

Pantomorphopsychonosophilography
— **The New School of Literature:**
A Note on Louis Umfraville Wilkinson
and John Cowper Powys

*Originally published in the July 1917
edition of The International.*

I have a liver. This organ is so constituted that if, at midnight, at the Cafe des Beaux Arts, I consume a ham sandwich with its own weight in mustard, and a pint of iced coffee, the result is similar to, but more urgent than that alleged of a dose of a quarter of a grain of morphia. A sleepless night of violent and concentrated, yet widely roaming, thoughts, passionate yet pellucid, is obtained at this trying cost: I perceive and glorify the infinite goodness of God.

The ancients did not know these things; great classics (still unappreciated in some quarters, 'tis to be feared), like the authors of *East Lynne* and of *Lady Audley's Secret*, show no acquaintance with these phenomena. When good Queen Victoria wept for priceless Albert these things were not so. At least, Emily Bronte, she alone, foresaw the possibilities of today.

The incalculable increase of human knowledge has been such that no mind can follow it. I have sat at meetings of the Chemical Society where only two or three of the eminent men present were competent to discuss the paper read; perhaps not more than a dozen could even follow it. The mind of man has, therefore, developed like a cancer, thrusting out tentacles in every direction, depositing strange poison even in the remotest tissues, and bearing no relation, save the most malignant enmity, to the rest of the structure. We have known too much; we have lost our standards of measurement. In *East Lynne* it is merely a question of the

Ten Commandments. All our motives, as our acts, were as simple as they are — in those dear dead days beyond recall!

Now we have discovered pantomorphism. We have broken down the line between man and monkey, nay, between man and moss and malachite. We can still argue that nothing has a soul, or that everything has a soul; but the half-way houses have lost their licenses.

Zola, in a vague symbolic way, makes his still or his locomotive accomplice in his tragedies; but it is only the modern pantomorphist who makes the seaweed and the spindrift characters in his novel as active as its human protagonists. It is really the old animism, the old demonology, come again, the Rosicrucian doctrine of elementals burst into sudden flower; and it comes triumphant over all its enemies, because it has placed itself beyond the reach of criticism, basing itself as firmly on the Academic Scepticism as on the Academic Theology. No self-consistent theory of the universe can rule it out.

Pari passu has come — almost as part of this — the discovery of the human soul. In the old days a man was a man and a rock was a rock, "and no damned nonsense about it, sir" — which nonsense consisted in persistence at "But what is a man? What is a rock?" and ended, as above stated, in pantomorphism.

So also our souls were not souls; we were going to heaven or hell or purgatory, and there was nothing to worry us. But what are "we," asked the man of science, and ended by the discovery: "Every man and every woman is a star." The soul is now recognized as an individual substance, beyond the categories of time and space, a king in itself; not one of a group, but capable of its own destiny. The old theory of stars — night-lights in God's bedchamber or holes in the floor of heaven — has gone the way of phlogiston. We no longer confuse Sirius with Aldebaran. Each is itself. Just so every man is Himself, with his own Way to Heaven.

Many of us are become conscious of this truth: and, reaching out and up on our new wings, are at times liable to dizziness, to spiritual cremnophobia, agoraphobia, claustrophobia — and nostalgia is in any case become quite normal to us.

Hence the psychonosologists have begun to construct manuals of spiritual pathology. They have hardly done anything even to describe the varieties of disease. Von Krafft-Ebing was the first to gain popular appreciation. He saw (at least) that the Seventh Commandment was not a simple matter of the divorce court, and even got a glimpse of the fact that to inhale the perfume of a gentian on the mountain-side may imply a sexual "abnormality" more profound and possibly more terrible than a thousand rapes. He erred (he has since seen the error) in classing these manifestations as disease. They are "variations" in the Darwinian sense, evidence of the growth of the race. The ox, the savage, the Victorian, the modern American, the cave-man, do not suffer in this way from the specialization of the functions of the soul. But since these phenomena are undoubtedly accompanied by severe distress, we are at present justified in speaking of psychonosology.

Now, the soul is eternally silent; it expresses itself only through the sexual instinct and its branches, Art and Religion. The Unconscious Will of a man is, therefore, his sex-instinct, in the first place. Therefore, this new passionate growth of his new-found soul must perforce express itself in sexual abnormality. Freud and Jung have done much to trace sex in the unconscious mind, in symbolic thinking, in instinctive selection of literary metaphor, and so on; Jung, in particular, has brilliantly perceived that sex expresses the Unconscious or True Will. But deeper thinkers, deeper because they are artists with the vision of Gods, not groping, purblind men of science, have gone further, and discerned sex beating at the heart of man's simplest, most conscious, and most rational acts.

I refer to Louis Umfraville Wilkinson and John Cowper Powys. In the latter his "Eureka" is so vivid that it resembles the cry of an epileptic; the former bears himself more godlike, the cynical yet caressing smile of some hermaphrodite child of Pan and Apollo quivering faintly upon his lips. Powys makes you want to go out and invent something deliciously damnable; Wilkinson makes you feel that everything you have ever done is damnably delicious. The former reveals to you the possibilities of life; the latter reveals you to yourself as a past master of all actualities.

It is needless, I trust, to insist that these masters have left Krafft-Ebing and his school with Dens and Liguori — nay, they have buried him far deeper. For the older writers did really understand the appalling possibilities of "innocent" things, though their simple standard of right and wrong prevented their perception of whither their facts tended. But Wilkinson and Powys see more clearly. They know that one can morally contaminate a soap-bubble, if one go the right way to blow it, defile the virginity of a valley by looking at it, or corrode the soul of a strawberry by refusing to eat it.

It will be hard for Puritan legislation to check the cerebralist!

But why (ask!) should we so uniformly perceive this curious development as evil? Wilkinson, it is true, is beyond the illusion of good and evil; not so with Powys, whose characters mostly understand themselves as unfathomable abysses, haunted by nameless horrors. The reason is simple: Powys is temperamentally a Christian. The soul is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked"; therefore its will is evil; therefore its sex-instinct is evil; therefore its universe is evil. Such is the Puritan sorites; and to the inverted Puritan, whose pleasure consists of inventing "sins" in order to commit them, the Pagan simplicity of a Wilkinson is rather tragic. For the Pagan accepts joyfully the Law of Liberty: "Every man and every woman is a star": "Do

what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law." He delights in his independence, in pursuing the glory of his orbit, free, self-balanced, inscrutable, ineffably alive. The mind which is bound to the Christian philosophy, the clinging, parasitic, Oedipus-complex mind, dare not confront Immensity. In a word, a Christian, when he dies, wants to go to heaven; a Pagan shrugs his shoulders and takes things as they are.

But, will he, nill he, these pantomorphopsychonosophilographers have "unloosed the girders of the soul," as Zoroaster says, Wilkinson rather as a chorister in love for the first time, Powys as a child that has lost its mother; but the effect is the same. We must learn to take care of ourselves, to be suns in ourselves, not plants lackeying a central orb. We must conquer "air-sickness," the nostalgia for atavistic superstitions to comfort us. In a few years we shall be as happy in being ourselves as we have hitherto been in our dependence — physical, mental, and moral — upon others. Then, not till then, will constructive work, the mapping-out of a free universe, become possible. And in that day let us not forget the noble, the austere, the elegant, the august spade work of these great pantomorphopsychonosophilographers, John Cowper Powys and Louis Umfraville Wilkinson. *Cras ingens interabimus aequor.*