

## Editorial

A year ago Janet Prior, in a letter responding to something I had written in an editorial, wrote that: '... if you really want to know what the membership thinks, then you're going to have to ask them; and not just a polite invitation of views, but something as crude as a questionnaire included in one of the mailings.'

Janet's suggestion was taken up by the Society's Executive Committee and I set about drafting (and re-drafting) a questionnaire which attempted to cover all aspects of the Society's activity. Eventually, having been revised by the Committee and re-designed by Martin Hamblin Research, the questionnaire was sent out with the April 1994 *Newsletter* and the responses collated. Elsewhere in this issue John Batten summarises these responses and they now have to be considered in detail by both the Executive and the Publications committees. What seems clear, however, is that there is generally a high level of satisfaction with the service which the Society offers its members, although there were also a number of useful suggestions as to ways in which these could be improved and expanded. Expansion, however, inevitably means more work and that will only be possible with the active help of our members. Should you feel able to offer your time and enthusiasm, for example in setting up local meetings, please write to John Batten, whose address is published on the inside of the front cover of the *Newsletter*.

As editor of the *Newsletter* I am always keen to publish responses to anything the Society has done. It may be that the survey results spark off an idea which you would like to share with the membership as a whole; perhaps you will be stirred to respond to one of the articles. For example, the articles by Richard Burleigh and Timothy Rogers have aroused considerable interest in John Redwood Anderson, but still too little is known about him and we would welcome further information. Does anyone know anything about Tom Jones, John Cowper's friend in Liverpool, or about G. Arnold Shaw and what became of his wife and children after he died in February 1937 at the age of fifty-two. Who was the Mrs Stacey of Eastbourne to whom T. F. Powys dedicated his book *An Interpretation of Genesis*? I have a feeling that among our membership there is a vast amount of information which ought to be shared, individually apparently insignificant (inscriptions in books, for example), but collectively of potential importance. The *Newsletter* is the forum through which it can be shared and I have already warned the lady who delivers our post that she will need a larger sack.

**Paul Roberts**

**WHAT ARE GREY POWYS BOOKS ? SEE PAGE 48 !**

## *The 1994 Conference*

### A Personal View

According to the survey recently conducted among the membership of the Society, the single most popular activity at conferences is meeting old friends and making new ones. Whether such a finding is a surprise or not to members is hard to say, but, for me, it is actually surprise itself which has become a major attraction over the years. Programmes always look inviting and much pleasure is to be gained through anticipation; yet, the hint of the unexpected is never far away. Last year it was Anthony Head's dramatic unveiling of John Cowper Powys speaking on film; in 1994 it was the revelation that J.C.P. had written so effectively for the theatre.

The partly staged reading of "The Entermores" (*circa* 1905), rescued and restored by Paul Roberts, was undoubtedly the highlight of the conference. This first public airing in the Tithe Barn showed a play dealing with early Powysian themes as well as suggesting Shavian ideas and employing the wit of Oscar Wilde. The performance was, quite simply, excellent. Characters were deftly etched, lines delivered with delightful panache and the whole piece played at a pace that both illuminated the structure and fully entertained the audience.

(Incidentally, more than one of those watching commented on the casting of Roland Entermore: was it coincidence or was it intended that he should bear a certain physiognomical resemblance to the young John?)

Not a great play, it is true – the ending, for example, being a formal tidying rather than an inevitable outcome – but I am sure I was not alone in ruminating upon the tantalising thought: if J.C.P. had achieved commercial success with such a play, how different might have been the development of his creativity?

In a sense, Paul Roberts' talk earlier on the same day formed an introduction to "The Entermores" and the six chapters of *Owen Prince* in *The Powys Journal*, as it was concerned with this period in J.C.P.'s life and work. Amongst the many fascinating points made in this clear and enthralling exegesis one particular remark struck me at the time as being especially sobering: there remains as much unpublished material by J.C.P. as has already been published.

As always, each lecture stimulated and provoked much discussion at meals and in the bar; their lack of consideration here is no reflection on their quality, merely indicative of my wish to be selective.

One final comment concerning an event not on the programme but which caused more than a little flurry of interest: Herbert Williams' forthcoming film on John Cowper Powys for HTV. Shooting began at Cirencester, many present being interviewed, and although the hour-long piece may only be screened in Wales, Herbert will endeavour to make a broader viewing possible. Next year's conference, maybe? It could even be next year's surprise!

**Rob Timlin**

## *Report of the Annual General Meeting*

29 August 1994 at the Royal College of Agriculture, Cirencester

1 **Minutes of the last A.G.M.** These were approved.

2 **Matters arising** There were no matters arising.

### 3 **The Secretary's Report**

John Batten reported that the Executive Committee had met twice since the last A.G.M.

#### *Committee Meeting of 19 February 1994*

a It was reported that the Bissell collection had been accepted by the Dorset County Museum on essentially the same terms as the Feather Collection, and that about half the material was at the museum.

b The questionnaire which was to be sent to members was approved in draft.

c The Treasurer gave his financial report.

d A report was received from the Publications Committee on the following:

Publication of Mary Casey's *Diaries*.

Revision of the *Powys Checklist*.

A members' discount on the new *Porius*.

The decision to publish *The Quiet Man of Dorset*.

e Morine Krissdóttir was authorised to negotiate the purchase, on behalf of the Society, of paintings by Gertrude M. Powys from the estate of Peter Powys Grey. She was also asked to explore the possibility of purchasing his books.

f A progress report on the organising of the Collections at the Dorset County Museum was received.

#### *Committee Meeting of 28 August 1994*

a The effect of the subscription rise on membership was discussed and it was reported that the number of paid-up members was very similar to what it had been a year earlier.

b A report on the membership survey was received.

c It was reported that virtually the entire Bissell Collection is now at the Dorset County Museum.

d The Treasurer gave his financial report.

e It was agreed that access to catalogued material in the Society's collections can only be permitted after prior notice has been given by the completion of an application form.

f The following recommendations from the Publications Committee were accepted:

- i That the Powys Press should publish two or three books of Powys walks;
- ii That, subject to suitable contractual arrangements, the Powys Press should publish jointly with Alyscamps Press an enlarged volume of the correspondence between J.C.P. and Henry Miller.

g It was agreed that Bev Craven should prepare a detailed set of proposals for the representation of the Powys family in the literary gallery which is being designed for the Dorset County Museum.

h A report was received from the Advisory Committee on the Powys Collections.

i Consideration was given to the sale of inscribed Powys books, which had formerly belonged to Peter Powys Grey, to members of the Society.

#### **4 Treasurer's report**

Stephen Powys Marks referred to the earlier publication of audited accounts in the *Newsletter* and commented on some aspects of a statement which he had circulated. He said that publication of *The Powys Journal* and three newsletters would, this year, absorb about 86% of our subscription income. He explained that as printing costs rose and the subscription remained static the proportion would rise towards a target of 90%. This year's Society publications, *A Net in Water* and *The Quiet Man* of Dorset had, we were told, brought in £260 from pre-conference sales, out of £900 received so far this year for publications. Thanks were expressed for the generous arrangement by which the Society had received copies of *A Net in Water* at no cost. Expenditure on the Society's collections was referred to. In 1993 the cost of repatriating the Feather Collection had been largely met by a donation. This year expenses of £428 had been incurred in the acquisition of books and paintings formerly belonging to Peter Powys Grey. £1,000 had been paid for the paintings and £2,000 for the books, of which £1,500 had been an interest-free loan, to be re-paid when the books are sold. So far, only about £100 has been spent on storing the collections, but it is anticipated that this figure will increase. It was stated that some 275 members had paid subscriptions for this year and income from that source was expected to total about £4,100 by the end of the year. Mention was made of the increased number of covenanted subscriptions which will provide additional income for the Society. The simplified, low-key book sale had raised £243, and the Theodore drawing was sold to a postal bidder for £261.02.

#### **5 Chairman's remarks**

Morine Krissdóttir described the past year as a period of consolidation, during which a number of projects moved towards fruition. She commented upon the competence of the team she had around her and said she had, for that reason, felt able to commit herself to the completion of her J.C.P. diary extracts, which will be published in the spring, leaving day-to-day management to the Vice-Chairman, officers and committee. Reference was made to a second J.C.P. diary project which she is undertaking with Roger Peers. The meeting was told of the approaches made to Morine by Peter Powys Grey's daughter, offering his books and paintings, the authority to purchase being given by committee and then the long journey to a remote part of upstate New York, where they were retrieved

from barns, unpacked, re-packed, plastered with stamps and posted to England. The paintings were described as being in need of cleaning and some repair. There are nine oils, one crayon sketch, three woodcuts, a plaster relief and three water colours. It was announced that there will be an exhibition of Gertrude's works, including those acquired by the Society, at the Dorset County Museum, to coincide with next year's Conference. Morine said that she had refrained from including references to the Bissell and Feather Collections in her Chairman's remarks because they were to be dealt with as a separate item open to questions and comment from the floor.

## **6 Election of officers**

The President, Glen Cavaliero, announced that the following were willing to stand for re-election:

*Chairman* Morine Krissdóttir

*Vice-Chairman* Paul Roberts

*Secretary* John Batten

*Treasurer* Stephen Powys Marks

Their re-election was proposed by Frank Kibblewhite, seconded by Derek Langridge, and carried unanimously.

## **7 Election of Committee**

Glen Cavaliero announced that all the members had agreed to stand for re-election and that the committee had proposed that Richard Burleigh be co-opted. That Richard Burleigh be co-opted and the following elected, was proposed by John Hodgson, seconded by Anthony Head, and carried unanimously:

Griffin Beale

Bev Craven

Timothy Hyman

John Williams

*Overseas Members*

Marius Buning

Charles Lock

Sven Erik Täckmark

Louise de Bruin

Peter Foss

Frank Kibblewhite

Francis Feather

Jacqueline Peltier

## **8 Appointment of Auditor**

Stephen Allen was re-appointed Auditor and the Secretary was asked to write thanking him for his services.

## **9 The Powys Society of North America**

The meeting was addressed by Richard Maxwell, Secretary of the P.S.N.A. He began by explaining that his Society operates on a smaller scale than ours and is geared primarily to the twice-yearly publication of *Powys Notes* and the holding of

occasional conferences. He expressed pleasure that Morine Krissdóttir had recently been elected Vice-President of their Society and the hope that there would be closer co-operation between the two societies as a result. An invitation was issued to any members of our Society, in North America next summer, to attend the P.S.N.A Conference, at which papers will be delivered on the theme: *John Cowper Powys and the Nineteenth Century*.

#### **10 The Powys Collection at the Dorset County Museum**

Morine Krissdóttir said that she had been working on the cataloguing of the collections with the help of Richard Burleigh and paid tribute to his contribution. The Bissell Collection was described as seven car-loads of books, manuscripts and memorabilia amounting to about 10,000 items. This, along with, but separate from, the Feather Collection, is housed in a room ten feet square. Although the collections have not been valued, we are aware that they are extremely valuable and Morine made reference to the high standard of security at the Museum. She went on to explain that arrangements for access to material would be in line with current practice at the Museum and in academic libraries. Material would not be available until it had been catalogued. Persons wishing to use any item from the collection should apply to the Secretary of the Society, giving adequate notice and stating specifically what they wish to see. In due course, a catalogue and an appropriate form of application for permission to use the collection will be available. At present invigilation has to be arranged by the Society. The difficulties encountered in seeking to integrate the catalogue into the Museum's data-base were explained. The Treasurer's earlier reference to the likelihood of more money needing to be spent on the collections was taken up by the Chairman. She said that there were many items in the Bissell Collection which needed to be stored to archival standards. Purpose-designed boxes and sleeving are expensive, but approaches to a conservation charity had suggested that a 50% grant may be available. That will involve the Society matching the amount of the grant if and when it becomes available. Questions were invited from the floor, but all had been explained.

