and the amount of energy and power I can put into one point of view compared with another which is really destined in the long run to turn out mine....All I will say now is that I think a more definitely atheistical and a more definitely socialistic revolutionary... will probably turn out to be my final pose.[15]

The utter wrongness of Powys' forecast of his intellectual development can be attributed to his abandonment of the procedure of choosing one attitude to the exclusion of others, of seeking the "real self" in a single set of consistent beliefs.

Powys was soon to realize that his destiny was not to

have any single point of view, but to make an individual intellectual life out of his ability to put so much energy into so many different points of view. For Powys, to emerge from that involvement with Catholicism was to learn, by taking pride in his initial embarrassment, that he was incapable of faith, in a theological or ecclesiastical sense, that scepticism was not provisional but absolute, itself a philosophy of life, not the means to one. Powys was to become an extraordinarily sceptical writer, and already in 1916 he was boasting of this:

> ... my scepticism is genuine scepticism, not
> ... a mere synonym for dogmatic agnosticism
> .... I doubt even the validity of doubt.[16]

These words echo almost exactly the words of Taxater at the conclusion of Wood and Stone, published three months before Confessions of Two Brothers:

> "If you were a philosopher you would know that to be a true sceptic it is necessary to be a Catholic. You, for instance, aren't a sceptic, and never can be. You're a dogmatic materialist. You doubt everything in the world except doubt. I doubt doubt." [17]

For the assertion of scepticism in his own autobiographical Confessions Powys has borrowed the words of a character in his novel who is a Catholic, based on J. W. Williams. That self-borrowed rebound off a fictionally refracted Williams is a signal moment in Powys' development. Instead of being an embarrassed ex-disciple, ex-victim of Catholicism, Powys is beginning confidently to use it, and all other manifestations of religious experience, for his own purposes.

We know that Taxater is based on Williams, because Powys states this in the Autobiography, when writing about an early, unpublished novel, written in about 1902. In that

novel Williams was called "Cousin Taxater". [18] Powys describes this work as "unpublishable", [19] which it is, not only because it is pornographic, but because it is thoroughly self-indulgent. As with many of Powys' early writings, before 1915, the story is merely an excuse for an intellectual dialogue. One gets a good idea of Williams' ideas, but Taxater, in his first fictional form, is not a character as he will be in Wood and Stone. If one takes the continuity, the renewed attempt at Taxater, to be significant, indicating that Powys sensed the fictional possibilities of J. W. Williams, then the success of Wood and Stone, his first "publishable" as well as his first published novel, may be due to Powys' changed perception of Williams, and of religion. While Powys was seeking for a single philosophy, for his "true bent", his attempts at fiction were dedicated to that quest, and imagination was sacrificed to narrow intellectual functions. [20]

If the above-quoted letter from John to Llewelyn marks the beginning of John's move away from Catholicism in 1907, some letters of 1910 suggest a point of arrival. In a letter to Llewelyn, in November 1910, we find the earliest extant mention of one of the concepts most important to Powys' thought and fiction:

> ... they are his life-illusion .... When you destroy a life-illusion you commit the one unpardonable sin. I have done it - I cannot be forgiven - I destroyed my wife's illusion of 'love'. [21]

Truth, object of philosophical and theological search, has been subordinated to other considerations, moral and humane. In a letter to his brother Theodore, in April 1910,

Powys gives almost his earliest expression to the pluralistic, chaotic enjoyment of life for its own sake, without regard for systems and interpretations. Perhaps for the first time the characteristic tone of published, familiar Powys is to be heard:

> I daresay the world is triplical or whatever you call it & I daresay from Horus Osiris and Isis all mythologies divide it into three - all I can say is that it doesn't present itself as Three to me or even as One but as MANY and always as Many, a mass of details a lot of impressions persons ideas events principles virtues vices etc etc all following each other in a funny sort of procession....[22]

In most of Powys' major novels the life-illusion and a pluralistic philosophy are prominent, and it is interesting to note how these two are linked: pluralism is a philosophical position (or non-position) which can be defended against all charges of inconsistency or irresponsibility by the over-riding moral concern for the preservation of other people's life-illusions. The imaginative and ironic possibilities which are generated by this interdependence are among Powys' most original contributions to fiction.

On fairly slender evidence, therefore, one suggests that Powys' intellectual course was determined, though in no sense completed, by 1910. In further support of the claim that 1907 marks the beginning of Powys' turn from more conventional attitudes, one can adduce another letter to Llewelyn, written in November 1907, when John Cowper was just over thirty-five; that age has been elevated to almost mythic significance by Tertullian, Dante, Jung, and, through Joyce, Shakespeare, [23] and Powys was well aware of this:

> You have plenty of time my dear, but what am I aged 35 in the middle of life's wayfaring, as the old mephistophelean tramp always says,

> doing chopping and changing, swinging and reswinging - I tell you I am getting a bit ashamed of it. ... half way through my life and no books written, no cause advocated, nothing done. [24]

Powys had published nothing apart from the two small volumes of verse in the eighteen-nineties, and of early drafts of fiction which have survived, none are from the period 1907-10. Yet that it was an important time for Powys we know because two of the most typically Powysian characters in his fiction, Wolf Solent and John Crow, are, explicitly and deliberately , thirty-five.[25] Whether explicitly or not a recurrent theme of the novels is that of a man "in the middle of this life's journey" who has not yet discovered his "destined" viewpoint or purpose. With the publication of Wood and Stone in 1915, Powys, at the age of forty-three, discovered himself as a novelist, and from then on his writing career, and his philosophical development, take the shape of consolidation rather than of fundamental alteration and revision. And, implicitly, in the age of his characters, his novels revert to that period in his life when Powys had not yet learned that he was a novelist. The pattern of the quest repeated so often in Powys' novels could be related to his own quest for a vocation.

That he should be a full-time novelist was not apparent to Powys for many years, and it was only in 1930, aged fifty-seven, that he retired from professional lecturing. Wolf Solent was to bring not only an income that made authorship financially possible, but the confidence that made it inwardly possible to give up his dependence on a career that, however brilliant, seems, as the novels come

into true perspective, a largely irrelevant distraction.[26] Only with Wolf Solent does Powys achieve a stance of full scepticism as a narrator. In spite of the claim in Confessions that Powys is a true sceptic, all his previous novels are severely marred by a sense of intellectual purpose, a residual tendency to subordinate the novel to alien functions of proof and discovery. In this respect, and perhaps in this alone, there is a clear development, with Wood and Stone suffering most, and each subsequent novel liberating itself, approaching more closely to the condition of Wolf Solent.

Between 1907 and 1910 the intellectual change took place which was to enable Powys to become a novelist. Until then he had been an imitative poet and a totally unsuccessful writer of prose. Still nothing was published until 1914, although there was an attempt in the previous year to write a good play,[27] and novel-writing and its difficulties becomes a common theme of Powys' letters in 1913. On 21 July 1913 Powys writes to Llewelyn:

> I have tried over and over again at this new story but I cannot get the right vein. I must be put off somehow or other. Is it Henry James? Is it Margaret? Is it Frances? Or is it simply lack of the authentic flame? I must have something to show you when we meet - and something I will have - but I fear it won't be - yet - what you want from me.[28]

By November we find that this story has been abandoned in favour of plays: "I rather think I may hit the right vein here eventually."[29] Despite the failure of this also, Powys experienced an access of confidence towards the end of 1913:

> The Devil take me if I don't ever write anything good! I know I could! I know I could! I know I could! [30]

That this is something more than Powys' adolescent dreams of being a "master-writer" that he describes in the Autobiography,[31] or what in 1902 he called "that inherent trust in my own potentiality, in my own forces, which, sans evidence and sans likelihood, supports me under all misgivings",[32] is proved not only by the fact of success, the justification of the promise. In a letter to Frances Gregg, in 1913, Powys expresses all his difficulties with the "new story", but adds that he is acquiring self-respect because he is writing "with some effort".[33] Self-respect must of course suffer from unfulfilled self-confidence. The effort, the control of self-indulgence - one of the worst flaws in all the early attempts at fiction - with which Powys was beginning to write in 1913, found further stimulus and encouragement the next year.

It is not a coincidence or accident that Powys' first work of prose should not have been a novel, or popular philosophy, or literary essays, but a political tract, The War and Culture,Powys' prompt contribution, as a non-combatant, to the Allied cause. Writing in 1934, Powys claimed that the War had been of great importance to his development as a writer:

> But the War, though I still went about my business, did have on me two very drastic psychological effects. It started me off at a break-neck pace writing books, for you must remember that before I turned forty the only things I had ever printed were those two little booklets of copy-cat verse that Cousin Ralph published in London. And it caused me to make a vow to give up all erotic pleasures - cerebral, voyeurish, or such as burlesque shows excited - until the War was over....
>
> This turned out in a double way a greater sacrifice than I calculated on, for not only did the War make all the sylphs I knew reckless

> and adventurous, but it made so many new opportunities for the "Sweets of Sin". Balzac always maintained that the refraining from amorous pleasures was a great incentive to literary creation; and I expect we do make much more out of our suppressions than out of our fulfilments; but of course the real reason for my becoming an author was simply that Arnold had become a publisher.[34]

The reader is led to hope that Powys will elaborate on the connection between artistic creativity and sexual desire; in his depictions of creative suppression, whether to literary ends, as Dud No-man, or religious, as Sam Dekker, Powys is comparable to his near-contemporary, Thomas Mann. But, with the modesty of one not wishing to be the subject of such interesting speculations, Powys lowers the reader into the unanswerable pragmatic. "The real reason" and the more interesting one are both illuminated by comments found in his letters to Llewelyn. Here the real reason is given at its point of application, a valuable corroboration of twenty years' hindsight:

> But, as you know, my unfortunate disposition is such that, unless the thing is certain to be published, directly I've finished it, I can't write. I try - I take a pencil and I buy a notebook - but the mere fact of being at liberty to write anything seems to paralyse me. I think of a new novel - and let it go. I think of a new book of verse - and let it go. It is almost impossible for me to write without the incentive of publication, and when Arnold will be in a position to publish again Heaven knows.[35]

This was written in January 1917, when Arnold Shaw's career as a publisher had come to an end as abruptly as it had started. Between October 1914 and December 1916 Shaw had published seven books by Powys, including two novels, and Confessions of Two Brothers, by John Cowper and Llewelyn had been published elsewhere. Shaw had been Powys' lecture-

manager since 1911,[36] and his decision to go into publishing may have been connected with Powys' new-found ability to write, itself a consequence of the War.

After The War and Culture was published, in October 1914, Powys wrote a book of literary essays, Visions and Revisions, for Shaw to publish in February 1915. It was probably the certainty of publication that/then enabled Powys to resume fiction, either the "new story" of 1913 or another one, and to bring it to completion by the autumn of 1915. But the coincidence of war and the novel goes further than that, for it was in the ominous month of July 1914 that we first hear of Powys taking practical steps to write, instead of making hollow promises. In this letter John refers to his recent stay at Montacute, where Llewelyn had been recuperating with the family after a tubercular attack:

> To my great annoyance I find I've left one if not two of my MSS note books behind with you - the 'Diplomacy' one and the 'Lust' one. I am not sure whether they are in the same book or whether there are two. I think there must be two but I may be wrong. Please look and send them at once, my dear. That diplomacy was what you liked best.
>
> ...Will you also send by parcel post or rail... that air-gun I left after all behind in the porch. I am so sorry. It would devastate my interest in this book to lose diplomacy and lust.
>
> ...No war so far. I don't think I like the idea of people slashing one another as much as you do. I shouldn't like to do it myself, and I never like things to be done that I shouldn't like myself to do. But you will no doubt regard this as absurd. I shan't be able to start on this book happily till I have those missing volumes.[37]

"Start" here suggests that Powys was not returning to a novel previously shelved, but was beginning afresh, conscientiously armed with note-books. It is not only a

tired mind but an anarchic scale of values that can meander from note-books to air-guns, from the prospect of a novel to that of a war.

For reasons of health Powys could not participate in the War, and the guilt that he experienced is expressed in many letters, as well as being one of the main themes in _After My Fashion_. _Wood and Stone_ itself offers very little evidence of its war-time origins, but then neither do Lawrence's _Rainbow_ or Conrad's _Victory_, both published in 1915 also. Powys wrote _Wood and Stone_ intensively through the summer of 1915, not as one might assume in America but in England. Until the middle of June, in Sherborne with his brother Littleton and in Burpham with his wife and son, he was writing his share of _Confessions of Two Brothers_.[38] That was easy, as was the verse he was continuing to write, mere self-indulgence when compared with _Wood and Stone_:

> I'm struggling laboriously with my Novel. It is a huge effort. O an awful effort.[39]

Two weeks later he wrote again to his sister Marian, "My novel is advancing. It is getting easier as it goes on."[40]

By October 1915 _Wood and Stone_ was completed, and Powys immediately moved on to another novel; in this letter he lends support to what was to be written in the _Autobiography_ about creative suppression:

> I'm beginning another novel. Think of that! I seem to have got into the swing of writing. ...Do you know - in this new mania for writing novels I have grown singularly independent of people and persons. I don't want to see anyone or make love to anyone - I only want to be left alone to write. ... You know I never really did have your power of enjoying life. I always was a bit mad, rushing here or there in this or that obsession. Well! writing's my obsession now and my heart hardens itself in its loneliness.[41]

Llewelyn awaited the publication of Wood and Stone with much excitement:

> My great interest now is anticipation of your novel. How excellent that you should have really finished it.[42]

After years of promises and assurances of great books in the offing Llewelyn's relief is understandable - his own great faith in his elder brother's genius must have been much strained over many years.

Some critics, who feel that the superiority of Rodmoor over Wood and Stone requires more than a year's interval between them for an explanation, have asserted that Wood and Stone was written much earlier. [43] Once one has understood the combination of Powys' intellectual development, the impetus of the War, and Shaw's entry into publishing, one need not be puzzled by the progress which Powys displays from one novel to the next. One of Powys' earliest admirers, Richard Heron Ward, was not perturbed at the thought that Wood and Stone was the work of a man in his forties. Ward wrote in 1935:

> In the case of most writers it is possible to make clearly defined distinctions between earlier and later works, to point out the progressive development of characterisation, plot, the use of experience, the style of writing, but where John Cowper Powys is concerned there is very little to distinguish between Wood and Stone, published in 1915, and his latest novels. In the early work, all the characteristics that come to fuller flower in A Glastonbury Romance are to be found. The passage of nearly twenty years has done little more than heighten the facility of their use. Mr. Powys must have been in his early forties when Wood and Stone was written, and the book has none of the immaturities of the first novels that most novelists write in their twenties or earlier...[A]ll of [Powys' development] took place before he began to publish. [44]

This view has been endorsed by Jeremy Hooker in the light of Powys' entire career as a novelist:

> The quest fulfilled in Porius... was first rendered fictionally in Wood and Stone, which contains in a rudimentary form all the elements disposed in subsequent novels.[45]

Ward overstated the merits of Wood and Stone, but, in the face of much general neglect and apology, overstatement is not entirely out of place.

In his short polemical book, The War and Culture, published in October 1914,[46] John Cowper Powys had written:

> Life gives up its secrets only to those who resemble life, in the large desperateness of their invasions, and the demoniac violence of their assaults.[47]

Wood and Stone is itself a kind of "desperate invasion", one of the most ambitious first novels ever written. It is of enormous length ("It'll take you some days to read - 700 pages - 722 as an exact fact - think of that!"),[48] and of all his novels is shorter only than A Glastonbury Romance and Owen Glendower. It is also remarkably readable, for although the style can be artificial it is never impenetrable. Rather, its fault is its lucidity. In Wood and Stone language never comes under pressure, or comes out under pressure, as it does in the later novels. In those there is some very dense and complex prose, and it is a necessary impenetrability, justified by the complexity of the subject. This criticism of John Cowper's first novel was made as early as January 1916 by Louis Wilkinson, through "The Marquis" in his sub-Wildean Blasphemy and Religion -A Dialogue about John Cowper Powys' "Wood and Stone" and

Theodore Powys' "The Soliloquy of a Hermit":

> "I have tried to hide among grassy hills; but the moods of God have hunted me out" - That one sentence bears more weight than all the seven hundred pages of "Wood and Stone." ...How did it happen to Theodore Powys to write those words that I remember? He wrote them under compulsion; under stress of the feeling of his God's moods....So, when he tells us, we respond, we are in union with the sense that held him. It is the thrilling communication of art. - Now: search "Wood and Stone" from cover to cover, strain your eyes upon each line of its seven hundred pages; you will find not one sentence, not one phrase that speaks to you from a valid experience. No, not one phrase driven forth under compulsion of God.[49]

Although the styles of John and Theodore remained absolutely distinct this particular contrast, concerning that numinous "pressure" or "compulsion", is not valid for John's later novels; the breakthrough in Wolf Solent is in large part due to a newly discovered stylistic intensity.

That breakthrough is due also to a development in Powys' vision and philosophy, but one must be careful in apportioning the causes. While being in general agreement with R.H.Ward, that the major philosophical and intellectual developments took place before Powys began to write fiction, it would be foolish to insist that Wood and Stone shows the full maturity of Powys' vision, or even that only the undeveloped style prevents the vision from being manifest. For the Preface to Wood and Stone helps us to understand the lucidity and pressurelessness of its prose: Powys' vision and theories seem to be dialectical and uncomplicated. The reader could be forgiven for expecting a roman à thèse of the worst kind:

> The following narrative gathers itself round what is, perhaps, one of the most absorbing and difficult problems of our age; the problem

> namely of getting to the bottom of that world-old struggle between the "well-constituted" and the "ill-constituted," which the writings of Nietzsche have recently called so startlingly to our attention. ...The present chronicle is an attempt to give an answer, inevitably a very tentative one, to this formidable question.[50]

Powys then attempts to withdraw from such a dreary enterprise, recognising "that every kind of drastic and clinching formula breaks down", and he phrases well the old conflict between probability and propaganda, between the contingent experience of life and its determined meaning:

> A story which grossly points its moral with fixed indicative finger is a story which, in the very strain of that premature articulation, has lost the magic of its probability.[51]

Powys has his own struggle in this novel of struggles, between the "well-constituted" imaginative story-teller and the "ill-constituted" thinker and theoriser. A single sentence from the first chapter embodies the conflict:

> In that particular corner of the West Country, so distinct and deep-rooted are the legendary survivals, it is hard not to feel as though some vast spiritual conflict were still proceeding between the two opposed Mythologies - the one drawing its strength from the impulse to Power, and the other from the impulse to Sacrifice.[52]

The first half of that sentence might come from A Glastonbury Romance, but the insistence on the polarity is crude and immature. The Marquis scoffs at the Mythologies of Power and Sacrifice: "A couple of Rocking Horses. He went out and bought them."[53] One must agree with the Marquis again. In October 1914 John Cowper had "discoursed on Nietszche [sic] and on the Latin races",[54] and he happily imposed Nietzsche's ideas on the world of Nevilton, even

while marvelling, in December, 1914, at his brother Littleton's purchase of a Russian dictionary: "Fancy the language of the Karamazov's reaching Bennett's, Sherborne, Dorset!"[55] Nietzsche in Somerset seems more bizarre, and "has lost the magic of its probability". Furthermore, between the Preface and the novel an unsettling change has occurred; the reasonable language of "that world-old struggle" has become "some vast spiritual conflict", and the "well-" and "ill-constituted" have been elevated into "two opposed Mythologies" deriving their strength from "Power" and "Sacrifice". The capital letters are for those readers too obtuse to realise that this novel is striving to be of Cosmic Significance - emphasis beyond grammatical norms is usually emphasis beyond factual warrant.

Having imposed Nietzsche's ideas Powys is not content to relate them simply to racial characteristics. Although he writes:

> The aboriginal tribes have been succeeded by the Celt; the Celt by the Roman; the Roman by the Saxon....[56]

he refrains from the obvious speculation that Celts are ill-constituted, Romans well-constituted, and Saxons ill-constituted again. More ambitiously, although without explicitly acknowledging Nietzsche, Powys uses the opposition of wood and stone to illustrate Nietzsche's idea that human characteristics are determined by the geological formation of the area of habitation. Nevilton Mount is "overgrown with trees", and it was on its "apex ...that the Holy Rood of Waltham was first found". [57] Powys does not tell us that the rood actually found on St. Michael's Hill,

Montacute, was a carving in black flint; [58] the material is unspecified, but as the Crucifixion is the epitome of "Sacrifice" it would be more appropriate to the symbolic patterning if the rood were made of wood. Nevilton Mount symbolises "Wood", in contrast to Leo's Hill, from which sandstone is quarried, and which hardly needs to be the symbol of "Stone" as its literal presence and influence is so pervasive:

> As far as Nevilton itself is concerned everything in the place owes its pervasive texture to this resistant yet soft material. From the lordly Elizabethan mansion to the humblest pig-stye, they all proceed from the entrails of Leo's Hill; and they all still wear - these motley whelps of the great dumb beast - its tawny skin, its malleable sturdiness, its enduring consistence. [59]

Such a passage is entirely acceptable as a statement of fact imaginatively rendered. But the author then goes on to load it with a significance more than material, stretching the reader's credibility, perhaps forfeiting his trust:

> Apart from any geological affinity, it might almost seem as though this Leonian stone possessed some weird occult relation to those deep alluvial deposits which render the lanes and fields about Nevilton so thick with heavy earth. [60]

Powys refers to the similarity between the stone and the soil later on, in more restrained terms:

> the tawny-colored clay which bore so close a symbolic, if not a geological, relation to the famous yellow sandstone....[61]

Between "symbolic" and "occult" there is the difference between subjective feeling, the affinity existing only for the human perceiver, and objective assertion, however tentatively phrased. This also constitutes the crucial distinction between "literature" and "fantasy" on which Powys' reput-

ation has so often foundered; there are still those to be convinced that Powys is the heir to Dostoievsky, not the precursor of Tolkien. [62]

Powys does not endorse his occult speculation in the opening chapter but withdraws from that slippery region to describe once more the contrast between the stone and the soil in a way that is neither occult nor symbolic:

> Leonian sandstone seems no more than a concentrated petrifaction of such soil - its natural evocation, its organic expression. The soil calls out upon it day and night with friendly recognition, and day and night it answers the call. There is thus no escape for the human victims of these two accomplices. In confederate reciprocity the stone receives them from the clay, and the clay receives them from the stone. They pass from homes built irretrievably of the one, into smaller and more permanent houses, dug irretrievably out of the other. [63]

The affinity exists only for the sake of a stylistic exercise; the language of Psalms and Ecclesiastes slides into the bathos of Hardyesque, and the prose is without authority or conviction, gratuitous, pressureless. The larger the idea the larger the hollow space that is sometimes expected to support it. Powys fails when his enthusiasm for rhetorical writers, such as Pater and Whitman, tempts him to make of language a hollow space. This temptation, which was almost the making of the early poetry, was never fully resisted; near the end of his life Powys indulged himself with total irresponsibility.

Yet the creation of a hollow language is the risk taken by Powys in the very heart of the serious enterprise of his fiction. He was impatient with novelists like Jane Austen, George Eliot, Thackeray, Turgenev, even Tolstoy, who, for

him, never ranged far enough away from the known, familiar facts, the ordinariness of human existence:

> Phyllis has read every word of 'War and Peace' but I have not read one single word! 'Tis odd how I find Tolstoi, Turgeniev, Tchekoff all very very dull & uninteresting....[64]

These novelists do not touch the deep impulses of sexual behaviour, or explore the religious response to existence (Powys' dismissal of Tolstoy is as perverse as Tolstoy's of Shakespeare); Powys' favourite novelist, Dostoievsky, would always "suffer at the hands of lovers of Turgeniev and Tolstoy and Thackeray and Trollope", those who prefer "realism" to the "more real realism" of Dostoievsky. [65] Powys' defence of Dostoievsky was in large part a defence of his own practice:

> It is not given to many of us...to reach even in our darkest hours the margin of such beautiful and terrible experiences as these, but the few who have traversed this holy-unholy rim of the world find almost all other novelists a trifle wooden, and rather stupidly sane, compared with Dostoievsky. [66]

At the same time, a novelist who is too speculative, too "insane", who is not continually "earthed" to a commonly understood reality, can make no claims on another's attention.

The first chapter of Wood and Stone is by no means as crude and insensitively ambitious as may have been suggested. We must note the tentative phrasing by which Powys qualifies himself when he goes "out of bounds", beyond the conventions demanded by realist fiction (paradoxical and unreal though they be):

> One might indeed without difficulty conceive of a strange supernatural conflict...
> it is hard not to feel as though some vast

> spiritual conflict...[67]

But this hypothetical disclaimer can easily become an irritating mannerism. With some tact Powys introduces a hypothetical person to carry some of the author's ideas and feelings:

> A village-dweller in Nevilton might, if he were philosophically disposed...[68]

For that, of course, was what John Cowper Powys was, a village-dweller in Montacute with the kind of imaginative and philosophical tendencies that made him write this chapter and this book about the village. Critical readers demand that a novelist be imaginative, but not too imaginative; however, a character created by a novelist need not be subject to any limitations on his imagination. Through this hypothetical village-dweller, with a mind much like his own, Powys filters many of his more outrageous speculations:

> A village-dweller in Nevilton might, if he were philosophically disposed, be just as much a percipient of this cosmic struggle, as if he stood between the Palatine and St. Peter's.
>
> Let him linger among the cranes and pulleys of this heathen promontory, and look westward to the shrine of the Holy Grail, or eastward to where rested the Holy Rood, and it would be strange if he did not become conscious of the presence of eternal spiritual antagonists, wrestling for the mastery.
>
> He would at any rate be made aware of the fatal force of Inanimate Objects over human destiny.
>
> There would seem to him something positively monstrous and sinister about the manner in which this brute mass of inert sandstone had possessed itself of the lives of the generations. [69]

For the remainder of the chapter Powys reverts to mere "seeming", but at the beginning of the next chapter the philosophical village-dweller re-appears in a slightly different guise:

> A fanciful imagination might indeed have amused itself with the curious dream, that some weird Druidic curse had been laid upon that grass-grown island of yellow rock, bringing disaster and eclipse to all who meddled with it. Such an imagination would have been able to fortify its fancy by recalling the suggestive fact that...[70]

These two hypothetical persons, one with a philosophical disposition, the other with a fanciful imagination, and a good memory, are aspects of the author himself. In later novels, Powys will create characters deliberately based on aspects of himself. This must not be confused with the creation of a character like the author; rather, Powys invests a character with those aspects of himself which are integral to the writing of his novels. This is partially attained in Ducdame, but is not fully achieved until Wolf Solent, and it will be examined closely when we consider those novels.

There is a suggestion that Luke Andersen was originally intended to be a spokesman for the authorial vision. We are introduced, in Chapter II, to a person whom the rest of the book renders unrecognisable:

> Luke Andersen, who was perhaps of all the inhabitants of Nevilton most conscious of the drama played around him, used to maintain that it was impossible to tell in the last resort whether Mr. Taxater's place was with the adherents of Christ or with the adherents of Anti-Christ. Like his prototype, the evasive Erasmus, he seemed able to be on both sides at the same time.[71]

The reader is not certain whether Luke himself makes the comparison with Erasmus; the more we learn about Luke the less likely it seems, and we see how this paragraph reveals some of the confusions in the author's intentions at the very beginning. It is not advisable to draw a character

from life when one's model is as contradictory, and implausible, as Llewelyn Powys. Of the Andersen brothers James was "the elder by some ten years"[72], as John was twelve years older than Llewelyn. Luke resembles Llewelyn closely in his enjoyment of life, and in his determination to enjoy life, a determination which could be ruthless in its disregard of other people's feelings. In Llewelyn this was disconcertingly combined with a genuine appreciation of literature, a not inconsiderable intellect, and a wrought, polished literary style. On the one hand Llewelyn could write to his brother in November 1915:

> I see in the background three Kikuyu girls who have come from far. I shall perhaps select one when I come back from dinner tonight.[73]

(One notices that the first sentence is "aesthetic", in both perception and wording; the second is hedonistic and, in every sense, insensitive.) On the other hand, John Cowper can write to his brother praising the style and content of his letters - praise which readers of Llewelyn's essays are compelled to echo:

> The Father of Itylus - good God, you know everything! A bird can't flap its wings but all history presents itself to your gaze, and the whole human race winds its tail round you if a sea-horse lifts up its head.[74]

To endow a character with these contrasting aspects of Llewelyn's personality, and then to make him a stone-mason as well, is probably an impossible task for any author; certainly once the novel has got under way Luke conforms to a fairly predictable type of life-loving artisan, distinguished only by his amorality from Victorian precursors.[75]

The result of this is that when James and Luke slip

back into their prototypes, John and Llewelyn, they are not deepened as characters but rendered implausible. They quote large chunks of Sir Thomas Browne at each other, so accurately that the author must have looked up the original himself. [76] It is not likely that, when confronted by his brother's death, Luke should be reminded of Webster and King Lear:

> "Ah! thou vile Larva!" he muttered. "What! Shall a dog, a cat, a rat, have life; and thou no breath at all?"[77]

Confusion between the author's view of the world and that which he imputes to his characters is a recurrent weakness of the novel. When Luke rejects a superstition that he is tempted to believe in, concerning a promise which he made in a desperate moment, the author writes:

> It was all part of the atavistic survival in him of that unhappy "conscience," which had done so much to darken the history of the tribes of men. It was like "touching wood" in honour of infernal deities! [78]

The exclamation mark implies that these are Luke's own thoughts, or, if not, that Powys' style is as embarrassingly bad as his detractors claim, and as his admirers sometimes fear. One would like to maintain that the exclamation mark indicates that these are Luke's thoughts, and that it is intended to convey the excitement of the thoughts for Luke; the trouble is that Powys does not have the conviction of his own plausibility to give these sentences as Luke's direct speech.

Another kind of confusion arises in one of Luke's encounters with Phyllis Santon; this time Luke is not credited with too much learning or intellect but with that

symbol-making, sign-seeking imagination which is almost the prerogative of the poet:

> The girl crouched at his feet became to him, as he gazed at her, something more than a mere amorous acquaintance. She became a type, a symbol - an incarnation of the formidable writing of that Moving Finger, to which all flesh must bow.[79]

Powys has become the victim of the claims which he makes for Hardy, and indirectly for himself, in the Preface. In dedicating the book to Hardy Powys chooses to stress not his characterisations or his descriptive powers or his great-hearted wisdom - the forms which praise of Hardy customarily took at that time - but his "literariness":

> Perhaps the deplorable thinness and sententiousness [of many modern writers] may be due to the fact that in the excitement of modern controversy, our enterprising writers have no time to read. It is a strange thing, but one really feels as though, among all modern English authors, the only one who brings with him an atmosphere of the large mellow leisurely humanists of the past, - of the true classics, in fact, - is Mr. Thomas Hardy.[80]

Interestingly, this is not a common criterion of praise from Powys, and is not to be found very often in his two volumes of criticism of this date, Visions and Revisions and Suspended Judgments. It becomes important only when Powys is himself trying to write a book. Wood and Stone is full of literary allusions, seldom properly assimilated - in this matter Hardy's example is not always the best to follow. Among the most unsubtle and clumsy allusions are those to Hardy himself. The young, innocent, suffering Lacrima suddenly finds herself to be the mouth-piece of Hardy, writing "Hap" and describing Egdon:

> There was something really terrifying to her

> in this callous indifference of Nature. It was like living perpetually in close contact with a person who was deaf and dumb and blind; and who, while the most tragic events were being transacted, went on cheerfully and imperturbably humming some merry tune. It would be almost better, thought the girl, if that tree-trunk against which the quarry-owner pressed his heavy hand were really in league with him. Anything were better than this smiling indifference....[81]

Although Powys attempts to justify the unlikelihood of Lacrima having such thoughts - "It was strange, the rebellious inconsistent thoughts, which passed through her mind"[82] - the reader sees only implausibility where Powys hopes for interesting inconsistency.

Powys learns from Hardy more successfully in the ironic use of religious and metaphysical language, of which Hardy's most notorious example is "the President of the Immortals". At the end of the chapter in which Gladys has been mercilessly teasing Lacrima Powys writes a paragraph which borrows an idea, an atmosphere, and a cadence from Hardy, and which is sufficiently integrated in the book to justify it entirely:

> The night-owls, that swept, on heavy, flapping wings, over the village, from the tower of St. Catharine's church to the pinnacles of the manor, brought no miraculous intervention from the resting-place of the Holy-Rood. What was St. Catharine doing that she had thus deserted the sanctuary of her name? Perhaps the Alexandrian saint found the magic of the heathen hill too strong for her; or perhaps because of its rank heresy, she had blotted her former shrine altogether from her tender memory.[83]

The echo here is of Tess's seduction, of which Hardy writes:

> But, might some say, where was Tess's guardian angel? where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he

was sleeping and not to be awaked.[84]

Powys reverts to the same theme in writing of Lacrima's impending marriage to John Goring:

> Where was the delegated Power of God - so the forlorn shadows of the long-evicted Cistercians might be imagined crying - whose absolute authority could be appealed to in face of every worldly force? What was the tender-souled St. Catharine doing, in her Paradisiac rest, that she could remain so passively indifferent to such monstrous and sacrilegious use of her sacred building?[85]

Powys becomes an "ironical Tishbite" (Elijah) himself, evoking St. Catharine only to explain, and to fail to explain, the predicament of the Catholic Lacrima. Here Powys is moving towards a solution of the problem of causality and the explanation of causality which faces a novelist who has no beliefs or solutions to such problems, but whose novel must advance somehow. In A Glastonbury Romance the story progresses according to the theories and beliefs of the character at the centre of the reader's attention in each episode. But the story never progresses as straightforwardly as any character thinks, so that what happens becomes an ironic commentary on each character's thoughts, or life-illusion.

Wolf Solent represents a provisional solution - everything that happens to Wolf being an ironic commentary on Wolf's thoughts and beliefs - but it is limited to a single character. In the novels before Wolf Solent Powys never achieves a true balance between a character's thoughts and his actions, and what, passively, is done to him. The link is seldom interesting or ironic, and too often implausible. This is particularly true of Luke, who is never convincingly

both stone-mason and thinker. And his conversion, from a belief in the supreme value of "Machiavellian astuteness", as found in himself, Romer and Taxater, to a belief in Quincunx's "imaginative sensitiveness to the astounding spectacle of the world"[86], passes almost unnoticed. Luke has never been seen by the reader in such abstract terms, his support for Romer having been motivated by expediency, for the sake of his job, and by contempt for Philip Wone. Furthermore, the "imaginative sensitiveness to the astounding spectacle of the world" defines the good side of Llewelyn's philosophy, on which Luke's behaviour has effectively been based for the past six hundred pages.

James Andersen is a much more successful creation. For the first half of the novel he is seen entirely from outside, defined largely as a foil to Luke. A consistent portrait is built up, of a conscientious craftsman without any accomplishments or pretensions beyond what is normally consonant with such persons. It is entirely through his job, his craft, that James arrives at a symbolic understanding of his life. Removing the moss and lichen from a Norman carving is conducive to symbolising, seeing one thing in terms of another:

> It represented a centaur, with a drawn bow and arrow, aiming at a retreating lion, which was sneaking off in humorously depicted terror. "That is King Stephen," said the stone-carver, pointing to the centaur. "And the beast he is aiming at is Queen Maud. Stephen's zodiacal sign was Sagittarius, and the woman's was Leo. Hence the arrow he is aiming." [87]

James's imagination, his capacity for thinking in symbols, is limited to this. But Vennie, the intense, intellectual

girl later to become a Catholic and a nun, extends these symbols further:

> Vennie's mind, reverting to her fanciful distinction between the two eminences, and woman-like, associating everything she saw with the persons of her own drama, at once began to discern, between the retreating animal and the fair-haired daughter of the owner of Leo's Hill, a queer and grotesque resemblance.
>
> She heaved a deep sigh. What would she not give to see her poor priest-centaur aim such an arrow of triumph at the heart of his insidious temptress! [88]

But, following his quarrel with Luke, James is on the verge of insanity, and he now extends the symbolism further, reducing Vennie to "speechless alarm":

> "I wanted to finish this job," he remarked, in a slow deep voice, "before I turn into stone myself."[89]

This episode is the justification for the vast symbolic structure which the author has erected round his characters, and which, for most of the novel, has little to do with them. Taxater's reply, his attempt to calm and console James, takes the reader back to the second chapter, in which the conflict between Romer and Clavering is given a ridiculously weighty significance:

> the master of the Leonian quarries found himself confronted by an alien Power - a Power that refused to worship Sandstone.[90]

Against Leo's Hill and its sandstone is Nevilton Mount, "the consecrated repository of Christian tradition"[91] by virtue of the Holy Rood found there. In calming James Taxater spells out the meaning, for himself, of the symbolism that dominates the novel:

> "You mustn't talk like that! You people get a wrong perspective in things. Remember, this is no longer the Stone Age. The power of stone was broken once for all, when certain women of Palestine found that stone, which we've all

> heard of, lifted out of its place! Since then it is to wood - the wood out of which His cross was made - not to stone, that we must look."[92]

This is Taxater's interpretation only, for the novel is not a sermon, and has no message as glib as this. The interest of the novel and its symbols is at a psychological level, in the way in which people will turn the reality around them into symbols, and from those symbols derive some explanation of life.

James, the ordinary craftsman, acquires a symbolic understanding of stone - rather than an understanding of the symbols carved in the stone - only in his madness, and Powys brilliantly shows how Taxater's symbolism is no more coherent, and no more adequate for anyone else, than James's crazed vision. James's speech, in response to the consolations of Taxater and Vennie, is no further removed than theirs from a direct description of reality, nor is it any further removed than the narrator's own prose:

> "You know why I have/been chosen to work at this particular piece of carving? And why, ever since I quarrelled with Luke and drank in Hullaway Inn, I have heard voices in my head? The reason of that is, that Leo's Hill is angry because I have deserted it. Every stone I touch is angry, and keeps talking to me and upbraiding me. The voices I hear are the voices of all the stones I have ever worked with in my life. But they needn't fret themselves. The end will surprise even them. They do not know," - here his voice took a lower tone, and he assumed that ghastly air of imparting a piece of surprising, but quite natural, information, which is one of the most sinister tokens of monomania, - "that I shall very soon be, even as they are! Isn't it funny they don't know that, Miss Seldom? Isn't it a curious thing, Mr. Taxater? I thought of that, just now,as I chipped the dirt from King Stephen. Even he didn't know, the foolish centaur! And yet he has been up there, seeing this sort of thing done, for seven hundred years! I expect he has seen so many girls

> dragged under this arch, with sick terror in their hearts, that he has grown callous to it. A callous king!" [93]

In the symbolic and material transformation of King Stephen into a stone centaur he has literally become "callous", hardened.

Once Taxater has given his interpretation of the symbolic struggle, that the stone has been rolled away from the tomb, James understands what has to be done; because he is so involved with "stone" James has to find a representative of "wood". And once he has realised that Quincunx has a symbolic link with wood James comes to believe that in the "real" world without symbols it is Quincunx alone who can save Lacrima:

> "He is an ash-root, a tough ash root....And that's the reason he has been chosen. There's nothing in the world but the roots of trees that can undermine the power of Stone! The trees will do it. What did that Catholic say? He said it was Wood against Stone. That's the reason I can't help her. I have worked too long at Stone. I am too near Stone. That's the reason Quincunx has been chosen. [94]

Quincunx is a "Pariah" whose apathy and incompetence could encourage nobody to think rationally that he would be capable of saving Lacrima. It is James's irrational, instinctive use of symbols that persuades him that the only hope lies in Quincunx. When James goes to see Quincunx the author intervenes to assure the reader that this is not just another extension of the symbolic struggle between "wood" and "stone" imposed by the author on to James while his mind is unbalanced:

> Mr. Quincunx might have struck the imagination of a much less troubled spirit than that of the poor stone-carver as having a resemblance to a root. His form was at once knotted and lean,

> fibrous and delicate. [95]

This intervention, and the "authorially-controlled" successful outcome of the appeal to Quincunx, is a stroke of embryonic genius. It endorses the symbolism of James's crazed imaginings, and it establishes an "objective" connection between the symbol and reality.

Just as Leo's Hill is made of sandstone and Nevilton Mount is covered by trees - which suggested the symbolism to the author - so Quincunx does bear resemblance, not only for James, to something made of wood. In James Andersen Powys is making an oblique reference to his own art as a novelist. The "truth" of art - a claim which Powys makes in the Preface to this novel, and elsewhere - is dependent on the imagination, and the imagination works through symbols, through connections between apparently disparate objects. The imagination, in its power of making symbols, works from the particular, Leo's Hill, to the general, the concept of stone, and then to other particulars, certain individual stones, as at Christ's tomb, people who carve stone, those who own it, those who in any way resemble or represent it.

The realist - not to be confused with the "realist novelist" who is no more of a realist than any artist can be - sees life in its separate parts, and will not make connections. Mortimer Romer is the exemplary realist in this novel:

> The whole world, looked at with the bold cynical eye of one who was not afraid to face the truth, was, after all, a mad,wild, unmeaning struggle. [96]

The crucial word is "unmeaning". The making of connections and the creation of symbols is motivated by a search for meaning. Powys shows us various characters, notably James, Taxater and Vennie, looking for a meaning within the idea of the struggle between wood and stone. But Powys himself, in the very process of writing a novel under that title, is also searching for a meaning in that conflict. The author originated the idea of the polarity between wood and stone, for the reader, in the first chapter; it becomes manifest among the characters, within their consciousnesses, only through Taxater's speech in Chapter Seventeen. The author is thus awkwardly implicated in the beliefs and actions of these characters.

Wood and Stone is a failure because of its title, a pattern of symbolism which originates with the author, and which therefore traps the author within the same symbolic and imaginative consciousness as that of the characters who think in terms of wood and stone. The novel's symbolic premisses are confused. Only in Powys' great novels do we find them unravelled, when the imaginations and minds of the characters are precisely differentiated from that of the author - and when the essential identity of the processes of searching for meaning and writing a novel is subtly manifested.

As early as Chapter Four the reader realizes, as perhaps the author realized only at this stage, that the book is not going to be a straightforward processing of a symbolic struggle. Philip Wone is possibly the most contemptible person in the novel - a novel in which admirable people

are scarce - and yet he is the "official", political opponent of the tyrannical Romer. Confronted by this unfortunate piece of bad planning Powys begins to cast doubt on, even to mock, his own construction of mythological and metaphysical conflicts:

> The vulgarity and meanness of the candidate's tone made one wonder how such a one as he could ever have been selected by the obscure working of the Spirit of Sacrifice, to undertake this titanic struggle against the Spirit of Power. [97]

The reader wonders so much that he doubts whether the concepts of sacrifice and power have any validity at all, especially when they have been hypostatised into spirits. But despite the author coming so close to a complete undermining of the central idea round which the novel turns, the basic concept of the struggle between wood and stone remains firm. Every novel needs ideas and themes to provide its structure. Most novels are content to be held within those ideas. Later Powys was to learn how to invent a vast, elaborate construction, and at the same time to remain sceptical about its existence and validity.

In reading the first of Powys' novels we find little of that freedom, for Wood and Stone is imprisoned within the dialectical pattern imposed by its title. It is extremely interesting that as late as July, 1915, (the novel was to be published in November) Powys had not yet chosen a title. His provisional choice had been "The Pariahs" but this was not acceptable because "the title 'The Pariah' has already been taken by some well-known writer - I forget who - but well-known". [98] "The Pariahs" would have been a neutral title that would not have implicated the author thoroughly

in the ideas and symbols of the characters. Yet Powys' next choice was "Planetary Opposition" which is not only very unattractive, but invests the author's beliefs even more inescapably within the book's structure.

Of course, another title would not of itself make a good book out of a bad one, and that the final choice seems almost obvious, integral to the story, is evidence of the helplessness of the dialectical state. Powys did not choose Wood and Stone himself, but claimed much later that the title "was invented by my wife".[99] It is almost the only known instance of Margaret contributing anything to her husband's career, and this piece of "help" is oddly representative. It is a simple title, that takes no account of the author's relationship to the book, but describes events in a symbolic phrase that might have been chosen by James Andersen. Taxater, representative of the scepticism for which the author strives, would not have accepted that title; the author's scepticism has capitulated to the beliefs of his characters.

Writing to his sister Marian, when the novel was almost finished, Powys offered a modest assessment:

> I don't know that it will be a masterpiece though. Not altogether - but possessed of some interest.[100]

Most of the interest seems now to lie in its relationship to Powys' subsequent novels. Its greatest flaw, the novelist's entanglement in the imaginative, intellectual and symbol-making lives of his characters, persists, diminishingly, through Rodmoor, After My Fashion, and Ducdame. In that development, completed in Wolf Solent,

one witnesses the emancipation of a vast but thwarted imagination.

CHAPTER II

RODMOOR

On October 29 1915, two weeks before the publication of Wood and Stone, John wrote excitedly to Llewelyn: "I'm beginning another novel. Think of that! I seem to have got into the swing of writing."[1] Three months later, in January 1916, dyspepsia had brought his writing to a halt:

> [M]y nervous irritability is great and just now I dare not undertake any more writing for fear the strain would bring the dyspepsia back. This is sad - but as the last books do not sell well, Arnold [Shaw] is in no hurry for anything else.This is a dark epoch in my days...a dark and horizonless epoch.[2]

In February Powys was still in a depression, and cannot have advanced far with his new novel as he was still deliberating on its locale:

> As a matter of fact when my lectures are over, come April, I daresay I shall be really quite happy writing my next novel, or romance let's say (I like the word better) in New York....I think it shall be about Norfolk or Suffolk - eh?[3]

During May and June Powys lived in New York with his sister Marian, and on July 1st, according to The Glimmerglass, a daily broadsheet of gossip in the Cooperstown and Lake Otsego area, published only during July and August, "John Cowper Towys and sister, Miss Towys of New York have taken Camp Tesebo for the season, arriving today."[4] "Camp" in upstate New York signified any sort or size of holiday residence, and Lake Otsego was among the most fashionable places for wealthy refugees from the New York summer. John Cowper and Marian seem to have settled in the middle of that idle,

decadent lake-side life described so disturbingly by their friend Theodore Dreiser in An American Tragedy. They did not fit into the daily round of picnics, boating parties and barbecues, and Powys wrote of his "neurotic loathing of summer life in America".[5] They had been there a week when John wrote to Llewelyn:

> I've never in my whole life since I was at school been more miserably wretched than I've been this summer. I made a great mistake not going back [to England]....I've been miserably home-sick, and with May with her bad back wanting this and the other and I myself full of irritable nerves, it has been the devil.[6]

It was hardly the quiet, relaxing summer which Powys had planned for his writing, but necessity and his deep sense of financial responsibility provided sufficient inspiration:

> Now I have to write as hard as I can - six or seven hours a day to make up for lost time. I leave this lake edge where our hateful hut is placed, and go in up to the hills to a tool shed in the middle of a field. There I keep a deck chair and ink and a coat and there I must now settle down to work and at all costs get this novel finished.[7]

Within a few weeks Powys had withdrawn from the irritations of life on Lake Otsego, and moved into lodgings with Dr. Philip Thomas in New York City, from where he wrote to Llewelyn:

> Don't think I'm mad or ill because of being with a Doctor. I'm neither - but I've been driven from pillar to post and now have snatched at a harbour with the hope of being able to work.
>
> I've left little May in the hut on Lake Otsego....She has been so good to me, poor little wounded thing - but the holiday people began to come.
>
> It's better to be hot in New York than to be cool among campers-out and pleasure seekers. Here I really believe I'm wellfixed up for the rest of the summer. I must work like the devil now to get these books done and this place ought to do it....I don't mind the heat. It's

> up to nearly a hundred though today, but I don't mind it....I am no longer miserable and all I ask is energy to write.[8]

This undated letter belongs either to late July or early August; either way it is remarkable evidence of the creative energy Powys possessed when conditions were right that he had received the proofs of Rodmoor by 14th September, and, while a friend read them, he began work immediately on the essays for Suspended Judgments, which was published in early December.On 14 September John wrote to Llewelyn:

> I should think I have been writing this summer - nothing but writing - and I'm still, still. I'm now beginning my new book of essays to match Visions [and Revisions], entitled Suspended Judgments. I've already written on Oscar, James, de Gourmont, William Blake, and I've got to write on - but you'll see the list, where I am watching it now and crossing 'em out one by one as I get them done, in the 'ads' at the end of A Hundred Best Books. ...
>
> At this moment Mabel [Hattersley, a dubious acquaintance of former times who was lodging with the Thomas's] ...is reading the proofs of my novel - 460 pages. So you can understand why I haven't written more to you my dearest and why now my hand is so erratic. You can't write books at this rate and write decent letters too.[9]

These letters which reveal so much of the circumstances in which Powys wrote his second novel, help us to understand both its mood and its setting.

As early as February 1916, Powys was fairly sure of the location for his novel - "I think it shall be about Norfolk or Suffolk"[10] - but it is not until August that he first tells Llewelyn the name he has chosen for the place and the novel:

> But I'm better alone - alone with my work - alone with Rodmoor - does that name please you?[11]

If Adrian Sorio's reaction to the name is in any way

derived from the author's it must have pleased John Cowper considerably:

> And the name of the place ... had from the beginning strangely affected his [Adrian's] imagination.
>
> He saw it sometimes, so he said, that particular word, in a queer visualised manner, dark brown against a colourless and livid sky; and in an odd sort of way it had related itself, dimly, obscurely, and with the incoherence of a half-learnt language, to the wildest and most pregnant symbols of his life.
>
> Rodmoor! The word at the same time allured and troubled him. What it suggested to him ... was no doubt what it really implied: leagues and leagues of sea-bleached forlornness, of sand-dunes and glaucous marshes, of solitary willows and pallid-leaved poplars, of dark pools and night-long-murmuring reeds. [12]

Rachel Doorm speaks of Rodmoor's past in a way which the reader is bound to associate with the Suffolk town of Dunwich:

> "It wasn't so very long ago ... that Rodmoor was quite an inland place. There are houses now, they say, and churches under the water. And it swallows up the land all the time, inch by inch. The sand-dunes are much nearer the town, I am sure of that, and the mouth of the river, too, than when I lived here in old days." [13]

Powys was fascinated by topographical borderlands, and many of the characteristic features of the Rodmoor landscape, the shifting margin between land and sea, "windrow" and "spin-drift", [14] are to recur in Weymouth Sands. But while Dunwich is on a cliff, Rodmoor lies on marshy land very similar to the uninhabited expanse to the east of Weymouth called Lodmoor. In his Autobiography Powys describes the summer holidays of his childhood spent at Weymouth, and their influence on a later visit, in language not dissimilar from Rachel Doorm's:

> Theodore and I - drawn together by some funny ineradicable feeling for that tract of salt-marshes known as Lodmoor, by crossing which any child of my father must of necessity feel the bony fingers of the dead past grope at his vitals...[15]

The landscape is a powerful conflation of two of the locations of his childhood holidays - powerful in the way of such memories, and worthy of the novel's dedication to Emily Brontë - but the name of Rodmoor is taken in part from the present, from the place of writing. The following item appeared in the gossip column of the Cooperstown, N.Y., local newspaper The Freeman's Journal, on July 12 1916:

> J.C.Powys and sister, Miss Marian Powys, both of England, are spending the summer at Camp Rodmore, formerly called Camp Tesebo. Mr. Powys is a noted English writer and lecturer and will spend most of his time writing books while at Rodmore.[16]

We are here offered a slight but important insight into the working of Powys' imagination; his is the imagination of an exile whose remembrance is stirred by the present and the different. America was as necessary for Powys as Trieste was for Joyce; both, in very different ways, had an extra-ordinary capacity to seize on chance-given details for the ordered structuring of their creations.

Rodmoor's landscape is made of far distances and empty spaces, in contrast to the enfolding hills and woods of Nevilton. One way in which the reader is enabled to see Rodmoor at a distance, in perspective, is by the device of setting the opening chapter elsewhere. South London had been used before by Powys as a setting for fiction, in an unfinished attempt at a novel probably written in about

1906-7. The manuscript is now in the George Aherst Research Library at Syracuse University, and has come to be known by the title, "The Life of a Street Girl". This is entirely misleading, for although the potential heroine, Glory Raven - whose body has already been shaped in the Powysian mould, being "lissom and willowy" - has a mother who wants her to take to the streets, and with Joycean exuberance, "fourteen or whoreteen", Glory chooses to work as assistant to a second-hand bookseller near Elephant and Castle. This bookseller, whose name Powys had yet to decide upon, between Theophilus Grave and Pentifold Rake, is an early attempt at Mr Malakite (while the name of Glory's boy-friend, Lopsy Turk, has a resemblance to Lob Torp).

After forty-five pages on the joys of second-hand bookshops and the familial pressure for an alternative career, the scene switches abruptly to the village of Godbarrow in the Nura valley (Arun backwards), near "the lordly castle and modest town of Nuradale", obviously Arundel. Godbarrow is based on Burpham, and the potential hero, Owen Prince, just down from Oxford, shows Powys' early identification with Owen Glendower. After much description of Godbarrow, Prince's home and family, the church and the Revd. Randolph Runnymede, the story peters out, after seventy-two pages. The reason is, clearly, that Glory and Owen have not yet met, and there seems little likelihood of them ever doing so.

