

John Cowper Powys at the Iris Club

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Before John Cowper Powys was able to turn his attention fully to the writing of fiction, a great deal of his time and energy was devoted to the public lecturing by which he earned his livelihood. Any account of his intellectual career is incomplete without some consideration of his American lecture tours from 1904-1905 to 1932— tours that brought him into contact with a wide variety of Americans and American towns. In his *Autobiography* Powys remembers one of these towns with particular fondness:

Lancaster, Pennsylvania, too I shall never, never forget. I feel a curious tenderness whenever I think of the Women's Club there, a club called "The Iris Club," where they allowed me to lecture on Hegel and Spinoza and Schopenhauer, in spite of the fact that they were nearly all the wives and the mothers of professors in a learned College. Nor did those kind "Iris Club" women ever protest, though my lectures always went on for an hour and a half.¹

I propose in this paper to examine JCP's success in Lancaster during his lecture series of 1909, 1910, 1911, and 1916. Superficially at least this success seems surprising, for the profound conservatism of this city appears uncongenial to a self-professed "Quixotic champion of the immoral against the moral."² By providing an account of a number of factors at work in this situation I trust that some light will be shed on Powys's unique qualities as a lecturer, and on his experiences during those years in which, as he wrote to his brother, "I put my genius in the lectures. . . ."³

I would like to begin my explorations with a recreation, as far as the facts will allow, of one day on which Powys gave a lecture at the Iris Club. I hope that this will be a useful model of the interaction of those parts that are subsequently examined in greater detail.

On Saturday, March 4, 1916, Powys had recently recovered

ANOTHER ENJOYABLE LECTURE BY POWYS.

An audience of several hundred persons on Saturday afternoon assembled at the Iris Club house to hear the second of a course of three lectures by John Cowper Powys. His subject was "Spain," and the lecturer spoke principally on its religious faith and reserve. As on the occasion of his initial lecture on France, Mr. Powys took his hearers from one part of the land to another to bring out the characteristics of the people. His aim was to bring out Spain's contribution to civilization, and reference was specially made to the artists of the country.

On Saturday, April 1, the closing lecture will be given on the subject, "America, the Hope of the Future."

Coverage of a Powys lecture from the Lancaster New Era, 18 March 1916.

from a cold; he had written only a few days earlier to his brother Llewlyn complaining of his schedule and of the lecture tour in general. "And how sick I am of trailing round! It's a wretched destiny—one might as well be a corpse as a lecturer." His meetings with Frances Wilkinson, his sister, and others were "gleams of sunshine which cross my path but all else for the next six weeks is dark and evil. . . . But by the time you get this it will be April, and if I'm alive I hope then to be writing my new story in peace and quiet at West 12th Street."⁴ The day before at 11 am JCP had given a lecture on "Ivan Turgenieff," the second of six on "Russian Writers"

in New York City under the sponsorship of the League for Political Education.⁵ Despite his gloom, he was pleased by the recent publication of *Confessions of Two Brothers* at the end of February.⁶

In the morning JCP would presumably have left New York City by train; from Philadelphia he would have proceeded past the lush farmlands of eastern Lancaster county, now flecked with the scattered remnants of Thursday's snowfall.⁷ The scene would have been a fairly bleak one: it was too early for spring plowing, and the only crop in the fields would have been the winter wheat that was only beginning to add a tincture of green to the landscape. But this was a familiar, agreeable scene to JCP, who remembered on one occasion traveling this route and "reading a book on Hegel by an American called Harris in the train between Philadelphia and Lancaster, and getting an ecstasy of sensual satisfaction as I mixed up in my mind Harris and Hegel and the little green shoots of wheat if it was wheat coming up in those rich arable lands!"⁸ The railway line ran past small rural communities such as Kinzer, Vintage, Paradise, and Bird-in-Hand that consisted for the most part of a few houses and a general store. Train #1 of the Pennsylvania Railroad arrived in Lancaster at 1:33 pm.⁹ The tracks, which the surveyors had laid down in line with the distinctive spire of Trinity Lutheran Church, looped down from the main line into the city past a series of foundries and tobacco warehouses. The station itself was only two blocks from the center of town; this arrangement was increasingly inconvenient to vehicular traffic, and talk had begun of building a replacement station at the edge of town.

The day was clear and chilly at 31°, with strong winds coming from the west. Powys would probably have been met at the station by a member of the Iris Club. The custom, at least in the early days of the club, was to extend a scrupulous hospitality to the (then typically female) visiting lecturer.

The club has one unwritten rule that is sure in time to make its name a pleasant sound to all who travel. When a woman is engaged to lecture to the club, the chairman of the entertainment committee invariably meets her at the train, escorts her to the Clubhouse, makes her comfortable, and after the lecture is over, always takes her to the train and sends her on her way cheered and pleased by a delicate courtesy that is as refreshing as (alas) it is unusual.¹⁰

The clubhouse, at 323 North Duke Street, was only about two blocks away by probably unpaved roads busy with trolleys. (The condition

of Lancaster's muddy streets was the subject of its citizens' public laments.) A handsome three-story brick row home built in 1858, the clubhouse stood (and stands) on the corner of a small side street and one of the town's major thoroughfares.

Powys's lecture was scheduled for 3 pm, and was preceded by a brief business meeting held in the auditorium of the high-ceilinged house. The president, Miss Susan Reigert Slaymaker, would have announced a number of club activities: the sponsorship of lectures on gardening and "Preparedness"; the hosting of the Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs on April 13; the opportunity to contribute individually to "Baby Saving Week" to benefit the orphans of France.¹¹ The second lecture and the orphans' fund are reminders of the concerns of that particular moment: President Wilson was even then pledging "to do anything except sacrifice honor" to stay out of the European war, while Secretary of State Robert Lansing attempted to resolve the *Lusitania* affair with the German ambassador.¹² Powys himself had changed the topics of two of the three lectures he would give at the Iris Club in the series "National Ideals of Life," "owing to the present European situation"¹³: instead of the originally scheduled "England: The Citadel of Individualism" and "Germany: The Fatherland of Efficiency," he would offer the less controversial "France: The Mistress of the Art of Life" and "Spain."¹⁴

The audience was "good-sized," but not as large as could have been hoped.¹⁵ As always, JCP would have spoken without notes; perhaps wearing an academic-looking gown, he would have captivated his audience with his eloquence, intensity and sense of drama. Clayton Hoagland has described Powys's mannerisms in a talk given a decade later to a larger audience: he began his peripatetic movements usually from a stance in which his legs were spread, and his hands behind him. He had broad shoulders, held the left higher, and made remarkable use of his long arms. He would bend one, with fist clenched, and swing the other, as he strode [about] . . . , tilting his head, one shoulder thrown up. He spoke slowly, and struck his poses for emphasis.¹⁶ Louis Wilkinson described JCP in lectures as "exciting and persuasive"; Maurice Browne called him "Incomparably the finest public speaker whom I have heard."¹⁷ His subject this day was France, with a particular emphasis on the unique character of that nation's civilization, which he said was most clearly brought out by the current state of war. A reporter from the morning paper, the *Lancaster Intelligencer* described the substance of the talk as follows:

France and the French, the one country and race which

are invaluable wherein have reposed the inherited classical civilization of the third and fourth centuries, expresses as does no other country the humanism of life. This is shown in its literature, its art, its people, its conversation. It has not felt that stress of mystery, that worship of fate, that negation of action which has been brought from the Orient to this country and is seen in many of the western nations at the present time. In France as in other nations, does the drama of life unfold itself in those little things which betray the true spirit of a country's people. The French with their love for the dramatic, the artistic, whimsical, at times unscrupulous are civilized in a way peculiarly their own. This is seen from the lowest journalism which possesses a sense of beauty, style and romance, to the highest type of art, with its arbitrary creations of the beautiful with a background of profound realism. The French possess that spirit of bravado of dramatic courage, or mockery, for which nothing matters. They are not ruled by that sense of puritanical hypocrisy as it were, which is so characteristic of the people of this country. In short the people of France are civilized as are no others because they possess what is at present a lost art in this country and in many others, the art of conversation.¹⁸

The reporter from the afternoon paper, the *New Era*, while judging the lecture "most brilliant," took in less of its substance, and was clearly somewhat resentful of Powys's suggestion that "the people of the United States have lost this art [of conversation], and . . . therefore [are] tending toward barbarism."¹⁹

After the lecture the customary tea would have been served, and Powys would perhaps have conversed with those ladies of the Iris Club whom he had often met before during his previous lecture courses from 1909-1911. If JCP had been heading back to New York that afternoon, rather than moving onward to another lecture, he would probably have been escorted to the station once more to meet train #52 of the Pennsylvania Railroad, which departed at 6:20 pm.

