# *Editorial*

The death of Oliver Wilkinson marks the end of an era for The Powys Society. As a child Oliver heard John Cowper lecture and in recent years delighted conference audiences with his readings from his letters and diaries. Five or six conferences ago, during discussion after a paper on his mother's *The Mystic Leeway* Oliver said, in tribute to her, 'I went to a school where I wore a top hat (Westminster) and came home to a cottage with an earth floor.' Nothing could follow that remark, but it may offer a clue to Oliver's deep humility, and concern for others. He hailed our most trivial achievements with such warmth as to convince us of their worth, while consistently making light of his own *tours de force*. It is not only fortunate, but thanks to the energy and foresight of his son Christopher, that we have his vibrant interpretation of John Cowper captured on tape. That is a great consolation, but at the next conference, how we shall miss the approach of his tall, stooped figure, leaning heavily on a wobbly stick, eyes twinkling with the ardour of a man who enjoyed everything in life, but most of all, meeting old friends.

The recent visit to Montacute from the conference seems to have been enjoyed and was made memorable for many of those present by the kind invitation to go inside at the 'vicarage' and the evening visit to Pitt Pond.

Elsewhere in this issue we announce a Weymouth Walk which will be in celebration of the new Penguin edition of *Weymouth Sands* and the Society's publication of a 'walk book' based on the novel. The idea that one can walk around a novel is a contentious one and while it is much more easily accomplished in the case of *Weymouth Sands* than, for example, *Morwyn*, there are those who will say that novels should be read rather than walked, just as they may well

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## ON OTHER PAGES

say a novel should be read rather than collected. In my view, if doing either adds to its revelation or prolongs its pleasure, then why not?

Weymouth in the three nines is not so very different from 'Weymouth in the Three Eights' retaining as it does many of its Edwardian embellishments and a gentile vulgarity which is perhaps even enhanced by today's coloured lights and tannoy on the promenade. In spite of all such modern aberrations it still clings lovingly to the last vestiges of Sunday-school outings, cheap-day excursions and old-fashioned family holidays.

Of *Weymouth Sands* it could be said, that although the actors have left the stage, the chorus has remained, the church spire, the King's statue and the Jubilee clock are still there, as eloquent as they are decadent. And only recently I was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of Sippy Ballard getting into his BMW in Brunswick Terrace.

We have waited long for the novel to be back in print, so let's celebrate it together.

**John Batten**

Sally Connely wishes to inform members of The Powys Society that the announcement in *The Bookseller* of 26 March 1999 regarding the management of the literary estate of Llewelyn Powys was an uncorroborated assumption on the part of those responsible for the announcement.

The literary estate of Llewelyn Powys continues to be managed by Laurence Pollinger Ltd.

## *Oliver Marlow Wilkinson*

*Oliver Wilkinson (son of Frances Gregg and Louis Wilkinson) died on 17 September 1999 in his eighty-fifth year.*

The death of Oliver Wlkinson will be a cause of sadness to all who knew him. Although living to a great age, he retained a youthful exuberance that was both infectious and endearing. His beautiful mellow voice warmed and invigorated so many of the Society's conferences; his generosity of spirit, sense of fun, and ability to recognise potential in those with whom he came in contact were a vitalising element at all times. He was responsible for several staged presentations of the Powys writings; and together with his son Christopher he organised readings from the brothers' letters that captured perfectly the sense of family solidarity and mutual self-creation that inspired them. Yet he was a modest man, blessedly free from pomposity; he never assumed the role of presiding patriarch or custodian that he might so easily, and so justifiably, have done. The editing of his mother's correspondence with John Cowper Powys provides a wealth of

information conveyed with a debonair informality that invites the reader into its particular world. This child of proudly independent parents, this godson of an intensely individual genius, preserved his own personality intact: that he did so was, I suspect, the result of an inherently enthusiastic and generous nature. To myself personally, both as Chairman and later as President of the Society, he was unfailingly supportive and encouraging, his warm and breezy presence a sign that life, in John Cowper's words, was to be enjoyed whenever possible 'up to the hilt'. We will miss him greatly.

**Glen Cavaliero**

*Robert Cove*

I have just returned from Oliver's funeral. As I looked around the village church, filled to overflowing with his children, grandchildren, relatives and friends, the old thought came that no man knows another. He was the least masked of men but I am aware that he presented to me but one aspect of his selves. Everybody there was grieving for *his* Oliver. I can write here only of the man I recognized and loved.

We first met at the Exeter conference in 1988, when he spoke on the last

afternoon. In those days all the participants could fit into a small room. We sat on the floor surrounding Oliver who began: 'I have broken my glasses and my hearing aid is making a terrible whistling noise so I can neither see nor hear, but I can talk.' And so he proceeded to do – telling us the fairy story of his father.

Thenceforth, a successful conference without Oliver as the finale was a contradiction in terms. He was soon joined by his son Christopher and sometimes by fellow actors or friends who were roped in as supporting cast: a reading from *Weymouth Sands*, 'The Entermores', 'The Powys Clowns'. Two events I will remember always. In 1992 Oliver and Micheline Patton gave a reading of 'Frances and Jack' at the Powys Conference and, later that year, at the Cheltenham Festival. The sparks flew between these two consummate actors as they must have done in the 'mad imagination & excited nerves' of those lovers.

In 1995 we decided to do a reading from the diaries of John Cowper Powys. Oliver insisted that it could not be his monologue, so together we devised a script from the 1939 year of *Petrushka and the Dancer*, which gave parts to both 'Jack' and the 'T.T'. That spring and summer I travelled up to Westcote Barton a number of times for rehearsals. And amidst barking dogs, mewing cats, a squawking parrot and the cheerful chaos of Hennock House, we created 'Ghosts on the Roof'. Christopher was the stern director and inventive stage-manager. But it was Oliver who, by sheer force of some inner direction, showed me, the rank amateur, the way to convey the Phyllis-in-my-mind into a Phyllis who had found the words.

Hardly surprising, I suppose. From the age of eighteen onwards, Oliver's professional life was spent in the theatre, as playwright, actor, lecturer, director. He could have had an equally successful career as a writer. His introduction to *The Mystic Leeway* is a remarkable piece of legerdemain, combining as it does, calculated risks of phrasing and imagery, with the sureness of rhythm of an accomplished actor. In it he made one of the most perceptive comments about John Cowper that I have read: 'Jack's mind ... was frozen in a kind of silt of childhood damnation.' It was an act of love that, in his late life, Oliver saw through the publication of some of his mother's writings and the inestimable letters between her and JCP.

Oliver's own letters were always exhilarating because he understood the meaning of sustained metaphor. An image received would be bounced back as gaily and lightly as a feather ball. Oliver and I sustained the metaphor of the voyager. After a particular gruelling conference, Oliver sent me a postcard of Turner's famous 'Snow Storm' with 'This card is you on your ship! Of course – that is you – an adventurer on a deep ocean!' Thereafter I was his Viking, forever setting out on uncharted seas for mythic lands. But, as he says in his introduction to volume one of *Frances and Jack*, 'letters are often more revealing of the writer than prose, poetry, or even biography.' Oliver's letters revealed that it was <u>he</u> who 'rode on the rim of existence'.

Perhaps it was from his mother Frances Gregg that he inherited the gift for ambiguous images. He begins his introduction to her memoirs by musing on the word 'leeway'.

> 'Lee' is the quarter from which the wind blows. It is also the shelter from the wind. A ship drifts to leeward ... In 'leeway' there is a sense of deviation – that amount by which a ship leaves its intended course.

Oliver was given leeway. Whether through genes or life experience or a combination of both, Oliver had within him a still centre which allowed endless exploration and discovery. The excitement of deviation was possible for him because somewhere there was a chart giving 'the intended course'. All his life, Oliver rode, in the total freedom of loving service, 'the rim of existence'.

**Morine Krissdóttir**

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## *Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society held at Kingston Maurward College, Dorchester at 4.30 pm on Sunday 22 August 1999*

**Present** the President, Honorary Officers and 32 members of the Society.

1 **Apologies** were received from Francis and Kathleen Feather, Hilary Henderson and Charles Lock, all of whom sent good wishes to the Society for a successful Conference.

2 **Minutes of the 1998 AGM** Proposed by Glen Cavaliero and seconded by Graham Carey, the Minutes of the Meeting held at Kingston Maurward on 24 August 1998 as published in the November 1998 *Newsletter* were approved and signed as a correct record.

3 **Matters Arising** There were no matters arising.

4 **Hon. Secretary's Report** Chris Gostick reported that the Committee has met on three occasions in the course of the year, twice in London, with special thanks to Bruce Madge and the British Library for providing a free Committee Room, and once at Kingston Maurward. There has also been one informal meeting of the Honorary Officers to review the Society's Publication Strategy, and a meeting of the Powys Collection Advisory Committee.

The meeting in London in November was the first opportunity for the Committee to consider issues raised at the Annual General Meeting, in particular that the Annual Conference should be moved away from the Bank Holiday

weekend. It was agreed that the dates should be changed for the 1999 Conference, but this appears to have had no noticeable effect on the total numbers attending. The November meeting also noted that the generous offer by Richard Perceval Graves to transfer copyright of his book *The Brothers Powys* to the Society, made at the 1998 AGM, had been completed.

Over the course of the year particular attention has been paid to developing a more comprehensive publications strategy, and Chris Wilkinson in particular has worked hard, often in difficult circumstances, to complete the recording of the new *Powys Brothers Audio-Tape*, and more recently has been assisted by Bev Craven and Stephen Powys Marks in completing the design, duplication and packaging of the tapes. Overall this represents a fine achievement for the Society and is a worthy successor to *The Dorset Year*. In addition, small project groups are currently working to produce a series of Walks Leaflets in Powys locations, and to identify rare or unpublished material for a possible anthology of Llewelyn Powys works.

Once again, a major priority for the Committee has been to consolidate the progress made last year to put the Powys Collection on to a firm financial and administrative footing, and this has been achieved in a number of ways, most particularly by:

— re-appointing Morine Krissdóttir as Honorary Curator, and supporting her in that role; continuing commitment of substantial financial support to the Collection;

— continued discussion with the Dorset County Museum over additional space and facilities for the Collection;

— completing a pilot study to microfilm the more fragile TFP Collection documents;

— completing within timetable and budget the conservation and cataloguing of TFP manuscripts in the Bissell Collection, jointly financed by the Society and the British Library.

In addition, Bruce Madge, with strong support from Morine Krissdóttir, had prepared a Heritage Lottery Fund application for cataloguing, conserving and microfilming the remaining Collection MSS, and for creating an interactive internet access system for the Collection. A decision on the application is expected in the autumn.

Inevitably this full programme of work will take a number of years to complete, but a very good start has been made, and significant progress continues to be achieved.

At its final meeting of the year, the Committee considered the future development of the Official Powys Society Internet Site, established on the Society's behalf by Thieu Klijn some two years ago. Due to illness and other difficulties, Thieu was no longer able to maintain this site as effectively as he had originally hoped, and it had been agreed that the Committee should evaluate the cost of

using a commercial provider to host and manage a site for the Society in future. This will be especially necessary if the Lottery application for the Collection is successful.

In May, a dozen or so members of the Society assembled in East Anglia to spend a most enjoyable two days exploring Powys connections in Norfolk and Suffolk, particularly around Northwold and Yaxham, where we were fortunate to be able to visit both Rectories, as well as to travel further afield to Sweffling and Aldeburgh. This visit was such a success that it is hoped to repeat it during the May Bank Holiday weekend in 2001.

Finally, in accordance with Llewelyn's will, 8 members of the Society were present at *The Sailor's Return* in Chaldon on 13 August to drink Llewelyn's health on the 109th anniversary of his birth. Six members then braved the indifferent weather to walk up past Chydyok to the high cliffs to lay a small wreath on Llewelyn's Memorial Stone, returning by way of Rat's Barn in time for tea at *The Sailor's Return*. Next year this anniversary will fall on a weekend, so it is hoped that a larger party might be attracted to what has now become a well-established annual event.

In response to questions, Chris Gostick confirmed that the Society was planning to publish a revised Address List of Members to go out with the November *Newsletter*, and at the suggestion of Jacqueline Peltier agreed that the inclusion of a full list of e-mail addresses would make a valuable addition. Graham Carey then requested that the Committee consider possible publication of a book of Powys family photographs, with which he was very willing to assist. The Hon. Secretary's report was then adopted by the meeting.

**5 Hon. Treasurer's Report** Stephen Powys Marks explained that the Treasurer's Report and Audited Statement of Accounts for 1998 had been published in the July 1999 *Newsletter*, and then went on to highlight the main features of the published report, in particular that the Society had an excess of income over expenditure of £710 for the year, after allowing for depreciation for the value of stock. As far as the current financial year was concerned, the Committee was continuing to give priority to undertaking the necessary conservation and cataloguing work at the Collection, but overall the Society remained in a sound financial position. The Audited Accounts for 1997 as published were then adopted by the meeting.

**6 Chairman's Remarks** Paul Roberts drew attention to the copy of his 1998 Annual Report to the Charity Commissioners published in the July 1999 *Newsletter*, and then reiterated his profound gratitude of the Officers and Committee members for all the hard work they had dedicated to the Society over the past year. He pointed out that as the activities of the Society expand, the expectations of members grow accordingly, and a considerable burden falls upon the shoulders of Officers and Committee members. He then urged any members of the Society who felt they might have some contribution to make to its work to

approach any of the Officers or Committee members to volunteer their services. Those members who did not feel able to become actively involved in the administration of the Society could also support its work by encouraging local libraries and bookshops to stock Society publications, as well as other available works by the Powys family and their circle. Finally, the Chairman said that any suggestions for the development of the Conference, including both its structure and content, would be very welcome.

