

Powys Notes

Fall and Winter 1992

The Powys Society of North America

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Powys Notes

The semiannual journal and newsletter of the
Powys Society of North America

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Subscription Addresses

US and overseas:
Constance Harsh
Department of English
Colgate University
Hamilton, N.Y. 13346-1398

Canada:
Ben Jones
Department of English
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario, K1S 5B6

Contents

Editing *Porius* 4
Wilbur T. Albrecht

"A Certain Combination of Realism and Magic": Notes
on the Publishing History of *Porius* 11
Michael Ballin

Notes on this Issue and an Invitation to Our 1992
Conference in New York 38

Observations Social and Bibliographic 39

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The Powys Society of North America

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

Powys Notes, the Society's publication, appears in Spring/Summer and Fall/Winter issues and presents scholarship, reviews, and bibliography of Powysian interest. Submissions may be addressed to the Editor, at the Department of English, Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana 46383. Mac or IBM compatible discs with accompanying printed copy are welcome. Backissues are available, some in their original form, others in photocopies. Volumes 1.1-4.1 (newsletter format) are \$3 each and \$15 the set. Volumes 4.2 on (bound format) are \$7 each. Address orders to Constance Harsh, Treasurer of the Society, at the English Department, Colgate University, Hamilton, N. Y. 13346-1398.

Editing *Porius*

Wilbur T. Albrecht

In 1942, at the age of seventy, John Cowper Powys began work on what he called his "Romance of the Dark Ages," the book that we know today as *Porius*, the book that he believed would be the greatest achievement of his long and varied career as a writer. On 12 March 1944, Powys wrote to his old friend, Louis Wilkinson, "Better does it suit me, I tell you, Louis, better than anything, this 'Dark Ages' book. It suits my weaknesses, badnesses, all my whimsies and quimsies and de quincies, all my superstition, prejudices, blasphemies and blissphemies, my hoverings round and my shootings off, my divings down and poppings up—and so, thanks to Mr P & Mr C & Sir N.F. & Mr Unwin, not to speak of [L.A.G.] Strong or to even mention your good self, I shall,—if I don't die of cancer or dropsy or prostrate gland or that disease you have to have insulin for (diabetes)—but I should refuse insulin, I should refuse (I mean it) to touch *insulin*—I shall finish the Best Book of My Life by October 8, 1945 when I'll be only 7 years off 80!"¹ But it was to be four more years before he completed *Porius*. In a letter to Louis Wilkinson of 18 August 1949, Powys writes, "I have reached chapter 24 of my Book—I mean I have reached this point in *revising* & correcting the typed-script of my completed 'Porius', a Romance of the Dark Ages in 33 long-hand chapters which ended on Page 2811."²

Those 2,811 pages of "long-hand chapters" explain why, in part at least, it took Powys seven years to complete *Porius*—he told Wilkinson that he had "not dared to look to see the number of pages of the type-script"³ as he revised it—there are 1,589 pages of typescript. And the length of the novel also explains why Powys had such a hard time finding a publisher for it. But, then, he knew that most publishers, even those who had profitably published his work in the past, would have second thoughts about committing themselves to a project of this size and, because of the size, inevitable cost. Even before he had begun revising the typescript, he confided to Malcolm Elwin that "I am so scared lest my kind friend Mr. Greenwood's Reader, who was so good to me over *Rabelais*, may

cry & howl when he sees or when he lets Mr. Greenwood [Managing Director of The Bodley Head Press] see the LENGTH of *this*,"⁴ and, as he was completing his revision of the typescript, he wrote to Louis Wilkinson: "what worries me now is fear lest the Bodley Head will say it's *too long to publish*."⁵

As it turned out, his fears were entirely justified. Not only did Simon and Schuster, the American firm that had published his work in the United States for many years, refuse to take the book, so did all of the other American publishers that he approached. Writing again to Wilkinson on 5 December 1949, Powys laments, "My huge 'Romance of the Dark Ages' did *not* find favour in America, so I can tell you, my dear, I've dropt all grand airs about it over here & now am 'bowing & scraping' and *not* laying down the Law at all."⁶ Nor did he fare any better in England. Even though he cut the novel by some 500 pages of typescript, presumably at the request of "Mr. Greenwood's Reader," The Bodley Head still found it too costly to publish. He did, of course, finally find a publisher for *Porius* in England, the London firm of Macdonald & Co.

In 1949, John Cowper Powys had been corresponding for seven years with Malcolm Elwin who was then the general editor of Macdonald Illustrated Classics. Elwin had known Powys's work for a number of years, and he admired it, though he had never met him; and in 1946 he had engaged the author of *Porius* to write the introduction to Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, one of the volumes in the Illustrated Classics series. "The result so impressed Eric Harvey, Macdonald's managing editor," Elwin tells us, "that he suggested I should ask him to expand his thoughts on Sterne in an introduction to *Tristram Shandy*."⁷ When Elwin heard that Powys was unable to find a publisher for *Porius*, he was astonished: "it seemed to me incredible that the greatest imaginative genius of our time should have spent seven years on a novel only to find publishers reluctant to print it."⁸

Travel had been difficult during the war, but Malcolm Elwin now journeyed to North Wales to meet Powys, and he convinced Eric Harvey to make a similar trip. Meeting Powys made a deep impression on both the editor and the managing director, and the result of Harvey's visit to Corwen was a request to see the typescript of *Porius*. Having read the typescript, Harvey determined to publish the novel, and *Porius*, in the abridged form demanded by The Bodley Head, now moved to Macdonalds. On this occasion Powys writes to Elwin: "This is to say that I have separated myself from . . . The Bodley head & that my 'Author's Agents' . . . are now sending . . . my '*Porius*' to your people i.e. to *Macdonalds!* i.e. to E. R. H. Harvey of 43 Ludgate Hill, London E.C. 4."⁹

Powys was fortunate in finding a publisher whose senior editor and managing director so greatly admired his work—after his visit to Powys in Corwen, Malcolm Elwin wrote to Eric Harvey that Powys was “the greatest man I ever met.”¹⁰ And he was doubly fortunate in finding a publisher whose parent company, British Printing Corporation, had a abundance of paper, a commodity in very short supply in 1949, when “the war-time paper shortage still prevailed in England”¹¹ and of which large quantities would be required for a book that, even in its abridged version, would run to 682 pages of text. While Macdonalds was well positioned to publish *Porius*, it was a project not without risk. As Malcolm Elwin comments: “A publisher would hardly expect a productive future on signing on a new author of seventy-eight.” But the risk turned out to be well worth taking. “Powys’s productivity during the next decade may be envied by many writers half his age,” Elwin continues. “He was already writing *The Inmates* before *Porius* was published; *Atlantis* and *Homer and the Aether* were inspired by his habit of reading Homer for recreation; *The Brazen Head*, at first called *The Three Barons*, began as a story about Roger Bacon; . . . there was the final statement of his philosophy, *In Spite Of*, and lastly his books of ‘space’ fiction, *Up and Out* and *All or Nothing*.”¹² Macdonalds not only published all of Powys’s new work up to his death in 1963, they also reissued most of his earlier work that had gone out of print.

With the abridged version of *Porius* safely in Macdonalds’ hands, Powys apparently had little or nothing more to do with the book—he was notoriously casual about the editing of his work once he had committed it to the publisher. Typically, as he completed sections of his longer works he would send them off to Mrs. Meech’s Type Writing Bureau in Dorchester while he continued composition of succeeding sections. He would then correct the typescript, often with little care, and send it to the publisher, readily acquiescing to whatever corrections or changes his publisher might demand. “He was always grateful for suggested amendments,” Malcolm Elwin tells us and offers the following anecdote to illustrate Powys’s relations with his editors and publisher. “He was perturbed only when his friend Redwood Anderson—one of the accomplished philologists of our time as well as an eminent poet—read a page-proof of *Homer and the Aether* and proposed copious alterations, not only in the anglicising of many Greek names, but in Powys’s interpretation of Homer’s story. Even then he attempted no argument; he did not doubt that his friend must be right, but was agitated lest the publishers might receive a heavy printer’s bill for corrections!”¹³

In the case of *Porius*, however, after Powys had edited the

novel himself, slashing some 500 pages of typescript from it at the request of The Bodley Head, no further editorial changes were called for by Macdonalds. Joseph Slater relates that “Miss Phyllis Playter told me in August, 1971, that Powys himself, not an editor, made the cuts and that the time allowed him was very short.”¹⁴ And Malcolm Elwin writes that, as a result of his lengthy report to Eric Harvey, “it ran to some 7 or 8,000 words,” *Porius* “was published by Macdonalds in 1951 without further cuts.”¹⁵ Powys, himself, writing to Elwin on 29 December 1950, explains that he has radically edited the novel: “But shortened it is to exactly a thousand or for rather Druidic reasons to 999!!!” He explains that he has cut two entire chapters: “These two chapters were redundant and were not essential to the development of the story; and so they made it much easier for me to cut the book in those 500 typed pages.”¹⁶ (The actual number of pages cut is closer to 600 typed pages.) The question of the redundancy and unessential nature of the text deleted from the novel is one to which I shall return later, but first we must look at the nature of the texts available to an editor attempting to establish a complete *Porius*.

Macdonalds published *Porius* on 13 August 1951; and The Philosophical Library, New York, “imported copies of *Porius* under its own imprint and issued copies in the United States in 1952.”¹⁷ In 1974, the Village Press, London, reissued the 1951 Macdonalds edition. The 2811 page holograph of the novel is in possession of the University of Texas, Austin; a typescript of 1859 pages, corrected in Powys’s hand, is held by Colgate University; and 620 pages of typescript, also corrected in Powys’s hand, are in the collection of Mr. E. E. Bissell.¹⁸ The whereabouts of the proofs of *Porius* is unknown. Mr. John Foster White, Powys’s editor at Macdonald, “thinks that they have been lost long ago.”¹⁹

A collation of the holograph at the University of Texas with the Colgate University typescript serves as a testament to the accuracy of Mrs. Meech’s Type Writing Bureau—the texts are virtually identical and variants between them are corrected in Powys’s hand on the typescript. A collation of the 1951 Macdonalds edition (including the limited issue in three-quarter morocco) and the Philosophical Library issue of the novel with the Village Press reissue shows these texts to be identical. All of the corrections in Powys’s hand which appear in the Colgate University typescript also appear (again in Powys’s hand) in the Bissell typescript, but in addition to those corrections, the Bissell typescript contains additional changes in Powys’s hand which do not appear in the Colgate typescript. The additional changes in the Bissell typescript indicate a far more thorough, and thoughtful, editing of the text.

