

# Powys Notes

Fall and Winter 1995

*Featuring a symposium on the new Colgate Porius*



The Powys Society of North America

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# Powys Notes

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Founded in December, 1983, the Powys Society of North America seeks to promote the study and appreciation of the literary works of the Powys family, especially those of John Cowper Powys (1872-1963), T. F. Powys (1875-1953), and Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939). The Society takes a special interest in the North American connections and experiences of the Powyses, and encourages the exploration of the extensive collections of Powys material in North America and the involvement, particularly of John Cowper and Llewelyn, in American literary culture.

## A Symposium on the new Colgate *Porius*

*Since the publication of the new Porius, in 1994, we have surveyed the globe, if not from China to Peru, then at least from Sweden to Toronto, in search of unusually wise, learned, and loquacious persons who might be persuaded to comment on it. The results of our search are revealed below. Our special thanks to Syracuse University Press (distributor of the Colgate edition), for providing an unusually generous number of review copies.*

### Porius: "Tired Thoughts Like Stones"...

Timothy Hyman

*Porius* has often been seen as a "dream-novel," but reading at last the complete text, with its sustained slow-drifting rhythms, it seems to inhabit a territory more signposted than I'd remembered—the borderlands that stretch either side of sleep. All through, the heavy slow protagonist (whose character is so much more vividly developed in this version) repeatedly registers exhaustion. Much of the action happens in the middle of the night, when Porius is "sleep-sick." (140) He is forever seeking or resisting or entering sleep.

I'm dead tired," he told himself. "I've reached the point of just having to wait quietly and see what thoughts come into my head. Who can tell? Tired thoughts like stones instead of pieces of paper sometimes sink deep. Fresh thoughts sail like paper boats till a puff of wind turns them of a sudden into drifting scraps of sodden fibre! Whereas, once at the bottom of the water, stones can be quiet beneath the

wind-blown reflections of sun, moon and stars."  
(781)

Shortly after, Porius suffers a "magnetic jerk" which, "taking advantage of his nervous and mental exhaustion dragged him across a sort of eel-bridge out of normal consciousness altogether." (782) In a trance-like state, he experiences a prophetic vision of the Last Battle.

All this occurs in the fascinating chapter entitled *The Little One*, now being published for the first time, where Porius and his companions penetrate to the dark interior of a prehistoric mound, and discover a five-year-old boy. (Who may, it is implied, be the result of the Druid's impregnating his brother Llew). Trance and prophecy and magic, and an openness to them, are throughout this book linked to the receptivity of exhaustion.

These states of drowsy being are associated with pleasure, often with sexual pleasure, but of an entirely self-contained and solitary kind: the moments for which Powys perhaps never found an adequate word, but which he sometimes misleadingly called "sensuality," and which in *Porius*, irritatingly became "cavoseniargising." So when the exhausted Porius, in the third major erotic encounter of his crowded week, finds himself in bed beside Nineue (another previously unpublished episode, 702),

he got the impression that his caresses were only a minor element in a long-drawn-out quietly-muted ecstasy to which she had begun to abandon herself before he appeared on the scene at all, a sub-sexual sensuous ecstasy, practically identical with his self-centred cavoseniargising.

Similar rhythmic sensations are experienced after making love to Morfydd, when it pleases Porius

to fancy that these long slow tranquilly rolling-ripples of sex-satisfaction resembled those other drowsily curving time-waves, though he never pretended to himself he could remember them, rocking so gently upon the brimming sea of contentment, such as every child born into the world may be imagined feeling, in its first independent falling asleep, after its first navel string is cut." (511)

The effect of such rhythms on the reader is often one of impa-

tience. The whole early part of the novel resembles the excruciatingly slow unfolding of one of those discomfiting dreams where we're on our way to some destination, only to be impeded by one distracting episode after another. Will Porius *ever*, *WILL WE EVER*, reach St. Julian's Fount? These initial chapters establish the atmosphere of *Porius*, where everything is muffled; as we hear later, in chapter 23, "There hung about the whole project something dream-like and insubstantial, not so much unreal as *sub-real*, like a decision underwater, or the soft persistent falling of snow upon snow!" This thickened atmosphere was characterized by Angus Wilson, "as though the half-fungoid personality of Uryen Quirm were being expanded to suffuse a world." And it's as though the mist (which, often smelly, seems to emanate from Myrddin) also gets into the sentences, and clogs the plot.

Mist bears a special symbolic burden in Powys. In the early west country fiction, the classical "Cimmerians," and their phantasmal existence on the misted borders of the afterlife, are already heard of. In *Porius* they are ever-present. (Among many examples, on p. 697: "The reed-stalks had gathered to themselves out of the moonlight an unearthly tint that was neither green nor grey nor black nor brown, and could only be described by the adjective Cimmerian"). The young John Cowper Powys would have come across (probably in an appendix to Matthew Arnold's *Celtic Literature*) the old tradition that identifies the Cimmerians as ancestors of the Welsh, the "Cymry." And *Porius* is perhaps best read as a celebration of misted and elusive states of being, just as it is written in defence of the ill-defined nation that is Wales.

It is extremely difficult to get clear the various racial identities that inhabit the misted forest marches of *Porius*. The defence of "Britain" by King Arthur, against the Saxon invaders, obviously carries some echo of the war just ended. But that isn't at all Powys's thrust, and he seems almost to go out of his way to muddle the reader. As history, or anthropology, we might as well be reading Tolkien's appendices on Elves and Dwarves. "Gwyddyl-Ffichti" means, I think, intermarriage between Scots (Gaels) and Picts; while "the forest-people" (non-Aryan, communistic, matriarchal) are apparently "Iberian," possibly originating in Marrakesh. Many currents in the book seem to exalt them as the rightful possessors of this part of Wales, though we're not allowed for long to forget that the real Welsh aboriginals are the Giants (the Cewri).

Porius himself is grandson of a Roman patrician, and heir to a Brythonic Celt dynasty, but his genetic inheritance includes both giant and forest people. Powys (always rather eugenically-inclined)

implies that Porius's paralysis is related to his racial mix. At thirty, Porius is "a man with an immense capacity for happiness," but only just beginning to resolve his contradictions. In one week, all will be transformed. He will, among much else, wed, conceive a child, inherit a principedom. (I'm leaving aside the single-handed slaughter of twenty-something Saxons; let alone the episode of the Cewri). But above all, he will fully realize his identity—which is connected to the territory he rules, to the states of being he values, but also to his service of Myrddin. And of course, even if we sometimes lose sight of him for almost two hundred pages, Myrddin not Porius is the magnificent conception at the core of this book. Myrddin "is" Wales, just as he "is" the mist, and "is" that state of oneness and merging with all created things, to which the whole book tends. It is by virtue of "being" all these large things, that Myrddin is a god.

It is tempting to identify the exhaustion so often felt by Myrddin, as by his servant and support Prince Porius, with the tiredness of John Cowper Powys, laboring into his middle seventies on one last ambitious fiction; one which, in the view of several of his admirers, he may have embarked on "too late." But the Golden Age quest implicit in earlier books is here made more explicit than ever, and the rhythms established in the complete *Porius* are now more fully integrated with the Cronos cosmology, the huge planetary cycle. It is slower and drowsier, and sometimes threatens to be impenetrable; but the itinerary of this great culminating dreamwork now unfolds more conclusively. When we have dragged our way past St. Julian's Fount, through the rock-passages, between the moonlit trees, deep into the earth, and up the mountain, we feel less "cheated" than by any other Powys romance.

But where have we descended into some such drowsy-visionary underworld before? At a first reading of *Porius*, twenty-five years ago, I was struck by the echoes—especially in Myrddin / Cronos—of the deposed god Saturn, visited by Keats in *The Fall of Hyperion: A Dream*. The complete *Porius* makes clearer, how the seventy year old John Cowper returns to the dream-territory of the sleeping god of his youth, with renewed conviction. Keats's self-condemning first lines ("Fanatics have their dreams wherein they weave/a paradise for a sect") were taken to heart; this kind of critique surfaces around each "Powys-hero" in the mature romances. Keats's "Dreamer" is tired, half-paralyzed: A "true poet" would move more confidently, to become "physician to all men." Byron famously complains of Keats's "always frigging the imagination"; the Powys-hero likewise embodies all that's implied, in our contemporary parlance, by a "wanker." But Keats, the dreamer, descends

into the dark bowels of the Earth, to discover a kind of consolatory god. Powys's achievement in *Porius* is to drag Keats's Saturn up into the mid-twentieth century, in the aftermath of World War and world-change, to vindicate the dreamers' god as one still worth serving.



## The Art of Sinking

Ian Duncan

*Hic in tumulo jacet: Porius*, like *Finnegans Wake* (although in other respects quite unlike it), is the massive burial-mound of a tradition, in this case the tradition of national historical romance instituted by Scott. After the distresses of *Owen Glendower* Powys turned from the historical novel to its unrespectable sibling genre: *A Romance of the Dark Ages*. So had Scott turned from the burden of modern Scotland to write *Ivanhoe: A Romance* in 1819. In Scott's Middle Ages and Powys's Dark Ages almost anything is possible, up to a point. We know that somewhere beyond the tale's horizon King Richard will lose his nation as well as his eastern empire, just as we know that no extravagance of swordplay on the part of Amherawdr Arthur will prevent the Saxon from coming back next year. But in *Ivanhoe*, despite first appearances, all is lightness—not just ballet and glitter but enlightenment (there are no castle specters here). *Porius* for its part studies heaviness, murkiness, the profundity or bathos Alexander Pope had glossed with a sneer as “the art of sinking”:

And still, like a magical-mechanical incantation to a *Time-Tune* whose pulses were in himself that he might assert free-will against all those false fates and sham destinies that the priests of the One God and the priests of the One Devil are always turning into One Necessity, his voice went on, as if it were the voice of every living creature protesting the freedom of its free choice: *Thumberol-gongquod-tungerong-larry-ruggerug-gwork-ong!* (p. 865)

These syllables are meant to represent the lost language of aboriginal giants.

Of course the bathos is integral; it's of a piece with his largeness that Powys was never afraid of the preposterous. Throughout *Porius* the narrator keeps referring to the Iliadic Homer, and brings on two chroniclers and a bard, Taliessin, alongside his prophet and druid. But the romance reaches back, back before legendary history and oracle and epic, to a primal poetic foundation that might be called titanic—or, in a coinage that may be one of the manuscript's happier typographic blunders, *totanic*, both titanic and totemic (p. 831). The episodes of *Porius*'s encounter with the Cewri, last of the ancestral giants, and his deliverance of Myrddin Wyllt, the avatar of Cronos, both touch the sublime, at least for this reader. But the reach back to the beginning, before the beginning, can also turn out to be merely bathos: a sinking into nonsense, infantile gibberish, mud-bubbles.

Bathos invests the romance's action, which is at once complicated, hectic and perfunctory. The epic time-frame, given a disconcertingly specific chronology (October 18 to October 25, A. D. 499) sustains a cat's-cradle of intrigues, battles, births, burials, murders, miracles, rapes and rescues, but much of this takes place off the page or well beside the center of concern. Subsequent events dampen the single blazing appearance of an exaggeratedly heroic Arthur, whose knights are “Romanized upstarts” and the famous Galahaut a peeping tom. Here Powys mischievously conflates the Arthurian Galahad with the Galeotto, or Gallehaut, of Dante and Boccaccio.) *Porius* himself, Herculean prince, is almost absent-minded in the execution of derring-do, uprooting a tree to disarm a swordsman and braining a band of Saxons by using one of their number as a club. Powys chooses to make problematic the status of the *event* as the modular unit of historical narrative. A confrontation between the Henog, a chronicler, and the “great prophet of the future” Myrddin Wyllt produces a remarkable critique of history:

It certainly did seem as if the Henog attributed to every last detail of what had actually occurred a special and curious consecration; as though *merely to have happened* made what *had* happened, whether tragic or comic, or even trifling or fortuitous, a sacred episode in a symbolic rite. (p. 89)

This states the crux of Powys's grand project, turning between a determined consecration of “every last detail,” especially if trifling

and fortuitous, and an intimation of the fundamental vanity of narrative—the attempt to make a world by covering up a void with eventfulness. The narrated event is what happens *merely to have happened*, something that crowds out alternative and more vital imaginings.

By far the main preoccupation of the novel's characters, the topic of interminable debate and soliloquy, "sacred episode and symbolic rite" occupy a spectrum between the ideological totalitarianism of Christian orthodoxy, which harnesses the sacred to power and proscription; and a private and idiosyncratic intensity of visionary contemplation, which alone bears the gift of consecrating "every last detail." Here is prose that sinks to behold (with Taliessin) an Odyssey in "a straw of wheat, dirty and split, crooked and crushed flat, with only a couple of empty husks adhering to its head-end, and its tail-end not only flattened out beyond all resemblance of the hollow reed it once had been, but polished, in its enforced travels over the earth, to such a degree of thinness, smoothness, and whiteness as to be almost transparent" (p. 428); prose that observes (with Porius) the enigmatic ceremonies of a "feeble daddy-long-legs" which, "preserved for another twelve hours of helpless sprawling by the day's warmth, danced its patient, private, hieroglyphical old insect's death-dance, to a sun-god that had looked down on the earth for a million years without seeing a sign of any real Mithras" (p. 770).

The most elaborate of these private rites is Porius's cavose-niargizing, his anti-epiphanic mental flight into the texture of the world around him. The romance is the macrocosm of its hero ("porous and saurian"), divided between a hulking, primitive body that mechanically dispatches its heroic business and a restless perplexed simmer of modern thought that solaces itself in a post-romantic absorption in superhuman, subhuman dynamics of energy and matter. These subjective sinkings (far from Porius's alone) release a somber lyricism, a poetry of the death-drive. Porius studies "a completely new expression" on the face of Myrddin Wyllt:

It reminded Porius of all the most magical and evasive aspects of the forest. It suggested grassy avenues whose lights and shades were forever waiting for feet that had already become dust. It suggested reedy pools and moss-grown recesses wherein long-fallen, long-mouldering tree-trunks sank slowly, season after season, autumn after autumn, into ever softer and ever gentler dissolution. It had about it the non-human silence and expectancy, and the

faint insubstantial sigh of a patience that is beyond expectancy, such as he had sometimes noted rising from the fields when his enemy Minnawc Gorsant said Mass at dawn at their Gaer altar. (p. 113)

The passage rehearses the grand tensions of Powys's narrative with wonderful delicacy: lulling us with a quiet music of the dissolution of human fuss into the vast subsidings of organic decay (langorous rhythms, alliterative sibilants on the brink of preciousness), exorcizing the anthropomorphic (the "patience...beyond expectancy" rises from the fields themselves, not from synecdochic agricultural laborers) at the very moment, however, that the human erupts again in its noisiest and most virulent type, the militant Christian priest.

*Porius* sets its lyricism against the categories of event and ideology, the imperial formations of history and the state, which have traditionally constituted the mimetic domain of the novel, especially the historical novel. At the same time those categories maintain a recalcitrant hold over the narrative, such that narrative itself is experienced as a continuous perturbation, distraction, deformation. Like a swimmer beset by cross-currents, the reader of *Porius* feels the chill of a great desolation beneath.

Twice, at the center and the end of the romance, lyric energy infuses narrative event to authentically sublime effect. The Freudian allegory that emerges through these episodes is all the more powerful for its obviousness—this has something of the unaffected crudeness, careless of interpretation and so genuinely mysterious, of myth. In the adventure with the Cewri, Porius's ecstatic coupling with the daughter provokes the attack of the father, armed with "the wrenched-up trunk of a pine-tree, along with its straggly root, whose corrugated excrescences and compressed knobs were hard as quarried marble" (p. 550). Aiming a blow at Porius he smashes his daughter's skull instead, carries off her body, and leaps from a cliff. The mountaintop rescue of Myrddin Wyllt, one of the astounding passages in fiction, revisits this primal scene to undo its Oedipal disaster. This time "the Mystery of Chance" helps Porius resist his desire for the "Seducer of Prophets," so that she rewards him with a "totanic" gift:

...she drew forth from between her unequalled thighs a small, hard, heavy, pear-shaped lump of iron-ore and handed it to him. As she did so he noticed that the ice-cold air about them caused a delicate wafture of faint grey steam—so warm had the

thing grown against her flesh—to float away between them. (p. 866)

With this thunderbolt Porius can break the lock of history and liberate old Cronos. The scene owes something to *Prometheus Unbound*, but its effect is more recondite, less jubilant. We are left with words of jaggedness, loneliness, and the temporary contentment of having touched something dæmonic.