**7 Appointment of Honorary Officers** The meeting noted that as a result of the procedures enshrined in the Constitution, the following Honorary Officers had been re-appointed for the next 12 months:

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| *Chairman* | Paul Roberts |
| *Vice-Chairman* | Griffin Beale |
| *Hon. Secretary* | Chris Gostick |
| *Hon. Treasurer* | Stephen Powys Marks |

**8 Appointment of Committee** The meeting noted that as a result of the procedures enshrined in the Constitution, the following Committee members had been appointed for the next 12 months:

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| John Batten | Judith Stinton |
| Bev Craven | Chris Wilkinson |
| Bruce Madge | John Williams |
| John Powys | |

**8 Re-Appointment of Honorary Curator** The meeting noted that Morine Krissdóttir had been co-opted to the Committee as Honorary Curator of the Powys Collection for a further year.

**9 Appointment of Auditor** It was proposed by Stephen Powys Marks, seconded by Glen Cavaliero and unanimously approved that Stephen Allen, a member of the Society, be appointed Honorary Auditor for a further year.

**10 Development of the Powys Society Collection** Bruce Madge then outlined the main features of the Heritage Lottery Fund application which had been submitted for funding to complete the cataloguing, indexing, conserving and microfilming of all remaining mss material in the Collection, together with a range of new technology equipment to allow the index to be accessed on-line, and for the range of material now held in the Collection to be much more widely publicised. In the meantime, whilst significant improvements to the facilities available for the Collection had continued over the year, there remained a major problem of space, particularly if the Collection is to be expanded in the future, and this is continuing to be positively pursued with the Dorset County Museum.

**11 Time and Place of the 2000 Conference** It was confirmed that this is to be held at Kingston Maurward from Saturday 19 to Tuesday 22 August; however, as this year, the main facilities would not be available on the Saturday and therefore similar reception arrangements would need to apply. Overall, this was accepted as inevitable by the AGM, although by no means desirable. It was

further confirmed that a provisional booking for Saturday 18 to Tuesday 21 August 2001 had also been made at Kingston Maurward, but the Hon. Officers were asked by the AGM to consult more widely with the membership and to seek a possible alternative venue for 2001. This in turn led to a more wide-ranging discussion about the Conference programme, and it was agreed to see if some changes could be introduced in the format to allow the possibility of including some shorter presentations and more discussion.

**12 Any Other Business** A variety of issues were raised from the floor, specifically:

— Graham Carey again proposed that the Committee look at ways in which local members might more effectively promote the Society by the use of a wider range of publicity materials.

— Leslie Booth suggested that the Committee investigate possibilities for subsidised Conference fees and travelling expenses to encourage students to attend Conferences, and it was confirmed that this was currently being investigated.

— John Batten then reported that he had recently received a letter from Francis Feather, in his usual immaculate handwriting, indicating that all was well with Kathleen and himself in Zimbabwe, and sending greetings to the Society for a successful Conference.

— Finally it was reported that Jeremy Hooker had recently been taken ill and was in hospital, and that a copy of the new *Powys Brothers Audio-Tape* was to be sent to him with best wishes from the Society.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 5.45 pm.

**Chris Gostick**, *Hon. Secretary*

## *Landscape and Legend*
## *The Powys Society Annual Conference 1999*

For me, the keynote of the 1999 annual conference was one of drama and it was set in the Dorset County Museum by Peter Tolhurst, giving the opening talk by way of launching his new book on Wessex landscape and literature and the Society's Powys Brothers audio-tape.

Tolhurst presented Wessex, with all its varied vistas, as the nursery of what he described as 'an extraordinary literary heritage'. Within his scope came not only the Powys brothers and Hardy but writers as diverse as William Barnes, Richard Jefferies, E. M. Forster, Edward Thomas and such moderns as John Fowles and Kenneth Allsop.

Green, rich and smiling though the landscape can be, I found myself haunted by the way Peter Tolhurst touched the strata of ancient lifeways and the macabre

lying under it: Here, well into the last century, bonfires burned to mark the end of winter and other changes in the year and ravens circled over cross-roads gibbets.

So, prepared for drama, I found it, as well as sympathetic understanding, in Chris Gostick's talk on 'Lord Jim and Lady Tim', titles bestowed on James Hanley and his wife by John Cowper Powys, a helpful friend to Hanley in his needy days. Astonishingly, Hanley had adventured at sea, jumped ship, joined the Canadian Army, fought in the brutal battle of Arras and worked as a railwayman all while still a teenager. He struggled doggedly before emerging as a powerful and often disturbing delineator of seafaring life. I rejoiced in the knowledge that the talents of this working-class struggler finally won out and that he made a happy marriage with his unlikely bride, Lady Tim – otherwise Dorothy Edith Heathcote – the daughter of an aristocratic Shropshire family.

I happily partook of the fare which followed, offered by a gathering of erudite speakers and it must be admitted that some of it was pretty dizzying.

Some quietly delivered humour accompanied Joe Boulter's paper on 'Crooked Counselling, Why John Cowper Powys writes as he does' which opened up considerations of a duality or plurality of words. Joe Boulter developed the theme of 'deordering', JCP's paradoxical method of having characters speak with authority then appearing to shed it.

Drama in the literal kind came with the stage presentation, 'Whispers of the White Death', a play for voices devised by Peter Foss from the diaries kept by Llewelyn Powys in his Swiss sanatorium. I mean no reflection on author, producer or performers when I say that I wish we could have looked at some action on stage rather than a static row of readers. But then, it *was* a play for voices, making its impact through the ear and it might best succeed on radio.

There was no lack of dramatic delivery from Richard Perceval Graves, zestfully presenting 'John Cowper Powys and Merlin' with a torrent of ideas mythical, mystical, theological and cosmological. He traced Merlin and the magical phenomena dealt with by JCP from Geoffrey of Monmouth and the early Arthurian cycle through to modern investigations into black holes and 'worm-holes' in the space-time continuum. Eddington, Jeans, Bertrand Russell and Stephen Hawking were touched upon in maintaining that in his writing JCP was far more in touch with modern reality than has been realised. And did JCP become so much a magician that he mastered the secret of bilocation as Theodore Dreiser had reason to believe he had?

Glen Cavaliero took a thoughtful look at Theodore Powys, pointing out that this son of a Victorian clergyman stood in a distinct Anglican tradition. He urged critics and admirers to pay more attention to *An Interpretation of Genesis* and averred that although misanthropy and cruelty are to be found in his work his viewpoint was more Christian than that of JCP.

Once again, my attendance at the Conference made me acutely aware that, where knowledge of things Powysian is concerned, I am still very much outside

looking in and I was stimulated to learn more. At the same time, the symposium on the difficulties of finding readers prodded me into seeing that even I could do some missionary work in making the Powys brothers and their circle better known.

As a respite from the cerebral demands made by the array of speakers, there was an energetic foray into Somerset to visit Montacute church and the former vicarage and other Powysian sites with appropriate readings here and there. For me, yet discovering the West Country, this was a rewarding experience with the inspiring landscape of which Peter Tolhurst spoke, seen in sweeping panoramas. The afternoon was rounded off by some truly great-hearted hospitality from Eve and John Batten at their delightful Montacute home.

Small wonder I left the West Country with happy memories of encounters with friendly kindred spirits from home and abroad – and with all thoughts of cross-roads gibbet and circling ravens totally dispelled!

**Tony Glyn**

*Susan Rands*

*Glen Cavaliero takes his Presidential responsibilities seriously as members descend from the loft in which Llewelyn convalesced (the stable building at Park House, formerly the Vicarage, Montacute).*

# *The Powys Society Annual Conference 1999*

*(Originally published in the* TLS *of 3 September 1999. We are grateful for permission to reprint it here. Ed.)*

People like coming together to talk about their favourite writers preferably near where the writer lived, or wrote about. The formation of a Powys Society was therefore inevitable: not only is there an easy attachment to place (Somerset and Dorset), but riches – there were three of them: John Cowper, Theodore Francis and Llewelyn; all with their different devotees who feel their chosen hero has not been given his due. In fact there were no less than eleven of them, six brothers and five sisters, all of them, it seems, with sufficiently large personalities to make the walls of the vicarage at Montacute – which is really quite small – bulge outwards.

The Powys Society's annual meeting, outside Dorchester, took place over a weekend at the end of August, and I was impressed. I am not even a member, but for various reasons I drifted in and was made welcome by the sixty or seventy people attending. If founding a literary society with a narrow focus is a wish to bring like-minded people together, it certainly works in this case: there was an excitement, a buzz. Not that the focus could be called limited, with three writer brothers so different from each other

In various ways, the three were in reaction against the conventional Victorian Christianity of their loved parents – their father was a vicar. Though two of the three, at least, remained explicitly God-haunted. Perhaps all the family were; Glen Cavaliero, in a paper on T. F. Powys, which had the great virtue of making me want to read more of him, suggested that three of the brothers could be said to have divided their father-vicar's roles between them: John Cowper, the Preacher, Theodore the Visionary and, for the Pastoral aspect Cavaliero selected Littleton, the second son after John Cowper, who was a schoolmaster. Louis MacNeice remembers Littleton in his poem 'Autumn Sequel'. He calls him Owen, he is now old, but 'the voice / Comes strong as a gong as ever, and the laugh / As deeply ingrained and warm. Rejoice, rejoice / Was always Owen's motto, on two sticks, / He still repeats it, still confirms his choice' This is tribute indeed, coming from a man whose contempt for the phoney could be near-lethal.

Cavaliero felt unable to include Llewelyn, the third of the writing triumvirate, in this splitting up of the vicar's roles. An apostle of Free Love, Llewelyn's writing seems so far removed from any reality that I can recognise that I cannot read it and therefore cannot talk about him.

Theodore, on the other hand, the wily hermit-comedian, felt himself pursued by God like Francis Thompson. He wrote to his brother John Cowper, that only the thought of him and Lulu (Llewelyn) 'gives me a chance against Him. Lulu tells me to hold out and hide – hide. Have you ever tried to hide from God? Don't begin it, it's a bad custom, it won't even allow you to open your own house door and go out.' David Gervais, in a paper delivered to the Society last year, quotes

this letter and comments: 'When Stanley Spencer resurrects half of Cookham on canvas, his art seems ingenuous and rhapsodic, but Powys' tone is ironic and suspicious. He clearly doesn't trust God an inch. His relation to Him in one way suggests the confusions of a Faydeau farce and, in another way the locked doors of Kafka's castle.' The farcical point is well made, T. F. Powys puts no frontier between the comic and the serious; for him they overlap. As a result, no one ever knew to what extent he was joking; also, he was a difficult man to play a joke on. Llewelyn hid in a gorse bush, as Theodore, deep in thought, passed by. 'Theodore!' he intoned. Theodore turned and said quietly, 'Yes God?' Llewelyn knew that his brother thought that God might turn up at any minute; however, what Llewelyn could never know is whether Theodore had already spotted him in the gorse bush. T. F. Powys leaves his readers in the same intriguing uncertainty.

Theodore 'the visionary', John Cowper 'the preacher': the only novel of John Cowper Powys's I have read twice, in order to satisfy myself that it was, as I thought, a work of genius, is *A Glastonbury Romance*. It contains scenes of such psychological acuity and precise observation – Sam Dekker's rejection of Manicheism on Glastonbury Tor, his sacramental (and adulterous) bedding of his love – that these can never be forgotten. There are many such set pieces, preceded and succeeded by rhapsodic philosophising which doubtless puts some readers off, but this is a pity. Such passages cannot be omitted, because they contain the author's insistence that these events are universal, or, as he would prefer to put it, 'multiversal'.

J. C. Powys considered himself, rather fearfully, a sort of Merlin, a magician, and tried to make sure he was a white one. One of the speakers last week, young Joe Boulter, who has given JCP a Website, pointed out that when any of Powys's mystically gifted characters are about to deliver their final message, they become inaudible, or fall down, or fall asleep; we never hear what they have to say. This, he suggested is because JCP, a believer in pluralism, a disbeliever in any single authority imposed from above, cannot *impose* the idea of pluralism – because that would be authoritarian. This is as fruitfully paradoxical as the reader's puzzle over his brother Theodore's humour: first you see it, then you don't.

As a group, we visited the house in Montacute where the family was brought up. Standing on the drive, someone read a passage, I think from JCP's *Autobiography* (another masterpiece), in which he described the massive figure of his father, setting off up the drive on some pastoral visit, quickening his step as he neared the gate, evidence of his huge delight in all the sights and sounds of the natural world about him. This he imparted to his family, the passage says, and as MacNeice's description of Littleton Powys in old age confirms. However, a necessary resistance to the notion of writers' houses being treated as shrines, as holy places, suggested the idea that the quickened step might have had something to do with relief; for a while, at least, their father was escaping from his alarmingly gifted brood.

**P. J. Kavanagh**

## *The Llewelyn Birthday Meeting*

This year's gathering was a little smaller than usual, foreign travel and illness having conspired to keep some regular participants away. For all that it was no less convivial than usual and our toast to Llewelyn linked his name with two of those present for reasons which may be of interest to a wider audience than the eight present.

In proposing the toast reference was made to a remark of John Bayley's in an interview about his life without Iris Murdoch. He had said that she is now 'existless' and it was commented that while Llewelyn Powys had no difficulty with the concept of 'existlessness' after death he did want to be remembered – hence, the free birthday drinks provided for in his will and, presumably, the memorial stone. We did not dwell on the apparent contradiction between ceasing to exist and being remembered, but acknowledged that he is not only remembered but admired by many in and outside our Society.

