

Powys Notes

A Publication of the Powys Society of North America: Fall, 1985
Edited by Denis Lane

C O N F E R E N C E I S S U E



The larger part of this issue of Powys Notes consists of a report of the Inaugural Conference of the Powys Society of North America held at Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, from June 7 to June 9, 1985. Perhaps in retrospect, inaugural "celebration" might have been a more appropriate figure, as the forty or so conferees from the U.S., Canada, and England joined together with energy and pleasure to pursue in common what previously they had so often sought as individuals: the enjoyment and understanding of the Powys authors. What follows is a day by day record of the events of the Conference through abstracts, reports, or verbatim accounts.

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Friday, June 7: Evening

"WELCOME" from Ben Jones, President, the Powys Society of North America

"It cannot be my privilege to welcome you either to Hamilton or to Colgate, since I too am a guest here, but I do welcome all of you to our Society's inaugural meeting. I am honoured to be able to extend this first welcome to our co-operative adventure.

There will undoubtedly be many offerings of gratitude extended at the end of the conference on Sunday, but I want now to put on record my thanks to Denis Lane for his extraordinary effort as Conference Director to bring us together, an effort that has ranged from the sealing of envelopes to the high calling of selecting papers, conceiving and forming an intellectual coherence.

Although we have come here to discover more about the astonishing Powyses, and to share our discoveries, we have also come here to find out about each other. Who is this Virginia Adams, now the owner of Phudd Bottom? What has Michael Greenwald been doing all these years since we met at the Powys Centenary at Churchill College in 1972? How does the President pronounce "Powys"? Are we just possibly an "interpretive community"? This knowledge about ourselves--joined together as we are by common, if diverse, interests in the Powyses--seemed to be the particular lack which a society might try to fill.

I said "common, if diverse, interests." Those of us who have had an association with the UK Powys Society, and with The Powys Review, know that there can be strength in diversity. I openly confess that my own interests in the Powyses range from the antiquarian to the semiotic, from the gates of Patchin Place to the chronotopicity of Glastonbury. Not good for an age of specialization, perhaps, but good for a society, and good for a conference. So in the varied papers of the conference--in our conversations, discussions--I hope that we shall find common ground, even though that common ground, as we are now told, may be made up only of differences.

In a noted (notorious?) article, Michel Foucault asked "What Is an Author?" We should ask ourselves this question. In this age of de-authorization, of the "death of the Author," in this age of cancelling the writs of canonization and celebrity status that literary study itself has issued, we might well wonder what we are doing setting up an author(s)-based society. Not canonization. Not celebrity status. It is ironic, yet pertinent--pertinent because ironic--that we should have as our common interest writers who have missed, indeed avoided, canonization. (John Cowper said that the only time he "pushed" one of his books was when he took a train out to Long Island to read portions of the Glastonbury manuscript to Max Schuster's mother.) What place in Foucault's space of writing do our writers occupy? (I warned you about semiotics.) And how, for the Powyses, can we as a Society articulate that space?

But let's shift spaces: right here to this place, Colgate, which for many years has kept the flame: for Powysians, Bob Blackmore's space. And as we analyse, hold forth, exacerbate, or even reconcile, our differences, let us do so with conviviality, with something of that play-instinct (John Cowper's word) which suits a sound mind, with something of that respect for ourselves, for language, and for the world which most becomes a Society of Powysians."

PUBLISHING NEWS of the Powyses and associated authors, Gerald J. Pollinger, Laurence Pollinger Limited, Literary Executor to the Powys Estates.

Wearing a dazzling waistcoat, two watches, and--as was soon apparent--two hats (as business man and wit), Mr. Gerald Pollinger treated his audience to a jovial, at times hilarious, account of his various business interests, and in particular of the activities of the Laurence Pollinger Literary Agency, of which he is Director. Of especial interest to Powysians is the news that Warren House Press plans to publish two further titles by John Cowper Powys: A Collection of Previously Unpublished Poems, edited by Kenneth Hopkins (tentatively set for release in the Fall of 1985), and My Dearest Sea Eagle: Letters to Katie (in proofs, but delayed pending a decision on publication of The Journals, mentioned below).

