

SENSUALITY IN JOHN COWPER POWYS' WOLF SOLENT

JOHN COWPER POWYS'  
IN DEFENCE OF SENSUALITY  
AND  
WOLF SOLENT

By

JOHN ANTHONY SCIME, B.A.

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AUTHOR: John Anthony Scime, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Maqbool Aziz

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## Abstract

This thesis is a close critical examination of the benefits derived from reading Powys' In Defence of Sensuality in conjunction with Wolf Solent.

A synopsis of the Defence is presented in order that the reader may become familiar with Powys' philosophy. It is contended that many critics, if they had paid close attention to the Defence would not have arrived at some of their critical and explanatory statements, especially in reference to Powys' amorality and the relationship between Wolf and Christie Malakite.

The thesis proper is divided into four main sections each dealing with important aspects of the novel. The first section deals with incest and homosexuality; the second with Ann Haggard and William Solent; the third with Gerda Torp and Christie Malakite and the fourth with Wolf's voyage of discovery.

Each section is closely examined in reference to the problems critics have encountered with each, and the clarification of these problems by reference to In Defence of Sensuality.

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## FOREWORD

John Cowper Powys studies are at a very critical juncture. The scholarship now devoted to the works of this extraordinary man will determine Powys' literary status for the next few decades. His writings contain a particular originality not to be found in any other writer since William Blake.

He is original because he does not begin with the same precepts as most other human beings. To term him a mystic would only cloud his real ambition of being a prophet. He spent his whole life preaching a way of life not restricted by Time or Space.

He is original because he has not restricted himself to the study of the human sphere. He is a complete visionary because his philosophy encompasses all aspects and types of matter.

At this point one may begin to doubt the critical judgement of the author of this thesis but misunderstanding, in many cases, needs only a slight sharpening of the focus, or a slight shift in point of view, in order to become understanding. This was the case with William Blake before Northrop Frye's unravelling. The same case applies to John Cowper Powys. Powys too has a world of concepts that are alien to the uninformed mind. To read Powys 'coldly'

without first trying to understand the bases of his ideas is to invite disaster and the outcome may be the heaping of ridicule on a very intellectual and creative individual.

William Blake used his drawings to complement his poetry. Powys has the advantage over Blake of having written works of philosophy and criticism to complement his fiction and poetry.

The combination of Powys' philosophical and critical works with his fictional works should give the reader a true and accurate reading of his novels. Powys himself, accepts this and forces the reader to realize the same thing when he writes in his autobiography, "My writings-- novels and all--are simply so much propoganda, as effective as I can make it, for my philosophy of life".<sup>1</sup>

We are invited to read his novels and poetry together with his philosophical works. There is no distinction to be made between the two except Powys' own distinction. He writes: "I certainly feel conscious of conveying much more of the cubic solidity of my vision of things in fiction than it is possible to do in any sort of non-fiction".<sup>2</sup>

This invitation has been turned down by many if not all of the recent Powys scholars. G. Wilson Knight in The Saturnian Quest<sup>3</sup> makes only passing references to the philosophical works as do Glen Cavaliero in John Cowper Powys: Novelist,<sup>4</sup> John Brebner in The Demon Within,<sup>5</sup> H.P. Collins in John Cowper Powys: Old Earth Man<sup>6</sup> and

Jeremy Hooker in John Cowper Powys.<sup>7</sup>

The time has come for scholars to direct their energies away from apologizing for Powys, to understand and explaining the environment and philosophies that concerned Powys in his novels. It will be only by using the man's own words and thoughts that one will discover the sometimes hidden meanings in the Powys novels.

Thus if one wants to understand Wolf Solent, one must be prepared to understand In Defence of Sensuality, published only one year after Wolf Solent. The Defence may or may not lead one to believe that Wolf Solent is a greater masterpiece than one may think without reading the Defence, but it certainly does explain some very confusing aspects of Wolf Solent. Wolf Solent cannot be fully understood without reading the Defence. It can, of course, be appreciated and its literary merit roughly gauged but it cannot be understood fully. Without the Defence many readers would be tempted to dismiss Wolf as an idle dreamer and philosopher with visions of grandeur. He is much more than that. He becomes Powys' standardbearer in the war of philosophical ideas. He deserves a prominent position there.

Since I have been claiming so much for In Defence of Sensuality, I have no choice but to present a synopsis of the major ideas in it. The first section of the thesis is such a synopsis.

## SYNOPSIS OF IN DEFENCE OF SENSUALITY

John Cowper Powys gives the reasons for In Defence of Sensuality in the book itself. He writes:

This book is written to reveal the fact that it is possible, by invading the social humanity in us from both ends at once, to squeeze it out almost completely! The sub-human invades this human element from below, thrilling us with the lovely receptivity of the vegetable world, while the super-human invades it from above, thrilling us with the strange intimations of a god-like state as yet unrealized.<sup>8</sup>

Powys places man as the "link in a long spiral ascent, not a finality" (D 100) and therefore does not judge man as the ultimate being. Although he acquiesces to man's need for food and shelter he denies any further association with money. Acknowledging a literary debt to Jesus he exhorts that after

we have paid our Caesar's Penny to Humanity for our sustenance, it is folly and weakness to allow ourselves to be hypnotized by human moralists and human idealists into accepting ...a purpose of life that has no outlet for its feverish humanism.

(D 123)

He continues his onslaught: "When we plunge into gregarious life, into practical life, into active life, our soul is temporarily committing suicide." (D 129) This is not to say that Powys detests humans. On the contrary, he is setting out to save humanity, but a necessary

condition for that salvation is the realization by humans of their strengths and weaknesses. The foremost weakness (or lack of knowledge that a human possesses) is man's pride.

According to Powys, "when it is a question of the ultimate secret of life, it seems a sort of human megalomania to limit it to the moral ideas that are peculiar to our species alone" (D 14). The problem of the human race can be seen in Powys' definition of it. He defines it as "this gregarious thing of false idealism, savage cruelty, and mean, acquisitive greed-lies in every individual midway between the life of the plants and the life of the gods" (D 71). He goes on to say:

It is the humanity in us, never allowing us to rest, that kills our happiness with responsibility, with envy, with hatred, with avarice, with selfish ambition, with troubled and restless striving after what we call success.

(D 72)

Humanity is, proverbially, caught in the middle and the qualities that are peculiar to it are the vices that Powys wishes to eliminate.

Powys sees his book as,

an attempt to emphasize what I regard as the sub-human and super-human elements in our cosmic awareness, and to reduce the claims of certain gregarious human ideals, which according to my view has muddied up and sometimes dried up the primordial wells of deep delight.

(D 1)

Powys begins his study and philosophy much in the same manner as Descartes by beginning with the simplest of facts.

Descartes wrote "I think, therefore I am" and Powys begins in the same vein. Powys writes:

Nothing exists for you now except your conscious "I am I" and this great mass of objective mystery at which you gaze! You are completely alone. That is the beginning and end of everything.

(D 2)

Powys elaborates and extends his simple beginning by turning inwards. This may seem quite subjective but it is in accordance with his own dictum that "we all have a right to sink down into the depths of our individual being and judge everything from that standpoint" (D 8). He continues his theory by continuing his inward search. Powys writes:

Within this "I am I" of yours, you are conscious of a feeling of power...of causing change...in what we have called the universe ...Now, it is my opinion that your mind is compelled, by the inner law of the way it inevitably functions, to ascribe the whole congeries, or "multiverse", of "souls" and "bodies" with which, on the analogy of your own, you have peopled Space and Time, to the causative power of some ultimate Final or First Cause, whose inward sensation of conscious power and will resembles your own.

(D 3)

Powys' explanation of this projection is not scientific, or in the strictest terms, very rational but he defends himself by insisting that the First Cause "is not an ideal striving or a moral striving or a spiritual striving: it is the natural urge of all organic sap, like

the thrust, both up and down, of a growing plant" (D 26). All things occur naturally and it is only the interference of human vices which cause problems and deny the human his essential happiness and contentment.

Powys not only acknowledges the existence of a First Cause but also informs the reader of the means with which to deal with this relatively unknown power:

What, then, as I lie on my back, a human reptile, meditating on this First Cause, will be my natural, spontaneous reaction to Her, or Him, or It? Surely it will be a very simple reaction, made up of a very few definite elements. Fear will dominate, of course; for, after all, how else can one conceive of this mysterious Power than as a formidable and terrifying Spirit, whose body is the starry ether and whose creative mind is as prone to cruelty as it is to mercy? Cruel it must be, the mind of this Power behind all life, because of the abominable vein of cruelty in all its creations. An artist it must be, to a degree absolutely overwhelming, because of the magical beauty of certain aspects of Nature.

After fear, then, what I shall naturally feel will be a thrill of pure abysmal gratitude toward this thing, gratitude for the "pleasure which there is in life itself", and for my personal good luck. It was obviously in the power of this great Spirit to have directed towards me that kind of unrelenting cruelty which it has directed, all his unlucky life, towards my poor friend Bartrum!

After this gratitude, what I shall feel next will be simple indignation with this stupendous Power for inventing the various diabolical traps of suffering into which not only my unfortunate friend, but also millions on millions of persons, animals, birds, fishes, reptiles, are remorselessly led.

By a little turn, however, of the wheel of my mind, it is possible for me to

visualize this guilty First Cause as a Being who once made a ghastly mistake in its creative movement, and is even now putting itself to infinite labour, weariness, and distress, in the effort to get things straight again. Thinking of it after this fashion, one's indignation against the cruelty of life may be a little assuaged.

(D 21-22)

In this passage, Powys clearly assigns himself with, and portrays himself as, a disciple of William Blake. Of William Blake, he wrote, "If I were asked to name a writer whose work conveys to one's mind, of any admixture of rhetoric or any alloy of cleverness, the very impact and shock of inspired genius, I would unhesitatingly name William Blake".<sup>9</sup>

The dualistic character of Powys' First Cause is a disguised rendition of Blake's splintering of God into both Jehovah and Jesus Christ. The disparity between cruelty and kindness had also been amply demonstrated in Blake's "The Tyger" where Blake asks the question, "Did he who made the lamb make thee?"

There has been much discussion and criticism concerning the meaning of that particular line in Blake, but for Powys the meaning was quite clear. Since the First Cause or Supreme Being created everything, then everything that has been created and everything that results from that creation is the responsibility and fault of the First Cause. Man's free will, then, consists of reactions to the punishments and rewards meted out by what Powys regards as the

greatest god, Chance.

Powys is very close to Blake again when he describes the First Cause, "as a Being who once made a ghastly mistake in its creative movement, and is even now putting itself to infinite labour, weariness, and distress, in the effort to get things straight again" (D 22). That idea is a striking and in-depth analysis of the subject matter of Blake's The Four Zoas where the fall of Albion commences the quest by Urthona, Urizen, Luvah and Tharmas to awaken Albion and make him whole again. The parallels between Powys and Blake are many and it would be very advisable to keep Blake in the back of one's mind when reading Powys.