Among his devotees it is common for admiration to take the form of a conscious attempt to savour, as he did, all experiences of the natural world and the miracle of life itself. Arguably, that is only proper and not very demanding. Sixty years after his death we certainly need to be as aware, as he would have been, of the pressure of the modern life-style upon our environment, and in that context, the places he knew and loved. We had with us two people who have devoted years of their life to conserving places Llewelyn held dear.

Janet Pollock, custodian of his home, Chydyok, which she has faithfully maintained, and made available down the years. In addition to which, almost alone among the residents of East and West Chaldon, she stood up and was counted, the implacable opponent of the oil exploration which threatened to disfigure an area as familiar to Powys as the Montacute of his childhood. Also at our table was Jack Parker, who with his friend John Hamalton has throughout 36 years, spurred on and sustained only by a love for the place, restored Pitt Pond, where the young Llewelyn had fished and skated, from a tree-grown swamp to its former glory. We therefore pledged our toast to Llewelyn Powys, Janet Pollock and Jack Parker.

On our walk to the stone we called at Chydyok and I was pleased to be able, once again to look across the downs from that upper window to which Jacqueline Peltier refers so evocatively in *A Woman at Her Window*, her recent essay on Alyse Gregory. However, we were sad to see that the magnificent cherry tree, which had graced the garden on Gertrude's side of the house, has died.

At the stone the now traditional bunch of wild flowers was laid – dandelion, yarrow and ground ivy along with some lady's bedstraw and boy's-love. There, looking out across the grey sea, flecked white beneath lowering clouds we listened as Morine Krissdóttir read this extract from Alyse's journal for September 28 1947:

Gertrude Katie and I have just got back from putting Llewelyn's ashes in the place dug by Mr. Treviss three feet deep in chalk. We climbed the stile and got over the barbed wire fence and walked through Tumbledown and along the cliff path, Gertrude carrying a spade, Katie a fork, and I a shovel. The sky was overcast with dense clouds forming a curtain, the horizon as if a silver pencil had traced a thin blue line all round the edge, the sea sometimes deep blue, sometimes blue-grey. Gertrude carved an ankh with a penknife on the wooden box that held the zinc box that held the ashes, then she got in the grave and placed it on the floor. Katie had brought a sunflower to place on it and Gertrude's boy's-love, and I ground ivy which I associate with all our walks together and a yarrow, my wedding flower. We filled it in again and came back along the cliff picking up sticks for our fire.

Our party returned to Chaldon via Rat's Barn and we refreshed ourselves with a cup of tea at the *Sailor's Return*. Next year the birthday falls on a Saturday, why not make an effort to join us?

**John Batten**

## *Who's For Powys?* ⋆

Who indeed! Having tried intermittently over a period of nearly 50 years to interest my friends in the work of John Cowper, I have failed. Here are a few thoughts on the subject.

When I met Phyllis Playter she told me that she rated John Cowper's talents as a lecturer more highly than as a novelist. To illustrate his power on the platform, she told me of an incident she had seen at a lecture given by him to a packed audience at Carnegie Hall. He spoke on King Lear and to illustrate a point recited a speech of Lear's to Goneril and Regan, berating them. I suppose it was the one in Act ii Scene iv. Before he had finished, two women had risen from their seats and run screaming from the hall. He had invested the speech with so much power that their feelings of guilt were beyond bearing.

I think this power is in his writing and that with it he probes his readers' feelings too deep for comfort. One of my friends told me that she had been unable to read further than the love scene between John and Mary Crowe in the first chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance* because she found it too disturbing. Interestingly, she had not fallen at what has been called the Beechers Brook of twentieth-century literature, the first paragraph. George Steiner has written that there is no

⋆ The success or failure of the forthcoming publication of three of John Cowper's novels could be crucial to his wider recognition as a major author. At the recent conference Patricia Dawson offered some thought-provoking comments on the difficulty of reading JCP.

more erotic writer of the English language than Powys, and gives as his example the very description that so disturbed my friend.

So who are the readers who enjoy a Powys novel? They must be sensitive to their surroundings and be aware that an environment can equally heal or harm. Armed with this knowledge they can tune into JCP's sense of place. This sense of place is shared by some other authors, but with Powys it is accompanied by a sense of solitude. He explains this in *In Defence of Sensuality*: 'Alone: that is what we have to face. Every living soul throughout this chaotic world is utterly alone – alone with a First Cause that is almost as evil as it is good. But not quite as evil! Ay, there is throughout the universe a faint quiver of the balances on the good side.' This quiver is evidently not enough to reassure all readers.

How, then, can so many people tolerate novels by other writers on grimmer subjects treated in a grimmer way? In a letter to me David Tighe says this of Powys' style: 'Words are the telephone lines of relationships, not the communications that are supposed to pass through them. The real communication takes place in the mind and does not leave it. People are necessary to provide material. To appreciate this point of view it has to be tested in oneself and to many people, perhaps most, it would appear repugnant. It implies great solitude. Probably those who appreciate his work experience this solitude without realising it.' I think that the keen Powys readers have come to terms with this solitude at an early stage in their lives.

As a child John Cowper, like many other children, cherished the fantasy that he was a magician. He speaks of it in his *Autobiography*. He felt he could make things happen. He became his own First Cause. When David says that words are the lines rather than the communication that flows through them, he points to Powys' ability to make his reader perform a Zen-type leap. This type of leap is often performed in the mind of a reader of poetry. Why did Powys, a great lover of poetry and writer of it, create poetry that is without these leaps? We find them instead in his novels. This to some is disconcerting. Another disturbing feature of his writing, experienced by many people, is as follows: After reading one of his books, a memory of a scene remains in the mind, but searched for in the text is impossible to find. A picture has been created between the lines. This quality in his writing makes it fulfil Virginia Woolf's definition of a novel as 'a cobweb of insinuations'. It makes of it, as James Kirkup says of Oriental art, 'Suggestive of something not stated, a craft of speaking that leaves space for the reader's mind to work in'.

There are those who criticise Powys' work as repetitive and monotonous. They use the words boring and pretentious. Often he is dismissed with a cursory aside. For example, Geoffery Ashe in his only reference to J. C. Powys in his book on King Arthur's Avalon, writes of *A Glastonbury Romance* as a 'frankly pagan novel in which the author draws upon everything and rather more than everything that is known about the pre-Christian Grail'. R. George Thomas in his review of

Belinda Humfrey's book on *Wolf Solent* printed in the *New Welsh Review*, recalls an incident in his own life. He had praised *A Glastonbury Romance* and *The Brazen Head* in an article in the *Western Mail*. Shortly afterwards he met Harold Laski as a fellow lecturer at a Summer School and was treated to an hour-long attack on Powys. In Laski's eyes Powys was 'a dangerous obscurantist wedded to ill-disguised metaphysical phobia and thoroughly unscientific'. Powys, Laski said, 'might well encourage the spread of loose theories similar to those that led to pre-war Fascism and Nazism'. Thomas continues with his own view that 'Powys has remained an interesting if indulgent cultural Autolycus who was ill-adapted to the novel form.' At least he found him interesting.

One of the objections often levelled at the novels is their formlessness. That they seem like life rather than taking an accepted literary shape. This upsets those who prefer the triteness of Trollope or even the familiar echoes of Greek tragedy found in Thomas Hardy's novels. The vast mosaic that has been created by Proust they find less daunting, JCP's multiverse is too much, it seems, for all but those who find it stimulating. They alone tune into its compassion. There are some who are put off by a style reminiscent of Scott used to clothe *sui generis* points of view and psychological insights of a more recent vintage. Turning Devil's advocate, I wrote these lines to express this attitude:

The unconverted flee the torrid scene,
Banjanxed by myth, erotica and spleen.
John's legends baffle and his fancy throttles,
Served up as new wine poured from ancient bottles.
I find this wine quite irresistible.

Maybe we should accept the fact that his readers will always be limited in number and be glad that new translations appear each year slowly widening his public geographically. Meanwhile we can comfort ourselves as we parry the criticisms levelled at John Cowper's work by adopting the stance of the mother who cried out, when watching her son on parade, 'Look, they are all out of step except our Johnny.'

It is not given to all of us to pursue the Saturnian Quest.

**Patricia Dawson**

## *John Cowper Powys on the Lecture Circuit*

**An Advertisement**

When the Welshman, John Cowper Powys, comes to the Chicago Little Theatre for his lectures during January and February a great many people ought to fall under the spell of this man whose methods spoil one for almost all other lectures. Mr. Powys's intellect has the emotional character which is likely to be the quality

of the man of genius rather than the man of talent. He might be called the arch-appreciator: he relies upon the inspiration of the moment, and when violently enthusiastic or violently the reverse (he is usually one of the two) he never stops with less than ten superbly-chosen adjectives to express his emotion exactly. His subjects will be Dostoevsky, Wilde, Milton, Lamb, Hardy, Henry James, Dante, Rabelais, Hugo, Verlaine, Goethe and Heine. The dates may be had at the Little Theatre.

*From An Editorial in* The Little Review *(Chicago) January 1915*

**An Appreciative Recollection**

In Chicago – America's most exciting city next to New York – I listened to lectures and readings by a number of authors, including Lord Dunsany and the American poets Conrad Aiken and William Carlos Williams. These were all writers primarily and lecturers secondarily, who appeared on the platform only because of the interest of the public in seeing writers in the flesh and hearing them read from their own productions, even if they read badly. I was shortly to hear a man who was primarily a lecturer and of whom others in the field might have said in the words of John the Baptist: 'There cometh one mightier than I am after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.' This was John Cowper Powys, sometime scholar of Cambridge University, who discoursed chiefly on literary giants of the past, though occasionally dealing with contemporary figures such as his admired friends Edgar Lee Masters and Theodore Dreiser. When I first heard him in a hall in the Fine Arts Building, his subject was Dostoevsky. He was introduced by Llewelyn Jones, a Manxman of Welsh blood who was then the literary editor of the 'Chicago Evening Post'. In honour of the occasion Llewelyn wore a black cutaway coat. I remember how odd it was to see the casual bohemian in such formal attire.

Powys had been lecturing in the States during the winter for a couple of decades, usually returning to England for the summer months. He stalked American forums, with his tall gaunt figure and arresting hawk-like head, as might some avenging archangel swinging a flaming sword. As he declares in his *Autobiography*, 'the queer ones' of the American continent always had a voice in him – meaning all deviations from type who were pilloried by their nice normal fellow beings. By defending the queer ones Powys had naturally made ferocious enemies and devoted adherents. Where he was concerned people always took sides violently.

Lecture was much too academic a word for one of Powys' inspired discourses; the ordinary lecturer by contrast appeared as a heavy-headed, droning pedant. In speaking of Dostoevsky he metaphorically crawled into the skin of the great Russian – novelist of superhuman penetration, epileptic and gambler. He gradually lifted himself into a dionysiac frenzy, and the most astonishing thing was to see the staid audience catch the infection and go careering along after the

wine-god. Here lay Powys' greatness as a lecturer: his power to communicate his own mood and enthusiasms. No comparable performance had been witnessed since Dickens gave his mesmeric readings.

When Llewelyn Jones, years later, was on his annual visit to New York I went with him to hear another lecture by Powys – this time on Oscar Wilde. Powys spoke of Wilde as a literary decadent, and continued sonorously: 'These other decadents, ladies and gentlemen' (here he rattled off half a dozen modern examples), 'how minor they seem beside this great decadent!' With his flair for effective emphasis he paused, then repeated: 'This great decadent!'

I did not encounter Powys again until I became his neighbour on Patchin Place, that tree-lined little street which still remains one of the last vestiges of Greenwich Village – the New York equivalent of the Parisian Latin quarter. I have never known anyone with Powys capacity for listening with absorption – or apparent absorption – to the utterances of friends or even casual acquaintances, as if they were speaking with the tongues of angels and the wisdom of Solomon. In such contacts he showed the wiliness of a serpent. If bored he signified it only by ejaculating at interval, 'How extraordinary!' and seeking refuge in his own secret thoughts, while his interlocuter rambled on contentedly. 'He makes you feel important,' one young Englishman remarked of Powys, while another in presenting him with a book inscribed the fly-leaf: 'For John Cowper Powys, Enheartener.'

In one of his letters John Jay Chapman wrote of Powys: 'You see he's a queer dick himself, or else with his wit and brilliancy, reading and enthusiasm he'd have shone in the Church or at the Bar or something – and so fate has shunted him off to lecture to barbarians.' As though the world didn't contain a superfluity of divines and barristers – whereas an inspired lecturer like Powys only appears once in a generation. Though he has since made a wide reputation as a novelist, he is aware that his writing is marred by the very devices – frequent exclamations, repetitions, abruptly interjected parentheses – which are so effective on the lecture platform. His realisation of this was expressed in a letter to me: 'But I am a born speaker but not a born writer, and my writings have all the faults and virtues of this quite different art, just as the modern school of poetry (of between the two wars) possesses the vices and virtues of the alien art of painting! Especially the school of paulo-post (whatever paulo may mean) impressionism.'

In New York Powys drummed up a few lectures for his younger brother Llewelyn, who though having no stomach or natural capacity for the task, grasped at this opportunity of adding to his slender earnings as a writer. One date was at a women's college, the head of which chose Mrs. Humphrey Ward and her popular novels as the subject. Llewelyn sat in his room pawing copies of the novels with a dejected, dumbfounded air, exclaiming at intervals to John: 'Oh my God! What a woman.' Whereupon John, proceeded to the office of his agent, dictated to the secretary an admirable lecture on the woman novelist, there being

present as audience, only the agent, secretary, Llewelyn and Louis Wilkinson a life-long intimate of the Powys family. At the end of the discourse John relieved his feelings at having to pretend to take seriously books which he despised by ejaculating: 'In short, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs. Humphrey Ward is a ——— ———!' The secretary typed the lecture, carefully omitting the final expletive – Llewelyn passed it off as his own at the college, and it was received with much applause.