There are additional corrections to punctuation and spelling, matters in which Powys was ordinarily and notoriously lax, but, more importantly, there are changes that clear up what would otherwise have been inconsistencies and other anomalies in the novel had the typescript in its Colgate version served as the original printer's copy.

Of the 620 pages in the Bissell typescript, very little of the typewritten text appears in the 1951 edition, but almost all of the longer passages in Powys's hand do appear in the printed text. The Bissell typescript clearly consists in those pages which Powys deleted from *Porius* in order to meet the demands of The Bodley Head for publication, along with those changes and additions which would make the shortened and much altered novel a coherent whole. In editing *Porius* for an abbreviated version, Powys frequently took passages out of sequence in the original and combined them with new language which would provide a bridge over the deleted material. Often whole pages in the Bissell typescript are lined out, and on other pages only single sentences remain intact, with a renumbering of the pages in Powys's hand indicating their rearranged sequence in the abridged version of the novel. This editorial process required that a fair copy of these changes (or a typed version of it) be submitted to the publisher along with the less radically changed portions of the original text, a requirement that accounts for the appearance in the Bissell typescript of so many of the transitional passages in Powys's hand that became part of the published text.

Aside from the deletions and additions made for the sake of the abridgement of the novel, the Bissell typescript represents, as I have said, a far more meticulous and thoughtful editing of the novel than does the Colgate typescript, or at least those pages of it that correspond to the Colgate typescript, and it must be assumed that Powys gave the same editorial attention to those missing pages from it which were finally submitted to the publisher. Indeed, in matters of punctuation, orthography, and detail of description and characterization, the 1951 edition is consistent with the editing of the Bissell typescript while frequently at odds with the text of the Colgate typescript.

In the absence, then, of the original printer's copy typescript²⁰ and of the missing pages of the Bissell typescript (presumably they are one and the same) as well as corrected proofs, a complete edition of *Porius* must be based largely on a combination of the 1951 edition of the novel and the existing 620 pages of the Bissell typescript. In the edition of *Porius* that I am preparing, where the 1951 edition does not clearly reflect differences from the Colgate

typescript which are the consequence of Powys's editorial process of abridgement, the text of that edition is given precedence; and where the Bissell typescript does not clearly reflect differences from the Colgate typescript which are the consequence of the process of abridgement, the Bissell typescript is given precedence.

To return briefly to the substance of the text. While one does not wish to appear arrogant in gainsaying the author's judgment of his own work, it is difficult to see Powys's assertions that the cuts that he was forced to make in *Porius* were unimportant—"These two chapters were redundant and were not essential to the development of the story"—as anything other than a rationalization, however understandable, of a thoroughly disagreeable set of circumstances. While space will not allow a detailed discussion here of the importance of the those two full chapters to the development of the novel as a whole, to say nothing of the radical cuts made to other sections of the novel, a reader familiar with the 1951 version of *Porius* will find in a complete *Porius* not only an enlarged cast of characters but a fuller and more complex development of familiar characters, a more careful and satisfying linkage between character and theme, and a tying together of the various narrative threads of the novel which, however interesting in themselves, were often only tangential in the published version. The *Porius* that we now have is a very good "story" indeed, and it may be that the deleted text is in some ways not essential to the telling of the story itself, but a *Porius* in which that text is restored comes much closer, I believe, to Powys's hope for the novel as the great achievement of his career than does the previously published version, as great an achievement as that is.

The *Porius* in preparation will be essentially a reader's edition. While a critical edition which would identify each variation in the text between the restored version and the 1951 version may be a desideratum, such an edition would have required the publication of the novel in two volumes (the projected one volume edition will run to almost 900 pages) at a production cost and resulting price that would be exorbitant and would have postponed publication for, perhaps, years. Furthermore, the identification of those variants and the places in the text where they occur would be, while handy in a new edition, little more than a replication of Joseph Slater's careful and accurate comparison of the published text with the Colgate typescript. Readers who wish to make a detailed textual study of the novel should consult Professor Slater's work.²¹

The new and complete edition of *Porius* is to be published by

the Colgate University Press in the late spring or early summer, 1992.

Colgate University

Notes

¹Louis Wilkinson, ed., *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson, 1935-1956* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1958) 142-43.

²Wilkinson, 266.

³Wilkinson, 266.

⁴Malcolm Elwin, "John Cowper Powys: Publishing His Later Works," *Colgate University Philobiblon* 8 (Winter, 1966): 28.

⁵Wilkinson, 267.

⁶Wilkinson, 271.

⁷Elwin, 28.

⁸Elwin, 28.

⁹John Cowper Powys, letter to Malcolm Elwin, 2 September 1950, University of Texas, Austin.

¹⁰Elwin, 29.

¹¹Elwin, 28. British Publishing Corporation was owned by Eric Harvey's father who, recognizing the advantage in possessing a surplus of paper in a paper starved time, created in the early 1940s (sometime between 1940 and 1942) the publishing house of Macdonald & Co. Eric Harvey was named the new company's managing director.

¹²Elwin, 29.

¹³Elwin, 29.

¹⁴"The Stones of *Porius*," *The Powys Newsletter* 3 (1972-73): 29.

¹⁵Elwin, 29.

¹⁶John Cowper Powys, letter to Malcolm Elwin, 29 December 1950, University of Texas, Austin.

¹⁷Dante Thomas, *A Bibliography of the Writings of John Cowper Powys: 1872-1963* (Mamaroneck: Paul A. Appel, 1975) 75.

¹⁸A photographic copy of Mr. Bissell's typescript is in the collection of Churchill College, Cambridge; and a third, but uncorrected, typescript was given to Gilbert Turner by Miss Phyllis Playter, and it is presumably the copy (a carbon copy of 1542 pages with the first 47 pages—Chapter I—missing) sold by Sotheby's in 1983. See Sotheby & Co., July 21-22, 1983 Sale Catalogue, Item 487.

¹⁹Gerald J. Pollinger, letter to the author, 17 January 1989.

²⁰See Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) 125-128 for a discussion of the importance of the printer's copy typescript in establishing a text for a complete edition of *Porius*.

²¹"*Porius Restauratus*," *The Powys Newsletter* 4 (1974-75): 22-44.

"A Certain Combination of Realism and Magic": Notes on the Publishing History of *Porius*

Michael Ballin

Porius was a novel written and published with great difficulty. Powys laboured intensively at it for about seven years at an age when most writers are content to retire. Then he had to face the formidable task of getting publishers to consider the novel at a time when, because of the restrictions of the Second World War, money was scarce and paper supplies restricted. Of course, Powys always wrote expansively and he freely admitted that in *Porius* he had been more than ever prolix; he was prepared for publishers to cut sentences and paragraphs here and there. However, when The Bodley Head required him to jettison five hundred pages and radically revise the whole text, he was more than a little dismayed. Thus, after the novel was rejected in America, Powys wrote to Malcolm Elwin:

I pray I may eventually be published by the Bodley Head. But O prince what labour O prince what industry: for they'll probably return it to old John to cut and old John would greatly prefer to go skylarking off with something different altogether. (24 December 1949)

The labour and industry to which Powys refers were certainly formidable—all the more so when they had to follow such a long expenditure of creative effort in the writing of the novel. Powys's diaries reveal the following history for the novel's composition. On 1 March 1945 he writes, "once more I take out *Porius* which was begun in the second sheepfold on January 18th. 1942, three years, one month and eleven days ago." The diary for 1942 contains a complete list of characters of the novel: it appears as if the overall conception of the work was already in Powys's head. Powys tried to work

steadily each day at the writing of *Porius* and finished the first chapter (to be read to Phyllis Playter) by 6 July 1943. The intervening months were taken up with writing "pot boilers" which Powys hoped would make quick money. They are in typescript form and called as a group *Edeyrnion*. The translation of Rabelais also diverted his energies from *Porius* until early 1944. By 31 May 1945 Powys had written nine chapters of *Porius*; chapters 12 and 13 were written by August 4 of that year and on November 19 he comments on the completion of chapter 14, "my best so far".

Correction of the proofs of *Rabelais* interrupts work on the "Dark Age Romance" in 1946 but in the "Calends" of May he takes out the novel again. By 9 March 1947 he is up to chapter 22 and he composes the Talicessin poems on May 7. On October 16 he decides to alter the last chapter and on 5 November 1948 his imagination is stimulated by inventing what is to be found in the Druid's chamber and underground. This episode is evidently an afterthought. In January 1949 he is at work on the last chapter, the last sentence of chapter 33 written on February 25 of that year.

After years of interrupted and then sustained labours, Powys probably did not want to expend further energies on this same novel. Nevertheless he persevered with great energy in his publishing task and fought albeit a losing battle in his desire to publish the original, complete text. He writes to Malcolm Elwin, 3 July 1950, "when the book is properly accepted and in proof at last it will be a triumph for your old John's savage resilience." This resilience yielded sufficient energy to overcome the practical obstacles and demands of publication; in order to gain a maximum readership for his novel Powys rejected the plan propounded by Norman Denny to go with a private printing of this text for a coterie of Powys admirers. Powys in fact fought manfully to gain a maximum exposure and maximum economic return for his novel. The latter Powys needed at a time when he was living in straitened circumstances in North Wales but he fought also for the ideology and the structure of *Porius*.

The important revelation contained in Powys's correspondence with the critically hostile Norman Denny and the sympathetic Malcolm Elwin is that *Porius* was an act of self definition for its author and a determined act of spiritual defiance against the political circumstances of World War II and the philosophical values of the mid twentieth century. In writing a "Romance of the Dark Ages" set in 499 A.D., Powys provides the reader not only with a romantic narrative such as could be told by a storyteller around a camp fire¹ but also a text meant to challenge the assumptions of his readers both as regards literary form and world-

view.

The catalyst for this act of conscious redefinition of values was undoubtedly Norman Denny's very critical response to *Porius*, uncompromisingly stated on 4 December 1949. I present a brief survey of the references in Elwin's and Denny's correspondence which mark the narrative stages in the publication of the novel. Then I wish to analyze those facets of Powys's correspondence which relate *Porius* to contemporary political circumstance and contemporary thought as well as to Powys's own life and spiritual explorations. These latter autobiographical concerns are revealed in the correspondence that concerns the novel's source materials. Finally, there are also statements which give remarkable insights into aesthetic aspects of the narrative, including the relations among myth, history and individual psychology.

