THE POWYS NEWSLETTER

THREE

1972-3

Seven of the eleven children of Charles Francis
and Mary Cowper Johnson Powys published books.
The POWYS NEWSLETTER reviews Powys scholarship
in America, and presents unpublished works
primarily by

John Cowper Powys, 1872-1963
Theodore Francis Powys, 1875-1953
Llewelyn Powys, 1884-1939.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

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Each issue of the *Newsletter* brings a previously unpublished work by one of the Powyses. Here, insofar as we know, are the words of a previously unpublished Powys—the Reverend Charles Francis Powys (1843-1923), father of John Cowper, Theodore Francis, Marian Powys Grey, Llewelyn, and seven other children. At the suggestion of Peter Powys Grey who kindly lent the notebook containing several sermons by his grandfather, the *Newsletter* prints sermon no. 860, "Harvest Thanksgiving," of 23 September 1894.

In length and style and creed the sermon is similar to others in the notebook; it would seem to be representative of the public words the Powyses heard each week from the pulpits at Shirley, Dorchester, and Montacute occupied by their father during their childhood and adult years. The Rev. C. F. Powys had been at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, as had his father and his father-in-law. Three of his sons—John, Littleton, and Llewelyn—followed that family tradition.

The title page of the sermon—perhaps in the handwriting of his wife, Mary Cowper Johnson Powys—tells that he delivered it twice more at St. Catherine's Church, Montacute (in 1901 and 1910), and once at Preston Plucknett (1899). Revisions and re-revisions of the sermon make the notebook a difficult palimpsest; the text given here attempts to follow the earliest version. Many underscorings in a lighter ink that seem later marks of emphasis have been omitted, but there are no editorial changes. The generous use of dashes rather than periods and the heavily italicized copy give the manuscript something of the visual flavor of holographs by John Cowper Powys.

—R. L. Blackmore

HARVEST
THANKSGIVING

Sermon 860

The Reverend Charles Francis Powys
Vicar of Montacute

St. Matthew XIII pt of v 30 "But gather the wheat into my barn."

Such will be the command of the Son of Man unto the angel reapers at God's great Harvest Day—"Gather the wheat into my barn." These words are taken from the parable of the tares, and a wonderful parable it is— What a living picture is brought before our minds by our Lord's words. We seem to see the husbandman hard at work sowing his field with good seed—while his stealthy enemy is secretly watching all he does, determined if possible to mar his labour—and he seizes his opportunity while men slept—he is busy sowing tares among the wheat—and he escapes unobserved—time passes on—the crop grows up—and the ears begin to form, and then at length the labourers discover the presence of the tares—and they come to their master for permission to pull them up—but no—it was impossible— They could not pull up one without the other—and not any of the wheat may be lost or injured. They must wait.

The harvest was approaching—and then would be the right time for the great

separation. The Master bid them wait—"Let both grow together until the Harvest"—"and in the time of Harvest, I will say to the reapers, gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

And this picture relates to the Church of God—and alas—until Christ cometh in his glory we must always expect to find tares among the wheat. It is not for us to set to work violently to root up the tares, lest in our impetuosity and ignorance we pull up also the wheat with them. We may indeed by gentleness and love—and constant culture seek to transform the tares into wheat—and this thank God is possible in the harvest field in which we labour—for by the grace of God the very tares may be changed in their nature and be numbered amongst the good corn.

But the great lesson of the parable is the solemn truth, which we confess in the creed—that however mixed the good and evil may be now in the Church on Earth, it will not be so in the Church in Heaven. There is coming the Harvest—God's Harvest Day—and then will come the time of separation. And then at length "the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom, all things that offend and them which do iniquity." And then shall be the great Day of final judgment—*Jesus Himself* shall be the Judge—"He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead." And there will be no escape—"We must all appear before the Judgment seat of Christ." And then the tares, and the wheat will be manifested. What a difference will there be seen between them—and how impossible the gulf which will separate them. The Lord of the harvest will say to the reapers "gather ye together 1st the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

And brothers, as regards some of us, the day of separation may be nearer than we think. *Life is the time to serve the Lord*—when death comes our work here must end, and as we die, so must we stand before the Judgment seat of God— Let us take heed then, that we ourselves are prepared—ready for our Master's call! Let us be workers in his Harvest—active workers seeking to do good continually one to another, while we have the power to help each other.

This evening you will have the opportunity—of giving to the help of those, who are deserving of your aid—and whose labour has been very closely connected with the harvests of past years— You are asked to give a free will offering as the Lord your God has blessed you to the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Society. And I ask you to do so the more liberally as cheap bread, which is such an advantage to many a labourer with a large family, has made it far more difficult for those who grow the corn to obtain a fair profit for their labour and anxiety—and for this reason, and because of bad seasons not a few Farmers have been reduced to very straitened circumstances—

And it becomes us Christians "to bear each others' burdens"—and if God gives us prosperity, to help those, who are hard pressed in the battle of life. For this life is indeed a battle field— It is for us to fight against the world, the flesh and the Devil—and in so doing—we must seek to lift up the fallen, and cheer the faint, and

comfort the sorrowful and heavy laden.

[The many alterations and obliterations on this page made it impossible to separate the several tributes to recently deceased churchmen.] And as we die so shall we stand before the judgment seat of God. We have been again taught during the present week the uncertainty of life in the sudden death of Arch-Deacon Salmon, who has held the office of Arch-deacon but a very short period—and who was well known in this neighbourhood, when Vicar of Martock. The whole Diocese will mourn his loss with sincere and heartfelt sorrow. But the great Master hath in his wisdom and love called him from joining with us in keeping our harvest rejoicing here on earth, to share in the joy of his own Harvest in Heaven—in the paradise of God.

And as we think of the Church of Christ militant here on Earth, and of the Saints of God resting in the presence of Jesus—waiting for the manifestation of his glory at the great Day of God, let us be stirred up to seek more earnestly the things of Heaven, and to work more diligently in this our day, ere this night closes in, when no man can work.

And let us each ask ourselves the important question—am I of the good corn? or am I still no better than a tare useless in the Great Master's field? am I bearing fruit unto God, or am I only a hindrance to the gathering in of the harvest? The Angel of death may come suddenly—and the corn fall before the sickle—and then shall the angels gather us into God's safe keeping *to be with Christ* in Paradise? or shall we find the door shut and ourselves left out in the outer darkness? because we knew not the Lord, and refused to hearken to his voice, in this our day of visitation.

My brethren are you numbered amongst the wheat? are your names written in Heaven in the Lamb's Book of life?

God grant that it may be so!

But it behoves us to *examine ourselves* and *see* that we have a sound hope and a *clear title* unto God's eternal kingdom— If we are unprofitable servants—if we are bearing no good fruit—but only useless and empty husks, how can we expect to be gathered into God's Barn— The distinction may not be manifest now—the good and the bad are mixed together in the Church on Earth—but there will be a day of separation.

Let us take heed that we may not be found on that great Day among the tares— *For then* it will be *too late* to change—it will be the time of judgment.

But it is upon the bright side of the picture that I would have your minds rest today— The Lord of the Harvest will give the command unto the angel reapers, and that command will be carried out—"Gather the wheat into my barn," and all the wheat shall be gathered safe into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour—no grain shall fall to the ground. What a glorious harvest will that be! what a precious ingathering!

O that we may all have *our part there-in*—and join in the shout of joy and adoration saying, "Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor,

and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever, amen"– And well may the Redeemed of God bless his holy Name at that great Day!

Our Harvest–the ingathering of which we celebrate today, has not been accomplished without toil and labour– There must first be the ploughing and the sowing–and the hoe-ing–*then the* reaping, and the ingathering– Nothing can be done without work– and so also must it be as regards *God's* Harvest. [Written vertically in the margin opposite the next sentence: "omit–but keep in mind–"] That for which we have laboured we count in a special sense our own.

The good grain cannot be gathered into God's Barn without labour and toil. We may indeed help forward the work by our own hands–but all the toil, all the labour, all the patient endurance after saints of God could never have accomplished the ingathering of the great Day– For that *glorious Harvest* is the *result* of the *work* which the *Son of God hath wrought* for us men when he bore the curse of our sins in his own body on the tree– That great multitude, whom no man can number, and who shall stand before the throne of God in Heaven, "clothed in white robes and palms in their hands"–are "those who have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The Lord of the Harvest the Son of man has indeed the right to issue the command "gather the wheat into my barn"– For *that wheat* is *his own–purchased unto himself* by his *own most* precious blood–and purified sanctified and regenerated by his holy Spirit. The Harvest of God is the manifestation of the completion of Christ's toil and labour in the Salvation of his people– And it is Christ, who shall command "gather the wheat into my barn."

And the wheat shall be gathered in–gathered unto Christ to be for ever with Him in his eternal and glorious kingdom–their everlasting Home– As soon as the right time comes in the wisdom of God the Almighty Father–the word will be spoken "Thrust in thy sickle and reap for the harvest of the earth is ripe"–and "the earth" shall be "reaped"–and the wheat shall be gathered together into the eternal Kingdom of Christ and of God. The *whole harvest* shall be gathered–the living and the dead–of God's own *redeemed people* of every nation and every age–rich and poor, young and old–all will be gathered safe into *God's Barn*. It will matter little *how* or *when* they have left this world– For the *Almighty Father* who 1st gave them life *can preserve* their life and fulfil the declaration of his well beloved Son "This is the will of him, that sent me, that every one, which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life, and *I will raise him* up at the last day."

We men cannot estimate the infinite power of God–nor his infinite love–but let us rest our souls upon his blessed promises– Let us rejoice in this Salvation as revealed unto us in his holy Word.

Let us seek to walk in the light of Christ–believing in Him, loving Him, following Him–and then we may indeed rejoice–not only in the bounty of the harvest displayed around us today, but rather in the bright hope of God's coming Harvest, when Christ shall gather his people unto Himself, and "so shall we ever be with the Lord." *Amen.*

THE SECOND NOVEL: RODMOOR

John Cowper Powys's second novel, *Rodmoor* (1916), followed his first, *Wood and Stone* by only a year. Yet just as the setting is different, a somber seaside village in East Anglia instead of the lush West Country, so is the emotional atmosphere. Instead of the cosmic immensities of the earlier work foreshadowing those of *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Porius*, we have for Powys a relatively narrow concentration on a smaller group of people. Although the book lacks both the poetic richness and the amplitude of the later works prefigured in *Wood and Stone* it marks an advance in psychological vividness over that more intellectualized and objectified but less intensely probing work. Indeed, *Rodmoor* is Powys's starkest projection of psychic desperation and despair in the absence of a consoling and redeeming life-illusion. Accordingly, the perspective is not so distant and remote as that in *Wood and Stone* but more agonizingly immediate, and Powys seems more intimately involved with his characters.