**Reginald Hunter**

*From* The Wooden Horse, *Xmas 1951*

**An Uncompromising Condemnation**

It was my official duty, a few years ago to attend Mr. Powys's lectures for the purpose of reporting on their character and influence to the trustees of the institution for which he was lecturing. I found a clever, literary vaudeville performer, entertaining a gaping and tittering audience with irreverent balderdash and 'stunts' of every conceivable sort – bodily contortions, rushings up and down the stage with a bedraggled academic gown flying from his shoulders like a black pirate flag, violences of speech, slang and shady stories, startling paradoxes, and sensational thrills. A lecture on Shelley, in which the poet's weaknesses were paraded in a limelight of hilarious jest and ridicule to the exclusion of his poetry, was the worst exhibition of bad taste and vulgar impudence I have ever witnessed on the lecture platform. To anyone who really loves poets and poetry it was sacrilege. Manifestly such literary charlatanry could be regarded as a menace to the literary culture of popular audiences, since it would degrade the taste to a point where the lectures of a legitimate and instructive lecturer would not be appreciated or attended.

I purposely use the past tense in speaking of Mr. Powys's lectures, for conceivably he may have changed his spots as a lecturer in five years. ... In *Suspended Judgments* the essayist is still the vaudeville lecturer, minus the physical contortions. There is the same cacophonous and chaotic style of expression; the same incoherent irreverent chatter, punctuated with paradoxes and inflated egoisms; the same 'large free ravishment' of the great minds of the ages, as Mr. Bragdon calls it, which tears genius to tatters and serves it up to the reader in shreds and patches, resplendent in barbaric colors; the same dashing and splashing literary criticism, producing that 'authentic thrill of genius' which has so prickled the cuticles of Mr. Bragdon's literary taste. ...

**J. W. Abernethy**

*From a letter to* The Dial, *April 5, 1917*

# *John Cowper Powys' Ideal Woman*

*The Story of Lady Charlotte Guest, translator of the* Mabinogion, *continued from Newsletter No 37.*

Lady Charlotte had over half her life to lead between the birth of her tenth child and her own death at the age of eighty-three. One of the Guests' major projects was the purchase in 1846 of Canford Manor in Dorset, and its embellishment during succeeding years by the famous architect Sir Charles Barry who was employed 'to turn it into a mansion with porch-tower, great hall, monumental staircase and completely remodelled service courtyard. In 1851 a conservatory and exhibition room (the so-called Nineveh Court) for Guest's Assyrian reliefs were added.'[13] The Assyrian reliefs were those discovered by Lady Charlotte's cousin, Henry Layard, who married the Guests' eighth child and third daughter Enid. Canford Manor, originally fifteenth-century, had been rebuilt twenty years before Barry by another famous architect Edward Blore, and it was remodelled yet again, after the Guests, by their eldest son, Ivor, Lord Wimborne. The final mixture of styles, Tudor, perpendicular and decorated so intrigued Pevsner that he calls it 'as pretty an archaeological conundrum as the enthusiast of nineteenth-century architecture could find anywhere' and devotes three pages to it. The 'gigantic entrance tower' he calls 'one of the best things Barry ever designed', better possibly than the Houses of Parliament on which he was working at the same time. The expense was great and the builders were not out of the house until 1850, four years after the purchase. Lady Charlotte was now unpacking quantities of china and seventy pictures while the building of stables and a lodge was still being discussed with Barry.

In October 1850 'an Agricultural Show was held in Canford Park which was the occasion for the first entertaining at Canford on a large scale.[14] Over a hundred and forty people sat down to dinner 'at two long tables down the hall and one at the top, at which we sat with our principal visitors' in the style of all the illustrations of medieval banquets. The dinner was followed by many speeches and in trepidation Lady Charlotte herself made a speech; it was to propose a toast to 'the labouring classes, and in praise of the peasantry of England'. How John Cowper would have approved. He would have approved too of the way that Lady Charlotte encouraged her children, every Christmas, to act a Shakespeare play in that marvellous Gothic setting, and apparently they were no mean performers, young as they were.

The negotiations for the purchase of Canford from Lord de Mauley had been protracted and worrying; the property had come to de Mauley through his wife, Barbara Ashley-Cooper, the heiress of the fifth Earl of Shaftesbury, and had been in trust for their two sons and their son-in-law so that there were legalities to be untangled before the sale could be completed and meanwhile the price mounted

as it became clear how much the Guests wanted it, for although 'not on good land nor in a fine park, nor a pretty country, the garden, the house, the village, the grounds and trees around it, and above all the clear blue river make it a delightful place ...'[15]

Then the repairs and alterations had been vastly expensive. At the same time Sir John was having trouble with the lease at Dowlais in Wales. Lord Bute, the landlord, wanted to put up the rent since the land was proving so valuable. Besides this there was trouble with the Chartists, the cholera, the Papists, Sir John's partner at Dowlais, his nephew, Edward Huchins and the children's education. It must have been all too much for Sir John, who was also having frequent operations for 'the stone'; he died in 1852, only six years after becoming Lord of Canford. As his executrix and trustee Lady Charlotte was still involved in all his affairs and in decisions about the iron works.

The eldest child, Maria, was eighteen when her father died and the eldest son Ivor, seventeen. He left Harrow prematurely and was not due to go to Cambridge for a year so Lady Charlotte engaged Charles Schreiber, a fellow of Trinity Cambridge, as his tutor. Gradually, however, she fell in love with Schreiber and then it was no longer proper for him to be her children's tutor. Expansive as she is about most matters in her journal, she is very reticent about this relationship which posed many problems for her. But in spite of this, and although Schreiber was fourteen years younger than she was, they were married on 10 April 1855. Before Sir John's death she had prevailed upon him to alter his will so that all power should be taken from her should she marry again. Exactly what that meant in practise is difficult to say but certainly after Ivor's twenty-first birthday, a year after her second marriage, and for which she organised a huge party, she left Canford for good and only returned for visits by invitation.

Ivor was the only one of her children, who, and with good reason as he evidently benefitted so much from it, did not oppose her second marriage. Maria in particular was troublesome and frequently quarrelled with her stepfather who was only eight years older than she was; these disputes caused Lady Charlotte much pain. During the early years of their marriage the Schreibers travelled much about England staying with friends and relations; sometimes they took some of the children with them; where the others stayed or who looked after them is not clear but they may have stayed with their elder brother at Canford

In 1857 the Scheibers leased Exeter House in Roehampton as their base. The two elder girls had to be introduced to Society but they were often difficult to manage and acted independently and against their mother's approval. However, in 1859 Maria married Edward du Cane, her mother's confidential legal adviser, and seems to have given no more trouble. Two years later Katherine married the Reverend Cecil Alderson and little more is heard of her. Constance, the fourth daughter, married the Honourable C. G. C. Eliot in 1865 and little more is heard of her either. Enid, the third daughter, married in 1869 her mother's first cousin

Sir Henry Layard, the distinguished explorer who was now the British Ambassador in Turkey. Blanche, the youngest, married in 1875, Edward, the eighth Earl of Bessborough, the son of the seventh earl who, when he had been the Reverend the Honourable Walter Ponsonby, Rector of Canford, had so worried Lady Charlotte with his Popish tendencies that she had consulted the Archbishop of Canterbury about him. With the exception of Enid we hear little more of these girls except that they regularly produced children so that by the time she died Lady Charlotte had well over forty grandchildren.

Of the boys, Augustus, the fourth son, died of some unknown fever aged only twenty-two. Like his brothers he seems to have failed to thrive at Harrow, and between school and Cambridge spent the time living with tutors where his chief object seems to have been to get back to his family. Lady Charlotte had successfully nursed her eldest son, Ivor, through scarlet fever at Konigsburg and when she got back to England found Augustus too ill to revive, a great grief. Of the other boys, Arthur the youngest married in 1867 Adeline Chapman Montague. The third never married and Merthyr, after a disastrous affair with Georgina Treherne, a very beautiful girl who sang well and was often at Little Holland House where she was painted by Watts, married Theodora Grosvenor who was as keen a follower of hounds as he was himself. They founded the Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt and Lady Charlotte records being disturbed when staying with them by the early hours at which they rose to go cub-hunting.[16] Ivor the eldest son married in 1868 Cornelia Churchill, the daughter of the Duke of Marlborough, and became Lord Wimborne; he and his descendants lived at Canford until the 1920s. His sons, Ivor and Freddie Guest, were the first cousins and intimate friends of Winston Churchill.

In 1863 the Schreibers moved from Exeter House to Langham House, Portland Place and two years later Schreiber became MP for Cheltenham. However, from 1863 till 1883 their chief occupation was, in John Cowper's words going 'about Europe collecting china ornaments and cups and saucers'. But it was rare, antique and valuable china that they sought in their 'chasses' as they called them. They were so successful that the Victoria and Albert Museum, or the South Kensington, as it was called in those days, was very glad to receive the collection, fully catalogued by Lady Charlotte who was by then a leading expert. The gift was in memory of Charles Schreiber who died on 29 March 1884 in his wife's arms in Lisbon on their way home from South Africa; they had taken a long sea voyage in the vain hope that it would help to heal his lungs.

Their travels to most of the capitals of Europe, where they often stayed with ambassadors and were entertained by royalty, are described with such observation and breadth of knowledge in Lady Charlotte's journal that they are valuable records of the political situation. Her visit to Turkey, where her son-in-law, Henry Layard, was ambassador, is particularly interesting.

By 1879 Lady Charlotte had begun to collect playing cards and fans of

historical interest and this collection she also catalogued during her widowhood. The catalogue was published in five large illustrated volumes by John Murray, and the collection presented to the British Museum.

In the General Election of 1880 five of Lady Charlotte's men-folk were candidates: her husband, a Conservative, stood for Poole and won the seat, her eldest son, Ivor, also a Conservative, stood for Bristol and lost, her third son, Montague, a Liberal, won Wareham, her second son Merthyr, also a Liberal, won Merthyr Tydfil, and her fifth son, Arthur, a Conservative, was defeated at Cardiff. She herself was a Whig but backed the foreign policy of the Conservatives.

She was now beginning to go blind; the days were past when she could embroider 'a curtain border, poppies on black satin' as a kindness to her daughter-in-law, Theodora, recovering from a still-birth. She took up knitting instead and became very adept and speedy. On 22 August 1885 she went to see Arthur because 'he is much interested in the Cabmen's Association, and I have asked him to find out for me the expense of putting up a cabmen's shelter, which, if not too costly, would, I think, be a pretty offering from me to a class of men, by whose services I have frequently profited, and from whom I have never experienced anything but civility.'[17] A cabmen's shelter was duly erected in Langham Place and a copy of *The Times* was delivered daily to keep the cabmen abreast of events. When they said they would rather have three cheaper papers Lady Charlotte compromised allowing them the *Daily Chronicle* as well as *The Times* so that they could read both sides of a question.

At the same time she knitted six or seven pairs of mittens or comforters for them every week and took the trouble to check with them whether she had made them of the right size and shape. As she became increasingly blind, if there was no one to read to her she would recite either the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* or Byron's *Childe Harold* as she sat in a chair or walked up and down her long drawing room.

In June 1889 she gave up the lease on Langham Place and at the invitation of her son-in-law Edward, eighth Earl of Bessborough, lived with him and her youngest daughter, Blanche, at 17 Cavendish Square; and it was there that her little grandson, Vere Brabazon Ponsonby, began his interest in her that culminated in his editing of her journals. By this time the children of the ironmaster of Wales had fairly colonised Dorset; Ivor was at Canford, Maria at Branksome Dene, Montague at Bere Regis and Merthyr at Inwood which is only just over the border in Somerset. Ivor's descendants at Canford continually improved the estate until Canford became a school; schoolboys could enjoy the Gothic architecture so redolent of the age of chivalry which was the result of the collaboration of Lady Charlotte Guest, under the influence of the *Mabinogion*, and Sir Charles Barry. The descendants of Merthyr Guest still live at Inwood and till recent years a redoubtable Miss Guest was the Master of the Blackmoor Vale and Sparkford Foxhounds.

Except that they both had unhappy childhoods, read widely, loved music and fine china, of which Lady Charlotte remarked that there was nothing like it for brightening up a room, John Cowper's 'Ideal Lady' and Phyllis Playter, his actual one, could hardly have been more different.

**Susan Rands**

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[13] J. Newman and N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: Dorset* (Penguin, 1972), 126.
[14] Lady Charlotte Guest, *Extracts From Her Journal 1833–1852*, edited by the Earl of Bessborough, P.C., G.C.M.G. (London: John Murray, 1950), 89.
[15] Ibid., 162.
[16] *Lady Charlotte Schreiber 1853–1891*, edited by the Earl of Bessborough (London: John Murray, 1952) 199.
[17] Ibid., 187.