I would like to use this historical recreation as a springboard into several issues we would need to address in any consideration of Powys's career as a lecturer: the institutional context of lecturing, the identity of the audience, and the nature of their response to him. With these in mind we can begin to suggest reasons for the success he attained as a speaker. To offer a definitive assessment of these issues is clearly beyond the scope of this essay, but I have tried to

provide an explanation of each in the context of Powys's Iris Club experiences.

Public lectures had long been part of American cultural life. In the antebellum period the lyceum movement had promoted the exchange of information by way of educational talks; the Chautauqua summer schools had begun in 1879.²⁰ Less formally educational speaking tours had been arranged for such foreign luminaries as William Thackeray, Charles Dickens, and Oscar Wilde.²¹ But Powys's lectures in the early part of his speaking career involved an organization that had been among the first to institutionalize adult education in the United States: the American Society for the Extension of University Teaching.

The ASEUT had been founded in 1890 (as the Philadelphia Society for the Extension of University Teaching) under impetus from William Pepper, Provost of the University of Pennsylvania. It modelled itself after the English system of university extension that had been pioneered by Cambridge and Oxford. A. Stephen Stephan has observed that "The national society was an advisory organization, printing syllabi [of] courses, booking lectures, and helping local groups through advice and suggestions in extension activity."²² Organizers thought of the courses the society offered, at least initially, as roughly comparable to university courses, suitably tailored to the different student population and the limited amount of time in class. Lectures were to be the focal point of each course, but those dedicated to learning (as distinct from those committed to mere entertainment) would write papers on the subjects covered and attend the class the instructor offered supplementary to the lectures. Naturally, compromises sometimes needed to be made; an early commentator from the ASEUT noted that, while "In England the Unit Course consists usually of twelve lectures and exercises," in America "the timidity of local committees renders it inexpedient to attempt to introduce such an extended course."²³ Still, the organization hoped to make a real impact both on the taste and learning of communities and the lives of those who had been excluded from the culture offered by higher education.²⁴

From the beginning the ASEUT worked closely with its English counterparts, and sought to bring "leading lecturers from abroad for the strengthening of the system in this country."²⁵ There may have been a particular incentive for this in the scarce supply of participating American professors, who apparently were originally envisioned as the primary lecturers in the program.²⁶ Practice diverged from theory in other ways as well. Despite the high-minded educational aims of its promoters, the ASEUT from the beginning sponsored many courses with no accompanying classes.²⁷

If its later experience was consistent with that of other sponsoring groups, there may have been a decreased emphasis on classwork as time went on. A 1914 assessment of the broad phenomenon of University Extension in the United States noted that "the lecture class" made up "the smallest . . . member of the lecture group." In contrast, a much larger category was composed of lectures that "offer[ed] addresses and entertainments, single or in courses, to large audiences," and sometimes supplemented these with musical numbers to maintain public interest.²⁸ Certainly I have as yet found no evidence that Powys, during his association with the ASEUT, corrected examinations or held small recitation sessions (or, on the other hand, provided musical interludes). He did, however, give "courses" of six lectures each, in his first three years at the Iris Club. For those years he was indeed affiliated with the ASEUT, which sent him all over the Northeast to such cities as Pittsburgh, Boston, Atlantic City, and Troy. In his final appearance in 1916, Powys was managed by G. Arnold Shaw, who arranged lectures over a far larger section of the country: trips across the Midwest as well as the East became a regular part of JCP's life. He would at one point describe this kind of relentless travel to his sister Marian as "jumping like a great clicking flea all over the States."²⁹

Powys had lectured before he came to America under the auspices of both Cambridge's and Oxford's university extension services. When he started work under the direction of the ASEUT's Charles Atkins, he brought with him some of his characteristic interests and well-known subjects. He lectured for Oxford in 1900-01 on Carlyle, Ruskin, Tennyson, and Dickens,³⁰ each the subject of a talk at the Iris Club a decade later. A particular favorite seems to have been "Representative Prose Writers of the Nineteenth Century," a course he gave for Cambridge in 1902 and for Oxford in 1901-1902.³¹ When JCP undertook his second series of lectures at the Iris Club in 1910, he would again speak on "Representative Prose Writers of the Nineteenth Century," and would cover writers from the older courses (with the interesting omissions of DeQuincey and Hazlitt). The article in the Lancaster New Era that preceded the first lecture of the second series described the series as "perhaps the best course of lectures he has to offer."³² I am speculating somewhat, but I hope not unreasonably, when I suggest that it was Powys himself who represented this course as his best, and that the Iris Club had chosen it for this year upon his recommendation. (Of course, when I speak of Powys giving the same course several times I do not mean to imply that he presented the same lectures. The lectures were always impromptu, as Louis Wilkinson observed: "He invented his lectures as he went on with them, just as he invented his novels,

without premeditation. This was the fascination of his public speaking—that you knew that he didn't know what was coming next, and at the same time you knew that whatever was to come was sure to be provocative and exciting. . . ."33) In short, as a lecturer for the ASEUT Powys was continuing with a familiar task in a novel setting, in which he was expected at once to entertain, to serve a serious educational purpose, and to provide an aspiring American organization with the cachet of Cambridge University.

In the Iris Club Powys found one of a multitude of American women's clubs groups that fellow lecturer Gregory Mason called "the best audience in America."³⁴ By 1916 the Iris Club had become well-established as a social and cultural center for women in Lancaster. It had been founded in January of 1895 with several objects in mind: "To form a recognized centre for social and mental culture, to further the education of women for the responsibilities of life, to encourage all movements for the betterment of society, and to foster a generous spirit in the community."³⁵ The club took as models Sorosis in New York and the New Century Club in Philadelphia, both of which its organizer, Miss Alice Nevin (1836-1925), had visited.³⁶ At the organization's silver anniversary, Alice Nevin had this to say about its inception:

Twenty-five years ago Lancaster was more or less a provincial city. The women of the community, more especially, had not been brought into touch with the great arteries of life and activity pervading the country. We had many small clubs and associations in our midst, but they were for the most part isolated, limited in scope, narrow and circumscribed; none had as yet struck the key-note of a universal harmony.³⁷

Lancaster was (and is) a deeply conservative city; it was linked economically to Philadelphia, only sixty miles away, but it had a distinct heritage and identity of its own. Lancaster took much of its special character from the rich agricultural district that surrounded it, and from the strongly religious heritage that found its most extreme expression in the Mennonite and Amish faiths. But the city was also exposed to the influence of Franklin and Marshall College in its midst. Indeed, local professors at F&M and the Lancaster Theological Seminary had constituted the nucleus of a literary organization founded in 1879: The Cliosophic Club. This study group of about one hundred persons met in the homes of members

to discuss primarily historical and political topics. Interestingly enough, Alice Nevin was one of the founding members and the first secretary of the club. "The Clio" would seem to have offered, at least superficially, the intellectual arena Alice Nevin sought; its insufficiency lies most obviously in the fact that it was largely run by men, notably the commanding Dr. Thomas G. Apple, president for its first nineteen years.³⁸

In founding the Iris Club, Lancaster women were partaking of a nationwide impulse that had led to the inauguration of women's clubs throughout America. To some extent, as Theodora Penny Martin has pointed out, the lyceum's "demise after the [Civil War] left a void that women's study clubs filled. . . ."³⁹ In this way the activity of women's clubs ran parallel to the activity of the ASEUT; in the introduction to an 1898 history Ellen M. Henrotin asserted that "The woman's club movement represents a part of the great popular educational movement which is sweeping like a tidal wave over the country, and of which Chautauqua, summer schools, night schools, university extension, etc., are all manifestations."⁴⁰ But such clubs were also providing an opportunity for women to find their own voices and pursue their own interests and abilities. In a 1924 biographical sketch, Alice Nevin herself recognized this element in the Iris Club:

"I can smile when I look back upon those early days," she said with a smile. "We would gather and try our best to conduct a real business meeting. We were truly so ignorant of the fundamentals of parliamentary law that it was a stage-frightened few who would arise and attempt to start the meeting in a business-like fashion. But those days are over now, and I marvel at the ability of the women of to-day; they are so competent, so able and self-reliant. Yes, club life has been a means of spreading a broader education," Miss Nevin continued seriously, "and I am so proud of our Iris Club."