Mr. Pollinger further revealed that he has in circulation the typescripts of three collections of letters: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Hal Trovillion, edited by Paul Roberts; The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Bill Lander; and The Letters of Gamel Woolsey to Phyllis Playter. The letters of John Cowper Powys to Phyllis Playter remain in manuscript.

While still on the subject of collections of letters, Mr. Pollinger announced that his agency is actively seeking to compile the correspondence between John Cowper Powys and Theodore Dreiser. He would appreciate receiving copies, not originals, of letters from either party to the other. As many readers know, the diaries of John Cowper Powys have come to light in recent years. Mr. Pollinger indicated that 31 volumes of this material, covering the years 1929 to 1960 and known as The Journals of John Cowper Powys, now exist in typescript and will eventually find their way to publication, that is, once missing sections of manuscript have been located and a scholarly apparatus provided.

With respect to the work of T. F. Powys, Mr. Pollinger said that with the assistance of Theodora Gay Scutt and Francis Powys he is conducting reconnaissance and collection of the unpublished material of that author. In addition Larry Mitchell is working on a program to locate missing short stories of T. F. Powys. In particular, two known stories by TFP evade detection: "One of the Wise," and "A Poor Neighbour." Also sought is the original typescript of Mr. Tasker's Gods, which may possibly have come to the U.S. around 1930 [Information on any of these to Mr. Pollinger, please]. The fruits of all of this activity, said Mr. Pollinger, will be the publication in the near future of four major T. F. Powys works by Chatto & Windus, under the Hogarth imprint, all with new introductions.

At the end of what was a very well-received talk, Mr. Pollinger announced that he was now acting for the estate of Littleton Powys, so that yet one more Powys was within the purview of the Laurence Pollinger Agency.

Saturday, June 8: Morning

Session One: John Cowper Powys. At the first working session of the Conference, two papers were presented. Denis Lane was the Respondent.

Michael Ballin, Wilfred Laurier University: "Porius and the Cauldron of Rebirth."

The motif of the cauldron in Porius helps Powys to explore his philosophy of history which relates past and present to an eternally changing process. As well as unifying past and present, the cauldron image unifies narrative structure. Powys's historical perspective counters the negative views of cultural change implicit in some aspects of Spengler's The Decline of the West or Sigmund Freud's Civilization and its Discontents.

In contrast to Freud, Powys's analysis of the nature of civilization allows him to assert the values of Life and Freedom while admitting the realities of death and destruction. Since civilization is the product of a marriage with aboriginal culture, aboriginal culture becomes the source of civilization. Thus, as civilization drifts towards decay, it encounters the life-giving values of its "primitive" origins. Moreover, Powys's philosophy allows him to accept death as the precondition of life.

Powys's unification of action and character is accomplished through his motivic pattern of death and renewal. This thematic vision and unifying conception is conveyed, not through Porius alone, but through many of the secondary characters of the novel. Brochvael and Morfydd are centrally important characters because they try most heroically to create a cultural rebirth from death of the old. Myrddin Wyllt fulfills the demands of death by providing hope of rebirth. Powys's "Three Aunties" dramatise the process of sexual ecstasy and death by playing out the death process against the background of the fertility rituals of the Fisher King. Powys counterpoints the birth of a child to Nesta to the death of Brother John. The death and rebirth process is thus presented in ritual terms as well as in terms of the personal experience of a Prince Medrawd or of Porius himself. It is the virtue of Porius to address the central contemporary theme, "How can a culture renew itself and what processes within the psyche of the individual allow for recreation and continued growth?" [MB]

Dorothee von Huene, Pace University: "Stone Worship and the Search for Community in A Glastonbury Romance."