## Porius and the Comedy of the Grotesque

Michael Ballin

To have access to an unabridged text of *Porius* in published form creates a momentous occasion. The edition by Wilbur T. Albrecht published by Colgate University Press is handsome in appearance and is printed in clear type on quality paper. It is a pleasure to read—an unaccustomed pleasure especially for those of us who have had to plough through typescripts and the eccentric vagaries of the holograph MS. available at Austin, Texas. This is not an authoritative text: there is still some missing material and the reader has to accept the assumption that the Cambridge typescript is the text Powys would have preferred. However, despite the crowd of amazing misprints and the lack of editorial guidance when it comes to allusions to Welsh mythology and *The Mabinogion*—hardly common knowledge for most anglicized readers—the text is not only physically pleasurable to read but reconfirms in my opinion the integrity and wholeness of Powys's original enterprise.

JCP resisted the necessity for abridgment of the text and fought those who suggested that dwarves, giants and magical mounds were too bizarre or grotesque for a narrative which unfolds a historical crisis in the Dark Ages, precisely dated as 499 AD. Powys was convinced of the functional importance of all elements of his text and the decorum of the presence of the fantastical, mythological, and magical with the historical. I wish to comment on the way the com-

plete text reveals not only the thematic completeness of the work but its generic individuality and originality. I think a case can be made that the complete text of *Porius* reveals a masterpiece unlike any other it may have to contend with, whether that be *War and Peace* in the nineteenth century or *Finnegans Wake* in the twentieth.

*Porius* is the work of Powys's late maturity. He put all of his own life experience as well as his imaginative capacity and historical knowledge into it. Powys once claimed that Goethe's *Faust* was his greatest autobiography; I think *Porius* a worthy advance over Powys's own *Autobiography* and a novel at least equal to *A Glastonbury Romance*. Powys's use of the word ROMANCE in his subtitle (*A Romance of the Dark Ages*) together with its incorporation of Arthurian characters relates *Porius* to *Glastonbury*.

*Porius* makes the clearest statement of a philosophy of life and existence. It introduces a specific conflict of philosophical and religious ideologies: Pelagian humanism versus Christian fanaticism; natural mysticism versus classical rationalism and monotheism versus metaphysical pluralism. These different visions of existence are explicitly dramatized in Brother John, Minnow Gorsant, Myrddin Wyllt, Brochvael, and Lot El Aziz. Powys's protagonist inherits a connection with most of these perspectives through his mixture of aboriginal and Brythonic ancestry, and his relationships to Brother John, Brochvael and Morfydd as well as his Christian grandfather.

Although *Porius* is more than the mouthpiece of the narrator, he reflects the eccentric mixtures and maturely considered values of Powys himself. At various points in the narrative, Porius declares his belief in the magical, discloses his perception of experience as chaotic and unknown and announces a heroic refusal to take refuge in a comfortable rationalism as a defence against reality. He realizes instinctively that he is a medium for the expression of unseen forces and wisely recognizes that the "mysterious mingling of Nature's purposes with accident and chance... is the only world we know" (114). "Though a serious pursuer of the Cewri, passionate lover of Creiddylaid, and tender partner of Morfydd, he opposes the enslavement of possessive love. He espouses the metaphysical priority of Time over Space and, in the final chapter, "Cronos" he becomes aware of a power which can defeat possessive power—the ability "not to create or to destroy, but simply to enjoy" (871).

Such a hero can inspire the reader to live a life as long as Powys's in order to explore and assimilate such a range of speculation in terms of a reader's own sensuous experience. However, my purpose in pointing out the range of this philosophy is to emphasize that the complete text of *Porius* incarnates that philosophy in its nar-



rative, its dramatic action, its generic form. Without the excised passages and the missing chapters, *Porius* would not be a complete statement or a fully coherent formal structure.

I have commented on the use of the term "romance" in the subtitle; the protagonist claims at one point that "love is not certainly *not* enough" but has to encompass pity and commonsense (572). (This statement is not in the abridged text.) *Porius* ends up marrying a woman he does not fully love, but learns to value and Morfydd sacrifices her love for Rhun for the political ends of marriage. So much for romance. The dramatic action of *Porius* seems more like a tragedy of frustration than a romance.

In fact, early in the novel *Porius* recognizes the inadequacy of traditional genres, at least by implication, in his statement in the first chapter that the outcome of the struggle between contending aboriginal and Christian elements will not depend upon rational decisions: "Not on Roman common sense" he thought, 'will the choice depend, nor on Brythonic romance; rather on fate and chance; rather on a mysterious magic in things, outside man's control'" (11). *Porius* is arguably not a Roman chronicle nor an Arthurian romance, nor a political tragedy. I find the appropriate generic label difficult to pick, but I now perceive *Porius* as a Gothic-historical romance. I will avoid more Polonius-like hybrids, such as comical-historical-mythical. I choose the term "Gothic" to cover a consistent emphasis on a kind of medieval comic grotesque. This perspective emerged from my rereading of the unabridged text in this first published edition.

Powys builds elements of the physically grotesque or abnormally ugly into many of his characters, from *Porius*'s size and bear-like eyes to the giant Cewri. Myrddin Wyllt is another grotesque as is Afagddu—a nickname for a character "of shocking and startling ugliness"; the name is said to be derived from "the hideous son of the great goddess Ceridwen" (142). This motif of the ugly/grotesque, used in *A Glastonbury Romance* in Mad Bet, the ugly Grail messenger, is woven into a comic perspective, an equally significant and pervasive motif in *Porius*.

Brochvael's encounter with the Derwydd in Chapter 14 involves a confrontation of a representative of Roman classical culture with the aboriginal worlds of Sibylla and the Druids. Brochvael does not respond defensively to the Druid world: he recognizes that Sibylla is "nearer to the reality of life and the reality of human nature than I am" (245). Again, this statement is omitted from the abridged text. Brochvael, however, is challenged by the Derwydd's detached attitude; his "Brythonic soul" distrusts the levity of the Derwydd and he is "outraged by the idea of being more anxious to enjoy the spec-

tacle of titanic struggles than to enjoy the good in the universe and fight against the evil" (262). Brochvael has his own detachment: the narrator describes him as being "Skeptical and tolerant, believing in nothing, yet believing in everything" (268: an accurate account, perhaps of JCP himself).

The reader is confronted with the issue: can I in reading *Porius* be the detached spectator of the action or do I have to identify with "good characters over bad"? It is part of Powys's deepest philosophy that life can be fulfilled if we tell ourselves the right stories. But these stories could be tragic or historical or comic. Comedy is presented in *Porius* as a source of wisdom and truth, as a mode which can express Powys's most universal and comprehensive truth. Brochvael, who is the moral conscience for this attitude, is the character who is presented with this comic wisdom by Dion Dionides in the form of the eleven comedies of Aristophanes.

In choosing Greek comedy—with its Dionysian base, its celebration of peace over war and of women over men in *Lysistrata* and *Thesmophoriasuzae*—over Greek tragedy as a preferred generic model, Powys expanded the generic range of *Porius* and provided a unique union of theme and form. The novel celebrates the ability of comedy to detach itself, to enjoy spectacle and to celebrate life. Comedy is separate from cynicism—expressed through Neb's and Medrawd's deep pessimism against life. Comedy could not be part of the vision of Drom whose advocacy of a possessive and enslaving love makes it impossible for him to foster the will to enjoyment. It enables *Porius* to develop his suspicion of the tragic stoicism of his mother Euronwy and to suspect that "everything about her was false" (623). Comedy can somehow be the vehicle of the commonsense as well as pity that is needed to complement love, for "Love is certainly not enough" (572). Romance as well as tragedy is subordinate to comedy.

The motif of the comic/grotesque is specially apparent in the last sections of *Porius*—the sections which contain most of the missing material: the missing chapter, "The Little One," the expansion of the Teleri/Blodewedd theme and the closing chapters. Powys incorporates the poetry of Taliessin and the heretical theology of Pelagius in order to support his liberation of the reader from the sin sense and guilt sense. In Western Christian tradition guilt and sin are inextricably associated with sexuality and with the issues of fidelity and infidelity related to it. In Chapter 30, "The Home Rock," the narrator asks the reader to face *Porius*'s "adultery" with the Gawres, his dalliance and love-making with Nineue and his marriage to Morfydd. And he asserts that not even the natural wisdom of Myrddin Wyllt could capture the wisdom Brochvael is trying to extract from the



Aristophanic comedies: that the whole business of sex is *comical*, a savage joke, in some ways, but capable of transformation into a super-sexual happiness (pp. 753-54; this description of sex as comic is omitted from the abridged text).

This observation precedes the missing chapter 31, "The Little One," a mythological chapter drawing on esoteric aspects of Welsh legend and *The Mabinogion*. The mound of Y Bychan has been consistently a point of reference for the aboriginal Druid life of Britain. Bleiddyn is an obscure reference to readers who are not Celticists but the situation in which this child figure appears presents a bewildering concatenation of opposites in mythological form: images of Rome are opposed to aboriginal images, child images are ranged against images of age, life against death. Powys shows the reader a mystical movement of history which magically blends these oppositions into new unities, the spirit of Roman rule magically assimilated to aboriginal traditions. What I wish to emphasize, however, is *Porius's* immediate reaction to this revelation—a reaction by no means reverential: "But what at this odd moment chiefly affected *Porius* was a strong desire to burst out laughing" (778). *Porius* recognizes that he must *not* laugh, for to do so would bring bad luck. Nevertheless, the narrator describes the episode as an "absurd and ridiculous incident" (778). The serious is inextricably interwoven with this comic-grotesque perspective.

The concluding chapters emphasize the comic dimension with increasing consistency. The dominance of the mythological perspective in this concluding section of the novel seems to intensify the sounding of this comic tone. Myrddin's Wyllt's "creation" of the owl girl Blodeuwedd and the episode of Teleri's rape present mysterious, pathetic and outrageous situations. Yet Myrddin Wyllt's owl challenges the fanaticism of the Christian priest by forming an accompaniment which "aroused in some of the rougher and more impious among that mass of people an irresistible sense of the comic" (789) as the crowd joins in the tu-whit-to-whos of the owl: Morfydd even describes her struggles over Teleri's grave as "grotesque and comical." These references are also excluded from the abridged text.

The Henog of Dyfed defines life as an incomprehensibility—and therefore NOT a tragedy OR a mystery but "a lively, amusing, horrible, comical, pitiful, cruel *Incomprehensibility*." (818) Similarly, Powys's answer to the philosophy of Medrawd who allies himself with Death against Life is that his philosophy of dualism is too crude and not complex enough. (It is, however, interestingly close to the philosophy of *Wolf Solent* at the beginning of that novel.) *Porius's* final encounter with Nineue becomes for him a "little comic, like a

solemn, crazy, ritual dance on the summit of Eryri" (863). Perhaps the final paradox is that *Porius*, a historical romance of the Dark Ages, which seems to be a conservative anomaly in the mid-twentieth century, incorporates a carnivalesque perspective closer to the postmodern absurd of Beckett than the traditional modernist perspective. *Porius* points the way to the later fantasies as well as looking back to *A Glastonbury Romance*.



## The New *Porius*: Another Story?

Janina Nordius

At a crucial moment of inner re-orientation, the hero of John Cowper Powys's novel *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* reflects on his newly gained wisdom:

This new thing was naturally an old thing, or it wouldn't have had the strength to dominate his life-illusion; but it had taken to itself a completely new power and he saw it under a completely new light. (537)<sup>1</sup>

These lines, previously cut from the published *Porius*, may serve as an apt comment on one of the major themes in Powys's fiction: the need for the individual always to rediscover, reaffirm and recreate his personal life-illusion, a gesture which, to Powys, means the same as being alive. From Wolf Solent's awareness in the field of golden buttercups "that a change had taken place within him, a rearrangement, a readjustment of his ultimate vision, from which he could never again altogether recede," through Dud No-man's self-transgressive "return with a difference" in *Maiden Castle*, up to the celebration in *Porius* of the imagination and the human capacity to tell oneself stories in order to create a different future, this impulse to transcend the already given runs through Powys's novels.<sup>2</sup> But the focus on "re-

novation" is not only a theme in the novels; it is also a salient characteristic of Powys's own aesthetic project. Again and again he returns to the same vital concerns, but always with a difference, always with a new eye to old questions. Seen from this viewpoint, the "new" *Porius* provides an interesting reading experience—not only in the blatantly obvious sense that this is really the "old" and unabridged text as far as possible restored to Powys's original conception, but in the sense that in this restored edition, Powys's "renovative" project is even more highlighted.

The abridged *Porius* has generally been considered a "flawed masterpiece."<sup>3</sup> Roughly a third of the original text was cut in order to allow publication, with obvious drawbacks in terms of coherence and narrative momentum as a result. Such shortcomings were especially noticeable at the end, where several chapters were cut.<sup>4</sup> From this viewpoint, then, the novel gains greatly in readability with the appearance of the restored edition; but readability in terms of narrative coherence, however much we may appreciate it, is not alone a guarantee for the literary value of a novel. What distinguishes Powys as a writer is not in the first place his mere ability to chronicle relevant events but rather a talent he shares with the Henog of his novel, as he meets us in the new edition—that is, a talent for capturing and conveying "the overtones and undertones of the words with which" he sets out to "chronicle those events" (89). In his focus in *Porius* on the unknown and the unseen, on the magical and elusive aspects of life, Powys presents an alternative vision to "the dogmatic positivism" he saw as dominating the contemporary intellectual and cultural scene;<sup>5</sup> but in doing so, he also, as Michael Ballin has emphasized, actively takes issue with "the philosophical outlook which seemed to dominate negatively the mid-twentieth century."<sup>6</sup> Reading *Porius* in the 1990s, one cannot help but notice how Powys's attack on the "narrowing-down...of all the unknown things in the world" to a limited positivist view has many traits in common with the attacks made by later, postmodern writers on what our civilization has treated as fundamental thought-modes and established truths. This goes especially for the prevalent western tendency to think in binary opposites and totalitarian "either-ors," which receives a fair amount of criticism in the novel. Powys's staging of a fictional multiverse in *Porius* should be seen as a direct expression of his ambition to displace these "old" thought-modes in favor of what I would like to call a "pluralistic logic."

*Porius* foregrounds the idea of a pluralistic multiverse as a far more rewarding way of conceiving of the world than in terms of metaphysical dualism or totalitarian monism—both of which views,

then, are seen as limiting and reductive modes of thought. Although this critique is certainly not new in Powys's fiction, the persistence and eloquence with which it is presented in *Porius* far outdoes anything we find in previous novels. The evidence of this is even more abundant in the new edition. Brochvael's rejection, in previous editions, of the Manichaeian opposites of the Christian-Platonic world in favor of "an unfathomable multitude of creatures in an unfathomable multitude of worlds" (241) is now corroborated by the Henog's conviction "that life was an everlasting succession of many worlds and of innumerable creative and destructive gods and demigods" (817) as well as by *Porius*'s rejection of Medrawd's fanatic dualism:

I don't believe in your eternal opposites....Isn't it better to take for granted that there's a host of worlds and a host of gods and a host of consciousnesses and more universes than we can imagine; and get rid, once and for all, of the unnatural and confining notion, however, logical and rational it may be, that there's only one God and only one Opposite of God? (851-52)

In particular, the ever-operative urge to extend the limits of the already given is underlined by Powys's obvious anxiety to save the idea of the multiverse from being cemented into another totalitarian pattern. He seems to envisage a mode of thought even beyond pluralism as he lets "the black tide" suggest

that though it might be impossible for the human brain to imagine such things it was still within the bounds of possibility that the ultimate reality was neither One nor Many nor even a mysterious mingling of them both,...but was something completely and absolutely *different*. (807)

When a writer tries this hard to suggest as desirable a break with prevailing thought-patterns, there is of course always the risk of his falling back himself onto these thought-patterns, thus undermining his own project. Or, I would like to add, so it would seem to a reader used to look for self-consistency—in itself, of course, already a "totalitarian" expectation. This is, indeed, a dilemma that a contemporary reader, exposed to decades of postmodern debate, would always seem to come up against; as Linda Hutcheon puts it, "post-modernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as

undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge."<sup>7</sup> Thus, both totalitarianism and dualisms are clearly tricky concepts that forever would seem to reinstate themselves in our attempts to get rid of them. To reject dualism in favor of what is "not dualism" would, for instance, only mean the imposition of a new binary opposition of meta-dualism. However, although such logical subtleties may be a problem for the postmodern reader, they do not seem to have bothered Powys himself in any great degree. On the contrary, since his overall design, as we saw above, was to escape the *confining* aspects and consequences of ordinary rational logic (which does not necessarily imply throwing it out altogether), we should not be surprised at finding his pluralistic multiverse wide enough to house both blatant inconsistencies and attempts at relative consistency. The most impressive manifestation of such consistency is perhaps Powys's attempt to avoid superimposing a new meta-dualism onto his narrative, by refraining from passing narratorial judgment. Any "logical flaws" of this kind in the anti-dualism utterances quoted above must be ascribed to the characters giving expression to them; and however much we may suspect that the narrator sympathizes with these voices, he does not, as far as I can see, explicitly intrude to say so.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, technically if not rhetorically, these voices contend on equal terms with voices very much in favor of dualism and totalitarianism.<sup>9</sup> The superiority of the multiverse is driven home, not by explicit narratorial statement, but by the eloquence and convincingness of its proponents, possibly helped along by the general moral squalor of some of its adversaries (counting among themselves "baddies" like the fanatical priest Gorsant and the necrophiliac Medrawd).