#### **11 Announcement of an Honorary Life Membership of the Society**

The Chairman announced that the Committee had unanimously agreed to invite Jeff Kwintner to become an Honorary Life Member, and he had expressed his willingness to accept. Paul Roberts then paid tribute to Jeff through a sequence of reminiscences which began with a purchase from one of Jeff's clothes shops, progressed through his discovery of his Regent Street book shop with its fish pond and music but, above all, its *Powys books*, and concluded with an expression of his sadness when it all came to an end with the closure of the Covent Garden shop. In Paul's estimation, Jeff Kwintner, through his Village Press, has published more Powys titles than any other publisher. He recounted how, as a student, he had often benefited from Jeff's deep knowledge and understanding of

the work of John Cowper Powys. Morine Krissdóttir added a briefer appreciation, making particular reference to his generosity with material he had collected for The Village Press.

## **12 Future Powys events**

The Secretary gave a tentative date for the Annual Montacute Lecture, which will now be at 2.30 pm on Saturday 19 November, when Oliver Holt, pupil and life-long friend, will talk about Littleton Powys. Stressing that it had not yet been put to Committee, John Batten went on to express a personal view that the Society should try to facilitate regional meetings outside Wessex. He cited the positive response to such a development from questionnaire respondents and advocated the setting-up of pilot schemes. Reference was made to the possibility of a lecture being delivered at more than one regional centre during the coming year. In closing he announced that, following the support from outside the South West for the Weymouth Walk, he contemplated organising a Montacute Weekend, managed on similar lines, with accommodation arranged for those who required it.

## **13 The time and place of the next conferences**

The Chairman prefaced her remarks by drawing attention to the fact that the entire cost of every conference is borne by those attending, it is not subsidised from general funds, and that, to that end, the only people receiving a free conference are the speakers. All those who work behind the scenes pay in full. From the floor Joan Stevens asked whether there was any possibility of subsidising members unable to afford to attend conferences. Paul Roberts responded that such help could only be provided from general funds. When a special fund for the purpose was suggested it was pointed out that that could lead to officers being asked to make invidious choices. John Batten said that a great deal must depend upon personal commitment to the conference. He went on to refer to members who would drive a very long way to spend one day at Conference, others who would camp nearby to reduce the cost, and others for whom it was the annual holiday. Glen Cavaliero felt that if any help were given it would have to be in an informal and discretionary way. It was confirmed that next year's conference will be at Kingston Maurward, Dorchester, from 19 August to 22 August (departing after breakfast on the 22nd). The Chairman announced that it will take as its theme: *Biography – the Art of Telling Lies*. It was also announced that it will be Eve Batten's last conference as organiser. The high cost of Conference was referred to again, and it was agreed that questions of frequency, duration and cost would once again be brought before Committee.

## **14 Any Other Business** There was none.

**John Batten**

## *Llewelyn's Stone*

It has been most refreshing to follow the debate in the *Newsletter* concerning the significance of the inscription on the stone on top of the cliff near Chydyok. Refreshing, in part, for what it tells us about our ways of reading, our dependence on knowledge of 'intention', and our tendency to project meaning 'where none intended'. The debate has provoked anew my own thoughts about a phrase whose origin in Isaiah has been for me suspended or occluded. I have always regarded the words as uncharacteristic of Llewelyn – not because of their apparently religious sentiment but, rather, because of their extraordinary word-play. (Meta-physical in that sense, yes.)

The Living      The Living      He Shall Praise Thee

It is important to insist that what we are discussing is not the phrase from Hezekiah's prayer but these eight words arranged in a particular way. Note that there are no commas, and that the use of upper-case initials severely modifies (even destroys) the syntax of the same words in the same order in Isaiah. The balance or imbalance of the eight words teases one out of thought, like a koan. There are two nouns and two pronouns, and many ways of ascribing antecedence and equivalence. Is the second 'The Living' merely a repetition and reinforcement of the first, or is it the running together of nouns, one of which accords with 'He', the other with 'Thee'? Or is the structure a chiasmus, in which the first 'The Living' accords with 'Thee' which will be praised by the central phrase

'The Living      He'?

The capitalization of 'He' and 'Thee' gives both terms equal orthographic rights to divinity. The Living shall praise The Living, and by praising and being praised, the Living is all of the divine we know or need. Note also that The Living is a gerund, and that the main and sole verb is Praise.

Peter Foss has rightly drawn our attention to the irony of the inscription: a prayer offered up in thanksgiving by Hezekiah for his survival, is now not offered up, not spoken at all, more an abstract affirmation than a prayer: it is written beneath the name of one who is dead. And one's response (one being the cliff-top wanderer) is that whoever He and Thee may be, they are among The Living, and can have nothing to do with Llewelyn Powys 1884–1939, who is as dead as the stone. Yet a stone inscribed does speak to us, its words formed by the chisel proclaiming the livingness of that which is not stone, the livingness even of those very words formed by lines in the stone. The lines live in the absence of stone. The stone is the ground of words, and the words are not spoken by any person, because as words, without speaker's intention or addressee, they are themselves The Living: words being as much of Living as we know or need – especially words of Praise. On the clifftop, the words speak, the wanderer assumes the position of addressee, 'Thee', and must ask, in response: but where, grammatically or otherwise, is He? Not among the Living?



Llewelyn certainly chose the words, as Griffin Beale and Peter Foss have demonstrated, but we should give credit also to Alyse Gregory and Elizabeth Muntz for making of the words' material presence a riddle and a charm: eight words (a sentence? how many phrases? yielding how many variants of emphasis and intonation?) with which to juggle and conjure.

Charles Lock

## Reviews

*A Net In Water: A Selection from the Journals of Mary Casey*,  
edited by Judith M. Lang and Louise de Bruin.

The Powys Press, 1994. ISBN 1 874559 10 4. Paperback. 232pp. £7.50.

The poet Mary Casey was born Mary Penny and was the daughter of Lucy, the youngest of the eleven Powys siblings. This selection from her journals is from 1963 to 1979, a few weeks before her death, years in which she divided her time between Kenya, where her husband Gerard was farming, and Mappowder in Dorset, where her mother lived.

Those with a taste for titbits of Powys family gossip will be disappointed, but anyone with a meditative cast of mind and a soul attuned to nature may well find this simple, carefully thought-out diet sustaining. 'To think, to pray, to read, to write, to walk' – these were what she chiefly liked to do, and the essence of each day is recorded as part of the same discipline with which she tried to balance these ingredients of a life, with some baking and gardening thrown in.

'I must write more of thoughts and less of things if I am to continue this,' she wrote in 1970, 'for in glancing back through my old journal I quickly see the thinking still lives, the descriptions are flat, the cares and confessions meaningless, of the *ego*; though to set them out at the time may have been salvation.' Fortunately her strenuous self-discipline failed to evict the 'things', and so her pictures of the beauty of the outer world continue, together with restrained glimpses of deep feeling, water to soften dry thoughts. And seven years later she again, and more roundly, says of journal-keeping 'it is, humanly speaking, my salvation'. Despite the qualifying phrase, for such a nature as hers mere scribbled, uncensored outpourings would have been no relief. Her words are chosen with care and are precise and restrained. Yet besides the benefits for the soul which attend on the careful, dedicated practice of any craft, the reader receives the impression that the daily entries were stepping stones laid down to keep her from sinking into the Slough of Despond.

'I have this faith in the nature of words, the very art of writing, to in some way make suffering endurable', she wrote, meaning, I believe, for reader as well as for

writer. Certainly I can attest to the consolation of reading these journals in typescript four years ago at a dark time in my own life, and having the sense of a deeply sensitive but steady and inspiring companion.

It is interesting that it is 'Uncle Jack' who 'has been a more potent influence in my life than any of the ones he writes of'. She writes of visiting him in hospital when he has already 'gone far away' and of going with him on his final journey to Chesil Beach: 'where the stones were already dark and wet Gerard spread the ash ...' Yet curiously she found herself unable to read *Weymouth Sands*, at any rate in Africa. She saw him as the only philosopher who didn't ignore the problem of evil. Just occasionally she catches a trick in his style: 'It is a problem for poets – having to let all soaring and sinking impulses of the soul *go to the limit* ... in order to feel the crafty play of things ...'

In the end it is the poet's eye that gives me the greatest pleasure of anything in these journals: 'four giraffe ... making various patterns against the azure sky'; 'in an ash with ivy festoons a pair of long-tailed tits, their small zree zree first calling me'. A lover of birds as poets often are, and an observer of the heavens by day and night in two continents, I would give all her thoughts about Plotinus for any one of the daily epiphanies; though happily for those of different taste she gives us both. Her mother, who evidently understood her make-up well although they were very different, in one letter sent her three T.L.S. and a primrose. There is much, almost everything, that Mary does not confide about herself. As she says, 'I have innumerable underlying and deep reserves'. Yet the reader is somehow able to draw on those reserves, there is the sense of a resource accompanying the reticence, as a friend's silence can sometimes say more than words. What Mary found in Chinese poems we can find in her writing also: 'Interplay of intimacy and secrecy', she wrote, 'is one of the qualities ... that endear them to my heart. The poet may take you by the hand and point to what you would not have seen, your foot moves by his, yet the mysterious is enhanced.'

**Kim Taplin**

*The Ecstasies of Crazy Jack* by A. P. Seabright.

Joe's Press, Kidderminster. 1993. ISBN 1 89828302 8.

Paperback. 142pp. £8.99 (Available from: 18 Chaddeley Road, Kidderminster. DY10 3AD.)

There is an odd inconsistency in the tone of A. P. Seabright's study of the ecstatic nature of J. C. Powys's writing, particularly in its earlier sections. Seabright observes that one of the main reasons for the critical neglect of Powys's work is that it has so far lacked a literary frame of reference, and he sets out with gusto to provide this, citing names as diverse as Mervyn Peake, Robert Graves, D. H. Lawrence, Michael Moorcock, Lawrence Durrell, W. B. Yeats, William Blake and Thomas Hardy between pages five and seven alone. At the same time, his study opens with a celebration of the essential loveableness of 'Crazy Jack', a silly and

pretentious soubriquet which, in effect, merely substantiates the marginalisation of Powys of which he complains. Lawrence and Hardy are frequently mentioned, yet they never appear as 'Neurotic Dave' or 'Gloomy Tom'.

It would be unwise, however, to dismiss Seabright's book on the basis of such quibbles, for it is an intelligent and wide-ranging survey, which both examines the importance of the notion of ecstasy in Powys's work and relates this to an astonishing range of authors and cultural practices and beliefs. Though one may sometimes tire of the frequent lists of famous names, the connections are suggestive. Indeed, one finds oneself regretting the brevity of the book, for a larger study would have enabled Seabright to explore more fully many of the ideas which he merely glances at here.

Readers will, however, be startled by some of Seabright's assertions, such as: 'Powys' life-philosophy is automatically a failure in modern post-psychoanalytical terms. Its anti-social, anti-altruistic, anti-emotional, anti-feminine stance also makes it wrong in the eyes of the modern world ... It is a cheap philosophy, asking not to change the world, or even really to get to grips with it, or with people or issues or societies. All Powys wants is, as Merlin says, to be left alone.'

This is nonsense. If it were true, one wonders why Powys should have devoted so much of his energy to the composition of 'philosophies for everyman', let alone his enormous correspondence. Yet, despite such serious reservations, Seabright is a critic from whom we could wish to hear more.

Sadly, the production of the book, loose pages held together with an ugly plastic strip, will do nothing to promote its sale. At £8.99 for 142 pages, we can surely expect more than this.

**Paul Roberts**

*Elusive America: The Uncollected Essays of John Cowper Powys,*  
*Volume One, edited by Paul Roberts.*

Cecil Woolf, London. 1994.

ISBN 1 897967 20 9. Casebound. 251pp. £19.95.

*Elusive America* is the first of three volumes of John Cowper Powys's uncollected essays under the editorship of Paul Roberts which are due to be published by Cecil Woolf. In turn we are due to receive *England Revisited* and *The Wind That Waves The Grasses*, covering European and Russian literary, social and philosophical themes.

When presented with an ambitious project such as this, which will, when completed, bring together more than one hundred essays, most little-known and some, as far as can be ascertained, previously unpublished, one has to admire the industry and research of an editor who, without the benefit of an academic sinecure, possesses enough faith in the value of his material to provide us with such a well annotated and comprehensive over-view of this somewhat neglected aspect of Powys's literary output.