It is useful to note that these comments come in the context of an interview in which the subject tries to avoid all mention of herself: "it was only with constant persuasion that the conversation was finally reverted to intimate conversation. . . ."⁴¹ But beneath the self-deprecation of this commentary lies a depiction of women who, even in the early days of the club, were able to grow into roles that were completely unfamiliar to them. As Martin observes, women's study clubs in general were at once conservative in their overt ideology and advanced in their focus on the education and self-

improvement of women.⁴²

In the period of JCP's involvement with the Iris Club, its activities included some charitable undertakings, card-playing, and the summarizing of current events for easy consumption. However, the club's focus seems to have been its biweekly meetings, at which a formal program was always presented. In the 1911-1912 yearbook, under the heading "What Does the Iris Club Do?," the first answer given emphasizes culture and the fortnightly program:

Every winter it gives to the members and residents of Lancaster, a Course of Lectures, by some well-known Lecturer. Also, there are numerous single lectures and concerts, the best of their kind; such lectures and concerts as few Clubs of such small membership can have.⁴³

Indeed, the yearbook's form of presenting the annual program of events indicates that the lecture series was the keynote of the entire year. In 1908-1909, for instance, a boldface heading with the following language precedes all other information about the season: "University Extension Lectures/Ancient and Modern Philosophy in Relation to Life/Prof. J.C. Powys, M.A./Corpus Christi College, Cambridge." Immediately following this is a listing of such fall events as talks by members, musicales, and Children's Day; Powys's lectures themselves did not actually begin until January, but they were clearly the centerpiece of the program.⁴⁴

The Iris Club offered a range of courses that included "The Formation of the American Ideal" by Dr. Guy Carleton Lee; "English Novelists of the Present Day," "Heroes of Liberty and Revolution," and "Notable Men of Modern European Letters" by Louis Wilkinson; and (in addition to the three courses mentioned above) "Modern Masters of Literature" by JCP. From at least 1901 to 1903 the club had a separate Literature Department that seems to have met as a study group on alternate Wednesdays, but this group disappears at about the time University Extension Lectures begin to be offered. This is consistent with Martin's description of the reservations some had about women's study circles: they were supposedly inferior to the university extension courses that could offer the intellectual authority of a professor.⁴⁵ It is plausible to suggest that the latter model of education might have driven out the former.

The description of the club in Klein's history of Lancaster indicates that, as of 1924, "Twenty university courses by fourteen professional lecturers have been given,"⁴⁶ but after about 1913 these

do not seem to have been affiliated with the ASEUT. From about 1916-17 onwards there was a change in the yearly program: there were fewer annual lectures, and those that were offered focused on more popular subjects. 1924-25, for instance, saw a "Literature Course" that covered "Books that should be Read," "Plays that should be Seen," and "Motion Pictures and the Drama."⁴⁷ The Iris Club itself was undergoing change, most notably an expansion in membership from 258 members in 1916-17 to 425 members in 1923.⁴⁸ One other demographic alteration involved the presidency: while "For the first 25 years all the Presidents of the Club had been single women. . . . [n]o single woman has held that office since."⁴⁹ Martin describes a more general shift in the orientation of women's clubs, although she locates it earlier: a "change in the purpose of most women's clubs around the turn of the century from study to service" that occurred in part because women were beginning to have expanded opportunities for education elsewhere.⁵⁰ The Iris Club seems to have largely maintained its emphasis on culture, but certainly the intensity of focus on intellectual betterment was lost.

So Powys encountered the Iris Club at a particular moment in its history, when a group of women who had had limited opportunities for higher education had turned to an outside authority for the widening of their cultural horizons. I would like to explore this issue a little more thoroughly by considering the particular women JCP would have met in his trips to Lancaster. Remember his recollection that the Iris Club women "were nearly all the wives and the mothers of professors in a learned College." In conducting research into those women who were prominent in the club at the time I have found that, for the most part in my sample, there was no perceptible connection to Franklin and Marshall College (which must surely be the "learned College" in question). The women who were elected officers in 1910 were the daughters of an attorney, an iron master, a liquor dealer/City Councilman, or the wives of an attorney, a printing-company owner, and a banker.⁵¹

The two notable exceptions to this generalization were Charlotte W. Appel and Alice Nevin herself. The father of the latter was Dr. John Williamson Nevin (1803-1886), a minister of the Reformed faith and for some years president of F&M. Both a distinguished teacher and renowned theologian, Nevin was a towering figure in Lancaster. Much of his daughter's life and identity seems to have been connected to his eminent position. There is a revealing passage in a 1904 guidebook prepared by the Iris Club's Hospitality Committee for visiting State Federation delegates: the section of the booklet on F&M consists of only three paragraphs, of which the first is general, the second covers John Williamson

Nevin, and the third runs as follows: "Miss Alice Nevin, the promoter and organizer of the Iris Club, serving as President for a number of years with much credit and zeal, was the daughter of Dr. Nevin."⁵² According to her obituary, Alice Nevin spent the early years of her life "study[ing] music here and in New York City, and for years she trained and led the choir in the F. and M. College chapel. . . ."⁵³ Her musical activity included the publication in 1879 of a collection of hymns and carols designed for use in the Reformed Church. Given her history and her status within the club, it seems inevitable that she would have made a point of meeting Powys and that she would have mentioned her eminent father.

It is difficult to obtain a clear sense of Alice Nevin's personality at this distance. The biographical sketch I quoted earlier depicts a woman of many accomplishments who engages in a relentless, ladylike self-deprecation. I have found two of her poems suggestive in this context. "The Unfading Beauty," dated 25 October 1923, focuses on a faded old woman whose superficial unattractiveness belies the spiritual beauty that shines through her wrinkles.⁵⁴ Most of the poems in the volume she had privately published in 1922 are devotional in nature, but one curious exception is a poem entitled "The Genesis of the Tomato," which was originally "Dedicated to [the] Horticultural Department of the Iris Club."⁵⁵ This piece begins by describing the contempt gardeners of the Colonial era felt for an ugly native vine with acrid fruit. One man with vision sees the possibilities of this plant, and carefully tends it.

And the vine responded, as all vines do--
For the matter of that all humans too,--
To the loving thought and watchful care,
To the vision steadfastly held in view.

And the rest is history: a marvelous fruit is the result. At this point we seem to have, as in "The Unfading Beauty," an assertion of the value of what people commonly overlook or disdain. One may suspect that Alice Nevin saw herself, and her Iris Club compatriots, as similarly undervalued members of the community who, just like the tomato, had something to offer. However, interestingly, the close of "The Genesis of the Tomato" wrenches the poem back into a moral of self-help. The tomato may have still more potential for improvement, and the last two lines imply that this possibility should inspire the speaker to self-betterment: "O Tomato! you've taught me a wonderful lesson,/There's hope for me yet if I keep on progressin'." Though it requires considerable contortion to make a

tomato responsible for its own pruning and tending, it may have seemed preferable to blaming inattentive gardeners.

Charlotte W. Appel (1855-1940) was the other member of the Iris Club board in 1910 who had evident F&M connections. She was the eldest child of Rev. Theodore Appel, who was for many years on the faculty of the college and served as its first librarian from 1853 to 1894.⁵⁶ The Appel and Nevin families were connected by religion, occupation, and marriage: Charlotte's sister married Theodore W. Nevin. Moreover, Theodore Appel seems to have been the Nevin family's literary executor, publishing *Life and Works* of Dr. John W. Nevin and *Lectures on English Literature* of Dr. W.M. Nevin. Charlotte Appel was a member of the Clisophic Club, and a founding member of the Iris Club, as well as its President from 1917 to 1920. For many years she worked as custodian of the Historical Society of the Reformed Church, in which position her father (a founder of the organization) had preceded her.

Those of Charlotte Appel's papers that remain bear witness to a woman with a variety of cultural interests. She was a dabbler in the fine arts, and wrote many notes to herself on the mechanics of paint preparation and application. She had a tendency, like many people, to start diaries and break them off around March. Two documents of hers stand out as particularly revealing. Charlotte Appel kept a commonplace book for Susan Burton Nevin, presumably her niece or great-niece, that included a variety of poems. The choice is in some ways intriguing: among the Whitman and Wordsworth are poems by Alice Nevin, including the two I examined above, "The Genesis of the Tomato" and "The Unfading Beauty." Written out as well for Susan Nevin's edification is a poem by A.M. Nevin (conceivably Alice, but perhaps more likely another member of the family) entitled "The Cheerful Lion." This piece tells the story of a noble stone lion stripped of dignity by being used by children as a plaything. The moral is the need to accept disappointment and degradation with resignation: "Don't grow cranky cross and snappy;/smile, and make the kiddies happy. . . ." It is an odd poem that, like "The Genesis of the Tomato," selects a subject replete with sentiment only to stave off pathos with a brisk object lesson at the end. Both poems step to the edge of discontentment with things as they are only to step back abruptly.