Powys's attack on Christianity in *Porius*, which emerges in the passages quoted earlier, should thus above all be seen as an attack on prevalent coercive thought-modes and the values they are seen to boost. In particular, it is an attack on totalitarianism and totalitarian control over people's minds and actions—values that there was every reason to be wary of in Powys's mid-twentieth-century Europe. The fundamental dualism inherent in the notion of the fall and the resultant doctrine of original sin has been the means by which orthodox Christianity has exercised control over man's thoughts and feelings in the West—trying to curb his imagination by imposing upon him "the Guilt-sense and God-sense,...the Sin-sense and Shame-sense,...the Love-sense and Loss-sense" that Taliessin sings of in his poem (428). In the unabridged edition, not even the Christian love message escapes the charge of being totalitarian: "that false, old, stupid, Christian tag about 'love' being 'enough'" (705) is rejected by

*Porius* as only generating new binary opposites, precisely because it seems to admit no concomitant alternatives. "No, no, no! Love is certainly *not* enough! It needs pity and common sense and a lot more if its [sic] not to breed hate and jealousy and suspicion and loathing and murder!" (571-72) The persecution of dissidents and freethinkers by Gorsant the priest and his followers in *Porius* are represented as violent enough to justify such apprehensions.

However, this view of Christianity as totalitarian power-system is problematized in the novel by the notion of "heresy," introduced in connection with the teachings of Pelagius. It is here that Powys makes his most effective move to bypass the limitations of binary and totalitarian thinking. "Heresy," being as it were both inscribed within and excluded from the Christian sphere of belief, would seem to escape the either-ors of ordinary logic. The "heresy" of Pelagius, then, functions in the novel not only as a model of an alternative Christianity, but equally importantly as an alternative to the limited and potentially repressive thought-modes traditionally fostered by Christianity. That is to say, when we read, in the uncut *Porius*, of the "abysmal gulf between this British philosopher's view of the Christian Religion and the orthodox Roman one" (38), this gulf should not be taken exclusively to refer to the Pelagian belief in "the essential goodness of man's nature" (38) (a belief which necessarily undermines the validity of the doctrine of original sin), but more pertinently to the Pelagian view of imagination presented in the novel. What Pelagius above all emphasizes is our human potential for transcending already given frames of thought and thereby extending the limits of our realities—or, as it is poignantly phrased in the novel, the power of the human imagination "to tell itself other stories, and thus create a different future" (48).

It is as such "another story" that Christianity may possibly be reclaimed in the novel. Yet the central passage where this is demonstrated is also where a postmodern reader may find Powys's most explicit critique of western logocentrism; I shall therefore dwell for a moment on this critique before I return to the story of Christianity.<sup>10</sup> Thanks to the new edition, this passage has now been restored to the published *Porius*. It shows us *Porius*, standing by the river, thinking that

there was no hereditary curse descending upon him from Adam. He wasn't separated from God by any fatal Predestination. But if Pelagius were right about the natural goodness of man, didn't that cut away the very root of Christianity, leaving its sacraments float-

ing on the water of life like weeds without stalks? All his thoughts just then seemed to take shapes that were prompted by the flow of the water before him; and it occurred to him that it might be possible that Christianity could survive without any root in the river-bed if the stalks were long enough; or still more if the stalks produced floating roots of their own. (42)

If we pursue the line of thought that seems inherent in Porius's reasoning here, we must ask ourselves whether cutting away the *logos*, the foundational doctrine of the fall and original sin, is not an attack on more than the root of Christianity. Is it not also, implicitly, and by analogy, an attack on the absolute status of all the other "roots" or "ultimate principles" of our Judaeo-Platonic Western culture? Pelagius's launching of *another* story of man's nature challenges the absolute status of the doctrine of original sin, exposing it as just one of many possible stories that could be told. From this, the step to the postmodern exposure of "ultimate principles" like "truth," "meaning," "reason" et cetera as "grand narratives" that our civilization has told itself seems a very short one indeed.<sup>11</sup> Seen in this light Powys's foregrounding of the multiversal at the expense of the universal in *Porius* can be regarded as an obvious attempt to displace some of these "grand narratives" in favor of other stories.

It is not only in *Porius* that such displacements occur, of course; they have, in a sense, always been part of Powys's literary project. "Philosophy," "Reality," "the Self," "History," "Love"—all have become "other stories" in his work. But what distinguishes *Porius* from other works in this respect is the extraordinary self-awareness we find in the narrative. Just consider the following comment, made by Porius in one of the now-restored chapters:

since, as Brother John told me, according to Pelagius, there's *experimentation in values going on all the time*, [a person who wants to be wise must analyze and criticize, even while he obeys, the values he's received from the past." (690)

Not only does such a passage invite a meta-fictional reading; but it is to be noted how Powys steers clear of establishing his meta-comment as a new unquestionable "truth" by presenting it as a *story*, even a story told within *another* story.

Thus, to return to the story of Christianity begun above: it is precisely the recognition of the grand narrative of Christianity as a

man-made narrative, and not the God-given Truth, that enables Powys to reclaim the name of Christianity for another story. As emerges from the passage where Porius ponders on these questions, quoted above, this *other* story would be a Christianity "without any root in the river-bed" (42), but obviously vital and regenerative enough to produce its own "floating roots" in the tide of human generations—thereby, perhaps, also making its imprint upon the future. It is as such a free-floating Christianity that we should see the story Brochvail tells Sibylla about the forest-people, an old story which (its dualism apart) is made to appear here in a new light:

they alone of all the ancient races of the world, found out for themselves what Jesus taught later, namely that it is necessary to die in order to live; that to give is better than to take; and that in the long run the weak are mightier than the strong, and the good more powerful than the evil! (247)

I began this essay by referring to Powys's ever-present ambition to see the old in a new light. Replacing our "grand narratives" with other stories is part of that project, but Powys does not stop at that. Once having told another story, he often goes on to "analyze and criticize" his *own* stories. Also in this respect, *Porius* is quite remarkable; most of Powys's old favorite stories are seen (like Christianity above) to send forth runners and produce new shoots.

To mention only one such story: "reality," which occurs in a number of different versions. That reality is not one but many is a truism in Powys's pluralistic world, the notion of a uniform and objective public Reality having been long since replaced by the many-faceted and many-leveled realities, or "dreams within dreams" (852), to which each solitary individual has unique access. What "people call the objective world is really a most fluid, flexible, malleable thing," Powys writes in his *Autobiography*—"a different cosmos, to every man, woman, and child."<sup>12</sup> (As we saw above, in *Porius* Powys tries to surpass even this pluralistic view, by suggesting that "the ultimate reality" might be "neither One nor Many" but something completely different [807]). But even if the notion of a public Reality, equally valid and accessible to everyone, is written off as story—"an illusion created by those self-destructive negative moments of sinking into the social ant-heap when as lonely individuals we *cease to live*," as Powys writes in *In Defence of Sensuality*<sup>13</sup>—it is not without importance in the novels. It serves as an external antithesis to the interior worlds of the Powys heroes—as a background of personal

involvements and moral obligations, not seldom complicated by worries and distress—against which are set these characters' escapes into what they think of as their much more "real" worlds of imagination and solitary communion with the inanimate. (As should be obvious here, however much we may theoretically distrust the notion of an absolute Reality—public or not—we seem unable to do without it; words like "real," "in reality," "really" tend to reappear in our discourse when we need some ultimate standard of reference. Powys is no exception in this respect.)

This, then, is the story which Powys normally substitutes for the grand narrative of Reality, and we find it in *Porius* as well. The inner reality of the self is privileged (as being more "real") in *Porius*'s reflection whether his "real" life had not always been in the psychosensuous embrace of the inanimate he calls "cavoseniargizing" (409). In contrast, external and public Reality is recognized as an illusion, for instance when Brochvail, anticipating the intrusion of other people, has to put aside his reading: "I must stop enjoying myself,...and come back to the accursed unreality of reality!" (455)

But parallel to this "old" and basically dualistic story, there is also in *Porius* a blurring of the distinction between the outer and public on the one hand, and the inner and private on the other. In one of the previously cut passages, we learn how *Porius* experiences the sensation of having "allowed his inner nature to confuse itself with his outer nature." The "two dominant emotions of his life"—that is, the pleasure he derives from his relation with Morfydd, his human fiancée, and the thrill given him by his secret fancies of meeting one of the mythical giantesses and abducting her—"had lost their unwavering edges and clear outlines" (536-37). This "confusion" may be seen as emblematic of the whole ontological scene of *Porius*, where events we usually think of as belonging to external, public and historical Reality (such as *Porius*'s involvement with Morfydd), and experiences we normally ascribe to our inner worlds of imagination (as daydreams of mythical creatures) are made to coexist on the same level. *Porius* does carry off his giantess, as well as marry Morfydd; both events are represented as equally real, or equally magic. This new story of reality, then, conveyed through Powys's deliberate "combination between realism and magic,"<sup>14</sup> is what most distinguishes *Porius* from previous novels. It is what is largely responsible for the lack of drama that many readers have sensed in the novel—Cavaliero, for instance, finds it directly "anti-dramatic"<sup>15</sup>—since so much of the drama in Powys's earlier fiction depended on the tension between these ontological levels. The "usual" scenario centers, as we know, on the Powys heroes' attempts to protect their inner solitary

worlds of sensation and reverie from being swamped by the involvements and worries of outside daily reality.

The novel's (more or less consistently effectuated) "confusion" of the traditional dualism magic/realism, or, on the individual level, inner/outer reality, can of course be referred to its overall pluralistic design: in the multiverse of *Porius*, dualism is not allowed to rule uncontested. Were we to situate this new story in a chronological perspective in regards to Powys's fiction, however, we may perhaps find some "roots," however recent, in the shift of imaginative vision that was so manifest in *Dud No-man's* breakthrough at the end of *Maiden Castle*.<sup>16</sup> By sinking deeper into himself, No-man found a way of going beyond both the pressure of external day-to-day reality and his own subjective inner self, arriving at a "less personal"<sup>17</sup>—although still interior—sense of embracing not only the inanimate but all human life of past generations. The all-inclusiveness of this mental state would certainly seem to foreshadow the narrative consciousness of *Porius*; the world of *Porius* anticipates "Powys's final phase," writes Cavaliero, in that the "animate and inanimate alike form a part of a single overriding consciousness."<sup>18</sup> What I would like to focus on here, however, is the way in which *Dud-No-man* bypasses the dualism of inner/outer reality by going beyond them both. It seems to me that such a bypassing is implicit also in *Porius*'s "confusion" of his inner and his outer natures, and that *Porius*, like No-man, is shown to arrive at a new meta-level of awareness—or, if we stick to the "reality" theme we are pursuing—that he gets a glimpse of another level of reality. (Here lurks, of course, a new dualism). Consider the passage that follows the previously quoted lines. *Porius* makes it clear that his outer reality—his relation to Morfydd—and his inner, subjective reality—his dreams of the giantess—had not in any way "lost their separate identities or had mingled with each other" (537). In other words, co-existence need not entail merging.

It was rather that they had assumed different positions in relation to each other and had allowed something completely alien to each of them, an attitude to life and the elements in which human relations played little part, to move forward and establish itself ahead of them both. (537)

External and subjective realities alike are here relegated to a shared secondary status, both being eclipsed by a new meta-reality. Set thus at one remove from these two "old" realities, *Porius*'s new "attitude

to life and the elements" certainly seems to repeat No-man's story; but whether it also includes the "impersonal" embrace of all and everything which is incipient in No-man's communion with the past, and of which Myrddin Wyllt and the narrative consciousness of *Porius* are such marked exponents, we are not told.

Finally, it should be mentioned that Powys tells yet another story of "reality" in *Porius*—one that seems quite deliberately to reinstate the notion of an absolute and incontestable Reality that so much of Powys's writings has set out to question. This bedrock reality tends to appear, however, in one particular context in *Porius*—that of death. Contemplating, early on in the novel, a memory of "the bloody and mangled head of an ox he had once seen in a butcher's shop," *Porius* feels "as though he saw everything in the world exactly as it was; yes, in all its unendurable reality" (52). Although at this stage *Porius* tries to dismiss the idea as "madness"—consoling himself with the thought that in every moment everything alive works to "recreate life and change this transitory reality!" (52)—it reappears later in the novel, but now incorporating also the notion of life. Visualizing to his inner eye the dead bodies of his giantess-lover and her father, as well as the face of a baby whose birth he has just witnessed, *Porius* feels "that if he could only plunge his soul into some mysterious under-world of *real reality* out of which those four open eyes had emerged from a spume of blood, and those two closed eyes had emerged from the torn and bleeding center of a woman's body, he would find that the secret of life included within its immeasurable orbit the secret of death" (576).

To delve into the different stories of death offered in *Porius* would lead too far here. Suffice it to say that if we limit our perspective to the solitary individual, death is the definite end of storytelling, erasing even the most basic of human stories, that of our "I am I." As I said at the beginning of this essay, being alive is, to Powys, the same as always retelling the story of self, always recreating our life-illusion. The inexorability with which this autocreative process goes on in our minds is superbly illustrated in one of the restored chapters in the new *Porius*. "What is this thing I call my life-illusion?" *Porius* thinks. "Aren't I still myself when it's [sic] utterly destroyed as it is now? Oh, but I'm deceiving myself! The second it's destroyed it starts growing again—only on different ground" (690). It is when *Porius* makes a futile attempt to "kill" his life-illusion so "that it *can't* start growing again" that it shows its tenacity.

But what exactly is it I've got to kill? That's the question....Its [sic] a sort of diffused conceit of yourself;

that's what it is; a sort of feeling that to be what *you* are and to feel as *you* feel, makes you a person in some peculiar way superior to the people you meet. In reality of course it only makes you *different*. (690)

Killing the story of being "superior," all *Porius* manages to do is to replace it with another story—that of being "different."

In a letter written in December 1950, Powys motivates some of his cuts by claiming that they were not "essential to the development of the story"—evidently referring to the capital-S Story of action and events.<sup>19</sup> Although this opinion may indeed be disputed *per se*, such considerations were obviously necessary with a view to publication. What had to go, then, were other stories, and even if all of them were not so essential to the actual plot, they will nevertheless, when now restored, give us a wider understanding of the imaginative vision that structures the novel. By accentuating and shedding new light on so many of Powys's most cherished subjects, the restored *Porius* marks a positive and welcome departure from the abridged one—a certainly recognizable but nonetheless, in these aspects, different story.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages*, "A New Edition," ed. Wilbur T. Albrecht (colgate University Press, 1994). All references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Wolf Solent* (1929; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964); *Maiden Castle* (1936; Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1990), p. 474.

<sup>3</sup>Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup>The restored edition contains the following four chapters that did not appear in the abridged one: 22, "The Marriage Tent," 26, "Off and Away Can Afford to Stay," 28, "Burial and Sleep," 31, "The Little One."

