

Powys Notes

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Powys Notes

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Michael Ballin

Nicholas Birns is now editing *Powys Notes*; all future submission should be addressed to Birns at 205 East Tenth St., New York, NY 10003; e-mail nicbirns@interport.net. This issue offers three impressive essays by three generations of Powys critics. I will refrain from Notes and Comment until the next issue, giving me time to work up to Richard Maxwell's standards of wit and eloquence.

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

Dismantling the Nineteenth-Century Novel: J. C. Powys's *Wood and Stone*

W.J. Keith

I first read *Wood and Stone* in the early 1970s in the Toronto Public Library, at that time on the corner of College and St. George, the only place in the city where I could then locate a copy. (This was before the 1974 Village Press reprint). With the possible exception of *Rodmoor* and of the as-yet-unknown *After My Fashion*, it was the last of John Cowper Powys's novels that I read, and I did so at the end of a serious and reasonably systematic exploration of his fiction.

I had known the name of John Cowper Powys for a long time, and much earlier I had read a few of his books--as I recall, these were *Maiden Castle* (because of my enthusiasm for Hardy and prehistoric monuments), *Ducdame* (attracted by the odd title quotation from *As You Like It*), and perhaps, though memory may deceive here, *Wolf Solent*. But I remember very well how, in the latter half of the 1960s, I had been urged by a diffident but persistent graduate student that JCP was someone who, with my literary and rural interests, I ought to be familiar with. The name of that graduate student, by the way, was Michael Ballin.

All this is not mere sentimental reminiscence. My

acquaintance with *Wood and Stone* is, I suppose, reasonably representative in that it is likely, if people have read it at all, that it will be among the last of his novels to be encountered. We tend to approach it, as a result, with a firm idea of JCP's qualities, both his genius and his quirks and quiddities, already in the forefront of our minds. So, as we read, we duly register the use of conflicting mythologies; the ubiquitous graveyards scenes; intriguing anticipations of scenes in *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands*, and *Maiden Castle*; the first of those sets of brothers obviously based on himself and Llewelyn; etc. Yet--and this is surely a very significant if obvious fact--*Wood and Stone* was the first of his novels to be published. Readers in 1915 (or 1916 in the US) reading it as a contemporary novel, had no preconceptions of what they might expect. JCP had published two slim volumes of poems (in the previous century, be it noted), but these had been long forgotten. He had recently published *The War and Culture* and *Visions and Revisions*, and had a reputation (especially in the United States) as an ebullient and idiosyncratic lecturer. But what sort of novel was he likely to write?

At this point, it is instructive to consider the book within the context of other fictional work published at that time. 1915 saw the publication of Conrad's *Victory* and D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*; 1916 saw the first appearance of *A Portrait of An Artist As a Young Man*. In addition, Ford Madox Ford (or Hueffer) published *The Good Soldier* in the former year, Somerset Maugham produced *Of Human Bondage* and Arnold Bennett the concluding volume, *These Twain*, of his Clayhanger trilogy, while Dorothy Richardson initiated her Pilgrimage series in *Pointed Roofs*, and Virginia Woolf made her debut as a novelist with *The Voyage Out*. With the notable exception of Joyce's *Portrait*,

1916 was less rich from the viewpoint of fiction (and we should note in passing that Henry James died in that year), but it is interesting to note that George Moore, a voice from the Victorian past, published *The Brook Kerith*, and a number of the more popular writers of the day--John Buchan, Hugh Walpole, H.G. Wells--all had new novels on the bookstalls. (I might add that I compiled most of the above list from the "Chronology" at the end of J.I.M. Stewart's *Eight Modern Writers* which, needless to say, makes no mention of the first appearance of *Wood and Stone*!)

So much for official literary history. As far as the UK is concerned, this period was also one of great activity in the area of the regional novel--and, as I argue in my book *Regions of the Imagination*, this is a tradition that should not be forgotten, as it has been forgotten by mainstream academic emphases, since it provides an enlightening contextual background for a number of permanently important writers including D.H. Lawrence as well as for a full understanding of JCP. I consider it important for a study of the early JCP to know that Eden Phillpotts was in the midst of his Dartmoor series (*Brunel's Tower*, the fifteenth, was published in 1915), that Sheila Kaye-Smith, had built up a popular readership by this time (*Sussex Gorse*, probably her best novel, appearing in 1916), that Constance Holme's third novel, *The Old Road from Spain*, appeared in the same year, as did Mary Webb's first novel, *The Golden Arrow*. This may sound like a report of dry-as-dust excavation from the mildew heaps of discarded fiction, but it may serve to remind us of a fact that many may not want to acknowledge: that JCP was one of those later to be parodied by Stella Gibbons (who, I discover, also published in 1915) in her once-famous *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932).

But it is high time that I focused more specifically on *Wood and Stone*. What this historical background has established, I hope, is that JCP made his debut as a novelist at a time of uneasy transition between what we might loosely call the 'Victorian' and 'Modern' traditions and tastes. "Victorianism" was, in many ways, under attack (witness the concerted onslaught of the Bloomsburys in the early years of the century; Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians* did not appear until 1918, but was in the course of preparation). At his time, middle-aged readers (including JCP who was 43 when *Wood and Stone* was published) had been nurtured in the Victorian period, and its influence still lingered. Outside intellectual circles, it lingered even longer; I now detect distinct traces of it in my own early memories dating back to the Second World War!

Let us, then, try to imagine the reaction of a "general reader" who happened to pick up a copy of *Wood and Stone* in 1915 or 1916. He (or she) would first notice the dedication "to the greatest poet and novelist of our age, THOMAS HARDY). But "novelist of our age" might well have provoked the response that Hardy hadn't produced any fiction for almost twenty years and had made it clear that his fictional oeuvre was complete. "Nineteenth-century novelist, twentieth-century poet": the latter phrase was already becoming conceivable. Hardy was, in some respects, a living exemplar of the fact that this period was indeed "an age of transition,"

The next feature to be noted by a contemporary reader would be the comparatively long and highly self-conscious "Preface" with its immediate reference to "the writings of Nietzsche" (vii). Nietzsche had a curious reputation at this time as a controversial spokesman for the modern who was himself a nineteenth-century figure (he died in 1900, a few months before Queen Victoria).

It is worth noting that both Hardy and Nietzsche have sections devoted to them in *Visions and Revisions*, the publication of which last preceded that of *Wood and Stone*. I have neither the time nor the expertise to investigate the impact of Nietzsche on Powys. Within the text of *Wood and Stone*, however, the allusions seem to me comparatively superficial. The general reader would pick up references to the main Nietzschean principles and catch-phrases that pepper the text--"blond beast" (50), "Dionysian madness" (218), "beyond...good and evil" (543), "eternal recurrence" (588), "Thus Spake Zarathustra" (625), and my own favorite "God died about the same time as Mr. Gladstone" (321). Certainly, the impact of Nietzsche belongs to the religious dimension that is decidedly prominent here and is, I think, an aspect of JCP that has not been sufficiently investigated. Hardy is also highly relevant, and I shall have more to say about him towards the end of this piece, but my own focus will be on the more literary and technical aspects of the book that hark back to the nineteenth-century novel in general.

If, following from one of Northrop Frye's recommendations, we "stand back" from *Wood and Stone* to observe its overall structure, what we find is a concentration on a village community and a society structured upon manor house and church. This is the identical pattern that we encounter in Jane Austen, the early George Eliot, in much of Elizabeth Gaskell and Trollope, and, of course (with significant qualifications, of which more later) in Hardy. It also constitutes the basic datum in the regional novelists I have already mentioned--Phillipotts, Kaye-Smith, Holme, and Webb. Of the prominent novelists in 1915-16, however, only Lawrence (in part) retain this pattern. Conrad, Joyce, Ford, and the rest have moved towards other preoccupations.

The reasons for this shift are not hard to find; profound political and social changes, technological developments and

related changes in the pace of human life--and, above all, the outbreak of the First World War. When, early in *Wood and Stone*, Mr. Romer complains that Madame Quincunx has been 'spreading dissatisfaction in the village" (27) we cannot help feeling that the theme is curiously remote from the pressing and immediate issues of the time. The time setting is subsequent to the accession of King George V in 1910 (181), but by the end Quincunx, Lacrima, Dolores, and Dangelia depart for the continent without any hint of war; presumably, *Wood and Stone* is set back in the immediate pre-1914 world but its publication in the period of trench warfare and mounting casualty-lists must have given the book--on one level, at least--an oddly old-fashioned air.

It would be foolish to assume that JCP--who, as I've said, had already published a short book called *The War and Culture*--was unaware of these anomalies. While we cannot rule out the possibility (even the likelihood) that some of the odd features in this novel are to be explained by an inexperienced novelist's uncertainty about how to gain his effects, at the same time I find myself increasingly conscious of a deliberate emphasis on incongruities that sometimes seems close to parody. For example, it is a commonplace in criticism of Victorian novels to point out the recurring stereotype of the fair heroine and the dark villainess. JCP uses but reverses the effect. He makes specific reference to 'these two girls, the fair-haired and the dark-haired" (100), but the former (the fair-haired) is the sadistic and obnoxious Gladys, while the latter (the dark-haired) is the sympathetic and suffering Lacrima. And elsewhere, traditional themes or situations seem consciously exaggerated almost to the point of absurdity. Thus the Victorian novel flourishes on intricate patterns of requited and unrequited love existing between the protagonists, but JCP's version here seems much closer to the artful

presentation of sexual musical-chairs that we find in the works of twentieth-century writers such as Iris Murdoch or Anthony Powell. Moreover, while many of these scenes echo (and are clearly derived from) the traditions of Victorian melodrama, these also contain an exaggerated quality that pushes them over the boundary-line towards a modern form of cynical comedy.

What, for example, are we to make of the following scene between Gladys Romer and Luke Andersen in the stone-cutters' workshop?

...she abandoned herself to her craving, and embraced him shamelessly and passionately. When at last in sheer weariness her arms relaxed and she sank down, with her hands pressed to her burning cheeks, upon an unfinished font, Luke Andersen thought that never to his dying day would he forget the serpentine clinging of that supple form and the pressure of those insatiable lips. He turned, a little foolishly, towards the door, and kicked with his foot a fragment of a carved reredos (49)

Gladys, taking over the lead from Luke, known in the novel as an intrepid womanizer, is clearly "the new woman" with a vengeance, and the reversal of the traditional sexual roles is one of the startling effects at work here, but I want to focus on the clearly-intended contrast between the sacred and the profane (that oh-so-Victorian dichotomy). One cannot but suspect that the juxtaposition of erotic passion with font and reredos invites a comic as well as a somewhat shocked response. This is all the more evident when the "unfinished font" reminds us that, later in the novel, Gladys is to be baptized as an adult, for decidedly non-religious reasons, and that she is well aware by this time that she is carrying Luke's illegitimate child.

Moreover, what is, in my opinion, one of the finest scenes in the novel also depends upon the sacred/profane dichotomy. This is the scene where Gladys flirts outrageously with the Reverend Clavering while he is giving her private conformation class. We know that Clavering is sexually obsessed with Gladys--"in love" as the Victorians would say, "lusting after her" as we might say--and Gladys is fully conscious of her power (it is a novel, after all, about what JCP calls "the mythology of power"). The effect of the scene cannot, alas, be conveyed by brief excerpts; I can only assert that here JCP is in full control of our multi-faceted response as readers. We admire Gladys's manipulative skill and her impeccable timing even as we are disturbed by her selfish irresponsibility. We rejoice in the rich comedy of JCP's art even if our moral instincts align us, albeit rather uneasily, with the absurd but nonetheless genuinely affected vicar. While in other parts of the novel we are aware of conflicting emotions but are uncertain how we are expected to react, here (if my response is at all typical) we recognize the skill with which the author is playing with our responses in a way (and this is surely the point) that is intriguingly but disturbingly comparable to Gladys's control of Clavering.

It is as if the standard features of the Victorian novel came apart in JCP's hands. The social situation and many of the fictional plot-complications are stolidly Victorian, yet the characters are at the mercy of decidedly non-Victorian impulses. Gladys, in the position of Victorian heroine, or at least as the person who ought to fill the role of the heroine, is immoral, cruel, hypocritical, contemptible. She is what the Victorians would call "a disgrace to her sex," yet she also represents many of the qualities associated at the time of publication with 'the modern Woman'--sophisticated, adventurous, forthright, sexually aware and even opportunistic. Moreover, in the midst of scenes that belong clearly to the traditions of the earlier century, JCP inserts

startlingly modern and conventionally inappropriate sentiments. Thus it is the vicar who feels "a sick disgust of the whole mad business of a man's life on earth" (182), while Maurice Quincunx, one of the more sympathetic characters in the novel, asserts: "No one 'loves' the person that they live with...the romantic idiots who make so much of 'love' and are so horrified when these little creatures are married without it, don't understand what this planet is made of". If many readers of 1915-16 were shocked at the sentiments expressed within this novel, they would also have been shocked aesthetically by the violent and jagged changes of mood and attitude that occur from page to page.