On 6 November 1950 JCP wrote to John Moore of Hollywood about finding, at last, a publisher for *Porius*. After admitting to his tendency to write long-winded books he refers to:

My present one called *Porius* though very sensational and in spite of too great a length exciting and full of magic and battles and demons and priests and Druids and poets and heretics has only now after a whole year of restrictive cuttings and shortenings succeeded in finding an English publisher prepared to accept such a long book. But I've got one now at last and the book will come out I hope and pray next summer.

Powys had sustained a twelve-month battle for publication—a battle which began when Schuster in America first refused *Porius*. Powys comments in his 1949 Diary that Schuster's rejection was "serious to our finances". *Porius* was condemned as "indecipherable and overwritten." This rejection called forth Powys's exhausted response "But . . . what labour . . . what industry" (already quoted from the letter to Elwin, 24 December 1949). Powys then turned to The Bodley Head, receiving his negative critical evaluation from Norman Denny on 4 December 1949. The letter called forth from Powys a series of responses in December of 1949, responses which provide a powerful restatement and protest defining the aesthetic and philosophical aims of the novel. Letters to Denny before 1949 also expound defensively on such elements in *Porius* as the use of Welsh names and the incorporation of legendary with historical elements in the text.

At the same time Powys's correspondence with Malcolm Elwin conducted between 1944 and 1949 includes comments on and

descriptions of the narrative process of *Porius*. On 2 September 1950, shortly after beginning negotiations with Macdonalds, Powys writes to Elwin: "I have separated myself from John Lane the Bodley Head . . . my 'Author's Agents' . . . Mr. Laurence Pollinger is now sending my '*Porius*' to your people i.e. to Macdonalds! i.e. to E. R. H. Harvey of 43 Ludgate Hill, London E. C. 4."

On 29 December 1950 Powys writes to Elwin that Harvey of Macdonalds now has the cut version—JCP still has the uncut version (1500 pages). The cut material of 500 pages Powys identifies as the two missing chapters: "The burial of the old Roman Porius Manlius and of Y Bychan." "Y Bychan" contained the discovery by Porius and the "Negroidish Iberian Butler of the 3 Aunties and his childless wife longing for a child inside the mound called 'Y Bychan' [and] the Druid and his curious brother who always behaved as if he were 'enceinte' himself." That the "homunculus" discovered beneath the mound of Y Bychan is the progeny of a male is possible evidence for a profoundly feminine identification on Powys's part. However, JCP seems to have yielded to the pressures of his publishers sufficiently at this stage to state that the cut passages were not significant to the novel and were redundant—redundant perhaps to the narrative of *Porius* at the level of the "camp fire" narrator but not to the thematic and mythological levels of the story.

Powys's correspondence with Norman Denny indicates that Powys worked through January at the task of cutting the novel, the complete text of which resided in the United States, since Powys gained two missing pages "from the version now I fancy with Pearn, Pollinger and Higham's agent in New York i.e. Anne Watkins."² On 23 January he writes to Denny: "my purpose and object is to do as you say and reduce the book from 1500 typed pages to 1000 typed pages."

The source of what Powys describes as his "savage resilience" and the "saeva indignatio" that fuels his protests against Norman Denny's criticism is undoubtedly his feeling that the crown of his creative energy was contained in this novel. Thus he writes to Malcolm Elwin on 6 March 1948 about his superstitious application of Druidic numerology in his pagination of the manuscript. Powys tried to make page 2000 end at a significant point in the narrative and so avoids whole numbers, numbering page 1999 from a to q ! His choice of 499 A.D. instead of 500 A.D. follows the same eccentric reasoning and in his 1945 diary Powys comments on 20 October: "Today on Saturn's day I shall describe a Dawn psychically a miracle on the exact date 20 October 499 A.D. of the events I now begin on chapter 14 entitled 'Myrddin Wyllt' to narrate." These occult coincidences encouraged Powys's identification with the

period he was writing about and probably fed fancies of pre-incarnation. But his identification with the events he describes in his narrative is made more meaningfully explicit in his letter to Elwin: "I have been superstitious too---for this romance is my Faustian-Cymric Life's work in one sense for I began it in 1941 & it reverts to some of my earliest boyhood's fancies—about not revealing its name till it was practically finished!" Three significant factors about *Porius* are worth exploring in this letter: the suggestive blend between Goethean symbolism and Welsh mythology; the 1941 date for the novel's inception which relates it closely to World War II and the Wordsworthian link between the elderly and the youthful Powys.

The links between *Porius* and the Second World War are obvious but important to note. Myrddin Wyllt, the historical embodiment of Time, places the Germanic invasion and the feared twentieth century one. The Dark Ages are thus repeated, like a Spenglerian cycle, in 1941; the link between the events of the narrative of *Porius* and the history of the twentieth century is clearly established. The diaries of the 1940's record the progress of World War II with almost daily regularity. "The war makes us all very touchy, jumpy and nervous," Powys complains on 30 January 1942, the year he began to write *Porius*. Further comments link the war with the Dark Ages: "The archbishop of Lyons as in the Dark Ages protects Jewish children from Hitler Herod" (11 September 1942). Powys's conscience was torn by the war; he records Phyllis's admonitions on 30 January 1942 concerning the "necessity of passive resistance, control of avenging spirit." The suicide of Himmler compels him to "ponder on the problem of Good and Evil and the mystery of revenge and the enigma of Justice and the ways of Eumenides" (26 May 1945). On January 31 of the same year Powys comments: "The migration of German people en masse from East to West is like the Dark Ages. The Goths are moving but behind them are others! Others! other races!" *Porius* mirrors, in incident and characterisation, these catastrophic events: for example, in the slaying of the three aunties, Porius's battle with the giant of the Cader, the pacificism of Brochvael and the death philosophy of Medrawd. Powys writes in his diary, "our last atrocity is to drag even Law into the grip of Force" (16 September 1944) and in *Porius* he makes Brochvael quote Aristophanes, "The use of force is the most horrible of all things".

The Edeymion setting is used in Powys's "pot boilers" in a sinister way to reflect war, sacrifice and spiritual despair. Mynydday-Gaer is described as "blacker than the black night of the soul spoken of by St. John of the Cross." One character, Mr. Jones, is preparing a thesis on war guilt and a second character called Orcus

feels that the scenery of Corwen "modulates to a minor key all human self-assertion whether creative or destructive muted to a level of acceptance of life . . . unexacted by hope . . . embittered by despair." Characters like Nesta (the same name is used in *Porius*) suffer "hysterical superstition due to war nerves" or modulate to a Yeatsian indifference to life and death. The war probably aroused a neurotic anxiety in Powys who only gradually calmed himself sufficiently to adopt the deeper philosophical and detached stance of *Porius*, detached from the war by its distant historical setting.

The impact of the two successive invasions of Britain alluded to by Myrddin Wyllt—the Germanic and the future Norman French—was to bury Celtic indigenous culture and myth twice over. Thus Powys wrote to Norman Denny, 6 October 1949, "Well! the deep down purpose of my book (you'll soon see!) is to destroy and blow sky high for good and all the whole of this Frenchified Song of Rolandish Malory Fable so victoriously sentimentalised by Tennyson and the Heathen Welsh gods." The process of recovery of a buried indigenous culture is expressed in *Porius* in terms of the metaphor of Faustian descent. This vertical-spatial metaphor is somehow essential to the conception of *Porius*. The mountain of Y Wyddfa is also a tomb and the novel frequently alludes to underground, Druidic lairs, such as the one beneath the mound of Y Bychan. At the bottom of an abyss is the Celtic "otherworld," posited as a basic and forgotten cultural reality, appointed to reappear and inaugurate a redeemed cultural order for the strife-torn mid-twentieth century.

Powys's early essay on Goethe reinforces the connection between *Porius* and *Faust*; Powys refers in his essay to the homunculus, "the little artificial being created by the patient toil of the pedantic Wagner," as the symbol which proclaims most fully that "Nature is magical not logical" and arouses a "magic-illusionist feeling about life" which first arises "out of the sea-out of the shell-cradle of the mother of Eros." In *Porius*, Powys relates his homunculus to the Welsh Dylan, the sea god; moreover, in expressing his dissatisfaction with the dullness of the second part of *Faust*, Powys comments: "one can only suppose it came from some weight of cosmogonic rubble in the Colossus that a little Celtic quicksilver or a grain of Gothic roguery would soon have transmuted." The magical essence of life thus lies, for Powys, beneath the weight of Northern mythology and French Romance in the underlying Celtic culture of British civilization."

Powys is trying to assimilate Faustian symbolism and Celtic mythology in this novel in order to create a balance between the forces of light and dark, masculine and feminine and heroic and

pacifist psychic attitudes. The nature of Powys's use of Celtic, Welsh mythology is clarified by his comments in a letter to Norman Denny, 28 July 1946; he claims that Pryderi, the hero of *The Mabinogion*, is "the most authentic Welsh god before Merlin or Arthur or Taliessin were brought on the scene." Moreover Julius Caesar or "Jul-Kessar" as he is called in the old Welsh books" tells us that: "all elite Welshmen claim to be descended from Pluto or Dis King of the underworld, in Welsh 'Pen Annwn' or 'Pen Annwfn.'" *Porius* is thus a Faustian descent into the underworld of forgotten Welsh mythology wherein is found what Goethe in *Faust* called "The Mothers," a polyvalent symbol which can be interpreted as the eternal feminine principle. A comment in a letter to Malcolm Elwin suggests that Goethe's symbol was in Powys's mind when he wrote *Porius*; he says that he is able to see from his window in Corwen the mountain "Moel y Fammau", which is "the mountain of the mothers" (6 March 1948). This Cymric mythology has the special value in World War II of providing a model of a culture which had followed the pacific feminine principle over the masculine aggressive one. The pacifist nature of ancient Welsh society is also represented by the use of the term "Cymru," for the Cymru were "brothers" formed as a means of cementing the warring Welsh tribes against a common enemy. Engagement in aggressive defence is thus neutralised by an emphasis on indigenous harmony and fraternal fellow feeling.