<sup>5</sup>Letter from Powys to Norman Denny, 7 December 1949, quoted by Michael Ballin in "'A Certain Combination of Realism and Magic': Notes on the Publishing History of *Porius*," *Powys Notes* (Fall and Winter 1992), p. 17.

<sup>6</sup>Ballin, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, New Accents (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. C. A. Coates claiming in *John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 139, that Powys offers different opinions with "non-dogmatic humour" and without being "committed to any of them."

<sup>9</sup>Apart from *Porius*'s exchange with Medrawd from which I quoted above,



see also Rhun's cult of the Persian god Mithras, with its inherent dualism between good and evil (35), and the "totalitarian" view of the Jewish doctor which is explicitly contrasted to the "pluralistic" view of the Henog. (809)

<sup>10</sup>Cf. a standard definition of logocentrism such as the one given in Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990): "the term used by Jacques Derrida and [others]...to designate the desire for a centre or original guarantee of all meanings, which in Derrida's view has characterized Western philosophy since Plato. The Greek word *logos* can just mean 'word', but in philosophy it often denotes an ultimate principle of truth or reason, while in Christian theology it refers to the Word of God as the origin and foundation of all things...."

<sup>11</sup>The term "grand narrative" was used by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), reprinted in Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, eds., *A Postmodern Reader* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 72.

<sup>12</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (1934: London: Pan/Picador, 1982), p. 62.

<sup>13</sup>John Cowper Powys, *In Defence of Sensuality* (London: Gollancz, 1930), p. 158.

<sup>14</sup>Letter from Powys to Norman Denny, 6 September 1949, quoted by Ballin, p. 23. Cf. Ballin's discussion of the co-existence of magic and realism.

<sup>15</sup>Cavaliero, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. my article "Life at One Remove: Solitude in *Maiden Castle*," forthcoming in *The Powys Journal* 5 (1995).

<sup>17</sup>Powys, *Maiden Castle*, p. 185.

<sup>18</sup>Cavaliero, p. 120.

<sup>19</sup>Letter of 29 December 1950 from Powys to Malcolm Elwin, quoted by Wilbur T. Albrecht in his Foreword to the restored *Porius* (xi).



## Porius and Exteriority

H. F. Fawkner

For those of us who understand John Cowper Powys as a mystic writer, indeed as one of the great mystic writers of all times,

the occasion of confronting *Porius* in its new *outré* entirety is an event that asks us to understand its author as someone other than a major mystic writer. *Porius* is exterior to the major mystic writing of John Cowper, and the fact that he incessantly toys with "mysticism" in *Porius* does not reduce that exteriority. In point of fact it is precisely the abstract manipulation of "the mystical" in *Porius* that finalizes an impression that *Porius* is not a mystic work. In *Porius* the great mystic writer John Cowper Powys is asleep, but this sleep, unlike Shakespeare's colossal terminal somnambulism, does not take you anywhere—least of all to Wales, least of all to the year 499, least of all to any locus in time and space, least of all to the mystical. Powys is asleep in *Porius*, because the *phenomenological world* of the mystical is asleep there—because the mystical by now is conveniently exorcised into a historico-mythic theatricality of narrative that is exquisitely disenchanted. *Porius* and his brethren are no more occult than the harmless beings who make judgments and conversation in *Sense and Sensibility* or *Alice in Wonderland*.

In *Porius*, no Chateaubriand, Goethe, Stendhal, Strindberg or Rimbaud of the latter-day world is going to find the methodical regard of mystical alertness. Truth is not of the order formerly recognized in *A Glastonbury Romance* or in the latter portion of *Owen Glendower*. Excitement now, like ecstasy and imagination, has become a cognitive, purely discursive and narratological event. Astonishment (in the Heideggerian sense) is senile, and remembers its former urgency only as an ideal shadow-urgency, as little more than the *possibility* of narrative. *Porius* does not say to itself: "this is narrative" but "this is what narrative is like." The mystical has become narrato-mystical, discurso-mystical. The mystic event is framed by its hypotheticality and is eidetically exhibited in the way that all other "possible units" of a "possible narrative" are methodically regarded. The mystical now is in the hands of fantasy rather than imagination. Its "history" adumbrates an "enthusiastic" nostalgia that closes off the imagination as well as the past, leaving us not with a nostalgic landscape but with nostalgia's landscape: "He wanted also to remember that he had the blood of the aboriginal giants in his veins as well as of the forest-people! He uttered a kind of wordless appeal to the spirit Creiddylad, the mother of Iddawc the Apostate. The fear that troubled him most as he groped his way downward towards the river was the fear lest his human soul should suddenly lose its separate existence and merge itself into the souls of these agitated birds and beasts who were evidently yielding to some strange and unusual excitement" (55).<sup>1</sup> The reader who is "stirred" by lines such as these is not the reader who has been moved by A



*Glastonbury Romance* to recognize in John Cowper one of the great mystic minds of Western literature. Such lines stir the sensibility of a reader who long ago has come to the decision that anything published in the author's name bears the imprint of his genius—a type of decision that, far from contributing to the growth of the writer's reputation, wrecks that growth and dismantles that reputation.

The alphabetic and syllabic redundancy created by the superfluity of Welsh words in the text does not merely suggest an effete, folkloristic atmospherism, but also the abstract fantasy-oriented construction of the mystical landscape as Euclidean, representational space, the kind of Cartesian space that Swift so meticulously fabulated in and for *Gulliver's Travels*—a space where double consonants and unpronounceable names designate not only a hypermechanical achievement of empty otherness but no doubt also a constructivist procreation that calls attention to a self-fictionalizing lack of inspiration “inspiring” the author to ever more digressive and demystifying remystifications of authorial presence. Alice is no longer in Wonderland. She is in Wales.

Like Carroll's work, in this way, *Porius* exceeds metafictional possibilities by a leap of unfaith. Powys does not bring himself to the Ultima Thule of an authorial self-dismantling but to a hyperconstructivist mock-pathos, mock-empathy, and mock-inventiveness that make irony look romantic and unfeasible. *Porius* tours history and Wales as the novelist now tours the possibility of fiction rather than fiction. *Porius* is only retrospectively present in his landscape and his times—and this retrospection (octogenarian and manipulospatial) somehow always needs to start anew in each paragraph, each sentence, each image, each unit of contrived fantasy. The author has to convince himself that he cannot write, and he only achieves this goal by writing. We feel that *Porius* (indeed the written word as such) is about to start from scratch at any moment, everywhere. In fact it does. Here is a writer looking for a style. Each sentence tends to run prematurely out of steam, changing its course so erratically that it is a great wonder that certain sentences at all come to an end. The same can be said of the “episodes” of fantasy, of the “events” of history, and of the pseudo-occult “significations” of myth. Anything goes, anything is possible. *Porius* is a “romance” that fictionalizes this “anything.” Any itinerary of the work is implicitly the equal of any other possible itinerary—thus debarring the work from a primary source of imaginative truth: the impression of necessity. *Porius* is marooned in a rampant randomness that is unable to rise to the aesthetic level of *anarchè* and metaphysical disorganization. *Porius* is too scattered to be called “disorganized.”

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The ideal reader of *Porius* is a being who is disembodied. This disembodied being (himself octogenarian) can “understand” the work's exteriority (its constructional self-abstraction, its lack of imaginative truth) by comprehending the literary event of *Porius* as an occasion that is exterior to literature and eventfulness. “Again he became conscious of the stink-horn-fungus smell, and of the ice-cold shudder that seemed to come from outside time and space” (64). Indifferent to literature and to the work (as well as to the mystical incisiveness of a writer once calling himself John Cowper Powys), we nod and solemnly try to “fantasize” this “outside” of space and time that is meant to thrill us.

“I must keep my head,” he told himself, and he began to wonder whether Rhun really worshipped that god of time with the head of a lion and with a serpent twisted round its body. “Blood of Creiddylad!” he suddenly thought, “I would only have to hold him a little tighter—” Why was it that the idea of squeezing the emperor's adviser to death—as if the Serpent of Time were to murder Time—gave him such a throb of peculiar shame? Was it because he knew it would please Minnawc Gorsant? (64)

One is tempted to suggest that the pathos of this typical passage is as minimal here as it is in a typical passage in *Gulliver's Travels*.

Another day Glumdalclitch left me on a smooth grass-plot to divert myself while she walked at some distance with her governess. In the meantime there suddenly fell such a violent show of hail, that I was immediately struck by the force of it to the ground: and when I was down, the hailstones gave me such cruel bangs all over the body, as if I had been pelted with tennis-balls; however I made a shift to creep on all four, and shelter myself by lying flat on my face on the lee-side of a border of lemon-thyme, but so bruised from head to foot that I could not go abroad in ten days. (155)<sup>2</sup>

Readers sensitive to the peculiarly contrived nature of literary inven-

tion in *Porius* will recognize that, with a little bit of editing, this passage from *Gulliver's Travels* could easily be fitted into the "structure" of the narrative of *Porius*. The "adventures" that befall Gulliver and *Porius* have nothing *directly* to do with the life-urgency of the author's existential demon: with any ongoing life-contradiction that is tearing him apart, or lifting him above himself, or plunging him into the immediacy of a proximate abyss. The narrator of *Porius* is as safe as the narrator of *Gulliver's Travels*. The narrator can take *Porius* *anywhere*—and remain perfectly and literally unmoved. But no such thing can be said of the narrator of *A Glastonbury Romance*, of *Weymouth Sands*, of *Wolf Solent*, or even of *Maiden Castle*. At the time of invention, the mystical career of the author of *Porius* is over in the way that the political career of the author of *Gulliver's Travels* is over. Nothing Gulliver does or can do is ever going to affect the political life of Jonathan Swift; and in the same way nothing *Porius* does or does not do has the slightest influence on or significance for the mystical life of John Cowper Powys. This mystical body already lies in the sarcophagus of time—in that temporal enclosure where the to-and-fro of the mystico-political is airy and theoretic. In *Porius*, Powys is "eternal" vis-à-vis the political.

Eternity is in Powys no gateway—as in so many other writers—to the space of imaginative art, but the solidification of that liminal, hypercreative possibility into the quasi-empiricist, low-brow concreteness of fantasy-pragmatism. The pragmatic fantasy-drive is an impetus that negotiates the *business* of fantasy—just in the way that an infinitely senile and bed-ridden individual negotiates the routines of daily life as the *business* of *getting-up*, the *business* of alleviating the bodily needs, the *business* of getting back into bed, and the *business* of signalling to the world that, remotely, one is somehow still alive.

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The life-spirit fueling the nervous phenomenological residuum of each transcendent positum of *Weymouth Sands* is not a merely inventive ego-mind going about the business of constructing the psycho-mystico-mythic. Nor is the demonic author adumbrated by the narratological momentum of *A Glastonbury Romance* some socio-mythological dilettante roused to existential and cosmological commentary. The Grail is a matter of life and death there (of "is" and "is not," the gods and the absence of the gods), just as the *object* is a matter of life and death in *Weymouth Sands* (grain of sand, block of stone, aquamarine talisman). Woman is a goddess in *Wolf Solent* because she

is close to the space in which allness swoons into the orbit and singular point of the pure detail (look, garment, button, shell, cloud, flower, word, leaf, comb, slate, feather). In *Porius* all of this has given way to "eternity," to that posterior world which is not exactly an afterworld but rather a business world of all things and meanings that have come to supersede each other in order to create a retrospective thematization of the world as a place where things "happen" and where the work "invents" itself. This world is an antithesis, but an antithesis of nothing we could know or want to know.

One way of understanding the peculiarly undemonic nature of the "mystical" in *Porius* is given to us by the idea of the now. For *Porius* strictly speaking lacks the now. *Porius* is in this way a somewhat process-oriented work, a romance in which "time" plays such an enormous role that it plays no role at all. *Porius* achieves the odd and becalming status of that which is immobilized and immobilizes. The "temporality" in *Porius* is uncannily non-temporal, but never translates itself into the spatial (ecstasy), since the narrative concerns are foregrounded to the exclusion of temporal or spatial imagination. Nothing occurs in space in *Porius*, and precisely for that reason nothing powerfully happens in time. Time (as process, structure, and narrative) erases space to the point where space is no longer imagined but merely represented. The "gestures" of the mystic mind, superficially masquerading as repetitions of their forerunners in previous romances, are no longer mystical but gestural:

But before he could carry this problem any further the whole situation—with himself in the centre embracing the prophet—drew in and back and out and away. But though it drew away it became ten times more vivid, ten times more distinct. His own consciousness—the identity of *Porius* ab Einion—seemed quietly and contentedly to approach so near to splitting itself into a multiple consciousness that it seemed to rock up and down in happy ease like a huge sea-squid floating on a smooth invisible ocean. There was nothing mystical, far less spiritual, in what he experienced as he thus came near to this squid-consciousness. "I mustn't squeeze the life out of him," he said to himself, "while I drain his thoughts." (64-65)

The reader who works up literary interest over the pseudo-issue of whether "the emperor's adviser" is or is not going to be squeezed out of existence must be a peculiarly undemanding being. This reader

(the work's ideal recipient) materializes, *as a reader*, on a level of reading that is ontologically transgressed by John Cowper's major romances. I am not, as a reader of *Porius*, the being who reads the following in *A Glastonbury Romance*:

*Is it a Tench?* Is there a fish of healing, one chance against all chances, at the bottom of the world-tank? *Is it a Tench?* Is cruelty always triumphant, or is there a hope beyond hope, a Something somewhere hid perhaps in the twisted heart of the cruel First Cause itself and able to break in *from outside* and smash to atoms this torturing chain of Cause and Effect?

The crystal goblet with the two curved handles was quite close to him now. (940)<sup>3</sup>

This juxtaposition of quotations suggests a significant discrepancy between the outrageousness of exteriority in the powerful works of John Cowper and the outrageousness of exteriority in the non-powerful works of John Cowper. The sighting of the nature of this discrepancy has a bearing on the issue of taste. Sooner or later the critic must bring the different works of Powys under the lamp of aesthetic judgment, and in the case of this writer no such adequate judgment is possible without a consideration of the role played in writing by outrageous exteriority. Exteriority in *Weymouth Sands* is the sea. Exteriority in *A Glastonbury Romance* is the Grail. Exteriority in *Wolf Solent* is suffering. Exteriority in *Owen Glendower* is destiny. Exteriority in *The Brazen Head* is magic. And exteriority in *Porius* is time.

Now exteriority, if it is not negotiated by powerful interiority or rounded inwardness, becomes abstract, theoretic, and masculine. This is precisely what happens in Powys's notoriously inane early poetry and early fiction; and it is also what happens in *Porius*. I have suggested elsewhere that woman plays a crucial role in the career of John Cowper as the being who saves the writer from his overly abstract, overly theoretic, overly masculine, and overly exteriorizing imagination. In fact, the word "imagination" is inappropriate here, since John Cowper *does not possess* a fully operative imagination until woman arrives on the scene in order to harness—or indeed metamorphose—his abstract reveries and fantasies into the order of imaginative truth. Lots of things are "imagined" in *Porius* (as in the early writings)—indeed too many things are "imagined," but inward-rounding and inward-metamorphosing femininity no longer

has that special hold over fantasy which is the sine qua non of major imaginative performance. *Porius* is emphatically not a work that materializes on the level of *War and Peace*, *Moby Dick*, *David Copperfield*, or *The Rainbow*, but a work that materializes on the level of mythological abstraction. No benevolent reading of the text's "magic structure" alters this obvious fact.

Since the days of Immanuel Kant, the event of judging the merits of a literary work has been liberated from the faculty of reason and been given to the faculty of judgment—a faculty that is "free" to the extent that it is free from rules, but not at all in the sense that it is arbitrary, up to the individual subjectivity of the human whim. Standards of taste and judgment, then, are worked out by the community of scholars and readers—a community that negotiates the appropriate levels of merit by comparing notes and by testing criteria of judgments against each other. (Such a community is not to be confused with the club of "admirers" who back up each and every word the writer has put on paper, in the manner that the fans of Manchester United cheer each and every kick taken by each and every member of the team at each and every soccer event.) The present contribution to such a collective testing is in the case of John Cowper the criterion of the degree of success with which the writer negotiates the exteriority-and-interiority fluctuation *as* an originary source of imaginative and aesthetic truth.

