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A PARADIGM OF "KNOWINGS":
NARRATIVE CONTROL IN SELECTED WORKS
OF JOHN COWPER POWYS

by

James W. Ryan, B.A.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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ABSTRACT

Powys rejects the possibility of a comprehensive explanation of the universe. To accommodate this sceptical, and highly subjective, approach, Powys creates a controlling, if aberrant, third-person narrator to relate and comment upon his characters' thoughts and actions. This paradigm of "knowings" allows Powys to maintain a sceptical perspective while making meaningful statements about human existence.

Chapter One sets up a framework for the discussion of narrative control and stresses the need to avoid prescriptive critical approaches. Chapter Two, on Ducdame, focusses on the "psychic biography" of Rook Ashover and Chapter Three discusses "psychic history" in A Glastonbury Romance. Chapter Four studies how narrative control in Weymouth Sands is particularly applicable to the central themes of the novel.

To attempt to express it (Life) in plain, blunt prose would be to attempt to express logically, rationally, argumentatively, what is always killed and blown to bits by logic, reason, argument. (DR, p.22)

He describes her works as "organically, not grammatically or philologically obscure" (DR, p.21) and defends her use of the stream-of-consciousness technique by stating:

if there were not so many passages that the frivolous could call "dull" this realism would not work its gradual, its insidious, its saturating spell upon our minds. (DR, p.45)

Powys's attack on Richardson's detractors provides insight into his own stylistic choices. Like Dostoievsky and Richardson, Powys believes that lengthiness is an essential characteristic of psychologically realistic fiction. Only in the lengthy and extended work can the subject matter be effectively woven into a text. Exalting Richardson's accomplishment, he places her among

the company of writers who, like Dostoievsky, are not limited to what is called "the art of the novel," but who are concerned with digging at the roots of the great mystic Mandrake that grows in the Cimmerian land beyond sun and moon. (DR, pp.44-45)

These statements, which are echoed and embellished in his non-fictional prose and letters,⁶ demonstrate Powys's concern

⁶ Powys felt that it was more important to touch the reader than create a stylistically perfect novel. See "Dostoievsky" in Visions and Revisions (London: Macdonald, 1955), pp.181-195. "Perhaps the most marked effect he has is to leave one with the feeling of a universe with many doors; and not a few terrifyingly dark passages; but a universe the opposite of 'closed' or 'explained'."

Also in the same essay, he says: "The books that are the most valuable... create a certain mood ... the temper of which no surprise can overpower." In a letter of Oct. 5, 1944 in Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson (London: Macdonald, 1958), p.160, Powys stresses the need for length to create a scaffolding for his story so that he can "let the chance moment have its way ... (thus his stories are) at the best, Mediumistic, and at the worst both silly and dull!"

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distasteful to some readers. Citing the careless use of hyperbole, repetition, exhausting parentheses, and enormously long sentences, Coates remarks that these criticisms can not be dismissed as incidental and suggests that the careful reader should question why these supposed faults exist.

In an effort to combat the misapprehensions which have led to inhibited readings of John Cowper Powys, I will build upon the combined critical efforts of those writers who have sought to provide an overview of Powys's canon and to establish his reputation as a novelist. The most important names in this list are G. Wilson Knight (The Saturnian Quest, 1964), H.P. Collins (John Cowper Powys: Old Earth-Man, 1966), John A. Brebner (The Demon Within, 1973), Glen Cavaliero (John Cowper Powys: Novelist, 1973), and C.A. Coates (John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape, 1982).¹¹ From this list, Glen Cavaliero's study is the most pertinent to my research because of his lucid discussion of Powys's language and style. Continuing on from Cavaliero's work, I will attempt to respond to negative criticisms of Powys's art through a close textual analysis of

¹¹ G. Wilson Knight's The Saturnian Quest (1964) is a pioneer work which avoids making judgements on the text while seeking to trace out thematic patterns. H.P. Collins's John Cowper Powys: Old Earth-Man (1966) is one of the original biographical studies and attempts a large scale survey of his work. In 1973, both John A. Brebner (The Demon Within) and Glen Cavaliero (John Cowper Powys: Novelist) published full scale studies of Powys's novels and attempted to examine and evaluate Powys's use of style and language. Finally, C.A. Coates is included because her study (John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape, 1982) seeks to further one specific aspect of Powys research while providing a good summary of research done to date.

Chapter One

Introduction

In 1924 Virginia Woolf made the following pronouncement to a group of undergraduates at Cambridge during her lecture

"Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown": "On or about December 1910 human nature changed".¹ This purposefully provocative statement drew attention to her notion that although human nature does not alter, man's notions of his nature may vary and in fact had in the early twentieth century. Her choice of the date is not arbitrary. It coincides with the first London exhibition of the Post-Impressionist paintings. This new movement proclaimed the death of Impressionism whose theoretical base is similar to Naturalism in fiction. The demise of Naturalism could be seen in the changing focus of many writers and thinkers. Signs of change occurred in many domains. Chekhov and Dostoievsky's works were becoming known through readable, English translations. Freud had laid the foundations for psycho-analysis and Einstein's relativity theory was replacing the more controlled, mechanistic, Newtonian view of the universe. The impact of these changes on English literature transformed many writer's conception of man. Emphasis on man's psychological depths replaced the great shaping force of the environment advocated by the Naturalistic school.²

¹ Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" in The Captain's Death Bed (London: Hogarth Press, 1950), p.91.

² Walter Allen, The English Novel (New York: Pelican, 1979), pp.341-2.

Woolf's disdain for the archaic and restrictive thinking and artistic conventions of writers like Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy and H.G. Wells was partially echoed by John Cowper Powys.³ A contemporary of Woolf, his disenchantment with the traditional novel stems from Powys's rejection of absolute statements in favour of a more relative and subjective approach. Although some of his contemporaries were forerunners in structural innovations of the traditional novel form, he chose not to follow their lead. Instead of writing like James Joyce (Ulysses, 1922), Virginia Woolf (Mrs. Dalloway, 1925), or his close friend Dorothy Richardson (Pilgrimage, 1938)⁴, the peculiar nature of his vision and his literary tastes lead him to renovate the existing novel structure in an effort to preserve the traditional emphasis on story and character while allowing, as well, for a discussion of the psychological realm.

³ H.P. Collins, John Cowper Powys: Old Earth Man (New York: October House, 1966), p.46. Collins notes that even in John Cowper Powys's early novels there existed a half-conscious dissatisfaction with past treatment of human character in imaginative art.

⁴ Allen, p.346. Commenting on Dorothy Richardson's twelve volume series entitled Pilgrimage which began with Pointed Roofs (1915), Allen describes the series as a "remarkable achievement" from the first writer to deliberately employ the stream-of-consciousness technique. However, in the end, Allen notes that once the initial interest in the opening volumes fades boredom negates any desire to reread the work. John Cowper Powys would reject Allen's appraisal, a fact noted in Robert Humfrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954), p.11.

Powys's preference for the traditional novel form is deceiving. His use of narrator and multi-plot lines is particularly effective in establishing the inner realism that he sought to capture in his work. The changes he implements and the themes he incorporates place him among his modern contemporaries instead of among the ranks of Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells. In his book on Dorothy Richardson,⁵ his statements reveal similarities between his concerns and those of modern writers using structural innovations. In discussing Richardson's vision, Powys praises her feminine perspective and her emphasis on 'psychic biography' (DR, p.5). These points reinforce his notion that chaos can only be ordered in the individual consciousness and that "only by being a projection of a deep, intimate, personal experience, can characters in fiction acquire a symbolic importance and come to be representative of the universal situation" (DR, p.15).

This emphasis on the "universally significant psychic biography: the biography of a solitary human soul" (DR, p.5) reflects Powys's interest in the individual's daily struggle to cope with life's pressures. Due to the 'inclusive' nature of his imagination, he refuses to restrict his subject matter to anything less than the celebration of Life in its entirety. Consequently, he praises Dorothy Richardson for her rejection of tight, economical prose. He lauds her decision:

⁵ John Cowper Powys, Dorothy Richardson (London: Joiner and Steel, 1931). All subsequent references to this work will be incorporated into the text using the abbreviation (DR) with the appropriate page reference.

To attempt to express it (Life) in plain, blunt prose would be to attempt to express logically, rationally, argumentatively, what is always killed and blown to bits by logic, reason, argument. (DR, p.22)

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Powys's attack on Richardson's detractors provides insight into his own stylistic choices. Like Dostoievsky and Richardson, Powys believes that lengthiness is an essential characteristic of psychologically realistic fiction. Only in the lengthy and extended work can the subject matter be effectively woven into a text. Exalting Richardson's accomplishment, he places her among

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These statements, which are echoed and embellished in his non-fictional prose and letters,⁶ demonstrate Powys's concern

⁶ Powys felt that it was more important to touch the reader than create a stylistically perfect novel. See "Dostoievsky" in Visions and Revisions (London: Macdonald, 1955), pp.181-195. "Perhaps the most marked effect he has is to leave one with the feeling of a universe with many doors; and not a few terrifyingly dark passages; but a universe the opposite of 'closed' or 'explained'."

Also in the same essay, he says: "The books that are the most valuable... create a certain mood ... the temper of which no surprise can overpower." In a letter of Oct. 5, 1944 in Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson (London: Macdonald, 1958), p.160, Powys stresses the need for length to create a scaffolding for his story so that he can "let the chance moment have its way ... (thus his stories are) at the best, Mediumistic, and at the worst both silly and dull!"

for a style which could serve as a suitable vehicle for his expansive, inclusive attitudes.⁷ Powys's choices have been criticized, but as C.A. Coates points out in John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape, the careful reader must differentiate between actual faults and unfashionable qualities.⁸

Glen Cavaliero⁹ cites Powys's prolixity and formlessness as the faults most often cited, and George Steiner, in "The Difficulties of Reading John Cowper Powys",¹⁰ notes how the lack of a good, critical introduction, a general biography, and the lack of readily available texts make it easy for emphatic and sweeping dismissals of Powys's work. Coates also notes that the inclusion of the intellectual as well as the excremental differs from the concerns of his contemporaries and can be offensive or

⁷ Ben Jones, "The Disfigurement of Gerda: Moral and Textual Problems in Wolf Solent," The Powys Review, No.2 (1977), 20-26.

Professor Jones strives to correct the view advanced by Louis Wilkinson that it is "hardly more than a slight exaggeration to say that he never, until quite late in life, revised anything he wrote..." (Letters of John Cowper Powys to Louis Wilkinson) (1958), p.9. Jones points out in the case of Gerda's disfigurement how Powys reduced more than 300 pages of manuscript to a single chapter. The reshaping of the text involved in this editing process shows substantial changes in both concept and technique which demonstrates Powys's concern for his craft (Jones, p.21).

⁸ C.A. Coates, John Cowper Powys in Search of a Landscape (London. MacMillan, 1982), p.1.

⁹ Glen Cavaliero, John Cowper Powys: Novelist (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.16.

¹⁰ George Steiner, "The Difficulties of Reading John Cowper Powys," The Powys Review, No.1 (1977), 7-11.

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selected works. What I am trying to demonstrate is that many of Powys's supposed weaknesses are an integral part of his fictional technique and were purposefully contrived in an attempt to incorporate his vision into the structure as well as the content of his works.

Cavaliero pinpoints the four main charges laid against Powys: the cumbersome framework of his works, his verbosity, the apparent unsophistication of his craft, and the apparent immaturity of his vision. When these qualities are combined with Powys's detachment from the contemporary scene, the indictment seems insurmountable. However, Cavaliero counters by attacking the perspective and presuppositions of Powys's detractors. He emphasizes that many of Powys's supposed short-comings are faults only if we demand that he change his vision and the content of his art in order to include elements of traditional literature that he was not interested in discussing.¹² Framing the debate on Powys's style, Cavaliero discusses the problems of dogmatically imposing critical standards upon a text instead of using a critical approach as a method to gain a better understanding of the writer's work. Cavaliero's concerns are particularly relevant to Powys's highly subjective, 'mediumistic' approach to art.¹³ The following statement made by Powys about Dostoievsky provides insight into the qualities Powys admired most in the Russian writer:

¹² Cavaliero, pp.15-16.

¹³ Letters to Louis Wilkinson, Oct. 5, 1944.

his special greatness as a writer of fiction is to be found in the fact that he is not just a mouthpiece, still less a calm and critical interpreter, but a true medium; that is to say, we have the curious feeling, as we listen to what his most disturbing characters are uttering, that he himself is as startled, shocked, awed and impressed by what they reveal as are his hearers.¹⁴

In line with this mediumistic role, Powys refers to his novels as romances.¹⁵ The result of this approach is a series of works which are a hybrid of the romance and novel tradition, or that require a reworking of the traditional definition of the novel to accommodate them. Aware of the restrictiveness of inappropriate critical methods, Cavaliero discusses the limitations of two opposing methods, most readily associated with Percy Lubbock's The Craft of Fiction (1921) and F.R. Leavis's The Great Tradition (1948). Both approaches identify the novel as a unified whole, but Cavaliero emphasizes the weaknesses he sees in Lubbock's over-emphasis on 'form' and Leavis's concentration on 'content'. Cavaliero pinpoints the problem confronting any reader dogmatically embracing one of these extreme approaches:

The evaluation of that life (the novel's vitality) comes through the subjective apprehension of the critic reinforced by examination of the text. The fallibility of the critic lies in the necessary subjectivity--a failure of imaginative sympathy, a doctrinaire position, may cost him his insight into truth; but the evaluation must be submitted not only at the bar of individual aesthetic sensibility but at that of commonly received tradition as well.¹⁶

¹⁴ Powys, Dostoevsky (London: John Lane, 1946), p.8.

¹⁵ Cavaliero, p.10.

¹⁶ Cavaliero, pp.11-12.

come to a knowledge of man's relation to the universe is shown in the "gnomic sayings" of Heraclitus and Hegel.²⁵

Powys is first and foremost a sceptic. However, to brand him as a despairing sceptic is to do him an injustice. He believes the essence of life to be unknowable, but that does not negate the meaning of individual experience. Far from it. One of the main themes discussed in his non-fictional prose provides suggestions on how to cope with life's chance fluctuations.²⁶ The whimsical polarity inherent in Powys's *First Cause* captures the tension existing in the universe and hints at the individual's continuous struggle to endure.

Confronted with this struggle for happiness in a chaotic universe, Powys advocates that the individual endure and enjoy life through escape into sensation and the ability to forget. Since Powys does not equate happiness with pleasure,²⁷ his

²⁵ Powys, In Defence of Sensuality (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930), p.42. In this book, Powys notes:

The deepest secret of the universe lies in duality, in contradiction, in the opposition of contraries.... The subtle reach of human metaphysics is to be found in certain gnomic sayings of Heraclitus and Hegel, wherein it is indicated that out of the conflict of Not-Being the Becoming of life eternally proceeds.

²⁶ Suggestions abound in Powys's non-fictional prose on how to cope with life's pressures. The following books deal with this subject: A Philosophy of Solitude (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant (Girard, Kansas: Haldeman-Julius, 1900), The Art of Growing Old (London: Jonathan Cape, 1944), In Defence of Sensuality (London: Gollancz, 1930), In Spite of: A Philosophy for Everyman (London: Macdonald, 1953).

²⁷ Powys, In Defence of Sensuality, p.63.

Tao, or life-way, emphasizes self-transformation instead of self-realization.²⁸ Thus, the individual is instructed to cope with life's trials by forgetting oneself and sinking into sensation. This confidence in the mind's ability to combat the suppressive forces in the universe reinforces Powys's belief that the mind is the "Great magician"²⁹ who half-discovers and half creates life.³⁰

Powys's emphasis on the power of the mind and on the individual's ability to sink into the inanimate through sensation is important to his art. Powys repeatedly emphasizes the central importance of sensation to the stories he loved to read and tell. As long as sensation is involved, he can lose himself to the world. In talking about his writing, he said:

I adore the sensation of a story ... Above all mythology--which contains a certain sort of fairy tale made into metaphysics and religion for me to play at.³¹

The importance of playing and telling a story stems from his being primarily, according to his own assessment, a mixture of a born clown and a born storyteller.³²

²⁸ Powys, A Philosophy of Solitude (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), p.213.

²⁹ Powys, A Philosophy of Solitude, p.220.

³⁰ Powys, The Meaning of Culture (London: Jonathan Cape, 1930), p.14.

³¹ Powys, Letters to Wilkinson, Jan. 2, 1953.

³² Powys, Letters to Nicholas Ross, ed. Arthur Uphill (London: Bertram Rote, 1971), Sept. 24, 1956.

organizing principle implied in every novel.²² Thus, Dryden rejects any impediment blocking the writer's wish to tell his story in his own way. The writer is not an observer. Rather, he is a creator of fictitious life who fashions a

neutral territory, somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other.²³

This freedom, or Melvillean "sea-room", that Dryden advocates is of particular interest to Powys studies because Powys, like Melville, fits Dryden's definition of a writer: "a 'wizard' who 'magically' constructs and inhabits an 'enchanted landscape'".²⁴

To appreciate why Powys wrote as he did, it will be worthwhile to discuss the nature and interrelation of Powys's view of man and the universe to get a better insight into his vision and how his vision is incorporated in his art. John Cowper Powys's imagination is "inclusive" rather than "exclusive". He believes that the universe exists in a constant state of flux and is an unfinished product. These fluctuations, plus the limitations of man's consciousness, ridicule any attempt to systematize life's mysteries. Powys feels that the closest human understanding can

²² Dryden, p.3.

²³ Dryden, p.20. Dryden is quoting in this passage Nathaniel Hawthorne, The House of Seven Gables, Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, Riverside ed., Vol. V (New York, 1883), p.55.

²⁴ Dryden, p.27.

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³¹ Powys, Letters to Wilkinson, Jan. 2, 1953.

³² Powys, Letters to Nicholas Ross, ed. Arthur Uphill (London: Bertram Rote, 1971), Sept. 24, 1956.

The peculiar nature of Powys's vision and his emphasis on sensation and story-telling directly effect his art. For Powys the story is more than an idle tale--it involves the struggle of a soul (conscious or unconscious) to overcome the obstacles that hinder its growth.³³ He says that he is a born "Inventor of Fairy Tales."³⁴ Any critic approaching his work must be careful because, as Charles Lock argues, the twentieth century novel is so different from its predecessors that each work sets its own standards of evaluation.³⁵ This view reinforces the fear of prescriptive critical methods voiced by Cavaliero and Dryden. Powys shares the modern writer's concern for psychological rather than external realism. This emphasis on the inner life of his characters separates him from Bennett, Galsworthy, and Wells despite his apparently traditional approach to the novel. Powys accepts yet is impatient with the traditional novel form. He maintains the emphasis on character, plot, theme, and narrator, but twists them to his own purposes. A master of long sentences, digression, and multi-plot lines,

³³ Powys, Autobiography (London: Bodley Head, 1934), p.46.

