



Penguin Modern Classics

10/6

John Cowper Powys  
Wolf Solent



*Some other Penguin novels are described  
on the following pages*



# Riders in the Chariot

Patrick White

In *The Tree of Man* Patrick White re-created the Garden of Eden in Australia: *Riders in the Chariot*, his story of four outcast mystics, powerfully re-enacts the story of the crucifixion in a like setting.

‘Stands out among contemporary novels like a cathedral surrounded by booths. Its form, its impulse and its dedication to what is eternal all excite a comparison with religious architecture. Mr White’s characters . . . have the symbolism of statues and spires’ – Maurice Edelman in the *Sunday Times*

‘He seems to me an unmistakably major writer who commands a scope, power, and sheer technical skill which put even our more ambitious novelists in the shade’ – A. Alvarez in the *New Statesman*

‘This is a book which really defies review: for its analysable qualities are overwhelmed by those imponderables which make a work “great” in the untouchable sense. It must be read because, like Everest, “it is there”, – Jeremy Brooks in the *Guardian*

*Also available*

The Tree of Man

Voss

The Aunt’s Story

NOT FOR SALE IN THE U.S.A. OR CANADA

# Of Human Bondage

W. Somerset Maugham

*Of Human Bondage* is generally considered to be Somerset Maugham's masterpiece in a long, versatile, and extremely distinguished literary career that has stretched from *Liza of Lambeth* in 1897 to *A Writer's Notebook* published in 1949. *Of Human Bondage* was first published in 1915. Maugham has described it as an autobiographical novel in which fact and fiction are inextricably mixed. Philip Carey, a handicapped orphan, is brought up by a self-indulgent Victorian clergyman. Shedding his religious faith as a young man, he begins to study art in Paris, but finally returns to London to qualify as a doctor.

Nine other books of fiction by Somerset Maugham, including his *Complete Short Stories* in four volumes, are available in Penguins.

NOT FOR SALE IN THE U.S.A.

# In Chancery

John Galsworthy

‘If the upper-middle class, with other classes, is destined to “move on” into amorphism, here, pickled in these pages, it lies under glass for strollers in the wide and ill-arranged museum of Letters to gaze at. Here it rests, preserved in its own juice: The Sense of Property.’

Thus John Galsworthy, speaking of *The Forsyte Saga*, of which *In Chancery*, set in the climacteric days of the Boer War, forms the central passage. Old Jolyon Forsyte is dead. Between Young Jolyon (so largely emancipated from Forsyte creeds), and his cousin, the coldly virtuous Soames (every inch a Forsyte), there begins to build up a feud. It centres about Irene, Soames’ beautiful wife, who is separated from him.

With his irony, his massive perspective, and his tolerant insight into the many characters he could handle, Galsworthy portrayed the mercantile and professional classes of Victorian England more exactly than any other writer.

NOT FOR SALE IN THE U.S.A.

# Border Country

Raymond Williams

'I do not think that I have ever been so moved by a modern novel as I was by this tremendously exciting and beautifully written book . . . I know that it has made me take stock of my own position, and cannot doubt that it is a great novel' – Dennis Potter

*Border Country* was Raymond Williams's first novel and was written between 1946 and 1958. During these years he also wrote *Culture and Society, 1780-1950*.

It is the story of a family and their community during the present century. Matthew Price, born in the Welsh border village of Glynmawr and now a university lecturer in London, goes back home when his father, a railwayman, becomes seriously ill. In a tension between past and present the growth and change of this family and its world are lived through and newly seen. Harry Price, Matthew's father, is the central figure of this action, and the final relationship between father and son is one of continuity across the many invisible frontiers.

NOT FOR SALE IN THE U.S.A.

*For a complete list of books available please write to Penguin Books whose address can be found on the back of the title page*



16

Penguin Modern Classic 2182

## Wolf Solent

A descendant of the poet William Cowper, John Cowper Powys was born in Shirley, Derbyshire, in 1872, and educated at Sherborne and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He became a lecturer in English Literature in about 1895, and continued this work, mainly in the United States, until 1934, when he returned to England and settled in North Wales, where he died in 1963. His first book, a volume of poems, appeared in 1896 and was followed by others – poems, essays, philosophical commentary – but his success came when he turned to fiction. His other novels include *Wood and Stone* (1915), *Rodmoor* (1916), and *Ducdame* (1925).