## *Letters to the Editor*

Dear Mr. Batten, Having completed reading the Newsletter there are a couple of things I'd like to comment on. The first one is that tomfool trial. Now I don't know Mr. Beale; apart from his legal training he seems to have quite some gumption; but he's not very old and I guess he's a townsman, so he's missed some facts. Well, I knew some of the parties concerned. I never met the Stevensons but from my books on Whippets I know that they bred them, and Great Danes, professionally and exceptionally well. Dog breeding done like that is a labour of love and very time consuming and it doesn't pay at all well. Considering this and that they had four sub-normal girls to take care of, it's not surprising that the Stevensons didn't return Uncle Lulu's call; Mr. Beale is quite right, that would have rankled. I suppose the women could have explained, but as in all the Powys family only Willie and Katie were genuine lovers of animals, they still would not have understood. Also, they were 'foreigners' – they came from outside Wessex, let alone Dorset, so they were disliked and suspected of the worst from the start. Even now it is so, and with reason. The Dorset Downs are sheep country, and to keep hunting dogs, gaze-hounds, in sheep country without bringing even more trouble than the Stevensons found, takes a great deal of doing – as I know.

Great Danes are terrific jumpers, and to fence in the big garden of Chaldon Vicarage to keep them in, would have cost a fortune even in those days. Mr. Cobb must have lived in terror – although the ones in terror should have been the Stevensons, and so they may have been for all I can tell. The stupid villagers certainly were terrified, I can remember that. I can also remember the dogs. When Violet pushed me in my pushchair past the Vicarage, one of them would fly

over the closed and pretty high gates – he was a blue fawn like my dear old Whippet Mac; he'd come up to the pushchair, to Violet's horror, and he'd ask for a biscuit. I suppose it says something in Violet's favour that she didn't simply flee because he was much bigger than she was. He'd put his great warm silky head in my little lap and I adored him. But nobody else did, and obviously Sylvia and Valentine were petrified by the sight of him – or else why the pistol? Good grief, what a pair of cowards! I never knew about their behaviour at this time of course, but I never liked them, and I never knew why. I do now! I must have had more sense than I gave myself credit for as a kid.

But what I did know then and still know and will tell you, is that James Cobb was entirely incapable of doing anything from malice or fear. In those days mental trouble was not at all understood (I'm not sure that it is even now) and he really believed that those girls were being ill-treated. So did Uncle Lulu. It was a case of complete misunderstanding ... and Daddy, who can have known very little of the matter, was I fear too easily influenced by somebody who had better be nameless – he had very little self-confidence.

Luckily for the Stevensons they were not dependent on the village for social contacts; they belonged to the world of gaze-hounds and show rings and pedigree papers. Dogs to a great extent reflect their owners. People capable of cruelty, either physical or mental, do not keep beautiful, happy, friendly hounds. Case against the Stevensons dismissed out of hand. I agree with Mr. Beale.

The other thing that deserves a retort is Mr. Harrison's letter about Paganism. The word does not mean country bumpkin but country-dweller. We have a name for townspeople too. Mr. Carter was being polite, the word he meant was witchcraft, although even that is not quite right. John Cowper Powys could have put a name to it. I suppose one could call it the Aquarian Religion. It comes near the belief of the Amerindians who certainly loved and honoured the earth. Most of today's witches will not have read Wordsworth. I can't say I have noticed his pantheism and he certainly wouldn't induce me to put down roots in anything.

I haven't read Barry Cunliffe, but generalisation seems dangerous. Caesar only heard that the Druids burnt people in wicker baskets – I can't see how it would be practically possible. As for the Aztecs, I cannot see any difference between tearing out someone's living heart and tearing out their living guts, as in the drawing and quartering allowed by Christians. In fact we don't know how the Druids worshipped and should make no judgement.

I can't think what Mr. Harrison is up to with his pervading spirits. Everything alive naturally has a spirit, be it tree, rock, horse, hound, cattle or that not superior creature, man. If it were not so, how could they be alive? The witches' creed is, 'So it hurt none, do what thou wilt'. If that is carefully read it can be very circumscribing indeed, even more so than the Christian creed. I see no difficulties in dealing with 'difficult modern ethical problems' by its means – but then the animal to be cloned, the wheat to be crippled, to me are lives like unto our own.

Mr. Harrison seems to be aware of only one form of life on this planet.

Llewelyn was an unbeliever. He certainly loved and I suppose one could say worshipped life, but his declaration about water, bread and wine was too complicated, whereas it is so simple. Water belongs to the Mother, and to pour it is a sacrament, likewise to break the bread made from the corn that grew in Her earth, or to pour wine made from Her grapes.

By the by, I am not a witch. I will finish this little sermon with a quotation from the greatest of all the Powys brothers, Theodore: 'The Mother is all-important', he said ... 'The father is really only a secondary figure.'

**Theodora Scutt**

How interesting it was to read in *Newsletter* 37 of the effects of JCP's *In Defence of Sensuality* on two young women readers. They reminded me of the far-reaching effect the book had on another young woman who read it at an earlier date and was led to the rest of John Cowper's work.

This was Elizabeth Myers who read the book in 1931, when she was 19. Ten years later in the London blitz of 1941 she was fearful that she might be killed at any time without ever having told JCP how greatly his work had enriched her life. So she wrote to him, thereby beginning a correspondence that ran for the rest of her life and caused her to meet Littleton Powys whom she married in 1943.

While on the subject, let me recommend a book which I discovered only recently: *Millions Like Us: British Women's Fiction of the Second World War*, by Jenny Hartley (Virago, 1997). It is a detailed, scholarly and highly readable study of the work of numerous women writers of the war period and my heart gave a leap of joy on discovering Elizabeth Myers and her first novel of 1943, *A Well Full of Leaves*, among the authors and works considered.

Since I have long been carrying a banner for Elizabeth Myers, I wrote to Dr Hartley, who lectures at the Roehampton Institute of Further Education, saying how pleased I was that she had encountered this author within the context of her time. Dr Hartley graciously replied, telling me that *A Well Full of Leaves* was one of the first wartime novels she had come across. 'I was really struck by its individuality. It was one of the novels which convinced me what a rich area this is', she wrote. Thus I was left with the warm feeling that Elizabeth Myers' work can still impress a younger generation and, indeed, had the power to help inspire a valuable study.

A great many women writers of the war years come under Dr Hartley's view and some Powysians may like to note that Sylvia Townsend Warner is among them. As a reading experience, I found that *Millions Like Us* struck many a personal chord but I have no doubt that those who do not share my vivid and bitter-sweet memories of life on what we used to call the Home Front will find it equally satisfying.

**Anthony Glyn**

In response to the fears expressed by Morine Krissdóttir (July issue of the *Newsletter*) that we would inadvertently provide free advertising space for secondhand book dealers should exchange lists of Powysiana be printed in the *Newsletter* I would suggest that if she wants to establish the market value of her duplicate Powys titles it would be sensible for her to consult the freely issued lists of those secondhand dealers, as so many Society members do either to value their own holdings or to add to them. Where would the reputations of the Powys family be without the attention given them by booksellers and publishers? I can remember when Jeffrey Kwintner was *persona non grata* in spite of his pioneering publishing and bookselling venture, and Kenneth Hopkins was obliged to offer his publications from the boot of his car at conferences because of the lack of support from the Powys Society establishment.

**Joan Stevens**

## *Members' News and Notes*

Ian Robinson has chided me for saying in the last issue that there were 'no crumbs of encouragement for admirers of Theodore'. I should have said that I knew of none. He tells me that Brynmill Press has in hand plans for an edition of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* to include the cancelled chapters and a *Selected Early Works* which will transform the understanding of the author's development. The next item, in 2000, is to be Theodora Scutt's memoir *Cuckoo in the Powys Nest* which I am told will be essential reading for anyone interested in the Powyses, but particularly in Theodore.

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Sally Connely has brought me up to date concerning the publication of Llewelyn: *Skin for Skin* (*Peau pour Peau*) was published in France in 1991 by Les Editions Hatier. *Love and Death* (*L'Amour la Mort*) was published in France in 1998 by Editions Phébus. 'Weymouth Harbour' from *A Baker's Dozen* was re-printed in *The Dorset Magazine* in October 1998.

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Marjorie Barber, *nom de plume* Michael Fairless, author of *The Road Mender* (see appreciation of Eleanor Walton, NL 35, p.3): Sally Connely dots some literary i's and crosses some t's. The *Newsletter* wrongly referred to her as Margaret. Her sister Agnes, married the brother of Henry Rider Haggard (see *The Days of My Life*, H. Rider Haggard, Longmans Green & Co. Ltd., 1926. Vol.i, p.216, Vol. ii, pp.28–30).

*****

Helen Zisul, looking for bargains on eBay the Internet auction site, came across

the following: "*Black Laughter* by Llewelyn Powys, published in NY by Harcourt Brace and Company in 1924, 216 pp. African Humor by one of the most famous of all black writers the wonderful Llewelyn Powys." Perhaps we shouldn't believe everything the Web tells us.

*****

'Needle and Bobbin', Marian Powys speaking on the West of England Home Service. Paul Roberts has sent me a photocopy of her talk which was printed in *The Listener* of 30 July 1953. It is unfortunate that the BBC archives do not contain a recording of this or other talks broadcast by members of the family.

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Are you thinking of a holiday in Ireland? P. J. Kavanaghs *Voices in Ireland, A Literary Companion to Ireland*, normally £12.99, is available to Society members at the special price of £10 including p&p. Send your cheque to: P. J. Kavanagh, Sparrowthorn, Elkstone, Cheltenham, Glos GL53 9PA.

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Look out for the April number of *Country Living* in which there is likely to be an article about Chaldon and the Powyses.

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Betty Cotton, who recently contributed an interesting letter about her visits to JCP, has generously offered to the Society's collection her book of Yeats' poems, owned by John Cowper and mentioned in *Autobiography* .

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Colin Huggett has been in touch to say he has a number of JCP publications for sale. These include copies of Richard Breckon's *John Cowper Powys The Solitary Giant*; Oloff de Wet's *A Visit to John Cowper Powys*; James Hanley's *A Man in the Corner*; and *An Englishman Upstate* (all Village Press editions); together with Ellen Mayne's *New Mythology of JCP*; *Venise (Suivi de ma Malice)*, a 14-page piece by JCP translated into French (1964); copies of *Essays on JCP*, edited by Belinda Humfrey (1972); and *JCP: A Record of Achievement*, by Derek Langridge (1966). Anyone interested in purchasing copies of any of these publications should contact Colin directly at Y Bwthyn, Dob, Tregarth, Gwynedd LL57 4PW.

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LIST OF MEMBERS A number of members have requested that we re-publish the List of Members, as the previous list is now almost 3 years old, and so plans are under way to include this with the April edition of the *Newsletter*. At the same time it has been suggested we also include a list of members email addresses, as more and more people are now going on-line – so if you have an email address, or if you **don't** wish your name and address to be published in the Members List, please let the Hon. Secretary know as soon as possible, and in any case by 31 December 1999 at the latest. Many thanks.

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WEYMOUTH WEEKEND – 6/7 MAY 2000 Some members have suggested we take

the opportunity of the forthcoming re-issue of *Weymouth Sands* and publication of the *Weymouth Walk* leaflet now being prepared, to hold another Weymouth Weekend, and plans are now going ahead to do this on **Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 May 2000**. Arrangements are only at a very early stage so any other suggestions from anyone interested in coming will be gratefully received, but the basic plan will be to spend as much as possible of the Saturday in Weymouth itself, visiting places of particular Powysian interest, and then on Sunday visiting the Chaldon area with opportunities to walk to Chydyok, the Coastguard Cottages, Rat's Barn, Llewelyn's stone, Beth Car, etc., with lunch at *The Sailor's Return*. Bed and Breakfast accommodation will be arranged in Weymouth for those wishing to stay over on the Saturday night. Further information will be in the April *Newsletter*, but **if you are interested in attending, and particularly if you are likely to require accommodation**, please contact *Chris Gostick, Old School House, George Green Road, George Green, Wexham, Bucks SL3 6BJ* as soon as possible, and in any case before 31 December 1999.

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LONDON MEETING A number of people have suggested the Society consider re-introducing occasional London meetings if a suitable venue can be found, so if you would be interested in attending such an event, which would be likely to last for a couple of hours or so, based around a short presentation and some more general discussion, then please contact Chris Gostick as soon as possible, indicating whether you would prefer a weekend or evening meeting, together with any suggestions for topics etc.

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SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER SOCIETY It is pleasing to be able to report that a number of Society members are currently involved with the setting up of a Sylvia Townsend Warner Society. This will be formally launched at a meeting at the Dorset County Museum on 14 January 2000, but anyone interested can join now by sending a cheque for £10.00 made out to the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society to the Acting Secretary, Eileen Johnson, 2 Vicarage Lane, Dorchester DT1 1LH. It is hoped that initially the new Society will publish two Newsletters each year together with an Annual Journal, and hold occasional meetings.

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QUESTIONNAIRE Enclosed with this *Newsletter* you will find a short questionnaire about possible future Conference and other arrangements. Even if you have never attended a Powys Conference, nor have any intention of doing so, it would still be extremely helpful in helping plan future events to have the views of all members, so do please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire, and then return to *Chris Gostick, Old School House, George Green Road, George Green, Wexham, Bucks SL3 6BJ*, as soon as possible, and in any case by 31 December 1999. With very many thanks indeed for your help.

## Powys Heritage Series 3 and 4

available from Cecil Woolf, 1 Mornington Place, London, NW1 7PR

*The Powys Family: Some Records of a Friendship*,
by Glen Cavaliero. £3.50, ISBN 1 897967 57 8
*Alyse Gregory: A Woman at Her Window*,
by Jacqueline Peltier. £4.95, ISBN 1 897967 62 4.

Following the inaugural issues in the Powys Heritage Series (reviewed in *Newsletter* 36), numbers three and four have now arrived, and look set to maintain the high standard already set.