This book comes at a time when the major works of J. C. Powys are shifting more and more away from the public eye. The trend is towards the publication of specialist, narrow-interest volumes of letters, essays, lectures and general ephemera, which finds its market mainly among Powys specialists, academics and libraries. This volume, despite the best of intentions, must in time join the ranks of such little-read tomes, since even the fine editorial skills of Paul Roberts cannot make the subject matter of this book something that appeals to a wider audience. There are many arguments in favour of the production of numerous ephemeral volumes of letters and occasional pieces by great writers in times when their general profile is low, since they consolidate, in the mind of the literary world and the academics (even if they remain only seen but unread), the idea that here is a writer of great worth and seriousness who must be critically re-evaluated in time and, hopefully, one day given a place in the front rank of our pantheon. When one begins to publish several volumes of essays and letters by a dead man of letters then one is subconsciously trying to start the process by which the literary reputation of a writer will be assured for future generations. In time, one hopes that the major novels, poetry, critical and philosophic works that should achieve lasting fame and the stature of 'classics', will be re-published and, even better, *read*. If the novels for the moment do not sell, then perhaps readers of Dorothy Richardson, John Keats, G. Wilson Knight or Henry Miller will be led to discover the major works of Powys by a devious route and be grateful enough for being led to an unknown, but irresistibly attractive, destination that they will remain to explore and, finding themselves captivated, become loyal devotees. It is a familiar pattern, already undertaken for figures such as George Gissing or, in France, Frédéric Mistral. However, in the minds of everyone there is a hidden subtext when one writes a commentary or review about a collection or book-length piece of secondary posthumously published work. If the author's fame is already assured, and the majority of work still in print, then the project is likely to be seen as either an amusing and illuminating minor text, interesting mainly for a dim light it may throw on an aspect of the writer's work (e.g. Ezra Pounds' *A Walking Tour in Southern France*, which highlights his interest in the troubadours and things Provençal) or, most unfortunately, a hidden gem which must be valued highly as a lost treasure. There are several cases of the latter, such as Henry Miller's *World of Lawrence*, Laura Riding's *The Word Woman* or D. H. Lawrence's *Mr. Noon*.

If the writer's place in our literary heritage is less well assured then the 'criticism' may be less generous. A cynic might say that there was little need for another book of second-rate material from a writer whose finest output remains generally unwanted. The mere existence of a book such as *Elusive America* throws each individual who comes into contact with it back on himself to decide whether it is a valuable work of scholarship or 'a loose sally of the mind' destined for dusty shelves and piles of remainders. To the readers of this review the question raised

above may seem irrelevant, but then they are supposedly Powysians through and through and, as such, they are the ideal readers of this book. Will they be the only ones?

William Burroughs once said that one should not condemn or criticise a writer or editor for not doing something that he never intended to do. One must ask oneself, what is the objective, how well is it achieved, does the work exhibit 'high seriousness' (that is, does it touch on the basic issues of the human condition), and lastly, does the writing 'ring true' – is the writer writing about what he really knows about? It is in the light of questions such as these that this book must be primarily considered. Although there is a valid reason for querying the publication value of such a book for the general public at all, once it is published we must look at its intrinsic qualities and judge it upon its merits.

*Elusive America* contains thirty-one essays written between 1915 and 1957, all of which concern either an aspect of American life or literature, or Powys's reactions to the society he found there. The essays are subdivided into five sections: 'American Scene and Character' (eight), 'Theodore Dreiser' (5), Edgar Lee Masters (5), The Arts in America (10), and lastly, 'Farewell to America' (3), the organisation being by theme rather than chronological order for the book as a whole, yet by date order within each section.

The book begins with a long introduction by the editor in which he argues persuasively for the great importance of the American experience to Powys's life and work. It is testament to the differences in human nature that while American writers fled their homeland for Europe in order to live closer to 'culture' and escape what one of their number called 'The Air-Conditioned Nightmare', Powys, according to Paul Roberts, found his creativity nurtured on the American continent. Roberts sees it in no uncertain terms:

It was America and the experiences which filled the thirty years he was to spend there which nurtured and channelled Powys's creativity ... It was America which enabled this awkward and neurotic young man to become what he had always dreamed of becoming, one of the few great writers of our time, one who has shown us the world in a new and penetrating light.

Such a thesis is deliberately impossible to refute since Powys did spend much of his life in America and wrote some of his finest work there. It is impossible to ask if he would have become a great writer had he journeyed to India or Russia instead, since we have no way of knowing. Without his innate genius, Powys could not have created in the way he did anywhere and I suspect that other facts could be as important as his exposure to American culture. An admirer, and later friend, of Powys, Henry Miller, provides an interesting parallel. He had written three full-length books and much more before going to Paris. Was it Paris that created *Tropic of Cancer* and his other major works, or rather, was it the people he met there and the freedom that an expatriate experiences to recreate himself and his worth among people who come to him fresh, rather than jaded by knowledge

of his past? For Miller, it was as much Anaïs Nin and Michael Fraenkel that unleashed his creativity as it was Paris. Like Powys, his novels mainly concentrate on landscapes and characters, real and imaginary, away from his daily milieu at the time he was writing. Like Miller, Powys had produced work which was inferior and had achieved some small publications; like Miller he was convinced that he possessed extraordinary gifts and (like Miller) it was more his wanting to be a writer than the writing itself that captured his imagination. 'The urge which drove him to fill page after page ... was not the urge to write, but the urge to make a writer of himself.'

Throughout the introduction Roberts writes using a mixture of deduction, Powys's and his friends' reminiscences, and supposition, to reconstruct the frame of mind of Powys as he prepared to leave from Liverpool, his farewell drink with his friend Tom Jones, whose company had brought him great happiness in troubled times. Powys's journey and his momentous meeting with G. Arnold Shaw who was in time to become his confidant, publisher, promoter and lecture tour manager are rightly given detailed discussion before Roberts goes on to describe the beginning of Powys's famous lecturing career. On this ground Roberts is more of an expert than most since he has the record of being the only person to have edited a collection of Powys's lectures from America. These appeared in *Singular Figures* (Footprint, 1989) and were derived from the texts of an unknown stenographer. Some introductory material is carried over from the previous book but it would greatly complement the understanding of any reader interested in why Powys was regarded so highly as a lecturer in America to read both these titles. It is difficult in an age where the lecture can rarely hold its place as a fascinating and entertaining education medium to appreciate the power that was often remarked in those auditoria. Lectures can occasionally hold power today, and there were always political orators of enough hypnotic talent to captivate the masses, but it is educationally a failing form. Reading Powys's lectures, such as we have, even allowing they are poor copies of the original, I for one suspect that his real power lay in delivery and his presence in a world which was in media terms far simpler, rather than the content.

Roberts traces the effect of the strenuous lecturing circuit on Powys's health and the suggestions of his brother Llewelyn that an easier life could be gained by turning to journalism: 'We must get him out of lecturing or he will be done for ...' (1909).

After trying short stories, Powys began to compose essays and journalism. Also in 1915 his association with the Little Theatre led to him trying his hand at plays. His first known magazine piece according to Roberts was March 1915 in *The Little Review* on 'Maurice Browne and the Little Theatre'. There follows a summary of Powys's career as contributor of essays and sketches and an attempt to explain what exactly it was about America that liberated Powys's genius.

This section is particularly well written and returns to the territory mentioned

earlier in this review – the freedom of all kinds created by the nature of being an expatriate and the awakening to an accessible literary milieu. This Powys found in America as few other writers did, most being driven to Paris or Berlin. As Roberts says, perhaps most significant of all here he found Phyllis Playter, who proved to be both muse and guide through most of his best creative work. America was, of course, called 'The Melting Pot' and seizing a variant of the metaphor Roberts draws on the *Mabinogion* and the story of The Cauldron of Rebirth to summarise the effect this land had on Powys – the land was perhaps the cauldron, but the ingredients and the substance needed to create this young man, reborn writer, were as much and more of Britain and the past, catalysed by the power of a new world than he perhaps allows.

One thing that is immediately apparent on confronting Powys's essays themselves is that they are of greatly varying quality. Some of these 'essays' are little more than sketches for reportage, a book preface ('the Poetry of Eric Barker'), a 'letter to the editor' ('Desperate Cry') or a few lines to plug a favourite writer ('The New Spoon River'). These pieces range from less than ten lines to many pages and the continuity of the book suffers as such – some of the writing is so ephemeral as to be almost a footnote whilst there are also essays worthy of the name, such as 'An Englishman Upstate'.

As a great admirer of Powys I came to this book full of hopes of a long-awaited pleasure, but instead found myself reminded of two of the better-known definitions of the essay by one of its more cutting practitioners: 'There is no room for the impurities of literature in an essay', and 'Trivial personalities decomposing in the eternity of print.'

One must accept that for Powys this form was not the most natural and that he had taken much persuading before he undertook to expend his energies on such pieces, but one must consider the practicalities (money, for example) and reasons that brought each one to life. If it is hard to imagine, one only needs to read John Updike's introduction to his collected essays and reviews (*Odd Jobs*, Penguin), which gives us graphically the choices facing the serious novelist badgered for copy, for boosts and fillers, opinions and reflections. Like him, we could see most of these pieces as generally: 'a little fun and freestyle generalizations in the prose ... a profitable subdivision of creativity', but for the fact that many readers might echo Jane Gary Harris in her preface to Mandelstam's *Collected Prose*: 'Generations, decades may not be separated by more than a stone's throw, but they differ in being vehicles of different cultures.'

With a couple of exceptions (in the section 'Farewell to America') the prose in this book is trapped in the past, seeming either naive or meaningless to most modern readers except for its historical interest.

Most modern readers in England will have little idea of who Edgar Lee Masters is – his *Spoon River Anthology* was one of the most popular books of its day, widely translated and admired, and few could have admired him more than

Powys, who praises his work to an embarrassing degree. It was a success of its time and its age – a commonplace in literature (look at Marie Corelli), but for most people it has not stood the test of time.

Masters (despite Powys's claims for his later work) was as Glen Ruibley described him: 'his first great achievement was his last and the remaining thirty-five years of his life were an embarrassing anti-climax as his first forty-five were a despairing preparation.'

Interesting light on his work is provided by John Hollander in the introduction to the Signet Classic edition of *Spoon River Anthology* and Elizabeth Hardwick's essay 'Wind from the Prairie' (*Best American Essays 1992*, Ticknor and Fields).

Theodore Dreiser also receives extravagant praise whenever he appears – five pieces are devoted to him. His novel *The Genius* is at one point called 'The Prose-Iliad of the American Scene' whilst most agree today it is among his weakest writing – probably due to the circumstances of its composition. It would have helped us if the editor had in his notations given us a greater understanding of the context in which these reviews etc. were written. For example, although Powys refers to moral objections to Dreiser's writings about sex and relationships, few would today realise that he was the man who: 'managed to offend puritanical America and the literary establishment more than any other twentieth-century writer, except, perhaps, Henry Miller ...'

*The Genius* was indeed called 'the epic of a human tomcat', among other things. The Western Society for the Suppression of Vice attacked, books were withdrawn, and Dreiser threatened with jail. 'A Protest' may well come from the time of the petition by Mencken to support the book and the campaign by the Authors' League of America. The novel, in fact, was out of print for about five years due to the controversy. Interestingly, while Powys reviewed *The Genius* in *The Little Review* of November 1915, Edgar Lee Masters had reviewed the same book in the *Chicago Evening Post* of 22 October 1915 – another rave, as one might expect. The strands come closer together. I know little of the biography of Powys, Dreiser and Masters at this time, but one could be forgiven for feeling one was at a mutual appreciation society for friends.

A natural comparison of an Englishman writing about American writers might be D. H. Lawrence, who wrote not only *Studies in Classic American Literature*, but also essays which, like those in *Elusive America*, were posthumously collected in *The Symbolic Meaning and Phoenix I and II*. A quick reading will tell most people that Powys is simply not in Lawrence's league in this collection and with the essay form in general. Without detailed context most of the import of Powys's essays on literature is simply lost on the modern reader.

The essays on 'American Scene and Character' have, in places, moments of quality, but generally these pieces are inferior and can, at times, read like the products of Grub Street. Powys is uneasy with his métier and sometimes the subject seems imposed upon him and unnatural.