John Cowper Powys was fascinated by stones which to him, in a curious dichotomy, represented both individuality and community. In his philosophical writings Powys reveals that to him, stones represent the inviolability of the self and the firmness with which it must face outside forces. In his A Glastonbury Romance he develops this idea. Here stones, especially stones that are parts of old structures such as Stonehenge, St. Joseph's Chapel in Glastonbury, and even the soil on which they rest exude the spirit of past generations whose memory and values Powys wanted to preserve and with which his characters sought to maintain communication. He derives strength and pleasure from the sense of community with previous ages, and suggests that a firm link with the past through contact with its physical remains can help us to gain eternity. [DvH]

The Powys Manuscript Collection, Bruce M. Brown, Colgate University.

After a short break, the meeting moved to the Everett Needham Case Library, where Bruce M. Brown, retiring University Librarian, gave a presentation on "Colgate's Powys Manuscript Collection." On his desk were an unopened cardboard box and a black ledger-type manuscript binder.

Professor Brown traced the fortuitous process by which an important collection of Powys manuscripts came to be housed at a small liberal arts college, once the training ground of Baptist ministers. The collection started in 1957 with a gift from Norman Strouse, the head of the J. Walter Thompson organization and stepfather of a Colgate student. He wrote to President Case: "I am sending along the holograph manuscript of John Cowper Powys's Autobiography which might serve as the keystone to a Powys collection. . . I purchased it in London and its value is \$200." [Gasps from audience]. No evidence has surfaced as to the nature of Strouse's interest in Powys. From there the collection grew in JCP holdings and widened to include works of family and friends.

Prof. Brown then turned to "the new manuscript"--the box on the table--which he said was a good example of the role luck plays in collecting. A dealer, at the end of a long enquiry on Arthur Morrison material, asked as a footnote: "Would you by chance be interested in John Cowper Powys's book on Dostoievsky--over 500 pages in JCP's handwriting?" What was in the box was indeed Powys's Dostoievsky, the first draft including two chapter revisions, but also there was a surprise: a large quantity of the corrected typescript of the last part of Owen Glendower, together with a few sheets of a non-fictional work yet to be identified. This "lovely addition" arrived the Thursday before the Conference. "I now own the Arthur Morrison material!" Prof. Brown added wryly.

The account then focused upon the highlights of the collection: The ms. of Autobiography, of Maiden Castle, of Morwyn; the typescript of Porius (one third of which is not in the published volume), and finally upon the black ledger upon the table: the first half of the corrected typescript of A Glastonbury Romance, supposed to have been found in a barn somewhere near Phudd Bottom and that turned up at a Sotheby's sale unnoticed by any other interested parties. Prof. Brown also spoke of the collections of letters that had been accumulated, and of the small collection of Powys portraiture on display, including the "famous" bust of JCP that once belonged to Dreiser. A full description of the collection is available in the work by former Librarian Thomas E. Davies, The Powys Family: A Checklist of the Collection in the Colgate University Library (Colgate Univ. Library, 1972). Prospective users of the collection should write to Serena Lancaster or Bob Blackmore, though Prof. Brown promised that he would be no more than a telephone call away if needed. He declared that working with the collection had been a wonderful experience.

Saturday, June 8: Afternoon

Session Two: John Cowper Powys. At the second working session three papers were presented, with Thomas Southwick as Respondent.

Margaret Moran, McMaster University: "Animating Fictions in Maiden Castle."

John Cowper Powys has long been interested in using characters who were themselves creators of art. By this means, he allowed discussions to arise very naturally about the relationship between life and art. This concern is continued in Maiden Castle through Dud No-man's book on Mary Channing. But what is new is the emphasis placed on the way the characters here define themselves by the books they have read. Uryen Quirm is the most outstanding example of a character's capacity to enter into a pre-existing myth so that it may be shaped to his own needs. In his speeches, he documents himself by alluding freely to the books of Sir John Rhys where background information about his namesake can be found. Instead of being an author, Uryen is made the ultimate reader who shows in a very literal way our vital dependence on story.