In the *Autobiography* Powys describes the war years during which *Rodmoor* was presumably composed as an unhappy period in his life, a time of mental and physical torment compounded of sadic guilt and a vow to refrain from all sexual indulgence until the war was over, ulcer attacks, and the heat of American summers which he had previously been able to avoid by returning to England. He felt himself overwhelmed by the "American Horror" which he associated with summer resorts and "Residential Sections," the "mysterious *meaninglessness*, and the absence of all that in human life is reassuring, satisfying, symbolic."[1] He was unwilling or unable to project this directly into a novel about the American scene, but it is possible to discern in the foreboding atmosphere of Rodmoor, so different from that of the West Country, an objective correlative to the neurotic misery he endured in America. Significantly, Adrian Sorio, the chief protagonist of the novel, has at the beginning of the book just returned from America where he had undergone "mental suffering" and a "final mental collapse" of unspecified nature which led to his imprisonment; among its causes were "his unhappy habit of deadly introspection"

Michael Greenwald, *a member of the English Department of Wilkes College, is completing his dissertation on John Cowper Powys at Harvard. Late in this* Newsletter *is his report on the Powys Centenary at Cambridge last September.*

and "his aching nostalgia for things less murderously new and raw."[2] However, the place to which he comes in England provides no solace; in many respects Rodmoor reflects in a more elemental way the same undermining tendencies he encountered in America. Instead of providing the magical vistas of imaginative escape which Powys repeatedly associates with the sea at Weymouth, the sea at Rodmoor is a cruel antagonist continually eating away the land. As a result the stability of human associations and traditions so valued by Powys is constantly being undermined and destroyed. The inhabitants of Rodmoor are repeatedly described as morbid and perverse, and their lives are literally sterile. The prevalence of unmarried men is specifically noted (XII, 152), and the women are frustrated and unfulfilled. Thus, Powys's characteristically dualistic imagination here pits the for him necessary organic continuity between man and the land against the annihilating power represented by the sea, and here the struggle is seen as a losing one. The disintegration of Rodmoor is made the setting for the disintegration of Adrian Sorio.

As is common with Powys, an elemental opposition is embodied in sexual terms. Sorio is alternately drawn to two women, one associated with the solid dependability of earth, the other with more volatile and dangerous elements. This pattern of antithetical attractions, subtly varied, will recur frequently in subsequent books. Unlike Maurice Quincunx of *Wood and Stone*, whose subjective dilemma is never made sufficiently vivid, the complexities of Sorio are sharply defined in terms of his surroundings, whether human or elemental or a subtle fusion of both. Like Lacrima Traffio of the earlier book, Sorio has an obscure Italian background, but this is only slightly developed in the novel; it seems an uncertain remnant of Powys's fascination with Catholicism. Adrian meets Nance Herrick, the daughter of a deceased sea-captain, in London; she falls unreservedly in love with him, and although he seems to love her too, Powys intimates at once that she is unable fully to comprehend him or his needs. Nance embodies normal human affections in all their strength and all their limitations. Powys always displays an intuitive sympathy and understanding for the suffering which ordinary femininity has to endure because of the caprices of masculine intellect and imagination; the novel gains a strength and solidity of its own from being frequently presented from the viewpoint of Nance as she struggles gallantly but in vain to preserve not only Adrian but her neurotic and susceptible half-sister, Linda, from the dangers of Rodmoor. With fine psychological insight Powys makes it clear that Nance's love both for her orphaned younger sister and for the essentially immature though considerably older Adrian is strongly maternal. This "deep maternal pity, infinite in its emotion of protection" (XVI, 220) is something which both Adrian and Linda, despite their weaknesses find confining and even stifling, and feel compelled to resist. Although Nance is the daughter of a seaman, she is completely one with the earth, while to Adrian and Linda the chaos of the sea is something at once terrifying and irresistible. Significantly, Adrian's attraction to Nance comes into being in the civilized and earthbound world of London, and only there does a happy consummation of their love seem even a possibility. When they remove themselves to the more elemental and unstable world of Rodmoor, the improbable becomes impossible. Interestingly, Powys's style in the opening chapter set in London has an almost Jamesian urbanity which is quickly lost in the turbulent atmosphere of

Rodmoor; indeed, except for one late unpublished fantasy,[3] Powys was never to visit London again in his fiction.

Even in this opening London chapter Adrian describes to Nance the bisexual image that haunts him after reading "Le Livre des Litanies" of Remy de Gourmont:

> . . . It was neither the form of a boy nor of a girl, and yet it had the nature of both. It gazed at me with a fixed sorrowful stare, and I felt . . . that I had known it before, somewhere, far off, and long ago. It was the very embodiment of tragic supplication, and yet, in the look it fixed on me, there was a cold, merciless mockery.
>
> It was the kind of form, Nance, that one can imagine wandering in vain helplessness down all the years of human history, seeking amid the dreams of all the great, perverse artists of the world for the incarnation it has been denied by the will of God. (I, 18)

Nance feels foreboding, and both her forebodings and his imaginings are soon given their embodiment at Rodmoor in the shape of Philippa Renshaw, the daughter of the town's most aristocratic family. Philippa is consistently presented in bisexual terms: her figure is variously described as "equivocal" (III, 42), "androgynous" (IV, 49), and "epicene" (IV, 50); she is an image of "defiant sexlessness" (IV, 50). Even her name is sexually ambiguous; Sorio likes to call her Phil. In evoking her special aura Powys clearly reveals his debt to Pater; she is reminiscent of both Pater's ambivalent Diaphaneite and his mysterious Mona Lisa. Her scarlet lips quiver into "that enigmatic smile challenging and inscrutable which seems, more than any other human expression, to have haunted the imagination of certain great artists of the past." She seems at first "some delicate evocation of perverse pagan desire restored to breath and consciousness," yet "her eyes had that particular look, sorrowful and heavy with mystery, which one feels *could not have been in the world* before the death of Christ" (IV, 50). Thus, she suggests an image transcending both ordinary sexual desires and the differences between paganism and Christianity.

Philippa is akin to Sorio but even more extreme in her self-absorption and in her fascination with the freer and more fluid elements. She gazes intently at her naked body in a mirror and then as "a mad desire seemed to possess her to throw off every vestige of her human imprisonment and to pass free and unfettered into the embrace of the primeval powers" (IV, 51), she embraces a tree. When she and Adrian go swimming in the ocean, she would like to swim on until the waters drown them, while he finally chooses to return to land. Ultimately he dies near the sea and she swims with his dead body until the sea covers them both. The attraction between them is essentially mental rather than physical, though rooted in their elemental natures. It is Philippa who inspires Adrian's philosophy and understands it, though she is feminine enough to despise "all philosophical theories . . . as being irrelevant and off the track of actual life" (VIII, 114). She claims to have the brain of a man and hates her woman's body. Adrian reveals a similar impulse when during a struggle between them he strikes her across the breast in a reaction against that which links her with Nance's maternal nature and conventional sexuality (XXI, 321). Philippa is emotionally estranged from her own mother, who in her feminine resignation counsels against girls trying to be boyish (XVIII, 256). On the other hand, her relationship with her brother Brand, a figure of masculine power,

has incestuous overtones. Brand is drawn to Nance's sister Linda by her weakness and her fear of the sea; he makes her pregnant and abandons her. Brand's physical cruelty complements Philippa's "spiritual cruelty" (XIX, 269); both embody sadistic propensities which Adrian Sorio, like most Powysian protagonists, contains within himself.

Powys's heavily symbolic treatment of a character like Philippa undoubtedly leaves him open to the charge of weighing down his characters with more significance than they can gracefully bear. Indeed, soon after *Rodmoor* was published his friend and severe critic, Wilkinson, again took issue with his work in a devastatingly funny and accurate parody entitled *Bumbore: A Romance*[4] consisting of a climactic Chapter DCCCXCIX in which most of the characters of *Rodmoor* with comically altered names—Adrian Sorio not inappropriately becomes Onan Sadio—and plunge fatally into the tide-drawn waters of the River Looney. But although Powys is often fair game for the parodist in *Rodmoor* as elsewhere, the book in its tendency to present characters as symbolic archetypes is subtler and more complex than it may at first appear. *Rodmoor* is "dedicated to the spirit of Emily Brontë"; in his contemporaneous essay on that author Powys declared that "the genius of a romantic novelist—indeed the genius of all writers primarily concerned with the mystery of human character—consists in letting the basic differences between man and man, between man and woman, rise up, unimpeded by frivolous detail, from the fathomless depths of life itself."[5] Thus, he is concerned in *Rodmoor* to explore the archetypal and elemental aspects of his characters without being overly concerned with what he would regard as frivolous details of social verisimilitude or societal role-playing, even though his symbolism sometimes becomes more self-consciously insistent and susceptible to parody than that of Emily Brontë. Still, in this work he remains a novelist, albeit a romantic one, and often there is an interesting tension in his creations between character and archetype, between their expected roles in the world and the perhaps authentic, perhaps imagined selves they may be struggling to realize. The creation of a viable personality is always a central Powysian concern, and *Rodmoor* provides a great deal of insight into the nature of the problem.

Just as Pater wondered about the relationship in the image of the Mona Lisa between the figure that repeatedly haunted Leonardo's imagination and the actual La Giaconda he came to paint, Powys presents Sorio first imagining his bisexual ideal and then encountering an actual girl who seems to conform to it. However, the ideal is something Philippa herself is still struggling to achieve and of whose true nature she remains uncertain. She herself recognizes this when, after speaking about how much she loathes her femininity, she realizes that she hates something that is inextricably part of herself. Young girls, she declares, seem to have a natural tendency toward role-playing:

> They've neither sensitiveness nor fastidiousness nor modesty nor decency! It's all put on—every bit of it. I *know*, for I'm like that myself—or half of me is. I betray myself to myself and lacerate myself for being myself. It's a curious state of things—isn't it Adriano? (VIII, 115)

The question deliberately left hanging by Powys is unmistakable: what is the authentic self? Elsewhere Philippa is dismayed when Sorio unintentionally disturbs her sense of security in the role she is playing by ignoring her, and himself taking a

dominant role:

> His proposal had . . . a most subtle and curious effect upon her. It changed the relations between them. It reduced her to the position of a girl playing with an older brother. It outraged, with an element of the comic, her sense of dramatic fastidiousness. It humiliated her pride and broke the twisted threads of all kinds of delicate spiritual nets she had in her mind to cast over him. It placed her by his side as a weak and timid woman by the side of a willful and strong-minded man. (XXXI, 319)

His proposal is that he swing her up on a rope to the top floor of an old windmill, a comic deflation of her autocratic life-illusion. Thus even in Rodmoor, whose predominant tone is one of desperate seriousness, Powys is capable of comic irony. At another point, one of Philippa's dramatic entrances is spoiled by her mother's mundane revelation that the girl has spent the day at the dentist's (XIV, 178). Similarly, a passionate assertion by Brand Renshaw of his elemental awareness of the nature of evil — 'I've seen bats in the dawn' — is deflated by Brand's own subsequent declaration that his words are merely 'melodramatic nonsense' and his claim to be 'just a common ruffian who knows a pretty face when he sees it.' (XIV, 193). Despite their aura of decadent aristocracy, the Renshaws own a thriving brewery in Mundham which is managed by Brand.