³⁴ Powys, Letters to Wilkinson, July 31, 1956.

³⁵ Charles Lock, "'Multiverse' ... language which makes language impossible." The Powys Review, No.5 (1979), p.71. Lock echoes a point made by Powys in Dorothy Richardson (1931). Powys praises her "gnomic, oracular, idolatrous way" (DR, p.22) of expressing herself in her novels. He continues by stating: "To attempt to express it (reality, life's mysteries) in plain, blunt prose would be to attempt to express logically, rationally, argumentatively, what is always killed and blown to bits by logic, reason, argument" (DR, p.22).

Powys creates in each work a series of stories, or "psychic biographies", which intertwine to enhance, echo, or contrast each other. His approach is implemented by a complex narrator whose own life-illusion creates a tension between himself and the characters and events he is chronicling. Through this tension, Powys forces the reader to become involved in the text and take an active role in evaluating the reliability of any information contained in the text. However, the reader must remember that his own life-illusion will affect his judgement and help to reinforce the tension that Powys has created.

Powys's narrative works on three levels: 1) the direct narration (description of events which characters are involved in); 2) the psychological (commentary on the inner workings of the characters', as well as the narrator's minds); and 3) the cosmological (the narrator's perception of the cosmological implications of the story he is telling). Powys's sceptical, unreliable, aberrantly omniscient narrator who identifies, evokes and mixes these levels conveys as much information about his own peculiarities as he does about the text. The bizarre or peculiar nature of many of the characters or narrative comments is integral to Powys's open-ended, provisional attempt to safeguard life's elusive mystery from imposed, restrictive, logical, rational models to communicate the unutterable.

This defence of the unutterable leads Powys to create a system of sceptical tensions which captures man's limitations and allows for the chaotic fluctuations of the universe. He is not a

Pyrrhonian sceptic³⁶ although some of his characters may embrace this view. Through the choice of a narrator who has his own brand of scepticism, Powys can separate his own scepticism from that of his characters. This system of sceptical tensions is central to the paradigm of "knowings" Powys weaves into his works. By balancing these various "knowings", Powys seeks to capture the multiplicity of experience available in his "multiverse"³⁷ of separate, subjective life-illusions.

Having made a case for a general study of fictional narrative technique, I will proceed to explain the focus of my study. Due to the peculiar nature of Powys's metaphysics and his interest in modern man's search for happiness amid the chaotic fluctuations of a universe dominated by a janus-faced First Cause, this study has been limited to a close analysis of three texts which treat the conflict between traditional, rural tranquillity and the mechanized roar of the twentieth century. Within each text, I have focussed even more intently on a single chapter selected on the basis of its place in the overall narrative pattern. It is my view that the question of narrative control can be satisfactorily examined through the examination on a specific narrative unit. The thematic discussion unifying this

³⁶ The O.E.D. defines Pyrrhonism as the sceptical doctrine advanced by Pyrrho of Elis (c.300 BC) whose philosophy rejected the possibility of attaining certainty of knowledge.

³⁷ Powys uses the term "multiverse" to capture the complexity of the subjective life-illusions that co-exist, although not necessarily in harmony, in our universe. The term captures the provisional, sceptical nature of Powys's vision.

study of Powys's narrative control necessarily eliminates his later works where he moves from the "present" to the "distant past." The possible arbitrariness of the decision to focus on one period of his work can be defended on the grounds that this study seeks to provide, primarily, a method to better understand how Powys's texts work. Other texts could have been chosen, but for the purposes of my study the following works have been chosen: Ducdame (1925), A Glastonbury Romance (1933), and Weymouth Sands (1934). Given the total number of pages in these three novels (2199 pages), they do represent a substantial body of work.

Those who wish more general studies of the Powys canon will find many excellent treatments of story and theme. In her Critical Appendix, C.A. Coates provides a chronological list of the most important contributors to Powys research to date. My aim is purposely limited, but I believe pertinent to the advancement of Powys studies. If a different theme had been chosen, the choice of chapter and text would perhaps alter. However, this would not change the fundamental purpose of my study which is to provide a methodology whereby the central organizing principle of Powys's narrative may be discovered. We turn, then, to Ducdame (1925) and to its protagonist Rook Ashover whose dilemma will identify the theme of scepticism and whose "story" will provide the complexities of sceptical narration.

Chapter Two

The Story and its Teller in Ducdame

Ducdame is a tightly organized novel which derives its thematic and structural unity from an intricate pattern of tensions. This pattern involves the interaction between the various characters and their divergent life-illusions, the battle between the creative and destructive forces of the janus-faced First Cause which influences the characters, and the complex interplay between the varying degrees of scepticism that Powys incorporates into his characters. The pattern of tension draws the reader into active involvement in the interpretation of information provided. This complex interaction forms the backdrop to the "psychic biography" of Rook Ashover, the novel's protagonist who is the 21st descendant of the direct male line of the House of Ashover.

A fragmented anti-hero, Rook Ashover is a Pyrrhonian sceptic who desires to escape life's pressures. This desire to escape, primarily through sensation, demonstrates one aspect of Rook's irresponsible nature. His ego-centricity allows him to reject any obligation to his social position, his family, or those individuals around him who care for him. However, this complacency is never fully accepted by the various individuals and forces surrounding him. Some patiently indulge him while others reject his whimsical, self-centeredness. The devotees of the Ashover Dead, their desires articulated by Lady Ann, seek to force him to produce an heir. This move to guarantee the

family's continuance is opposed by William Hastings, the nihilistic, local clergyman whose life-negating book holds the secret of how to undo Life's victory over death.

As Edgar A. Dryden pointed out, the narrative is one of the special organizing principles that provide access into a writer's fictional world. The narrator in Ducdame,¹ like other characters in Powys's fiction, has a life-illusion which enters into the novel's complex interplay of scepticism. The narrator's personal blend of scepticism distances him from the characters, yet his aberrantly omniscient perspective colours the information he provides. The subjective bias inherent in the narrator's view is integral to Powys's art. As a self-styled "charlatan",² Powys rejects absolute statements in favour of a flexible, fluctuating, purposely inconsistent approach. This allows the narrator to tell a story which makes meaningful statements about human experience while, in the novel as a whole, life's mysteries are safeguarded.

¹ John Cowper Powys, Ducdame (London: Riverside, 1925). All further references to this work will appear in the text accompanied by the abbreviation D.

² Powys provides the following definition of charlatanism in his Autobiography (London: Bodley Head, 1934), p.387:

Charlatanism ... consists in being so transported by a large, general, simple aspect of something exciting in life, or nature, or books, or history, or psychology that without waiting to get the details correct, or the passage verified by exact scholarship, you just rely on your private taste, prejudice, imagination, inspiration, and abandon your whole being to the delight of brooding over what you see and feel.

The inclusiveness of Powys's imagination requires the diversity, complexity, and multiplicity of detail involved in his art. This approach creates the impression that Powys loses control of his narrative. This is incorrect. Powys's supposed prolixity and formlessness are essential to his attempt to weave a psychological realism into his texts. Although Powys is an actor, shape-shifter, charlatan, he is also a serious craftsman. Thematic inconsistency is integral to his art, however, his playfulness does not interfere with his careful selection of detail that forms the backdrop to the complex interplay between the various characters and forces involved in his "multiverse".³

Chapter Twelve of Ducdame was chosen for this study of Powys's narrative control because of its unique importance to the novel's development and structure. This chapter contains the pivotal point in Rook's life. Up to this point in the story, Rook has been able to indulge himself. Due to his irresponsibility and general weakness of character, Rook has sought to escape life's pressures. His relationships with women have been particularly ego-centric and self-indulgent. His "saurian viciousness" (D, p.168) is a rationalization of his approach to life and reduces his love affairs to the following

³ The 'multiverse' is an amalgamation of each individual's private, subjective world. For the best discussion on the subject, see Charles Lock, "'Multiverse' ... language which makes language impossible," The Powys Review, No.5 (1979), 63-74.

terms: Netta--viciousness mingled with pity; Lady Ann--viciousness and camaraderie; and Nell--viciousness and romance. Interestingly enough, none of these women agree with his pretensions, and they love something deeper than his confused formulations.⁴

When confronted by Lady Ann's pregnancy, he can no longer escape inaction. He must decide between Netta, his sterile, lower-class mistress and Lady Ann, his aristocratic cousin. However, Lady Ann (and the life-affirming forces she represents) has circumvented his indecisiveness by convincing Netta that Rook is suppressing his desire for a son out of consideration for her. In love with Rook, yet sterile, Netta embarks on a heroic plan to kill his love for her so that he will be free to marry. As Lady Ann's plan to bear the future heir to Ashover House is legalized in Tollminster, Netta slips off; consequently, upon returning to Ashover, Rook is stunned by what has happened and must learn how to cope with the consequences.

Since the overall action of the novel occurs between two consecutive Novembers, the month when Fall gasps its last breath and gives way to winter's icy grip, the choice of Spring as the

⁴ Powys' A Philosophy of Solitude (London: Jonathan Cape, 1933), p.82. Powys defines a person's life-illusion as "that secret dramatic way of regarding himself which makes him feel to himself a remarkable, singular, unusual, exciting individual.... It is a shadow ... of your subjective self...." Since the life-illusion is a shadow it is real, but its veracity is not guaranteed. As seen in Dudcame, the women who love Rook penetrate his delusions.

pivotal point in Rook's life reinforces the structural unity of the work. The mood surrounding the struggle to beget an heir to Ashover is captured in the regenerative, yet brutal aspects of the spring season. This emphasis on the cyclic nature of the seasons parallels the passage of time. The fluctuations in the weather resemble the trials of a life time while the successive seasons capture the sense of past generations. In Ducdame, the struggle to beget an heir is closely surveyed by the Ashover Dead and their devotees who seek to ensure the family's continuance at any cost.

Some preliminary information will be helpful to the reader who wishes to more fully understand Ducdame. Powys includes various clues to the novel's meaning in the title and the epigram, the dedication and the coat-of-arms placed on the novel's cover as well as the map on the novel's inside cover. The title, Ducdame, which is identified and explicated in the epigram, comes from Act II, Sc. V, As You Like It.⁵ The term 'ducdame' is identified as "a Greek invocation to call fools into a circle...." Both fools and circles have rich implications in this novel. Man's foolish qualities, whether heroic or pathetic, abound in this struggle to beget an heir to the Ashover line. The cyclic notion "into a circle" appears in the seasons, the repetition of error, and the successive generations of Ashovers

⁵ The quote in the novel's epigram defining 'ducdame' comes from Act II, Sc. V, As You Like It, not Act II, Sc. VI as noted.

who refuse to rest until Rook complies with his duty as the twenty-first male descendant of the direct male line. Thus, the title and the epigram could be seen as a condemnation of mankind's foolishness, but this is not Powys's intention. This point is clarified in the dedication to Kwang-tse which suggests the indulgence inherent in the author's attitudes.

The reference to Kwang-tse, or the laughing philosopher, in the dedication is crucial to any reading of the text. Powys was well read in Kwang-tse, and even published an article on him in The Dial in 1923.⁶ Kwang-tse lived two generations before the more famous, and more traditional, Lao-tse.. Perceived as whimsical, perhaps even irresponsible, Kwang-tse's thought, according to Powys, was more original and imaginative. His mania for "the heterogeneous and the casual, as contrasted with the homogeneous and the inevitable..."⁷ puts forth a chaos-loving philosophy which craftily salutes the Unutterable behind the mystery of the universe. Called by Powys the Voltairean high priest of the Tao, Kwang's philosophy echoes certain basic elements that Powys incorporates into his prose. Ducdame's dedication demonstrates Powys's regard for the oriental philosopher:

⁶ Powys, "The Philosopher Kwang" The Dial, Vol. LXXV, No.5, (Nov., 1923); rpt. The Powys Review, No. 7 (1980), 45-48.

⁷ Powys, "The Philosopher Kwang" Powys Review, No.7, 46.

THE ONLY ONE AMONG PHILOSOPHERS TO BE
AT ONCE RESPECTFUL OF HIS SPIRIT-LIKE
ANCESTORS AND INDULGENT OF THOSE WHO,
LIKE THE PROTAGONIST OF THIS BOOK,

GO WHERE THEY ARE PUSHED,
FOLLOW WHERE THEY ARE LED,
LIKE A WHIRRING WIND,
LIKE A FEATHER TOSSED ABOUT,
LIKE A REVOLVING GRINDSTONE.

The reference to Kwang-tse's ability to be respectful of his spirit-like forebears (not to be confused with his own familial ancestors) while indulging the foibles of the present generation shows that Powys seeks to survey Rook's actions critically while compassionately accepting his weaknesses.

The fictitious coat-of-arms that Powys placed on the novel's cover, provides clues to the history, nature, and present condition of the Ashover family which relates directly to the main theme of Chapter 12, the problem of succession. To obtain this information, we must decipher the meaning of the shield (escutcheon), the helmet resting above the shield (crest), and the motto.⁸ The coat-of-arms is, one must remember, fictitious, and, therefore, the reader should be prepared for traditional interpretations as well as any subtle, or ironical twists that Powys adds to serve his own artistic purposes. The tree and the helmet should be the most important elements of the coat-of-arms, but the repetition of the bird's display and

⁸ The following books were most helpful in the study of heraldry: C. Boutell, Boutell's Heraldry (1867; rpt. London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1970); A.C. Fox-Davies, A Complete Guide to Heraldry (London: T. Nelson and Sons, 1925); Francis J. Grant, A Manual of Heraldry (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1952). See Appendix A for a picture and a further discussion of the fictitious, Ashover coat-of-arms.

positioning reinforce the bird's (hence the protagonist's) rejection of the traditional claims of social position and personal duty. This tension in the Ashover family is further reinforced by the family motto "Mortua Vivescent" (the Dead Live). Instead of being concerned with maintaining the family's honour, this despairing family is willing to settle for mere continuity.

This preliminary information, to which may be added the map on the inside covers, provides material which helps the narrator establish control.⁹ The map, for example, has parallels to Faulkner's cartography of Yoknapatawpha County and it has affinities with Hardy's actual/imaginary Dorset. By establishing the actual, physical backdrop to his thematic concerns, Powys increases the realism of his multi-layered text. This aid helps the reader to pinpoint the characters' movements and personalizes the "psychic biography" that Powys creates.

Having discussed the clues Powys provides to establish the novel's framework, the idiosyncrasies of the narrative control will be investigated. The narrator in Ducdame is not the mere recorder of objective fact because Powys's 'charlatanism' stresses the importance of subjective reality in face of the restrictive limitations imposed by empirical, rational observation. Powys's use of Matthew Arnold's term, 'imaginative

⁹ For map of Ashover House and surrounding area, see Appendix E.

reason', is central to his whimsical thought because he feels that the meaning of the universe is half created through the power of the Will.¹⁰ Thus, the narrator (as well as each one of the other characters) will have his own, personal, 'life-illusion' which colours his perceptions. In Ducdame, the narrator quickly determines the importance of the fantastic elements to his life illusion, and to the novel. The veracity of these ideas is secondary to their acceptance by the characters, and their importance to the novel's backdrop. The opening paragraph of the novel serves several functions and alerts us to the kind of story that interests the narrator.

Some of the most significant encounters in the world occur between two persons one of whom is asleep or dead; and it might almost seem as if Rook Ashover had recognized this fact when he found himself standing by Netta Page's side on the night of November's fullest moon.... Rook looked at her with fixed intensity, as if he were striving to solve some long-withheld riddle; some riddle to which a night of this kind could alone bring the solution. (D, p.1)

¹⁰ The term 'imaginative reason' was used by Arnold in Essays in Criticism: First Series. Powys uses it to differentiate between his creative, subjective musings, and the more rational methods of thought and discovery. (See Powys, In Defence of Sensuality (1930), pp.12-13). For an interesting discussion on the role of the imagination, see Michael Greenwald, "Powys's Complex Vision" in Belinda Humfrey, Essays on John Cowper Powys (Cardiff: Univ. of Wales, 1972), p.62. In addition the strength and creative power of the Will is central to Powys's charlatanism, and even participates in the creation of the universe. In A Glastonbury Romance (p.931), Geard shouts:

Any lie ... I tell you, any lie as long as a multitude of souls believes it and presses that belief to the cracking point, creates new life, while the slavery of what is called truth drags us down to death and to the dead! Lies, magic, illusions--these are names we give to the ripples on the water of experience when the Spirit of Life blows upon it.

The importance this paragraph places upon encounters with the sleeping or the dead, as well as the power of the full moon, alerts us to the possibilities contained in the novel. Secondly, this paragraph illustrates the difference between the perceptions of the narrator and of the other characters. Finally, the bizarre and sometimes tentative quality of the narrator's remarks indicate that he is neither totally reliable, nor totally omniscient. The variety of opinions and their related degree of truth corresponds to Powys's emphasis on Personality as the central truth in the nature and operation of the individual as well as the universe.¹¹

The degree to which the narrator differs, and even disagrees, with the protagonist is made explicit in the first chapter where Rook's mind drifts off during a conversation with Lexie. Fantasizing about the nature of sound, Rook feels that it could travel

at a rate immeasurable to science, toward the moon. If the vibration of them survived the loss of the earth's atmosphere it would soon be reaching a point from which, if sounds had sight, the other side of the moon would be visible! (D, p.13)

To this, the narrator, who considers Rook "a human soul, fooled to the top of its bent..." (D, p.335) remarks: "Some such

¹¹ From the individual will to the awesome power of the First Cause, Personality is the key to Powys's janus-faced universe; in A Glastonbury Romance (p.693), the narrator says:

Apart from Personality, apart from Personal Will, there is no such "ultimate" as Matter, there is no such "ultimate" as Spirit. Beyond Life and Death there is Personality, dominating both Life and Death to its own arbitrary and wilful purposes.

fantasy as this passed obscurely through Rook's mind as he delayed his response" (D, p.13).