Those of us who read the novel for a better understanding of the evolution of "the mature Powys"--whatever that might mean!--will find, I believe, numerous anticipations of what we might call vintage JCP alongside a good deal of technical, intellectual, and aesthetic uncertainty. To take an obvious example, the introduction late in the novel of Dolores, fugitive from the sleazy circus, is obviously a not-yet-fully-realized attempt at the effects later explored so much more cogently in *Maiden Castle*--though in the contexts of Powysian relations with the nineteenth century, it is worth noting that the scene in *Wood and Stone* also looks back in a curiously compelling way to the circus scene in Dickens' *Hard Times*. Only occasionally do we encounter an extended scene where we feel that JCP is working comfortably in what was to become his own inimitable mode. One of the Gladys/Clavering scene already briefly referred to; another occurs towards the end of the novel, and I would like to examine it in more detail because it leads me back to the manifold Hardy-esque elements that dominate the book.

The chapter to be examined is entitled "A Royal Watering Place". The watering place in question is, as one

might expect, Weymouth, a resort where JCP had once lived and full of reminders of Hardy's writings. Here JCP as narrator not only makes general reference to Hardy's work but also mentions a specific Hardy novel, *The Well-Beloved*, the last of Hardy's novels to be published in volume form though it was written before *Jude the Obscure*, is the conceivably possible but hardly "realistic" story of a man who becomes obsessed with the spirit of beauty, a "Shelleyan 'One-shape-of-many-names'" (90), and pursues its earthly manifestation through three generations of women in a family on Portland or the isle of Slingers. JCP plays his own intertextual reference with the allusion since Luke Andersen, on this trip to Weymouth, has three of his girlfriends present at the same time (not including, however, the one who is carrying his child).

A typically Powysian effect is created here. On one level, the sequence could not be more Victorian, offering as it does something close to a verbal genre-picture of a nineteenth century middle-class seaside excursion. It includes 1) A visit to that favorite JCP locale, a "little tea-house" (579) 2) watching the "arrival of the passenger-boat from the Channel Islands" (579), an event important in *The Well-Beloved* as well as in a later chapter of *Wood and Stone*, and anticipating the opening of *Weymouth Sands* 3) A bathing scene 4) A ferry-ride and 5) a desperate rush to the station to catch their last train home. But the trio of available "maidens" represents a defiance of Victorian proprieties, and a remarkable passage in which Luke leaves the trio to go for a solitary swim belongs decidedly to our own century:

Girls, love-making, marriage,--the whole complication of the cloying erotic world,--fell away from him,....and naked of desire as he was naked of human clothes, he gave himself up

to the free, pure elements. In later hours, when once more the old reiterated tune was beating time in his brain, he recalled with regret the large emancipation of that moment. (589)

A little later, he recalls his brother James whom we had left in a troubling emotional state when setting out on the trip. And then we encounter the following sentence with its astonishing resemblance to Lawrence's contemporary but not-yet-published *Women In Love*:

He made a vigorous resolution that never again--whatever mood his brother might be in--would he allow the perilous lure of femininity, to come between him and the nobler classic bond of love that "passeth the love of woman"

Hardly the kind of sentiment we would expect in Victorian fiction. Yet JCP achieves an additional effect. "Never again." But what we as readers already know, as Luke does not, is that his brother has just died after a fatal fall on the nursery on Leo's Hill. There is a complexity--and a poignancy--here, a simultaneous evocation of life's heights and depths, its sublimity and absurdity--which is unmistakably JCP's.

I am suggesting, then, that in this infuriatingly transitional work appearing at a transitional point in literary history, JCP is simultaneously exploiting and dismantling the fictional conventions of the nineteenth century. Yet in my rather oversimplified division between "Victorian" and "modern"--not unlike JCP's own binary division within *Wood and Stone* between their mythologies of Power and Sacrifice--you may well have been wondering, despite my occasional asides, whether I have somehow forgotten or at least grossly underestimated the contribution of Hardy. Indeed I have not, but I have played down his influence hitherto so that I can highlight it here in my conclusion. Thus Luke Andersen's subsequent return to Bevilton, immediately

after his epiphany in the waters off Weymouth, as to the fact of his brother's death, is a classic instance of what Hardy called "life's little ironies", an archetypal satire of circumstance.

And here let me insert a personal anecdote. I have been stressing that what might be called the Janus quality of *Wood and Stone*, the way it reads differently if we regard it as the first of JCP's unique novels or as a late example of fiction in the nineteenth-century style. Intrigued by the reference to *The Well-Beloved* when rereading *Wood and Stone* for the purpose of composing this lecture, I returned to Hardy's novel, which I had not read for many years. I retained a memory of it, after acquaintance with the Hardy of *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and so on as one of his bizarre aberrations. This is, I suspect, still the generally held scholarly consensus about the book, and, within its own limits, this is fair enough. But when I reread it with JCP's early novels at the front of my mind, it came across very differently: as a serio-comic tale continually drawing attention to its own artifice, mirroring a world of strange synchronicities that might be more than coincidence in the popular sense of the word, revealing the unsettling effects of deeply based but ultimately incomprehensible psychological compulsions. It is, to be sure, unsatisfactory if we are expecting another *Far From the Madding Crowd* or *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, but if we see it, in F.R. Leavis's phrase, as a "moral fable" (though Leavis wouldn't have seen it in this way himself) alongside *Silas Marner* or *Hard Times*, or even (despite his dismissal of *The Well-Beloved* as "sheer rubbish" (Phoenix 480)) Lawrence's *St. Mawr* or "The Woman Who Rode Away," we may find Hardy's late novel coming into sharper focus.

And, if we follow this line of thought, we may find ourselves looking at other lesser known Hardy works through Powysian eyes. In *Wood and Stone* the Reverend Clavering ends up married to the pregnant Gladys; in Hardy's *Two on a Tower* the Bishop of Melchester marries the pregnant Lady Constantine--an important difference being, however, that Clavering knows the truth of the situation while Hardy's Bishop does not. It is easy to find Powys-like scenes in Hardy's other supposedly lesser novels. One thinks, for example, of the notorious episode in *A Laodicean* where two male voyeurs watch the heroine performing gymnastic acrobatics while dressed "in a pink flannel costume" (195). What JCP might have made of that scene! Yet how surprising that, outside the pornographic tradition, a Victorian--even so unconventional a Victorian as Hardy--should have presented it at all.

But even in Hardy's better known "mainstream" novels we find scenes and effects that JCP would have found especially congenial. Here too the Victorian conventions seem to come apart, or are reconstituted to accommodate the very different attitudes of the impinging twentieth century. I'm thinking of the erotic implications of Sergeant Troy's demonstration of the sword exercise to Bathsheba in *Far From The Madding Crowd* (so different in tone from a superficially similar scene in *The Mill on the Floss*); the realistically implausible yet psychologically compelling sacrifice of Giles Winterbourne and the unswerving love and loyalty of Marty South in *The Woodlanders*; Alec, complete with pitchfork, peering through the couch-grass flame in *Tess*; the "seraphic" quality (to employ Wilson Knight's adjective for many of JCP's female characters) of Sue Bridehead in *Jude The Obscure*; or the death of Jude himself, deserted by Arabella, as his memories of the Book

of Job (significantly omitted from the serial version) are punctuated by the festive hurrahs from Christminster celebrations--a scene that reminds me more of the conclusion to Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* (1925) than of any Victorian text. Surely the "feel" of these scenes is closer to the world of JCP's fiction than to any in Hardy's Victorian contemporaries,

A number of commentators, including myself in *Regions of the Imagination*, have explained the more obvious connections between JCP's work and the English regional novel. In this context, the Hardy connections are clearly central. This is all the more evident because of JCP's willingness to challenge Hardy on his own regional ground, as it were. As he remarks at the conclusion of the preface to *Wood and Stone*, "one could hardly have the audacity to plant one's poor standard in the heart of Wessex without obeisance being paid to the literary overlord of that suggestive region" (xi). This is an important background to JCP's work, and I am in no way playing it down here. But it is, I think, worth considering the possibility that JCP's Hardy is as much the marginalized Hardy (if you will forgive that currently overused word)--the Hardy who gave us, for instance, the quasi-lesbian relationship between Cynthia Spingrove and Mrs. Aldclyff in *Desperate Remedies*, the sleepwalking-in-the-graveyard scene in *Tess*, the scandalous sexual goings-on in *A Group of Noble Dames*, and some of the more grotesque scenes in other Hardy works to which I have already referred. let us consider again that dedication of *Wood and Stone*, "to the greatest poet and novelist of our age." But which novelist? The "historian of Wessex" as Barrie called Hardy? The trained architect who constructed his plots with such meticulous care? The "good hand at a serial," as Hardy once defined the extent of his ambitions in fiction? In *Visions and Revisions* JCP isolates two spirits in Hardy: "one infinitely sorrowful and tender, the other whimsical,

elfish, and malign" (163). Both these spirits doubtless contribute to the Hardy whom JCP once dramatically characterized as "the greatest writer then living on this earth" (Autobiography 229). But I now believe that the "elfish" Hardy who remarkably anticipated shifts of sensibility in the early twentieth century is one that held a special place in the lifelong veneration of JCP.

But I cannot quite stop there. The resemblance between some of JCP's effects and certain of the odder aspects of Hardy's work are worth pondering, yet it is possible to make too much of them. When I was regularly teaching Hardy to undergraduate students, I found that a useful way of helping them on to Hardy's wavelength was to say: "If, when reading Hardy, you find yourself feeling acutely awkward and uncomfortable, or even aesthetically outraged, consider the possibility that Hardy intends you to feel precisely that way." Such a warning can, I think, be helpful for a good deal of Hardy, but it applies only to the better scenes in *Wood and Stone*. I get the distinct impression that JCP's achievements in this mode at this period are distinctly hit-or-miss, and I would like to conclude with a few tentative comparisons and contrasts between this novel and *A Glastonbury Romance* in order to suggest how JCP refines the effects that he is, as it were, trying out here. What are the qualities present in comparable scenes in later JCP that we do not find in *Wood and Stone*?

First, JCP learns to go beyond the black-and-white characterizations that link *Wood and Stone* with the norms of Victorian melodrama. There are, to be sure, exceptions, but even the least engaging of his later creations seem to possess some redeeming characteristics. Thus it is not unreasonable, surely, to see Philip Crow in *Glastonbury* as an equivalent character to Mr. Romer in *Wood and Stone*. Romer is the archetypal villain in power, but Philip Crow is

decidedly more complex. Here is one sentence about him that JCP slips into the "Wookey Hole" chapter: "With all his maniacal lust for power, his {Philip's} was probably the least cruel human soul within a radius of twenty miles from that singular spot." (239). One cannot imagine the JCP of *Wood and Stone* making such a concession, and it is an index, I think, of his growth as a man and as a writer.

Second, JCP learns the virtue of the understated effect. Take, for example, this paragraph from "The Christening" where Nell Zoyland is nursing her baby (by Sam Dekker) while her husband and Persephone Spear, "under the power of what they had drunk," are unequivocally revealing their feelings for each other:

She {Persephone} watched every movement he {Zoyland} made; and her whole body as she lay back in her chair cried out to him in wordless yearning. "We are yours!" her child-breasts called. "We are yours!" her long relaxed limbs answered. "We are yours!" whispered her warm neck and her glowing curls. "We are yours!" echoed her sinuous waist and her boy-hips. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pippard had begun to clear away the supper things. (900)

In some respects, this passage resembles the one from *Wood and Stone* I quoted earlier about Gladys's feelings towards Luke. But the earlier JCP would not have added that final deadpan remark about Mrs. Pippard and the supper things. The references to "unfinished font" and "carved reredos" are uncertain in their effect; JCP's intentions in including them are not altogether clear. But that last sentence here leaves us in no doubt about the response JCP wants us to feel. He throws it away, yet knows that its very casualness adds to the "placing" effect. He is, as it were, in full control of the scene and its interpretation. We are at liberty, if we so wish, to prefer the fuzzy oddity of the *Wood and Stone* passage, but the greater artistic assurance of the *Glastonbury* paragraph must, I think, be

acknowledged.