It is clear even to the most superficially educated observer that only a few fictional works by John Cowper are completely free of aesthetically ugly exteriority. The only two one can easily come to think of as aesthetically perfect works are *Wolf Solent* and *Weymouth Sands*. At the same time, certain mature commentators will acknowledge the rather obvious fact that *A Glastonbury Romance*, albeit troubled by numerous ugly paragraphs and unself-critically overblown narratorial intrusions, is in a significant sense in toto a *greater* work of fiction than more aesthetically satisfying works like *Wolf Solent* or *Weymouth Sands*. Thus abstract exteriority (the inclusion of an event or unit that is exterior to the organic) is not per se something that excludes writing from greatness. (The postmodernist era has made this fact perfectly clear.) We can *forgive* certain aesthetic trespasses for the simple reason that the narrator *makes up* for these trespasses by furnishing us with some of the most powerful instantiations of imaginative power and fictional truth in world literature. (The "baggy monsters" of Powys are in this respect equivalents of the "baggy monsters" of Charles Dickens' *Porius* is no such "baggy monster"; it is baggy, but it does not reach the monster-potency of the sublime.) In the case of the *great* work of genius, such compensations do not

neutralize the "errors" of the work in the way that certain profits counterbalance certain debts in a bank account. If the true parts of the work are to save the bad parts of the work, the true parts of the work must all by themselves draw the whole bagginess of the work into the sublime light of creative truth and imaginative *phobos*.

In *A Glastonbury Romance*, the Grail, as a mystical but also æsthetic mineral, is precisely the locus of such a coming-together of imaginative *truths* into imaginative *truth*. By contrast, *Porius* is the work of a docile, self-forgiving being who is too tired and too appeased to leap. *Porius* is built with the imagination, not imagined. Its rampant moments of random exteriority, however imaginatively poignant they may want to be, never present themselves to a visionary eye that makes its sightings at the outer limit of what is possible in literature and art. *Porius* is a leisurely work. It is not the work of a man who is *becoming* the literary genius he has so far never been. In a suggestive sense *Porius* is not a work at all. The publication of the "entire" *Porius*, rather than effacing this impression, strengthens it into certainty.

We can read an utterly inane pronouncement in *A Glastonbury Romance* ("The crucial thing for Western humanity at this moment was to concentrate a magnetic flood of desperate faith upon this magic casement, now pushed a little open," 1073) without feeling that the truth-fabric of the novel is compounded of such pronouncements—for all things and beings (including the reader) are in this work drawn together into an encompassing æsthetic and imaginative cataclysm: "Revelation had been made in Glastonbury" (ibid.). There is revelation in *A Glastonbury Romance*, in *Wolf Solent*, in *Weymouth Sands*. Glastonbury has been revealed. Wolf has been revealed. Wet and dry sands have been revealed. But the works sporting these revelations themselves too are revealed by themselves. *A Glastonbury Romance* reveals *A Glastonbury Romance*. *Wolf Solent* reveals *Wolf Solent*. And *Weymouth Sands* reveals *Weymouth Sands*. But what does *Porius* reveal? The "entire" *Porius*? The previous or the present edition? The small or the big *Porius*? Many readers will find that such questions are largely academic in the case of *Porius*.

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The fact that exteriority in *Porius* is not the Grail or suffering or the sea but *time* is a fact that should cause some alarm at the very outset. For if time itself is exterior to a thing—what is this thing itself? This question brings us back to the issue of the eternal and the suprasensory. There is something adolescently eternal about John Cowper's early writings, just as there is something pseudo-mytho-

logically eternal about the writings effectuated during his second childhood (*Porius*, *Atlantis*, etc.). Atlantis (a fantasy-land emergent also in *Porius*) is eternity transformed into space. It is a territory, like the eternal as such, that originates for us very much in the thought of Plato.

Plato is important for Powys, but as in the case of Nietzsche, Powys's power grows primarily out of a negation, overturning, or unconstruction of the Platonic. Thus the poignant presence of Platonists in *Weymouth Sands* and *Maiden Castle* is embedded in an æsthetic outlook that has transfigured the Platonic into the Cowperesque—a transformation that is at the heart of John Cowper's artistic and intellectual competence. In all such Cowperesque transformations of the Platonic, woman plays a crucial part by being the being who triggers and negotiates it. Woman is by nature the negation of Plato for the simple reason that she is not Plato. She does not belong to the order of man. Nor does writing. Nor does the imagination. Nor does the mystical. Nor does the Grail. Nor does time.

It may be suggested that in *Porius* the transformation of the Platonic (of eternity) has lost its hold over the writer, or at least over writing, so that now, as in the self-hating *Autobiography*, we are no longer in the company of either woman or time, but only in the company of the terminated exteriorizings of these (Plato). The author of *Porius* is Plato. That *this* author (*this* John Cowper) is hailed as the maestro by classic commentators is devastatingly logical and devastatingly predictable.

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The exteriorizing of time is fatal not only in *Porius* but for *Porius*. It results, on the aesthetic level, in the creation of a historicism that is felt to be emergent from the self-immobilized wheel-chair of the narrator's antiquarian complacency rather than from the viewpoint of time itself. The narrator moves clumsily through "history," poking his walking-stick of attention into this or that item of mytho-historic "interest," as he awkwardly shuffles forward in the direction of the arrow of time. Here time is no longer conceived in the historicist, modern way (the one inaugurated by Hegel) but in the way of the ancients (time as chronicle). The *fact* that John Cowper is not one of the ancients creates a pervasive strain in style and word-streaming. Since it is precisely the lack of such a strain—indeed the momentum of its fluent opposite—that is the hall-mark of John Cowper's major works, a crucial sense of urgency is altogether lost in *Porius*. This sense of urgency (misunderstood by superficial criticism

as "enthusiasm") creates a sensation of win-or-lose, all-or-nothing, life-and-death in the major romances. They contain an intensity reflecting our intuition of language and imagination as things that hang in the balance—precariouly turning this or that word, this or that paragraph, either toward Hell or toward Heaven. Read with adequate empathy, *A Glastonbury Romance* is a work of trepidation, a phobic artifact resembling a moment in which a Creator is or is not about to accomplish the betokening icon of an absolutely supreme gesture. *Porius* lacks that trepidation—so that its basic attitude to history is therapeutic rather than cosmological, pathological rather than existential, fabulatory rather than investigatory. *Porius* is not a matter of life and death. Nor is it a matter of time and eternity. We are outside time. We look at time from the clouds.

What we have been considering now is ultimately related to the issue of strength. In *Porius* John Cowper is no longer strong, and his narrator is no longer a being irradiating the violence of a competent defiance. The work wants to be strong, but in almost every line of the work the discursive results of the narrator's efforts are at odds with these efforts—causing (on the stylistic level) a faint hemorrhage that encourages writing to perpetually rupture the momentum of a sentence or an image, in the vain hope of finding some more poignant angle of vision or some more effective contemplative directness. On the psycho-ontological level, usually the heartland of the Powys romance, this backward-looping tentativeness produces the disconcertingly persistent sensation that what is immanent in the work's momentum is the writer's secret lack of spiritual commitment to it. As a result, the typical world-difficulty of the Powys hero's esoteric gestures are in *Porius* downgraded to the lower-order level of effete trivia, performed at random anyhow and anywhere. What John Crow or Sylvanus Cobbold would do, perform, and allow only at elect moments of metaphysical crisis, all minutely crafted in psychological time-space by the narrator, are things that *Porius* and his "historical" companions do, perform, and allow at any random moment, in any random place, and in any random way. Because of this evident slackness in the imaginative focus of the work's narratological crafting, occult passages in *Porius* are more often than not inadvertent parodies of their counterparts in the major romances they are no more mystical (and no more interesting) than an electricity bill.

What proved to him that there was no sorcery about it was the fact that all the time he was feeling it he was perfectly aware of a wafture of ground-ivy fragrance from under his feet and a lingering whiff of

delicious pungency from some bed of water-mint on which he must have trodden as they came up from the river. The impressions of multiplicity for which he became the medium at this moment were as far-flung and telescopic as they were concentrated and microscopic. He grew aware of vast continents and countries and cities. He was conscious of the unrolling of world-shaking events; of famines and plagues, of battles and migrations, of the births and deaths of whole civilizations; but he also became aware of millions of infinitesimal insect lives. It seemed to him as he kept resisting the giant in his blood which would fain have tightened his powerful hold, that he shared the recession backward of the bones under his grasp into those animal-worlds and vegetation-worlds from which they had, it seemed only yesterday, emerged. And by degrees the figure he was holding grew less self-contained, less buttressed-in upon himself, and the man's very identity seemed slipping back into the elements. (65)

This is all very well. It might have been a passage we had extracted from a more powerful fictional work of Powys's. The problem, however, is that this passage has no *world* in which to make an appearance. John Cowper has lost that world, much the way that Wordsworth lost his. The passage quoted above is abstract, positionally exchangeable with any other part of the generalized bric-à-brac of the "text." It can be moved virtually anywhere. Put it in chapter sixteen if you like.

The orchestration of reality into what may be aesthetically conceived as a *world* (what Wolf Solent calls a mythology) does not take place in *Porius*. *Porius* does not successfully imagine a world, and its busy construction of mythological material, rather than betokening the inhering of mythology in the work, betokens the absence of that inhering. In *Porius* mythological truth constantly has to *labor* for the advent of what (supposedly) is a mythology.

John Cowper Powys does not belong to the category of writers who progressively work in old age toward the summit of their powers. It is unprofessional (and indeed unjust) to understand the last works of Powys in the way we understand Shakespeare's *Tempest*, Rousseau's *Rêveries*, or any other last-work-of-the-genius. Powys does not belong to the category of writers who rise to ever greater heights. He belongs to a much larger group of writers, the

ones who have a rise, a middle, and a fall. *Porius* is a work betokening the fall of Powys's genius. Such a statement involves a preunderstanding of the specific nature of the writer's genius. *Porius* is exterior to John Cowper Powys's specific nature not because of *Porius* but because of specific nature. Ultimately, the exteriority of a writer to his own specific nature is a result of genius. In Shakespeare such exteriorization can sometimes be viewed as aesthetically successful. That we are unable to say the same of John Cowper Powys will not trouble the minds of those who love him unconditionally.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* (Hamilton, N.Y.: Colgate University Press, 1994). All references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup>Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 155.

<sup>3</sup>John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance* (London: Picador, 1975).



## On the New *Porius*

Charles Lock

The good news is that *Porius* has been transformed, from a remarkable historical novel into one of the supreme works of twentieth-century literature. The less good news is that, just as a mere handful of critics appreciated the merits of the shortened *Porius* in 1951, so today's critics are no more likely to estimate justly the even larger claims of the full version.

*Porius* when written was deemed too long and eccentric by the publisher's reader, Norman Denny of the Bodley Head, and when published, was still considered too long by most of the critics and reviewers, for whom the mid-twentieth-century novel ought to be a slim and quiet affair. (Norman Denny was himself a distinguished translator of French novels, including *Les Misérables*: Denny thought that his duties as the translator of such a long novel must

include its abridgment, as Richard Maxwell tells us in *Powys Notes* 7:2, p. 38. Denny was clearly much happier translating the works of Marcel Aymé.) Fifty years later, the long novel has enjoyed a revival, to a somewhat greater extent in America than in Britain: Pynchon and Gaddis in particular are novelists who have shown what the long novel can do, by making length itself a thematic function of the narrative. Time is of the essence of the long novel, for the reader's negotiation with the turning of pages becomes part of the theme (entropy, waiting for the end, apocalypse as unconcealment and deciphering) just as, for Proust and Joyce, the novel's writing had determined the shape of the author's life.

Some statistics: the old *Porius* was published in just under 300,000 words: the new *Porius*, roughly as written, contains 440,000 words. By comparison, Dostoevsky's longest novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, has about 360,000 words, *Owen Glendower* 400,000, *A Glastonbury Romance* is 450,000, and *War and Peace* around 650,000. By my rough calculations, then, *Porius* has now become the second longest of Powys's novels, only slightly shorter than *A Glastonbury Romance*. This sort of lexical quantification may hardly be a valid critical instrument. But it is of more than statistical interest. It is a mistake to regard Powys as an exceptionally copious writer; other writers have published more words, in more books. But unlike Trollope or Dickens or Balzac, Powys does not have the measure of the book. This is, for most critics, his debilitating structural weakness, one which he shares with hardly anybody else, except perhaps Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy.

The novel has no measure; as a literary genre (unlike the play, usually in five acts, or the sonnet, usually in fourteen lines, or the epic in twelve or twenty-four books) the novel is unique in specifying no fixed or conventional number of books, divisions, chapters or pages. Yet the unlimited sprawl of the novel must be subject to some constraints and, if they are not to be aesthetic, then they are likely to be economic. Publishers determine the parameters of the novels they accept. If we compare Powys to the contemporary he so much admired, Dorothy M. Richardson, we will appreciate the latter's wisdom and sense of proportion. *Pilgrimage* may strike us as a *roman fleuve*, a novel which runs in a constant stream over some 3,500 pages. But Richardson knew about economic measure, and offered the work to the publisher in twelve independent volumes. Indeed we might say, with references to the sequences of Romain Rolland, Anthony Powell and Henry Williamson, that the long novel has submitted itself to the twelve-book convention of epic.

Tolstoy, no two of whose novels are of the same size, is the



closest analogy that we may adduce for Powys. And it is worth recalling Tolstoy's attempt at a definition.

What is *War and Peace*? it is not a novel, still less a poem, still less a historical chronicle. *War and Peace* is what the author wished to express and was able to express in that form in which it is expressed.

Powys did not make that sort of remark, even in his correspondence. He lacked, obviously, the vast stature with which Tolstoy's *faux-naïveté* sits so comfortably. We might suppose that Powys wrote his great books, often titled or subtitled "Romance," without even thinking of them as novels, and with little consideration of the novel as a genre, with its specifically generic traditions and conventions. There is however a letter, of 16 February 1949, in which Powys admits that *Porius* is "more 'conscious' as you might put it, of being written after Dostoevski..."<sup>1</sup> That is a remarkable phrase: the novel, not its author, is "conscious" as someone, but not the author, might put it. Powys therefore claims to be unconscious of what others might be conscious of: that his novel is conscious of being written after Dostoevsky.

According to Bakhtin, the novel is the one genre that is free, that is not to be defined or identified by any generic, formal or stylistic conditions; and the genre finds its greatest manifestations in those writers for whom the novel is nothing but permission. On the other side of this debate is Henry James, who was pleased to label the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky "loose baggy monsters." One could not honour *Porius* more than by pouring its words into the great golden bowl—or cauldron of Ceridwen—in which swirl those worlds of words disdained by James as "fluid puddings." As Powys wrote in an unused "Preface" to *Porius*:

My own favorite of all is the epoch so often described as the Dark Ages. I like everything about this age. I like its indeterminate frontiers.<sup>2</sup>

We might say that Powys writes a novel not only as if there were no existing tradition of "the novel," but as if he were writing his own first novel. This takes its own cunning, the striking of a tone that is unknowing of its own effects and echoes. Occasionally we may detect resemblances of a structural rather than a thematic kind (which unfriendly readers would label not recurring patterns but artless obsessions). The first paragraph of *Porius* may stand comparison with the first paragraph of *A Glastonbury Romance*:

Porius stood upon the low square tower above the Southern Gate of Mynydd-y-Gaer, and looked down on the wide stretching valley below, a valley that was still covered by the aboriginal forest but which now bore the name Eternus or Edeyrn, the name of a favourite among the sons of the Brythonic chieftain Cunedda, from whom Porius was the fifth in succession. "Eternus, Edernus, Edeyrn [sic]," he was murmuring mechanically as he gazed down at that far-spread expanse of tree-tops. He was thinking of the pedantic way the old Roman, his mother's father, from whom he had received his own name, would always catch them up over the pronunciation of such a word as "Eternus" and make them repeat it in the correct Roman manner.<sup>3</sup>

The brilliance of this opening is that it takes us from the limitless horizon (a viewpoint that is almost a cliché at the opening of historical romances), and the evocation of "the aboriginal forest" (compare the opening of Longfellow's *Evangeline*: "This is the forest primeval..."), to a territory named (and claimed in possession by the act of naming) for a limitlessness of temporality; and thence, dropping, to philology and the correct Roman pronunciation. Our attention is brought from the limitlessly visual to the constrictingly phonetic. Yet, in noting that an overview, a lordly survey from the ramparts, is a cliché of historical fiction, we must reverse the terms of constriction. The correct pronunciation of "Eternus" (where we non-Gallophone readers would stumble rather over "Edeyrn") is rather like the precise time of the train expected at Brandon railway station ("the twelve-nineteen from London") in the opening paragraph of *A Glastonbury Romance*. From the sublime, let us say, to the meticulous. But it is the meticulous, the precise, the measured, which is in fiction the unconventional, the unexpected, the unmeasured. Who, reading this opening paragraph, would dare to suppose that the notions of eternity, time and space are going to obsess our hero's thoughts?