This narrative cul-de-sac is avoided in <u>Rodmoor</u> by placing both main characters in the London setting of the first chapter. And here the South London atmosphere is far

more briefly and skilfully delineated, with a professionalism that probably owes much to Somerset Maugham; it is likely that this setting was inspired, in part at least, by Maugham's Liza of Lambeth, of 1897. However, Powys knew the area well himself, for it was in "the Borough" that he used to meet Lily, the prostitute.[17] Incidentally, for one gross topographical inaccuracy, the presence of "Kensington Park" in South London,[18] Powys should be excused; Mabel Hattersley must have been one of those all-too-helpful proof-readers who took it upon herself to correct "Kennington".[19]

The opening sentences of Rodmoor are as unexpected from Powys as the locality. Instead of a grandiose description of landscape or a philosophical assertion of at least cosmic importance, which crushes the reader into humble submission or complete withdrawal, the first sentence is elliptical: "It was not that he concealed anything from her". The smooth professionalism of this mid-flight opening is quite alien to Powys, and unsustainable. Normally, with a skilful writer, whether merely skilful as Maugham, or Henry James, all will be revealed to the reader in time; it is proof of incompetence for the author to baffle his readers, and then move on to other matters and other places without providing explanations, in the vague hope that although the baffling was necessary the explanations would be of no consequence. We are told about Adrian's mental illness, caused by circumstances not unlike those in which Powys is writing this novel in America: "his savage reaction...against the

circle he was thrown into there; his unhappy habit of deadly introspection; his aching nostalgia for things less murderously new and raw."[20] But there is not a word to explain why he left America, or how he came to meet Nance.[21] They first met earlier in this month of April, Nance thinks that she is in love with Adrian, and they are now having their "first real conversation."[22] Powys was obviously keen to get Adrian and Nance together as soon as possible, but a continuation of the Glory Raven story could have been more plausible than this. Adrian may not be concealing anything from Nance, but the author is concealing much from the reader, and it is not an accomplished piece of mimetic prose.

Worse is to come. Having set his two characters in a preliminary scene Powys now has to move them both to the main location. On p.3 we learn that "Rachel Doorm was anxious to transport both sisters", Nance and Linda, to Rodmoor. "Transport" is the appropriate verb for the author's manipulation of his characters' movements. On p.8 Nance is:

> startled by hearing the name "Rodmoor" from his lips. How amazing a coincidence! What a miraculous gift of the gods!
>
> Fate was indeed sweeping her away on a full tide.
>
> It seemed like a thing in some old fantastic romance. Could it be possible even before she had time to contemplate her separation from him that she should learn that they were not to separate at all!
>
> Rachel Doorm was indeed a witch - was indeed working things out for her favourite with the power of a sorceress.

There is, however, less cause for laughter here than is at first apparent, or at least more cause for laughing with

Powys than at him. For at such moments the author decides that the finer details of plausibility are beyond him, and what does it matter anyway why people do what they do, and why life is as it is? Powys seems to be making a fool of himself - and from many sources we know of his enjoyment in doing this - but at the same time he is saying to the reader: "You and I both know that Nance and Adrian have got to be transported to Rodmoor somehow, as that is where the story takes place. But instead of wasting time and ingenuity in finding a plausible reason for them to go there, I am allowing you to choose your own explanation." And there is a choice between "coincidence", "gift of the gods", "Fate", "some old fantastic romance", or "the power of a sorceress". We recall Powys' letter of February 1916, "my next novel, or romance let's say (I like the word better)", and that Rodmoor is subtitled "A Romance".

One of the crucial differences between a novel and a romance is that the latter does not attempt to exclude the deus ex machina; this element of romance still flourishes in the modern, or modernist, novelist's refusal to deceive the reader, to pretend that his characters are anything but his puppets. Powys sometimes manipulates his characters in a fashion so cavalier, so unconstrained by probability, possibility, or even artistic patterning, that the characters themselves become aware at times of the fantastic, "romantic", happenings in their lives. The realist tradition of the European novel, precisely because it strives to be realistic - therefore, paradoxically, illusionistic - does not permit a character to reflect:"It

seemed like a thing in some great nineteenth-century novel." When Nance recognises the "romance" of her situation the reader is led to a strange plane of awareness. As in Wood and Stone Powys is experimenting with "dual consciousness" in his characters - the consciousness of being alive and participating in events, and the consciousness of seeing these events as a story, whether a novel or a romance, from the detached viewpoint of the author or reader.

In medieval literature irony has its source in the coincidence of, or confusion between, the social code and the literary convention. By contrast, the "realistic" novel insists that the individual is as unshackled by codes of behaviour as the form is unshackled by literary conventions. (The phrasing here is deliberately ambiguous, to avoid outright condemnation of "realism" - it is possible that these two illusions cancel each other out.) This is, of course, a more weighty thesis than that apparently laughable passage in Rodmoor can support, but despite its clumsiness, even foolishness, it anticipates Powys' more sophisticated deployment of that medieval tension in his later novels. It may not be a coincidence that the full titles of what are often considered his greatest novels are A Glastonbury Romance and Porius - A Romance of the Dark Ages, his only books after Rodmoor to be thus designated, to guide the reader's expectations.

Once the reader has recovered from the "amazing...coincidence", the "romance" of the air-lift to Rodmoor, the novel gains enormously. Nevilton was not a village in a wider world; beyond its narrow confines was only a stage back-drop

on which Dangelis was painted (and from which, in rare moments of animation, he sometimes became free-standing). In contrasting Wood and Stone with Rodmoor Cavaliero has written "agoraphobia replaces claustrophobia"[23]; throughout Rodmoor Nance and Linda are aware of the possibility of returning to London, and this leaves open the possibility that their fate is to some extent self-imposed, self-willed, as Nance herself recognises.[24] In the earlier novel most of the characters are unable to imagine the existence of a world elsewhere. In Rodmoor even the shadowy Baptiste, who never appears, has a specific, real address, "fifteen West Eleventh Street", which makes his absence far more convincing than Dangelis's presence.[25]

Despite obvious differences, and obvious ways in which Rodmoor is superior, Powys was himself aware of one major fault which it shared with Wood and Stone. Asking Llewelyn for his opinion of Rodmoor, John says of his planned third novel, "I think Nature must obtrude itself less - don't you?"[26] In the same letter John talks of Louis Wilkinson's "quite admirable parody",[27] Bumbore, which is indeed unusually shrewd:

> There was something singularly arresting, and yet at the same time repelling, about the river's aspect - or expression, so a philosophical observer, if there had been one standing by its bank at that moment, might have called it....[28]

This deliberately echoes the sentence in Wood and Stone, "A village-dweller in Nevilton might, if he were philosophically disposed...",[29] but is as pertinently applied to Rodmoor. This is how Philippa Renshaw is described as she

stands naked in her room at night after having first met Adrian:

> Her hair remained tightly braided round her head and this, added to the boyish outlines of her body, gave her the appearance of one of those androgynous forms of later Greek art whose ambiguous loveliness wins us still, even in the cold marble....that enigmatic smile challenging and inscrutable which seems, more than any other human expression, to have haunted the imagination of certain great artists of the past.
>
> Permitted for a brief moment to catch a glimpse of that white figure, an intruder, if possessed of the smallest degree of poetic fancy, would have been tempted to dream that the dust of the centuries had indeed been quickened and some delicate evocation of perverse pagan desire restored to breath and consciousness.[30]

Philippa, when described in these terms, is clearly the fulfilment of Adrian's visionary experience on reading Rémy de Gourmont's "The Litany of the Rose":

> "As soon as I had read those lines...I seemed to see a living human figure outline itself against the wall of my room....It was a human form, Nance, but it was unlike all human forms I've ever beheld - unless it be one of those weird drawings, you know? of Aubrey Beardsley. It was neither the form of a boy nor of a girl,and yet it had the nature of both. ... "It was the kind of form, Nance, that one can imagine wandering in vain helplessness down all the years of human history, seeking amid the dreams of all the great, perverse artists of the world for the incarnation it has been denied by the will of God."[31]

The interest in comparing these two passages lies in the apparent confusion between Adrian's way of thinking and seeing and describing, and Powys' way. It was, after all, Powys, not Adrian, who was writing, concurrently with Rodmoor, essays for Suspended Judgments. And in the essay on Rémy de Gourmont we can read of Powys' response to "The Litany of the Rose", " that amazing poem addressed to the

rose, with its melancholy and sinister refrain which troubles the memory like a swift wicked look from a beautiful countenance that ought to be pure and cold in death".[32] An essay on Beardsley was advertised for Suspended Judgements, and was either omitted or never written. Powys' wording on this matter is ambiguous: "I have at last finished Suspended Judgements, leaving out the essay on Beardsley and the extra essay on things in general."[33] Either way, Powys was lending to Adrian concerns, and artistic comments thereon, that were very much his own. As in Wood and Stone Powys is unable to create an imagination or a way of thinking distinct from his own.

Although the presentation of Philippa has been taken as an example of the confusion and conflation of two imaginations, it occurs many times in descriptions of landscapes and natural things. These are Nance's thoughts on her first day in Rodmoor, while walking:

> Nance felt as though some alien influence were at work here, reducing to enforced sterility the natural movements of living and growing things....The leaves of the poplars, as they shook in the gusty wind, seemed to her like hundreds and hundreds of tiny dead hands - the hands of ghostly babies beseeching whatever power called them forth to give them more life or to return them to the shadows.[34]

If Nance had really had an imagination as exciting and tormented as this, Adrian would not have had to look elsewhere for a kindred spirit. Brand Renshaw, like Luke Andersen, sometimes swerves from his usual course of sensual, unmediated response to life, into a poetically imaginative detachment. It may be that John Cowper, whose response to everything was tortuously, perhaps perversely,

indirect, filtered through layers of metaphors and analogies, was fascinated by Llewelyn's capacity to see things in this way, but also to be able to break free, to live innocent of aesthetic and ethical considerations. The name "Brand" is presumably owed to Ibsen, whose visionary preacher is both poet and cruel sensualist, the dark side of Llewelyn's "sunny" personality, as Renshaw is the dark side of Luke's. Standing over Philippa in the wood at midnight, this is how Brand experiences the darkness:

> The darkness seemed to rise and fall about the two figures, to advance, to recede, to dilate, to diminish, in waves of alternate opacity and tenuity. In its indrawings and outbreathings, in the ebb and flow of its fluctuating presence, it seemed to beat - at least that is how Brand Renshaw felt it - like the pulse of an immense heart charged with unutterable mysteries. [35]

Powys goes some way to redeem the improbability of this experience by giving it a reductive explanation, demystifying and demythologising:

> This illusion, if it were an illusion, may have been due to nothing more recondite than the fact that, in the silence of the heavy night, the sound of the tide on the Rodmoor sands was the background of everything. [36]

It seems here as if the author, having lapsed into fostering his own ideas on one of his characters, has become resentful and assumes an objective stance of rational explanation by which to undermine these ideas.

Near the end of the novel Brand speaks in phrases used by Powys in his moods of racial atavism, and then himself dismisses such talk:

> "And it is so with us. It may be some dark old strain of Viking blood, the blood of the race that burnt the monasteries in the days of Aethelred the Unready! ... I daresay you think

> me a grotesque hypocrite for bringing such a matter into it at all ... There's really no need to drag in Aethelred the Unready!"[37]

It is almost as if Brand is rebelling against his author, complaining: "Why do you make me talk such nonsense?" He responds similarly to the large chunk of sub-Ibsenism in his discussion of evil with the Revd. Hamish Traherne. Each intense profundity is matched by a self-deprecating invalidation:

> "You priests! You shut yourselves up among your crucifixes and your little books, and meanwhile - beyond your furthest imagination - the great tides of evil sweep backwards and forwards! ...
>
> "Bah! I'm talking like an idiot. But what I want you to understand is this. When you're dealing with me, you are dealing with some one who's lost the power of being frightened by words, some one who's broken the world's crust and peeped behind it, some one who's seen the black pools .... what did you take me for when you talked to me like that? A common, sensual pig? A vulgar seducer of children? A fellow to be frightened back into the fold by talk of honour and the manners of gentlemen? I tell you I've seen bats in the dawn ....
>
> "Bah! I'm chattering like an idiot. I must be drunk ....
>
> "I tell you, evil goes down to the bottom of life and out beyond! I know that, for I've gone with it. I've seen the bats in the dawn ....
>
> "Don't you believe a word of what I said just now. I'm not drunk at all. I was only fooling. I'm just a common ruffian who knows a pretty face when he sees it." [38]

It is very hard to know how to understand such a passage. Is Powys simply incompetent, confusing the conventions of drama (the "How can a criminal like Macbeth be a great poet?" syndrome) with the conventions of the novel, through his inability to separate his own language and imagination from those of his characters? Too much self-awareness of this weakness is revealed in Brand's speech for such a negative answer to be plausible. Powys seems to know of his

susceptibility to the temptation of uttering his own thoughts indiscriminately through any of his characters, and makes the best of this by mockery. As susceptible as he is to this temptation, Powys is almost completely immune, in his novels, to the temptation of preaching. This is remarkable in view of his considerable output of polemical lay-philosophy; when he succumbs in fiction, as on the subject of vivisection, the collapse is total and unredeemable. As a novelist he is a great respecter of his characters, even while powerless to give them the freedom and independence that they deserve. When he, the novelist, cannot help imposing himself on his characters, he turns also on and against himself. In his later novels Powys was to become a great writer through self-mockery - almost, one could say, good because he knows he's bad.

Powys' inability to create a distinctly different character is matched by his inability to describe nature without reference to character. The abiding image of the landscape of Rodmoor for the reader is Adrian's image of it as suggested by its name, before he has seen it:

> Rodmoor! The word at the same time allured and troubled him. What it suggested to him...was no doubt what it really implied: leagues and leagues of sea-bleached forlornness, of sand-dunes and glaucous marshes, of solitary willows and pallid-leaved poplars, of dark pools and night-long-murmuring reeds.[39]

No later description is as imaginatively impressive as this. And once more Powys' technical weakness is revealed in his confusion of separate imaginations. Powys makes no distinction between himself in Camp Rodmore, Lake Otsego, imagining

and inventing an East Anglian town, and Adrian in a South London street imagining an East Anglian town whose name alone is known to him. Rodmoor is created as much by Adrian as by the author, and the town is true to both their inventions. It is clumsy and unconvincing because Powys has not yet understood where his imaginative strength lies; by Wolf Solent all is within his grasp, and that there are two stories, two inventions, Powys' about Wolf and Wolf's about himself, is made explicit, integrated within the formal structure.

In Rodmoor Powys is still an imitator, working against the grain of his creative strength. That his first two novels are dedicated to Hardy and "to the spirit of Emily Brontë" is symptomatic of his aims. Both Hardy and Emily Brontë achieve a balance - albeit virtually unrivalled in English fiction - between human and elemental forces, which is beyond Powys' competence. Instead of showing a human life being shaped and determined by its surroundings, whether moor or heath or pasture, Powys shows a person being thinned, flattened out by a highly subjective response to a landscape which has little reality outside the imagination of the author or the character. (And one could add that the imagination of the character has little reality outside the imagination of the author - in the sense in which that is not a truism.)

The reality of Rodmoor, the creation of the combined imaginations of a very depressed novelist and a deported madman who was in prison two months before the book begins, is doubted even by one of the characters. Nance Herrick

is the representative of common sense and objectivity who, not surprisingly, gets cruelly treated by Powys. She makes an observation to Traherne which has probably been made already by the reader:

> A queer thought came suddenly into Nance's head and she asked the priest why there were so many unmarried men in Rodmoor.[40] it was that

Such a question, such a comment on the bizarre assortment of characters that inhabit this novel, is tantamount to treason, mutiny within the novel. Much later, and on a necessarily related subject, Nance shares her doubts with Fingal Raughty. They are discussing Linda and her problems:

> "What Linda wants is a mother," he said laconically. Nance stared at him.
> "Yes I know....But that's the worst of it, Fingal. Her mother's been dead years and years and years."
> "There are other mothers in Rodmoor, aren't there?" he remarked...
> "What do you mean by <u>other</u> mothers?" she asked.[41]

Raughty then launches into an abstract panegyric in praise of motherhood, and concludes decisively:

> "A woman, Nance, who has borne children has certain instincts in dealing with young girls which make the wisest physicians in the world look small!"
> Nance smiled helplessly at him.
> "But, Fingal, dear," she said, "What can I do? I can't appeal to Mrs. Raps, can I - or your friend Mrs. Sodderley? When you come to think, there are very few mothers in Rodmoor!"[42]

To the question of unmarried men Traherne had replied, "You go far, Nance, you go far with your questions."[43] Too curious/a questioning is a betrayal of plausibility, and on the answers given by the clergyman and the doctor depends the credibility of the novel. By allowing Nance to rend the texture of illusion from within, the author dares to "play"

the reader like a fish; it is a fascinating exercise, at which Powys gets increasingly adept and brazen, reaching a high point in the opening sentence of A Glastonbury Romance.[44]

Traherne proceeds with his explanation, long, complex, and odd, an explanation that, at a botanical, scientific level is directed at Nance, and that at a metaphysical level is directed at the reader:

> "It's the effect of the sea. If you look at the plants which grow here you'll understand better what I mean. But you haven't seen the plant yet which is most characteristic of Rodmoor. It'll be out soon and I'll show it to you. The yellow horned poppy! When you see that, Nance, - and it's the devil's own flower, I can assure you! - you'll realise that there's something in this place that tends to the abnormal and perverse. I don't say that the devil isn't active enough everywhere and I don't say that all married people are exempt from his attacks. But the fact remains that the Rodmoor air has something about it, something that makes it difficult for those who come under its influence to remain quite simple and natural. We should grow insane ourselves - shouldn't we, old rat? shouldn't we, my white beauty? - if it weren't that we had the church to pray in and 'Don Quixote' to read! I don't want to frighten you, Nance, and I pray earnestly that your Adrian will shake off, like King Saul, the devil that troubles him. But Rodmoor isn't the place to come unless you have a double share of sound nerves, or a bottomless fund of natural goodness - like our friend Fingal Raughty. It's absurd not to recognise that human beings, like plants and animals, are subject to all manner of physical influences. Nature can be terribly malign in her tricks upon us. She can encourage our tendencies to morbid evil just as she can produce the horned yellow poppy. The only thing for us to do is to hold fast to a power completely beyond Nature which can come in from outside, Nance - from outside! - and change everything."[45]

Nothing is very clear in this explanation. First Traherne asserts that the sea is the sole cause, and then that its

effect can be seen at its most characteristic in the horned poppy. One can look long and lovingly at the yellow horned poppy, one can consult herbals and books of folk-lore, and still conclude - even taking into account its presence in Paddock Calls - that the yellow horned poppy has no hidden significance, unless it be so esoteric as to be private. Exegesis is tempting but futile, for it might miss the point by assuming that all things have a straightforward point. Traherne exempts himself from the prevailing madness in Rodmoor, and turns to his rat for confirmation of his sanity. Powys' sense of irony was not sharp, but it could go deep; why should the reader look for authority, for authorial endorsement, in such an explanation from such a man? His discourse on the poppy is a revelation of Traherne's mental state, which bears a recognisable relationship to the mental condition of other inhabitants of Rodmoor, with or without the church and Don Quixote. And because it is a community with so few married men or mothers it lacks a norm of social and emotional behaviour. Nance, who is the character in whom the reader initially places his trust, is the spokesman of a world elsewhere, and she is unable to concentrate on Traherne's explanation, "and as soon as he paused she broke in". [46]

No reader will be satisfied with Traherne's explanation. Dr. Raughty's reply to Nance springs from a virtually "bottomless fund of natural goodness," is not too unclear or unreasonable, but is a very limited explanation:

> "The place will die out altogether in fifty years. It's as bad as the sand-dunes with their sterile flora. Women who bear children are the only really sane people in the world...

> " They know what it is to find the ultimate virtue in exquisite resignation. They do not only submit to fate - they joyfully embrace it. I suppose we might maintain that they even 'love it' - though I confess that that idea of 'loving' fate has always seemed to me weird and fantastic. But I laugh, and so do you, I expect, when our friends Sorio and Tassar talk in their absurd way about women. What do they know of women? They've only met, in all their lives (forgive me, Nance!) a parcel of silly young girls. They've no right to speak of life at all, the depraved children that they are! They are outside life, they're ignorant of the essential mystery." [47]

Whose fault is it that Adrian and Baltazar have only met silly young girls? Is it the fault of Rodmoor, whose sterility does not allow for a blossoming into womanhood? Or is it the fault of the novelist, whose fascination with oddities has left a vacuum where the ordinary should be? Is the perversion, the disease, to be more convincingly attributed to Rodmoor, the landscape and its elements, or to Powys' imagination? By posing such questions in their conversation the characters themselves help to forestall the reader's doubts and objections. Even so, Nance and Raughty are both unmarried, and although Raughty's observations are correct, his perspectives recognisable to the reader, he is yet another man whose fulfilment is not achieved in the normal way but, in this case, by "a bottomless fund of natural goodness."

It is Raughty who, in his shrewdly tactless parenthesis, "(forgive me, Nance!)", reminds the reader that Nance is far from being a normally developed young woman herself. In the early chapters Nance seems destined to be the novel's heroine. Her initial impressions of Rodmoor are phrased

in a way that is imaginatively capable of empathy with Adrian's state of mind - that is the foundation, should one be needed, of their initial love. The woman who is possessed of both common sense and an understanding of the irrational is a recurrent ideal in Powys' fiction, as also, probably, in his life. The great central weakness of Rodmoor lies in the inconsistent development and presentation of Nance. Although we know from Adrian's vision of a Beardsleyesque androgynous form, in the first chapter, that Philippa is destined to supplant Nance in Adrian's love, we are not prepared for the change in Powys' presentation of Nance. The voice of reason and objectivity and wide sympathy, whom the reader initially trusts, is transformed into a hard, narrow, puritanical enemy of joy and love.

Baltazar Stork is the first to disapprove of Nance, when she and Linda call on him after the latter's rendez-vous with Brand has been intercepted and prevented by Nance. Baltazar "shrewdly guessed that some trouble connected with Brand was at the bottom of this and the suspicion that she had been interfering with her sister's love affair did not diminish the prejudice he had already begun to cherish against Nance". [48] If there can be any psychological justification for Baltazar's prejudice, one might argue that it sprang from jealousy. For he also is of a sound, reliable temper and judgment, also capable in his own way of sympathising with and helping Adrian. But this can hardly explain the blind hatred which he comes to feel for Nance. Powys grabs for a bit of amateur psychology and insults the reader's intelligence with this theory:

> The hatred which he felt at that moment towards Nance was so extreme that it overpowered and swamped every other emotion. Baltazar Stork was of that peculiarly constituted disposition which is able to hate the more savagely and vindictively because of the very fact that its normal mood is one of urbane and tolerant indifference. [49]

If you can believe this you can believe anything, for it is a catch-all justification of every inconsistency and implausibility. It is sufficient licence for Powys to turn Stork into a maniac - but only with regard to Nance:

> His hatred rose to the level of a passion. He vowed that nothing should make him pause, no scruple, no obstacle, until he saw that beaten look in Nance's face. Like all dominant obsessions, like all great lusts, his purpose associated itself with a clear concrete image, the image of the girl's expression when at last, face to face with him, she knew herself broken, helpless and at his mercy. [50]

The problem is manifold, for the reader does retain a residual trust in the objectivity of Stork's judgment, even while recognising the absurdity and unreality of his attitude to Nance.

Stork is not alone in his opinion, for it is endorsed by Philippa and Mrs. Renshaw, and by the latter for exactly the same reason:

> "I don't like this interference with the feelings of people! My son is of an age to choose for himself and so is your sister. Why should you set yourself to come between them? I don't like such meddling. It's interfering with Nature!" [51]

"Nature" is of course a very loaded word, sufficient to sway the reader's judgment, to suspect Nance of a sterile morality, and to be prepared for Philippa's climactic denunciation. Nance attacks Philippa for her liberal attitudes, revealing a most distasteful snobbery in her assumption

that such attitudes belong to the lower classes, and a most dreary mind in her inability to distinguish between romantic love and prostitution:

> "You - what are you, who, as you say yourself, are ready to share a man with some one else? Do you call that a sign of good breeding?"
>
> Philippa laughed again. "It's a sign at any rate of being free from that stupid, stuffy, bourgeois respectability, which Adrian is going to get a taste of now!" [52]

The final condemnation of Nance is made only with regard to Adrian's "genius", not to his humanity. Philippa, who after all has emerged from the pages of Rémy de Gourmont as much as from life, is entirely on the side of "genius", however dubious its worth may be. Nance's "womanly sensitive ways" which, earlier, had been a source of strength and security to Adrian, are now seen as tools of deception, of protection from the reality which is essential to genius:

> "Yes, he's always deceived - the easy fool - by your womanly sensitive ways and your touching refinement! It's women like you, without intelligence and without imagination, who are the ruin of men of genius. A lot you care for his work! A lot you understand of his thoughts! Oh, yes, you may get him, and cuddle him, and spoil him, but, when it comes to the point, what you are to him is a mere domestic drudge....He'll never be able to write another line when once you've really got hold of him!"
>
> Nance had her answer to this. "I'd sooner he never did write another line," she cried, "and remain in his sober senses, than be left to your influence, and be driven mad by you - you and your diseased, morbid, wicked imagination!" [53]

Despite her apparently dreary, reactionary opinions, Nance has by no means the worst of this argument. Powys understands the ambivalence of imagination as Philippa does not. He was himself aware of the conflict between calm and uncreative domesticity, and the misery of 1916 during which

five books were published. In some ways Nance resembles Powys' wife Margaret Lyon, who may not have stimulated Powys to write while they were living together. This is not an unequivocally bad thing, nor was Margaret only a burden in his life. Her dependence on him may have strained Powys' finances, but it also gave him a responsibility and a prospect of uncreative peace should it ever have been needed. The conclusion of the novel, and of the lives of Adrian and Philippa, is, however romantic and imaginatively satisfying,[54] testimony to the moral worth of Nance. The plight of Mann's Tonio Kröger is an extreme example of the artist's fate: "I am sick to death of depicting humanity without having any part or lot in it....Literature is not a calling, it is a curse."[55] As Tonio strives for the "bliss of the commonplace", so in Nance Powys is paying ambiguous, indeed reluctant, tribute to his wife.

Powys is a knowing victim of a diseased imagination. Everything that he says about sadism should be taken seriously, for it is not a literary or psychological affectation, but an unsentimental honesty about the workings of the imagination. Until 1922, he tells us, "this deadly vice transported and obsessed me".[56] Since then he claims to have overcome it, and his mention of Dostoievsky makes a cunning claim of literary kinship through a shared vice:

> [I]n Dostoievsky to whom it was obviously a temptation but who, as obviously, completely conquered it, every single trace of it in his books... has been sublimated and purified by the power of the spirit.[57]

As Powys goes on to claim that no sadistic pleasure can be derived from A Glastonbury Romance, despite the presence of

Mr. Evans, so he is acknowledging that before 1922 he was not always capable of denying sadistic pleasures to the reader. It is on moral grounds that this novel falls short, sadistic in its treatment of Nance, and misanthropic in its conclusion. The final scene might owe something to Timon of Athens, or to Timon himself rather than his creator. Philippa, with Adrian's body bound to her, struggles out into the North Sea, and drowns. The last paragraph is unwittingly honest:

> Far from land it [the tide] carried them - under the misty unseeing sky - far from the misery and madness, and when the dawn came trembling at last over the restless expanse of water, it found only the white sea-horses and the white sea-birds. Those two had sunk together; out of reach of humanity, out of reach of Rodmoor.[58]

The unconscious truth of this is that they have escaped from the misery and madness of Powys' mind, and are out of reach not of Rodmoor but of Rodmoor. The humanity from which their escape is celebrated in this purple prose is a collection of peculiar characters from a diseased imagination. To accept the apotheosis of Adrian and Philippa as either deserved or convincing is to be complicit with misanthropy.

The "diseased, morbid, wicked imagination" of Philippa, and of Adrian, is projected from Powys himself; his imagination is not yet subject to the restraints of morality or experience. Writing of himself in the early summer of 1915 John Cowper observed the gap between his verbal imagination and his actual feelings:

> Those wonderful second-thoughts and earth-escaping ecstasies,which I am able to describe only too eloquently in words, never come to me in life.[59]

This problem, which is at the heart of the failure of his first two novels, finds its resolution in two ways; Powys learns how to turn his "word-mongering" to good use, and he relies, when necessary, more closely on his experience. In Rodmoor his experience, his knowledge of people, is not enhanced by his imagination, but distorted by it, twisted, beyond recognition and response.

Most clearly we can see this in Philippa Renshaw, undoubtedly based to some extent on John Cowper's sister, Catherine Philippa Powys. John's fascination with androgyny, "sylphs" and "undines", does not come only from within his imagination, and is inseparable from this sister who always wanted to be a boy. For most of her adult life Katie, as she was known in the family, presented a masculine figure, wearing men's clothes and with her hair close-cropped. [60] The link with Philippa Renshaw is indisputable, "this thing whose slender form and tight-braided, dusky hair might have belonged to a masquerading boy". [61] And, again like Katie, "Philippa was an abnormally good walker". [62] Adrian speaks of her "boy-arms and boy-legs", [63] but Philippa's reply is of hysterical frustration: "Oh, I hate this woman's body of mine". [64] She is torn between a proud desire to be masculine and a self-pitying resentment that the will is powerless against the fact of birth. It seems that she would rather relate to Adrian as would a male friend, that she despises her own sexuality, and pretends to be immune to his:

> "All that annoys you in me, and all that annoys myself too, comes from this," and she pressed

> her little hands savagely to her breast as she spoke, as though, there before him, she would tear out the very soul of her femininity.[65]

Full awareness of her sexuality comes to Philippa only when she cannot rise to Adrian's challenge to be fearless:

> "[Y]ou often tell me you're afraid of nothing weird or supernatural. You often tell me you're more like a boy in those things than a girl....You always say you're like a boy ... well, prove it then! Run over to Dyke House...."
>
> ... Philippa regarded him silently. For one moment the old wicked flicker of subtle mockery seemed on the point of crossing her face. But it died instantly away and her eyes grew childish and wistful.
>
> "I'm not a boy, I'm a woman,"she murmured in a low voice.[66]

That is both admission and assertion, humble resignation to the fact with a tentative, incipient pride in the acceptance of womanhood. Powys has achieved great poise here, and the modulations in the development of the self-acceptance of Philippa's mind and body are refined further when Philippa does go bravely to Dyke House, where, true to her girlish and superstitious fears, Rachel Doorm is lying dead.

Not much is known about the extent and nature of Katie's nervous breakdown in August, 1912, nor of its effect on John Cowper, who helped to look after her. She had fallen in love with Stephen Reynolds, politician and writer, while living in the rough company of fishermen at Sidmouth, in Devon. [67] Reynolds' rejection of Katie caused her breakdown. John wrote to Llewelyn:

> Poor Kate! It was, I confess, a shock of an utterly unexpected character to me....It is all a strange and tragic business - and in the future none of us will be altogether free from fear. [68]

To Frances Gregg he pours out more of the trouble and confusion into which he has been thrown. He was with Katie

for much of the time, and had to restrain her from killing herself, or someone else: "She talks of killing someone if she is not allowed to see Stephen Reynolds."[69] John and Llewelyn went to Sidmouth to ask for Reynolds' help, but it was not forthcoming. In September John, by himself, took Katie to an asylum at Brislington, near Bristol, and later helped her to find suitable agricultural work.[70]

From what information we have we can see that John was deeply involved in this unhappy situation, with a sincerity of feeling which is explicitly denied in his 1915 Confessions, and which is not present in his treatment of Philippa Renshaw. To Frances Gregg John proffered an explanation of Katie's problems:

> The real cause of all this is our present cursed system which permits no freedom to a child of unhappy and hopeless passions like Katie.[71]

"A child of unhappy and hopeless passions" describes Philippa as well; like Katie she is both suicidal and murderous, and eventually in both fulfilled. But the fictional presentation fails because John Cowper was unable to attribute the cause of Philippa's instability to a "cursed system", to demonstrate a coherence between environment and mental condition. The novelist asks us to believe that both Philippa and Brand owe their familial characteristics to their remote Nordic ancestors.[72] This is a failure in the persuasion of the reader's imagination which is to be repeated at the beginning of A Glastonbury Romance, where John Crow is supposed to feel a deep atavistic kinship with his Viking forbears.[73] Only twice does Powys

attempt to find a relationship between Brand's amorous exploits, and exploitings, and the society in which he lives. On both occasions it is the presence of Nance which seems to insist on a "sensible", social or psychological, explanation of Brand's attitude and behaviour. Brand meets Linda for the first time:

> nothing that Nance heard or said [misprint for 'saw'?] prevented her mind from envisaging the fact that there had leapt into being, magnetically, mysteriously, irresistibly, one of those sudden attractions between a man and a girl that so often imply - as the world is now arranged - the emergence of tragedy upon the horizon.[74]

That parenthetical qualification hovers uneasily, for while it seems to belong to the "envisaging" of Nance's mind, the imagination of a world arranged otherwise, on a different plan, is not convincingly within her scope. And when, much later, as already quoted, Brand tries to defend his treatment of Linda to Nance, he himself loses conviction in the argument from atavism:

> My blood, my race, my father's instincts in me, go too deep. We're an evil tribe....It may be some dark old strain of Viking blood,the blood of the race that burnt the monasteries in the days of Aethelred the Unready! On the other hand it may be some unaccountable twist in our brains, due - as Fingal says - to - oh! to God knows what!...Well! Let it go! There's really no need to drag in Aethelred the Unready.[75]

This insurrection against the author would, if allowed to succeed, be in the author's best interests. But Powys has not the courage to do without the vague, atavistic explanation, nor to condemn the present arrangement of the world; he does not have the power to describe society with incision, and the immediate, indeed, obvious, causes of its evils are left undiagnosed, untouched.

Yet, to Frances Gregg, Powys had been able to condemn forthrightly "our present cursed system". This letter was written from England, while Powys wrote of Philippa from America. While his imagination was stimulated by exile, Powys lost his tenuous grasp on social reality - that most essential restraint on the novelist's omnipotence. "I made a great mistake in not going back [to England]", Powys wrote in July 1916,[76] when struggling with Rodmoor; it was one of the very few years in the entire period of his American exile in which Powys never set foot in England. Social comment and criticism was never among his strengths, and Rodmoor is in this respect the worst of the early novels. It is a futile strategy to believe that enough peculiar people, even when closely derived from life, as Philippa is, will be an adequate substitute for a social milieu.

There is, however, one character in the thoroughness and generosity of whose presentation we can see a potentially great novelist, a transforming imagination. Powys' insistence on the distant ethnic origin of Brand and Philippa is the more unfortunate in that it precludes the possibility of attributing any influence to their mother, Mrs. Renshaw. This woman, like her predecessor Mrs. Yeobright, and her successor Mrs. Solent, has a massive background presence. Like other mothers in Powys' fiction, Mrs. Renshaw is stranded and stunted by her lack of purpose - a reflection perhaps of his own mother. Her personality as a determining influence on her children is crushed into redundancy by the weight of all the Vikings. Powys is unable to develop the more interesting theme of her power-

lessness against the Renshaw blood of her husband - as he will in Wolf Solent - because Baltazar Stork is an illegitimate son of Herman Renshaw,[77] but in no convincing way is he kin to Brand and Philippa. Powys' characters are peculiarly immune to the influence of heredity or environment except at long range, millenial and geological.

We first see Mrs. Renshaw with her daughter. "The brown-eyed, grey-haired lady"[78] shares with Raughty a knowledge of plants,[79] and disapproves of the mythologising and romanticising of the sea by Philippa and Rachel Doorm.[80] Mrs. Renshaw feels instinctively close to Linda, and at the end of their walk Powys tells us, awkwardly, that she might have been wishing "that it had been the more docile and less difficult child that fate had given her for a daughter".[81] Later we read that "Mrs. Renshaw always had a way of detaching herself from her daughter and speaking of her as if she were a somewhat strange and menacing animal with whom destiny had compelled her to live."[82] The relationship is close to that which existed between Mary Cowper Powys and her extraordinary brood. When Katie was going mad Mrs. Powys was strongly opposed to having a specialist called in, and very angry when her wishes were ignored.[83] When Llewelyn first discovered that he was suffering from tuberculosis, in 1910, his mother's behaviour was hardly less than perverse. According to Louis Wilkinson, when Llewelyn expressed his determination to try every possible cure (he was in his mid-twenties), including treatment in a Swiss sanatorium, his mother was quite uncomprehending, and exclaimed: "These young men want to live for ever".[84] That

this is not worthy stoicism given a cynical twist by Wilkinson is shown by a letter from John to Llewelyn:

> The parents' attitude towards your illness is most complex and interesting. They both have a slight tendency to treat you as if you were already dead, but at the same time mother seems irritated with us all because your funeral is so very expensive.[85]

Powys strives for a similar complexity in Mrs. Renshaw's attitude to Adrian's illness:

> The mistress of Oakguard stopped for a little while to speak to [Nance], and to express, in her own way, her sympathy over Adrian's recovery. She did this, however, in a manner so characteristic of her that it depressed rather than encouraged the girl. Her attitude seemed to imply that it was better, wiser, more reverent, not to cherish any buoyant hopes, but to assume that the worst that could come to us from the hands of God was what ought to be expected and awaited in humble submissiveness.
>
> She seemed in some strange way to resent any lifting of the heavy folds of the pall of fate and with a kind of obstinate weariness, to lean to the darker and more sombre aspect of every possibility.[86]

Mrs. Renshaw's submissive nature and bewilderment at her children can be compared with John's description of his parents in a letter to Frances Gregg of June 1912; they have "with melancholy and Buddhistic resignation washed their hands of their mad wilful children". And we cannot escape the identification of Mrs. Renshaw with Mary Cowper Powys when she is described as "a votary of moonlight and of shadows, and so unsympathetic towards the sunshine and towards all genial normal expressions of natural humanity".[87] We recall that Llewelyn described his mother as "one who ever preferred the shady side of the road",[88] and who was "in love with the side of the moon which turns itself away from the earth".[89] When John heard of the

diagnosis of her cancer, in March 1914, he wrote to Llewelyn of how much he would miss her:

> if there is one person to whom one may talk of dark thoughts it is surely her!...what a dull world it would be - what an appalling world - if really and truly filled up by merry fornicating pagans. There must be some daughters of darkness and the spirits of the night to represent the other side.
> ...I went over, a cursed traitor to the Night's Plutonian shore, and curried favor with the Sun - Her enemy![90]

And as she was dying John wrote again: "how far she has been swept now out into her native night."[91]

At a factual, rather than symbolic, level Mrs. Renshaw's brown eyes[92] are those of Mrs. Powys, as described by John in 1914:

> It is that look of her eyes - those terrible brown eyes.[93]

And their literary tastes are similar; Mrs. Renshaw finds Humphrey [sic] Clinker on Nance's shelves and expresses her enthusiasm: "I think Smollett was a very great writer".[94] According to Theodore Powys, writing to John in March 1947, "Humphry Clinker [is] a book mother was fond of."[95]

Mary Cowper Powys died on 30 July 1914, on the eve of the outbreak of war. John was increasingly affected by her death, and in November wrote:

> Mother's dead! That keeps recurring. I miss her more than ever. I want to write descriptive letters to her.[96]

In May 1916, when John was struggling to begin Rodmoor, and looking after Marian, not yet recovered from her skating accident, he compared their sister with their mother:

> [S]he is a bad invalid - too much like the desperate woman who bore her, with the same

> strained merriment, the same bowed head, the same terrible irony.[97]

Mrs. Powys was an enigmatic figure to John, who could compare her with Marian, again, in "the same endless fuss over little details", [98] and with himself in their "evasions of all but mad remote imaginative feelings". [99]

In December, 1914, John was again lamenting his mother's death, and told Llewelyn, "I want to write to mother. They ought to have some kind of post for that sort of letter".[100] The best alternative is to depict her, and her enigmatic character, in fiction. It is notable that Nance is the standard of objectivity, the authorial norm, when Powys is trying to present a complex and contradictory person; she is a deliberate foil to Adrian and Mrs. Renshaw. Powys uses Nance as the vehicle of his own contemplations and speculations about his mother in the guise of Mrs. Renshaw. Mrs. Renshaw objects to people enjoying themselves on a bank-holiday:

> "They trouble me. I always think of Sodom and Gomorrah when I see them".
>
> "I suppose," murmured the girl, "that they're human beings and have their feelings, like the rest of us."
>
> A shadow of almost malignant bitterness crossed Mrs. Renshaw's face.
>
> "I can't bear them! I can't bear them!"she cried fiercely. "Those that laugh shall weep," she added, looking at her companion's prettily designed dress.
>
> "Yes, I'm afraid happy people are often hard-hearted," remarked Nance, anxious if possible to fall in with the other's mood, but feeling decidedly uneasy. [101]

Mrs. Renshaw soon comes to the point, her objection to Nance's interference in the relationship between Brand and Linda. "I don't like such meddling. It's interfering with Nature!" [102] she complains, hardly consistent with her com-

parison between a bank-holiday and Sodom and Gomorrah. She continues, furthermore: "You've been trying to interfere with the one thing [Brand's marriage] I've been praying for for years!" [103] so that Nance finds herself in conflict with the Divine Will as well as Nature.

Mrs. Renshaw's contradictory nature is seen at its deepest in the matter where it seems to have entered most precisely into Mary Cowper Powys' being, in religious feeling. Mrs. Renshaw's religious and philosophical utterances have a sentimental quality that is entirely convincing, telling of spiritual depth:

> "Why is it, do you think, that men in these days are so unwilling to [go to church]? It isn't that they're wiser than their ancestors. It isn't that they're cleverer. It isn't that they have less need of the Invisible. Something has come over the world, I think - something that blots out the sky. I've thought that often lately, particularly when I wake up in the mornings. It seems to me that the dawns used to be fresher and clearer than they are now. God has got tired of helping us, my dears," and she sighed wearily. [104]

So little straining after effect, a natural rhythm and idiom which keeps rhetoric at bay, contrasts favourably with Brand's "bats in the dawn". [105]

It was most unperceptive of Theodore to praise Rodmoor as he did in a letter to John:

> I am filled with wonder at the ugly things ... the bats in the dawn .... I thought I alone saw the ugly things. [106]

The convincingly gloomy vision is that of Mrs. Renshaw, victim of an illusion comprehended by Powys, both bigoted and over-charitable, and always masochistically self-denying. The illusion concerns men and women, and the differences in their functions and responsibilities. Such an illusion

is ambitious for a man's presentation, or indeed a woman's, but Powys' great strength is his extraordinary sympathy with the female consciousness and psyche. As a narrator he can be truly omniscient, for his perception is androgynous. This is his explanation of Nance's reaction to what is going on between Adrian and Philippa, early in their acquaintance:

> [Nance] could not make any response. She could not bring herself so much as to look into his face. It was not from any capricious pride or mere feminine pique that she thus turned away but from a profound and lamentable numbness of every emotion....
>
> A man, viewing the situation from outside,the slightness and apparent triviality of the incident, would have been astounded at the effect upon her of so insubstantial a blow, but women move in a different world, a world where the drifting of the tiniest straw is indicative of crushing catastrophes, and to the instinct of the least sensitive among women Nance's premonitions would have been quite explicable. [107]

This is a courageous, or foolhardy, claim for a male novelist to make; Powys derived his confidence from, in his own words, his "curiously epicene or half-feminine way of feeling", and from his "almost Lesbian" attraction to girls. [108] As we see so often in the lives of great creators, an emotional liability is turned into an artistic strength.

When Powys describes Nance's feelings towards Adrian in their autumnal, October love, the tone indicates authorial assent to her thoughts:

> Sometimes when she thrust him away as if the emotion produced by his caresses were more than she could bear or as if some incalculable pride in her, some inalienable chastity beyond the power of her senses, relucted to yield further, he grew angry and morose and accused her of jealousy or of coldness. This would have been harder to endure from him if there had not existed all the while at the bottom of her

> heart a strange, maternal pity, a pity not untouched with a sort of humorous irony - the eternal irony of the woman as she submits to the eternal misunderstanding of the man, embracing her without knowing what he does. He seemed to her sometimes in the mere physical stress of his love-making almost like an amorous and vicious boy. She could not resist the consciousness that her knowledge of the mystery of sex - its depth and subtlety not less than its flame and intensity - was something that went much further and was much more complicated and involved with her whole being than anything he experienced.[109]

Rodmoor was published in the same year as Women in Love and this passage, at least, justifies that link as more than an arbitrary coincidence. Always more complex than Nance, Mrs. Renshaw's attitude to men is still within the compass of Powys' "epicene" imagination. She, as we would expect, deludes herself over masculine sensitivity, regarding woman-hood as martyrdom, and yet a role with which all women should be content, for the fate of men is much worse. Once again it is the element of religious faith and resignation which gives credibility to Mrs. Renshaw's contradictory character:

> It may appear to us unjust...It may be unjust. God does not seem in his infinite pleasure to have considered our ideas of justice in making the world. Perhaps if he had there would be no women in the world at all! Ah, Nance, my dear, it's no use kicking against the pricks. We were made to bear, to endure, to submit, to suffer. Any attempt to escape this great law necessarily ends in misery. Suffering is not the worst evil in the world. Yielding to brutal force is not the worst, either. I sometimes think, from what I've observed in my life, that there are depths of horror known to men, depths of horror through which men are driven, compared with which all that we suffer at their hands is paradise!"[110]

To this grim philosophy Nance prefers "the high, inspiring tone of Mr. Traherne's mystical doctrine,"[111] of which the

reader has heard a most unimpressive explication, yellow horned poppy and all. [112] While Nance recognises that "there was very little practical difference between the two points of view" (Traherne's and Mrs. Renshaw's) she identifies with the dreary monochrome of the latter's beliefs, "as if nothing but what was pitched in a low unhappy key could possibly be the truth of the universe."[113]

Powys then allows Nance to speculate extensively on Mrs. Renshaw's character, his own refracted meditation on his mother. It is the conflict between her religion, or religiosity, and her hard earthiness, between her rooted solidity and her pessimism, between her harsh puritanism and her amoralism, that fascinates Nance, and Powys:

> Mrs. Renshaw began picking up shells from the debris-scattered windrow at the edge of the wet tide-mark. As she did this and showed them one by one to Nance, her face once more assumed that clear, transparent look, spiritual beyond description and touched with a childish happiness, which the girl had noticed upon it when she spoke of the books she loved. Could it be that only where religion or the opposite sex were concerned this strange being was diseased and perverted? If so, how dreadful, how cruel, that the two things which were to most people the very mainspring of life were to this unhappy one the deepest causes of wretchedness! Yet Nance was far from satisfied with her reading of the mystery of Mrs. Renshaw. There was something in the woman, in spite of her almost savage outbursts of self-revelation, so aloof, so proud, so reserved that the girl felt only vaguely assured she was on the right track with regard to her. Perhaps, after all, below that tone of self-humiliating sentiment with which she habitually spoke of both God and man, there was some deep and passionate current of feeling, hidden from all the world? Or was she, essentially and in secret truth, cold and hard and pagan and only forcing herself to drink the cup of what she conceived to be Christianity out of a species of half-insane pride? In all her utterances with regard to religion and sex there was, Nance felt, a kind of heavy materiality, as if she got an evil

> satisfation in rendering what is usually called "goodness" as colourless and contemptible as possible. But now as she picked up a trumpet-shaped shell from the line of debris and held it up, her eyes liquid with pleasure, to the girl's view, Nance could not resist the impression that she was in some strange way a creature forced and driven out of her natural element into these obscure perversities.[114]

The reader has already observed the "heavy materiality" bound up with Mrs. Renshaw's religion, in the chapter "Vespers", when she and Linda and Nance sit on the low parapet which separates churchyard from marsh - another symbolic border - waiting for the service to commence:

> She shivered a little and let her fingers stray over the crumbling masonry and tangled weeds at her side, seeking there, in a fumbling, instinctive manner, to get in touch with something natural, earthy, and reassuring.[115]

A person's reaction to the yellow horned poppy is of wide and telling significance, yet Powys organises a pattern of subjectivity from which the reader can draw no objective conclusions. Traherne has called it "the devil's own flower",[116] and we know he is not entirely sane, but he also sees it as representative of "the abnormal and the perverse"[117] in Rodmoor; Nance, voice of dreary common-sense, finds herself, when she first sees the plant, in agreement with Traherne, for she "realised how completely right the priest had been in what he said".[118] This comes just before Mrs. Renshaw's accusation that Nance is interfering with Nature; these two incidents together weaken the reader's trust in Nance's sensible reliability. Mrs. Renshaw likes the plant, and in her perverseness that means some degree of truth must lie with Traherne. Her attitude to the plant is anything but perverse:

> "I always liked the horned poppy...it's different from other flowers. You can't imagine it growing in a garden, can you? I like that. I like things that are wild - things no one can imprison." [119]

Every reader can sympathise with that, but before Mrs. Renshaw can be entrusted with the objectivity that Nance has forfeited, she compares the bank-holiday with Sodom and Gomorrah. [120]

These fluctuations and contradictions are entirely plausible in Mrs. Renshaw, as they are not in Nance, and one reason for this is that everything we hear of her seems to fit into our impression of Mrs. Powys, though to prove this is to argue for facts on fictional premisses. Mrs. Renshaw's mind and imagination are steeped in the language and rituals of the Church, though Nance's idea that she might really be pagan is not invalid; [121] as the wife of the Vicar of Montacute was dying, John wrote to Llewelyn: "What a dark heathen she is at heart!" [122] Standing with Linda over Rachel Doorm's grave Mrs. Renshaw recites a devotional poem and a psalm. [123] The churchyard is symbolic of the solidity of earth, but that firmness is only temporary, being surrounded by the borderline of marsh and dunes, and, beyond that, the sea, "the earth's antagonist" [124] - a phrase to be used again in the opening paragraph of Weymouth Sands. The parallel between mortality and the ephemeral geology of its resting place is not overstated, and becomes overt only in the next chapter; the official post of "Warden of the Fishes" was "one of the essential peculiarities of life upon those strange sea-banks[,] this sense of living on the edge, as it were, of the wave-drowned graves of one's fathers." [125]

In the eternal conflict between earth and water the praying voice of Mrs. Renshaw seems neither transcendent nor conciliatory, but necessarily a force within the struggle, and on the side of the earth:

> Her voice sank. A slight gust of wind made the trees above them sigh softly as though the words of the kneeling woman were in harmony with the inarticulate heart of the earth.[126]

One should note the tactful restraint of "as though" and, in the following quotation, of "seemed" - the author withholding his own and not demanding the reader's full assent. He is alert to the rich texture - mythological, spiritual, geological - which a novel is capable of sustaining, and has here attained provisional mastery, a stepping-stone towards his later achievements. The key to this mastery lies in his imaginatively far-reaching, and far-fetched, vocabulary being underpinned by sceptical "seemings" and aloof conditionals, in vigilant defiance of its absolute validity. The reader is asked to believe in nothing fantastic, but only to empathise with the wrought mind of Mrs. Renshaw:

> "Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way.
> Though thou hast sore broken us, in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadows of death."
>
> Once more she was silent but with a slight veering of the wind, the sound of the waves beyond the sand-dunes came to them with pitiless distinctness. It seemed to mock - this voice of the earth's antagonist - mock, in triumphant derision, the forlorn hope which that solemn invocation had aroused in the girl's heart. But in contending against Mrs. Renshaw's knowledge of the Psalms even the North Sea had met its match. With her pale face uplifted and a wild light in her eyes, she continued to utter the old melodious incantations with their constant references

> to a Power more formidable than "all thy waves and storms". She might have been one of the early converts to the faith that came from the sacred Desert, wrestling in spiritual ecstasy with the gods and powers of those heathen waters. [127]

Such an elemental religion is primitive, conceptually unsophisticated when compared with Traherne's "high platonic mystery",[128] his "mystical doctrine",[129] even while his faith and Mrs. Renshaw's are joined in church. At the same time, a contrast and a unity are pointed between Mrs. Renshaw's faith and the author's. The passage continues:

> Either by one of the fortunate coincidences which sometimes interrupt even the irony of nature or, as Mrs. Renshaw would herself have maintained, by a direct answer to her prayer, the weathercock on the church tower swung round again. North-east it swung, then north-north-east, then due north. And finally, even while she was uttering her last antiphony, it pointed to north-west, the quarter most alien and antagonistic to the Rodmoor sea, the portion of the horizon from which blew the wind of the great fens. [130]

While Powys leaves open the explanation of the cause of the wind's change of direction, suggesting but not insisting on a disagreement with Mrs. Renshaw, he describes the wind in language and concepts from which Mrs. Renshaw would not dissent:

> The east wind here is, in a paramount sense, the evil wind, the accomplice and confederate of the salt deep, the blighter of hopes, the herald of disaster. The north-west wind, on the contrary, is the wind that brings the sense of inland spaces, the smell of warm, wet earth and the fragrance of leaf mould in sweet breathing woods. It is the wind that fills the rivers and the wells and brings the fresh pu rifying rain. It is a wind full of memories and its heart is strong with the power of ancient love, revived even out of graves and sepulchres. To those sensitive to finer and rarer earth influences among the dwellers by the east coast there may be caught sometimes

> upon the north-west wind the feeling of pine woods and moorland heather. [131]

The swelling Paterian rhythms have been deployed ironically, for this is no testimony to earth-spirits or ancient magic, but only to a sense of smell. Being notoriously hard to describe, the sense of smell is also "unfalsifiable"; its evocations are too inaccessibly private for comparison or dispute. Many readers have assumed that Powys himself had a particularly acute sensitivity, through smell, to "finer and rarer earth influences"; whether or not this is so, he certainly appreciated its value for the sort of fiction that he was trying to write. The smells in A Glastonbury Romance, on Stonehenge and on the Somerset Levels, are triumphs of natural description bearing a legitimate implication of the extra-natural. That Powys was aware that his fictional use of smell was in excess of his own sensitivity is suggested by a letter he wrote from Phudd Bottom in 1932: "A South East wind is blowing ... & I can pretend to smell the sea." [132] In Rodmoor Powys uses the legitimate excesses of smell to bring the narrator's voice and Mrs. Renshaw's strange thoughts into linguistic proximity.