Powys has defined the First Cause for us but he is not finished with it. It has a much larger part in a person's life than one guesses, for although one reacts to it, one also,

in certain very deep moments...has the curious feeling, full of a thrilling magnetic power, of being oneself an integral portion of this ultimate creative energy. In the presence of a feeling of this kind, the moral conception of a free-will as a thing of human responsibility in relation to some universal Law of God, falls away, and seems singularly irrelevant. For in these deep, strange moods, one is oneself both God and Satan, both Zeus and Prometheus.

(D 23-24)

After defining the First Cause, Powys returns to the searching inwards and describes the process and the findings. He writes:

Now, when you try to analyze the contents of your deepest and most individual self, it is my opinion that you will find there is a great deal of the primordial passivity of rocks and stones and trees, and also, at rarer moments, certain fleeting feelings that seem to connect you with the super-human.

(D 4)

The sub-human and super-human must originate from something and Powys informs the reader that everyone possesses a great deal of the primordial passivity of rocks and stones and trees because "every human consciousness has got something in it older than humanity and that will outlive humanity" (D 203). The certain fleeting feelings, such as kindness and pity, that seem to connect one with the super-human are transported into one's mind,

from the future--that is to say, is it not a mysterious "entelecheia" or premonitory rumour of a non-human, god-like state of being, in which humanity will be merged, lost surpassed?

(D 70)

These are the extremes of the human polarity and it is wise to keep them in continual sight because in the final analysis what each person has to contend with is his own loneliness and the First Cause but also each person has some power of his own which can cause change. If one keeps that in mind one can heed Powys' advice that

upon this sensitive plate of the lonely mind two parallel tides of impressionistic waves will be felt flowing in, namely those that come from the objective world and

those that come, carried upon wings and  
sails and deep sub-aqueous keels, from  
the auto-energy of memory.

(D 16)

Powys formulated the same duality and contradiction which William Blake deemed mandatory if there were to be any sort of progression.

It stands to reason then, if one follows Powys' logic that:

the "purpose" of every living organism is to sink back, and out, and away, into that primordial ecstasy of contemplative enjoyment which was the life of God before He was driven forward by some fatal urge into his ambiguous role of creator-destroyer.

(D 295)

That is the purpose of every living organism but to leave one hanging there with a vision of the ultimate goal without the means with which to achieve that goal would be a cruel trick on Powys' part. A cruel trick which befits the First Cause but not John Cowper Powys and he, therefore, does not leave us in a quandary but instructs the reader, informing him, not only of the problem but of the solution as well.

Powys begins the instruction by asserting that:

Every personal life has vast unexplored regions of sub-human existence within the circumference of its being, into which in certain moods and under certain conditions, it has the power of retreating.

(D 99)

In conjunction with this sub-human existence there is another link to the super human. Powys explains:

Nor is it only with more primitive forms of consciousness that our individual, personal soul is linked. It also seems to touch sometimes--but this is a strange mystery--levels of consciousness that belong to the future, levels that indicate a higher or at least a different stage in the evolution of life, levels that suggest the surpassing of the human animal and the change of humanity into something different from humanity. Yes, in every human being who dares to indulge himself in the fathomless loneliness that is the birthright of us all, there are both these elements of feeling--those that are super-human and those that are sub-human.

(D 100)

The best way to proceed towards the fulfilment of contacting the sub-human and super-human is to isolate your "soul by using your physical sensations to emphasize your separate existence" (D 120). In this way the gulf between the self and not-self is accentuated and the lonely person can proceed to disengage itself from any annoyances and hindrances.

The type of sensation is not important:

Any sensation, in fact, will serve, so long as it reminds you that the pyramid of your consciousness has its base upon the earth, and so long as it focusses, so to speak, at a definite point on the surface of our globe, this dialogue of a limited self with an unlimited not-self.

(D 120)

This concept of the unlimited not-self places man in the correct perspective in the vast universe but it also demonstrates the order of importance when one is deciding on whom to concentrate. The "I" in "I am I" is the most important fact to remember. This is not a facet of

hedonism or self love. Since everyone is lonely and it is impossible (except in special cases which I will discuss later) to penetrate that essential loneliness, this is the only advice which allows everyone to take care of themselves. If one heeds that advice, and Powys warns that:

the lonely consciousness that has not learned to be sceptical of every human tradition will never acquire the drastic faith in its own powers that enables it to exercise those powers and assert itself as a god among other gods.

(D 159)

then it is only natural and necessary that

He has to forget the miseries, the starvations, the unspeakable cruelties that are occurring, even at this very minute, all over the planet Earth. But he has already faced this necessity. Honestly and shamelessly he has faced it. He knows now that if he gave full rein to his imaginative pity, the mere existence of one single unhappy creature would be enough to damn his peace.

(D 161)

This part of Powys' philosophy extends to everyone and everything, as does the rest of his philosophy. Therefore, "All living things, from infusoria to amoeba to the most god-like man, suffer pain in this our life, and have to learn certain psychic tricks of enduring or forgetting pain" (D 240). If one takes this statement in conjunction with the statement that "What we call the universe is simply a vast congeries of living Bodies and Souls, each of whom is in contact with dimensions of

of existence transcending both Time and Space" (D 240) and that

There is no such thing as chemical or electrical force apart from the bodies and souls of living creatures. Every portion of every universe is a portion of the body of some conscious or semi-conscious being.

(D 170)

one realizes that Powys is invoking and advocating a purpose of life for absolutely everything and everyone.

Powys' next step is to disclose the relationship between the self and the not-self. Although there is a distinct and deliberate separation, Powys asks the rhetorical question, "Can anyone deny that there is an organic link, potent, magnetic, psycho-chemical, binding together all existence, "animate" as well as what they falsely call "inanimate"?" (D 270) If everything is alive and there is some sort of link between everything then some sort of communication can be made between the self and the not-self. There exists a very wide gulf between the two which Powys is very deliberate and careful in pointing out, but after noting it he begins to build the bridge with which to connect the two disparate entities. The ways and means to achieve this involves something which William Blake also believed in and which Powys strongly upholds. That something is the conviction that "a perpetual mental warfare is necessary" (D 170) in order to remember these

important points and constantly combat the encroachment of others' misery upon one's own consciousness.

Although Powys instructs the reader to reminisce and mull over his own pleasant experiences, he also wants one to choose objects which display and contain "the contemplation-essence". Powys explains:

By this I mean that a certain number of physical phenomena--such as fire and rain and snow and moonlight and earth-mould and sea-sand and river-reeds and chimney-smoke and candle-light--have gathered about them such a rich deposit of human associations, that they have come to suggest, like the cross-handle of a sword, or the blade of a plough, or the circle of a marriage-ring, the purged and winnowed residuum of human life upon earth. This quintessence of existence, this "contemplation-essence", lies hid, like a vase of precious, tragical-sweet potpourri, in the inherited memory of the race, ready to be aroused, under certain conditions, in any individual's soul.

(D 173)

This philosophy of contemplation "should have a certain overtone of awareness falling upon a mass of obscure, disorganized sensation, and giving them a compact and living continuity" (D 199). This sounds much like the artistic process and in a large sense, it certainly is. The difference is that the individual is concentrating upon his own life and this fact encourages the search for the pleasant aspects of his life.

To contemplate does not necessarily restrict one to his past. The future is also apt for contemplation as is

the realm not only of probability but possibility as well.

Powys makes that very clear in this statement:

To philosophize is to think of one's life floating as a whole--to call up out of one's memory a lovely floating mass of all the delicious sensations one has ever had; yes, and if need be, to imagine vividly to oneself that one is where one is not but where one would like to be!

(D 201)

The advantages of this process are quite obvious especially for the less fortunate in the world. However, the main advantage is that it allows one to travel mentally to wherever one wants to be. Powys gives his own example:

I have the power (even while people are talking to me) of passing through the air, over sea and land, swift as thought, to such a place as the Stone Circle, in Dorset, between Osmington and Owermoigne. And once there, I have the power of kneeling down and tapping my forehead on one of those cold, rainy, flat stones, flecked with the grey lichen of ten thousand years. I have the power of doing this so intently, vividly, actually, and palpably, that the talk I am listening to, and the preposterous place where my "material envelope" is, are reduced to a thin phantasmagoric dream. I am, in fact, literally in two places at the same time.

(D 202-3)

Continual use of this power makes it easier each time that one attempts it:

Continuity is the whole secret! To have smoothed out, by constant use, those psychic grooves in one's nature along which the Will hurries, like a polished machine along a steel incline, bringing back those moments of fleeting delight, this is the great achievement.

(D 38)

This power that Powys speaks of is closely related to the power that William Blake was endeavouring to tap when he wrote:

I will not cease from Mental Fight  
 Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand  
 Till we have built Jerusalem  
 In Englands green & pleasant Land <sup>10</sup>

These two writers may seem miles apart but, in essence, both are attempting to change a person's perspective. When Powys writes of being, "where one is not but where one would like to be", he is writing of the same thing as Blake when he writes that the sunset is not a sunset but the godhead surrounded by choirs of angels. Both are the products of the combination of vision and will power.

When a person, through his soul, has achieved this measure of facility in the philosophy then he can embrace the objects he contemplates:

with its whole nature, sinking into them,  
 mingling with them drawing their essences  
 into itself. It knows well enough that  
 the basis of its ecstasy is at once  
 psychic and sensual. It eats what it  
 contemplates. It enjoys--with a  
 sublimated sexual abandonment--what it  
 contemplates.

(D 297)

In doing this, "Each individual soul sinks down so deep, sinks down through so many universes, that it can tap for its own purposes all sorts of strange, non-human, cosmic reservoirs of magnetic power" (D 249). In the words of Blake, "he became what he beheld"<sup>11</sup> and Powys emphasizes

this to a great extent in his passage where he outlines the transformations:

A really lonely spirit can gradually come to feel itself just as much a plant, a tree, a sea-gull, a whale, a badger, a woodchuck, a goblin, an elf, a rhinoceros, a demigod, a moss-covered rock, a planetary demiurge, as a man or a woman. Such a spirit can gaze at the great sun, as he shines through the morning-mist, and feel itself to be one magnetic Power contemplating another magnetic Power. Such a spirit can stand on the edge of the vast sea and feel within itself a turbulence and a calm that belong to an aeon of time far earlier than the first appearance of man upon the earth. It is only out of the depths of an absolute loneliness that a man can strip away all the problematical ideals of his race and all the idols of his human ambitions, and look dispassionately about him, saying to himself, "Here am I, an ichtyosarus-ego, with atavistic reminiscences that go back to the vegetable world and the rock-world, and with the prophetic premonitions in me that go forward to the super-men of the future!"

