

Editorial

For many years we have been accustomed to think of the Powyses as "neglected" writers, yet I wonder whether the term is any longer appropriate. It is certainly still difficult to find many of their books and those which are available take up very little room in our high street bookshops, but in fact a great deal of work is being done.

In recent issues of the *Newsletter* we have reported on a number of important books and activities, including the John Cowper Powys exhibition at Uppsala University, and the future looks every bit as exciting. Members of The Powys Society Committee, led by Frank Kibblewhite, have encouraged the setting-up of two new Powys exhibitions, both of which are to be held in Dorchester this Summer. The first, at the Dorset County Library will be open throughout July and this will be followed by an even larger exhibition entitled (to coincide with our conference) *The Powyses in Wessex*, which will open at the Dorset County Museum on July 22nd and continue for about six weeks. Frank Kibblewhite says of this exhibition: "It will be a substantial exhibition including many rare, interesting and unusual examples of Powysiana and I hope it will be as exciting as it is inventive. There will be posters, leaflets and, hopefully, postcards." There is to be a private viewing of the exhibition for members of the Society on the evening before the opening of our conference, when the new *Powys Journal* is also to be launched and Charles Lock will speak on John Cowper Powys's time in Dorchester. The exhibition will also be supported by articles in the local press and County magazines. In addition, Longmans, Dorchester's main bookshop, will feature a full window display to advertise its substantial stock of Powys material. Naturally, we expect this to create a good deal of local interest, which we hope to stimulate further by opening our lectures to members of the general public; yet another innovation for the Society.

Frank has also been very busy in other areas, having delivered a highly successful "dayschool" on *John Cowper Powys: Man and Novelist*, which concentrated on *Wolf Solent*. The event was held appropriately enough at the Community Arts Centre in Yeovil under the auspices of the University of Bristol and was attended by twenty-four students. It is hoped that similar events will be arranged in future.

Robert Carrington, who, with the Dunstable Doysters and Oliver Wilkinson, made a memorable contribution to our 1990 conference, has been busy arranging other performances combining his own music with the words of John Cowper Powys. As Robert reports: "On Saturday February 2nd, the Church of the Good Shepherd, Brighton, was the setting for a concert including works based on the writings of John Cowper Powys, performed by Robert Carrington, Darren Jameson and friends. These included another performance of 'Whiteness' and the first public performance of three movements from *The Brazen Head*'.

It is hoped to present a concert at All Saints Arts Centre, Lewes, to repeat these works and other music from *The Brazen Head*, together with a dramatisation of John Cowper's version of *The Idiot*, with live incidental music by Robert Carrington."

Robert also reports that he is currently composing a new ballet based on *Wolf Solent*, to be called *Gerda and Christie*, for performance in 1992.

As well as these exhibitions and performances, a number of books have either been published or are in active preparation. The Brynmill Press (Gringley-on-the-Hill, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN10 4RE) have now issued their long-awaited edition of *The Market Bell*, a previously unpublished novel of over three hundred pages by T.F. Powys, which was written just before *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. The book is issued in a limited edition of two hundred copies at £39 and a trade edition at £14.95 and will be reviewed by Alan Howe in the next Newsletter.

On December 7th 1990 *Le Monde* carried a long review (page 30) under the title "Le Village de T.F. Powys" of *Mrs Moggs Va Voir La Mer*, a new translation by Patrick Reumaux, published by Hatier at 128f. The article also provided a brief survey of T.F.P.'s work, perhaps further evidence of a continuing interest in the works of the Powys family among French readers. Nordine Haddad-Lacquement is currently translating the letters of John Cowper Powys to Henry Miller (possibly also including some of Miller's letters) for Criterion Publishers of Paris, while Benjamin Stassen is translating Richard Perceval Graves' book *The Brothers Powys*. One of my happiest moments recently was on opening a parcel containing an advance copy of *Rabelais* by JCP, translated by Catherine Lieutenant and published by La Thalamege (4800 Verviers. P.O. Box 170, Belgium). This large, handsome paperback edition of one thousand copies is well illustrated and supported by a wealth of notes and a superb introduction. La Thalamege have had to overcome enormous difficulties in publishing this book and its appearance is a tribute to their skill and tenacity.

Another translation scheduled to appear this year is Sven-Erik Tackmark's version of JCP's *Autobiography*, which Coeckelberghs of Stockholm intend to publish in the Autumn.

English and American editions of books by the Powys family and their circle are also in active preparation. My own three volume edition of *The Uncollected Essays of John Cowper Powys* is to be published over the next two or three years by The Bristol Classical Press and plans are also afoot to publish *My Dearest Sea Eagle*, John Cowper's letters to his sister Philippa, possibly in two volumes, although an editor is still to be confirmed. David Goodway has edited the correspondence between Emma Goldman and John Cowper Powys under the title *My Dear Good Friend*, and this will be published by The Feminist Press of New York in the Spring of 1992, although a copy will be available on microfilm to students of the University of California this year.

Meanwhile, work continues on the first complete edition of *Porius* at the Colgate University Press and Charles Lock and Lawrence Mitchell are progressing with their biographies of, respectively, John Cowper and T.F. Powys, while Ben Jones is currently editing Frances Gregg's book *The Mystic Leeway*.

As if that were not enough, Rigby and Lewis, publishers of *Echoes* by Gerard Casey, intend to publish the first complete edition of T.F. Powys's *Fables* in time for this year's conference and our previous Chairman, Cedric Hentschel, is preparing John Cowper's early and unpublished book on Keats. Cedric writes of this project: "*The Life of Keats* by John Cowper Powys (his title is rather misleading), a lengthy and discursive work completed in 1910 and hitherto rejected for publication, may at long last appear in print. Preceding the earliest fiction, *The Life of Keats* sheds light on a relatively obscure phase in its author's development.