Mrs. Renshaw's religion is conditioned by its surrounding, adapted to her needs as a resident of Rodmoor. That Nance can suspect her of being pagan is the usual obloquy directed against a supernatural faith susceptible to natural influences. Mrs. Renshaw's faith is a spiritual and philosophical borderland, a counterpart to the marginal topography. The opening theme of Wood and Stone, which, alluding not too frivolously to Nietzsche, one might term "the geology of morals", recurs in the chapter "Warden of

the Fishes". In his later works Powys will articulate what is here dimly present, that language, imagination, religion, could all be symbolised by this official post "whose real raison d'être lay with the submerged foundations of former human habitations, deep at the bottom of the waters". [133] The philosophical weakness in the argument of Rodmoor's marginal and submerged topography is that its very representativeness required that other places are different, lastingly secure. Wolf Solent and A Glastonbury Romance show that symbolically all places are subject to submersion and erosion, and that what is submerged is not destroyed but remains, enormously powerful in its very anachronism. If we keep in mind his later, extraordinarily convincing presentation of Glastonbury we can see the confusion in his idea of Rodmoor, a confusion caused by an over-exploitation of the symbolism of the borderland:

> Other abodes of men rest securely upon the immemorial roots of the past, roots that lie, layer beneath layer, in rich historic continuity endowing present usages and customs with the consecration of unbroken tradition. But in the villages of that coast all this is different. Tradition remains...but the physical continuity is broken....In scriptural phrase, they have no "abiding-place" nor can they continue "in one stay."...Nothing so guards and establishes the virtue of a community than its sense of the presence in its midst of the ashes of its generations....But East-Anglian coast-dwellers are not permitted this privilege....The fires upon their altars have been drowned and over the graves of their fathers the godless tides ebb and flow without reverence. Fishes swim where once children were led to the font and where lovers were wedded the wild cormorant mocks the sea-horses with its disconsolate cry. It is eas[il]y to be believed that the remote descendants of human beings who actually walked and bartered and loved and philosophized on spots of ground now tangled with seaweed and sea-drift, and with fathoms of moaning and whispering

> water above them, should come in their hour to depart in a measure from the stable and kindly laws of human integrity! With the ground thus literally moving - though in age-long process - under their feet, how should they be as faithful as other tribes of men to what is permanent in human institution ?[134]

By giving the disintegration of the past an actual, topographical reality Powys has deprived the basic idea of its general, unlocalised validity. Glastonbury does not have to go under water for Philip Crow to be unfeeling of its past - and when the sea does encroach it is apocalyptic as the natural erosion of Rodmoor can never be. Powys has succumbed to Rachel Doorm's mythopoeic view of Rodmoor, unable, perhaps, to resist the linguistic possibilities in its expression. Fine as the writing is, in its way, the view insists on the uniqueness of Rodmoor, and commits Powys to an unjustifiable, unconvincing optimism about the rest of the world. Mrs. Renshaw's religion and philosophy, while conditioned by Rodmoor, is generalised; she recites a psalm in support of her defiance of the world, while Powys cites a psalm to show its irrelevance to Rodmoor. Only a foolish man says that the psalms do not have universal validity. For the sake of the Vikings Mrs. Renshaw is allowed no influence over her children; for the sake of a misguided but rhetorically tempting idea of Rodmoor, Powys denies to himself the benficent influence of her most plausible gloom. Mrs. Renshaw exists in magnificent isolation, but it is an isolation born of inconsistencies and falsities that are connected only too thoroughly in the main fabric of the novel.

Mrs. Renshaw's isolation is epitomised by her relationship to Adrian. Astonishingly, the two never meet, never say a word to each other, and see each other once, briefly.[135] It is not without reason that Mrs. Renshaw is kept out of Adrian's way, and the novelist is quite deliberate in his arrangement of their movements. When Adrian attacks Brand in the Renshaw home Nance screams, and two servants come running, but "Mrs. Renshaw, dressing in her room on the opposite side of the house, heard nothing".[136] In the last chapter she has to communicate to her children the improvement in Adrian's condition; it is one of the very few times that she even mentions his name, and she is merely passing on what she has heard from Nance.

Powys must keep these two in separate spheres for the simple reason that Adrian's flimsy personality would wither away when confronted with a more convincing person. Adrian survives as well as he does because of the author's policy of protectionism, imposed because competition with other characters would be disastrous. His friend Baltazar Stork is often critical of his behaviour, but the reader must find him also frustratingly indulgent:

> As for the Italian's vague and prophetic suggestions with regard to the possibility of something ... beyond "what we call life" that seemed to Baltazar's mind mere poetic balderdash and moonstruck mysticism. But he had always listened patiently to Sorio's incoherences. The man would not have been himself without his mad philosophy! It was part of that charming weakness in him that appealed to Baltazar so. It was absurd, of course - this whole business of writing philosophic books - but he was ready to pardon it, ready to listen all night and day to his friend's dithyrambic diatribes, as long as they brought that particular look of exultation which he found so touching into his classic face![137]

That seems a very wretched excuse for putting up with nonsense, symptomatic of the feebleness of the entire conception of Adrian.

The autobiographical foundations of Adrian's character are never firm enough, and his eccentricities are too far-fetched. The trouble lies in what Cavaliero sees as one of the dominant motives of the novel, "the relation of man to his own self-consciousness". [138] Adrian's problem is that he is almost entirely lacking in self-consciousness, or self-awareness. His "consciousness" is to be found in Baltazar Stork.

Powys himself was supremely aware of his oddities, of the outrageous nature of some of his speculations, of the possibility that he was a charlatan. That is why Jack Welsh, Louis Wilkinson's portrayal of Powys in The Buffoon, rings false: "Welsh was an egoist who acted as was natural to him, and had a curious obliquity preventing him from noticing the effect he produced on others". [139]The mocking description by Wilkinson in Swans's Milk, of meeting Powys at Chicago railway station, is unconvincing because Powys would have been the first to see how Christ-like was his appearance, and would have done the mocking himself.[140] But it is possible that The Buffoon, which was published in April 1916,[141] and which Powys was thinking about in August 1916, at the very time when he was writing Rodmoor,[142] influenced Powys' image of himself and the projection of that image in Adrian Sorio.

This speculation is prompted by aspects of Adrian's behaviour which seem quite characteristic of Welsh, and

entirely unlike Powys. Such is Adrian's hatred of the noise of the sea, and Stork's retort exemplifies the dry, condescending wit which Wilkinson tiresomely cultivated:

> "Listen to the thing now -/shish, shish, shish, shish! Why can't it make some other noise? Why can't it stop altogether? It makes me long for the whole damned farce to end. It annoys me, Tassar, it annoys me!"
>
> "Sorry you find the elements so trying, Adriano...."[143]

The odd friendship between Wilkinson and Powys was, at the time of The Buffoon and Rodmoor, based on Wilkinson's inability to understand Powys, which led him to adopt a somewhat patronising attitude of amicable cynicism. Stork has a similar attitude towards Adrian, but in this situation it is justified, for Adrian is as naive as Stork assumes him to be. The conversation continues with Adrian "mythologising" Rodmoor and himself, without any self-consciousness, until Stork insists upon the obvious, that Adrian's situation is not unique, needing psychic or metaphysical explanations, but extremely ordinary:

> "There's something here which works upon the mind, Tassar ...."
>
> "What's working on your mind, my friend," laughed Baltazar Stork, "is not anything so vague as dreams or anything so simple as the sea. It's just the quite definite but somewhat complicated business of managing two love affairs at the same time! I'm sorry for you, little Adrian....It's a situation not unknown in the history of the world...." [144]

That Wilkinson, self-advertising admirer of Oscar Wilde, is the model for Stork cannot be disputed when we learn of his attitude to the sea:

> "the one word that I shall henceforth refuse to have pronounced in my house is the word 'sea'. I'm surprised to hear that Goethe -

> a man of classical taste - ever refers to such Gothic abominations." [145]

And the dissenting voice is much more that of Wilkinson's idea of Powys than of Powys himself:

> "Ah!" cried Sorio, "the great Goethe! The sly old curmudgeon Goethe! He knew how to deal with these little velvet paws."[146]

Powys' behavious was doubtless eccentric, but consciously so: "Yes, I am the 'Moony', the silly 'John' ... of old school days still", he wrote to Llewelyn, [147] and the Autobiography is a masterpiece of self-mockery. Powys is part Adrian, part Baltazar Stork, an ironic buffoon.

That Sorio is a failure because he is insufficiently like Powys, and too much like Wilkinson' erroneous picture of him, is a most tenuous argument, not singly to be relied upon. Another, and dependent, problem is that Adrian is a picture, static; he never changes, never comes to self-awareness, even under the barrage of Baltazar's cynical but friendly criticisms, or through the experience of Nance's sensible, calm love. Adrian's unreality is constantly revealed by his style of talking, his manner of expression, which is constantly vapid. This is how Nance talks about her relationship with Adrian:

> "If **he** could only be made to understand...what his real feelings are! I believe he loves me at the bottom of his heart. I know I can help him as no one else can. But how to make him understand that?"[148]

Indeed, how can one make this language of precise determination comprehensible to one who thinks in evasive abstractions? This is how Adrian regards Nance:

> As for the girl who leant so heavily upon him,

> he felt nothing for her just then but a dull, inert patience and a kind of objective pity such as one might feel for a wounded animal. One deep, far-drawn channel of strength and hope remained open in the remote depths of his mind - associated with his inmost identity and with what in the fortress of his soul he loved to call his "secret" - and far off, at the end of this vista, visualized through clouds of complicated memories - was the image of his boy, his boy left in America, from whom, unknown even to Nance, he received letters week by week, letters that were the only thing, so it seemed to him at this moment, which gave sweetness to his life.[149]

And Philippa, who is threatening the relationship, he calls "this other one - this insidious 'rose au regard saphique' - this furtive child of marsh and sea".[150] Adrian's unfortunate ability to transform life into the terms of eighteen-nineties symbolism has obvious parallels with Wolf's "mythologising"; the great difference is that Wolf succumbs to the pressure of reality, but Adrian never encounters reality, lives in false symbols and, with Philippa, dies the death of Axel and Sara.[151]

Adrian's language is at its most abstract and silly when he is expounding his philosophical book to Philippa. Twentieth-century fiction is blighted by protagonists who, instead of enacting their beliefs, are writing more books to explain them. Adrian's philosophy bears no relation whatever to his mode of existence, not even by ironic inversion, nor to the course of the novel, neither of which are quite such meaningless gibberish as this:

> "What I'm aiming at in my book...is a revelation of how the essence of life is found in the instinct of destruction....I'm going to show in my book how the ultimate essence of life, as we find it, purest and most purged in the ecstasies of the saints, is nothing but an

> insanity of destruction!...Man is the highest of all animals because he can destroy the most. The saints are the highest among men because they can destroy humanity."[152]

Adrian's crass mixture of Nietzsche, Dostoievsky, and Ibsen, is exemplary of the novelist who oversteps his intellectual bounds. The problem lies in Powys' inability to resist temptation, the temptation of words and of thoughts, as he himself recognised:

> I know I do get 'carried away' by the look of words and the bluff of words and the parade of words.[153]

It is through Adrian that Powys indulges this temptation most thoroughly, and, just as Mrs. Renshaw is kept out of Adrian's way, it is notable that Baltazar is hardly ever within hearing of Adrian at his most extravagantly eloquent. Such nonsense would not withstand Baltazar's listening, and it is a measure of Powys' fondness for nonsense that it passes without criticism or reproof. The listener to Adrian at his worst is almost always Philippa, who is conveniently taciturn. His praise of destruction, of which part was quoted above, is concluded by his rescue of the fish left in the nets. Philippa criticises him for breaking an old custom, of letting the children take the fish, but she does not criticise him for such a blatant contradiction in his philosophy of destruction.[154] And the author is so half-hearted in pointing the contradiction that he cannot be said to make an ironic presentation of Adrian. When Adrian attacks Brand we are told that he had the same expression as "when on the point of rushing to the assistance of some wounded animal or ill-used child".[155]

At this stage it is futile, and contemptuous of the reader, to hope that implausibility can be redeemed by paradox.

Baltazar's response to Adrian, when some desperate rhetoric is addressed to him, is illuminating of the relationship between them, and explanatory of its lack of conviction:

> "I've got to the point, Tassar, my friend, when I see the world as it is, and I can tell you it's not a pleasant sight!...until you can hear the hearts of people beating - until you can hear their contemptible lusts hissing and writhing in their veins, like evil snakes - you haven't reached the point."[156]

Baltazar's response is cool, cynical, and very sympathetic. Never possessed of a sure sensitivity to voice and accent, Powys achieves here a passable rendering of the Edwardian tone, of the second generation of aesthetes:

> "Well? The world is like that, then. You've found it out. You know it. You've made the wonderful discovery. Why can't you smoke cigarettes, then, and make love to your lovely friends, and let the whole thing go?...unless you get rid of this new mania of yours, you'll end as you did in America. You'll simply go mad again, my dear, and that would be uncomfortable for you and extremely inconvenient for me. The world is not meant to be taken seriously."[157]

Powys' own thorough-going scepticism is grounded on that premise. His thousands of words and torrents of thoughts, his moral concerns and his serious imaginative endeavours, all have at bottom the same escape clause, that "nothing matters". His literary criticism is not only the product of an enthusiast for whom many writers are equally greatest, but also of a man who, as he says, is capable of "taking my favourite authors with a pinch of salt".[158] Baltazar's

philosophical unconcern is that of the structuring artist, capable of imaginative sympathy with those in psychological extremity, but imperviously detached:

> Baltazar Stork regarded him with a look of the most exquisite pity, a pity which was not the less genuine because the emotion that accompanied it was one of indescribable pleasure. In the presence of his friend's massive face and powerful figure he felt deliciously delicate and frail, but with this sense of fragility came a feeling of indescribable power - the power of a mind that is capable of contemplating with equanimity a view of things at which another staggers and shivers and grows insane.[159]

That last phrase is an impressive description of the elevated, Apollonian artist as he surveys his characters. Powys' genius was never, perhaps, of that cast, and certainly not at the time of writing Rodmoor. To say that Powys has torn himself in two in creating Adrian and Baltazar is psychologically crude, but it does seem to explain the implausible and arbitrary division of attitudes and functions between the two. Neither of them changes or develops in any way as a result of their conversations and extended acquaintance, and there is no true response or exchange as between friends.

In Suspended Judgments, written almost simultaneously with Rodmoor, Powys makes some interesting comments on the importance of style. He can admire it intensely in others while appreciating his own sad lack. In Blake's style:

> One touches the fringe of the very mystery of human symbols - of the uttermost secret of words in their power to express the soul of a writer -...We all have the same words at our command; we all have the same rhymes; where

> then lies this strange power that can give the simplest syllables so original, so personal a shape?[160]

And in the essay on Byron he proclaims, almost dogmatically:

> Style alone, the imaginative rendering in monumental words of the most personal secrets of our individuality, gives undying interest to what men write.[161]

Yet of himself he wrote, in 1914, "One can't cultivate a 'sincere' tone - I can't, anyway. I must ramble on in my fantastic charlatan manner or not at all."[162] In 1918 Powys wrote to his brother Theodore:

> I know (no one better) the unique and rare value of a style which is a person's own.[163]

That parenthesis bears much anguish, of dissatisfaction with his own struggle, through two novels, to find a voice of his own, and other voices for his characters. If the voices are not discrete, the novel remains a mass of unindividuated words. Having completed two large novels, in his mid-forties, and without a style of his own, Powys' future as a writer hardly looked encouraging. Although he never achieved an individual style of true distinction, and distinctiveness, Powys did develop a technique, a conflation of styles, which he scrupulously denied to his characters. The composite style of the major novels is the extravagant undercut by the ironic, the prophetic undermined by the sceptical, Dostoievsky's dark inwardness coupling with Homeric light, Nietzsche and Rabelais in crazy linkage.

Such resourcefulness is absent from Rodmoor, and in the book's liveliest chapter, "Symposium", the characters themselves point to the weakness. Adrian asks Raughty:

> "why do you move your head backwards and forwards like that, when you light your pipe?"
>
> "Don't answer him, Fingal," expostulated Baltazar, "he's behaving badly now. He's 'showing off'as they say of children."
>
> "I'm not showing off", cried Sorio loudly, "I'm asking the Doctor a perfectly polite question. There's more in it than appears. There's a great deal in it. It's a secret of the Doctor's; probably a pantheistic one."
>
> "What on earth do you mean by a 'pantheistic' one? How, under Heaven, can the way Fingal holds a match be termed 'pantheistic'?"protested Stork irritably. "You're really going a little too far, Adriano mio."
>
> "Not at all, not at all," argued Sorio ... "The Doctor can deny it or not, as he pleases, but what I say is perfectly true. He gets a cosmic ecstasy from moving his head up and down like that. He feels as if he were the centre of the universe when he does it." [164]

Baltazar's expostulations must find echo all too often in readers faced with the author's prose. "Mere poetic balderdash and moonstruck mysticism"[165] is a common verdict on Powys' entire output. Contrast Mrs. Renshaw's response to the wind with Linda's, which, despite its parenthetical qualification, is transferred, disguised self-indulgence:

> Perfumes and odours that could not be expressed in words, and that seemed to have no natural origin, came to the girl on the wind which went sighing past her. This - so at least Linda vaguely felt - was not the west wind any more. It was not any ordinary wind of day or night. It was the dawn wind, the breath of the earth herself, indrawn with sweet sharp ecstasy at the delicate terror of the coming of the sun-god. [166]

Such language is far in excess of what "Linda vaguely felt", and when the author decides that one of Adrian's ideas is worth borrowing for the purposes of his own, authorial description and explanation, the reader despairs:

> It will be found not altogether devoid of a

> strange substratum of truth, though fantastic enough in the superficial utterance, the statement that there are certain climacteric seasons in the history of places when, if events of importance are looming upon the horizon, they are especially liable to fall. Such a season with regard to Rodmoor, or at least with regard to the persons we are most concerned with there, may be said to have arrived at the beginning of Autumn and with the month of October.
>
> ...[Sorio's] whole being seemed to undergo some curious disintegrating process as difficult to analyse as the actual force in Nature which was at that very time causing the fall of the leaves. We may be allowed to draw at least this much from Sorio's own theory of the universal impulse to self-destruction - the possible presence, that is to say, of something positive and active, if not personal and conscious, in the processes of natural decadence. [167]

Bad writing seldom speaks for itself so eloquently.

Finally, Adrian's vision of 'Nothingness' seduces the author into a swelling, throbbing rhetoric which does not leave Powys unimplicated:

> This image, of a shape dim and vast and elemental, seemed to flow upwards from land and sea, and stretch forth towards infinite space. It was an image of something beyond human expression, of something beyond earth-loves and earth-hatreds, beyond life and also beyond death. It was the image of Nothingness; and yet in this Nothingness there was a relief, an escape, a refuge, a beyond-hope, which made all the ways of humanity seem indifferent, all its gods childish, all its dreams vain, and yet offered a large cool draught of "deep and liquid rest" the taste of which set the soul completely free.[168]

By this time the novel's most inexplicable incident has taken place, Baltazar's suicide, apparently without motivation or significance. It would be futile to seek an explanation, but within the terms of the novel there is a significance, and it is on the stylistic level. Powys, in

his own near-insanity on the shore of Lake Otsego, finds Adrian's language more and more tempting, Baltazar's increasingly awkward and interfering. When Powys drowns Baltazar in the Loon he extinguishes the voice of reason and scepticism, and is free to conclude the novel in the prophetic style, without restraint or ambiguity. The misanthropy of the conclusion has already been discussed. Style and morality are inseparable. With regard to one admirer of Rodmoor, Powys' disquiet was well justified:

> The devil, he took half of a fancy to Rodmoor. It made me feel as if I had written one of those awful books such as I used once to buy....[169]

"He" was Aleister Crowley.

CHAPTER III

UNPUBLISHED POWYS

After Rodmoor was completed in September 1916, Powys had to write a book of literary essays, Suspended Judgments, for which Arnold Shaw had been waiting since January. This book of 438 pages took Powys about eight weeks to write,[1] and was published at the beginning of December.[2] The shape of the book, the title of each essay, had been advertised on the end-papers of One Hundred Best Books, and John described to Llewelyn how he was working through the list "and crossing 'em out one by one as I get them done".[3] With the exception of two or three essays, on Blake, Pascal, Rousseau, the book has obviously been written to order; in spite of this, it is revealing of Powys' range of reading, particularly in French literature.

By contrast, Powys' next book, Mandragora, was the product of emotional compulsion: "I am now writing another book of poems - desperately - one after another".[4] From the spring of 1916 to the summer of 1917 Powys was divided between two women:

> The verses are directly and entirely - all of them - the result of the way I have been torn between Margaret Mower and Helen Wylde since...the early spring.[5]

Both were actresses, Helen Wylde with the Comedy Theatre in New York, then with the Greenwich Village Theatre,[6] and Margaret Mower with Maurice Browne's Little Theatre in Chicago in late 1917; she had previously worked in New York,

possibly at the Comedy Theatre.[7] Little is known about either of them, and the quality of the poetry in Mandragora does not encourage one to find out more. However, without being Lauras or Beatrices, their part in the shaping of Powys as a writer is of some importance. The title of the book, with its epigraph "Give me to drink Mandragora", not only makes a good companion-piece to Wolf's-Bane (1916), but is also a covert allusion to a play. In January 1915, Powys had been in Chicago, and was closely involved with Browne and the Little Theatre; from a letter to Llewelyn we learn that Powys submitted for consideration and read aloud to Browne and one Genefride (apparently the leading actress) "my play 'Mandragora'".[8] The play was not accepted and nothing more has ever been heard about it.

At that time Margaret Mower had not yet joined the Little Theatre, and the title of the book of poems - none of which is itself called "Mandragora" - may be intended to imply that she, or Helen Wylde, would have taken the part in the play turned down by Genefride. It appears that Powys did not see Margaret Mower between 1917 and October 1921,[9] and in April 1922 we find her acting the part of Aglaia Ivanovna Epanchin in Powys' dramatisation of The Idiot.[10] One would like to know more about Powys' relationship with these two actresses, before asserting they were an inspiration to his play-writing, and possibly to his fiction as well. At least, Mandragora, giving access to oblivion, is an appropriate title with which to signal the end of three extremely productive and public years, and the beginning of

seven years of near-silence.

Between 1918 and 1924, inclusive, Powys published, altogether, one long philosophical book, The Complex Vision, one slim book of poems, Samphire, two philosophical pamphlets, five poems and nine reviews, essays, and articles. It has recently become apparent that Powys was writing a considerable amount, if not quite as much as in the previous three years, but being less fortunate with his publishers, or more scrupulous with his reputation and his own standards.

Powys was possessed of a large amount of self-confidence, in the literary sphere, which mixes oddly with his capacity for self-mockery in his personal and social life. The latter is flaunted and examined with perverse pride in the Autobiography, while the former is more clearly revealed in the privacy of correspondence. In 1902 John wrote to his brother Theodore about their respective literary talents, and the judgement thereon of a mutual friend, "the Catholic", J. W. Williams. It must be remembered of course that neither of them had published anything of substance:

> The Catholic, whose evenly balanced, yet searching, mind nothing common or unclean can entice, recognised in your writing originality and character. Indeed I am almost inclined to think he regarded the works of John Cowper as of inferior interest to the works of Theodore Francis: such a verdict I can understand and would believe if it was not for that inherent trust in my own potentiality, in my own forces, which, sans evidence and sans likelihood, supports me under all misgivings.[11]

In 1913, with nothing at all published since 1902,John wrote

to Llewelyn:

> We must really write now or we shall never write...The Devil take me if I don't ever write anything good! I know I could![12]

In the Autobiography John describes his experience on seeing his first book in print, and remarks on the irrelevance of publication to his confidence in and estimation of himself:

> Yes, I knew I was a mere imitating copy-cat, repeating, repeating, repeating the rhythms of men of genius. But though there was nothing in "Odes and Other Poems" to justify it, and though "Odes and Other Poems" might have remained even unto this day my sole printed claim to originality, I knew then, just as I knew twenty years later, when I had not published anything else, that I was, in some way impossible to prove, a great and for all my cringings and propitiations a terrifyingly formidable genius![13]

Apart from Poems, 1899, it had in fact been eighteen years before his next book, The War and Culture, was published.

In 1915 and 1916 Powys had demonstrated his ability to write, and to get himself published, but he had standards, an ideal of literary achievement, which were seldom satisfied. Powys was not lacking in critical self-awareness, as is commonly thought, but he sometimes lacked the self-restraint which would have put self-awareness into practice. In November, 1919, when he had finished The Complex Vision, and was looking for a publisher, he wrote ruefully to Llewelyn:

> You idealise me, old friend, and I think very likely over-estimate my writings. But I know I have the power - only I am so damned lazy, timid, shifty, and superficial in certain things.
>
> I think Suspended Judgments is much my best

> work so far. I already react from this damned philosophy of mine. It is a mythological tour-de-force. But I rather think Boni and Liveright will take it - but sometimes I think I ought to destroy what I no longer believe in - but I am not strong enough to do that.[14]

Powys was not unable to write, but unable to control the fate of what he had written. Although Boni and Liveright rejected The Complex Vision Powys was so keen to publish it that he employed a literary agent in New York, who thought of submitting it to Macmillan, and who got it accepted by Dodd,Mead and Co., who published it in September, 1920.[15]

The Complex Vision is possibly the most boring of all Powys' books, philosophy on a grand and solemn scale, a "mythological tour-de-force" without an understanding of the true value of myth and fictional hypotheses. It could have been written by Wolf Solent when he still believed in his "mythology". Its publication met with a very poor response, only two reviews and corresponding sales. [16] Given Powys' own dissatisfaction and lack of conviction in The Complex Vision, its failure, with presumably a damaging effect on his reputation, may help to explain his new, more circumspect attitude to publishing. [17]

Since the completion of Rodmoor Powys had been trying to write another novel. False starts, distractions, conflicting literary and lecturing obligations, again and again prevented him. In February, 1920, without The Complex Vision as an excuse any longer, Powys is drawn into a desperate self-justification:

> The whole of last summer I practically wasted

> in trying to write short stories - twenty of 'em - and none were any good and I've chucked them away. You must remember that no one is writing anything worth writing now; it is a curious psychic wave - the effect of the war upon the nerves of the earth![18]

Certainly at this time, early 1920, there was a lull before the spate of modernist masterpieces which was to break in 1921 - and in which spate Powys was signally, and misleadingly, to have no part.

By 1922 Powys had written three important works which he refrained from publishing. One was a novel, After My Fashion, eventually published in June 1980; the other two were plays, a dramatisation of Dostoievsky's The Idiot, and Paddock Calls, both of which survive and deserve to be published. Although the novel was actually written between the two plays, its origins go back to 1916; it will here be treated first, thus enabling us to look at the two plays together.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER MY FASHION

In December 1916, Powys was already thinking of writing a new novel, one that would be an improvement on Rodmoor:

> I think my third novel must have Sussex for its background and I think Nature must obtrude itself less - don't you? - and I think it must be more quiet and less mad - eh? - and also must be free from the influence or even the suggestion of any other writer....I shall try and devote a good deal of time to thinking over it so as really to hit a vein that shall please me. I don't feel quite satisfied with either Wood and Stone or Rodmoor. I must do better, and I think I can sooner or later.[1]

Powys was not going to be rushed into a new novel, and allowed himself over three years to think over it. First he was distracted by Mandragora, then by some philosophical essays which, begun in June 1917, troubled him until the publication of The Complex Vision in 1920.[2] In August 1917, he abandoned the philosophical essays, temporarily as it turned out, and, with Mandragora at the printer's, tried to write a novel:

> Now I am going to think and think and think about another novel...thinking of it absorbs me - I forget Helen [Wylde] - I forget everything.[3]

Now that he had the time and/the opportunity and no other commitments inspiration failed; he had addressed himself earlier "O fool - O led astray by every lust and every laziness!"[4] This time he claims to have run out of energy, "my driving force seems to have ebbed."[5]

It can be deduced from the letter of 20 September 1920

that Helen Wylde has replaced Margaret Mower in Powys' affections, and the way in which he writes of her gives a clue to his next novel:

> Helen is still - in her fashion - faithful and sweet to ne and is an oasis in this wilderness of my calamity.[6]

Powys quotes here from Ernest Dowson's "Non sum qualis eram bonae sub regno Cynarae", that quintessential poem of the eighteen-nineties whose coarse, haunting refrain runs "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! in my fashion." Powys' admiration for Dowson belonged to his own youth in the eighteen-nineties. In 1946 Norman Denny asked him about his life at that period:

> Yes I met Yeats, Corvo, Richard Garnett, John Buchan and adored the poetry of Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson. [7]

But the novel whose title points to this enthusiasm, and which has a sense of placement within the eighteen-nineties, remained obstinately unwritten.

On the last day of 1917 Powys wrote to Llewelyn, reflecting not only on the previous year, but on his entire literary achievement so far:

> I still cannot write a word - isn't that curious? Oh this whoreson lethargy! But when I do write something it will be something different - something that I shall not grow so soon weary of....[A]ll I crave for at present is to be allowed to write a book in peace and to have energy enough to do it. It will be a novel, for my last and most important thoughts are such as can be expressed better indirectly rather than directly....It will be what I am pleased with in a far deeper sense than ever before. I am not really pleased - not really - with anything I have done yet - all too hurried - all too patched up and rushed through.[8]

A week later his lethargy was causing Powys to despair, and at this time, perhaps as a result of his despair, or as a cure for his lethargy, he read Dostoievsky intensively. It is interesting that Dostoievsky and Isadora Duncan occur in the same passage:

> I read Dostoievsky over and over again, and find he spoils me for all other writers. Not yet can I actually start on any new work....I have not been without salutations, of an eccentric character, from the incomparable Isadora....[9]

In the same letter, but not in any connection with Isadora, Powys repeats his determination to write a novel, and one begins to wonder whether his promises hold any conviction even for him:

> What I must do now is just exist from day to day...and think out as clearly as I can my next work which assuredly is going to be a novel; but a very much better and more solid and massive and formidable piece of work than the other two. Slowly will I meditate on it - slowly will I write it - and the question of publication can go to the Devil![10]

His next book was not a novel, and his next novel was half as formidable as his previous two; on the question of publication Powys proved correct.

1918 went by and still the novel was delayed. In May he planned to go to California for the summer, to lecture and to "start writing another novel - better than Rodmoor".[11] His determination to improve as a writer has not wavered, but by the end of this long letter he is no longer set so single-mindedly on writing a novel:

> By the gods what I next write, whether it be poetry or essays or a novel, shall be something different - something far better. I swear it - and the stream of these days of troubled and

> difficult decision will give a tang to it that will please you. Whatever happens I shall write and write. Oh I long to begin in a new and more formidable style. I have the inspiration and the love of the noble Isadora still with me....[12]

Here, for the first time, in May, 1918 Powys links his new novel with Isadora Duncan, and specifically with her inspiration. Although Frances Gregg had known Isadora Duncan since 1913 she did not manage to introduce her two friends to each other. [13] Frances Gregg was, however, probably the person who sent a copy of Visions and Revisions to Duncan, who responded with typical exuberance:

> When she read my first book Visions and Revisions,she sent me so many red roses that they filled the little flat, but I was then too nervous to go and see her. [14]

John's sister Marian seems to have met her by 1917, according to a letter from John to Theodore which also suggests that John had still not met Isadora:

> The wonderful Isadora (aged 43) is in New York now Marian tells me - Do you recollect, long ago,reading about her children being drowned in the Seine? Marian says too that this strange one's idea now is to go to France. Will she dance like a Valkyrie between the lines? She ought to go to Russia. [15]

By September, 1917, when Mandragora was published, Duncan was the subject of an ecstatic and gauche poem:

> All of us, sitting in darkness,
> Saw a great light.
> You danced as dance the morning stars
> And the universe was conquered.
> You smote the universe in the mouth;
> And you saved us -
> You - a woman. [16]

The tone of the poem suggests that its author could never have met the dancer, or seen her at all off the stage.

At the end of September, 1917, Powys finally underwent the gastroenterostomy operation which had been inevitable at least since early 1916.[17] The operation was a success, and Powys had six weeks of convalescence before his lecturing began on 13 November.[18] Among his visitors was Duncan;[19] during this visit, if it was their first meeting, they might have behaved very exuberantly and eccentrically towards each other. Evidently they developed a strong sense of kinship, for the following month John wrote a letter to Llewelyn almost entirely devoted to "that unequalled Isadora" who had just left New York for a season in California:

> She swears she is going literally to dance herself round the world through Japan, China etc, etc. Pardon my boring you with these unknown matters; but Isadora is the first woman (of undoubted genius) to recognise any value in your elder brother! She has always been friendly to me, thro' my books, long before we met, and we harmonised at once - and of this I think I am really and legitimately proud, for, in her own style, she is as fine a genius as Nazimova or Sarah [Bernhardt] or Eleanora Duse, and - heaven help her!-far less responsible or shrewd.
>
> Yesterday Rodin died, aged seventy-five. Did we look together at 'The Thinker' within the iron railways [railings?] of the Pantheon in Paris? He was devoted to Isadora and always said her dancing was his greatest inspiration.... She has been one of the most thrilling sensations - but that is a wretched word to express it - of my whole existence. She has danced for me alone - with a beauty that makes the most beautiful young girls' dancing seem mere child's play. It was as though Demeter herself, the mater dolorosa of the ancient earth, rose and danced.
>
> Well, she has gone - and I enclose to you the red rose she gave to me as she went. I am not in love with her, but it has been one of the chief felicities of my life to have known her.[20]

That this dance for Powys alone was no casual favour, that their friendship, unlike so many of Duncan's - as witnessed by the mass of "intimate portraits" and lucrative gossip published after her death - was genuine, is shown by its duration, through all her travels, and through the ten remaining years of her life. When the scarf killed her in Nice on 14 September, 1927, a memorial service was held in St. Mark's, New York. Powys gave an address.[21] Isadora Duncan was an artist who was an inspiration and a subject of other artists, among them Rodin, Diaghilev, Cocteau and Segonzac. The character of Elise Angel in After My Fashion is another thread in the web that binds Powys close, and without strain or reluctance, to the leading artistic movements of his age.

"The inspiration and the love of the noble Isadora", still with Powys in May, 1918, was not sufficient to overcome his lethargy, to inspire his creativity in fiction, for another eighteen months. We hear nothing at all, in his letters to Llewelyn, about his intentions to write a novel until December 1919, when The Complex Vision was, at last, almost completed: [See Errata.]

> But all the same I shall be all right and well-pleased if my lecture prospects improve and I form in my mind the outlines of a really good novel and get it started....
>
> Do you recall how once on the road to Tintinhull when we were wondering if ever we should live in real proximity, we also set ourselves to wonder, looking at real mud by a real gate, whether we would either of us really write anything worth writing? I suppose certain passages from my novels and certain essays in Suspended Judg ments have value - but not much, my dear friend, not very much! I must do better - for the years are passing.[23]

It is odd that Powys should make no promises about a third novel in his letters to Llewelyn throughout 1919; an explanation may lie in a letter from John to Frances Gregg, dated 5 May 1919, in which he writes of finishing The Complex Vision "so as to clear the road for yours - for the novel".[24] It is to Frances Gregg, not to Llewelyn, that Powys eventually writes with the news that he is about to start writing, on 17 February 1920; Powys' remarks about the "curious psychic wave" that is preventing any good writing come from a letter to Llewelyn of 26 February 1920. Either nine days had passed without Powys having managed "really and truly to begin it",[25] or the book had become something of a secret between Powys and Frances Gregg, from which Llewelyn was deliberately excluded.[26]

Sometime, and somewhere, during 1920 the novel was written. In August 1921, in a clear reference to After My Fashion, Powys calls it "last summer's rotten novel".[27] As Powys was in England from April to August 1920, it is a fairly safe assumption that After My Fashion was written at his home, "Bankside", Burpham, Sussex.[28] It is, therefore, apart from some of Wood and Stone, the only novel written by Powys in England before 1935; Powys' "exiled imagination" may have become habitual, drawing him naturally towards an American setting for the first and last time.[29] Also, being dedicated to Frances Gregg, it was appropriate that it should attempt some aspects of cultural life in America, to which she had helped to introduce Powys.[30]

Having finished After My Fashion Powys immediately

started writing another novel, motivated in part by Frances Gregg's lack of enthusiasm for the book written with her in mind. That is the only explanation that can make sense of a letter from Powys to Frances, dated 4 October 1920:

> I tried to work at a novel of the kind I thought would interest you and at the same time interest and please me - but it won't do - these 115 pages will have to be scrapped. I am inclined to let novel-writing alone for a while...I rushed too quickly into writing another novel...I am a little inclined to think that a really good novel is beyond my power.[31]

A few weeks later Powys chose a title for the already completed novel:

> I have decided to call this Sussex and New York novel - "After My Fashion".[32]

In December 1920, it had already been submitted to and rejected by Dodd, Mead And Co., partly because of the poor sales of The Complex Vision which they had published three months earlier.[33] By the following August Powys had abandoned the intention of publishing After My Fashion, and thought that Frances would be pleased to hear this:

> You'll be glad to hear that last summer's rotten novel cannot find a publisher - all the better! but it is annoying to me that I wasted all that time over the damned thing.[34]

Powys had some extremely influential acquaintances in the American literary world, among them Margaret Anderson, editor of The Little Review, to which Powys had been a regular contributor since its inception, and Scofield Thayer, editor of The Dial. Through Frances Gregg Powys would have had access to H. L. Mencken, Van Wyck Brooks, Edmund Wilson and everyone else.[35] She would not have wanted

to endanger her own reputation in promoting a book which she disliked, and whose author, even, did not seem particularly satisfied or confident of its worth.

The protagonist, Richard Storm, returning from Paris after twenty years exile from England, decides to go to Sussex for no greater reason than that his grandfather was the rector of Littlegate, a quiet Sussex village. Powys had better reasons for bringing Storm to Sussex, as he was writing the book in Burpham, a village which shares certain features with Littlegate, including a church with a Norman arch, and a clergyman who was also a naturalist.[36] Selshurst, which Powys describes better than any other town in his fiction before Blacksod and Ramsgard, is based on Chichester. It is one of Powys' qualities that his Sussex, with its villages and downs and cathedral city, is entirely distinct, as a literary landscape, from his renderings of Somerset, Dorset and East Anglia.

In the Autobiography, Powys calls Sussex "profoundly English; more English...than any other county in the kingdom."[37] That awareness emphasises the symbolic force of Storm's return, in his coming to terms, as a free-thinking, cosmopolitan intellectual, with both his ancestral past and his nostalgic sense of national identity. In Chapter 2 Storm encounters "English soil", an "English country-town", "the very secret of English life", "How much of England...!", and "the sort of garden that one cannot conceive of as existing outside England".[38] Apart from

holding the grave of Storm's grandparents, there is only one feature mentioned that differentiates Sussex from England:

> Richard Storm vaguely recalled the fact that out of all England the land of the South Saxons was the last to be converted to Christ. [39]

That provides a potential link, through national history, earlier than the very English cathedral and churches, with Storm's own beliefs, "Half-atheist, half-superstitious".[40] However, Powys shies away from this immensely rich theme, and returns to it only in the four great Wessex novels.

Against this England Storm, in his public and intellectual life, has been in conflict, as a critic of modern French literature, and author of "monographs upon René Ghil, Gustave Kahn, Jules Laforgue, Grégoire Le Roy, and so forth" , in addition to the Life of Verlaine. [41] He has left France in order to get away from his former lover, Elise Angel, and he has come to England in order to write his own poetry, instead of writing about French poetry. [42] Storm was, like most people who had been alive in 1914, "well aware of the sinister ambiguities of most patriotic moods". [43] The patriotism implicit in Storm's return to England, and his endeavour to be an English poet, is full of sinister ambiguities, of emotional insensitivity and intellectual irresponsibility.

Inside Storm's mind, representing the philosophical, sceptical, and cosmopolitan part of his psyche, is a "deadly critic", a "critical demon", a "mocking demon", "the callous observer in Richard's brain", "the demon observer within

him". [44] So evident do these tiresome little devils become that Storm himself is aware of them, and, like the author, calls them demons: "Those sinister conclusions of dispassionate scrutiny he called his 'demons' ...." [45] Doubtless, as a literary critic, Storm is supporting Powys in his efforts to make him one of The Possessed. These demons, which either spoil or threaten to spoil the unsophisticated joys and delights of English pastoral, take on moral virtue: "some honest cynical demon". [46] As a check against emotional self-indulgence, of amorous dalliance and jingoistic patriotism, cynicism is ambiguously allied to honesty and truth: Iago is never called cynical, only honest.

This observant, detached cynicism is knowledge which is always a step ahead of or at a remove beyond self-consciousness, which can attack the moral foundations of one's attitudes and responses. When his wife leaves him for Canyot Storm collapses in convulsive sobbing:

> He rose to his feet in a little while, relieved by his outburst. One of the cynical demons that were always ready to whisper unpardonable things in his ear commented with sardonic interest on the fact that somewhere within his consciousness there was an actual throb of self-congratulation that he was still able to shed tears. [47]

A destructive degree of self-awareness characterises the Powys protagonist, but Storm is, with Wolf Solent, probably the most extreme sufferer. It can be depicted not only with great honesty but also with great perception because Powys suffered acutely:

> it was one of my peculiarities to link up the emotional feelings I had for the men and the women I liked best with some desperate dramatic

> passage or some resplendent historic gesture. My emotion doubled itself in this curious way. It was as though I was so inhuman that the tears only rushed to the back of my eyes - and that was as far as they ever came except by reason of a woman's kindness or cruelty - when some tragic aspect of a friend's life could be linked with the death of Caesar or Socrates or Christ, or when some proud imperiousness in a friend's endurance could be linked with Napoleon at St. Helena, with William Blake at Felpham, or with Swift in Dublin. [48]

While admitting to an appearance of inhumanity, Powys might be regarded as excessively kind to himself in this passage; what he calls a "doubling" of his emotion others might see as a cancelling out. Llewelyn Powys and Frances Gregg both agreed, in 1921, that the particular weakness in John's character was a lack of sincerity; [49] "You are spiritually insincere", Llewelyn once told John. [50] All this fitted him well to depict, as others might put it,men of bad faith in pursuit of authentic experience. Only in his death does Storm approach an integration of emotion and consciousness, when Canyot tells him that Nelly still loves him; the moment of death was "the moment most unalloyed by critical self-consciousness in all [his] experience". [51] Not often in all Powys' fiction does one find such moments, innocent of emotional, moral or aesthetic expediency.

Storm's quest for authenticity takes two forms, literary and emotional. After championing "all this modern stuff - vers libre and so forth",[52] as Canyot puts it, Storm is going to try to write English poetry set in the English landscape. After Elise Angel he will strive to be content with Nelly Moreton, daughter of the vicar. The free living

and free thinking and vers libre of hitherto are to be constrained by the pressures of locality and tradition. He has a bad conscience about his life in France and the values he held:

> He would 'dig himself in' in English soil and write such poetry as would really satisfy the stern Arbiter whose hidden purpose, whatever it was, had kept him alive while so many better men had fallen.[53]

Guilt was also felt by Powys himself in relation to the War. He was absent from Europe virtually for its duration, and in April 1918, with one brother a prisoner-of-war, Powys wrote an uneasy letter from Los Angeles to Llewelyn:

> And A. R. P. is a prisoner....I cannot, I really cannot, eat ice-cream and drink grape-juice in California, while these barbarians overrun the earth....Can you imagine any honest and noble soul 'lecturing on literature in California'?[54]

There is a thesis to be argued that the great artistic achievements of the post-War era were created under the pressure of guilt, by able-bodied non-combatants like Eliot, Pound, Joyce, Picasso and Stravinsky. Such men had taken unto themselves the cultural traditions of the warring nations, without, for various reasons, taking on the political and military responsibilities. After My Fashion could be seen as Powys' testament of guilt, with a slight variant in the political background. Storm had spent the war years:

> in a small French town doing unheroic but necessary work at a certain military base. His war record...had been neither especially noble nor especially mean .[55]

Powys had considered joining the French Foreign Legion in 1914;[56] his stomach ulcers kept him from active service in

the British army,[57] and his belated contribution was to lecture for the Committee of War Aims in the summer of 1918, under the direction of John Buchan.[58]

Powys is able to make Storm distinct from himself, by having him feel, through the loss of friends, a guilt of survival, a guilt which serves him as inspiration. Powys, strangely enough, seems to have lost no close friends in the War, and his inspiring guilt had come, as we have seen, at the beginning of the War.

> What he felt now, in regard to so many of his French friends, who were lying dead in their crowded graves, was a deep desire to justify the accident of his own escape by some really adequate contribution to the bitter-sweet cup of the world's hard-wrung wisdom.[59]

Storm wants to write poetry "different altogether, and far more human and original, than the easy charming verses, with a faint fragrance of morbidity, which had so far contented him".[60] Now his poetry is going to be inspired, not by modern, avant-garde attitudes, a "modernity" dating back to the eighteen-nineties, combining both Verlaine and Dowson, but by rooted, English traditions:

> the wanderer felt that, however England might have changed, something essential in it, something that belonged both to the earth and the race, remained unchangeable and secure. The home of one's people! There must, he began to think, be some sort of intangible emanation proceeding from that which, more than any ritual, had the power to call one's mind back to its lost rhythm, to its broken balance. Too long, he decided, had he occupied himself with questions of technique, with problems of style. The work which he would do now, the poetry he would write, should primarily concern itself with some definite vision of things that should be left to evoke its own method of expression, its own music....[61]

This looks very like a caricature of Georgian verse aims, and so it might be, if Powys had not been out of England for so long that he gives no sign of ever having heard of the phenomenon. It is as if Storm is attempting to constitute a one-man reaction against the combined avant-garde of many years, Symbolism, Imagism and Modernism. It is notable that the thoroughly reactionary, thoroughly English painter, Canyot, is linked by Storm not with the Georgians but with Bloomsbury.[62]

Powys had had two poems published in Harriet Monroe's Poetry (Chicago), in October 1918 and June 1920, poems whose quality would have encouraged anyone to try something completely different.[63] And we see Storm with a near-Georgian apprehension of nature, but with a more modernist attitude to language:

> It was comparatively easy to let the faint magic of his view of things ebb and flow before his mental vision....It was a very different matter when he came to attempt the task of putting all this into poetic form. How...he wrestled with the obstinate mystery of words![64]

We learn, though no reason is given, that he has after all chosen to write in vers libre, and that he is writing a long poem of which we are given no sample:

> He had composed about two hundred lines of this uneven dithyrambic 'litany of the earth-soul', its slow growing into consciousness, its use of the sentiency of all living things, its vague 'dreaming on things to come'....
>
> The lines he had written were full of the sounds and scents of the English country, and the more conscious, more human element in them was religious in the calm reserved English way and was rootedly, but not feverishly, pagan. Dithyrambic in its broken ebb and flow the poem might be; but the music of it was rich and slow and a little heavy - not by any means a song

of air and flame![65]

Once again Powys appends to his description of the subject-matter a sophisticated, knowing approach to the problem of its language; Storm is "[w]innowed and purged by his days with the secrets of words, their mysterious alliances and treacheries".[66] It all seems not very far from Four Quartets.

By this stage the novel has shaped itself as a kind of middle-aged bildungsroman, or a portrait of the artist as a late starter. But the quest for literary authenticity has come into conflict with the quest for emotional authenticity. Storm marries Nelly Moreton, having originally flirted with her in order to spite her fiancé, Canyot, with whom he was annoyed on artistic grounds.[67] Storm's resolution to sever all communication with Elise Angel is breaking down, and the conventions, both of English poetry and of English girls like Nelly, have forced the novel up a blind alley. Storm and Canyot really hold very similar views, and their disagreements are artificial, not productive of serious discussion. Storm now needs to defend his new life against the claims of modern art and modern morality, embodied by Elise Angel.

In America the debate is resumed:

> 'I've been reading those poems of yours' she said, with just a faint flicker of malice, 'And I cannot say that I think they're worthy of you. They are so overloaded with sensations that one doesn't get any emotion at all from them.'...
>
> 'What do you mean by sensations?...The whole purpose of what I've been writing is to get

into it the very essence of the English country - and that's a "sensation", isn't it?'

'It may be to an Englishman, my dear,' she replied. 'It isn't to me. All this indiscriminate piling up of flowers and trees and grasses, all this business about lanes and fields, seems to me just heavy and dull. It seems to get into the way of something.'

'That's because you're an American,' he threw at her indignantly. 'Any English person reading what I've written would be reminded of the happiest moments of his life.'

'And what are they, if I may ask?'

...'It's no use trying to explain to an American things of that kind,' he said. 'The happiest moments of a person's life in England are associated with old country memories, with just those lanes and gardens and fields that you find so dull. If you don't care for things like that, of course my poems are nothing to you!'

'But my dear Richard,' cried Elise, 'surely the whole purpose of art is to make such impressions universal, so that everybody feels them? If you're content to write about ponds and ditches for the benefit of English people - well! you may please yourself, of course; but I cannot allow you to call such a thing art. ...Art's an emotion not a sensation. It's an emotion that expresses the only really impersonal thing in the world.'

'And what may that be?' asked Richard sarcastically.

'Ah! my dear,' murmured the dancer with a sigh, 'if you don't know what that is, if you don't care to know what that is, you'll never be a great poet.'

'Well, at any rate,' said Richard, 'I've only done in my poetry what English poets have always done; that's to say, tried to get the magic of the earth soul into words that are not too vague or mystical.'[68]

Much is exposed in this conversation, which is perhaps the most polished and effective piece of dialogue in Powys' fiction to that date - and its subject is one in which writers always have difficulty avoiding the pompous, the condescending, or the obscure.

Through Storm Powys has brought into the open his own weaknesses as a writer. Powys does not fulfil many of the

demands of modernism, particularly with regard to its antipathy to nostalgia, romance, and a sense of place. Storm's argument with Elise makes clear Powys' awareness of the divergence between his own art and the aesthetic demands of his friends and acquaintances like Isadora Duncan, Ezra Pound, or Frances Gregg herself. After My Fashion is an admission of exclusion from international modernism, in which at the same time Powys attempts to defend his limitations. The major problem is that with Powys' total lack of irony it is hard to create distance between Storm and the author; in stylistic terms the two writers are barely distinguishable. The argument thus runs the danger of being entirely circular - if one enjoys reading After My Fashion one will take Storm's side, against Elise, and one would not be reluctant to read his two hundred dithyrambic lines.