(D 106-7)

In concluding and summarizing his philosophy of contemplation, Powys states:

What the "ichtyosaurus" habit of contemplation really does, when one shamelessly practises it, is to revert to the Static aspect of life in the midst of the vicious flux of the Dynamic age. It dares to have faith in all those potentialities of life that our popular pseudoscience denies. It has faith in the existence of the will and in the magical creative power of the will. It has faith in that "something" called the soul and in the integral identity of that other "something" called personality. It has faith in a "multiverse" full of gods, full of "good" powers and "evil"

powers, wherein not only miracles happen, but also wherein the future is undetermined. Chance rather than Fate is its most worshipful Divinity. And, being akin to the aboriginal slime, it is not put out of countenance when confronted by any drifting fragment of prehistoric chaos.

(D 182-3)

So far I have tried to present and explain Powys' views on sensuality but the unanswered question regarding the relationship between sensuality and sexuality still exists. Powys himself, notes that he chose to defend sensuality instead of sexuality because, "he finds that in his discussion of the root-sensations of life the word sensuality, taken in an unusually comprehensive sense, serves his purpose better than any other word" (D Foreword). The reader can sense Powys' reticence in equating the two but if anyone has read a Powys novel, he would realize that sexuality is an integral component of Powys' definition of sensuality. Powys and I have declined to mention the matter in conjunction with the other types of sensuality because sexuality is a special and higher form of sensuality. Powys does not make this distinction because of a predilection towards his own race. This distinction is made by Powys because he is enough of a realist that he can distinguish between the emotions and empathy that a human being should have for all other forms of life, and the emotions, empathy and, should we also add "love" or

"chemical reciprocities" that a human being should have for someone of his own race. Powys makes the distinction very clear in this passage:

What it is the soul feels toward those violet-coloured flames is a physical sensation heightened by the imagination. What, finally, it feels toward those sleeping forms [human beings] upon the bed, is a sensuous, superstitious fetish-worship--a worship rooted in earth-life and quivering with chemical reciprocities such as one could conceive a drooping willow-branch to have for the dreaming river-weeds that drift and float in the water below it.

(D 210)

Along with the distinction, Powys gives the advice that "The lonely soul holding fast to its mate will be wise never to lose its ambiguous contact with the double-natured First Cause" (D 214). The reason behind this being that:

We have, each of us, the power of tapping its magnetic contradictory energies... Between it and us there is an umbilical cord: We are Its offspring--Its latest-begotten. We are It.

(D 215)

This contact between the First Cause and the human being is very important because it allows what Powys terms the quincunx. He writes:

The male and the female in us (as a Harvard psychologist has said quite recently) embraces the female and the male in our mate; so that in real predestined conjunctions (with the First Cause as the fifth component) a divine quincunx emerges as the true

Pythagorean unit. The happy person in this world is therefore the person who has found his mate, or who with the creative energy of a true magician--and this can be done far more completely than most people realize--has managed, by psychic sorcery, to hypnotize his companion or her companion--contrary to all expectation--into such a mate.

(D 92)

Powys further exalts the relationship between man and woman when he writes, "All sensuous moments, all divine moments occur in solitude and silence--except in the single case of exchanging ideas with anyone you have singled out to love" (D 93). I could keep on attempting to explain and paraphrase Powys but I think that the reader is at the point where he can ingest unadulterated John Cowper Powys' thoughts and words. This rather long passage explains, better than I could ever explain, Powys' thoughts on the relationship between male and female:

The phenomenon of "love", as popularly understood, is a psycho-physical attraction, generally between persons of opposite sexes, resulting, with any luck, in an amorous partnership, wherein the two enamoured beings, essentially free and independent, seek some working-compromise between their divergent self-interests and their mutual attraction. All the vulgar jokes about marriage and jealousy imply this clash of opposite, equal, and essentially unreconciled antagonists.

But the sort of "love" that lends itself to the lonely egoism I am here advocating has not the very slightest resemblance to this stirring and lively compromise between enamoured opposites.

When between two lovers (each of them an egoist, but one a man and one a woman) there is established the real harmony whose consummation is implied in the nature of each, all conflict, all differences, all equality ceases. The male possesses the female; and throughout all eternity this "act of possession" (of the psychic-physical sort that can be continued sans cesse as long as the two are left alone) produces in both of them a long-drawn-out ecstasy of magical content.

This ecstasy swings forever backward and forwards, like the motion of an everlasting pendulum or the advance and retreat of the sea-tide. The male hath his Beatific Vision in his unremitted possession of the Female: she in her unremitted passivity in thus being possessed. Their mutual ecstasy is something that isolates them from all the rest of the universe... Before they met each other, they went about through the world maimed, abortive, disillusioned, quasi-moribund. But now they have met, they have become two in one. They have come to resemble those two horned flames, in whose inseparable conjunction Dante beheld the eternal fate of Ulysses and Diomed! It is, indeed, as if , enclosed in the same hollow opalescent shell of ecstatic isolation, the male held the female in a perpetual trance, while the female, responding to this act of possession in an eternal dream of abandoned self-immolation, would as soon perish as awaken!

Love of this kind--shall I name it ichthyo-saurus-love or super-human love?--could endure in exactly the same psychic-sensual state without a flicker of change--the male possessing, the female possessed--for thousands of years...For the love of two really lonely human creatures who are absolutely satisfied with each other, is like an encounter between life and death, between Being and Not-Being, between day and night. What makes such an encounter so great a thing is that it is the blending of two eternal dialogues in a five-fold eternal dialogue. It is therefore an absolute living quincunx--the number which, according to Sir Thomas Browne, is the most lucky of all. Each of

the two lovers is a self confronting a not-self. Each of the two keeps up its indignant dialogue with their First Cause, which is, of course, the hypothetical substratum of every inflowing impression composing both their not-selves. And in addition to this, each converses consciously or unconsciously with the other. Every pair of real lovers in this deep physical-metaphysical embrace make up a third entity, the united multiple dialogue of which the First Cause--a dialogue of alternate gratitude and indignation--is the cumulative voice of the Number Five. The vast mass of animals, fishes, reptiles, plants, share in this universal planetary love-making and in its five-fold ecstasy. No human speech is theirs; but a vibration radiates from every perfect embrace, which creates a new pattern in the fluctuating tapestry of the windblown cosmos.

Each pair of lovers, isolated in its planetary shell, is forever gathering more and more magnetic power wherewith to enjoy the good and to defy the evil of the ultimate First Cause which is responsible--through the medium of Chance--for their ever having come together at all. Never for one second do they forgive this First Cause for the horrible suffering which they know exists around them. From their united ecstasy there is forever projected a protest against this suffering, and an out-jetting godlike command--quivering with the good-will of their own chance-favoured happiness--that this suffering should be lessened and that all living sentiences should attain pardon and peace.

(D 149-50)

I have attempted in the previous pages to present the main ideas contained in Powys' In Defence of Sensuality. These ideas and thoughts are what occupied Powys' mind at the time of the writing of Wolf Solent. Surely it should be read and considered by any student or critic of Wolf Solent. The pitfalls of not doing so are demonstrated by the false conclusions of some Powys' scholars.

## INTRODUCTION

In essence, it is my contention that Wolf Solent is an extremely concrete manifestation of Powys' theories in In Defence of Sensuality. Without this philosophical background, it is too easy to misconstrue Wolf's personality and Powys' intentions. Modern psychologists may apply the Oedipus Complex and certain aspects of psychosis to him.

Readers with strict Freudian bents may tend to view Wolf as an unreliable narrator with visions and illusions of grandeur and self-aggrandizement. Without In Defence of Sensuality, Wolf Solent can become an inescapable maze with many false exits. These false exits seem to be escapes and offer conclusions because the reader cannot see far enough or deep enough to discern the walls and barred gates still surrounding him. To elude these false escapes and false conclusions, a reader needs In Defence of Sensuality as a Virgil to help point out the way.

In light of this, the best manner in which to commence this section would be to attempt to explicate and understand, with the help of In Defence of Sensuality, some very pertinent questions and very interesting relationships in the novel. In this way the meaning and significance of Wolf Solent will be much clearer and more comprehensible.

The areas which I have chosen as of particular interest and value are the treatment by Powys of incest and homosexuality, the struggle for control of Wolf between Ann Haggard and William Solent. Other areas of particular interest are the choice of Christie over Gerda and finally Wolf's voyage to self-discovery and the philosophy of sensuality.

I treat the subject of incest and homosexuality in Wolf Solent, not because it is important in itself, but to demonstrate the meaninglessness of such social taboos. In Powys' definition of sensuality, evil has a very limited definition and it does not embrace incest and homosexuality.

In Ann Haggard and William Solent, the reader and Wolf have two polarities to choose from. The battle lines are drawn. The separation of Ann Haggard from William demonstrated their two opposite natures. Wolf, as a young child, had no choice but to follow his mother, but now in his return to Ramsgard, the area of William's life and death, the conflict arises again and Wolf now has the freedom to choose between his mother and father.

Gerda Torp and Christie Malakite are another set of opposites from which Wolf has to choose. Gerda is the flesh goddess, while Christie operates on a much more spiritual plane. Gerda presents the greatest obstacle to Wolf's quest while Christie offers the best means to his mental salvation. Both wage a constant battle with Wolf

as the spoils of war.

These subjects culminate in Wolf's voyage to self-discovery and the emergence of his slightly altered 'philosophy'. The oscillation, the final choices and the realization of the consequences of the divergent attitudes result in Wolf's ability to discount the external and concentrate on the internal and eternal. Subjectivity triumphs over objectivity and its unpredictability.

## CHAPTER I

### INCEST AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The failure to take into account In Defence of Sensuality has led many eminent critics such as G. Wilson Knight and Glen Cavaliero astray. By discounting In Defence of Sensuality, they misinterpret Powys' appeal to a higher cosmic morality as amorality.

Cavaliero implies the very word 'amoral' in this quotation: "the novel is a critique as well as a defence of the individualistic life; and makes no glib or confident moral judgements".<sup>12</sup> Cavaliero does not realize that for Powys, and this is a powerful and confident stance, "The only 'goodness' is being kind and pitiful, and the only 'badness' is being unkind and cruel" (D 135).

G. Wilson Knight's thoughts on this subject are much the same as Cavaliero's. Knight writes, "Our thought on such perversions pursues a moral borderline".<sup>13</sup> Both Knight and Cavaliero have misinterpreted Powys' completely radical morality as no morality. The error is quite a large one because, although Powys' morality is so much more expansive and liberal, it makes it much more difficult to recognize evil when one does encounter it. I will attempt to discuss incest and homosexuality with In Defence of

Sensuality in mind to see what possible critical alternatives exist.