Finally, and paradoxically, JCP can achieve through humor an effect that he would not dare to attempt except with reiterated seriousness, even solemnity, in the earlier work. Few readers, I suspect, fail to get somewhat bored by the repeated emphasis on Nietzschean dichotomies in *Wood and Stone*. The references become predictable; we are never allowed to forget that this is a novel with a "thesis". In some respects, he cannot leave well enough alone. In *A Glastonbury Romance*, there are similar references to invisible watchers and occult correspondences that can irritate the unsympathetic, but this is more a matter of aesthetic perspective than novelistic "message". Yet JCP has by no means abandoned his concern about the conflict between the spirit of power and the spirit of sacrifice: what else is the final scene where Johnny Geard takes the place of Philip Crow on the wing of his sinking aeroplane but a revealing illustration of these principles united in an unexpected and extraordinary way? But this JCP does not belabor us with the Nietzschean philosophic origins of his scheme. The one hint is of the slightest. Mayor Wallop--soon to be ex-Mayor Wallop when replaced by Johnny Geard (more power and sacrifice)--is the proprietor of a respectable draper's shop, and a sly suggestion of coming changes in attitude and responsibility is conveyed as follows:

Mr. Wallop had once overheard one of his younger shop-assistants--a young man in whose sleek black hair he had come to take a quiet interest, wondering what hair-wash he had patronized--refer to something called "Neetchky." From the context Mr. Wallop gathered that "Neetchky" could hardly be the name of a hair-wash. It seemed rather to be some pious formula used by the young man, by which he threw off responsibility for having got some young woman

into trouble. At that point, Mr. Wallop's interest ceased... (212-3)

That shop-assistant, always along with "Neetchky", is mentioned casually on a number of subsequent occasions, and that is all we hear of the philosopher whom JCP referred to so frequently, solemnly, and even ostentatiously in his earlier work. It is not that he rejects Nietzsche but that he has absorbed him into his literary and intellectual system. That he can now refer to him obliquely and with humor while retaining much of the power and stimulation of his example shows the extent by which Powys has become a "modern" writer by qualifying though by no means abandoning his nineteenth-century inheritance.

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Porius: A Week without History, A Word without Sense

Charles Lock

The historical novel derives its validity from an aesthetics of temporally transposed realism. The supposedly realistic or 'referential' novel introduces its readers into a world, a spatial domain the other side of the text, a domain whose spatiality is constituted by the invisibility, the unobtrusiveness of text. There is nothing more destructive of that sense of space than literal obtruding, letters getting in the way, words drawing attention to their failure to achieve transparency, words that refuse to be seen through, that subsist in their inky materiality.

If historical fiction is unfashionable, it is largely because of the linguistic problem. "Gadzooks" and "forsooth" litter, as only literals can, the pages of Harrison Ainsworth, Bulwer-Lytton and Charles Reade. Yet one understands the need to introduce some linguistic markers to distinguish present diegesis from past dialogue. How is historical difference to be represented except by linguistic and philological shifts? Yet if that shift is not felt to be "natural" it will be said to jar. The double function of the historical word - at once to represent and to be representative of - makes for a precarious balance. Such a word as "forsooth" is exclusively "representative of"; we recall and cite such instances of the archaeo-phatic precisely because in phatic speech reference is

suppressed. By contrast, a word like "halberd" does still represent, in spite of its representativeness.

Powys as a child loved to read historical fiction, even the least-liked of Scott's novels, such as *Count Robert of Paris*, and we may suppose that what Powys valued was what we can call "literal disruption." That is certainly what he achieves in *Porius*, a novel which does not admit us through its textual membrane into a magical world of Arthurian romance and Celtic legend. In search of such, precisely, many readers must have turned to Powys. Their disappointment is our celebration. For the words, and specifically the names, are as outcrops in the text, causing us to stumble near at foot, getting in the way of longer views. These strange words are themselves limbed, being well-heeled, according to the figure of *Porius*'s first and less than friendly reader, Norman Denny, of the Bodley Head, in a letter to Powys of 4 December 1949:

you seem to be resolved to slow up and obscure and entangle the progress and movement of the story in every conceivable way ... by loading it up with non-essentials, inconsequent details, trivialities, sheer perversities by which I mean, for one thing, the constant playing with Celtic and Brythonic words, which you frequently drag in by the heels for your own pleasure and not for that of your reader, who cannot be expected to share your philological interests.

(Cited in M. Ballin, "Notes on the Publishing History of *Porius*," Powys Notes, Vol. 7, no. 2, Fall & Winter 1992, 26)

In the 1994 edition of *Porius*, Chapter 27, "The Homage of Drom," we read of a conversation between the hero and Drom, in which *Porius* asks Drom "what the word was in the language of the Cewri for 'struggling to the last'."

(653) The word is not just dragged in by its heels; it becomes the very topic of conversation:

"There is such a word," he declared to Drom ... " and it is a word of only one syllable.... I think it means to enjoy fighting; and to be fond too of what you're fighting for, or of what you're fighting against. ... In fact what I liked about the word, Master Drom ... is that it seemed to declare in one breath that you were glad to have lived and that you'd struggle to the last to feel you were glad, in fact fight to the last to feel it; to feel, I mean, that weak as you might be, that defeated as you might be, that humiliated as you might be, that feeble and ridiculous as you might be and as much like a wounded insect as you might be, you still refused to curse life." (653)

The allusion to Job is worth pursuing. The word which signifies the refusal to curse life may also be, itself, a word that anyone but Job might have cursed, and, in cursing that word, have cursed life also. Life itself, not any concept about it, in a word.

Indeed, Powys takes this very word as emblematic of Denny's contempt and derision. Denny, in his letter to Powys, had tried to find praise for "the scene at the death of the Prince. But here I was brought to a full-stop, and it was a single word that did it - the word 'Gwork'." (Ballin, 28) Powys responds to Denny:

As to "Gwork!" - good God my friend don't I hear exactly & precisely that very sound that & none other uttered by the Ravens & I fancy the Carrion-Crows too! as they circle over my head every day in my morning walk up this mountain. Gwork! Gwork! Gwork! is what they cry. And anyway if I sent you ... a page of our Welsh paper you'd see words like this & if you heard the Welsh talking Welsh - God! you'd - - probably laugh! But don't you

see, old friend, to the natives themselves these sounds that make us laugh ... don't make them laugh...

(Ballin, 30, amended with reference to Ms. Syracuse U.L.)

In an earlier letter, 6 October 1949, Powys had already warned Denny of the necessity of using Welsh words in his texts:

You see how ... the Welsh names & Welsh words in all their uncouthness are essential to make the story real; without them the reality thins out, thins away, & vanishes into thin air. (Ms. Syracuse U. L.)

In a letter of the following month, dated 25 November 1949, Powys makes a wonderful confession of the thickness of those names whose absence would be thinness:

... for I've had that feeling very strongly myself over the Gwyddyl Ffychti for I never brought the sods in by name but I forgot how to spell the damned things! (Ms. Syracuse U.L.)

Such words thicken our senses as they thicken the text, preventing us from gliding into a past world as if it were merely a displacement of our own.

Bad historical novels are constantly interpreting the past, assimilating it to our understanding, to our vocabulary and mental processes. "What I can't endure in historical novels" wrote Powys to Denny, 6 September 1949, "is that ineffably tedious & when you think of it perfectly silly utterance you get in Green's Hist of England for instance which always begins: 'Men thought ---' or 'Men felt' or 'Men saw' --- when all the while you & I know

from too bitter experience that 'Men' - in this abstract sense - simply don't exist!" (Ms. Syracuse U.L.) Precisely in the contesting, the debate about the meaning of "Gwork," we apprehend in the past no common language, no single mentalité, but only a strange word, opaque even to "the men of those days."

Yet it is this very word "Gwork," signifying the refusal to curse life, which is the exact focus of Denny's curse. Denny claimed to have been brought by that word to a full stop, yet he managed to continue:

this lingo of yours has on me precisely the opposite effect [of Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky] - it seems to me innately meaningless. And the effect upon me of the word "gwork" was almost like that of an emetic. I simply do not believe that this ludicrous monosyllable can in any conceivable circumstance mean anything whatever or be anything except a simple onomatopoeia - a crudely humorous attempt to convey the noise made by a man who is kicked in the belly or the crutch. That is "Gwork", so far as I am concerned; and when I came to the wonderful and elaborate meaning which you put into the mouth of Drom I could only sit back and laugh. (Ballin, 28)

It is a most fortuitous stroke of Tyche that Denny should have seized on this word so allusively associated with the struggle of Job.

For oppositional thinkers, since the beginnings of modernity, Job has been a hero, a knight of faith for Kierkegaard; for Pascal, Job is a true worshipper of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not of the God of the Philosophers. Lev Shestov took as emblematic Kierkegaard's choice of Job against Hegel:

To seek the truth from Job means to cast doubts on the basic principles of philosophic thinking. It is possible to give

preference to Leibniz or Spinoza or the ancients, and to contrast them with Hegel. But to exchange Hegel for Job is like forcing time to reverse its course, like turning back to the age, many thousands of years ago, when men did not even suspect what our knowledge would bring us....

Kierkegaard went from Hegel to Job and from Socrates to Abraham solely because Hegel and Socrates demanded that he love reason, and he hated reason more than anything else in the world.

(Shestov, Kierkegaard and the Existential Philosophy, Athens, OH: Ohio U. P., 1969, 33-4)

Job has been an emblematic figure in modernity (and only in modernity) for his rejection of reason. Before modernity, it was faith and patience that distinguished Job. But there is a catch in the modern emphasis of Job's story which Porius seems to be addressing. Job stands for the defiance of the claims of Reason. But if Reason is one of the axiomatic values of Modernity, it is not the only one. Equally important is History, and the dialectic by which subjects and concepts individually and collectively negotiate the passage through time. And Job's relation to History is by no means antagonistic. In rejecting the reasonable voices of the Counsellors, Job is making a wager on faith, but his faith is actually a faith in History. The wager is to be redeemed when Job is vindicated, and vindication will arrive through the dialectic. Job's fame is itself testimony to one man's wisdom in understanding History correctly. Otherwise we should not know his name. The patience of Job may be a patience in spite of Reason, but it is a patience validated by History and by what must be called historical reasoning, by which Faith and Reason can be reconciled, or their conflict held in suspension.

One supposes that the modern champions of Job,

from Pascal onwards, must have known very well what was at stake here; if they chose to be silent, it is because they themselves are, after all, or above all, accomplices. To honor and celebrate Job is to be complicit with a patience - a waiting-game - and to share a faith in eventual vindication. Indeed, History has been occluded in the debate by posing its terms as "Reason versus Faith." Yet those opposed terms become almost complementary when they are seen to be mediated by History. It is in History, precisely through the turns and curves of the dialectic, that faith is vindicated. And faith is vindicated at that time when it first appears reasonable.

To rehearse further these old-fashioned debates, the story of Job exemplifies the tension between a faith in Reason and a faith in History. Faith in Reason is founded on available present evidence; faith in History is founded on the 'evidence of things not seen' (Heb. 11), precisely in the faith that one day, in the long dialectical run, they will be seen.

What *Porius* offers us, most radically, is the possibility of imagining a world in which one could have faith, but a faith invested in neither Reason nor History - a faith even less impure than Job's, one that could not be vindicated in time. It is a faith that would consign the faithful one to lasting oblivion.

Porius is the culminating figure in the Powysian series of protagonists who might all be called Dud No-man. "No-man" for their failure to make a mark or leave a name; "Dud" in the specific sense of something that fails to go off, that disappoints its vast potential, like a dud shell. Porius has the power to be a figure of consequence, to make his mark not only metaphorically, but literally, for we are told that his message to Morfydd was left unsigned because "it was a peculiarity of Porius to assume that he was the only man in Edeyrnion who could write a letter." (738)

Yet that letter has been lost, as has every other

document from that week in October 499. If Porius is a historical figure in a historical novel, we must understand that history has entirely failed in its task of vindication. What should we call that week? Is there a name for all that has been forgotten in an ahistorical lacuna? Powys himself wrote of the advantages for a novelist in choosing such a week in the middle of a period bounded documentarily by the *Life of St. Patrick* (mid 5th century) and Gildas (mid 6th century):

I am in no danger of being criticized by historians with the weight of contemporary documents, in their hands; for there are no contemporary documents at all. (Letter to Miss Muller 16 Feb 1949, cited in Powys Newsletter, Four, 1974-5, 6)

Powys goes on to make a familiar point:

It is in fact 30 to 40 years of peace in these Isles and as such has (as is usual in times of Peace) no history at all!

As the Spirit Sinister puts it in Hardy's *Dynasts*: "My argument is that War makes rattling good history; but Peace is poor reading."