With results that are not always quite so felicitous, the other characters also seek in books of their own choosing guidance about how to give shape and direction to their lives. For instance, Wizzie derives her standards of decorous feminine behavior from her reading of pulp fiction. Teucer Wye has the fetishistic requirement that his copy of the Phaedrus be placed in his right pocket and the Timaeus in the left.

In other ways, the lines of demarcation between art and life are blurred to illustrate the interconnectedness of the imagined and the real. Thus, Dud can think of Hardy's characters as if they had actually wandered in their day through the Dorchester streets. When Dud contrasts his own behaviour in buying a "wife" to that of Henchard in selling his, he makes the comparison as if he and Henchard had an identical ontological status. In these and in various other ways, literature and daily life are engaged in a creative interplay, not confined to their separate spheres. Powys shows in Maiden Castle that, by varying degrees and with diverse results, everyone lives through books. [MM]

Peter G. Christensen, State University of New York at Binghamton:
"Middlemarch: A Point of Reference in Weymouth Sands."

In John Cowper Powys's Weymouth Sands, Jobber Skald reads George Eliot's Middlemarch at Cove House. He has not followed the course of English fiction farther than the mid-nineteenth century. If the world of artistic endeavor had not moved beyond George Eliot, then Powys would not have looked like he had been left behind as a curiosity by the course of modern fiction. The manner in which George Eliot panoramically examines human misery among many characters in an entire town can be compared with Powys's approach to the same problem. Powys's novel is dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense and offers several responses to the question of human misery. Yet it gives the overall impression that mutual, enduring love between two people (rather than communion with nature) is the most effective means of combatting misery and disaster. In this sense, Powys is closer to George Eliot than is initially evident. Although she entertains the theory that social responsibility is of the greatest importance in dealing with life's sorrows, her narrative ultimately shows that a successful marriage is the most important means of sustaining happiness in people's lives. [PGC]

Charles Lock, University of Toronto: "Powys, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin and the Polyphonic Novel."

That J. C. Powys was greatly influenced by Dostoevsky is well-known. This is usually taken as an explanation of Powys's shapelessness, of his lack of interest in form and construction. This common assumption, concerning both Dostoevsky and Powys, is a characteristic product of the critical tradition that descends from Henry James.

The most forceful and theoretically-developed opposition to the Jamesian tradition is that presented by the Russian philosopher and critic, Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975); in his Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (first edition, 1929) Bakhtin demonstrated that there were stringent formal and constructive principles in Dostoevsky's novels. Comparison between Bakhtin's book and Powys's writings on Dostoevsky shows a number of telling likenesses. Bakhtin's concept of "polyphony" and Powys's concept of "multiverse" lie behind their shared perceptions of Dostoevsky.

Before A Glastonbury Romance the influence of Dostoevsky was ill-absorbed in Powys's novels, being external, thematic and "atmospheric." Wolf Solent, with the entire story being narrated through Wolf's consciousness, is Powys's great achievement in the Jamesian mode. In 1929 Powys became disenchanted with that mode, and with the success of Wolf Solent, and determined explicitly to reject the example of James.

The result was A Glastonbury Romance, a polyphonic novel, in Bakhtin's term, that reveals a number of formal similarities to Dostoevsky's novels, notably to The Devils, Powys's favourite, "the greatest of all novels."

[CL]

Saturday, June 8: Evening

On Saturday evening, conferees were joined by members of the Colgate community for a dinner at the Merrill House in honor of Robert L. Blackmore. In recognition of Professor Blackmore's outstanding contribution to Powys studies in North America, a presentation was made by Peter Powys Grey, Vice President of the Powys Society of North America, whose prefatory Address is excerpted below.