The most interesting aspect of Powys' treatment of incest and homosexuality in Wolf Solent is the fact that he treats these seemingly sexual aberrations blatantly rather than latently or obscurely. This attitude, coupled with the fact that incest and homosexuality are not the main themes in Wolf Solent, but in fact, are peripheral, forces one to wonder at the feasibility of mentioning them at all in the narrative.

Although incest and homosexuality are not the main topics or themes in the novel, instances of both exist and perhaps, in many readers' opinions, abound. Incest is intimated between Wolf and his mother, when Powys describes their actions at Roger Monk's trim house. Powys purposefully describes Ann as having a "cynical maternal eroticism".<sup>14</sup> He describes her movements as being dominated by, "the same savage eroticism", (WS 301) and later he becomes more graphic by having Wolf imagine her to be towering, "above him there with 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" (WS 302).

This realm of imagination is transformed into reality when Wolf surveys, "her as she lay there, one strong

leg exposed as high as the knee, and one disparaged tress of grey hair hanging across her cheek" (WS 303). Up to this point, incest is only a spectre but Powys makes it tangible by having Ann finish the scenario by, "finally kissing him with a hot, intense, tyrannous kiss" (WS 304).

A more explicit and consummated incest occurs between Mr. Malakite and Christie's older sister. This seems common knowledge in the village as Darnley conveys the information to Wolf matter-of-factly. Darnley says of Mr. Malakite and his wife, "there was quarrel between this man and his wife, connected with his fondness for their daughter, this young Christie's elder sister...and...well...there was a child born, too" (WS 81).

This information only affects Wolf in his realization of what all this meant to Christie, but Christie's admission of her own incest in her manuscript Slate affects him much more profoundly. Christie wrote:

But the silence that followed when his footsteps died away? Drops; one, two, three, four...four drops. Drops of acid on the grooves of a waxed pattern. A girl's excited senses rousing desire in old age. What a curious thing! Filmy butterfly-wings waving and waving; and old cold lust responding.

(WS 485)

Christie sees her incest objectively and dissects it clinically. She makes no typical human moral judgements. That is also the manner in which we should view both incest and homosexuality in this novel.

Homosexuality also surfaces in this novel. However, the significance lies not in homosexuality but in whether the relationship is beneficial to both partners. There are no actual instances of homosexual actions but Powys makes it very clear in which direction Urquhart, Redfern, Jason and Darnley tend. Wolf himself, at times, has homosexual urges.

Urquhart's homosexual tendencies are revealed to Wolf by Urquhart himself, while under the influence of his own Malmsey wine. Urquhart's mind turns to the dead Redfern and he describes Redfern in these words:

His skin was always soft. Three feet is more than enough. How do we know they don't feel it falling on 'em?...D'ye think it's an easy thing to talk up and down on the earth with him lying down there? What would it be to stop thinking about it and just do it?...Foulness?...Abomination?... I don't know about that...I...don't...know .... It falls of...it falls off...the sweet flesh!...The lips...the lips...where are the lips now?

(WS 424)

Urquhart and Jason Otter have homosexual fantasies while watching Lobbie Torp and Bob Weevil, "two naked figures, splashing, gesticulating and clinging to the branches of a submerged willow" (WS 296). Urquhart reacts to this display of nudity by acquiring, "the air of an innocent, energetic schoolmaster superintending some species of athletic sports" (WS 298), while, "Jason had the look of an enraptured saint, liberated from earthly persecution and awakening to the pure ecstasies of Paradise" (WS 298).

Darnley is also affected by the same tendency. He asks Wolf, "What would you do if you were in love with a girl and had at the same time some peculiarity that made all women repulsive to you?" (WS 391) When Wolf answers with, "It would entirely depend on who the girl was" (WS 391), Darnley reinforces and explicated his position by countering with, "but you can't go against nature beyond a certain point (WS 391). Darnley seems locked into a homosexual psychological make-up which he cannot discard or alter.

Wolf, the man who seems to love the Helen-like Gerda, also tends towards homosexuality at times. One of his reasons for loving Christie is that she has, "a figure so slight and sexless that it resembled those meagre, androgynous forms that can be seen sometimes in early Italian pictures" (WS 83).

Even more obvious are Wolf's musings on, "what it would be like to live with Darnley" (WS 609). This comes as a complete surprise to the reader if he has not digested the contents of In Defence of Sensuality.

If these episodes of incest and homosexuality had been condemned or left to the reader to condemn, the critics would have a simpler task. However, many of these episodes are reinforced by the participants as positive actions. Powys implies that incest and homosexuality per se are not evil. The circumstances surrounding them, especially the

question of whether the participants are in quest of sensuality rather than simple hedonism, is of prime importance.

I have already quoted Powys previously as writing, "it is a folly and weakness to allow ourselves to be hypnotized by human moralists and human idealists" (D 123). This same idea is further elaborated upon when he writes, "when it is a question of the ultimate secret of life, it seems a sort of human megalomania to limit it to the moral ideas that are peculiar to our species alone"(D 14). What are incest and homosexuality then but arbitrary bans initiated by human moralists? Do fish or fowl know the meaning of incest? Do they not practise it?

This expansion of thought into the realms not occupied by man allows Powys to negate any qualities that are specific to the human race. Therefore, there is no question of good or evil in these circumstances because according to Powys, the "difference between brutal cruelty and harmless sensuousness...is indeed the sole 'good' and 'evil'" (D 131). The importance of this matter is evident when he stresses this same philosophy a few pages later. He writes, "The only 'goodness' is being kind and pitiful, and the only 'badness' is being unkind and cruel" (D 135).

The above quotations explain the incest in Wolf Solent but the homosexuality is explained in another manner. In putting forth the love aspect of his philosophy, Powys makes it very clear that:

It is not necessary that each pair of human lovers who embrace in this way should be to outward semblance of opposite sex. All males have a psychic ingredient in them that is feminine. All females have a psychic ingredient in them that is masculine. The outer semblance matters nothing. The opinions of the world, the contemptible prejudices of the vulgar herd, the traditions of a particular age or country, count, in these high planetary matters, for nothing--for less than nothing! The mystic-sensuous embrace that binds such lovers together and that isolates them in a heavenly loneliness, need not result in the begetting or the conception of any offspring.

(D 152)

Here again Powys transcends the human mentality, for it is in only a few instances of the cosmic way of things that genders actually exist. Are there male or female amoeba? or rocks? Are not plants bisexual? Powys is lecturing that we, as humans, must overcome this trap that we have set for ourselves.

Since our normal morals and traditions cannot guide us through a Powys novel, especially Wolf Solent, we must search for other criteria. Powys makes no hesitation in offering us that much-needed criteria and direction. He states his position succinctly when he writes, "The only real sin is not to be happy" (D 277). There is the crux of the matter. If you are committing incest or practicing homosexuality and it makes you and your partner happy, then it is justified and promoted. If, on the other hand, it causes unhappiness, then it is sin and should be stopped.

It is in this light that one should re-examine the incestuous and homosexual episodes in Wolf Solent.

One can easily see that the incestuous feelings between Wolf and his mother do not make him happy. On the contrary, they render him quite unhappy. Powys describes Wolf immediately after Wolf saw his mother's exposed leg. Powys writes:

His remorse, however, was not a pure or simple emotion. It was complicated by a kind of sulky indignation and by a bitter sense of injustice. The physical shamelessness, too, of her abandonment shocked something in him, some vein of fastidious reverence. But his mother's cynicism had always shocked this element in his nature; and what he felt now he had felt a thousand times before--felt in the earliest dawn of consciousness. What he would have liked to do at that moment was just to slip out of the room and out of the house.

(WS 303)

Theirs cannot be a successful incestuous relationship.

The incest committed by Mr. Malakite and his oldest daughter should also be examined with respect to happiness. Although we are not allowed into the minds of the two participants, the actions of Mr. Malakite and the opinion of Christie will suffice. Mr. Malakite suffers no remorse at all. In his first meeting with Wolf, it seems that Mr. Malakite has already acquired the technique of sensuality for Powys describes him as, "reposing in a kind of abstracted coma, his bony hands clasped around one of

his thin knees and his eyes half closed" (WS 83). This action is not substantial in itself to justify the incest but when it is coupled with Christie's opinion, "that there never seemed to be anything strangely unnatural in it. I don't think mother was even the right person for father. I think from her earliest childhood there was a peculiar link between him and my sister" (WS 246), the evidence becomes substantial enough to support this instance of incest as an avenue to happiness.

The incest between Christie and Mr. Malakite is a much different matter. Ultimately it cannot succeed. Powys writes of the quincunx: "For the sort of love I am speaking of now can only come once in a person's lifetime. One may have many affections and many lusts, many long devotions and many poignant spasms of pity; but one can have only one love" (D 155). And if this is true then Mr. Malakite's love was for his eldest daughter and not Christie. The examination of Christie's remarks regarding that affair leads the reader in the right direction. Christie wrote in Slate:

...She slid down the old slippery groove into the old deep hole. A girl dissecting memory and forgetting her shame! Why shouldn't she forget? He was a very old man. In a few years, perhaps in less than a year, she would be looking at his dead face. A few years more and somebody else would be looking into her dead face. 'To live as to regret nothing!' It must have been a young man who said that. A man, anyway. Remorse as man's prerogative!

Nature. It was Nature that girls hid themselves and covered their heads. Nature has no remorse. Nature has no 'substance' behind her thought. Thoughts without 'substance'. One... two...three...Three drops of acid in a grooved, waxed pattern? The girl smiled into her mother's mirror. Thoughts without 'substance'. Butterfly-wings quivering. Unconscious signals. Little fool. The old man meant nothing at all.

(WS 486)

From that passage it is clear that no love or quincunx was involved or meant to be involved. Christie too wanted sensations and since Wolf denied them to her, she went elsewhere. Wolf realizes, only too late, his part in the incestuous relationship. Wolf realizes that, "If he hadn't made love to her and then drawn back in the way he did, she'd be still just as she used to be, immune as the flowers on her mantelpiece to that old satyr's approaches" (WS 517).

The homosexual relationship between Squire Urquhart and Jimmy Redfern is very cloudly. What does become clear, however, is that the Squire and Redfern were not meant for each other and therefore Urquhart does not achieve any degree of happiness. Urquhart's thoughts of Redfern bring him only misery and his actions of pressing, "his perturbed face against the cold featurelessness of Redfern's mortality, or whether, like Isabella in 'The Pot of Basil', he carried 'so dear a head' back to his secret chamber" (WS 553),

bear this out.

In another instance, however, when Urquhart is with Jason watching Lobbie Torp and Bob Weevil swimming, the happiness is realized. Both Jason and Urquhart are meant to be homosexuals and their happiness can only be found if they find homosexual partners. This "Giorgione-like fête champêtre", as Wolf calls it, supplies a "psychic aura... [which] seemed entirely natural and harmless. The presence of these two lads seemed to have drawn out of both these equivocal companions every ounce of black bile or complicated evil" (WS 298). Their problem is resolved.