Porius is in some respects Powys's response to *The Dynasts*. Hardy's Spirit Sinister continues: "So I back Bonaparte for the reason that he will give pleasure to posterity." (*Dynasts*, Part First, Act II, scene v.) Powys replaces Napoleon by Porius, and makes no claim for the entertainment of posterity. What Powys leaves unsaid is the problem of writing about "peace." Where there is peace there is the absence of a plot. Where there is peace there is no conflict. And conflicts alone produce the plots that are the stuff of history: one cannot have a plot and deny history.

Powys, writing to Denny on 6 September 1949,

elaborates the point, and mentions the documentary evidence available on the Continent, frequently cited in *Porius*:

... between St. Patrick's discourses in Latin in 450 & Gildas' damnings in Latin in 550 there's not a thing known not a thing! not a thing! about this Island of Britain whereas from the voluble letters of the Bishop of Auvernes in Gaul & the voluble letters of Cassiodorus in Italy not to speak of more official historians in Constantinople everything is known about the Continent of Europe & the Great Migrations & battles. But over here not a single authentic document.... What does that mean? Only one thing. Peace & an absence of wholesale misery!
(MS. Syracuse U.L.)

Powys goes on to explain that in this documentary lacuna all the Arthurian and Celtic legends have found a space and a time to have their mythical being. And while Powys includes Arthur and Modred and Merlin in his novel, "all these mythic figures are only the Background of my story. My real story is just an excitingly simple one between young lovers trying to escape..." To escape, *Porius* has to shirk, evade, fail to confront; for if he did not, there would be a record of his deeds. The specific condition of this novel's possibility is that the "hero" do nothing noteworthy. A week in which nothing is known to have happened must remain, after nearly half a million words, a week in which nothing has happened.

Porius is a novel about a man who suppresses, denies or evades all possible conflicts, who chooses not to be renowned, who strives to avoid any action that might be construed as historical, any deed that might become an event, that is to say, that might "go off."

Yet, despite the comprehensive documentary lacuna, a name has been given (in history, outside the fictive realm)

to our eponymous "protagonist," or rather the fictive figment is given the same name as his supposed grandfather whose stone stood near Trawsfynydd in North Wales. The stone reads "Hic jacet in hoc tumulo *Porius* fuit -anus." Powys writes: "Strictly, this single stone with 'Hic jacet *Porius*' on it which can be visited today remains the only contemporary historical document that exists." (Letter to Miss Muller, 5) Strictly, one must add, that stone which one can see there today and which Powys saw then was a replica, the original having been removed in 1940; it is now displayed in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff.

Joseph Slater has not been alone in assuming (see "The Stones of *Porius*," *Powys Newsletter*, Three, 1972-73, [27]) that Powys was unaware of the fact that the original stone was no longer in situ; this is certainly the impression to be received from most of Powys's letters, in which the substitution goes unremarked. However, in a letter to Malcolm Elwin of 27 December 1950, Powys writes of the "Cardiff Museum where the *Porius* stone now is; leaving a sham stone in its place, because of the military practice and training bombing..." (Cited in M. Ballin, "Notes on the Publishing History," 35; the "sham stone" is also mentioned by Powys in his letter to Denny, 6 October 1949.)

The *Porius* stone is controversial, its inscription subject to a long interpretative dispute concerning the crucial defaced adjective. This has been briefly outlined by Slater ("The Stones of *Porius*" [27]), who cites the earliest transcription, published in 1720:

PORIUS
HIC IN TUMULO IACIT
HOMO ----RIANUS FUIT

Edward Lloyd, who had made this transcription in 1687, records that the local people had understood the stone to mark the grave of one of the earliest Christians in the area, and that they supplied in the lacuna the letters that would spell CHRISTIANUS. In 1796 a variant transcription was published, supporting the same thesis: XTIANUS. This was slightly amended, and authoritatively endorsed, by Sir John Rhys in 1879: "The first two syllables of the adjective are represented by the Greek abbreviation XPI" (Lectures on Welsh Philology, London, 1877, 390). Rhys does not allude to the point of detail, that the Greek monogram is not XRI but XP, often conflated in a single symbol. Such an interpretation can be traced back to the seventeenth century, when Vaughan read "HOMO XRIANUS," which Macalister somewhat hopefully explains: "The X is entirely defaced, but it can be faintly traced by standing a little way back from the stone." (See R.A.S. Macalister, *Corpus Inscriptionum Insularum Christianum*, Dublin, 1945, 396-97). By 1920 a more positivist or downbeat generation of antiquarians decided that the adjective was "planus." Against this, however, Macalister argues convincingly that the foot of the L was a late addition, quite different from the L of TVMVLO, and therefore that the word must end with -IANVS. Clearly Nash-Williams and Macalister were in disagreement, and Nash-Williams had influence where it counted, in the National Museum of Wales.

Some interest was restored to such a disappointingly plain conclusion when in 1920 Egerton Phillimore argued that "planus" signified "flat-faced" and therefore "leprous." Was Porius, then, in North Wales as Baldwin the Leper-King of Jerusalem? Preposterous as this suggestion seems, it appears to have superseded Rhys's reading in the official literature of the National Museum of Wales. Indeed, on a poster "Early Christian Monuments" (undated, c. 1980) the Porius stone is transcribed thus: "PORIVS HIC IN TVMVLO

IACIT HOMO PLANVS FVIT." The "translation" is even more remarkable: "Porius lies here in the tomb. He was a leper."

Powys appears to have been ignorant of Phillimore's leprous interpretation, though he was familiar with the "planus" reading, in the sense of plain or common, rather than flat-faced, nose-eaten. However, both his own judgment and his respect for Sir John Rhys's scholarship favored the reading of "XRIanus." The official line of the National Museum, in favor of "planus" (though not the leprous gloss) goes back at least to 1949, when Powys comments on the Handbook of the Museum (which he had heard about but not seen):

"The lettering is a bit odd -- but if you please 'He was a common man.' Mind you Malcolm my friend this is only hearsay for I've never seen this note in the Museum Guide-Book at Cardiff - and it does seem wholly unbelievable."

At this point, regrettably, Ballin's transcription of Powys's letter to Elwin breaks off, abruptly, into italics within square brackets:

[Manuscript is difficult to decipher at this point but Powys indicates that he thinks it unlikely that "a common man" would merit a special headstone and prefers "he was a Christian"] (Ballin, "Notes on the Publishing History," 35)

We may cite instead a passage from Powys's letter to Denny of 6 October 1949:

This same stone reads thus:

In hoc tumulo
hic jacet
PORIVS

followed by certain marks or letters which Sir John Rhys interprets as "Homo Christianus Fuit" But some to me unknown authority who had to do with the composition of the Guide to Cardiff Museum suggests means "Who was a Common Man" (!!!) But personally I can't imagine any deprived relatives of any Deceased Homo, even after Jesus 499 A.D. proclaiming their lost loved one (& hero worthy of a lonely stone) as "a common man," can you? (Ms. Syracuse U.L.)

(The unknown authority may have been V.E. Nash-Williams, whose *Early Christian Monuments of Wales* was published by the University of Wales Press, Cardiff, in 1950. Nash-Williams (174) transcribes "planus" and translates "he was a plain man." In the National Museum's own copy of Nash-Williams a pencilled note on p. 174, said to be in the hand of Dr. Savory, adds: "a Hellenistic Greek word planos - a vagabond, wanderer, etc., borrowed by Cicero ... may have arrived in late Latin in the sense of 'itinerant' preacher, monk etc.")

In accepting the attribute of Porius as "Christian", even in the text of *Porius* itself (622), Powys makes clear the difference between Porius Manlius and his grandson. Indeed, Porius's closing words, "There are many gods; and I have served a great one," (873) are specifically in defiance of his monotheistic grandfather.

Yet, despite Powys' preference for Rhys's interpretation, the reading "planus" also has a lurking presence. For while Porius Manlius is a Christian, his grandson is decisively not; furthermore, in his evasiveness, in his refusal to fulfill or realize the Herculean similes by which he is constantly described to us and presented to others, the novel's protagonist aims to be plain, unworthy of record, and certainly unworthy of such a stone as commemorates his

grandfather. And whether or not Powys knew of Phillimore's suggestion, we might find it present, shaded, in the allusion to the sore-covered, leprous Job.

The name of Porius is the minimal unit of memory, a mark of history, but a mark that in itself fails to constitute history. Yet it is a real name, and one that conveniently suggests the quality of porousness, as well as approximating the name of the novelist. Porius is a name porous to Powys; and it is as a medium that Powys claimed authority for every detail of the text, notably in his letters to Norman Denny. To Denny's numerous objections Powys expostulated: "I tell you my dear I am a MEDIUM and I was there." (JCP to N. Denny, 7 December 1949, Ms. Syracuse U.L.) In the unused "Preface - or anything you like - to *Porius*" (requested by Denny) Powys writes: "Now I personally felt, as I was passing through each of these successive days and nights, that I was really there - moi qui vous parle" (*Powys Newsletter*, no. 4, 1974-75, 9) A medium is porous, and what is porous allows things to "pass through" its own substance. Porius (whether novel or character) is thus a container who/which contains nothing and allows all things passage. Nothing, we might say, sticks, nothing belongs: this is the one attribute of a man without attributes. The name stands for that attribute, for on the Trawsfynydd stone, the name alone has stuck, and endured. Why should we not fancifully suppose a reading "Fuit Homo Planus/Porus"? It is worth noting that Powys was almost superstitiously protective about this name, and through the years of its composition referred obliquely to "my Romance of the Dark Ages," telling Louis Wilkinson that "to no one but P. [Phyllis Playter] will I reveal the title, otherwise the hero's name" (JCP, Letters to Louis Wilkinson 1935-56, London, 1958, 150 [letter dated 21 May 1944]).

Allowing all things to pass through one and by one is the way to live without and outside history. The

conventional and reasonable ambition to make one's mark, to leave a name, is not Porius's ambition. And whether or not it was his ambition, it has certainly been the destiny of Job to have made a name for himself.

Porius stands as the representative figure of the Dark Ages, Powys's favorite historical epoch, whose darkness pays tribute, surely, to the people's freedom from historical ambition, from fame and record and all that we - we "Romans" - mean by history. In the unused "Preface", Powys praises the Dark Ages: "I like its indeterminate frontiers." ("Preface", 7) Revealingly, he goes on to name his least favored historical periods: "I would hate and loathe to live in the Middle Ages or in the Age of Pericles or in the Age of Queen Ann!" {sic} ("Preface," 9) These are the clearly defined epochs, the ones that lack porousness.

The art of the porous is also the presentation of the art of being porous, and this art we know by the strange word "cavoseniargizing":

Normal consciousness to him always meant, if he was to enjoy himself, the particular plunge into nature, or the particular taking nature into himself which he called cavoseniargizing (781)

when he was too absorbed in cavoseniargizing to notice anything, hear anything, or be aware of anything, beyond the magical ecstasy of mingling his whole being with the elements. (687)

He used the word as one of his precious sensation-symbols and to serve as a description of those recurrent moments in his life when the gulf between the animal consciousness of his body, the body of a youthful Hercules, and the consciousness of his restless soul was temporally [for -arily] bridged; so that his soul found itself able to

follow every curve and ripple of his bodily sensations and yet remain suspended above them. (87)

Here we must make a philological and antiquarian digression, to reveal the source of this peculiar word. Joseph Slater ("Stones of Porius" [25]) reproduces the illustration of the "Cavoseniargii" stone from V.E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (1950). This was clearly not Powys's source, which we can locate instead in Sir John Rhys' *Lectures on Welsh Philology* (1877). This contains an Appendix, "Our Early Inscriptions," arranged by county; in Merionethshire there are five inscriptions, including, no. 23, the Porius stone. Immediately above it, on the same page, no. 22, is a stone on which is inscribed, according to Rhys, "Cavo Seniargii." "Others," writes Rhys, "may prefer dividing it into Cavoseni Argii: it is written like one word, though it can hardly be one." Clearly Powys had the page (390) open for the details of the Porius stone, and his eye was taken by the entry above; he must have been provoked by Rhys' insistence that what was written as one word must be somehow divided. Powys chooses rather to augment and Anglicize the one word.*

Cavoseniargizing is then a word taken, like Porius, from a stone, a lithogenic word. (On stone signs, see my "Petroglyphs in and out of Perspective," *Semiotica*, 100-2/4 (1994), 405-20.) And what it is made to describe is known to readers not only of Porius but of any Powys novel, or of the philosophical books, the sinking down into one's own sensations, of subsuming all consciousness in the immediacy of the felt world - except the consciousness that one is doing so, which Powys also calls the Ichthyosaurus Ego. It is above all, or better, below all, an escape from the social and public domain, the invention of a private sphere, a secret life, one which is devoid of all responsibility, and

therefore makes no claim on history, not even on record.

