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Chroniclers and Prophets: Time and Genre in *Porius*

Novelistic discourse is characterized by speech diversity and language stratification, obtained through, among other things, the incorporation of the languages of other speakers, other jargons, other writers, and other genres into the narrative. Because of its readiness to incorporate different discourses, the novel cannot be homogeneously classified according to particular generic characteristics. Or, paradoxically expressed, openness to every genre is *the* generic characteristic of novelistic prose.

The novel allows for the coexistence of many different time-space configurations or chronotopes.[1] The act of reading has its own chronotope; the reader belongs to a time-space constellation other than that of the author when writing the text; thus - it goes without saying - author, reader, and the fictive world of the narrative find themselves chronotopically wide apart. Within the novel, though - that is, in the material text contained within the pages of a book - different chronotopes exist as if synchronically. In the 'Concluding Remarks', added in 1973 to his essay on chronotopicity, Bakhtin defines the time-space configurations as 'the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied.' It brings together time and space in such a way that time becomes 'palpable and visible'. The chronotopicity-notion is closely linked to the development of different generic types. Bakhtin shows how the inseparable time and space components cooperate in the creation of genre-specific fictional motifs - the chronotopes define and determine genre. In a novel, some chronotope(s) may be more predominant than others: 'it is common . . . for one of these chronotopes to envelope [sic] and dominate the others'. The chronotopes, however, are 'mutually inclusive': they exist together in the textual web, they interact ('Chronotope' 250-2).

The multigeneric *Porius* crowns John Cowper Powys´s fictional achievement.[2] It is his most challenging novel, published when he was seventy-nine years old, an age when most people have since long retired. A great and complex novel naturally invites many different readings. Because of the distant time of action, and the occurrence of certain historically verifiable phenomena such as the presence of Saxon warriors, Roman legionaries and Arthurian *equites, Porius* is often classified as a historical novel. The year of 499 A.D. does not automatically qualify the text as 'historical', though. The pronounced multivoicedness of *Porius*, and above all the generic variety it displays, are factors that may at first contribute to a sense of bewilderment in the reader. As can be seen in the subtitle - *A Romance of the Dark Ages* - Powys refers to *Porius* as a romance. From a Bakhtinian perspective, the distinction prose romance - novel is obsolete. Novelistic discourse moves back and forth between different genres. Each genre has its own particular frames of reference that reflect different sets of values, and - most important - each genre has its characteristic discourse, its own accents and particular linguistic-stylistic codes. The meeting of two or more radically different genres with dissimilar accents in one and the same narrative tends to be regarded as a sign of artistic fault. Anyone who insists on a conventional mimetic reading of a multigeneric narrative like *Porius* will fall into conceptual as well as aesthetical puzzlement as a result of, among other things, the unrestricted introduction of the mythological *cewri* on the same level as, for example, the presence in Britain of Saxon warriors.[3] A multivoiced and strikingly multigeneric text such as *Porius* - with features of, among other things, history, magic, epic, mythology and fairy-tale - cannot be categorized according to the criteria of one single genre.

Even if it contains historically verifiable elements, *Porius* is thus not a 'historical' novel in the ordinary sense of the word. Neither is it a chronicle although it contains some chronicle traits. The *OED* defines the chronicle as '[a] detailed and continuous register of events in order of time;

a historical record, esp. one in which the facts are narrated without philosophic treatment, or any attempt at literary style'.[4] A chronicler is 'a writer or compiler of a chronicle, a recorder of events'. The terms derive from *khronos*, the Greek word for 'time'. The *Porius*-text plays with the homophony - that is, when adapted to English pronunciation - between *Kronos* - the name of the god who in Greek mythology was Zeus´s father - and *khronos*. The thirty-third and last chapter is entitled 'Cronos'.