Chapter 12 opens with a descriptive piece which captures how the narrator perceives Spring in Britain. Through careful detail and narratorial comment, the "sadder, more human significance" (D, p.162) of this "northern syllable" is contrasted with the more sophisticated allurements of the latinized 'primavera.' This joyous, yet fateful season

has something that carries the mind back, beyond the supplience of any particular spring sound or spring sight, into the dark rain-soaked background which gave all these things birth; into cold wet places where stinging hazel twigs switch the skin, where the ground is treacherous with hidden swamps, where young birds and young rabbits are devoured by hawks, where the winds bring a perilous relaxation and heart-hurting memories, where the beech drippings are black and poisonous, where the black-thorn buds are ominous with fate and sorrow and sudden death. (D, pp.162-3)

The ambivalent nature of this season sets the mood for the life-affirming and life-negating forces involved in the struggle to beget and legitimize an heir to Ashover.

Once the mood has been established, the narrative proper starts. As Rook and Lady Ann are about to enter Drool's cottage to make arrangements for Corporal Dick's belongings, Lady Ann prepares to tell Rook that she is pregnant with his child. As she ponders what to say, the narrator mentions how Lady Ann's condition has increased her sensitivity to the "little things of nature and life" (D, p.163). This simple comment might have sufficed for a description of Lady Ann's condition, but not for the narrator. His passion for escape into the non-human through

sensation provokes a three paragraph meander (pp.163-4) which both captures and personalizes the various things attracting Lady Ann's attention. Lost in sensation, her thoughts become irrelevant:

As they leaned now side by side upon this gate the faint, almost sickly smell of primroses stole over her senses and made it harder than ever to break the silence. She had a little bunch of them in her dress, loose pink-tinged stalks and diaphanous blooms mingled with large vegetable-like leaves.

She could see the crimson buds of a large pink campion ... and not far from it, at the edge of a fallen trunk spotted with fungi, she could make out what she imagined to be the fragile greenish-yellow petals of the little plant called moschatel. (D, p.163)

This focussing on natural detail, which risks a loss of narrative control, is a typically Powysian trait integral to the inclusiveness of his imagination. Through this technique, Powys is able to weave the brand of realism into the art that he admired in Dostoevsky and Dorothy Richardson. Thus, the reader not only understands the character better, but gains insight into Powys's method of creating a "psychic biography".

When Lady Ann finally announces her pregnancy, her softened nature melts Rook's obstinacy; however, their close reciprocity quickly evaporates. If it was not for Ann's ability to suppress her family pride and place herself in Rook's hands, the marriage might never have taken place. As Rook leaves Ann, the narrator comments on the significance of their parting:

Her reluctance to leave him and his reluctance to go seemed based on a sad clairvoyant recognition in them both that chance had given them that one brief interim of understanding only to take it away again forever. (D, p.166)

The references to chance and to the supernatural that colour the narrator's comments transcend the boundaries of normal omniscience and reflect certain aspects of the narrator's life-illusion. These perceptions, regardless of their veracity, become another strand woven into the world of Ducdame.

Rook leaves to make arrangements for their upcoming marriage, and as this takes place the narrator follows Rook's thoughts and sensations as he tries to come to terms with his lot in life; this passage is long, but the extended quotation is necessary:

Beginning to ascend the uneven slope of Dorsal he was unable to prevent all the little aromatic tufts of ground ivy over which he stepped from associating themselves with his thought. The pale-green fronds of the bracken, too, like miniature motley-coloured giraffe necks transferred to the realm of vegetation, uncurled themselves amid the images of his brain, as if they had been so many motionless sea horses among dark-finned, swift-flashing fish.

And most of all did the peculiar fragrance of the yellow gorse pass into his troubled consciousness, bringing with it, as he avoided those piercing spikes, a sense of honey upon the air.

As he approached the fir trees on the summit Rook found himself gathering up the tangled threads of his consciousness into one ravelled wretched skein. A feeling of miserable self-reproach took possession of him, mixed with a helplessness in the presence of this rush of events. He looked back woefully to the days when he first inherited Ashover, to the days when all his available emotions were centered round the personality of Lexie; round the long, delicious, irresponsible conversations they had had together under sweet-flowering hedgerows, in hot cornfields, and by the banks of the river! (D, pp.166-67)

This intimate look at the workings of Rook's inner being helps the reader to understand how, as well as what, he feels.

Abnormally sensitive to physical sensation, even to the point of

physical enslavement, Rook's desire for escape from the human adversely affects his ability to control his life. Instead of grappling with the situation, Rook bemoans the disappearance of the long, irresponsible days shared with his brother Lexie before his desire for "something new and strange" (D, p.167) led to the arrival of Netta.

Rook's lamentation is in keeping with his general philosophy of life. An aristocratic, ego-centric sceptic whose escapist tendencies tend to allow his moods to develop into obsessions or manias, Rook's fatalistic attitude allows him to rationalize his situation. The narrator knows, but Rook fails to comprehend that

the universe could be envisaged as a place where human characters were hammered and chiselled into some premeditated mould of valour or resignation (D, p.304).

Incapable of imagining that the universe has some kind of order, or realizing that his situation was due to earlier irresponsibilities, he says that

"Life and death are just words! All we know is a mad chaotic jungle of things that we call 'living' and things that we call 'dead.' What I feel is that the whole imbroglia may be a set of obscene dreams, a great concourse of phantasmagoric shadows, most of them disgusting; some of them magically lovely! And what I would like to do is to dive down into some lake of nothingness where you could forget that there ever were such horrors!" (D, p.288)

In addition, he laments the pressure exerted on his life-illusion by his "insane, impersonal desire" for women. The resultant entanglement and consequent feelings of entrapment stem from

the weakness, nay! the deformity in his nature, that had betrayed him into this cul-de-sac. If only he had been capable of one natural simple human passion it

would have been all so different! It was this accursed detachment of his brain, mingled with his particular kind of cold sensuality, that had rendered him so fatal an influence in the lives of all his friends. (D, p.167)

Interestingly, the narrator merely follows Rook's thoughts at this point. No attempt is made to comment on the validity of these notions; however, the precision with which the narrator is able to follow Rook's thoughts suggests a familiarity with his concerns.

Transfixed in a patch of Lords-and-Ladies (we remember the title: Ducdame, or duc-dame, that is, Lord and Lady) on Heron's Ridge, Rook attempts to put his thoughts in order. The narrative follows the tangled threads of his consciousness as he contemplates his "saurian viciousness". As with Ann, this method provides a more personalized account of the individual's experience. However, this does not mean that Rook's statements are valid. His manias which have coalesced into his "saurian viciousness" are merely a rationalization of his approach to life. Rook, as we know from the epigram and the dedication, is the fool whose inability to grapple with life's tasks force him to rotate like a grindstone, or be buffeted like a wind-tossed feather.

Paralyzed in this patch of flowers, Rook's mood becomes darker and more fearful as he compares his own ambiguous nature to his brother's completeness. Fearful of the responsibility involved in a relationship with a women, he perceives that his "satyrishness", which pre-empts true love, should be satisfied only through chance encounters with prostitutes. Feeling like a

trapped animal, he recognizes that even the individuals he had used in his blind selfishness have the same rights as he does to personal happiness. Feeling miserable and hopelessly entangled by the demands made upon him, he notes how he has impinged on others:

Oh, he deserved every inch of the iron which now pierced him through his bones! With cold clairvoyance he reviewed the stages of philosophic scepticism, of spiritual disillusionment, that had gradually made him so indifferent to what he did, so indifferent to work, to ambition, to any purpose in things at all. He recognized the fact now that it was this refusal to take the ultimate issues of life seriously that had laid him open to these disasters. (D, p.169 underlining mine)

It is only here, near the end of the passage on Rook's thoughts, that the narrator interjects his judgement to put the protagonist's thoughts into perspective. By telling the reader that Rook's inability to take life seriously was his downfall, the narrator clearly separates himself from the character and provides the reader with a perspective from which to judge Rook.

Arriving at Ashover House, Rook decides to act. He orders the house-keeper Pandie to order his driver, Mr. Twiney. Possibly feeling guilty about what he is about to do in Tollminster, he asks Pandie if she has looked after Netta and taken her tea up to her. Pandie's uncomfortableness and verbal paralysis irritate an already troubled Rook. Sending the servant off to fetch Twiney, he bounds up the stairs filled with sinister forebodings.

The inclusion of this exchange between Rook and Pandie is interesting because it places him in his social context. Here he

is not allowed to let his senses rove freely; he must be the decisive master. These characteristics form a side of Rook that he ignores when he irresponsibly allows his moods to develop into manias. Rook's interaction with the servants and the whole flavour of their world furnishes another strand to be woven into the novel. The narrator's attention to background detail enhances the immediacy of the setting and the events, and helps to give the novel a three-dimensional effect.

Worried and feeling guilty, Rook enters Netta's room. Her drunkenness shatters his composure. Shocked and angry now, he lashes out in bitter sarcasm; however, due to her condition, she fails to comprehend the nuance of his remarks. Feeling self-righteous, he bemoans this "farcial travesty of the first romance" (D, pp.170-71) of his life.¹² He totally fails to perceive the heroic motivation of her actions. Rook's lack of compassion and understanding, as she cries, "I did it for you!" contrast the joyous splendour of the spring sunshine flooding the room:

The room, facing south, was flooded with lovely spring sunshine. The window was wide open, and across the garden came the song of an invisible blackbird, that clear-throated gay-wistful song, which always seems to reach the mind from some mysterious pre-natal region, full of something sadder than human tears and happier than human laughter. (D, p.170)

¹² If this is Rook's first romance, he is a strange character. Since his mother is 73 years old, Rook must be well into middle age. His choice of Netta as the first love of his life, is interesting. Women find him attractive, yet he chooses someone who has "never been beautiful; never even pretty" (D, p.1).

The spring day sharply contrasts the bitter scent in Netta's room, but the narratorial comment provides an even deeper significance. The narrator's reference to the blackbird's song coming from a 'pre-natal region' and touching the mind with something 'sadder than human tears and happier than human laughter.' These references do two things: they increase our knowledge of how the narrator views the world; and, they remind us of the paradigm of "knowings" integral to Powys's art. Like the various characters, the narrator has his own life-illusion which limits his ability to know. However, since the narrator is distanced from the events, he can achieve partial omniscience which helps Powys make meaningful statements about human experience.

As Rook tries to disentangle himself from a drunken Netta, she stands like a "woe-begone leaden statue in a fountain of gold" (D, p.172). The dust motes in the beam of sunshine distract Rook. Perceiving them to be tiny planets containing equally meaningless suffering, he ponders his repugnance for existence:

He registered in his mind a deep, silent vow that he would never, whatever happened to him afterward, forgive the Power that was responsible for this fermenting-vat of misery. No conceivable rearrangements or renewals or redemptions should ever make up, to him, at any rate, for what certain sensitive organisms are compelled to endure while this particular sphere is turning upon its axis!

Though he retorted thus, with all the righteous anger at his command, at the shameless First Cause of human suffering, his own nature was such that it never occurred to him to ask her again what she meant by that obscure cry: "I did it for you! I did it for you!" (D, p.173)

The lack of a corrective comment demonstrates "a similar outrage on the part of the narrator in regards to the First Cause, yet through Rook's inability to understand Netta the narrator reinforces his selfish blindness.

Heroically holding to her plan, Netta eases the pressure on Rook at this agonizing moment of decision. Through her fortitude and his cowardice, he leaves and heads for Tollminster to make arrangements for his marriage to Lady Ann. As Rook and Peter Twiney are travelling, they pass an old, lichen-covered, weather-stained signpost entitled 'Gorm' which points a long, exhausted arm towards Antiger. The sign serves three purposes in the chapter. First, the sign reminds Rook of Lady Ann's presence at Drool cottage which further reminds him that if he is going to marry her then perhaps he should bring her along. Secondly, and more importantly, 'Gorm' adds another dimension to the region around Ashover. Through Mr. Twiney's reply to Rook's inquiry about the exact location of 'Gorm,' we discover that it is not a village at all, but rather a signpost bearing "a girt devil's name, writ on thik board for to guide boggles and ghosties" (D, p.176). This tidbit of local gossip introduces the local population's belief in the supernatural and thus adds another strand to the background fabric of Ducdame.¹³ Finally, due to the inclusiveness of Powys's imagination, he seeks to include cosmological as well as precise, minute, physical detail in his

¹³ For a discussion of the supernatural in Ducdame, see Brebner, p.42.

vision. "Gorm" is more than local colour. It reminds the reader that many things experienced in our daily existence are unexplainable. For Powys many of these mysteries will remain unsolved and the thoughtful person should include these details into his celebration of life instead of reducing the complexity of reality for simplicity's sake.

As the tint of the afternoon sun turns from orange to amber, Rook pulls up outside Drool cottage. As he waits, having knocked at the door, the narrative comment provides insight into the nature of Rook's thoughts:

As he waited the impression came over him, as impressions do on such occasions--our reasoning faculties not having altogether destroyed our intuitions--of something or another being seriously amiss. (D, p.177)

This reference to both Rook and the narrator's perception of the supernatural potential of those refusing to be governed solely by reason is perhaps folly, but it coincides with one of the central aspects of Powys's thought. John Cowper Powys believed that he could come closer to the mystery of the Unutterable by positing a variety of hypotheses. Their validity was not of prime importance as long as they allowed for a greater possible truth.¹⁴

¹⁴ Powys, "The Philosopher Kwang" Powys Review, No.7, 46. By quoting Kwang, John Cowper demonstrates the limitations of relying solely on the senses, and the rational faculties:

He who uses only the sight of the eyes is acted on by what he sees; it is the intuition of the spirit that gives assurance of certainty. And yet stupid people rely on what they see, and will have it to be the sentiment of all; all their success being with what is external--is it not sad?

Fearing something is wrong, Rook bursts into the cottage and listens in breathless amazement to two extraordinary sounds:

Binnory's high pitched monotone, and Lady Ann's pathetic sobbing. Once Rook removes Binnory and locks him outside, Lady Ann is restored to her normal self. The idiot's presence in the novel as one of the characters, and his ability to neutralize any aristocratic claim to authority add yet another strand to this increasingly complex tapestry. Binnory is not merely included to provide local colour. His presence, along with the other strange characters that live around Drool Cottage, are an integral part of the pattern of tensions in Ducdame. The inhabitants of Drool Cottage populate an entirely different world than do their aristocratic counterparts at Ashover House. Binnory provides an interesting foil to Pandie, one of the principal servants at Ashover House. Rook's authority is recognized at Ashover House, however, such is not always the case at Drool Cottage. Rook must forcefully remove Binnory who has reduced his usually self-possessed, aristocratic cousin to tears. As with the signpost "Gorm", Binnory and the other strange inhabitants of Drool Cottage demonstrate the inclusiveness of Powys's imagination and reinforce the pattern of tensions which underlie the novel.

Lady Ann's vulnerability to Binnory softens Rook's usual defences. Her usual strength and self-possession diffuse any sensual pleasure in their encounters because he needed to "feel himself to be stronger, more formidable, more integrated than this other" (D, p.305). His need to possess and control is

balanced by a contrary need to remain aloof and indifferent. This strange mixture allows him to enjoy "certain faint, vague, elusive ecstasies that were entirely unspiritual, entirely unemotional, and entirely de-personalized." (D, p.306)

Feeling stronger and more self-assured due to Lady Ann's newly exposed vulnerability, Rook finalizes his plans to take her to Tollminster. Remaining passive and docile, Ann allows him to lead her down the stairs and into the cart. Seeing her plan to bear the future heir to Ashover nearing completion, she abandons herself to a "delicious wave of voluptuous contentment" (D, p.180). In this trance her scheming intellect relaxes and all the objects around her become porous and dream-like as she lets her sensations have free reign.

This dream-like state provides an interesting prelude to their arrival in Tollminster. As they seek out the curate's lodgings, the narrator includes an interesting, descriptive paragraph about the town which illuminates another aspect of his life-illusion. While summing up the description, the narrator remarks:

all these things together, mingled with sudden breaths of mud-scented coolness coming up from river banks, where the great moist marigold buds are swelling and swelling in the darkness, give to the streets of such a town an enchantment that has the power to summon up and embody the rarest memories of our race consciousness. (D, p.180)

This focus on the 'rarest memories of our race consciousness' gives an added dimension to the physical description of a town on a warm, sunny, spring day. Talk of an 'enchantment' which can summon these memories transcends the bounds of human perception

and normal omniscience. This, of course, is in keeping with Powys's playfully inconsistent charlatanism.

Once Rook has located Tishmarsh, the priest, the process begins to obtain the necessary witnesses and documents to legitimize the marriage, and consequently, the future heir to Ashover. Tishmarsh, the energetic, little curate, is a strange character. A priest of the Church of England, he, like Hastings, has become estranged from his calling. Instead of being one of Tollminster's spiritual leaders, Tishmarsh appears to more closely resemble a boyish bourgeois whose "youthful idolatry for the Squire of Ashover (had) a natural and innocent snobbishness mingled with a quaint personal hero worship" (D, pp.180-1). These feelings are improper of a clergyman whose 'hero' should be Christ. This awe of social and worldly position is more suitable for a businessman, or a social climber than for a priest. The narrator's constant reference to the cleric's 'littleness' alerts us to the possibility that his physical size may reflect not only his youthfulness, but his emotional and spiritual stature as well. The constant repetition of "I'm proud to be able to launch you!" illustrates an aggravating aspect, or weakness in his personality. Angered by the persistence of this "romantic schoolboy" (D, p.181), Rook, who chose to be married by Tishmarsh, can barely control his irritation. Even Mr. Twiney, the mild mannered driver, disdains the little man:

They were off at last, but not before Mr. Peter Twiney had thrown a most quizzical and knowing leer in the direction of the curate of St. Mark's, left bare-headed and excited among the staring ostlers of the Red Lion. (D, p.182)

The continuous pressure exerted on Rook throughout this fateful day does not abate as he arrives home. Confronted with news of Netta's disappearance, Rook is stunned. In this state he remains until he regains his composure in the closing chapter. But it is at this moment that he is murdered by Hastings, the nihilistic priest, whose life-negating book champions Death's destructiveness over Life's creativity. The negativeness of Hastings' views stems from the suffering he endured as an unhappy, little schoolboy whose only solace came from his ability "to think the whole world away and to sink back, back, far back, into the comfortable arms of the infinite Nothingness!" (D, p.210). The resulting scars and struggle for recognition created a life-negating metaphysics where he could be wise and powerful. However, his misanthropic mania fails to achieve its ultimate goal. Hastings kills Rook, but fails "to 'crack Nature's moulds' and bring back the original chaos!" (D, p.441). Raving mad, he dies shortly after killing Rook, having failed to defeat the life principle: Lady Ann, a scarred bridge to the future, gives birth to a son, John, the new Squire of Ashover.¹⁵

Since one of Powys's main interests as a writer is the sensual escape provided by his stories, he creates narrators who were able to enter people's minds and follow the course of their sensations thereby personalizing their various perceptions. When

¹⁵ At the request of Rook's mother, the child is named John after her husband (D, p.446). Even Lexie, who cherishes Rook's memory, secretly hopes that Rook's name and his manias will be banished from the face of the earth.

these meandering forays into sensation are coupled with narratorial commentary, the resultant intimacy helps to capture the subjective realm of each character's life-illusion. By capturing the idiosyncrasies of his characters, Powys includes the weird elements of existence into his novels. By personalizing the characters' sensations, Powys sought to establish the diversity of mankind as well as the complexity of each individual's life-illusion. This attempt to allow for co-existing, but not necessarily harmonious, sets of truth reveals the complexity of his multiverse. As Charles Lock points out, if truth is the central goal of a philosophical system then to speak of a multiverse may render language impossible.¹⁶ However, Powys is more concerned with an individual's sensations and his ability to cope with hostile forces acting to limit his enjoyment of his surroundings. This preoccupation with personal happiness, instead of truth, pervades Powys's non-fictional prose and is one of the motivating forces behind his character's actions.