Darnley resolves his problem by deciding to marry Matti Smith. Wolf understands and thinks to himself, "So that's how it has worked out! His love for her spirit has been accepted on its own terms; and his inhibition with regard to her body has become a matter of maternal solitude for her" (WS 440). In this case it would seem that the sexual roles have been reversed. Human sexuality plays no part in the relationship between Darnley and Matti, while spiritual sensuality is of the utmost importance. Matti and Darnley will achieve happiness because Matti (the spiritual male), "hath his Beatific Vision in his unremitted possession of the female [Darnley]: she in her unremitted passivity in being thus possessed" (D 149).

Wolf's ventures into homosexuality are doomed. The attraction to Darnley is only momentary and in reaction to

the generosity of Lord Carfax and the wrong-headed notion of wanting acquaintances. When Wolf is finally thinking straight and is following the rules in accordance to In Defence of Sensuality, he cannot fathom how in the past he had, "once wondered what it would be like to live with Darnley" (WS 618). Darnley is now out of the question.

Wolf's mind is turning towards completely new directions-- sensuality and Christie. The sensuality is present in that, "Between his body thus freed from his tormented spirit, and the increasing loveliness of that perfect day, there began to establish itself a strange chemical fusion" (WS 618). His relationship with Christie continues since, "After all Christie did belong to him, as she had never belonged, and never would belong, to anyone else" (WS 619).

Incest and homosexuality are ingredients in Powys that may mistakenly be overestimated in Wolf Solent if one is not familiar with In Defence of Sensuality. With the proper reading and interpretation, they become no more than variations on the theme of sexual love. They are no more aberrant or immoral than a failed or successful liaison between an unrelated male and female.

The themes of incest and homosexuality do, however, instill a tension in the novel, not between themselves but in relation to human morality. This tension is carried through the confrontations and the contrary philosophies of

Ann Haggard and William Solent. Wolf's philosophy hangs  
on a knife's edge between the two.

## CHAPTER TWO

ANN HAGGARD AND WILLIAM SOLENT

Not reading In Defence of Sensuality has allowed John Brebner to misinterpret some of Wolf Solent. He writes: "Throughout the book runs an agonizing awareness of economic pressure, of the role played by money in human happiness".<sup>15</sup> This is red herring in Brebner's own criticism. The point that Powys tries to make over and over again is that money is insignificant. Powys, while allowing that man has to live and therefore needs money, sees money as an aside. He writes that after, "we have paid our Ceasar's Penny to Humanity for our sustenance, it is folly and weakness to allow ourselves to be hypnotized by...human idealists" (D 123). This certainly suggests that although that may and should be our first concern, it is a concern for sustenance and subsistence not luxury. Those who covet luxury and money are following "a purpose of life that has no outlet from its feverish humanism" (D 123).

Without the understanding of this basic concept, Brebner cannot make sense of the relationship between Ann Haggard and William Solent and their influence on Wolf. I will try to do so.

Wolf's return to the site of his father's death is the beginning of his voyage to the perfection of his philosophy of sensuality. That voyage leads him to the perfection of his philosophy of sensuality via a return to Ramsgard and an identification with his father. It is evident, since Ann Solent decided to leave Ramsgard for London while William stayed, that Ramsgard is associated with William while the modern and urban London is associated with Ann Haggard.

Wolf, himself, sees the departure from London as an escape from his mother. He deliberately exaggerates the truth concerning his 'malice-dance' to his mother by recounting that, "He had, in fact, so at least he had told his mother, danced his 'malice-dance' on that quiet platform to so abandoned a tune, that no 'authorities' in so far as they retained their natural instincts at all, could possibly condone it" (WS 15). This malice-dance episode allows Wolf to escape, "from the weight of maternal disapproval into the very region where the grand disaster of his mother's life had occurred" (WS 15).

Wolf, until the beginning of the novel, had avoided one of Powys' dictates in In Defence of Sensuality. Powys wrote: "Visit the grave of someone who is dead, every day" (D 94). He later elaborates on the same theme when he writes:

The Chinese are very wise to pray to their dead. That they do this is one of the reasons why they are the happiest of all the races. Every living soul, if it cares to demand it, can have a guardian spirit among the dead. And this can be made true even if there is no conscious life after death. There are a great more forces at work than merely the conscious ones.

(D 95)

William Solent represents this type of philosophy while Ann's philosophy is much more hedonistic.

The antagonism between Ann Haggard and William Solent concerning Wolf can be detected early in the novel by the actions of Ann and William towards Wolf's trances which are the basis for his philosophy. While analysing his life, Wolf returns to his childhood and the subject of:

what he called 'sinking into his soul'. This trick had been a furtive custom with him from very early days. In his childhood his mother had often rallied him about it in her light-hearted way, and had applied to these trances, or these fits of absent-mindedness, an amusing but rather indecent nursery name. His father, on the other hand, had encouraged him in these moods, taking them very gravely, and treating him, when under their spell, as if he were a sort of infant magician.

(WS 19)

Ann is rooted in the material and physical, while William understands the value and prime importance of mental sensuality.

Ann's hedonism is amply illustrated in the novel. She is an extremely practical and pleasure-seeking individual. Wolf describes her situation with Mr. Manley, who has lent her the money to open a tea shop, quite accurately. He says: "Either that fellow wants to get social prestige by persuading you to marry him, or you are just exploiting him ...playing on his infatuation and using him" (WS 476).

She responds to his accusation by flaunting her pragmatism. Her response is:

Why do you always try and make out that your motives are good, Wolf? They're often abominable! Just as mine are. There's only one thing required of us in this world, and that's not to be a burden...not to hang around people's necks! My Manley-man, whom you hate so, at any rate stands on his own two feet. He gives nothing for nothing. He keeps his thoughts to himself.

(WS 477)

Wolf now understands his mother and correctly characterizes her when he thinks, "It's action she enjoys. I can see it all now like a map. Life's simply tedious to her when she isn't stirring" (WS 478). In this instance also, the styles of Ann and William clash. If Ann represents action and mobility, William represents inaction and stasis. Wolf's mother describes his father as one who:

lapped up the cream of those silly women's love like a leering cat. He laughed at people who did anything in life. He wasn't afraid of being broken, because there wasn't anything in him hard enough to break. He oozed and seeped into women's hearts like

bad water into leaky pipes. And he justified himself all the time. He never said, "This is outrageous, but I'm going to do it."

(WS 477)

The metaphors of not being hard enough to break and the imagery of water help one to understand Wolf's problem of dreading the splitting of his "hard, round, opaque crystal" (WS 289). Wolf, at first, thinks that, "his inmost identity was a hard, round, opaque crystal, with the power of forcing itself through any substance, organic, inorganic, magnetic, or psychic, that might obstruct its way" (WS 289-90). Doubts, however, constantly creep into his consciousness:

A villainously evil thought assailed him as he walked along. Were all his better actions only so many Pharisaic sops thrown one by one into the mouth of a Cerberus of selfishness, monstrous and insane? Was his 'mythology' itself only a projection of such selfishness? He carried this sardonic thought like a demon fox pressed against the pit of his stomach, for nearly a mile; and it was just as if the hard, opaque crystal circle of his inmost identity were, under that fox's black saliva, turning into something shapeless and nauseating, something that resembled a mass of floating frog-spawn.

(WS 288)

Wolf, through Christie's help, has realized that, "There is no reality but what the mind fashions out of itself. There is nothing but a mirror opposite a mirror, and a round crystal opposite a round crystal, and a sky in water opposite water in a sky" (WS 325).

Wolf, at this point, does not realize the total meaning of these words or he would not be afraid of letting his innermost being become a lake. Later, he again cerebrally accepts this position when he states, "What a fool I was to try and make my soul into a round, hard crystal! It's lake...that's what it is...with a stream of shadows drifting over it...like so many leaves!" (WS 448-9)

Mental thoughts do not always become physical actions and one can sense the terror in Wolf's heart as on the verge of making love to Christie:

He reeled awkwardly to one side, and, snatching his hands away from her, sank down against the pillow. For a second or two the struggle within him gave him a sensation as if the very core of his consciousness--that 'hard little crystal' within the nucleus of his soul--were breaking into two halves! Then he felt as if his whole being were flowing away in water, whirling away, like a mist of rain, out upon the night, over the roofs, over the darkened hills! There came a moment's sinking into nothingness, into a grey gulf of non-existence; and then it was as if a will within him, that was beyond thought, gathered itself together in that frozen chaos and rose upwards--rose upwards like a shining-scaled fish, electric, vibrant, taut, and leapt into the greenish-coloured vapour that filled the room!

(WS 460)

Wolf finally matures and realizes that his innermost being must be fluid in order for him to survive and be happy. One of his final thoughts in the novel concerns the necessity of being, "crafty in dealing with these modern

inventions! He must slide under them, over them, round them, like air, like vapour, like water" (WS 633). This is Wolf's ultimate destiny and it is his father much more than his mother who helps him achieve it.

Wolf's mother makes the error of allowing humans the leniency to commit both good and evil actions. Her analysis of human nature may be fairly correct in Freudian terms but in Powysian terms those good and evil aspects are not to be assigned to humans but only to the First Cause.

Ann presents her hypothesis to Wolf in this way: "Will you never face the facts of life, my son? Can't you accept once and for all that we all have to be bad sometimes ...just as we all have to be good sometimes? (WS 476) Powys, however, has distinctly advised all humans to be good and that the combination of good and evil should exist only in the First Cause. We, as humans, have an obligation to be good, not in human moral terms but in the cosmic terms of, "being kind and pitiful" (D 135).

Ann, in denying this, stands accused by Powys. Powys has already relegated her to the unworthy when he writes, "When we plunge into the gregarious life, into practical life, into active life, our soul is temporarily committing suicide" (D 129). She now stands doubly convicted for misplacing the aspects of good and evil and thereby misleading Wolf.

The most damaging appellation ascribed to Ann Haggard by Wolf is that of witch. Wolf surmises that, "She was like a witch--his mother--on the wrong side in the fairy story of life. She was on the side of fate against chance, and of destiny against random fortune" (WS 199). This clearly places her in the opponent's ranks while the appellations given to William Solent by other characters in the novel place him in a much more favourable light.

Mr Malakite, as Wolf so astutely observes, "had confused William Solent with God! In those two alone lay the ultimate dignity of life" (WS 624). If Christie represents Love, Death is the symbol of William Solent. The two of them guide Wolf to a new state of awareness.

William Solent is again obliquely referred to near the end of the novel when Wolf decides that, "he was going to take as the talisman of his days the phrase endure or escape. Where had he picked up that phrase? Behind a workhouse? Behind a madhouse?" (WS 633) If indeed he did pick up that phrase behind a workhouse it was placed there by William Solent who had died in the Ramsgard workhouse.