The section devoted to 'The Arts in America' begins with a plug for his friends at the Little Theatre; there follows an essay on 'Race and Literature' which is an interesting look at the 'Judaic strain' in literature in the decade before Hitler when, we seem to forget, anti-semitism was common in both England and America. Pieces on art, Longfellow, Cabell, *The Dybbuk*, crime literature, Charles Fort, Eric Barker and James Purdy follow like so many brief encounters, full of the usual critical over-enthusiasm and journalistic prose.

By the time I reached the closing section, entitled 'Farewell to America', I for one was tired and frustrated and felt little inclination to continue. Perseverance was, however, rewarded, for in the last three essays in this volume Powys seems to come to life, to regain his sensibilities and his balance. They are perhaps the best written things in the book and in them Powys pays homage and says farewell to the country he grew to love. Indeed, here one sees the unfolding vision of Powys's deep attachment to America, his perception of the contrast of cultures (native and adopted) and, at last, the potential power of his prose. Editorially, it is a masterstroke to place these pieces last, like a reward after a long journey – they read almost as if they were the reward Powys gave himself after so much toil at lesser things.

As I reached the last page I was reminded of a recent review of another Cecil Woolf volume, *Powys on Keats*, reviewed by Charles Lock – I would not go so far as to say that *Elusive America* is 'of no obvious scholarly or commercial value', but it is of limited scholarly value and very little commercial value.

Any criticisms in this review reflect more the latent nature of material than any faults in Paul Roberts' editing. Roberts has worked tirelessly and competently to produce this volume and his work is of a very high standard indeed. It would not be amiss, I hope, if I said that his talents are worthy of better material than this and certainly of better production. This is an extremely shabbily produced book from a publisher who usually does much better – with an unlaminated dust-jacket mine has lost its colour in three weeks. In the end one has to take one's choice – is a book like this worth producing for the mass market or no? Roberts believes (I assume) in the intrinsic value of making available all Powys's work, no matter how minor or ephemeral and, despite reservations, I would have to agree that there should be access in some form. I have myself produced books people probably thought of less interest than this but, paradoxically, they may well sell more than this – due to differences in publishers' strategies. Cecil Woolf deserves credit for taking on such books and if sales are low it is both due to the material and the politics of bookselling, which are harsh beyond most people's realisation. For myself, I would have preferred to see a project of a collected essays or critical writings by Powys that could have reached a larger audience and so much more helped his cause. Books like *Elusive America* may, almost imperceptibly, damage it. Powys was at times a great critic and a superb essayist, but here I saw only shadows; if we dream of recognition for Powys we must realise that 'in dreams

begin responsibilities' and the greatest responsibility in the end is to enable a writer to be judged by his best, for on that alone can he truthfully become 'great' for posterity.

Karl Orend

*Jack and Frances: The Love Letters of John Cowper Powys  
to Frances Gregg, Volume One,*

edited by Oliver Wilkinson assisted by Christopher Wilkinson.

Cecil Woolf, London. 1994. ISBN 0 900821 99 x. Casebound. 271pp. £29.95.

*Powys To Glyn Hughes: The Letters of John Cowper Powys  
to Glyn Hughes,* edited by Frank Warren.

Cecil Woolf, London. 1994. ISBN 0 900821 79 5. Casebound. 80pp. £12.50.

Readers of the Powys family soon learn the art of waiting; yet, even among Powysians, few books can have been as long and as eagerly awaited as the correspondence between John Cowper Powys and Frances Gregg.

'Correspondence' hardly seems an apt expression for the letters contained in this first of the two volumes to be published, suggesting, as it does, an exchange of ideas, of sentiments and of experiences. Not only do few of Frances Gregg's letters of this period survive, but the collection as a whole reads more like the joint creation of a *Romance*. No wonder they sometimes preferred to sign themselves with an interlinked C and H, standing for Cathy and Heathcliffe. At once a record of an intensely cerebral eroticism, an exercise in Powysian mythologising and mutual psychotherapy, one is reminded of Powys's *Autobiography* by the way in which Frances and Jack are at once both themselves and creatures of their own imagination, or rather of John Cowper's imagination, for Frances, in her own letters, remains throughout the voice of reason, temperance and practicality. As Oliver Wilkinson writes in his fine introduction:

To her, Jack was not a devil, but a muddled infant who should have realised his power, become adult in it, and used it. It was important to dredge the silt of the disgusting compulsions clogging his genius. Genius she saw in him, but genius avoided except when he climbed onto a platform, and pretended to be someone else.

When, in *After My Fashion*, John Cowper has the artist Robert Canyot consider the 'psychic surgery' which was so essential to his well-being and which could only be performed in or by America, did he, I wonder, have the healing power of Frances' love in mind?

Inevitably, quite apart from the power of the love story it tells, the book will become an essential source for future writers on the Powys family. There is, for example, the harrowing story of Katie's breakdown and the inability of her parents to deal with it ('... the parents only stand aside and let things drift'), which has never been told as fully or as honestly before. Much will be learned too

of John Cowper's life at Burpham with Margaret and of his immense love for his son Littleton Alfred, as well as of central but still too-little-known figures such as Arnold Shaw.

How much of what John Cowper writes in his letters is autobiographically 'true', and how much the creation of his mythology is irrelevant. For, in the case of John Cowper Powys, mythologising life, not simply one's own but other people's too, was the way to tell and to know the truth.

The work of Oliver and Christopher Wilkinson in editing this important book is exemplary. Not only do they provide a preface, an introduction and a detailed index, but we are also given what amounts to a miniature biographical dictionary of the Powys circle, which I have already used on several occasions for matters not directly related to these letters.

Following *Jack and Frances*, the letters to Glyn Hughes will inevitably seem slight, particularly as eleven of the thirty-four letters it contains were previously published by the Ore Press in 1971 under the editorship of Bernard Jones.

However, the earlier edition is now scarce and it makes sense to have as complete a collection of the letters as can be gathered. In addition, Frank Warren is able to provide the letters with an essential context by drawing upon his personal knowledge of Glyn Hughes, whose life, tragically short but filled with incident and activity, is celebrated in the introduction. A useful appendix also reprints Hughes' essay 'Writer and Wizard: a Portrait of John Cowper Powys', first published in *Prediction* in October 1965.

The letters themselves show Powys in the role of encouraging and supportive teacher, which was so important a part of his character, explaining, among other things, the pronunciation and etymology of Welsh and Greek words and urging Hughes on to success in a field in which he can have had little personal interest, for Hughes was a skilled guitarist and songwriter.

This is not an essential addition to the library of every Powys reader, but it is a pleasing collection, edited with a profound admiration for both correspondents.

**Paul Roberts**

## *Book News*

No doubt members will be so fascinated by the catalogue of Peter Powys Grey's books which is issued with this *Newsletter* (see page 48), and so eager to buy as much of its contents as they can afford, that they will have little time to think of buying *new* books. Advance warning is, therefore, in order. Buy the books you want from the catalogue now, but start saving again too because 27 April 1995 will see the publication by the Carcanet Press of Morine Krissdóttir's selection of

John Cowper Powys's diaries from 1929 to 1939. Further details of this important publication are not yet available, but will be given in the next issue of the *Newsletter*.

As John Batten mentions in his report of the Annual General Meeting, the Society is currently planning, subject to suitable contractual arrangements, to undertake a joint venture with the Alysamps Press, run by Karl Orend in Paris. We plan to publish a full, English-language edition of the correspondence between Henry Miller and John Cowper Powys in the latter part of 1995. This will be an entirely new edition and we hope to make it as comprehensive as possible. Therefore, we would be most grateful to any member who is able to provide us with material which may be relevant – letters, inscriptions in books, magazine articles, references in other books; literally anything which you think may be useful. These should be sent to me at the address published in the front of the *Newsletter*.

**Paul Roberts**

### *The Powys Society of North America*

The Powys Society of North America publishes its journal *Powys Notes* twice a year. Future issues will include:

- a special issue on John Cowper Powys's Canadian lecture tours, featuring previously unknown newspaper transcriptions of Powys's lectures;
- a *Porius* issue, featuring critical commentary on the new Colgate University Press edition on the novel;
- John Cowper Powys's letters to Dorothy Richardson and to James Purdy;
- a special issue on John Cowper Powys and the Nineteenth Century, the theme for next summer's P.S.N.A conference.

*Powys Notes* is available by annual subscription. Members in the United Kingdom should send a cheque for £8, payable to The Powys Society of North America to the Society's British account at The National Westminster Bank, 10 Bene't Street, Cambridge, CB2 3PU, referring to the Society's account number, 5989741. They should *also* write to Constance Harsh, The Department of English, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York 13346-1398 U.S.A., to inform her of their payment. This will facilitate more rapid distribution of each issue of *Powys Notes* as it is published.

Members outside the U.K. should write directly to Constance Harsh for further advice as to the most appropriate means of paying their subscription.

**P.R.**

## *Lily Brooks*

### **A Recollection of John Cowper Powys at Burpham**

On 14 January 1994, there was an article and a photograph in the *Worthing Herald*, reporting that the Mayor had attended the 100th birthday celebration of a lady who had not only spent most of her life in Burpham but had also worked for John Cowper Powys. This set an exchange of letters and phone-calls in motion between Paul Roberts and myself wherein it was agreed that I would seek permission to arrange an interview with Mrs Lily Brooks.

I met Lily in her room at Larkspur Nursing Home, High Salvington, on Saturday 30 April, 1994, together with her son, Mr C. R. Brooks and his wife. Since Lily has less than perfect hearing, Mr and Mrs Brooks were most helpful in putting my questions and explaining any of Lily's answers that eluded me. She was very firm in manner and sure of what she said, and had the most winning smile. Lily also showed me several photographs, some of which are reproduced



*Lily aged 18, when nursemaid for Mervin Eustace, the doctor's son.*



*Lily aged 18, by now probably in J.C.P.'s employ.*

here, with kind permission. I spent about one and a half hours in the company of this delightful lady who was a housemaid at Burpham for John Cowper Powys and his wife Margaret for almost eighteen years.

Mrs Lily Maggie Dorcas Brooks (née Stevenson) was born on 10 January 1894, in Balmaclean, near Dumfries, Kirkcudbrightshire, and her family moved to Sussex when she was fifteen years old. She first took up service as a housemaid with the Revd Elijah Solomon Seleby\* at Arundel. Her next post was also in Arundel, as nanny to the son of Dr. Eustace, who lived in Maltravers Road.

It was two years after Lily was born that, in 1896, John Cowper Powys married Margaret Lyon, living first at 'Court House', in Offham, a village just outside Lewes, whilst he was in the process of becoming an Oxford University Extension Lecturer. In 1902, with the help of Margaret's brother Harry, they were able to purchase a house in the village of Burpham, near Arundel, on the Duke of Norfolk's estate. John wrote : 'We had often admired from the train ... this particular tract of country and I think I must secretly have "willed" that I should settle here.'<sup>1</sup> Margaret fell in love with the large and imposing building, which was named 'Bankside House', presumably because of the giant prehistoric earthwork which backed onto the garden. According to Powys, she cried, 'That is the house I have been thinking of all my life!'<sup>2</sup> Here, in late August 1902, not long before John's thirtieth birthday, their son Littleton was born. Burpham seems to have been a splendid place for a couple to set up home at the turn of the century. In his *Autobiography*, J.C.P. recalls:

... all day long at Burpham there poured in upon us with the full flood of sunshine the voices of children, the bleating of sheep, the lowing of oxen, the ringing of bells, the stamping of horses, the tinkling of anvils, the sawing of timber, together with the most cheerful voices from the George and Dragon.<sup>3</sup>

For the Brooks family, the Powys connection began with Lily's older sister

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\* *Editorial note* Revd Saleebey (the spelling given in *Crockford's Clerical Directory* and also in a letter by John Cowper to his brother Littleton in 1902) became vicar of Burpham in 1899. He was friend of both John Cowper and Margaret Powys and John Cowper writes of him in his *Autobiography* (Macdonald, 1976, 316) :

It was Harry Lyon, with the help of the Reverend S., who was at that time the Curate-in-charge of our new home, who helped us to leave Court House ... and settle at Burpham near Arundel in West Sussex....My father...had evidently some deep obscure prejudice against it [their settling at Burpham]. At any rate, in a manner rather unusual for him, he refused me any financial help.