It is possible to regard this sort of persistent irony as disruptive of the book's romantic mood, even as proof of Powys's fundamental lack of seriousness, but it seems more appropriate to see it as a serious effort to come to grips with human ambiguity and complexity, though one falling infinitely short of the involuted romantic irony found in a more sophisticated artist like Nabokov. There are times when Powys seems to be rejecting dramatic self-consciousness and romantic role-playing in favor of the spontaneous and the natural, but there remains a continual ambiguity about what is truly natural. Under the influence of the naturalist, Dr. Raughty, who ignores her sex entirely, Philippa recalls the childish innocence of a past fishing expedition and bursts "into a peal of ringing boyish laughter" (XIX, 281). On the other hand, a "childish and wistful" moment with Adrian causes her to insist to him: 'I'm not a boy, I'm a woman'(XXI, 329). Even apparent spontaneity and naturalness reveal the contrariness of the self and its desires. Philippa's mother, Mrs. Renshaw, is the spokesman in the novel for feminine acquiescence in the natural order of things and submission to the ways of God, while the perverse character of Philippa's rebelliousness is frequently emphasized. Yet even the maternal Nance, the representative of feminine normality and Philippa's consistent enemy, recoils from Mrs. Renshaw's masochistic doctrine of obedience to nature and sees the old woman in her passive morbidity as "a creature forced and driven out of her natural element into...obscure perversities" (XVIII, 255). In the world of Rodmoor the natural order consists of the sterile destructiveness of the sea as well as the desperate fecundity of the land, and the two are in continual conflict with each alternatively giving way to the other as the tides advance and recede. The sea, of course, has its own dangerous vitality, while the land can be barren. Nor do human beings always adhere to their expected roles; unexpected affinities link apparently dissimilar types, while surprising differences divide the apparently similar. Mrs. Renshaw in her Christian submissiveness to the will of God seems closer to Fingal Raughty's paganistic exaltation of 'the rhythm of

nature' (XXII, 345) than to the views of the Anglican priest Hamish Traherene, whose conviction that 'nature can be terribly malign in her tricks upon us' and that 'the only thing for us to do is to hold fast to a power completely beyond nature which can come in from outside . . . and change everything' (XII, 158-159) is strangely reminiscent of the seemingly irreligious yearnings of Philippa and Adrian.

At the heart of *Rodmoor* there remains the Powysian figure of Adrian Sorio; like Powys himself he composes "dithyrambic notes" for a book of metaphysical philosophy. His philosophy, as he explains it to Philippa amidst a blazing setting of sun and sea, has the paradoxical effect of clarifying the very elemental surroundings which diminish it to hopeless futility:

> "What I'm aiming at in my book," he said, "is a revelation of how the essence of life is found in the instinct of destruction. I want to show—what is simply the truth—that the pleasure of destruction, destruction entered upon out of sheer joy and for its own sake, lies beyond every living impulse that pushes life forward. Out of destruction alone—out of the rending and tearing of something—of something in the way—does new life spring to birth. It isn't destruction for cruelty's sake," he went on, his fingers closing and unclosing at his side over a handful of sand. "Cruelty is mere inverted sentiment. Cruelty implies attraction, passion, even—in some cases—love. Pure destruction—destruction for its own sake—such as I see it—is no thick, heavy, muddy, perverted impulse such as the cruel are obsessed by. It's a burning and devouring flame. It's a mad, splendid revel of glaring whiteness like this which hurts our eyes now. I'm going to show in my book how the ultimate essence of life, as we find it, purest and most purged in the ecstasies of the saints is nothing but an insanity of destruction! That's really what lies at the bottom of all the asceticism and all the renunciation in the world. It's the instinct to destroy—to destroy what lies nearest to one's hand—in this case, of course, one's own body and the passions of the body. Ascetics fancy they do this for the sake of their souls. That's their illusion. They do it for its own sake—for the sake of the ecstasy of destruction! Man is the highest of all animals because he can destroy the most. The saints are the highest among men because they can destroy humanity. . . .
>
> "What the saints and the mystics seek," he went on, "is the destruction of everything within reach—of everything that sticks out, that obtrudes, that is simply *there*. That is why they throw their stones at every form of natural life. But the life they attack is doing the same thing itself in a cruder way. The sea is destroying the land; the grass is destroying the flowers; the flowers one another; the woods, the marshes, the fens, are all destroying something. The saints are only the maddest and wisest of all destroyers—" (VIII, 111-112).

The pertinence of this to the crucial problem of personality should be apparent. In Powys's own subsequent metaphysical work, *The Complex Vision*, the development of an authentic personality is seen to be an essentially creative process and destruction is closely linked with creation. In order to create a new personality and escape the old one must be prepared to destroy the resistant material that impedes the realization of the new. However, *The Complex Vision* reflects the

Wordsworthian insight that our personal universe is something that we half-create and half-discover; the fluid realm of imagination must be grounded in the hard rock of fundamental being. To attempt a complete self-transformation is to court self-destruction. This Philippa embraces willingly when she ultimately drowns herself in the fluid ocean; Adrian, on the other hand, dies at the edge of land and sea, his back to the humanity he has rejected and his eyes on the "inexpressible, infinite reassurance" of the sea (XXVII, 458), overcome at last by his efforts to reconcile the contrary impulses of his own nature and of nature itself. Unlike the self-absorbed Philippa he would transform the universe as well as himself; he urges universal destruction as the necessary prelude to universal regeneration. Nowhere else does Powys so emphasize the dangerous and destructive elements in creativity, for nowhere else does he so nakedly confront the horrors of existence.

Like Pater in his imaginary portraits but with far greater vividness and immediacy, Powys here presents a world in which sensitive nerves are forced to suffer vicariously the cruelty and pain that seems endemic to the very scheme of things. Adrian Sorio shares his creator's compulsion to rescue living creatures from the toils of circumstance, but he is frequently reminded of the futility of his actions. After his philosophical discourse in praise of destruction he takes paradoxical delight in freeing some small fish from the nets left on the sand by fishermen and returning them to the sea in violation of Rodmoor custom. But his pleasure in saving the fish from the scavenging children is dashed by Philippa's observation that 'they'll find others. . . . There'll always be some nets that have fish in them' (VIII, 117). Life needs to feed off life, and Adrian's efforts to interfere with natural processes can only seem absurd, which makes them all the more painful. Cruelty and suffering are equally inevitable in the human world in which people consciously or unconsciously torment each other in order to satisfy their own needs and desires. Linda, who in her weak helplessness recalls Lacrima Traffio of *Wood and Stone*, seems to invite the cruelty of others; perversely her weakness invites the disasterous attentions of Brand Renshaw, while her need for him causes her to be cruel to Nance, who struggles vainly to protect her. Adrian's ultimate mental collapse and incarceration in an asylum comes about when he is overwhelmed by the cold-blooded practicality of Brand with regard to Linda which leaves the more equanimous Nance almost sympathetic in spite of herself. Adrian's response is to seize the heavy phallic walking stick which he, like so many other Powys heroes, always carries, and to beat Brand savagely about the head with it until he collapses. This image of cruelty and destruction, which so haunted Mr. Evans of *A Glastonbury Romance*, is one that repeatedly haunted Powys as well; it appears in the first published work, *Wood and Stone*, and in the last, *All or Nothing*. Here it conveys most vividly not only Powys's habitual association of masculine sexuality and sadism, but his conviction that the assertion of power over another living creature, whether sexual or not, inevitably threatens to involve one in the very cruelty he may be seeking to combat. Maurice Quincunx's efforts to defend persecuted innocence in *Wood and Stone*, revealed similarly cruel propensities in him. Cruelty then, which is so inextricably a part of the nature of things, must be destroyed or transcended, if at all, not by physical power but by the power of the imagination.

Such a transcendence is suggested by the philosophy which Adrian is unable to realize in life because for him the pain of living is too great and the necessary

detachment too difficult. In articulating this philosophy he speaks of the need for 'pure destruction' which stands in contrast to the 'invested sentiment' of cruelty. Such destruction 'lies behind every living impulse that pushes life forward.' It is associated with a blinding white light; in its absolute rejection of the actuality of earth it recalls Shelley's desperate assertion that

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments. . . .

This extreme sort of idealism is ordinarily not very congenial to Powys whose tendencies toward Platonism are ordinarily tempered by a rich appreciation of the natural world. His usual conception of "real reality" is a magical blending of the actual and the imagined; even the suicide by drowning of Johnny Geard at the conclusion of *A Glastonbury Romance* and the cosmic suicides that conclude *Up and Out* are passionate quests for more and richer experiences rather than a rejection of previous ones. However, the reader of *Rodmoor* is forced to conclude that the characteristic Powysian bent toward imaginative escape here emphasizes the need to escape *from* life rather than *into* a life more vital and magical. Adrian's tragedy lies in his personal failure to move beyond the cruelty of 'inverted sentiment' to the 'pure destruction' and imaginative transfiguration he seeks. Hence, his death is the book's inevitable conclusion.

Still, Adrian's ultimate vision does not entirely abandon humanity; linked in his mind with the white radiance of eternity is the idealized image of his son, Baptiste, left behind in America. Baptiste is one of those boyish figures—termed "seraphic" by Professor Knight—who appear repeatedly in Powys's fiction; such figures radiate youthful innocence and beauty. But Baptiste, whose name recalls the precursor of Christ and who in an interesting imaginative transference must have been inspired by Powys's own son left in England, significantly never appears in the flesh in *Rodmoor*. Furthermore, his origins remain almost completely a mystery. He almost seems a creation purely of Adrian's desperate imagination rather than of the sexual act, although his actuality is not placed in doubt. He incarnates a mystical love that is free of sexuality, embodied only in the perfection of light.

In contrast to Baptiste is Baltazar Stork, Adrian's sybaritic friend who, significantly, invites him to Rodmoor. He is an illegitimate offspring of the Renshaw family, and his homosexual tendencies, whether latent or fully realized the book does not make clear, make him the appropriate agent for initiating Adrian into the sterile perversities of Rodmoor. He attracts that part of Adrian's mercurial temperament which responds to the masculine and excludes the feminine. At one point Adrian and Baltazar unite to lacerate Nance with their gibes against women (XX, 285). Baltazar and Nance feel a powerful antipathy toward each other as they compete for the attentions of Adrian, who is frequently driven to escape them both. Under Baltazar's merciless gaze Nance, the epitome of normality, is made to feel false and unnatural to herself (XX, 284-285).

Baltazar's vision of existence is at once similar to and yet revealingly different from Adrian's. Adrian sees him as 'absolutely hard and self-centered,' creating his private 'fancy-world' while he speaks of himself as being porous to influences from outside (XX, 288). In the midst of Adrian's dreams of annihilation he still retains his vision of pure whiteness and the seraphic image of Baptiste;

Baltazar, on the other hand, lacks all consolation. Beneath the distractions of his sensuous pleasures he glimpses images of "absolute colourlessness" and recognizes "the ghostly loneliness of his soul" (XXIII, 367). He is haunted by a vision of human hands losing their grip on an icy ledge and slipping into a bottomless crevasse; this image superimposes itself upon all the sights of his everyday life (XX, 293). He is attracted to young boys, but, unlike Adrian's idealization of Baptiste, his sensual attachments give him no comfort or satisfaction.

The depths of Baltazar's loveless despair helps to place the desperate visions of Adrian in perspective. With his putative lack of illusion, he is a striking portrait of what Powys in *The Complex Vision* would call "The Illusion of Dead Matter"; in him the power of genuine creativity and love has given way to the power that resists creation, the sterile power of malice. Baltazar's maliciousness manifests itself not only in his attitude toward Nance but in his desire to dominate and possess Adrian. His malice contributes significantly to Adrian's mental collapse and, recognizing both his responsibility for that and the sterility of his life, he finally destroys himself. Before his suicide, there is a touching scene in which the sybarite reveals his underlying affinity with the self-denying Mrs. Renshaw; the geniune affection the two share is a fine example of Powys's capacity to discover the endearingly human in the most unlikely places. Ultimately, the life-denying Baltazar finds his death not in the vastness of the sea but in the tidal river which, with Powysian irony, seems to be asserting its own living identity to the full as the dead man relinquishes his (XXV, 429).