The other intriguing document is a long letter Charlotte Appel wrote her family from Cairo in 1925. Unlike the diary entries she wrote on a 1916 visit to Europe, this letter is full of intense excitement. "Egypt," she exclaimed, "has long been with me the land of my wildest dreams and the reality is beyond words to me."⁵⁷ She thinks of Scripture wherever she goes; this may reflect an origin

for her interest in a book from her father's library: Philip Henry Gosse's *The Monuments of Ancient Egypt, and Their Relation to the Works of God* (London, 1847).⁵⁸ But for a visitor with a decidedly Christian perspective, she has enormous sympathy for the Muslim culture around her; she acknowledges, for instance, mosques and whirling dervishes as authentic channels of the divine. (She also has enormous stamina for a seventy year-old woman, only reluctantly leaving the "Feast of the Prophets" at her weary companions' insistence.) In this letter Charlotte Appel shows herself to be impressionable, enthusiastic, curious, and tolerant, with a genuine appreciation for Egypt and its people. In all these examinations of the Iris Club we have seen that the club was a unique resource for women in Lancaster, and that the two women Powys is likely to have met and kept in mind were intelligent and imaginative people who had lived in the shadow of powerful fathers.

John Cowper Powys's career in Lancaster was marked by a series of popular successes. Although no newspaper announcement of his first Iris Club course reveals it, Powys had already enjoyed a resounding triumph before his first lecture series in 1909. In 1908 he had given an enthusiastically received talk on Tennyson under the aegis of the Dauphin Institute. According to the *New Era* for January 4, 4, he "so charmed his hearers. . . . [that] there is a movement on foot to secure his return . . ." ⁵⁹ (an engagement that was unfortunately cancelled on account of a blizzard). It is quite possible that Powys had lectured in the area even before this, as there was an ASEUT extension center in town as early as 1891.⁶⁰ However, a 1908 newspaper account introduces him as if for the first time: the *New Era* observed, "He calls himself a Welshman, but looks like a Norman crusader, reminding one of Brian de Bois Gilbert, of 'Ivanhoe.'" ⁶¹

My real concern here is of course Powys's experience at the Iris Club, but this example provides some preliminary information about his appeal to the Lancaster community. This is especially useful given the evidence of his reception that is available. I have had the opportunity to look at the Iris Club minutes for the period, but they are tersely businesslike rather than descriptive. Here is a representative sample of the mention accorded a lecture (the secretary in this case was Charlotte Appel): "Prof. Powys gave his last lecture of his course & farewell lecture in this country on Walter Savage Landor and Walter Pater. Tea was served."⁶² In such a context, in which effusive comments are not customary, an adjective or two can convey a great deal. On two occasions recording secretaries took it upon themselves to editorialize: "Business meeting adjourned & Prof. Powys gave a delightful talk on Charles

Dickens"⁶³; and "Prof. Powys gave his very delightful lecture on 'Alfred Tennyson.'"⁶⁴ The very fact that JCP was asked back for a second and third series of University Extension Lectures (and later a fourth, unaffiliated series) indicates the Iris Club's satisfaction with their speaker. I also find it suggestive that the first lecture of the third series ("Modern Masters of Literature") treated "Edgar Allan Poe (by request)"; this suggests to me a relationship warm enough that club members could break with the standard syllabus of the course to include a writer close to both their and the speaker's hearts. It may well be that the only reason Powys was not asked back for the 1911-12 year was that he had just broken with the

ASEUT, to which the Iris Club still remained committed.

A d d i t i o n a l information about JCP's reception in Lancaster may be found in reports in the local newspapers. Every lecture he gave received some sort of notice in the *New Era* or the *Intelligencer* or both. However, the nature of these papers at the time complicates assessment of their evaluations. Particularly before 1914, the newspaper consisted of a multitude of short squibs that covered a wide array of events across the county. Given the rural character of the region, some of the papers' interests were predictable: in 1910, for instance, a piece captioned "Big Porkers Butchered" described the dressing of two eleven-month Chester White hogs.⁶⁵ Others are perhaps more readily explicable by reference to the small size of the town or the slowness of a news day, such as my favorite page-one story, "Nose Badly Cut."⁶⁶ There was little world news, but the papers would always be willing to go far afield for a sensational murder or divorce. The *Intell* was especially fond of stories we would today

UNIVERSITY EXTENSION LECTURES
"Representative Prose Writers of the
Nineteenth Century"
PROF. J. C. POWYS, M.A., at The
Iris Club at 3 p.m.
January 14th, "Lamb," January 21st,
"McCauley," February 19th, "Carlyle,"
March 5th, "Ruskin," March 12th,
"Newman," April 2nd, "Landor," and
"Pater."
Tickets for the Course, \$1.25; at
the book shops of G. L. Fox, Deramith
and J. R. Herr 1st & 7th

Fresh Fish!

(NO FROZEN STOCK.)

RED SALMON, HALIBUT, HAD-
DOCK, WEAK FISH, PIKE, CAT-
FISH, STEAK COD AND SMELTZ.

Frank Mettfelt & Bro.

2nd & 7th NORTHERN MARKET.

The vagaries of classified advertizing: Powys and fresh fish in the Lancaster New Era, 7 January 1910; tickets cost \$1.25 and are sold at local bookshops; what appears to be a survey of "Representative Prose Writers of the Nineteenth Century" is followed by evenings devoted to Lamb, "McCauley" [sic], Ruskin, Newman, Landor, and Pater

associate with supermarket tabloids, such as the memorable "Jumps Rope 1,000 Times, Dying."⁶⁷

In this environment articles tended to be uncritical announcements of the events local groups sponsored. Sometimes one can see the strong influence of a press release, as when the *New Era* and the *Intell* use identical language to inform their readership of an upcoming Powys lecture. In such situations I suspect that we encounter another clue to the particular reactions of his Iris Club hostesses. Both papers, for instance, characterized JCP's first course as "the best and most successful ever given at the Iris Club."⁶⁸ The second talk of the second series was introduced with the following assertion: "Mr. Powys' reputation as a lecturer has been so well established that his many friends will be glad to welcome him on Saturday afternoon."⁶⁹ And both papers heralded the third series with the prediction that "Those who have heard him in his former courses during the past two years will be prepared for the delights of a course on 'Modern Masters of Literature,' with interpretative readings."⁷⁰

Even when the ultimate source of the evaluations offered appears less clear, there is valuable information to be found in these articles. In response to the Dickens lecture that so moved the Iris Club's recording secretary, the *Intell* began by observing simply that "At the Iris Club meeting held on Saturday afternoon there was a lecture on 'Dickens,' by Dr. Powys," but then added with ingenuously surprised pleasure, "and it was quite interesting, too."⁷¹ A later retrospective takes a more formal tone but nonetheless reveals the degree of renown Powys had attained: "After the wonderful and masterly manner in which Prof. Powys delivered his lecture on Dickens there is a great desire to hear his interpretation of the late poet laureate [Tennyson]. The large audiences which fill the Iris club at these lecture[s] attest the great popularity of Prof. Powys in Lancaster."⁷² In the somewhat different words of the *New Era* at this time, "This is Professor Powys' third season at the Iris Club, and his audiences are growing constantly and his lectures listened to with closest attention."⁷³

The question that naturally arises is whether other lecturers in Lancaster evoked a similarly rapturous response from the local papers. Lecturing was indeed a popular form of entertainment at the time, and a wide spectrum of speakers held forth in town at local churches, the Y.M.C.A., and other locales. After examining a sampling of articles on these talks, I would say that, while the pieces were generally positive and sometimes enthusiastic, in general they did not reach the high pitch of praise we have seen for Powys. There were other compelling speakers who came through Lancaster, but

JCP had few rivals among the best of these. I considered at some length the case of Louis Wilkinson, who lectured for three seasons at the Iris Club and received respectful and supportive treatment from the Lancaster *New Era*. On one occasion the paper goes so far as to say that he has delighted large audiences at the Iris Club.⁷⁴ More typical, though, is temperate praise of lectures that "have been so clear, so forceful and altogether so instructive and entertaining" that people were glad to attend.⁷⁵ The level of excitement and affection Wilkinson evidently generated by his lectures was considerably less than that created by his friend. The evidence suggests that Lancaster indeed perceived John Cowper Powys as an exceptional lecturer and that it was as fond of him as he was of it.