The catastrophic world events of 1939-1945 are not the only contemporary references in *Porius*. Powys is equally concerned with a "Weltanschauung" in the Dark Ages which specifically contradicts the philosophical outlook which seemed to dominate negatively the mid-twentieth century. In contrast to his own period Powys tells Malcolm Elwin that the Dark Age period of *Porius* is one "where I [felt] more absolutely at home than in any other world or epoch Past, Present or . . . Future."³ One of its central attractions was a metaphysical outlook unlike the restricted positivism which Powys saw as a malevolently dominant perspective of the contemporary postwar world. Thus, in a letter dated 7 December 1949 to Norman Denny, Powys defined defensively his conception of *Porius*: "You see, my dear friend, this was started as a Book of Marvels and Wonders for such is my own attitude to life still—in defiance of this narrowing down in these days of all the unknown things in the world to the dogmatic positivism advocated today by Prof. Ayres or Ayre is it? in Oxford--'There are more things in Heaven & Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of —' etc etc!"

The historical and psychological narrative of *Porius* is thus complemented by a mythical and magical level, "full of magic and

battles and magic and demons", as Powys said to John Moore, which earns the descriptive title "Book of Marvels and Wonders." Such episodes as the owl-maiden, the homunculus and the giant Cewri are there to preserve a certain attitude to life—JCP's pluralist world view with its belief in a "multiverse" in which there are many possibilities and alternative choices in experience. The word *defiance* is also significant and arresting, a striking manifestation of Powys's energy and determination in asserting his own values offensively as well as defensively against a scientific and philosophical narrowing down of experience to a world of materialist specifics wherein all metaphysical entities are ignored. *Porius* is thus an aesthetically realized world celebrating a relativist pluralism in defiance of the tyranny of logical positivism. *Porius*'s encounter with the realities of Time and Space at the end of the novel allows the reader to experience abstractions of language in sensory terms. Thus Powys asserts the validity of a concept of Time which can include the patterned repetitions within individual and historical experience. In defiance of the hypothetically objecting positivist, Powys both uses Time as a metaphysical concept and dramatises Chronos in a concrete, human, animate image: Myrddin Wyllt.

In this way Powys asserts the validity of metaphysical concepts as realities; the function of magical and romantic elements in *Porius* was therefore not to encourage the reader to escape from reality but rather to force him or her not to close down the possibilities of what is real. For this reason Powys foregrounds in his narrative technique the contiguity of the historical, the physical, the legendary and the magical—a technique which forces the reader to correlate these levels and contain them inclusively in the imagination. The effect is thus to make the giants exist not separately from the human but to coexist alongside them; psychological realism co-exists with imaginative fantasy.

The personal philosophy expressed in *Porius* proceeds from an act of self definition. *Porius* relates in an important way to *The Autobiography*, for it is a creative completion at seventy of what Powys wrote at sixty-one. I make this connection because of the affinities between *Porius* and Goethe's *Faust*. Elwin's letters provide the evidence that Goethe was in Powys's mind and that the second part of *Faust* influenced the direction of Powys's myth-making in *Porius*: I have already mentioned the homunculus, the Mothers and the quest into the Eternal Feminine but Powys valued the mysticism of Goethe's work because it is "Rooted in a curious realism, being a matter of personal experience that gives such integrity to his irrational instincts" and he concludes concerning *Faust* that "this extraordinary poem . . . is nothing less than the

greatest autobiography ever written."⁴ This perception may have encouraged Powys to amplify his own autobiography in *Porius*.

That Goethe composed his second part "sequel" to Part One of *Faust* as an old man in his eighties made the experiential aspect of the myth of special relevance to Powys as he composed his experiential mythology in *Porius*. The metaphysical aspects of *Porius*'s quest—his search for and integration of the feminine principle, his attempts to reconcile Fate, Chance and Necessity with individual freedom, his urge to explore the spatial and temporal aspects of his multiverse—are Powys's metaphysical quests too and they gain integrity in so far as they are so strongly rooted in his own mental and emotional life.

All the more irritating to Powys therefore were Denny's strenuous criticism of those aspects of *Porius* which made it quintessentially Powys's own personal statement of his most cherished values and "life-illusions." However, Powys's response to Denny reveals that these irritations provoked a personal response which contained the pearls of reconfirmed personal conviction and renewed faith in both his philosophical values and aesthetic methods which were related to those values.

Although Denny's criticism of *Porius* hit hard at the literary style, language and mythological content, these criticisms were not entirely groundless. One arguably negative aspect of Powys's prolixity as a writer is occasional over-intrusiveness as narrator and Denny's advice to learn when to keep quiet and give the reader a chance to draw conclusions about narrative action or the inner feelings of characters. Denny is also genuinely appreciative of some unique virtues of *Porius*; for example, he says of the initial chapters that they "were certainly over-long, but none the less there was life and purpose and movement in them, a strange wild landscape peopled with wonderful and weird beings and full of the promise of tremendous things to come." Denny also recognized that only Powys could revise and recreate *Porius* so that the novel could realize this "promise of tremendous things to come." However, having granted so much sensibility to Denny, it is obvious that there were dimensions to the reading experience of *Porius* that Denny could never apprehend because of a specific kind of inflexibility in his response to a work which purposefully disconcerts the expectations of even the current modernist reader. It is particularly the mixture of historical and psychological realism combined with mythological material which demands an especially imaginative flexibility, because historical romance does not generally require such radical shifts in attention between realistic and imaginative modes of experiencing.

For this reason, the Cewri episode was particularly objectionable to Denny; he writes that when he "came to the Cewri episode" it "stuck . . . badly in my gullet." Denny claims he can accept such experience in a dream context: "But being offered it on the same level of reality as the rest of the book, I jibbed badly. All I can say is that I found it not only distasteful but utterly unconvincing." Moreover, Powys was guilty of a major breach in literary decorum, in his view, in giving to imaginary mythological beings an imaginary language. The word *gwork*, spoken by the Cewri, "*acted like an emetic*" (my emphasis). On this question, Denny is particularly severe in his strictures:

I simply do not believe that this ludicrous monosyllable can in any conceivable circumstance mean anything whatever or be anything except a simple onomatotype—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 come to the wonderful and elaborate meaning which you put into the mouth of Drom I could only sit back and laugh.

Powys's linguistic inventions entrenched Denny in his demand that the Cewri be obliterated from the novel. I conclude therefore that he could not accept a mythological presentation of prehistory as operating at the same level of seriousness as the historical and psychological. Denny, after all, was not exposed in 1949 to narrative techniques of writers like William Golding or Gabriel Marquez; these were to come later and Powys anticipates them.

The sense of defiant protest is sounded nowhere so strongly as in the letters in which Powys angrily and uncompromisingly rejects Denny's condemnation of the Cewri and rallies to the defense of their physical reality (rather than their dream status) and their language. Powys's response is testimony to the conscious thoughtfulness as much as unconscious creativity of his writing in *Porius*.

Powys starts his defence by defining his anti-positivist stance. He steadfastly and absolutely refuses to cut out the Cewri or the owl girl, Y Bychan, and the Little One: he strenuously asserts their equal status with the historical levels of his narrative. Especially important is the letter dated 7 December 1949, since episodes such as the Cewri, the owl girl and the events in the mound of Y Bychan surely count among the marvels and wonders which proclaim JCP's defiance of the "narrowing down in these days of all the unknown things in the world." Moreover, Powys had more than

an inkling of the resistance his current public would have to such content:

But I do really know for an absolute certainty —granting fully the faults of longwindedness & repetitiveness etc! — that this book, tho' it may very easily be entirely rejected by all publishers of this particular generation . . . because of this generation's particular passion for the verifiable & the positively scientific AS AGAINST the great huge vast irrational Multiverse of thousands of Unknown Dimensions

Although the syntax of this sentence appears to founder at this point Powys's sense is reasonably clear: "The Mysterious Boundless Universe or Multiverse Full of Marvels and Wonders" will come round again, fulfilling a Spenglerian cultural pattern and will speak to a future generation more sympathetically than to one Powys denominates as "the sort of electric-lit Research Laboratory at the end of the Tube Station that the fashion of the present generation alone allows!" Such statements, substantiating the notion that *Porius* was written as an act of defiance against twentieth century scientific and positivist models of experience, confirmed Powys in his defiantly firm opposition to the cutting of the "fantastic" elements in his novel. He declares roundly to Denny, "Tis a Too sweeping Censorship my dear to cut out all Marvels and Wonders from Historic romances . . . I treat them as real not as dreams & who can dogmatically be sure they're not real OR never happened?" Although Powys *is* willing to cut out some of the prosaic aspects of the novel—in spite of his arguing the validity of passages of dullness in an epic work as being like "blank spaces [which] assist the reality of a book and the imaginative weight"—he will not even *hear* "about giving up the Cewri or their language or the Owl-girl & her flights!" Powys also defends the Cewri language by explaining that his *gwork* is close to both the cry of the ravens and the sounds of many Welsh words. The latter, he asserts, are not ridiculous to their native speakers who share Powys's anti-positivist stance: "I wouldn't be at all surprised if some of our modern expressions . . . scientific or otherwise . . . wouldn't make them . . . these old wonder-workers and wonder-seers and miracle-mongers laugh!" *Porius* was thus written in the context of a linguistic and cultural tradition which lives with the mythical levels of experiences and perceives them as an integral part of reality. It is for this reason that the magical elements belong with the historical: because they are part of an ancient cultural tradition which Powys pits equally defiantly against

French Romance *and* modern science. *Porius* was after all the culmination of a long ambition to write a great Welsh novel and the presence of the supernatural and mythological in it is part of its "Welshness," Powys's tribute to an essential aspect of Celtic culture.

The use of Welsh words and Welsh names is integrally connected also with Powys's purpose to defy French and modern traditions enunciated in his scornful references to the "Frenchified Song of Rolandish Malory Fable," already quoted. For this reason Powys goes back to the Four Branches of the Mabinogion, which he regards as superior to Irish legend and unique in literature. Powys acknowledges his debt to "the great Miss Weston as T. S. Eliot did in his notes for 'Wasteland' in her 'From Ritual to Romance'" (Letter to Denny, 6 October 1949). *Porius* is thus a modernist book turning from traditional literary conventions to anthropological data in order to create an anti-modernist reality.

Powys returns again to the role of language in helping to create this reality: "You see old friend and new, how the Welsh names and Welsh words in all their uncouthness are essential to make the story real and without them the reality thins out; thins away—vanishes into thin air." Powys's use of "real" and "reality" is a testimony to the concern for authenticity of experience rendered by means of a use of language which encouraged breadth and flexibility in the sensibility of the reader.