Eight hundred and seventy pages later we read of Porius: "he, the child of Time, was absolutely alone with this physical mirage, this primordial abyss, this necessary illusion, this holy nothing, that is called Space" (870). The added intervening 140,000 words make the sense of connection, of structure, all the more overwhelming, as they challenge the reader's powers of attention and recollection over what is likely to be, not an eternity but some weeks of reading.



Both of these passages are familiar from the 1951 edition. All that is new is the misspelling of "Edeym," and it is one of so many hundreds, if not thousands of typographical errors, that one must blush and swallow before recommending the new *Porius*, almost before acknowledging its existence. If this publication has not enjoyed much publicity—nothing remotely comparable to that which has recently attended the scholarly editing and professional production of selections from Powys's diaries (*Petrushka and the Dancer*)—it is surely because Powys's admirers have been embarrassed. This ought to have been the most significant event in the Powys bibliography since his death in 1963, as it has certainly been the most fervently solicited and keenly awaited. Not by the weight of the new *Porius*, nor by its appearance, the clarity of its typeface, the quality of the binding—all acceptable and even dignified—are we disappointed. In particular one should praise the most elegant dust-wrapper, omen of excellence within.

Let it be said that the experience of reading the new *Porius* is no pleasure at all: it is rather like correcting very poor essays, from students who cannot tell its from it's, who know nothing of the proper placing of commas, who even attempt her's (page 669, line 22; p. 746, l. 31), who cannot tell began from begun (832) or been from being (640), where from were (168, 242, 355) or wary from weary (225); who venture Igantius (735), Anastastius (167), Jasion (533); who think emporer sounds right (26), and outdo even that rank with conquerors's (163). In brief, one taste: "But its all wrong.... its all wrong." (241: its for it's perhaps 300 times—but not always); and another: "it turned it's awestruck saurian eyes away" (330). And wept.

This text ought not to be circulated among the public. It could do enormous damage to Powys's reputation. One hopes that a few scholars will take advantage of the material that it provides, but that the volume will be of restricted interest. Given Powys's current reputation such a remark may sound treasonable. It also takes comfort in the likelihood of public neglect. Never have I been so irritated, so exasperated by any text—never so utterly distracted from the activity of reading. In its present state this is not a book to wish on one's enemies.

Furthermore, it is virtually impossible to make any sense of this *Porius* unless one has the 1951 version open alongside. The new book will be useful only to devotees, because it can be read, be made intelligible, only by those who already know. Wilbur Albrecht's "Foreword" provides a not entirely satisfactory account of the editorial procedure—it is less informative and detailed than his essay, "Editing *Porius*," in *Powys Notes* 7:2. There are four extant texts of

authority: the novel as published in 1951 (of which the proofs are not extant); the holograph in 2,811 pages at the University of Texas; a typescript of 1,829 pages at Colgate; and a typescript of 620 pages in the E. E. Bissell Collection, now part of the Powys Collection at the Dorset County Museum. The two typescripts bear numerous corrections in Powys's hand.

Clearly the task of collating and integrating this quantity of paper has been enormous. But in the absence of any textual apparatus we must take the result on faith. Nowhere is it indicated which material comes from which text; we may however deduce that the new material comes from the Bissell typescript, which, in the editor's words, "consists of those pages which Powys deleted from *Porius* [1951] in order to meet the demands of the Bodley Head for publication, along with those changes and additions which would make the shortened and much altered novel a coherent whole." (xii) In his earlier essay (p. 9) Professor Albrecht anticipated the demand for a full critical edition, and pre-empted it, not unreasonably, on grounds of size and expense. But one wonders how many extra pages would have been needed to include the material edited by Joseph Slater in the invaluable *Powys Newsletter* 4, 1974-75 ("Porius Issue"). There we find the long unused preface, and a detailed, also unused, description of the characters, together with Slater's summary of the material omitted from 1951. All told, they fill forty pages; that pamphlet has been my *vade mecum* in reading the new *Porius*, and first-time readers would surely need it even more.

The absolute minimum which ought to have been stated clearly is the principle by which the "additions" to 1951 have been allowed to drop from the 1994 version. This passage, for example, occurs in 1951:

And then it was that Morfydd heard for the first time in all her days, lifted up from the banks of the Divine River and from the slopes of Mynydd-y-Gaer and from the rocks of the Cave of the Avanc, the life-in-death cry of the forest-people.... It had no connection with the fisher-king's chant... (659)

The 13 lines of this "bridge" replace four pages (800-03: 1994) yet they also supplement them, especially in the non-connection with the fisher-king. In fact the three lines at the beginning of the paragraph at the bottom of 803 could themselves be a bridge for those 13 lines. How did our editor determine that this was, in fact, a "bridge," and not an addition to the text?

On p. 78 (cf. 1951: 75) we find a splice that makes no sense at all, not only at the level of proof-reading. This is the 1951 text:

[While Porius looked and Nineue murmured about how] the ladies preferred Caer Gwynt because of the romantic old-world villas in that region which even in their ruin and dilapidation retained a certain Roman magnificence, his expression was not a happy one.

Now 1994:

...which even in their ruin and dilapidation retained a certain Roman magnificence, being in some cases were actually inhabited by the descendants of the old patrician settlers, he tried to escape her attraction by a favourite trick of his, the trick of rapid mental journeys in various directions.

Such poor splicing as this must be noticed, but I suspect that there are other instances which will become apparent with closer comparison of the two versions.

We might also note a rare error in the 1951 version:

But it was then and not till then, and only then, that there was displayed to him the primordial grandeur of this Seducer sense of Prophets. (675)

This has at least been amended (866; a new misprint occurs immediately). But on the previous page of 1951 we read this:

he would have done better not to have left himself alone with this enchantress who could cavoseniargize to his own absorbing tune. ( 674)

This is important, because it takes us back to "the trick of rapid mental journeys" by which Porius had earlier attempted to resist Nineue's attraction. If he fails, it is surely because Nineue can out-cavoseniargize Porius. Yet I am quite unable to find this crucial passage on or about p. 865 of the 1994 version. A passage has been taken for "bridge" that was, I suspect, intended as an addition to the full text.

Take for another example the character of Lela, the wife of

Amreu, who appears in the company of Nesta on 387 and in the company also of the Lord of Surluse. Galahaut (according to the list of characters, "Tennyson's Galahad," but in his much-expanded role in 1994 he is rather T. H. White's creation; we should note as relevant the publication of *The Sword in the Stone* in 1938, and Powys in his unused preface: "this whole business of the 'purity' of Sir Galahad was and is a made-up job. and not made-up by any good bard or trustworthy chronicler either!"<sup>4</sup>) In the entirely new Chapter 31, "The Little One," Lela returns, together with Galahaut, but our editor has not remembered her from previous appearances, and here she is Lelo, not once but fourteen times.<sup>5</sup> Did Powys change the name? Is the spelling not clear in the typescript? Why should the typescript spelling of Ch. 31 take precedence over the spelling as published in 1951 in its Ch. 21 (without entailing a consistent change in spelling)?

One who reads *Porius* for the first time in the 1994 version might assume that Lela and Lelo were two separate characters. Here the determination to produce a "reader's edition," without any notes or apparatus, seems anything but helpful to the reader. I am afraid that without the 1951 text to hand, the new *Porius* (even were it purged of its proof-horrors) would be, at crucial and radial moments, unintelligible.

And yet, having paid one's scholarly tribute to the principles of scholarly editing, there lingers a sense of gratitude, and marvel. The small world of Powys studies has now, for the first time, a very good idea of what the text of *Porius* ought to be. A future editor will probably be more grateful to Professor Albrecht than are his present readers. It has been a peculiarly disconcerting experience to read through *Porius*, the definitive text, and to realize, with each new apprehension, that it would not do. All Powys's admirers had great hopes that this would be a lasting monument. A disappointed hope, of course, but perhaps also a mistaken one.

The Dark Ages with their indeterminate frontiers were Powys's favourite epoch; the name *Porius* invokes the porous, and the porous is the enemy of monumentality. Merlin is trapped beneath a grey monolith of determinate form. the "*laas anaidees*, that 'obstinately stubborn stone'" (868), which *Porius* is unable to move:

And then quite suddenly the stone yielded. It toppled sideways, remained horribly balanced for a second and then lay upside down. It lay indeed so motionlessly upside down that its whiteness in that perishing twilight had a positively ghastly quality... (869)

Here we are returned to our consideration of long novels which themselves enact or embody our boredom or expectation in waiting, our suspense or exhaustion, our memory, our fear of death. Each of Powys's great books resists even the loose measure of a novel, not formed by the structural but deformed by the porous. The new *Porius* is a great slab of a book, a grey monolith in dust-wrapped appearance, which, when read, discloses white pages of a positively ghastly quality. There is odd magic here: the story, like Merlin within it, has been released from its own tome.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Cited by M. Krissdóttir, "'An Artfully Artless Work': *Porius*," *Powys Society Newsletter*, no. 22 (July 1994), p. 27; the text of the letter is given in *The Powys Newsletter*, 4 (1974-75), 6-7..

<sup>2</sup>Cited in *Powys Newsletter*, 4, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>John Cowper Powys, *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages* (Hamilton, N.Y.: Colgate University Press, 1994), p. 3. All references are to this edition and will be given parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup>Slater, "Porius Restauratus," *Powys Newsletter*, 4: 13

<sup>5</sup>This spelling is also that given in Slater, "Porius Restauratus," pp. 41-42.



## A Question or Two About the Text of *Porius*

Richard Maxwell

"If the complete *Porius* had appeared in the sixties," a friend once said to me, "it would have been a bestseller." One pleasure of alternative history is that you can write it any way you like—but the supposition in this case is more probable than most projections of its kind. The age of Tolkien, of Zen, and of expanding university budgets might well have found a place in its heart, not to mention its libraries, for John Cowper Powys's extraordinary historical novel,

with its Porius-graphic wonders. By 1975, when Joseph Slater published his textual synopsis of *Porius*, titled "*Porius Restauratus*," the chances for a new edition of the novel seemed much bleaker.<sup>1</sup> Slater concluded that even a relatively modest project—printing, say, the unabridged concluding chapters—would "seem an academic extravagance." "For many lean years to come," a *Porius* fully restored would be beyond imagining, he predicted.

So it appeared from the perspective of Hamilton, New York. It was apparently on the other side of the Atlantic that the first new initiative was taken after the publication of the important Slater account. Last year Belinda Humfrey, writing from Saint David's University College, gave me this narrative of her own efforts to get *Porius* into print:

You ask if the project was once in my hands. What happened was that I discovered that the typescript of the complete *Porius* had been given to Gilbert Turner, the ex-librarian of Richmond who in the war years had done some typing for JCP and on retirement had moved to the Llyn Peninsula where he was not far from Blaenau Ffestiniog and could also listen to the Sunday sermons of R. S. Thomas (Gilbert Turner learned Welsh during this retirement). I visited on one of the occasions when I took Phyllis Playter for a drive (see the account of Gilbert Turner, at his death, in *The Powys Review*). Gilbert left his estate to a friend in England, including Powys books and the *Porius* manuscript. I negotiated a sale for him to the copyright library, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, which already had collected a number of important Powys manuscripts....On the sale to the NLW, I was able to take a photocopy of the Turner typescript and to attempt to push forward my plan to get a British publication of the complete *Porius*, we having waited it seemed far too long for the emergence of the Colgate one. Gerald Pollinger [literary agent of the Powys estate and esteemed member of the two Powys Societies-RM] wrote to me to say that he would pass the contract to me if I could get a publisher within two years. I got a prospective publisher at once, University of Wales Press, in 1987, at which point Gerald Pollinger dropped his offer. I don't know whether the friendly rivalry stirred the Colgate project to life

again. Much time has elapsed since 1987! I'm glad the complete *Porius* has been published. I still agree with Powys that it is his "masterpiece"... even with cuts.<sup>2</sup>

As a longtime admirer of *Rashomon*, I am aware that there are probably others in the world with alternative or competing narratives of these interim years (and, harboring an equally longtime interest in publishing history, I wouldn't mind hearing from some of them in the pages of *Powys Notes*). At the very least, Humfrey's admirably circumstantial relation puts on the record certain crucial details of the genealogy of the *Porius* manuscript and of the potential involvement of the University of Wales Press. Whether she was moving too quickly or too slowly, Humfrey found her project superseded by a Colgate initiative (things in Hamilton having looked up considerably since Slater's 1975 period of discouragement).

At this point, however, we had better turn to Wilbur Albrecht's introduction to *Porius*. Albrecht writes, "The 2,811 page holograph of the novel is in possession of the University of Texas, Austin; a typescript of 1,859 pages, corrected in Powys's hand, is held by Colgate University; and 620 pages of typescript, also corrected in Powys's hand, are in the collection of Mr. E. E. Bissell. The whereabouts of the proofs of *Porius* is unknown"<sup>3</sup> He adds in a footnote: "A photographic copy of Mr. Bissell's typescript is in the collection of Churchill College, Cambridge, a third, but uncorrected, typescript was given to Gilbert Turner by Miss Phyllis Playter and is presumably the copy (a carbon copy of 1542 pages with the first 47 pages—Chapter I—missing) sold by Sotheby's in 1983."

So we can begin to get our characters—or rather our documents—straight. First, the 1983 Sotheby's sale is evidently identical with the sale arranged by Belinda Humfrey. The Turner typescript can therefore be traced further than Albrecht supposes; it is the one at the National Library of Wales. Albrecht does not claim to have seen this typescript or even to know where it is; over the last year or so, I have talked to one person who *has* seen it and found it significant, but, not having examined it myself, I will leave the question of its ultimate interest hanging. Of the other documents, it is the Bissell typescript to which Albrecht attributes the greatest authority. It "clearly consists of those pages which Powys deleted from *Porius* in order to meet the demands of the Bodley Head for publication, along with those changes and additions which would make the shortened and much altered novel a coherent whole." (xii) According to Albrecht, "All of the corrections in Powys's hand that appear in the Colgate University typescript also appear (again in Powys's hand) in

the Bissell typescript, but in addition to those corrections, the Bissell typescript contains additional changes in Powys's hand [changes which] indicate a far more thorough, and thoughtful, editing of the text." (xii) The missing printer's typescript, Albrecht adds, presumably consists of the pages of the Bissell typescript which have disappeared.

Scholarly readers of the new edition will of course be frustrated that they have to take the editor's word about the high quality of those corrections in the Bissell typescript. (Ian Hughes, the editor of the recent, complete *Maiden Castle* published by the University of Wales, included no textual notes in his printed version of the novel but did propose to distribute such notes on request; perhaps Albrecht could follow his lead in this respect.<sup>4</sup>) At this stage, however, it might be more to point to ask about the fundamental logic of such a preference. As I read his remarks, Albrecht seems to be implying that corrections in the Colgate typescript were transferred to the Bissell typescript *after* Powys determined that abridgment was the only way that he would get his novel published—at which time further alterations were also made, some perhaps in the interest of *refining* work already done, all, one way or another, in the interest of *condensing* work already done or of clarifying work that had had to be condensed. Bissell is therefore the last typescript to be prepared by Powys before the actual publication of *Porius*. Large portions of it, speculates Albrecht, had to be retyped before being submitted to the printer; other portions were neat enough to be submitted to the printer without retyping. The latter portions have, it seems, disappeared; the former constitute the Bissell typescript as it currently exists.