In the view of H. P. Collins, Powys's tendency in this work to focus his attention at times on secondary characters like Baltazar Stork has the effect of diverting interest from the protagonists—Adrian, Philippa, and Nance—and thereby weakening the impact of the book.[6] But even though *Rodmoor* is a more concentrated work than many of his others, it still gains much of its richness from Powys's pluralistic sense of the diversity that at once divides and relates numerous lives. The central plight of Adrian Sorio is made more meaningful because Powys can convey such an assured sense of both its parallels with and differences from that of Baltazar Stork. This impression of surprising similarities and distinctions among diverse personalities is part of what gives Powys's romances their unique flavor. The unrestrained passion of Linda, the masochism of Mrs. Renshaw, and the frustrated sadism of Rachel Doorm, unable to forget her rejection by Nance's father in favor of Linda's mother and punishing Linda for it while loving Nance—all provide examples of women suffering which put Nance's own sufferings, and her response to them, in perspective. Traherne, as a representative of kindly Christian ineffectuality, and Raughty, with his Rabelaisian heartiness, are perhaps too self-consciously eccentric to be altogether satisfying characters, but they provide their own dualistic commentary on the central dualisms of the novel.

Our last glimpse of Nance finds her enjoying a moment of serenity with the priest and the doctor and blissfully unaware of the final catastrophe. Nance is here seen to be in her proper element; as Linda observes, she makes the two men happy by treating them like children (XXVI, 445). The Rabelaisian glow emanating from Dr. Raughty in this penultimate chapter is something Powys will embrace more fervidly in his later work; in *Rodmoor* it comes to seem almost illusory although significantly present. In the final chapter it is Philippa and not Nance who liberates

Adrian from the mental home, but at the end he has turned his back on her and dies alone, with his eyes on the sea and his mind on Baptiste. Ironically, at this moment the actual Baptiste, summoned by Nance, is crossing the sea to restore his peace of mind, but Adrian has abandoned the world of actuality forever. The hopelessness of his efforts to reconcile the warring elements of his psyche has been foreshadowed in a vivid scene shortly before his collapse in which he watches Nance and Philippa abuse each other and becomes conscious of being the witness of "some deep cosmic struggle" (XXIV, 389). He takes the hand of *each* and draws them close both to himself and to each other, while they continue to lacerate each other verbally. The three of them then make their way through a violent storm locked in a single embrace, and Adrian's mood is one of exultation. But when he commands the girls to kiss they break apart, and the moment is gone. The Powysian protagonist in *Rodmoor* is unable to sustain his delight in life's volatile diversity and dramatic conflict, and ultimately he collapses under the strain. The final immersion in the deadly sea is seen as carrying Philippa and Adrian "far from misery and madness . . . out of reach of humanity, out of reach of Rodmoor" (XXVII, 460). Humanity is here unmistakably equated with the horrors of Rodmoor, and only death can provide a satisfactory escape from both.

Nine years were to pass before the appearance of Powys's next novel, *Ducdame* (1925), which would represent not only a return to the reassuring earth of the West Country after *Rodmoor's* terrifying immersion in the destructive ocean of East Anglia, but a decisive move toward surmounting the destructive sado-masochism that dominated the first two novels. In *Ducdame* the forces of creativity and life are depicted as winning a narrow victory over those of destruction and death; although the protagonist, Rook Ashover, is ultimately destroyed, he first perpetuates life by producing a son and, more significantly, affirms life by imaginatively detaching himself from its pain and recognizing its beauty. With *Wolf Solent* (1929) the Powysian protagonist unmistakably becomes, like his creator, a survivor by virtue of the vitality of his creative imagination, mastering and transforming his purely destructive urges. *Rodmoor*, however, remains a powerful product of a crucial period in Powys's creative development when his fictional perspective seems almost to correspond with Adrian Sorio's desperate view of his projected philosophy of destruction: "I show in my book how what every living thing really aims at is to escape from itself, to escape from itself by the destruction of itself" (XXI, 324).

NOTES

1. *Autobiography* (1934; rpt. London: Macdonald & Co. and Hamilton, N.Y.: Colgate University Press, 1967), ch. XI, pp. 578-579.

2. *Rodmoor* (New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1916), ch. I, p. 1. Subsequent chapter and page references to *Rodmoor* appear parenthetically.

3. *You and Me*, read in typescript at the offices of Laurence Pollinger, Ltd., London.

4. Published Hamilton, N.Y.: Colgate University Press, 1969.

5. *Suspended Judgments* (New York: G. Arnold Shaw, 1916), p. 325.

6. *Old Earth Man* (New York: October House, 1967), p. 49.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS:
A Reading of WEYMOUTH SANDS

Our fathers water'd with their tears
This sea of time whereon we sail,
Their voices were in all men's ears
Who pass'd within their puissant hail.
Till the same ocean round us raves,
But we stand mute, and watch the waves.

--Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse"

Weymouth Sands (1934) represents John Cowper Powys's first and only attempt to confront the modern world as a real presence. Both *Wolf Solent* (1929) and *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), the novel's immediate predecessors, are set in "the present," but barring an occasional aeroplane and a motor car or two, they are essentially dateless. *Weymouth Sands*, however, is firmly grounded in the spatial and temporal realities of a world between wars. In terms of narrative structure, the novel most resembles *A Glastonbury Romance*. An imposing setting dominates a virtually plotless exploration of motivation and instinct in a large cast of characters as these attempt to come to terms with a basic human issue—in this case not religious feeling but the individual's relationship to the past as that past interacts and conflicts with the present. *Wolf Solent* dealt with this problem on a personal level, *A Glastonbury Romance* on a racial and ultimately cosmic plane. but the characters of *Weymouth Sands* encounter the past primarily as an entity of national consciousness. Like their counterparts in the earlier novels, they too must resolve the mystery of their parentage and come to terms with the Absolute, but both of these endeavors are bound up in their overwhelming necessity to confront the suffocating spiritual presence of the Victorian Age, which hangs over Weymouth like the death-mist over Chrétien's *Terre Gastée*.

The world of Weymouth is indeed a waste land of sexual disorder and social decay. Life there is as stagnant as the town's own brackish Backwater, for the mainstream of history has passed it by. Formerly the favorite summer resort of King George III and a fashionable watering spot well into Victoria's reign, twentieth-century Weymouth has degenerated into a minor port of call for second-class freighters and a cheap holiday amusement center for the working-class rabble of Dorsetshire. A sort of fifth-rate Brighton lacking that town's vulgar vitality, Weymouth clings obstinately to the faded splendors of its Victorian past as these are embalmed in the musty drawing rooms of Brunswick Terrace, the

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David A. Cook, *currently teaching at Purdue University but moving next year to the Department of English, Emory University, has written two articles on J.C.P.: on* A Glastonbury Romance *in* Contemporary Literature *(XIII) and on the* Autobiography *for a forthcoming issue of* Modern Philology.

pseudo-Gothic spire of St. John's Church, and the massively ornamented Jubilee Clock which dominates the esplanade like some beneficent nightmare from the Prince Consort's pillow. The whole town is "an indestructible monument to that imposing epoch in English History when both Gladstone and Disraeli were young, and when Tennyson was writing 'In Memoriam'."[1] But Weymouth's inhabitants are unmistakable products of an era which has already witnessed one cataclysmic war and is verging wilfully toward another; and though both Church and Clock proclaim, "'It will be long . . . before Respectability and Piety lose their importance in Melcombe Regis [greater Weymouth]'" (64), most of its citizens seem bent upon the pursuit of as much sensual gratification as human faculties will allow. Yet even as they frantically clasp and fondle, flaunting their contempt for the miasmic morality of their fathers, these people are frequently gripped by a wistful nostalgia for what seems the calmer and more cohesive existence of Victoria's age. As one observes to himself, " . . . A person like his father who had lived to eighty without really encountering the underlying chaos and violence and shame that exist in life was incredibly lucky" (37). Thus, the characters of *Weymouth Sands* are alternately oppressed and consoled by the spirit of the past which pervades their town; and their ambivalence toward it produces a disintegration and confusion which has already reached crisis proportion as the novel opens.

Indeed, there is little real dramatic tension in *Weymouth Sands* because almost everything *has* happened before the novel begins. Our ontologically maimed "Powys-hero" (to borrow G. Wilson Knight's term for the quintessential Powysian protagonist)[2] is the middle-aged Magnus Muir, "tutor in Latin to backward boys" (17), who has strong ties with the Victorian past through the spiritual presence of his father—"massive, primeval, and conceding nothing to human weakness and frivolity"(24). Like Wolf Solent and Powys himself, Muir has spent most of his adulthood in thrall to a selfish, assertive and overbearing parent (one might say, on all counts, a *Victorian* parent) and remains so still in memory.[3] His father's domination has rendered him an existential cripple who lives most intensely in revery, fantasy and dream (and here again the parallels hold); but Magnus is attempting to break the circle of his dependence by courting Curly Wix, a pretty, conniving shop girl and true creature of the modern age, who sees in his suit an easy if none too thrilling access to the Nirvanic middle class. Everything in Muir's experience militates against this liaison, from his father's intractable pride of class to the genteel rose-wood furniture where he boards with Miss Le Fleau, herself a faded virginal flower of a bygone era; but Magnus doggedly pursues marriage to Curly as his one hope of escaping the comfortably lined casket of affective sterility for which his father's Weymouth has so carefully prepared him. Curly, however, is in no hurry to plight her troth to this aging, slightly foolish schoolmaster and coquettishly evades him in order to spend her free time at Sark House with her egregiously ambitious paramour, Sippy Ballard.

The center of corruption and sexual disturbance in modern Weymouth, Sark House is a finely sinister creation. It is ostensibly the residence of Dr. Lucius Girodel, "notorious quack, empiric, and abortion-procurer" (220), but in fact a bordello for the privileged and/or moneyed which panders to "the excremental undertides of existence" (221). Unlike Mother Legge's "Camelot" in *A Glastonbury Romance*, an essentially joyful (and perhaps religious) house of prostitution, Sark

House is a cheerless and a sterile place where coupling ensues with the insensible and programmatic variety characteristic of pornography. Sexual contact there has no issue, as Girodel's profession implies, and human feeling no entry. To its dismal chambers, decorated in conscious mockery of Victoria with prints of her coronation, are drawn all the town's more jaded palates: Jerry Cobbold, world famous music-hall clown whose Swiftean irony and urbane comportment conceal a soul as tawdry as that of John Osborne's Archie Rice; Dogberry Cattistock, known as "the Dog," an industrial magnate of the Philip Crow mold who plunders the stone-quarries of outlying Portland and the souls of the people who work them; Peg Frampton, daughter of Cattistock's partner, a dissipated bisexual nymphomaniac who will give herself to anyone for the asking; Sippy Ballard, the town clerk, a nightmare product of class-leveling whose erstwhile sophistication would be amusing if his fanatical will to power were not so clearly linked with the great wave of authoritarianism sweeping Europe; and finally Curly Wix herself, playing a sluttish Garbo to Ballard's vulgarian Barrymore without benefit of klieg lights or orchestra. Indeed, Dr. Girodel's brothel is an epitome of that spiritually impoverished amorality exemplified in the smart, cynical films of the early sound era (productions which Powys often sharply criticized), and its corruption seems prophetic of the fascist Armageddon soon to rend the world.