In 1958 John Cowper Powys's stature as a major figure in European literature was recognized by the award to him of the Bronze Plaque of the Free Academy of Arts in Hamburg, a recognition endorsed by the telegram of appreciation sent to him from the gathering of the Prix Formentor judges in 1962. He was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Letters by the University of Wales.





John Cowper Powys

# Wolf Solent



Penguin Books

Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth,  
Middlesex, England

Penguin Books Pty Ltd,  
Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

First published by Cape 1929

This edition published by Macdonald 1961

Published in Penguin Books 1964

Copyright © John Cowper Powys, 1929

Special Contents Copyright © John Cowper  
Powys, 1961

Made and printed in Great Britain by  
Cox and Wyman Ltd, London, Reading,  
and Fakenham

Set in Monotype Bembo

This book is sold subject to the condition  
that it shall not, by way of trade, be lent,  
re-sold, hired out or otherwise  
disposed of without the publisher's consent  
in any form of binding or cover other  
than that in which it is published

*Affectionately Dedicated to  
Father Hamilton Cowper Johnson*



## *Contents*

PREFACE	9
I THE FACE ON THE WATERLOO STEPS	13
2 'CHRIST! I'VE HAD A HAPPY LIFE!'	24
3 A DORSET CHRONICLE	40
4 GERDA	53
5 THE BLACKBIRD'S SONG	87
6 BAR SINISTER	117
7 YELLOW BRACKEN	144
8 THE THREE PEEWITS	171
9 THE HORSE-FAIR	184
10 CHRISTIE	224
11 THE TEA-PARTY	255
12 THE SLOW-WORM OF LENTY	265
13 HOME FOR BASTARDS	278
14 CROOKED SMOKE	292
15 ROUNDED WITH A SLEEP	322
16 A GAME OF BOWLS	329
17 'THIS IS REALITY'	359
18 THE SCHOOL TREAT	375
19 WINE	405
20 MR MALAKITE AT WEYMOUTH	450
21 'SLATE'	469
22 THE QUICK OR THE DEAD?	511
23 LENTY POND	539
24 'FORGET'	569
25 RIPENESS IS ALL	603



## Preface

Writing a preface to this book entitled *Wolf Solent* is like writing a commentary on my whole life as it was, as it is, and as it probably will be, before I die. Thanks to an early association with the Shirley family, the first five of us eleven children of the Rev. C. F. Powys and Mary Cowper Powys were born at Shirley Vicarage near Ashbourne in Derbyshire, the next three at Rothesay House, Dorchester, Dorset, and the final three at Montacute Vicarage in Somerset. We were six boys and five girls, and our grandmother's name on our father's side was Moilliet and came from Geneva, while our grandparents' names on our mother's side were Johnson and Patteson and came from Norfolk. The eldest of my mother's four sisters, our Aunt Kate, married Mowbray Donne, the son of Bodham Donne, and it was in his house, in Gloucester Terrace, London, that I met Kate Donne, descended from the philosophic poet John Donne, the lady who still dictates, for she is too blind to write herself and is well over ninety years old, the wittiest letters I have ever had from anyone in all my life. Her daughter Mary is writing the life of my great-grandfather, the Poet Cowper's friend, who took care of him after the death of Mrs Unwin. Cowper always called him 'Johnny of Norfolk'.