In that secrecy, that abnegation of responsibility, one has no interest in anyone's approval or opinion, no hope of one day being vindicated, recognized, or even of becoming proverbial. Here the neglect of Powys's novels seems to be related to their thematic concern: in their "cavoseniargising" (or Wolf's "mythology") Powys's protagonists simply don't care what we make of them, but that uncaringness is utterly different from the tiresome ethical defiance of your average existentialist. (It is worth recording that in January 1947 Powys was reading Guido de Ruggiero's *Existentialism*, and was familiar with the thought of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Jaspers, Sartre and Marcel; Powys even had a correspondence with Jean Wahl. See letter to Denny, 27 January 1947, Syracuse U.L.) And in this respect, we can return to a consideration of Job. It is the resolution of Job's story, and his fame, which turns mere suffering and endurance into 'patience'. Patience, like sacrifice, can be defined only in terms of the reward or resolution which serves to terminate it.

What is patience without reward or expectation of reward? Porius' question about the word in Cewri for "struggling to the last" while, in spite of all, "you still refused to curse life," is answered by Drom:

"I think the word you mean must be gwork... Yes, I'm sure that's what my brother told you; and it does mean fighting and struggling and not yielding. Yes, and it is a word a person might use who felt that, though life had been cruel to him, he wouldn't curse it, but for a secret reason would force himself to praise it." (654)

In refusing to curse God, Job keeps alive the possibility of redemption. More than that, he allows for the possibility of some sort of enjoyment. The problem with cursing God, if

not life, is that God would know our inwardness and the sincerity of our misery. It is no good cursing God and then cultivating a life of secret pleasures - for the God whom we have cursed must be privy to our secrets. And if one curses life, one is even more bound to be miserable, for one cannot then secretly derive any pleasure from any aspect of life at all.

Cavoseniargizing is the way to avoid cursing life, as is it that which becomes impossible only if one has cursed life. And "gwork" is a refinement or a gloss on cavoseniargizing: the ability to derive pleasure from things, sensations, words, which gives them, or draws from them, a value in excess of what they are in themselves, or as they are to others, in the universal scheme of things.

Here one can only mention Porius's wonderful struggle with time and space, the coordinates of all our knowledge, and for Kant the very basis of categorical knowledge. Porius wants to assert the claims of Space over those of Time - a radical move against the dialectic; and then of Time over Space, a move against the universal and the homogeneous. Porius remembers hearing Minnawc Gorsant, the hated Christian priest of the Gaer, crying out that "the Christian faith demanded and exacted not only the external reality of Space, that noumenal matrix of all life, but the complete dependence on it of the inferior phenomenon, nay! the wretched necessity, of this half-unreal, half-untrue thing, Time!" (839)

Space unifies, is the condition of the universal, assigning measure and value to all the things which it contains. "Gwork" allows for the irrational, the incommensurable, the irreconcilable, the value of x over y, and, also, of y over x. Such incommensuration requires an understanding of the multiverse. And the multiverse is what comes into being when there is no one unifying principle, metaphysical, philosophical or theological, which

organizes all things by the same standard. The universe belongs to the Middle Ages and the Age of Pericles. But our age does not know a universe, and for Powys that is one of the things that we have in common with the Dark Ages - "its remarkable resemblance to our own epoch." Powys writes in the "Preface" that he is fascinated in the Dark Ages by their

rich beautiful mysterious fusion of so many cults, traditions, races, languages, religions, and above all its blend of all the horrible, delicious, beguiling, fascinating decadences of the dying classical world with all the startling, childlike, magical, shocking, crazy beginnings of nobody-then-quite-knew-what kind of Christian world. ("Preface," 8)

"Gwork" resists the oneness of the universe, whether Christian, Kantian or Hegelian. The narrator brilliantly gives to the Christian Drom the task of explaining the word, and thus of amending and contesting Porius's understanding of it:

"Gwork ... does mean what you say... we must listen to the splash of the stone, to the whirr of the arrow, to the rustle of the wind, to the flapping of the flame, as these sounds gradually die away, and we must think of them as more than stone, or arrow, or wind, or flame. And this more -" here the man's words became so low that Porius had to move forward a step or two to catch them, "- this more is what goes against the grain with me. For there is a defiance of God in this 'more' and in the word which expresses it, a lack of submission to the Will of God, a determination to enjoy yourself at all costs...." (655)

At this point Drom's discourse breaks off, he is lost for words, and then he grasps Porius's hand, "lifted it to his lips

sounded neither like the scarcely audible susurrations of one class of kisses nor the genial smacking noise of another." (656) Porius is convulsed by anger, and Drom wonders to himself "whether that impulsive and pitying kiss, which had so clearly offended its recipient, had been given by himself at his own initiative or by Jesus Christ, using him as a medium." (657)

That sort of medium is Pauline - "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. 2, 20) - and it seems to have little in common with Powys's own mediumistic authorship. Powys's mediumism is porous, an uncontainment, where St. Paul's and Drom's is a well-defined substitution.

All of these passages are new to the 1994 edition of *Porius*. What is not new is the stupendous paragraph describing Porius's response to that kiss, although in the 1951 text the paragraph hangs without context as a merely rhetorical triumph. Now we can understand the full philosophical charge against both Hegel and Christ, faith and reason, the dialectic of history, the dialectic of master and slave, the principles of order and unity:

He didn't need just then to analyze very far what it was that made the homage of Drom so horrible to him. The kiss of Judas crossed his mind, only to be rejected at once. There was no treachery, no cruelty, no hypocrisy, about Drom's kiss. It was worse. It enslaved the person kissed to the person kissing. It took away the former's ultimate human right - the abysmal right to choose, to choose not to love Drom, or any other living creature, the right to live alone, and finally to choose death if a person preferred death to life. The kiss of Drom sought to condemn him to the holy glory of life however much he might long for the unblest anonymity of death. The kiss of Drom was not the kiss of a corpse-god or *deus mortuus* whose embrace sucked the life-blood from the tragedy of life, nor was it the kiss of a

god who wanted to die but who couldn't die and who wished to share his horrible immortality with as many as possible. It was simply the kiss of righteousness without the possibility of evil or the possibility of death. It was the kiss of that which couldn't mock, of that which couldn't cry, of that which had for ever wiped away all laughter and all tears. It was the kiss that lives forever in the beatific contemplation of itself. It was the kiss of rounded identity, of perfect balance, of the reconciliation of all opposites, the kiss of everlasting peace, the kiss of unutterable sameness, the kiss of pure divinity, the kiss of anti-man.... [Porius had] a ghastly feeling of sinking down into the inescapable horror of being made one with an ever-living and ever-loving Creator. (658)

There is hardly a more thorough denunciation of the project of modernity - even of "Civilization" - than this, and its narrative brilliance lies in its infinitesimal difference from that which it condemns. For if "gwork" is the refusal to curse life, is this not a magisterial sweeping curse, very far from "gwork"? It is not, because it attacks all that is valued in life, and especially in systems and orders of life, precisely because all that is valued in life serves to obscure and devalue life itself, life irreducible to concept or principle. In the kiss of Drom Porius rejects the principle of oneness, wholeness, harmony, unity, balance, peace, love, all of which obscure the non-principle behind them. Here, like Drom, one is inarticulate in the non-face of the non-present. Denny was absolutely right to be scandalized.

The word that disrupts, inarticulate, irreducible to voice, absolutely resistant to conceptualization - Gwork! - is the graphic fragmentary stoniness over which every metaphysic must stumble.

Theory, with all its claims to lead us beyond modernity, and out of our fixations on reason and history, can do nothing helpful as long as it is an accomplice in the

universal. Imagining the local of theory, the fragment as entity, the hiatus as norm: that is the wager of Porius, a pure faith, which makes Job look almost cunning, a faith forever unredeemed, and unredeemable: for there are no local redemptions, no narratives of hiatus, nor names of fragments. Yet the Jewish doctor, Lot-el-Azziz, tells Porius that "false gods can, alas, give signs and tokens - such is the measure of the power allowed them - that are not as false as themselves." (747)

Those signs and tokens that partake of truth, despite the falseness of their origins, what could they be but fragments, made true in being broken from the falseness of the whole, as a week attains truth by dropping out of history? Fragments such as the Porius stone, or its incomplete inscription, or the "complete" *Porius* whose publication we celebrate: Gwork! Gwork!

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P.P.S. After preparing this essay, I stumbled upon the following, scrawled by Powys on the back of an envelope to Norman Denny, probably that which contained the letter dated 27 January 1947: "In Llanfer church near the Lake there is a Stone on wh. my Porius found the inexplicable words Cavo-Seniargii. "This word," says Sir John Rhys in *Lectures on Welsh Philology*, Published 1877 "is written like one word tho' it can hardly be one." (Envelope in Syracuse U.L.) My thanks also to my former colleague Prof. W.J. Keith of the University of Toronto, for help in locating references.

Subversions of the Celtic in John Cowper Powys's *Porius*

Joe Boulter

At first sight John Cowper Powys seems committed to the idea of the Celtic. Powys represented himself as Welsh,¹ he lived in Wales from 1935 until his death in 1963, and two of the novels he wrote there are concerned with the two most important events in the history of Welsh identity: Owain Glyn Dwr's rebellion (*Owen Glendower*, 1941), and Arthur's reign (*Porius*, 1951). Powys's representations of the Celtic are highly subversive, as a result of the fact that he saw ethnic identity as performed rather than essential, in the same way Judith Butler presents gender as an effect of "defining institutions".² For Powys, life and location is seen to be chosen because of discourse rather than discourse reflecting life and location when he says, "twas partly to live up to my name which is a Welsh one, that I came here!"³

Powys's idea of identity as performance extended to all areas of his life, as indicated by his repeated characterisation of himself as an actor,⁴ and it is also thematised in his novels in a way which aligns him with contemporary cultural theory. Murray Pittock emphasises the performative quality of Charles Edward's behaviour in 1745, saying 'he acted as the fulfilment of the propaganda dreams of his supporters, through his dress, pageantry, concern for tradition, and opposition to the Union.'⁵ Powys shows his nationalist leader constructing identity in the same way in *Owen Glendower*: when Owen gives Tegolin in her role as 'The Maid in Armour', in order to inspire the Welsh to fight for him, we are told that Owen 'had tried to

resemble some elderly master of ceremonies'.⁶ The fact that Powys viewed identity as a politically motivated construct might go some way to explaining why what he regarded as his best novel, *Porius*,⁷ constitutes a thoroughgoing subversion of traditional portrayals of the Celtic. *Porius*, set in 499, is positioned precisely at the paradigmatic Celtic moment, the age of Arthur, the 'final age of Brythonic power and ascendancy'.⁸ Powys troubles central aspects of this construction by showing its manifestations to be performances, by representing it in unusual revisionist versions, and by creating in his fictional worlds a hybrid displacing space in which its claims to authority and authenticity are undermined by contact with contesting cultures.

The Bard

A central aspect of traditional constructions of the Celtic is the bard, as represented by the mythical figure of Ossian, and by the earlier legendary figures of Taliesin and Aneirin. Arnold, for example, calls the Celts "the children of Taliesin and Ossian", and admits he is ridiculed for doing so by *The Times*.⁹ Arnold's coupling of Taliesin and Ossian demonstrates their similar roles in the making of Celtic identity: though there may be historical evidence to show that Taliesin and Aneirin existed, as they used in constructing the Celtic they are as much the material of fiction as Ossian. For example, introducing *Taliesin Poems*, Meirion Pennar makes a circular argument in contending that because "there is that great celebration of his lord and leader Urien" in Taliesin "Urien must really have stood out".¹⁰ Pennar removes from his equation the obvious fact that the purpose of eulogistic poetry is not to be faithful to what its object really was but to make that object pre-

eminent.