It fell therefore to the destiny of Mr. S., our benevolent parish-priest, to produce the necessary loan.

Powys makes it clear that the Revd Saleebey had originally been a friend of his brother-in-law Harry Lyon, who had introduced the two. The vicar is also mentioned in John Cowper's recently published letters to Frances Gregg, where his name is transcribed as Salubey, the double 'e' presumably having been mistaken for a cursive 'u'. **P.R.**

Fanny (Fanny Frances Nye Stevenson), who was living in Sussex prior to 1902 and working for the Powys family. This was almost certainly at 'Court House', but the actual dates and circumstances need confirmation. Fanny was employed as a nanny to look after Littleton for Margaret, but for the rest of the Powys family 'The feeling that Margaret expected to live in too grand a style was reinforced when, after Littleton Alfred's birth, she insisted on having two servants to help her.'<sup>4</sup>

As time passed and the boy grew older and no longer needed nursing, Fanny became a parlour-maid. When she got married, Lily was asked to take Fanny's place in the Powys household; this would have been in late 1913 or early 1914, when she was nineteen or twenty. Dr Eustace was reluctant to let her go, and Lily didn't want to leave, but Fanny and other members of her family persuaded her to relent. She was nominally a parlour-maid, but 'did a bit of everything, whatever needed doing, be it cook or maid or whatever.' There were other servants employed alongside Lily, including another older sister named Mary, usually known as Poll, who was nominally the cook.



*Lily and her mother towards the end of World War I; her mother died in 1931.*



*Littleton; signed on front (not shown on enlargement) "L. A. Powys, 1930".*

Also employed in the household were Charles Foster and his sister Fan. Lily clearly remembers Fan Foster taking breakfast up to Mrs Powys one fine morning. They all laughed later on, because of the way Mrs Powys had exclaimed that it was 'a balmy morning!' Lily and Charles, who was the gardener, had planned to marry, but he was sent off to France as a soldier and unfortunately killed in Belgium in 1915.

I asked Lily for her impressions of the Powyses. Margaret, she replied, 'was a very nice lady, but quite formal and very class-conscious. She was tall and fair-haired. Mr Powys, always Jack, was a real gentleman, very generous and free and easy, and would always make friends with everyone. If he saw a tramp in the streets asking for money, Jack would have to give him everything he had, even turning out his pockets. Of course, after a while, some used to turn up at the door expectantly.'

Lily said that during her service she worked mostly for Mrs Powys because Jack was away in America for six months of the year. Margaret was very fair to her and therefore good to work for. One day she tried to teach Lily how to drive the pony and trap (a two-wheeled vehicle) that she used, but Lily couldn't get the hang of it and, when she almost turned the trap up on its back, Mrs Powys thought it best to give up. Lily mentioned Mrs Powys's work as secretary for the Red Cross in Arundel, along with Lady Johnston, who was a frequent visitor to the house. Despite her husband's unfitness for the army, Margaret posted up 'a notice in a local shop saying that England expected every man and woman to do their duty.'<sup>5</sup> Lily remembered that there were always demands for tea when neighbours



*Margaret Powys in her trap with her small terrier, "Whisker", date unknown (an enlargement from a very small snapshot).*



called, including a Mrs Collier from nearby Peppering Farm, who once brought a bunch of black grapes, presenting them loudly and proudly 'to MRS POWYS!' (rhyming the name with 'how-is' instead of 'hoe-is'). It was at Peppering Farm that the Powyses had stayed whilst they were waiting for their new abode to be prepared for their occupation, John describing the Collier family as 'lively and charming' people who 'accepted us in the heartiest old-world style'.<sup>6</sup>

On another occasion, Lily recalled that 'there was a great commotion', when the famous writer Thomas Hardy came to tea. This was most likely in the summer of 1922, which John mainly remembers for the happy times spent with Littleton Alfred.

When John was living at home he always worked alone on his writing upstairs in his own special room, with its window facing the earthwork. There were no particular house-rules; it was usually fairly quiet anyway, especially if Littleton



*Left: Lily's sister Mary, also known as 'Poll', was the cook at Bankside House until her marriage in 1919 and subsequent move to Canada. Her daughter now lives in Colorado Springs.*

*Right: Lily's sister Fanny was Littleton's nursemaid at first, then the parlour-maid. This was towards the end of 1915 or early 1916.*

was away at school, and Lily remembers that he attended the school where Littleton Charles, one of Jack's younger brothers, was a teacher. This, of course, was Sherborne. However, she does remember that Jack had acute stomach trouble and had to be extra careful about what he ate, although she cannot remember any specific diets. He did have to take some medicine before meals, but Margaret wouldn't let him drink it at table, so Jack had to go over by the window to take it. When I asked about his well-known habit of eating bread and milk, Lily did recall preparing it more than once for him.

Whilst Margaret went to church regularly, John never did, but he did go for very long walks and, incidentally, never ever wore a hat. Like many a father, he enjoyed taking Littleton out on walks with him whenever he was at home on school holidays. Margaret would admonish her husband: 'Don't take Littleton anywhere near the river, it's too dangerous for a little boy.' Upon his return, Jack would say, 'What a splendid walk we had by the river!'

Lily recounted how Mrs Powys once took Jack to task for addressing her wrongly: 'In public, call me Mrs Powys; in front of the child, call me Mother; when we are alone call me Margaret.'

'Mrs Powys, Mother, Margaret, three in one,' John duly replied in some amazement. 'What a wonderful person!'

On another occasion, when Lily was ill with measles, she was quarantined in Wall Cottage, at the end of the garden. When John returned from a trip abroad, he stood outside the house, jumping up and down and waving his arms, calling out loudly, 'Helloo, Lily, helloo!'

All in all, Lily has very fond memories of John Cowper Powys and his family; she said he was very clever and a real gentleman, but an eccentric one. In his own eyes, whilst always seeking an appropriate persona for his many-sided nature, in Burpham he found it 'difficult to be anything but the absurd, rather suspicious, extremely good-natured *Mr Powys*.'<sup>7</sup>

Although Margaret gave up the tenancy of 'Bankside House' in 1927, Lily remained in her employ until October 1931, when she married Christopher George Brooks, a shepherd from the nearby Lee Farm. She was very pleased that Littleton Alfred, by now of course a full-grown man, officiated at the wedding ceremony, along with Tickner Edwardes. This was another well-known and respected Burpham figure, for he was vicar, author and bee-master. J.C.P. writes: 'Mr Edwardes was a man of meticulous nicety in his literary art. I recollect being confounded by the elaborate craftsmanship with which he laboured ... [however, his] physical presence had an appeal for me beyond the wisest remark the honest man might make.'<sup>8</sup> Praise indeed!

Lily concluded by saying that she didn't think she had been of much help to me, for it was her sister Fanny who would have been more informative, but she had died. However, I had to disagree and assure Lily that she had been very helpful indeed and said that it was a privilege to talk to her. This is perhaps the

appropriate moment to quote J.C.P.'s remark that among those classes of people he felt most at ease with were 'priests and tramps and old family servants'.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that in that remarkable novel *A Glastonbury Romance*, the servants of Miss Euphemia Drew are two sisters, Lily and Louie Rogers. One is the housemaid, the other is the cook. In a brief exchange with Tom Barter, Lily is described thus: 'in her black dress and white apron [she] looked a sweet picture of domestic security ... [and she had] a rosy spot in each of her soft cheeks.'<sup>10</sup>

Later on, Lily is distressed at the prospect of her employer getting the wrong idea about Tom Barter's attention towards her; Mary gives her a handkerchief and is impressed by Lily's face, 'as innocent of all guile as a wrongfully accused heroine' in a romantic love story.<sup>11</sup> Of course, I am aware that all authors, including John Cowper Powys, put a disclaimer at the front of their fictional works, saying that all characters therein are imaginary, but it is tempting to assume that the images of Lily and Louie Rogers were partly inspired by his fond memories of Lily and her sisters at his house in Burpham.

Jeff Meddle

### Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Mr and Mrs C. R. Brooks for their generous and helpful attitude, for their patience in answering my questions and for providing copies of the photographs. I would also like to thank the staff at the Larkspur Nursing Home.

I also wish to acknowledge Mr T. J. Diffey's article in *The Powys Review* 18, although I was unaware of it until after I had seen Lily Brooks myself.

J. M.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, John Cowper Powys (London: Picador, 1982), 316.

<sup>2</sup> *The Brothers Powys*, Richard Perceval Graves (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1983), 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Autobiography*, 324.

<sup>4</sup> *The Brothers Powys*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 98.

<sup>6</sup> *Autobiography*, 318.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 458.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, 319-320.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, 326.

<sup>10</sup> *A Glastonbury Romance*, John Cowper Powys (London: Picador, 1977), 272.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 633.

POCKET SERIES NO. 451  
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

**Essays on De Gourmont  
and Byron**

JOHN COWPER POWYS

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 451  
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

**Essays on De Gourmont  
and Byron**

JOHN COWPER POWYS

HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY  
GIRARD, KANSAS

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 451

**MASTERS  
of  
EROTIC  
LOVE**

**Essays on de Gourmont  
and Byron**

John Cowper Powys

## *Powys in Little Blue Books*

In the 1920s, the Haldeman-Julius Company of Girard, Kansas, published a series of pocket books under the title of 'The Little Blue Books', though, as will be seen, they were not always blue and not always so called. They measure about 5" by 3½", and those I have seen, with one exception, have 64 pages each in paper covers, stapled; the print is very small and the text paper rather poor quality and far from white; the normal cover is a dull grey-blue. I have seen two titles by Llewelyn Powys and ten by John Cowper Powys; these are listed below.

This contribution to the *Newsletter* sets out the bibliographical details of those I have been able to examine in a short period. It is prompted by the recent purchase of the Powys books formerly owned by Peter Powys Grey, and before him by his mother, Marian Powys Grey (listed in a catalogue sent out with this newsletter). In that collection there are nine items, including one variant; I have eleven, and I have also inspected another private collection and the Society's own copies in the Bissell and Feather collections.

Altogether I have seen fifty-nine copies of these books, many of them, of course, duplicates, but there are various little, and not-so-little, differences between copies which are worth noting, namely covers of different colours, change in the size of the volume number on the front cover, different names for the series, even on one volume, and, most conspicuously, the introduction of a more striking title for two of them, allied with a more eye-catching colour. Some of these differences can show the chronological order of the copies of a book. Unfortunately, however, the date of printing is never changed from that in the original version in the series (although occasionally it is simply omitted), so that, from internal evidence, we cannot tell when changes were made.

I have also seen two catalogues for the Little Blue Books (see page 34), lent to me by Paul Roberts;\* they are uniform in style with the books. The earlier, of 32 pages (headed 'I QUIT !', clearly a marketing ploy), claiming 868 'Good Books', and 'Over 75,000,000 Sold in Five Years', includes Nos. 414, 435, 448-453, 534 and 702 (see list below), and also No. 838 (photocopy seen) which is a translation by Phyllis Playter of de Fontenelle's *Dialogues of the Dead* (1925). One can deduce, therefore, that the five years referred to, with the mid-400s in 1923, and No. 838 in 1925, must correspond fairly closely with the first half of the 1920s.

The second list, of 64 pages, refers to 1,375 titles (although the numbers go up, not continuously, to 1440) and several other books, journals and series, including 'Big Blue Books' (of course). It claims over 100,000,000 copies sold; if earlier progress was maintained, this would have fallen comfortably within the second half of the decade. This list includes Nos. 414, 435, 448, 450, 451, 453, 534 and

\* I am indebted to Paul Roberts for the loan not only of these but also of the photocopy of No. 838 and of a letter and other material from the Curator of the E. Haldeman-Julius Collection at Pittsburg State University; this includes Llewelyn's letter reproduced below.

702 (the last two under their subtitles only). Nos 449, 452 and 838 have been allocated to other works, but two new Powys titles are Nos. 112 and 1264; 112 was previously allocated to the second of two volumes of *Words of Jesus*. No. 1 was that old favourite, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*. In both these catalogues prices are 5 cents apiece including post if you ordered enough and sent your money.