As Brebner points out, this work has flaws; however, despite its weaknesses the novel has an intensity which makes it worth studying. Far from being formless, Ducdame has a structural and thematic unity that serves as a suitable vehicle for Powys's vision. By allowing Powys to tell his story in his own way, many of his supposed faults disappear. The pattern of tensions

¹⁶ Lock, p.74.

underlying Ducdame provides a sense of thematic and structural unity which clearly demonstrates that Powys's art is not a haphazard confusion of bizarre ramblings. Through his choice of narrator, Powys is able to distance himself from the characters and use the varying degrees of scepticism to tell a meaningful story about human experience while safeguarding life's mysteries.

Both Rook and Ducdame are important stepping stones to Powys's more successful novels. Brebner describes Rook, an early version of the Powys hero, as a sceptical, uncertain modern man who fumbles around in an attempt to understand his origin and destiny. Unfortunately, for Rook this journey must be made alone without the aid of religious conviction, or social convention.¹⁷ He is isolated in his search for a personal vision which will help him to escape the pressures of his obligations. Rook is murdered just as he prepares to begin his struggle to embrace life and its responsibilities.

¹⁷ Brebner, pp.55-6.

Chapter 3

"Ripples in the Creative Silence":

Narrative Control in A Glastonbury Romance

"Miracles are lies; and yet they are happening..."¹

This statement by Johnny Geard, the magical, charismatic mayor of Glastonbury, is crucial to an understanding of A Glastonbury Romance. Battling the tyranny of the empirically observable and the rationally intelligible, Powys sought to capture Glastonbury's "psychic history". This attempt to emphasize the mystical, unseen nature of his "chaotic, irrational, chance-ruled, strung-along, pluralistic multiverse"² is not easy since there are "many forces at work for which human language has at present no fit terms" (GR, p.779). Rejecting "infatuated art-drunk verse",³ Powys prefers the 'wide canvas' technique of Dostoevsky because it perceives 'real reality' to be composed of a conglomerate of particular universes created through each individual's

¹ John Cowper Powys, A Glastonbury Romance (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1933), p.932. All subsequent references to A Glastonbury Romance will be incorporated into the text and noted by the abbreviation (GR) and the appropriate page reference.

² Powys, "My Philosophy up-to-date as Influenced by Living in Wales" in the Obstinate Cymric (Carmathen: Druid Press, 1947), p.140.

³ Powys, "The Simple Vision" in the Obstinate Cymric (Carmathen: Druid Press, 1947), p.118.

imaginative will power.⁴ In the course of this study of A Glastonbury Romance, which will be restricted to examples from Chapter 29, "The Iron Bar", I will focus on how Powys's choice of narrator and subsequent narrative control combat the tyranny of chronological time in telling a complex story. This technique which seeks to enhance the appreciation of each passing moment may initially distract the reader, but through close examination of the construction of a single chapter, the reader will be able to see how Powys's narrative control develops his subject matter.⁵

To appreciate Powys's fiction, the reader must realize that Powys rejects the possibility of a comprehensive explanation of the universe whether it be in philosophical, psychological, scientific, or even poetic terms. By refusing to be limited to any one system, Powys seeks to use language to liberate the imagination to the myriad possibilities which exist beyond the realm of rational comprehension.⁶ This emphasis on our

⁴ Lock, p. 72.

⁵ G. Wilson Knight, The Saturnian Quest (London: Villiers, 1964), p.122. Knight notes that Powys's technique creates a world of its own. In fact, through his use of long sentences, repetition, and a highly spatialized narrative technique involving massive deployments, he has created a style attuned to his artistic purpose.

⁶ Charles Lock's "'Multiverse' ... language which makes language impossible" is a key article that should be read by anyone interested in Powys's concern with liberating the imagination.

inner, subjective world, or 'life illusion', creates a plurality of personal universes which in turn, create his 'multiverse.' The flexibility created through this diversity of personal visions creates an elastic truth which allows our imaginations to enter a realm in which the psychic history of Glastonbury can be understood.

The indefinite article in the title of A Glastonbury Romance alerts us to the provisional nature of any truths, or hypotheses, the narrator, as chronicler, proffers. Interestingly, Powys chose the Romance form instead of the Novel to write his psychic history. Instead of social commentary, Powys is more concerned with capturing the magic of the universe. Thus, the Romance was the logical choice, since by definition a 'Romance' can either be a work involving extravagant characters, and highly exciting and heroic events, or a work relatively free from the restrictive aspects of realistic verisimilitude, which can explore profound, transcendent, or idealistic truths.⁷

Before beginning to analyze Powys's narrative control in "The Iron Bar" chapter, it will be useful to determine the narrator's nature and reliability. The opening paragraph provides us with a few clues:

⁷ C. Hugh Holman. A Handbook to Literature 4th ed., (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), p.387. Powys's use of the romance is also developed by Glen Cavaliero in John Cowper Powys: Novelist (1973), pp.10, 15-16.

At the striking of noon on a certain fifth of March, there occurred within a causal radius of Brandon railway-station and yet beyond the deepest pools of emptiness between the uttermost stellar systems one of those infinitesimal ripples in the creative silence of the First Cause which always occur when an exceptional stir of heightened consciousness agitates any living organism in this astronomical universe. Something passed at that moment, a wave, a motion, a vibration, too tenuous to be called magnetic, too subliminal to be called spiritual, between the soul of a particular human being who was emerging from the third-class carriage of the twelve-nineteen train from London and the divine-diabolic soul of the First Cause of all life. (GR, p.1)

These statements about time, space and the nature of the janus-faced First Cause controlling the universe definitely exceed the abilities of any objective, omniscient narrator. The imaginative projections of the chronicler's life-illusion demonstrate a special bias which colours the facts, half-truths, and whims to be contained in this treatment of Glastonbury.

The subjective colouring of the narrator's bias is integral to a paradigm of "knowings" that Powys uses to convey the variety of subjective perceptions inherent in his 'multiverse'. This paradigm involves the "invisible watchers", the narrator, as well as the various characters. The "invisible watchers" (like Blake's "eternals") are sufficiently removed from earth's affairs to analyze objectively the proceedings while both the narrator and the characters are limited in their knowing due to their subjective life-illusions. The narrator, as chronicler of Glastonbury's "psychic history", clearly states his ignorance of certain matters while commenting on the aftermath of Tom Barter's murder:

His consciousness, the "I am I" of Tom Barter, shot up into the ether above them like a released fountain-jet and quivering there pulsed forth a spasm of feeling, in which outrage, ecstasy, indignation, recognition, pride, touched a dimension of Being more quick with cosmic life than Tom had ever reached before in his thirty-seven years of conscious existence. This heightened--nay! this quadrupled--awareness dissolved in a few seconds, after its escape from the broken cranium, but whether it passed, with its personal identity intact, into that invisible envelope of rarefied matter which surrounds our astronomic sphere or whether it perished irrecoverably, the present chronicler knows not. (GR, p.1100, underlining mine)

Against this backdrop of a multiplicity of "knowings", Powys seeks to convey the complexity of his multiverse by reworking the traditional novel's emphasis on plot and character. In the tradition of Dostoevsky, he believes in simultaneously running several plot lines. Like major and minor themes in a musical score, each plot contributes to a complex, interdependent whole. He interweaves these strands in such a way that the reader is simultaneously aware of the major events as they occur in chronological time as well as the minor events and details which help to illuminate the significance and interrelatedness of human experience in a universe whose ultimate truth, for Powys, transcends the physical and the rational. As a result, Powys creates a form capable of capturing the psychological complexities inherent in the works of his contemporaries which does not confuse or detract from the importance of the plot. This use of narrator and multi-plot lines in Powys requires a possible revision of the term "chapter" because this definition

seems restrictive and inappropriate to Powys's vision; consequently, the term "narrative unit" could be used to suggest Powys's tentative, pluralistic vision.

Powys chose Glastonbury and its environs as the setting for his romance because it is an enchanted soil where "the Eternal once sank down into time! (GR, p.1113). Powys's interest in Glastonbury's special magic was shared by others. In an article for The Powys Review, John Thomas provides some background on studies done regarding Glastonbury's history.⁸ Thomas mentions Frederick Bligh Bond's quest in 1907, which involved the use of spiritualism, to re-establish the architectural history of the Glastonbury Abbey. Bond's book Mystery of Glastonbury and her Immortal Traditions (1938) and K.E. Maltwood's A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple of the Stars (1935) demonstrate that Powys was not alone in his interest in Glastonbury's "psychic history". Thomas also mentions the existence of an Arthurian festival launched in 1914 which continued on into the 1920's. Powys would have been aware of this festival and could have used it as a model for Geard's Pageant. The richness of Glastonbury's past which includes the Eternal and a variety of myths, legends and historically verifiable facts co-exist with the Mechanized Age of

⁸ John Thomas, "The King Edgar Chapel Man": Bond, Glastonbury, and the 'Alternative' Theory of Gothic Architecture" The Powys Review No.9 (1981/82), 39-43.

the twentieth century.⁹ As such, Glastonbury is not a fragment of history; it is "something that's making history" (GR, p.830).¹⁰

The pattern of tensions or antitheses integral to A Glastonbury Romance can be confusing. In the preface to the Macdonald edition (1955), Powys notes that he sought to convey a "jumbled-up and squeezed together epitome of life's various dimensions" (p.XIV). This kind of experiment which seeks to

⁹ Interviewing himself on the subject of A Glastonbury Romance, John Cowper Powys provided several reasons for why he wrote the novel. ("Glastonbury," The Powys Review No.9 (1981/82), 7-9; rpt. from The Modern Thinker vol. 1, No.1 (1932)). One of the most important reasons was to "express certain moral, philosophical and mystical ideas that seem to me unduly neglected these days" (p.7). He chose Glastonbury as the site for this project in which he sought "to isolate a spot on the surface of the earth...making the spot itself the real hero or heroine of the tale" (p.7). The importance of Glastonbury's 'spirit of place' reflects the richness of its history. Surrounded by three hills (Wirral, Chalice, and Glastonbury Tor) as well as by a series of rivers and water meadows, the town has been an island secluded from the rest of the world throughout history. The ancient Celts called it 'Ynys-witrin' (Isle of Glass) while in Welsh mythology Glastonbury is 'Avalon': the place where the souls of the dead gather before passing into another mode of existence (Esplumecoir). In the Arthurian legend, the 'Isle of Avalon' is Arthur's traditional resting spot and in Christian terms, Glastonbury is important because it was here that Joseph of Arimathea came with the cup containing the blood of Christ and preserved it in the haunted Carbonek castle. However, in the present era, our mechanized age has created many sceptics who reject the past and the realm of the unseen. Thus, in this tale of Glastonbury's psychic history, the realms of the seen and the unseen co-exist even if the human participants are unaware of these occurrences.

¹⁰ Evans' statement angers Cordy who disagrees with many of her father's eccentricities. However, she is not a sceptic like John Crow because when needed, like her father, she can heal people as she did with Evans' sadism.

allow for the possibility of mystical experience while recording precise, microscopic detail is difficult because of the conflict between the timelessness of eternity and the temporal mode of storytelling. This project is particularly complex because A Glastonbury Romance is a multi-centered psychic history instead of a uni-centered psychic biography as seen in Ducdame.¹¹ The potential confusion inherent in the use of multi-plot lines and the various perspectives provided by almost 50 characters results from Powys's refusal to acknowledge absolute authority.¹² The resultant pattern of tensions, mixed with the multi-levelled comments of an aberrantly, partially-omniscient narrator, is similar to yet more complex than in Ducdame.

One of the central antitheses in A Glastonbury Romance involves the tension between the sceptical, East Anglians (the Crow family and their Norfolk acquaintances) and their idealistic or mystical counter-parts from the Glastonbury region. Two principal characters participating in this tension are the Pyrrhonian sceptic, John Crow, and Johnny Geard, the charismatic,

¹¹ Coates, p.95.

¹² Lock, p.72. Lock notes the lack of any formal orchestration in A Glastonbury Romance and equates this with Powys's refusal to organize the psychic history of Glastonbury into a coherent whole, a model of the universe. His understanding of the psychic history is necessarily limited and he tries to prevent the form from implying assumptions which his knowledge does not warrant.

magical mayor of Glastonbury. The reader is constantly reminded of the inherent tension between these divergent ideologies by the involvement of these two men in promoting Glastonbury's Pageant. At the core of the pageant is a Miracle Play which seeks to tap the region's supernatural energy.

One of the triumphs of A Glastonbury Romance is the narrator's use of John Crow as a sceptical mediator for the reader.¹³ The narrator creates a balance between extreme approaches which would be restrictive to life's mysteries by focussing on the tension between Crow's and Geard's perspectives. He further defuses reader scepticism by viewing Glastonbury through John Crow's scepticism at the outset of A Glastonbury Romance. By initiating this clash at the outset, the narrator creates an atmosphere in which the reader is not antagonistic to the possibility of mystical experience. By understanding the narrator's role as chronicler of a psychic history, the reader can see the inappropriateness of the following statement:

The great weakness of A Glastonbury Romance lies in the fact that too often what are acceptable as superbly imaginative insights and intuitions of an infinitely suggestive nature are presented as dogmas uttered with a kind of pseudo-gnomic wisdom which lend themselves all too readily to the accusation that John Cowper Powys was a crank.¹⁴

¹³ Coates, p.93.

¹⁴ Cavaliero, p.67.

This confusion between Powys and his biased narrator is unfortunate because it fails to see how Powys distances himself from the narrator and the story being chronicled so that meaningful statements can be made through the variety of knowings inherent in the work.

The choice of Chapter 29, "The Iron Bar", is due to the importance of John Crow, the Powys-hero, to A Glastonbury Romance. By choosing to focus on John Crow instead of Johnny Geard--whose participation in the story ends with his life-affirming suicide in the next and final chapter, "The Flood"--I do not wish to imply that Crow's participation in the work is more important than Geard's. Chapter 29 terminates the involvement of a variety of characters and demonstrates how their different approaches to life affect their perspectives. In this process of tying up loose ends, John Crow is important because of his role as the Powys hero and as a sceptical mediator between the narrator and the reader. Despite shunning mystical experience, John Crow is caught in an interesting tension because of his interest in psychic realities. When John departs for Norfolk with Mary, Tossie and the twins, the narrator clearly states that John is going to miss out on something by turning his back on the possibility of psychic reality. Interestingly, the narrator's subtle use of John as a sceptical mediator brings even the sceptical reader to the point of wondering if John Crow will

ever find peace in East Anglia since he has been touched by Geard and the magic of Glastonbury.

As a narrative unit, Chapter 29, "The Iron Bar" (pp. 1032-1113) contains many revealing elements of Powys's narrative control. To begin with, the chapter's title is very important and serves two functions. On a superficial level, the bar represents the murder weapon used by the homicidal Codfin. A discussion of how and why a mad woman's henchman kills her idol/lover would be sufficient for a simple story; however, this is insufficient for Powys's purposes. The bar plays a deeper and much more sinister role in the life of Owen Evans. The bar comes to represent the irrepressible element of Evans' perversion and introduces the 'negative blood law' which flows from the diabolical side of the janus-faced First Cause and is central to his sadistic tendencies.

This 'blood law' is central to Powys's philosophy because his janus-faced First Cause is equally creative and destructive. The battle between the life-affirming and life-negating forces continues throughout the universe as well as within the individual. This state of tension is central to Powys because of

his emphasis on personality and the power of the will.¹⁵ Thus it is up to the individual to choose a course of action and the results will demonstrate whether the forces of dark or light have mastery over him.

In order to appreciate more fully Powys's technique, the narrative unit has been divided into three sections which contain several scenes or sub-sections. The first section (pp.1032-69) treats the morning of February the 25th which introduces the characters, establishes the importance of the 'blood law', and sets the backdrop for the murder. The second section (pp.1069-1103) which begins later that same day covers the murder. The final section (pp.1103-13) separates and terminates the participation of several characters in the work most of whom are directly affected by the murder.¹⁶

¹⁵ In the chapter entitled "Tin", the narrator describes the janus-faced First Cause and its place in Powys's universe:

Both the two great forces pouring forth from the double-natured First Cause possess the energy of sex. One is creative, the other destructive; one is good, the other evil; one loves, the other hates. But through both of them pours forth the magnetic energy that moves and disturbs the lethargy of Matter...

Apart from Personality, apart from Personal Will, there is no such "ultimate" as Matter, there is no such "ultimate" as Spirit. Beyond Life and beyond Death there is Personality, dominating both Life and Death to its own arbitrary and wilful purposes. (GR, p.693)

¹⁶ Elizabeth Crow is the only main character who is unaware of the murder. However, as a representative of the positive blood law and a foil to Mad Bet, she is important in her own right.

The first section centers on Evans' struggle with the dark, perverse elements of his nature. However, in accordance with Dostoevsky's 'wide canvas' technique, several other characters, animate and otherwise, are introduced and the narrator demonstrates the complexity of the moment by slowing down chronological time through a series of comments on their thoughts and activities. In this way the various plot lines of Glastonbury's residents are woven together to capture the spirit of the place.