Cecil Woolf has agreed in principle to publish, initially, certain selected chapters at a date as yet unspecified. The editor, Cedric Hentschel would be pleased to hear from anyone who has encountered the manuscript in the course of its peregrinations and, in particular, would welcome identification of a (mooted) previous 'American' editor." Members who may be able to assist Cedric in this work should write to him at Millpool Cottage, Ellingham, Bungay, Suffolk NR35 2EP, or telephone 050845 651.

The Society itself has also been active on a number of fronts, including some important developments which we hope to be able to report in future issues of *The Newsletter*. The first issue of *The Powys Journal*, due for publication in August, promises to be an exciting publication and it is to be followed by a checklist of the publications of all members of the Powys family, compiled for the Society by Alan Howe.

Perhaps members may have news of other publications and activities, but at the moment it is hard to believe that the Powyses are "neglected".

Paul Roberts.

Conference News

*THE 1991 POWYS SOCIETY WEEKEND CONFERENCE
AT THE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
KINGSTON MAURWARD,
NEAR DORCHESTER, DORSET.*

THE POWYSES IN WESSEX'

AUGUST 3rd to AUGUST 6th

Kingston Maurward House is a substantial Eighteenth Century house set in impressive grounds which include a magnificent lake. Nearby is the Old Manor house, a late Elizabethan E-plan manor house.

Accommodation at Kingston Maurward comprises 45 study bedrooms, two of which can be converted into double bedrooms and one of which *is* a double bedroom. This gives a maximum capacity of 48 conference delegates.

As accommodation is limited, unfortunately only those members attending the whole of the conference can be accommodated at Kingston Maurward and for those attending the whole of the conference accommodation will have to be allotted on a first come first served basis. It is therefore important to book very early if you wish to secure accommodation for the whole of the conference at Kingston Maurward.

For late applicants who cannot be accommodated at Kingston Maurward or for those members not wishing to attend the whole of the conference, there are a number of establishments nearby, including Birkin House at Stinsford (telephone 0305 264147) or the self-catering Greenwood Grange Cottages at Higher Bockhampton (telephone 0305 68874),

both of which offer very comfortable, though more expensive, accommodation. Further details of local accommodation may be obtained from the West Dorset Tourism Centre, Acland Road, Dorchester DT1 1JW (telephone 0305 267992) or from the conference organisers, Frank Kibblewhite of Walnut Tree Cottage, Mappowder, Sturminster Newton, Dorset DT10 2EH and Louise de Bruin of 600 Mappowder, Sturminster Newton, Dorset DT10 2EH.

We should stress that those members wishing to secure outside accommodation must make early bookings, before the end of April, as Dorset attracts a large number of summer tourists. It should also be noted that single room accommodation is scarce.

Those members who have outside accommodation but who wish to take meals at Kingston Maurward may do so, but members are again requested to give early notice to the conference organisers.

Those members wishing to attend the conference or those members requiring further details are requested to fill out the form provided (see centre pages) and return it to the Secretary, Griffin Beale, as soon as possible. To save costs, further details of the conference will be sent only to those members who return the form to the Secretary.

The cost of the conference is likely to be similar to the cost of last year's conference (£110.30), but more details will be provided in due course to those members who return the enclosed form.

Griffin Beale.

PROVISIONAL CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

On Friday August 2nd at 7.30 pm there will be a private viewing of *"The Powyses In Wessex"* exhibition at the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, for members of the Society at the invitation of the museum's curator, Roger Peers. The first issue of *The Powys Journal* will also be launched. Charles Lock will also present a lecture on John Cowper Powys's period in Dorchester. Light refreshments will be available.

The Powys Society Annual Weekend Conference

Saturday August 3rd:

5.45 Welcoming Reception.

6.45 Dinner

8.00 Jeremy Hooker

Sunday August 4th:

8-8.45 Breakfast

9.15 Angela Pitt

10.30 Coffee

11.00 John Williams

12.30 Lunch

2.00 Furse Swann
3.15 Tea
3.45 Paul Roberts
6.45 Dinner
8.00 Oliver Wilkinson and Robert Carrington

Monday August 5th:

8-8.45 Breakfast
9.15 Michael Everest
10.30 Coffee
11.00 The Powys Society Annual Booksale
12.30 Lunch

Free Afternoon (Committee meeting)

4.30 Tea
5.00 Annual General Meeting
6.45 Dinner
8.00 Charles Lock

Tuesday August 6th

8.-8.45 Breakfast
Departure.

A Montacute Stone

Readers of *Wood and Stone* will remember Luke Anderson's discomfiture when he discovered that Annie Bristow had irretrievably wedged the ring given to him by Gladys Romer in one of the holes in the block of Leonian stone standing in Splash Lane. JCP described the stone as standing in the middle of the path, its original purpose uncertain, but having two deep holes bored in it, possibly to support a chain (*Wood and Stone*, pages 348-352).

It came as a surprise to find a block of Ham stone precisely answering that description, standing to this day, half way along Wash Lane, Montacute. About a metre high, the modern and perhaps ancient service this pillar performs is to prevent vehicles from using what is clearly intended to be a pedestrian short-cut. In 1915 Wash Lane was an unsurfaced track and successive layers of asphalt will have reduced the height of this singular standing stone.

There can be no doubt that it was a familiar landmark to all the Powys family, marking for them as it did, the mid- point of each journey between vicarage and church. In *Wood and Stone* JCP speaks of the "whitish glimmer, shining on the worn surface of the stone." Indeed, the soft undulating contours of its upper surface glow with a deep golden waxy

patina which demands, after the fashion of an old horse, to be patted by passers-by. Who can tell how many generations of village folk have obediently responded to its dumb behest.