The first of these is a more than welcome addition to the series for its author, Glen Cavaliero, as well as being the Powys Society's President, is a well-respected Powysian in his own right, irrespective of any titles he may hold, and to have a selection of his reminiscences readily available in this handy format is a boon indeed.

Dr Cavaliero's opening paragraph explains his intention: these are not reminiscences plucked at random from memory, for memory is subjective and selective; so, he has chosen to look again at letters received from JCP and others, and to consult his long-kept diary. He says, from the point of view of writing these 'records of a friendship', as the subtitle has it, that he is fortunate he has kept a diary. He isn't the only one fortunate: we are too.

That subtitle is, however, somewhat misleading, for it is not just one friendship described in these pages, but half a dozen or so, each recollection enhanced and augmented by the accompanying illustrations such as the photos of the 'gentle' Lucy, and the oil by Will Powys of the 'indomitable' Katie. At times, the descriptions are, if anything, too evocative; when we read, on page 5, 'In [Lucy] the family likeness, although very evident, was softened ...', or, on page 7, '... a ringing voice [Marian's] urged me in unmistakably Powysian tones to come inside ...', we long to know more, to have tangible proof that this was so – we feel an urge to meet, or, as that now can never be, a desire to have known the members of this remarkable family. Reminiscences like these of Glen Cavaliero will always mean more to the reminiscer than to the reminiscee. Like photographs, such recollections can only ever be tantalising, two-dimensional glimpses. (That is not to say, I hasten to add, that the writing is in any way two-dimensional!)

The highlight, for me at least, is the description of the author's first attempt to meet JCP. Receiving a reply, to the initial fan letter sent, full of underlinings, marginalisings and exclamation marks, Cavaliero momentarily feared Powys may have been as mad, as eccentric, as marginalised himself, as all the reviewers of the time, the literary establishment (God help it), and, let's face it, as most readers too, thought. Luckily for him, he persisted; but, as Cavaliero remarks

'He will always, I feel sure, have that power to disconcert.'

Which begs the question, why should that be? There may be a number of reasons, the chief of which seems to me to be: one is never sure whether to take JCP seriously or not. Is he a prophet, a seer, or merely a clown, a charlatan? To devotees he is something like the former; to detractors, definitely the latter. But surely the point is, he isn't one or the other, black or white, he can be one, both or all these things, even on the same page of the same book, for in his world clowning is as valid as deep seriousness. As Cavaliero says (13), 'I describe my journey in such detail since it was dominated by the feeling that I was being drawn into a world of myth and fable; and if on the next day high romanticism turned to farce, that too was in keeping with John Cowper's fictive world.'

As to the meeting itself, who – which true admirer of John Cowper Powys – does not envy Glen Cavaliero his first encounter with the great man, as described a little later on the same page? 'There, plain to see, was the head [of JCP] in profile at the upstairs window, writing ...' It would be invidious of a reviewer to quote any more: read it at first hand in this booklet, where there's at least as much again on that elusive figure, John's partner, Phyllis Playter, the whole written with insight and reading with ease.

Glen Cavaliero only once met Alyse Gregory. 'Everything about her was intense', he writes; 'she was at once vulnerable and daunting'. In Powys Heritage No 4, a thorough, lucid and clearly heartfelt essay by Society member and French resident Jacqueline Peltier, we learn this and much more.

Mme Peltier shows us that there is more to Alyse Gregory than just wife of Llewelyn and author of a few forgotten books. Consequently, her study is partly, and surely rightly, revisionist. If readers know Alyse Gregory at all it is through *The Cry of a Gull*, her edited journals; the key word there is 'edited' – as Mme Peltier points out, her thoughts, impressions, opinions were all selected by the editor to show Alyse as someone who lived through, for, and by Llewelyn Powys, come what may. And as this essay goes on to show, Alyse did have a life of her own, both before and after her fifteen years of marriage to Llewelyn.

Indeed, one gets the impression Alyse's character was the antithesis of that of her husband; she was introspective, melancholy, lonely, none of which qualities (for that is what they are) one could ascribe to Llewelyn. As a friend of Alyse writes in a letter to Mme Peltier: 'She took life much too hard and seriously ...' This isn't exactly the opposite of Llewelyn, who can't be accused of taking life lightly or superficially; but likewise, he wasn't one to let the cares of the world, or even the cares of those nearest and dearest to him, get him down.

Alyse's seriousness, though perhaps in some ways studied, was nevertheless in earnest. Read her impressions, too long to quote here, at the bottom of page 13, a penetrating deep-felt reminiscence that recalls Yeats' poem with its lines, 'Something drops from eyes long blind / I complete my partial mind.'

Of course, Alyse was never the same person after meeting Llewelyn, and the

fateful triangle of Llewelyn, Alyse and Gamel Woolsey is discussed here at length; perhaps most touchingly at the point when Gamel breaks off her relationship with Llewelyn to begin her life with Gerald Brenan; far from being a happy time for Alyse (after all, she was getting back the man she loved), this was the worst time of all, as she had to endure – had to because she chose to – the agonies the man she loved went through at losing the woman he loved.

Alyse Gregory lived for many years following Llewelyn's death, but it can truly be said a huge part of her died with him. What kept her going was art – books, music, nature (for what's nature if not art?). As she herself said, 'Art can always transcend life.' If it does anything, it can do that; indeed, it's doubtful if it could, or needs to, do anything else.

As handsomely produced as the first two in the series, both booklets have four pages of illustrations as well as notes for reference. In addition, *Alyse Gregory: A Woman at Her Window* has a substantial bibliography, and at fifty-two pages is the longer of the two booklets, and consequently is slightly more expensive.

**Barry Cronin**

*The Powys Brothers, Selections from the writings of John Cowper Powys, T. F. Powys and Llewelyn Powys.*
The Powys Press, Hamilton's, Kilmersdon, near Bath BA3 5TE.
1999, ISBN 1 874559 22 8, £9 including p&p.

This audio-book, professionally produced and using professional actors, contains three hours of readings from the works of the three brothers. The material was selected by Oliver and Christopher Wilkinson and the readers are: Oliver Wilkinson (JCP), Freddie Jones (Theodore) and Christopher Kent (Llewelyn). The short musical interludes between readings are written by Will Powys, great-grandson of Theodore and the attractively designed inlay is the work of Bev Craven.

All the readers are excellent. It is good to have such a fine recording of the late loved Oliver Wilkinson.

Llewelyn is well represented by selections from a number of his books. He has always been my least favourite of the three brothers and it is only now, having heard him read aloud, that I have realized his mastery of words, the accuracy of his observation of people as well as Nature and the variety of his subject matter.

I was touched by the tenderness of 'Under the Stars' and caught up in the small tragedy described in 'An Owl and a Swallow'. The homeliness of the familiar 'The Village Shop' with its tender observation of the affection between

Miss Sparkes and her parrot contrasts strongly with the violence of the porcupine hunt described in *Black Laughter*, 'Kill, Kill, Kill'. Llewelyn accepts this violence as an integral part of Nature. A reading from *Glory of Life* speaks Llewelyn's hedonistic philosophy played out against the prospect of eternal death.

Theodore and John are not as fortunate as their brother in the selections from their writings. These are too limited.

Readings from Theodore comprise two from *The Soliloquy of a Hermit*, two from *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and the short stories 'The Candle and the Glow-worm' and 'When Thou Wast Naked'. One passage each from the early *Soliloquy* and *Mr. Weston* would have allowed time for further readings illustrative of other aspects of Theodore's genius.

John Cowper suffers similar limitations. His novels are represented by one reading from *Weymouth Sands* (Magnus Muir's wait for Perdita Wane's arrival at Weymouth and three, yes *three* from *A Glastonbury Romance*. All are primarily reflective passages with little action, particularly JCP's musings on the erratic ways of the Janus-faced First Cause to whom John and Mary Crow pray that their love may have a happy future. The novels contain much lively, dramatic action but there is none of it here.

Oliver Wilkinson's interpretation of John Cowper's account of his lecturing method – 'I worked myself up to such a pitch that I *became* the figure I was analysing' – becomes an apt description of Oliver's own readings. Also from *Autobiography* is an account of JCP's attempts to satisfy his cerebral sex longings at penny-in-the-slot machines in New York hallways and in the 'Caves of Venus Mechanistica' in the Bowery.

The readings also include a letter from John to Frances Gregg, poignant in his expression of love and also illustrative of his mental sadism. Or was he just playing verbal games? The diary account of the death of The Old haunts precisely because of its dispassionate objectivity.

Most Powysians will find much to enjoy in *The Powys Brothers*. Some, Like me, may make new discoveries. I appreciate Llewelyn's writings more; and an extract from *Lucifer* encourages me to take that neglected poem from the bookcase and read it.

There remains the question which prompted my criticism of the Theodore and John Cowper selections. For what audience was this audio-book intended? Was it meant for Powysians or for newcomers to Powys books? The Chairman's remarks at this year's Conference indicated that it could be a way of introducing others to the brothers' writings, a way of whetting appetites and gaining new readers.

*The Powys Brothers* begins with 15 minutes of *The Soliloquy of a Hermit* (how many of those coming to the Powyses for the first time will get beyond that?) and it ends with an account of a dying dog doing No 1 and unsuccessfully attempting No 2. Will this attract new readers?

**Eileen Mable**

*Wessex – A Literary Pilgrimage*, by Peter Tolhurst
and with a Foreword by Ronald Blythe.
Black Dog Books, 11 Trinity Street, Norwich, Norfolk NR2 2BQ.
1999, ISBN 0 9528839 1 0, £19.95.

This book is a real treat, and I doubt there will be many in the Society who won't find something of interest within its covers. Those familiar with Peter Tolhurst's earlier book on literary East Anglia with not be disappointed with another sumptuously designed and produced book, full of strikingly evocative photographs and a carefully considered text; but they will also find a good deal more besides. Although subtitled *A Literary Pilgrimage*, the book far transcends that description to become a fascinating study of the impact of the landscape of Wessex on both writers and their writings. This is an idea that has been explored before, most recently by Jeremy Hooker's excellent *Writers in a Landscape* (1996), but Tolhurst evokes a broader canvas and a wider cast – writers who themselves become characters within their own landscapes.

Wessex for the purpose of this book is defined by a triangle with Swindon at its apex, Lyme Regis to the west and Poole Bay to the east; an area that broadly takes in Wiltshire, East Somerset and Dorset, but not Glastonbury. The book starts gently enough in Northern Wiltshire with Francis Kilvert at Langley Burrell and Richard Jefferies at Coate, both writers with a particularly well developed response to landscape, before moving south to the Salisbury of E. M. Forster and William Golding's *The Spire*. Within this whole area Hardy is necessarily a dominant figure, and the exploration of Egdon Heath and *The Return of the Native* is superbly achieved. Indeed without Hardy it is unlikely we should any longer even think of this as Wessex at all, but Tolhurst manages to bring in plenty of Powys too, with special emphasis on Montacute, Weymouth and Chaldon.

He is especially good on *Wolf Solent*, and explores the landscape of JCP's childhood around Sherborne and Yeovil with great effect, associating the more broken Dorsetshire countryside to the south with the voluptuous Gerda Torp, and the Somerset Levels to the west and north as the spiritual home of Christie Malakite, which allows him to throw interesting light on the way JCP uses landscape as both symbol and metaphor. Dorchester and *Maiden Castle* also receive effective attention, and the discussion is carefully linked to Sir Mortimer Wheeler's excavations at the time JCP was writing the novel, but above all Tolhurst shows how dreadfully emasculated was the original published text, and how indebted we are to the University of Wales Press for publishing the full text in 1990. This not only restores the complex sense of place into the narrative, but indicates the striking difference between the early novels full of beautiful evocations of the Wessex countryside nostalgically written in exile in America, and the way that *Maiden Castle* was gradually nourished from JCP's daily walks around the very places he was describing.

Weymouth and Portland also receive their fair share of attention, with interesting discussions of both *Weymouth Sands* and Hardy's much under-rated penultimate novel *The Well Beloved*. A whole chapter is then devoted to 'Powysland', that magical area around Chaldon and the Dorset coast. T. F. Powys inevitably receives the lion's share of attention here, but there is also plenty of interest to say about Llewelyn, Alyse and Gamel Woolsey, as well as Sylvia Townsend Warner, Valentine Ackland, David and Ray Garnett and other members of the Powys Circle.

The Powys family are certainly well served by this book, but there is very much more besides. The Tyneham Valley of Mary Butts is particularly well done, as is the Lyme Regis of John Fowles, and the mysterious Pilgrim Valley of Peter Ackroyd's *First Light*. I also suspect there will be surprises here for everyone. I have to confess not knowing before that Ottoline Morrell actually invited TFP to Garsington Manor, and when he inevitably refused visited Chaldon herself, apparently anxious that Beth Carr and its circle might begin to eclipse her own literary hegemony. But satisfied that it would not, she never returned again! Equally, to my shame, I was unaware of the Marlborough poet Charles Hamilton Sorley (1895–1915), which I shall take immediate steps to rectify, whilst Tolhurst's irrepressible enthusiasm for many sadly neglected writers kept me revisiting my own bookshelves far too frequently when I should have been writing this review, and I have no doubt that others will find the same.

Inevitably there are also omissions. For myself I was sad that Tolhurst had not explored the Salisbury Plain of V. S. Naipaul, where he has lived within walking distance of Stonehenge for many years, and which he wrote about so hauntingly in *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), probably one of the most tantalizing novels of the past twenty years. Naipaul seems to go beyond the idea of landscape simply influencing writers, to the concept that writers may actually re-imagine that landscape for themselves :

> Land is not land alone, something that simply is itself. Land partakes of what we breathe into it, is touched by our moods and memories.