My final goal here is to attempt to explain the affection that arose between Powys and the Iris Club. I think it is possible to do so, despite the surprise with which I greeted this relationship at the outset of the paper, and I would like to address this issue by exploring JCP's attitude to both his material and his audiences.

First of all, it is salutary to remember the qualities that many audiences perceived and valued in Powys: he was a brilliant lecturer who captivated listeners wherever he went. What he offered was both a quality of mind and an intensity of engagement that drew in his listeners. William Arthur Deacon characterized *Visions and Revisions*, the book that covered much of the subject matter of his lectures, as a set of "love letters" that displayed "all the boisterousness and yearning and delicacy of a youth in a first passionate love experience."⁷⁶ Powys himself wrote in the *Autobiography* of his approach that I worked myself up to such a pitch that I became the figure I was analysing. . . . You see my whole idea of criticism was different from the academic idea. What I aimed at was a sort of transmigration of my soul, till, like a demon possessing a person, I serpented myself into the skeleton of my author, and expounded his most eccentric reactions to life from the actual nerve-centers where these reactions originated.⁷⁷ Powys provided an immediate experience of celebrated authors, one that could be appreciated by those who, like the Iris Club women, had no academic training but an abiding interest in the acknowledged greats of literature and philosophy. I turn again to Deacon.

Mr. Powys . . . does not lay himself open to the charge of obscurity commonly laid against the learned writer who writes for the educated. His sentences are elongated but perfectly clear and straightforward. Above all he does not, like Pater, lead us into a labyrinth of classical allusion. . . .⁷⁸

At the same time, he did not patronize his listeners, as a letter to the book editor to the New York *Herald Tribune* in 1934 recognizes: "John Cowper Powys never 'talked down' to an audience, whether in Lancaster, Pa., Mount Vernon, Iowa, or New York City."⁷⁹ The Iris Club, like those other Powys admirers, would have appreciated all these qualities.

Powys's unacademic approach to material was part of what placed him outside the mainstream of university life. He seems to have felt ambivalent about the American university: on the one hand he told his brother Llewelyn that "I wish I could get a permanent place as a lecturer in some potty provincial university"⁸⁰; on the other hand he felt an intimidated resentment of their disrespect for him and a deep sympathy for those others whom they also excluded.⁸¹ This mixed attitude is not unlike that which Powys took to middle America. He had a deep-seated respect for the "really old-fashioned cultivated person who comes from a family and from a house where books have been seen and handled and read for several generations,"⁸² and despised the illiteracy and crass vulgarity of much of American life.⁸³ He would, however, be the first to defend the undercultured inhabitant of a provincial town, as he remarked in a 1930 article, "Easy enough is it to pour forth pseudo-cultured abuse upon the thousands of prairie-lost 'Main Streets' between Kansas City and Omaha."⁸⁴ And in the ambiguity of his situation and attitudes Powys resembles those Iris Club women whose lives I have described. Raised to revere the academic life, they were excluded from full participation in it; covertly resentful of society's undervaluation of them, they overtly conformed to the moral commonplaces of their age. Despite the differences in their experience, there is a natural sort of affinity at work here between these two sorts of outsiders; it is no wonder that Powys asserted that he felt at home in girls' schools and women's clubs.⁸⁵

Finally, Powys had a sort of intuitive sympathy with his audiences that enabled him to accept even those whose "life-illusions" differed from his own. This is part of the philosophy that made him

refrai[n] from any attempt to change the characters of the new friends I made or to bully them into the values that I held. . . . I had come to recognize that in conversation with people it is silly to try to force them to embrace your values, your disgust, your excitements, and that it is a *splendide mendax*, a meritorious treachery, to flatter them into self-complacency and well-being.⁸⁶

He was sensitive as well to the presence of those in the audience who might be desperate for his cultural message—"the misfits and the non-mixers, whose hold on life is introspective and introverted and to whom books mean simply everything"⁸⁷—the sense that he was giving life-saving hope to these gave him a feeling of purpose and a potential respect for the hidden needs of his audience. This sort of perceptiveness, in which must surely lie some of his popularity in Lancaster and elsewhere, makes a sharp contrast with another man who lectured at the Iris Club, Richard Burton. In an article that described his speaking career, Burton described the Pennsylvania Dutch as a particularly horrible audience because of their "tranquil inexpressiveness." He recounts a terrorizing experience during which he received no sign that his audience had any sympathy for him at all, and only later learned that they had found his talk extremely interesting.⁸⁸ It seems to me that Powys's sympathy for the currents that can run beneath still surfaces would have kept him from similarly misjudging the often-phlegmatic Lancaster Countian. On the other side of the equation, I believe that the picture I have painted of the Iris Club bespeaks a group of women of great curiosity and often surprising tolerance who would in turn have been able to accommodate the life-illusions of a visiting English lecturer.

I will close by offering two tentative generalizations about John Cowper Powys's relationship to American audiences based on the example of his Iris Club experiences. Throughout his American tours he was speaking to people with what Mason characterizes as an intense "mental thirst."⁸⁹ Another lecturer, Muriel Draper, would observe a few years later, "I believe that men and women in America are conscious . . . that they are not getting from the civilization in which they live an essentially good life, and I believe it is this that drives them to lectures."⁹⁰ Powys's work to some extent satisfied his audiences by reinforcing their preconceptions about authentic culture as classic works mediated by universities, particularly English universities. But his self-presentation and unacademic take on material would have spoken to the experiences of groups marginalized by class background or gender, and would have demystified for them a set of ideas and authors still largely controlled by a select few. With his unique embodiment of both cultural authority and an anarchic personal engagement with culture, Powys offered a powerful tonic to parched minds throughout America.

Notes

¹ John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (1934; Hamilton, NY: Colgate UP, 1967), 518.

² Powys, *Autobiography*, 500.

³ John Cowper Powys, 11 Nov. 1910, *Letters of John Cowper Powys to His Brother Llewelyn*, ed. Malcolm Elwin, 2 vols. (London: Village Press, 1975), 1: 86.

⁴ Powys, 28 Feb. 1916, *Letters to Llewelyn*, 1:200.

⁵ Derek Langridge, *John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement* (London: Library Association, 1966), 82.

⁶ Powys, 24 Feb. 1916, *Letters to Llewelyn*, 1: 199; 28 Feb. 1916, *Letters to Llewelyn*, 1: 200.

⁷ I am indebted to M. Duffield Harsh for information on agriculture and geography, and for meteorological research.

⁸ Powys, *Autobiography*, 479.

⁹ Information about P.R.R. service between Lancaster and Philadelphia was printed regularly in the paper at this time. This information was taken from the *Lancaster Intelligencer* of 30 Mar. 1916, and represents the timetable in effect since 24 Oct. 1915.

¹⁰ *Philadelphia Record*, 1 Jan. 1896; qtd. in *The Iris Club of Lancaster: Reflections of Seventy-Five Years, 1895-1970*, compiled by Elizabeth B. Stine (Lancaster: Iris Club, 1970), 2.

¹¹ "First of Powys Lectures Given before Iris Club," *Lancaster New Era*, 6 Mar. 1916: 3; "John Cowper Powys at the Iris Club," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 6 Mar. 1916: 3.

¹² "President Willing to Do Anything but Sacrifice Country's Honor" *Lancaster New Era*, 3 March 1916: 2.

¹³ "John Cowper Powys at the Iris Club," *Lancaster New Era*, 3 March 1916: 2.

¹⁴ S. K. Ratcliffe, "The English Lecturer in America," *Century Magazine* ns 83 (1923): 921, observes that "The Great War . . . wrought an immense change in the lecture situation. . . . The lecturer fell under a general, though not necessarily an unkind, suspicion. He was no longer accepted without question as a man whose word was his own. Audiences and responsible secretaries were tempted to think that a lecturer from England . . . should be regarded as an interested missionary or special pleader. . . ."

¹⁵ "First of Powys Lectures Given before Iris Club" 3.

¹⁶ Clayton Hoagland, "I Am a Born Orator," *Powys Newsletter* 1 (1970) n.p.