The dubious status of Storm's poetry is related to the quality of his emotional life. The clue to Elise's claim that art expresses the "only really impersonal thing in the world" is to be found a few pages earlier. Storm is arguing with Karmakoff about the latter's revolutionary politics, and the conversation turns towards the notion of personality, in which Storm seems still to believe:

> Karmakoff positively stared at him. 'Personal?' he said. 'You don't mean to say you still think - wait a little. Wait a little. You evidently have never been in love.'
> 'What are you talking about?' asked Richard, almost petulantly.
> The man laughed aloud. 'I'm talking about the utter impersonality of the most devastating force in the universe!'[69]

Impersonality is thus, from a modernist and revolutionary

perspective, the essence of both love and art. Karmakoff's suspicion that Storm has never been in love is not contradicted by anything that the reader has seen in his relationships with Nelly or Elise. One of the causes of his "love" of Nelly is that "[s]he looked the very incarnation of English girlhood, some idyllic blending of earthiness and innocence". [70] Storm is able to extract personality from impersonality, and it is hard to judge from the style whether Powys is merely conveying or actively endorsing Storm's attitude to his wife:

> In loving Nelly he was loving the trees, the hedges, the lanes, the meadows, and the thyme-scented grass. In embracing Nelly he was embracing the very body of the sweet earth which, just then, was so luxuriously responsive. [71]

The unfortunate Nelly has a choice between Storm and Canyot, a reactionary, xenophobic painter, to whom she is engaged at the novel's opening. His attitude to love is also rather destructively self-aware, that what he doesn't possess he can paint; if Nelly marries Storm instead " 'it'll be part of what I have to put into my paint box' " [72] And if she marries Canyot after all, part of her will still be in his paint box, as "'my painting draws its life from every single thing which destiny takes away from me'" [73], and he will never possess her "soul". This "soul" is the ultimate personality of her being: "'the thing in you which says "I am I" isn't Nelly at all. It isn't even a girl. It isn't even a human being.' " [74] To understand better this notion of personality it is helpful to look at The Complex Vision; in a chapter called "The Reality of the

Soul in Relation to Modern Thought" (as mainly represented by Bergson and James), Powys writes about love, soul and personality:

> The emotion of love abstracted from personality is not the secret of the universe, because personality in its concrete living activity is the secret of the universe. It is this very abstraction of love,isolated from any person who loves...that has done so much to undermine religious thought, just as that other absolute of "pure being" has done so much to undermine philosophic thought. ...
>
> Strictly speaking it is not true to say that the ultimate secret of the universe is the emotion of love. The emotion of love, just because it is an emotion, is the emotion of a personality. It is personality, not the emotion of love, which is the secret of the universe....[75]

Before we start saying that Elise is not quite right "strictly speaking", or that Canyot is closer to the mark, we must remember that Powys himself was not in full agreement with what he had written in The Complex Vision. The interest of this lies in the evidence that Powys was interested in this metaphysical notion of personality, and that he might not yet have made up his mind; concepts of personality are of course central to the shaping of fiction, from Tristram Shandy onwards. When Powys finally achieves the disintegration of fictional character, in A Glastonbury Romance, it is one of the great innovations in the history of the novel. One can only say of After My Fashion that the theory is being defined, but has not yet been put in practice.

An aspect of After My Fashion which Powys tries to integrate into the aesthetic and moral arguments is religion, the spiritual and the psychic. The Reverend John Moreton,

unlikely father of such a dull girl as Nelly, is the most sharply drawn and impressive of all Powys' strange clergy, at least before T. E. Valley. Moreton is an Anglican vicar who as a thinker would seem more at home in a Dostoievsky novel:

> 'there are two entirely separate conceptions - the conception of God round which have gathered all the tyrannies, superstitions, persecutions, cruelties, wars, which have wounded the world; and the conception of Christ round which has gathered all the pity and sympathy and healing and freedom which has saved the world.' [76]

What partially saves Moreton from being yet another Dostoievsky character in early twentieth-century English fiction is that he is not an abstract thinker but an amateur biologist. Parallel to the link sought by Storm between landscape and poetry is the continuity displayed between Moreton's natural studies and his ideas:

> 'What I've told you, young man, I've learnt from beetles and mosses...from newts and slow-worms. It is not a poetical fancy with me.' [77]

Unpredictably, and refreshingly, Storm holds conservative religious views and is sympathetic to Catholicism; he tells Canyot, who thinks all modern French poets are immoral, " 'not all my authors have the weaknesses you speak of. Two very interesting ones are priests.' "[78] Storm argues fiercely against Moreton's heresies, in language reminiscent of Taxater:

> 'You will hardly deny...that our Lord himself believed in what we usually mean when we use the expression God?'
>
> The Reverend John Moreton stared down at his visitor with a look of infinite contempt.
>
> 'The Christ I celebrate in the sacrament,' he said, "has nothing to do with ignorant

> repetitions of badly reported misunderstandings. The few great authentic logia which I adhere to make no mention of the Eidolon Vulgaris of which you speak!'
>
> Richard had really lost his temper now. 'You are a very good example, sir,' he flung out, 'of what happens when a Church separates itself from the traditions of Christendom!'
>
> 'It is reason, it is science, it is common sense!' roared the old man. 'It is a confounded exhibition of obstinate private judgement!' shouted the writer back to him.[79]

We would like to hear more of the Catholic tendencies of the "[h]alf-atheist, half-superstitious" Storm;[80] his work in New York as a literary reviewer for Catholic journals does not elucidate his beliefs or his spiritual motivation.

Related to religion in Powys' fiction is the psychic, and in After My Fashion there are deliberate attempts to confuse the omniscient narrator with the possessor of psychic powers. Of Storm, Canyot, and Nelly, all in separate places at the same time, Powys writes:

> armed
> An aeroplane traveller/with a good telescope would have been able to observe...three separate groups of human beings linked together by thoughtwaves but completely ignorant of each other's movements....
>
> What he would not have seen - unless he had been a god himself - were those quivering invisible magnetic waves, which it is difficult not to believe must pass backwards and forwards, fast as thought itself, between persons who are linked together by some impending dramatic crisis.[81]

Powys is playing about with the conventions of fiction and with the language to be found in reports of psychic phenomena. This is potentially very close to the more playful (or, as some say, ludic) experiments of modernist fiction. But in a writer without irony, and with much uncertainty of tone, these experiments go amiss. The

language in which Powys describes the death of Moreton is similar to that in which he describes the death of the Reverend William Crow, in the first chapter of A Glastonbury Romance;[82] for both men the question of annihilation, and the sensation of annihilation, is crucial. Powys has far greater success in the later book, because by then he has a more sure mastery of tone.[83] This tone, peculiarly Powys' own, might be called the "sceptical absurd"; in Moreton's death it takes this form:

> What did actually go on under that high forehead and behind that elegantly poised head no human being will ever know.[84]

The same tone, with far greater control and sophistication, is used by Powys to describe each of the three main deaths in A Glastonbury Romance, those of William Crow, Tom Barter, and Geard.[85] Powys' scepticism is a brave inversion of the normal modern meaning of the word; usually it is a challenge to belief in the name of knowledge, but with Powys it is a challenge to knowledge and disbelief in the name of imagination.

The death of Moreton, while providing an example of this scepticism, marks the end of the book's engagement with theological controversy and religious intensity. It is also the end of Powys' attempt to integrate Storm's poetry with the Sussex landscape, and to explore the emotional problems of the characters in that setting. With an abandon that makes the shift from London to Rodmoor look almost plausible, Powys takes Storm, Canyot and Nelly to New York. The attempted excuse, Canyot's artistic needs,

is bogglingly inept:

> 'If you and your wife don't come with me on this American trip my work will stop dead....Without seeing her I can't do my work....So you see you must come with me, Storm.'[86]

Without Nelly Canyot would have all the more in his paint box, but there is not much point in being consistent in details.

The description of America is the greatest disappointment in After My Fashion. These hundred pages represent the entirety of Powys' fiction with an American setting,[87] and one need not have visited America to have written them, any more than the creation of Dangelis depends on an acquaintance with Americans, or Kafka's America depends on leaving Europe.

> Like some great wedge of iron this tremendous new world bored its way through the thick sensuousness of his nature and laid his deeper instincts bare....There were no lovely fields or leafy lanes here in Manhattan; as he trod its hot pavements and passed down its echoing canyons of iron and stone he was compelled to fall back upon his own soul....[88]

Powys often uses the technique of description by absence and contrast, this time followed by a good, authoritative touch, a moralising cadence reminiscent of Hardy:

> There were no fields or lanes in Manhattan where he could recover his spirit by drawing upon the deep earth forces. All about him were iron girders amd iron cog wheels and iron spikes. All about him were the iron foreheads of such as partook of the nature of the machinery whose slaves they were. And the iron that entered his soul found no force that could resist it; for all the days of his life he had been an epicurean: when the hour called for stoicism he could only answer with a dogged

despair.[89]

This fails even as a European stereotype of New York, linguistically marred by the crass phrase "the nature of the machinery". There are, furthermore, two stereotypes of New York held by outsiders, the inhumanly mechanical and the humanly exuberant, and Powys is unable to choose between them. Storm, in an unexplained moment of illumination, leaps the abyss from one cliché to the other:

> As he swung down Varick Street brandishing his stick - a stick bought under the shadow of Selshurst Cathedral - he actually exulted in all the sights around him. He exulted in the rawness of the iron frameworks, in the great torn-out gaps, like bleeding flesh, that were being laid bare in the sides of the old Dutch houses, in the subterranean thunder and the whirling puffs of air and dust that came up through the subway's gratings. He exulted in the huge grotesqueness of the gigantic advertisements, in the yells of the truck drivers, in the flapping clothes lines, in the piled-up garbage, in the hideous tenements and vociferous children. He suddenly became aware that in all this reckless, gay, aggressive crowd, there was an immense outpouring of youthful energy, an unconquerable vitality, a ferocious joyousness and daring.[90]

The language here has a certain mimetic energy, but no precision, no detail to distinguish Varick Street from hundreds of others. Powys wrote far more interestingly about America in the Autobiography, and in an excellent essay of 1935, "Farewell to America".[91] Even the Greenwich Village setting of the short story, "The Owl, the Duck, and - Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!", has a conviction in its oddity that Powys' grand statements about American life do not hold.

In After My Fashion the best descriptions of America

are either those least specifically American, or those rendered with the greatest subjectivity. Storm and Karmakoff have an argument on the shore of the Hudson, but such specification is not necessary; the sea and the tidal reaches of rivers evoke from Powys some of his best prose, whichever side of the Atlantic he is describing:

> At their feet the tide was rolling in from the Atlantic, dark and swift and stormy; an evil-looking volume of formidable water, out of whose blackness arose gurglings and whisperings, capricious splashings and strange indrawn sucking gasps, like the swallowings of an indescribable monster.[92]

The best descriptive writing of all is devoted to Atlantic City, which some of the main characters visit in the autumn. (Powys had spent a week's holiday there with his sister Marian in October of 1917.)[93] Seaside resorts out of season have an extraordinary imaginative appeal (as at the end of Death in Venice, or the beginning of The French Lieutenant's Woman); typically, Powys tries not only to convey that appeal but, aesthetically self-conscious, to explain it too:

> Where Richard and Elise were now walking, the noises of traffic and entertainment had ceased; the high bare boards had a look quite peculiar to themselves and different from any other inanimate objects in the world.
>
> They were curiously melancholy, these projections of woodwork, but not melancholy in the manner in which most new human erections are depressing and sad when contrasted with so old a thing as the sea: they were full of peculiar loneliness and desolation of their own - and one not devoid of an appeal to the imagination - but it was a desolation quite different from that produced by deserts or moors or marshes. It was a negative desolation, wherein the mere absence of humanity in a place obviously built for humanity evoked something peculiarly forlorn.[94]

Only the famous board-walk, and that is not intrusive, makes this distinct from Weymouth.

An excellent passage of description rendered subjectively is Nelly's response to Pennsylvania Station; of course, the Powys-protagonist cannot respond "subjectively" for he is not adequately distanced from the author. The naive Nelly is innocent of stereotype expectations and cultural reference:

> Walking down the stately arcade of the grandest of all railway stations, she paused at the top of the great flight of granite steps leading into the enormous concourse.
>
> She was impressed, even in the midst of her agitated thoughts, by the superb magnificence of that imperial architecture. The feelings that passed through her must have resembled those of some unhappy Celtic captive, conveyed with her unborn child into the forum of the classical city. In spite of herself she was conscious of a sort of exultation as she looked at these huge columns and embossed roof. Something in the tremendousness of that weight of primitive stone, measured and carved in such grand outlines, lifted herself above herself and beyond herself. Here at any rate was a beauty and nobility that had something in common with her Sussex Downs.[95]

That comparison is an implicit criticism of Storm's dreary inability to see anything but contrast between New York and the English countryside, and it asks us to think again about Powys' own limitations. Was his description of the walk down Varick Street meant to be Storm's view, which,through a mismanagement of tone, is received by the reader as the author's? If so, the poor description of America should be taken as a device to expose the poverty of Storm's imagination, with which we must exempt Powys' imagination of complicity. Such a reading, and such a defence, is

tempting, but subtle apologists should not be relied upon; that way it gets too ludic altogether. With Nelly there are not the same confusions. One notices in the above passage that Powys says that her feelings "must have" resembled those of the Celtic captive; with the Powys-protagonist such words are unnecessary, for communication with the author is instantaneous. One notices also that the sentence does not go: "She must have felt like some unhappy Celtic captive", for that might suggest that Nelly was comparing herself to the captive. Of Storm in that identical situation Powys would have written: "He felt like some unhappy Celtic captive". The reader would be unable to disentangle Storm's thoughts from Powys' , and the simile from its subject; only in the sentence as written does the Celtic captive stand out, independent of Nelly and of the author, valid in the reader's imagination. Powys is much better with minor characters, and in later novels he learns how to use the Powys-figure as a mere catalyst, almost to be dispensed with when the book has got started - John Crow and Magnus Muir serve this function. And when the Powys-figure remains the protagonist, as with Wolf Solent, Powys has learnt how to control and keep distinct the two imaginations.

Another characteristic problem of Powys', exemplified in <u>After My Fashion</u>, is his sense of contemporaneity. His apprehension of history in landscape, his understanding of myth and tradition, his awareness of a past both archaeological and "Saturnian", are among Powys' great qualities.

But the present itself is hard to define, hard to separate out, being in what one might term a condition of "chronistic levitation"; for Powys reality is a palimpsest, and a palimpsest is anachronistic. The price of being able to cope imaginatively with the Grail is an inability to grasp changes on a shorter time-scale, especially of a technological level. It is no imaginatively stimulating and enriching palimpsest to have aeroplanes co-existing with candles, in the absence of electricity, in Glastonbury. This weakness is compounded in a condition of exile, when Powys in America, in 1920, is imagining the England of his childhood, and he is nearly fifty. The confusion in Powys' mind is epitomised in a single sentence in the typescript of After My Fashion: "The electric light was not turned down ..."[96] A helpful editor has corrected "down" to "out".

One might have hoped that in writing about America - which he had not known before 1905 - and about England when in situ, Powys could have achieved a measure of exactitude and present immediacy. For how little could the friendship of Dreiser count? An American Tragedy was being written at the same time that Powys was making his attempt to evoke America; in After My Fashion there is only one sentence which dates the book to a particular epoch in American history:

> The weeks and months dragged on and the innumerable circles of people in that cosmopolitan city began in their various ways to prepare to celebrate the far-off event which for a minority meant the birthday of a God, while for the majority it signified parties and presents and desperate attempts to defy Prohibition.[97]

Having become law in January 1920, the Eighteenth Amendment was highly topical at the time Powys was writing. Although it was not until 1924 that Powys himself managed to defy Prohibition,[98] he took an anti-establishment public stance on many issues of the day. Powys contributed a poem to a volume championing the socialist leader, Eugene Debs, and protesting against his imprisonment in 1920.[99] Owing to his long-standing support of Sacco and Vanzetti, whose notorious trial lasted from 1920 to 1927, Powys was invited to give a speech at a memorial service in Boston, shortly after the executions in August 1927.[100] One of Powys' friends was the lawyer, Clarence Darrow, described by Powys in terms that point an affinity, "this champion of all Dogs with a Bad Name".[101] Perhaps the most noble and distinguished of all Powys' involvments in political and judicial affairs was his defence of Joyce's Ulysses, in February 1921.[102] Altogether, apart from his writings, Powys played an honourable and active part in a society which was not notably appreciative of such virtues. His daily life would have been a creative privilege for another novelist, but there was no easy access from daily life to Powys' imagination.

Another large disappointment is that Powys' imagination seems to have been incapable of utilising his friendship with Isadora Duncan; Elise Angel is a very poor tribute to her "love and inspiration". All the evidence implies that the relationship between Powys and Isadora was chaste: "I am not in love with her, but it has been one of the chief

felicities of my life to have known her", he wrote to Llewelyn.[103] Storm is enslaved by disabling infatuation, and is explicitly Elise's lover; Elise is presented as a heartless professional. An extraordinary individual has been reduced to a stereotype. Great artists are unmanageable as characters in minor novels, and Powys tries to separate the artist from the character. The one passage in which her dancing is described is, of its kind, magnificent, possibly one of the best evocations in words of Duncan's art. But it has little to do with Elise Angel, whose name is significantly absent:

> At last she appeared, with the familiar background of plain black curtains; and out of infinite depths of obscure suffering his spirit rose up, healed and refreshed, to greet her.
> She danced to some great classical rhapsody, tragic, passionate, world-destroying, world-creating; and the harmonies of the dead musician lived a life greater, more formidable, more liberating, than humanity could have dared to dream they contained. Her arms, her limbs, were bare; her nobly modelled breasts, under some light fabric, outined themselves as the breasts of some Phidian divinity.
> Once more, as if all between this moment and when he had last seen her were a dark and troubled dream, she lifted for him the veil of Isis. In the power of her austere and olympian art, all the superficial impressions that had dominated him through that long summer dissolved like a cloud of vapour.
> This was what he had been aiming at in his own blundering way; this was what he was born to understand! The softness of ancient lawns under immemorial trees, the passion of great winds in lonely places, the washing of sea tides under melancholy harbour walls, the retreats of beaten armies, the uprising of the multitudinous oppressed, the thunder of the wings of destroying angels, the 'still small voice' of the creative spirit brooding upon the foundations of new worlds - all these things rose up upon him as he watched her, all these things were in the gestures of her outspread arms, in the leap and the fall and the

> monumental balance of her divine white limbs.
>
> Her physical beauty was the mere mask of the terrible power within her. Her spirit seemed to tear and rend at her beauty and mould it with a recreating fire into a sorrow, into a pity, into a passion, that flew quivering and exultant over all the years of man's tragic wayfaring.
>
> But her dancing was not the wild lyrical outburst of an emotion that spurned restraint. Beneath every movement, every gesture, binding the whole thing together and realizing the cry of the beginning in the finality of the silence of the close, there was the stern intellectual purpose of a mind that was consciously, deliberately, building a bridge from infinite to infinite, from mystery to mystery.[104]

This passage is an admission that Powys is a lesser artist than Duncan, that he lacks the "stern intellectual purpose"; it appears to pay tribute through humiliation. Yet, stylistically, the prose is not a failure because, for once, the influence of Pater actually works as a control instead of as a temptation.

The contrast between this and the sordid trivial exchanges between Elise and Storm is barely convincing. After the performance the two meet for the first time since Paris, and it is in this episode that the novel approaches most closely the mood of the title:

> He let her lips be the first to seek his lips, and the fact that it <u>did</u> happen in that way seemed, to his half-extinguished loyalty, justification enough.[105]

Dowson's faithfulness has much to do with lips, "betwixt her lips and mine", "between the kisses and the wine", "the kisses of her bought red mouth", "hungry for the lips of my desire". The depiction of Elise Angel suffers from a confusion of styles, a conflict between the decadence of the eighteen-nineties and the vigorous new art associated with

the Russian revolution. Although in recent years it has become conventional to see the origins of modernism in decadence, symbolism, and other movements of the eighteen-nineties, Powys does not describe any development. Isadora Duncan is an important link, austere and dissolute, devoted to art and politically involved; her personality, and what she represents, illuminates the impurities of modernism, but Powys was not a cultural historian. Elise Angel is at her best a confusion without explanation, at worst a stereotype without interest.

The rest of the novel shows Storm's rejection of his discovery, during Elise's performance, that she has achieved, artistically, everything for which he has been striving. The argument about aesthetics, between Storm and Elise, takes place after the performance, indicating his rejection of what he then felt; he has been unable to make the move from the old avant-garde of Paris to the new avant-garde of New York. This may be a deliberate reflection of Powys' own difficulties, of one surrounded by modernism and artistically, stylistically, unable or unwilling to participate.

Storm's aesthetic quest ends in failure, his only creation being an abandoned son; as with Adrian and Rook, a distant, removed son is a symbol of a highly ambivalent creative fulfilment. While Canyot has achieved a "noticeable originality" within a tradition, as Storm admits very early on,[106] the latter has equivocated and fulfilled none of his literary aims. As, aesthetically, Storm falls

between the traditionalists and the avant-garde, so in his emotional quest he loses both Elise and Nelly. He achieves authenticity at his death, "the moment most unalloyed by critical self-consciousness,"[107] in a grotesque parody of goodness, saving a sheep. While we must believe the author, we cannot help suspecting that Powys' consciousness was alloyed by the image of the Good Shepherd, prepared to die for one of his flock. Powys cannot make this explicit, because there is too much confusion between his consciousness and Storm's. For an artistically successful ending the author must not sink with the character. The arch and self-mocking mention of "that moment which, in human speech, it is the custom to refer to as his last"[108] is not enough to keep a human narrator afloat. Sharing in Storm's defeat is the result of an inadequate style, without distancing or distinction. In treating Wolf Solent Powys has the needed style, which he uses to mocking, mastering effect.

Before Powys wrote his first mature novel, he wrote a fourth minor work of fiction. The outcome of After My Fashion is the triumph of Canyot and the defeat of one who tried to be avant-garde and wavered. Powys wavered also, and could not commit himself to the subject of New York and Elise Angel. That story and setting is trapped within the Sussex and Nelly novel. Storm's humiliating return to England is Powys' also, in the setting of his next novel. In After My Fashion Powys does not have the courage to take the risks implicit in the plot; with one foot in Sussex

and the other in New York the author seems less colossal than indecisive. Ducdame, the most conventional and least venturous of all Powys' novels, is a monument to Canyot.

CHAPTER V

POWYS AS DRAMATIST

Among the earliest surviving manuscripts of Powys', dating from the eighteen-nineties, are a number of plays. Dialogues might, however, be a more appropriate word, as there is little sense of dramatic structure or theatrical intention. "With Love Away", dated 1894, a tedious medieval romance involving Count Ravelstein and Ermintrude, runs to 230 pages in manuscript. "The Goat and Boy", the title referring to the Sussex pub which is its setting, alternates between a play and a novel. A third play, untitled and referred to as "The Entermores", is 154 pages long and uncompleted, action being minimal.[1]

The two latter plays do sometimes reveal a freshness and vitality of dialogue that one hardly expects from Powys, and yet which is absolutely characteristic of the eighteen-nineties. Hardy mixed with Shaw produces this:

> Simon Stonebrook: Tis a pity, cordin' to me, that ever that young man was born.
>
> Ben Pod: Keep your bloomin' Mathoosinism to yerself.[2]

Part of "The Entermores", an argument between Theophilus Grave and Florian Fay, owes much to Shaw and Wilde (Mrs. Warren's Profession is alluded to), and looks forward to Baltazar Stork:

> Florian Fay: Don't speak of anything so commonplace. Altruism is the most odious of vulgarities. It always makes me think of Mr. Herbert Spencer and after-

noon tea.[3]

The conversation later turns to religion:

> Florian Fay: When will you stop using these silly words true and false? Things are either agreeable or disagreeable - I think Catholicism is agreeable.

That Powys should also have written, at the same time, "With Love Away", thick with symbols and Gothic longings, and much atrocious, unpublished poetry, signifies more than an eclectism of styles. Powys did not escape the aesthetic problems of the decade, and availed himself of the solutions offered by both Shaw and Dowson, Wilde and Lionel Johnson, confrontation through satire and escape through symbolism. Although Powys himself never resolved this dilemma, some strands in his achievement can be traced back to his "muddling through" of the eighteen-nineties; in some ways After My Fashion is a belated testament to the problems of that decade.

In 1905 we find Powys' first mention of writing a play for performance:

> I have not been idle - the play is nearly ready and the first scene is going to be typed by a lady in London. There is a chance that it may be acted by amateurs in a County Council Theatre.[4]

Nothing further is known about this play, or about Powys' interest in drama until 1911. He then wrote from Chicago, home of Maurice Browne's Little Theatre, an enthusiastic letter to Louis Wilkinson:

> Maurice Browne and I think it would be a fine scheme if we gave up next October [1912] to acting over here....The idea is that you & I

and Maurice each write a play for six persons - three men and three Girls -

One girl to be Maurice's Fiancée Nelly Van Volkenburgh...Another to be my Mrs. ——— of Pittsburg...and the third to be...selected by yourself in England or America....

Each play running two days, you see, in each place; which would make up the six days of the week everywhere. Three plays spread out over six days - and six performers. If anyone wanted special dresses, scenery or supers, they would have to pay for them themselves. Ordinarily we assume the plays to be modern ones and the scenery mere plain 'drapery' or nothing at all. The acting must create the illusion itself....

I myself would be ready to lose a little money...for the fun of the thing, and to satisfy my love of acting.

Besides the stimulus to write a play!...we ought to hurry up and begin so as to see if we can write possible plays with the limitation of six persons.

Of course the author would in each case despotically allot the cast. What a chance! What lovely situations! I shall certainly have a girl dressed up as a boy and all sorts of things - Only Maurice says a majority vote must suppress anything dangerous!

Well - my dear - what do you think? How much more thrilling, dignified and exciting than this blasted eternal lecturing! Perhaps it will really be the beginning of the formation of a lovely dramatic company of author-players....Think of having to set the casts for the chorus! Think of the selection of shoes and stockings!...and you know as far as acting goes everyone says I am the very devil....

Well - what do you say? I die to start writing. I have thought of a masterpiece - what little gestures! what wicked situations! I know what you shall be in my play! Ho! Ho! Ho![5]

If the mere idea gave Powys such kinky thrills (selecting shoes and stockings as ritual in Powys' ankle-worship)[6] and inspired such an immature effusion as this letter, we can be neither very disappointed nor surprised that Wilkinson did not join the scheme; it was soon abandoned.

Wilkinson points out that, apart from his unwillingness,

the project had a good chance of success; Browne was already showing his great flair as a producer and theatre manager.[7] His Little Theatre played a part in the Chicago "Renaissance", along with the magazines, The Dial, Little Review, and Harriet Monroe's Poetry.[8] Powys contributed to all of these magazines, but never had a play accepted by the Little Theatre. Maurice Browne was a close friend, and was to write of Powys that "no man has influenced me more deeply";[9] Powys wrote that Browne was "like a cousin to me".[10] Neither was disappointed by the failure of the project involving Wilkinson, and in 1913 Powys was trying hard to get a play taken by Browne's increasingly successful theatre:

> I am now trying my hand at play-writing. I rather think I may hit the right vein here eventually. I have written one play which has certain faults; and I am off on another....I have been watching their rehearsals at the Little Theatre and I see the kind of thing they want....But plays are what interest me just at this moment. If only I could manage anything in that line that would be the best escape from lecturing, because plays pay so well.[11]

The next day Browne rejected the play, and two days later Powys wrote to Frances Gregg:

> That demon Maurice has turned down my play as it was and makes me revise & revise - and I know he won't take it after all.[12]

A few days later Powys repeats this to Llewelyn, adding: "But I love Maurice".[13] Powys persisted in his revisions and on 8 December 1913,[14] he read the play to Browne and his wife, Nelly Van Volkenburg, again without success:

> Do you know I like my play - although Maurice doesn't. I shall try it elsewhere. It is, I find - but I didn't know him when I wrote it

> - rather in the style of Tchekhof...[15]

Unfortunately, neither the title nor the subject nor the fate of this play is known.

Just over a year later, in January 1915, Powys' play Mandragora was rejected by Browne, as Powys predicted even before Browne had seen it.[16] In the Little Review of March 1915, Powys published an enthusiastic essay, "Maurice Browne and the Little Theatre". Powys may have wished to flatter, but he lacked a sense of cunning purpose; nor would he allow professional irritations to interfere with enthusiasms. This essay contains an interesting passage on poetic drama and the religious function of theatre, for understanding which Browne is applauded:

> Putting aside Wagner and Strauss and half-a-dozen Latin Opera-Makers, what has our stage got which really answers to the religious exigency of which I am speaking?...Hyperborean morbidities technically adjusted to bourgeois drawing-rooms with snow-avalanches muttering at the window, are indeed enough to make unlaid troublesome ghosts of the great psychological names of Ibsen and Strindberg. But psychology...is, after all, only a transitory analysis of ephemeral situations. It does not spring from what, in the relations between Man and Woman, is eternal and unchangeable. It does not turn into dramatic poetry the long cry of our common fate. The pathological "macrabrism" [sic] of Ibsen and Strindberg dissolves like mephitic scum when the eternal constellations, under which Job and David and Sophocles wrote, mount up through the deep hushed air....The great work of the Little Theatre...is, as we all confess, the revival of Euripides.[17]

The oddity of Powys' views here lies in their inappropriateness, if not their contradiction, to his practice as a playwright. His 1913 play was like Chekhov, his dramatisation of The Idiot retains more of Dostoievsky's

psychology than his metaphysics, and Paddock Calls is firmly imitative of Ibsen, Strindberg and Chekhov. In neither of these plays is the influence of the Greeks apparent, except for the unities of time and place observed in Paddock Calls.

Powys' novels, however, aspire in many respects to Browne's theatre. It is precisely his realisation of the inadequacy of psychology, its existence as a temporary phenomenon, that singles him out from the novelists of the nineteen-twenties and -thirties. Although, to the best of knowledge, only one of Powys' plays has ever been performed, and none has been published, they absorbed much of his attention. Both in themselves and in their effect on Powys as a novelist The Idiot and Paddock Calls need to be examined - and, indeed, to be published, read and performed.

CHAPTER VI

DOSTOIEVSKY AND THE IDIOT

The origins of Powys' dramatisation of The Idiot are hard to determine. The play was completed by January 1920,[1] at the latest, and we know that Powys was immersed in reading Dostoievsky in January 1918.[2] It would seem likely that the dramatisation was written within those two years. However, as early as December 1913, in the same letter as that in which he talks of reading his revised play to Maurice Browne, he writes to Llewelyn:

> The Idiot! Yes, I have just gone and got an edition over here. It is impossible to read him too often, but I envy you horribly reading this for the first time.[3]

As he had read The Idiot before, the edition that he had just acquired was presumably Constance Garnett's translation, first published in 1913. This, as we will see, was the translation used by Powys for the dramatisation.

It was only a few years before 1913 that Powys first read Dostoievsky at all. In the 1955 Introduction to Visions and Revisions Powys writes:

> The most teasing mischance, as far as exciting encounters go, in my whole life was the fact that, while a University Extension lecturer in Dresden, it was my misfortune never to have read one single word of Dostoievsky, whether in English or French. So that, though I could easily have obtained an official introduction to this patron of his - for Royalty came to my lectures - I was totally unaware that the Russian Ambassador to the Saxon Court at that very time was none other than the Baron Vrangel himself, who was Dostoievsky's earliest and most loyal and lasting personal patron.[4]

There is confusion here as Powys first visited Dresden in May 1908,[5] yet his source of information on Vrangel, clearly Carr's biography, states that Vrangel retired from Dresden in 1906.[6] Despite inaccuracy, Powys' memory can be trusted to the extent that at the time of one of his visits to Dresden he had not read Dostoievsky. In his notebook, 'Burpham Journal 1909',[7] there are notes for lectures on Shakespeare; these contain many allusions to recent European authors, notably to Dostoievsky, Tolstoy, and Ibsen. A specific comparison, now a commonplace, between Macbeth and Raskolnikov, is made by Powys, with a concession that "Raskolnikov has been influenced by intellectual speculations of a sort altogether out-of-reach of the simple-natured Macbeth".[8]

The novel and the date are both confirmed by Powys' recollection, in the Autobiography of 1934, that he first read Dostoievsky when sailing to America, in Llewelyn's company:

> It was on this trip, which must have been about my tenth crossing, that I made my first acquaintance with Dostoievsky. I can see now that old tattered second-hand edition of Vizetelly's translation of Crime and Punishment....[9]

The only time when John and Llewelyn sailed together to America was in 1908, when they left Liverpool on December 19.[10] He had been in Dresden in May 1908, so Powys' memory and contemporary documentation all confirm that Powys first read Dostoievsky in December 1908.[11]

It is important that this date should be established, for Dostoievsky was to be perhaps the greatest of all

influences on Powys, both as a novelist and as a thinker. Recalling his first reading of Crime and Punishment, in mid-Atlantic, Powys continues:

> Under the title of the book the publisher had added the descriptive words, "a realistic novel," presumably to give the reader an idea of something out of the ordinary. But it was not for its "realism" that I knew my Master the moment I got into this work. It was for the extreme opposite of "realism." It was for the overpowering intimation that you do not have to go outside the mind in order to find God and the Devil. [12]

From then on Powys placed himself in the shadow of Dostoievsky. He read new translations and books on Dostoievsky as they were published, [13] and he lectured on him an incalculable number of times. It was in 1910, with this new influence strongly felt and expressed, that Powys started lecturing under the management of Arnold Shaw. He explained then, to Shaw, Louis Wilkinson and others, his ideas about lecturing:

> "Lecturing has come to mean something portentous - pompous - a trifle absurd....So don't think of yourself as a lecturer. You must go from place to place to spread your gospel. Set them on fire with it. Say what you think, say what's really important to you. Convert them. Then it won't be dull to them or to you." [14]

The earliest documented, though probably not the first, lecture on Dostoievsky by Powys was in December 1913:

> Tonight here, I'm going to wither, blight, freeze, devastate and bewilder the souls of some 500 double-dyeds, with a kind of mock-serious, pseudo-wistful Apologia. I'll larn them not to like the Brothers Karamazov! [15]

The residents of Youngstown,Ohio, might have been shocked, but not bored. Powys later wrote: "Whenever I got the chance

I felt it was 'laid upon me' to lecture on Dostoievsky."[16] Constance Garnett's translations of Dostoievsky were published between 1912 and 1920, and it was in those years that he gained a large readership in English-speaking countries. Powys' lectures took place and had an active part in what Helen Muchnic called "The Dosto evsky Cult;"[17] Randolph Bourne commented shrewdly that the enthusiasm was partly created by the gradual but regular appearances of the novels, which he compared with the serial publication of a Dickens novel and the sense of mass-involvement which that achieved.[18] As a lecturer Powys participated in the suspense and the momentum. Of all his lectures, which must number a few thousand,[19] none was recorded, but at two of them, in 1915, notes were taken and printed in the Little Review. One of these is on Dostoievsky, and the notes convey Powys' evangelical manner:

> Shudders of life...
> I have only one thing to do - to bring you into a strange mass of palpable darkness with something moving in it. Dosto evsky is really a great mass, a volume, not a cloud or a pillar of fire nor a puff of smoke, but a vast, formless, shapeless mass of darkness, palpable and drawing you towards itself.
> Reading him is dangerous...[20]

As Helen Muchnic has shown,[21] this sort of verbiage was characteristic of the period, when there was an informal competition to be the St. Paul of the "Fifth Gospel", as Powys called Dostoievsky;[22] the intention was not to show understanding or acuity, but to lay bare the passionate intensity of one's response, witnessing to the quality of one's own soul. Powys continues:

In Dostoevsky we suddenly realise that these Russians are ourselves. If the religion, mysticism, liberalism, despotism they possess were only Russian there are excellent books written by travellers in Russia for us to read. But Dostoevsky is different. If I could but mesmerize you...It is like reading the gospels in childhood, being overrun and overthrown by fate and then after one has lived meeting the words of the childhood situation and making associations.

I do not think of him as an artist, though he is a great one. You do not think of him...In ordinary life we suppress half the things and more that we might say. Vanity and fear are the ultimate things. In Dostoevsky people tug and scrape at one another's vain nerves with adder's poison. He gives one the sensation of discovering one's self and betraying one's self. He reveals as friends talking and discussing in the small hours of the morning reveal themselves to one another. The talk may be a describing of the animal functions of the human body. But in reality it is the psychic tingling, electric vibrations which the physiological structure exerts upon mind! Mind! Mind! Dostoevsky is interested in what people actually feel. He is more with people who have written diaries than with so-called realistic novelists. One gets from him a sense of perversion of human imagination...He is the most important of novelists....Dostoevsky I cannot put into words....[23]

That is no reason for Powys to stop speaking, and having, at length, compared Dostoievsky with Nietzsche he returns to the subject of the imagination:

> His special ty is imaginative reactions. All the lusts that have stretched their wailing arms, all the hopes, all the goblins...In sex as in everything else people are not what they are doing; they are in that vortex of what they imagine themselves. Dostoevsky understands all that.[24]

He concludes with an insistence that everyone should go away and read Dostoievsky immediately: "Constance Garnett's translations are masterpieces".

From the advertisement of Wood and Stone as

"Reminiscent of Dostoievsky"[25] his weight lies heavily on Powys' novels. The style, through Constance Garnett, the theme of the perversion of imagination, and the idea of the religious novelist, are recurrent. In the early novels the influence of Dostoievsky is a great burden, the shadow too deep, the sense of debt anxious to the point of servility. To absorb such influence properly, to take it within and then/to move on, still individual, with a new strength no longer borrowed but one's own, marks the attainment of literary maturity. Although one would insist that Wolf Solent is the first of Powys' mature works, one can see some years earlier deliberate attempts to work through and assimilate Dostoievsky.

Instead of writing yet another novel in attempted, futile rivalry, Powys created a work in which he was entirely the servant of Dostoievsky, prepared to sacrifice all originality and individuality out of respect for the great original. Of all Powys' works one might claim that the least characteristic, the most surprising, is his dramatisation of The Idiot. The most unexpected feature is that it is simply a dramatisation, without quirks or adornments or anything that would obviously identify the adapter. It is a thorough, competent job, and a most respectful tribute.

The obvious difficulties of the task encourage humility. Yet there had long been awareness of the dramatic possibilities, and Dostoievsky himself had contemplated dramatising an episode of The Brothers Karamazov.[26] There

was a French dramatisation of Crime and Punishment as early as 1888;[27] in 1905 dramatisations of Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov were produced in New York, starring Alla Nazimova, about whom Powys later wrote a bad poem.[28] Various dramatisations of these two novels are recorded in Britain and America from then on, but only one production of The Idiot, adapted and acted by Michael Hogan in 1926.[29] Powys saw some of these plays, writing in 1920:

> the French Theatre did The Brothers Karamazov in French with some success,though in my opinion they rounded off the thing in too neat and Gallic a manner. [30]

Powys may have attended a performance in order to learn things useful for his own dramatisation. Generally, despite his interest in writing plays, Powys seems to have visited the theatre very seldom. In 1934 he wrote, "I care very little for plays";[31] Phyllis Playter, who knew him well from 1922 onwards, never remembers Powys once going to see a play.[32]

In a critical essay on Dostoievsky, of 1915, Powys is conscious of the importance of "scene", without formulating a specific comparison with drama:

> certain scenes - the scene between Aglaia and Nastasya in "The Idiot;" the scene between Sonia and the mother and sister of Raskolnikoff...the scene in "The Possessed" where Liza leaves Stavrogin...brand themselves upon the mind as reaching the uttermost limit of devastating vision. [33]

"Scene" is laden with a range of meanings, for the characters are colloquially "making a scene", and the dramatist needs only to shape what they have made. In "making a

scene," both colloquially and by theatrical analogy, Dostoievsky and his characters are bound in fraught collaboration. Through dramatising, Powys may have hoped to learn as a novelist how to make a scene with his characters: the collaboration between the author and Geard in the Glastonbury pageant is one result.

Why Powys should have chosen to dramatise The Idiot is not certain. Crime and Punishment and Karamazov had already been adapted with some success; of the other two major novels it appears that nobody has been tempted to dramatise The Possessed. More positively, Powys felt some sense of identification with Myshkin: "I know that in certain subterranean motions of my spirit I am much more like the 'Idiot' of Dostoievsky than I am like [Dumas'] Cagliostro!" [34] He goes on to speak of "my amber-tinted drop of 'good-will' ...resembling what Dostoievsky's 'Idiot' displayed when he was least inspired".[35] Unintended confirmation of this identification comes from Louis Wilkinson's satirical description of "Jack Welsh" arriving in Chicago:

> He walked along the platform, head bowed, shoulders bent, carrying a suitcase in each hand, bearing his Cross....He could at least have got a porter...But it was all showing off. He couldn't do things like that, oh no, not he; much too ordinary, they were, much too undistinguished! He couldn't get a porter when he was being Jesus Christ.[36]

Much the same criticisms have been levelled against Myshkin, of spiritual self-indulgence, false innocence, "the curse of saintliness".[37] Hard-hearted critics tend to misunderstand Myshkin; it is interesting that the hostile Wilkinson should inflict , as a clinching accusation against Welsh,

the phrase "a pseudo-Dostoevski ".[38]

Critically, Powys regarded The Brothers Karamazov as Dostoievsky's greatest, and therefore "superior...to all the novels ever written",[39] while feeling, against "my own critical reason", that aspects of The Possessed move him more deeply, having "so direct, so startling, so pathological an appeal to me personally".[40] However, in the Dostoievsky essay in The Pleasures of Literature (1938), Powys regards Myshkin as a greater imaginative creation than Alyosha:

> Alyosha makes me think of Walter Pater's "Diapheneité" and of those strangely guileless and spiritually incorruptible figures of Raphael who look, in their inherent purity, so immune to all obsessions from the underworld of our nerves! The Idiot himself is quite different from this; and to me he always seems a much subtler and deeper creation.
>
> Quite as untouched by the wickedness round him as the other, he yet - as though his very physical infirmity and mental danger made his imaginative sympathy more clairvoyant - seems to be able to enter much further than Alyosha into the mystery of the evil he rejects.[41]

This perceptive and deep understanding of Myshkin's function and significance may also originate in a "pathological appeal" to Powys himself.

It was during the years of "the Dostoievsky Cult" that Powys experienced most difficulty with sadism, and with perversions of the imagination. More openly and more fully than anywhere else Powys discussed this major problem in an article written late in life, in 1952:

> In regard to "Wood and Stone", which I was actually writing before the 1914 war broke out and when both my parents were still alive, I recollect so well going through certain moral tensions...How far ought I...to allow myself

> vicariously to enjoy the wickedness of my wicked characters when they really are feeling genuine delight in genuine wickedness? I will only say here that neither in the case of "Wood and Stone" or "Rodmoor" did I decide that it was necessary to resist the temptation to enjoy vicariously....I mean only one thing. I mean cruelty....
>
> Now this prolonged and imaginative crisis in my novel-writing came to an end after I had written the first two of my novels....With"Wolf Solent" and "Ducdame" I entered upon a completely new fictional epoch in my attitude to literary descriptions of cruelty whether mental or physical. I do not mean that I avoided it as an element in life, but I avoided those peculiar and special aspects of it in which as a person, apart from authorship, I knew I might be tempted to derive pleasure.[42]

Although Powys does not mention Dostoievsky in this essay, he was exemplary during the crucial years. In the 1909 lecture notes on Macbeth, in which Raskolnikov is prominent, Powys wrote that the play treats "that most important question of modern ethics, namely the legitimacy of the terrible in a work of art, and at what point the horrible turns into the disgusting".[43] In his 1938 essay Powys deals directly with this matter in Dostoievsky, in defending him against Turgenev's charge of sadism:

> Turgeniev called him "sadist"; but that terrible word only proves how spiritually deep his insight into evil was. Dostoievsky never plays for its own sake, as certain modern writers do, upon that fatal nerve. His allusions to it are always allusions to the past, to a past repented of in the flame of the abyss. They are the confessions of lost souls, or of redeemed souls, never indulgences in a present excitement, never the gloating relish of a literary voyeur's lust.[44]

That last phrase pictures Powys as the reader of "'Pearl'... published by the Society of Vice",[45] the "person,apart from authorship" and apart from literary taste, who read widely in

"this unspeakable genre".[46]

Powys' attainment of maturity, in the years before 1929, was twofold, moral and stylistic. His attitude to sadism in fiction altered between Rodmoor and Ducdame; Powys noted with disquiet Aleister Crowley's enjoyment of Rodmoor: "It made me feel as if I had written one of those awful books such as I used once to buy - but never again".[47] That was in 1917, and Powys claimed that he had overcome his sadism entirely by 1922.[48] Stylistically, as well as morally, Ducdame is a negative achievement, lacking some of the vices of cruelty and imitation; only with Wolf Solent is something positive, worthy of comparison with Dostoievsky, achieved. Dostoievsky played a part in the resolution of both the moral and stylistic problems. Whether consciously willed or not, Powys' close involvement with Dostoievsky, as a servile adapter responsive only to another's psychological, moral and literary requirements, coincided with the mastery of his own sadism. In dramatising The Idiot Powys purged his imagination.

One of the most distinctive features of this dramatisation is its neutrality, the absence of anything idiosyncratically Powysian. As literature it is mediocre; on stage it might come to life, but the life would be in the "scenes" and the acting, not in the words. The neutrality is significant, telling of humble subordination to one respected as a greater writer and a morally stronger person.

The devotion, the daunting dedication involved in this task, is manifested by a detailed comparison between the novel,

in Constance Garnett's translation, and Powys' adaptation. We do not possess a "definitive version" of the dramatisation, for the typescript now in the Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge,[49] contains some redundant material, and does not tally, in cast or scene divisions, with the version performed in New York in the spring of 1922.[50] The "Churchill version" has a cast of eight men and six women, that performed has seven men and four women. The changes, tailoring the play to the resources of the company, were made, apparently without Powys' advice or approval, by Reginald Pole, who also produced the play and took the part of Myshkin. According to the programme the adaptation is the work of both Powys and Pole,[51] leading to a common misapprehension that it was a collaborative venture.[52] The typescript ascribes the adaptation entirely to Powys, and it is therefore safe to assume that the Churchill version is, of surviving evidence, the closest to what Powys wrote.[53]

The novel is reduced to four acts and fourteen characters, apart from "Beggars, policemen, and flower-sellers". The most violent simplifications are in the elimination of Lebedev, General Ivolgin and his son Kolya and daughter Varvara, their lodger Ferdyschtchenko, the entire circle of Rogozhin's followers, Burdovsky, Keller, Ippolit, Terentyev and Doctorenko, and of Aglaia's sisters, Alexandra and Adelaida; on being introduced to the Epanchin family Myshkin is told that Aglaia is "their only child".[54]

The play opens with the first word spoken in the novel,

Rogozhin speaking to Myshkin on the train: "Chilly?" The rest of the chapter is paraphrased in the first scene, essential information being crudely turned into dialogue. To add interest to the conversation Myshkin tells Rogozhin about the "glorious moment" at the onset of an epileptic fit; in the novel this is confined to Myshkin's memory and meditation, and is described much later on, in Part II, Chapter V.[55] Powys omits the conclusion of that passage: "I seem somehow to understand the extraordinary saying that there shall be no more time".[56] He may have realised that the novel's extraordinary enactment of eternity, the sensation of there being no more time, or no time at all, many of the main events taking place within twenty-four hours,[57] cannot be transferred to the stage, where other and looser conventions of chronology are observed. Powys shifts from the metaphysics of eternity to the morality of forgiveness:

> It's like eternity and I can forgive everything then. I seem to know what Christ meant then. And Dr Schneider thinks I should never have such moments if I had not been ill. So sometimes I feel as if my illness, even if it came back, were the price I have to pay for the secret of life....if more people knew the happiness which comes from forgiving everything, the horror of the world would stop.[58]

The dramatisation stresses the moral and the psychological at the expense of the spiritual and the metaphysical.

Act I, scene ii, set in the Epanchin house, is compounded of incidents from Part I, Chapters II to VII of the novel. The problems of dramatic characterisation are well illustrated in this scene; the Epanchin servant, once named in the novel as Alexey,[59] is here given the stereotype name,

Ivan,[60] and he has an important function telling Myshkin about Nastasya Filippovna and her complications. Ivan has a crude understanding of the situation ideally suited to the theatre:

> There's a rich landowner Afanasy who has proposed for Miss Aglaia; but he is entangled with a shameless hussy; Nastasya Filippovna is her name, and unless the General can marry her off there seems no way of making the match. Madame Epanchin anyway doesn't like it much - and the young lady herself - well! you know,prince, what young ladies are? They want it and they don't want it![61]

This is much more efficient than direct presentation, and there is much drama in confidential disclosures from a servant:

> what they're trying to do now - only you won't betray me will you, prince? - is to marry this Nastasya off to Gavril Ardalionovitch, the general's secretary.[62]

For those characters who appear without being talked about first, other problems appear. Powys' stage direction describes Ganya as "a very good-looking young man of about twenty eight. His smile, with all its affability, is a trifle too subtle".[63] This is a close paraphrase of his description in the novel,[64] and is of course over-specific for a play. General Epanchin has a somewhat vague and undefined function in the novel, which is not dramatically acceptable; in the stage direction, Powys adds information about him without specific warrant from the text: "A tall dignified rather pompous rather stupid gentleman of pleasant appearance".[65] The reduction of character to caricature is inevitably the result of dramatising a great novel; this at least demonstrates that a novel has an essential form,

despite Dostoievsky's disingenuous disclaimers of aesthetic intent. Both precision and vagueness of characterisation have to be evened out.

The matter of Part I, Chapter III, Ganya's relationship with Nastasya Filippovna, and Myshkin's knowledge of her, is efficiently condensed into four pages of Act I, scene ii.[66] Chapter IV is entirely excluded, being inseparable from Alexandra and Adelaida, and, with one brief, bridging speech invented by Powys for Madame Epanchin,[67] the scene continues with Chapter V. Myshkin tells Aglaia and her mother what he has been telling Ivan, about the execution in Switzerland. In the novel Aglaia's reaction to Myshkin is immensely complicated in its oscillations from sympathy to hostility, from contempt to veneration. Powys concentrates on her hostility. When Myshkin finishes a story, in the novel, Aglaia makes comments which are ambivalent, helpful or mocking, tender or acerbic: "But what did you tell that story for?"[68] and "As soon as you have finished telling us anything, you seem to be ashamed of what you've said".[69] Powys makes Aglaia's response to the story of the execution simply antagonistic: "Are you saying this to make us think you original?"[70] From this Powys passes over the whole of Chapter VI, the story of Marie, to Myshkin's praise of Aglaia:

> I think she is exceedingly beautiful. So beautiful that I am afraid to look at her.[71]

This is taken almost exactly from the novel,but whereas there it is Madame Epanchin who arrogantly persists: "Is

that all? What about her qualities?"[72] here it is Aglaia who asks "Is that all? Is that all you see in me, prince?"[73] Aglaia's wilful, spoilt nature is constantly emphasised by Powys, at the expense of her deeper, more attractive and fascinating qualities.

When Ganya asks Myshkin to convey his message to Aglaia, in an attempt to disentangle himself from Nastasya Filippovna, Powys' version is very close to the novel, with one extra sentence:

> Will you give it to her, so that no one sees it? I see she has taken a fancy to you. It's no very terrible secret - nothing of that sort - but - will you do it?[74]

Powys has added the middle sentence, for nothing in his adaptation so far would suggest that Aglaia had anything but contempt for Myshkin. "Telling" seems in this instance inferior to "showing" not because it should be redundant, but precisely because it is not redundant; what we are "told" is that what we have been "shown" appears to be misleading.

This weakness may be the product of necessity rather than carelessness; evidence against the latter is to be found in Powys' scrupulous concern elsewhere for accuracy and plausibility. In Myshkin's first meeting with General Epanchin Powys omits the loan of the twenty-five roubles;[75] when dramatising an episode fifty pages further on in the novel Powys realises that Myshkin needs money, and twenty-five roubles is then lent to Myshkin by Madame Epanchin, conveyed through Aglaia.[76]

Even of this invented episode Powys does not make use

to show Aglaia'a attraction to the prince. Once more, it is Ganya who has to tell us, when talking to Myshkin about Aglaia's response to his message. Ganya's questions follow the novel closely:

> And how is it that you - an idiot - are trusted with such confidence after two hours acquaintance?[77]

Myshkin' attempt to answer this question is interrupted, without any authority from the novel, by Ganya:

> That does not explain how you've won your way into Aglaia's heart in two hours.[78]

The family's "confidence" and "their hearts" which Myshkin has won, are in the novel, but Ganya's telling of Myshkin's way into "Aglaia's heart" is superfluous, and not confirmed by what the adaptation has shown us so far of Aglaia and her heart.

At this point, if one is feeling generous towards Powys, one might speculate that these inconsistencies are the product neither of carelessness nor of necessity. Powys may be using the compulsions of the dramatic form, notably the absence of the authorial voice, and therefore of a constraint on interpretation, to reveal elements of his own interpretation. Powys could be suggesting that the friendship between Myshkin and Aglaia has no basis in the feelings of either of them, but is entirely the product of Ganya's blind and unjustified envy.

Likewise, the relationship between Myshkin and Nastasya Filippovna can also be seen to be created out of Ganya's spite. Powys omits entirely Chapters VIII-XII, the Ivolgin household, and the surprise visits of Nastasya and/of Rogozhin

and his followers. There is no occasion, therefore, for Nastasya to invite Myshkin to her party; instead Powys has the invitation extended from Ganya, at the end of Chapter VII:

> Look here! Why shouldn't you come with me to Nastasya Filippovna's house this evening. And then you will understand everything better - Besides - who knows? If you have made such an impression on these people here, you may make a still greater impression there - Oh yes prince, you must certainly come with me! Nastasya Filippovna is just the person to appreciate your originality, prince, you must talk to her about capital punishment![80]

This speech is entirely Powys' invention, and, after the disparity which we have se en between Aglaia's opinion of Myshkin and Ganya's version, the audience may suspect that Nastasya will not be "shown" to be "just the person" to appreciate Myshkin; because he has been "told" this, he will by suggestion be persuaded to believe in an affinity.