The narrator in *Porius* refers to himself as 'chronicler'. He carefully renders the time and place of the events he records, and, from time to time, the full name of his characters. Thereby he secures their genealogy and fixes them in the time and space of the narrative. Porius´s ancestry is stated at the very beginning (3; 7-8); then, gradually, the chronicler reveals that it is 'late October' (6), in the 'Year of Grace, 499' (12). The narrative span is short: only one week in October A.D. 499 is recorded. The novel begins on the eighteenth of that month, and comes to a close in 'the morning of Thursday the twenty-fifth of October, in the year of Christ four hundred and ninety-nine' with Porius ab Einion ab Iddawc ab Edeyrn ap Cunedda, alone on a rock at Harlech (873).[5] Each day of this week, together with the year - *Anno Domini* 499 - is meticulously referred to. As a counterweight to the mass of incidents great and small, realistically plausible, supernatural and mythological, the assiduously time-obsessed chronicler repeatedly states not only the date and the day of the week. Sometimes he indicates part of the night or the day, at times aided by his computations of the position of the sun. His occasional references to uncle Brochvael´s Boethian water-clock - time as if materialized, made tangible - add to the illusion of time as something 'captured' or controlled through the agency of human inventiveness.

Superficially, chronology is thus the organizing principle of this narrative. But the temporal confinement is circumvented and counterbalanced - or counteracted even - by the frequent backward leaps into the memory and prehistory of the characters. The incorporated strands of myths, as well as the discussion of the Henog´s professional obsession with the past, take us back in time. There is also a thrust forward, towards the future and the generations yet unborn, verbalized in, among other things, Myrddin Wyllt´s prophesies. The frequent rendition of inner speech, sense impressions, and Porius´s 'cavoseniargizing' are other narrative constituents that circumvent the chronicler´s chronological precision since these instances display the inherent distortion of linear time that occurs, for instance, in the free flow of thoguhts. The temporal mobility within the narrative contributes to its discontinuous structure. According to Hayden White, the insistence on chronology, together with a lack of formal closure, is what distinguishes the chronicle from the concluding, and thus well-made, history: 'Chronicles are, strictly speaking, openended. In principle they have no *inaugurations*, they simply 'begin' when the chronicler starts recording events. And they have no culminations or resolutions; they can go on indefinitely' [6] *Porius* is essentially open-ended. Since there is no final and conclusive summing up of the events, the novel has been understood to endorse the idea of an as yet open future, a future that can be moulded through human agency.[7]

Past, present and future perspectives always figure in Powys´s novels.[8] In *Porius*, the movements back and forth in time - and to a lesser degree also in space - are modified not only by the repeated temporal references discussed above, but also by descriptions of place. There are topographical details of Edeyrnion, of its hills, forests and waters - and not least of its particular, near-anthropomorphized mists. The world outside the Isle of Britain makes itself constantly known in various shapes. Within the confines of Edeyrnion we meet a number of hetereogenous and sometimes polyglot characters. There are for instance a Hebrew doctor and a Greek captain. Porius´s scholarly uncle Brochvael - a friend of Boethius - has travelled widely: he knows Gaul, Greece, Alexandria and Rome. During a considerable part of the narrative Porius plans a voyage to Constantinople, officially in order to get Pelagius canonized by the Patriarch, privately to obtain his portion of personal freedom. The temporal location of the chronicler, at a time subsequent to the present of the narrative, allows for repetitive references to the thoughts and memories of his characters on much later occasions, long after the ones recorded in his narrative.

Through flashbacks and prognostications, and by way of narratorial comments, the text moves both backwards and forwards in time. In the last chapter there is a collapse of time and space: Porius experiences it as a coalescence of past and present.

In the heteroglot and polyglot context of *Porius*, different voices are at the basis of the lexical shape-shiftings and continuous displacements that structure the narrative as a whole.[9] The novel is episodic and digressive. Strands from a number of different genres are incorporated in the whole text from beginning to ending. The generic variation and the consecutive changes of accent have a disruptive effect. The structure could thus best be described in terms of non-unity. Hence it follows that every attempt at tracing a coherent structure in a pronouncedly multigeneric narrative like *Porius* will be futile. It is important to stress that a structure of displacement is not the same thing as a lack of structure. Taken together, the displacements in *Porius are* the structure. Below will follow some examples of the various generic discourses that are incorporated into the textual web of this vast and complex novel. Genre is understood in a wide sense, as connected to the recognition of the quality of the new accents that enter into the narrative.