This plausible scenario leaves us with a choice. On the one hand, we might conclude that the Bissell typescript represents that Shangri-La of traditional textual scholarship, "the author's final intentions." On the other hand we could see it as the means by which a shorter *Porius* was conceived and brought into being. These two interpretations are not necessarily identical or complementary. Everything in the narrative constructed by Albrecht asks us to regard Bissell as a typescript used to make a quick, indeed somewhat desperate abridgment. Why, then, should the corrections *peculiar* to Bissell seem so crucial to a version of *Porius* which seeks to undo that abridgment? Why should the "finality" of the author's intentions get special weight under these peculiar circumstances? These questions are not without possible answers; I would invite Albrecht, who is in possession of more specifics than most of us, to give those which he regards as pertinent to the case at hand. His policy in the Colgate edition—to use Bissell as an authority whenever possible and otherwise

to use the published abridged text as an authority—will in the meantime seem bothersome to me, performing what appears to be a self-canceling twist. The implicit argument is: I will provide you with an unabridged text but use the abridged text as published and its various vehicles and instruments (above all the Bissell typescript) as a *basis* for my unabridged text, *rather* than going back to the complete typescript[s]—those in New York and Wales—completed before the subject of abridgment ever came up and *written* to be published in their entirety. This is, at the least, a controversial way of going about the project, one which seems likely to create considerable awkwardnesses (such as the peculiar “splices” mentioned above by Charles Lock) and which in any case needs a fuller defense than Albrecht has yet given it.

A second point: The projected Humfrey edition would, by Humfrey’s own account, have put considerable emphasis on the Turner typescript. The difference between the Colgate edition we do have and the University of Wales Press edition we don’t is partly a difference about which typescript is to be preferred, and why. One could reverse time, pretending that Norman Denny had never made trouble at Bodley Head, never forced big cuts, but instead had simply let *Porius* be published as Powys originally wanted. In that case the Colgate and/or Turner typescripts would have been crucial.<sup>5</sup> This, I take it, is the implied Humfrey alternative. Or one could accept time as, in a sense, irreversible, and work from the ruined and fragmented edifice available in the abridged edition eventually published by MacDonalds, along with the supplement provided by the Bissell typescript—as though the original project in its original form were now inaccessible. The latter project, which I take to be Albrecht’s, has a certain romantic aura, attractive in its very complexity and indirectness. I remain unconvinced that it was the best possible move.

The new *Porius* provokes thought. One sometimes thinks of the “world” of Powysian scholarship as small and cozy, hemmed in partly by the extraordinary enthusiasm of those who participate in it and partly by the difficulty of publishing on the Powyses anywhere else but in a journal whose title actually *contains* the word “Powys.” The history of efforts to provide an adequate text for *Porius* suggests another view. However small the circle of committed Powys readers, they are not in such close or genial or constant (or even *forced*) communication as might be desirable. I have already suggested that the distance between Wales and Colgate is far greater than it should be under present circumstances. The point might easily be generalized. Whatever else it may turn out to represent, the Colgate *Porius* is an artifact, a product, of a strangely dispersed and incommunicative

scholarly network, one which has produced a great deal of worthwhile work on Powys but which remains, despite meetings and reviews and essays and collection-building (in Dorchester, Colgate, and Hamilton or at the National Library of Wales), and a good deal of epistolary communication, quite hermetic: private, I think, in some unsatisfactory way.<sup>6</sup>

The prognosis? Critically, *Porius* may come to be considered a blot on Powys’s career, a weird, late and possibly senile descent from the heights of mysticism to some sort of debased Menippean satire (this, I think, is Harald Fawkner’s view). Alternately, *Porius* may come to seem not only the author’s masterpiece but (as Ian Duncan implies) a manual on the Art of Sinking not less formidable and breathtaking than *The Memoirs of Martin Scriblerus* or *The Dunciad* (though far more favorably inclined to the attractions of Sleep). My own feeling, however, is that neither of these judgments—so near and so far apart—can yet be fully debated. First we would need to clarify the history of the text—its drawn-out composition, its abruptly mandated abridgment, its survival over half a century as huge and lurking ghost, its new incarnation in 873 big pages with a somewhat elusive rationale behind them. I am thinking less of the model of scholarship where one accumulates facts, building a pyramid of them, than of the model where one saturates oneself in a topic in order to get a good second sense about it. In this spirit, then, several small projects might be useful. Those of us who have studied the manuscript could consider further its amazingly intricate revisions (revisions which occurred *before* those errant typescripts were so much as a gleam in the eye of Mrs. Meech’s typing bureau and which quickly dispel any notion of carefree, feckless composition). Those who have seen both the Colgate and Wales typescripts could be persuaded to say a word or two about their relative merits. Those who know *anything* about Powys’s (rumored) efforts to publish *Porius* in America could usefully tell all—and let us know, in the process, which (if any) of the extant documents can be identified with these efforts. Albrecht, as noted above, could tell us a good deal more about the persuasiveness of the Bissell typescript. Should such discussions as these occur publicly and in a focused fashion, we might know a good deal more about those difficult social, aesthetic, and logistical transactions which proceeded *Porius*’s first publication, where it appears as a shell of itself, and its second, where it appears as a not-quite-rematerialized original, a kind of uncanny *Doppelgänger*. We might, correspondingly, be able to specify just how a usable edition of the novel should look. That would be a start.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>See the "Porius issue" of *The Powys Newsletter* (4, 1974-75).

<sup>2</sup>Personal communication with the author, 23 March 1994.

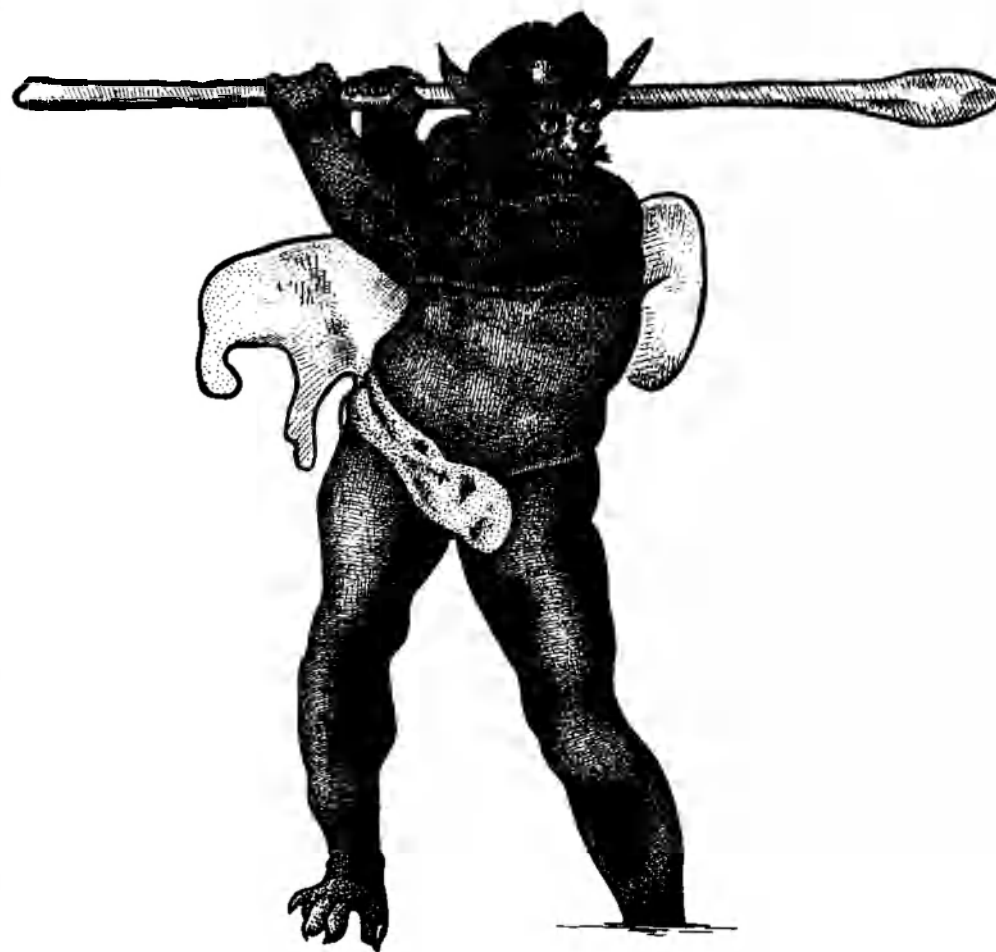
<sup>3</sup>p. xii.

<sup>4</sup>Albrecht's preface gives us a clear cue to ask for such examples when he notes of Bissell, "There are additional corrections to punctuation and spelling, but, more important, there are changes that clear up what would otherwise have been inconsistencies and other anomalies in the novel had the typescript in its Colgate version served as the original printer's copy." (p. xii) It is these changes that one would most urgently want to see. Assuming that Albrecht is correct, and that Bissell contains fairly widespread changes clarifying inconsistencies in the stage of composition represented by the Colgate typescript, we are presented with a truly difficult situation. It would appear, in this case, that Powys, in Bissell, is engaged in two activities not altogether complementary or consistent. He is looking at the novel as a tightly organized and interdependent whole, altering its parts to make them work together more effectively than they otherwise would; he is chopping out huge sections of the novel with the (slightly delirious) expectation that fifty pages here or sixty pages there can simply be excised. One of these approaches to *Porius* must be deluded. Given the author's situation—he wants to get his book published on almost any terms possible—his delusion, whatever it may be, is understandable. But it leaves the aspiring textual editor with a big problem.

<sup>5</sup>Once again, I emphasize that the question of the Turner typescript's relevance is unsettled; the one at Colgate is very likely to be preferred, but a first-hand look at all the materials in questions would be necessary before such a judgment could be confidently articulated.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Glen Cavaliero's little review of the recent *Maiden Castle* published by Colgate (*TLS*, 30 December 1994). Cavaliero recapitulates the publishing history of that novel, reduced "without Powys's prior knowledge" by some twenty percent, and only published in its complete version in 1990 (I refer above to this Ian Hughes edition). He then comments: "Alas, this new paperback reproduces the earlier version. Presumably the Hughes edition is unavailable, but considering that Syracuse has recently published the complete text of Powys's even more drastically mutilated *Porius*, it is surprising that they should endorse an abridgement which the author only acceded to for financial reasons." Cavaliero adds, "one welcomes any initiative that makes [Powys's] novels available," but one is also, of course, compelled to wonder whether scholarly activities and public presentations of JCP are as fully integrated as they might be. Recent copyright legislation in the United Kingdom will complicate attempts to publish *many* twentieth-century writers; JCP, I suspect, will suffer particularly, given what appear to be funda-

mental structural difficulties in bringing his work before a mainstream span of readers. Hughes did the work; his work cannot be shared, indeed, in some respects might just as well not have been done.





## Observations, Bibliographic and Social

Bayley on JCP. Powysians who haven't seen it already will want to have a look at John Bayley's long review-essay on John Cowper Powys published in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 19 May 1995, pp. 3-4, with impressive cover photo. Focusing particularly on Morine Krissdóttir's recent edition of the Powys diaries and the first volume of the JCP letters to Frances Gregg (both to be reviewed in forthcoming issues of *Powys Notes*), Bayley finds room for a number of illuminating comments beyond the strict boundaries of the occasion. We particularly enjoyed his comments on Powys's reputation ("Even D. H. Lawrence, for all his aliveness...does not reach, as it were, this extraordinary gusto of ongoing literary instability"), on Powysian Life Illusions ("the word 'illusion' expresses both the absurdity and the necessity of being oneself") and on "the vanished world of the American lecture circuit, in which Powys was Ancient Mariner and Don Quixote."

Dialogues with the Non-Human. Jerome McGann, another Eminent Powysian, was recently (10 July 1992) interviewed by two scholars from the University of Leicester. Reprinted in *The Cambridge Quarterly* (22.4, 1993), the interview ranges over a fascinating variety of topics, and has—Reader, you guessed it—one notable Powysian moment. Asked about his "call for an engagement between the textual scholar and the hermeneutic critic," McGann has touched on recent developments in textual studies (developments for which he himself bears considerable responsibility). "Language is always coming through a Bakhtinian kind of dialectical scene, it's never private"—not even in what might seem the limit-case of Emily Dickinson, who, as McGann notes, is often thought to have "had no audience." He advocates efforts to recover—"analytically and historically"—"the dialogical scene in which the writing is taking place." One of his interlocutors asks in response, "Do you think it's possible to have a conversation with the non-human?" To which he answers: "Certainly, I believe that, in several sense. We talk with all sorts of non-human things, we certainly enter into conversations with our pets, with our plants. I think, for me, the world is alive in the way that John Cowper Powys believed"—a cue the interviewers do not pick up. The Powysian moment is over. We hope to hear more of McGann on Powys at the PSNA conference in Toronto, September 8-10, where he will speak on *Porius* and modernism.

A Cirencester Frolic. Our visit to the Powys conference in

Cirencester (August 27-30th, 1994) was pleasant and profitable for us, and probably for all concerned. There were papers by Glen Cavaliero, Peter Foss, Ben Jones, Catherine Lieutenant and Paul Roberts, as well as ourselves; there was an extraordinary effort on the part of Oliver and Christopher Wilkinson, who mounted what must have been the first dramatic presentation of John Cowper Powys's early play *The Entermores* (1905), which had been edited and transcribed by Paul Roberts. *The Entermores* was an amusing account of strife between aesthetic/Satanic bohemia and pious respectability. The main characters were Roland Entermore ("a poet") and his wife Madeline. Roland's naughty set at a local den of iniquity, "The Goat & Boy," included Theophilus Groteus ("a writer") and Florian Fay ("editor of 'The Black Pierrot'"), bad boys both. The lineup also including an amorous curate, a conniving vicar, several indiscreet "Piccadilly girls," and a teeming supporting cast (several parts were doubled or even tripled). The performances were wonderful; few period pieces get such loving attention. Also on hand at the conference was Herbert Williams, who was making a film on JCP for Welsh television. We heard whispered rumors that Morine Krissdóttir had crawled around a courtyard at the Royal Agricultural College (where the conference was held), demonstrating stone worship for the video cameras. We ourselves, when interviewed, preserved a much higher degree of sobriety and so may not get on TV, but we look forward to viewing Professor Krissdóttir's performance at the first possible opportunity. (Could PBS be persuaded to show Williams's film, or would that be a violation of the regnant Contract with America?)

Passage to Albania. One night at the British Powys conference we met a melancholic Powysian living in Albania. He was working, if we recall correctly, for the British Council, teaching English literature to Albanian students with distinctly limited resources (no books, mimeographed poems, etc.). We thought of him later that summer when we stood on the waterfront at Trieste. We were in the midst of one of those epiphanies only available to the proper sort of philosophic traveller. Much as Lord Byron in Venice found himself with a palace and a prison on each hand, so we at Trieste found ourselves with an aquarium and a sea-food restaurant on each hand. Much as Byron must have meditated on the relation between the palace and the prison, so we meditated on the relation between the aquarium and the seafood restaurant, particularly on the possible transference of fish from the one establishment to the other. And then our eyes wandered to a sign far out on a pier, reading (in Italian, no doubt, but our memory works in English): FERRY TO ALBANIA. We longed to drop



everything and catch the ferry, possibly to take up lodgings with the Albanian Powysian (who had not, however, invited us), possibly to bring Powysian lore to Albania or at the very least to read *Wolf Solent* and *Weymouth Sands* amidst the olive trees of that perhaps rocky and mountainous land. Instead we left almost immediately for Prague, where we milled around with six million other tourists and forgot about Powys altogether (though we did have a fine time in other respects). So died a fine impulse.

**Collecting Powys at Dorset.** One topic discussed at the British conference was the progress of the Powys collection at the Dorset County Museum, where the important Bissell and Feather collections are now housed. Efforts to establish Powysian materials as a central resource in the museum would appear to have had their ups and downs, but there was considerable optimism about the future of an increasingly ambitious project. In this regard, perhaps we can also quote a letter from Francis Feather to Constance Harsh (dated October 1993) about the transference of the Feather collection: "There were some 400 volumes in all. Packers had been engaged and were half-way through their work, when a letter was received from the Reserve Bank withdrawing consent—no reason given! This really did set wheels in motion, but we secured withdrawal of THAT communication. Partly in consequence, but also owing to unrest in South Africa, the decision was taken to get them out of the country by air rather than sea, notwithstanding the extra cost!" These intricate international contretemps are largely beyond our comprehension, but we direct the attention of all Powys scholars to the resources now available in Dorchester.