This seems to me to be a particularly important idea for understanding much of JCP's writing, and indeed for re-conceptualizing the very meaning of landscape itself, as Jeremy Hooker has so perceptively suggested, so I would have been especially interested in Tolhurst's comments on Naipaul. But this is a small quibble about an excellent book that can be unequivocally recommended to anyone with an interest in the Powys brothers or in Wessex, or simply in the way that landscape and art somehow transcend each other to create something even greater. Why else would we get so much pleasure from actually visiting the places that feature in our favourite books?

**Chris Gostick**

# *A Tribute to Alyse Gregory*

*The publication of Jacqueline Peltier's revealing essay on Alyse Gregory (see review on p.31) provides an opportunity for the* Newsletter *to offer readers an example of her writing for* The Dial. *By way of introduction Jacqueline writes:* 'Cities of the Plain *is not the last volume of* Remembrance of Things Past. *It was followed by* The Captive, The Fugitive, *and* Time Regained, *which in France were published in '23, '25 and '27, and a few years later translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff, and Stephen Hudson in the case of the last volume. Alyse throughout her life retained her love for Proust, "who in the days of my greatest unhappiness supported me, gave me back my desire to live", as she wrote in her Journal in 1958.'*

*It is appropriate to reproduce a paper on Proust to celebrate her memory. Ed.*

## POETIC ENFRANCHISEMENT

CITIES OF THE PLAIN. By Marcel Proust.
Translated from the French by C. K. Scott Moncrieff.
Two volumes. 12mo. 352 and 384 pages. Albert & Charles Boni. $15.

WITHOUT our knowledge or concurrence we are, each one of us, a little closed system of preconceptions, our imaginations hobbled by custom, our thoughts as sedately guarded, as carefully regulated, as those long lines of pale orphans in their black uniforms led out for their daily walk by the unsmiling head of the establishment. Our illusions, so sedulously garnered, so anxiously cherished, so bitterly defended, are the props by which we live; habit, the prison through which we move; fear, the sentinel that foils us in our endeavour to issue into a universe too vast and frightening for our uncertain nerves.

It is the privilege of great and original minds to let down for us those bars held in place by the unconscious conspiracy of a timorous and torpid society, and to guide us with firm directions into a more audacious view of existence; it is the greater privilege of the artist, not only to heighten our vision of that reality beyond reality, the truths which lurk so fugitively under the ordinary accepted aspects of the objects surrounding us, but to charm and fructify us at the same time, to rouse our own dormant potentialities, to force us into creative thought, to render us more aware of the implications of our own lives, to indicate the greatest disaster that can befall us, apart from disease, destitution, or death, namely, that of losing our capacity for fresh and penetrating response. This no author has done to a more marked degree than has Marcel Proust. Open any of his volumes at random, and you are led on from sentence to sentence, from page to page, from chapter to chapter, until stirring within you is a new power, a more bold and delicate insight, a whole fresh set of interests and appreciations, and at last an entire world of people takes sensible shape, a world more vivid, more intimately realized, more interesting, than any you have known or will probably

ever be privileged to know. This, to a certain extent, might be said of any novelist, of Henry James to whom Proust has by an authoritative English critic, been unfavourably compared. But how restricted, how narrowly genteel, how lacking in humour, is *this* master of the social situation, rare as his gift to us will always remain, compared to the unfettered perspicacity of the disillusioned Frenchman. And of the two it is certainly not Marcel Proust whom one can accuse of snobbishness. Only the most obtuse of critics could have started such a rumour. He has chosen to portray that portion of society which, since it is the most aristocratic, is also the most historically interesting, in which more diverse and complicated types sooner or later appear, and where the assumption of superiority being greater and the play of wit more fierce and more light, the challenge to discrimination is proportionately more exigent. But he has, at the same time, parallel with this privileged upper world, depicted with an insight heretofore unequalled the world that serves it, that must bow down to its whims—the valets, the cooks, the bell-boys, the coach men—a world made up of the same types as its masters, as arrogant and as limited, but rendered servile, cunning, and affable through necessity.

In these last of his volumes to be translated, alternating with the themes already familiar to us in his previous writing—the tortures of normal attraction with its unrelenting doubts, its ennuis and its sudden rewards, all so fleeting and all so important; the outward pretentiousness and the malicious undercurrents of a small, homogeneous group; the delicious sensations of the country; the changing aspects of the sea—is the major motif of a love heretofore banished from the pages of fiction. By society at large sexual inversion has been regarded either as a vice so revolting and unnatural that a conspiracy of silence has prevailed, or so dangerous that it must receive immediate public castigation. Since the newer psychology has explained it in terms of a malady, another attitude has among the enlightened come into fashion, but even this attitude, so supercilious in its tolerance or so vulgar in its frivolity, veils a contempt which betrays a sense of superiority and a limited sympathy. No writer before Marcel Proust has dared, or has perhaps been permitted, to touch with so free a pen on so dark a subject. We can imagine no author who could have possibly done it with so relentless yet so tender an understanding, with such consummate art. And be it said, we are not among those who discover a "defect" in his "moral sensibility" because of the inclusion of certain much discussed episodes. Candour absolves everything, and for the artist curiosity, combined with spiritual detachment, is essential. Sensitiveness is the unique virtue, and the passionate weight of certain pages of this profound and revealing book should cause hesitation to those who judge certain other passages with too great temper. As alert to the conflicts of his characters, to their sufferings, their pitiable subterfuges, the nervous masks through which their telltale eyes look out, as a lover to the steps of his mistress, Proust can never be accused of moral insensibility.

To follow the possessed divagations of the Baron de Charlus, the sly, self-interested deceptions of Morel, is to be initiated into a life as fantastic as it is absorbing. Tragedy and comedy alternate with so swift and so equal a balance, and our shocks are so softened by our increasing perceptions, that presently our dispraise dissolves, and only our understanding remains, our instructed and compassionate understanding. Moral indignation has no place where the instincts are seen striving, with the desperate zeal of necessity, to create within the small space alloted them by a withered or frightened society the very breath of life itself.

To blame or criticize Marcel Proust because his philosophy is one of despair is to miss much of the intensity of his writing. Because he never forgets death he equally never forgets life. Unlike Leopardi, "*pâle amant de la mort*," Proust seeks to extract from life each little drop of experience it has to give, to bathe himself in it; he does not court death, he covets life, but at the same time sees it, like the wild ass's skin, shrinking hour by hour. His descriptions of nature are like those of a convalescent returning to the strange and overpowering revelation of an existence which only one who realizes its dreamlike quality, its fleeting duration, is able to achieve. It is largely the secret of his rich, rash, and subtle meditations, this constant accompaniment in his mind of the knowledge that suddenly each sense, so swift to his bidding, so perfect an instrument of ravishment, will be blotted out, extinguished, and darkness will prevail. It is why his observations of the ephemeral niceties of an artificial society, its colossal illusions, its sentimentalities, and its crudeness, are so acute. All is nothing and therefore anything is everything. That he withdrew from life was due to his illness and it was only because he had lived with so submissive and dedicated an attention to the minutest measurement of experience that he was able to build with his art so splendid and so enduring an edifice.

**ALYSE GREGORY.**

## *Reminiscences of A.R. Powys and The S.P.A.B.*

(*Including the answer to the riddle of the Winterborne Tomson manuscripts.*)

When Thackeray Turner resigned the position he long held as Secretary to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Powys, strongly recommended by Turner, was appointed to fill his place. Turner's estimation of Powys's character and abilities was more than justified, for except for a break during the war, Powys devoted his mind and energy to the work of the Society. He carried on the ordinary practice of an architect, latterly assisted by his partner, J. E. M. Macgregor, but the Society's work always with him took first place and absorbed

his best thought and zeal. Visiting, inspecting, reporting and interviewing were but a part of his days work, and he would fill in the evening by travelling to some provincial town to lecture on the work he had so much at heart, the preservation of some noble building or the saving of a row of ancient cottages. Recently much of the work of the Society and its Secretary has been, with the help of C.P.R.E., devoted to attempts to save from ill-considered road widening the ancient cottages and bridges of the country.

The establishment of the Central Council for the Care of Churches and the appointment of the Diocesan Advisory Councils relieved to some extent the feeling of responsibility that the Society seemed to have for the repair and additions constantly being made to ancient churches, but it was far from reducing the work of the Secretary, who was unremitting in his watch on behalf of these bodies. Frequently technical advice was sought from the Society and its Secretary by the Councils.

With all his ardent appreciation of ancient buildings and old work generally, Powys held a very practical outlook on every branch of building work and construction. His reverence for the old did not prevent him from considering and adapting the new when it was useful or sound. This may be seen in his book *Repair of Ancient Buildings*, where he deals in turn with all the different crafts connected with building and gives reasons why the old methods and customs are nearly always the right ones right at any rate at the date they were done.

The executive of the S.P.A.B. contains six or eight practising architects, with the result that the Secretarys proposals or his reports were pretty thoroughly – to put it mildly – discussed. Powys held strong views and did not hesitate to state them, while he was at the same time the perfect Secretary and deferred at once to the decision of the Committee – which was sometimes wrong! I can remember only one occasion when Powyss enthusiasm quixotic it might – be called carried away the Committee on a course most of us now regret.

Powys's sincerity won him friends from unexpected quarters. He shocked his Committee one day into silent amazement by calmly handing the Chairman a cheque for £20,000 and announcing that it had been given by an anonymous donor specifically to acquire and preserve ancient buildings, which we might judge to be worthy of preservation. But the Secretary had done more than merely accept the gift; he had told the donor at once and got his approval for the money to be used as capital to purchase buildings which could be put in repair and either let or sold (under restrictions) so that the capital would remain and continue to be used over and over again. That at any rate was the aim and a company called the Ancient Buildings Trust was formed to carry on this branch of the work on behalf of the Society. Already several buildings have been acquired and dealt with. One example may be cited – 48 Devonshire Street, Bloomsbury. This is now a museum for ancient musical instruments and is worthy of a visit, both for the building and its contents.

The donor, however, was not done with his gifts. He next bought and handed over to the Society the old Assembly Rooms in Bath.

Finally he handed over another cheque, with instructions to purchase Montacute House in Somerset. The freehold of these two properties the Society vested in the National Trust, the Society remaining responsible for management and maintenance.

None of the Committee knows the name of this generous donor; and it seems to me they might never have heard of him but for Powys, who must have impressed him and been the immediate cause of the unparalleled munificence, and this is my only reason for giving these details.

Amid all his serious work and the heavy task of guiding his executive committee, Powys had a very keen sense of humour, which came out from time to time. In one of his lighter moods he caught the writer turning up his nose at a photograph of some doubtful ancient building labelled 'antique'. 'Troup,' he said, 'can smell a faked building before he sees it!' A little frivolity in a committee is a good thing, and Powys knew it.

Thomas Hardy started life as an architect and was a member of the S.P.A.B. The Society possessed some reports and specifications written by Hardy, and the manuscript of an address he gave at an annual general meeting. We decided that as they were no longer of use to us we would sell them, and this was done. Powys again took the lead and persuaded the Committee that the money, or part of it, should be used in repairing some building in the Hardy country as a memorial to the novelist. The little church of Winterborne Tomson, which was half roofless and in a derelict condition, was chosen, and Powys himself saw to its reparation and to a small bronze panel being affixed to the walls recording what had taken place. Here it was he chose his own burial place, and here his body was laid to rest on the 12th of this month.

Powys had more than one serious attack of the complaint from which he died. We urged him to ease off and let others do the hard work, but nothing would persuade him that he was not – as he certainly looked – a strong and healthy man. He had not allowed for being a prisoner in Germany during the War. That privation and hardship may well have made him less able to resist disease.

A splendid and loveable man cut off in his prime, it will be long before his place can be filled as he filled it.

**F. W. Troup**

*This obituary was published in the* Journal of the Royal Institute of Architects *for 21 March 1936, following A. R. Powys's death on 9 March. Its author, F.W. Troup FRIBA FSA, was among the 'six or eight practising architects' on the S.P.A.B. Executive at the time, and had been on the Committee since 1905, well before ARP was appointed Secretary in 1911.*

*The 'the generous donor', whose gift saved Montacute House, was Ernest Cook, art collector and connoisseur, and grandson of the founder of Thomas Cook and Son.*

# *Letters from Louis Wilkinson to Theodore Powys About Their Books*

*Selected from 26 letters from Louis Wilkinson to Theodore Powys in the Powys Society Collection. In most cases references to family and other matters not concerned with books have been omitted and cuts are indicated thus: . . . . Ed.*

Deepdene,
Aldborough,
Suffolk.

June 26 1919

My Dear Theodore,

... I have written a novel with this name 'Brute Gods', it comes out in America next September and I will send you a copy.

I am sorry that the brute gods have not been kinder to you. Perhaps it is only to brutal people that they are really kind for long. I suppose my lechery puts them on my side, a little. It becomes clearer and clearer to me that life becomes tolerable to us through our selfish and evil qualities. Lechery protects us as stoutly as ever it did, but the business of money has been pinching my heels lately. In England I notice the war has made all the scoundrels richer and all the honest men poorer than ever. I have had to take up £200 this year and am already in view of the shadow of the worry of how to get more when that is done. It was not that America yielded so much less gold, but illness expenses and voyage expenses (they have doubled the fares) pressed on me.