One other point can be made about the chronology. The copies of Nos. 451 and 453 with new titles and new colour contain a list of 'Sex Education' books up to No. 1851. Prices have gone up to 'Any 7 for \$1, prepaid, or 15c each'. Even if the price had not risen it would be evident that these two volumes are later versions. In the list of Powys Family holdings in the E. Haldeman-Julius Collection at Pittsburg State University it is stated that the new titles occurred after 1951, but I do not believe that this is possible, in the first place because the printing, production style, and quality are identical with those of the volumes of the 1920s, and also because a copy which I have must have come from America before the War: I can only suppose that '1931' in some source document was misread as '1951'; 1931 would be plausible as a *terminus post quem*. One final curiosity is a photocopied version of No. 112: I have seen two identical copies of this, both bound without the cover; I believe that this could also be a publisher's issue, since photocopying was available before the War in America.

I have reproduced several covers in whole or part at full-size. Some of these show what I consider to be the first form of numbering with small figures in line with the legend 'LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. ...' (see below), others the larger figures occupying the two lines of the heading. Clearly no-one would change the number to make it less conspicuous, so the large number indicates the later printing, and indeed all volumes dated or published after 1923 have large figures.

Both Llewelyn's books come in a version with a subtitle and a version without (see *Honey and Gall*, opposite); again one would assume that the fuller title was the later version. While the subtitle additions for Llewelyn's books are perhaps not too surprising, we can be amused by the change in titling of two of J. C. P.'s books: *Essays on De Gourmont and Byron* (see p. 28) and *Essays on Joseph Conrad*



LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 414

## The Art of Happiness

John Cowper Powys



LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 534  
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

## Honey and Gall

LLEWELYN POWYS

LITTLE BLUE BOOK NO. 534  
Edited by E. Haldeman-Julius

## Honey and Gall

(Studies in Mystic Materialism)

Llewelyn Powys

HALDEMAN-JULIUS COMPANY  
GIRARD, KANSAS



and *Oscar Wilde* are preceded by new titles in much larger letters which are designed no doubt to catch an audience rather different from their original target: *Masters of Erotic Love*, and *A Sailor and a Homosexual*; these are covered in a fetching pale apricot paper. None of these four additional titles occurs on the title-pages themselves. The title-pages seem never to have been altered except by the omission of words in the name of the series.

Two of the Powys books come in a white cover with a roundel on either the front (414, see p. 31) or the back cover (1264); this contains the circular legend 'A UNIVERSITY IN PRINT READ THE WORLD OVER' and a tilted globe with eyes, spectacles, and a bald patch, the North Pole, on top, engrossed in reading a large volume entitled *Little Blue Books!* No. 1264 has been seen only in this form.

The other significant differences which I have noticed concern the name of the series. In most cases the cover carries the name 'Little Blue Book'; but in some instances 'Pocket Series' or 'Ten Cent Pocket Series'. On the title-pages there are all these names and also the name 'Five Cent Pocket Series'. These other names occur often, frequently differing from the name on the cover, but it is evident that only the earlier volumes were given 'Pocket Series' names, as 'Little Blue Books' is consistently used for those published after 1923 both on the cover and on the title-page and also on the covers of later printings of those with 'Pocket Series' names. On the title-page, however, the 'Pocket Series' name was not changed in later printings, though sometimes simply omitted or curtailed. The 'Ten Cent' title preceded the 'Five Cent', and by the time of the two catalogues which I have seen, the books are priced at 5 cents.

It appears that the Little Blue Books were normally reprints of work already published. The essays in volumes 448-453 were first published in *Suspended Judgments, Essays on Books and Sensations* (G. Arnold Shaw, 1916), and *One Hundred Best Books*, also published by Shaw, appeared in the same year. The essays in Llewelyn Powys's two books first appeared, according to acknowledgments, in *The Art Review*, *Arts and Decorations*, *The Freeman*, *The Double-Dealer*, *The New York Times*, and *The Dial*. Paul Roberts has pointed out that most of the essays in No. 1264 had already been printed in the *Haldeman-Julius Quarterly*. At the time of writing I do not know about Nos. 112 and 414.

In the list below, S signifies small figures, L large figures, for the volume number on the cover. LBB indicates the name 'Little Blue Book', PS 'Pocket Series', 5PS 'Five Cent Pocket Series', and 10PS 'Ten Cent Pocket Series'; the first mention is on the cover, the second on the title-page, thus: LBB/PS. Cover colour is blue unless otherwise indicated. Small-cap G before details indicates one of Peter Powys Grey's books, B and F volumes in the Bissell and Feather collections respectively, x one in a private collection, and M one from my own. I have another Little Blue Book, No. 113, *Proverbs of England*, which is inscribed 'Isobel from Philippa Sept 1925', that is, to my mother from Philippa Powys.

Stephen Powys Marks



# JOHN COWPER POWYS

- 112 *The Secret of Self Development*, occupying pages 5–25 of 32-page booklet, followed by 'The revolt from knowledge', by Isaac Goldberg  
(B, F: n.d. [Langridge: 1926], L, LBB/LBB, cream cover)  
(B, M: n.d., L, [no cover]/LBB, photocopy bound without cover)
- 414 *The Art of Happiness*  
(G: 1923, S, PS/PS)  
(B: 1923, L, LBB/PS)  
(B, F, M, x: n.d., L, LBB/PS, very thin white cover printed in green, roundel on front cover)
- 435 *One Hundred Best Books*  
(G: 1923, S, 10PS/10PS)  
(B: 1923, L, LBB/PS)
- 448 *Essays on Montaigne, Pascal, Voltaire*  
(F, M: 1923, S, PS/5PS)  
(B, F, G, x: 1923, L, LBB/5PS)
- 449 *Essays on Rousseau, Balzac, Victor Hugo*  
(F, M: 1923, S, PS/10PS)
- 450 *Essays on de Maupassant, Anatole France, William Blake*  
(\*B, B, F, M, G: 1923, L, LBB/5PS)
- 451 *Essays on De Gourmont and Byron*  
(G: 1923, S, PS/10PS)  
(\*B, M: 1923, L, LBB/10PS)
- 451 [new title:] *Masters of Erotic Love, Essays on de Gourmont and Byron*  
(B, F, G, x: 1923, L, LBB/[nil], apricot cover)
- 452 *Essays on Emily Bronte and Henry James*, includes also 'The Art of Discrimination'  
(F: 1923, S, PS/5PS)
- 453 *Essays on Joseph Conrad and Oscar Wilde*, includes also 'Suspended Judgment'  
(G: 1923, S, PS/10PS)  
(B: 1923, L, LBB/10PS)
- 453 [new title:] *A Sailor and a Homosexual, Essays on Joseph Conrad and Oscar Wilde*  
(B, F, M, x: 1923, L, LBB/PS, apricot cover)
- 1264 *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*, includes also 'The Real Longfellow', 'The Perfect Gentleman', 'Walled Gardens', and 'The Wind That Waves the Grasses'  
(B, B, F, M, x: n.d. [Langridge: 1928], L, LBB/LBB, white cover, roundel on back)

# LLEWELYN POWYS

- 534 *Honey and Gall*; contains 12 essays: 'The Magic in Names', 'When I Consider Thy Heavens', 'The Blessings of Longevity', 'The Sense of Smell', 'The Open Spaces of New York', 'In Durance Vile', 'The Circus Within a Circus', 'The Moods of March', 'The Moods of April', 'Ungasolened Pleasures', 'In Exitu De Egypto', 'The Inconstant Visitor'; dedicated to William Powys 'In memory of long rides

(CATALOGUE)

# I QUIT!

On June 30, I Shall Quit  
Publishing Little Blue Books! Order Till Then at **5<sup>c</sup>**

I am Going to Stop Because I Must Give Full Attention to My Immensely Successful "Haldeman-Julius Monthly"—The Enterprise of Bringing Out 868 Good Books Has Been Sensational—Over 75,000,000 Sold in Five Years—Order Now—Today—Before June 30, the Quitting Date! ORDER NOW OR NEVER!

After June 30, It Will Be Too Late—Order a Big Supply of Books Today at Only 5 Cents Each

E. HALDEMAN-JULIUS, DESK 4  
GIRARD, KANS.

COMPLETE  
CATALOG  
OF 1,375  
LITTLE  
BLUE BOOKS

**5c**

WE HAVE  
SOLD OVER  
100,000,000  
COPIES OF  
THESE BOOKS

5c EACH POSTPAID!

*Haldeman-Julius Publications*  
*Dept. C-64, Girard, Kansas*

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(Contents continued on back cover)

together over the glaring plains of equatorial Africa as well as of happy boyhood walks along the turnpike roads and goose-paths that border the banks of the river Yeo in the West Country of England.'

(M: 1924, S, LBB/LBB)

(B, F: 1924, L, LBB/LBB)

534 [as above with subtitle:] (*Studies in Mystic Materialism*)

(B, F, G, X: 1924, L, LBB/LBB)

702 *Cup-Bearers of Wine and Hellebore*; contains essays on François Rabelais, Jonathan Swift, Matthew Prior, William Cowper, James Thomson, Padraic Colum; dedicated to A. R. Orage 'whose intellectual vigour is only surpassed by the goodness of his heart, and whose criticism and appreciation were of such inestimable value to me in the days when I first began writing, sitting under the Catherine Pear-tree, outside the saddle-room at Montacute, in the County of Somerset.'

(M: 1924, L, LBB/LBB)

702 [as above with subtitle:] (*A Book of Intellectual Rowdies*)

(\*B, B, B, F, G, M, X: 1924, L, LBB/LBB)

\* Three items in the Bissell collection marked with an asterisk (450, 451, 702) have a rubber-stamped address, presumably of an agency, on the back cover:

THE LITTLE BLUE BOOKS / 100 FRANT ROAD / THORNTON HEATH / SURREY

*The following letter was sent from 4 Patchin Place, New York City, on August 6th 1923, and is one of several published in Life and Letters in January 1924 congratulating Emanuel Haldeman-Julius on reaching 500 titles.*

### More Strength to Your Elbow!

Dear Mr. Haldeman-Julius:

I send you my heartiest congratulations upon your having been able to bring the Pocket Series up to so astounding a figure as half a thousand. More power to your elbow! It is an achievement which should indeed make you proud.

It would be difficult for me to tell you how much I admire and esteem the work you are doing. Communion with the great minds of the past, through books, is the one consolation in life which never betrays those who have understanding. It offers a happiness more permanent than love-making, more estimable than the pleasures of the table. A cask of wine is an honest thing to look upon but 'tis not near so honest as a good book; and you, my dear Mr. Haldeman-Julius, by your enterprise and genius, have made this great consolation accessible to the very beggars of the town, who, for the price of a glass of ale can fill their wallets with a baker's dozen of your priceless volumes.

Yours sincerely,

LLEWELYN POWYS

## *The Powys Society Membership Survey*

### About The Survey

The survey came about because, although the Society has existed for about twenty-seven years, membership figures were the highest ever, and a number of new initiatives had been taken recently, no direct attempt had been made to find out what members want. A draft survey, covering the main areas of the Society's activities, was drawn up by Paul Roberts and amended by Committee. Martin Hamblin Research gave advice on the design of the questionnaire, and processed the results at minimal cost.

There was a very satisfactory response from members. What follows is a summary of a great deal of detailed information which has yet to be considered by the Committee. Future newsletters will keep you in touch with their response to it. I am asked by the Chairman and Committee to thank those members who returned the questionnaire.

The notes in italics are mine. Paul Roberts will welcome comment on the outcome of the survey.