In remarks that were at once full of insight, earnestness, and delight, Peter Powys Grey offered some "stray thoughts concerning our nascent Society," which, he said, "faces some quite curious obstacles." We would do well to avoid the "rival passions" that have sometimes arisen between supporters of the different writers, and to suppress any tendency toward faddism or "willful separateness." Rather we should seek the clear "appraisal of the work itself--and of the authors themselves." The Powys Society in England and The Powys Review were our models here, for their achievement in separating the texts themselves "from the sometimes intrusive clouds of Powysian legend and doctrine." Thus our mandate entails "clarity, and rigor, and comprehensive investigation." Yet, as North Americans, we would need all our "vitality" and "outrageousness" to match the "vitality and outrageousness of those remarkable texts." Despite the investigative work already accomplished, the challenge remained; the work of John Cowper Powys was emblematic of this--in its profusion, both of material and themes, and in its profound originality and radical insight. Then there is the matter of the Powys sisters, of their personal courage, their practicality, their savage protectiveness towards their brothers--whose work is "archetypally drenched as it were in psychological femaleness." This is a theme that has barely been alluded to and yet which could prove of the most considerable clarifying value in better understanding the work of the brothers and their root values in common. Mr. Grey spoke of other projects that urgently needed attention and suggested that the Society investigate fully its university and foundation connections for the funding of these projects. He praised the efforts of our Treasurer, Thomas Southwick, for his enabling work towards securing a not-for-profit status for the Society. He continued: ". . . we here now--and our friends--are in a strangely timely position and place to blow a fresh wind, a generative wind, a glorious wind on these Powys books and Powys authors. God knows, the materials deserve it!" "One compelling example" of that which deserved attention, said Mr. Grey, was JCP's Journals, from which--to the great interest of those present--he read nine partial excerpts. His assessment of the Journals was equally of interest: "You'll note a tremendous range and, simultaneously, a remarkable simplicity in these entries: no outrageous personae, no semi-arbitrary masks, no quick-silver Protean disguises. Here is absolutely none of such: no mannerisms, no silliness, or hectoring, or special pleading. In these journals we astoundingly find ourselves inside this enormous, mercurial author, as perhaps we have been inside few other authors, reacting almost natally, yet simultaneously with the greatest wisdom, to whatever impinges next."

Mr. Grey then turned to "the best assignment of all at this Conference," the honoring of Robert L. Blackmore, William Henry Crawshaw Professor of Literature at Colgate, "for everything he has done to further the Powys cause in North America over so many, many lean years, when interest among other scholars and critics was so sadly minimal. If those days of neglect are over (and we all here tonight are largely resolved that this is indeed the case!), we principally have one man to thank." Mr. Grey was

pleased to read (and the audience to hear) a letter sent for the occasion by his 95 year old aunt, Lucy Penny, "the youngest of the extraordinary eleven brothers and sisters--the one to whom A Glastonbury Romance is dedicated." Mrs. Penny's letter reads as follows:

"As Peter is speaking in thankfulness and admiration of Professor Bob Blackmore and his wife Lucia, I take this chance to add my word to his. To me they have been valued friends for years, in spite of very brief meetings (only two or three times, when, immediately, I felt at home and happy with Bob and Lucia.) He has done so much for us all, each one, and shared so many thoughts and feelings with us: we will always have affection for him and his wife. It will be left for Nigel and Antonia [Antonia Young, Peter's cousin, and her husband] to enjoy their companionship and to see their trees in the autumn and their garden full of flowers and vegetables, which I have, alas, only to see in my dream mind.

This meeting alone proves all I have said about Bob--
Long may he be our cornerstone in America."