For John Cowper this stone represented stability and continuity. In 1914, under the two-fold stress of his mother's death and the outbreak of war, he wrote to Llewelyn from New York " Everything seems to be tottering around me. Nothing seems solid or permanent. I must write to Theodore, that fixed pillar in Wash Lane - that type of everlastingness."(*JCP Letters to Llewelyn* Vol 1,page 165).

Llewelyn did not generally share John's affinity for particular stones. Nevertheless, he too drew reassurance from this minor monolith. In his essay "The Reverend Henry Hardin" (*Somerset Essays*, page 71), he comments that reading of the simple life of that good man caused his childhood memories to "lose something of their inconsequent mirage quality to become.....part of a solid reality, as firm tangible and stubborn as the Ham stone in Wash Lane."

A wind-swept block of Portland stone and the tide-washed pebbles of Chesil Beach, each serve as a memorial to individual genius; but the humble pillar in Wash Lane, which both brothers regarded as a touchstone of reality, stands as an enduring reminder of their sense of a shared identity.

John Batten.

Profiles

Pressure of space has forced us to hold back our regular Profiles ,but we are delighted to be able to re-introduce them with self-portraits of two very active Powysians.

Benjamin Stassen:

Born under the sign of Capricorn, not in Kenya but in the Belgian Congo, I was soon packed off back to Belgium as a result of the Independence riotous "events". The son of a self-taught genealogist and theologian, formerly an eccentric taxi driver, I was constantly moved from one place to another, which may account for my wish to discover unknown landscapes and feel in touch with familiar roots.

Left-handed and rather impatient, photography used to be my only way to share my inmost feelings with other people. No doubt that I experienced the first reading of *Wolf Solent* as a rebirth: it confirmed my sensation that solitary happiness on one's chosen places may be the first step to a creative reconciliation with oneself and one's fellow (human) beings.

Discovering JCP coincided with my appointment to the post of assistant lecturer in English literature at the Catholic University of Louvain, but I soon dropped out (due to my poor interest in teaching) and gave up my projected thesis on "The influence of landscape on JCP's works" (photography speaks volumes and is better for my lungs).

This was the beginning of a productive period during which I edited the special issue on JCP published by *Plein Chant*, a splendid opportunity for which I am indebted to the Belgian writer Jean-Pierre Otte (a novelist whose work displays deep spiritual affinities with JCP's) and which kept me busy for one and a half years as I worked during my daily three hour commuting (how I used to think of JCP's American train journeys!). I then translated *Romer Mowl* and the first ever published French anthology of the Swedish writer Vilhelm Ekelund. I am now currently translating R.P.Graves' *The Brothers Powys*.

Quite recently I have founded a voluntary society to promote both the Tree Heritage of Belgium and literary translation, which reflects my ambivalent interest in both mental and physical landscapes. One of my recurrent dreams has to do with a long journey in Wessex and Wales where, as a photographer, I would be in search of John Cowper's inner landscapes. Dreams happen to come true, or don't they?

Benjamin Stassen.

B.J. Craven:

Curious, I had often picked up *A Glastonbury Romance* whilst browsing in a bookshop, frowned and replaced it on a shelf. Then I read Colin Wilson's book *The Occult* and found numerous references to the life and work of John Cowper Powys. Eventually, curiosity and Colin Wilson made me actually buy the book (in paperback) and read it. I was hooked instantly.

I joined The Powys Society in 1982. Now I'm equally interested in the lives and works of John Cowper, Theodore and Llewelyn Powys, I collect first editions of their works and enjoy visiting Powys locations, many of which I already knew and liked.

I'm a graphic designer by profession and partner in a small advertising agency with my 'other half', Sarah Linden. I've offered my design services to the Powys Society because I feel that a professional, attractive and appropriate image, used consistently, is important for credibility and status. The Society may already be the established authority on things Powysian, but it needs a strong, powerful voice to carry its story wide, further its aims and create interest ... as well as new members.

Among my interests are: reading, writing, painting, listening to all kinds of music and walking. I am aware of the threats to the environment and am outraged at the way the beauty of our countryside, towns and cities is being destroyed by insensitive development and the proliferation of new roads. I still enjoy visits to Dorset and Somerset, but am saddened by some of the 'changes' occurring there. I can only hope that common sense, coupled with human aspirations, will prevail.

B.J. Craven.

A.R Powys : Letters From The Front, 1917.

A.R. Powys fought on the French front in the First World War. As befitted an architect, he had a vivid power of description; he could write with both detachment and passion. Among the letters he wrote from the front are these two, one dated November 1917, to his brother Llewelyn. In their precision he conveys the awfulness of trench warfare and the ever-present prospect of injury and death. It is perhaps topical, when a new war is upon us, to put them into print. As we know, he survived, being taken prisoner in March 1918; his account of the remarkable return journey at the end of the War was published by me five years ago. (*Homeward Journey*, 1918, a letter).

Stephen Powys Marks.

[The original spelling and punctuation of the letters has been preserved in these transcriptions. PR]

OFFICERS' CLUB, (CAMP) 28 NOV: 1917

My dear Lulu,

I hear of you now & again. now I am at the Base again I'll tell you my news in my manner. I am just out of hospital where I have had a poisoned leg. It is quite healed. Though it took a month to do it one way & another. I shall return to my unit (the 4th Yorks in a day or two) I am going to tell you the sort places I have been to & the things I have seen. I can do so I think freely because they all belong to time some time past i.e. at least one month. I've been away from the Battalion so long that I don't know now where they are.

I have been on the Arras Front just where they (not the 4th Yorks) have lately done a push at Cambrai though I was not in that.