¹⁷ Louis Marlow [Louis Wilkinson], *Seven Friends* (London: Richards, 1953) 68; Maurice Browne, *Too Late to Lament: An*

Autobiography (London: Gollancz, 1955), 109.

18 "John Cowper Powys at the Iris Club," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 6 March 1916: 3.

19 "First of Powys Lectures Given before Iris Club," 3. When I delivered a version of this paper at the "Powys and America" conference, Ben Jones called my attention to the similarities between Powys's talk on France and War and Culture: both assert the importance of the fundamental idea that forms the basis of a nation, and both emphasize the indispensability of those ideas represented by the Allied Powers. (*War and Culture* 62 is especially informative in this regard.) In *War and Culture*, his response to Hugo von Munsterberg's pro-German propaganda, JCP equates France with "Latin civilization," "the loss of which, or any serious blow to which, would be more detrimental to the world, as a felicitous and gracious place to live in, than anything which could possibly happen. Whatever happens, this great Latin tradition must be protected and defended; for, as long as it lasts, no purely 'efficient' and 'mechanical' ideal can override the beauty and dignity and grace of life" (John Cowper Powys, *War and Culture* [1914; London: Village Press, 1975] 30, 31). So Powys's Iris Club lectures seem to have been a continuation of his advocacy of the Allied cause (as perhaps were his New York City lectures on Russian writers as well). Interestingly enough, the last lecture's title, "America: The Hope of the Future," also echoes a theme of *War and Culture* (32), as does the abandoned lecture on "Germany: The Fatherland of Efficiency." (JCP explicitly calls Germany "the Fatherland of modern efficiency" [17].)

20 A. Stephen Stephan, "Backgrounds and Beginnings of University Extension in America," *Harvard Educational Review* 18 (1948): 99-108.

21 Ratcliffe offers a general overview of the history of English lecturers.

22 Stephan 103.

23 Willis Boughton, "The Unit Course," *Handbook of University Extension*, ed. George Francis James, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, 1893), 82.

24 Boughton, 87-88.

25 "Notes" in James, 365.

26 "The University Extension Seminary" in James, 356. The organization's 1901 retrospective asserted that "One of the greatest difficulties your directors have met is in finding competent men." *Ten Years' Report of The American Society for the Extension of University Teaching, 1890-1900* (Philadelphia: ASEUT, 1901) 8.

27 The percentage of courses at which classes were held during this period was as follows: 1891-92 31%; 1893-94 76%; 1894-95 60%; 1895-

96 73%; 1896-97 76%; 1897-98 57%; 1898-99 51%; 1899-1900 61%. Figures were not available for 1890-91 and 1892-93. *Ten Years' Report*, 12.

28 Louis E. Reber, *University Extension in the United States*, US Bureau of Education Bull. 1914 No. 19, Whole No. 592 (Washington: GPO, 1914) 29. Admittedly this survey does not mention the ASEUT or the University of Pennsylvania. I use this report speculatively, in the absence of published records of the ASEUT from the years of Powys's involvement in it.

29 John Cowper Powys, "To Marian Powys," 29 April 1921, Marian Powys Papers, Special Collections, Everett Needham Case Library, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York.

30 Langridge 45.

31 Langridge 23-43, 47. I should point out that the ASEUT had given the course "Prose Writers of the Nineteenth Century" four times from 1890-1900, even before Powys's participation (*Ten Years' Report*, 26).

32 "Prof. Powys at the Iris Club," *Lancaster New Era*, 7 Jan. 1910: :2.

33 Wilkinson 74.

34 Gregory Mason, "Quenching America's Mental Thirst," *Scribner's Magazine* 75 (1924): 554. JCP himself recommended "small audiences of nice women and girls" to aspiring lecturer Llewelyn Powys, 26 Feb. 1920, *Letters to Llewelyn* 1: 279.

35 "The Women's Club," *Lancaster New Era*, 10 Jan. 1895: 1.

36 Ironically enough, the inspiration for Sorosis's founding came when Jane Cunningham Croly and other women were denied tickets to a Press Club dinner for another English lecturer, Charles Dickens. [Jane] C[unningham] Croly, *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* (New York: Henry G. Allen, 1898), 15.

37 Alice Nevin, "Foreword," *Year Book of the Iris Club, 1919-1920* (Lancaster: Iris Club, [1919]) n.p.

38 The information in this paragraph is based on Charlotte Appel, [Organizations Clubs and Societies], *Lancaster County Pennsylvania: A History*, ed. H.M.J. Klein, 4 vols. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1924), 2: 1070-72.

39 Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 33.

40 Ellen M. Henrotin, introduction, Croly x.

41 "Alice Nevin" in Klein, 3: 169.

42 Martin, 79-81.

43 *Year Book of the Iris Club, 1911-1912* (Lancaster: Iris Club, [1911]) n.p.

44 *Year Book of the Iris Club, 1908-09* (Lancaster: Iris Club, [1908]) n.p.

- ⁴⁵ Martin 114.
- ⁴⁶ Appel in Klein 2: 1073. Its first association with the ASEUT came before 1901, as there is a notation of a single course having been given at "Lancaster, Iris Club" in the Ten Years' Report (13).
- ⁴⁷ Year Book of the Iris Club, 1924-1925 (Lancaster: Iris Club, [1924]) 20.
- ⁴⁸ Year books for 1916-17, 1923-24.
- ⁴⁹ Stine, 12.
- ⁵⁰ Martin, 174-75.
- ⁵¹ Respectively, Susan Carpenter Frazer, Daisy Elizabeth Brooke Grubb, Daisy Rohrer, Eliza Hager Herr Appel, Jessie Hough Wickersham, Adele Altick.
- ⁵² Hospitality Committee of the Iris Club, *Here and There in Old Lancaster* (Lancaster: Iris Club, 1904), 12.
- ⁵³ "Miss Nevin Dies, Civic Leader," *Lancaster New Era*, 20 Nov. 1925: 1.
- ⁵⁴ Charlotte W. Appel Papers, Franklin and Marshall Library, Lancaster.
- ⁵⁵ Alice Nevin, "The Genesis of the Tomato," *Poems* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1922), 20-21. The dedication to the poem does not appear in the book, but in Charlotte W. Appel's gift commonplace book. Theodore Appel Family Papers, 1836-1933, Archives and Special Collections Department, Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, Pennsylvania.
- ⁵⁶ Klein 3: 186.
- ⁵⁷ Charlotte W. Appel, "To Her Family," 2 Mar. 1925, Theodore Appel Family Papers.
- ⁵⁸ This book is now in the collection of the Evangelical and Reformed Historical Society of the United Church of Christ, Lancaster.
- ⁵⁹ "Dr. Powys May Return," *Lancaster New Era*, 4 Jan. 1908: 2.
- ⁶⁰ "Notes," James 237. The Ten Years' Report gives a figure of eleven lectures between 1890 and 1900 under "Lancaster" (13).
- ⁶¹ "The Dauphin Lecture," *Lancaster New Era*, 1 Jan. 1908: 2.
- ⁶² Minutes of the Iris Club, 2 April 1910. Used by permission of the Iris Club.
- ⁶³ Minutes of the Iris Club, 21 Jan. 1911.
- ⁶⁴ Minutes of the Iris Club, 18 Feb. 1911.
- ⁶⁵ "Big Porkers Butchered," *Lancaster New Era*, 21 Jan. 1910: 2.
- ⁶⁶ "Nose Badly Cut," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 8 Mar. 1909: 1.
- ⁶⁷ "Jumps Rope 1,000 Times, Dying," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 17 March 1911: 5.
- ⁶⁸ "Mr. Powys' Last Lecture," *Lancaster New Era*, 2 April 1909: 2; "Lecture at Iris Club," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 3 April 1909: 2.