**John Batten**

### A Summary of Responses to the Powys Society Membership Survey, April 1994

NUMBER OF QUESTIONNAIRES	324
NUMBER RETURNED	139
NUMBER PROCESSED	130

*Nine were returned too late for computer processing, but useful comments were noted.*

#### RESPONDENTS:

MALE	92
FEMALE	35
UNITED KINGDOM	96
OVERSEAS	29

*The male/female balance is roughly proportionate to the membership. There was a response from a higher proportion of overseas than U.K. members.*

#### 1a HOW DID YOU FIRST FIND OUT ABOUT THE SOCIETY?

Through another individual	12%
Through a reference in a book or newspaper	8%
Through an ad. in a book or newspaper	8%
Through a Powys Society publication	12%
Through a study course or exhibition	5%
From a member of the Powys family	5%

*Those who have joined through a study course or exhibition had all joined within the last four years. A Society notice inserted in After My Fashion was fruitful in the past.*

**b HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A MEMBER?**

1-2 years 32    3-5 years 25    6-10 years 25    over 10 years 50

*The spread is probably representative and suggests a good proportion of actively interested members who have been in the Society for some years.*

**c ARE YOU ALSO A MEMBER OF P.S.N.A?**

Yes 29

**d DO YOU BELONG TO ANY OTHER LITERARY SOCIETIES?**

Thomas Hardy Society	5%
Edward Thomas Fellowship	4%
D. H. Lawrence Society	4%
Arthur Machen Society	4%
Bronte Society	3%
William Barnes Society	2%
Other	25%

*We might have gone on to ask: 'If so, does any of them give better value for your subscription than The Powys Society?' Paul would welcome comment on this matter.*

**e DO YOU HAVE A SPECIAL INTEREST IN A PARTICULAR MEMBER OF THE POWYS FAMILY?**

John Cowper	80%
Littleton	17%
Theodore Francis	52%
Gertrude	12%
Eleanor	9%
Albert Reginald	12%
Marian	8%
Llewelyn	58%
Philippa	14%
William Ernest	8%
Lucy	15%
Other member of the family	12%

*'Other' included: Parents, Phyllis, Alyse, Margaret, Littleton Alfred.*

*Here, a 'whole family' box would have been helpful. Catering for the inevitably fragmented interests of our members is a challenge for editors and conference organisers.*

**2 THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE:**

**a HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU ATTENDED?**

Never	55%
Once	11%
Twice	8%
Three times	8%
Four times	7%
Five times	9%

*i.e. 55 respondents had attended, 72 had not.*

**b IF YOU HAVE ATTENDED, EVALUATE THESE FEATURES:**

	very valuable	fairly valuable	not very	not at all
lectures	76%	24%		
A.G.M.	14%	54%	7%	9%
book sale	35%	53%	7%	
meeting others	90%	10%		

**c IF YOU HAVE NOT ATTENDED, EVALUATE THE INFLUENCE OF:**

	very strong	fairly strong	not very strong	not at all
cost	30%	16%	18%	10%
dates	28%	13%	17%	13%
accommodation	1%	8%	13%	27%
location	17%	18%	11%	15%
programme	6%	7%	14%	26%

*The questions of cost, location and frequency of conferences is under review by the Committee.*

**OTHER FACTORS WHICH HAVE PREVENTED YOU FROM ATTENDING:**

- Cost of travel from overseas
- Have a specialised Powys interest
- Other commitments
- Perceived as forbidding
- Time available
- Advanced age

*These are the responses of a small minority.*

**d HOW USEFUL IS THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE?**

- Very useful 68%
- Fairly useful 17%
- Not very useful 1%

**e HOW LONG SHOULD IT LAST?**

- One night 3%
- Two nights 42%
- Three nights 29%
- Longer 2%

**f IN WHAT WAY COULD IT BE IMPROVED?**

- Reduce the cost
- Make it less structured
- Broaden its scope beyond the membership

*Again, small minority responses, but the conference is already open to non-members, to both attend and contribute. Delegates can make their own accommodation arrangements and need only pay the standing charge of £4 per session.*

### 3 OTHER EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

#### a Levels of participation:

The Montacute Lecture	15%
Exhibitions	37%
Society Walks	18%

*These activities have all taken place in the South West.*

#### b If regional meetings were arranged:

Would be interested in attending	68%	
Would be interesting in helping organise	22%	[28 respondents]
Would be interested in leading an activity	15%	[19 respondents]

*This response suggests that regional meetings could be held outside the South West.*

#### c Willing to have address published:

Yes 87% No 13%

*A number of respondents expressed a wish for more contact between members.*

### 4 THE NEWSLETTER

Excellent	35%
Good	50%
Adequate	11%
Unsatisfactory	2%

#### a How might it be improved?

- Layout is cramped
- Improve cover design
- Include list of contents

*Most respondents left this section blank. A number commented on the progress made in twenty-two issues. Cost considerations play an important part in determining layout and presentation.*

#### b Indicate how much you value Newsletter features:

	very	fairly	not very	not at all
notices	65%	28%	4%	
reviews	61%	35%	2%	
editorials	52%	38%	3%	
bibliogr. notes	56%	32%	5%	
articles	60%	35%	2%	
memb. profile	28%	42%	18%	4%
accounts	15%	45%	22%	8%
obituaries	35%	47%	10%	1%

#### c Are there areas of interest that might be better represented?

- More information about members
- More non-academic Powys articles
- More information about academic developments

*76% did not respond to this question.*

d Other comments:

Very satisfied

An index to earlier issues would be useful.

5 THE POWYS JOURNAL

Very useful 76%

Fairly useful 17%

Not very useful 1%

Not at all useful NR

a The current layout and design:

Excellent 58%

Good 32%

Adequate 3%

Unsatisfactory NR

b Do you feel that the *Journal* should

Maintain the present balance? 69%

Devote more space to unpublished Powys material? 17%

Devote more space to reviews? NR

Devote more space to other articles 7%

c How would you like to see it improved?

Make it less academic

Return to a magazine format

*These were the responses of a small minority.*

6 THE SOCIETY'S PUBLISHING PROGRAMME

Very valuable 39%

Fairly valuable 41%

Not very valuable 8%

Not at all valuable 2%

a Which of the publications have you found most interesting or useful?

*Powys Checklist* 67%

*Index to The Powys Review* 44%

*Driftwood and other poems* 23%

*The Joy of It* 25%

*Soliloquies of a Hermit* 32%

*In Honour of Isobel* 8%

*The English House* 10%

None of these 8%

*Two inexpensive reference booklets head the list.*

b Would you prefer hardback or paperback?

Makes no difference 49%

Prefer hardback if difference less than £5 35%

Prefer hardback at any price 12%

*The Society has not, so far, published in hardback.*



**c How important should the following categories be?**

	very	fairly	not very	not at all
out of print texts	75%	15%	3%	
previously unpublished Powys material	72%	18%	2%	
reference material	43%	35%	2%	
academic studies	15%	51%	16%	3%
biographical work	42%	42%	3%	1%

**d Would you be prepared to subscribe in advance for a specific book otherwise too expensive to publish?**

Yes	87%
No	9%

*If the Society were to undertake the publication of a major work it is likely that it would depend upon pre-subscription. The problem is that 87% would-be subscribers are unlikely to share an interest in the same title.*

**e Are there any specific works you would like published?**

The complete J.C.P. diary	12%
<i>The Blackthorn Winter</i>	4%
<i>The Cry of a Gull</i>	3%
<i>A Glastonbury Romance</i>	6%
Early J.C.P. novels	5%
<i>A Philosophy of Solitude</i>	4%
<i>Unclay</i>	3%
<i>Mockery Gap</i>	2%
<i>In Defence of Sensuality</i>	2%
Other	40%

*This list demonstrates the diverse interests of members, and possibly indicates the rarity of a book. The unpublished J.C.P. diaries are the exception.*

**7 ARE THERE OTHER ACTIVITIES OR SERVICES WE COULD PROVIDE?**

- Publish a list of dealers and bookshops specialising in Powys books
- Advertise books for sale and wanted in the *Newsletter*
- Produce material about Powys places.

*These seem thoroughly practical cries for help.*

**8 HOW MIGHT WE IMPROVE OUR SERVICE TO OVERSEAS MEMBERS?**

- By enabling members in the same country to get in touch with each other
- By reducing E.U. subscriptions to U.K. level

*The Society incurs considerable additional postal costs for E. U. members since postage is only standardised for letters of minimum weight.*

## 9 RESPONDENTS:

### a Occupational status:

Student	2%
Not working	8%
Academic/teacher	25%
Retired	24%
Other employment	35%

### b Regional distribution in the U.K.

South West	23%	[30 respondents]
London and South East	22%	[28 respondents]
Midlands and Wales	18%	[23 respondents]
North and Scotland	12%	[15 respondents]

*These figures approximate to the actual distribution of U.K. members.*

**John Batten**

## *The Old Man of the Hills*

In the November 1993 issue of the *Newsletter* we announced the forthcoming production of "The Old Man of the Hills", an hour-long drama-documentary on the life and work of John Cowper Powys, written by Herbert Williams. We are delighted to be able to report that filming has now finished and, as the *Newsletter* goes to press, editing is almost complete. When Herbert joined us at this year's Conference he was unable, for contractual reasons, to announce the names of the actors taking part, but hinted that we might be in for a pleasant surprise. He was right, for we can now announce that the cast will include some extremely eminent names, particularly those of Freddie Jones as John Cowper Powys and Suzanne Bertish as Phyllis Playter. The programme will be broadcast by HTV on 12 December 1994, but will unfortunately be available only to viewers in Wales. However, there is the *possibility* of a video release and details will be published in the next *Newsletter*, where the programme will also be reviewed.

**P.R.**

*One of the inscriptions in Grey Powys Books — turn to page 48*

For Marian Powys Grey  
From Brother J. C. P.  
Thursday August 8 1957

## John Redwood Anderson

I expect many readers will have responded to Richard Burleigh's interesting contribution to *Newsletter 22* on the forgotten poet, John Redwood Anderson, in his later years friend and for a time neighbour of John Cowper Powys. My slight connexion with him was especially important to me because it coincided with my introduction in 1943 to the Powys family. Like other 'prize poets' of Sherborne School, I received in successive years critiques of my entries from both John Cowper and Redwood Anderson: the latter's were painstaking analyses of prosody; John Cowper's were far more exciting!

Littleton Powys, retired headmaster of the Sherborne Preparatory School, adjudicated the prize, and it was natural that he should choose to share that responsibility with his beloved elder brother who had himself won it in 1891. Adjudication was followed by what Littleton called a 'Symposium', a Sunday afternoon tea-party at which each entrant would read his poem together with another of his choice. Elizabeth Myers, Littleton's second wife, would attend these happy occasions if she were well enough. Before meeting Littleton she had corresponded with John Cowper (see *Letters of Elizabeth Myers* and *Still The Joy of It*). In 1931 she had been profoundly influenced by reading *In Defence of Sensuality*, and ten years later, thinking that at any moment she might die in the London blitz, she wrote to him to express her thanks. It was in consequence of her writing to John on the death of Littleton's first wife Mabel that she and Littleton had met; and it was on that first meeting (June 1943) that she was 'particularly pleased by my reading to her Redwood Anderson's "Icarus"' (*Still The Joy of It*, 33).

Later that same month Elizabeth wrote to Littleton. 'I've landed a commission for an article on Redwood of 3,000 words, better than anything I had hoped for in view of the paper shortage' (*ibid.*, 79). Her article for *The Poetry Review* will have appeared later that year or in 1944 (I have no immediate means of checking when, for a reason which will follow) because it provoked a four-page letter from Raymond Bourne dated 2 February and published in the July-August issue, 1945. Bourne refers to 'an appreciation by an ardent admirer of Elizabeth Myers' article appearing in a subsequent number' before attacking Elizabeth for (allegedly) comparing Anderson to Milton – to Milton's disadvantage! That she did not do so in any general sense Elizabeth makes plain in a spirited and well-supported rejoinder of 18 August (*ibid.*, November-December, 1945), Bourne's equal in length and vastly superior in content. Those interested in pursuing either Redwood Anderson or Elizabeth Myers will find much of relevance in this lively exchange.

I gave those copies of *The Poetry Review* which contained the two articles, together with some of Redwood Anderson's books, to my late friend Walter J. Strachan, who had been a pupil of J.R.A.'s at Hymer's College, Hull, and who

wrote about him in his yet unpublished memoirs, *Encounters & Relationships*. J.R.A. taught (circa 1920) 'what was pretentiously called philosophy'; his sixth-formers 'went through the hoops of Bertrand Russell's *Problems of Philosophy* and touched on logic and psychology'. His other teaching was 'junior work', and Strachan recalled his saying at the end of one lesson, 'Now comes my purgatory!'