By the end of the novel Wolf has completely left London and his mother behind and gravitated towards Ramsgard and his father. Wolf asks rhetorically, "Ha, old Truepenny, am I with you at last? Air and earth mould, clouds and a patch of grass, darkness and the breaking of

light..." (WS 631) and answers his own question with, "Ay, it is enough!" (WS 631)

The contraries presented between Ann and William are only one section of the constant mental warfare that both Powys and Blake believed in. The next section, Gerda Torp and Christie Malakite, elaborates on the need for contraries and Wolf's reactions to them.

### CHAPTER III

#### GERDA TORP AND CHRISTIE MALAKITE

Most critics of Wolf Solent tend to misjudge Christie. They all understand Gerda because her role is more realized and complete in the novel. She is the entrance to Wolf's physical sexual experience and a constant human reminder, via the blackbird song, of the beauties of Nature.

Christie's role in the novel is not completed. The possibilities for her and Wolf are not realized in the novel but the events would promise to a sensitive reader of Wolf Solent and In Defence of Sensuality that a union does exist.

Jeremy Hooker writes:

the Powys-hero accepts isolation not just in society but in the universe; it is a condition of his freedom. To put it simply, the Powys-hero enjoys being alone, has rich inner resources to fall back on and is not forever in a fever of claustrophobic human contacts or desolated by his distance from them.<sup>16</sup>

Glen Cavaliero writes: "He stresses man's loneliness, and the private worlds in which each man and woman must in the last resort live alone."<sup>17</sup> Both of these men

must be recalling Powys' ancestor William Cowper who wrote "We perish, each alone" because this is only the first step in Powys' philosophy. Because the quincunx is not obtusely evident in the narrative of Wolf Solent, they refuse the possibility of its occurrence. Powys points out the difficulties in achieving this god-like union, not the impossibility of it.

The contraries first presented by Powys in relation to Ann Haggard and William Solent are continued with Gerda Torp and Christie Malakite. These two young women, although friends, are fashioned of entirely different fabrics. The names assigned to them by Powys demonstrate their dichotomy. Gerda Torp has an extremely earthy ring to it. Her name reminds one of the Gaelic word "tor" meaning a rocky hill or peak and this reinforces the phonetic imagery.

Christie Malakite is quite a different matter. Her name Christie, immediately lends itself to Christ imagery. Malakite can mean a type of rock but perhaps more importantly it can refer to the prophet Malachi and this is another spiritual reference.

The polarization of Gerda and Christie is fully outlined in a common allusion. Both Gerda and Christie are likened to Artemis, but they possess different characteristics of Artemis.

At Wolf's first view of Gerda he describes her in this way:

She sat on a stool opposite her father, leaning her shoulder against the edge of a high-backed settle. She was a young girl of about eighteen, and her beauty was so startling it seemed to destroy in a moment all ordinary human relations. Her wide-open grey eyes were fringed with long, dark eyelashes. Her voluptuous throat resembled an arum lily before it has unshéathed its petals. She wore a simple close-fitting dress, more suited to the summer than to a chilly day in spring; but the peculiarity of the dress lay in the way it emphasized the extraordinary suppleness of her shoulders and the delicate Artemis-like beauty of her young breasts.

(WS 70)

Christie is also likened to Artemis but not in any physical sense. At Wolf's and Christie's second meeting, Christie is described in these words:

He found Christie in a long blue apron, dusting the little sitting-room. Wolf was touched by the grave awkwardness with which she pulled this garment over her head and flung it down before offering him her hand. The dress she now appeared in was of a sombre brown, and so tightly fitting that it not only enhanced her slenderness, but also gave her an almost hieratic look. With her smoothly-parted hair and abstracted brown eyes, she resembled some withdrawn priestess of Artemis, interrupted in some sacred rite.

(WS 88)

Powys emphasizes the physical in Gerda and the spiritual in Christie. It is with this image of Artemis that one can explore the relationship between Wolf and the women in his life.

Artemis is a goddess and that alone should discourage the reader from expecting Wolf to achieve that celestial equilibrium that he so desires. However Powys, although he necessarily emphasizes the near impossibility of the quest when he writes: "For the sort of love I am speaking of now can only come once in a person's lifetime. One may have many affections and many lusts, many long devotions and many poignant spasms of pity; but one can have only one love" (D 155), and Wolf through his continued quest for the creation of the quincunx with Christie, denies the futility of the quest and re-affirms its possibility.

If Gerda is the physical paradigm, then Christie is the spiritual and religious one. Christie as a symbol of spirituality is alluded to when:

as he sank down in an armchair by her side, the impression he received of her appearance was confined to an awareness of smoothly-parted hair, of a quaint, pointed chin, and of a figure so slight and sexless that it resembled those meagre, androgynous forms that can be seen sometimes in early Italian pictures.

(WS 83)

Powys, as a student of art history, would know that the subjects of early Italian pictures were invariably saints or the Holy Family.

It may seem presumptuous to so quickly assign the appellations of physical and spiritual to Gerda and Christie

respectively, but it is not only in Wolf's eyes and thoughts of them but in the description of their very actions which makes these labels stick.

Gerda possesses some of the sensuality described in In Defence of Sensuality but it is too rooted in the physical and can never escape from it. In the case of Wolf and Gerda, "Each of these two torn edges...is pinned or gummed or glued to a foreign torn edge, alien, ill-fitting!" (D 155) Wolf's and Gerda's edges have been forcibly connected and as Wolf has found out to his chagrin, he and Gerda are not the quincunx that he was searching for.

Gerda entices Wolf because he does recognize in her some of the looking back into the icythosaurus era. Her voluptuousness and beauty promise sensations that can be contemplated for the rest of one's existence. However, these reminiscences would contain none of the contemplation essences which are so integral a part of sensuality.

Gerda's blackbird song promises sensuality to Wolf because:

He listened spellbound, forgetting hamadryads, Daphne's pearl-white knees and everything.

The delicious notes hovered through the wood--hovered over the scented turf where he lay--and went wavering down the hollow valley. It was like the voice of the very spirit of Poll's Camp, unsexed by Roman or by Saxon, pouring forth to a sky whose peculiar tint of indescribable greyness exactly suited the essence of its identity, the happiness of that sorrow which knows nothing of misery. Wolf sat entranced, just

giving himself up to listen; forgetting all else. He was utterly unmusical; and it may have been for that very reason that the quality of certain sounds in the world melted the very core of his soul. Certain sounds could do it; not very many. But the blackbird's note was one of them. And then it was that without rising from the ground he straightened his back against the sycamore-tree and got furiously red under his rugged cheeks. Even his tow-coloured hair, protruding from the front of his cap, seemed conscious of his humiliation. Waves of electricity shivered through it; while beads of perspiration ran down his forehead into his scowling eyebrows.

(WS 102)

But in the end this ecstasy is relegated to Lord Carfax and not Wolf.

Christie's spirituality is evident also by the effects she produces in Wolf. She is ethereal, other-worldly. Gerda describes her as being "for no man" (WS 112), and it is this sense of the non-physical that pervades Wolf's relationship with her. Although Christie's relationship with Wolf is spiritual, it certainly does evoke sensations:

It was with a strange sensation that he found his thoughts reverting to Christie and her trip to Weymouth--a strange and peculiar sensation. He felt as if Christie had grown thin and frail as a ghost--remote and far off, too--like the day when he saw her crouched in the Castle land! She seemed to have become once more what she was in the beginning of their friendship...a disembodied entity dwelling in his consciousness like a spirit in a

cloud, immaterial, unreal...near to him  
as his own thought, and yet far removed  
in body.

(WS 535)

One need not search too deeply to realize that  
Wolf and Christie possess the possibility of achieving  
a quincunx and the reader certainly believes that this  
quincunx which has now been recognized, will be achieved.

Passages such as:

He rose to his feet, too, and they stood  
awkwardly there, side by side in that  
windless darkness. Wolf had the feeling  
for one second as if the world had  
completely passed them by...gone on its  
way and forgotten them...so that not a  
soul knew they existed except themselves.  
As the shadow of a solitary bird on  
lonely sands answers the form of a bird's  
flying, so did he feel at that moment  
that his spirit answered her spirit.

(WS 355)

and "Her voice replied to his voice with a sound that  
might have been a whisper out of his own heart or might  
have been a cry from the other side of the world" (WS  
155) are paradigms of the descriptions of the quincunx  
in In Defence of Sensuality which read:

Thus it follows that each of them will  
share the other's contemplations, and  
have thoughts, fancies, feelings, and  
sensations in common with the other. Here,  
indeed, lies the whole secret of love and  
the clue whereby you may know whether your  
lust and your tenderness have sunk deep  
enough to have been transformed into this  
mysterious and final bond.

(D 155)

Powys renders their relationship even clearer when he practically quotes from In Defence of Sensuality. In Wolf Solent he writes: "And there really is a sense... don't you see, Christie? ...in which by just knowing each other and being as we are we've got outside Time and outside Space!" (WS 356) and in the In Defence of Sensuality he writes: "Time and space, in fact, have no longer any power to separate them once they have met." (D 154)

Wolf's voyage must lie in the direction of Christie, not Gerda. She will be his mentor, guide and finally, if perhaps not in this novel, she will become the other half of the complete quincunx.

CHAPTER IV  
WOLF'S VOYAGE

Many critics fail to understand Wolf and the change in Wolf because they have not read In Defence of Sensuality. Brebner especially misunderstands Wolf when he writes that, "Wolf seeks to save his essential humanity."<sup>18</sup> No-one could write that after having read, "It is the humanity in us, never allowing us to rest, that kills our happiness" (D 72).

Cavaliero writes that, "Wolf has learned to accept himself. Whether this will help him with Gerda or Christie we do not know."<sup>19</sup> Firstly, Wolf has not learned to accept himself, he has always done that, but he has learned to accept what Chance has thrust upon him. Secondly, the main thrust behind Wolf's change is that now he can deal with life, which includes both Gerda and Christie.

The preceding two critical quotations will pale when one reads Collins' words:

And moral force, for John Cowper, has a life of its own, living on in the air and inspiring even those not yet born. It is like the face of the man on the Waterloo steps that had haunted Wolf with its haggard suffering ever since he left for the West Country, inspiring compassion in characters a hundred miles away who have never seen it.<sup>20</sup>

The man on the Waterloo steps, like Jason, is a trap.

Powys makes this very plain when he writes:

He has to forget the miseries, the starvations, the unspeakable cruelties that are occurring, even at this very minute, all over the planet Earth. But he has already faced this necessity. Honestly and shamelessly he has faced it. He knows now that if he gave full rein to his imaginative pity, the mere existence of one single unhappy creature would be enough to damn his peace.

(D 161)

Doesn't Wolf give full rein to his imaginative pity in the bedroom with Christie? It is that face that wounds the possibility of a quincunx between Wolf and Christie.