Prophet versus historian

Myrddin Wyllt is not containable within the time span of the narrative. He can displace himself as far back as possible in time and as far ahead as to a (hypothetical) New Golden Age. This character is thus ana-chronistic in the literal sense of the word, that is, he negates the order of time. Displacement is the spatial notion that corresponds to the temporal notion of ana-chronism. With his memories from a past outside the time and place of the narrative - together with his prognostications about the future - Myrddin Wyllt thus embodies the narrative´s negation of linear narration which the chronicler so assiduously attempts with his careful observations of place, date and day. To a great extent, displacement in *Porius* is located in the consciousnesses of the characters. Displacement on the textual level is effectuated by the means of digression and the frequent changes of voice and genre. The Myrddin-character is the very principle of displacement. His Messianic prophecies about a second coming seem likely to be fulfilled by his capacity to displace himself - in different disguises, under different names - both backwards and forwards in time. When he prophesies about a point in time which he cannot foresee, or alternatively, about something for which he does not possess the proper vocabulary, such as the technical terms for the various weapons and methods of destruction used during World War II when *Porius* was written - he simply stops short (see 'Prophecy' below).

On the linear level of the narrative, Myrddin Wyllt is counsellor to the Emperor. Intermittently, though, he is assailed not only by intimations from the future, but also by fragmentary memories from an existence aeons of time ago, when he was in the shape of Cronos, the disinherited god of the Golden Age. As his memories confirm, Myrddin-Cronos thus exists in at least two different spatio-temporal configurations simultaneously. The composite and protean Myrddin-character voices an anxiety about the ways of the world, both in his 'private' musings and in the parodic dialogue between sage and disciple (Chapter 15, 'Myrddin Wyllt'). There is no sharp dividing-line separating his different personae; the contours are floating. At one and the same time, Myrddin is prophet/god and herdsman/counsellor. In other words, there is no core of fixed identity in this shape-shifting character. Myrddin is liable to return under ever new names and in ever new shapes; there is neither tomb nor inscription summing him up for posterity. This is the case of his emperor as well - the authenticity of the 'Hic Iacit' on the cross on Arthur´s disputed tomb in Glastonbury is highly questionable. A person safely entombed is in due cause reduced to a skeleton. Thus he is not likely to reappear among the living. The eschatological hope for a second coming presupposes the absence of the material body and its bony remnants. When Christ was resurrected, his body left the tomb.

The Henog of Dyfed is the official chronicler of Myrddin Wyllt in the latter´s capacity as imperial counsellor. He distinguishes the official character, the legendary and romanized Ambrosianus, 'chief Counsellor of Arturus Imperator', from Myrddin Wyllt, the private man, the

Welsh-Caledonian Wildman of the woods, magician and prophet. The Henog holds this latter Myrddin in low regard; indeed, he explicitly denies the importance of the magician´s reputed prophetic powers. Historical fact is opposed to prophecy. Porius registers the words of both Henog and counsellor. He silently terms the situation a 'psychic tournament between historian and prophet' (110). Is the future, seen from the perspective of the present, nothing but a 'dark gulf in Time and Space', as the Henog claims (104); or is it predetermined, which is implied in Myrddin´s reputed capacity to receive intimations of events that have not yet occurred? This is how the dispute appears to Porius´s sensitized perception when he has to support the near-collapsing counsellor (105-6). The Henog is of the opinion that Myrddin sees the *contours only* of various creatures through 'clouds and mists and vapours!' (104). In other words, according to the historian, the prophet can never claim anything with certainty about the future. Therefore his words are doomed to remain apples of discord between differing interpreters (104). The Henog voices the claim that the truth can be drawn from the past only, from what has already happened.[10] He is both a historiographer and a mythographer, as is shown by his interest in Cymric lore, always with his utensils ready for the taking down of valuable information about the present to be kept and handed down to future generations. He thus clings to his version of the value of historical 'truth' over and against Myrddin Wyllt´s as yet unproved, and from the perspective of the present of the narrative unverifiable, prophecies.