In his attempt to repress Taliesin's political motivations in constructing an artificial picture of Urien as great, in order to argue that the picture is a reflection of how Urien really was, Pennar's own political motivations are implicated. Macpherson's use of a similar circularity points to his constructing Ossian, as Pennar constructs Taliesin, as a realistic portrayer of the Celts. This circularity is seen in Macpherson's use of explanatory notes as if his knowledge of the Celtic world and Ossian's were separate things which could be used to validate each other, for example, he says that 'small eyebrows were a distinguishing part of beauty in Ossian's time: and he seldom fails to give them to the fine women of his poems.' We know now that Ossian is Macpherson's invention, and Pennar's argument is equally concerned to erase the traces of its own construction in order to use the bard to authenticate a particular portrayal of the Celtic.¹¹

Specifically, the bard is used to authenticate the idea of the Celts as a homogeneous group. This is seen in Pennar's statement that Taliesin and Aneirin's importance derives in part from the fact that they were 'among the first' to compose in "Cymric".¹² In a circle of support, the bards are valorised as the representatives of homogeneous Welsh identity, and Welsh identity is given a homogenising linguistic basis via the work of the bards. In order that the bard authenticate the reality of Welsh identity, it is necessary that the bard be real: Leslie Alcock says Taliesin "can definitely be dated to the second half of the sixth century",¹³ and Pennar is insistent that the poems he presents are "most likely poems of the historical Taliesin", who lived in the sixth century.¹⁴ However, it is unlikely that Taliesin's poems were written in this period.¹⁵ Alcock's and Pennar's certainty is produced need for that the Taliesin tradition to be preserved, constituting as it does, "a major factor in the maintenance,

stability, and continuity of the Welsh identity and the fragile concept of Welsh nationhood."¹⁶ By contrast, Powys treats the bard scarcely less respectfully than Goscinny and Uderzo: his Taliesin works to subvert the image of which he is traditionally the original in many different ways, and consequently problematises a Celtic identity which relies on that image.

The bard is conceived by Macpherson, Blair and Burns as "an inspired singer, drawing on "primitive" tradition, rather than [as] a modern, cultured, and correct poet."¹⁷ A poet in a tradition, the bard is also a receptacle of tradition, maintaining the Celts image of themselves as the representative of collective memory: in "Fingal", when Swaran worries that his and Fingal's fame will not last, Fingal commands the bards to sing of "other years" to demonstrate the bardic guardianship of the past.¹⁸ The bard is also able to maintain in song a culture which has decayed in actuality. Ossian asks Malvina to take up the harp to return to him, "the days of the mighty Fingal", and elsewhere in the poem the bard's song is described as being 'of other times'.¹⁹ The translator Macpherson is consequently implicated by the poems he translates as continuing the bardic tradition. Macpherson continues Ossian's theme of cultural decay into the present, saying that

The genius of the highlanders has suffered a great change within these few years. The communication with the rest of the island is open, and the introduction of trade and manufactures has destroyed that leisure which was formerly dedicated to hearing and repeating the poems of ancient times [...people have left the highlands and though they may return, during their absence they have...] imbibed enough of foreign manners to despise the customs of their ancestors. Bards have long ago been disused, and the spirit of

genealogy has greatly subsided.²⁰

Powys undercuts the whole of this traditional positioning of the bard when he refers to Taliesin as if he were a modernist contemporary, whose work is "obscure" and "modern",²¹ neither fulfilling a need for the community, nor part of a tradition.

The bard's importance in society is also stressed in Ossian. As Blair highlights, the bard is often used as an ambassador between contending chiefs.²² Taliesin plays no such role in Porius, and instead is given a second job (which of course most modernist poets had) as a temperamental chef²³. The juxtaposition of the poetic and the worldly in Taliesin's two roles is typical of Powys, who uses such juxtapositions to prevent the reader taking any of the ideological positions represented in his novels too seriously. The paradigm of this technique is seen in *A Glastonbury Romance*, when John Geard, leader of the Glastonbury commune/religious revival, follows his last speech with a fart.²⁴

Emyr Humphreys makes the bard responsible for a further aspect of Celtic culture, seeing in the poems of Taliesin and Aneirin "the peculiarly Celtic form of nostalgia known as *hiraeth*",²⁵ and thus representing the bards not only maintaining the image of Celtic civilisation, but simultaneously mourning its loss (thus implicitly desiring its return and serving the nationalist cause). This sense of loss is a key note in Ossian, most fully articulated when Fingal says:

I have seen the walls of Balclutha, but they were desolate.
The fire had resounded in the halls: and the voice of the
people is heard no more [...continues] Raise the song of

mourning, O bards, over the land of strangers. They have
but fallen before us: for, one day, we must fall.—Why dost
thou build the hall, son of the winged days? Thou lookest
from thy towers to-day; yet a few years, and the blast of the
desart comes; it howls in thy empty court, and whistles
round thy half-worn shield.²⁶

Loss is also abstracted by Arnold as the key image for Celtic literature when he takes from Ossian his epigraph "They went forth to war, but they always fell", and pictures the world "constantly slipping [...] out of the Celt's grasp."²⁷ Powys, on the other hand, takes away from Taliesin his role as elegist for a civilisation, writing new poems for him in a faintly Whitmanian style which replaces *hiraeth* with a celebration of pure sensation, "independent of love and religion and nationality and power and fame and glory and learning".²⁸ *Hiraeth*, so consistently ascribed to Celtic poetry since Ossian,²⁹ is not part of Powys's Taliesin's vision, nor is it a significant theme in Porius.

If we turn from Powys's refusal to subscribe to a key element in the construction of Celtic identity to check again to see if there is any evidence for this element in the literature still claimed for the period, we find that in fact *hiræth* is not a significant theme in Taliesin or Aneirin. Taliesin describes Urien as a man with limited interests:

He kills
he hangs
he nurtures
he dispenses;
dispenses
and nurtures,
he kills
in the front line.³⁰

These interests are those which also concern Taliesin, as well as that of eulogising those who exemplify them. Taliesin's primary eulogistic purpose is signalled by his usual method of concluding a poem, "I shall not be in my element / If I don't praise Urien."³¹

In *The Gododdin* too, there is little sense of mourning a civilisation: the subject is warriors drinking mead, killing, and being killed, and the imagery recalls Blair's description of Lodbrog's funeral song, featuring "the noise of arms, the streaming of blood, and the feasting of birds of prey, often recurring."³² Blair is using this imagery from a non-Celtic writer to contrast to his Celtic tradition, to which Ossian is central, but in fact it seems that the *hiraeth* of Celtic poetry originates with Ossian, that it is a retrospective construct more inspired by contemporary political realities such as the failure of the Jacobite rebellion, as Pittock argues,³³ than by the evidence of earlier Celtic literature. Of course, none of the poems of Aneirin or Taliesin as they stand actually dates from the period in question (though the fact that in the thousand years following Arthur these poems did not receive any graftings of *hiræth* points even more strongly to *hiræth* as a recent invention): I am just playing one construction of Celtic identity off against another, but the fact that Powys prompts such playfulness indicates his subversive effect.

King Arthur

If in *Porius* Powys's Celts are not given cultural unity by their bardic tradition, they are also not united politically or militarily by their pursuit of power. Typically constructions of Celtic identity have portrayed the Celts as a united group. For Arnold, after the Roman withdrawal there came "the

recovered independence of the native race".³⁴ This not only implies pre-Roman Celtic independence but also fits the Jacobite image of once-and-future power. The implication is that the Celts lost and recovered their unity and control of Britain once and can therefore do so again. Often this image of unity involves opposition to invasion. Such oppositional definition is seen in "Fingal" where though the heroes sometimes fight amongst themselves, they are united against the Scandinavian. The threat of Swaran prompts Fingal to join Cuchullin, and Macpherson notes that Carril's purpose in telling the story of Cairbar and Grudar is to reconcile Connal and Calmar by giving them an example of the need for unity in the face of a common enemy.³⁵ Identity as constructed through difference is also seen in Geoffrey of Monmouth's account of Merlin's prophesies, where the Red Dragon of the British is placed in opposition to the White Dragon of the Saxons.³⁶ Oppositionality creates Gwyn Williams's Welsh too: he tells that "[b]y [...the time of Offa's Dyke] they themselves were beginning to call what was left of the Britons Cymry or fellow-countrymen." Pretty soon there was nobody left to call Cymry except themselves. Their stronger kings started to hammer the whole bunch together and to make a country called Cymru: Wales."³⁷

Powys's deconstruction of this Briton-Saxon opposition coincides in *Porius* with his displacement of Arthur, who with his "claim by rightful inheritance to the kingship of the whole island,"³⁸ usually represents the Britons. In Powys's novel, Arthur's displacement from the centre of the legend is obvious: *Porius*'s protagonist is *Porius*. Arthur appears for only a short while, and has "very little glamour":³⁹ he is "a man of pure undiluted generalship, realistic, practical, and competent."⁴⁰ We also see "Powys's refusal of conventional idealism [...as he] makes Arthur's followers a set of effeminate young men out-of-place in their

grim setting".⁴¹

Most unfortunately for Celtic unity, although in *Porius* Arthur is fighting the Saxons, Britain is not united behind him. Arthur does not unify Britain firstly because in *Porius* not all Britain's inhabitants are Celtic, and many of them feel that their Celtic "masters are just as deeply our enemies and exploiters as any pirates from Germania?"⁴² Accordingly, the non-Celtic forest people treat with the Saxons against the Celts.⁴³ Secondly, Arthur's opposition to the Saxons fails even to unify the Brythonic Celts themselves. This is most obvious in the imminent challenge to Arthur by Medrawd (Powys's Mordred), but Powys also focuses on the fact that many of the leading Brythonic Celts are not interested in the Matter of Britain. Brochvael decides that he lacks the "heroism and initiative" to "implore them all, Brythons, Romans and Iberians, for the sake of Ynys Prydein, their island-home, to follow the Prince of Edeyrnion against the invader".⁴⁴ This lack of heroism subverts the image of the Celts as warriors pure and simple promoted in Aneirin and Taliesin: in his poem "You are the Bes", Taliesin identifies readiness for the fight as primary among the qualities which mark out Urien as pre-eminent, telling his patron, "your spear-thrust is deep / whenever you get the sniff of combat."⁴⁵ *Porius* too is "in no hurry to join the emperor's forces", and pursues a "policy of drift" (the novel's plot depends partly on his prevarication).⁴⁶ And Einion seems "to care for nothing but hunting and light loves and listening to Indeg's three sisters talk of the heathen superstitions of the forest-people", and looks forward to a time when there is "no more of this 'Emperor of Britain' business".⁴⁷

Full-blooded?

Blood imagery is common in the Celtic battle poetry tradition. Taliesin refers to warriors "regaling themselves / on a surfeit of blood",⁴⁸ in the first fifteen sections of *The Gododdin* blood, dripping from warriors, foes or weapons is mentioned five times, and in *Fingal* the steeping of a limb or a weapon in the enemy's blood is a common image.⁴⁹ Mixing of blood is also a common metaphor for racial hybridity among nineteenth-century writers, to the extent that Robert Young tells us that "every time a commentator uses the epithet 'full-blooded' [...] he or she repeats the distinction between those of pure and mixed race".⁵⁰ These two strains of imagery mingle potently in *Porius*: when Arthur bends over a dying Saxon we are told,

He then took the living dead in his arms and laid him gently on the ground and knelt beside him, the bandage trailing from his thigh and his own warm blood dripping upon the cold caked blood of the other. Then he stooped down and kissed him.⁵¹

This scene undermines traditional images of the Celtic firstly in its stress on the ability of Celt to feel for Saxon. The sympathy for the enemy Arthur shows here is not much in evidence in *Ossian*, where although there are moments which might be used as images of ethnic mixing, the potential of the moments is refused. Images of mixing which are go unexploited include the mutual slaying of Duchomar and Morna, the battle between Lochlin and Innis-fail where "[c]hief mixed his strokes with chief, and man with man", the wrestling of Fingal and Swaran where "[t]he sinewy arms bend round each other", and the moment at the death of Orla where 'Fingal bends over him as he die'.⁵² In *The Gododdin*

such closeness is exploited only as the opportunity for further killing. It is said of one warrior that

after a banquet
he would often give presents
to the enemy

but they were poison:
it was in this manner that
he would befriend them⁵³

The Scandinavian Starno behaves in a similar manner towards his guests in 'Fingal': he invites Fingal for three days of hunting and feasting, but sets up an ambush on the third day to kill him.⁵⁴

If Arthur's show of sympathy is not in the tradition of Celtic battle poetry, Powys's scene is still more subversive in that it undermines the attempt to represent the Celts and Saxons as opposites. We are shown the bloods of the two races mingling, a mingling which is nowhere present in either of the older constructions of Celtic combat in Taliesin, Aneirin, or Ossian, despite their drenching in the stuff. Powys is stressing the fact that in hand to hand combat the two sides of an opposition "close" in both senses of the word. Self and other are liable to mix, to the extent that in the ultimate act of self-definition through aggressive exclusion of the other, blood and bodies mingle, threatening hybridity and deconstruction. This threatened dissolution is compounded by the mingling of eroticism and violence with the kiss, which recalls Aufidius' "Let me twine / Mine arms about that body whereagainst / My grained ash an hundred times hath broke".⁵⁵

This image is one of the several ways in which Powys shows the Celtic threatened by racial hybridity. Another symbol of this threatened mixing occurs when Porius puts

into practice his fantasy of sex with a giantess, or "cawres".⁵⁶ Young sees sex as a major area, along with language, of cultural contact.⁵⁷ Porius makes this contact hugely problematic for the idea of identity constructed through difference, as he has intercourse not only with a female of different race, but also of different species, and of different genre: Porius is historical, the Cawres is mythic, the intercourse happens in a hybrid fictional world.