Ganya has been invested by Powys with the special role of prejudicing characters' opinions about each other before they meet. This is evident again at Nastasya's party, which fills all 15 pages of the long Act I, scene iii.[81] The episode which takes up much of this space in the novel, each person's account of his most shameful action, is, however, omitted; it is replaced by four pages of invented conversation between Nastasya and Ganya. It is necessary to explain the complicated situation to the audience, and to present Nastasya fairly objectively, before she becomes involved in te action. So far all the audience knows about her is what Ganya told Myshkin when the latter was admiring the photograph.[82] Having then stirred up Myshkin's interest

in Nastasya, Ganya now tries to make that interest mutual and reciprocal:

Ganya:	There was a crazy fellow from Switzerland up at the Epanchins this morning - some relation of theirs - a prince Myshkin - and he saw that picture of you and it had quite an effect on him.
Nastasya:	What effect? What are you talking about?...So this prince Myshkin liked my face did he? Crazy did you say he was? Tell me about this prince Myshkin who is crazy and who liked my face.
Ganya:	There's nothing to tell you. The man's a sort of idiot...
Nastasya:	What did he say about my picture?
Ganya:	He said it was beautiful.
Nastasya:	Anything else?
Ganya:	Oh, some nonsense about it having "suffering" in it - or something of that kind.
Nastasya:	Anything else?
Ganya:	He said it was the face of a good woman. Oh I don't know, the man is a complete fool I tell you.
...	
Nastasya:	I like this Prince Myshkin of yours, Ganya. I should like to see him. [83]

This invented dialogue of Powys' is an excellent illustration of the curiosity of vanity, and is entirely consistent with Dostoievsky's presentation of Nastasya. It also confirms Ganya in his new role, for the dramatisation, as the source of information and the subtle creator of attitudes and opinions.

The result of Ganya's reticence about Myshkin is of course to arouse Nastasya's interest in him. To achieve the reciprocal end in Myshkin, Ganya had been artlessly

straightforward, addressing himself to naivety; with Nastasya, Ganya uses contrary, devious means. Still deviating from the novel, Nastasya leaves the party for five lines, as Myshkin arrives, and enters with him, declaring: "The prince and I are friends already."[84] The play then gets into step with the novel again, with the episode in which Nastasya entrusts to Myshkin the decision about marrying Ganya; the scene is dramatised with simple, almost exact adherence to Dostoievsky's dialogue.[85] The remaining two chapters (XV,XVI) of Part One, culminating in Nastasya's challenge to Ganya to rescue the money from the flames, are condensed into eight pages. There are, naturally, numerous omissions of detail, and a few alterations. Most are minor, some without obvious reason, such as the substitution of "droshkys" for "troikas".[86] More interestingly, when Nastasya has accepted Myshkin and then rejected him for Rogozhin, the prince moans, in the novel, merely: "Is it possible?"[87] Powys elaborates this, without any basis in the text, to "Nastasya Filippovna! This is all madness - You do not know what you are doing -".[88] The undefinable concept of madness, whose very existence the novel encourages us to doubt, is here given some objective weight within Myshkin's mind. By indirection and circumspection Dostoievsky delays until Part Three, Chapter II, Myshkin's explicit realisation that Nastasya is mad.[89] Powys' alteration is necessary, perhaps, as a declaration of theme, an unavoidable focussing of Dostoievsky's classic blur.

Some small changes show Powys' alertness to idiom, in

the face of the weaknesses in Constance Garnett's translation. Nastasya, challenging and taunting Ganya about the money, cries, according to Garnett: "Don't be shy, pick it out! It's your luck!" [90] Powys has corrected the latter phrase to "Try your luck!" [91] At the least, a dramatisation of a translated novel is a test of its idioms.

Some minor alterations or additions may be intended to have large effects. When the money is retrieved unharmed from the fire Darya Alexeyevna, Nastasya's companion, exclaims, without any support from the novel :"It is a miracle! Nothing but the wrappings is burnt!"[92] If this scene is carefully staged Powys' introduction of the word "miracle" may evoke, in analogy or in parody, the fiery furnace, or trial by fire. The scene, a gift for the stage, merits this hinted amplification of significance; we become witnesses to a motif either of divine apprehension or of a pathetic travesty thereof. The spirit of The Idiot has not been betrayed.

Act I concludes with the end of Part One of the novel. Here Powys makes his most drastic change, passing over the whole of Part Two and almost all of Part Three. Originally Powys had tried to carry on with a dramatic paraphrase at the same cautious pace as that at which Act I had encompassed Part One of the novel. Something of this attempt has survived in the Churchill tps., mistakenly headed Act II, Scene III within the sequence of the final version. It has no place there, both duplicating and contradicting incidents in Act II, scene i.[93] This redundant scene dramatises

Chapters VIII-X of Part Three in eight pages, making no progress towards an adequate condensation. Powys therefore took the basic situation, Aglaia finding Myshkin asleep, and transferred it from a bench in the park to a sofa in the Epanchin villa at Pavlovsk. While in the novel and in "Act II, Scene III"[94] Aglaia tells Myshkin that she loves Ganya, Powys transfers her affections to Yevgeny Pavlovitch Radomsky. This makes Ganya's behaviour in Act I more plausible, and gives dramatic justification to what, in the novel, in the rather inexplicable and uninvolved importance of Radomsky. After the admission of Aglaia's love for Radomsky the conversation between her and Myshkin is blended smoothly with that which takes place immediately before the party, almost one hundred pages later in the novel.[95] Aglaia's warning to Myshkin about the Chinese vase is reproduced almost verbatim.[96]

This mockery is followed by Aglaia's doubts as to Myshkin's capacity to fire a pistol, lifted from Part Three, Chapter III.[97] Radomsky has not yet appeared on stage, and Myshkin's seizing of his arms has been omitted. The duel, for whatever reason it will be brought about, is given added point by the rivalry over Aglaia. Act II scene i is concluded by an invented dialogue between Myshkin and Aglaia in which, with some prescience, Myshkin anticipates his quarrel with Radomsky.[98]

Act II, scene ii, is set in the same room, with the party now in progress. The audience has been prepared for the moment when Myshkin breaks the vase, and for two pages

the conversation has an absurd poise in the face of the inevitable. An interesting detail is the censorship of Dostoievsky's ill-mediated attacks on Roman Catholicism. Powys alters this to "organized Christianity", so that Myshkin now proclaims that "Organized Christianity is as good as an unchristian religion!"[99] The legacy of Powys' complex, shamed involvment with Catholicism at the turn of the century seems to be strong still; Powys expresses his own dislike of organized Christianity in The Complex Vision and in his pamphlet of 1925, "The Religion of a Sceptic". Furthermore, attacks on Catholicism would not have been appreciated by a New York audience. Following the novel exactly, Myshkin's rhetoric swells as he enthuses about the Russian Christ, redeemer of humanity, until he smashes the vase. The calming words of the Epanchins are followed closely, with one interesting addition, in the style of Powys' dramatic dialogues of the eighteen-nineties. Radomsky becomes a Wildean aesthete:

> You mustn't take us so seriously, prince. At least we have learnt the art of never being serious - and you mustn't spoil it. Only the lower classes are serious.[100]

As a comment on St. Petersburg, on the contrast between what is expected of princes and what this prince offers, Powys' attempt at comic relief is apt.

The scene ends with a major alteration of the plot, Aglaia's announcement, at this stage, of her betrothal to Myshkin.[101] This conflation and confusion of two separate incidents[102] is carried out for good structural reasons. Having concluded Act II with Myshkin and Aglaia engaged Powys opens Act III with a great leap backward to Part Two,

Chapter III, the ritual solemnisation of the relationship between Myshkin and Rogozhin. The scene does not move to Rogozhin's house in St. Petersburg, but remains in Pavlovsk, where Myshkin and Rogozhin are alone together - somewhat implausibly - in Nastasya Filippovna's villa; the action can thus more easily be linked with the events of Part Four, Chapter VIII. A potential anomaly, the presence of Rogozhin's knife, is satisfactorily explained; at the beginning of the scene "Rogozhin begins mechanically cutting the pages of a book with a horn-handled knife which he takes out of his pocket".[103] Having, in added dialogue, established the relationship between Myshkin and Aglaia, the events of Part Two, Chapters III and IV, are closely followed.[104] When Rogozhin surrenders Nastasya to Myshkin:

> Well, take her then, since it's fated! She is yours! I give in to you![105]

Myshkin is directly and simultaneously committed to both women, as he never is in the novel. For theatrical purposes this is an excellent contrivance.

At this moment Nastasya enters, and we jump over three hundred pages to Part IV, Chapter VIII, without a scene division. Before the play can proceed with the final actions of the story a page of dialogue is needed, in which Nastasya explains that she has been writing letters to Aglaia, and that Aglaia is now going to come and talk to her.[106] This conveniently simplifies the movements and machinations required to bring about the meeting of the four main characters. That Dostoievsky is deliberately creating one of his great "scenes" is clear from Rogozhin's stage-

conscious words:

> There's no one in the whole house now, except us four .[107]

The scene accords / exactly with the novel, and ends, as does Chapter VIII, with Myshkin and Nastasya together and set for the marriage. There is another example in this scene of the dramatist having to be more cautious than the translator. The dramatist, attentive to location, can see Constance Garnett's blunder in Aglaia's opening words: "You know, of course, why I asked you to come".[108] As she has just entered Nastasya's house Powys corrects this to "why I have come to you".[109] One would not guess from Powys' writings on Dostoievsky that he had ever scrutinised a text so closely.

Act III, scene ii opens "outside an Orthodox Church",[110] where Radomsky is trying to persuade Myshkin of his folly in marrying Nastasya. This first page is entirely invented (Radomsky has replaced Keller as best man)[111] and makes the plot more complicated, as Radomsky has to acknowledge that if he prevents Myshkin marrying Nastasya it will decrease his own chance of marrying Aglaia. This conversation then merges with the words in the novel, but some days before the wedding.[112] This creates an unsatisfactory situation, as Radomsky in the novel seems to be an uninvolved, impartial adviser and observer. Dostoievsky introduces him only in Part Two, Chapter VII, by which time the reader has been submerged in a confusion of unreliability. Ganya, in whom Powys sees the major source of unreliability, declines in importance throughout the second half of the novel; as the

plot gets disentangled and the characters become increasingly mad, the reader finds a source of reliability and objectivity in Radomsky. Although it is now evident that the character of Radomsky is intended to be seen ironically,[113] this was probably not clear to Powys; to him the substitution of Radomsky for Ganya may have seemed like a failure of nerve, sign of an inability to sustain a wavering, uncentred series of viewpoints to the end of the novel. By having an emotionally involved Radomsky Powys avoids what he sees as a weakness, but cannot prevent inconsistencies in Radomsky's character becoming apparent in this scene.

The fiasco outside the church is presented by Powys in an extremely abbreviated, brisk version, with Nastasya meeting Myshkin before fleeing with Rogozhin.[114] This has such dramatic intensity that one wonders why Dostoievsky chose to keep Myshkin inside the church.[115] Partly for the sake of a facetious allusion to Bosworth Rogozhin does not come prepared to take Nastasya away; when she frantically asks him to take her, he cries out:

> A droshky! A droshky! A hundred roubles for a droshky![116]

More seriously, this alteration emphasises Nastasya's volition, and makes Rogozhin appear to be her victim (in the novel, Dostoievsky has left it unclear whether Rogozhin came prepared for this event). That it is Nastasya's will, not Rogozhin's, is insisted on by Radomsky who consoles Myshkin (not in the novel) with a double explanation that appealed to that faculty in Powys - and that he found in

Dostoievsky - of seeing in the confusion of the physical and the metaphysical something humorous and deeply pathetic:

> You fool - can't you see that this is the will of God? Can't you see that she wanted to go?[117]

The scene is brought to a close with another addition of Powys', the cheers of a crowd for the unconventional behaviour of Rogozhin and Nastasya.

With the final scene, Act IV, scene i, of eight pages, Powys takes considerable liberties. The first four pages stick closely to the novel, up to the point where Myshkin asks for the pack of cards.[118] From this moment until they are discovered covers only one page in the novel, with no dialogue at all, and no further mention of the cards. Powys invents three pages of dialogue between Myshkin and Rogozhin, and uses the cards to great psychological and theatrical effect. Myshkin scatters the cards over Rogozhin,who is lying on his back; Rogozhin enters a trance, but instead of muttering about officers and cadets, he imagines that he is playing a game of cards with Nastasya:

> Two of spades, three of spades, two of clubs, three of clubs - the ace of spades! Why are your thoughts wandering from the game, Nastasya Filippovna?[119]

This litany is repeated regularly on the next page, both evocative of and justified by manic card-players elsewhere in Dostoievsky and other Russian writers.[120]

Myshkin's response to this is pure Dostoievsky, but is not to be found in The Idiot:

> Myshkin: Brother! Brother! I am Lyov Nikolayevitch - Look at me! Don't you know me? Schneider

- the Swiss doctor brother - said to me once that what would bring me back to him would be if my heart broke in pieces - Schneider told me a secret, brother. He told me that if they hadn't crucified Christ he would have become an Idiot like me. Something would have broken inside his brain. Don't laugh, brother, I cannot bear it when you laugh. Listen! Do you think that even God could go on living if he knew how much pain there is in the world? Wouldn't it kill even God to know that? This is the kind of night, brother, from which Christ took his idea of Eternity.

Rogozhin: Ha! Ha! Ha! I know well what eternity is. Eternity is one,two,three,four,five jars of Zhdanov's disinfectant. Eternity is what covers her up now. But why does one of her feet stick out from beneath Eternity? Nastasya! Nastasya! Dead - she is certainly dead! But I should not like to think of one of her feet being cold!

Myshkin: Brother, try and say something to me, try and say something to me; because this night is not one night - this night is all the nights of the whole world.

(The stage is here darkened so as to represent the passing of many hours. Before there is any light at all, the voices of the two men are heard from the darkened stage.)

...

Myshkin (in a strange and new tone, suggesting that his mind has broken down):
No! No! No!No!God cannot put the pain of the whole world into one heart. He knows that would be too much. God doesn't practice upon us

> like that. No, doctor, No! No! What you say about Christ's becoming like me isn't true! He didn't become like me - he - became - He - became -
>
> (Here the stage is lightened again in such a way as to suggest the coming of dawn.)
>
> He became God! Doctor - you see - I am - very much-better now...[121]

This superb, melodramatic improvisation on Dostoievskian themes, mingling together the thought of Myshkin, Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov, is, one might guess, theatrically the most successful part of the dramatisation. It has the energy of unrestraint, a new-found vitality of unfettered inspiration, which shows up all that has gone before it for what it is - a submissively pedestrian labour of devotion.

For his finale Powys makes a brilliant, original thematic and iconic link with Rogozhin's print of Holbein's "Deposition", which Myshkin has described in Act II, scene ii.[122] Both men are now delirious, and the stage direction reads: "As it gets lighter and the faces of the two men are clearly seen it becomes evident that the two men no longer recognise one another". [123] Myshkin now thinks that he is Mary, holding Christ's body in his arms:

> Can't you see that they have taken him down from the cross and given him to me? Keep them back, doctor! I mustn't let them see the look on his face or they will go mad.[124]

The painting that had destroyed Rogozhin's faith is recreated as a tableau on stage, and Myshkin is afraid that Rogozhin's face will have the same effect on the audience as Christ's face had had on Rogozhin.

In the novel, unspecified "people" find Myshkin and Rogozhin; here two policemen enter, followed by Radomsky.[125] The policemen having established the facts of the case, Radomsky maintains his determination not to take things too seriously. His words are compounded of a blasé version of Ippolit's excitement as the sun rises after his "Explanation", and of Schneider's hypothetical verdict:

> Radomsky: Well, gentlemen, I can see that the sun is going to rise, quite as usual. It always does rise, after all. A hopeless Idiot! A hopeless Idiot![126]

The theatrical history of this worthy adaptation is unfortunately short. In May 1919, Powys wrote from San Francisco to his sister Marian in New York: "I never wrote to Arthur Hopkins, by the way. I suppose nothing has happened about the Idiot?"[127] Arthur Hopkins still seemed interested in January 1920,[128] and in February John wrote to Llewelyn: "There is still a chance of my Idiot being put on. It's long to wait, but in the end I rather think it may be."[129] However, there appears to be no connection between the plans of Arthur Hopkins and the production eventually put on in April and May of 1922.

The programmes of three performances "By Arrangement with the Play Producing Society of New York" are preserved in New York Public Library.[130] As already discussed, the cast list and scenario differ from those of the Churchill tps., and the adaptation is attributed to both Powys and Reginald Pole. There is no record of Powys having known

Pole before October 1921, when Powys writes to Frances Gregg about an old girl-friend of his, Margaret Mower, whom he has not seen since 1917. On meeting her again, in October 1921, Powys finds that she is a leading actress in Pole's company. Six months later she was to take the role of Aglaia. No connection between Powys and any other member of Pole's company can be established, and it is therefore a reasonable assumption that it was Margaret Mower who was responsible for persuading Pole to take The Idiot.

There is a valuable account of the first performance in the autobiography of Claude Bragdon who, as owner of the Manas Press, had published Confessions of Two Brothers in 1916. He attended not through that connection, but through his friendship with Dorothy Whitney (Mrs. Willard Straight), a remarkable woman who later married Leonard Elmhirst and founded the arts and crafts centre at Dartington Hall, Devonshire. Bragdon writes:

> [Mrs. Straight] was interested among other things in the theatre; and she manifested that interest by financing certain experimental productions contributory to the health and dignity of the theatre, which without such aid could not have been done. On the occasion of the first performance of one of these plays she would inite me for dinner at her great austere Georgian house on upper Fifth Avenue and we would go afterwards to the theatre. Of these performances the one which I remember best was a dramatization of Dostoievsky's The Idiot, admirably acted by my friend Reginald Pole and a volunteer company. The stage properties, borrowed from the drawing-rooms of my hostess and her friends, the back grounds of black velvet, and the spot-lighting were so skilfully co-ordinated by that brilliant but ill-starred young artist-in-the-theatre, Frederick Jones ...as to produce effects of extraordinary beauty.[132]

The peculiar thing about this is that Bragdon seems unaware that the adaptation was by Powys. For some reason Powys did not attend the first night; Bragdon did not meet him there, nor does Powys ever mention seeing a performance. This is very strange, and under the circumstances of Pole's "adaptation of an adaptation" it is possible that the two men quarrelled. Evidence for this is to be found in a letter of a few months later, from John to Llewelyn, discussing the possibility of a production of Paddock Calls by Maurice Browne:

> Maurice won't meddle with it...He is too noble and gentle and unselfish a person ever to play any Reginald like this.[133]

Nothing more about The Idiot is heard from Powys himself until 1945. His sister Marian had been trying to get the play revived in America, and Powys writes to her:

> Marian Darling! You are an absolute wonder; now you've directed your magnetism & electric gipsy guile magic force for my benefit over this old Play it seems (to me even!) an exciting proposition ...Phyllis is greatly & particularly interested in the idea of BERGNER doing it - I mean acting Nastasya in it - So I am torn between the word "soon"...and the idea of Bergner whom Phyllis says is one of the few great actresses now alive - perhaps the greatest - even if it means less soon in fact next Sept.! And Goodness of God! what's this talk of International appeal & Translation into Russian!!![134]

All these ambitious plans came to nothing. Elisabeth Bergner recalls that the proposition to play Nastasia Filippovna came to her repeatedly; she does not remember the details of the adaptations, and always refused to take the part.[135] As for international appeal, there has never been a shortage of Dostoievsky dramatisations. In 1926

The Idiot was adapted by Michael Hogan, who took the part of Rogozhin in a moderately successful West End production.[136] In Russia The Idiot had recently been dramatised by Yuri Olesha, reduced by political pressures in the late nineteen-thirties to adaptive rather than original work.[137] Powys' version is probably not worthy of international attention, but one production starring an actress of the calibre of Bergner would have brought the deserved recognition, and would have led, probably, to regular revivals.

While its influence is sadly unfelt in the theatrical world, the experience of adaptation was of inestimable importance to Powys. As an analytical comparison of novel and play has shown, Powys steeped himself in a Dostoievsky novel, comprehending its structure and balance of forces from within. His major alterations, of the characters of Ganya and Radomsky, are not motivated only by the need for abridgment; Powys has brought out what is implicit in their presentation, but which some readers have missed. Radomsky aroused much critical controversy until the publication of Dostoievsky's notebooks; to pass from Powys' mocking, deflating interpretation to Dostoievsky's thoughts and intention is to witness uncanny like-mindedness.[138] Powys has resisted the temptation to use either Radomsky or Ganya as objective, choric voices, to supply a substitute in drama for the authorial voice in fiction. When Ganya tells Myshkin and Nastasya about each other he is misinforming not only

those two but also the audience. Both Myshkin and the audience need to be "shown" Nastasya before they can judge the value of what they have been "told". What they are shown, and what they imagine, is an enigma which is soluble by no amount of information from the other characters. When transferred to the novel the notion of"multiverse" is not far away. Each man's understanding of the world, (not only the characters' but the author's and the reader's) is deliberately and explicitly in conflict, collision, and sometimes coincidence with another man's. The authorial voice in Powys' mature fiction - the opening paragraph of A Glastonbury Romance being a famous but typical instance - is no more reliable than that of any prejudiced, involved character. [139]

At the technical level of size and complexity of plot, Powys' Idiot also looks forward to Glastonbury. Most readers find it hard to hold in their minds a composed picture of the plot of a Dostoievsky novel. To take freedoms with the plot, and to produce a plausible, theatrically tighter situation, is the achievement of one who had an innate faculty for large-scale organisational imaginings.

Two of Dostoievsky's most magisterial opponents warned specifically against his influence. Henry James wrote, privately, in 1912, about the "fluid puddings", Tolstoy and Dostoievsky:

> we see how great a vice is their lack of composition, their defiance of economy and architecture, directly they are emulated and imitated; then, as subjects of emulation, models, they quite give themselves away.[140]

Less well known are T. S. Eliot's comments in his "London Letter" to The Dial, in September 1922; it is tempting to see in this date more than coincidence.

> All novelists are dangerous models for other novelists, but Dosto evsky - a Russian, known only through one translation - is especially dangerous...One reason of Dosto evsky's appeal to the British mind is that he appears to satisfy the usual definition of genius; that is, an infinite capacity for taking no pains.[141]

James and Eliot would, doubtless, have regarded Powys as no exception to their pontifical generalisations. Wolf Solent, John Geard, Sam Dekker, Sylvanus Cobbold, Dud No-man - some of the greatest characters in twentieth-century fiction - could not exist without that model. For some readers the often-applied label, "an English Dostoievsky", implies no dishonour.[142]

CHAPTER VII

PADDOCK CALLS

1921 is the only year between 1914 and 1961 in which no publication by Powys is recorded in Langridge's bibliography.[1] It was a year in which Powys was extremely busy lecturing, in Chicago in the early Spring and in California from April to October.[2] He then returned to New York briefly before setting out on a lecture tour of the mid-West in November.[3] Since the summer of 1919 Powys had had two lecture-managers together, Arnold Shaw on the East Coast and in the mid-West, and Jessica Colbert on the West Coast.[4] The main reason for this was that Shaw's organisation, the University Lecturers' Association, to which Powys had been attached since 1910,[5] could not provide enough work. In 1921 and 1922 Powys felt a constant "background of financial agitation",[6] and it was this that led to the frantic intensity of lecturing in 1921; it was one of the very few years in his career in which Powys did not take a long holiday in the summer, usually returning to England, to devote to writing.

In May 1921, Powys' financial situation was so serious that Jessica Colbert was able to persuade him to sever all contracts and agreements with Shaw, with the exception of the mid-West tour already arranged for November 1921, through to January 1922.[7] The seriousness of this decision can be measured against the very close friendship between Powys and Shaw, who, Powys later wrote, was "like

a brother to me",[8] and the obligation and gratitude that Powys felt, not only for the lecturing but for publishing eight of his books, including his two novels. But so irregular and unreliable was Shaw that, according to Phyllis Playter, Powys was often compelled to behave like a responsible businessman in order to keep the Association going; nobody else could ever thus force Powys to be so reasonable.[9] As a result of Powys' defection the Association collapsed shortly afterwards, in 1922-23.[10]

One of the effects of Powys' transfer of allegiance was that his interest in the theatre was maintained. The Plaza Theatre, San Francisco, was one of Jessica Colbert's ventures, which she ran together with Sam Hume of the University of San Francisco.[11] Powys did not like Hume, "a great rollicking husky son of a bitch - a kind of barbarian vandal of a swinging rough and ready art-exploiter",[12] and his apprehensions were well-founded. Having persuaded Powys to write a play for the company in the autumn of 1922, Jessica Colbert spent the spring of 1923 trying to disentangle herself from the Plaza Theatre, before Powys' play had been performed.[13] Powys' financial position was not improved by the lengthy and bitter arguments between Colbert and Hume; even when released from other obligations Colbert proved to be little better than Shaw as a manager. In October 1924, Powys left her as well, and joined one of the most long-established and secure lecture businesses in America, that founded in 1906 by "the great Lee Keedick - the most formidable of all the managers - the one who ran Chesterton".[14]

Powys remained with Keedick until they had an argument in 1930, which precipitated Powys' decision to retire from lecturing and, somewhat belatedly at the age of 57, become a full-time writer.[15]

"One redeeming feature of it all," Powys wrote in October 1922, "is Paddock Calls".[16] Following the discouraging response among his friends to After My Fashion Powys was, in October 1920, "inclined to let novel-writing alone for a while....I am a little inclined to think that a really good novel is beyond my power".[17] 1921 was not entirely uncreative, for it was in that year that Powys began work on what was eventually published, in 1959, as Homer and the Aether.[18] When Powys began his full-time professional relationship with Jessica Colbert, at the beginning of September 1922, he was treated casually, and given very few lectures. Colbert suggested that, as she was so busy with the theatre, she would not try to arrange more lectures: instead she "encouraged me to spend these three idle weeks in writing a play for them to try out...and I have done so".[19]

Paddock Calls started off as a "redeeming feature" of this troubled period:

> They were thrilled by that! Yes, it was a great hit! I read it to Sam Hume and Jessica and the Brownes and Miss Reicher...and I think they will certainly try it out, with Maurice or Hume directing it, but that will not be yet. But it is something of a play, Lulu, and I feel now that I really could write more plays. I tell you it did make them sit up - and they made comparatively few serious criticisms, and those merely corrective and revisional just here and there. Jessica is very keen on it and talks of the company touring California with it, and then selling it to New York, but all this won't happen for a long time I guess -

you know the delays![20]

A play that satisfied the scrupulous demands of Maurice Browne merited Powys' burst of confidence and hope. But the fate of Paddock Calls was even more unfortunate than that of After My Fashion or The Idiot. In November 1922, plans were going well: "I believe they are really going to play Paddock Calls here....Jessica will...try and sell it to some New York Manager if it is at all a success. Maurice won't meddle with it...except...to direct it....Jessica will be the one who 'produces' it...."[21] In December a date was fixed for a performance, 4 March 1923,[22] and Powys was expecting rehearsals to begin in January, before he set out from San Francisco to Los Angeles on a lecture-tour.[23] Throughout this time Powys was working hard "revising and polishing Paddock Calls very carefully",[24] and there seem to be firm plans to publish it after the first production.[25] In January 1923, the Plaza Theatre became embroiled in bitterness and disputes; as it became apparent that Paddock Calls would be forgotten in the confusion, Colbert promised to "get my play out of them, and if they won't play it she'll try it on New York".[26]

In the spring of 1923 Powys summed up this Californian experience as "an epoch in my life which I trust never to have repeated".[27] Interestingly, in describing the same events in the Autobiography, Powys glosses over the unhappiness and frustration that he had experienced:

> Maurice Browne was "on the Coast" at that time and he had authority of some sort and in connection with my new manager over an enormous theatre. I was full of eagerness to write a

> play for this theatre, since it was entirely in the control of my personal friends [no mention of Sam Hume], and I did compose a tragic and rather Strindberg-like play about Chesil Beach which I entitled Paddock Calls. This play was actually advertised as "soon to appear" but it was never even rehearsed; and since then I have sheered away more than ever from the stage.[28]

The misfortunes of Paddock Calls do not end there. The text survived, supposedly in its "revised and polished" form, and the play was due to be published in 1975 by the Village Press. The book was set up in print, and proof copies are available for interested persons; the reverse title-page bears the copyright date of 1975 but the play's extraordinary ill-fortune holds still.

The mood and style of the play can be gauged from the comparisons which Powys himself made; in the Autobiography he calls it "Strindberg-like", and in letters to Llewelyn and Theodore he introduces Ibsen and Dostoievsky: "I swear Paddock Calls is as good as any of those Ibsen things - Rosmersholm and Hedda Gabler".[29] To Theodore he gave a detailed account:

> rather a gloomy story of a degenerate family (all gone to Pot) like the Karamazovs, only English, - and I've put them in a delapidated imaginary house near Chesil Beach!...a kind of dirge-like performance, varied with questionable Dorset dialect, - a sort of mixture of Rosmersholm by Ibsen and Rodmoor by that fool...."[30]

One should also recall that the third of the great late nineteenth century dramatists, Chekhov, was claimed by Powys as akin to the style of his unsuccessful play of 1913.[31] In providing a context of influences in which to appreciate

the play, these comparisons also tempt one to argue that, Shaw, Synge, Moore, Yeats and Martyn being Irish, Paddock Calls is one of the very best plays by an Englishman in the dramatic idiom of the great Europeans.

It is an excellent play, and of the three suppressed works of these years the most deserving of publication, and production. As a drama it is well-organised and balanced, with three acts and seven scenes, and a cast of five men and five women:

> The scene is laid in Chesil Grange, and Chesil Vicarage, near Weymouth, Dorset, England.
> Only two stage-sets are required.
> The date of the action is November 1921 and the whole action of the play takes place within only a little over twenty-four hours.[32]

The setting had strong suggestive overtones for Powys; it was later to be used to great imaginative effect for Cattistock's heroics in Weymouth Sands, and in view of his own long association with the place, since childhood holidays in Weymouth, and its mysterious qualities, it was from here that Powys' ashes were scattered. Although he told Theodore that the house was imaginary, and there is no village of Chesil as such, Powys may have been remembering an experience he had with a friend, W. E. Lutyens, in 1892 or 1893:

> Lutyens... was tutoring with some people who lived between Chickerel and Wyke Regis, somewhere near the western reaches of Chesil Beach. Him we used to meet, in the late August afternoon, when our day's reading was over, at the old bridge across the Fleet, and I enjoyed those encounters right well - until it entered our swift-footed one's head - a head as immune to misanthropy as it was to ambition - to introduce us to his pupils' relations.[33]

Powys tells us no more than this, delicately suggesting, through his compliment to Lutyens, his own lack of immunity.

True to the Ibsen pattern, there are no good characters in the play, only the bad, the weak, and the fanatical. Sir Robert Sark, "(aged 50), a very impoverished country Squire",[34] with his wife, his daughter, Alice, and his son, Horton, and the servants, Durnie and Jane Odcombe, live in the decrepit Chesil Grange; the set "gives the suggestion of an aristocratic family that has sunk into extreme poverty."[35] Balancing these six characters are the fiancée and the fiancé of the son and daughter, Betty Stalbridge and David Jones, an aspiring politician; in the nearby Chesil Vicarage lives yet another of Powys' crazed priests, the Reverend John Paddock, "(aged 30), an extreme ritualist", and his sister Undine, aged 20.[36]

Powys' specific allusion to Rosmersholm has point. The stage directions at the opening have the same degree of precision, and Powys requires "smoke-darkened family portraits"[37] where Ibsen demands that "all round the walls hang portraits, older or more recent, of clergy, officers, and government officials in uniform."[38] It is not pedantic to argue the significance of this, for no other play of Ibsen's makes this requirement;[39] in both Rosmersholm and Paddock Calls we are watching the demise of a family with a long and portrait-worthy past.

Powys also learns from Ibsen the device of alerting the audience, in the opening words, to the sinister potential of the commonplace. Ibsen:

Mrs Helseth: Just think, Miss - he's beginning to use the mill-path again.

Rebekka: He went by the mill-path the day before yesterday too.[40]

Powys:

Durnie: Where's Missus?

Jane: Her Ladyship's doing her fancy work in the nursery - to get the light.

Durnie: Reckon 'a do bide in thik nursery, day in, day out - seems so!

Jane: Her Ladyship has always liked that room; since Mr. Horton grew up - she do see the sea best from that room![41]

At once a location off-stage is established as the focus of significance; at the end Rebekka and Rosmer will throw themselves into the mill-race, and Undine will be drowned in the sea. By recurrent mention a constant background noise, of the race and the waves, is instilled in the audience's imagination. Precisely because there is actually no noise the effect is heavily charged with mystery and symbolic force.

But Paddock Calls is by no means simply an imitative patchwork of Ibsenite elements. The "questionable Dorset dialect" does not merely provide variety: it both localises the scene more firmly and creates a social comedy, hinged on accent, peculiar to England. While the effect is humorous - dialect on stage invariably is - Powys manages to make it sinister and menacing as well. That he achieves this may in part be inadvertent. Powys seems to have had an appallingly bad ear: "John assured me that he could not tell from his accent whether a person were English or American."[42] If

that was really so - and Dangelis in Wood and Stone hardly proves otherwise - then Powys has been remarkably successful in Paddock Calls, for all circumstances were against him. His childhood was divided between Dorset and Somerset, whose dialects are subtly but distinctly different, and he was writing in California, where his only access to the dialect was through the orthography of Barnes and Hardy. With the best of ears one would have little chance; even Joyce in exile, with a superb aural memory, probably benefitted from his wife's accent.[43] To complicate the situation, when Powys had been living in Burpham, Sussex, his house-keeper was the widow of the Powys' gardener at Rothesay House, Dorchester.[44] This is the justification for the dialect of Grace, the Moreton servant in After My Fashion, who "came from the West Country."[45] Wisely, Grace's utterances are minimal; the most extended passage of dialect in that novel is a conversation between two Sussex farm-labourers, who speak an unspecific rustic.[46]

The Odcombes speak a recognisably West Country accent, without verb inflection, "she do see," "he did love," although this is not sustained, and we also find "has always liked," "I ain't said," and from this into the grotesque inconsistency of "we hain't lived."[47] Confusion with Somerset is understandable, but to lapse into Cockney, even in distant San Francisco, is unforgivable. The Odcombes take time to warm up, and they start by using an inflected "is": "Where's Missus?" "Her Ladyship's doing," "Sir Robert's not..."[48] After a page of this Jane says "child

be always" and Durnie immediately picks this up: "Who be you?" and "it be".[49] Such analysis is quite beside the main point, that a linguistic barrier is established between the Odcombes and the rest of the cast, but it arouses our suspicions that this is not the "revised and polished" version.

The Reverend John Paddock, round whose visits the play is structured, is of central significance although his is one of the smaller parts. What people think of him, and what he represents, is more important than who he is. At first we hear about him from Durnie who reports to Sir Robert the gossip from the pub:

> It be about Parson Paddock, sir - the folks down at King's Arms be telling terrible tales of what 'a be doing up at church! Calling to the Old 'Un, they say 'a be; and mumbling heathenaries and sorceries same as they did in King Charley's time![50]

We later learn that this is the reverse of the truth, but the man's name, and the play's title,lead us to expect some supernatural elements. The allusion is recognised and made explicit by Horton and Alice; when Paddock and Undine "call" on the Grange, Undine is taken upstairs by Sir Robert:

> Paddock: Where is Undine?...Undine! Undine!
> Horton (with a look across the table at Alice): "Paddock Calls"!
> Alice (answering his look): "I come Graymalkin"![51]

What exactly are we to make of this? Paddock, far from being a heathen himself, suspects Sir Robert of releasing the dark forces. No amount of stretching, however, enables us to find a meaningful connection between this play and the

two words from Macbeth. It is curious that, since quotations were first used for titles in the eighteen-seventies,[52] they have often been intended ironically,[53] but have very seldom been mere puns. Indeed the only instance known to me of a quotation as a pun is Mr Weston's Good Wine, by Powys' brother Theodore. The title describes the subject of the book, and is precisely apt for an allegory, yet is a quotation from Jane Austen: "She believed he had been drinking too much of Mr Weston's good wine, and felt sure he would be wanting to be talking nonsense."[54] The identity of words is so pointless as to be uncanny, almost as if it was not a quotation but a verbal coincidence. Both John and Theodore must have chosen the titles first and named their protagonists accordingly, an extraordinary way of going about things.[55] The effect of Paddock Calls is less discomfiting than that of Mr Weston (partly due to Horton's explicit quotation), for John Cowper lacked Theodore's teasing subtlety; still, one must give credit to John for having anticipated his brother in this experiment by some years.

Paddock calls because Sir Robert has taken Undine upstairs, and we learn from Durnie at the beginning that he is a notorious seducer; yet Sir Robert's excuse is to show her a yellow horned poppy,[56] and this thickens the mystery of its meaning. Yellow symbolises betrayal, horns adultery, but especially after its importance in Rodmoor such a simple explanation is inadequate. All one can say is that this plant must have had a very strong private symbol-

ism for Powys, and we do not know what it is. Botany, fishing and bird-watching are all metaphors in the play for sexual activities. / Shortly before seducing Undine with his poppy Sir Robert has told his son that "Botany's a great refuge for the nerves of the house of Sark! Or birds ."[57] Durnie, in telling us of Sir Robert's activities, compares him with his father, a keen fisherman:

> Sir Robert's a different gent altogether! He do like a bit of fishing too, now and again, but 'tain't mackerel-fish he's after![58]

And we learn that a previous victim was called Daisy Hawk.[59]

As a naturalist Sir Robert is clearly distinguished from Horton and Paddock who are interested in the spiritual. They both see natural things in terms of the spiritual or the supernatural, and they both see supernatural evil in Sir Robert. Horton wants to become a clergyman, but he does not want the living of Abbotsbury, which Sir Robert has, with some difficulty, been keeping vacant for him.[60] Horton sees this as an insult to his sense of vocation, and would rather work in London. But he admits, somewhat obscurely, that "I know there's something here that saps a person's spirit and I shall be glad to be out of it."[61] There is insincerity and evasion here, similar to that of Storm and other of Powys' protagonists, for while he affects to be rejecting a life of comfort and escape Horton knows he does not possess the spiritual strength to survive in the area of the Chesil Beach.

Horton's ideas are not very coherently presented - this is perhaps the central weakness of the play - and pale in the presence of Paddock, for whom the storm raging outside

is not merely rain and wind:

> Spirits of the air! That's what they call it! That's what they've always called it! For don't you people understand that the heathen powers are still alive - still active? They keep pulling us back, you know; pulling us down! Forgive me, Lady Sark - forgive me!...there's something about this old house of yours - especially when a storm like this stirs things up - that has a queer effect on me!...listen to the rain! It's like a blind face - a terrible streaming face - beating itself against these old walls![62]

The audience might think that the bad vibrations felt by Paddock are due to the recent unobtrusive disappearance of Sir Robert and Undine. Inconsistently for such a dogmatic priest, Paddock foretells the future in the palms of Alice and Betty; through this Powys is able to expatiate on the "Saturnian" theme at greater length than ever before in his writing (except for a vapid poem, "The Saturnian")[63]:

> Do you see those lines? Do you know what they mean? They just mean the end of the whole comedy! They mean the end of the epoch! Do you realize that all young girls are getting the same line in their hands? And what line? Saturn! Always Saturn! No Venus, no Mars, no Jupiter! Nothing but Saturn, Saturn, Saturn! Soon there'll be no more love-marriages in Europe - no more children -...No more children will be born! It'll be the end of the Dispensation![64]

Among much else, the Saturnian Age is that in which the distinction between male and female has disappeared; Powys regarded himself as "of this Saturnian sex," neither male nor female.[65] An undine is a type of such androgyny, the spirit of water which, like a sylph, has access to the soul, love and pain of a mortal.[66]

While Paddock has been prophesying a Saturnian Age, far from golden, Undine has been upstairs with Sir Robert

- "Not in the cold, Lady Sark" as she nervously explains when they descend.[67] At this point Horton feels ill and retires upstairs with his doting, possessive mother, akin to Mrs. Renshaw. Lady Sark and Horton have already been seen by Paddock as emblematic of the new age, depending sterilely on each other.[68] Horton also represents sterility through his fiancée, Betty, a sexually emancipated student of anthropology who proudly announces that she may plan not to have children, as "Our marriage will be a very modern marriage!"[69] This theme of Ibsen's has been filtered through Shaw and Wells, and weakened in the process; although neither of these was one of Powys' favourites Ann Veronica had made a considerable impression in 1910.[70] Paddock thus counters political advance not by reactionary politics but by the mythological resonance of Saturnian (or saturnine?) sterility.

Next, and still in Act I scene ii, Powys brings together water and death in a ship-wreck - no rare occurrence on the Chesil Beach[71] - and Paddock, Sir Robert, Betty and Durnie go out to help. Alice and Undine are left together talking, about Sir Robert. Alice knows everything about her father, and condones him, thus celebrating fertility, as she enjoys the energy of the storm but not its effect: "I love storms! If only they didn't mean dead men and lost ships I'd like them to go on and on, and on!"[72] Undine asks Alice if she does not pity her mother, and Alice does not think they need mention her. Instead, she answers symbolically, linking together the events and themes of the play:

> It's the breaking up of the ship, I suppose! It's what your brother calls the end of the Dispensation!
> (wildly)
> I love it! I love it! I love it! The end of the Dispensation![73]

Jane Odcombe interrupts this to clear the table, and Undine, to avoid the embarrassment of Alice's outburst, offers to help, unwittingly laying herself open to a decisive, telling pun:

> Undine (rising to help her):
> Well! Let's help you with the things, Jane - things must be washed up, storm or no storm.
> Alice (rising to help too):
> Yes, things must be washed up! Cleared away and washed up![74]

This attractively contrived pun serves to epitomise the play, and, indeed, a type of drama, for it is a verbal coincidence of the domestic and the apocalyptic. We are reminded of the "bifocal" title, descriptive and supernatural, irreconcilably. This many-layered and richly dramatic scene is concluded with Horton walking and talking in his sleep off-stage, a phenomenon admitting of explanation through reductive psychology or through dark heathen powers.

The rest of the play does not quite sustain the depth, variety, and quality of dramatic incident of Act I. Act II treats the more conventional subject, the development of relationships between Horton and Betty, Alice and David, and Sir Robert and Undine. In the first two of these

romances the problems are similar to those in the Powys family, and are presumably based upon it. Betty feels unable to become part of the family:

> It's the atmosphere of this house! People have lived here too long! And too close together! Old Families like yours are puzzling to us outsiders - you know I feel now as if I couldn't talk to you without pushing something back with my hands - something heavy, enormous, terrible![75]

Towards the end of the scene David makes much the same complaint to Alice.[76] Louis Wilkinson, on his first visit to Montacute, when he was not even courting, had uneasy memories of meal-times:

> My early experiences as a guest at Montacute Vicarage, the only alien at that great Powys Table surmounted by the Father, excited and baffled me, disconcerted and embarrassed me
>
> That Table was a formidable phenomenon. Sitting at it, I felt perturbingly single-handed, an alien invader without the ghost of a chance. I felt that I belonged to an entirely different race ....
>
> I was not only non-plussed but resentful; for there seemed something preposterous and unallowable about this great strong thick wall of Powys solidarity...[77]

Wilkinson also observed that the wives of the Powys brothers "when they stayed at the Vicarage, saw more of their sisters-in-law than of their husbands".[78] In Chesil Grange Jane Odcombe reckons that neither Betty nor David will be able to marry into the Sark family, and that they will "go off together",[79] which is indeed the outcome.[80] As evidence of Powys' awareness of the oddities of his family, as seen and criticised by outsiders, this is valuable; but although thematically it sustains and deepens the sterility of the place, it does not actually convince, psychologically or

dramatically. Horton and Lady Sark are so close as to be mutually destructive, but Alice and her father, although very close, are energetic, life-loving and outward-looking. Incest would have been here the perfect symbol of barrenness, but Powys makes no suggestion whatever of this.

More peripherally, but more successfully, Powys introduces some comic relief based on his own experience. As we have already seen, Jane Odcombe and the Moreton's servant, Grace, both owe something of their West Country manner to Mrs. Curme. One incident related in the Autobiography is to be found in Paddock Calls:

> Horton: I wish to heaven none of us had any souls! Then there'd be some peace!
>
> Enter Jane
>
> Jane: I doesn't want to intrude on you...but it do make a body lonesome-like to see 'ee spearin' and leerin' with solemn church-words; when 'ee might be keeping company, easy and snug.[81]

In Sussex Powys had insisted on reading some poetry to Mrs. Curme, and had chosen Swinburne:

> "Thou hast conquered, O pale Galilean, the world has grown grey with thy breath!"
> After some twenty minutes...I laid the book down and enquired how my hearer liked it.
> "Mr. John," said Mrs.Curme gravely; "I do thank 'ee, Mr. John, from my poor heart. It does me good to hear the dear Lord's name mentioned so frequent!"[82]

The effect of this is to elaborate on the limitations of linguistic and literary reference; just as "Paddock calls" was an allusion exclusive to Horton and Alice, so here there is a limitation which cannot distinguish casual metaphor

from pious effusion.

Act II, scene i, ends with the Odcombes reporting that Lady Sark has set off at great speed, "like a mazed gippo", towards Abbotsbury; she suspects that her husband is alone with Undine at the Vicarage. Alice, always ready to help and protect her father, runs off to get there before her mother and warn him. Here Powys has got confused topographically; Chesil Vicarage cannot be very far from Chesil Grange, certainly not far enough for Alice to have a chance of overtaking her mother. As Lady Sark has run up the road to Abbotsbury, it seems that she is going to Abbotsbury Vicarage, sufficiently distant for Alice to make up lost time - elsewhere, we learn that Abbotsbury is five miles from Chesil.[84] Abbotsbury Vicarage is the Sark living, set aside for Horton, and has nothing to do with the Paddocks. Act II scene ii, set in Chesil Vicarage, takes place simultaneously with, or even before, Act II scene i; Undine and her brother talk for a while, and Undine is relieved when at last he goes out visiting, as she is expecting Sir Robert. Act II scene iii is meant to take place some hours later; Sir Robert and Undine are together, and after five pages of conversation they are interrupted by Alice, who arrives just ahead of Paddock and Lady Sark - the latter pair having met by chance.[85] The timing does not make sense, the movements of the characters do not fit together, and the vicarages have changed places. This would not matter much (and may not be obtrusive in performance), if we had not witnessed the extraordinary competence with

which Powys arranged The Idiot. In the long novels, with a large range of characters and a huge, loosely-structured plot, the odd inconsistency or error would be understandable; but there appear to be few. Taken together with the inconsistencies of dialect, one must assume that this version is not the one which Powys had been "revising and polishing...very carefully."[86]

Positively, Act II scene ii allows us to see more of Paddock himself. In talking to Undine, he returns to his old theme, the survival of heathenism, without seeming to realise that it lives on in his sister's name:

> Some one has stirred up the old hidden powers! And it's not only human beings who feel it! Things feel it!...They all keep willing against God! The things as well as the people! And He isn't allowed to touch their wills - never, never, never, may He do that! For that would be the end! That would be Nothingness![87]

And he puts the blame largely on the Sarks: "It's that family...[that] has stirred up all the hidden heathenish evil of this place!"[88] And, as before, one wonders whether Paddock is not offering a vast metaphysical interpretation of his feeling that something is going on between Undine and Sir Robert. Undine is visible nervous and impatient for Paddock to go before Sir Robert arrives.

Whenever we see Sir Robert all Paddock's theories look rather absurd. Far from being a sinister bewitcher of innocence Sir Robert seems himself almost innocent in his enjoyment of life and the flesh. His explanation, to Undine, of his behaviour is simple, open and rational: his infidelities are due to his wife's absorption in Horton,

for "directly Horton was born he took my place with her."[89] This explanation is endorsed by Alice, who later accuses her mother of having no love for her husband or her daughter, and now of preventing her son's marriage to Betty.[90] Sir Robert's lechery is not wittingly heathen, and if he has any principles or philosophy at all, they are close to epicureanism:

> ...forget all the joy-killing Paddocks in creation!...Don't you see that the best that any of us can do in this mad world is to watch a few sunrises and a few sunsets without too much malice and stupidity - and then go back where we came from,without making too much fuss![91]

The audience is faced with a choice between this wholesome and "natural" attitude, and the recourse to various other explanations and attitudes taken by the other characters. While Paddock accuses Sir Robert of stirring up evil, Durnie persists in accusing Paddock of exactly this, according to Jane. David has asked her if she knows where Alice is:

Jane:	To tell 'ee the truth, sir, I think she be gone to bed, sir, all tumble and towzel!
David:	Gone to bed!
Jane:	I think she's been having crying fits, poor maidie!...
David:	The Devil!
Jane:	Devilment is't indeed, sir! That's what Durnie said this very morning... that it be all because of Parson Paddock's cantrips and new-fangled idolatries-[92]

Once more, Jane has mistaken a meaningless imprecation for metaphysics, and reveals that Durnie has made other mistakes; perhaps he has heard Paddock talking about heathenism and erred like Mrs. Curme.

Alice, like her father, proffers a natural explanation; against both the supernaturalism of Paddock and the arid legalism of her mother, Alice locates evil in the relationships between women, as she says to Lady Sark:

> When will someone discover that the real poison is - the poison link - between women like us? When will some one explain what we do to each other, down in the depths?...What is it we know about each other that we never put into words?[93]

Yet this also is cause for Alice to take an interest in the supernatural; she and Betty, both of them enlightened and sceptical, suggest a table-turning session, to the indifference of the dull rational David, and the shock of Horton.[94] They are dining alone, in the absence of the Sark parents, because they do not know where Sir Robert is, and Lady Sark, fearing the worst, has stayed upstairs.

Already Alice and David have broken off their engagement, because David cannot accept or understand Alice's moods, and Alice is not very sympathetic to her fiancé's devotion to the political platform.[95] As a result of Betty's interest in table-turning, Horton is evidently close to breaking off their engagement; the implication being that men, absorbed in the abstractions of politics or religion, are incapable of understanding women, who are neither rational nor religious, but naturally mystical, in touch with the Earth, the feminine principle which refuses to acknowledge a distinction between the natural and the super-natural.

The last surviving relationship is the subject of the table-turning; the two uninterested members, David and

Horton, frivolously ask where Sir Robert is. At this moment Paddock calls climactically "Open! Open, please!"[96] echoing the witch's "Open, locks, whoever knocks." Paddock and Sir Robert enter together, carrying the dead body of Undine. Durnie, entering, proclaims that "They've'a killed her, between them!"[97] but then decides that it is mainly the fault of Paddock's "heathen junketings."[98] Paddock is full of divine wrath at Sir Robert, but the latter explains in calm, measured tones, that it was an accident for which he must take responsibility. They had been on the beach and she had slipped on the sea-weed; Sir Robert was unable to get her out of the water until Paddock arrived. None of the characters spoils the symbolic beauty of this, by explaining that Undine has returned to her element.

In an excellently compressed finale the main action is the recrimination and explanations over Undine's corpse; woven into this is the ending of Horton's and Betty's engagement. David is sent to get the police, and Alice tells him that she is now devoted only to her father. David asks Betty to accompany him, and as she leaves she asks Horton three times if he wants her; twice he ignores the question, then he finds himself poised between Betty and his mother, and chooses the latter. Paddock, obsessed with his dead sister, sums up the futility and fruitlessness of human relationships.

Above this, beyond the range of consciousness of the characters, the audience sees the symbolic, poetic resolution. Undine, water-spirit, drenched, on land, is also

Paddock, a toad, amphibious. The natural person and the supernatural spirit are resolved into the elements of both earth and water only by death. The theatre demands that drowning be off-stage; drowning is therefore a good reason for an off-stage death, displaced melodrama. Rosmersholm and Little Eyolf were probably in Powys' mind, and, despite the quite different mood, Ophelia "like a creature native, and indued Unto that element," may have been more than the inescapable prototype.[99] One of Powys' common themes is death by drowning; sensually intimated by Luke in Wood and Stone, apocalyptic in Rodmoor and A Glastonbury Romance, on-stage, melodramatic and gross in Ducdame, sinister and haunting in Wolf Solent, mystical and sexual in Porius, surprisingly unobtrusive in Weymouth Sands.[100]

The significance of such symbolism is not our concern here. What matters is that in this motif Powys has achieved a satisfying blend of the realistic and the symbolic, without upsetting an important balance elsewhere in the play. The audience should realize at the end that the sense of mystery and the supernatural evoked in the theatre resides only in the consciousness of the characters. All the talk of heathenism and evil spirits, especially from Paddock and Durnie, manages to remain only talk in spite of the fact that Undine has been drowned. The audience is not required to believe that her death is anything but accidental, and finds Sir Robert's honest and reasonable explanation the most acceptable. Again, as in his novels, Powys has arranged that the mysterious is undercut by the ordi-

nary. But hereby Powys is not making a philosophical statement, typical of the late nineteenth century, that the mysterious is demonstrably false in the face of the ordinary truth. The imaginative value of talking about heathenism is not discredited. More than that, the undertow of scepticism is what preserves the imaginative in an age acutely embarrassed by the gap between what we can imagine and what we can believe.