Sark House, of course, is also a microcosm of greater Weymouth, and the pathology enshrined there radiates outward to the other characters of the novel, bringing several of them to a local institution which rejects the past even more emphatically than Girodel's establishment. This is "Hell's Museum," a mental asylum on the Downs above the town operated by Dr. Daniel Brush, a malign and unscrupulous man of science who embodies everything that is wrong with the modern age. A Freudian psychoanalyst who maintains an extensive vivisectional laboratory, Brush dissects the psyches of his patients and the brains of his dogs with equal detachment and indifference, at one point musing to himself, "If I were allowed—as no doubt we *shall* be in half-a-century—to vivisect *men*, I'd gladly let the dogs alone" (439). (Actually, Brush has only several years to wait; the Nazi experimental medical center at Auschwitz-Birkenau was instituted in 1942.) In fact, it is rumored in town that if the Doctor does not find a particular case of lunacy to his liking, he makes certain surgical adjustments upon the lunatic to render the complaint more interesting. Be this as it may, Daniel Brush is the very type of modern European technocrat who will spearhead the totalitarian nightmare, overseeing and rationalizing its Dachaus, Buchenwalds and Treblinkas. He represents the triumph of logic over value, and Powys properly considers him more dangerous to the human spirit than all the Crows and Cattistocks in the world.

The administrator of Brush Home and the denizens of Sark House are damned alike by their wholesale renunciation of the past; Magnus Muir is suffocated by embracing it. It is as if the people of Weymouth stand between two worlds, one dead and the other evermore about to be born into a belching Moloch. But there is another presence in Weymouth which opposes itself absolutely to both the stale exhalations of the Victorian age and the tinsel but sinister glitter of modernity; and this, of course, is the sea. Massive, primordial and eternally recurrent, the sea provides a constant background and accompaniment to life in Weymouth, dwarfing the little dramas played out before it and making time all but

irrelevant. Like the Grail in *A Glastonbury Romance*, it is a symbol of the Powysian Absolute; and only those characters in touch with it are saved. Most of the townspeople ignore the sea's deific magnitude in pursuit of their petty jealousies and amours; but there are a few who still do reverence to its life-sustaining benefice and its unbridled power.

Chief among these is Adam ("Jobber") Skald, a sunburnt giant of a man whose allegiance to the sea and his native Portland stone is unalloyed with self-interest or self-regard. Primitive and inarticulate but not unintelligent (he reads *Middlemarch* with genuine appreciation), the Jobber seems to emanate from these two substances, for he is that rare thing in Powys—a completely vital and integrated human being. As a character, Skald is rather rigidly drawn but for this very reason functions perfectly as a symbolic projection of the Inanimate. Appropriately, he is deeply in love with the ocean-sprite Perdita Wane, a true daughter of the Guernsey Isles unhappily employed in Weymouth as a companion to Jerry Cobbold's neurasthenic wife Lucinda—a morbid sadist whose major occupation in life is tormenting her deranged and aged father with the incest he has apparently committed upon her as a child. Perdita instinctively reciprocates the Jobber's passion; and if *Weymouth Sands* can be said to have a plot at all, it lies in the progress of this relationship.

Like Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, the Jobber and Perdita are elemental lovers;[4] and they become the medium for some of the most powerful descriptive prose in our language.[5] Both are intimately associated with the freedom and romance suggested by the appearance of Portland Island as they come upon it in the morning mists:

> Portland, as it lay before them, rising tier by tier over its terraces of old walls and grey roofs, seemed to be tugging at its tether in that luminous and liquid haze, seemed to be straining at this gigantic rope of transparent stones, agates and carnelians, which bound it to the mainland. The huge limestone rock seemed to have no roots, under this enchanted light, in any solid earth. It seemed to be riding, just as the battleships in the harbour seemed to be riding, upon a liquid abyss of opalescent water that sank down to the antipodes. (340)

Yet their union is also figured in the megalithic "torso of love," carved out of stone not by human hands but by "the slow process of aeons of time," which they encounter together at Portland Bill:

> Man's nakedness and woman's nakedness locked together in the primordial creation of life were suggested here by the straining together of god-like flanks and thighs. Neither of the two figures possessed arms, head or shoulders. Neither possessed legs below the knee. And yet the effect of this hugh organic work of art was neither base, nor gross, nor bestial; but god-like, cosmogonic, life-creating. (353)

Indeed, what the Jobber and Perdita feel for one another is "the love of bone for bone, skeleton for skeleton, not any mere spiritual affinity, not any mere sexual passion" (565); and at one point Perdita echoes Cathy's "I *am* Heathcliff":

> "It's as if something of him were inside me and something of me were inside him. It's as if there were no need for him to take me, more than he has taken me already! It's as if when I hurt him I hurt myself and when he hurts

me he hurts himself. . . . It's as if we were both digging into each other's soul to find a self that was put there before we were born." (345-346)

But there is an impediment to their union in the heavy stone from Chesil Beach which Skald carries in his pocket; for in his affective simplicity the Jobber believes that he can liberate the quarry-men of Portland by smashing the skull of Dog Cattistock, that "enemy of everything sacred in life" (70) who has enslaved them to his combines. Skald is heroic in desiring to restore his people to their immemorial "heritage of freedom" (359) but like many another liberationist of Powys's day (and our own) obstinately stupid in his choice of means. Perdita recognizes this and leaves him for her homeland when he refuses to renounce his intention. In her absence the Jobber sinks into the Slough of Despond represented by the Weeping Woman, a local alehouse, whence his threats against the Dog grow ever more slurred and voluble.

In the meantime Curly Wix has proved too slight a thing to counterpoise the ponderous weight of Magnus Muir's Victorian heritage proved it materially by running off with Cattistock to Italy, where the craven industrialist hopes to escape the Jobber's wrath. Magnus is crushed but finds temporary solace in the courage of another character connected with Portland and the sea—Sylvanus Cobbold, or "S. C.," the brother of Jerry and another of Powys's extraordinary magus heroes. Like Johnny Geard, Sylvanus Cobbold worships an Ultimate Being whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere (503), an oceanic Absolute which includes even "the Gross the Repulsive and the Disgusting" (382). He takes as its mystical symbol "the dazzling glitter of the sun on the sea" (392) but can find his God with equal felicity in a dungheap, sharing Sam Dekker's knowledge that all Matter incarnates Spirit. Only one thing in the creation disturbs S. C.—the atrocious suffering of other living entities—and like Wolf Solent he struggles to forget their pain as he simultaneously wills to alleviate it. His natural antagonist in all these particulars is that godless, super-rational practitioner of physical and psychic vivisection, Daniel Brush; and Sylvanus is painfully aware that he may himself become the Doctor's next victim for the town officials have come to regard him as an undesirable presence and threatened his eccentric behavior with incarceration at Brush Home, where, indeed, his father died an inmate.

Sylvanus is not mad, of course (if either of the brothers has inherited the father's strain, it is Jerry), but he can be something of an embarrassment to the Weymouth Establishment when he rages against the horrors of Hell's Museum from the esplanade or preaches his strange gospel of "excremental acceptance" to vacationing Dorset shopkeepers on the beach. Sylvanus also has a misunderstood predilection for certain young working-class girls from whose protracted asexual embraces he draws a spiritual strength that looks suspiciously like the afterglow of intercourse to the local bluenoses, though in fact S. C. is "entirely free from the least flicker of erotic perversity, a freedom very rare among prophets, philosophers and priests" (527). All things considered, Sylvanus is an unseemly nuisance which the faltering resort trade of the town can ill afford; and so this mystical life-worshiper and benevolent prophet of universal love is rendered into the murderous hands of Dr. Brush.

G. Wilson Knight has called *Weymouth Sands* "a happy book" because of the dominating presence of sun, stone and sea;[6] but it seems to me that Powys's

whole purpose here is to show that *despite* the terrific vitalizing power of these entities, they can no longer redeem in a world gone mad with arbitrary concupiscence, systematic logic and self-perpetuating gadgetry. The fate of Sylvanus is a case in point. He languishes in the antiseptic environment of the asylum, believing that his Absolute has forsaken him (503-504); and though his faith is ultimately restored by gaining a moral victory over Brush (527-532), the note of the chapter describing his existence at Hell's Museum is one of pervading sadness. Powys makes it clear that the confinement of S. C. is a terrible thing, not merely because it deprives the man of his beloved freedom or saps his vitality by closeting him from those inanimate presences which he holds most dear, but because it does both of these things to no real purpose but expediency. Hell's Museum is the Weymouth authorities' "final solution" to the nagging, troublesome Sylvanus Cobbold question; and lest we miss its significance as the police lead Sylvanus away from the Weymouth sands for the last time, Magnus Muir has an ominous vision of the modern industrial state, peopled by brutal, Punchlike "Sippy-Cattistocks" which will rise from the ashes of the human spirit

> after Science has killed God, tortured the last animal to death, suckled all babies with machines, eaves-dropped on the privacy of all souls and made life to its last drop an itch of the blood and a weariness of the will (472)

Powys shares with Magnus his fear of an age which reduces ethics to equations, and both are agreed in their disgust for the modern world of Sark House, Brush Home and resplendent new Palladium Cinema. But Powys ultimately realizes, as Magnus does not, that S. C. would have fared no better from the Queen's Weymouth (which would no doubt have piously trundled him off to the country workhouse or some provincial Bedlam), for no well-constituted society can long tolerate a prophet. It is only in the world of an Emily Brontë that characters like Sylvanus can hope to remain at large; and like the authoress of *Wuthering Heights* Powys in the final analysis does not reject modernity as such but as a manifestation of social order (thus the loose construction of his novels, which attempt to circumvent this order even as they portray it). *Weymouth Sands* does indeed constitutes a scathing indictment of the modern age but only as that age systematically opposes itself to the flux of experience represented by the sea. For Powys is not, as some critics have suggested, our last great Victorian (this distinction belongs perhaps to Forster) but our last great Romantic; and this is why his novels, for all their complexity, have but two possible resolutions—withdrawal or apocalypse.

Weymouth Sands concludes appropriately, then, not in Weymouth but in the Romance precincts of Portland Island. Here at an ancient inn perched high above the Bill, the regenerate Jobber and Perdita Wane are reunited amid the savage splendor of stone and sea, coalescing like figures in the megalithic oolite below them. There is comfort in human love; but it is an affirmative chord in a symphony of sighs. For here too Magnus stands on the Chesil Beach embankment and recedes into a dream of childhood, a strange, phantasmal Weymouth of the mind where there are no more Curlys to trouble the senses and no more S. C.'s to stir the soul (549-552). On the tier above him, the padlocked entrance to Last House where Sylvanus worshiped his Absolute for twenty years of sunlit freedom whispers, "Gone, gone, gone—never to come back" (562). And beyond them all is the

"motiveless, causeless, non-human grief" of the cosmos itself "that comes on the wind, that rises and sinks on the sea, and that seems older and more tragic than all our human agitations" (567). We may draw strength from a burden of sorrow that is older and larger than our own, Powys seems to say, but the Brushes and Ballards will inherit the earth, and no man can harvest the sea.

If *Weymouth Sands* is a work full of individual beauties, as a totality it must finally be judged the aesthetic inferior of its predecessors. Technically the novel varies little in quality from *Wolf Solent* and *A Glastonbury Romance*, but we miss in it the intellectual energy and spiritual dynamism which inform the earlier books. The tendency to substitute sensuous description for narration and characterization, always implicit in Powys, is increasingly manifest, and he yields ever more readily to the self-indulgent romantic strain which permeates his juvenilia. Lyricism reaches new heights while narrative structure disintegrates, and we are left with a sequence of beautiful prose poems strung together by the barest thread of plot. Nevertheless, *Weymouth Sands* is a book of multiple discrete splendors which marks a significant shift in thematic direction for its author. In it, Powys consciously strives to catch the tenor of modernity and, finding it intolerably harsh, withdraws like Magnus Muir himself into the wilfully archaic and fantastic vision which will give us *Maiden Castle* (1936), *Morwyn* (1937) and, ultimately, the great historical fiction *Owen Glendower* (1940).