The first three paragraphs of Chapter 29 acquaint the reader with the social and political repercussions of the Glastonbury commune.¹⁷ Powys, however, quickly passes on to more personal and interesting issues. As Owen Evans begins the day in which he is to succumb to the 'evil worm-snake' of the negative blood law, he is in high spirits. Promising his wife to be back by five for tea, he heads off and fatefully encounters Finn Toller, alias Codfin, as he enters Dickery Cantle's tavern.

The mood surrounding Evans is established with the narrator's comment:

¹⁷ The Glastonbury commune is led by four men-- Johnny Geard: the mystical, charismatic mayor; Paul Trent: the anarchist lawyer; Dave Speare: the communist; and Red Robinson: a communist whose fiery Jacobean temper dominates his political awareness. Each man seeks to liberate Glastonbury, but their objectives are as different as their personalities. The discussion of the commune in the novel is less a study of the problems confronting the new political regime than another demonstration of Powys's concern for the various perspectives co-existing within a supposedly unified group.

The day was one of unusually delicate atmospheric effects. Grey upon grey abounded, with occasional fragments of what looked almost like mother-of-pearl as the ditch-mists were blown here and there over walled courts and mossy lawns while the sun struggled with the clouds. (GR, p.1032)

Despite the delicate atmospheric effects, the emphasis on grey clouds, mist and a struggling sun foreshadow the events to come. Evans is drawn to Codfin, a strange and homicidal creature. Their common bond is the iron bar. With imbecilic clairvoyance, Codfin knew the 'curiosity man' is not to be feared. In fact, he quickly discovers that

his own homicidal instinct, in which the mental image of the iron bar played so lively a part, was responded to by something darker and far more evil, as it was far less simple, in Mr. Evans' nature. (GR, p.1034)

The intertwining of the worm-snakes of their perversions creates a wordless understanding between the two which allows Codfin to reveal specific details of the upcoming murder to Evans. Despite Evans' warning not to take this 'joking' too far, Codfin is resolute because of his fear and respect for Mad Bet.

As Codfin shambles towards the bar, Evans leaves the tavern and shortly thereafter runs into the elderly Miss Elizabeth Crow. The mood established by her presence differs significantly from the scene focussing on Evans:

Over the empty enclosures behind her, ... the flickering misty sunlight fell with the same caressing benediction as it would have carried had it fallen upon the dancing waves of Weymouth Bay or upon the mossy stones of Mark Court. (GR, p.1035)

This emphasis on the 'caressing benediction' of the sunlight and the 'dancing' waves contrasts the subtle play of cloud and mist surrounding Mr. Evans' moods and perceptions. This bright picture reinforces Elizabeth Crow's life-affirming energy which partakes of the positive blood law and establishes her as a foil to Mad Bet. Although she is getting old and has a heart condition, her problems are only physical. She suffers none of Evans' torment, yet she, like Codfin, plays a part, however accidental, in stirring up the evil worm-snake of Evans' perversity. By requesting a special volume on Saint Augustine, she is sending him to the bookcase that contains The Unpardonable Sin, the book which excites in him the dark temptation of the iron bar.

While Elizabeth provides this unwilling encouragement to the 'gulf stream of evil,' the exchange between Elizabeth and Evans as well as the narratorial comments help to create the complex weave integral to Powys's vision. In this scene, Elizabeth wrongly infers from Dr. Fell's statements that her death is imminent. Despite this heady news, she refrains from egotistical self pity and enjoys life more intensely. It is as if the verdict of death "had taken away a thin screen between herself and life" (GR, p.1036). She experiences many things simultaneously and she confronts the crisis. The layered effect of her awareness demonstrates the complexity of the human mind. While she sits there, she can feel several things: the desire to

speak to Evans about the book on Saint Augustine; the pleasure Matt Dekker will derive from the book; an inner shuddering recoil from the thought of death; and, a delight in the magic of the light flickering on the poplars. The complexity of the scene is increased further when the narrator introduces the "invisible watchers". This comment goes beyond the limit of human perception for it is rationally and empirically impossible to verify the following statement:

The invisible watchers--those scientific collectors of interesting human experiences in this ancient town--communicated to one another the conclusion that certain essences and revelations are caught and appropriated by an old maiden lady, like Miss Crow, which are never touched by turbulent, tormented lives like those of Mr. Evans and Codfin. (GR, p.1037)

The scene continues to focus on Elizabeth as Evans departs and Paul Trent, the anarchistic lawyer and co-leader of the Glastonbury Tribunal, arrives. During the exchange between Elizabeth and Trent, the mystical and psychic concerns of the preceding scene give way to the social implications of Trent's solely rational attempt to gain liberty for mankind. Yet, as was previously noted, each sequence contains much more than the central plot line and the topic being discussed. In the midst of Paul's attempt to convince Elizabeth of his views, the narrator notes that the anarchist emits

a small globule of white sputum which now adhered to the black frill of Miss Crow's maternal but maidenly bosom. (GR, p.1042)

This emphasis on the minute and the earthy elements of life in the midst of a political discussion breaks the rhythm of chronological time and reminds the reader of Powys's emphasis on the micro-cosmic and macro-cosmic events occurring simultaneously with the 'central story.' However, Powys does not believe in a world where there is a central story. His world comprises the events and sensations experienced by individual characters whose life-illusions co-exist, but not necessarily in harmony, in his 'multiverse.'

Paul Trent's inability to convince Elizabeth reinforces his failure in Glastonbury. His failing is further reinforced during his discussion with the child robber band.¹⁸ Confronted by the children, they present him with two opposed views of the effectiveness of his attempts at social reform. Bert, age five, has memorized and can regurgitate his school lessons. His definition of Glastonbury reflects the shallowness of relying solely on rational insight. The strange girl, Morgan Nelly, has a completely different response which transcends rational inquiry. She cries out in her shrill, mocking, elf-like voice:

"Glaston be a person, like I be, and persons can't be spelt by no teacher, nor taught by no teacher. 'Twere Mad Bet who told I that Glaston were a person and I arst Holy Sam if such 'un were, and 'a said, 'Sure-lie, girlie, sure-lie. Glaston be the 'Ooman of Sorrows what holds Christ in lap!'" (GR, pp.1044,45)

¹⁸ Due to Powys's belief in a multiverse comprised of a plurality of life-illusions, he creates appropriately realized, minor characters who increase the complexity of the fictional tapestry.

Her answer reintroduces the spiritual or mystical aspect of the universe¹⁹ that had disappeared with the strictly social and rational preoccupations involved in Paul Trent's conversations with Elizabeth! Taking Morgan Nelly's comments as a significant omen, Trent begins to feel that the town's "wayward and mysterious Personality" (GR, p.1045) emphasizes the hopeless inadequacy of a philosophically rational solution. Consequently, he has the dim suspicion that by growing porous to the cosmic forces surrounding him more can be understood.

Leaving Trent to ponder his thoughts, the narrator returns to Evans as he goes to his job as assistant in Jones's book and antique shop. The old book-seller provides further impetus to the evil tide seeking to overcome Evans' resistance. By asking Evans to bring up books from the basement, he places Evans in the immediate vicinity of the book which stirs his perversion. Once down in the basement, Evans is unable to resist the temptation to open The Unpardonable Sin; thus, he gives in totally to his vice and the destructive element of the First Cause. Possessed by this evil worm-snake, he returns to

¹⁹ Morgan Nelly's answer, which reintroduces the realm of the unseen, was given to her by Mad Bet. Thus, even though Mad Bet is caught up in the negative blood law, she can have a positive effect on Paul Trent. Morgan Nelly's comment opens up a whole new realm of possibilities regarding the nature of reality that Paul had not previously considered.

Cantle's Tavern to rejoin Codfin. Here they formally acknowledge their confederacy by shaking hands and drinking 'Our Special' together.

Due to the importance of Evans's perversion to the upcoming events, the narrator expands on the motivation and satisfaction involved in order to emphasize the nature and depth of Evans' vice:

What drove him on to it then? What drove him on to this pleasure-divested horror? The coiled snake-nerve of sex! And the strange thing is that the insane will to the satisfaction of this terrible sex-nerve does not demand pleasure.... No, no, that was the curious thing. Mr. Evans was compelled to contemplate with cold-blooded precision the state of being to which this up-and-down iron bar--whatever it did to its victim--would conduct himself. (GR, p.1060)

These comments on Evans are complemented by an explanation of Codfin's motivation to commit murder by wielding the iron bar.

It was certainly not any sex-nerve. It was purely and solely his sense of honour. Codfin was honourably committed to do the bidding of Mad Bet, and it had never, for one second, since their talk in the sheepfold, presented itself to his mind as a possibility that he could get out of doing it. (GR, p.1061)

These narrative interjections are an integral part of Powys's desire to slow the action so that the complexity of the moment can be more fully appreciated.

While these two bewitched slaves of the iron bar droop over their empty glasses, Dave Speare, the local commune organizer, enters the tavern. As with Paul Trent, the narrator does not limit the implications of the scene to socio-political commentary. Speare drained and worried from his labours as part

of the Glastonbury triumverate, tries to convince the workers drinking in the tavern of the rationale and necessity of his scheme. His communistic fervour matches Paul Trent's idealism, yet he is similarly unsuccessful. Finally, moved to passionate tears, Dave leaves the crowd in stupified bewilderment. In a trance, he shuffles off like a convalescent and slips out the door. Feeling purged and relaxed, he longs for the sympathy of Johnny Geard, the mystical mayor and true leader of Glastonbury. This desire to reach out to Bloody Johnny parallels Paul Trent's more conscious affirmation of the limitations of rational and social frameworks. Thus, even within the weave of socio-political commentary, Powys emphasizes the co-existence of the spiritual and the mystical with the physical and the material.

The first section of the narrative unit ends, as does the morning of February 25th, with a conversation between Evans and a groggy Codfin. Both men were oblivious to Dave's speech: Codfin was lost in his drink, while Evans was possessed by the worm-snake of the negative blood law. Consequently, as Codfin relates the time and location of the proposed murder, Evans' being is flooded with a relentless, pleasureless desire to witness the evil deed regardless of who is involved, or the possible consequences. Thus, the basis is laid for the remaining events, as well as an insight into the personalities, emotions and forces surrounding these actions.

In the second section (pp.1069-1105), Powys brings the events to a climax. However, this is not all that he does. As in the first section, Powys slows the passage of time through narrative digression or commentary so that the complexity of the moment can be more fully understood. The section begins by focussing on Evans once again, who is located on Wirral Hill, five hours after he left Codfin at Cantle's Tavern.

The passage of time has not diminished Evans' obsession with the iron bar. In fact, the dark nature of his perversity increases his appreciation of the use of a bat and ball in an innocent game of rounders. Probing the nature of Evans' perversity, the narrator comments on Evans' awareness and the internal battle raging within him. The narrator mentions that Evans is neither mad,²⁰ nor deluded, and is totally aware of the consequences of his vice in this situation. Further, the narrator describes how Evans, by listening to the worm-snake's twisted logic, bandages his tormented conscience:

he had covered with a sort of adhesive plaster the gaping hole in his tormented conscience; and this covering up of the dark, sweet, irresistible twitching of the snake-worm, left his normal upper-consciousness free to deceive him to the limit with accumulated plausibilities; while all the time the worm licked its devouring fangs in the darkness below! (GR, p.1071)

With his conscience lulled to sleep, Evans is placed in the highly ironic position of being called upon, while being

²⁰ The narrator comments that Evans is not mad unless "all sexual desire, from the satisfaction of which other sentiences suffer unnecessary suffering, is mad" (GR, p.1069).

possessed by the negative blood law, to administer to the needs of Elizabeth Crow who exemplifies the positive blood law. He fails to take charge of the situation. Instead, he is more concerned with the similarities between her condition, heart trouble being "the gentlest of wielders of iron bars" (GR, p.1073), and his perversion which thrives upon the violent, destructive power of blows inflicted by the iron bar. However, the scene is not restricted to a discussion of the dark nature of Evans' perversion. In contrast, the narrator subtly reinforces the positive blood law and the more positive aspects of life introduced by Elizabeth Crow when he comments on the weather:

A soft, light mist, filmy and gossamery as a wet sea vapour, hung over the town; while the sun, shining between heavy banks of clouds, touched with a curious opalescence, pearly and tender, the portion of the hill upon which he was now seated. (GR, p.1072)

Leaving Elizabeth, Evans hurries off to fetch Dr. Fell. However, due to his confused wits, he ends up at his own home where he surprises Cordy and her mother. Interrupting their discussion of Geard's recent behaviour, Evans babbles out a confused message about Elizabeth's dilemma and the importance of a meeting at sunset. Concerned about her husband, Cordy dispatches her mother to fetch Dr. Fell. At this point, the narrator interjects to comment on the degree of interest expressed by the invisible watchers "who were standing at the brink of the deep Glastonbury Aquarium" (GR, p.1077). They were aware that Cordy's response depended upon how she would react to

the twin vibrations emanating from the janus-faced First Cause. Choosing the creative vibration, she reaches out to her husband thinking only of her love for him.

Attempting to exorcise the worm-snake, Cordy--true daughter of Bloody Johnny, the miracle worker--proceeds to work her own miracle, despite her lack of knowledge of the exact nature of the perversity. She embarks on no easy task, but guided by love and her intuitive senses she begins. She is, however, not alone. Other forces operate around her of which she is totally unaware. Seeking to sooth her disturbed and agitated husband, she receives aid from "a flock of obscure, half-material presences, the sort of etherealised thought-projections that are liable to hover over certain crises in human lives" (GR, p.1080). In addition, the unborn child which she carries in her body began to assert itself as an entity. The emphasis the narrator places on these occurrences is not to be disregarded because in his view:

the very essence of life is revealed in such fleeting impressions; and in experiences such as these Eternity itself can be heard moaning and weeping, as its Cimmerian waters advance and recede around the lamplit promontories of Time. (GR, p.1081)

Unmoved even by the announcement of his wife's pregnancy, Evans still seeks to escape. However, Cordy refuses to give up. This scene between man and wife provides the narrator with another occasion to demonstrate the powers of the unseen element of our nature:

Roused to the uttermost her soul suddenly became a psychic force, a magnet of destruction, an annihilating ray, and the murderous instrument, summoning up page seventy-seven of that fatal book, crumbled into a pinch of dust. (GR, p.1083)

The battle to subdue Evans' perversity lasts about an hour. Healed, Evans seeks to prevent Codfin from committing murder. However, despite racing frantically to Wirral Hill, Cordy and Evans arrive too late.

While Cordy worked her cure, other events occurred in Glastonbury. The third scene in the second section deals with the lives of those who are to be victimized by Mad Bet's desire to kill John Crow. By shifting from the dark, perverse corners of Evans' temptations to the bright, joyous world of Tom Barter and Tossie Stickles, the narrator sets up the clash between the two sides of the blood law which result in Tom's death. By discussing the emotional and psychological hurts Tom has experienced and the healing induced by Tossie's love and laughter, the reader can empathize with Tom and feel the ruin falling upon Tossie after Tom dies in his attempt to save John's life.

Early in this scene, the narrator establishes the difference between John's thoughts and the Barter's concerns. John, an East Anglian sceptic, like Tom rejects the world of the unseen, but he also rejects Tom's noisy, domestic situation. Uncomfortable in Tom's social world, John shows why he is a good choice as a sceptical mediator. As the narrator follows John's thoughts back

to his morning interview with Johnny Geard,²¹ the reader is more fully able to understand Crow's relationship with Geard. Uneasy in the presence of the mystical mayor, John tries to cynically reject Geard's desire to commit suicide out of a love of life, or a desire to experience more life. Yet somehow John can neither totally rationalize nor reject Geard's views. However, despite his sympathies for Geard, John does not avail himself of Bloody Johnny's spiritual riches but is provided for financially.

Returning to the main story line, the narrator follows John as he links up with Tom and Tossie and they head off for Wirral Hill. Although John Crow, Tom and Tossie form a trio, Crow is lost in his own thoughts (like Evans) and participates only minimally in their Rabelaisian badinage.² Thus, separated from the others, John's thoughts are more pronounced. Passing Geard's Saxon arch, John is reminded that ever since the mystifying, perhaps mystical experience of the vision on Pomparles bridge, he has been unable to maintain his totally sceptical outlook. That experience of vision, coupled with his interest in psychic

²¹ Interestingly, John's conversation with Geard occurs simultaneously with Elizabeth's conversation with Paul Trent. Who knows what forces (if any) were at work to allow both Elizabeth and Geard to contemplate their deaths at the same moment of time. They both are part of the positive blood law, but the nature of their thoughts is completely different. Elizabeth is worried about the condition of her old heart and the real possibility of her imminent death. Bloody Johnny, on the other hand, is seeking to commit suicide out of a love of life. The goal of his search is more life on another plane of existence. In Arthurian mythology this would be called *Esplumeoir*. Evans devotes his life to the discovery of the true meaning of this magical place.

problems, creates a battleground within him so that he must choose to accept the world of the unseen existing in Glastonbury, or reject it and accept to live with the questions raised by the experience.

While John is lost in his thoughts, Tom has just finished teasing Tossie for her ignorance of history and begins to reprimand her for her superstitious fear of Mad Bet. The anger in his East Anglian rejection of superstition foreshadows the upcoming events and allows the narrator to colour our perceptions of the scene:

his [Tom's] temper about such a trifle might be considered as a premonitory sign that he was not completely impervious to the distant hum of the catastrophic avalanche. (GR, p.1096)

Once again, the narrator reinforces the reality of the unseen in Glastonbury where the Eternal has sunk down into time.

As the three approach Tor Field, Codfin helps Mad Bet up to the top of St. Michael's Tower so that she will be able to watch the upcoming murder. Having mentioned the Tower, the narrative veers off the main plot line and comments on the importance and usefulness of the Tower to others. For example, the local town council views it as an object to attract tourist dollars. Matt Dekker, the priest, has a more personal interest: only from the height of the tower does he find the peace necessary to pray for a solution for the turbulent state of his own affairs.