Prophecy

Porius knows of Myrddin Wyllt´s prophetic gifts already before meeting him. The herdsman from the south turns into a prophet when, at their very first meeting, he refers to the possibility of Porius going away in a ship (60). As mentioned, Porius is seriously considering sailing to Constantinople. Myrddin also prognosticates the deaths of Colgrim, Baldulf and Cheldric, the Saxon chiefs, who will be dead before Porius´s potential voyage. The first reference to Myrddin in his capacity as prophet comes after this prediction (60).

In the verbal battle between historian and prophet referred to above, the Henog expresses himself more and more eloquently. His speech of defence starts with an angry outburst against the opinions of Myrddin Wyllt. Then it moves over to a superficially obsequious but formally correct - and emotional - disquisition on how to relate to time and interpret events. The Henog is agitated but self-assured, and, as has been discussed, he explains why he values his own opinions and profession higher than the prophet´s prognostications. Still, he does not want to offend the Emperor´s counsellor too much; he thus addresses him with suitable appellations. No less than eight apostrophes are interspersed into his explanation-cum-exhortation. The result is parodic. He begins patronizingly: 'And let me tell you this, Myrddin ap Morfryn', followed by the variant 'O son of Morfryn'. Thus the Henog has been addressing Myrddin Wyllt the private person, not the imperial counsellor. In the second apostrophe a rhetorical 'O' is added, signalling the more formal - and superficially reverent - addresses to follow: 'O master'; 'O illustrious counsellor'; 'O master!'; 'O mysterious one'; 'O illustrious one'; 'O master' (104-5). The Henog´s shift of register - from patronizing to reverent address - precedes and signals Myrddin´s change of persona, his change from herdsman into prophet.

When the Henog has finished, all eyes are on Myrddin. Porius, who fears that the staggering prophet will fall a victim to one of his fits, throws his arms around him for physical support. Instead of collapsing, Myrddin starts to speak in a 'voice of awe-inspiring authority'. Something very strange happens to Porius. The chronicler describes it as if he hears Myrddin´s voice 'on three different levels of consciousness' (105), and most amazing of all is that he experiences the prophet´s words as a 'cry from the future, backward-flung over its shoulders by the vanguard of the unborn till it pierced like a sword the outraged ears of the indignant past' (106). There is no one-to-one correspondence between language and this kind of experience. To give the essence of it, the chronicler has to explain its effect metaphorically, an explanation in which metaphors of both future and past are anthropomorphized. In other words, time is anthropomorphized: the

future has 'shoulders', the past 'ears'. This personification is continued and followed up in Myrddin´s prophesy, delivered '[i]n a voice that was entirely his own' (106). Hereby the chronicler confirms - through Porius´s senses - that Myrddin speaks in many and different voices, corresponding to his shape-shiftings, one of which occurs at this moment: The staggering counsellor is transformed into a resounding voice, uttering eschatological revelations with the religious authority and apocalyptic vehemence of an inspired prophet. 'Inspired' he is - not by God, not by the Son of Man, but by another deity, by Cronos, 'the Son of the Morning':

> 'Through my voice the Son of the Morning speaks, the god at whose word the heavens shiver and shake and all the angels hide their heads. Cronos is his name and he speaks through me; and my animals and my birds and my fishes hear his voice and rejoice; and the kings and the priests and the druids tremble! *He is the Future*, and all the blind leaders of the blind and all the false astronomers and false prophets and all the kings and emperors are sick because of him, and their hearts melt within them because of him.' (106)

Christian and pagan notions are mixed in this literally Saturnalian sermon, which echoes the diction of St. John the Divine in *Revelation*. Myrddin´s parodic monologue expresses, in Bakhtin´s words, a 'mythological and literary relationship to the future', a form of 'historical inversion' ('Chronotope' 147-9), that is, a basically religious or mythological way of (under)standing the hardships of the 'fallen' present in relation to an ideal state of perfection, located in the past (the notion of paradise on Earth; a former Golden Age; an heroic past), and/or in the future (Heaven; Paradise; the New Jerusalem; a future Golden Age; the Age of Aquarius . . .). Viewed this way, present existence is thus as if 'doomed' to remain the poorer at the expense of a 'richer' past, and supported by a compensatory hope for a better or even 'ideal' future form of existence.