However many myths, legends and imaginings are introduced into their work by, for example, Hardy or Ibsen, the reader or audience is never allowed to forget the writer's withheld assent, the active partition of imagination and belief. The dramatist has, at least since Romanticism, had greater access to non-commitment than the novelist or poet; the theatre provides the mechanics of presentation without commentary, gives freely what the novelist must laboriously strive for. Powys' experiences as a dramatist - even without realisation on stage - may have helped him in his novels to negotiate the problems of the authorial voice, to see himself as a character within, not a god above, his creation.[101]

At a less complex level, one can demonstrate that Powys' dialogue improves in his fiction during the period when he is writing plays. As an extreme example of crispness, one can point to the conversation between Storm and Elise on the Atlantic City boardwalk, which is a kind of stichomythia in prose (only seventeen out of sixty-five speeches exceed one printed line).[102]

It is probably not a coincidence that, until 1937,Powys' two shortest novels are After My Fashion and Ducdame. By general consent, and in the absence until now of After My Fashion for comparison, Ducdame is regarded as Powys' best organised novel: for Cavaliero it is his "most compact and tightly constructed novel,"[103] and for Collins it is "the nearest approach in John Cowper's fiction to the common forms of the novel...his tendency to rambling being deliberately curbed."[104]

Compactness and tight structure were, however, not appropriate to Powys' genius. So one should conclude that the effect of his brief career as a dramatist was not entirely beneficial. The novels written in that period lack something essential to Powys - a form-regardless exuberance which is not the same as formlessness. On the other hand, the astonishingly balanced presentation of Wolf Solent may owe something to dramatic experience. Aside from, and more important than, its influence on Powys' fiction, Paddock Calls is a very fine play in its own right. One looks forward to the day when such an assertion will be subject to theatrical proof.

CHAPTER VIII

POWYS IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERNISM

The years 1924-25 can be seen to mark a crisis of conscience in the history of literary modernism in America. An inescapable fact had become apparent, that radical politics and experimental aesthetics were now treading divergent paths. Ulysses, which was first published in instalments in the April / Little Review from/1918,[1] Cummings' The Enormous Room (1922), William Carlos Williams' In the American Grain (1925), are not without political content; as vehicles of social protest, agents of the left, their influence is negligible in comparison with Dreiser's masterpiece of naturalism, An American Tragedy, of 1925. Van Wyck Brooks' abandonment of modernism, from about 1925 onwards, is a representative failure of nerve.[2]

From all this Powys may seem very far, yet his writings in the mid-nineteen-twenties reveal him as very much involved in these conflicts. In critical essays between 1923 and 1926 Powys wrote about, among others, Wilde, Joyce, Kwang-Tse, Proust and Dreiser, as well as substantial pamphlets on Psychoanalysis and Morality and The Religion of a Sceptic. Powys appears to champion a modern sensibility in his critical writings, and probably also in his lectures, while seeming totally ignorant of current debates in his novel of 1925, Ducdame. The insularity of Ducdame is doubly shocking for those who have read After My Fashion, who have evidence that Powys did not live in New York for

nothing, and latterly in Patchin Place, Greenwich Village. It was there, in the summer of 1923, that Ducdame was written, with E. E. Cummings living in the adjacent flat.[3]

Very few creative writers had shown such whole-hearted enthusiasm for and appreciation of Joyce as had Powys by 1923. His sympathy and feeling of kinship with Joyce was deep and long-lasting. In February 1921 Powys had been one of the three witnesses for the defence in the trial of the Little Review, publisher / of Ulysses.[4] Throughout the nineteen-thirties he wrote in praise of Work in Progress, and in 1943 Powys reviewed Finnegans Wake at great length, courageously regarding it as greatly superior to Ulysses.[5] What marks Powys' writings on Joyce is great enthusiasm and unquestioning acceptance; unlike most reviewers of Joyce's works, there is in Powys an absence of apologetics or theoretical justifications. Joyce's stature is taken for granted, and he is praised for giving pleasure that is independent of comprehension.

"James Joyce's Ulysses - an appreciation" was, undeservedly, printed in a minor journal, Life and Letters, in October 1923, having failed to find a more presitigious publisher. Llewelyn had submitted it, on his brother's behalf, to the Dial, writing to John: "I regard it as a worthy tribute from one great and abused man of genius to another."[6] The Dial had, however, already received five articles on Ulysses by March 1923, and was unable to print Powys'.[7] The essay was reprinted for the first time in 1975, and should take its place as one of the most

open-minded and least hysterical of early responses to Ulysses:

> The whole question of obscurity in literature is a very complicated one. There is an obscurity...that has a vast aesthetic value by reason of its thrilling suggestiveness; and there is also an obscurity that is just teasing, tiresome and annoying. I think one gets both kinds in...this dinosaurian book.
> "Ulysses" is wonderful, not because it is obscure, but because so much of its obscurity is imaginative.[8]

On this rare occasion Powys' is the voice of moderation and restraint, reproving even Arnold Bennett for exaggeration and excess:

> There are plenty of clever modern writers who can psychoanalyse quite as well, if not better, than James Joyce. Arnold Bennett thinks that the Marion Bloom monologue at the end of the book reveals the ultimate essence of the psychological content of the female mind. I do not in the least agree with him! It certainly may reveal the final essence of what Bennett will ever discover in the female mind.[9]

Powys then moves on to attack those who read too much significance into the title, alluding on the way to Owen Glendower and Eckermann:

> And as to fussing about the 'Odyssey-symbolism'; Heaven forbid any sensible critical intelligence should worry itself with such trivialities! 'Joyce had been attracted by the Ulysses myth from his earliest childhood'. I daresay he had, good luck to him! So have we all....There is a dog in the Odyssey and there is a dog - two of 'em - in 'Ulysses'....'What was your "idea", Herr Geheimrath, in writing Faust?' 'My idea, Thickhead? Does the work of a man's lifetime limit itself to so contemptible a category as an idea?'
> I fully believe that Joyce is saturated with Homer; though not nearly as much as he is with Shakespeare....You might as well say that the essence of Tristram Shandy is in the story of Iseult.[10]

While insisting on enjoying Ulysses at its face value, Powys is not justifying an avoidance of the depths. His quotations, both extensive and of phrases, are not always the obvious ones, the instantly stereotyped, and reveal a thorough familiarity.

One of the chief pleasures for Powys is Joyce's style, and again he opposes a conventional response, that heralds Ulysses as something utterly new and different:

> ...the enchanting symphonies and rhythms of its style. And these rhythms are saturated with literary tradition. It is just here that the 'originality-mongers' go quite off the track. They seem to think that because the word-arrangements are so queer and the punctuation so eccentric, the thing is without roots in the past. Not at all! To any lover of literature the book is weighty with delicious ritualistic effects, mellow and savorous....[11]

What is fairly obvious today was less so in 1923. Against pedantic explicators of the exact meaning of each neologism Powys insists on the physical value of words:

> Joyce realizes, as few writers before him have done, what enormous imaginative possibilities there are, what evocations of obscure half-physical responses, in mere verbal assonance; while his audacious habit of dovetailing separate words is a quite legitimate experiment in philological psychology.[12]

In asserting the physical against the semantic value of words Powys seems to be moving with modernist times, from a "window" to a "mirror" or even opaque notion of language. Although it is somewhat difficult to establish or demonstrate the influence of Ulysses on Ducdame, one can see in A Glastonbury Romance evidence of such linguistic speculation. Between "hate" and its cockney pronunciation, "'ate",

Powys suspects that there is probably some "infinitesimal difference, which a new science - halfway between philology and psychology - may one day elucidate."[13] When the same cockney has to write "haffairs of himportance" without the "h" Powys wonders if he felt any sense of "a psychic-philological shock" at the discrepancy.[14]

The influence of Joyce on Powys deserves to be studied in detail. One would like to know what Percy Hutchinson meant, or what his readers thought he meant, when, on the front page of the New York Times Review of Books, 19 May 1929, he questioned "whether Powys would have written 'Wolf Solent' if Joyce had not written 'Ulysses'." Without much clarification Hutchinson concludes that "John Cowper Powys is a step, an enormous step, beyond James Joyce, but he falls short of the goal." It is important to give prominence to such a comment as this, and to the essay on Ulysses, to suggest the complexity and contradictions of Powys' relationship to his age. At least one can discredit the utterly wrong but wide-spread view of Powys as an "isolationist". What matters about Powys' writings on Joyce, apart from the fact of his simple enthusiasm, is that he tries to rescue Joyce's work from abstract theory and aesthetic prescription, and bring him over to the side of tradition and imagination. It is an ironic, provocative stance, and quite consciously so.

If one disputes that last clause, denies that Powys knew anything about what was going on around him, one can look at his review of Dreiser's An American Tragedy, printed

in the Dial, April 1926.[15] For most early readers what was most worthy of discussion was the degree of truth and distortion in this indictment of American society; its mode is naturalism, and its purpose and impact therefore chiefly social and political. Only one possessed of a sharp understanding of the issues involved could be so aptly unpredictable, upsetting the stock response to Dreiser on the point of its most sure assumption. In the opening paragraph of his essay on An American Tragedy Powys says/"[t]hat the pleasure to be derived from it is grim, stark, austere, a purely aesthetic pleasure...."[16] Mere inadvertence does not achieve such outrageous effects. Powys then goes on to have it both ways, provoking all parties, by describing the novel in broadly aesthetic, at least, apolitical, terms, mythologies, life-illusions, the psychic chemistry; and yet, he adds, this is not all:

> 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....[17]

Most peculiarly, the book turns out to be 'realistic' as well. As criticism this is too misleading to be acceptable; as a review, a provisional opinion, it is legitimately, and wittily, stimulating. Powys has taken the two rivals of literature, modernism and naturalism, and written about Ulysses and An American Tragedy as if each belonged to the opposite camp.

To see Dreiser as a modernist is to come close to seeing Powys as a modernist. Some of Powys' comments on

Dreiser seem to be directed to his own work:

> I think it is a critical mistake to treat this Dreiserian style as if it were a kind of unconscious blundering....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.[18]

Stretched that far, of course, style becomes a part of all writing, and to be "without style" is as meaningless as to call a thing formless. By a narrower, more usual definition of style, Powys later wrote that Dreiser's "'style' is simply the name we are forced to give, for lack of a better, to his complete contempt for style."[19] Both these views of style fit Powys, but in his own attitude to his work he never makes apologies by way of the stretched definition. In 1925 Powys wrote to Frances Gregg, admitting to having no style, and pointing out the advantages:

> ...having no rooted banked-up engrained style gives me the freedom of all the world of ideas - something protean and fluid that really in its way is an important asset....What a quaint difference between us - you think you're hard on the track of the secret of the Universe sans style to express it when you've got it - I think I've got such a line on the secret of the Universe that it saves me the trouble of bothering about style at all...[20]

Frances Gregg, whose relationship with Powys was far too deep and intricate for any summary, was the best friend of Hilda Doolittle, and a very close friend of Pound, both in Philadelphia and London.[21] Her critical sympathies were formed by imagism, and her own writings, short, spare, and few, are utterly different from Powys'. Beneath the

emotional struggles of their correspondence a critical battle is being fought. It is in a spirit of defiance that Powys asserts his contempt for style.

Little can be concluded from Powys' utterances on the subject of style, which are themselves "protean and fluid". However, one must not think of him as naive, unaware of some of major aesthetic preoccupations of the time. It is ironic that of all the essays submitted to the Dial that chosen for publication has become one of the canonical texts of modernism. And in the same issue, November 1923, in which T. S. Eliot's review appeared, an essay by Powys was printed about something completely different. Kwang-tze (more usually known as Chuang Tzu) is Powys' subject, and the gist of his essay is that Kwang has been unfairly neglected in favour of Confucius and Lao Tzu:

> the real genius of the Taoist tradition is not the legendary Lao-tze, its portent ous prophet, but the much more whimsical and irresponsible Kwang, its Voltairian high-priest....For some mysterious reason, Kwang, compared with his great forerunners, still lacks the homage, still lacks the intellectual recognition, that seem his due.[22]

Powys turns to a discussion of Kwang's sense of humour, and uses this also for critical comparison, especially against Confucius:

> And yet the quality of his thought strikes us as more original, as more imaginative, than that of either Lao-tze or Confucius. Perhaps it is that his chaos-loving thought besieges our purer reason and - it may well be - corrupts it, in the very manner against which the whole elaborate ritual of the Confucian ethics was especially directed![23]

This hardly seems like a burning issue of the day, meriting such insistence, and one might suggest that Powys is having a little dig at Pound, and his loyal follower, Frances Gregg; Pound was greatly interested in Confucius during this time, publishing Canto XIII and his translation of the/ Ta Hio in 1928.[24] Powys' praise of Kwang's love of chaos and contingency:

> ...his mania for the heterogeneous and the casual....His philosophy is...a worship of chaos....His humour therefore delights to concentrate itself upon the most disconnected and inconsequential details; isolating such details arbitrarily and at random...[25]

contrasts neatly with Pound's celebration of Confucius' opposition to chaos:

> 'If a man have not order within him
> He can not spread order about him...'[26]

The arguments about chance and determinism, order and contingency, are not confined to Powys' fight with Pound, mediated through Frances Gregg. Powys qualifies Kwang's devotion to chaos by adding: "...isolating such details arbitrarily and at random; and yet managing to squeeze out of them a pungent metaphysical sap."[27] This may have no more to do with Kwang than with words to be found a few pages further on in the same issue of the Dial:

> [Joyce's use of myth] is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anomaly which is contemporary history....Instead of narrative method, we may now use the mythical method. It is, I seriously believe, a step toward making the modern world possible for art...[28]

The dilemma posed by a confrontation between "mythical method" and "metaphysical sap" is to be turned into a central

ambiguity of Powys' art. And while Eliot would not call Wolf Solent or A Glastonbury Romance or Porius art, those who do thus designate these novels should acknowledge, with both Eliot and Percy Hutchinson, that the possibility was in part created by Ulysses.

CHAPTER IX

DUCDAME

Amid an impressive context of intellectual and personal contacts, Ducdame is a sorry sight. Its imposing dedication "to that superior man KWANG-TSE of KHI-YUAN the only one among philosophers to be at once respectful to his spirit-like ancestors and indulgent to those who, like the protagonist of this book, go where they are pushed, follow where they are led, like a whir ing wind, like a feather tossed about, like a revolving grindstone" makes one suspicious. What can be meant by "spirit-like", and is this particular indulgence especially peculiar to Kwang-tse and Rook Ashover? Of the qualities of Kwang that Powys describes in his essay, notably his sense of humour and his love of chaos, there is no mention in the dedication, and no evidence in the book. Even the apparent point of contact, the conflict between Rook's obligations to his ancestors and his own freedom, has little to do with Taoist ancestor-worship. Despite a willed effort, evinced by the dedication, Powys was unable to assimilate his interest in Kwang to his art, just as his enthusiasm for Joyce is not creatively manifested.

That one should feel in Ducdame more of an absence, of Powys' full and waking awareness, than of a presence of any quality, is pathetic enough. However, this novel suffered further ironic misfortune in its context by being the subject of a review by Faulkner - one of the four book-

reviews that he ever wrote.[1] 1925 was for Faulkner a transforming year, between The Marble Faun and Soldiers' Pay, from poetry to fiction; twenty-five years younger than Powys, Faulkner produced his first major novel, The Sound and the Fury, in the same year that Powys came to maturity with Wolf Solent, in 1929. Both of them were, in 1925, searching for an appropriate form and style. There is little point in labouring the enormous contrasts between these two writers; Powys would have been baffled by Faulkner's artistry. Even Hardy, not known as a deliberately painstaking stylist, had shocked Powys by his concern with the form and construction of novels:

> Do you know quite casually once old Hardy said to me-"O that was when I was feeling about for my method!" I nearly jumped out of my skin at hearing those words...for I never supposed that any writer especially not of novels ever had "to feel about for a method."[2]

Even if Powys was, in this letter, trying to shock, the basis of it is unhappily true. Unhappily, in that Powys was fifty-six before he intuited his method without looking or feeling for it; and yet, however belated, for some readers great methodlessness has the edge over the methodical. For Powys, as for many of those who admire him, Dostoievsky is greater than Turgenev, Balzac greater than Flaubert, Scott than Jane Austen. As Powys himself wrote: "My absolute indifference to artistic form, and my passion for analytical suggestion, obviously lead me to prefer Jean Christophe to Madame Bovary."[3]

As we would expect, and quite justly, Faulkner found little to praise in Ducdame, and concluded:

> These people are not dramatic material. What we want in our reading is people who do the things we cannot or dare not do, or people that motivate stories in us....
>
> Gathering people into a circle is like removing your overcoat at a Child's restaurant - you do it at your own risk. For sometimes you get a novel, and sometimes you don't. From a successful novel you get a sense of completeness, of form: that is, the people in it do the things which you would do if you were, one by one, these people. We are all fools, probably; and most of us know it: but it is unbearable to believe that the things we do are not significant. And the things these people do are not significant, for they do things which we do not like to believe we would do.
>
> ....Here shall he see
> Gross fools as he
> If only he come with me.
>
> To be gross fools: being a gross fool is as hard as being a saint. Being a gross anything is rather grand....One who can sincerely lie, or squeeze every potato before buying it; to be sincerely unpleasant to live with - this is something. But these people are not sincerely fools, none of them are. In the sense of having their actions change the trend of somebody's life. But perhaps this was what Mr. Powys wanted. But surely they do not do those things that we as individuals would like to do to preserve that world of fine fabling in which we live.[4]

This review is extremely prescriptive - thus betraying the incipient novelist - and only in the penultimate sentence does Faulkner acknowledge the possibility of Powys holding other opinions, having other intentions. And Faulkner is not very clear on many points: why should it be characteristic of a sincere fool that he changes another's life? why are things not significant because we do not like to believe that we do them ourselves? One can certainly defend Powys by arguing that, quite unlike Faulkner, he does not try to determine the behaviour of his characters, and the action of

the book, and therefore is prepared to accept much contingency. And the novel's sigificance may lie elsewhere than where Faulkner wants to find it.

Faulkner may also be underestimating the subtlety of the title: "Gross fools as he" means that the characters and the reader will be equally gross fools, and the reader's folly might originate in wondering about the significance. Hyman sees the "Ducdame" syndrome as a model for Powys' other novels,that he draws us into a circle to make fools of us:

> In such a way does Powys draw us into Glastonbury or Weymouth or Dorchester, and in just such a way, when we ask: "What's that Grail?" or "What's that Mythology?" we discover the author outside it all, mocking us, telling us it was but a trick, so he could draw us together.[5]

In the major novels this is acceptable, but in Ducdame itself the reader might well feel annoyed that he is not reading Ulysses or Proust or even An American Tragedy instead. To give it that title is to give the game away, so that anyone, knowing the meaning of Ducdame, must be a hopeless fool to take up the book. As Powys had written of Ulysses, "the book...had to be called something",[6] and Powys chose the most self-deprecating and off-putting title. A more pompous author might have chosen "Their Tragic Scene" from "The Phoenix and the Turtle," quoted in the novel, or,with specific reference to the plot, from the same poem, "Leaving No Posterity".[7] Powys chose a title that is a warning, embarrassed by its inferiority - for in 1925 the state of literature was changed utterly from what it was in 1920 when Powys had asserted that "no one is writing anything

worth writing now."[8]

There are qualities in Ducdame. The description of landscape dispenses with the sinister suggestion of those of Nevilton and Rodmoor, and is of the same type as in After My Fashion. Until the discovery of the latter novel it was a common misapprehension that a letter of 1916 referred to the origins of Ducdame: "I think my third novel must have Sussex for its background."[9] The confusion received support from Powys' comment on a map that had been drawn for publication in Ducdame: "The Map...is excellent except that it looks just a tiny bit more like Sussex than like Dorset."[10] It was assumed that Powys re-named a landscape set in Sussex, without altering any of the topography; certainly nowhere in Dorset corresponds to Ashover, Tollminster or Bishop's Forley. On close examination it transpires that the landscape has nothing to do with Sussex but is a composite of Somerset and Dorset. From Dorset comes the River Frome, and from Somerset come the marshes: the peaceful coexistence of a river, water-meadows and Heron's Ridge with level marshes is a matter not of topographical inconsistency but of a failure of common sense. The clue to the Somerset setting is in Rook's walk along "a broad highway, the famous Roman road between Salisbury and Exeter."[11] This road passes within three miles of Montacute, and barely touches Dorset. Near both Montacute and the road is a village called Ash, where Will, the youngest of the Powys brothers, had a farm for a short time; John had stayed there with Will

in 1910.[12]

"Ashover" was probably formed by analogy with Okeover, in Derbyshire, known to Powys in his early childhood; his recollection of "old Mr. Okeover of Okeover...whose ancestors without a break went back to Saxon times,"[13] suggests the theme and situation, as well as the name, of "the Ashovers of Ashover."[14] The setting in the area of Montacute also enables one to identify with confidence "the parting of the ways between Tollminster and Bishop's Forley"[15] as the junction on the A 303 of the roads to Ilminster and Crewkerne. Although Montacute House is not depicted, a major source of the novel's theme must have been the problems of the Phelips family. After 300 years of possession the house was let out to tenants (including Lord Curzon) from 1911 onwards, and eventually sold to the National Trust in 1931. Apart from the financial troubles, there was no direct heir, as W. R. Phelips (1846-1919) had two sons, born in 1882 and 1884, neither of whom married. In 1925 Edward and Gerard Phelips would have been about the same age as Rook and Lexie Ashover.[16]

The descriptions of landscape in Ducdame are impressive on first reading, and much praised, but soon become hollowly theatrical because of the inconsistencies.[17] There is a degree of self-indulgence, of landscape for the sake of description, not for the sake of the story or the characters, which is common in beginning novelists. In this respect Ducdame shares the faults of excess of The White Peacock, which also impresses at first but then fails to

convince. In his three previous novels Powys had been more successful, by sticking to one kind of terrain instead of trying to blend two together; it is notable that Powys' letters do not reveal the concern with topography and details of natural and local history which he devoted to his other novels.

There is however one major improvement in Ducdame over the earlier novels, and one which will develop into an important element of Wolf Solent. The improvement lies in the difference between the "philosophically disposed" villager of Nevilton, one with a "fanciful imagination",[18] and Rook Ashover, the protagonist of Ducdame, who is himself endowed with that imagination and capacity for speculation. The thoughts and feelings of the author are beginning to be incorporated into the fictional character. Powys' problem, which may partly explain his late attainment of this rather basic accomplishment, is that he does not have confidence in his own sensibility. Put in another way, Powys doubts the plausibility of himself when objectively recreated in fiction.

The change, which takes place through Ducdame and Wolf Solent, involves both the protagonist and the narrator, and the relationship between them. In the first three novels Powys had attempted to make the narrative voice objective and reliable, in the conventional way; this had not been very successful because his own bizarre tendencies and odd mannerisms could not be entirely suppressed. At the same time, in his proximity and subservience to convention, Powys

did not transfer those odd and eccentric qualities to the protagonist. Thus one has an unsatisfactory relationship in which the suppressed oddities keep popping up indiscriminately in protagonist and narrator. The absence of a line of demarcation between the two makes for implausible characterisation and, in the bad sense, unreliable narration.

From Ducdame onwards Powys makes the authorial voice deliberately absurd and untrustworthy, thus unreliable in the good, intended and purposeful, sense. The opening sentence of Ducdame anticipates the magisterial craziness of the opening of A Glastonbury Romance:

> Some of the most significant encounters in the world occur between two persons one of whom is asleep or dead; and it might almost seem as if Rook Ashover had recognized this fact when he found himself standing by Netta Page's side on the night of November's fullest moon.[19]

By "might almost seem as if" Powys has introduced four qualifications for a single assertion: a less assured sentence would be hard to compose. The first paragraph alone contains "as if" twice, and "as it were" once. It is difficult for the reader to put his trust in a narrator so lacking in self-confidence. In the retrospect of the later novels, the tendency is clear, towards a language released from responsibility to positivist semantics, but Powys still lacks the confidence to break with convention without apology.

Simultaneously with this development, of which Ducdame can be called the pivot, the typical Powysian protagonist is being created. This can be seen most clearly in the

relationship between Rook and the landscape, and especially in his walk to Comber's End, in Chapter XIX. In the first chapter Rook is kept apart from the narrator's ideas about landscape:

> Between [Rook's] soul and all this enchanted spaciousness there arose a reciprocity he could not analyze, a feeling that had the irresponsibility of despair and yet was not despair, that resembled loneliness and yet was not loneliness. It was almost as if, just behind all this etherealized chemistry, there really did exist something corresponding to the old Platonic idea of a universe composed of mind-stuff, of mind-forms, rarer and more beautiful than the visible world.[20]

Rook has the feeling of reciprocity but it is the narrator alone who speculates on the Platonic possibilities. The author's intention is to establish the suggestion of that reciprocity in the reader's mind, but the author is not prepared to entrust the full reciprocity, feeling plus analysis, to Rook. The narrator then continues to speculate without reference to Rook:

> Certain portions of the earth's surface seem, from the remotest past, to have responded in some particularly intense way, to the influence of moonlight.
>
> Among these predestined localities the strip of road and river and meadowland surrounding Ashover Bridge was one of the most susceptible of all planetary spots to the lunar sorcery.[21]

The transition from "seem" in the first paragraph, to "was" in the second, is irritating because it has nothing to do with a character; what we witness is an author dithering, and fictional significance is not to be drawn out of an author's argument with himself.

Constantly, the author misses the opportunity to involve Rook in the landscape and the ideas that it stimulates.

Rook is in a contemplative mood, looking at the river from the bridge, and when a perch breaks the surface the narrator comments:

> To that big fish, too, it must have seemed as if there were more in this November night than a mere ordinary lapse of hours and moments.[22]

It is hard to know what the reader is supposed to gather from such a sentence: that a perch "must" make a distinction between what is and what seems is singularly uninteresting. It would be interesting if Rook imagined that the fish was having the same ideas and sensations as himself, but Rook's consciousness does not come into this.

However, at some points, the necessary integration of external nature and human consciousness is approached. The difference in quality between the two following passages is slight, but significant in terms of Powys' development. The first describes Binnory Drool, the idiot:

> Under the smooth branches of the newly leafed beech trees he ran; under the darker foliage of the sycamores; under the stinging twigs of the green hazels; over dog-mercury, over pink campion, over the soft unbudded whitish-green spikes of foxglove and mullein. Feeble-winged currant moths flapped against his face as he ran. Greenish-coloured pollen from the stamens of entangled parasitic plants clung to his cap and to his hair. Swathes of pith twine tripped him up. The oozy stalks of half-dead bluebells bent and broke beneath his boots, staining them with sticky vegetable juice.[23]

Because Binnory Drool is an idiot, ignorant of the names of plants, this description can only be praised under the modifying charge of botanical self-indulgence, an easy Hardyesque.[24] Rook meditates on his emotional situation to slightly more purpose:

> His instincts were not perverted. They were only so capricious and elusive, so bloodless and non-human, that they flitted over the flower-beds of life very much as those little blue butterflies he was watching now flitted from that patch of St. John's-wort to that patch of hawk-weed![25]

The integration is closer here, but by too crude a simile to be satisfying; the strained prose, including the exclamation mark, indicates Powys' difficulties and embarrassment, and his uncertainty about the effect he is trying to achieve.

Elsewhere Powys fails to strike the balance by attributing to Rook too many of his own thoughts, beyond convincing range of Rook's knowledge and awareness:

> Rook was reminded of that mysterious glow, seeming to come from all quarters of the horizon at once, such as forms the background to the delicate Tuscan leafiness in many an Old Master's picture. The very cuckoo-flowers in the damp margins of the fields had that curious allegorical look which all fresh spring growths sometimes assume, as if they were painted in the illuminated edges of old breviaries.[26]

Apart from the archness of the allusion one can admire the effect of changing the normal places of "margins" and "edges". That reversal thickens out the collaboration between the narrator and Rook in seeing the things of nature as allegorical and symbolic. An incident such as this looks forward to the sustained complementarity of vision operative throughout Wolf Solent, in which "Nature was always prolific of signs and omens to [Wolf's] mind."[27]

Powys' problem is that shared with novelists lacking the capacity to create major characters utterly other than themselves. Dostoievsky, Lawrence and Kafka survive this liability by strategies of differentiation, often ironic

or moral.[28] One must avoid what Coleridge, speaking of dramatic poetry, called "a species of ventriloquism":

> Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking while in truth one man only speaks.[29]

It is greatly to the advantage of the novel, as a genre, that throughout its development it has resisted attempts to make "unity" or "congruity" of style a basic criterion of judgment. "Ventriloquism", however, is a two-fold sin, because it ignores the nature of art, and does not respect the uniqueness of individuals. The most unsatisfactory state of all is when ventriloquism is not deliberately avoided but casually applied: then there is confusion between the consciousness of the narrator and that of the character, the latter being hardly plausible anyway.

That, essentially, is the situation that exists with regard to the Andersen brothers, Adrian Sorio, Richard Storm and, with a decisive, germinal exception, to Rook Ashover. Chance-created hieroglyphics, visible in nature to those who seek for signs, play an interesting part in Ducdame, revealing both confusion and a potential for the imaginative consistency of Wolf. On a single page in the first chapter we find the following passages:

> There was something about the illuminated ripples that extended behind [the rat], as it swam, that seemed in some way symbolical of all planetary movement.
>
> ...
>
> Ashover leaned back against the stone coping

> of the bridge and stared up at the [moon]. Those queer hieroglyphs written across her face seemed as if they were on the point of revealing, to him alone of all the tribes of men, some incredible world secret.
>
> ...
>
> between the white face looking downward and the white face looking upward a strange correspondency established itself.[30]

The problem with the first two of these passages is that they both contain "seemed" without specifying that they "seemed to Rook": even the second passage can be read in a way suggesting that the hieroglyphs seemed, to the narrator, as if they would reveal to Rook some secret. And this confusion of consciousnesses is inescapable in the final passage, because only an observer, probably the omniscient narrator, can see both Rook and the moon. There is no possibility of a correspondency establishing itself in Rook's eyes, visually, by whiteness, but only conceptually, and that is not mentioned.

"Correspondency" may appear to be an aesthetic device for drawing the reader's attention to symbolic and latent symmetries within the word-painting. Yet from a later instance one can see that Powys is trying to use the idea to form a bridge between the narrator's and the character's consciousnesses. Powys' suggestion here is subtle:

> Between the excited woman [Cousin Ann] and the mysterious power emanating from the mortality of that place [the graveyard] there was a formidable and strange correspondence - a correspondence that did not rise to the level of the girl's mental consciousness, but affected her, none the less, and strengthened, so to speak, the despotism and magnetism of her will.[31]

The correspondence here is purely conceptual, not visual, and the reader seems to know more about it than Lady Ann, and yet, feeling it less directly, may not know what it is at all. Powys wants to suggest the collaborative power of Lady Ann and the Ashover dead - of which a straight equation would not be plausible - and it is achieved through Lady Ann's semi-articulate, symbolically semi-conscious mental state. Thereby Powys is able to describe and to enact the limitations in a man's portrayal of a woman's being. This technique, based, crudely, on superior knowledge and inferior feeling, is to be used with unique accomplishment in the presentation, through Wolf's consciousnes, of Gerda and Christie.

Hieroglyphics never justify their existence in Ducdame. Apart from the moon's signs, already cited, there is one example of hieroglyphics without observer or meaning, which makes mockery of the use of the word. The narrator is describing the landscape without reference to any character:

> Little by little the puddles in the roads turned into cat's-ice. A faint film of solidification formed over the ponds at the meadow corners. Hieroglyphic patterns made themselves visible in the mud of secluded lanes.[32]

It is not a fatuous koan to ask whether a hieroglyphic can be visible except to somebody who is making a conscious effort of interpretation. A more proper use of the word is to be found in Nell Hastings' relationship with a mark on the wall near her bed:

> There, in the pallid dimness, she stared passively at a little chance-drawn mark on the gray-plastered su rface before her, a quaint little hieroglyph of the fingers of accident,

> which had come to take many strange shapes and be associated with many strange feelings during her life in that room.[33]

Nell is not a major character, and this is an isolated incident; we are still quite a long way from Wolf's constant interpretation of things around him in nature. Then the word is seldom used by the narrator, and it is Wolf himself who thinks: "I've got a sort of underlife...full of morbid hieroglyphics."[34]

For most of the time, the best that Rook can manage is an articulation, or a self-consciousness, of the clichés of the authorial pathetic fallacy:

> Vaguely in his mind he associated the great darkened mass of frozen cloud-stuff that covered the earth with the inevitableness of the fate that was gathering about him.[35]

It is notable that Powys works hard to make it quite clear that this obvious association exists in Rook's mind. When Rook might be making more original comparisons it is as if the author wants to take the credit himself. As with the passage quoted earlier, about Rook's thoughts flitting "over the flower beds of life very much as those little blue butterflies he was watching now flitted from that patch of St. John's-wort to that patch of hawk-weed...."[36] the author tells us specifically that Rook was watching the butterflies, but not that he was identifying his thoughts with them. Confirming that the author is jealously protecting his imaginative resources, guarding them against his main character, we can see that the simile of the butterflies does nothing except spell out, redundantly, the authorial metaphor, "flitted over the flower beds of life"; if Rook

does have a symbolically conscious imagination he is merely catching up with the author. And even if the comparison with the butterflies is Rook's, the author gives us no evidence that the added botanical knowledge is Rook's also. The passage exemplifies the uncertainties of tone and intention, and the insecurity of the authorial voice, that bedevil Powys' presentation of character until Wolf Solent.

As if to obscure the argument, that passage occurs in what is for the most part the saving exception of Ducdame, the episode that looks forward to Wolf Solent, Rook's walk in Chapter XIX. Described by Cavaliero as "one of the finest things in all of Powys's fiction",[37] this chapter merits detailed analysis. In Rook's walk from Ashover to Comber's End, entirely gratuitous to the plot, Powys comes close to achieving a proper relationship between authorial voice, character's consciousness, and external nature. The chapter begins with three paragraphs of entirely authorial description of the countryside at the end of June, impressive, if somewhat indulgent, but certainly not superfluous. This is balanced by three paragraphs in which Rook thinks about himself - "To himself he seemed a moral leper"[38] - and about his relationship with Nell and Hastings. One more paragraph of luxuriant, authorial description follows, after which the author describes the reason for the walk, the minor event of Rook and Lexie having a picnic together. Lexie, due, oddly, to "one of those earth-obsessed intuitions,"[39] has decided that the weather will be fine and that he will

be driven out to Comber's End in a cart.

This is rather a laboured way of allowing Rook to be an ambulatory solipsist, the favourite mode of heightened awareness for Powys' protagonists:

> He felt wearily, hopelessly sad, as he walked along,switching aimlessly with his stick the dock leaves and hemlock plants and rousing from their noon siesta, now a long-legged heron, and now a green snake, while the far-travelled wind rustling through the alders and the guelder bushes seemed to him like a trailing army of defeated sighs....[40]

The snake and the heron point to the literary antecedent of the walk, that of Mrs. Yeobright across Egdon Heath.[41] The interest of Rook's conscious simile is that Powys has already described this wind in his own way, as a kind of summation of the countryside, carrying the smells of orchards, dairies and cottage gardens.[42] For Rook this abundance of nature holds within it symbols of defeat, thus matching the paradox that Cousin Ann draws strength from the graveyard for her campaign to provide an Ashover heir. While the author has chosen to describe the hay and the wild flowers, the fruits of midsummer, Rook sees other features of the landscape:

> As he stared at the long lines of pollard willows on either side of the lane, their grotesque trunks, topped by what looked like thick upstanding panic-stricken hairs,became to him a silent avenue of Rook Ashovers, each of them born without a heart and each of them awaiting some kind of retributive judgment day![43]

This is symbolic writing of high complexity. A controlling idea is that of the family tree, particularly relevant to a family called Ashover. Pollard trees are literally without

heads, metaphorically without hearts, and Rook calls their grotesque, unwanted growths, "hairs", suggested, of course, by "heirs". The imaginative brilliance of this, and the unobtrusive wit, trip one up as one plods through so much mediocre prose.

Rook, like Wolf, tries to live according to a cult of sensations, and bases his "life-illusion" on a response to sensations in nature.[44] Intellectualised, and imaginatively heightened, nature becomes "hieroglyphic", the sensations it offers loaded with symbols and allegories:

> He stopped for a while, leaning over a gate and gazing into the green slime of a cattle-trodden ditch, across which three orange-bodied dragon-flies were darting with as much arrogance as if it were a Venetian lagoon.
> ...He suddenly found himself actually trembling with a convulsive fit of anger against his wife; and not only against his wife. It was as if he had never realized before how profoundly his life illusion was outraged by his marriage. The thought that he was irretrievably committed to this brilliant high-handed companion; the thought that his life was no longer to be a series of sweet solitary sensations, but a thing which was only half his own, stripped the magic from earth and air and sky![45]

Not only can such sensations not be shared - this is the source of emotional problems for many of Powys' protagonists - but they can be used in order to withdraw callously from emotional relationships. Rook's reflections on his "emotional detachment", his ability "to reduce all human relations into a misty puppet show,"[46] echo Powys' own experience. As already quoted, with application to Richard Storm, Powys writes of his inability to feel emotions directly:

> It was as though I was so inhuman that the tears only rushed to the back of my eyes...

> when some tragic aspect of a friend's life could be linked with the death of Caesar or Socrates or Christ....[47]

Crudely on cue, as Rook dissolves humanity into a puppet show, the dragon-flies come into prominence again, along with "clouds of infinitesmal midges" and other insects.[48]

One expects this to be followed by further evidence of Powys' inability to resist the stereotype and the well-worn device:

> in a corner of clear water a group of tiny black water beetles whirled round and round, as if they were trying to outpace their own small shadows which answered to their movement, down there on the sunlit mud, in queer radiated circles like little dark-rimmed moons.
>
> The peculiar nature of Rook's intelligence did not permit him the pragmatic refuge of some drastic change in his system of life.....
>
> His vision of things would go on to the very end drawing its quality from just such vignettes of the ways of nature as he was staring at at that moment - those casual heaps of cattle dung, those dancing midges, that green pond slime, those revolving jet-bright beetles!
>
> He was sick and weary with the effort of thinking; of thinking round and round in the same circle.[49]

Our expectations are in fact disappointed, for nowhere does Rook reduce life to nothing but a few midges. He compares the shadows of water-beetles to little moons, his own face having earlier afforded a "correspondency" with the moon. Yet, instead of making the obvious, tedious point, that all is unified on a great scale, and that scale alone distinguishes moons from midges, Rook rejects that consolation of a system, and celebrates the casual and contingent vignettes of nature. To the Powys-protagonist the things of nature may be hieroglyphic and allegorical, but they are

never turned into functions of a system.

Like the water-beetles going round and round in circles (and, of course, like moons), Rook's thoughts are trapped in a circle, because he does not accept the easy escape of systematisation. Rook does not make all circular motion one, nor does the author, and the identity of these creatures and their motions is left to the reader to discover. While the reader is thus forced into being systematic, he also realises that these circles are similar to that into which the author is gathering fools. Circles are elsewhere associated with fools. Hastings feels that he and his wife are isolated from the world by "a sort of magical circle":[50] this circle actually binds Rook and Nell together, making a fool and a cuckold of Hastings. The Cimmery Stone, the crystal ball of the witch, Betsy Cooper, gathers fools around it: Rook, peering into "this microcosmic symbol of the world", manages to see himself dead in a coffin, mourned over by Netta.[51] That this scene occurs at the end of the novel [52] proves nothing except that the book and the crystal ball have collaborated in bringing fools into circles.

In his thoughts about Lady Ann, his new wife, Rook's imagination becomes still more distinct from the narrator's. While we have already seen Rook and the narrator selecting different aspects of the landscape for comment, and different metaphors and similes, now we see Rook's imagination becoming disturbed and grotesque. The narrator is explicit about this:

> His imagination got more and more unbalanced; ran riot more and more wildly; as he thought of himself in relation to his cousin-wife.[53]

As part of this process, Rook "got the sensation that his brain was going to burst like the seeds of a gorse-bush in hot weather,"[54] a simile of imaginative force not just because it seems to blend Hardy and Kafka but because it is outside the normal imaginative range of the Powys narrator. It is more successful than Rook's feeling that Ann was "some sinister living growth, fungus-like and carnivorous,"[55] because we are familiar with Powys' affection for the life of ponds and marshland.

As Rook continues his walk, and as a result of the activity of his imagination, all colour drains out of the landscape, leaving everything grey. Seized by dizziness, Rook has a hallucinatory vision of his future son. A handsome youth on horseback, he is, like Adrian's son Baptiste, a "seraphic ideal."[56] This young man speaks to Rook, and even holds his hand, and leaves the reader in no doubt that he is physically there, not a figment of Rook's imagination. It is one of the rare moments in Powys' fiction, much more infrequent than is generally assumed, in which the psychic or the supernatural breaks through into the "real" world of the novel. The apparition does not offend the reader's sense of propriety because the purpose of introducing the son is not trite or obvious; Powys does not draw forth the predictable metaphysical or spiritual lesson. Instead, and paradoxically, it is this experience of another order of reality, suggesting boundless scope for

human life, that forces Rook to realise that he must accept the natural order of reality:

> "I thought just now," Rook went on, holding tightly to the edge of the rider's saddle, "that there was no one in the world more cowardly, more contemptible than I am; no one in the world more treacherous, lecherous, and mean-hearted! And then I saw that the green slime was the green slime, that the cattle dung was the cattle dung; and it came into my head that a man has to accept himself for what he is; or if he can't do that just kill himself and end it!"[57]

Rook at once has another extraordinary experience, this time concerning, as often in Powys, the material being of words:

> Kill himself and end it! The words seemed to drift away, over the flanks of the horse and over the pollard willows, as if they possessed some palpable body of their own that could not dissolve at once into the air. Rook heard them floating across the fields. Why didn't they sink into that mass of grayness that now began suffocating him again?[58]

The paradox that the vision of his son should help to make Rook realise the futility of aspiration, of rejection of the natural world, is reinforced by his odd sense of the words. The son has become manifest to tell Rook that birth and death are natural, and that suicide is unnatural, the ultimate rejection of nature. Furthermore, Rook learns that an acceptance of nature is not only an enjoyment of dung and slime, but an awareness of oneself as a social and emotional being:

> "...no one who makes any effort to change his nature or to change any one else's nature has any right to be alive upon the earth...Slime - dung - not one gray feather - " he gasped wildly; and then, in a sudden burst of exultant freedom: "No one is worthy to live," he cried with a loud voice, "who doesn't know - who doesn't know - "
>
> "What, Daddy?" whispered the voice at his

> side.
>
> He flung the words into the air now with a ringing triumphant voice.
>
> "Who doesn't know that all Life asks of us is to be recognized and loved!"
>
> ...
>
> "Recognized and loved," he muttered; and there arose within him the feeling that it was for the creation of a being like this that all the suffering he had caused and all the horror he had endured found their solution.[59]

This is the great awakening which Powys' protagonists typically experience. And on this matter Ducdame is truly pivotal. All the protagonists of the early novels die, and all the protagonists of the later novels (up to Maiden Castle) survive the end of the book. James Andersen, Adrian Sorio and Richard Storm all die on the impact of losing their life-illusions, as if to prove that reality without illusion is unbearable. Wolf Solent, John Crow, Magnus Muir, and Dud No-man all come to a humiliating realisation, and have to come to terms with that more modest self-appraisal. The evidence suggests that Powys tried to get Rook to accomodate himself to his new knowledge, and failed. Rook has been offered the redemption of normality through ancestral sharing, the quotidian raised, by communion through time, to intense experience. These are Rook's feelings after the visionary horseman has left him:

> The scene...struck Rook now as if it came to him with the weight of a whole series of complicated human impressions behind it. It seemed to summon him forth, as it must have summoned his ancestors before him, out of the cluttered distractions of the passing hour into some larger, nobler world, some world that lay all the while only just behind the familiar, the taken-for-granted, the common undistinguished face of crude reality![60]

The trouble with this is that it pulls in the opposite direction to Rook's true awareness that slime is only slime, and dung only dung: indeed, the narrator here is trying to change nature, to look for a greater world hidden behind this one, by each of which he should, according to Rook, have forfeited the right to life.

Having achieved a radical realisation in Rook, it is as if the narrator also feels let down. How can Rook's relapse into the natural be described except in collapsed language? Powys' rather desperate solution is to elevate the scene to the condition of art. The narrator asserts, frantically, that Rook:

> felt as if he were some shadowy supernumerary come to life in the rich canvas of a Tintoretto or a Titian; one of those carelessly sketched anonymous figures whose business it is to stare modestly and self-effacingly at some great mythopoeic event whose "persons" are gods and beasts and heroes.[61]

This is a most fruitful idea, implying that nobody can ever be more than an attendant lord: its extension is to be found in A Glastonbury Romance, whose "heroine is the Grail,"[62] but in which the Grail, as such, does not appear. This is not only Hamlet without the prince, but Hamlet himself as an attendant lord. Whereas, by these means, Powys achieves in A Glastonbury Romance an immense and superb deflation, in Ducdame he is reluctant, afraid to let go of so much. The passage cited above forces us to concentrate on Titian, Tintoretto, and a great mythopoeic event, and thus neglect the pathetic figure of Rook. Rook has attained self-knowledge, a reconciliation with the world as it is,

while the narrator clings on to illusions of art and myth.

Rook's humble devotion to the underside of nature remains firm to the end of the chapter, and is summed up just before his meeting with Lexie:

> Rook's own particular response to the accidental groupings of scenery was something that implied sometimes a vindictive malice against the richer forms of loveliness and an obstinate sullen preference for things that were abject, woebegone, god-forsaken.[63]

This aesthetic ambiguity is matched by his morally ambiguous preference of the pathetic, sterile Netta over the fruitful and overbearing Ann. A clue to the significance of this walk, with its satisfying blend of sensation and reflection, is to be found in Powys' book of 1930, <u>In Defence of Sensuality</u>:

> Our philosophy should have a certain <u>overtone of awareness</u> falling upon a mass of obscure, disorganised sensations, and giving them a compact and living continuity. Such sensations must revert on the one hand to the slow vegetable growths of the beginning of things, and on the other hand to the embryo rudiments of strange and godlike ecstasies.[64]

The latter pair of extremes are to be found in the dung and in the vision of the horseman, token of his future son.

Rook has become true to the precepts of Powys, while the narrator is trying to salvage some mythological grandeur from the situation. Powys, as narrator, has a great fondness for the magnificent and the apocalyptic which does not square with a protagonist like Rook. Here one must point to one of the least-known of the major influences on Powys, that of Turgenev, and in particular, his novel <u>Rudin</u>. Powys did not admire this work for its artistry or

technique, but for its presentation of somebody like himself. To Frances Gregg in 1913 Powys wrote: "I am as you know (only he was so much more capable!) gently adumbrated in Rudin."[65] The following year he told Llewelyn that "I seem detached from all I care for. I have no one to fall back upon. I have so little identity of my own. I am like one of those half-dead superannuated ones in Turgeniev...."[66] In Louis Wilkinson's novel of 1916, The Buffoon, in which Powys is satirically drawn in the character of Jack Welsh, we read:

> Welsh replied that he had never been in love, that he did not think he ever could be. "I am without love," he said, "as I am without tears. I cannot weep: I cannot adore. I am incapable of true sorrow, and of true religion." He warmed at this point, comparing himself with Turgenev's Dmitri Rudin. "A man without heart!" he exclaimed. "Can you conceive it? That is my destiny."[67]

Powys realised that Rudin's death on the barricades was by no means a triumph over his lassitude and non-commitment, but the ultimate length of emotional detachment:

> Probably I shall end by perishing like Turgeniev's oratorical Rudin - shot through the heart in an attempt to analyze his last revolutionary sensations.[68]

So Powys wrote in Confessions of Two Brothers, in 1916. Later mentions of Turgenev are either critical of his technique, or reveal a former interest that has lapsed.[69] Much of the importance of Turgenev's influence lies in the date of Powys' interest, most strong between 1913 and 1916. This was when Powys was in his early thirties. At his first appearance, Rudin is thirty-five as, at theirs, are also Wolf Solent and John Crow.[70]

The creation of the Powys-protagonist, a unique and original type of character in English fiction, is not merely the product of a self-portrait. It is also the introduction of Turgenev's character-type, the idle seeker after sensations carried over from an aristocratic society to a democratic one. In the context of Powys' fiction, the phrase "superfluous man" is illuminating at once, both of the psychological type and of the uncertain relationship between the protagonist and his society. In Powys' creation of a protagonist distinct from himself one must also see clearly what he has done with his own personality. Other writers extend themselves imaginatively, so that one can say that each of the Karamazov brothers represents an aspect of Dostoievsky. Powys imaginatively reduces himself, creating over and over again selfish, insensitive and emotionally warped men. However, they are not deprived of Powys' imagination, of his sign-seeking consciousness, his sceptical and speculative intellect. And here, seldom noticed, lies the central moral interest of Powys' fiction, the existence within one person of emotional meanness and imaginative largeness.

It is easy to use death to bring an end to a novel. In a novel whose main happening is the transformation of the protagonist, it is hard for the author to extend the novel beyond the turning-point, the climax of recognition and change. As soon as Adrian or Richard Storm arrives at a new understanding the plot disappears, for the release of the

character is essentially one that offers no path and compels in no direction. By making death follow immediately upon the awakening Powys both shapes a neat end, and avoids the consequences of the meeting between the "born-again" prot agonist and the old bathos of life. This escapist technique is similar to that of certain Christians who have endeavoured to die immediately after baptism, thus unstained by further being. Ducdame is pivotal, between After My Fashion and Wolf Solent, because at the end of his walk Rook does not fall into the lake at Comber's End. Powys manages to make both his life and the plot continue.

Chapter XIX deserves to be in a better plot. The plot of Ducdame is the most absurd and irritating ever invented by Powys (even the plots of the very late fantasies are more interesting and hardly less plausible). Netta's barrenness, and the need for an heir to the Ashovers, is so flagrantly stupid a device that it destroys what it is meant to illustrate, the limitations imposed by the past, and the family tradition, on an individual's freedom: the novel should have been a squirearchical version of Buddenbrooks. It is remarkable that in seven years Powys had moved from this narrow, trivially genetic problem, peculiar to the landed gentry, to the endlessly complex problem of the pressure of the Grail on the modern population of Glastonbury.

The plot suffers also from being structured round a precise chronological scheme that is simply not justified. The book runs from November to November for no good reason,

and, as Faulkner sardonically observed, of Rook's death in the autumn coming after the description of winter: "Where is the man who can die as grandly as December?"[71] And to the specified date of Rook's death and his son's birth, 30 September, it is hard to attach any significance.

More than that, it is hard to attach any significance to Rook's death. Unfortunately, I was unable to examine the manuscript of Ducdame, now in Texas. We do, however, have external evidence that the end of the book was much revised. Powys wrote to Louis Wilkinson, in 1944, about a letter he had just written to Llewelyn's biographer, Malcolm Elwin:

> I wrote to him...saying that I did read 'Ducdame'chapter by chapter to Lulu and that I clearly recall his making me change the end of the book completely....[72]

This comes out rather differently in Elwin's biography:

> Llewelyn accompanied him to the office of Doubleday, Page & Co. to discuss publication of his novel Ducdame, which, perhaps because it was written during close contact with Llewelyn, who always counselled him against prolixity, is the most condensed and least digressive of his novels.[73]

This looks like a biographer's attempt to defend his subject, for the ending of Ducdame is certainly not something for which one would hurry to take credit. Even so, its assumption that Ducdame is condensed and not digressive is a casual judgement. It is especially interesting that, in his self-criticism of After My Fashion, Powys wrote that "its chief fault is longwindedness."[74] After My Fashion is the shortest of all Powys' novels, and much shorter than any of the important ones. Perhaps it is essential for the

appreciation of Powys that one understands A Glastonbury Romance to be more condensed and less digressive than Ducdame.