But now, the Tower belongs to Mad Bet. She and Codfin are compared to a witch and attendant demon. As they arrive at the top of the tower, the narrative digresses once more to explain

the inner workings of Codfin's mind and his motivation in attempting to murder another human being. For Codfin, murder was an impersonal act performed out of a religious awe for Mad Bet. Totally aware of the consequences of his witch-queen's demands, Codfin prefers the hangman's rope to the possibility of displeasing Mad Bet. Also, his joy in contemplating wielding the iron bar overflows to enhance his enjoyment of the twilight view from the tower.

As John Crow, Tom and Tossie arrive at the top of the hill, Chance--or the spirit of Gwyn-ap-Nud--allows Codfin to approach them unawares. By a similar twist of fate, Tom, in the midst of a fit of laughter twists slightly and sees the iron bar poised to strike John. Acting instinctively, Tom saves his friend at the cost of his own life. Once again this climactic moment allows the narrator to texture his account of Glastonbury's psychic history. As Tom's skull was crushed, the narrator tells us,

His consciousness, the "I am I" of Tom Barter, shot up into the ether above them like a released fountain-jet and quivering there pulsed forth a spasm of feeling, in which outrage, ecstasy, indignation, recognition, pride, touched a dimension of Being more quick with cosmic life than Tom had ever reached before in his thirty-seven years of conscious existence. This heightened--nay! this quadrupled--awareness dissolved in a few seconds, after its escape from the broken cranium, but whether it passed, with its personal identity intact, into the invisible envelope of rarefied matter which surrounds our astronomic sphere or whether it perished irrecoverably, the present chronicler knows not. (GR, p.1100)

This last statement, acknowledging the limitations of the narrator's knowledge, reinforces the provisional nature of the

truths, semi-truths, and opinions offered in this account of Glastonbury. Thus, A Glastonbury Romance becomes an account of the area and its people. This account lacks a central core upon which to build a logical framework to analyze the events which occur. Yet information is there, in a somewhat chaotic state, and from this information it is possible to construct Glastonbury's psychic history.

In the aftermath of the murder, Tossie flings herself on the bloody corpse while Codfin scrambles back to the tower to join Mad Bet. In a "paroxysm of frenzied remorse" (GR, p.1101), Mad Bet pushes Codfin to his death before he can climb up onto the platform with her. In texturing the events occurring after the murder, Powys attempts to stop time by examining some minute and only loosely related details which could be easily ignored if his vision were different. The narrator speaks of the thoughts, or lack of awareness of the rooks, the activity of a tiny, earth beetle, and the panic-stricken flight of a hare. In the normal sense of the drama, these actions may seem unrelated and unimportant, but in a romance trying to capture the magical magnificence of the seen and unseen realms around Glastonbury, they belong. The scene ends as the evening's twilight gives way to the approach of star-lit night. Growing reflective, the narrator leaves this gruesome scene on Wirral Hill while pondering how no one is safe from sorrow and grief:

There is that about an uttermost sorrow which levels all distinctions; and not Deianeira for Heracles, not Iseult for Tristram, moaned and murmured to her lost love with more absoluteness of pitiful grief than did this bald-headed creature on the top of the tower to her supposedly dead idol. (GR, p.1102)

In the third and final section of Chapter 29 (pp.1103-13), the narrator comments on how the events of February the 25th, affect Evans, Mad Bet, Elizabeth Crow and John Crow. The four short scenes in this section separate and terminate the participation of these characters in Glastonbury's psychic history. This process of tying up loose ends helps to focus attention on Johnny Geard's life-affirming suicide in the flood in the next and final chapter.

The first scene in this section involves the arrival of Evans and Cordy at the tower on Wirral Hill. The time taken to exorcise Evans' worm-snake has prevented them from stopping Codfin. Upon arriving, Evans spoke not a word. With the "punctual, mechanical precision of the consummate actor" (GR, p.1103), he wiped the bloodied end of the iron bar on the grass and then removed John's jacket from over Tom's head to inspect the damage inflicted by the iron bar. Reacting immediately, Evans barely has time to replace the coat and turn away before he begins to vomit with "cataclysmic heavings" (GR, p.1103). This violent reaction to the murder and his past perversion transforms Evans into a meek, docile creature:

It was not that the man's sanity was affected by the accumulating shocks of this day. What it seemed to be was a substitution of a definite sense of guilt over Barter's death for the less tangible but far more deadly remorse over his sadistic dreams and fantasies. (GR, p.1104)

This new sense of guilt has a bizarre effect on Evans. Upon awaking the next morning, Cordy discovers that he has been transformed into an elderly man complete with white hair. Unable

to work, Evans must rely on Geard's annuity to survive, but he cares little. A broken man, he has little energy left. He devotes himself to writing about Merlin and searching for the real meaning of Espumeoir. The scene ends with Cordy losing her child at birth; thus, freeing her to lavish all her maternal affection on Evans.

In the next scene, the narrator quickly treats how Mad Bet is affected by the events of February the 25th. The treatment of Mad Bet's reaction is short and to the point (pp.1105-06). After the murder, the demented woman slips back to her room at St. Michael's Inn unobserved. However, the physical and spiritual strain of the day's events breaks her. Hurt in the heart and feeling the imminence of death, she summons Johnny Geard to her, possibly to confess and ask absolution for her inability to resist the whims of the evil worm-snake. Although the narrator admits to not knowing what went on in the room, the scene provides an interesting variation on the exorcism scene with Evans. Having talked with the mystical Geard, Mad Bet dies the next morning, March 1st.

The scene treating Mad Bet and the repercussions of the negative blood law gives way to the next scene which deals with the effects of the positive blood law in Elizabeth Crow's life. All through the narrative unit, Elizabeth worries about her heart and her fainting fit seems to reinforce her concern. However, in this sub-section (pp.1106-08), the narrator flashes back to the evening when Evans was exorcised and reveals that Elizabeth is

healthy. The life-negating Dr. Fell reprimands her for unnecessarily taxing herself and setting a poor example to the less life-affirming members of the population. Buoyed up by this announcement, she invites Dr. Fell to tea three years hence. Thus, this scene acts as a positive affirmation of life which reinforces the creative, divine aspect of the blood law.

The last scene (pp.1108-1113) dramatizes John and Mary's reaction to Tom Barter's death. Eventually they decide to bring Tossie and the twins to Northwold. However, during their conversation, some interesting comments are made about John. The narrator notes that upon discovering that Tom had sacrificed his life for him, John, oddly enough, accepts the fact without any feeling of gratitude. Habituated to the feminine role in their relationship, John had grown to expect this kind of behaviour from Tom. John's failure to accept fully the meaning of Tom's sacrifice frustrates Mary who comments on the difference between man and woman in these matters:

Women want to suck up to the last dregs every drop of the awful things that happen. They want to soak themselves in their feelings ... whereas John is squeezing all the love he really feels for Tom into a tight little juggler's ball and throwing it from hand to hand! (GR, p.1110)

As they prepare to go to sleep, Mary asks John if he still hates Glastonbury. John surprises her by relating how Geard's presence has touched him and affected his perceptions; however, he is still resolute on returning to East Anglia. Mary agrees that somehow the magic of Glastonbury has affected her and left her with a curious and irresistible sadness when she contemplates

leaving. Despite these feelings, she, like John, is determined to return to Norfolk. However, upon leaving they would be carrying two corpses with them: Tom's body and

the corpse of their stillborn never-returning opportunity of touching the Eternal in the enchanted soil where the Eternal once sank down into time! (GR, p.1113)

Thus, they have decided to reject the mystery of the unseen that surrounds Glastonbury and return to their pragmatic, sceptical ways. However, it remains to be seen if this is possible because John and Mary have been touched by Glastonbury, and they are bringing Tossie, a Glastonbury resident, and her children with them.

Powys seeks to battle the tyranny of empirical, rational models which seek to impose a rigid framework upon reality, a reality which for Powys is unknowable to man. His reverence for life's mystery led him to battle the tyranny of chronological time as well. The steady march of time hindered his attempt to tell a complex story making meaningful statements about human experience while allowing for the limitations of human thought and language to come to terms with life's ultimate mysteries. His search for a suitable literary technique led him to reject the structural innovations of his contemporaries and institute a paradigm of "knowings" which creates a pattern of tensions which the reader must understand and allow for. The diversity of opinion co-existing in Powys's multiverse is in keeping with the fluctuations of a world dominated by a janus-faced First Cause.

between actual physical suffering and mental worry. His ailing body, in contrast to the sickness of Captain Poxwell's mind, is the worst kind of suffering for Powys because it affects both the body and the mind, and various mental tricks are insufficient to alleviate the pain. Secondly, Ruth's disgust with her father's actions drives her to the seashore in an attempt to lose herself in its enchanting, psycho-sensual magic. Thus, section 8 is important because it redirects the chapter's focus and shifts the setting from the esplanade and the dry sand to the wet sand along the seashore.

In addition to the use of Magnus, Ruth, and the seashore as unifying devices, Powys adds the puppet 'Punch' and Dr. Mabon. These two character foils are essential because the plurality and flux that Powys wishes to capture in this novel force him to reject the use of a central binding image. Punch and Dr. Mabon represent the two poles of Man's existence which parallel the confrontation between the land and the sea, the rational and the imaginative, as well as suffering and happiness. Punch is an irrepressible rascal whose whimsical nature parallels the disposition of Powys's First Cause. In Weymouth Sands, Sylvanus suggests that much of the cruelty and pain suffered by Man could be reduced or eliminated if "the Original Jester himself repents Him of His Joke and ceases to cry 'Judy! Judy! Judy!' across our shining sands" (WS, p.519). The ambivalence of Powys's janus-faced First Cause is noted by Magnus Muir who recognizes

Chapter 4

The "Pendulum Swing of this Self-Contradictory Universe":

Narrative Control in Weymouth Sands

As we have seen through the study of Ducdame and A Glastonbury Romance, Powys's narrators and stories are complex. This complexity has erroneously, resulted in Weymouth Sands¹ being called a "novelist's sketchbook".² Unfortunately, this misunderstanding exists even among those who seek to establish Powys's reputation.³ These comments fail to recognize the underlying unities employed by Powys to tell a story which focusses as much on 'spirit of place' as upon the characters. In telling his stories, Powys is committed to undercutting the veracity of his own statements to create a paradigm of "knowings" which will safeguard life's mysteries while making meaningful statements about the human condition. Powys is more concerned with the human struggle to achieve happiness and cope with life's

¹ John Cowper Powys, Weymouth Sands (London: Macdonald, 1963). I am using this text. However, Weymouth Sands was first published in the United States by Simon and Shuster (1934) and in England under the title Jobber Skald by John Lane, the Bodley Head (1935). All future quotes are taken from the Macdonald edition and will be identified by the abbreviation WS.

² Brebner, p.137.

³ Two critics in particular who have advanced our knowledge of Powys, but who have failed to understand Weymouth Sands, are John Brebner, The Demon Within (NY: Barnes & Noble, 1973), and Morine Krissdottir, John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1980). Both critics criticize the work's failure because it does not fit the reading they impose on the text. Their failure results from an inability to see that the unity of Weymouth Sands lies in the Heraclitan fluctuations of the universe which captures the chaotic forces of Powys's janus-faced universe and First Cause.

pressures, than he is with "truth" which for Powys is impossible to ascertain. As a result, Powys embraces the playfulness of Kwang-tse's philosophy as well as the fluctuating, Heraclitan notion of existence. Thus, in an attempt to understand Powys's experiment, "Punch and Judy" (Chapter 13 of Weymouth Sands), has been chosen⁴ to demonstrate how Powys's views mold his themes and affect his choice of theme, narrator, and chapter structure.

Powys's concern with the human quest for happiness (not to be equated with pleasure) dominates Weymouth Sands. The work is dominated by the various characters' attempts to come to terms with themselves, their failures and their loneliness. Happiness, for Powys, is a mental struggle constantly involving each individual.⁵ Powys believes that through the power of the Will, anybody can change his/her perceptions, and consequently, the meaning of any situation. The mental trick Powys advances to help cope with trying situations is formalized in his philosophy of 'Elementalism' which embraces three major points: the cultivation of a kind of 'lonely happiness; a happiness derived from the psycho-sensuous feeling from earth, sea, and sky; and a

⁴ Despite Cavaliero's reservations about Weymouth Sands, he singles out the 'Punch and Judy' chapter as an exemplary of Powys's narrative control:

But at its best, as in the 'Punch and Judy' chapter, the book achieves a narrative method peculiarly Powys's own. (John Cowper Powys: Novelist, p.92.)

⁵ Powys, A Philosophy of Solitude, pp.206-7.

sharing of the cosmic tragedy with the Inanimate.⁶ This emphasis on self-transformation, instead of self-realization, is central to Powys's answer to coping in a chaotic, chance-ruled universe.

The process of self-transformation involves the ability of the individual to sink into the inanimate through sensation. The link between sensation, the inanimate and happiness manifests itself in the lives of many of the characters in Weymouth Sands. As with A Glastonbury Romance, the inanimate place is important because Powys perceives that certain geographical locations are receptive to spiritual and human influence over the course of Time. The animistic philosophy which underlies this notion of 'spirit of place' is so strong that the physical setting develops a distinct personality of its own which interacts with both the characters and the individual physical objects which comprise its landscape.

/In Weymouth Sands the landscape is crucial to the thematic development. The earth and the sea are ancient antagonists. The constant ebb and flow of the sea dramatizes the uncertainty of the Heraclitan fluctuations to which the land and its population are constantly exposed. On the land, a person felt

held by gravitation to the very bed-rock of our planet's substance, whereas in that rushing whirl of waters he was aware of gaping holes out of which jets of the aboriginal chaos kept bubbling up. (WS, pp.348-9)

⁶ Powys, A Philosophy of Solitude, p.172.

This confrontation with the chaotic unknown does not necessarily require a fearful response. In fact, as noted by the title of the novel, the focal point of the work, as well as the town, is the beach: a neutral zone between two ancient antagonists which allows for the possibility of reconciliation.

As with this novel in general, the 'Punch and Judy' chapter rejects any symmetrically organized structure in favour of a more fluid, fluctuating model. For the purpose of this study, Chapter 13 has been divided into ten sections. The apparent disorder and random arrangement of this chapter becomes more comprehensible through the use of several unifying devices (see Appendix F). In sections 1 to 7 (pp.455-485), Magnus Muir serves a transitional role which allows Powys to introduce a variety of material dramatizing the difference between the ephemeral and the elemental. This tension between external events and the rich, subjective reality of each character's life-illusion demonstrates the complexity of the tapestry that Powys creates out of Weymouth.

The remaining three sections (pp.485-501) are unified by the wet sand at the sea's edge. Each of the groups that come to the shore are drawn there for different reasons, but each group feels a need to go. The apparently unrelated material introduced in section 8 concerning James Loder's ulcers is important for two reasons. Firstly, Loder's histrionics introduce the difference

between actual physical suffering and mental worry. His ailing body, in contrast to the sickness of Captain Poxwell's mind, is the worst kind of suffering for Powys because it affects both the body and the mind, and various mental tricks are insufficient to alleviate the pain. Secondly, Ruth's disgust with her father's actions drives her to the seashore in an attempt to lose herself in its enchanting, psycho-sensual magic. Thus, section 8 is important because it redirects the chapter's focus and shifts the setting from the esplanade and the dry sand to the wet sand along the seashore.

In addition to the use of Magnus, Ruth, and the seashore as unifying devices, Powys adds the puppet 'Punch' and Dr. Mabon. These two character foils are essential because the plurality and flux that Powys wishes to capture in this novel force him to reject the use of a central binding image. Punch and Dr. Mabon represent the two poles of Man's existence which parallel the confrontation between the land and the sea, the rational and the imaginative, as well as suffering and happiness. Punch is an irrepressible rascal whose whimsical nature parallels the disposition of Powys's First Cause. In Weymouth Sands, Sylvanus suggests that much of the cruelty and pain suffered by Man could be reduced or eliminated if "the Original Jester himself repents Him of His Joke and ceases to cry 'Judy! Judy! Judy!' across our shining sands" (WS, p.519). The ambivalence of Powys's janus-faced First Cause is noted by Magnus Muir who recognizes

the brazen, violent element in Punch, but cannot help but be attracted by a curious poignance initiated by the "essential masculine element" (WS, pp.458-59) embodied by the puppet. Thus, Punch's masculine energy could be used to either cause or prevent cruelty; however, Punch's role is dramatized by Magnus's vision of the rascal mocking a long procession of his despairing, neurotic acquaintances as they march off to 'Hell's Museum.' Therefore, Punch represents the destructive, chaotic forces pulsating through the universe which hamper or destroy people's happiness.

In opposition to Punch's whimsically negative strength, Powys introduces Dr. Mabon: the Powysian version of a saint. Redemption and ease from suffering are not to be found in organized religion, or secret, magical formulas. Happiness is a goal to be battled for daily. A Powysian saint is an individual who helps others by having

no desire to build any particular kind of character. All he wants to do is to remove from people's lives those definite causes--material, physical, or nervous--which prevent this magnetic wave of happiness from flowing through them.⁷

This ability to help others and to submerge personal desires and cravings parallels Powys's 'Elementalism' which stresses the importance of sensation to happiness. Mabon, a great traveller, is a silent, self-contained man who appears to have both the wisdom of the sea and the Orient. The peace and assurance he

⁷ Powys, A Defence of Sensuality, pp.63-4.

carries with him prompt Magnus to wonder "if this man were a new specimen of a new type of personality in the world" (WS, p.494). Powys's dramatization of the need for Mahon in a Punch-plagued world creates a tension which must be faced by everyone. Since no protagonist could represent everybody's personal struggle, Powys rejects the traditional novel's reliance on the protagonist as a central, unifying figure. Instead, since Powys seeks to capture the diversity of daily life, he introduces a variety of unifying and transitional devices which allow for, but do not systematize, a wealth of apparently unrelated material which co-exists, however dissonantly, in Powys's multiverse of divergent life-illusions..

As previously mentioned, Chapter 13 has been divided into ten sections to facilitate a study of Powys's thematic concerns as well as his notion of chapter and his use of narrator. The opening section (pp.455-57), a mood piece, captures the 'spirit of place' which pervades the novel's complex backdrop. Having quickly established the physical setting in Time, the narrator is free to texture the scene by incorporating elements ranging from the inanimate to the ethereal. This emphasis on areas of knowledge which escape our rational capabilities suggests Powys's affinity with the Romance genre.