There life is easy & simple by comparison. only a direct hit of a shell does damage the trenches are so good. when they send as many shells as they can over it is not so nice but that happened seldom & a trench properly made is I have since found out a safe place; at the time I had the wind up.

Now the last lot of front I was at was part of the Ypres front There things are very different. I was sent out to spy out the land so as to act as a guide to my company. I walked in from 8 miles behind the front line. The 1st 4 miles were over road very muddy & full of traffic both lorries, wagons, & mules. The lorries stop about 4 miles from the front the wagons about 3 & the mules go up to the forward artillery with ammunition. The nearer the front you get the more broken are the roads. about 4 miles from the front the roads there are almost continually fenced in by overturned and smashed wagons dead mules & horses & now & again a lorry. for once they get off the road they get stuck in the mud & cannot move. over the whole of this area the germans drop shells. not thickly but you never quite know where they are coming & its a little nervy. Well through this sort of road I went till I

got about 3 miles from the front when I left the road, & took to duck boards. Duck board track lead up to within half a mile of the front or sometimes 1/4 mile. These are all known to the Germans & they shell then fairly thickly all night & a little by day. most movement is done by night. There are no trenches for the water line is about 1 foot below ground so you have no shelter from shells at all & may be shot to pieces from one that bursts 200x away though it is not likely. Well I went down these duck boards & on each side the ground is like a potato patch newly dug up magnified about 5 times and more that is to say it is all raw ground turned up by shell fire. any shell hole of more than 48 hours age is full of water & this water is sometimes green yellow mud coloured & even red according to the shell that has made it. one or two men can make their way over the land between two shell holes without sticking in the mud but if you get a long file of men they stick abominably & when they are shelling to be struck is not nice. another trick they have is to gas these duck boards. the nearer the line you get the more sour does the land become. & you find stiff 'uns lying about here & there. These dont smell unless you agitate them. It is not nice. The night we went in was after an attack that failed & we found a defeated & bewildered group of men who had left the front line to take care of itself & were so shattered & nerve broken that they had not stopped to collect their own wounded nor even to carry back those who had been dressed & were laid on stretchers. That night we dug our selves into holes in the ground 3 times before we found the front line. & on one of these occasions I occupied a hole next which was another in which two men had been chucked to die I could hear their breathing yet knew they were sinking in the water at the bottom They were all covered in mud even their eyes were stopped with it. I had to get on to the front so it was impossible to do any thing. of course one of these days I may be left like 'em. We got on to the front & there I placed the men told them to get into the holes & so prepare to be out of sight by day. This we did before dawn. all through the day I & they remained in holes which gradually filled with water & into which the sides gradually fell. we were shelled from time to time but as the Boche did not know the exact line we were on we had no casualties. I did not know what unit was on my left nor where they were. The nex night I set out to find them & that is an amusing game. as you may imagine. 1st I was not quite clear where the Bosch was & had no idea how far off our next post was. to walk as I had to 1/2 a mile with 2 men only among shell holes & as it happened a lot of dead is a little nervy its playin Jabberwack with a vengeance. 1st we got about 25x from the Germans & heard 'em talking. so that helped us to know where to go i.e. back again to start on another line then at last we were halted in English & a shot or two fired at us before we could explain who we were. anyhow I found the next unit to the flank. & also discovered that about 1/4 of a mile of front had no defenders at all. That was put right at once. well Lulu dear thats the worst experience I've had. except for narrow escapes from shell fire which I may tell you had an odd temporary effect on my mind for it made me see all sorts of odd things

- .1. a group of french women & children on the edge of the road waving to some crowd of people who passed down it I knew they were not there
- .2. delicate clay moddelling in the sides of my hole lovely little venuses & some delicate

arabesques: some grotesques too such as a tommy would do of the Kaiser. these I thought were there & spoke of 'em to the sergeant who soon made me realise they were not.

.3. finally I saw bits of the meat and carrot in a dish I had when I got back to a concrete 'Meba'

LORD LORD it is an odd world

A R Powys

[written from the French front]

My dear Lulu

I forget if I answered your letter or not any how I will write to you again & tell you that like Willy

"I don't like Shells

I wish I were at Wells"

by this you will see that I'm at the French front. Again I say shells are the Devil I was in a hell of a straff this afternoon and also again last night a little today was very bad. It lasted 1/2 hour as hard as it could go. why more men were not hit I can't tell at all. There were only 5 men of this Coy hit one of them killed died of wounds in 3/4 of an hour. It is a horrid sight although I'd love to have Willy with me I'd rather he did not risk his life. This may give you the impression that I'm bloody uncomfortable in shell fire & this is true.

Otherwise I'm in the best of health & the weather is fine. I live in a German Dug out i.e. taken from them. A dead Boche was taken out of it some days ago. its all in chalk.

I tell you the desolation here is beyond any of the journalist discriptions. Miles of empty hedgless treeless country covered with weed of all sorts thistles predominating pocked with shell holes & scarred with old trenches & long rusty lines of wire. There are tracks of all sorts in all directions across this. small groups of cemeteries & lone graves of all the nations.

when behind the line we live not in tents but low corrugated cubby holes 4 ft by 6 inside & 3ft high [sketch] These all rusty red pitched any how.

We have more war material than the Boche but Im prepared to say they have enough to frighten

A R Powys

I hope you won't hear of my death though I have lived half my 3 score years & ten I want to live in England again & go to Rome

A R Powys

Uppsala in Prospect and Retrospect

With the news that the John Cowper Powys exhibition at Uppsala had been extended until February 20th and with the possibility that it may be repeated at another important Swedish university, the time seems ripe to consider various reactions to the exhibition. We begin with an account of the opening of the exhibition, by Jacqueline Peltier, which we were unable to publish in the last *Newsletter*, and this is followed by a summing-up by Sven -Erik Tackmark and translations of two newspaper articles which were prompted by the exhibition.