Powys's renewed consciousness of the effects of language is a noticeable theme in typescript and diary materials of this period. For example, the character John Gaunt in the "pot boiler" *Edeyrnion*, who is seventy years old and probably Powys's surrogate in the narrative, comments on language: "when you find a word for a thing and say it to yourself often enough, the thing comes alive and comes so alive it can stand between you and all your trouble." Gaunt later asserts that the Welsh god Bran "exists through language." Powys thus opposes the creativity of language which markedly contrasts with a positivist distrust of language and its abstractions.

Powys at this time was conscious of modernist crisis and the way language was involved in that crisis. He comments in his diary of 1945, in connection with the bomb at Hiroshima, "words suddenly become of Planetary and Cosmogonic importance" (August 7). Powys's recognition of the issue "Is the human race going to commit Hari-Kari? and did the end of the war mean the end of the race?" is recorded on August 7; on August 4 he had finished chapters 12 and 13 of *Porius*.

Despite this deep sense of crisis, Powys says on December 31 that, unlike Phyllis Playter, he "has not ceased to believe in Progress." That belief seems to be based on a faith in the power of

language to create and enlarge perceptions and values rather than in any theistic or political faith. Powys's demands upon the reader in *Porius* are thus placed in a context of a need for a radical therapy of human sensibility. More specifically, language and narrative technique demand an imaginative response which can accept the magical in terms of the "real" and the "real" in terms of the magical. Mythic episodes—the owl-girl, the Cewri, Y Bychan—were not meant to be taken as separate from the battle against Colgrim or the psychological experiences of Moryfdd, Brochvael and *Porius*.

Powys does use the term "background" about his deployment of the supernatural: "My story is about a group of quite ordinary mortals with the Background of these supernatural creatures just as we are today with our background of these crazy notions about—well! you know!" (6 September 1949). Later in the same letter Powys repeats this idea: "But you see my dear friend 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—such is *Porius* a Brythonic Heracles but with a quick and enquiring mind and his cousin and betrothed Moryfdd and his cousin and Brother in Arms." There is a difficult and deceptive paradox in Powys's assertion that he is the campfire story teller presenting an exciting adventure story. *Porius* is far from being that and the experience of most readers does not accord with the view that it can be responded to on a naive level. But there is truth in what Powys is claiming; there is psychological realism in the presentation of character and action—realism which must be transferred to the mythological "background," however. Since the "foreground" of the narrative is psychologically real, the "background" is no dream—Powys fought such an approach fiercely against Norman Denny's comfortable approach. It is easier to relegate the unconscious levels of experience to the unconscious and thus dispose of them.

JCP insists in his September 6 letter to Norman Denny that the supernatural background of his narrative is an expression of a distinctively personal view of reality, rooted in Powys's own biography and psychology. Powys writes:

So I've let loose in this book all my most intimately privately personal degeneracies and prides and wickednesses and intense reactions and envious perverted optimisms and mania for a certain combination of realism and magic and a return in fact thickened out of course by what clue words from the more daring metaphysical systems and psychic experiences of my own psychological illuminations from

books and most of all my own secret adult anti-psychoanalytical heathen unscientific tricks I've picked up by nature as I've gone along to my peculiar world of "giants and fairies and enchanters" and "monsters of the night"—in which I was so thrillingly happy at the age of 7-8-9-10 in fact before I was in school.

Porius, a novel written towards the end of Powys's life, is thus related to his earlier life and to his own psychological view of the world—a view defended most clearly in the phrase "a certain combination of realism and magic." What is cut out of the abridged text of *Porius* is thus not only thrilling, original and imaginative attitudes but a view of reality. In *Porius* this combination is presented to the reader in a uniquely compressed manner. Temporal compression in the narrative is the product of Powys's own dislike of the conventional handling of time in historical fiction. He writes on September 6, "I hate in semi-historical novels all that damned passing of historic time!" Paradoxically, in a novel which readers like Denny condemned for prolixity, there is intense compression of narrative in time, the five days of the action telescoping not only history and narrative action but the alternations between realistic and mythic levels of the action. I will conclude by pointing out one final paradox: Powys compressed time in *Porius* realistically but expanded it mythologically through the character of Merlin who, as Cronos, dramatises Time and History in one character.

Wilfrid Laurier University

Notes

¹ "I am born -Camp-Fire or a Cave-Fire Story-Teller-with a gift for narrating or even of chanting my interminable story-without heed even to chapters and far less paragraphs!" JCP to Norman Denny 6 October 1949. Denny had complained about Powys's lack of paragraphing.

² Letter to Norman Denny, 9 January 1950

³ 6 March 1948

⁴ Essay on Goethe, Texas holograph typescript.

Letters on the Publication of *Porius*

I present a selection from the correspondence which I have discussed. First I present Norman Denny's letter containing his objections to the complete text of Porius in full and also in full the letter dated 7 December 1949 which presents Powys's almost immediate response. I follow with a selection from the letters to Malcolm Elwin which elaborate on Powys's special feeling for the historical period of the Dark Ages; then a letter discussing the relationship between myth and history and another on the passages which were cut from the published text.

Direct transcription of JCP's letters can be problematic. I have attempted to preserve as much of the visual impact of the letters as is practical, given the limitations of a typeset, justified, standardized page. (Perhaps in a longer correspondence, further regularization might be appropriate, but the impact and energy of these documents resides partially in their singularities.) Double underlinings are indicated by words underlined and italicized, triple underlinings by words in bold type and underlined. Two dots, . . . , indicate my excision, three, . . . , or for that matter any larger number, Powys's own punctuation. Some spatial/typographical oddities, such as running words together or isolating punctuation marks, are retained, as are a few misspelled words. Given Powys's consistently idiosyncratic punctuation, editorial use of sic seemed likely to be distracting rather than clarifying.

--MB

4 December, 1949.

My dear John,

I have got to write to you now about "Porius," although I have not finished correcting the typescript. I had intended to wait until I had read the whole of it before I told you of the strictures and very grave misgivings that have been accumulating in my mind. But I find I cannot do this. I have got to tell you now, absolutely frankly, and you must forgive me, John, and realise how distressed I am. You must forgive the typewriter, too. I am using it because I have so

much to say, and can get it down on the machine more quickly.

At first - at the time when I sent you back those opening chapters - I was full of hope. It was a slow opening, and those chapters were certainly over-long, but none the less there was life and purpose and movement in them, a strange wild landscape peopled with wonderful and weird beings and full of the promise of tremendous things to come. I continued to feel like this up to the point in the story where Porius reaches Brother John's cell. I felt that it was tremendously good (although I also felt that it would have been better still if it had been a good deal shorter) - so good that one must overlook its defects, and the facts that in these days it could not be expected to find very many readers, for the sake of its peculiar and unique virtues.

But then, for me at anyrate, it began to go downhill. You widen your canvas, as you were bound to do: but in doing so you seem to be resolved to slow up and obscure and entangle the progress and movement of your story in every conceivable way - by homilies, dissertations, diversions of all kinds - 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. There is indeed an immense amount of sheer self-indulgence in the book. You seem to be determined to reverse the old and sound precept that the secret of story-telling is to know what to leave out, and to be determined to see how much you could possibly bung in, regardless of the fact that in doing so you defeat your own object by hiding the wood under the trees.

There is another practice of storytelling which you entirely ignore, and it is the trick of knowing when to keep quiet - in other words, when to let your story and your characters speak for themselves, without any commentary or elaboration or explanation or embellishment or any other form of intrusion on the part of the author, so that the reader has a chance to see for himself what they are, and the thing that is happening for what it is. You seem to assume throughout that your reader is a witless loon who can be trusted to see nothing, to grasp not even the simplest implication; that everything must be pointed out to him, elaborated, embroidered, repeated and endlessly explained. But it is simply not true. The type of people who might be expected to be attracted to

this book - there can't be many of them - are not so stupid. They know a hawk from a handsaw. Show them your picture faithfully, and they are capable of interpreting it. They can only be exasperated by your endless attempts to make everything clear.

The tragedy is that embedded in this mountain of verbiage there really is a book, a story, beings worth meeting and things worth saying - if only one could get at them through this torrent of words. You are the Old Man of the Sea, John, riding on your story's back, driving it under, never giving it a chance to live and move and breathe. I kept on thinking as I read and corrected the thousands of errors of paragraphing and punctuation, was that the kindest thing I could do for you was, without saying anything to use my pen as a surgeon's knife and cut away all that huge layer of adipose tissue - prune out five or six hundred pages - so that the structure underlying it, the real guts of the book, might be revealed. But I could not do this, not only because I cannot spare the immense amount of time that would be required, but in any case because I doubt my own competence. No one but you could have written this book, and no one but you can alter it - that is to say, if you can!

I had been thinking a lot about this before, for reasons which I shall come to in a minute, I suddenly decided that I must write you this letter. After all, I have to advise the Bodley Head, as faithfully as I can, about what is to be done with the book. As it stands, I do not think any publisher would consider it a commercial proposition. What matters is not that it is long, but that it is so very much too long for its length that I do not think it would hope to find many readers, and published at a commercial price would simply result in a serious loss of money. So there seemed to me to be two alternatives - either to cut the book down to about 1,000 pages, which I am convinced would enormously improve it, or else to resort to some such publishers dodge as a limited edition at a very high price, designed for the select body of your admirers. I was going to write to you, when I had finished working on the book, and before sending it to the Bodley Head, to find out what you thought about this.

I was considering these points as I went on reading the book, and trying to put off making up my mind until I had come to the end. But then I came to the Cewri episode. I should have to do a lot of talking, I think, to explain to you all the reasons why this stuck so badly in my gullet. The purpose of the episode is clear, and if you had presented it as a kind of erotic vision - a wild wet dream! - I

might have been able to accept it. But being offered it on the same level of reality as the rest of the book, I jibbed badly. All I can say is that I found it not only distasteful but utterly unconvincing.

It broke the spell of the book, which until then had never quite failed, in spite of all your wordiness, and it shook me badly. None the less I toiled on into the heart of that interminably long study in still-life and meditation, 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"!

I had not cared for any of the samples of the Cewri language which you had offered, and which I take to be a sort of jabberwocky of your own invention. The beauty of Carroll's words is that they convince you instantly that they must mean something, whereas this lingo of yours has on me precisely the opposite effect - 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 onomatopoe--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.