In trying to capture the relationship between Weymouth's population and physical surroundings on this hot August afternoon, the narrator describes the sky as resembling "the air

of Watteau's 'Embarkation to Cythera' (WS, p.456). The sand, because of its importance as a neutral zone between the sea and the land, is symbolically divided into the wet, 'Homeric' sand, and the dry, 'Rabelaisian' sand.⁸ The dry sand is enjoyed by two groups: "Rabelaisian mortality" (WS, p.457), with their "earthy, care-forgetting ribaldry" (WS, p.457), who frolic and carouse, and a more sedate group who prefer to sleep, read, and sew. In contrast, the Homeric golden age represented by the wet sand has a "marvellous heathen glamour" (WS, p.456). The ecstasy of the scene transcends Time and its cares and lifts children into "some ideal region of everlasting holiday" (WS, p.454), or "some limbo of unassailable playtime" (WS, p.457). The narrator reinforces the magical quality of Weymouth's 'spirit of place' by pondering the kind of commentary to be offered by the town's buildings and surrounding landscape. Thus, although the inanimate may be unresponsive to those lost in the crowd of the dry sand, the narrator allows for the possibility of the inanimate possessing a soul and interacting with those who develop their life of sensation, or 'Elementalism.' However, the tentative nature of the narrator's comments reminds us that his views are subjective and limited. Thus, his ideas are useful

⁸ Weymouth's setting as well as the clear cut distinction between the wet and dry sand is clearly laid out in the photo of Weymouth's sea shore. See photo, Appendix G.

only to the degree that they help establish the framework for Weymouth's 'spirit of place' and safeguard the diversity and mystery of Powys's multiverse.

With the mood and backdrop established, Section 2 (pp.457-60) follows Magnus Muir as he wanders along the beach towards the Punch-and-Judy show. Due to the importance of sensation and subjectivity to an individual's life-illusion, the narrator uses Magnus as a device to contrast external events and an individual's internal musings. Initially, as Magnus walks along the beach, the scene triggers a series of childhood memories. However, as he lingers in front of the puppet show, the narrator introduces both the external scene and his own perceptions as well as Magnus's subjective response. This total control of the scene by the puppet is important to the development of the character of Punch. The narrator compares Punch's voice to "a savage chorus of age-old mockery, as if all the Mimes and Mumpers of Antiquity, without pity or sensitiveness or remorse, were jibing at our modern sympathies" (WS, p.458). However, despite the brutal heartlessness in Punch's voice, some chord deep in Magnus's nature responds positively to him. Thus, this device of setting the narrator's perceptions and commentaries against those of the characters helps to incorporate a plurality of views into the chapter's structure.

Later in this section, Magnus's thoughts leave Punch and begin to agonize over his frustrating relationship with Curly Wix. This radical shift of focus happens again almost

instantaneously as Magnus attempts to visualize Weymouth as a thought-image substituted for the town itself. Magnus felt as if the old Georgian resort had

risen in its complete totality--Spire and Statue and Nothe and Breakwater and all its ivory-misted rows of houses--straight out of the glittering bay. It seemed an immaterial, an insubstantial thing to him just then, a thing made out of the stuff of thought! It was as if in all its long nights and days an impalpable thought-image of it had been wrought, that on such an afternoon as this substituted for the solid reality.
(WS, p.459)

The erratic course of Magnus's thoughts includes both his idle thoughts as well as deeper concerns. The variety of detail included in the content of Magnus's thought, when interwoven with the narrator's comments, contributes to a better understanding of the various levels of existence the narrator wishes to include in this story about Weymouth.

The third section (pp.460-68) is more intricately layered than the previous one. Using Magnus as a transitional device once more, the narrator interweaves his path with the Rugg, alias Clive, party. Focussing principally on Magnus's and Tossty's thoughts, the narrator seeks to capture the intricate, cerebral underworld which exists simultaneously with the external action. Touching on Tissty and Tossty's relaxed good-naturedness with their parents and Herbie Dandin, the narrator shifts to Magnus's thoughts. Although in close proximity to the Rugg party, Magnus is preoccupied with his own frustrations. Curly Wix has ruined his birthday plans. Rejecting her excuse, he bitterly ponders the nature of the liaison between his love and

Sippy Ballard. Despite his anger, Magnus's frustrations are quickly absorbed by the stoical, 'elemental' part of his nature. The shifts between Magnus's and Tossty's thoughts and sensations occur more rapidly on page 462. The narrator quickly shifts from outlining the difference between Tissty and Tossty's emotional and physical characteristics to noting how they represent woman's evasiveness to Magnus in the next paragraph. However, in the subsequent paragraph, Magnus's frustrations with Curly are followed up by narrative commentary on Curly's reckless, carefree treatment of both Sippy and Magnus which has left even her mother perplexed.

These shifts continue throughout the rest of the section. By rapidly changing the narrative focus between characters as well as developing the difference between internal and external events, Powys captures the essence of his pluralistic vision. An example of the difference between perceivable action and a character's internal wanderings occurs during an interruption in Herbie Dandin's conversation with Hepzibah Rugg. The "fatally double sound" (WS, p.464) of the sea triggers Magnus's sexual hunger. As he responds to the "long planetary rise-fall, up-down, pendulum swing of this self-contradictory universe,"

it seemed as if some destiny-drenched lust-sobbing force within him was carrying him forward on such a foam-crest, that he felt he must and would possess her [Curly], possess that maddeningly sweet body of hers, even if he had to ravish it by force! (WS, p.464)

The forcefulness of Magnus's reaction is contrasted to his stoical, bookish nature, but he immediately repents his lust as he becomes overwhelmed by sensations of a more spiritual and pure

nature. Interestingly, the placement of the battle between Magnus's thoughts and sensations as an interruption of Herbie Dandin's conversation parallels the Radipole clerk's comments on the difference between Squire Coots' lasciviousness and farmer Coots' religious wholesomeness.

The remaining part of this section focusses on Tossty's thoughts. Although a member of the Rugg party, she extricates herself from the group by losing herself in memories of her childhood and her previous visits to Weymouth. Then the past gives way to the present. Focussing on both her sister and Jerry Cobbold, she evaluates her present situation. Avowing her passion for her sister, Tossty bemoans her sister's lack of emotional control in relationships. Contrasting Tissty's genuine sweetness with her own dark nature, she prides herself on her ability to confuse Jerry constantly and thus keep his attention, if not his affection and loyalty.

While the narrative in this section focusses principally on the thoughts of Magnus and Tossty, some interesting minor, yet still important aspects of Powys's vision are developed through Herbie Dandin and Zinzin. Discussing Herbie's heavy-handed jocularity, the narrator develops Herbie's personality in sufficient depth to make him a round and solid, if minor, character:

When he went to the privy these autumn mornings and just glanced through the wet mist over the nettles and burdocks of Mr. Cole's hedge to catch the yellow eye of Mr. Cole's great sow, the creature, in plain pig-language, told him he was a nuisance.

And Herbie Dandin was a nuisance. He was not a vicious man, nor was he a malevolent man, but he had only to wink at a pig for the animal to get that look. (WS, p.463)

The minuteness and precision of detail make Herbie come alive as the real, if irritating, clerk of Radipole. This attention to small detail helps to layer the backdrop so that it has a three-dimensional effect. In addition, the references to Zinzin produce the same effect, but in a different manner. Instead of describing her peculiarities solely by visual means, the narrator identifies Zinzin through her body odour. When Magnus first notices this "small, slippery, gliding, iridescent person, curiously suggestive of a fresh-caught mackerel, ... there emanated a strong odour of Opopanax mixed with human perspiration" (WS, p.462). Next, Magnus equates her ordinary working emanations with turpentine. Thus, the backdrop is layered and textured through the use of various mental and physical sensations.

The various incidents and the often unrelated sensations which occur simultaneously in the tea tent end with the "brazen, goatish, rammish cry" of Mr. Jones as the puppet show begins once again. The puppeteer's cry reminds us of the ever present reality of cruelty and despair. Once again the narrator uses Magnus as a transitional device to set up the next section. Although he sets off in search of Sylvanus, his thoughts drift off elsewhere. As he walks along, he ponders Gaul's love affair with Peg Frampton. This bizarre relationship provides the material for the fourth section and introduces many new kinds of

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The diversity of allusions, special word choice and narratorial comment contribute to a further understanding of Powys's vision. However, lest we should begin to take this philosophy too seriously, Powys reminds us that all of our passions and problems as well as our philosophies are no more substantial than an "airy, floating ephemeral balloon."

The sixth section (pp.476-83) principally deals with Magnus's interaction with Sylvanus after he has left the Jobber. The scene opens with Magnus, standing upon the stone steps leading down to the dry sand, watching two infants and their enormously fat grandmother on the beach. In his thoughts, Magnus compares the child who wet himself to the poor Israelites who attempted to make bricks without straw during the Egyptian captivity. This biblical allusion quickly gives way, mid-paragraph, to a strong sexual passion for Curly Wix. His reverie is broken by a shrill bark from a dog hidden in the woman's lap. The shifting focus of Magnus's thoughts helps to develop and convey the complexity of man's subjective reality as well as the total unrelatedness between external stimuli and the variety of thoughts, impressions and sensations that can occupy our minds.

Breaking past the grandmother and the children, Magnus goes in search of Sylvanus on the wet sand. Walking along the beach he decides to rest upon a beached boat named 'Calypso' whose classical reference sweeps him away to an unworried, obsession-free, Homeric realm.¹² Contented, Magnus calmly

¹² Magnus's ability to escape into sensation reflects Powys's belief in the mind as the great magician.

Gaul's confusion and inability to understand Peg reinforces Powys's rejection of pat intellectual systems. Gaul talks about using 'imaginative reason' to keep his system flexible, but Powys undercuts the philosopher's credibility by contrasting his mind's theory and his body's actions as the spring weather and his attraction to Peg begin to work on him. Gaul seeks to put everything into its suitable 'Representational' box. By exposing the young philosopher's foibles and shortcomings, Powys undermines Gaul's claim to having the whole truth. This, however, does not negate the value of Gaul's feelings, thoughts, and sensations; his inner world, along with Peg's bizarre life-illusion, enhance the complexity of the paradigm of "knowings" woven into Weymouth Sands.

In section 5 (pp.470-75), Magnus once again serves as a transitional device. Still on the esplanade, Magnus is accosted by another unhappy member of Weymouth's population, Jobber Skald. The Jobber, an 'Image of Desolation', is seeking Perdita Wane. Suffering under a cruel twist of fate which has separated him from his lover, Jobber reaches out to Magnus. Barely able to look after his own problems, Magnus cannot help or heal Dummy Skald. Muir's answers and suggestions sound empty and conventional. Even this token help is withdrawn as Magnus becomes angry with him over his rum-scented breath and his criticisms of the elder Muir.

In this section, new facets of Powys's art are introduced through narratorial commentary during Jobber's questioning of Magnus about Perdita's whereabouts:

It would be impossible to compare the intensity of these words to any earthly vibration. Their accent resembled the accent of those terrible scoriac syllables wherewith Dante makes the souls of his sons of perdition ask their single blood-freezing questions; questions that almost turn asker and answerer alike to stone. Such, and not less than such, was the petrifying force of Jobber's intensity, as he clutched at Magnus, gazing into his face. (WS, p.471)

The petrifying force of the unearthly vibrations of Jobber's intense questioning is as shocking to Magnus as Skald's appearance. The narrator's allusions and word choice provide clues to a better understanding of this strange, if learned, person. The narrator's interests and knowledge are further developed in the following description of Jobber Skald. His voice seems to come "from somewhere below the pit of his stomach" (WS, p.471). His face resembled "a landscape over whose lineaments a whole ice age had passed". "It had grown" to resemble a real dummy, at which, for the fun of the fair and out of pure sport, the gods had been aiming missiles. It moved about among men like an 'Aunt Sally' of the immortals" (WS, p.471). The narrator concludes his description of the Jobber by comparing him to a wandering Belisarius.

Magnus's ineffectual answers to Skald's heart rending situation reduce the Jobber to a Homeric 'Kamontes'.¹⁰ The narrator incorporates this saddened despairing state into the texture of the backdrop through the following comment:

¹⁰ Homeric 'Kamontes' are "those sad troops of the enfeebled Dead, who were sub-conscious, sub-sensitive, sub-normal, sub-substantial" (WS, p.472).

It was like some ultimate babbled, burbled, blubbered sob, uttered by the whole human race, after Science has killed God, tortured the last animal to death, suckled all babies with machines, eaves-dropped on the privacy of all souls, and made life to its last drop an itch of the blood and a weariness of the will. ... (therefore Magnus thought) that perhaps it would be a good thing if human nature were completely changed, and Science did create a fresh race of Sippy-Cattistocks, to cry their "Judy! Judy!" in a new accent. (WS, p.472)

The comparison between the Jobber's sob and a Science-dominated world in which Sippy-Cattistocks would be in complete control clearly captures the emptiness and despair of Jobber's anguish. The link established between Punch and the lack of sensitivity inherent in a solely logical, rational world demonstrates the cruelty and brutality inherent in the Sippy-Cattistock approach to life.¹¹

Finally, while the two men are discussing Jobber's problem, Magnus spots the word 'oolite' in a novel being read by the young man sitting next to him. The word dances off the page and fixes itself onto a child's balloon "like a label on the surface of a red moon". (WS, p.473). The balloon triggers Magnus's thoughts and he perceives that

the whole of Portland, with all its people and all their passions, was no more solid than this airy, floating ephemeral balloon. (WS, p.473)

¹¹ As much as Powys aligns Sippy and Cattistock with Punch and the negative forces in the universe, they are not totally reprehensible. Powys may use them as symbols, but they are still flesh and blood characters whose foibles are part of their humanity.

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waits for Sylvanus so that he can discuss vivisection. To his surprise, he discovers that today is Sylvanus's last day of freedom before he is committed to Hell's Museum: the very place where this cruelty is taking place. The ensuing conversation goes astray and both men become angry. Sylvanus attacks Magnus's bourgeois attitudes toward his friendships with young women. For Sylvanus, women are his channel to God. The added slur regarding his father's conservative nature enrages Magnus who inherited his deep, elemental nature from his father. Separated by their differences, Magnus, suffering from remorse because of his opinions, goes off to tell Jerry Cobbold of his brother's plight.

The narrator increases the complexity of the tapestry he is weaving by mentioning that 'Melia and 'Celia Gadget, "short, stiff girls in pink frocks and be-ribboned hats" (WS, p.477), deeply interest Sylvanus. Their receptive souls are "reed pipes through which the Absolute played without a pause" (WS, p.477). The importance laid upon the feminine, intuitive principle as an aid to Sylvanus's search is central to Powys's philosophy. Man's rational logic is limited and can not transcend the data provided by the senses. Restricted by the limitations of logic, the male principle can never discover, as the Spirit taught Faust, that "all appearance is but a symbol" (WS, p.477). In addition, Powys offsets this emphasis on the spiritual by demonstrating the presence and importance of the physical. As Sylvanus and Magnus depart in angry silence, the narrator mentions that Magnus is

aware that from Sylvanus's "bent form by the boat's side there rose an enamation of human sweat mingled with sun-blistered paint" (WS, p.483). The incredible power of the inanimate sun to cause men to perspire and paint to blister reduces man's importance. The narrator reinforces this by disregarding Sylvanus's philosophy and animism as mere "rigamarole" (WS, p.391). Thus, Powys has effectively undercut the importance of both man's philosophy and personal presence.

Section 7 (pp.483-85), continuing the action of section 5, occurs simultaneously in time with the previous section, focussing on Jobber instead of Magnus. The narrator's use of parallel plot lines in sections 6 and 7 dramatizes the plurality of life-illusions that exist side by side in Powys's multiverse. The action begins as Bum Trot arrives and expresses his concern for his friend's condition. Touched by this display of faithfulness, the Jobber unburdens himself of his sorrow as he shares a drink with Bum Trot at the 'Flag Ship' tavern. The resultant conversation uncovers the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the Jobber's last meeting with Perdita. The narrator captures Skald's sadness by describing his frame-wracking tears as "the most self-obliterating passion of tenderness that Bum had ever seen shed" (WS, p.485). Thus, this section is important because it demonstrates the depths of an individual's suffering as well as the plot related function of informing us how the Jobber's relationship with Perdita was sundered.

In the previous sections, Magnus served as a transitional device to introduce the richness of the new characters' perceptions and life-illusions. In section 8 (pp.485-91), Ruth replaces Magnus. In this section, the nature of suffering is seen from a different perspective. James Loder's agony acts as a foil to those characters who cope with life's trials through the power of their mind. His physical distress, unlike Captain Poxwell's mental problems, cannot be alleviated by mental tricks. Ruth heads for the seashore to eliminate the disgust she feels for her father's actions. The narrator establishes the tension between the father and daughter, and reaffirms the importance of the 'elemental' world of sensation to soothe mental distress. Her arrival at the seashore, a neutral territory between land and sea, sets the stage for the introduction of the various distraught characters who visit the beach as well as the introduction of Dr. Mabon, the Powysian saint, in section 9. The positive attributes associated with Dr. Mabon provide hope for those suffering under the whimsical cruelty of a Punch-dominated universe. At this point in the chapter all the transitional and unifying devices have been introduced. This is necessary because as Powys concludes the chapter he increases the complexity of the parallel plot lines. The concerns developed in these three, overlapping plot lines create a microcosm of human existence. In the tumult of suffering and despair, Powys offers Mabon as a beacon of hope. However, salvation is not a passive act. The individual who wishes to be saved must go to the seashore and

discover as well as develop the world of their sensations. If not, they will remain faceless in the crowd which never leaves the esplanade or the dry sand, which stands mesmerized by the brazen, brutal tone of Punch's voice.

At the outset of section 8, the narrator informs us that Ruth's inner 'elemental' nature differs from her quiet, dutiful life of service. Her inner life-craving made her "a fellow denizen of the elder Muir's Ideal Weymouth" (WS, p.303). Indifferent to men, her 'elemental' nature allows her to enjoy "with a passionate and proud exclusiveness every light and every shadow, every breath and every calm, that touched these familiar landmarks" (WS, p.303). This calm, placid, inhuman detachment protects her from the vicissitudes of daily life. Thus, when she is seeking Dr. Girodel to come cure her father, only part of her mind is involved in this mission. The remainder of her consciousness calmly ponders "certain greenish-coloured fish" (WS, p.485). This interplay between her daily concerns and the focus on her 'elemental' nature links her to Magnus who copes with life's trials by practicing his own variety of this mental trick.