L. A. P.

Mr. Grey then reviewed Bob Blackmore's remarkable career: his graduation from Colgate in 1941, his years as a test pilot in World War II, his decade and a half as an executive with Time Inc., and his amazing decision to take "an 83% pay cut" and return to Colgate as an Instructor of English. This was in 1959. By 1970 he was a Professor, by 1972 Chairman of the Department, by 1979 Provost and Dean of Faculty. In 1984 he was accorded the Crawshaw Chair in Literature. Yet all the while, said Mr. Grey, Bob "jeopardized his reputation for stability" by becoming one of the most popular disc jockeys of jazz in this part of the state. Bob Blackmore's involvement with "de Powys tar-baby" began with his interest in the Strouse manuscript donation. He became Director of the Colgate Press in 1964, was founding editor of The Powys Newsletter in 1970, and thence acted as editor and commentator on a variety of texts by the Brothers Powys. This early work, said Mr. Grey, represented "the very root and foundation stone out of which this North American Powys Society has sprung."

Mr. Grey continued: ". . . I want to make a curious presentation to Bob Blackmore from our Society at this, its first formal gathering. It is a photograph of John Cowper Powys (I think the only print extant): an exciting photograph, a dog-eared and torn photograph, perhaps even a vandalized photograph -- at the past history of which we can only feebly guess, but I suspect it's also an historic photograph. It's the only photograph I know of my Uncle Jack smoking, his left hand held up in the air in the most langorous and most sensuous of semi-decadent mannerisms: a real Edwardian or even Yellow Nineties gesture. (Never forget that he sprang from that background.") Narrating the background of the photograph, Mr. Grey said that it had been called, "The Lost and the Found" and had perhaps been "the focus of various and powerful conflicting emotions." Saying that this was only conjecture, Peter Powys Grey then read the inscription:

"THE LOST AND THE FOUND"
 storied photograph
 of
 John Cowper Powys
 given with admiration (tinged with awe)
 to
Robert L. Blackmore
 by
 The Powys Society
 of
 North America
 Colgate, June 8, 1985

"Long May He Be Our Cornerstone"
 L.A.P.

Response from Robert L. Blackmore

In receiving this tribute, Bob Blackmore was also evidently bent on giving tribute of his own. He spoke of his deep appreciation to Peter and to the Powys Society of North America. He said that he wished to speak informally of his twenty-one year involvement with "the world of Powys," and of the sizeable list of persons from whom, in a sense, the Society could trace its origin. Since we are a North American society, we should take special note of two American women who were pivotal in Powys' life. The contribution of Phyllis Playter to the career of John Cowper Powys was inestimable, he said. She provided Powys with 41 years of companionship and counsel, prepared his work for publication, gave support during financially lean years, all with devotion and loyalty, and all without the benefit of marriage. Phyllis Playter will "loom ever larger in the final reckoning of Powys's life," said Professor Blackmore. Then as the other American there was Marion Powys, Peter's mother, the authority on lace, and through his letters to her (copies of which are now in the Colgate Library), a conduit for John's thoughts over many years. She too was a memorable woman.

Prof. Blackmore reflected on the work of others who deserved inclusion in the Powys Society of North America's "Hall of Fame of Unsung Heroes." There was Eric Harvey, war-hero then publisher, who secured Porius for MacDonald's after its refusal by other houses and who helped the family in a variety of ways. There was E. E. Bissell, "Ted," who lived in a house packed with manuscript material from all of the Powyses and who, a humble man, was a generous and painstaking provider of information to scholars. There was Jeffrey Kwintner, the extraordinary entrepreneur who as clothier-turned-publisher has put back into print no less than 52 of John Cowper Powys's works. There was Kenneth Hopkins, whose 1964 visit to Colgate sparked the idea of the MacDonald-Colgate co-publishing arrangement, and there was G. Wilson Knight whose tireless scholarship provoked interest in John Cowper Powys over several decades. Prof. Blackmore spoke of himself as a bridge (rather than perhaps as a cornerstone) to the new Powys Society, a role that had been totally rewarding in and of itself because of the people he and Lucia had met and loved. He made special mention of Lucy Amelia Penny, saying, "Of all the tribe of Powyses, the sweetness and light of that woman is magnificent." He talked of Isobel Powys Marks, "with whom I have walked every inch of Powys Wessex," and of Frances Powys from whom he purchased the foundation of his Powys collection just as the Powys Bookstore in Hastings was going out of business. Gerard Casey, said Prof. Blackmore, was another individual whose role Powysians will increasingly appreciate.