Without the realization of the tragic possibilities of Wolf Solent, its overall scope is minimized.

Wolf's voyage, or progress, or journey, or whatever one may wish to call it, has something undeniable in it; there is a change in Wolf. The description of that change is more difficult to discern. The change does involve a certain degree of resignation and a shift in the emphasis of Wolf's life-illusion or philosophy. Wolf learns many things. Among them are the necessity of loneliness and the possibility of establishing a quincunx with Christie.

Professor G. Wilson Knight in The Saturnian Quest contends that, "Our exploration is largely an exploration of the human psyche in interaffective relationship with natural surroundings; and this relationship accumulates

new importance in the weighty narratives starting with Wolf Solent."<sup>21</sup>

This is certainly true but only in a limited sense. The main thrust and ideal state of any life is the establishment of a quincunx. All other human relationships can be regarded as unnecessary and distracting.

In order to judge Wolf and Wolf Solent one must evaluate Wolf at the beginning of the novel and then at the end of the novel. One must establish and evaluate the occurrences and relationships that affected him and which leave him as he is at the end of the novel.

The Wolf Solent at the beginning of the novel is one who has realized that his life in London is at a dead end and has, therefore, executed his malice-dance. This outrageous disregard for conventional morality leaves Wolf with no other alternative than to seek employment elsewhere. Wolf, therefore, has made a conscious attempt to disassociate himself from the stifling surroundings of London and, perhaps more to the point, his mother. The reader can only assume that this malice-dance which at first seemed to be outside of Wolf's control must have been the culmination of the reaction to his stifling surroundings.

Wolf arrives at Ramsgard with both strengths and weaknesses. He knows from his Weymouth days that all he wants are "certain sensations" (WS 19). He has learnt as he himself phrases it: "I've learnt sir, to get my happiness

out of sensations. I've learnt, sir, when to think and when not to think. I've learnt..." (WS 23). He equates human love with love for nature when he expresses one of his yearnings as, "I hope I shall find a girl who'll let me make love to her...tall and slim and white! I'd like her to be very white...with a tiny little mole, like Imogen's, upon her left breast...I'd like to make love to her out-of-doors...among elder bushes...among elder bushes and herb Robert..." (WS 19). He has learnt to do what he calls "sinking into his soul" (WS 19), a term used by Powys in In Defence of Sensuality.

He has also learned the magic secret of "the intoxicating enlargement of personality that used to come to him from imagining himself a sort of demiurgic force, drawing its power from the heart of Nature herself." (WS 16)

So far Wolf's thoughts and actions are in line with Powys edicts but Wolf is not yet the Powysian hero. This title has been left to Bloody Johnny Geard in A Glastonbury Romance. Wolf, throughout the novel reaches closer and closer to the ideal Powysian protagonist but he has quite a few things to learn and many others to unlearn before then.

Wolf has four basic beliefs that must be destroyed. They are: the equation of his mythology with his life-

illusion; the fact that "he remembered...things that had hurt his feelings rather than things that had thrilled him" (WS 24); the definitions of Good and Evil and finally the promise that "I won't forget" (WS 30).

JCP in A Philosophy of Solitude defines life-illusion as: "that secret dramatic way of regarding himself which makes a person feel to himself a remarkable, singular, unusual, exciting individual. Everyone has a life-illusion; and it is something that goes much deeper than mere vanity or conceit...It is the shadow of your subjective self."<sup>22</sup>

This definition does not necessarily involve Wolf's mythology and Wolf's restriction of his own life-illusion is one of the obstacles that he must hurdle.

Wolf cannot control his memories and recollections at the beginning of the novel. It is only with the instruction by Christie that he learns to be selective. This selection involves what Powys terms, "This art of forgetting what I decide to forget...an essential part of the process." (D 27)

Although Wolf's secret practice of recalling certain sensations "was always accompanied by an arrogant mental idea--the idea, namely, that he was taking part in some occult cosmic struggle--some struggle between what he liked to think of as 'good' and what he liked to think of as 'evil' in those remote depths" (WS 20), is an echo of

In Defence of Sensuality where it is written: "All the insane, fanatical, sex-perverted ritual of human vice and virtue, all the fussy phariseisms and conscience-stricken propitinations of our self-absorbed race, have obscured our vision of the great cosmic drama of good and evil that goes on in the gulf of Nature" (D 222) the meanings are quite different. The second quotation is a condemnation of the first.

One will note that Powys is very explicit in demonstrating the human morality of Wolf's thought. Powys is very careful to write, "what he liked to think of as 'good' and what he liked to think of as 'evil'." There is certainly a comparison to be made here of the good as seen by Wolf and the good as seen by Powys. Evil is also differentiated in this way. Wolf is still too linked to "our self-absorbed race" to be able to distinguish between human and the cosmic good and evil. Powys gives an incontestable definition of both good and evil when he writes, "The only 'goodness' is being kind and pitiful, and the only 'badness' is being unkind and cruel." (D 135) Wolf needs the expanse of the whole novel to learn the difference between good and evil and then to realize that good has the slightest of advantages over evil.

How then, does Wolf travel from ignorance to knowledge? It is quite obvious that the equation of Wolf's

mythology with his life-illusion is inextricably linked to his definitions of Good and Evil. Also, his refusal to select and arrange his thoughts is inextricably linked to his promise of "I won't forget."

In order to break the bond between his mythology and his life-illusion, Wolf must realize that each person's life-illusion is different. In doing this, his own life-illusion is transformed from a hard crystal into a watery and nebulous lake.

Christie starts him on this path by revealing to him her lack of a moral sense. She confides this to him: "You must be prepared for one thing," she said. 'You must be prepared to find that I haven't a trace of what people call 'the moral sense'." (WS 221) This admission from someone as highly regarded by Wolf pierces a tiny hole in Wolf's mental armour. If there is no moral sense then good and evil are meaningless in conventional human terms.

This idea is further extrapolated into the case of Squire Urquhart. For Wolf, Urquhart symbolized the "abysmal ooze from the slime of that which underlies all evil" (WS 187). Urquhart therefore, is one of the main components of Wolf's definition of evil. Wolf's opinion of the Squire does change and this makes Wolf wonder, "Had he seen himself all this while as a great spiritual protagonist to the Squire, only to find at the last that

the man was paying surreptitious visits to T.E. Valley?" (WS 623-4) When evil and good can be changed by such a small gesture or shift in point of view the differences between the two are no longer important. The primeval struggle that Wolf imagines cannot exist without a proper definition of good and evil and Wolf had not discovered it at that point in the novel.

This inconsistency in the definition of good and evil forces Wolf to question his actions. He asks, "Were all his actions so many Pharisaic sops thrown one by one into the mouth of a Cerberus of selfishness, monstrous and insane? Was his 'mythology' itself only a projection of such selfishness?" (WS 288) These doubts and misgivings are necessary if Wolf is to lose his dependence on human morals and graduate to cosmic morals.

If good and evil are so difficult to define and so elusive, Wolf is very wrong in wondering, "That hidden struggle between some mysterious Good and some mysterious Evil, into which all his ecstasies had merged, how could it go on after this?" (WS 421)

At this point, Wolf has almost destroyed both his life-illusion and his mythology of a primeval struggle between Good and Evil. We, as readers of the Defence, know however, that everyone has a life-illusion and that it is a human duty to humour someone else's life-illusion. We have also been told by Powys that a primeval struggle

between Good and Evil does exist.

Wolf too, must work his way to these precepts. He accomplishes this by first realizing that everyone has life-illusions. The narrator explains:

Thus it seemed to him now that while his own life-illusion was his 'mythology', Christie's must be those 'platonic essences' about which she was always pondering, Weevil's the mystic beauty of girls' legs, and Urquhart's the idea of his shameless book.

(WS 430)

If everyone has a life-illusion then everyone must be involved in the primeval struggle. If everyone is involved in the primeval struggle then the forces of Good must be stronger than the forces of Evil. Powys explains it in this manner:

His consciousness, as he stood there, seemed to stretch out to all the reborn life in the whole countryside, 'Good is stronger than evil,' he thought, 'if you take it on its simplest terms and set yourself to forget the horror! It's mad to refuse to be happy because there's a poison in the world that bites at every nerve. After all, it's short enough! I know very well that Chance could set me screaming like a wounded baboon-- every jot of philosophy gone! Well, until that happens, I must endure what I have to endure.'

(WS 506)

Wolf has accepted this idea philosophically but it takes something concrete to finally persuade him. Gaffer Barge is the concrete goodness. Powys writes, "There came

into the boy's face on hearing these words, a smile of such sheer, innate sweetness and goodness, that Wolf was staggered." (WS 581) Gaffer Barge is the weapon that Wolf can use against all Evil. Barge is living proof of the inevitability of the primeval struggle. Wolf asserts this when he says, "No! He would not yield! The inborn goodness of Barge....a thing natural and inevitable as the rising of sap in a tree...was stronger than all the 'white-magic' in the world." (WS 625)

Wolf overcomes his human morals and can view life and the primeval struggle on a much different and simpler plane where the concepts of Good and Evil are not prejudiced by limited human standards. It is interesting to note that to many Gaffer Barge would seem a dull, dim-witted "lubberhead" (WS 581), but Wolf pierces the superficiality of that description in order to dwell on the life-giving and perhaps more importantly the unconscious (like the sap rising in a tree) Goodness of this person.

Wolf also overcomes his inability to select memories and his inability to forget. These two weaknesses are tied together, hand in hand, because one must be able to forget in order to select. Without the act of forgetting, undesired details and instances will continue to haunt one's memory as the man on the Waterloo steps does.

If "The 'purpose' of every living organism is to sink back, and out, and away, into that primordial ecstasy

of contemplative enjoyment which was the life of God before He was driven forward by some fatal urge into His ambiguous role of creator-destroyer" (D 295), then Wolf certainly has much to learn in regard to forgetting, selecting and creating.

Wolf has no control over his selective memory. He realizes the importance of such a memory but has no means of controlling it. As Wolf arrives at Ramsgard, "it struck him, even in his excitement, just then as being strange that what he remembered were things that had hurt his feelings rather than things that had thrilled him" (WS 24). This is certainly not a permanent condition and Wolf does have some redress. The good and bad sensations are sometimes scattered helter-skelter through his consciousness. The following is a good example:

As he grew sleepy, all manner of trivial occurrences and objects of this adventurous day began rising up before him, emphasizing themselves, out of all proportion to the rest, in a strange half-feverish panorama. The long enchanted road revealed in that Gainsborough picture hovered before him and beckoned him to follow it. The abrupt apologies of Roger Monk melted into the furtive exhortations of the old woman in the blue apron. Framed in the darkness that closed in upon him, the coarse black hairs, that had refused to be reduced to a wig, metamorphosed themselves into similar hairs, growing, as he knew they could grow, upon a long-dead human skull! The jogging, grey haunches of the mare that had brought him from Ramsgard confused themselves with the

grey paws of the cat upon Selena Gault's knees.