Myrddin paraphrases the words of Jesus at the very end of the *Apocalypse*: 'I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, *and* the bright and morning star.' (*Rev.* 22:16). Lucifer, the light-bringer, is one of the names for the morning star. It is a direct translation into Latin of the Greek *Fosforos*. In the Bible, Satan is mentioned in terms of light, not only in direct connection with the gleam of hellfire. Jesus says: 'I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven' (*Luke* 10:18). In these words the Church Fathers saw a reference to Isaiah, who refers to the King of Babylon: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!' (*Isaiah* 14:12).[11] Generally, Lucifer has come to refer to the name of Satan before his fall from heaven. When working on *Porius*, Powys wrote, among other things, a comprehensive monograph on Rabelais. This was during the disastrous situation of World War II. John Cowper praises the French master in Messianic terms:

> He thought creatively like a god. He thought destructively like a god too ! He thought like Lucifer, Son of the Morning; he thought like Christ, Son of Man. I would even go so far as to say that like Walt Whitman he should be regarded as the Messiah of the new era under the Zodiacal Sign of *Aquarius* into which our bleeding and distracted world, notwithstanding all the horrors of this unimaginable war, has begun to move; out of the desperations, and ghastly hypocrisies of the Sign *Pisces* ! And what more right and proper than that it should be from France . . . that this great 'Lantern' should have its renaissance and arise and shine from the masthead ? [12]

Myrddin reads the future and prophesies that Arthur will drive the Saxons out of the country, but after 'thirty good harvests' they will return victorious. And they in turn will be conquered. He further reveals that 'our speech will refuge itself in the mountains and from thence till the Day of Judgement it shall be heard' (107). 'Our speech' could be understood to refer directly to the Cymric language, or alternatively, to the languages of all Ynys Prydein. There is also an additional

possibility of interpretation, namely that the very words that have just, mediumistically, resounded through him, will remain among the Welsh mountains, and thence resound for as long as mankind will exist. The prophet-counsellor´s predictions are provoked by the Henog´s insistence upon the past as the only available source of knowledge. Towards the end of his monologue, he changes diction and becomes more intimate: 'us' encompasses both speaker and listeners *and* the peoples of all Ynys Prydein. It directs itself towards future generations as well, to the sinister period of a world in flames, and even beyond that, to the beginnings of a new and more peaceful era. By means of astrological jargon, he reverts to his Myrddin persona. There is a glimpse of implicit hope with the predicted passage into the 'Age of Aquarius':

> 'But when our Lord the Sun with his attendant planets has passed from the power of Pisces into the power of Aquarius, the white dragon from Germania will cross the sea to trouble us again. This time it will not swim with its feet and with its tail through the water, breathing smoke and fire. It will - it will - that white dragon from Germania will - that white dragon will' (107)

When Myrddin is about to describe by what means the 'white dragon from Germania' will return to pester the Isle of Britain, he stops short. The peoples of the Dark Ages had their own kind of cruel warfare and its concomitant horrors, but they were happily ignorant of bombers, *Luftwaffe*, and the like. Lacking the proper terminology for the seemingly ever-increasing development of our present-day devastating military technology, it is evident why Myrddin has to stop. In this context, it is interesting to note how John Cowper discerns prophetic qualities in Rabelais; noble characteristics as compared to the bigotry and injustices sanctioned by hierarchical thinking, repeatedly targeted in the grotesqueries in his books:

> I have come to regard him [Rabelais] as a prophetic voice, testifying to our planet´s emergence from the influence of the Zodiacal Sign '*Pisces*' into that of '*Aquarius*'; that is to say, out of nearly two thousand years of *pain and purity and piety and prisons and punishment and privilege* to - well ! to what his enemies would call 'a Leap into the Dark.' (*Rabelais* 393; my emphasis; except the astrological names)