That was when I decided that I must write you this letter. It did not matter about my being angry with you, John. I could be exasperated with you and your infernal jabber-jabber to the point of fury, and still go on working on the book and seeing the good that was in it. But once I started to laugh at it I had to stop.

So what is to be done? For what it is worth, this is my advice:-

I would advise you to regard the book as unfinished - simply as a first draft heavily encumbered with the redundant material that one expects to find in the first draft of any novel, and that the workmanlike novelist proceeds to weed out. I think you should now tackle this weeding-out process, and drastically and remorselessly cut it down to round about 1,000 pages of typescript.

Secondly, I would advise you to cut out the Cewri, lock, stock and barrel, simply because I don't believe anyone is going to

swallow them. Their incursion into the story is in any case a colossal irrelevancy. They have nothing to do with anything or anyone in it except Porius. Away with them! Porius must have his experience, and you must achieve your erotic imagery, in some other way - perhaps in the form of a dream.

If you feel like trying this, then I will gladly give all the help I can. Don't misunderstand me, John. I have done nothing but attack the book in this letter, but what I am attacking is certain specific faults (as I hold them to be) and not the thing as a whole. I don't for one moment regard it as worthless or hopeless. I'm simply trying to prevent you from ruining what may yet be a very fine book, and one that I can honestly recommend to the Bodley Head.

If, however, you don't feel able to tackle this admittedly formidable task, then I think I had better send the book to Greenwood, saying simply that I am not happy about it as it stands and that I should like him to get another opinion, or half-a-dozen. You may in any case feel that you would like to hear what someone else says before making any decision. And if I am over-ruled I shall be delighted.

Well, I think that's all. You must let me know whether you would like me to return the typescript to you or send it to London. Whatever happens, if the book is published I think it will certainly need the Argument and the list of characters I asked you to do.

My dear John, this has been a hellish letter to have to write. You will not need to be told that my quarrel with your book has no bearing at all upon my feeling for you. Indeed, it is my affection that has made me so cross with you - because I would have liked to do nothing but praise it.

Your friend

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merioneth shire
N.Wales
Dec. 7
1949

My dear Norman,

Sure! We can quite naturally & easily, you & I separate literary differences completely from our personal affection. Well! I'll be as brief & clear as I possibly can. 1. Nothing wd, my dear friend, induce me, or make me leave out the Cewri, or make them a dream, or tamper with them as they are here in any way.

Nothing also wd induce me, persuade me, or make me, leave out or turn into anybody's dream, the Miracle of the Owl-Girl Blodeuwedd worked by Myrddin Wyllt at the entombing in that great field of the Prince and the Owl's flapping over the violated grave of Teleri that scared them all so!

I won't launch into a metaphysical or mystical or even a poetic-imaginative defence of this element of the marvellous in this book. I'll only say that in these things I really am a "Medium" and that my autumn of the year 499 A.D. is my vision of what Reality really was then to the people of that Age. To leave out Marvels & Wonders wd. be to make the whole thing false, to make it ring untrue & unreal, to make it a tiresome & tedious transferring of our present pseudo-scientific & narrowly exact scientific attitude to life & the cosmos into the brains of the people of that time—which wd. make the whole business unreal & untrue. You see, my dear friend, this was started as a Book of Marvels and Wonders for much in my own attitude to life still—in defiance of this narrowing down in these days of all the unknown things in the world to the dogmatic positivism advocated today by Prof Ayres or Ayre is it? in Oxford.

—"There are more things in Heaven & Earth Horatio, than are dreamt of—" etc etc!

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 (I may possibly enclose it!!) 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 as funny and ridiculous don't make them laugh & I wouldn't be at all surprised if some of our modern expressions . . . scientific or otherwise . . . wouldn't make them . . . these old wonder-workers and wonder-seers and miracle-mongers laugh! Of course I do fully plead guilty to being verbose & wordy & repetitious etc & all that sort of dullness and surplusage I am fully ready to cut out—but NOT a word about the Cewri & not a word about the Owl-Girl & not a word about Y Bychan or the Little One & not a word about those incantatory premonitions of the Battle of Camlan! For think this is a Book that aims at catching the actual real atmosphere—as the

people in those days felt that atmosphere—of that last year of the 5th. Century. I tell you my dear I am a MEDIUM and I was there—even as Bunyan was fleeing from the City of Destruction or that Obsessed Dante himself was

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura
Che la diretta via era e cosa dura
questa selva selvaggia ed aspra e forte,
Che nel pensier vinova la paura!

"Oscar Wilde he was there!" as an old lewd ditty in Yeovil used to run!

or Captain Abner with his harpoon in the side of the Impossible White Whale . . . or Doughty that more long-winded Pundit than our old John himself saw Allah knows what High Jinks of an unearthly kind(?) in the Desert!

No but seriously Norman . . . I'm not a conceited chap nor a vain one nor heaven is my witness! even a proud one. But I do really know for an absolute certainty —granting fully the faults of longwindedness & repetitiousness etc! —that this book, tho' it may very easily be entirely rejected by all publishers of this particular generation—how long is a generation, eh?—well!—say 30 years?—because of this generation's particular passion for the verifiable & the positively scientific AS AGAINST the great huge vast irrational Multiverse of thousands of Unknown Dimensions in which I am as convinced as I am —and more ! —that my name is John! But I know that the Mysterious Boundless Universe or Multiverse Full of Marvels and Wonders and of occurrences completely unexplicial (sic) by any modern science . . . will come back again . . . & be again much more like what I have found (as a Medium) in 499 round the Gaer here Cewri & owl-girls & Myrddin Wyllts & Y Bychans and all!! than the sort of electric-lit Research Laboratory at the end of the Tube Station that the fashion of this present generation alone allows! Tis a Too sweeping Censorship my dear to cut out all Marvels and Wonders from Historic Romances

I treat them as real not as dreams & who can dogmatically be sure they're not real OR never happened? Well!! anyway in the world I've always lived in & shall always live in till I'm dead. And I've never felt I tell you my dear Norman more entirely at home than in Cerwen of 499 AD. Well! enough of that -And now to business O No I do not at all like -indeed I here & now totally refuse such a solution!—the idea of having the book sent to other readers for Greenwood's consideration. You are Greenwood's sole reader as far as I am concerned—Nothing wd induce me to have the book sent to

any other Bodley Head reader save you or to accept the advice & help of any other Bodley Head reader but you. It would be a hell of a business to cut it considerably—but if I were sure & certain of its being published—say within a year of my doing that—I COULD shorten it to about a thousand typed pages going clear through it and cutting out repetitions & redundancies and tedious and dull pages & passages and even large segments of whole chapters—certainly I could do this although I am myself but then that's a matter of very personal taste that certain longueurs (if that's the Frenchy word?) & what in a building would be blank spaces actually assist the reality of a book and the imaginative weight and poetic massiveness and projected solidity and lasting-ness of a book. As I say I'm not conceited or vain or proud but I've a passionately Bookish Vampirizer & Imitator & absorber and an intensely Mediumistic worshipper of the great old books and I agree with Goethe's saying that if a writer is worth his salt what links him to his own age is not his strength but his weakness! Well I'll think about it all a little longer—I mean not about giving up the Cewri or their language or the Owl-girl & her flights!!—but I will think a little longer about undertaking to go thro' it cutting cutting cutting & making it really considerably shorter. But I wouldn't care to undertake this labour unless I were sure that it would be accepted for certain & not only so but published within at least a year of its acceptance.

P.S. I'll go on with this list of characters & this brief Historic Argument & get it off to you you quickly & untyped so you can cut it or add to it or change it which will be a clear gain whatever by [Postscript indecipherable here]

I enclose for your entertainment an essay on knowledge in the current number of "Y Fauer" our most high-brow Welsh paper-& all these matters apart I am ever yr. afftn old John.

[After some heavily inked-over marginalia Powys then writes:]

Here I've cut out a few Cewri obscenities! Try with a wry face pretending its a tale by one of your boys, if you can swallow the Cewri & owl-girl Miracle!)

[The following letter from Malcolm Elwin presents more information about the writing of Porius and Powys's relationship to the Dark Age period. I interpret Powys's comments about "mediumship" in the letter to Denny metaphorically: I think the concept enabled Powys to achieve a sense of the "presentness" of the past for himself, psychologically, and—for the

reader—through language and grammatical tense.]

Letter to Malcolm Elwin 6 March 1948 [Extract]

I have been superstitious too for this romance is my Faustian-Cymric Life's work in one sense for I began it in 1941 & it reverts to some of my earliest boyhood's fancies—about not revealing its name till it was practically finished!—It's called PORIUS a name which is the one sole historical document existing from this exact date this year 499 A.D. only this is not a document exactly but one of a few words on a stone!

. . . I've decided to shake off my Pythagorean superstition of numerology by which I was really crippling my invention at the end of the Romance of mine about Corwen in 499 A.D. & just not care how the pages or chapters fall! I mean what will be my last page of my last chapter or the last day or my last week etc. etc. etc.! I've therefore resolved to let page 2000 in my sprawling and crawling & drooping & scrooping & burrowing & exploding and whirling and vanishing and floating in space hand.

Another most curious and odd thing about my Romance of the Dark Ages where I feel more absolutely at home than in any other world or epoch Past, Present or if I may say (& it is permitted in a sense considering the tales of the Future world that we have !) this Future-is that though I have already gone beyond 2000 pages I have only taken five days or rather four nights & two separate halves of a day Yes two halves-i.e. one evening and one morning but cannot say like God the evening & morning were the fifth day for they were these halves divided from each other by the whole Friday Saturday and Sunday!! Well! you'll be thinking soon my friend that much reading of Larry Sterne has gone to my well-balanced head!

So the result of all this is that I simply Malcolm, my dear friend can't stop so I pile "inset" on "inset" & after having exhausted our alphabet exhaust the alpha/beta/gamma/delta one down to omega so that poor Mrs Meech of 24 High West St. is now having to keep in due succession the maddest sequence of insets & to bring some sort of order and some sort of series that follows intelligently the story and makes sense of the long long parentheses that go winding & winding & winding like wounded dragon-worms up & down these hills and waterfalls and old Roman roads & this isn't fooling my friend! It's literally true -such pages as 1999q sigma inset 13 & 1999 q psi inset 15.