The ending of Ducdame is entirely otiose. The book moves explicitly from a solution to a dissolution. As we have already seen, Rook's vision of a son gives him the feeling that in this youth all the suffering and horror have "found their solution."[75] That is Rook's achievement of meaning, to which he is not allowed to hold for long. In Chapter XXV Rook is again walking, along the road from Ashover Church to the village. He is approaching Foulden Bridge, named in Rook's childhood after some lovers who used it as a rendezvous; the name is invented, private, unknown to Rook's wife Ann, unlike "Gorm", a syllable on a sign-post, of mysterious potency.[76] In this last chapter Rook again meets his "son" and tells him why he is there:

> "I've obeyed Ann to-night quite literally. She told me to walk to Foulden Bridge."
>
> Why he said just this, when Ann had never once mentioned the word "Foulden," is one of those queer incidents in a man's life destined to remain to the end of time hidden away unsolved in the limbo of the irrelevant.[77]

That "unsolved" purposeless contingency immediately precedes Rook's certainty that he has a son, which recreates the "solution" of Chapter XIX:

> he,too, Rook of Ashover, was experiencing now, for all his sceptical disillusionment, the most primitive emotion of the human race: that immemorial exultation, older than the tents of Abraham, older than the tents of Achilles, the joy that a man child is born into the world![78]

Foulden Bridge is presumably meant to be retrieved from the "limbo of the irrelevant" by being the place of Rook's

murder, just as we are told that the rake used by Hastings to murder Rook has "gathered to itself more and more" personality, as Rook and Hastings have lost theirs.[79]

That the author is uncertain of his intention is evident in his reflection on the murder:

> Rook Ashover was buried a couple of days later than the man who brought to an end his Pyrrhonian scepticism with a garden rake.[80]

On the previous page we have been told that his scepticism was overcome by the experience of the birth of a son. That, the reader feels, is the significant triumph of emotion over detached scepticism. Indeed, in the context of the plot and of Rook's character, it is the murder that should be assigned to the limbo of the irrelevant. The author has allowed Rook to survive his awakening, only to find it impossible to do anything with him except have him murdered. Powys had learned how to manage this by Wolf Solent but for the present novel he would have done as well to drown Rook in the pond at Comber's End, and cut the book's length by a hundred and fifty pages.

This treatment of Ducdame has concentrated on the character of Rook, as bodied forth, promisingly, in a single chapter. The other characters, and the rest of the book, deserve to be neglected. Even when one has conceded, as most readers and critics do, that Ducdame is a work of apprenticeship, one can still demand some progress. We find no development of ideas, no elaboration of themes. The two brothers, the hollow women, the clergyman with his nihilist book, stock items of previous novels, are not merely no

more interesting in Ducdame, but they seem tired of rehearsals. With the exception of Chapter XIX, which may have been indispensable to Powys' development, Ducdame is one "early novel" too many.

CHAPTER X

WOLF SOLENT

"The truth is that only on a long stretch does my inspiration come."[1] So Powys wrote in 1933, at the height of his most creative period, during which the four "Wessex novels" and the Autobiography, as well as four books of "popular philosophy," were written. After the financial and emotional worries and instabilities of the early nineteen-twenties, Powys found economic security with the Keedick lecture agency,[2] and had begun his lasting relationship with Phyllis Playter.[3] Powys was able to spend three years writing Wolf Solent, during which time there is little evidence of the frustrations, distractions and uncertainties with which the making of his earlier novels was fraught.[4] We sense that, at last, Powys knew what he wanted to write and was able to proceed at his own pace.

Powys' pace was conditioned by his constant travelling; as he recalled in his Preface for the 1961 reprint, "I wrote Wolf Solent travelling through all the states of the United States, except two."[5] Much of the manuscript consists of hotel note-paper, and we can assume that the novel was largely written in hotel rooms and trains in the forty-six states traversed over three years.[6] The reward for such discomfort and inconvenience was large sales, which meant that the manuscript could be sold for a good price to the collector, Melrich von Rosenberg.[7] The profit from that sale and the royalties enabled Powys to purchase a house

in up-state New York, Phudd Bottom, and, in 1930, to retire from lecturing.[8] For the first time since leaving Cambridge in 1894, Powys was able to settle down in one place. "Few foreign visitors," he wrote, "indeed few native commercial travellers, know the length and breadth of North America as well as I."[9] Thirty-six years of constant travelling was, fittingly, brought to an end by Wolf Solent.

Yet it would not be correct to say, with symbolic neatness, that Powys had found his métier, and settled down in literary terms, to produce a series of novels of the same kind. The usual groupings of "Wessex novels" and "Welsh novels" have little significance, for each of the novels differs from the others in almost everything except topography. One could go further and say that each of Powys' major novels rejects the lessons and achievements of its predecessor - an attribute of greatness that Powys shares with, for example, Joyce, Mann and Faulkner, and which Lawrence, for example, disastrously lacked. In an age of frantic, self-justifying experimentation it would be hard to find anyone, in any sphere of art, who created something as radically original as Porius at the age of seventy-eight. If by "style" one means method of procedure, routine of creativity, then Powys failed admirably in the finding of it.

Evidence of this, of the discontinuity between Wolf Solent and A Glastonbury Romance, is found in the Autobiography, when Powys writes about his friend, James Abell, whose

> curiously metaphysical attitude to literature...has been of considerable value to me in the writing of my latest novels, for he has encouraged me to rebel against that Henry James rule of "straining" the whole thing through one character's consciousness.[10]

The great achievement of Wolf Solent lies precisely in that straining, in the absolute, uninfringed centrality of Wolf's consciousness. The next novel is entirely different, having a number of important consciousnesses, and no centre at all, unless it be the Grail. The influence of James was detected by one of Wolf Solent's early admirers, Paul Jordan-Smith:

> For comparisons one must look, not to Hardy, but to Emily Brontë, to John Trevena, and, oddly enough, to Henry James. The subjective method employed by Mr. Powys was not sired by James Joyce, but by the sly, American-Englishman who was the analyst of the drawing-room.[11]

In part, Jordan-Smith was reacting against reviewers, such as Percy Hutchinson, already quoted, who asserted that Wolf Solent was dependent on Ulysses, and developed from it. But Powys explicitly acknowledges the influence of James, and we know, furthermore, that his favourites among James' novels were The Tragic Muse, The Spoils of Poynton, What Maisie Knew, and The Ambassadors.[12] This is a purist's choice, and Powys specifically excludes Daisy Miller, Roderick Hudson, and The Portrait of a Lady from the summit of James' achievement, because they are merely for "[l]overs of simple story-telling."[13] Powys explains his own choice through being among those "who are concerned with sheer beauty of form apart both from exciting subjects and psychological curiosities."[14] In the retrospective of Powys' later novels - at the time of the essay on James only Wood and Stone had

been written - and the bias of critical attitudes to Powys, his view of James may seem provocative, or even perverse.

Yet Wolf Solent does possess "sheer beauty of form," is lacking in "exciting subjects" if not in "psychological curiosities," and is one of the finest presentations of a single consciousness since The Ambassadors. It is because one assumes that the influence of James is entirely formal that it seems so unlikely, so embedded is the assumption that Powys' novels are formless. The Dostoievskian themes, of good and evil, cruelty and perversion, the "double" of Redfern, and images such as the face of the man on the Waterloo steps, have been present before in Powys' fiction without such success. The influence of Dostoievsky is, as James and Eliot observed, not formally beneficial. If Powys, realising this, turned to James as a compensating counterweight, he may have felt drawn by their shared experience as failed playwrights.[15] The extended presentation of a single consciousness is what the novel is uniquely capable of shaping, and with which drama is essentially incompatible. In addition, the influence of James is not entirely formal. Wolf's life-illusion is taken from Ibsen's The Wild Duck, but may owe something to Strether's "tribute to the ideal."[16] The basic theme, the deception of the protagonist, which is revealed by the protagonist to the reader, before the protagonist himself realizes, is common to both The Ambassadors and Wolf Solent. Strether observes much, Solent feels much, yet both miss the point; and, by missing the point, both men arrange

to have themselves placed in the centre of a story which in other eyes is not theirs.

Another literary similarity, that may be an influence or just a coincidence, is anyway significant. We know that Powys had read Mann's The Magic Mountain by the time that Wolf Solent was published;[17] the English translation was published in 1927, and it is therefore possible that the beginning of Wolf Solent was written with The Magic Mountain in mind. Both books begin with a train journey, but not merely that, for these train journeys have radically opposed symbolic functions. Castorp's train goes up; Wolf's is a down train. Castorp ascends into the elevated atmosphere and clear light of the cosmopolitan mind, while Wolf descends into his past, his childhood, his dead father, from the city to the country, "back" to nature, from the capital to the provinces. These train journeys can symbolise the conflict in which Wolf Solent touches the perimeter of twentieth-century history.

Powys was brought to Thomas Mann's attention by Karl Kerényi in 1934; Mann's comment, made without having read anything by Powys, is illuminatingly negative:

> My attention was called to Powys at the same time as your letter by an article in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung which dealt with his books Defense of Sensuality and The Meaning of Culture. The article was entitled, moreover, "Back to the Ichthyosaurus." That is to be sure a coarse and coarsening heading, but the sneer implicit in it is not entirely without justification. One finds in European literature of the present day a kind of rancor against the development of the human cerebrum, a rancor which has always struck me as a snobbish and ridiculous form of self-negation. Permit me the confession that I am no friend

> of the anti-intellectual movement represented in Germany, particularly by Klages. I feared and fought it early, because I saw through all its brutally anti-human consequences before they became apparent.[18]

What Mann is actually objecting to is not Powys himself, whom he had not read, but his susceptibility to misinterpretation by Nazi sympathisers. If there is not much "Blut" in Wolf Solent there is plenty of "Boden", as one Bernhard Fehr discovered;[19] in the 1930s a protagonist who is keen on walking takes political risks. On the other hand, some anti-Nazi intellectuals who had read Powys were full of admiration. In Vienna Wolf Solent was praised by Hermann Broch and Elias Canetti, in Prague by Max Brod, in Budapest by Kerényi, in Switzerland by Hesse, and in Germany itself by Hans Henny Jahnn.[20] Brod corresponded with Powys in the 1930s, and makes brief, vague but laudatory mention of Wolf Solent in his autobiography.[21] Although Brod's letters to Powys have not been found, Powys mentions them in a letter of 1942:

> O yes that Prague Jewish writer, author of "Prince of Judea" who used to write me long letters about Kafka & always swore he found something Kafka-ish in my tales was Max Brod.[22]

One would like to know much more about the exact nature of the response given by intellectuals to the German translation of Wolf Solent. It is the only one of Powys' novels which was given, through the quality and circumstance of its early readers, a historical context. Even more than the initial comparisons, by minor reviewers, with Joyce and James, the immediate sense that the novel was of equal

stature, an understanding of the German reception would help us to view Wolf Solent with confident, cosmopolitan gaze; not the apologetic defence in rescuing a book from oblivion, but the discussion of a novel in awareness of its moral and historical possibilities, would be the rare fortune of the critic of Powys.

The presentation of Wolf Solent is confined to a single consciousness which, ironically, reveals more to the reader than is known or comprehended by itself. The level of sophistication at which this is performed lies somewhere between Goldsmith's Dr. Primrose and James' Maisie or Strether. Powys' original development is that Wolf's problem is not ignorance or innocence, as is Primrose's and Maisie's, nor is it the wrong interpretation of known facts, guided by another person, which is Strether's problem. With, perhaps, one exception, the reader does not have knowledge of anything of which Wolf is ignorant;[23] Wolf's problem is the "over-interpretation" of what he does know. Although his own word for his attitude to life, "mythology", is not very appropriate - as is acknowledged: "he used it entirely in a private sense of his own"[24] - it at least conveys the process, mythopoeia. This "mythology" has two main aspects, the first being that, in any given situation, Wolf imagines himself to be "taking part in some occult cosmic struggle" between good and evil; the second aspect is that Wolf's mythology "had no outlet in any sort of action."[25] In this way Powys has created remarkable

possibilities for irony. His protagonist does nothing in the expression of his main idea, and can do nothing. His only willed act is entirely inward, to put himself in the centre of a myth. There is to be no physical evidence of a cosmic struggle. Everything that happens, externally, in the novel is irrelevant to Wolf's mythology. If not sociologically a superfluous man - for Wolf earns his living as secretary and schoolmaster - he has created for himself a myth in which his every action is superfluous to his being. Viewed thus, Wolf Solent is a novel whose external action is entirely irrelevant except as an ironic accompaniment to Wolf's own story.

On his first meeting with Urquhart we learn that Wolf:

> had now really come across a person who, in that mysterious mythopoeic world in which his own imagination insisted on moving, was a serious antagonist....[26]

As the book proceeds we come to realize that Urquhart is not the agent of metaphysical evil but a senile, harmless pervert. Much of Wolf's attention is absorbed in speculating about the death of Redfern, with no explanation less sinister, less cosmically vibrant, than murder, suicide or homosexual necrophilia. Lord Carfax, appearing at the end of the book, not only endorses the reader's unexcited, "unimaginative" view of Urquhart, but has the wit to ask the doctor who attended Redfern at his death as to its cause - which was prosaic pneumonia.[27] All that Wolf might have thought and imagined about himself, and conveyed to the reader, dwindles to nothing - at least, nothing worth writing a novel about. At the end Wolf has lost his myth-

ology, and gets a fearful glimpse of himself through Carfax's wordly, cynical, "demythologising" eyes: "nothing more than a pedantic usher in a provincial school."[28]

The structure of the novel depends partially on Wolf's mythology being his "life-illusion". As Ibsen intended the word, the life-illusion is each person's esential protection against reality.[29] For Ibsen, reality is positivist, material, scientific, in which beliefs are illusions; Powys, having emerged from the positivist tunnel after the War, takes the word and the concept a logical step further, and maintains that a scientific and reductive understanding of the universe is as much of a life-illusion as any other understanding. Each of the characters in Wolf Solent has, according to Wolf, his own life-illusion,[30] even though at one time Wolf thinks that Jason Otter (modelled on Theodore Powys) has none: "He must see life continually as we others only see it when our life-illusions are broken through."[31] Wolf soon realizes that logically everyone must have a life-illusion, and that Jason's is "no less of an illusion" than anyone else's, only a bit different.

If the novel is to have any bearing on life, if Wolf is not to be a mere psychological curiosity, an irrelevantly unique specimen, then the deduction must be that each one of the readers must have his own life-illusion. To the reader's annoyance, the implication is irrefutable; the only revenge is to turn on the author and insist that Wolf Solent is nothing but Powys' life-illusion. Powys would happily accept this, from his sceptical position that all

philosophical and religious enquiry is not the pursuit of reality but the search for an appropriate, congenial life-illusion. Wolf and Christie discuss philosophy, and agree that the meaning has little to do with the pleasure of reading Leibniz and Hegel. Philosophical phrases are appreciated as sensations:

> "I think we're thrilled by the weight of history that lies behind each one of these phrases. It isn't just the word itself, or just its immediate meaning. It's a long trailing margin of human sensations, life by life, century by century, that gives us this peculiar thrill....Words like "pluralism" and "dualism" and "monism"...delicious, physical sensations!"[32]

The paradox of this is that what appears to be mindlessly reductive is imaginatively expansive; indeed, the revival of dualism in Bergson and James answered to an imaginative want rather than to intellectual rigour. Philosophy as sensation is not a peculiarity of the "ichthyosaurus-ego", an anti-cerebral attitude, but a common element in the experience of philosophy: Nietzsche, for Powys and many of his contemporaries, was literally a sensation. And for Wolf philosophy is just one sensation among many which influence one's understanding:

> He had come more and more to regard 'reality' as a mere name given to the most lasting and most vivid among all the various impressions of life which each individual experiences.[34]

Extracted and paraphrased, the idea sounds as feeble as most "ideas" in literature; the successful effect here depends on the setting, Wolf with Urquhart and Jason watching Weevil and Lob swimming naked in Lenty Pond. The heat, the stagnant pond, the rich vegetation, Urquhart's

pederastic longings, are all strongly evoked and presented through Wolf's consciousness. When the reader is "convinced" of the "reality" of the scene it makes impressive Wolf's feeling that reality is "a mere name."

In his Preface of 1961 Powys wrote that his own life "resembled Solent's in being dominated by Books."[35] Reality is a name, and it is words; the reality that we can imagine through literature is as real as our physical surroundings. Such is the domination of books, it is implied, Lenty Pond is more "real" to the reader than to Wolf who is there but cannot read about it. The culminating subtlety, proof of the triumph of the imagination, is that the author was not by Lenty Pond but on an American rail-road. The world of Blacksod and Ramsgard has a reality for the author, which is conveyed to the reader through a protagonist who doubts its reality. The development in sophistication and imaginative power is evident, since the opening of Rodmoor and the inventing of the village by the author in America and the protagonist in London. The whole discussion of "reality" by Wolf is conditioned and enriched by his existence in a convincingly realized fictional world.

Powys sometimes contradicts himself on the subject of the life-illusion. While in Wolf Solent all the characters have their own, Wolf does lose his at the end of the book. Outside his fiction, Powys talks of the need to create and cultivate one's life-illusion, arguing that:

> the abandonment of this dramatic heightening of one's personal life-illusion...has produced the widespread sense of futility in our time.[36]

Arising from the triumph of scientific truth over imaginative truth, this sense of futility is an important part of what the life-illusion can prevent. But, of course, it is an admission that everyone does not have a life-illusion, that more people ought to have one. It might be argued that it is Wolf's life-illusion, not Powys', that everyone has a life-illusion; or Powys may have made its universality a condition of his fictional world for his fictional, literary purposes.

It is the moral importance of the life-illusion, as described by Powys outside fiction, that most severely contradicts what happens in Wolf Solent. Many unsympathetic readers assume that Wolf is supposed to be the hero of the book, and that his cult of sensations, his mythology, is Powys' own; it is in addition assumed that Powys is blind to the cruelty and insensitivity in Wolf's treatment of other people. According to this experience of reading, the book ends sadly, with Wolf defeated together with his life-illusion. Others, more correctly, regard Wolf as the anti-hero whose life-illusion is a pompous justification for a selfish life. However, when Wolf loses his life-illusion, the mood is that of futility: then most of all we sense the importance of the life-illusion. A quotation from a letter of Powys' to Llewelyn renders the end of the novel dubiously complex:

> When you destroy a life-illusion you commit the one unpardonable sin. I have done it - I cannot be forgiven - I destroyed my wife's illusion of love .[37]

The peculiar horror of this letter is that words like "unpardonable," "sin," and "forgiveness" bolster, and betray, Powys' own Wolf-like life-illusion of cosmic, metaphysical conflict. At the end of Wolf Solent, although there is a sense of futility, no moral blame attaches to the forces which have destroyed Wolf's life-illusion; rather, in the light of Wolf's behaviour, the destruction of the life-illusion must be seen as a good thing. Wolf himself blames the possible loss of his life-illusion on the prospect of two events: making love to Christie, and receiving payment from Urquhart. The first temptation Wolf survives, rescued by the Pharisaically moral vision of the face on the Waterloo steps; the appropriate comment comes from the imagined skull of Wolf's lecherous father:

> "Your metaphysical virtue, my most moral son, has caused more unhappiness this night to this Love of yours than all my sensuality ever caused to any woman!"[38]

Wolf's life-illusion is destroyed when he has to accept payment from Urquhart; his intention to refuse the money is appropriately savaged by Gerda:

> "I've always known you were the most monstrously selfish man any girl could live with!"[39]

If the loss of Wolf's life-illusion is the price for satisfying the needs of both Gerda and Chistie, there can be nothing good to be said for the preservation of that life-illusion.

If a clear moral idea is to be drawn from the book, it might be concerned with a discrimination, a testing of the quality of different life-illusions. That, however, is not evident in the book, and the reader is left with the impression that reality has defeated illusion, and that Wolf is as a result a better person. It may be that, in literature, the best ideas are those that don't work, that don't ask to be looked at in isolation from the fictional context.

The successful aspect of the life-illusion in Wolf Solent is its formal, structuring potential. Powys wrote of his own mythopoeic imagination, and the dangers that that poses to the autobiographer, in "giving my life the sort of fulfilled entelechy for which one's maturer life-illusion clamours."[40] Constantly in the Autobiography Powys reflects on the process, casts doubt on what he has written, wonders how much of life can be put into a narrative. Life as we experience it consists of "so many completely meaningless, insignificant, irrelevant episodes...unconnected with any general 'stream of tendency'"; and out of these episodes we "have to invent our own destiny."[41] It is an obsession with every irrelevant incident in a person's life that makes most autobiographies tedious, because:

> What excites our more intelligent interest is a story, that is to say the struggle of a soul... with the obstacles that hinder its living growth, that obstruct the lilt of its pulse and joggle to left or right its integral continuity....
> [I]t is claiming too much to suppose that everything that happens to us is intended to be part of our particular story by an omnipotent artist. Interest, drama, meaning, purpose

> are qualities given to events by the individual mind.[42]

Powys' Autobiography resembles, in its use of mythopoeia and the life-illusion, the book that Wolf Solent might have written had that novel taken the form of a first-person narrative.

As it is, Wolf Solent's structure is based on a tension between an omnipotent artist and a protagonist who wants to invent his own destiny, to shape his own story. What happens in Wolf Solent - all that really happens in the novel - is that Wolf's life-illusion is destroyed, and, with it, the ability to give his life a "fulfilled entelechy." Nobody has committed a crime in this case, as it is a combination of people and places which has destroyed Wolf's mythology, and its destruction is no bad thing. Wolf cannot put the blame on anyone else as, with the loss of illusion, he realizes that the characters in the novel existed only in his mythology, that he knew them only as pawns in a metaphysical game. The shape of that game is basically dualistic, and Wolf continually uses people to establish polarities, between himself and Urquhart, himself and Redfern, Gerda and Christie, mother and father, and also places, Blacksod and Ramsgard, Dorset and London. For Wolf, the existence of all these people and places is confined to a schematic myth; for him "dualism" is not at all a mere word or sensation.

Yet, demonstrating the omnipotence of the artist, Wolf Solent is peopled and placed like very few novels of its time. This is distinctively so with regard to the minor

characters, the entire Torp family, Mrs. Otter, Dimity Stone, Bob Weevil and his father, Bess Round and her uncle, Albert Smith, Mattie and Olwen, Roger Monk and others. However briefly, these people hold our complete attention, like the minor characters of Dickens, Trollope or Hardy - indeed, their solidity and vitality may depend on the somewhat Victorian atmosphere which they inhabit. Most interestingly it is those characters whom Wolf invests with significance who carry least conviction to the reader. Stalbridge and Barge exist only as ciphers, which is the novelist's daring way of showing the misguidedness of Wolf's imagination. Even Carfax, who has ample opportunity, only possesses a generic degree of plausibility, and this cannot be the unwitting fault of a novelist who has a Dickensian competence with Albert Smith, say, or Bob Weevil.

As for the major characters, they are not at all Victorian, and their presence is formidable. One would not wish to dissent from the claim that Gerda and Christie are "arguably among the best-drawn women in twentieth-century fiction."[43] Angus Wilson has said of Mrs. Solent that she is derived from Mrs. Yeobright, "and very much better done."[44] These three women reach us through Wolf's consciousness, and there they exist more as ciphers than as individuals. The technical achievment is not especially remarkable, given that the author has the freedom to describe an encounter between Wolf and another externally; the author's main limitation is that nothing can be described in Wolf's absence. The significance of the contrast between Powys'

depiction of characters and Wolf's version of them is that it illustrates and embodies the conflict between the omnipotent artist and the wilful, egocentric protagonist trying to make his own story. And, as readers, we accept the two views, author's and protagonist's, because we learn, through literature, to define and hold together those contrasting views of other people: in literature we experience objectively those social relationships which in so-called real life we can only experience subjectively. The development in Wolf Solent, beyond James, one dares to suggest, is to bring both those conflicting experiences within the confines of literature.

In an essay on Dickens, published in 1938, Powys introduces one of his most considered attacks on the contemporary novel, particularly its failures of characterisation:

> And returning to his [Dickens'] pages from the novels of our own age, how lacking we seem in this magician's gift! Philosophy, psychology, sociology - our great writers abound in all of these, but where are the "dramatis personae," where are the characters?
>
> In Joyce's great Ulysses, Daedalus and Bloom and Bloom's wife are all symbolic focusses of whirlpools within whirlpools of inspired psychic discoveries; but their very weight of mythological and cosmic suggestiveness detracts in some way from the clear-cut outlines of their personalities....The universal, in other words, swallows up the particular!
>
> And the same is true of D. H. Lawrence. The grotesque and pathetic and never-to-appear-again outlines of a unique human creature, how completely swamped and absorbed and lost they are in these representative and symbolic sex reactions!...
>
> If one of our chief "pleasures" in reading fiction - and it is a legitimate and very ancient one - consists in adding to our list of real acquaintances a vast array of imagined acquaintances, what a meagre satisfaction we get - putting the unequalled Proust aside - in

> present-day literature! They do not stand out, these dissected perambulatory pathoids. They puke and pine, they mime and mow at one another, they reveal to a wonder their "streams of consciousness"; but their loves and hates are like the loves and hates in fish-ponds and aquariums....these fishy universals....[45]

Many have made this complaint, but few have offered serious remedies. Powys' solution is not simply to pretend that the nineteenth century is still with us, or at least that what was good enough then is good enough now; his attitude towards sex is evidence against that. But the collapse of character, the irrelevance of individuality, that was assumed to be consequent on the theories of Darwin, Marx, Freud and others, was something that Powys saw no need to accept. Nor did Powys see any reason why the author's omnipotence and omniscience should be diminished; in A Glastonbury Romance he manages to increase their force through mocking absurdity.

One of the chief faults of Powys' early novels, their structural emptiness and pressurelessness, is due partly to his undiminished omnipotence and omniscience as an author. Nothing in the books themselves provided a check or restraint on the author's freedom. Wolf Solent is a great novel because that restraint exists: it takes the form of Wolf's uncomfortable presence as a typically twentieth-century protagonist in a novel which seems to provide nineteenth-century powers and freedoms to its author. Wolf's is a modern sensibility struggling in a world of nineteenth-century solidity and actuality. Character is preserved without an expense of integrity or modernity.

The reader collaborates in the imagining of character not only insofar as he finds objective and subjective views of people brought together in the novel. The reader is also required to exercise his mythopoeic imagination in empathising with Wolf. One sees Powys' technique at work in one of the most brilliant and memorable scenes, the confrontation between Wolf and his mother in Chapter 14, "Crooked Smoke." With shameless honesty, the author makes explicit the sexual currents; "her cynical maternal eroticism"[46] is a prelude to a scene reminiscent and suggestive of myth:

> She towered above him there with that grand convulsed face and those expanded breasts; while her fine hands, clutching at her belt, seemed to display a wild desire to strip herself naked before him, to overwhelm him with the wrath of her naked maternal body, bare to the outrage of his impiety.[47]

So intimate and balanced is the reader's relationship with the author and Wolf that, almost for the first time in Powys' fiction, we are no longer worried by "seemed", "almost as if", and other sceptical qualifications. We see objectively the two figures, one standing over the other, and feel with Wolf what "seemed" to be happening.

In the next paragraph the conflict is described as specifically mythical, "between the body of Maternity itself and the bone of its bone!" The suggestion of earth-motherhood looks back to Gerda's intimate relationship to Poll's Camp,[48] thus lending to women a mythopoeic endowment which reconciles both their maternal and uxorial natures: through myth one of the major psychological themes of the

novel is focussed and elaborated. The particular, astonishing beauty of this scene lies in its conclusion, the return to "normal" from the impersonal sense of the mythic and cataclysmic:

> It was his mother herself who broke the spell. She raised her hands to his head and held it back by his stubbly straw-coloured hair, pressing, as she did so, her own glowing tear-stained cheeks against his chin, and finally kissing him with a hot, intense, tyrannous kiss.
>
> He rose to his feet after that and so did she; and, moved by a simultaneous impulse, they both sat down again at the deserted tea-table, emptied the tea-pot into their cups, and began spreading for themselves large mouthfuls of bread-and-butter with over-flowing spoonfuls of red currant jam.
>
> Wolf felt as if this were in some way a kind of sacramental feast; and he even received a queer sensation, as though their enjoyment in common of the sweet morsels they swallowed so greedily were an obscure reversion to those forgotten diurnal nourishments which he must have shared with her long before his flesh was separated from hers.[49]

The descent from the mythic to the domestic anticipates exactly the book's conclusion, in which Wolf falls from Saturnian gold to another cup of tea - the latter epitomising the quotidian. The rich texture of the prose, woven with psychological, religious,mythological and political references, varied with swift transitions of emphasis and mood, brings out the complexity of human relationships in a way rivalled by few of Powys' contemporaries. By contrast, their allegiance to the values acceptable to modernity is restrictive and debilitating.

To say that the reader has to exercise his mythopoeic imagination in order to understand Wolf, may be begging the

question of whether imagination can be anything but mythopoeic. The essential form of our imaginings, at least those which immediately involve ourselves, may be a story. Jung's elucidation of this, in a well-known passage of his autobiography, seems relevant to Wolf's problems:

> But in what myth does man live nowadays? In the Christian myth, the answer might be. "Do you live in it?" I asked myself. To be honest, the answer was no...."Then do we no longer have any myth?" "No, evidently we no longer have any myth." "But then what is your myth — the myth in which you do live?" At this point the dialogue with myself became uncomfortable, and I stopped thinking.[50]

We need to see ourselves as participators in a story; and, within the narrow sphere of family and friends, each contrives to see himself as the hero of his own life.

Powys had a great deal of trouble with the title of this novel: Ripeness is All, Crooked Smoke and The Quick and the Dead were all suggested and rejected.[51] Powys was frustrated: "But except for 'Wolf Solent' which he thinks will not induce people to read the book - we cannot think of a good title. It is teasing how long I've tried, searching through Shakespeare, Milton - everything - & all in vain hitherto."[52] In November 1929, when the final decision had to be made, Powys settled for Wolf Solent, which had been the provisional title for over a year:

> But no one can think of a really good title for it so I suppose it will have to [be] called Wolf Solent after the hero of it....But most people say that Wolf Solent sounds like a Boy's book - like Tom Sawyer or Peter Penniless. But the impossibility of thinking of a really very good title seems to suggest that Wolf Solent, the character himself, has got a sort of existence and stops people's wits from choosing any other title than him![53]

The maintenance of Wolf's life-illusion depends on his being the eponymous hero of his own life.

What happens when Wolf discovers that he is not his own hero, and that the book that contains his life could have been called Crooked Smoke, or anything else? The novel called Wolf Solent comes to an end, in Wolf's mind if not in the reader's hands:

> How did human beings go on living, when their life-illusion was destroyed? What did they tinker up and patch up inside of them to rub along with, to shuffle through life with, when they lacked that one grand resource? [54]

Wolf has reached the same dead-end as Jung, with all myths seeming to be uninhabitable. Twenty pages later Wolf has gone a stage further in feeling alienated from his life and from his story:

> He felt as though he were beginning a posthumous life - a life that his own cowardice had snatched from the end intended.[55]

Wolf has abandoned the hope of giving his story the end which he desires, but more than that his life is posthumous because it cannot be written about in a story. All Powys' novels before Wolf Solent are brought with a death to a climactic close. This novel simply dissolves, leaving Wolf in an unstructured and insignificant limbo somewhere between actual death and full, myth-creating, story-shaped life.

Wolf himself does not connect his "mythology" with a book, although he does, quite separately, think of himself as being in a book. When he finds out about the parentage of Mattie and Olwen, Wolf thinks, "We might all be in Mr.

Urquhart's book!"[56] And the reader wonders whether this novel is not in fact The Dorset Chronicle, whose completion by Wolf is coincident with the destruction of his life-illusion, and the end of Wolf Solent. Proust may not have been admired for nothing. When Wolf's life-illusion is at its most secure, he feels then most completely at the centre of his own novel. This is the last occasion on which we see Wolf in full command of his mythology:

> Everything disturbing and confusing sank away out of sight for Wolf just then. Indeed, his whole life gathered itself together with lovely inevitableness, as if it were a well-composed story that he himself, long ago and time out of mind, had actually composed.[57]

Powys never wrote a novel in the first person singular. Had he used that method in Wolf Solent one of the essential points would have been lost: that we all create stories about ourselves, and some, those who are novelists, happen also to write them down. Because Wolf is a writer, but only a scribe, shaper of another's material, Powys gets the best of both possibilities, enabling Wolf to have something in common with Marcel without being his own author. That is why, in terms of myth-making, Wolf Solent is so much more interesting than David Copperfield. Wolf is both the hero as representative man, and the hero as artist, without being the mere confessional curiosity that the latter can often be. He is the creator both of a book and of his own unwritten story, whose rough coincidence is left arbitrary and unexplained.

Once Wolf has lost his life-illusion, his own justification for being at the centre of the novel, the responsibility for the story's continuation falls on the author. The way in which Powys brings the book to an end is entirely appropriate to Wolf's finished story. Before the end, however, there is an interesting example of the struggle over the story between Wolf and the author. In the manuscript one finds 350 pages, out of a total of about 1,200, which are not part of the published version.[58] Chapter 19, which bridges the gap, is felt to be inconsonant with the rest of the novel, disturbing the rhythm and flow of time.[59]

The novel had to be cut, partly because the publishers wanted it shorter, and partly because the novel was suffering from a plot that had difficulties in developing. Once Wolf has resigned his job as Urquhart's secretary the plot gets stuck. In a desperately melodramatic attempt at a remedy, Gerda has an accident which leaves her disfigured; this failed to re-animate the plot, and its omission, along with everything related to it, is certainly to the novel's advantage.[60] What thematic strands are, as a result, left undeveloped or unfulfilled - and there are no major inconsistencies - only contribute towards the book's uncertain, undetermined conclusion. The main interest lies in Powys' successful remedy, to make Wolf resume his employment as Urquhart's secretary; in the words of Ben Jones, who has examined the manuscript in detail: "Only Wolf's decision to return to Urquhart carries the narrative forward."[61]

Neatly endorsing the present understanding of the novel, this means that the progress of Wolf Solent is dependent on the progress of The Dorset Chronicle. Wolf can only stop working on Urquhart's book when he has lost his life-illusion, when he is left without a book.

Left without a book, without a story to shape about himself, Wolf must leave the ending to the author. While in the middle of writing Wolf Solent Powys wrote a fascinating letter to Llewelyn, in which he discusses the book's ending:

> I can't tell whether I have the power or not for a world-shaking dramatic dénouement like the end of a Dostoievsky tale or a Shakespeare play - probably not - and the whole structure of this book is river-like and could go on or could stop, just as the Iliad needn't have ended with the death of Hector or the games in his honour, but might have gone on to the death of Achilles or at least to the Fall of Troy...[62]

Powys deceives himself, or, rather, attempts to deceive others with his constant pose as one ignorant of all sense of art and design. His novels show far more awareness of structure than his critical and epistolary comments ever allow for. One suggested dénouement left Urquhart dying in a storm on Redfern's corpse, Miss Gault ending tragically, Darnley and Mattie separating, while Jason makes sardonic asides; Wolf would either go back to London or drown himself in Lenty Pond. Powys tells Llewelyn that this might have made a greater book, but that if the conclusion was "forced" it might have been "far less massive and satisfying (to Hell with 'convincing') than it is now, even with the present close in a quiet minor key!"[63] This is

so perceptive, so sensitive to the needs of the book, that one is tempted to dismiss as self-mockery his suggestion that there could be an alternative ending.

However, the problem here, the temptation of a grand dénouement, is precisely that to which Powys had succumbed in Rodmoor and Ducdame. In the former it was Rachel Doorm's mythopoeic view of Rodmoor which the author found irresistible to the imagination; the final apocalypse originated in the unbalanced minds of the characters, thus justifying their fears and premonitions, and implicitly proving that the characters were in fact not unbalanced in their minds, but quite correct. The suicide of Adrian and Philippa does, however, admit the complicity of these characters in their conclusion. In Ducdame the dénouement was Rook's murder, not suicide, with Hastings acting solely as the author's hit-man, utterly gratuitous to the plot. A violent, dramatic death can make a hero of a nonentity; in those conclusions, and in that of After My Fashion, the author unfairly manipulates the protagonists' freedom of movement and of life, while at the same time sparing them the pain of confronting their own mediocrity. To have ended Wolf Solent as Powys projected to Llewelyn would have been to commit the same fundamental error yet again. For it would have been a confirmation and fulfilment of every detail of Wolf's life-illusion, his version of how the story should go. If Urquhart is seen to be a homosexual necrophiliac then Wolf is living not in an illusion but in the truth. Wolf wants a place in apocalypse, for that is the conclusion for which

his life-illusion strives. If Powys had collaborated in that ambition the novel would be only a reassuring fantasy.

Wolf is warned that apocalypse is not his destiny, by Christie, who tells him, in that magnificent description of a non-event, brilliantly entitled "Mr.Malakite at Weymouth":

> "What you never seem to realize, for all your talk about 'good' and 'evil,' is that events are something outside any one person's mind. Nothing's finished...until you take in the feelings of everyone concerned!"[64]

Wolf's mythology has no outlet in action, and no part in social relationships; as long as Wolf lives in his mythology he does not consider the feelings of others. Most novels concentrate on the relationships between characters, while this one stops just before Wolf enters into a thoroughly unmythological relationship with Gerda and Carfax. To the end he survives, "Solent", alone.

Nothing is finished in Wolf Solent, except the mythology, the story, the novel; Wolf must continue to live, albeit "posthumously". The last chapter is a wonderful depiction of confusion, for Wolf, released from his mythology, has no sense of direction, nothing with which to structure his life and his thoughts. All is arranged and managed by Carfax, and structured around him. Of the cleverness of this device, essential to the grand dénouement's alternative, Powys was for once not unaware:

> By letting Carfax substitute himself for Wolf at the end like a rich-fleeced sly old Scapegoat and letting his very disillusioned view of Urquhart's mania prevail over Wolf's piled up edifice of supernatural Good and Evil, I have avoided the danger of any forced catastrophe or sham theatrical thunder at the close.[65]

Ripeness may be all, but for Wolf it is nothing. His novel is over and this last chapter could be the first chapter of Carfax's novel. Thus life-illusions come and go, thus we feel ourselves to be living in a myth, and that security falls away and we are abandoned, lost outside a novel.

But do life-illusions go, can they be destroyed? If so, why was such a fuss made by Wolf over the possibility that Jason had no life-illusion? And is Wolf a morally better person as a result of the destruction of his life-illusion? Until the end Wolf has, like other of Powys' protagonists, combined in himself emotional meanness with imaginative largeness. After the novel has ended Wolf will have a cup of tea, and face reality; one fears that with Gerda he will be tender, sensitive, and dull, the man of imagination reduced by moral pressure to a bourgeois existence, the lone wolf become a social being.

Such speculation is doubly unfashionable, both for the folly of imagining a novel's world to exist after the last page, and for the dreariness of what one finds there. A lot of nonsense has been talked about Saturnian Gold. Wolf's last, desperate attempt to salvage something of his life-illusion is to survey "this fragment of the West Country," and exclaim "'It is a god!'" By this stage the reader should be attuned to irony. Wolf wants to pour Saturnian gold over all his acquaintances, with a culminating gesture of pontifical benediction:

> All...all...all would reveal some unspeakable beauty, if only this Saturnian gold were sprinkled upon them![66]

"If only" is Wolf's recognition of the limitations of the world, that there can be no equivalence between imagination and reality. The attempt to make the two into one, the province of fantasy, of corrupt, deceitful art, has been Wolf's error, and, with regard to other people, his sin. On the penultimate page Wolf admits to himself that "it was his own mind that was diseased," and at the very end the doubtful future bliss of Saturnian gold has been replaced by the present humble satisfactions of a cup of tea. The moral is as poised, as suggestive, as unforced, as the tone of the conclusion. Those who can see only Saturnian gold, who see that as the novel's redeeming solution, are so steeped in their own mythologies that they have not learnt Wolf's lesson, about the ambivalence of imagination, that human relationships are not fulfilled through fantasy. Saturnian gold is a Utopian, totalitarian solution to mankind's problems: a cup of tea is a more appropriate, humane consolation.

Of all the gods and goddesses in Powys' polytheistic, secular worship, Chance is a great one. If life is ruled by chance, any thesis must have its own life-illusion to sustain its progress. There is a development in Powys' writings, for in the fifteen years between Wood and Stone and Wolf Solent he moved from conventional ambition, imitatively striving for originality, to a work that, with easeful lack of pretension, is one of the supreme masterpieces of fiction in the twentieth century. Within those broad limits it would be dishonest to argue that each

book is an improvement on its predecessor. There is really not very much continuity at all between these various writings, for they were incidents, or episodes, in a life that was not until 1930 devoted to writing. It has been the intention of this thesis to show that the development, in the most general sense, is a development of style rather than of vision, of technique rather than philosophy. What changes and develops is not, except incidentally, the subject-matter or the mythical and visionary frame-work: it is the style, the application, the textual surface.

Before closing, one is obliged to confess, dutifully, with deference to stylistic purists, one's regret that Powys did not have a good editor; to abolish the exclamation mark should have been the first heave. But apart from that and other minor infelicities the badness of Powys' language is more visible to prejudice and superficial reading than to long acquaintance. In the early novels it is usually confused and uncertain of its purpose, while on occasion anticipating its later strengths. From Wolf Solent onwards the language has an extraordinary power and quality. The language of modernism, of most of Powys' significant contemporaries, tends to be self-referring, self-advertising; Powys uses the unfashionable language that, rendering itself almost invisible, becomes a window onto imagined worlds.

Powys' language is for the imagination, not for itself and the critics' analytical faculties. John Bayley suggests that this uncertainty between the reader and the language

is something that Powys shares with Hardy, and that explains in part their unstable reputations:

> those different pretensions to scope and power do not make [Powys] at all resemble Hardy, except in one respect. He too disconcerts judicious criticism, irritates its purists, and threatens their criteria. With his boisterous, cliché-ridden style, his seemingly naive and facile absorptions, he ought to be bad - but is he? [67]

In defensive reaction against critical strictures, many of Powys' admirers have stressed the magnitude of his vision, as if, by comparison, the language was of no importance whatever. Of course the language matters, and that is why this thesis has never wandered far from the text. Attention to the language, to the style, has not shown Powys' vision to be of less magnitude, but it has revealed it to be not that of a forbidding, disciple-demanding prophet or mage, but that of a sceptic, quizzical, modest, fallible. Powys is not an eccentric but a great representative of his time.

NOTES

For editions of works cited in the Notes, see Bibliography and Sources. Throughout, John Cowper Powys is abbreviated to JCP. Two short titles used in the Notes are Letters to Ll.P., for Letters of John Cowper Powys to His Brother Llewelyn, Volume 1, and Frances and Jack, for Frances and Jack: Letters from John Cowper Powys to Frances Gregg; for details see Bibliography and Sources, Primary, Section C.

Notes to Chapter I: Wood and Stone

1 Autobiography, p. 229
2 From "Ode to Proserpine", in Odes and Other Poems, 1896; reprinted 1975, p. 10
3 Autobiography, p. 227
4 Lucifer, 1956, reprinted 1974, p. 30
5 For some of Llewelyn's criticisms, see Letters of Llewelyn Powys, edited by Louis Wilkinson, p.194; Letters to Ll.P., pp. 317-18, 328; Frances and Jack, 14 September 1921. Louis Wilkinson's criticisms of JCP are to be found in all his writings on the subject; some are quoted elsewhere in this thesis.
6 Confessions of Two Brothers, pp. 184-85
7 See Michael Hanbury, "John Cowper Powys and some Catholic contacts," The Month, November 1963, p. 301
8 Autobiography, p. 330
9 Louis Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors,p. 59
10 Welsh Ambassadors, pp. 60-61
11 Autobiography, p. 336
12 Welsh Ambassadors, pp. 61-62
13 Confessions of Two Brothers, p. 58
14 Letters to Ll.P., p. 30
15 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 30-31
16 Confessions of Two Brothers, p. 43
17 Wood and Stone, p. 716; quotations are from Village Press edition, 1974, reprinted, with identical pagination of text, from editions of G. Arnold Shaw, 1915, and Heinemann, 1917. References are henceforth abbreviated to W&S.
18 Autobiography, p. 314
19 Autobiography, p. 314
20 A manuscript of "Philip Wharton" (a provisional eponymous title for the work referred to by JCP in Autobiography, p. 314) is in the George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse, New York. Other early attempts at fiction by JCP are to be found in the same library, and in the Humanities Research Center, University of Texas.
21 Letters to Ll.P., p. 86
22 JCP letter to T.F.Powys, April 1910, in Appendix I (a), Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 319
23 For Joyce on Shakespeare at thirty-five, see Ulysses, (Penguin edition) p. 207; see also Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, p.463
24 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 35-36
25 Wolf Solent, p. 2; A Glastonbury Romance, p.22
26 Among the more authoritative opponents of this view is Phyllis Playter, who insists that it was in his lectures, not in any of his books, that Powys' genius was most evident. Interview with Phyllis Playter, 11 February 1980.

27 See Chapter V, "Powys as dramatist".
28 Letters of Ll.P.,p. 123
29 Letters to Ll.P.,p. 127
30 Letters to Ll.P.,p. 133; see also pp. 134-35
31 See Autobiography, pp. 105, 203, 225, for example.
32 JCP letter to T.F.Powys, 15 March 1902, Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Humfrey, p. 315
33 Frances and Jack, August 1913
34 Autobiography, p. 581
35 Letters to Ll.P., p. 219
36 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 84-6, and Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, p. 286
37 Letters to Ll.P., p. 147; further on these notebooks, see p. 148
38 See JCP letters to Marian Powys, 2 June and 19 June 1915
39 JCP letter to Marian Powys, 19 June 1915
40 JCP letter to Marian Powys, 5 July 1915
41 Letters to Ll.P., p. 190
42 Letters of Llewelyn Powys, edited by Wilkinson, p. 81
43 See H.P.Collins, John Cowper Powys: Old Earth Man, pp. 43-45; Kenneth Hopkins, The Powys Brothers, p.38
44 Richard Heron Ward, The Powys Brothers, pp. 33-35
45 Jeremy Hooker, John Cowper Powys and David Jones, p.25
46 Langridge gives 8 October 1914 as date of publication of The War and Culture, but on 15 October JCP wrote to Llewelyn: "I've finished my little book on the war. It will be out in a fortnight and then I'll send you a copy". Less than a fortnight later, however, on 28 October JCP wrote again: "We've had to bring out a second edition of the little book on the war." Letters to Ll.P., pp. 162, 170
47 The War and Culture, p. 69
48 Letters to Ll.P., p.191
49 Louis U. Wilkinson, Blasphemy and Religion, 1916; reprinted 1969, p. [10]
50 W&S, pp. vii-viii. JCP expresses his sympathy for the "ill-constituted" in Autobiography, pp. 94, 515-16. Further references to Nietzsche occur in W&S, p. 588 (the doctrine of eternal recurrence) and p. 625 (Thus Spake Zarathustra); the influence of Nietzsche on JCP has been treated briefly by Patrick Bridgwater, Nietzsche in Anglosaxony, pp. 109-113
51 W&S, p. viii
52 W&S, p. 2-3
53 Wilkinson, Blasphemy and Religion, p. [8]
54 Letters to Ll.P., p. 164
55 Letters to Ll.P., p. 180
56 W&S,p. 2
57 W&S, p. 1
58 See H. Avray Tipping, The Story of Montacute and its House, p. 3

59 W&S, p. 4. Ham Hill, on which Leo's Hill is based, is the subject of an essay by Llewelyn Powys in Somerset Essays, pp. 305-309; Llewelyn notes that the hill has "the shape of a couchant lion," (p. 305) which doubtless suggested to JCP its fictional name. Incidentally, it appears that JCP chose the name "Nevilton" in the belief that "the fief had belonged to the Nevils in ancient times" (Autobiography, p. 117), but there is no evidence for this in the various histories of Montacute by Dodd, Dunning or Tipping. A slender link is that one of the coats-of-arms depicted in the glass of the upper row of the bay window of the Library in Montacute House is that of Nevill, Earl of Salisbury; see Tipping, p. 34

60 W&S, p. 5

61 W&S, p. 262

62 A notorious case is Raymond Williams, who writes of "an extraordinary development of country-based fantasy, from Barrie and Kenneth Grahame through J.C. Powys and T.H.White and now to Tolkien." See The Country and the City, p. 258

63 W&S, p. 5

64 Letters to Louis Wilkinson, p. 116

65 Dostoievsky, pp. 18-19

66 Dostoievsky, p. 32

67 W&S, pp. 1-2, 2-3

68 W&S, p. 3

69 W&S, p. 3

70 W&S, p. 9

71 W&S, p. 19

72 W&S, p. 12

73 Letters of Llewelyn Powys, edited by Wilkinson, p. 81

74 Letters to Ll.P., p. 169

75 For information on Ham Hill quarries and stone-masons, see R.W.Dunning, A History of Montacute, p. 218; according to the activity of the quarries JCP must have set the novel in the 1880s or 1890s: "A decline set in fairly rapidly at the end of the century. There were four stone-masons in the parish in 1897, but only one by 1902."

76 W&S, p. 468; James is quoting from Urn Burial, Chapter V. Browne is of course alluded to in the name of Quincunx, though its significance is not entirely clear.

77 W&S, p. 598

78 W&S, p. 408

79 W&S, p. 406

80 W&S, pp. x-xi

81 W&S, p. 193

82 W&S, p. 194

83 W&S, p. 108

84 Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Chapter XI

85 W&S, p. 541

86 W&S, p. 622

87 W&S, p. 439; a photograph of this carving, in Stoke-sub-Hamdon church, is to be found in Sylvia Townsend Warner, Somerset, plate 40, p. 67
88 W&S, p. 439
89 W&S, p. 440
90 W&S, p. 14
91 W&S, p. 2
92 W&S, p. 440
93 W&S, p. 442
94 W&S, p. 463
95 W&S, p. 480
96 W&S, p. 187
97 W&S, p. 45
98 JCP letter to Marian Powys, 5 July 1915; The Pariah was a novel by "F.Anstey" (pseudonym of Thomas Anstey Guthrie, 1856-1934), first published by Smith,Elder & Co. in 1889, and last reprinted in 1893. However, it was re-issued by a new publisher, Hodder and Stoughton, in 1913, and it was this that interfered with JCP's plans.
99 JCP letter to Glen Cavaliero, 16 March 1959
100 JCP letter to Marian Powys, 5 July 1915

Notes to Chapter II: Rodmoor

1 Letters to Ll.P., p. 190
2 Letters to Ll.P., p. 194
3 Letters to Ll.P., p.198
4 The Glimmerglass, (Cooperstown, N.Y.), Saturday July 1st 1916, Vol. VIII, no.1
5 Autobiography,p. 593
6 Letters to Ll.P., p. 208; see also Autobiography, p. 592, where "1917" is a mistake for 1916.
7 Letters to Ll.P., p. 208; see also Autobiography, p. 595
8 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 209-10. Dr Philip Cook Thomas was JCP's doctor in New York City; also mentioned in Letters to Ll.P., p. 238, Frances and Jack, 24 December 1919, July 1933, and Autobiography, pp. 596, 607, 613. Further, see note 98 of Chapter IV, below.
9 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 211-12. On Mabel Hattersley, often referred to by JCP as the "Ann Veronica tart", see also Letters to Ll.P., pp. 74, 210
10 Letters to Ll.P., p. 198
11 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 210-211
12 Rodmoor, p. 9. Quotations are from Macdonald's edition of 1973, (the book's first publication in England) which is a photographic reprint of, and identically paginated with, G. Arnold Shaw's edition of 1916; references are henceforth abbreviated to R.
13 R., p. 47
14 R., pp. 41, 95, 254
15 Autobiography, p. 264
16 See also Louis Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, pp. 37-38, a letter from JCP in the summer of 1916:
> "Madly hunting for somewhere to live in Virginia. It was hot as the devil. I landed myself finally in an Inn on a marsh by a sea-estuary among reeds...."