John Cowper Powys Redivivus

We all remember how our dear friend Sven-Erik Tackmark announced to us, last summer in Cirencester, the coming event of the first major Powys exhibition ever held anywhere in the world , which would take place in his country, in Uppsala. On the eve of my departure, Morine Krissdottir called me to ask if I would represent the Powys Society. It was an honour. I accepted with pleasure, but, at the same time I regretted that no worthier members of the Powys Society could attend such an important event.

For it was a very important event indeed. The exhibition is entitled: *John Cowper Powys - Den otidsenlige och den aktuella* (The Timeless and the Topical). The opening took place on Tuesday the 6th of November, in the Carolina Rediviva Library in Uppsala, the very first university in Sweden. It was organised thanks to the impetus of Sven-Erik, as a tribute to a man whose work he had discovered, read and admired since 1936. The Library which is situated at the top of a hill, close to the Cathedral and the University is an elegant Eighteenth Century building, housing two million books and thirty thousand manuscripts. The ceremony started at 11 am in the Reception Room of the Carolina, where is held the precious Codex Argenteus (or Silver bible) of the Fifth Century. About sixty people attended, mostly from University circles. The room was ornamented with plants and flowers and a big portrait of JCP, the National Portrait Gallery one. Dr. Stig Stromholm, Rector of the University, was there. It was Dr. Thomas Tottie, the Head of the Library, who opened the ceremony in Swedish. It was followed by a long speech by Carl-Erik af Geijerstam, who is a poet and a writer of renown. He retraced the whole life of JCP, his lecturing in America, his life in England and Wales and then turned to the fascination JCP exerted on him through those solitaires present in all of his novels.

Then Sven-Erik Tackmark talked. He evoked for us how he came to discover *The Meaning of Culture* in 1936 and how his life was changed. In a modest and admirable way, he never mentioned his personal relation to JCP. He gave thanks to all the people who helped him organise this exhibition, also thanking his publisher, Rene Coeckelberghs (who, unfortunately, died recently) and his wife. And finally, through my person being your official representative, he thanked the Powys Society.

These different speeches took about half an hour. After, we were at leisure to go around the fifteen or so showcases in which his magnificent collection of books was displayed:his

original editions, but also the Vilage Press ones, the essays, poems, letters, the critical studies, the different reviews, the English and American ones but also French, German, Swedish, CanadianThe translations into German, Italian, French and, of course, Swedish: Sven-Erik's two translations, *Dararas dans* (Ducdame), 1977, and *Wolf Solent*, 1975, but ,alas, not the *Autobiography*, translated but awaiting publication. It might be worthwhile to recall that two of JCP's books had been translated into Swedish in the Thirties: *Modern sjalskultur* (The Meaning of Culture) in 1935 and *Lyckans Vasen* (The Art of Happiness) in 1937.

We were also able to see the originals of JCP's letters to Eric the Red, the very first one, for instance, written from Corwen on the 16th of February 1937:

"I cannot tell you how pleased I was with your letter, and, if I may be allowed to say so, what a wonderful scholar in English you are!"

Yes, it was a moving sight to see all these books assembled, alive, each evoking memories within ourselves, fragments of a living presence that brought so much to each of us. And I could not help thinking of the beautiful evocation Proust made of Bergotte's books after his death, keeping vigil all night, books like angels with spread wings.

A catalogue has been made, which includes texts by Dr. Tottie, Sven-Erik Tackmark, Professor Ingemar Algulin, Professor Charles Lock and Cedric Hentschel (the last two in English) and the list of all the books and documents presented. I was particularly attracted by a reproduction: it is JCP's dedication to Sven-Erik in his copy of the *Autobiography*:

Se tu segui tua stelle,
non puoi fallire al glorioso porto.

These words from Brunetto to Dante (if you follow your star, you cannot fail to come to the glorious harbour) strike me as particularly felicitous. On that 6th of November 1990, I hope that Sven-Erik felt he had come, elated, to that "glorioso porto".

Jacqueline Peltier.

A Summing Up

The splendidly mounted JCP exhibition at Uppsala Library, including the radio presentations on December 12th and 16th, have made quite a few Swedes (maybe also some Danes and Norwegians) aware of a literary giant very little known here. The visitors' book in the large show room has twenty pages filled with the names of people from all parts of the world. Several people have contacted the University library, eager to know how to get hold of the author's books. Unfortunately, very few Swedish public libraries, or bookshops for that matter, have any other books by JCP than my translations of *Wolf Solent* and *Ducdame*, often not even those, I'm afraid. Our university libraries have also, as a rule, very little Powysiana, excepting, as far as I know, The Swedish Academy's Nobel Library, which has all the essential books by John, T.F. and Llewelyn, but even that collection is far from complete.

Some of the visitors have been deeply impressed by the exhibition. Thus, a female

tobacconist, Eva Sjogren, told me that she was so fascinated by one of JCP's novels that she arrived two hours late at her shop and forgot to turn off the washing machine. A retired physician, Sven Belfrage, wrote to me, saying that he was struck by the formidably penetrating portrait of Wolf Solent. A Bachelor of Law, Staffan Folcker, came across *The Meaning of Culture* in the Swedish version. The book was like a revelation to him. A Professor Emeritus of Pharmacology, Erik Sandell, all of a sudden turned up in my shop, enthusiastically declaring that we ought to form a Powys Society in Sweden, however small that might be. Halvdan Renling, the poet and publisher of the fine little literary magazine *Metamorfos*, rang one of our most successful and distinguished publishers on his own initiative, imploring them to publish more of JCP. I could keep on telling you about the many contacts I have had, but finally, a rather amusing little episode: a man from Umea, a town 500 miles away up in the north of Sweden, asked the Director of the Library if it would be possible to transfer the exhibition to the town's university library.