The towns mentioned in this story are Sherborne and Yeovil and Dorchester and Weymouth. What might be called the purpose and essence and inmost being of this book is the necessity of opposites. Life and Death, Good and Evil, Matter and Spirit, Body and Soul, Reality and Appearance have to be joined together, have to be forced into one another, have to be proved dependent upon each other, while all solid entities have to dissolve, if they are to outlast their momentary appearance, into atmosphere. And all this applies to the difference between our own ego, the self within us, the being of which we are all so vividly aware as something under the bones and ribs and cells and vessels of our physical body with which it is so closely associated. Here we do approach the whole mysterious essence of human life upon earth, the mystery of consciousness. To be



conscious: to be unconscious: yes! the difference between these is the difference between life and death for the person, the particular individual, with whom, whether it be ourself or somebody else, we are especially concerned. But to thin or thicken out this difference we are at once confronted by another question. What about sleep? When we are fast asleep, and very likely not even dreaming, we are totally unconscious and yet we are certainly fully alive.

Then at last we come to the most agitating of all the topics with which this book deals: I mean its love affairs. Naturally and unavoidably, these are associated with the shops in the towns. Then there is the castellated House with its Squire who possesses a large library of books and whose big house stands mid-way between the two counties of Dorset and Somerset.

It is inevitable that Sherborne School with its Preparatory School and its Big School and its various Schoolmasters should play a great part in this story. All we six boys, John, Littleton, Theodore, Bertie, Llewelyn whom we all called 'Lulu', and who was the favourite both with the girls and the boys, and Willie who was our youngest brother and who had a farm in our neighbourhood before he set out to East Africa, went to school there. Montacute House which is the noblest Elizabethan House in our British Isles was familiar to all of us, and its owner when we were there was particularly kind to me when I was in my early teens. The ironical thing was that he was a great student of Russian and had learnt to read Dostoyevsky. So it was to the owner of the finest Elizabethan House in the country that I owed my earliest knowledge of him whom I regard, with Thomas Hardy and Sir Walter Scott as his sole rivals, as the greatest of all novelists in the world; yes! greater even than Balzac.

After Shakespeare and Milton my favourite poet is Horace and I rejoice to think how much I owe to his special use of that splendid word 'impavidum'. It does indeed come in so grandly at the close of one of his very noblest of all poems . . .

Si fractus illabatur orbis  
*Impavidum* ferient ruinae

One of the most touching and moving scenes in this book is Wolf Solent's quarrel with his mother when she attacks him for his mania for certain young girls, especially for Christie, and compares him with his father and utters indignant wails and sobs and screams about the misfortune of being born a woman and the ill-luck of women in this

world. Wolf doesn't think that his mother is fair just here either to his father or to himself or to men in general. There came the thought to Wolf like the galloping of a black horse against the horizon that when Christie was dead and he was dead, *that* was the end. . . . Moments as perfect as this *required*, he told himself, death as their counterpoise.

Whatever death may mean, and none of us really know, I have come to the conclusion for myself that when I die it is the complete and absolute end of me. I am now satisfied that when I lie dying I shall be feeling a perfect contentment in the sure and certain knowledge that no consciousness of mine will continue after my last breath.

As I wrote *Wolf Solent* travelling through all the states of the United States except two, I became more and more intensely aware of the hills and valleys, the trees and various flowers, the lanes and hedges and ponds and ditches, of the country round Sherborne; with the Abbey and the Preparatory School and the Big School; and also of the Great House and Lake, a mile or so away. Walking up the road to the town from the station one first passes the Digby Hotel and then the Preparatory School and then the Abbey and the Big School Library. My own life on earth has resembled Solent's in being dominated by Books. I used to read Sunday after Sunday in the Big School Library except on the days when I set out with my brother Littleton to scamper home to Montacute Vicarage round the back of Montacute House; our favourite way being always by the Trent Lanes rather than by Babylon Hill and the Slopes. Sherborne was five miles from Yeovil; and Yeovil was five miles from Montacute; so at Sherborne we were ten miles from home if we ran the shortest way. The shops with their owners and with the girls and the shop-owners' wives who ran them, whether in Sherborne or in Yeovil or in Dorchester, were the milestones so to speak in the landscapes between School and home; and our grandmother's dwelling, Penn House, at the end of Brunswick Terrace in Weymouth, was the gate to the waves and tides and pebbles and sands of the salt sea.

*Wolf Solent* is a book of Nostalgia, written in a foreign country with the pen of a traveller and the ink-blood of his home.

JOHN COWPER POWYS

Christmas 1960