From this graphic description of the holograph text of Porius Powys turns on 27 December 1950 to a discussion of the relation of myth and history in Porius. He is responding to Elwin's suggestion that he supply a map for

the setting of the novel. Powys describes the idea as having "difficulties & dangers . . . the whole Geography or Topography of Porius is my own invention very craftily and very cunningly (during all these years since 1942) adjusted to certain known spots and places & persons with a good deal of imaginative straining not only of "Space" - I mean of certain very ancient traditional places & certain pre-historical Rivers Mountains and Lakes—but also of "Time"—I mean the possible conceived approximate DATES when certain demi-semi-historical-mythological figures flourished alive on this corner of the globe — and also I must add of historical veracity and verifiability touching that perilous borderland between history & mythology which has been dealt with in some of the editions of Lempriere's by separating into sections 1. Geography. 2 History 3 Mythology! . . .

. . . it has taken me an intensive study of our old Welsh authorities & their old editions of the Mabinogion & the Histories combined with the Scholarly New Commentaries on early Welsh traditions & Semi-Histories such as Sir John Lloyd's History & Sir Ifor Williams preface to Aneirin "Goddoden" etc etc etc to which . . . I have been casually & carelessly (though very intensely) addicted for the last ten years that is before as well as after I started my own Inventions and Imaginary Constructions of the Chaotic Confusion of mixed legends & exciting demi-semi-quaver mythological pseudo-quasi-pre-historic history!

.....

You see we Englishmen of letters & students of historical documents & of archaeology — see Collingwood & Myers' Roman Britain (a book I have never read and never want to read) for what fascinates me is the - how the hell shall I put it? —the "psychic aura" —no—that sounds a bit too much like dear Annie Besant and even more like the formidable (if less dear to me!) Madame Blavatsky! No! not "psychic aura" for what I am struggling to express isn't exactly "mystique" as they call it now a days— it is much realler truer more material, more actual than that—how the devil can I express it to you my dear friend but you will get my meaning for you've been so wise in your handling of Hayden whom I felt to be a real fellow spirit of mine in his desire to be a Medium for the large, gigantic misty, not mystical obscure, cloudy, titanic, difficult to catch (tho not no not merely "psychic") heavily- moving lumberings of the—what did you say Redwood said? of the—Zeit-Geist ! isn't it?

You see Porius is really a very ambitious attempt to project myself into that actual age — the autumn of the last year of the fifth century and to write as if I were really there— not as if I'd been mugging it up for an exam . . .

And you know how here now in this queer corner of North Wales I

still come on actual tracks and traced (not mystical at all!) of those lost times . . . I had a mad old neighbor now dead who used to talk of "a general" who won a battle against South Wales & very soon, tho' my old oddity had never heard of him (sic) -it turned out without question to have been Gwydion overcoming Pryderi. Now you see I invent the coming of Arthur to that forest near Tysilio and I have invented that Lake . . and I have invented Brother John's cave or cell-and I have invented that cave where the Giant and Giantess hid and half-devoured the body of that boy! You see the family of Cunedda that chief the Romans bought to Edyrnion to drive out the Irish or Gwyddl-Ffychtiaid is historical & their chief descendants were at Deganwy which exists today just as Corwen does but I invent entirely my family of young Porius and [of?] Euronwy his mother. The truth is I chose, my friend, with infinite cunning & with really exquisite care just this particular generation between Saint Patrick whose Latin writings are extant, and Gildas, whose Latin writings are extant—when—(for all the voluble letters to Posterity of the Gaulish-Roman Bishop of Averne and the not less voluble letters to Posterity of that lively secretary of Theodosius the Ostro Goth in Italy) there was not existing one single authentic historical document about Britain not one single one except that Porius Burial-Stone in the hills above Bala Hic jacet Porius in hoc tumulo and even the other words "Christianus" fuit "he was a Christian" have been made out—'tho Sir John Rhys gave in 1882 the proper version -and still they tell me are made out in the present Handbook in Cardiff Museum where the Porius stone now is; leaving a sham stone in its place, because of the military practice and training bombing —made out to mean NOT "he was a Christian" —the lettering is 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 [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"]

You see even the word and the title & dignity "Henog" I borrowed from a book by Timothy Lewis once a "Reader" at Aberystwyth College of the University of Wales I have lost touch with him of late. He was & I hope still is a very daring student of the Mabinogion etc etc. From his conversation too I got the idea of the nearness of that great old Roman Camp at Uriconium-but I shrewdly suspect that the most learned and cautious of the Welsh Scholars would hesitate to commit themselves to the existence of "the Henog from Dyfed" and I daresay would quarrel with Mr. Reader Timothy L. for putting it into his book at all! They do seem however pretty well agreed that

there was one special author of the Mabinogion and that he was a South Walian. And then as to the date of Taliessin and as to the date of Arthur and as to the very existence of the Merlin I invent here mixing up Merlin Ambrosius or "The Immortal" with Merlin Emrys the builder of Stonehenge and "subsuming" both- (& what a pretty tricky craft of theologically scholarly-mythological word "subsume" is! -a sort of euphemism for gobble up alive!-subsuming both under the name of Myrddin Wyllt from "Gwyllt" or "wild") as I say to the very existence of Merlin and the way our French authorities hated to call him Myrddin -do you know why?- because of their French word "Merde" meaning manure I believe! And don't you see the foaming hodge podge of bitter academic quarrels that this whole subject of this epoch of history stirs up and although a map would in one way be all you say it might bring down on me & on the Publisher all the fury ... of the most difficult and contrarious and controversial epoch in the whole history of the world and it is just because Nobody Knows that I selected this epoch to get a free hand-Well! I must really stop! But its the almost irresistible temptation of the two blank maps -that set me off & at such length too! Love to Eve from us both —

[Powys's marginalia here include references to "my acrobatic balancings, walkings, & turnings head-over-heels on the Tight Rope between St. Patrick & Gildas" which "might get me and my Publisher in Devil of a Row by so to say pillorying my inventions shameless on high stands unabashed De-Fo as Pope wasn't it described the author of Robinson Crusoe when the theologians got after him?" Another marginal note makes this comment on the geographical setting: "I know of two landlakes that might be Brother John's . . . one of which is Redwood's 'Llyn-Oror' that got him his bardic title of 'Bardd-Oror' at the Powys Eisteddfod but you see, my friend, in then 1400 off years (as you say) the physical geography of a province suffers huge changes ! lakes appear& disappear Nobody knows what Edeyrnion was like then! Only the Cader, only that Peak of Snowdon , only the Gaer, only the River, are left to be sure of!

Friday 29 December 1950 Corwen N. Wales.

It suddenly occurs to me that perhaps Mr. Harvey wd like to know details of this book. My first version was longer than the one you & Mrs. Harvey have read by about 500 typed pages and since both of you have taken such an interest in the book and have read it with such wonderful care and sympathy it now occurs to me that you both ought to know that I shortened it by 500 typed pages. I took for granted that any publisher would be thankful for a book being

shortened & this process did not hurt it. It was originally 1558 typed pages or 1585 perhaps I forget, at this moment of writing the exact number (-but if you or Mr Harvey wd. like to see the whole un-cut book as it originally was, I have got it here and could send it to you by Registered Post. But my own feeling is and I fancy you will agree with me that since I worked at the cut book which you've got & McDonald have [got] very hard for so many months to get it rounded off without those chapters it is just as well to let them bide in my cupboard. But I felt that you & Harvey ought to know of the existence of this un-cut version! And of course some day you both just out of pure interest may like to see it.

But shortened it is to exactly a thousand or rather for Druidic reasons to 999!!! And though I went through it all cutting out entirely two whole chapters. . one about the Burial of the old Roman Porius Manlius under the Porius "Hic jacet in hoc tumulo Christianus fuit" Stone and the other that I entitled "Y Bychan" that I really shortened the book. These two chapters were redundant and were not essential to the development of the story and so they made it much easier for me to cut the book in those 500 typed pages! But if- (see postscript) This "Y Bychan" chapter was about the discovery by Porius & that rather Negroidish Iberian Butler of the 3 Aunties and his childless wife longing for a child inside the mound called "Y Bychan" where the Druid and his curious brother who always behaved as if he were "enceinte" himself with a child! and of whose condition I leave it as a dark suggestion & as one of those local mysteries never really explained -(but that every neighbourhood possesses) that by some old Druidic devilry this Druid's brother did bring into the world . . . an infant who now is promptly adopted on her own by the childless wife of the 3 Aunties dark curly-haired laughing Iberian

Notes on This Issue

This is a *Porius* issue, anticipating the publication (sometime in the next six months) of the complete *Porius*, edited by Wilbur Albrecht, through Colgate University Press. Around this time in 1993 we will no doubt be featuring a section of reviews and discussion treating that long-awaited edition; for the present, Albrecht and Michael Ballin offer two perspectives on the sequence of events that led up to *Porius's* abridgement.

We are also glad to be publishing, with the kind cooperation of Gerald Pollinger, pertinent letters by JCP and Norman Denny, the crucial publisher's reader in this tale of authorial woe. Having worked with Denny's good translation of *Les Misérables* (1976, 1982, currently available from Penguin), the editor of *Powys Notes* can offer a postscript of his own on Norman Denny as literary mediator. Denny writes in his *Misérables*, "the translator's first concern must be with his author's *intention* . . . there is an overriding intention, larger than all others. The author—each and every author—writes because he wants to be *read*." Working from this premise, explains Denny, he has decided to edit and abridge Hugo's inflated prose—in order that Hugo may be read. The consequences are a little peculiar. One thing that goes is "In the year 1817" (a wonderful passage of historical evocation, recently the subject of Alan Spitzer's essay "Reflections on Historical Remembering," *Literature and History*, 1988). Two crucial essays—within-the-novel, on convents and on argot, are relegated to appendixes, as though Denny were offended by Hugo's desire to discuss ideas at length. (I think that the argot essay is as nearly central to the book as anything in it.) Strange and yet somehow comforting to see Denny work with Hugo as he worked with Powys. The combination of intelligent affection and unintentional aggression is compelling.

An Invitation to Our 1992 Conference in New York

Forthcoming issues of *Powys Notes* will include special selections of essays on *Owen Glendower* and on Powys and America. The latter

theme belongs to our 1992 conference, to be held in New York this May. The conference will include presentations by Charles Lock, Constance Harsh, Peter Christensen, and Nicholas Birns, among others. Topics to be covered range from JCP's Greenwich Village days to his lecture career to the American audience of *A Glastonbury Romance* to the Powys/William James connection. The ever-popular panel discussion will also be a prominent feature of the occasion. A flier on the conference will be arriving in your mailbox soon!