Two other effects of the exhibition may, by degrees, promote a somewhat wider interest in JCP: Rene Coeckelberghs' publishing firm, now taken over by Rene's two sons after his death, has told me that my translation of *Autobiography* is being prepared for publication, possibly this Autumn. The other interesting thing, already mentioned in the *Newsletter*, is that the JCP catalogue has been distributed to a large number of major libraries throughout the world.

Alas! there is a little rift - or a big one - within the lute. Ambitious as I am when JCP is concerned, I cannot deny that I am disappointed - despite the relative success - that so very few newspapers have noticed the exhibition (over one hundred were informed about it beforehand). I was pleased, though, that *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's biggest newspaper, gave half a column to it. Nor - which grieves me more - has any response come as yet from any other publisher. Well, well, I say to myself: patience, old chap, patience! and bear in mind the old saying: "gutta cavat lapidem".

For, after all, ever since I began to read JCP in the 30s I have been convinced that posterity will recognize him as one of the greatest English writers of the Twentieth Century.

Sven-Erik Tackmark.

[NB: Distribution of the catalogue has not been limited to university libraries. On receiving her copy, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth "commanded" a Lady-in-Waiting to convey her sincere thanks to Mr. Tackmark. PR.]

Meet John Cowper Powys

"The meeting with an outer Master often makes our inner Master wake to life." Those were the words of Bernard Durel, the Jesuit priest. I heard them just as I had come home from the exhibition at Uppsala University Library, where we meet John Cowper Powys, the writer.

Indeed, his words were to the point. Unexpectedly I had opened the door to a rich and

enriching world. A treasury. I had taken part of profound wisdom.

This is the first major exposition in the world of a giant, a multi-faceted and elusive author in the Anglo-Saxon world and now here - on our northerly latitude!

The exhibition has many facets. We meet, in fact, two personalities - the collector and the object: Sven-Erik Tackmark, the translator and antiquarian book-dealer and John Cowper Powys, the author and visionary.

When Sven-Erik was 21 years old and a junior journalist at *Avetsa* newspaper in Dalecarlia he went into a book shop and turned over the leaves of a book, *The Meaning of Culture*, by one John Cowper Powys. The book at once caught his attention. He felt as if the author had addressed him alone. The book became an elixir.

Tackmark came to devote the major part of his life to the man behind the book. And the man in his turn was charmed with the Swede, "a very unusual being" with a passion for his writings and for the English language.

Who, then, was Powys?

He lived between 1872 and 1963, died after 91 years and was the eldest of eleven children in a Somerset vicarage.

Eva Strom, the poet and novelist, has compared him with a cross between Rainer Maria Rilke and the beloved Fritiof Nilson Piraten. He combines a broad realism with an ecstatically visionary and pantheistic outlook on life, a strong passion for Nature and spiritual culture. He seeks Man and Truth everywhere.

He concerns himself with the grand issues of life. In his novels he always studies human relationships, the pecking order, the hidden sadism of life's lonely wanderers. He is often concerned with Society from beneath; he takes side with the weak, the aberrant, the odd and the despised. In a complex and diversified prose Man appears, dependent on and in reciprocal action with Nature. The author realised early the outcome of an expanding technology. He foresaw the environmental crisis and held passionately fast to Nature's cause against a destructive civilization.

"Deep inside himself he disassociates from all wielding of power and has a cautious hand with everything alive", Professor Ingemar Algulin wrote in the first Swedish presentation of Powys in *Jakobs stege* (Jacob's Ladder), Rene Coeckelbergh's literary magazine, No. 3 (1980).

Powys made his debut in 1896 with *Odes and Other Poems*, followed in 1899 by *Poems*.

Six years later he left England for the USA, where he spent nearly thirty years as a lecturer. He travelled all over the vast continent and gave over 10,000 lectures. He spoke in all the states except in Alaska and Hawaii. A man who was on an intimate footing with the great figures in world literature must have had a unique talent to make them come alive.

His audiences learnt, for example, about Homer, Goethe, Dostoevsky, Rabelais, Shakespeare, William Blake, Dickens and Byron - and our Strindberg.

His spectrum was rich. He wrote, for instance, about *The Secret of Self Development* and *The Art of Forgetting The Unpleasant*.

Not until he was 56 in 1929 did he have his breakthrough with *Wolf Solent*. After that a number of literary and philosophical works appeared, among them *In Defence of Sensuality*,

A Philosophy of Solitude and his formidable *Autobiography*.

Between the ages of 60 and 80 - back in Britain - he developed a phenomenal vitality. He wrote books on Dostoevsky, and Rabelais. He wrote huge psychologically penetrating novels such as *A Glastonbury Romance* (1120 pages) and *Owen Glendower* (950 pages).

Despite his extensive productivity he was unknown in his homeland, but in the USA his singular genius was more appreciated.

That is not quite so any longer. His reputation is now growing in different parts of the world. In both England and in the USA Powys Societies have been formed and ever since 1977 there has been a *Powys Review*, mainly devoted to J.C. Powys, but also to his brothers, Theodore Francis, the short-story writer, and Llewelyn, the essayist. New editions are being prepared, unprinted and unknown material likewise, plus an abundance of diaries and letters.

But now to the exhibition!

In the first showcase lie *Modern sjalskultur* and *Lyckans vasen*, published during the 30s and discovered by Alf Ahlberg, the Swedish philosopher who translated the former book.

Will Durant, the American philosopher, wrote: "Powys is the most sensitive instrument for thought and feeling I can find in contemporary literature. For once an artist has found a perfect language to express an artist's philosophy."