Now there was a new generation to edit the journals, to provide the scholarship, and to conduct meetings like this one. "The four officers of the Society: Ben, Peter, Tom--and Denis, who put this all together--these are the people to whom I pass on the torch."

Sunday, June 9: Morning

Session Three: T.F. Powys. One paper was given. Ben Jones was Respondent.

Bruce R. S. Litte, Northwest Missouri State University: "The Quest for God in the Fiction of T. F. Powys."

Though the fiction of T. F. Powys will now strike readers as remote from recognizably twentieth-century social, political, or aesthetic issues, and the isolated English villages in which he sets all his fiction offer few familiar material appurtenances, it does grapple with human and religious issues of continuing concern: the nature and presence of God, the relationship of the divine and the physical, and the need for a broadened conception of religious experience for the sake of our human well being. As we examine T. F. Powys's fiction we see characters engaged in an obsessive quest for God. The quest takes these characters away from restrictive traditional doctrines and practices (whether misguided fervid evangelism or staid Anglicanism) and toward a more explicitly Christian version of the elementalism that readers will recognize from the fiction of his brother J. C. Powys. Three works are examined in this paper: Mr. Weston's Good Wine (1927) and two lesser-known novellas, both first appearing in 1923, "Abraham Men" and "God." All three works illustrate Powys's belief that cloistered virtue makes a mockery of itself, that God is found not through denial but through the earth, infusing all life, the most humble as much as the sublime, and that the successful quest will not dispell melancholy: inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness is the basis of Powys's theology. Powys's characters discover that the presence of God involves an acceptance of gifts as well as defeat and death, an acceptance that will enable them to accept the transitory joys and sorrows of earthly life until they are ready for the everlasting contentment of the rich dark wine of eternal life.[BRSL]

Also in Session Three, Dante Thomas, SUNY-Geneseo, made a presentation entitled "Updating the Bibliography of John Cowper Powys," which he accompanied with readings of some uncollected poems by JCP. A transcript of this presentation was not available at press time.

The Inaugural Conference of the Powys Society of North America concluded with the BUSINESS MEETING, with Ben Jones presiding. Members present received the President's Remarks, the Report of the Executive Secretary, and the Report of the Treasurer; they adopted the Constitution, and ratifies the appointment of the Executive Officers; they recommended an increase in the annual dues; discussed the format and location of future meetings, and the nature of special projects; and, finally, they passed unanimously a motion by Robert Blackmore "to establish an informal sub-committee to investigate why this Conference has been so friendly, has gone so well, has been accomplished in such a mood of wit and grace--in short, to find out how this has been done and to repeat it at all future conferences!" Complete Minutes of the Business Meeting will be available at a subsequent date.

1986 CONFERENCE

The Executive Committee is pleased to announce that the 1986 Conference of the PSNA will take place on the weekend of June 6 to June 8, at Glendon College, York University, Toronto, Canada. A preliminary announcement is being mailed to members.

G. WILSON KNIGHT (1897-1985)

Professor G. R. Wilson Knight died on March 20, 1985. He was the first Honorary Member of the Powys Society of North America. He had been, in addition, President of the Powys Society (U.K.) and was, at his death, President of the Wilson Knight Interdiscipline Society, New York. His other achievements--his works on Shakespeare, Byron, and John Cowper Powys, as well as honors received--are well known. Peter Powys Grey writes of another aspect of G. Wilson Knight.

THE KINDNESS OF WILSON KNIGHT

It is difficult indeed to write of Professor G. R. Wilson Knight without some initial subjective laud, without a personal homage to the particular numen of that astonishing man. On each of several meetings with him, I'd find myself almost at once in a blithe state of surprise that he could react to me with such remarkable attentiveness, such a willingness to be engrossed--as though I were some figure of overriding integrity and known insight. Unforgettable are the quick chipmunk eyes, the eagerness, the white head craned forward to catch every word. And my own sense of a sudden good fortune of being elevated beyond normal concourse.