(WS 50-1)

Powys makes it very clear that Wolf has not cultivated that strength enough when he writes:

As the locomotive slowly lessened its speed, he tried in vain to recall those moments of happiness...the vision of the bed of pinks...the sweet emanation from the very body of death. But in place of these things all he could think of was obdurate roots in clinging clay, sparkles and blotches that bore no human meaning, hammering of nails into coffins, men with lanterns in slaughterhouse yards, and the pallid loins of Bob Weevil streaked with the green slime of Lenty Pond.

(WS 321)

The examples I have provided so far demonstrate a mental agony on Wolf's part but more importantly than has so far been purported, Wolf's inability to forget destroys, for the moment, his chances of forming a quincunx with Christie. Wolf mistakenly believes that making love with Christie will destroy his mythology and life-illusion. On the contrary, it destroys his chances of achieving complete mental and physical happiness. While in anticipation of making love to Christie this occurs:

It was Christie herself who made the next move. Naturally and easily she slid down by his side on the edge of the bed....His eyes seemed to be dimmed now by a film of gauzy mist, which, as it floated before him, made everything vague and fluctuating. And then--without a second's warning--there appeared, at the end of the reflected perspective

in the mirror on the chest of drawers,  
the lamentable countenance of the man on  
the Waterloo steps!

The pitiful face looked straight into  
his face, and it was in vain that he  
struggled to turn away from it.

All the sorrows in the world seemed  
incarnated in that face, all the oppressions  
that are done under the sun, all the  
outrages, all the wrongs.

(WS 459)

After this vision, Wolf, of course, does not make  
love to Christie and their relationship is altered forever.  
Wolf thinks that he has saved his life-illusion for he  
says, "His life-illusion had been given back to him!...  
He was still the old Wolf, whose philosophy--such as it  
was--kept its hand on the rudder." (WS 463)

On the contrary, he has damaged the possibility  
of establishing a quincunx with Christie. Wolf's  
inability to forget has destroyed his happiness. Christie,  
who is much more aware of the powers of forgetting, has  
a much better explanation of the same incident. She says  
to Wolf: "If that man's face,' she sighed wearily,  
'hadn't appeared to you...I should have known...tonight...  
what...now...I...shall...never...know!" (WS 467)

Wolf Solent is a novel of learning and although  
Wolf seems defeated at this point, it is Powys' contention  
that everyone may learn the secrets and habits of Powys'  
particular philosophy. Let us trace Wolf's learning  
process. The first thing he must learn is to control his

thoughts. He begins the control process in the company of Christie. As he attempts to seduce her:

Two images troubled him just a little-- Gerda's white, tense face as it had looked when she left him on the street, and, with this, a vague uncomfortable memory of the figure on the Waterloo steps. But, in his intensely heightened consciousness of this 'suspended' moment, he deliberately steered the skiff of his thought away from both these reefs.

(WS 248)

In steering away from those reefs, Wolf is exercising his faculty of forgetting. However, to forget without having a basis or philosophy for forgetting is a mental inconsistency and not a conscious and deliberate system of thought. The philosophy behind such a seemingly negative action is supplied by many people. Wolf himself, in an argument with his dead father, states the truth without realizing all its implications. He says: "There is no reality but what the mind fashions out of itself. There is nothing but a mirror opposite a mirror, and a round crystal opposite a round crystal, and a sky in water opposite water in a sky." (WS 325)

Mr. Malakite, who has committed incest not once but twice, has learned to cope and he bequeaths his theories to Wolf. Powys writes:

With a convulsion of his whole frame, the bookseller jerked himself to a sitting posture. Spasmodically drawing in his legs, like a frog swimming on its back, he kicked off every shred of clothing....

'Forget!' he shrieked; and his voice resembled the tearing of a strip of calico.

(WS 595)

The greatest exponent and follower of this advice is Christie. She has already formulated the philosophy that Powys expects Wolf to finally accept and follow wholeheartedly. She is Wolf's teacher. She is not entangled in human morality and therefore she sees the clearest. She explains to Wolf:

Her eyes flashed. 'Everything that happens,' she cried passionately, 'is only something to be fixed up in your own mind. Once you've got it arranged there, the whole thing's settled...all is well. 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! And what's more, Wolf,' she went on, 'not only do you refuse really to understand other people; but I sometimes think there's something in you yourself you're never even aware of, with all your self-accusations. It's this blindness to what you're really doing that lets you off, not your gestures, not even your sideways flashes of compassion.'

(WS 466)

These may seem like idle words without any proof, but in her own book, Slate, she reiterates these same ideas and sentiments. Of her incestual relationship with

her father she writes:

Shame? She felt nothing of the kind!  
 Human tradition meant little to her.  
 Sacred guilt. Forbidden thresholds.  
 Just custom! Just old moss-covered  
 milestones of custom...Curious, not  
 terrible. A chemical phenomenon.  
 Interesting in a special way. The  
 opposite of tedious routine!...The girl  
 smiled into her mother's mirror.  
 Thoughts without 'substance'. Butterfly-  
 wings quivering. Unconscious signals.  
 Little fool. The old man meant nothing  
 at all.

(WS 485-6)

Christie is the teacher but Wolf must finally learn on his own. The process of selection and forgetting must be taken one step further if one is to completely escape the malice of the First Cause. If everything must be arranged in the mind then Wolf is completely correct when he says:

I am god of my own mind...and when I'm not actually teaching history--or "Latin" ...I can create, out of thin air, the essence of earth, grass, rain, wind, valleys, and hills! I've only to concentrate my mind on the living idolons in my mind; and even if they put me in prison--and Blacksod School is a prison--I ought still to be able to cry at the end like my father, "Christ, I've had a happy life!"

(WS 439)

This aspect of Powys' philosophy finds itself very well explained in the Defence. There, he writes: "To philosophize is to think of one's life floating as a whole--to

call up out of one's memory a lovely floating mass of all the delicious sensations one has ever had; yes, and if need be, to imagine vividly to oneself that one is where one is not but where one would like to be!" (D 201)

One will notice a progression here from recalling events to creating events. Wolf also learns this mental trick. He too progresses from recalling events to the creation of events when he says to himself:

Everything is as I myself create it. I am the wretched demiurge of the whole spectacle....Alone...alone...alone! If I create loveliness, there is loveliness. If I create monstrosity, there is monstrosity! I've got to move this creaking machinery of my mind into the right position; and then all follows. Then I can stop that old man from persecuting Christie. Then I can make Gerda happy without the two hundred!

(WS 489-90)

Powys' secret is finally imparted to Wolf and from then on there can be no turning back. He knows, finally, that, "There is no limit to the power of my will...as long as I use it for two uses only...to forget and to enjoy!" (WS 631)

Wolf uses his newfound powers in a most particular way. He has arrived at the realization that, in a sense, everything is god, especially the platonic essences that Christie has informed him of. These platonic essences are rooted in the surrounding countryside. The Saturnian

gold is the metaphor for selection, forgetting and creation. If these things can occur, if Saturnian gold can be taken from the fields, can be spread over all living and suffering things, then everyone and everything can be soothed, succoured and be made happy. Powys presents this view in the following two paragraphs:

Then as he turned eastward, and the yellowness of the buttercups changed from Byzantine gold to Cimmerian gold, he visualized the whole earthly solidity of this fragment of the West Country, this segment of astronomical clay, stretching from Glastonbury to Melbury Bub and from Ramsgard to Blacksod, as if it were itself one of the living personalities of his life. 'It is a god!' he cried in his heart; and he felt as if titanic hands, from the horizon of this 'field of Saturn,' were being lifted up to salute the mystery of life and the mystery of death!

What he longed to do was to plunge his own hands into this Saturnian gold, and to pour it out, over Mr. Urquhart, over Mattie, over Miss Gault, over Jason, over all the nameless little desolations--broken twigs, tortured branches, wounded reptiles, injured birds, slaughtered beasts--over a lonely stone on which no moss grew, in the heart of Lovelace Park, over a drowned worm, white and flaccid, dropped from the hook of Lobbie Torp into some Lunt pool, over the death-pillow of old Mr. Weevil, deprived now of his last conscious gluttony, over the lechery of the 'water-rat' himself, so pitiful in its tantalized frustration! All...all would reveal some unspeakable beauty, if only this Saturnian gold were sprinkled upon them!

(WS 632)

Wolf arrives at the conclusion that everything has a potential of becoming beautiful and worthwhile if they can be covered with Saturnian gold. With the correct philosophy, Powys', everything is possible.

Wolf Solent's view at the end of the novel, and J.C. Powys' view in the Defence coalesce and become one view. Wolf's oscillating and changing views finally harden into the precepts proposed by Powys in the Defence. Wolf Solent and In Defence of Sensuality are inextricably entangled and the philosophical work sheds light on an otherwise dark and sometimes misinterpreted novel.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>John Cowper Powys, Autobiography (London: Macdonald, 1934) p. 641.

<sup>2</sup>Powys, Autobiography, 642.

<sup>3</sup>G. Wilson Knight, The Saturnian Quest (London: Methuen, 1964).

<sup>4</sup>Glen Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys: Novelist (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).

<sup>5</sup>John Brebner, The Demon Within (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1973).

<sup>6</sup>H.P. Collins, John Cowper Powys (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1966).

<sup>7</sup>Jeremy Hooker, John Cowper Powys (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1973).

<sup>8</sup>John Cowper Powys, In Defence of Sensuality (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1930), p. 287. (All subsequent references to this edition will be footnoted by (D page number) immediately following the quotation.)

<sup>9</sup>J.C. Powys, Suspended Judgements (New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1916), p. 265.

<sup>10</sup>William Blake, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, David V. Erdman ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1970), p. 95.

<sup>11</sup>Blake, Poetry and Prose, p. 329.

<sup>12</sup>Cavaliero, JCP: Novelist, 45.

<sup>13</sup>Knight, The Saturnian Quest, 32.

<sup>14</sup>J.C. Powys, Wolf Solent (London: Penguin, 1929), p. 300. (All subsequent references to this edition will be footnoted by (WS page number) immediately following the quotation.)

<sup>15</sup>John Brebner, The Demon Within, 74

<sup>16</sup>Hooker, John Cowper Powys, 41.

<sup>17</sup>Cavaliero, JCP: Novelist, 54.

<sup>18</sup>Brebner, The Demon Within, 78.

<sup>19</sup>Cavaliero, JCP: Novelist, 60.

<sup>20</sup>Collins, JCP: Old Earth Man, 67.

<sup>21</sup>Knight, The Saturnian Quest, 30.

<sup>22</sup>John Cowper Powys, A Philosophy of Solitude (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1933), p. 82-83.

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