**Recent Writings on Powys.** We continue to keep an eye on the three other magazines (besides *Powys Notes*) devoted to the writings of the Powys family: *The Powys Review*, *The Powys Journal*, and *The Powys Society Newsletter*. The first two maintain high standards and are, we think, fairly widely available in America and Canada. The *Journal* has been particularly notable for its presentations of hitherto unpublished Powys manuscripts, a specialty continued in the latest number. The most recent *Powys Review*, which we haven't seen as yet, includes a wide range of critical pieces by the usual suspects (plus a few less familiar names), and a piece by Herbert Williams on his JCP television project. We are tempted to add a special word about *The Powys Society Newsletter*, certainly the smallest and least beautifully printed of the three magazines in question, but far more than a social calendar of British Powysian doings. Given its slightly fly-by-night

look, we suspect it is probably unrepresented in North American library collections—if so, a shame. In recent issues we were especially fascinated by a piece of Robin Patterson on blurbs of JCP—terrific subject for those interested in the byways of the sociology of publishing. Also of note is a review of a book we have so far not succeeded in finding ourselves, *Correspondance Privée*, being the letters of Henry Miller and John Cowper Powys (in a French translation by Nordine Haddad), from Criterion Press in Paris (ISBN 2 7413 0089 5). An English-language edition is evidently planned. (*The Powys Society Newsletter*, April 1994) In the most recent issue we have seen, the publisher Cecil Woolf takes issue with Karl Orend's review of JCP's *Uncollected Essays* (our own review of this volume, with other recent books from Woolf, is forthcoming). Orend had maintained that this collection was more or less superfluous; Woolf contests the point with some vigor, ending on one of those personal notes which remind us how interconnected is the world of small publishers: "Could it be that Mr Orend's hostile review was the result, at least in part, of our success in outbidding him for the publication rights of the Powys-Dorothy Richardson correspondence?" (*The Powys Society Newsletter*, April 1995)

**Publications from the British Powys Society.** The British Powys Society has now built up a large list of publications. One which we encountered for the first time last summer is Francis Powys's essay on his father, T. F. Powys, titled "The Quiet Man of Dorset." (£1.80 for an order to North America). This piece, which first appeared in *The Adelphi* in 1954, has now been reprinted with considerable elegance (the designer is Stephen Powys Marks). "The Quiet Man" includes a new introduction by the author, remembering his father's death in a mood and manner not unlike certain scenes from the novels of—naturally—T. F. Powys. The Society has also recently published a new edition of Powys's *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, with "a specially written *Afterword* by our member John Williams," a volume we have not yet had a chance to examine (£7.50, plus £1.20 postage to North America), as well as Littleton Powys's *The Joy of It* (an autobiography, £8.50 post-free to North America) and *A Net in Water*, a selection from the unpublished journals of Mary Casey, daughter of Lucy Powys (youngest sister of J. C., T. F., and Llewelyn &c.), edited by Judith Lang and Louise de Bruin (£7.50, plus £1.80 postage to North America). We hope to review these volumes at some later date, but they are in the meantime available from Stephen Powys Marks, Hamilton's, Kilmersdon, near Bath, Somerset, BA3 5TE.

**Maiden Castle Republished.** We are pleased to announce that Colgate University Press has republished editions of John Cowper Powys's *Autobiography* and his novel *Maiden Castle*. The edition of the *Autobiography* includes a useful contextualizing note by R. L. Blackmore and an appreciative essay by J. B. Priestley, who pays tribute to "Mr. Malcolm Elwin, the literary adviser, and to Messrs. Macdonald, the publishers. Without their enterprise and enthusiasm, Powys's later works might never have reached print"—nor might, have Priestley goes on to observe, reprints of Powys's earlier writings. Colgate carries on this tradition grandly. The *Autobiography* is available for \$22.95 and is distributed by Syracuse University Press. *Maiden Castle* (\$19.95, prefatory note by Malcom Elwin, also distributed by Syracuse) is the edition first published by MacDonald in 1966; the more recent edition, edited by Ian Hughes, and featuring many restored passages, would be preferred by most Powysians, one suspects, if only it were available at a reasonable cost.

**Mock's Curse.** The Brynmill Press has recently published *Mock's Curse*, described in their circular as "19 new stories by T. E. Powys....The stories are part of a huge collection left unpublished at the time of Powys's death, yet are, in the opinion of the publishers, of very high quality." Brynmill promises other hitherto unpublished work by Powys in the near future. Write The Brynmill Press Ltd, Pockthorpe Cottage, Denton, near Harleston, Norfolk IP20 OAS, England. *Mock's Curse* is £16 plus £3.25 for airmail postage and packing; they will accept checks drawn on American banks in dollars of equivalent value.

**Sightings of a Crescent Moon.** Crescent Moon & Joe's Press (18 Chaddesley Road, Kidderminster DY10 3AD, U.K.) has published *Powys: The Ecstasies of Crazy Jack*, by A. P. Seabright, £8.95; also on their list is *Thomas Hardy and John Cowper Powys: Wessex Revisited*, by Jeremy Robinson, £21.95. Crescent Moon has as well begun a new journal, *Passion* ("The work ranges from the passionate, erotic and spiritual, to the humorous, polemical and incisive, but it is always entertaining.") A subscription is available to North American subscriber for \$22.00 per annum.

**JCP's Urbanity.** A. N. Wilson's recent *Norton Book of London* begins with a section called "The Man on the Waterloo Steps," a section that itself commences with a well-known passage from John Cowper Powys's *Wolf Solent*. Few of us think of Powys as an urban novelist (unless Glastonbury or Weymouth is a metropolis), but Wilson seems

to have given him, however fleetingly, something of this aura.

**Roy Fisher on JCP.** We recently stumbled across Roy Fisher's poem sequence *A Furnace* (published by Oxford in 1986 and evidently well-distributed, since it was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation). *A Furnace* must have been reviewed fairly widely, but we don't ourselves remember seeing any notices. It is, our readers will be interested to learn, dedicated "to the memory of John Cowper Powys," "to whom I owe thanks for some words of exhortation he gave me in my youth and in his old age. More importantly, I am indebted to his writings for such understanding as I have of the idea that the making of all kinds of identities is a primary impulse which the cosmos itself has; and that those identities and that impulse can be acknowledged only by some form or other of poetic imagination." Fisher goes on to evoke the wonderful passage in Powys's *Atlantis* describing "a lost poem which gains its effects by the superimposition of landscape upon landscape rather than rhythm upon rhythm," an idea he claims to be working with in his *Furnace*. The *Atlantis* passage is also evoked in the poem itself ("All landscapes/solid, and having transparency/in time, in state"). Fisher, born in 1930, seems to have been touched by all sorts of fairly early modernist experiments, cubist, symbolist, acmeist, converging, as Edward Lucie-Smith has noted, on an interest in simultaneity. It is this interest, refocused by Powys and directed towards the cityscapes of Birmingham, which gives *A Furnace* its identity, making its mixture of the cerebral and the mystical curiously powerful.

**Dawson's Kiln.** Closer to home—or at least to the two Powys Societies—is a poetry collection that has given us pleasure recently, Patricia Dawson's *The Kiln* (HUB editions, 1994). This is an edition of pieces written over the last quarter of a century, characterized, at their best, by concise and clear lines remarkable for a kind of emotional directness which does not scorn ornament. One poem, at least, treats a Powysian subject. It is called "On Re-Reading 'Maiden Castle'" and begins "The puppet master's gone/blown by a ghost wind on the sea./By lighting fires in dewponds/he could make his puppets weep." Among other pieces in the volume, there are ekphrastic and mythological lyrics lighter, and much less cumbersome, than most in these debateable genres. There is an excellent poem on what must be the Chelsea Physic Garden, as well as other good pieces on related botanical subjects. Many of the poems are autobiographical, the best of these defining romantic spots of time. There is also a fine piece on the invention of the inflatable tire by Dr.

Dunlop of Belfast. We wish we had had this small lyric narrative to inspire and inform us when we were, several years ago, writing an encyclopedia piece on the history of bicycles, a subject about which we had thoughtlessly claimed expertise.

"Radio Inside." A friend and obsessive film-viewer, Dick Lee of Valparaiso, informs us that a recent Hollywood movie, "Radio Inside," "will probably be the only film this year containing a reference to John Cowper Powys!" The reference in question occurs towards the beginning of "Radio Inside"; anyone who finds a video copy and watches it is asked to write a brief account of the sequence for *Powys Notes*, that omnipresent and omnivorous chronicler of Powysian reception history.

The Village That Died For England. Patrick Wright, whose writings on London we have admired, has published an account of *The Village That Died for England: The Strange Story of Tyneham* (Jonathan Cape), a book we caught up with via a review in the *New Statesman* (17 March 1995). Tyneham, on the coast of south Dorset, was evacuated in 1943 for use as a gunnery range and (evidently) never returned to its inhabitants. T. F. Powys is mentioned, as are Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland ("busy," notes the reviewer, "demolishing myths of the rural idyll with accurate accounts of wet, overcrowded cottages and starvation wages.") Wright's book would seem to be a fascinating piece of social history for anyone interested in a certain quintessential Powysian milieu.

The Joy of Small Fetishistic Objects: A Contest. *Powys Notes* has been particularly fortunate, over the last few years, in receiving through the mails, unsolicited and free, many small fetishistic objects with the initials of the Powys Society of North America engraved upon them. Clocks, rings, stick pins, cuff links, tie tacks, tiny calculators, elegant ballpoint pins: All have arrived in our mailbox with the initials PSNA neatly incised into their shiny surfaces, ready for immediate and enthusiastic use. To tell the truth, we have grown slightly sick of this invasion; and yet, it must be admitted, our daily life has been subtly enriched by the presence, through our house, of that magical Powysian anagram, which flickers at us, even as we write, from more than one object of considerable decorative value and at least moderate utility. These objects have not been distributed in a completely disinterested spirit. The Meanswell Industrial Company of Taiwan announces with appealing frankness in its cover letter: "We are taking the liberty to write with regard to Badges and

Patches that we make. Badges and Patches have been extensively used as one of the most effective advertisements as well as the most popular souvenirs today." Our Powys Badge from Meanswell remains a prized possession, one which might well send thrills of envy through the typically isolated and disorganized readers of John Cowper, T. F., Llewlyn, and many other Powyses. Which brings us to the point. The editors of *Powys Notes* have sworn that some lucky member of the Society will receive the next such sample to appear at our doorstep. To be considered for this prize, just send the best entry possible to the column you are presently reading. A fresh bibliographic citation would do; so would an amusing or sinister anecdote, should it touch on matters of Powysian interest. Deadline for the contest, if it is a contest, is December 31st, 1995. Rush your entry to us today.

## Errata

Due to a software glitch, not to mention a certain amount of serene inattention from the editor, Constance Harsh's article in the 1992 double issue on Powys and America (v. 8, nos. 1 & 2) contained several errors in punctuation and typeface selection. Most particularly: p. 7, "began his peripatetic movements...for emphasis" should have been in quotation marks; p. 20, "has delighted...Iris Club." should have been in quotation marks; p. 20, "I worked myself up...reactions originated." should have been in quotation marks. Also, on p. 13 line 5 the word "biweekly" should have been "semimonthly." In the same issue, we had Janina Nordius announcing that a Swedish translation of JCP's *Autobiography* had already appeared, when in fact it was pending and has not, as of last word, seen the light of day.

## For Sale: A Powys Brothers Collection

Either individually, or as a lot, a seventeen-piece collection representing works by the three brothers, including:

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by Llewlyn Powys

*Ebony and Ivory*. New York, 1923, American Library Service. 1st edition; page with inscription and signature tipped in.

by T. F. Powys

*Captain Patch*. London, 1935, Chatto & Windus. 1st edition in dust jacket.

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"Porius stood upon the low square tower above the Southern Gate of Mynydd-y-Gaer, and looked down on the wide stretching valley below." So begins one of the most remarkable novels of 20th-century literature.

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Set in the geographic confines of Powys's own homeland of Northern Wales, the epic of *Porius* takes place in the course of a mere eight October days in AD 499, when King Arthur—a key character in the novel, along with Myrddin Wyllt, or Merlin—was trying to persuade the people of Britain to repel the barbaric Saxon invaders. Porius, the only child of Prince Einion of Edeyrnion, is the main character who is sent on a journey that is both historical melodrama and satirical allegory.

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## On the cover:

Timothy Hyman, *Weymouth Sands: John Cowper Powys Introduces Me To a Circle of His Admirers*.

1986-90.

48 x 72 inches, oil on plywood.

Exhibited Royal Academy, Summer Exhibition, London 1990.

*Hyman writes:* Ever since adolescence, I'd responded to the panoramic "romances" of John Cowper Powys; and throughout my twenties, this shared passion led to several close friendships. From 1970, I became a member of the Powys Society (working in rural isolation as a painter, this often seemed the only Society I had access to). Our annual conference often took place in Weymouth, the setting of my favorite of all these books.

When the image first came to me, its conjunction of the *Weymouth Sands* landscape ("the spire, the clock, the statue") together with the various "Powysians" hovering above, seemed to embody a twenty-year experience. The cast is—from right to left—John Cowper Powys; my (adolescent) self; Wilson Knight's head below—it was he who first told me of the Powys Society's existence—and, above the town, Janet Shaw, John Toft, Glen Cavaliero, David Goodway, Terry Diffey, Giles Wordsworth, Rosemary Manning, Gerard Casey, Louise de Bruin. I wanted these personalities to be suspended in a kind of *affectionate substance* ("Saturnian gold"?) for which buttery paint might provide some equivalence. I would characterize the mood as humorous/sublime.

"On this occasion that sudden whistle of the Cherbourg Steamer produced a very queer impression on his mind. It was an impression as if the whole of Weymouth had suddenly become an insubstantial vapour suspended in space. All the particular aspects of the place known to him so well, the spire of St. John's Church, the rounded stucco-façade of Number One Brunswick Terrace and of Number One St. Mary's Street, the Jubilee Clock, the Nothe, the statue of George the Third, seemed to emerge gigantically from a mass of vaporous unreality." (25-26)

"What he really felt now was a sensation as if St. John's Spire, the

statue of George the Third, the rounded ends of Brunswick Terrace and St. Mary's Street, that great stone house on the Preston Road, called High House...had become a cloudy ridge upon whose peaks the chilly bench on which he was resting was lifted up, and from which he could not descend..." (26)

"The familiar smell of dead seaweed kept entering his room; and a strange phantasmal Weymouth, a mystical town made of a solemn sadness, gathered itself about him, a town built out of the smell of dead seaweed, a town whose very walls and roofs were composed of flying spindrift and tossing rain. Lying in bed in the faint glimmer from the grate he could hear the waves on the beach, and a great flood of sadness swept over him." (39)

—*Weymouth Sands* (Colgate University Press: Hamilton, New York, 1963)

Timothy Hyman was born in 1946 and trained at the Slade School of Fine Art, University College, London (1963-7).

As well as four one-person exhibitions in London, he has exhibited widely in mixed shows (including the Hayward Annual, Whitechapel Open, Royal Academy). His work is in numerous public collections (including the British Museum, Arts Council Collection, Contemporary Art Society, Sheffield and Bristol City Art Galleries).

He has also published widely on art, in *London Magazine*, *Studio International*, *Artscribe*, *Burlington Magazine*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and elsewhere. In 1979 he mounted the controversial exhibition *Narrative Paintings* (Arnolfini, Bristol; ICA, London, and tour). He has lectured for many universities, museums (including the National Gallery, Tate, British Museum) and art schools (including the Royal College of Art, Royal Academy Schools, and Glasgow School of Art). He has recently delivered a series of lectures at the Slade on *The Tradition of Narrative Available to the Twentieth-Century Painter*.

In 1992 he received a Leverhulme award and was made an Hon. Research Fellow at University College, London.

Since 1976 he has made four long visits to India. In 1980, and again in 1982, he was a visiting professor at Baroda, and also completed extensive British Council lecture tours. In 1988, he exhibited in Ahmedabad. He has published six articles on twentieth-century Indian painting.

## Forthcoming in *Powys Notes*

Selections from the Powys-Wolcott  
Correspondence at Colgate

A Selection of Essays on Owen Glendower

More about JCP in France

Transformations of Homer in *Atlantis* and the  
poetry of Derek Walcott

An (Evidently) Unknown Letter Restored to  
Public View

Reviews of Three Recent Books from Cecil Woolf