Ruth displays her aversion and subsequent reaction to her father's histrionics by hastily departing for the seashore. As the sun sets, she arrives at the beach. The tide has come in and a special, enchanted mood exists for those walking along the wet sand near the sea's edge:

Itself invisible, the afterglow of the sunset gave the sands an incredible look of enchantment.... But by degrees the golden reflections died away and a curious chilliness, that gave to the dark blue water a cold,

untouchable marbly look, and to the sands themselves something unfriendly and remote, established itself there, a chilliness that was the chilliness of a cemetery across which a gay procession of intruders has come and gone. (WS, p.490)

As the golden glow fades, Ruth's initial happiness is transformed into a mysterious sadness as the "irresponsible Homeric hour had fled, and in place of it the sad, austere Hesiodic wisdom had begun to prevail" (WS, p.490). Thus, the enchanting magic of the sunset is fleeting, but Ruth is able to counter this feeling of sadness by delving into her deeper, 'elemental' nature:

Ruth was not one to allow a momentary sadness to spoil her evening, any more than she would allow the sight of a naked man playing at "Marjery-Daw" to do it, and she soon began following the windrow along those sands with her accustomed response. (WS, p.491)

Ruth's ability to transform herself to an ego-less speck of consciousness helps her to respond to nature through her senses. This ability to sink into her senses is an ability that she shares with Magnus and those individuals who have chosen to develop this potential. Although every individual has the capabilities, not everyone learns how to use this mental trick. However, Powys feels that those who are able to sink into their sensations will be far better prepared to endure and enjoy the chaotic fluctuations of fate.

Section 9 (pp.491-97) overlaps the latter part of section 8. The enchantment of the sunset which drew Ruth to the seashore has attracted Dr. Higginbottom's party to another part of the beach. Higginbottom purposefully chose to come to the beach at this hour hoping to entice Dr. Mabon to eventually replace him as Weymouth's physician, and to become his grand-daughter Caddie's

guardian. The enchantment of the scene contained "the sort of atmospheric expectancy that makes human thought become more intense and evokes the feeling that Nature herself is waiting for some oracle (WS, p.491). This atmospheric expectancy, which often results in nothing, anticipates Dr. Mabon's oracle. A complete stranger to the town despite his established Wessex roots, Mabon is an active and accomplished man who brings a promise of new life and direction to Weymouth.

The Higginbottom party is laid aside as the narrative shifts to focus on Magnus. By summarizing Muir's activities since he left Sylvanus, the narrator demonstrates why Powys rejects the notion of an 'average day'. Every day is special and complex when both the external events and the internal thoughts, impressions and sensations are included. After Magnus spends a disturbing day at the police station, the narrator focuses on Magnus and his thoughts as he makes an abundant lather from his Windsor soap. Somehow, the suds have triggered his thought processes so that he ponders the human race's two ultimate gestures: Jesus driving the rabble out of the temple, and Pilate washing his hands of any responsibility in regards to Jesus' death. Thus man can fight for a cause or choose to forget about it. Both these qualities are central to Powys's maxim regarding the avoidance of suffering: enjoy, defy, forget. Like Ruth, Magnus slips out of the house and heads for the seashore to cleanse his mind and relax his nerves. The 'wine dark' colour of the sea reminds him of Homer which produces a calming affect.

Transported by this sensual release, a placid, peaceful, child-like expression replaces his usual worried look, and the sea's enchantment brings about a reconciliation between Magnus and life.¹³

Having discussed the special enchantment of the scene as well as the reasons for the various individuals presence on the beach, the narrator merges Magnus into the Higginbottom party. Magnus provides an additional perspective from which to evaluate Mabon's qualities as a Powysian saint. A great traveller, conchologist, writer, and philosopher, the doctor's silent, self-contained power intrigues Magnus. The indescribable calm of this awe-inspiring meeting establishes the mood for the upcoming oracle. However, Powys undercuts the seriousness of the scene by contrasting Mabon and Muir's sage intercourse with Higginbottom's emotional and tactless comments.

Finally, the conversation turns as the group simultaneously press Mabon for some oracular statement. The doctor begins by explaining that his book on Ethics is based on his aversion to

¹³ Magnus's inner life is more complex than the other characters. He can slip into his sensations but he can also be transformed by the 'elemental' part of his nature. This part of his nature comes from his father. This ability once gave Magnus the

queer feeling that he had suddenly grown to be of enormous stature, like a giant ... He felt as if he had only to stretch out his hand to clutch this great lemon-coloured orb (the sun). He began to rise' completely above all those timidities that had so fettered his spirit. He felt strong to cope with his fate, to marry or not to marry as he chose, and to treat his Father's majestic ghost as an equal, not as a cringing dependent. (WS, p.118)

the antediluvian, barbaric nature of man's behaviour. When pushed to clarify on his alternative for psycho-analysis, Mabon finally utters his oracle: "I do nothing but listen...and...move ...perhaps...a few things that have got in the way!" (WS, p.497). Thus, Mabon rejects the systematization of the psyche's complexity and focusses on each individual's specific problem; consequently, as a medical doctor and Powysian saint, Mabon has the necessary training and perspective to cure both body and soul.¹⁴

In the tenth section (pp.497-501), Jerry Cobbold and the Poxwell sisters are drawn to the water's edge. Their confusion and irritation establish the section's mood of loathing and emptiness which reinforces Weymouth's need for Dr. Mabon. The section begins with Hortensia Lily's indecision about her future. Frustrated and disappointed in her matrimonial affairs, she refuses to take any action to remedy her situation. Idly bemoaning the impression she radiates, Hortensia decides to stay with her sister at High House and replace Perdita as her sister's companion. Next, the narrator focusses on Jerry Cobbold's sick loathing of the human race. Drained by his ordeal at the police station, Jerry is weary of life. Although he maintains his

¹⁴ Powys describes psycho-analysis as 'scientific Licence to Bad Manners'; see Powys, A Philosophy of Solitude, p.145. He continues his attack by saying that psycho-analysis seeks to

depersonalize the soul, and leave it a collection of mass-production emotions, so tarnished and crude that we become like so many galvanized puppets in an erotic Punch-and-Judy show; all our passions speaking in the same harsh, strident shriek which we recognize the minute we hear it.

punctilious support of the status quo, he despairs because even his interest in Lucinda's convoluted morbidity can not fill the void within. His frustration with life is so complete that if he could cram all his loathing into one word, he would gladly die with that misanthropic shriek of rage and despair on his lips. The emptiness and despair exhibited in the first two characters finds a new and different expression in Lucinda. The narrator comments that Lucinda's thoughts were so devastating that Sylvanus might have learned what had "induced his evasive Absolute to start at all costs setting a cosmos in motion!" (WS, p.499).

The imperturbable Corporal provides an interesting foil to the other three characters and demonstrates that happiness can be maintained, regardless of the situation, by the mental trick of slipping into the inanimate through the senses. Despite being an obstinate and stupid bore, the Corporal manages to transcend the ephemeral through his variation of Powys's 'elementalism':

The road dust soothed him, the sound of the waves soothed him, the vesper bells at St. John's soothed him, and there was wafted through his old, cropped, snow-white pate ... a mysterious breath of indescribable reconciliation, a flowing, floating breath, that was at once a sigh of contentment in all the white-washed stones and cockle-shells and flower-pots that have ever comforted the human heart, and a sigh of relief that there are welcoming graves--at least in Singapore--to which old men can escape. (WS, p.500)

Although pressed on all sides, the Corporal can enjoy life because he has the ability to escape and endure which is lacking in Jerry and the Poxwell sisters. This mental trick that the

Corporal shares with Ruth and Magnus demonstrates that everyone possesses the potential to be happy despite the turmoil of daily existence.¹⁵

The central focus of Weymouth Sands is the human struggle to cope and find happiness in a janus-faced universe. The inherent polarities in this system are introduced into the novel through the tension between the sea and the land, the wet and dry sand, the animate and the inanimate, and the positive and whimsically negative or chaotic influences of Dr. Mabon and the puppet 'Punch'. As the title suggests, the focal point of the novel is the beach. The wet sand at the sea's edge is a possible point of reconciliation between these opposing forces. However, the moment of reconciliation, or vision, is fleeting and may be experienced by those few who have developed their ability to sink into the inanimate. This ability does not come easy, although everyone can potentially perform this mental trick.

¹⁵ The ability to sink into the inanimate through sensation is central to Powys's method of coping in this chaotic, chance-rules universe. In trying to suggest what this self-transforming process achieved, Powys wrote that what

this "ichthyosaurus" habit of contemplation really does, when one shamelessly practices it, is to revert to the static aspect of life in the midst of the vicious flux of a Dynamic Age. (Defence of Sensuality, p.170)

The term "ichthyosaurus-ego" refers to the remote vegetable-reptile-saurian background of our soul while the "ichthyosaurus-sensation" is nothing less than the primeval happiness in the immediate experience of being alive. See Defence of Sensuality, (pp.9,41).

The elusiveness of the visionary moment, or the distractions which impede a person's ability to sink into the inanimate through sensation, is reinforced by the appearance of Punch at the novel's outset as well as the beginning of Chapter 13. Mabon, on the other hand, does not appear until the end of the same chapter. Mabon's role as beacon to the neurotic, despairing pilgrims of Weymouth is important to the novel. He is ~~the~~ Powysian saint who points the way, but can not offer salvation. His failure to save Caddie's life demonstrates that he provides a positive alternative to the science-dominated world of the Sippy-Cattistocks, but his presence does not guarantee success in the daily struggle for happiness which takes place in our minds.

Thus, the polarities and fluctuations in Powys's universe are incorporated into both the theme and structure of Weymouth Sands. Powys embraces ~~the~~ reality of life through the richness of individual experience in a chaotic, fluctuating universe. By unifying the myriad, subjective approaches to coping with life, Powys develops a personal, subjective, and complex response to the mystery of creation. By undercutting the narrator's as well as the character's claims to truth, Powys stresses the complexity of reality in his fiction and sets up his paradigm of "knowings". This relativistic, sceptical vision necessitates a 'multiverse' which may render language impossible, but it is by this vision that Powys integrates life's mysteries into his fiction.

The scope of Powys's vision, combined with the whimsically chaotic nature of Powys's First Cause, led him to create in his

art a world which was governed by Chance. The eternal fluctuations between the positive and negative poles inherent in the personality of the First Cause are responsible for Powys's choice of a dynamic model of reality based on the notion of flux. This approach is in keeping with the paradigm of "knowings" central to his narrative control and helps to explain why a reader attempting to impose a traditional or any other inappropriate fictional model upon Powys's art will be confused. Powys is not an innovator in the tradition of Joyce, Woolf, or Dorothy Richardson, but his fiction is carefully constructed to provide a suitable vehicle for his vision.

In Weymouth Sands a group of characters confront a universe which to them remains in varying degrees indefinite. It is the narrator who organizes the world for the reader and this is the primary experience of "reading" a Powysian novel. In Weymouth Sands, as in Ducdame and A Glastonbury Romance, we have followed in some detail the experience of the various Powysian anti-heroes, Rook Ashover, John Crow, and Magnus Muir, as well as the multitude of related characters. The large number of characters and the wealth of detail, the inclusiveness of his imagination, stem from Powys's belief that nothing is commonplace. If the "fictional" lives are finally unfulfilled, it is nevertheless the reader's experience to have discovered in these lives some recuperative meaning. It is the narrator, with his unique powers of knowing, who makes such meaning possible.

Appendix A: The Ashover Coat-of-Arms (located on the cover of Ducdame)

Powys's fictitious, Ashover coat-of-arms provides many clues to the family's nature and history. By being able to decipher the meaning of the shield, the reader can further add to the knowledge provided by the title, epigram, dedication and motto. The four most important elements on the shield are the diagonal line (a 'bend'- the principle charge), the tree and the bird (the secondary charges), and finally the box (canton) with a cross (cross crosslet) inside.¹ The diagonal line (bend) is important heraldically and artistically because it separates the tree from the bird. In heraldry, this division stresses the importance of the right (dexter) side. (Shields are always read from the bearer's, not the viewer's, perspective).² Thus, the tree is traditionally more important; however, despite its positioning, this once, possibly, majestic tree appears to be diseased, or lightning struck. This description of the tree as little more than a "colossal relic" lessens and ironically twists the tree's importance on the shield. The tree's fallen majesty is further reinforced by the representation of the elm in the graveyard near the Ashover tombs:

There was only one tree in that portion of the churchyard, a very old elm, lopped and beheaded and almost leafless, but with a trunk of such sturdy proportions and so deeply indented that it resembled

¹ Boutell, p.15. In this section, he provides a list outlining the proper order for reading the features on a shield.

² Fox-Davies, p.104. In addition, see Appendix B for the different parts and points of an heraldic shield.

the torso of a gigantic pillar, half buried in the earth but still bearing witness to its old obscure importance. (D, p.11)

Positioned on the left, or 'sinister' side of the shield, stands a member of the crow family. (In heraldry, rooks, ravens, and crows are all lumped together under the term 'corbie.')

³
By choosing a 'bend' which separates the secondary charges, Powys creates a state of tension, and by placing the rook higher on the shield's surface (field), he gives the impression of distance, or perhaps even aloofness or indifference. The rook's physical 'display' reinforces these inferences about the protagonist's character. When shown in profile with its wings in the 'close' position, a bird is said to be positioned on the ground; an idle instead of a menacing, or powerful position.⁴ The bird's idleness is further reinforced by the bird's size, closed beak, and smooth plumage. These details traditionally indicate a possible lack of strength, virility, or other important masculine qualities.⁵

The use of the protagonist's namesake on the shield demands a closer study of the bird's characteristics and usual connotations. T.H. White's The Book of Beasts⁶ and The Oxford English Dictionary, provide the following information

³ Boutell, p.78.

⁴ Christopher Lynch-Robinson and Adrian Lyncy-Robinson, Intelligible Heraldry (London: Macdonald, 1948), p.55.

⁵ Fox-Davies, p.248. See Appendix C.

⁶ T.H. White, The Book of Beasts (London: Jonathan Cape, 1954).

regarding the rook and the crow family in general. The crow, or carrion crow, is considered a bird of ill-omen. The raven, the largest member of the family, was prized by the Danes for its mysterious, mischievous, and thievish nature, and was subsequently used as a symbol for the flags on their warships. When used as an adjective, raven can mean either glossy black, or intensely dark or gloomy. The rook, a smaller and very common member of the crow family, distinguishes itself by possessing the negative traits of the others, as well as being used as a disparaging term when applied to a person. In gaming, a rook refers to a cheat, or swindler while in the vocabulary of the 17th century, a rook was a simpleton. In the northern dialects found near the Scottish border (where the Danes would have had an influence), rook, a variation of roke, or rouk, means a mist, or fog. In opposition to the more valourous, or proud charges usually appearing upon more traditional coat-of-arms, this blighted bird of ill-omen appears to be a suitable counterpart to the once majestic Ashover 'tree'.

The last important part of the shield is the box (canton) overlapping the diagonal line. The 'cross crosslet' inside the box bears witness to Lord Roger's participation in the Crusades. He is the first lord of Ashover, and the original bearer of the coat-of-arms which originated in the twelfth century.⁷ The

⁷ Fox-Davies, pp.2-6. He points out that although various artists throughout history have used animals on shields, and in their art work that these early works should not be confused with the science of heraldry. These early drawings were no doubt its forerunners, but heraldry, in its true form, did not come to England until after the Norman Conquest.

positioning of the box which contains Lord Roger's cross is important because it is situated in the top right corner and straddles the 'bend.' In heraldry, the dexter, or right side is more important than the sinister, or left side while the chief, or top of the shield is more important than the base. Lord Roger and those who follow his example are able to span the division between the bird and the tree and are able to seek personal fulfillment while accomplishing their respective familial duties.⁸

The second element of the coat-of-arms is the 'crest,' and is comprised of a rook perched upon a helmet backed by a flowing, feathery mantle. The mantle was originally used to protect the helmet from the elements, but here, it appears for solely decorative purposes.⁹ The helmet, displayed in profile with the visor closed, denotes the rank of gentleman, or esquire; the Ashovers are gentility, but not to be confused with royalty, or the peerage.¹⁰ The appearance of the rook in the 'crest' which echoes its presence on the sinister side of the shield reinforces the bird's qualities and its importance in the novel. The tree and the helmet should be the most important elements of the coat-of-arms, but the repetition of the bird's display and positioning reinforce the bird's rejection of the traditional claims of social position and personal duty.

⁸ Boutell, p.21. See Appendix D.

⁹ Grant, p.104.

¹⁰ Fox-Davies, pp.303-19.

The last detail of the coat-of-arms to be discussed is the motto. In England this element, of minimal importance, may be changed at will and need not be included at all. Those who chose to include a motto often incorporate the battle cry of the lord who earned the right to the coat-of-arms.¹¹ In this fictional coat-of-arms, Powys does not include a famous battle cry, but the motto "Mortua Vivescent" (the Dead Live) does illuminate certain family values. Instead of being concerned with deeds of honour, or valour, this despairing house is willing to settle for mere continuity. All these details included in the coat-of-arms provide clues which help establish the novel's central conflict between the Ashover Dead and their devotees' continuing efforts to beget an heir, and the protagonist's rejection, or indifference to these concerns.

¹¹ Grant, p.107.

Appendix B

The different parts and points of the heraldic shield are set out in the diagram below.

A Dexter side	H Dexter base
B Sinister side	J Sinister base
C Chief	K Middle base
D Base	L Honour point
E Dexter chief	M Fess point
F Sinister chief	N Nombil or Navel point
G Middle chief	

Appendix C

This striking example of a raven's virility starkly contrasts the bird in the Ashover coat-of-arms.

These other, more fierce and majestic birds reinforce the rook's weakness.

Imperial
Coat of Arms

Earl of
Cornwall

Appendix D

This knight bears the Crusader's cross crosslet on his suit of armour. With the dog at his feet, this figure resembles the tomb of Sir Roger Ashover, the first Lord of Ashover.

THOMAS BEAUCHAMP, 4th EARL
OF WARWICK, 1406

Appendix E: A Map of Ashover taken from inside cover of Ducdame

Appendix F: Chronological time in Chapter 13

Weymouth Sands is unified through theme, character and place rather than through unified action. Magnus acts as a transitional unifying device in the first six sections, but is replaced by Ruth in Section 8. The first six sections establish the problems of individual characters, but the shift to the sea shore, initiated by Ruth, introduces Dr. Mabon and the possibility of reconciliation in a Punch-dominated world.

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