The most problematic effect of inter-racial sex for racial identity is the threat of hybrid offspring which belong to both or neither racial category and thus reveal those categories to be constructs. Although this threat is not realised via Porius's action (the Cawres is killed shortly after they have sex), it has already been centralised in the novel in the shape of Porius himself: the protagonist of Powys's *Romance of the Dark Ages* is not the Romano-Brythonic unifier of Britain, King Arthur, but a Brythonic Prince, "[p]lunged from infancy into the criss-cross eddies of racial and religious divergence",⁵⁸ with a Roman name and an ancestry which is part-Iberian and part-giant, who marries the half-Ffichtiad half-Brythonic girl. Given this hybrid inheritance, it is unsurprising that Porius finds it hard to maintain sense of identity: though "what [...Porius] wanted above all was to keep his inner identity [...] intact [...] He wanted also to remember that he had the blood of the aboriginal giants in his veins as well as of the forest-people!"⁵⁹

Noble Savages?

If the Celts in Porius are not racially pure or politically unified, they are also not a single or a dominant civilisation. Writers from Hugh Blair to Meirion Pennar have compared the Celts to Native Americans.⁶⁰ This comparison forms

part of the portrayal of the Celts as noble savages, living as warriors and hunters (in "Fingal" the alternative to fighting is hunting: Calmar tells Connal that if he doesn't want to fight, he should "pursue the dark-brown deer of Cromla: and stop with thine arrows the bounding roes of Lena"),⁶¹ and living in a country largely empty apart from themselves.⁶² Such a portrayal of the Celts as "sons of the desert"⁶³ emphasises their prior claim to the land, which in turn bolsters the priority of their civilisation: Macpherson says of the Scottish highlanders that "[c]onscious of their own antiquity, they long despised others, as a new and mixed people."⁶⁴

The Celts are seen as preserving a primitive way of life while at the same time naturally possessing some consistent cultural qualities such as tenderness and sublimity (Blair) and sensibility and sentimentality (Arnold).⁶⁵ Such constructions were initially politically motivated in that they served "to reach back into the past in order to invent a community-based organic society, free of conflicts, which was represented in the persons of the Stuart kings and the status of an independent Scotland". (They remain politically motivated, though from the opposite direction, later on, in that they suited Arnold's wish to promote English culture as a hybrid of the two sides of the Enlightenment binary in which the Celtic provided the feminine half of emotion and the Teutonic provided the masculine half of reason).⁶⁶ By showing an ancient original Celtic rule over Britain—especially by combining it with the idea its loss through the tradition of *hiræth* (as Pennar does in comparing the Celts' loss of Britain to the Native Americans' loss of America)⁶⁷ which suggests that such a rule could return,—writers are constructing the Celtic from a nationalist position. When such constructions privilege the wild and free highlander as the modern representative of the

one and only truly original Scot,⁶⁸ they indicate that an independent Scotland emblemized by the present-day highlanders remains a possibility.⁶⁹ Macpherson often reinforces this link by making connections between the names in Ossian and places, people and customs in the highlands which persist. For example, when, in 'The Battle of Lora', Fingal's peacemaking offer includes "[a]n hundred girdles" Macpherson notes that "[s]anctified girdles, till very lately, were kept in many families in the north of Scotland".⁷⁰

Fingal concerns the uniting of Celts in Ireland and Scotland against the Scandinavian invader, and Macpherson indicates that such a union was not simply constructed as part of an opposition, but resulted from the fact that both nations were almost the same people in the days of that hero. The Celtæ, who inhabited Britain and Ireland before the invasion of the Romans, though they were divided into numerous tribes, yet, as the same language and customs, and the memory of their common origin remained among them, they considered themselves as one nation. After South Britain became a province of Rome, and its inhabitants begun to adopt the language and customs of their conquerors, the Celtæ beyond the pale of the empire, considered them as a distinct people, and consequently treated them as enemies. On the other hand, the strictest amity subsisted between the Irish and Scots Celtæ for many ages, and the customs and ancient language of both still remaining, leave no room to doubt that they were of old one and the same nation.⁷¹

Just as traditional constructions of Scottish Celtic identity have stressed homogeneity, so images of the Welsh stress that are part of "a great homogeneous nation called Cymry or Britons".⁷² Geoffrey of Monmouth's definition of

"Cymri" prefigures the tendency to see the Welsh as part of a single British race: in Geoffrey, Brutus's son Kamber ruled Wales, "As a result the people of that country still call themselves Kambri today in the Welsh tongue"⁷³

Later writers also play on the meanings of "Cymry", and "Welsh", in attempting to set up an opposition to Saxons via which the Welsh are defined.⁷⁴ Gwyn Williams maintains the idea of the Celts functioning as "one civilization".⁷⁵ Roger Loomis describes "a general community of traditions [...] between Brythons and Goidels [...] due in large measure to their common Celtic inheritance."⁷⁶ Powys used Loomis as a source for *A Glastonbury Romance*,⁷⁷ and uses him for *Porius*: his Myrddin Wyllt, a prophetic shape-shifting herdsman, corresponds faithfully to Loomis's Merlin.⁷⁸ But Powys does not follow Loomis's version of Celtic history. Rather, he uses John Rhys's more heterogeneous portrait of "Brythonic clans forming a tribal aristocracy superimposed upon Goidelic tribes, partly Celtic and Aryan in origin and partly Aboriginal".⁷⁹

The subversive effect Rhys has on Celtic identity is illustrated when he extrapolates his model to claim that 'the Welsh people of the present day is made up of all three elements: the Aboriginal, the Goidelic, and the Brythonic. And [that] it would be unsafe to assume that the later elements predominate.' Later he says that in the past the Celts representing a dominant class among the Welsh, not Welshness itself, and that the present day Welsh are, "on the whole [...] not Aryan".⁸⁰ John Lloyd too says that "Welshmen have inherited neolithic blood and the neolithic civilisation."⁸¹ Rhys and Lloyd thus pose a major problem for the association of Welsh and Celtic identities.

Powys's picture of ethnic heterogeneity is only

partially supported by Rhys and Lloyd. Rhys's model, despite its admission of different racial groups, shows the history of Wales as one of progressive Celticisation: the aboriginal population is invaded by the Goidels, and enslaved by them. The aboriginals are pictured as already having a Celtic identity by the time the Brythons arrive to displace the Goidels and add a further layer of Celtic hegemony.⁸² Thus according to Rhys the aboriginal non-Celtic elements were 'more or less completely assimilated by the first Celtic conquerors.'⁸³ Similarly for Lloyd the mixed nation began to be Brythonized, that is, to adopt the Brythonic language; in the fifth and sixth centuries, following the invasion of Cunedda.⁸⁴ This is the point from which Rhys dates the beginning of historical Cymri.⁸⁵ Other modern historians subscribe to the idea of Cunedda as the unifier of Wales.⁸⁶ Geoffrey gives to Arthur Cunedda's rule as the creator of the Cymry: having seen off the Saxons, Arthur ethnically cleanses his kingdom: "He cut [...] the Irish] to pieces mercilessly and forced them to return home. Once he had conquered the Irish, he was at liberty once more to wipe out the Scots and the Picts."⁸⁷

Powys, radically and subversively, uses Rhys's waves of occupation, but contradicts Rhys in denying assimilation of the previous occupiers of the land by their successors, and in emphasising the tensions between those ethnic groups concerned at a time when other historians see them as most united. *Porius* shows "a multi-racial society trying to cope with very different claims, all of which seem to be legitimate".⁸⁸ The novel contains Brythons, Romans, Gwyddylaid, Ffichtiad, Gwyddyl-Ffichti, forest people, Giants, survivors of Lost Atlantis, Coranians, and reincarnations of Greek gods, all occupying the same region and preserving their differences, and intermarrying to create further variants, thereby acting out the threat which

hybridity poses to any absolute structure of difference and showing the labels which the novel itself uses to be constructions which though necessary, are at the same time illusory.

The range of ethnic groups in *Porius* results in a challenge to the hegemony of Celtic civilisation, not just as a demonstration of cultural alternatives, but also as a direct political threat. Far from being subject to Brythonic control as they are in Rhys's model, we are told at the beginning of the novel that the Gwyddylaid have "[f]or centuries [...] been a menace to the Peace imposed by Roman Law."⁸⁹ This loss of control by the Brythons is symbolised when *Porius*'s absent-minded self-indulgence results in his breaking the sword of Cunedda, the symbol of Brythonic rule.⁹⁰

True Brits?

"That the ancient Scots were of Celtic original, is past all doubt", says Blair.⁹¹ It is necessary for the promotion of Scottish identity that Celtic originality go undisputed, because in the etymologically inclined Enlightenment system of values original was best and the Celts' claim to Britain was authenticated by prior possession. Powys subverts the Celtic claim to originality in *Porius*, where although the question of who first inhabited Edeyrnion is asked, it is never satisfactorily answered. In Powys's history of Wales, the Brythons succeed the Goidels, who succeed the Picts. If the Picts are the original Welsh, as Rhys thinks they are, this invalidates the Celts' claim: the Celts were Aryan, whereas the Picts, according to Rhys, were not.⁹² *Porius* confuses the issue of originality still further by containing other claimants to the land: the forest people, who are not Celts but "Iberians from North Africa".⁹³ These forest people, however, are also not the first: when they arrive they "intrude on the solitude of the mysterious Ffichtiaid and the

aboriginal giants".⁹⁴ Powys does not make the status of the giants clear: we are threatened with the implication that the first inhabitants of Wales were not even of the same species as the present occupants. Gwythyr articulates this loss of an original claim to the land, asserting that "We were all foreigners once! Who are the true possessors of these woods and mountains, Nesta? The Cewri! And, if you go further back still, the wild beasts or the old gods!"⁹⁵ The death of the last Cewri can be interpreted as the end of any original claim to the land, but in a hybrid form, the Cewri still retain some possession. The region of Edeyrnion is named after Edeyrn, who in marrying a 'daughter of the Cewri' has ensured that the Brythonic Princes who rule Edeyrnion are not entirely Celtic.⁹⁶

Thus by its very name we are reminded that Edeyrnion is ruled by the originals and the latecomers all at once. Powys leaves his portion of Britain in the possession of a hybrid ethnic group whose genealogy, political positioning and cultural pursuits subvert homogenising constructions of identity as Celtic or as anything else. That possession itself is already in the novel subject to challenge, and as the mingling of Arthur's and the Saxon's blood implies, with that challenge will come a new hybridity. The mingling of identities in *Porius*'s family can thus be seen as prefiguring the mingling of Celtic and Teutonic by which Arnold characterises "the composite English genius",⁹⁷ but whereas in order to construct his Teutonic-Celtic hybrid Arnold presupposes essentialised Celts who really are Ossian's progeny, the lesson of *Porius* is that the Celtic is already hybrid, and that any homogeneity in identity is constructed via a difference which turns out to be *différance*, as the homogeneity cannot be sustained and heterogeneity reasserts itself.