But we tardy Swedes were slow to recognise him. Alas! Alas!

In the 70s the excellent Coeckelberghs' publishing firm widened our literary horizon by issuing *Wolf Solent* and *Dararnas dans* (Ducdame). We also meet these books in the Swedish showcase. We see foreign bibliographies and books about him, a book of lectures, his Diaries, which started coming out in 1987 (two have been published, twenty-eight remain to be so), plus the nucleus of his writings: the novels.

In one showcase we find his earliest books, for instance, *Poems*, white with its flowering Jugend-style, which Sven-Erik Tackmark paid five shillings for in 1938.

We see posthumous editions and photographs associated with his various homes, from the vicarage in Somerset to the house in Wales where he lived the last nine years of his life.

And, above all, we see his expressive face in many portraits, en face and in profile, sitting in silhouette and as a doll in a brown suit.

And we can meditate on his powerful, flying handwriting which is to be found in about 60,000 letters. Thirty of these went to Eric The Red, as he called his Swedish friend.

In a little niche there is a selection of articles from Swedish newspapers on Powys. I read a few words from an article by Goran Borge:

"For those who are willing to follow him - a long journey with the help of old vehicles - a remarkable landscape opens itself, not like any other, full of surprising beauty and saturated with significance."

And Eva Strom has observed that Powys can penetrate far into the most subtle nuances of the human psyche without losing his foothold.

This is an exhibition where it is absolutely necessary to slow down the tempo and be absorbed. Read the texts, study the books and the author's statuesque face, the magnetic look in his eyes and the atmosphere around him. Notice his handwriting, which tells you so much

about him.

Then read him and continue to do so. We need him in this era.

Karin Algrim.

John Cowper Powys - a Master of Solitude.

It is difficult to capture John Cowper Powys in a picture. He is as elusive and baffling as a Proteus and yet childishly open when he writes about himself, innocently shameless, one might say. But however nakedly he discloses himself, his faults and peculiarities, there is still the picture of him as something enigmatically complex.

And it is just as difficult to place him in a literary context. He was born in 1872 and should be counted among the generation of Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells, but he was a late literary starter and was 57 years old when his first great novel, *Wolf Solent*, was published.

He grew up in a vicarage in the South West of England and had many brothers and sisters. After his university studies he married, had a son and earned his living by giving lectures on literature for Oxford University. For about ten years he went across the country and also made shorter tours to Germany and the USA. In 1910 he moved on his own to America. He suggests that it was not only because he wanted to get away from England itself, but also from its conventionalities.

For over fifteen years he was to lead a nomadic life and travel by train all over the USA. He usually lectured in women's clubs, synagogues and workers' unions.

A lecture belongs to the most evanescent phenomena in life, but the way Powys lectured has been testified to, not only by such fellow writers as Edgar Lee Masters, Theodore Dreiser and Henry Miller. He seems to have been free from all academic pomposity, but he spellbound his audiences by becoming the person on whom he lectured. He was indeed a great actor.

He spoke frankly, even about painful things and Henry Miller says : "He gave us wounds that have healed badly." An Indian professor who was on his way through Iowa has given an apposite description of what Powys looked like on the platform: "tall, slim with long arms and legs and expressive hands, a massive head like a dynamo of energy and ideas; a firm chin and a mouth that trembled with a mystical eagerness to express his inner ecstasy, a mass of curly hair and big penetrating eyes."

In 1929 Powys stopped lecturing and settled in a distant part of Upstate New York. There he stayed until 1934 and during these five years he produced three great novels, all with motifs from the Dorset and Somerset of his childhood, the great *Autobiography* and three books of essays. It is as if the dammed-up vigour of the years had broken out in endless writing.

On his return to England Powys settled first in his native region, but very soon moved to Wales, where his family on his father's side had its origins. He was also drawn to Wales by

an early interest in Cymric literature and mythology. Here he lived in quiet seclusion for almost thirty years, until his death in 1963.

During these years he published several great novels with subjects and themes ranging from ancient Wales of the mythical age to the Fifteenth Century.

What was it that made me read book after book by Powys, a ceaseless return to this myriad of human relationships and to these recluses with Nature as their great source of power? They were fairly like one another, these Masters of Solitude, as if the same person appeared in different guises.

Instead of getting tired of all of these reiterations, I was just waiting for this lonely wanderer to turn up and be visible again as a result of his obsession with walking itself. For he is always there in Powys's novels, sometimes as a doppelganger. He disappears in aimless walks for the sake of the movement itself, in an attempt to gain strength against inner and outer threats from life's tyrannical powers. The wanderer does not seek help from others, only from these lonely walks which put him into a receptive mood and open his inner sources of power.

In his childishly open but also satirically exhilarated *Autobiography* apropos his time at Cambridge, he writes about his urge to set off on day-long walks, disappearing out on to the roads from his studies and friends. That did not imply that he was looking for beautiful scenery in a conventional sense. Everybody who has struggled through East Anglia by bicycle or on foot remembers its monotonous plains and unvarying landscape.

What his long walks gave him was a kind of ecstasy in which his body beamed alive and his sense in their awakening saw and heard and felt everything around him. It could begin by the wind suddenly touching his cheek or by the sensation that the ground arose to meet his foot.

The wanderer felt he was connected with everything inanimate around him, with mossy stones and slanting gateposts, with overgrown ponds and old blackened haystacks. No unusual visions and perspectives, but an intimate, one might almost say erotic, meeting with secretly related beings that in the onlooker's soul arouse unknown life and unknown strength.