NOTES

1. John Cowper Powys, *Weymouth Sands* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934); published in England as *Jobber Skald* (London: The Bodley Head, 1935) with place names disguised (not very artfully) to prevent another ruinous libel suit like the one which absorbed the royalties of *A Glastonbury Romance* in 1934 (Weymouth becomes "Sea-Sands," Portland "Shell-Back," etc.). The page numbers cited parenthetically in the text refer to the American edition reissued in 1963 by Macdonald & Co., London, and Colgate University Press, Hamilton, N.Y. I wish to thank the John Cowper Powys Estate for permission to quote from this edition.

2. G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest: A Study of the Prose Work of John Cowper Powys* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 27, *et passim*. Hereafter cited as Knight.

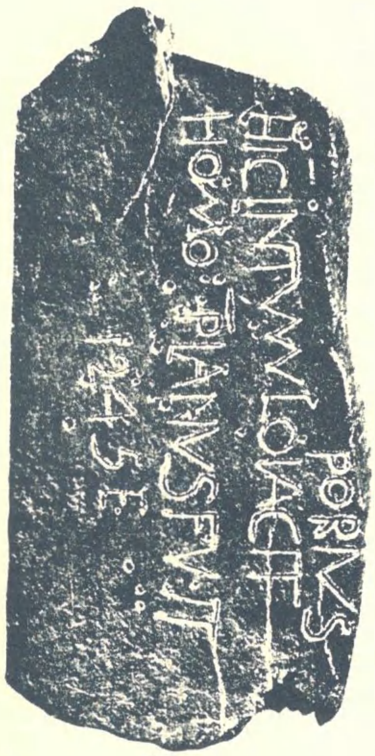
3. Magnus Muir has been largely glossed over by the critics, who understandably find more to marvel at in the Wertherian Wolf Solent and flamboyant Johnny Geard; but Muir deserves attention as one of Powys's finest self-portraits and "roundest" characters generally. Unfortunately, most of Magnus's compeers in *Weymouth Sands* are less subtly rendered and do not share his cumulative fulness.

4. Powys's second novel, *Rodmoor* (1916), was dedicated (somewhat ostentatiously) "To the Spirit of Emily Brontë," and certainly many elements in his fiction are traceable to her influence.

5. See, for example, the passage pp. 348-350 where they stand clasped in awe of the sea as it swirls and eddies over the tip of Portland Bill like "jets of the aboriginal chaos."

6. Knight, p. 47.

THE STONES OF PORIUS



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Illustrations from *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales*; the numerals at the bottom of the Porius Stone, says V.E. Nash-Williams, were added later. *The Stones of Porius* is by Joseph Slater, Professor of English at Colgate, who edited *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*, Columbia University Press, 1964.

On February 16, 1949, as he was finishing the last chapter of *Porius*, John Cowper Powys wrote from Corwen to Miss Muller, an associate of his agent Laurence Pollinger: "This Romance is (in our opinion here anyway!) the best piece of work I've ever done."[1] Not many readers of *Porius*—if indeed there *are* many readers of *Porius*—would agree. But the "piece of work" with which Powys was so well pleased was a very different novel from the abridgement which readers now know. In order to meet his publisher's space limitations Powys was obliged to slash away, in haste, almost two-fifths of a romance that had been, he told Miss Muller, "exciting to write all the way through": of the 1589 pages of the corrected typescript now in the possession of the Colgate University Library, approximately 616 do not appear in print. Obviously, no serious judgment of *Porius* can be written until those pages are somehow restored.

For similar reasons there can be no full account of the years of study and imagination which produced the massive romance until Powys's Journal is published and his letters of the 1940's are found, copied, and assembled—or, at least, catalogued. Nonetheless it is possible even now, in the infancy of Powys scholarship, to write a kind of source-study, to describe a few of the materials from which *Porius* was constructed.

Ironically, nothing was more attractive to Powys about the latter half of the fifth century in Britain than that there had survived from it "*no historical documents at all.*" As a romancer he rejoiced in "a beautiful, a heavenly, an all-allowing and nothing-excluding *blank*!"[2] But documents of one sort had survived, records of that misty past which were written not on paper but on stone and which were easily visible or visitable from the town of Corwen.

Directly across the valley of the Dee from the hill-top house where *Porius* was written stands a neolithic hill-fort, Caer Drewyn, a vast oval of stone walls which Powys's imagination transformed into "the low-roofed chambers and intricate stone corridors of Mynydd-y-Gaer."[3] Between the fort and his house, by the arched bridge of the Holyhead Road are the shallows of the Dee, which had surely once been the Ford of Mithras. Nearby is the 15th-century parish church of St. Mael and St. Sulien, which must have replaced that of the malignant Minnawc Gorsant, still unfinished in October of the year 499. This was the stage Powys looked down upon every day in Corwen and peopled in the thousands of pages of his manuscript.[4] Indeed, this is the valley which Porius sees from the watch-tower of Mynydd-y-Gaer, the valley of the sacred river Dyfrdwy winding from the fort to the lake of Bala, in the opening scene of the novel.

Ten miles away, built into the tower of the parish church of Llanfor, there is a rough stone, once presumably a Roman tombstone of the late fifth or the early sixth century, which bears the mysterious inscription CAVOSENIARGII[5] and which became one of the central "historical documents" of the novel. Aware, of course, that the stone had not originally been part of Llanfor church, Powys moved it a few miles farther southwest to a mountain slope near Bala Lake. There he has it seen by the boy Porius, who transforms the unintelligible word into

"cavoseniargizing" to designate those periods of trance and detachment which are an essential part of his character, "those recurrent moments in his life when . . . his soul found itself able to follow every curve and ripple of his bodily sensations *and yet remain suspended above them*." (83)

Present in fact as well as romance on the slopes above Bala Lake in the parish of Trawsfynydd there is a cromlech called Llech Idris, the Stone of the Giant Idris, which as late as 1919 country people believed was a memorial to "the Idris of Cader Idris—the Idris Gawr of Welsh legend."[6] How could Powys—whether he actually stood by Llech Idris or merely read about it in *Archaeologica Cambrensis*—have failed to make that cromlech the tombstone of Rhitta Gawr, to see beyond it two giant figures moving up the mountainside, to hear words in a forgotten language?

Near the Stone of the Giant, in Maes y Bedd, the Field of the Grave, there had lain for fourteen centuries "a rough slab or pillar stone". . . twenty-seven inches high, thirty-four inches wide, and seven inches thick, with a Latin inscription in thinly incised Roman capitals,[7] which gave Powys's romance its title and its strange, misleading epigraph, "PORIUS/ HIC IN TUMULO JACET/ HOMO CHRISTIANUS FUIT." In 1932, two years before Powys moved to Corwen, the "Porius Stone" had been taken from Maes y Bedd to the security of the National Museum in Cardiff,[8] an act of archaeological prudence of which Powys was happily unaware. For him, as he wrote his romance, the slab lay where it had always lain, in the Field of the Grave, "a solitary stone," he told Miss Muller, "on a lonely plateau in the mountains above Bala Lake . . . which can be visited today." That he had seen it there on some Welsh holiday before 1932 seems very likely: his words to Miss Muller seem not at all second-hand. But if he had never in fact looked at its roughly-cut Roman letters, he would surely have read—and in Corwen heard—much about it; for the Porius Stone is one of the best-known and most controversial of Welsh antiquities.

It seems to have made its first appearance in print in 1720 in Bishop Edmund Gibson's translation, "with additions and improvements," of Camden's *Britannia*. For the chapters on Wales, those additions were the work of Edward Lloyd, Keeper of the Museum, Oxford, who was the narrator of the following passage: " . . . in the year 1687, I copied this inscription from a stone called Bêdh Porws, or Porus's Grave, near Lhech Idris in the same parish:

PORIUS
HIC IN TVMVLO IACIT
HOMO -----RIANVS FVIT

I found afterwards that it was generally understood, that this had been the grave of one of the first Christians in these parts; and that they read it Porius hic in tumulo jacet: Homo Christianus fuit." Lloyd seems to have assumed that the years had obliterated CH, but he doubted that even a provincial stonecutter could have

omitted the STI after RI. Perhaps, he modestly wrote, he himself had transcribed the inscription carelessly.[9]

In 1796 *The Cambrian Register* printed, from manuscript, a "Sketch of the History of Merionethshire, by Mr. Robert Vaughan, of Hengwrt," whom it identified as "that eminent scholar and antiquary . . . friend and correspondent of the celebrated Archbishop Usher." Vaughan (1592-1667) copied the inscription even less accurately than Lloyd had done, "HIC IN TUMULO JACET EPORIUS QUI HOMO XTIANUS FUIT," and he attempted no interpretation, but he did, by reading certain obscure markings as an X, suggest a justification for the traditional belief that Porius had been a Christian.[10]

In 1879 Sir John Rhys, Professor of Celtic at Oxford, wrote confidently that the "first two syllables of the adjective are represented by the Greek abbreviation XPI" and that the adjective was therefore "Christianus." He also suggested that the word "Porius" was intended by its superior position to be read before "iacit," thus making "a rude couplet."[11]

By the time Powys could have made a visit to its "lonely plateau" the stone had been subjected to many interpretations and examinations. In 1911 Sir John Edward Lloyd wrote in his *History of Wales* that "the well-known Porius stone" almost certainly marked the grave of a Brythonic chieftain (p. 115). The members of the Cambrian Archaeological Society during their annual meeting in August 1919 made a pilgrimage to the "field called Maes y Bedd, on Llech Idris farm, in the parish of Trawsfynydd" and debated the controversial penultimate word. Did it really begin with "the common contradiction XPI" and was it "hence Christianus"? Or were the first two letters PL and the adjective thus "planus"? If so, whatever did "plain" mean?[12] The following year Egerton Phillimore, a member of the Society, argued learnedly that "planus" meant "flat-faced" and that Porius had probably been one of the many nose-less lepers of fifth-century Wales.[13]

All these interpretations and controversies were of course easily available to Powys when, in the early Forties, his "Romance of the Dark Ages" and his studies of his Welsh heritage were his chief occupation and delight. The reading which he chose was essentially that of *Britannia*, of Edward Lloyd and popular tradition. (Indeed, the caption of a self-caricature with which he ornamented a letter to Louis Wilkinson in 1942—"Hic jacet John Cowper. Xtianus fuit."[14]—suggests that he was familiar with Robert Vaughan's even older transcription.) What he wanted was to have Roman Christianity and the most ancient of Welsh giant-legends combined in his book as tradition had juxtaposed them in the fields of Llech Idris farm.

Unhappily, the major surgery which he had to perform on his typescript, the painful haste[15] with which he excised paragraphs, pages, and entire chapters, not only crippled the novel but gave—for all except the most careful readers—a false meaning to its epitaph-epigraph. It is not Porius but his grandfather, the Roman patrician Porius Manlius, who lies, *homo Christianus, hic in tumulo*. Porius himself had served another god. Not until the chapter "Burial and Sleep," now wholly missing, is restored, with all its details of the old Roman's burial—the moonlight

and mist above the lake, the words chiseled into the heavy slab by the centurion Aulus—can the epigraph from the Porius Stone have the force and meaning Powys meant it to have. Not until the novel is published as it was written can Powys's evaluation of it seem other than an old man's fantasy.

NOTES

1. Typewritten "Transcription of Letter Received from John Cowper Powys," owned by the Colgate University Library.

2. Manuscript, owned by the Colgate University Library, of an incomplete and unpublished "'Preface' or anything you like to Porius," p. 3.

