



The Meaning of Culture

By John Cowper Powys

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John Cowper Powys could never be straightforward or orthodox but here he sets off with a useful purpose. 'The aim of this book,' he declares, 'is to narrow down a vague and somewhat evasive conception, which hitherto, like "aristocracy" or "liberty", has come to imply a number of contradictory and even paradoxical elements, and to give it, not, of course, a purely logical form, but a concrete, particular, recognizable form, malleable and yielding enough and relative enough, but with a definite and quite unambiguous temper, tone, quality, atmosphere, of its own.' The book is in two parts: Analysis of Culture which deals with, in separate chapters, Philosophy, Literature, Poetry, Painting and Religion: Application of Culture which covers Happiness, Love, Nature, The Art of Reading, Human Relations, Destiny and Obstacles to Culture.

John Cowper Powys hoped 'that the fine word "culture" . . . might lend itself to an easy, humane and liberal discussion - a sort of one-man Platonic symposium - and even turn out to contain, among its various implications, no unworthy clue to the narrow path of the wise upon earth.' He succeeds completely, in his own idiosyncratic way, in achieving that.

'Mr Powys is to be congratulated on having written a book of the kind that most needs writing and most deserves to be read . . . Here in a dozen chapters of glowing and eloquent prose, Mr Powys describes for very reader that citadel which is himself, and explains to him how it may be strengthened and upheld and on what terms it is most worth upholding. . .' *Manchester Guardian*

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Editorial Review

About the Author

John Cowper Powys (1872-1963) was born in Derbyshire, brought up in the West Country (the Somerset/Dorset border area was to have a lasting influence on him), went to Cambridge University and then became a teacher and lecturer mainly in the USA where he lived for about thirty years. On returning to the UK, after a short spell in Dorset, he settled in Wales in 1935 where he lived for the rest of his long life. Those are the bare bones of his life. In some senses they seem unimportant when set alongside his extraordinary writing career. Not only was output prodigious, it was like nothing else in English Literature. Indeed, George Steiner has made the bold claim that his works are 'the only novels produced by an English writer that can fairly be compared to the fictions of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky'. And even that doesn't touch on their multifarious strangeness. John Cowper Powys wrote compulsively: letters, diaries, short stories, fantasies, poetry, literary criticism, philosophy and, above all, novels poured out of him. He also wrote a remarkable autobiography. In addition to his **Autobiography** his masterpieces are considered to be **Wolf Solent**, **Glastonbury Romance**, **Weymouth Sands** and **Porius**. But his lesser, or less well-known, works shouldn't be overlooked, they spring from the same weird, mystical, brilliant and obsessive imagination. John Cowper Powys is a challenging author with an impressive list of admirers. In addition to George Steiner, these have included Robertson Davies, Margaret Drabble, Theodore Dreiser, Henry Miller, J. B. Priestley and Angus Wilson.

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