Powys´s alliterative characterization of the age of Pisces is composed of an unorthodox mixture of six nouns: we have a parallel pattern with three nouns of normally positive connotations whereas the other three are, generally speaking, of a negative nature. The sentence is ingeniously composed. The first noun in the list is of a negative value, the last one usually denotes something positive. The four nouns in between are placed in such a way that two words of a normally positive value - *purity and piety* - and two words of unambiguously sinister connotations - *prisons and punishment* - meet, so to speak, in the middle of the characterization. The juxtaposition of these opposite pairs functions to illustrate the gap between lexical sign and the 'unstable' referent, between word and meaning. 'Privilege' is ambiguous, at least when literally employed. Context and point of view have jointly to decide whether it should be interpreted as something negative or as something positive. 'Purity' and 'piety', on the other hand, would in most non-ironic contexts be experienced as something 'good' or 'noble'. In this particular context, these nouns come to mean something diametrically opposed to their customary significance - something in accordance with the oxymoronic 'War is Peace' in Orwell´s 'Newspeak'.[13] Thus purity becomes 'impure' and piety 'impious', both words referring to the potential bigotry of the privileged guards of an all too 'Christian' morality, so much ridiculed by, for example, Rabelais and Joyce, and so distasteful to Powys. He wanted to lift the books of Rabelais out of 'the forbidden shelf' into worldwide recognition (*Rabelais* 393). Powys´s melioristic-utopian hope for mankind, as expressed towards the end of his Rabelais-study, implies a comprehensive liberty - on the individual as well as on the 'cosmogonic' level, a freedom from all closed conceptual circles; a 'free and fathomless Multiverse' as against 'an inescapable Circle of "yearning"'. His ideal(istic)

'Multiverse' welcomes all; it recognizes that there are levels and interrelationships that can neither be classified nor explained according to any categorical cause-and-effect reasoning (397-9).

After Myrddin´s unfinished prophecy, the narrative returns to Porius´s consciousness. He has supported the counsellor during the whole of his prophetic monologue, and he becomes aware of 'an unpleasant gurgling in his [Myrddin´s] throat as if blood was rushing into his mouth' (107). Prediction would have turned into horror story if the prince´s appreciation of the situation had not worked as a rational corrective to Myrddin´s prophetic speculations. With his angry dismissal, a new and informal accent enters the discourse:

> 'Comical! That´s what it is!' he said to himself, articulating the words under his breath as if to prove his detachment - 'Simply comical, that I should go on hugging this monster with his stink-horn smell who´s been abusing all the three chief nations of Britain, Iberian, Brython and Roman! Where does he come from himself, this bastard of the devil?' (107) [14]

Porius is thus involved in the prolonged dialogic dispute between historian and prophet. In his silent outburst he responds at first primarily to Myrddin´s words. Then his scepticism leads him to ponder upon the Henog´s position as well. A process is started: Porius begins to doubt his initial and spontaneous dismissal of the counsellor´s prophecies. The chronicler has so far written down the prince´s reactions in the form of direct quotations of his silent protests. Then he stops short:

> He ceased to articulate his feelings at this point; but the *inexpressible feelings* that followed this interior outburst completely contradicted everything he had just said! (107)

The chronicler of Porius´s consciousness now takes upon himself to express the inexpressible: He orders the un-ordered, non-verbal flow of his protagonist´s thoughts into decipherable, semantic sequences:

> You could call them 'feelings,' but strictly they were sensations; for they had to do with the ice-cold arctic breath which disturbed the air about this extraordinary person wherever he went; and Porius, try as he might to see the present situation as a ludicrous one, was aware of an uneasy, unearthly chill emanating from the being he clutched that seemed as if it were actually responding to a force outside human experience. (107-8)