3. *Porius*, London, 1951, p. 6. Subsequent page references to *Porius* appear parenthetically.

4. The manuscript, owned by the University of Texas, is over 2800 pp. long.

5. V. E. Nash-Williams in *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales*, Cardiff, 1950, p. 170, conjectures that the word may have meant "Cavos, son of Seniargio" and been accompanied by a "hic jacet."

6. *Archaeologica Cambrensis*, 6th Series, Vol. 19, p. 552.

7. Nash-Williams (p. 174) dates the inscription as "late 5th-early 6th century A.D." The lettering at the bottom of the stone was added, he says, "in modern times." The publishers, University of Wales Press, have given permission to reproduce the illustration of the Porius stone from *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales.*

8. Letter to me from Mr. J. M. Lewis, Assistant Keeper, Department of Archaeology, National Museum of Wales, 13 September, 1971.

9. William Camden, *Britannia*, London, 1772, II, 51.

10. *The Cambrian Register*, 1796, I, 191.

11. *Lectures on Welsh Philology*, London, 1879, p. 376.

12. *Archaeologica Cambrensis, loc. cit.* p. 551.

13. *Ibid.* 6th Series, vol. 20, pp. 224-238.

14. *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956*, London, 1958, p. 107.

15. Miss Phyllis Playter told me in August, 1971, that Powys himself, not an editor, made the cuts and that the time allowed him was very short.

THE POWYS COLLECTION AT COLGATE

A generous gift of manuscripts from Norman H. Strouse in 1957 became the start of Colgate's Powys collection. Subsequent gifts and acquisitions have increased the holdings to a virtually complete collection of books by and about the Powyses, and the following manuscripts.

JOHN COWPER POWYS

Manuscripts

Autobiography, Ams., 1285 pp.

Maiden Castle, Ams., 1543 pp. And: changes suggested by Quincy Howe (11 pp.); J.C.P.'s changes, Ams., 23 pp.

Morwyn, Tms., 378 pp. With inked corrections by J.C.P. and additional corrections by Dorothy Richardson.

Porius, Tms., 1589 pp. With typescript of a letter about the novel to Miss Muller.

Interpretation of *Porius*, Ams., 24 pp.

Dedication and Foreword to *A Glastonbury Romance*, Ams., 25 pp.

"Edgar Lee Master's Recent Poetry," Ams., 24 pp.

Thomas Davies *is the Acquisitions Librarian of Colgate University's Everett Needham Case Library.*

"An Englishman Up-State or Columbia County, New York," Ams., 28 pp. Also: Tms.

"Farewell to America," Ams., 61 pp.

"The Poetry of Eric Barker," Ams., 3 pp.

Letters by John Cowper Powys

Total: over 900; among the recipients are Louis Wilkinson (498); Boyne Grainger (45); E. H. Visiak (28); Donald Goodfellow, Thomas Bell, and Trevor Molliett. Most recently acquired are some 300 letters to John Redwood-Anderson.

Letters to John Cowper Powys

Total: 545; from Louis Wilkinson, Allen Lane, E. H. Visiak, and others.

Miscellaneous documents:

75 sketches, proofs, scripts and documents pertaining to J.C.P.

LLEWELYN POWYS

Manuscripts

Swiss Essays, Tms.

"African Wisdom" (notebook), Ams., 54 pp.

Letters by Llewellyn Powys: 56

Recipients: Louis Wilkinson (11); Boyne Grainger (22); Walter Miller (230).

OTHER

Letters by Theodore Francis Powys: 106.

Recipients: Louis Wilkinson (92); Elizabeth Myers and Littleton Powys (13); Herbert West.

Letters to Louis Wilkinson:

approximately 290 from members of the Powys family including Littleton, Gertrude, Phillipa, and Albert Reginald.

Art:

A sketch of J.C.P. in maroon chalk by Ivan Opffer.
A pen-and-ink sketch, "John Cowper Powys of Gay Street, N.Y.C." by Art Young.
Small copy of the bust of John Cowper Powys by Oloff de Wet.
African watercolor by William Ernest Powys.

THE POWYS COLLECTION OF E. E. BISSELL

The most important collection of Powys manuscripts in private hands—indeed, one of the most impressive private collections of twentieth-century manuscripts—is held by E. E. Bissell, Ashorne, Warwickshire. A number of scholars have visited the hamlet, some few miles east of Stratford-on-Avon, wishing to check a manuscript or to seek information from Mr. Bissell. Unanimously they report three reactions: amazement at the extent of the holdings; gratitude for the courtesy and time given them; and great respect for Mr. Bissell's thorough and sensitive knowledge of his entire collection. At a time when too many collectors are "squirrels" whose primary concerns are the size and the monetary value of their possessions, it is delightful to hear Mr. Bissell say, "Now didn't John write something about that in a letter to T.F.," and watch him draw the pertinent letter from among the fifteen hundred letters by J.C.P. that he owns.

The *Newsletter*, in its first two issues, reported on the primary Powys collections in American libraries. We are more than willing to postpone completion of that task in order to outline the dimensions of the Bissell Collection. The descriptions that follow are Mr. Bissell's, rearranged, somewhat, to conform to our earlier format. The *Newsletter* is doubly grateful to E. E. Bissell—for sharing the information, but much more importantly for his foresight nearly thirty years ago in beginning to collect the letters and manuscripts that might otherwise have been lost.

[Note: all manuscripts in the following lists are autograph manuscripts unless a typed manuscript is indicated by Tms.*]*

JOHN COWPER POWYS

Works:

The Art of Happiness, corrected Tms.

The Brazen Head, Ams. and corrected Tms.

Confessions of Two Brothers

The Death of God (Lucifer), Ams. and corrected proofs. Also, Ams. of the introduction written fifty years later.

Maiden Castle, Ams. of the discarded first start; corrected Tms.

Porius, 620 pp. of discarded Tms.

Short Stories:

Two boyhood manuscripts, illustrated: "The Lost Chord" (unfinished) and "The Astonishing Adventures of a Lulu, a Welshman and an English Sailor, as narrated by the Welshman." [The *Newsletter* plans to publish the second story next year.]

"The Harvest Thanksgiving"

"The Incubus (Romer Mowl)"

"The Spot on the Wall"

Essays:

"G. K. Chesterton" (1913)

"My Welsh Home"

"Pair Dadeni"

"The Unconscious"

"Vivisection and Moral Evolution"

"Wales and America"

Prefaces to:

Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*

Huw Menai's *The Single Vision*

Other:

A collection of early poems and fragments

Translations of verses used in *Rabelais*

The Archarnians (unfinished)

Letters by John Cowper Powys:

approximately 1500 to recipients that include Littleton C. Powys (732); Huw Menai (400); Elizabeth Myers (166); T. F. Powys (88); and Clifford Tolchard (55).

Letters to John Cowper Powys:

a small collection, including 11 from Emma Goldman.

Miscellaneous:

a large collection including periodical contributions and book reviews, reviews of J.C.P.'s books and articles about him, and photographs.

From J.C.P.'s library, 103 books including three source books: Kérényi's *The Gods of the Greeks (Atlantis)*, Lloyd's *Owen Glyn Dŵr (Owen Glendower)*, and Plattard's *The Life of François Rabelais (Rabelais)*.

Portrait in crayon by Ivan Opffer.

THEODORE FRANCIS POWYS

Works: Approximately 200 separately titled manuscripts, including:

From *Fables*, Ams. of 17 pp.; Tms. of 11 pp.

Innocent Birds

Kindness in a Corner, Ams. and Tms.

The Left Leg

The Moods of God (early version of the first four chapters of *Mr. Tasker's Gods*)

Mr. Tasker's Gods

Mr. Weston's Good Wine, Ams. and Tms. (with revised endings)

Soliloquies of a Hermit

The Bondage of Fear (Ams. of approx. 28,000 words, unpublished)

Father Adam (Ams. of approx. 21,000 words, unpublished)

Three plays: *Father Adam*
The Sin-Eater
The Wood

"Goat Green" or *"The Better Gift"*

"God"

"When Thou Wast Naked"

Letters by T. F. Powys:
144 to recipients that include Sylvia Townsend Warner (44), William Dibben (25), and Gertrude Powys (24).

Letters to T. F. Powys:
approx. 350, including 117 from Charles Prentice or Harold Raymond, both of Chatto & Windus, his publishers.

Amss. of 44 short stories: original drafts on foolscap torn into strips. Several of the stories are unpublished.

Miscellaneous: a large collection including all agreements and accounts with Chatto & Windus from 1923 to 1941 (not complete), periodical publications, book reviews and articles about T.F.P., documents relating to his farming, letters in connection with his lecturing, and 115 books from his library, many with numerous notes and markings by T.F.P.

LLEWELYN POWYS

Works: Approximately 150 separately titled manuscripts, including:

Apples Be Ripe

The Cradle of God

The Craft of Happiness or *The Devil's Hornbook* (unfinished)

Earth Memories, Tms.

Impassioned Clay

Now That the Gods are Dead, Tms.

The Pathetic Fallacy

Swiss Essays Tms.

Several unpublished essays and stories in Ams. and Tms.

Three notebooks containing notes on books read.

Letters by Llewelyn Powys:

245 to F. T. Powys (79), Louis Wilkinson (65), William Dibben (43), Lynd Ward (25), Robert Gibbings (9), and others.

Letters to Llewelyn Powys:

a small collection including one from F. D. Roosevelt quoted in *The Life of Llewelyn Powys* by Malcolm Elwin.

Other:

The death mask of Llewelyn Powys.

The manuscript of *The Life of Llewelyn Powys* by Malcolm Elwin.

From his library: 139 books, many with markings by L.P. and some by J.C.P.; original drawing and signed proof engraving for *The Glory of Life* by Robert Gibbings.

Over 250 periodical publications of essays and stories; also, reviews of books by L.P. and book reviews by him.

POWYS FAMILY

[Here it is possible only to state the wealth of material in the Bissell Collection concerned with other members of the family—the manuscripts, notebooks, books, memorabilia, and letters to and from the parents, brothers and sisters, relatives, and friends—but several items may warrant special note.]

—a sketch book kept by the writers' grandmother, Amelia (Emily) Powys from 1841 to 1849 that contains a drawing of their father, "Charlie a year old," May, 1844.

—an exercise book kept by E. M. (Marian) Powys, titled *The Caddis Worm*, that contains juvenilia composed by members of the family.

—part of the Ams. and the complete Tms. of *Still the Joy of It* by Littleton C. Powys. Letters to Littleton from Walter de la Mare (36) and Eleanor Farjeon (3).

—the complete set of drawings for Llewelyn Powys's *A Baker's Dozen* by Gertrude Powys. Many other paintings, drawings, engraver's proofs, and sketch books by Gertrude.

—a few poems in Ams. and Tms. by C. E. P. (Philippa) Powys.

—correspondence and (in the second instance) a few short typescripts by two of the brothers' wives who also were authors: Alyse Gregory (Mrs. Llewelyn Powys) and Elizabeth Myers (the second wife of Littleton C. Powys).