JCP also spent some of that summer in Vermont; see Letters to Ll.P., p. 204. Each of these places may have contributed to the setting of Rodmoor.
17 See Autobiography, p. 344. The offices of Gabbitas and Thring were near Waterloo Bridge; see Autobiography, p. 204, and Letters to Louis Wilkinson, p. 141
18 R., pp. 4, 35
19 Kennington was also known to JCP in connection with Lily; see Autobiography, p. 345
20 R., p. 1
21 All that we are told is that Adrian has been in prison in New York, and that he was deported ; see R., pp. 67, 297
22 R., p. 1
23 Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys: Novelist, p. 27

24 R., p. 337
25 R., p. 298. On the same page, time is extended beyond the novel's range by the china cow which survives for another fifty years.
26 Letters to Ll.P., p. 215
27 Letters to Ll.P., p. 216
28 Louis Wilkinson, Bumbore: A Romance, p. [9]
29 Wood and Stone, p. 3
30 R., pp. 49-50
31 R., p. 18
32 Suspended Judgments, p. 250
33 Letters to Ll.P., p. 214. For the extra essays, not included in Suspended Judgments, see advertisement in end-papers of One Hundred Best Books, 1916 edition, p. [77]
34 R., p. 28
35 R., p. 54
36 R., p. 54
37 R., p. 400
38 R., pp. 190-193
39 R., p. 9
40 R., p. 157
41 R., p. 342
42 R., pp. 343-4
43 R., p. 157
44 See Charles Lock, "'Multiverse'...language which makes language impossible", Powys Review, 5, p. 72
45 R., pp. 158-59
46 R., p. 159
47 R., pp. 344-45
48 R., p. 145
49 R., p. 365
50 R., pp. 371-72
51 R., p. 249
52 R., pp. 386-87
53 R., p. 388
54 See Brebner, The Demon Within, p. 25
55 Thomas Mann, Death in Venice, Tristan, Tonio Kröger, translated by H.T.Lowe-Porter, Harmondsworth, 1955, p. 153.
56 Autobiography, p. 8
57 Autobiography, pp. 8-9
58 R., p. 460
59 Confessions of Two Brothers, p. 123; that JCP wrote much of Confessions in the summer of 1915 is evident from his letters to Marian of June 1915.
60 See Louis Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, p. 20
61 R., p. 44
62 R., p. 314
63 R., p. 112
64 R., p. 114
65 R., p. 114
66 R., pp. 328-29

67 Reynolds was the author of at least seven books, of fiction, politics and topography. He lived from 1881 to 1919, mostly in Sidmouth as a fisherman and local politician. Much information is to be found in The Letters of Stephen Reynolds, edited by Harold Wright, 1923.
68 Letters to Ll.P., p. 103
69 Frances and Jack, 25 August 1912.
70 See Frances and Jack, September 1912, April 1913.
71 Frances and Jack, 7 August 1912.
72 See R., pp. 21, 52, 73, 400
73 See A Glastonbury Romance, pp. 47, 76, 83
74 R., p. 93
75 R., p. 400
76 Letters to Ll.P., p. 208
77 R., p. 36
78 R., p. 42
79 R., p. 43
80 R., pp. 46-47
81 R., p. 47
82 R., p. 176
83 Frances and Jack, August 1912
84 Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, p. 238
85 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 70-71
86 R., p. 437
87 R., p. 438
88 Llewelyn Powys, Skin for Skin, p. 59
89 Skin for Skin, p. 73
90 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 144-45
91 Letters to Ll.P., p. 148
92 R., pp. 42, 239
93 Letters to Ll.P., p. 145; see also p. 181
94 R., p. 197
95 T. F. Powys letter to JCP, 12 March 1947
96 Letters to Ll.P., p. 172
97 Letters to Ll.P., p. 204
98 Letters to Ll.P., p. 242
99 Letters to Ll.P., p. 264
100 Letters to Ll.P., p. 181
101 R., pp. 247-48
102 R., p. 249
103 R., p. 249
104 R., p. 92
105 R., pp. 190-91
106 T. F. Powys letter to JCP, 23 November 1916
107 R., pp. 44-45
108 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 317, 318
109 R., pp. 357-58
110 R., pp. 251-52
111 R., p. 253
112 See R., pp. 158-59
113 R., pp. 253-54
114 R., pp. 254-55
115 R., pp. 92-93
116 R., p. 158
117 R., p. 158

118 R., p. 246
119 R., p. 247
120 R., p. 247
121 R., p. 254
122 Letters to Ll.P., p. 147
123 R., p. 348
124 R., p. 349
125 R., p. 359
126 R., p. 348
127 R., p. 349
128 R., p. 221
129 R., p. 253
130 R., p. 349
131 R., p. 350
132 Frances and Jack, 5 October 1932
133 R., p. 359
134 R., pp. 359-61
135 See R., p. 42
136 R., p. 402
137 R., p. 368
138 Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys: Novelist, p. 27
139 Louis Wilkinson, The Buffoon, p. 35
140 Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, p. 230; quoted in Welsh Ambassadors, p. 31
141 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 198, 202
142 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 210
143 R., p. 61. This, or a common source, is apparently recalled by JCP in a letter to Wilkinson in 1942, about the miserable summer of 1916:

> "that lake (of Fen imore Cooper's) would lap so (I fled, with my writing, once to a barn inland to avoid that 'lap lap lap')"; Letters to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956, p. 106.

JCP is clearly playing up to Wilkinson's idea of him, acting the part of Jack Welsh.

144 R., p. 62
145 R., p. 69
146 R., p. 69
147 Letters to Ll.P., p. 323
148 R., p. 91
149 R., p. 85
150 R., p. 85
151 JCP praises Villiers de l'Isle-Adam; see Frances and Jack, 15 October 1913
152 R., pp. 111-112
153 Letters to Ll.P., p. 153, 9 September 1914
154 See R., p. 116
155 R., p. 401
156 R., pp. 203-04
157 R., pp. 204-05
158 Confessions of Two Brothers, p. 120
159 R., pp. 203-04
160 Suspended Judg ments, p. 267
161 Suspended Judg ments, p. 307
162 Letters to Ll.P., p. 153
163 JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 1918

164 R., pp. 69-70
165 R., p. 368
166 R., pp. 228-29; contrast with Mrs Renshaw, R., p. 350
167 R., p. 352
168 R., p. 456
169 Letters to Ll.P., p. 226

Notes to Chapter III : Unpublished Powys

1 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 211, 244
2 Langridge, p. 80
3 Letters to Ll.P., p. 211
4 Letters to Ll.P., p. 222
5 Letters to Ll.P., p. 207
6 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 222, 232
7 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 228
8 Letters to Ll.P., p. 183. See also Little Review, vol. II no. 1, March 1915, pp. 5-10, "Maurice Browne and the Little Theatre" by JCP
9 Letters to Ll.P., p. 231; Frances and Jack, 11 October 1921
10 Langridge, p. 92
11 JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 15 March 1902, in Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 315
12 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 132-33
13 Autobiography, p. 225
14 Letters to Ll.P., p. 265; see also p. 270
15 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 272; Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, p. 171; Frances and Jack, December 1919. For conflicting dates of publication, varying from 3 September to 1 October 1920, see Langridge, p. 90, P. H. Muir, Points - Second Series 1866-1934, pp. 135-38, and Frances and Jack, 14 September 1920
16 Reviews by Mary Siegrist, Literary Review, October 1916, and by Edgar Lee Masters, Chicago Evening Post, November 1916. Neither of these is listed in Langridge; see Letters to Ll.P., p. 287. For the poor sales, see Frances and Jack, 23 December 1920
17 A more generous estimate of The Complex Vision is to be found in the writings of Wilson Knight; for an "autobibliography" see "Sadism and the Seraphic," in Recollections of the Powys Brothers, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 234. See also Morine Krissdottir, John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest, pp. 14-17, and Michael Greenwald, "Powys's Complex Vision," in Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, pp. 57-83
18 Letters to Ll.P., p. 279; for more details about these stories, see p. 262

Notes to Chapter IV: After My Fashion

1 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 215-16
2 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 223, 231; Frances and Jack, January 1918, 5 May 1918
3 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 232-33
4 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 217-18
5 Letters to Ll.P., p. 235
6 Letters to Ll.P., p. 235
7 JCP letter to Norman Denny, 16 December 1946
8 Letters to Ll.P., p. 243
9 Letters to Ll.P., p. 247
10 Letters to Ll.P., p. 248
11 Letters to Ll.P., p. 253
12 Letters to Ll.P., p. 256
13 Frances and Jack, April 1913
14 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 241-42. JCP had no suspicion at all that Duncan had not read Visions and Revisions of her own accord
15 JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 14 February 1917. Duncan, who was born in 1878, was at this time only 38
16 Mandragora, p. 71
17 See Letters to Ll.P, p. 194, 12 January 1916
18 See Letters to Ll.P., p.239; JCP letter to Theodora Cowper Johnson ("Aunt Dora"), 25 October 1917.
19 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 238
20 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 241-42, 18 November 1917; see also the Foreword, by Francis Powys, to After My Fashion, p. 5, a quotation from "a letter to one of his sisters": "And she danced the Marseillaise for me once in New York." For a pictorial record see Isadora Duncan (Mitchell Kennerley, New York, 1929), a book of photographs taken by Arnold Genthe in New York in 1915 and 1916
21 See Frances and Jack, September 1927
22 Letters to Ll.P., p. 267, 4 December 1919
23 Letters to Ll.P., p. 270
24 Frances and Jack, 5 May 1919
25 Frances and Jack, 17 February 1920
26 This is one of the matters in which one realizes that knowledge of the relationship between JCP and Frances Gregg is frustratingly slight
27 Frances and Jack, 3 August 1921
28 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 280, 284
29 With the minor exception of the short fantasy The Owl, the Duck, and - Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!, 1930
30 All JCP's novels, and almost all his other books, bear a dedication; one to Frances Gregg should be included in a reprint of After My Fashion
31 Frances and Jack, 4 October 1920

32 Frances and Jack, October/November 1920; note that "my" has no upper-case letter, and should not have one in the title as published.
33 See Frances and Jack, 23 December 1920, and Chapter III, "Unpublished Powys", note 16
34 Frances and Jack, 3 August 1921
35 Frances and Jack, passim, and Llewelyn Powys, The Verdict of Bridlegoose, passim
36 Autobiography, p. 319; After My Fashion, p. 15 (henceforth abbreviated to AMF.)
37 Autobiography, pp. 208-9
38 AMF, pp. 25, 27, 31
39 AMF, p.15
40 AMF, p.15
41 AMF, pp. 46, 43
42 See AMF, p. 33
43 AMF, p. 12
44 AMF, pp. 22, 32, 34, 35, 38
45 AMF, p. 53
46 AMF, p. 87
47 AMF, p. 259
48 Autobiography, p. 393
49 Frances and Jack, 14 September 1921
50 Autobiography, p. 536
51 AMF, p. 287
52 AMF, p. 43
53 AMF, p. 25
54 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 251-52
55 AMF, p. 9
56 Frances and Jack, 30 August 1914
57 Letters to Ll.P., pp. 254-55
58 JCP letter to Marian Powys, July 1918; JCP letter to Louis Wilkinson, 26 August 1918, printed in Welsh Ambassadors, pp. 136-38; JCP letter to Norman Denny, 16 December 1946.
59 AMF, p. 9
60 AMF, p.9
61 AMF, pp. 22-3
62 AMF, p. 40
63 Langridge, pp. 86, 90
64 AMF, p. 90
65 AMF, pp. 90, 96
66 AMF, p. 97
67 AMF, p. 40
68 AMF, pp. 219-20
69 AMF, p. 196
70 AMF, p. 125
71 AMF, p. 159
72 AMF, p. 139
73 AMF, p. 139
74 AMF, p. 140
75 The Complex Vision, pp. 312-13
76 AMF, pp. 75-6
77 AMF, p. 76
78 AMF, p. 43
79 AMF, p.77

80 AMF, p. 15
81 AMF, pp. 72-3
82 AMF, p. 146
83 For further discussion, see Charles Lock, "'Multiverse'...language which makes language impossible," Powys Review, 5, pp. 72-73
84 AMF, p. 148
85 A Glastonbury Romance, pp. 47, 1051, 1118
86 AMF, pp. 162-63
87 See note 29, above.
88 AMF, p. 172
89 AMF, p. 177
90 AMF, p. 185
91 Published in Scribner's Magazine, Vol. XCVII, April 1935, pp. 201-07; reprinted in Powys Review, 6, pp. 54-63
92 AMF, p. 193
93 JCP letter to Theodora Cowper Johnson, October 1917
94 AMF, pp. 246-47
95 AMF, p. 243 (Pennsylvania Station was, sadly, destroyed in the late nineteen-sixties.)
96 AMF, p. 215
97 AMF, p. 264
98 JCP had a permit for the use of alcohol for medical purposes, issued on 6 January 1924, by Dr Philip Thomas; nowhere does JCP mention a medical need for alcohol, and this may be another deed of friendship from the man who had given JCP shelter in 1916 for the writing of Rodmoor. On the other hand, JCP never mentions any dependence on alcohol for non-medical reasons. Permit now in Bissell Collection.
99 See Langridge, p. 90
100 See Frances and Jack, August 1927; JCP wrote a poem, "The Moon over Megapolis," on the MS of which is written "given to Sacco-Vanzetti paper The Lantern." The paper has not been located, Langridge, p. 226; the MS of the poem is in the Bissell Collection.
101 Autobiography, p. 535; see also JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 21 May 1921, printed in Powys Review, 2, p. 74
102 For details, see Chapter VIII, "Powys in the Context of Modernism," below.
103 Letters to Ll.P., p. 242, 18 November 1917.
104 AMF, pp. 179-80
105 AMF, p. 183
106 AMF, p. 30
107 AMF, p. 287
108 AMF, p. 287

Notes to Chapter V: Powys as dramatist

1 The MSS of "With Love Away" and "The Entermores" are in the George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse. The MS of "The Goat and Boy" is in "Chest D1" of the Powys collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas. There are almost certainly more such manuscripts to be discovered

2 "The Goat and Boy" MS p. 15

3 "The Entermores" Act I scene ii

4 Letters to Ll.P., p. 26

5 Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, pp. 157-59

6 See, e.g., Autobiography, pp. 221, 243, 280

7 Browne was to achieve fame as the director of R. C. Sherriff's Journey's End in 1929

8 See Eric Homberger, "Chicago and New York: Two Versions of American Modernism", in Modernism, edited by Bradbury and McFarlane, pp. 151-61; see especially p. 153

9 Maurice Browne, Too Late to Lament, p. 205

10 Autobiography, p. 528

11 Letters to Ll.P., p. 127, 25 November 1913

12 Frances and Jack, 27 November 1913

13 Letters to Ll.P., p. 128

14 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 129

15 Letters to Ll.P., p. 132

16 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 183. In a letter to his son, Littleton Alfred, in January 1916, Powys reveals something of his subsequent annoyance:

> "The Little Theatre Company has gone crazy. They insist on doing puppet shows instead of plays."

17 Little Review, vol. II, no. 1, March 1915, p. 8. Browne quotes part of this essay in Too Late to Lament, p. 385

Notes to Chapter VI : Dostoievsky and The Idiot

1 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 272. A letter from JCP to Marian Powys of May 1919, suggests that Powys was working on the dramatisation at that time.
2 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 247
3 Letters to Ll.P., p. 129
4 Visions and Revisions, (1955 edition), p. xxi
5 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 44-6. JCP could not have visited Dresden earlier than 1908, as he was there again in the spring of 1909 (if Louis Wilkinson is to be trusted), and in October 1909 JCP says that he has been in Dresden twice; see Louis Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, pp. 130, 122
6 See E. H. Carr, Dostoevsky (1821-1881), (London, 1931) pp. 75-76
7 In the George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse, N.Y. That the date is applicable to the contents is confirmed by twenty pages of drafts for an elegy on Swinburne.
8 "Burpham Journal 1909", Notes on Macbeth (unnumbered pages).
9 Autobiography, p. 445. See also JCP's Dostoievsky, p. 19. JCP attributes the translation incorrectly to Vizetelly, who was the publisher. The translator was Frederick Whishaw; see Gilbert Phelps, The Russian Novel in English Fiction, (London, 1956) p. 156
10 See Elwin, Life of Ll.P., p. 59. See also Louis Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, p. 116, and Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, p. 283. This would in fact have been JCP's fifth crossing.
11 In Autobiography, p. 271, JCP writes that he "first heard of" Dostoievsky from Bernard Price O'Neill. In the 1961 Preface to Wolf Solent, p. vi, JCP gives credit for "my earliest knowledge" of Dostoievsky to William Robert Phelips of Montacute House. Neither of these instances refers to JCP's reading of Dostoievsky.
12 Autobiography, pp. 445-46. The "descriptive words" were presumably meant to suggest comparison with Zola, whom Vizetelly had published; for thus "trafficking in pornographic literature" the publisher had been imprisoned. See Phelps, op. cit., p. 29
13 See Letters to LL.P., pp. 132, 183
14 Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, p. 282
15 Letters to Ll.P., p. 131
16 Autobiography, p. 525
17 Helen Muchnic, Dostoevsky's English Reputation (1881-1936), (Smith College, Mass., 1939) p. 62

18 See Randolph Bourne, "The Immanence of Dostoievsky" (review of The Eternal Husband), The Dial, LXIII, pp. 24-25, 28 June 1917. Exemplary of such enthusiasm was the stealing, on a train, of JCP's copy of The Humiliated and Offended; see Frances and Jack, 28 December 1915

19 See New York Times, 19 June 1963, obituary of JCP: "in April 1932 Mr Powys told a New York interviewer that he had lectured 10,000 times"

20 "The Reader Critic, Mr. Powys on Dostoevsky (A reader sends us these jottings from one of Mr. Powys's lectures)", Little Review, Vol I, no. 11, February 1915, pp. 61-62

21 Muchnic, pp. 62 ff.

22 Pleasures of Literature, p. 89

23 Little Review, I, 11, pp. 61-62

24 Little Review, I, 11, p. 62

25 Suspended Judg ments, (New York, 1916), p. [440]

26 George Steiner, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky, (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 128

27 Muchnic, p. 28

28 "The Riddle", Poetry (Chicago), XVI, 1920, pp. 138-39

29 Muchnic, p. 146

30 Letters to Ll.P., p.272. Cf. Little Review, I, 11, p. 62: "The French are too artistic to translate Dostoevsky."

31 Autobiography, p. 475

32 Interview with Phyllis Playter, 11 February 1980

33 Visions and Revisions, (1955 edition), p. 190

34 Autobiography, p. 339

35 Autobiography, p. 341

36 Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, pp. 229-30

37 The quotation is the title of an essay in Murray Krieger's The Tragic Vision (New York, 1960), pp. 209-27. Among the earliest of negative attitudes to Myshkin is that of Lev Shestov, in "Dostoevsky and Nietzsche: The Philosophy of Tragedy" (1903; reprinted in Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Nietzsche, Ohio, 1969), p. 216

38 Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, p. 230

39 Dostoievsky, p. 20

40 Dostoievsky, p. 20

41 Pleasures of Literature, pp. 98-99

42 "My First Publication", Mark Twain Quarterly (Missouri), IX, 2, Winter, 1952, pp. 22-23

43 See Notes 7 and 8, above

44 Pleasures of Literature, p. 100. Cf. Autobiography, p. 516

45 Letters to Ll.P., p. 45

46 Autobiography, p. 191. A general discussion of JCP's sadism is to be found in Autobiography, pp. 8-9

47 Letters to Ll.P., p. 226; see Chapter II, Note 169

48 See Autobiography, p. 8

49 Donated by C.J.S.Lock, on behalf of Peter Powys Grey, November 1979

50 The programme of the matinée performance of 16 May 1922 is reproduced in Langridge, pp. 92-3. Programmes of all performances are preserved in the Theatre Collection of the New York Public Library
51 Langridge, p. 92
52 See Powys Review, 2, p. 76, and various reference books
53 The "Churchill version" was typed in America, in the 1940s, from an earlier version which Powys himself would have seen. Interview with Peter Powys Grey, September 1979
54 Act I, scene ii, p. 8. This is my own system of pagination, as the typescript is erratically paginated. There are eighty pages altogether, which I have numbered from 1 to 72. "Act II, scene iii", consisting of eight pages, is actually an alternative version of Act II, scene i; this is therefore paginated 37A-44A
55 Fyodor Dosto evsky, The Idiot, translated by Constance Garnett, (London, 1913; reset 1946 and reprinted 1975), pp. 219-20. This edition is henceforth referred to as Idiot CG
56 Idiot CG, p. 220
57 See Edwin Muir, The Structure of the Novel (London, 1928), pp. 73-80
58 Act I scene i, p. 4
59 Idiot CG, p.59
60 Act I scene ii, p. 6. Cf. Ivan Karmakoff, After My Fashion, p. 190.
61 Act I scene ii, pp. 8-9
62 Act I scene ii, p. 9
63 Act I scene ii, p. 9
64 Idiot CG, p. 20
65 Act I scene ii, p. 9
66 Act I scene ii, pp. 9-13
67 Act I scene ii, p.13
68 Idiot CG, p. 57
69 Idiot CG, p. 62
70 Act I scene ii, p. 13
71 Act I scene ii, p. 14
72 Idiot CG, p. 73
73 Act I scene ii, p. 14
74 Act I scene ii, p. 15. Cf. Idiot CG, p. 75
75 Idiot CG, p. 31
76 Act I scene ii, p. 19
77 Act I scene ii, p. 20. Cf. Idiot CG, p. 83
78 Act I scene ii, p. 20. Cf. Idiot CG, p. 84
79 Idiot CG, p. 83
80 Act I scene ii, p. 21
81 Act I scene iii is incorrectly labelled "Act I, scene ii" in tps.
82 Act I scene ii, p. 12
83 Act I scene iii, pp. 24-5
84 Act I scene iii, p. 26. Cf. Idiot CG, pp. 135-6
85 Act I scene iii, p. 27. Cf. Idiot CG, p. 150
86 Act I scene iii, p. 30. Cf. Idiot CG, p. 157

87 Idiot CG, p. 166
88 Act I scene iii, p. 34
89 Idiot CG, p. 341
90 Idiot CG, p. 169
91 Act I scene iii, p. 35. JCP may have received linguistic advice from the actress Fania Marinoff, wife of Carl Van Vechten, whose translation of Gorky's A Night's Lodging was produced in New York, in 1919. JCP had known her then, and met her again in October 1921, when her translations of three Russian plays were likely to be accepted for production: see Frances and Jack, 24 December 1919, and 11 October 1921
92 Act I scene iii, p. 36
93 Confusingly, Act II scene i of the New York production is set on "The bench in the park", like "Act II, scene iii" and unlike Act II scene i of the typescript. See Langridge, p. 93
94 Idiot CG, p. 423;"Act II, scene iii," p. 40A
95 Act II scene i, p. 39; Idiot CG, pp.423, 514
96 Act II scene i, pp. 39-41; Idiot CG, pp. 514-16
97 Act II scene i, p. 42; Idiot CG, p.346
98 Act II scene i, p. 43
99 Act II scene ii, p. 45; Idiot CG, p.532
100 Act II scene ii, p. 48
101 Act II scene ii, p. 49
102 Idiot CG, pp. 457, 544
103 Act III scene i, p.50
104 Act III scene i, pp. 50-53; Idiot CG, pp. 201-17
105 Act III scene i, p. 53; Idiot CG, p. 217
106 Act III scene i, pp. 54-55
107 Idiot CG, p. 554; Act III, scene i, p.55
108 Idiot CG, p. 555
109 Act III scene i, p. 55
110 Act III scene ii, p. 60
111 Idiot CG, p. 564
112 Act III scene ii, p. 61; Idiot CG, pp. 571-72
113 See Dosto evsky, The Notebooks for The Idiot, edited by Edward Wasiolek, translated by Katharine Strelsky (Chicago, 1967, reprinted 1973), pp. 16-17
114 Act III scene ii, pp. 63-64
115 Idiot CG, pp. 583-84
116 Act III scene ii, p. 64
117 Act III scene ii, p. 64
118 Act IV scene i, pp. 65-69; Idiot CG, pp. 595-600
119 Act IV scene i, p.70
120 JCP seems never to have read anything by Pushkin, whose Queen of Spades is the prototype of the theme in Russian literature
121 Act IV scene i, pp. 70-71
122 Act II scene ii, p. 48; Idiot CG, pp. 212, 399-400
123 Act IV scene i, p. 71
124 Act IV scene i, p. 71
125 Idiot CG, p. 601; Act IV scene i, p. 72
126 Act IV scene i, p. 72; Idiot CG, pp. 407, 601
127 JCP letter to Marian Powys, 10 May 1919

128 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 272
129 Letters to Ll.P., p.276
130 Langridge, pp. 92-94
131 See Frances and Jack, 10 October 1921
132 Claude Bragdon, The Secret Springs - An Autobiography (London, 1938), p. 100
133 Letters to Ll.P., p. 304
134 JCP letter to Marian Powys, 22 November 1945
135 Letters received from Elisabeth Bergner, 9 June 1980, and from O. Kenyon (secretary), 5 July 1980.
136 Muchnic, p. 146. Desmond MacCarthy wrote an unfavourable review of this production in New Statesman, XXVII, pp. 672-73
137 Yurii Olesha, Zavist', edited by Marion Jordan (Oxford, 1969), p. xx
138 See Note 113, above
139 See Charles Lock, "'Multiverse'...language which makes language impossible", Powys Review, 5, pp. 72-73
140 Letter from Henry James to Hugh Walpole, 19 May 1912, quoted in Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (London, 1959, reprinted 1975), p. 235
141 The Dial, LXXIII, September 1922, pp. 330-31. JCP may have been remembering this and other utterances when he praised a poem "by T. S. Eliot (whom otherwise I condemn as a mincing ginger-footed snob)", in a letter to T. F. Powys, 25 August 1931. Yet that poem,"The Waste Land", Powys knew by heart and would recite in its entirety; letter received from Gerard Casey, March 1981
142 "John Cowper Powys - An English Dostoievsky" was the title of a lecture given by Charles Lock to the Russian Literary Society of Montreal in September 1979. Angus Wilson uses the same phrase in a contribution to Recollections of the Powys Brothers, edited by Belinda Humfrey, London, 1980, p.263

Notes to Chapter VII : Paddock Calls

1 Langridge does not list a set of articles which JCP wrote for the Examiner in 1922; see Letters to Ll.P., pp. 300-01

2 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 287; Frances and Jack, 10 July 1921; Llewelyn Powys, The Verdict of Bridlegoose, pp. 27-9

3 See Ll. Powys, The Verdict of Bridlegoose, p. 58; Letters to Ll.P., pp. 288-89; in Bridlegoose, p.64, Ll. Powys wrongly gives December, instead of November, as the date of JCP's departure

4 See JCP letter to Marian, 4 June 1919

5 Letters to Ll.P., p. 84

6 Letters to Ll.P., p. 298; JCP gives an account of the state of Shaw's business in January 1920,Letters to Ll.P., pp. 271-73

7 Frances and Jack, 6 May 1921, 17 May 1921, June 1921

8 "My First Publication", Mark Twain Quarterly, Vol. IX, no. 2, p. 22

9 Interview with Phyll is Playter, 11 February 1980

10 See Louis Wilkinson, Swan's Milk, p. 287: JCP moved to Keedick's agency, and got a job there for Shaw as well in October 1924; see Letters to Ll.P., p.352. In February 1925 Shaw had a nervous breakdown from which he never fully recovered, and JCP gave him support with occasional loans; see Frances and Jack, early September 1927, 14 September 1927. The role of Shaw as sacrificial victim of JCP's success, and a source of guilt for JCP, is to be examined elsewhere

11 See JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 24 September 1922

12 Letters to Ll.P., p. 298

13 See Letters to Ll.P., pp. 315, 319, 333

14 Letters to Ll.P., p. 349; see also pp. 352-56

15 See Frances and Jack, 6 March 1930

16 Letters to Ll.P., p. 302

17 Frances and Jack, 4 October 1920

18 See Frances and Jack, 14 September 1921: "a running commentary...appreciation - sans scholarship! of Homer...of the Iliad and Odyssey both...with Cary's prose translations....I am trying my own hand at fragmentary translations into English hexameters...you know, a la Evangeline??" JCP mentions Longfellow's "Evangeline" in Homer and the Aether, pp. 13-4. Compare also the pier-post, Homer and the Aether, p. 25, with the poem, "The Old Pier-Post," in Samphire, 1922, p. 6

19 JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 24 September 1922

20 Letters to Ll.P., p. 302. The Brownes are Maurice and his wife, Nellie Van Volkenburg, actress and native of Chicago; see M. Browne, Too Late to Lament, p.111. Miss Reicher is presumably another actress

21 Letters to Ll.P., p. 304
22 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 305
23 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 306
24 Letters to Ll.P., p. 305
25 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 306
26 Letters to Ll.P., p. 316
27 Letters to Ll.P., p. 335
28 Autobiography, p. 529. JCP's memory confuses this with war-time; in fact, he wrote another play, after Paddock Calls, which is not known to have survived, Letters to Ll.P., p. 302
29 Letters to Ll.P., p. 302
30 JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 24 September 1922
31 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 132
32 Paddock Calls, p. [3]. All quotations, and pagination, are from the version of Paddock Calls set up in proof by the Village Press in 1975; proof-copy was kindly lent by Jeff Kwintner. All references henceforth are abbreviated to PC, and page numbers are followed by act and scene divisions
33 Autobiography, p. 187; "western" is a mistake for "eastern", "swift-footed" as Lutyens was an athlete; Autobiography, p. 110
34 PC, p. [3], Dramatis Personae
35 PC, p. 5,I, i, stage direction
36 PC, p. [3], Dramatis Personae
37 PC, p. 5, I, i, stage direction
38 Rosmersholm, translated by Una Ellis-Fermor, in The Master Builder and Other Plays, Harmondsworth, 1958, p. 29
39 Hedda Gabler requires one portrait; see Three Plays, translated by Una Ellis-Fermor, Harmondsworth, 1950, p. 263
40 Rosmersholm, pp. 29-30. These are not quite the opening words, but those lead up to this brief quotation
41 PC, p. 5, I, i
42 Louis Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, p. 17. Wilkinson prefaces this with the remark that "It would make it impossible for any one of them [the Powys brothers] to write a play that could be acted." T. F. Powys also wrote plays that remain unpublished and unperformed; see Michel Pouillard, "T.F.Powys and the Theatre", Powys Review, 5, pp. 45-54
43 See Richard Ellmann, James Joyce, pp. 162-3
44 See Autobiography, p. 251
45 After My Fashion, p. 54
46 See After My Fashion, pp. 64-5
47 PC, p. 5, I, i
48 PC, p. 5, I, i
49 PC, p. 6, I, i
50 PC, p. 9, I, i
51 PC, p.17, I, i
52 E.g., Rhoda Broughton, Red as a Rose is She, 1870, and Hardy, Under the Greenwood Tree, 1872

53 The earliest instance is probably Far from the Madding Crowd, 1874
54 Emma, Harmondsworth, 1966, Chapter 15, p. 148
55 In comparison, the jokes played by, for example, Beckett and Nabokov on Watt and Ada have straightforward foundations
56 PC, pp. 15-6, I, ii
57 PC, p. 12, I, ii
58 PC, p. 5, I, i
59 PC, p. 5, I, i. Another was "Effie Geard", a name common in Montacute and later used in A Glastonbury Romance
60 See PC, p. 12, I, ii
61 PC, p. 13, I, ii
62 PC, p. 16, I, ii
63 Mandragora, p. 63. Wilson Knight gives this poem the honour of epigraph to The Saturnian Quest; Paddock certainly lends support to its shaky argument
64 PC, pp. 18-19, I, ii
65 Autobiography, p. 206
66 JCP may have been influenced by de la Motte Fouqué's fairy-tale, Undine (1811), mentioned in Autobiography, p. 146
67 PC, p. 19, I, ii
68 See PC, p. 19, I, ii
69 PC, p. 14, I, ii
70 See Malcolm Elwin, Life of Llewelyn Powys, p. 81. JCP compared his acquaintance, Mabel Hattersley, to Ann Veronica, Letters to Ll.P., pp. 74, 210, 212.
71 A well-known, and inept, fictional example is in Meade Falkner's Moonfleet, 1898, which JCP probably knew.
72 PC, p. 20, I, ii
73 PC, p. 21, I, ii
74 PC, p. 22, I, ii
75 PC, p. 25, II, i
76 See PC, p. 37, II, i
77 Wilkinson, Welsh Ambassadors, p. 3
78 Welsh Ambassadors, p. 18
79 PC, p. 34, II, i
80 See PC, p. 59, III, i; p. 68, III, ii
81 PC, p. 35, II, i. "Spear" and "leer" mean, respectively , "thin" (spare) and "empty" in Dorset dialect; JCP seems to have remembered "spear" for another political David, in A Glastonbury Romance.
82 Autobiography, p. 252
83 PC, p. 39, II, i
84 See PC, p. 39,II, i; p.51, II, iii
85 See PC, pp. 51-2, II, iii
86 See Note 24 above
87 PC, p. 42, II, ii
88 PC, p. 45, II, ii
89 PC, p. 46, II, iii
90 See PC, p.56, II, iii
91 PC, p. 12, I, ii; Sir Robert reads Lucretius, p. 54, II, iii

92 PC, p. 57, III, i
93 PC, p. 55, II, iii
94 JCP took part in a séance with Louis Wilkinson and Frances Gregg, in April 1912; they summoned up a spirit named Laroche who had just gone down with the Titanic; see Frances and Jack, April 1912. JCP's interest in the occult - distinct from the religious, mystical, or psychic - was encouraged by his cousin Ralph Shirley, editor of The Occult Review.
95 See PC, pp. 58-59, III, i
96 PC, p. 63, III, i
97 PC, p. 64, III, i
98 PC, p. 66, III, i
99 Hamlet, IV, vii
100 For a good account of JCP's attitude towards water, and its relationship with earth - but not with death and drowning - see Wilson Knight, The Saturnian Quest,pp. 41-48
101 The similarities between JCP and Henry James, evident in Wolf Solent and discussed in chapter thereon, may in part originate in their shared experience of being failed dramatists
102 After My Fashion, pp. 251-54
103 Glen Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys: Novelist, p. 33
104 H. P. Collins, John Cowper Powys: Old Earth-Man, p. 58

Notes to Chapter VIII: Powys in the Context of Modernism

1 Ellmann, James Joyce, p. 517
2 See Richard Chase, "The Fate of the Avant-Garde," in The Idea of the Modern, edited by Irving Howe, p. 152
3 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 344, and Richard S. Kennedy, Dreams in the Mirror - A Biography of E. E. Cummings, pp. 260-61. JCP and Cummings maintained a correspondence until at least 1957; see Raymond Garlick, "Powys in Gwynedd: the last years," in Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 306
4 Ellmann, James Joyce, p. 518. The information is taken from Margaret Anderson, My Thirty Years' War, p. 220; further deails are to be found in an article by Margaret Anderson, "'Ulysses' in Court," Little Review, January-March 1921, Vol. VII, no. 4, p. 23, and in Frances and Jack, 15 February 1921
5 "Finnegan's Wake," (sic) in Modern Reading, No. 7, 1943, pp. 75-88; reprinted in Obstinate Cymric, 1947, pp. 19-36. Praise of Work in Progress is to be found in, for example, Autobiography, pp. 65-66
6 Letters of Llewelyn Powys, edited by Louis Wilkinson, p. 97; the letter is wrongly dated by the editor to 20 March 1924, instead of 1923
7 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 331; wrongly dated February, 1923, instead of March, as JCP had read Clement Wood's review of Samphire, printed on 7 March 1923. See Langridge, p. 99, no. 69 d
8 James Joyce's 'Ulysses' - an Appreciation, Village Press, p. 4, (henceforth abbreviated to JJU.) The review was first printed in Life and Letters, October 1923, Vol. II, no. 2, pp. 16-22
9 JJU, p. 4. In 1926 Bennett and JCP were near neighbours in Sussex, and - in part, perhaps, thanks to the restricted circulation of Life and Letters - became friends; Bennett's Journal, 11 June 1926, records a visit from Powys that lasted six hours; see Bennett, Journals, edited by Frank Swinnerton, Harmondsworth, 1971, pp. 513-14. Other aspects of the relationship between JCP and Bennett are treated in R. L. Blackmore, "John Cowper Powys and Arnold Bennett," Powys Newsletter, 5, pp. [16-18]
10 JJU, pp. 4-5
11 JJU, p. 8
12 JJU, p.9
13 A Glastonbury Romance, p. 481
14 A Glastonbury Romance, p. 650
15 The Dial, April 1926, Vol. LXXX, no. 4, pp. 331-38; reprinted in Powys Review, 6, pp. 38-42 (which wrongly acknowledges "Vol. LXXX, no. 2")

16 Powys Review, 6, p. 38
17 Powys Review, 6, p. 40
18 Powys Review, 6, p. 40
19 "Modern fiction," Chapter 3 of Sex in the Arts: a symposium, edited by J.F.McDermott and K.B.Taft, 1932; section on Dreiser reprinted in Powys Review, 6, pp. 43-45, quotation from p. 43. JCP and Dreiser were close friends between 1914 and 1917, and again from 1924 onwards; see Letters to Ll.P., pp. 162, 229, 357, 365
20 Frances and Jack, 6 September 1925
21 See Frances and Jack, passim; Hilda Doolittle mentions Frances Gregg and Louis Wilkinson in End to Torment - a memoir of Ezra Pound, pp. 8-9
22 "The Philosopher Kwang" in The Dial, November 1923, Vol. LXXV, no. 5, pp. 430-34, quotation from p. 430; the essay is reprinted in Powys Review, 7, pp. 45-48
23 Dial, Vol. LXXV, no. 5, p. 430
24 See Hugh Kenner, The Pound Era, pp. 445-46
25 Dial, Vol. LXXV, no. 5, p. 431
26 Pound, Canto XIII
27 Dial, Vol. LXXV, no. 5, p. 431
28 Dial, Vol. LXXV, no. 5, p.483

Notes to Chapter IX : Ducdame

1 See Carvel Collins, "A Fourth Book Review by Faulkner," Mississippi Quarterly, 28, Summer, 1975, pp. 339-46 (of which Faulkner's review fills pp. 343-46); first printed in the Times-Picayune, New Orleans, 22 March 1925, p.6. I am indebted to Professor Michael Millgate for drawing my attention to this review

2 JCP letter to Norman Denny, 11 October 1949

3 Confessions of Two Brothers, p. 120; on JCP's dislike of Flaubert see also R. H. Ward, The Powys Brothers, p.1. JCP seldom mentions Jane Austen, and then provocatively: "I read Jane Austen purely for the romance of the tale; that very thing that the mature young wit was always scoffing at." Autobiography, p. 333. In other words, JCP read Jane Austen as if she were Scott. For JCP's attitude to Turgenev, see remainder of chapter. JCP was not entirely immune to Faulkner's genius, and admired Absalom! Absalom!; see Pleasures of Literature, p. 137, and Letters to Louis Wilkinson, p. 32

4 Mississippi Quarterly, 28, p. 346

5 Timothy Hyman, "The Modus Vivendi of John Cowper Powys," in Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 131

6 JJU, p. 5

7 Stanzas from "The Phoenix and the Turtle" are quoted in Ducdame, pp. 149, 150, 249

8 Letters to Ll.P., p. 279

9 Letters to Ll.P., p. 215

10 Letters to Ll.P., p. 352

11 Ducdame, p. 311; quotations from Village Press edition, 1974, reprinted, with identical pagination, from editions of Doubleday, Page & Co., and Grant Richards Ltd., 1925. References henceforth abbreviated to D

12 See Letters to Ll.P., p. 68. Will Powys farmed at Witcombe, Ash, from 1908 to 1913; see "William Powys: an appreciation," by Anthony Dyer, Powys Review, 5, p. 81

13 Autobiography, p. 23. (By 1956 JCP's memory had adjusted the spelling to "Oakover"; see Letters to Louis Wilkinson, p. 378)

14 D, p. 16

15 D, p. 3

16 See R. W. Dunning, A History of Montacute, p. 214, and Dudley Dodd, Montacute House, pp. 43-44, [46]. After the sale of the house Llewelyn Powys wrote: "I do not think any occurrence I have observed in my life has given me sharper understanding of the insubstantiality of all temporal values than the

separation of this house from the Phelipses." Somerset Essays, pp. 29-30

17 For praise, see Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys: Novelist, p. 33, and H. P. Collins, John Cowper Powys: Old Earth-Man, p. 60

18 Wood and Stone, pp. 3, 9

19 D, p. 1. See also Charles Lock, "'Multiverse'...", Powys Review, 5, pp. 72-73, which extends this analysis to A Glastonbury Romance

20 D, p. 3

21 D, p. 3

22 D, p. 4

23 D, p. 259

24 Compare this passage with Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Chapter XX

25 D, p. 302

26 D, p. 177

27 Wolf Solent, p. 274

28 Another, and extreme, case is that of Saul Bellow, who shapes autobiography with a minimum of "art" and imagination; the critical debate, between those who see Bellow as a "ventriloquist" and those who find an extremely subtle form of ironic differentiation, is very similar to that which is developing over the status of Wolf Solent

29 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Chapter XXII, edited by George Watson, Dent, 1975, p. 258

30 D, p. 7

31 D, p. 239

32 D, p. 136

33 D, pp. 277-78

34 Wolf Solent, p. 426

35 D, p. 123; see also p. 173

36 D, p. 302

37 Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys: Novelist, p. 34

38 D, p. 298

39 D, p. 299

40 D, p. 299

41 See The Return of the Native, Book Fourth, Chapters V-VII. Rook's walk takes place on the last day of June, Mrs Yeobright's on the last day of August; compare the openings of D, Chapter XIX and Return, Book Fourth, Chapter V.

42 See D, pp. 298-99

43 D, p. 300

44 Other significant references to the life-illusion are to be found in D, pp. 168, 268-69, 283, 384

45 D, p. 303

46 D, p. 303

47 Autobiography, p. 393

48 D, p. 304; I have corrected the misprint "midgets" in the text

49 D, p. 304

50 D, p. 137

51 D, pp. 262-63

52 See D, p. 448

53 D, p. 306
54 D, p. 306
55 D, p. 306
56 Wilson Knight's phrase, from The Saturnian Quest, p. 29
57 D, p. 308
58 D, pp. 308-09
59 D, pp. 309-10
60 D, pp. 313-14
61 D, p. 314
62 A Glastonbury Romance, p. xiii
63 D, p. 316
64 In Defence of Sensuality, p. 184
65 Frances and Jack, April 1913
66 Letters to Ll.P., p. 152
67 Louis Wilkinson, The Buffoon, p. 150
68 Confessions of Two Brothers, pp. 103-4
69 See, respectively, Frances and Jack, "Ash Thursday" (sic), 1931, and Letters to Louis Wilkinson, 25 November 1938, p. 41
70 Turgenev, Rudin, translated by Richard Freeborn, Harmondsworth, 1975, pp. 52, 144; Wolf Solent, p. 2; A Glastonbury Romance, p. 22
71 Mississippi Quarterly, 28, p. 344
72 Letters to Louis Wilkinson, p. 155
73 Malcolm Elwin, Life of Llewelyn Powys, p. 162; the first part of Elwin's sentence is based on Llewelyn Powys' Verdict of Bridlegoose, p. 128. Kenneth Hopkins, usually sympathetic to Llewelyn, suspects that he might have damaged Ducdame; see The Powys Brothers, pp. 95-96
74 Frances and Jack, October/November 1920
75 D, p. 310
76 D, pp. 175-76, 311
77 D, p. 433
78 D, p. 434
79 D, p. 444
80 D, p. 444

Notes to Chapter X : Wolf Solent

1 JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 5 December 1933
2 See Frances and Jack, 22 March 1926, 10 July 1927, 6 March 1930
3 The relationship became permanent in 1924; see Letters to Ll.P., pp. 357-58
4 In the absence of JCP's letters to Llewelyn from 1925 onwards, one's impression is probably distorted; until their publication one must depend on other letters (and JCP was a most Protean correspondent), and calm speculation
5 Wolf Solent, p. vii. Quotations are from the edition of 1961, to which references are henceforth abbreviated to WS
6 The manuscript of Wolf Solent is in the George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse
7 JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 11 October 1931
8 Frances and Jack, 6 March 1930; the intention was to stop lecturing for one year, which would be devoted entirely to writing. This yielded a small but adequate income which saved Powys from ever having to lecture professionally again. His last regular lecture was in the fall of 1930, at Columbia University, on Goethe's Faust. See Edgar Lee Masters, "Solitary Man - Phudd's Mountain Will Miss John Cowper Powys," newspaper cutting, date and provenance unknown, c. 1935, in J. D. Watson Collection, Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge
9 "Farewell to America,", Scribner's Magazine, Vol. XCVII, April 1935; reprinted in Powys Review, 6, pp. 54-63, quotation from p. 55
10 Autobiography, p. 544. Abell is, unfortunately, unidentified
11 Paul Jordan-Smith, For the Love of Books, p. 109
12 Suspended Judg ments, p. 380. Nothing in JCP's later comments on James suggests any basic change in these preferences
13 Suspended Judg ments, p. 379
14 Suspended Judg ments, p. 379
15 See Chapter VII, note 101, above
16 Henry James, The Ambassadors, Book Ninth, II
17 See The Meaning of Culture, p. 99, published just four months after Wolf Solent
18 Thomas Mann to Karl Kerényi, 20 February 1934, in Letters of Thomas Mann 1889-1955, p. 183
19 See Elmar Schenkel, "John Cowper Powys: The Literary Reception in Germany," Powys Review, 4, pp. 79-81, note 7

20 See Elmar Schenkel, op. cit. It was through Jahnn's influence that Powys was awarded in 1958 the Bronze Plaque of the Hamburg Free Academy of Arts, which had previously been awarded only twice - once to Thomas Mann; see Langridge, pp. 200-201
21 See Max Brod, Streitbares Leben, pp. 373, 396
22 JCP letter to I. E. Jones, 9 April 1942, unpublished; quoted in part in letter from I. E. Jones to the editor, Times Literary Supplement, 18 July 1980
23 The possible exception is Wolf's homosexual tendencies, hinted at on pp. 387 and 547. However, even here the reader's suspicions are Wolf's suspicions
24 WS, p. 7
25 WS, p. 8
26 WS, p. 36
27 See WS, p. 590
28 WS, p. 591
29 On JCP's discovery of this word in Ibsen, see J. M. Turner, "Life-Illusion and Stupid Being," Powys Review, 4, pp. 25-28
30 See WS, p. 414; compare The Ambassadors, Book Ninth, II, where each person's distinctive "tribute to the ideal" is described.
31 WS, p. 336; see also JCP letter to T. F. Powys, 29 November 1928
32 WS, p. 341
33 On Nietzsche's influence on the English-speaking world, see Patrick Bridgwater, Nietzsche in Anglosaxony, in which JCP figures prominently. "Ichthyosaurus-ego" (to which Mann was referring) is a phrase used frequently by JCP in In Defence of Sensuality, and best explained on p. 9
34 WS, p. 285
35 WS, p. vii
36 Autobiography, p. 219
37 Letters to Ll.P., 11 November 1910, p. 86; this is JCP's earliest-known mention of the life-illusion, and should not be taken as a sure guide to its use in a novel written almost twenty years later
38 WS, p. 447
39 WS, p. 458
40 Autobiography, p. 73
41 Autobiography, p. 46
42 Autobiography, pp. 46-47
43 Carole Coates, "Gerda and Christie," Powys Review, 5, p. 55
44 Angus Wilson, "John Cowper Powys as a Novelist," Powys Review, 1, p. 18
45 The Pleasures of Literature, pp. 131-32
46 WS, p. 287
47 WS, p. 289
48 WS, p. 90
49 WS, p. 291
50 C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, p. 195

51 See JCP letters to Littleton C. Powys, January 1928, 9 May 1928, in Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 322; and JCP letter to Llewelyn Powys, 16 August 1928, in Powys Review, 7, p. 57

52 JCP letter to Littleton C. Powys, 14 September 1928, in Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 323.

53 JCP letter to T.F.Powys, 29 November 1928

54 WS, p. 527

55 WS, p. 549

56 WS, p. 269

57 WS, p. 330

58 For details of the cuts which JCP had to make, see Frances and Jack, 14 September 1927; JCP letter to Littleton C. Powys, 30 July 1928, in Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, p. 323; JCP letter to Llewelyn Powys, 16 August 1928, in Powys Review, 7, p. 57

59 All the chapters, except Chapter 19, comprise a single day, or part of a day. As is evident from a table, the dating of the events of the novel is extremely precise:

Chapter	Date
1-3	Thursday, 3 March
4	Friday, 4 March
5	Saturday, 5 March
6	Sunday, 6 March
7-8	Wednesday, 9 March
9	Thursday, 10 March
10-11	Wednesday, 1 June
12	Early August
13	The next day
14	The next day
15-17	Friday, 26 August
18	Monday, 29 August
19	From September to the last Sunday in December
20	Monday, 26 December
21	Saturday, 25 February
22	Sunday, 26 February
23	Thursday, 1 March
24	Friday, 2 March
25	Saturday, 26 May

These dates fit the calendar for 1927 and 1928. The only mistake is found in Chapter 19, which specifically ends on the last Sunday in December; this would be the 25th, but no mention is made of Christmas.

60 See Ben Jones, "The Disfigurement of Gerda: Moral and Textual Problems in Wolf Solent," Powys Review, 2, pp. 20-26. (I was myself able to have only a cursory look at the manuscript.)

61 Ben Jones, "The Disfigurement of Gerda," Powys Review, 2, p. 21

62 JCP letter to Llewelyn Powys, 16 August 1928, Powys Review, 7, p. 57

63 Powys Review, 7, p. 58
64 WS, p. 450
65 Powys Review, 7, p. 58
66 WS, pp. 612-13
67 John Bayley, An Essay on Hardy, p. 4

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES

This Bibliography is selective, and lists only those works quoted or prominently mentioned in the text. It is divided in two parts, "Primary", for writings by John Cowper Powys, and "Secondary" for other writings which have been quoted or referred to in the text. The "Primary" part is itself divided into three sections: Section A for Powys' published works, Section B for Powys' unpublished works, Section C for Powys' letters, published, unpublished, and in process of publication.

When the original publisher is listed as well as the publisher of the later edition used, this indicates that the type has not been re-set, and that the pagination of the main body of the text is identical in both editions.

Works of well known authors quoted in the text (e.g., Jane Austen, Hardy, James, Joyce, Pound, Turgenev) are omitted from the Bibliography; where precision of reference, to a single page, has been necessary, the edition used is specified in the Notes.

One item in the "Secondary" part is an unpublished source, letters from T. F. Powys to John Cowper Powys.

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The Meaning of Culture. New York: W.W.Norton & Co., 1929; reprinted London: Village Press, 1974
The Owl, the Duck, and - Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe! 1930; reprinted London: Village Press, 1975
In Defence of Sensuality. 1930; reprinted London: Victor Gollancz, 1930; reprinted Village Press, 1974
"Modern Fiction." 1932; section on Dreiser reprinted Dyfed: Powys Review, no. 6, pp. 43-45, 1980
A Glastonbury Romance. 1932; reprinted London: Macdonald, 1955; reprinted 1966
Autobiography. 1934; reprinted London: Macdonald, 1967
"Farewell to America." 1935; reprinted Dyfed: The Powys Review, no. 6, pp. 54-63, 1980
The Pleasures of Literature. London: Cassell, 1938; reprinted Village Press, 1975
Dostoievsky. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1946; reprinted Village Press, 1974
Obstinate Cymric: Essays 1935-47. Carmarthen: The Druid Press, 1947; reprinted London: Village Press, 1973
"My First Publication." Mark Twain Quarterly, Vol. IX, no. 2, pp. 22-23, 1952
Lucifer: A Poem. London: Macdonald, 1956; reprinted Village Press, 1974
Homer and the Aether. London: Macdonald, 1959
After My Fashion. London: Picador, 1980

SECTION B: Unpublished works by John Cowper Powys, including consulted manuscripts and typescripts of published works, listed in assumed order of composition.

Ms.	1894	"With Love Away." George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse, New York.
Ms.		"The Goat and Boy." Chest D1, Powys Collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
Ms.		"The Entermores." George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse, New York.
Ms.	1902	"Philip Wharton." Powys Collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
Ms.	1906–07	"Story about London Life of a Street-Girl." Powys Collection, Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
Ms.	1909	"Burpham Journal 1909." George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse, New York.
Tps.	1918–20	"The Idiot." Archives Centre, Churchill College, Cambridge.
Tps.	1920	<u>After My Fashion</u>. c/o Laurence Pollinger Ltd., London.
Proof	1922	"Paddock Calls." Village Press, London.
Ms.	1926–29	<u>Wolf Solent</u>. George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse, New York.

SECTION C: Letters from John Cowper Powys to various correspondents. Because the thesis relies heavily on Powys' letters, and because the situation with regard to their publication is unclear, unsettled and arbitrary, all cited letters, published and unpublished, are listed together, in the order of frequncy of citation in the text.

Letters of John Cowper Powys to his Brother Llewelyn, Volume 1, [1902-1925]. Edited and selected by Malcolm Elwin. London: Village Press, 1975. Referred to in Notes as Letters to Ll.P.. One later letter, of 16 August 1928, has been published in Powys Review, no. 7, 1980

Frances and Jack: Letters from John Cowper Powys to Frances Gregg. Edited by Oliver M. Wilkinson, publication pending. Referred to in Notes as Frances and Jack. Quotations taken from typescript prepared for publication, in possession of Oliver Wilkinson

Letters to Marian Powys. In possession of Peter Powys Grey; copies in possession of Colgate University Library, Hamilton, New York

Letters to Theodore Francis Powys. In possession of E.E.Bissell; some published as Appendix 1 (a), Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Belinda Humfrey, pp. 314-320, and others in Powys Review, no. 2, pp. 67-74, and no. 3, pp. 71-77

Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 1935 - 1956. Edited by Louis Wilkinson. London: Macdonald, 1958; reprinted Village Press, 1974

Letters to Littleton Charles Powys. In possession of E.E.Bissell; some published as Appendix 1 (b), Essays on John Cowper Powys, edited by Humfrey, pp. 322-342

Letters to Littleton Alfred Powys. In possession of E.E.Bissell

Letters to Theodora Cowper Johnson. In possession of E.E.Bissell

Letters to Mary Cowper Powys. In possession of E.E.Bissell

Letters to Norman Denny. In George Aherst Research Library, University of Syracuse, New York

Letters to Glen Cavaliero. In possession of recipient

Letters to I. E. Jones. In possession of recipient

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