Powys and America

New York, May 8-10, 1992

Observations Social and Bibliographic, by the Editor and Others

Bibliomania. John Brebner writes: "I have decided to sell my J. C. Powys collection. . . . The collection includes all of JCP's novels in original publication and many rare items such as *Confessions of Two Brothers*, *One Hundred Best Books*, *Psychoanalysis and Morality*, *The Religion of a Sceptic*, and an uncut edition of *Lucifer: A Poem*. . . . There is also a considerable amount of related material: books of criticism and biography, collections of letters and essays; books, pamphlets and offprints from Kenneth Hopkins, Wilson Knight and so forth. Many of these—including some of JCP's—are signed and/or inscribed by the authors. Of special interest is a holograph letter from John Cowper to his brother Littleton dated "the last day of 1947." As part of the collection I am also offering letters and cards I have received from Phyllis Plater, Kenneth Hopkins, Adelaide Ross (wife to Nicholas), Colin Wilson and G. Wilson Knight. Knight's correspondence dates from 1968 and covers a ten year period during which time he revised *The Saturnian Quest* and worked on *Neglected Powers*. His more than fifty letters are fascinating glimpses into an amazing personality and mind. I wish to sell these materials as a collections rather than individually. Interested parties should contact me for a full catalogue at P.O. Box 3285, Station B, Fredericton, N.B.,

Canada E3A 5H1."

A Chance to Visit Yale (and do some reading there). The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library offers every year short-term Visiting Fellowships, supporting travel to and from New Haven and paying a living allowance of \$1500 per month. The deadline this year was January 15; provident Powysians might try to plan ahead and submit a proposal before January 15 of 1993. The Beinecke contains significant Powys material, much of it neglected. For an application or further information, contact Robert Babock, Coordinator of Fellowship Programs, at 203-432-2968.

Uppsala Exhibition. We acknowledge receipt (via Ben Jones) of Sven Erik Tackmark's catalogue on John Cowper Powys, produced to accompany the Uppsala exhibition held in November and December 1990. More of this fine catalogue, and of other news from Europe, in our next issue.

Kingston Maurward and Dorchester, July 1991: A Report. I arrived in Dorchester a few days before the 1991 conference of the British Powys Society. The town is compact—laid out around the ghosts of the Roman walls, now capacious and shady walks. On the evening immediately preceding the conference, a group of perhaps fifty or sixty people crowded into the main hall of the Dorchester Museum; here Charles Lock lectured on "John Cowper Powys: The Years in Dorchester." Lock's talk combined some vigorous research into matters of genealogy and local history (also evinced in a Lock piece published by the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, "The Powys Family in Dorset") with a highly sophisticated form of theoretical awareness. To some extent, one can take these Lockean excursions as one will: they carry with them an aura of local identification, even local patriotism (The Native Returns); they also offer materials and provocations for debunking identifications between Powys and any discernible Dorset roots. Is it important to connect J. C. Powys, most particularly, with this county? Lock combines, here as elsewhere, the most fascinatingly detailed biographical explorations with hints that these explorations are somehow futile, that the crucial truths about JCP lie elsewhere. It will be interesting to see how Lock's biography of Powys, of which the Dorchester lecture seemed to be a fragment, treats this problem. (A Lock essay published a few days later, in the first *Powys Journal*, purported to explain "Why John Cowper Powys was born at Shirley;" the conjunction of "why" and a stark biographical fact offers similar food for thought.)

Lock also dwelt on questions of libel and linguistic reference. Thinking about Powys in Dorchester turned out to an excellent method of holding on to reference, of separating it from the endless play of . . . as we used to say . . . signifiers. Signifiers, I have discovered, tend to fly around like crazy when I read in bed. Walking is different, a more mobile process but also a more stable one. As I wandered around the neighborhood of *Maiden Castle*: Reference occurred. Language and reality meshed, at least in my exhilarated touristic mind. The most memorable referential opportunities were also the most obvious. No purple prose shall burden the pages of this narrative, reader: Go thou and see Maiden Castle for thyself. I will add only that I managed to get there twice, once, alone, on a sunny day, and once, through a mild fog, in the company of a magnificent continental delegation, French and Swedish, to the conference. A longer expedition, to Mappowder and surrounding locations, was made possible by Michael Everest; I am in his debt, as in the debt of an intricate mazelike countryside where one can drive round and round the same five villages while almost indefinitely postponing arriving at any of them.

The conference was unfailingly pleasant and instructive. One of its highlights, for me, was a paper by Angela Pitt on Katie or Philippa Powys, whose agonizing journals Pitt has studied at length. Glen Cavaliero commented after Pitt's paper that (I quote Cavaliero only roughly) "Katie is the real elemental of the family—and this scared people off: her apparent sexual jealousy, regarding Valentine Ackland for instance, was part of something much larger and more impersonal." This comment is a good quick way of suggesting the interest of Katie, especially for people who suppose they can study, say, JCP in magnificent isolation.

Another highlight was an exhibit at the Dorchester Museum on the Powys family, organized by Louise de Bruin and Frank Kibblewhite. The range of books displayed was exciting. I admired the group of illustrated T. F. Powys editions: John Nash did one, so did someone who was, in my mind anyway, Stanley Spencer's sister (I stand correctable on this matter); there was also a T. F. booklet on Bewick. Other other noteworthy items: Anyone who tries collecting JCP for a while is bound to get interested in inscriptions. (I have not yet seen the recent *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Dedications*, but it ought to contain one or two entries by JCP and there ought to be a supplementary volume of handwritten as opposed to printed dedications, where the

Powyses could also figure.) At all events, there were some wonderful inscriptions here, particularly an expostulation of 1951 (in a copy of *Porius*) to W. F. Parrish. This striking verbal exercise suggests that "all authors must feel, if they're worthy of being printed, that the Perfect Production of a Book like this is no light task now" anymore than when "Rabelais was a Proof Reader as well as an Author, 'En mille maisons, au dedans un grand million de dents noires Travaille en foires et hors foires'—for such teeth since he refuses white ones will be to the end of his days his/the [?] only kind he'll have, wherewith to Bite the Enemies of Freedom, this old book-worm of yours who has learnt the meaning of the word Production." Not quite coherent, I know—though that's partly the fault of my imperfect transcription, but several kinds of food for thought here: Powys links himself with Rabelais, connects teeth (biting, eating, chewing) with the letters of the printing press, associates the press with acts of historical significance, brings out of this net of associations the idea of Production—which deserves in my opinion its capital letter. There's a poem here: Could someone unravel it for me? (See also Albrecht and Ballin, in this issue, for more on how Powys learnt the meaning of Production!)

News of the terrifying contentiousness of the British Powys Society occasionally reaches us in North America; however, while this conference was full of strong personalities, they all behaved admirably, at least in the views afforded to this correspondent. It was hard to be in anything but a good mood at Kingston Maurward Agricultural College. The phrase "Agricultural College" does not suggest the beauty of the gardens on this former country estate. These gardens (including an excellent clump of palms and other rather tropical vegetation) may be more recent than they appear; a waitress at a local Indian restaurant told me that her father had been involved in bulldozing the declivity where the current lake lies. Recent or no, the gardens are well-conceived and superbly kept up (apparently by the students). Even the food at Kingston Maurward was pretty good. The French delegation was thrilled to be eating lamb with mint sauce, surely an authentic English experience, they maintained. The North American delegation was thrilled to get quite frequent drinks from the bar, though one unfortunate byproduct of this last activity was an unnecessary breakage of spectacles on the final night of the conference. On several subsequent days I stalked through parts of Dorset and Somerset in dark glasses, unintentionally frightening people, especially at dusk.

The conference also included distribution of the first issue of the *Powys Journal*, nicely produced and featuring some items which will be of urgent interest to all Powysians—most spectacularly, a generous piece of the hitherto-unpublished *Edeyrnion*. There are now four periodicals—that I know of—devoted to the literary activities of the Powys family: the *Powys Review*, now the most venerable such publication in print!, the *Powys Journal*, the *Newsletter* of the British society, and the lone North American contribution, *Powys Notes*. Is there enough money and material for all of these to keep going? Writing as someone who longs for the days when major cities could and did support nine or ten daily newspapers. I hope so.

As I have made this narration a personal one, perhaps I can be excused for closing with one more autobiographical excursus. Following the Kingston Maurward conference, I spent a few days in Somerset. Again, reference occurred. Susan Rands kindly helped me locate some crucial *Glastonbury Romance* locations. Powys's evaluation of Glastonbury is apt. The town is a magnet for lies, a tourist trap for believers, and—marginally but effectively—a den of malcontents (only a few miles away, the Wellsians play croquet on the Bishop's lawn—but I am sure they have nightmares about Glastonbury, whose inhabitants terrorized them during Monmouth's brief heyday). Rands (like Lock and a few other Powysians I know) is working on libel, a subject I'm increasingly convinced might bring us close to the greatness of *A Glastonbury Romance*, could we find the right way of thinking about it.

In another patch of Somerset, Eve and John Batten were enormously hospitable and informative. In company with the Battens and Peter Durman, a Powysian of genuinely distinguished architectural knowledge, I toured the area around Montacute—the setting for *Wood and Stone*, as well as for some fine essays by Llewelyn—essays I hadn't, I'm ashamed to admit, previously read (see particularly *Scenes from a Somerset Childhood*) but which the Battens convinced me were very powerful indeed. At one point I found myself in Wash Lane (Splash Lane, in *Wood and Stone*), inspecting a sort of marking-stone that stuck up through the pavement. Peter suggested that this stone was originally an estate marker. At all events this specific object figures unmistakably in *Wood and Stone*, as the hiding-place for a ring. (See also JCP's letter to Llewelyn, 15/16? October 1914: "I must write to Theodore, that fixed Pillar in Wash Lane.") It would be absurd, I suppose, to put a blue plaque or a bronze one on this object—and yet, there it stands, liable to be

smashed by a Volvo at any moment. My companions evinced concern over the health of the fixed Pillar, even apart from the threat of stray Volvos. Because of the pavement, "soluble salts are being forced up through the stone." This sounds destructive and I'm against it. What does one do? I took a picture.