THE JOHN COWPER POWYS CENTENARY CONFERENCE

An enthusiasm for the writings of John Cowper Powys is apt to be a lonely one, which hardly would have surprised the author of *Wolf Solent* and *A Philosophy of Solitude*. Yet the opportunity for those interested in Powys to share their enthusiasm and communicate their ideas has been greater in Britain than in America, partly because of the more concentrated population but more significantly in recent years because of the existence of the Powys Society, an organization dedicated to the promotion of interest in the work of not only John Cowper but of Theodore and Llewelyn as well. The Society's bi-annual meetings in London have produced several valuable papers and much stimulating discussion, but the special John Cowper Powys Centenary Conference held at Churchill College, Cambridge, on the weekend of September 8-10, 1972, not only far exceeded in scope and achievement the Society's previous accomplishments, but left at least one visitor to the conference considerably more optimistic about the future growth of John Cowper's reputation than he had been when he arrived. The gratitude of all Powysians is due to Angus Wilson, president of the Society, T. D. Stephens, the indefatigable secretary, to George Steiner, who offered the hospitality both of the college and of his own home to the members of the conference, and to all the others who made such a gathering possible.

To an American to whom literary conferences have always meant an overwhelmingly academic ambience, the diversity of background of those in attendance was a refreshing reminder of the range of Powys's appeal: one sensed that the egalitarian and non-academic spirit of John Cowper would have been delighted. Academia, including a promising contingent of youthful teachers and students, was well-represented, but also present and actively contributing to the liveliness of the occasion were businessmen, booksellers, librarians, film-makers, artists, housewives, members of the Powys family, and the Chief Druid of England. The barriers of age and nationality were removed as well: youth and age and those between consorted harmoniously together; the anticipated representatives from Britain, Canada, and the United States were augmented by others from France and Sweden. One advantage of Powys's present lack of status in most college English departments is that he seems not yet to have attracted to his banner the sort of sterile pedantry and joyless careerism with which more academically respectable writers are too often afflicted. The conference's participants seemed rather to be amateurs in the best sense of the word, whose interest in Powys was inspired by

genuine affection for the man and his work, and they displayed a Powysian delight in absorbing the diverse viewpoints of others rather than merely relishing the opportunity to air their own.

It should not be inferred, however, that the conference's approach was either dilettantish or lacking in fundamental seriousness; during its little more than two days the participants took part in a demanding but well-planned series of lectures and seminars whose overall effect could only have been to deepen the understanding of and further stimulate the interest in the bountiful but still largely unmapped terrain that is Powys's work. Three of the lectures proved to be significant additions to the still relatively meager body of Powys criticism, and one hopes that they will eventually be made available in more permanent form.

In his opening address, "The Difficulties of Reading John Cowper Powys," George Steiner, whose frequent laudatory allusions in essays and reviews must have encouraged many readers previously unacquainted with Powys to investigate his work, offered his most extended discussion of him to date. Taking the position of a sympathetic but critical outsider in contrast to those more absolutely committed to John Cowper's cause, Dr. Steiner drew upon his broad knowledge of both literature and literary politics to consider the obstacles that have hitherto prevented Powys from enjoying a recognition commensurate with his achievement; his remarks provided a focal point for much of the subsequent discussion at the conference. After noting such practical factors as the lack of sufficiently influential academic and critical sponsorship and the not unrelated lack of ready availability of the texts, particularly of paperbacks which would more readily attract the attention of unaware but potentially interested readers, he called upon those seriously concerned with Powys to recognize the unevenness and weakness of much of the writing and to concentrate on discriminating with greater care between Powys's personal qualities and eccentricities and what is genuinely valuable in his work, both in terms of its originality and of its relationship to literary tradition. He concluded with sensitive readings from and discussions of the "Consummation" chapter in *A Glastonbury Romance* and the episode of Merlin crossing the river in *Porius* to illustrate the imaginative power of Powys at his best, marvelously attuned at once to the subtlest sensations of the private consciousness and to the most elemental immensities of the cosmos.

In contrast to the broad overview provided by George Steiner, Angus Wilson and G. Wilson Knight concentrated upon more specialized aspects of Powys's work. By entitling his talk "Powys the Novelist," Angus Wilson made it clear that he regards Powys less as a romancer or fabulist than as one whose fiction like his own is rooted in social actuality. By emphasizing the verisimilitude of the essentially upper-middle class worlds of the middle novels, he provided a valuable corrective to the view—sometimes encouraged by the author himself—that these works ought to be seen as merely subjective fantasies, related only obliquely if at all to "real life." In contrast, Mr. Wilson suggested that with *Porius* Powys may have been on the verge of creating a new kind of "dream novel" but that advancing age prevented further explorations in this direction and diverted him instead to the more casual fantasies of his "second childhood." In his discussion of "Powys the Humorist" G. Wilson Knight presented a delightful pendant to his trailblazing explorations of the Powysian cosmos in *The Saturnian Quest* and *Neglected Powers*. Powys's humor

is subtle, less a matter of incident and characterization than of tone and perspective, and it is easy to overlook. Professor Knight had indicated an awareness of this humorous aspect in his earlier interpretations of Powys, but he had not previously concentrated upon it. Here he revisited familiar territory with a new and revealing emphasis on its humorous implications, and he did so with a playfulness and grace admirably suited to his subject.

The major disappointment of the conference was Colin Wilson's talk on "Powys the Depth Psychologist." One hoped, as with Dr. Steiner, for some provocative and illuminating new insights into Powys from this celebrated "outsider," but in this case Mr. Wilson unfortunately provoked more than he illuminated. Properly enough he chose to begin by defining his own perspective before relating it to that of Powys, but as it evolved the talk transformed itself largely into a disquisition on Wilson's New Existentialism with references to Powys limited to questionable opinions and generalizations, inadequately developed and too lacking in specific references to Powys's own texts to be convincing or even suggestive.

Another scheduled speaker, H. P. Collins, had to cancel his talk of "Powys the Philosopher" because of illness, but here the resourceful organizers of the conference were able to convert disappointment into opportunity by improvising a highly interesting panel discussion which considered the problems involved in writing and teaching about Powys and speculated about which approaches might prove most fruitful in the future. The group was divided as to which book would make the best introduction to Powys for students, some opting for works like *Wolf Solent* and *Weymouth Sands* which can be more easily fitted into the traditional curriculum of the English Novel, and others because of the widespread Tolkien-inspired fascination with fantasy—recommending a later work like *Atlantis*.

Perhaps most stimulating of all were the various seminars on individual novels—*Wolf Solent, Weymouth Sands, Maiden Castle,* and *Porius*—since these allowed for the most concentrated and focused, yet diverse, exchange of viewpoints. Time and again one found himself re-thinking or refining long-established attitudes; especially memorable and provocative was Glen Cavaliero's forceful case for a greater appreciation of the merits of *Maiden Castle*. Repeatedly one was inspired to return to the books with fresh vigor and interest, a powerful testimony both to the value of such interchanges and to the continuing richness of the books themselves.

In his closing remarks C. Benson Roberts saw the remarkable harmoniousness of the conference as a reflection of Powys's own nature, and, in view of John Cowper's tendency to regard himself when expounding upon another author as merely a medium, one may perhaps be excused for fancying that at least an aura of his own gusto and good humor pervaded and inspired the conference. This Powysian influence seemed especially tangible during the seminar on *Porius* presided over not only by Angus Wilson but by an impressive new bust furnished for the occasion. ("The Brazen Head," quipped George Steiner.) In any case, if W. H. Auden's delicately punning suggestion in his elegy for Yeats that dead authors become their admirers contains truth as well as poetry, it now seems encouragingly possible to imagine John Cowper Powys entering his second century of life with renewed vitality.

JOHN COWPER POWYS

(1872-1972)

A hundred years have passed since first the light
  Broke on the prospect of emerging fame;
Effulgent now for him whose occult sight
  Descried the cosmos wrapt in flower and flame!
A Titan towering over Time's confusion,
  Prestidigitator in word and act;
A leprechaun eschewing man's delusion
  That fantasy is falsified by fact.
Rapt animist, he saw life as a fusion
  Of wood with stone, star with humanity;
Found fetish worship a fond life-illusion,
  And rapture vibrant in a moss-bound tree!
Both seer and saint, he's matching now his hour
With kindred souls, with Merlin and Glendower.

--C. Benson Roberts

EDITOR'S NOTES

Powys Seminar at MLA Convention, December, 1973: Although the specific date and place are not yet firm, there will be a discussion seminar on "The Novels of John Cowper Powys" at the Modern Language Association meeting in Chicago, December 26-30, 1973. The response to the seminar held at the 1972 MLA meeting—a tribute to the initiative and enthusiasm of Professor Douglas A. Hughes of Washington State University—confirms the need to continue the seminar on an annual basis. Co-chairmen of the Chicago meeting: Professors David A. Cook of Purdue and Robert L. Blackmore of Colgate. Because of the limited meeting space, all who wish to attend should write to Professor Cook for reservations. His address until July 30 is the Department of English, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana 47907. This summer he will join the Department of English, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia 30322.

New Publication: *Welsh Ambassadors: Powys Lives and Letters* by Louis Marlow (pseudonym for Louis U. Wilkinson) was reissued in 1971 by Bertram Rota Ltd., London, and in 1972 by Colgate University Press. The new edition of the standard biography of the Powyses features an introduction by Kenneth Hopkins.

Scheduled for Publication in 1973: A new edition of *Rodmoor*, John Cowper Powys's second novel (1916), with an introduction by G. Wilson Knight—in England by Macdonald & Co.; in America by Colgate. **And:** *A Bibliography of John Cowper Powys and Some Works about Him* by Professor Dante Thomas, State University of New York at Genesee. Publisher: Paul P. Appel, Mamaroneck, New York.

Centenary Sonnet: We are pleased to publish, opposite the contents page, the tribute by C. Benson Roberts, Bridgend, Glamorgan, Wales, first chairman of the Powys Society.

Distribution: The *Newsletter* goes at no cost to Powys scholars who are in touch with Colgate University Press. For others the cost is two dollars for Number One (1970), and three dollars for Numbers Two (1971) and Three. Distributing a journal in so small a quantity is possible because of the many hours contributed by Lucia Blackmore of Colgate Press; Nancy Sastri of Colgate's English Department, Earl Widtman and John Winchester of Widtman Press; and the support of Colgate University and the Ford Humanities Fund.

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R. L. Blackmore
Hamilton, N.Y. 13346
April, 1973

Colgate University Press has
published or distributed these
works by John Cowper Powys:

ALL OR NOTHING

ATLANTIS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY (introductions by J.B. Priestley and R.L. Blackmore, 1968)

THE BRAZEN HEAD

A GLASTONBURY ROMANCE (preface by the author, 1953)

HOMER AND THE AETHER

LETTERS TO LOUIS WILKINSON

LUCIFER (signed edition)*

MAIDEN CASTLE (introduction by Malcolm Elwin, 1966)

PORIUS (signed edition)*

RODMOOR (introduction by G. Wilson Knight, scheduled for late 1973)

SELECTED POEMS (edited by Kenneth Hopkins, 1965)

UP AND OUT*

VISIONS AND REVISIONS

WEYMOUTH SANDS

WOLF SOLENT (preface by the author, 1960)

these pamphlets:

Louis Wilkinson, BLASPHEMY AND RELIGION (a dialogue about John Cowper Powys' *Wood and Stone* and T.F. Powys' *The Soliloquy of a Hermit)*

Louis Wilkinson, BUMBORE: *A Romance.* (A parody, written in 1916, following John Cowper Powys' *Rodmoor)*

Kenneth Hopkins, SLIVERS OF SYNTAX: *More Emanations from Emily.* (Purporting to be sixteen newly discovered poems by Miss Dickinson)

and: Louis Marlow [Wilkinson], WELSH AMBASSADORS: *Powys Lives and Letters* (introduction by Kenneth Hopkins, 1971)

*out of print