Wolf Solent, the chief character in the first novel I read by Powys, belongs among those who secretly devote themselves to disappearing into the landscape, searching insect-like and with swaying antennae towards new points of contact and new connections. But there is also something else. Wolf is deeply aware of the petrified despair that can exist for a human being; he is aware of life's immeasurable cruelty towards everything on earth, against animals, plants and water. Everything that arises, protesting, within him against this cruel tyranny comes from his walks. He sees big green leaves growing within himself, as if he has become part of Nature with its irrepressibility and inevitability. It is as if there were a connection between the lust-filled life one can live in one's senses and the cruelty that permeates life. One must not turn away or close one's eyes, no, one must use the strength one's senses are capable of creating. Powys is no lotus-eater, but dependent on what he himself can test; he does not fight shy of the dark aspects of life.

And yet everything is met with the fresh eye of the moment, free from all illusions, and in the firm conviction that even in old age every day can turn out to be a new day.

Carl-Erik af Geijerstam

[The two articles above have been translated from the Swedish by Sven-Erik Tackmark.]

Books for Sale

Members will be interested to learn that Steven Ferdinando of The Old Vicarage, Queen Camel, near Yeovil, Somerset (tel: 0935 850210) has recently issued a new catalogue listing many items by the Powys family and their circle.

Subscriptions.

Subscriptions from members represent the main source of income for the Powys Society and therefore determine the extent and nature of our activities and the services which we can offer to members. In view of this, the following facts may be of interest:

In January 1991 Griffin Beale wrote to 48 members who had not paid their subscriptions for 1990.

Only 23 of these have subsequently paid their 1990 subscriptions.

163 members, from a total of 280, have still failed to pay their subscriptions for 1991.

These unpaid subscriptions represent a total sum of £1880, which could currently be earning interest for the Society. Had these unpaid subscriptions been covenanted the total sum available to the Society would have been £2350.

It is therefore clear that members must pay their subscriptions regularly and on time if the Society is to flourish and is to be able to offer its members an ever increasing range of services and activities. Reminding members that they have not paid their subscriptions also increases our administrative costs. Please check that your subscriptions have been paid for this year (and last!).

Paul Roberts.

Reviews

In The Spirit of Powys, edited by Denis Lane. Associated University Presses, London. 1990. ISBN 0 8387 5173 3. £26.50.

John Cowper Powys's Wolf Solent: Critical Studies, edited by Belinda Humfrey. University of Wales Press, Cardiff. 1990. ISBN 0 7083 1000 1. £25.

It has long been a source of regret that John Cowper Powys has received comparatively little attention in the academic world, not because his genius needs to be ratified by appearances on university courses but because it would widen his readership and help to provide a more balanced view of the nature of twentieth-century literature. There have, of course, been a number of academic works dealing with Powys's novels, but these have tended to be specialist investigations of particular aspects of his work, invaluable in themselves, but unlikely to attract those not already acquainted with his work. What has, until now, been lacking is a single book which attempts the essential, but often avoided task of placing Powys within the context of modernism, thus providing a route by which his protean genius may be approached. Admirers of Powys, myself included, tend to concentrate on the undeniable uniqueness of his work, but there is a danger here of regarding him as an author *sui generis* and thus of unintentionally marginalising his importance whilst marvelling at his achievement. It must not be forgotten that Powys was a man living at a particular time, subject to particular social, cultural, historical and literary influences and that his work was, in a sense, a mediation between his individual personality and these influences. Many of these influences would also have been exerted upon his contemporaries and an examination of their differing literary responses provides a context for comparative discussion of their works. As Jerome J McGann states in his Foreword to *In The Spirit Of Powys*: "The essays in this book will illuminate in depth the extraordinary procedures of Powys's work, and some of its important modernist connections. We will understand modernism much better after we have restored Powys to that context, of course, but - what is perhaps more important - we will have greatly enlarged our sense of the power of fiction when we have made Powys as essential to our reading as Turgenev or Austen, Balzac or Dickens." This is a large claim, the declaration of a mighty task, but one for which this outstandingly important book makes significant advances. Restrictions of space preclude any detailed discussion of its contents, but something of the book's range can be gathered from the fact that it contains discussions of *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Weymouth Sands*, *Maiden Castle* and *Porius*, as well as of Powys in relation to Lawrence and Joyce, by many of the leading Powys scholars. This is a serious, scholarly and challenging book which deserves a place in every university library, but which is not accessible only to scholars.

John Cowper Powys's Wolf Solent: Critical Studies is, in a sense, a complementary work, bringing much of the same breadth of critical thought to bear upon a single, seminal work. The editor, Belinda Humfrey, provides an admirable introduction in which she

surveys contemporary critical reactions to the book and examines many of its major themes. Most original and exciting, however, is the way in which, by the use of John Cowper's unpublished letters to Phyllis Playter and the important Aberystwyth manuscript of *Wolf Solent*, she traces the history of the book's composition and revision. Such scholarly detection is not only of interest in itself, but may provide new insights for future critics. The essays which follow deal with John Cowper's use of self-analysis in the novel, poetry, the feminine, "Illusion and Reality", "Myth and Narrative" and "Creative Lies".

Taken together, these books represent a major affirmation of the importance of Powys in the context of broader literary scholarship.

Critical Studies is the fifth Powys volume to have been published by the University of Wales Press. Perhaps it is now time that the Press considered issuing a uniform series in paperback (perhaps also including *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*, now out of print with Peter Owen) which would make these valuable books available to those for whom the cost of hardback editions is prohibitive.

Paul Roberts.

Editor's Notes

Members will be pleased to learn that just as the *Newsletter* was going to press, news arrived that the John Cowper Powys exhibition is to be re-established at Gothenburg University in November 1991.

Would any members having material for the next issue of the *Newsletter* please note that it must reach the editor by the beginning of May, as it will be necessary to begin editorial work somewhat sooner than usual.