- ⁶⁹ "Professor Powys at the Iris Club," *Lancaster New Era*, 21 Jan. 1910: 2; "Prof. Powys' Lecture," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 21 Jan. 1910: 10.
- ⁷⁰ "Prof. Powys at the Iris Club," *Lancaster New Era*, 6 Jan. 1911: 2; "Prof. Powys at the Iris Club," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 6 Jan. 1911: 1.
- ⁷¹ "The Iris Club," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 23 Jan. 1911: 2.
- ⁷² "Prof. Powys at Iris Club," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 17 Feb. 1911: 3.
- ⁷³ "Lecture at the Iris Club," *Lancaster New Era*, 17 Feb. 1911: 2.
- ⁷⁴ "The Iris Club Lecture," *Lancaster New Era*, 6 Mar. 1908: 2.
- ⁷⁵ "Dr. Wilkinson's Lecture," *Lancaster New Era*, 15 Mar. 1907: 2.
- ⁷⁶ William Arthur Deacon, "John Cowper Powys," *The University Magazine* (Montreal) 18 (1919): 190.
- ⁷⁷ Powys, *Autobiography*, 457.
- ⁷⁸ Deacon, 194.
- ⁷⁹ Ferner Nuhn, letter, *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 June 1934; qtd. in Langridge 58.
- ⁸⁰ John Cowper Powys, 8 Jan. 1918, *Letters to Llewelyn*, 1: 245.
- ⁸¹ Powys, *Autobiography*, 468-69 expresses particular dislike for Harvard and Yale.
- ⁸² John Cowper Powys, "Lecturing on Books," *Publishers' Weekly*, 22 Mar. 1930: 1656.
- ⁸³ See for instance JCP's letters to Llewelyn of 21 Jan. 1908 (*Letters to Llewelyn* 1:38) and 20 Jan. 1917 (1: 218-21).
- ⁸⁴ John Cowper Powys, "The American Scene and Character: A Resident Alien to Alien Critics," *Century Magazine*, Dec. 1927: 180.
- ⁸⁵ Powys, *Autobiography*, 469.
- ⁸⁶ Powys, *Autobiography*, 466.
- ⁸⁷ Powys, "Lecturing on Books" 1657.
- ⁸⁸ Richard Burton, "Literature from the Lecture Platform," *Bookman* 50 (1920): 404.
- ⁸⁹ Mason 552.
- ⁹⁰ Muriel Draper, "Standing and Talking," *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 162 (1931): 202.

Appendix I: John Cowper Powys's Lectures at the Iris Club

1908-1909: Ancient and Modern Philosophy in Relation to Life

- | | |
|------|--|
| 1/9 | Greek Philosophy |
| 1/23 | Spinoza |
| 2/20 | Hume and Kant [originally scheduled: Hume] |
| 3/6 | Hegel [originally: Kant and Hegel] |
| 3/20 | Schopenhauer [originally: Schopenhauer and |

Nietzsche]

4/3 Nietzsche [originally Comte and Spencer]

1909-1910: Representative Prose Writers of the Nineteenth Century

1/8 Lamb
1/22 Macaulay
2/19 Carlyle
3/5 Ruskin
3/19 Newman
4/2 Walter Savage Landor and Walter Pater

1910-1911: Modern Masters of Literature

1/7 Edgar Allan Poe (by request)
1/21 Charles Dickens
2/18 Alfred Tennyson
3/4 Algernon Charles Swinburne
3/18 Robert Louis Stevenson
4/1 Rudyard Kipling [JCP ill; replaced by Dr. Gauss, Princeton]

1915-1916: National Ideals of Life

3/4 France: The Mistress of the Art of Life
[originally England: The Citadel of Individualism]
3/18 Spain
[originally Germany: The Fatherland of Efficiency]
4/1 America: The Hope of the Future

Appendix II: A selection of articles from New York newspapers on lectures by John Cowper Powys

[Editor's note: Constance Harsh found these pieces while researching Powys's Lancaster lectures and has kindly passed them on. They do not necessarily tell us what Powys's Lancastrian appearances were like—one suspects that he may have adopted quite a different tone in Pennsylvania than in Manhattan—but they do give us a vivid sense of a few Powysian dithyrambs, 1912-1929. The pose of the aristocrat; the evocation of Oxbridge glamor; the dallings with English Eccentricity; the promotion of the midwestern Edgar Lee Masters in New York City (with the

accompanying rejection of "Greenwich village coterics"); the play to a mixed audience specified defined as mixed ("those come alike from labor and from leisure"); the element of theatrical improvisation (particularly in the performance at St. Marks'); each of these gestures, whether it stems from the lecturer himself or from those reporting him, suggests a starting-point for thinking about Powys's lecture career. One last observation: It is fascinating to watch the Times pick up on the Powysian recommendation of Masters, following it almost immediately with a full-scale feature article. Powys presents himself as marginal or second-rate but clearly has a certain amount of influence.]

[19 February 1912: *The New York Times*]

PRAISES BYRON IN PULPIT

Poet's Magnificence and Courage Excuse His Profligacy,
Says Powys.

At St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie yesterday the afternoon service was supplemented with a talk by John Cowper Powys of Oxford, wherein he exhorted his audience to admire Lord Byron, for the very reason that he was "so magnificent a profligate, so royal and warrior-like a villain."

"Indeed," cried Mr. Powys, whose lecture on "Byron, the Revolutionary Poet," was rather a dithyramb than a lecture, "spiritual beauty sits side by side with immorality full often, and, as our age and democracy have shown us, morality can reside in the most lamentable ugliness. It is just because Byron was a royalist, just because he had the courage—and how many of us have?—to love a Countess, that we must bear him in our hearts in these days of cowardice and ugliness."

According to Mr. Powys, the appeal of Byron is the merging in him of the spirit of youth and the spirit of aristocracy.

"Like Nietzsche, Byron does not argue, he proclaims, he commands," he said. "This is the mood of the royalists and of little children."

The lecturer explained that the blood of Douglas, mingled with the Norman strains of the poet's wicked uncle, were sure to produce this startling phenomenon.

"For in Byron's double appeal," he went on, "to the proletariat and to the superman, this poet is unique in all literature. We have had poets who appealed to one or the other; here we have the double man, the aristocrat, the darling of the gods, who came down and led the popular cause for liberty. And when Byron left

England and joined the men who were fighting for Greece, he was showing the greatest pride of all."

[22 February 1912: *New York Times*]

BYRON TALK NOT IN PULPIT

Mr. Powys's Lecture Was Delivered In the Hall of St. Mark's Church.

To the Editor of the New York Times:

The rector and Vestry of old St. Mark's-in-the-Bouwerie will be obliged if you will kindly correct an error in your headline this morning, under which you mention Mr. Powys's lecture—a dithyramb, as your reporter acutely terms it—on "Byron, the Revolutionary Poet." While entirely within the proprieties, given as it was from a lecture platform, it would have been most improper to have been uttered, as your headline states, from a pulpit.

The scheme of Sunday services, framed by our new rector to meet the changed conditions confronting this historic church, is thus arranged: The morning and afternoon services are of the conservative Prayer Book type. Following the afternoon service university extension lectures are given in St. Mark's Hall at the rear of the church, to which the congregation are invited, the connection of literature and art with religion being the dominant note.

The evening service is more informal, a social service, so to speak, where laymen as well as clergymen are asked to preach on various social problems pressing for solution, (as for example, last night Bishop Spaulding of Utah on the Mormon question.) The duty of the church to face such is emphasized. Afterward free discussion of their subjects is invited in the hall. Needless to say, things are said from the platform which would not be appropriate teachings from a pulpit.

In its new endeavor to link itself with the throbbings and yearnings of the many nationalities surrounding it, to minister to their needs, and to provide a platform for free discussion, it is not the intention of the new management to permit St. Mark's pulpit to be given over to the promulgation of any such cult as that of the dashing Mr. Powys, whose command of daring phrases and delicious paradoxes yesterday delighted an audience in a hall where it would have offended that same audience, if delivered from the pulpit of a Christian church.

John Brooks Leavitt, Senior Warden. N.Y. Feb. 19, 1912.

[29 March 1915: *New York Times*]

SPOON RIVER'S POET CROWNED BY BRITON

English Critic Marvels that it Has Been Left to Him to Discover E. Masters

His Elegy not like Gray's

Mr. Powys Finds the Illinois Prodigy Was Stirred by "the Brazen Lies" on Tombstones.

When John Cowper Powys, M.A. of Cambridge, England, stood up to speak before the Sunday afternoon lecture class in the hall of St. Mark's Church, at Eleventh Street and Second Ave. yesterday, he started right in by promising, in the words of Charles Lamb, to "snatch a glittering something and share it with them." The glittering something turned out to be no less a point of interest than Spoon River, Ill., which, Mr. Powys said, was destined to leap from its seclusion in the railroad time table and become really famous along with the works of the "aboriginal American poet," Masters.

Mr. Powys apologized for not knowing the aboriginal American poet's full name. But that presumably did not matter, as the full name would doubtless come into its own hand in hand with Spoon River, Ill. However, Who's Who has been careful enough to put the missing handle on Mr. Master's name. It is Edgar Lee.

The reason why Spoon River was not better known, Mr. Powys said, was the fault of American newspapers.