Very similarly, subjective echoes are pervasive in relation to the formidable numen of John Cowper Powys. When, on my last visit to him at Blaenau Ffestiniog in the fall of 1959, I spoke of Wilson Knight, Uncle Jack's response was an explosion of delighted sound, those bony, heavily veined, so-expressive octogenarian hands signalling high into the air in sudden benediction and wild thankfulness: "O, he is such a worthy, worthy, worthy man!"

To Knight, Powys wrote: "We sure are a pair!" Indeed they were--so different in every public characteristic, and yet so ultimately suited to each other. How very simply, and with what grave mutual respect, they were able to infiltrate into each other's profoundest and most idiocyncratic nerve centers! In a particularly dear sense, they deserved each other.

teachers

Yet rarely did either of these two great/bludgeon us with subjective overkill. In both, genius remained guided by stern intellect, by deep reservoirs of knowledge, and by paradoxical and frequently quite unexpected zones of dispassion. And, of course, by marvellous humor. At the same time, unlike most of their contemporaries, both asserted the primacy of certain anomalous cosmic powers, to be approached only through subjective voluptuous searchings. (These powers have never been more sensitively assessed than by Morine Krissdottir in the most recent (#16) issue of The Powys Review.)

A key to Professor Knight's sagely discriminating literary writings is his repeated insistence that he wrote "interpretations," rather than "criticisms." The difference is fine, but I would dare to hazard that one discrete and invigorating quality of these "interpretations" is that special personal kindness, for which Knight is so remembered by those who knew him. Re-reading his pages now, it does indeed appear that this penetrating variant of "kindness" did illumine and transmute their substance.

Can kindness be a quality of literary exploration? Indeed: a vital one, provided it remains only subtly apparent--a subjective pungency haunting the more formal context of the work. At its best, a disposition prone to kindness in human terms implies a keen understanding of the intended recipient of kindness, which elicits a benign, hopefully inspired, action which could indeed even irradiate the life and work of that recipient. In the endeavors of kindness, intently focused consciousness is implied, as well as ardent exertion and vivifying intelligence. Ultimately, little pretense of dispassion. Channeled into the exploration of great works, such enkindening interpretation can, as it may be illumined, produce a genuine literary agape.

At the 1972 Cambridge Powys Conference, Wilson Knight referred to an earlier distinction he had made between "kindly humour" and "derisive humour." "The kindly humour tends to dissolve conventional judgements, taboos, religious or moral judgements, or just respectability, into some 'golden centre', as I called it." Knight's entire oeuvre (and particularly his writings on Powys) stands as a lovely example of this golden, sacramental centre, as do so many of Powys' kindly writings to the world. They sure were a pair!

-Peter Powys Grey

OF NOTE

The Harper Colophon reprint of Wolf Solent was offered as the Quality Paperback Book Club's alternate selection for July, 1985, as a book "too good to forget." Sales of this members-only edition are said to have gone well.-

John Bayley's quite extensive review of both Wolf Solent and Weymouth Sands appeared in the March 28, 1985, issue of the New York Review of Books. It was accompanied by the drawing by David Levine reproduced on our front page. Liberal artist's license appears to have been taken in depicting JCP--the longest of writers of longhand--at a typewriter!

New news at the new court. The new address of Paul Roberts, General Secretary of the Powys Society (U.K.) is: 29 St. Mary's Road, Sale, Cheshire, England.

An expanded version of Charles Lock's essay, "Powys, Dostoevsky, Bakhtin and the Polyphonic Novel," has been accepted for publication in the University of Toronto Quarterly. No date of issue available as yet.

In the next issue of Powys Notes: A review by Thomas Southwick of JCP's Three Fantasies; a review of JCP's play, Paddock Calls; a bibliography item; the membership list; full program for Conference 86; and more.

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