The war seems to have done England harm in every way. But I am glad to be back. These new countries don't suit me and they never will – my mother is very little changed (found her well and active) she sends her best love and wants me to tell you how much she liked your 'Soliloquy' – she often looks at it and reads over and over again the parts she likes best. I still feel confidence that your books will be published and recognised. It is a bad time now, with the level of public taste never lower, but things will change, and they may change quickly. If only we would copy Russia instead of trying to bite her, we should do better. I want very much to see you. If I have enough money I will come down later in the summer – to Weymouth, perhaps? I hope you are all well. Much love, Louis.

Deepdene,
Aldborough,
Suffolk.

11 April 1923

My Dear Theodore,

I hear with great delight that a book of your stories is very soon to be published; and you may be interested to hear that it is already being spoken of with great enthusiasm by the critics of the literary 'coteries'. I saw my American publisher

Mr. Alfred Knoff in London the other day and he'll probably try to get the rights of American publication.

The very people whom I used to try to get interested in your work, and who pretended to have read what I showed them of yours and made remarks like, 'of course there's some fine original stuff in [it] it's too uneven and would only appeal to a very few'. These same wise men now chant your praises and will no doubt give you excellent reviews and probably inform their friends that they arranged for the publication of your book – However that doesn't matter: the great thing is that the book is coming out. I very much look forward to reading it. It seems to have been fairly widely read in 'page-proof' already: at a 'literary party' the other night I went because the liquor would be good and plentiful – they talked of hardly anything else – particularly of 'Left Leg'.

I hope you get money as well as recognition. ever yours Louis.

Duke's Avenue,
Chiswick, W4.

27 April 23

My Dear Theodore,

Your letter was most welcome and I am very glad to know that Mr. Knoff has taken 1,000 sheets of 'The Left Leg' and may set up the book later. He is a good man of business – an Arabian type of Jew – a person of some sensibility, though I think he loves money better than anything else.

If I can get a chance to write about your book I shall not miss it. ...

3 St. John's Street,
Oxford.

17 August 26

My Dear Theodore,

I particularly wish that we could be meeting now and talking about your work. Do you really feel that you can go by David Garnett's advice not to publish 'The Market Bell'? I did not know before Bernie told me that you think that unpublished book your best – very likely it is – for I can't believe that David Garnett is a better judge of your work than you are yourself. He has written well, but that doesn't mean that he can judge well: in fact considering his 'Sailor's Return' which showed in some ways the influence of your writing, I think he must be susceptible to just what are not the strongest and most distinctive qualities in you. My feeling is that he may be so bad a judge that your best work would seem to him your worst – I think I am a much better critic than this David Garnett.

I don't ask you to send me the Mss of 'The Market Bell' because it is probably the only fair copy that you have, and I should be very nervous about it getting lost in the post, or my bringing it myself. But I wonder if you would let me read it when we next meet? And why not reconsider this matter of not publishing it? As

you are taking a rest from writing now, it would be very good thing to publish this book, so as not to leave too long an interval.

I hope you do not continue to be discouraged about your writing. You have no need to be. There is no doubt that your repute stands high and it is widely spread everywhere except among the mob. ever from Louis.

26 Primrose Hill Road,
NW3

1st February 1934

My Dear Theodore,

Thank you for your kind letter. I meant to have written when I sent the book, but I have been rather occupied these last days. I hope you will not feel that either you or your family have been badly treated in this 'Swan's Milk' Llewelyn writes to me of his 'outraged family'. I do not think you will agree, and I hope you will not. But I should be glad if you could reassure me. Llewelyn has written words of praise on the wrapper of the book – I will send you a copy of this when it is ready – and he has alluded there to my 'malicious misrepresentation' of his brother John, and made it clear that he doesn't like things I said about his family. The joke was that Fabers left all that out, but they're now printing new wrappers with all of it in. That was why I didn't send you the old wrapper. Lulu will no doubt tell you about this.

I cannot think you will be outraged. It would be very dull to say nothing but praise of people, to be always cautious and safe about them; it would be dully untrue. No one would believe it either.

Love from us both Yours ever Louis.

Sylvan Press Limited
24 Museum Street
LondonWC1

27 May 1947

Louis Marlow Esq.
17 St Leonards Terrace,
London SW3

Dear Sir

Living Writers
A Collection of Twelve Talks Broadcast by the B.B.C.
Edited by Mr. G. H. Phelps

It gives me much pleasure to inform you that our preparations for the publication of the above, incorporating your broadcast talk on T. F. Powys are well in hand, and there is every hope that the volume will be ready during the coming summer.

We understand from Mr. Phelps that he has received your permission for the

inclusion of the talk in the above volume, and that direct arrangements have been made between him and yourself concerning the fee payable to you in respect of publication.

We beg to remain, Dear Sir,
Yours faithfully
For Sylvan Press Ltd.
(signed) Charles Rosher, Managing Director

The following postscript is added by Louis Wilkinson:

My Dear Theodore, Mr. Phelps seemed to think that this volume would be very much delayed or not appear at all. So I'm glad to have this letter this morning. I don't want it back of course. Thank you for sending me the announcement of 'God's Eyes A-Twinkle' – I hope it will sell many copies and I know I shall read it with a great deal of pleasure. I wish I liked the title better – I feel sure you did not invent it. ...

With much love etc. Louis

## *Tetsuo Akiyama (1910–1998)*

I have recently learned of the death of Tetsuo Akiyama, a poet and professor of English Literature who became a friend of John Cowper Powys in the last years of the latter's life. Among his published works were a study of English epic poetry and several volumes of poems.

His correspondence with John Cowper began in 1958 when he sent him a copy of that year's *Rikkyo Review*, a journal published by St Paul's (Rikkyo) University in Tokyo, which contained an essay Akiyama had written called 'J. C. Powys and His Nature Cult'. The article was in Japanese but had a two-page synopsis in English, which concluded with this passage:

> As the world becomes mechanised and man becomes more and more de-humanised, so the nostalgia for nature will tend to be more strongly felt among people, since they are born of mother-earth. A new type of Rousseau is needed today. On that account it seems that the advent of a Powysian cult will be but a question of time.

Powys wrote in response on 1st February 1958 in the first of his letters to Akiyama: 'One observation in this article & towards the end of it is to me specially exciting & pleasing, namely the introduction of Rousseau. Didn't Rousseau come from Geneva? Well! My father's mother came from Geneva, and I have now got several cousins in Geneva who bear her name before she married my grandfather ... Her name was Moilliet and I find myself often wondering whether this M. Mollet who is one of the chief statesmen in France today may not have the

same ancestors as my Moilliet relatives in Geneva!' [A reference of more than passing interest to myself, since my mother was a Mollet].

Much of the content of John Cowper's letters to Akiyama is, of course, similar to those written to other correspondents during these years. But Akiyama's first impressions on receiving this letter from Powys are clear from John Cowper's next: 'My dear Professor, This wondrous letter of yours does make me feel so so proud! Just think of your liking my handwriting! You are the only person in the world who has ever said that to me!' Akiyama's letters are probably no longer extant, but Powys's often suggest their content:

> what you say about this rough and rude and often vulgar urbanisation of beautiful country is true over here too. I've just seen in one of our Sunday papers here a picture of a little village in Norfolk where some of my Mother's family lived and of which I have heard my Aunts speak from childhood – a perfectly lovely little medieval village in danger of being completely destroyed – and for what purpose my friend? To make a road! It's almost comical it's so outrageous! I love your description of the trees you remember from childhood.

In other letters Powys expressed gratitude and admiration for his other Japanese friend, Ichiro Hara. Hara claimed not to have read Powys's novels, being more interested in his philosophical works, bur Akiyama clearly enjoyed them all – *In Spite Of*, *The Art of Happiness*, *Up and Out*, *All or Nothing*, *A Glastonbury Romance*. Powys recommended him to read Llewelyn's *Love and Death* and Akiyama must have got hold of it quickly, for John Cowper begins his next letter, 'My dear Friend, for anyone who can appreciate and follow Llewelyn's *Love and Death* and my *Glastonbury Romance* as you do is indeed a real friend to us both ...'

Akiyama sent Powys photos of himself, his house, and his son, and also pictures of places in Japan, providing explanations of their geography and history. 'I have learnt a great deal from all this trouble you have taken', Powys wrote,

> I do indeed learn from these pictures what a wonderful and magical country Japan is. I remember in my youth long ago when there was a war between Japan and Russia how strongly I took the side of Japan. That was in the days of the Czars and before the word Soviet had ever been used! I can even remember composing a poem in favour of Japan against that old Czaristic Russia!'

Akiyama wrote another essay called 'The Elementalist Faith of J. C. Powys' published in Hara's journal *Sozo* in June 1959. This drew more expressions of pride from John Cowper, who was also pleased that Akiyama liked the black and white feather he had sent him. When Hara visited Powys in the summer of 1961 he brought with him two prints from Akiyama as gifts – a Hokusai and an Utamaro. Powys replied with gratitude and delight, and looked forward to the day that

Akiyama himself could visit. His last letter written in July 1961 expressed his pleasure in Akiyama's description of his travels around Japan.

Akiyama determined to make that visit, and did so in the autumn of 1962, the 90-year-old John Cowper bed-ridden with 'Asian Flu' but with Phyllis Playter in caring attendance. Akiyama was later to write that she seemed to him a sort of Dorothy Wordsworth to John Cowper's William. He perhaps has claims to be the last of John Cowper's overseas admirers to see him before his death, and he touched on his visit in an essay called 'My Chance Encounter with John Cowper Powys' published in 1980 in an issue of *Juvenilia* the journal of Atomigakuen Women's University.

I first met Tetsuo Akiyama – or 'Willie' as he liked to be called – in 1994 by arrangement in a hotel restaurant in Tokyo. He wrote to me shortly thereafter: 'I remember we had a happy time at the Hotel Metropolitan. Let's get together sometime again, if it makes you feel alright.' It did, and when we met again he generously gave me the letters Powys had written to him. That delight in John Cowper's handwriting was genuine, for he wrote to me later about it, describing it as 'free and picturesque with no trace of artifice.' In his retirement and own old age, Akiyama enjoyed himself as much as John Cowper, despite a heart problem, and wrote in 1966, 'As for myself, every day is Sunday. Such a condition as mine reminds me of 'The Superannuated Man' by Charles Lamb. To kill time yesterday, I watched Chaplin's *City Lights* and *Modern Times* again, recalling that I enjoyed them more than 60 years ago.'

In that year, too, he wrote that he was reading *In Spite Of* again, and in another letter lamented that Powys was not more widely known or appreciated in Japan:

> After Hara's death, JCP's works have scarcely been talked about in Japan. It seems to me that his attractive charm, originated in the philosophy of life making much of solitude, does not always appeal to the temperament of the Japanese people who are apt to be gregarious all the time.

I did not hear from him for a while, and then early in 1998 he wrote:

> Allow me to apologise for my long silence. To tell the truth I was in hospital last January for three weeks on account of heart disease. If I were much younger, it would be possible for me to undergo a bypass operation. As it is, I am taking good care of myself before anything else. Happily I've got almost well.

Well enough, it seemed, to set off on his travels again with his wife. We had hoped to meet up again later in the year, but there came no response to a letter of mine in the summer, and shortly thereafter I learned he had died on 10th April from heart failure, brought on by that quintessential Powysian activity – walking.

Willie Akiyama was a short and sprightly man, humorous and self-deprecating. I regret not having seen more of him. But it was a privilege to have met him at all and to share his company.

**Anthony Head**

Arjen Mulder donated to the collection *De Kunst Van Het Oud Worden*, translated by N. Perk-Perk, Den Haag: Ad. M.C. Stok, n.d. Any further information about this publisher and the possible date of translation would be welcomed. Arjen and Marius Buning were both at the August Conference. Perhaps we should have a one day meeting in Amsterdam – we now have a number of members living in the Netherlands.

Thanks also to Mrs Susan Ellis, Chickerell, who has donated Powys books and journals to the Society to be used to forward the work of the Collection.

Working on the Collection is a slow, painstaking job, and often a rather lonely one. But occasionally something unexpected turns up which makes it all almost worthwhile. I have been working at the JCP manuscripts, checking to make sure they are in order before re-housing them and keying in information such as number of pages, noting if the manuscript differs from the published version, the physical condition of the manuscript, etc. Last month I checked a manuscript which Mr Bissell had labelled 'early version of introduction to *Wood and Stone*'. This is apparently what it is, but Powys has not given it a title, and only the first sentence bears much similarity to the published introduction. Dating such things is almost impossible, but raises interesting questions in the mind.

More recently I have been re-housing a manuscript which JCP did give a title to – 'My Welsh Home'. I have not finished sorting it out, but it must be a long essay which eventually was chopped to become two essays in *Obstinate Cymric* entitled 'My Welsh Home' and 'Wales and America'. I have not discovered who put together *Obstinate Cymric* and would welcome any enlightenment about this. However, the manuscript essay we have in the Collection has more in it about America and about Corwen than appears in the two essays. Further, as one long essay it holds together much better than the two separate published ones.

This manuscript is written on different bits of paper, including the reverse pages of some of the typescript of 'Farewell America'. The Collection does not have either the typescript or the manuscript of 'Farewell', so this was an intriguing find. Much more exciting was the discovery that two pages of the manuscript were written on the back of an almost complete letter from Blundell, Baker & Co, dated 4th December 1934 (see back cover). Those of you who read *The Dorset Year* will know who they are and that this was the period of the Glastonbury libel. If we look at JCP's diary entry for 5th December 1934 we read 'A letter from "B&B" "Blundering and Bakering" in their gentlemanly manner ... It is clear that S. & S. are being sued & it is clear that what they have to pay can legally be got out of the Author. So there you are!' The editors of *The Dorset Year* had deduced this outcome from other evidence, but here is the very letter! Such are the small pleasures of a curator.

**Morine Krissdóttir**