- 1 John Cowper Powys, *John Cowper Powys: Letters to Glyn Hughes*. Ed. Bernard Jones (Stevenage: Orc Publications, 1971), p. 12 (4.5.57).
- 2 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. ix.
- 3 John Cowper Powys, *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Sven-Eric Täckmark* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1983), p. 37, 16.3.37.
- 4 for example, in one set of correspondence we find the idea repeated several times: *John Cowper Powys, Letters to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956*. Ed. Louis Wilkinson (London: Macdonald, 1958), p. 130, 25.12.43., p. 194, 21.1.46, p. 285, 8.1.52, p. 296, 2.1.53.
- 5 Murray G. H. Pittock, *Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity, 138 to the Present* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 63.
- 6 John Cowper Powys, *Owen Glendower* (London: Picador-Pan, 1978), p. 694.
- 7 Powys, *Letters to Louis Wilkinson*, p. 143 (12.3.44).
- 8 Meirion Pennar, 'Introduction', *Taliesin Poems*. Taliesin, trans. Meirion Pennar (Lampeter: Llanarch, 1988), p. 12.
- 9 Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1867), p. viii, p. xi.
- 10 Pennar, , p. 16.
- 11 Ossian, "Calthon and Colmal: A Poem" *Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem, in Six Books: Together with several other Poems*. Ossian, son of Fingal. Trans. James Macpherson (London: T. Becket and P A. de Hondt, 1762), p. 221.
- 12 Pennar, p. 9.
- 13 Leslie Alcock, *Arthur's Britain: History and Archaeology AD 367-634* (London: Allen Lane-The

- Penguin P, 1971), p. 23.
- 14 Pennar, pp. 8-10
- 15 Those who accept Taliesin as historical include Pennar, pp. 8-9, Alcock, p. 23; Prys Morgan and David Thomas, *Wales: The Shaping of a Nation* (Newton: David and Charles, 1984), p. 178, and Gwynfor Evans, *Land of My Fathers: 2000 Years of Welsh History* (Talybout: y Lolfa, 1984), p. 54. For the convincing evidence against this assumption, see Emyr Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition: A Quest for the Welsh Identity* (Brigend: Seren-Poetry Wales, 1989), p. 6. Also Myles Dillon and Nora Chadwick, *The Celtic Realms. History of Civilisation* (London: Cardinal-Sphere, 1967), p. 270.
- 16 Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition*, p. 2.
- 17 Robert Crawford, *Devolving Scottish Literature*, (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1992), p. 97.
- 18 Ossian, "Fingal", *Fingal*, p. 79.
- 19 Ossian, "The War of Inis-Thona: A Poem", *Fingal*, p. 110, p. 117.
- 20 Macpherson, "A Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity of Ossian's Poems", *Fingal*. Ossian, p. xv.
- 21 John Cowper Powys, *Porius: A Romance of the Dark Ages*. Ed. Wilbur T. Albrecht (Hamilton: Colgate UP, 1994), p. 417.
- 22 Hugh Blair, 'A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal', *Ossian's Fingal*. James Macpherson (Poole: Woodstock Books, 1996), fasc. of 1792 ed., p. 376. For examples see Ossian, 'Fingal', *Fingal*, p. 15; and 'Calthon: A Poem', *Fingal*, p. 135.
- 23 *Porius*, p. 421.
- 24 John Cowper Powys, *A Glastonbury Romance*

- (London: Picador-Pan, 1977), p. 1086.
- 25 Humphreys, *The Taliesin Tradition*, p. 9.
- 26 Ossian, "Carthon: A Poem", *Fingal*, p. 132.
- 27 Arnold, p. 1., p.106-7.
- 28 *Porius*, p. 425.
- 29 For example by Ernest Renan, *The Poetry of the Celtic Races, and Other Studies*. Trans. W. G. Hutchison (London: Scott, 1896), p. 1.
- 30 Taliesin, "Urien at Home", *Taliesin Poems*, p. 63.
- 31 Taliesin, "The Battle of Wensleydale", *Taliesin Poems*, p. 52.
- 32 Blair, p. 373.
- 33 Pittock, pp. 1-3.
- 34 Arnold, p. 52.
- 35 Ossian, , p. 2, p.13.
- 36 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain*. Trans and intr. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 170-185.
- 37 Gwyn A. Williams, *When Was Wales: A History of the Welsh* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 3.
- 38 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 212.
- 39 Glen Cavaliero, *John Cowper Powys: Novelist* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1973), p. 123.
- 40 Powys, *Porius*, p. 357.
- 41 G. Wilson Knight, *The Saturnian Quest: A Chart of the Prose Works of John Cowper Powys* (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 77.
- 42 *Porius*, p. 177.
- 43 *Porius*, p. 207.
- 44 *Porius*, p. 500.
- 45 Taliesin, 'You are the Best', *Taliesin Poems*, p. 58.

- 46 *Porius*, p. 705.
- 47 *Porius*, p. 38, p. 40, p. 9, p. 135.
- 48 Taliesin, 'Rheged Arise', *Taliesin Poems*, p. 84.
- 49 Aneirin, *The Gododdin*. Trans. Steve Short (Felinfach: Llanerch Publishers, 1994), pp. 21-34; Ossian, *Fingal*, p. 13, p. 14, p. 37, p. 38.
- 50 Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 27, gives examples of descriptions of racial hybridity featuring blood mixing imagery, p. 113, p.115, p. 117, p. 129. Young's index has 27 entries for 'blood'.
- 51 *Porius*, p. 367.
- 52 Ossian, "Fingal", *Fingal*, p. 9, p. 12, p. 62, p. 65.
- 53 Aneirin, *The Gododdin*, pp. 132-3.
- 54 Ossian, "Fingal", *Fingal*, p. 37.
- 55 William Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*. *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*. Ed. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor. Compact Edition (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988), p. 1091 (4.5.108-9).
- 56 Powys, *Porius*, p. 548.
- 57 Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 5.
- 58 *Porius*, p. 11.
- 59 *Porius*, p. 55.
- 60 Blair, p. 366. Pennar, p. 18. Crawford, *Devolving English Literature*, p. 17, p. 73.
- 61 Ossian, pp. 5-6.
- 62 Blair, pp. 379-81.
- 63 Ossian, ' p. 56, and frequently thereafter. It is also the name of the Laurel and Hardy fan club.
- 64 Macpherson, 'A Dissertation', *Temora*, Ossian, the Son of Fingal, trans. James Macpherson

- (London: T. Becket and P. A. de Hondt, 1763), p. ii.
- 65 Blair, p. 384, Arnold, p. 108, p. 100.
- 66 Arnold, p. 124.
- 67 Pennar, p. 13.
- 68 Pittock, p. 43.
- 69 Pittock, p. 24.
- 70 Ossian, 'The Battle of Lora: A Poem', *Fingal*, p.115.
- 71 Macpherson, 'Preface', *Fingal*. Ossian, unnumbered.
- 72 John Rhys and David Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People: Chapters on Their Origin, History, Laws, Language, Literature and Characteristics* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1900), p. xxii.
- 73 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 73.
- 74 for example, Morgan and Thomas, p. 32.
- 75 Williams, p. 7.
- 76 Roger Sherman Loomis, *Celtic Myth and Arthurian Romance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1927), p. 25.
- 77 John Cowper Powys, *The Diary of John Cowper Powys*, 1930 (Ed. Frederick Davies. London: Greymitre Books, 1987), p. 24, 5.1.30.
- 78 Loomis, *Celtic Myth*, p. 125, p. 128.
- 79 Rhys and Brynmor-Jones, p. 120. This position is first stated more speculatively in John Rhys, *Celtic Britain, Early Britain* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1882), p. 4.
- 80 Rhys and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People*, p. 13, p. 32. Again, this is first stated in Rhys, *Celtic Britain*, pp. 257-8.
- 81 John Edward Lloyd, *A History of Wales* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), p. 3.
- 82 Rhys and Brynmor-Jones, pp. 12-13.

- 83 Lloyd, p. xxiv.
- 84 Lloyd, pp. 116-9.
- 85 Lloyd, p. xxiii.
- 86 T. G. E. Powell, *The Celts, Ancient Peoples and Places*, vol. 6 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1958), p.174; Evans, *Land of My Fathers*, p. 64, pp. 44-6.
- 87 Geoffrey of Monmouth, p. 219, p. 221.
- 88 Peter Christensen, 'The Marriage of Myth and History in John Cowper Powys's *Porius*' (*The Powys Review*, 25, 1990), p. 22.
- 89 *Porius*, p. 3.
- 90 *Porius*, p. 205, p. 146.
- 91 Blair, p. 375.
- 92 Rhys and Brynmor-Jones, *The Welsh People*, pp. 13-15, p. 34, p. 1.
- 93 *Porius*, p. 4.
- 94 *Porius*, p. 4.
- 95 *Porius*, p. 372.
- 96 *Porius*, p. 537, p. 538, p. 693.
- 97 Arnold, p. 116

Extraordinary Musings of A "Plain Man"

Michael Ballin

Frank Brown, *Reflections of a Wayward Walker in Dorset Creeds*, Bridport: Ann Askenskold, 1996. 143 pp.

Traditionally, the President of the Powys Society of North America possesses as his or her proud authoritative insignium of office John Cowper Powys's walking stick. The stick measured many miles in New York State and North Wales, its associations, shamanic and otherwise, are a powerful reminder of how much Powys loved walking as a means of surveying the countryside and of bringing himself close to Nature. No doubt Powys thought of himself in some ways as part of the companion of peripatetics, philosophers who taught while walking and perhaps for whom walking was a means of stimulating reflection and consciousness of mind and body.

Frank Brown's privately printed text is very much in this peripatetic tradition. He tells us that his book is *not* a guide book to Dorset but what the title proclaims: a meditative reflection on the life and times of a walker in the Dorset environment. He tells us in the introductory chapter: 'Like everyone else who loves this county, I owe thanks beyond repayment to Thomas Hardy. For this is indeed his county; known and loved all over the world wherever the feet and minds of men tend to wend their wayward path (14)'. However, in the chapter called "An Open Day" Brown quotes from John Cowper Powys's *A Philosophy of*

Solitude: "But the real point about walking is that it isolates you in the midst of the Cosmos. It liberates you from the necessity of isolating yourself by a terrific effort of mind" (97). There are many references in the text to Theodore and Llewelyn Powys. A visit to the grave of the latter closes the volume.

I missed in Brown's work any of the visionary sense John Cowper Powys could so powerfully convey of the presence of the cosmos itself and the isolation of the human condition within it but the author preserves the spirit of Powys by providing a common man's walking philosophy from the field and not the desk. The phrase "a wayward walker" resonates with Powys's own eccentricity and independence from the fads of modernity. "Waywardness" is an interesting modernist value, straying from the "strait and narrow" of the restrictive evangelical spirit and asserting the values of individuality, freedom to move and think as the spirit takes us. Brown indulges in his accounts of Dorset walks in some ideological speculations concerning change, industrialism, political freedom, and the influence of technology in a humanistic and politically socialist vein that accords very well with the spirit of a Powysian work such as *A Glastonbury Romance*.

In this ideological vein I appreciated the author's presentation of Dorset as a changing county, reflecting the larger macrocosmic changes of the world. He notes the incursion of technology and is alive to the dangers of passive and slavish subjection to the machine and the computer. At the same time Brown recognizes the value and labor saving and therefore emancipating value of the machine. One of my favorite episodes is his narrative about local politics in which he pays tribute to the courage of one solitary Labour voter in one Dorset village at election time and his serious response to one Conservative voter's

attempt to intimidate Labour supporters and deter them from holding a meeting. He points out quite fairly that such autocratic and despotic behavior does not separate the United Kingdom from the fascist states the British like to think are their enemies. And in one of his musings about the Jekyll and Hyde aspects of human nature he comes down hard on the importation of animals under the patronage of the Queen. This sentiment would have done John Cowper Powys's heart good!

There are in *Reflections of a Wayward Walker* attractive physical descriptions of the Dorset scene, dramatizations of Nature's varying moods amidst the changing seasons from summer to Winter and the occasional blizzard and snow. I chose an example of the latter, a description of Dorset in winter snow in which the author allows the reader to share in the metamorphosis of the natural scene, more familiar in North America perhaps than in England. The writer is walking with his dog Bill:

The path I followed lay on the north side of a low wall; this is also the windward side, so it was rather cold and snow was heaped in low drifts and patches at the foot of the wall. Bill jumped and rolled in the strange softness of the snow, causing it to scatter in clouds of fine white dust. Where it was frozen he bit it and the crunching sounded loud and clear in the stillness of air. The balance of temperature between the attempt of the sun to thaw and the cold wind to freeze was well held. There was no warmth in the atmosphere. Shadows cast by the trees and bushes and other intrusions into the smooth outline of the hills, were marked in white hoar frost and melted only where the rays of the sun actually touched them.

Not often do we have such a day as this in Dorset; our

winter is mostly rain and wind. Today the view from the ridge was one of form and outline. Every distorted bush with windcrippled limbs showing the way of the prevailing winds, was plain to see. Every break in the hedges, which seen from this point looked like dark lines across dull green fields, was empty of foliage to cover the holes and gaps and conceal the twisted branches. Everything lay still and a little unreal; the masts of the wireless station seemed nearer than one knew them to be. The fields were muddy and dark, with the darker areas, caused by standing at gates, making deep broad paths across the fields from gate to gate. But soon Nature would stir and put on her dresses of new material and fresh colour, so cloaking her deformities and scars as we humans dress up for a similar reason, though not always with similar success.

Frank Brown is a name of almost archetypal Englishness and plainness; his essays are a testimony to the preservative value of the "plain man's" ability to share with the more eccentric aesthetic literary genius of writers like the Powyses a deep appreciation of the presence of the natural world and the sacred partnership between Nature and Man upon which our survival as a species depends. Frank Brown's "plainness" is all the more extraordinary.