In terms of sensation, the chronicler explains that this *inexpressible* feeling had to with the odious smell and the 'arctic' chill that always accompany the counsellor, 'this extraordinary person' (108). The double-voiced 'extraordinary' confirms that Porius *is* impressed by Myrddin - or, alternatively, that *the chronicler* wants him to be so - but as yet he refuses to admit it even to himself. Silently, he continues to ponder upon the nature of Myrddin´s prophecies: 'Could the time-breath of Cronos,' he thought, 'really be caught in blows backward from the remote future?' (108). Myrddin´s reading of future events could profitably be contrasted with the parodic predicament of another soothsayer, Merlyn in T.H White´s *The Sword in the Stone*. When this character of our time - and yet *not* of our time - predicts the future, he has to take a paradoxical backwards glance, since he has - long ago - already witnessed the events he is about to predict. Merlyn complains to the Wart: 'But I unfortunately was born at the wrong end of time, and I have to live backwards from in front, while surrounded by a lot of people living forwards from behind. Some people call it having second sight.' [15]

With Porius´s philosophizing upon the questions brought up by Myrddin, the accents gradually move away from the biblical-homiletic to the philosophical. He begins to consider the possibility that the counsellor speaks the 'truth':

> Indeed he began to feel as if this wind were something that had reached them *through time* as well as through space, something that brought to this devil-bitten Decrepitude he was supporting an *authentic message*, just as those accurst Coranians used to get theirs. (108)

The rendition of Porius´s thoughts continues with his sceptic sounding of the Henog´s position, the two first sentences given in free indirect discourse, followed by a direct quotation of his inner speech:

> But if the Henog were right and the future completely indetermined, why then there was no such thing as Fate, and no such thing as a man´s, or a nation´s or a world´s destiny. All was chance; all was chaos; all was anarchy. 'Nor am I quite certain,' he said to himself, 'that I wouldn´t prefer it be so. I have a suspicion that such was the view of things natural to the giants of Eryri!' (108-9)

The interspersed 'why' in the first line of the above quotation lays an extra stress on the presence of Porius´s accents. Moreover, it approaches his silent conclusion to spoken language, and announces the subsequent direct quotation of his inner speech.

A discussion of the role of chance and necessity in the shaping of events - on the historical as well as on the individual level - runs through *Porius*. In his silent musings, Porius brings the utterances of both Henog and Prophet to their utmost conclusions. According to the opposite views he has been listening to - expressed in different linguistic registers - existence is either subject to chance occurrences or it moves forward in time according to a predetermined pattern of events. Through Porius´s summarizing and tentatively evaluating voice, the reader becomes dialogically implicated in this dispute between 'sages'. Nothing is concluded or confirmed; the question thus remains open. After Porius has observed an entirely new expression on the counsellor´s face (113), and after some further musings on his shape-shifting identity as well as on his own personal situation, his thoughts gradually change direction and begin to wander from the problem of time to a consideration of the constitutive forces at the basis of existence. He dismisses the search for 'order' and 'uniformity' as vain, concluding that 'the wisdom of every creature lay in reconciling itself as well as it could to that mysterious mingling of Nature´s purposes with accident and chance which is the only world we know' (114). Towards the end of the narrative, Porius voices a third attitude to the problem of time and truth, which focuses on the present moment, but in a more general way. He takes the issue down to a personal and practical level: 'But what madness to make our state of mind at the moment depend on our fears and hopes about the future! It´s just as crazy as to make it depend on our memories of the past' (828). Porius thus dismisses the Henog´s categorical preoccupation with the past and the prophet´s with the future.

The Henog´s incorporated legend

As has been discussed above, the Henog of Dyfed regards himself as a historian. Porius thinks of him as a 'collector of legends' (564). With his interest in legendary material, the Henog is something of a Herodotus, who recorded both the conditions of life and the cultivation of foreign people, such as the population along the Nile, together with ample accounts of their gods and religious cults. After having listened to the Henog´s tale in Brother John´s cell, Porius feels as if he is living some kind of myth (Chapter 24, 'Birth and Death'). This sensation harmonizes with his recent encounter with the aboriginal inhabitants in Edeyrnion. Despite his awareness of the already delayed mission to the imperial counsellor, he cannot but listen to the Henog´s story since he somehow finds it 'so relevant to his special case' (567). This relevance is, however, not immediately clear to the reader.