The only book of his poems which I still have, *Almanac and other Poems* (Macdonald, 1956), contains a long poem, "The Choice", dedicated to John Cowper, and supports Richard Burleigh's tribute to the worthwhileness of his work. John Guthrie's question (quoted on the dust-wrapper), 'Might one suggest that in thought, vision and imaginative faculties John Redwood Anderson is the most complete poet of our times?' deserves a fairer answer than the present silence about him.

Timothy Rogers

## *A Walk On The Sands*

A Weymouth Weekend: 18-19 June 1994

I first visited Weymouth in 1963, a month or so after J.C.P.'s death and, just like all the Powyses, immediately fell in love with it. Largely as a result, *Weymouth Sands* was also the first Powys novel that I read and, despite all literary criticism to the contrary, it remains my undisputed favourite. I know this is an unfashionable view, but Weymouth itself is a pretty unfashionable town, which is a large part of its essential charm. I was therefore thrilled with John Batten's suggestion of a Weymouth Weekend, and disappointed when the original date had to be postponed. But this delay turned out to our advantage, as we were eventually blessed with two hot and sunny days, ideal for a traditional seaside weekend.

So, on a sunny afternoon in June, three dozen or so members of the Society met by the famously ornate Victorian clock tower at the centre of The Esplanade. This was a good deal more than I had anticipated and I arrived somewhat apprehensively for, although a member of the Society for the past five years or more, I have been very much a sleeping member and this was my first public Powysian event. I needn't have worried. People couldn't have been nicer or more welcoming and it quickly felt as though we had all known each other for years. And what a mixed group we were, distinguished only by the piles of books we all seemed to be clutching. Modesty requires that the eldest among us remain anonymous, but Kit Freiesleben deserves special praise, not only for being the youngest but for celebrating his first birthday that weekend. The rest of us were somewhere in between. We had our celebrities too: Isobel Powys Marks turned out to see us off and welcome us home on both days, whilst Stephen Powys

Marks, his sister Antonia Young and her husband Nigel and Theodora Scutt accompanied us throughout, together with other senior members of the Society.

John Batten, our tireless Secretary, had organised everything meticulously, and we were all provided with maps and other relevant hand-outs. Weymouth may be unfashionable, but it is certainly not unpopular and the town, sands and esplanade were packed with enthusiastic holiday-makers enjoying the first really hot weekend of the summer. They were all somewhat surprised (but far too polite to comment) as we clustered around the clock tower for the first reading from J.C.P.'s diary about the background to and early writing of *Weymouth Sands*, by Morine Krissdóttir. Herbert Williams then read of the meeting between Perdita Wane and the Jobber in Chapter Two, so setting the scene and introducing two of the most important characters.

We then moved off along The Esplanade to the famous line of tall Victorian houses which is Brunswick Terrace. This marks the end of the long curve of sandy beach and the beginning of 'the shelving bank of pebbles', where 'the water grew so quickly deep, that the fishermen draw in their nets'. Alas, there are no fishing boats on Weymouth beach these days, nor any sign of the red post that made such an impression on the young Llewelyn. But Penn House itself is still there, next to last of the long terrace and now a bed and breakfast hotel, where a select group of us were lucky enough to be spending the night. The interior has inevitably changed from the dim Victorian gloom remembered so vividly by both J.C.P. and Llewelyn from when their grandmother, Amelia Powys, lived there in the 1880s. But the magnificent view across Weymouth Bay, from White Nothe in the east to Portland in the west, hasn't changed at all, and one can well imagine the ecstasy of the fifteen-year-old J.C.P., faced by this same view from this very window 'morning after morning, as I saw the sun glinting on the sea'.

Our group was beginning to straggle by now as we all found something to feed our own recollections of the books, but John soon had us mustered again opposite the tall, imposing building that formed the model for High House (turret and all), and the home of that famous clown Jerry Cobbold: 'Mr. and Mrs. Cobbold have the top with all the attics. 'Tis a fine view from the top ... clear acrost the bay', as one of the customs officers on Weymouth Pier confided to Perdita Wane as she landed from the Channel Island ferry.

But we were already moving on, this time to the grounds of St John's Church at the rear of Brunswick Terrace, with the bronze statue of a grim Queen Victoria at the gate, where a church fête was in full swing. Then we retraced our steps along The Esplanade to join the thickest of the holiday crowd on the sand, like Magnus Muir, increasingly aware of the unmistakable, triumphant cackle of Mr Punch in the distance. Professor Guy Higgans' famous Punch and Judy Show, together with the troop of patient donkeys, is still very much a part of Weymouth Sands. The show may not have changed much, and the children were clearly entranced, but there was not the faintest sign of a Punch and Judy girl, no Marret Jones or her

flirtatious younger sister. By way of compensation, Guy Higgans, who continues to give regular shows throughout the summer, entertained us with some scandalous tales of old Weymouth, Punch and Judy, the pre-war music halls – and a good deal more besides.

Lawrence Freiesleben then made us all laugh by reading the story of the confrontation between the cockney policeman and that eccentric prophet Sylvanus Cobbold, worshipper of sun, sea and sky, who was so impudently ‘hobstructing of ’is Majesty’s Hesplanade!’ with his preaching. But time pressed again and we dashed off to cross the harbour by the Nothe Ferry – fewer boats than in J.C.P.’s recollections – but we were all soon safely across in the bright sunshine and into Weymouth proper at last.

Then a wonderful wander past the cottages lining the sides of the old harbour. Impossible to discover exactly *which* was Jobber Skald’s lodging at Cove House, but almost any could have been the one. Now many are expensive fish restaurants, a far cry from the simple meat and pudding diet served up by Cassy Trot. Then for a quick diversion to the old Devenish Brewery, model for Dog Cattistock’s, before crowding up the steep steps of Trinity Church to hear Susie Dye read the story of how ‘Mr Cattistock’s wedding has – has been – indefinitely postponed – owing to – owing to –’. Sippy Ballard, of course, did not know the awful reason himself and so was never able to finish his sentence. But this did not matter, as his words were ‘totally swallowed up in the clamour and hullabaloo raised by the grosser elements of the crowd’.

Crossing the harbour bridge, we slowly retraced our steps through the town to The Esplanade, past the magnificent statue of George III, and so back to our starting point at the clock tower, and the end of a wonderful afternoon walk. Inevitably, it had taken longer than planned, and we were not a very disciplined group, giving John endless trouble, stopping to gaze, chatter and reflect at every available opportunity. But it was all hugely enjoyable and quite the nicest way of spending a sunny summer afternoon.

That evening eighteen or so of us gathered in a high flat at the far end of The Esplanade, close to what is now Lodmoor Park, kindly loaned to the Society by Gordon Cunliffe. Lodmoor is, sadly, reclaimed these days from its original wild marshland, but the view across the wide bay is still as magnificent as ever. Sipping wine kindly provided by Eve and John Batten, and transfixed by the view, Morine Krissdóttir read us yet more extracts from J.C.P.’s unpublished diaries, interspersed with comment and discussion. Stephen Powys Marks then shared a whole range of unpublished letters and other documents, such as scrap-books and photograph albums from the family of Mary Cowper Powys, wife of the Revd C. F. Powys, including a diary entry relating to her first confinement and the birth of J.C.P. on 8 October 1872.

Then it was time for the rest of us to join in, and virtually everyone had brought something interesting or amusing from their collections. Not that there was any

need for anything extra; there was already far too much to enjoy and it was soon time to drain our glasses, tidy up and make our way back to Penn House for the night. In the distance the Portland light flashed with, closer at hand, the sound of waves breaking endlessly against the long curving beach. No wonder the Powys family took this place with them wherever they went.

Sunday dawned bright and sunny again, and some of us even managed a brisk walk before breakfast. Then, at ten o'clock, we re-assembled at Sandsfoot Castle, a tiny ruin now, lost amid the cliffs to the south of the town, where Captain Poxwell hoarded his collection of seashells. There was less walking and more travelling on this second day, but John quickly organised us into the minimum number of cars and then we were off again, this time to Wyke church. Morning service was in progress, so we tip-toed past to the enclosed graveyard at the rear, 'crowded thick with the bones of wrecked men', and the sombre memorials to the countless people who died when their vessels foundered on the Chesil Beach.

We then moved off across Fleet Bridge to Portland proper, to a bleak spot in the heart of the limestone quarries, where we walked for a mile or so along a disused railway track and up on to a high flat plateau with a strange, tall rocky outcrop, overlooking Portland harbour and the Dorset coast beyond. Despite much research, this was apparently the nearest John Batten could get to identifying Nicodemus Knob, where Perdita and the Jobber spent part of their long day together. 'But it's facing the wrong way!' we all roared at once, for it was certainly not looking out over 'the whole expanse of the West Bay, stretching off towards Cornwall and the Atlantic', as described in the book. Whatever the truth of the matter, it is now a gloomy place, with the dark, forbidding bulk of Portland Prison to the south.

So we quickly retraced our steps and drove to the fine viewpoint of Cheyne Weares on the south-east corner of the island, where Lawrence Freiesleben and Leslie Harrison read from the sections involving the Sea Serpent's Head Inn, where the Jobber climbed up on top of the Slug to hold the swinging signboard steady against the rising gale, so that in the sheets of lightning young Sue Gadget could see whether the serpent's eyes really were opening, as local legend said they should. Despite the bright sunshine, it all came vividly to life.

We then drove to the very tip of the island and scrambled out onto the Bill itself, with its flat platform of solid rock 'like some dancing floor for sea nymphs so smooth was it', with the great open fissure in the rock that plunges down into the turbulent sea below. Here Eve Batten read wonderfully the long account of Adam Skald tightly embracing Perdita over this very spot, as in his head he imagined coming back here to throw himself into the abyss the very next day, after he had fulfilled his feverish plan to batter Dog Cattistock to death with the heavy rock he had long carried in his pocket for this purpose. Horrible.

Finally, we drove to the Cove House Inn, magnificently situated above the long curve of Chesil Beach and, despite being in the wrong place, slightly too near to

the start of the beach, rather than by the village of Weston, a perfect model for the Serpent's Head, with its great rooms and cellars of rough-hewn Portland stone. Many fine pictures of shipwrecks decorated these walls, and this was a fitting place to end our odyssey, with a pint or two of local ale and vast plates of crab and prawns for lunch. For all of us, however, Weymouth will never be quite the same again, for we now feel so much more a part of its story.

*Weymouth Sands*, of course, is about much more than a sleepy Dorset seaside town. Written in J.C.P.'s last months in America, its spirit of place, the meeting between land and water, between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknowable, provides a focus for his own personal life as he contemplates his permanent return from the New World to the Old, as well as a fulcrum on which his imagination can pivot. The sand, the sea, the harbour, the fort, the cliffs and surrounding downs, provide the vivid, familiar backdrop against which his gigantic creativity works. By appreciating the accuracy of his recreation of the town of his childhood, we also begin to recognise that its description relates increasingly to the town of his imagination, with its unrequited passions and ambiguous relationships, which in turn mirror the passions and linkages of his own life. And it is this process of constantly re-reflected duality that marks the magnitude of J.C.P.'s achievement, and by which the novel achieves its greatness.

It was a wonderful weekend. Both perfectly relaxing and yet intellectually stimulating. Like all the best learning, it happened without you realising how it was done. Special thanks must go to John and Eve Batten for providing such effective and seemingly effortless logistical support, and to all who did the readings and set new standards in interpretation. For myself, I can't wait for the next one! We can possibly do Dorchester and *Maiden Castle* in a weekend, but I shall be booking a week for Glastonbury – and probably a whole summer for wild Wales. Whichever it is, don't miss it. See you there!

Chris Gostick

### *Grey Powys Books — an unrepeatable opportunity !*

Don't miss this **truly unrepeatable** opportunity to buy and own one or more books which have very strong association value. As is explained in the thick annotated list of Powys books which comes with this *Newsletter*, the Society has purchased more than 140 items, half of them by John Cowper Powys, which had belonged to Peter Powys Grey. Many of them are inscribed by J. C. P. and others.

Please respond quickly, and please observe the rules on the order form in the list. We will deal with your requests as fairly and promptly as we can, so that you, or some lucky recipient, can enjoy these books for Christmas!