"Your newspapers are really wonderful in many ways; they are positively audacious, astonishing, but they are the worst in the world for discovering genius," he said.

So the newspapers were no help at all in his wanderings in search of the truly great American poets.

"It is tragic, tragic, he remarked. "Here I find the whole continent heaving with poetic emotion—but what about the poets?"

By the great poets, Mr. Powys said, he did not mean those poets who belonged to Gramercy Park and Greenwich village coteries. The really great poets, he found, were a solitary lot, with

very little hope of recognition in a land where there was no focussing of opinion on poets. New York was worst of all in this respect, but he had hopes for Chicago. In fact, it was from Chicago, Mr. Powys thought, that the great American spirit was destined to spring. The great poets, painters, and musicians would come from there.

Americans for the most part were guilty of mistaking "pretty dialect poets" for the real article, but as Mr. Powys sized the matter up "truly representative American poetry must have something devilish about it, something ghastly grim, something that bites and stings." In this, he said, Mr. Masters shines.

All of which qualifications were fulfilled, he thought, by the stinger of Spoon River, Ill., who incidentally had the other necessary requisite to greatness in being a Chicagotown. In Masters he saw the "natural child of Walt Whitman," whom he described as "the only poet with true Americanism in his bones."

Pausing merely to remark that "it was an awful shame that a second-rate critic from England should have to be called in to tell Americans who their poets are," Mr. Powys proceeded to reveal the glories of Spoon River as set forth in the free verse of Poet Masters. Spoon River has a cemetery, and it was here that the aboriginal poet sought his inspiration. He was stirred, Mr. Powys said, by "the brazen lies" in the epitaphs of American tombstones. So he took his pen in hand and set forth the truth about the dead folk of Spoon River. Mr. Powys read several samples of the result. They bore the somewhat prosaic titles of Ollie Magee, Jeduthah Hawley, Mr. Tut, and Walter Simmons, and were by no means flattering to the memory of those gentlemen. However, Mr. Powys said there were others still stronger—so much so he didn't dare read 'em there in church.

Mr. Powys said Masters was the third great American poet he had been able to discover. He was the realist poet. Edwin A. Robinson was the poet of the metaphysical—the American Browning almost—and Arthur D. Ficke the poet's poet—the American Schiller [*word unclear: could be Schider—can anyone identify?*].

"Ah, what a fellow Ficke is," he remarked, and proceeded to read some of Ficke's verse to prove it.

[4 April 1915: *The New York Times*, Magazine Section]

Spoon River Poet Called Great

Famous English Critic Lifts Edgar Lee Masters from Chicago Obscurity to the High Peak of Parnassus

John Cowper Powys of Cambridge, the English critic, declared in lecture a few days ago in New York that Masters-Edgar Lee Masters of Chicago—was a really great poet, the third great poet whom Mr. Powys had been able to discover, the others being Edwin A. Robinson and Arthur D. Ficke. Mr. Powys said that Masters is "the natural child of Walt Whitman," whom he described as "the only poet with true Americanism in his bones." Masters was also characterized by the English authority as the "aboriginal American poet."

[*There follows a lengthy article on and interview with Masters: "Mr. Masters smiled whimsically when told the nature of the correspondent's mission, and the fact that a distinguished English critic had stated he was one of the greatest American poets...."Mr. Powys," said Mr. Masters, "of course has reference to my 'Spoon River Anthology' which is about to be published by Macmillan of New York."*]

[28 October 1920: *New York Evening Post*]

JOHN COWPER POWYS EXPLAINS HIS OWN PHILOSOPHIC SYSTEM

by Mary Siegrist

"It reminds me very much of the New Court at Corpus," observed Mr. Powys, indicating the wide green quadrangle and the ivy-colored red brick church which his third-story window overlooked. In his tone was an implication of precious irrecoverable college days held in memory—days out of whose warp and woof this poet-philosopher has spun some of his rarest visions and appreciations.

Picturesque, distinctively careless, is the studio of Mr. Powys, which he shares with his sister, the lace expert. Not only in its peculiar ensemble does it express its occupants, but down to the last detail it seems to reflect the impress of the Powys family's moods. Mr. Powys is more than a brilliant academician and an unsparing but appreciative critic and poet. He is artist to the core. In his whole physique and personality one senses the outward expression of a soul attuned to fine issues.

In contact with his fellow men, it is evident that he combines a sense of spiritual power and awareness with a certain reverent appreciation for personality. One easily sees him covering the limitations and eccentricities of his friends—perhaps even the malice of his foes—with forgetfulness. He is a compassionate figure, this eccentric lecturer and distinguished rhetorician, full of enthusiasm and hope for the recreation of a shattered world, as he lectures from day to day in America to audiences of those come alike from labor and from leisure.

He Is a New Eclectic

John Cowper Powys belongs to no definite school of philosophy. Rather, out of the weltering chaos, the conflicting conclusions of ancient and modern philosophic thought, he has fashioned and built up his own definite system of philosophy, which he gives the world in his book "The Complex Vision." It was with the exposition of his thought as expressed in its arresting pages that he was occupied during this interview.

"It fills a gap in human thought which until now has remained unfilled. It is a philosophic system suspended midway between materialism and spiritualism," he said. "It is frankly based upon actual human experience, shamelessly including all those instincts, intuitions, illuminations and obsessions usually neglected and disdained under the disparaging name of 'superstition.' It boldly visualizes the world as entirely composed of the souls and bodies of living entities, human, sub-human and superhuman. It recognizes in all these living things the presence of an unfathomable Duality made up of the eternal conflict between the power of creative love and the power of inert malice."

"How is this philosophy related to other systems of thought?" I inquired.

"The Complex Vision," answered Mr. Powys, "sees the world as bodies and souls. It carries the pluralism of William James to its logical conclusion. It is a revival of the ideas of Plato. (His ideas are actually personalities; they are gods.) It revives the latent truth in

primitive polytheism and antique mythology. It is a new Hellenism adapted to modern psychology. It gives at last its due place in thought to the aesthetic sense, and it conclusively proves that what is called philosophy is in reality nothing else than the supreme work of art of the human race."

"Does not this teaching give rhythmic balance to all man's powers or spiritual attributes?"

Response to a Modern Craving

"The Complex Vision' is a systematized answer to the widespread modern craving for some rhythmic balance between supernatural religion and natural paganism. It is an attempt to bring into definite articulation that mysterious open secret in the handling of nature and life of which there are intimations and glimpses all the way down the ages and which we have come especially to associate with the name [*sic*] of Plato, Da Vinci, Rabelais, and William Blake."

"To those modern minds who find no solution either in experimental science or in mystical dogma will this system offer something satisfying?"

"The Complex Vision' brings into a single focus and into one rhythmic harmony the ideal of the God Man and the multiplicity of the organic universe. It is a system which corresponds, on the philosophical plane, to all those daring experiments in painting, sculpture, drama, and music through which the restless spirits of our time are expressing in a new way the mystery of the riddle.

Mr. Powys agrees with Henry Adams in being skeptical about any steady advance carried out independently of individual wills by the evolution of some Hegelian world spirit. He finds the immediate future of the race to depend not upon some inevitable tendency called progress, but upon arbitrary exertion of groups of individual wills dealing with the difficulties of human nature and society as artists deal with the difficulties of their material.

[12 October 1929: *The New York Times*]

Powys Call [*sic*] Movies 'Essentially Vulgar'

English Writer Tells Goucher Girls That the 'Craze Over Airplanes' Is in the Same Category.

Special to the New York Times.

Baltimore, MD. Oct. 11.—The movies, "talkies" and popular radio programs are "essentially vulgar," John Cowper Powys, English poet and novelist, said in an address to the Goucher College girls today on the "The Genuine Aristocrat."

Mr. Powys classed the "present-day craze over airplanes" in the same category of vulgarity. He described the "genuine aristocrat" as a person of humble birth who is "nevertheless the salt of the earth because of innately gentle qualities."

Leisure, the speaker declared, is a prerequisite of genuine aristocracy. Since his ideal of a genuine aristocrat is "likely to be a proud but poor and shabby individual," he said that leisure must be obtained even at the risk of having to give up a lucrative position for poorer pay.

"The world is run by the go-getters," he said. "But if there were no other people, what a horrible place it would be! They all feel impelled to do good because it pays.

"The genuine aristocrat is interested in helping his fellows simply because he gets an inner joy out of it. But he doesn't care a rap whether service pays or not."