The incorporation of the Henog´s mythological tale has a digressive effect. It interrupts the progression on the linear time axis, and introduces new accents into the narrative. It is incorporated from the point in time when Porius starts listening. The end of the legend remains in obscurity, as the Henog has to interrupt his narration. The tale is characterized by dialogue and by two pieces of a short recapitulation of intermittent events, told in a formalized language recalling the style of an old, orally transmitted legend with recurring formal epithets and repetitions of phrases (a typical trait of oral transmission), together with the meticulous rendering of the full names of the characters referred to by the two speakers in the legend. When the Henog interrupts his tale, Porius understands that he has been reading it, i.e. that it has already been written. The Henog´s legend is hence to be regarded as an imitation of the style of legendary tales and is thus, paradoxically, an example of a *written oral* tale in which the oral traits are rendered at a second remove. There are ballad-like turns of phrase ('a week and a day'), and an occasional archaic verb form ('goeth'). Furthermore, there are references to magic and magical places. The incorporated tale tells of destructive black magic, performed to obtain some material good, and to the detriment of those who are the targets of these ministrations. This kind of magic is thus at the opposite end of the basically inoffensive white magic performed by the christianized version of Merlin as he appears in some of the Arthurian romances, or just hinted at in the case of Myrddin Wyllt in *Porius*, with the exception of the transformation of the owl-girl - an event which is stated as factual. The black magic in the Henog´s old-style legend is stated as a fact, whereas the possibility of Myrddin´s white magic in the majority of cases remains one of various possibilities, that is, it is *not overtly* confirmed by the text. In the context of *Porius*, the contours of Myrddin´s magic are thus somewhat blurred. In this, *Porius* differs from the legendary tales about Myrddin/Merlin, which never question his magic capacities.

The incorporation of the Henog´s legend into the narrative makes it stand out as a fragment of a different genre through the diverse stylistic devices mentioned above. Still it is alien neither to the linguistic nor to the conceptual context of the whole. *Porius* is, among other things, a tale with magical elements, strengthened by the fact that the characters believe in magic, or at least they do not disregard the possibility of it. This, however, does not amount to claiming that magical things actually occur with a decisive influence on the events. The element of magic as a whole is and remains an open possibility, one explanation among others. It is thus differently treated by the chronicler in *Porius* from the way it is seen as instrumental in the Henog´s incorporated tale, where magic is stated as an outright fact.

NOTES

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Norman Denny, the reader of the Bodley Head, emphatically advised against the incorporation of the giants. His negative reaction to the presence in Porius of the mythological giants indicates that he felt that Powys offended against some tacit law of plausibility when introducing them - creatures, if not of another species, at least of an as yet unverified variant of homo sapiens - into his story: 'But then I came to the Cewri episode. . . . The purpose of the episode is clear, and if you had presented it as a kind of erotic vision . . . I might have been able to accept it. But being offered it on the same level of reality as the rest of the book, I jibbed badly. All I can say is that I found it not only distasteful but utterly unconvincing.' Letter from Norman Denny to John Cowper Powys, 4 December, 1949. Quoted in Michael Ballin, 'Letters on the Publication of Porius.' *Powys Notes* 7.2 (1992).

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In his professional zeal, the Henog is just as firm as latter-day expertise. John Cowper was well familiar with the works of R.G. Collingwood. In his introduction to *Porius*, 'Historic Background to the Year of Grace A.D. 499', he refers to Roman Britain (xviii-xix). In The Idea of History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), Collingwood dismisses medieval historiography because it contains a religiously-grounded vision of the end of things: 'Eschatology is always an intrusive element in history. The historian´s business is to know the past, not to know the future; and whenever historians claim to be able to determine the future in advance of its happening, we may know with certainty that something has gone wrong with their fundamental conception of history' (54; my emphasis).
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[14] In his *History*, Geoffrey of Monmouth expresses the opinion that the unidentified, handsome man who provided Merlin´s mother with a child, the result of nightly embraces 'of a long time', was nothing less than an incubus. See Sir John Rhys, *Studies in the Arthurian Legend* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891), 126-7. The above quotation is the only instance in *Porius* that directly alludes to the posssibility of a devilish origin of Myrddin-Merlin.

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