Editorial

Two successful Powys events to report again, with a variety of views of Llangollen and its surrounding delights. It seemed appropriate after our visit to JCP territory, to reprint 'The Ridge' – which among other things is a good description of a hill-walk in autumn. Three brothers writing in one book in praise of another writer can't have happened that often, and it's interesting to compare what each Powys saw in Conrad, and what this says about themselves – TFP's views are perhaps the most revealing. A postscript to the last *Newsletter*'s 'Louis and *Morwyn*', with a brotherly letter to JCP from Llewelyn; and an original view of *Mr. Weston* from Australia ... The covers may be interpreted as symbolic of the various ways of capturing the Powyses in print. The photograph below, of the remains of Dinas Brân, could be seen as a monument – to History? – sculpted by Time.

KK

Dinas Brân (photo: Anna Pawelko).

ON OTHER PAGES

Minutes of the of the Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society, held at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen, 11 a.m., 31 August 2003

1 **Present**: The Officers and about 30 members of the society. A number of members sent their apologies for absence from the conference; these included Peter Tait, Headmaster of Sherborne Prep, who we hope will be hosting our next Conference, and John Hodgson, both of whom were booked to be there but were unavoidably prevented. Good wishes were also sent from Raymond Cox, Leslie Booth, Chris Gostick, Tony Head and Griffin Beale.

2 **Minutes of the 2002 AGM** were published in the November 2002 *Newsletter* and there were no matters arising.

3 **Report of the Hon. Secretary**

The committee has met four times in the past year – on 26 October, 1 March, 5 July and two days ago, on 29 August. We usually meet in London, courtesy of Tim and Judith Hyman (for whom thanks are here due). Summaries of the agendas and matters arising at these meetings have been included in *Newsletters* 48 and 49; official minutes are available on request. A discussion group on T. F. Powys was held in June; and Llewelyn's birthday was once again celebrated at East Chaldon on 13th August, with over 20 people present. 45 members, with guests, signed up for the present Conference which I think can be counted another notable success.

As our published accounts show, we are in a reasonably healthy position, and have some scope for reinvesting our funds into other ventures which accord with our stated charitable purpose of 'promoting public education and awareness' of the life and works of the Powys brothers. It was one of our main aims last year to revitalise our **publishing activity** by putting out this new collection of Llewelyn Powys's essays, *Wessex Memories*. As editor of this I hope it is appropriate for me to say how pleased I am with the result. It was a book long in the offing, that went though many reincarnations, going back to the 1980s (when it was first discussed with John Sansom of The Redcliffe Press, with illustrations suggested by the engraver George Tute: at one point I was offered an advance of over £400 – which unfortunately never materialised.) I hope this will be the start of a series of printing ventures involving unpublished or unknown texts by members of the family, of which there is still a large amount in the various archives (as I know from my visit to Texas).

As in previous years the organisation of the **Annual Conference** has taken up a fair amount of the officers' time, with a programme to put together and frequent liaising with the Hand Hotel. We have also been forward-planning for the 2004 conference, which looks set for Sherborne at the end of August 2004. I would like to thank all those involved in this year's conference – particularly Louise de Bruin, Richard Graves, Kate Kavanagh and Chris Wilkinson, and the manager of

the Hotel, Niall Moules and his staff, for their consideration and hospitality.

A query was raised last year about our **membership numbers**, and I gave a figure which included members who were still on our books but not currently paid up; a clearer picture emerged later in the year. Our membership numbers have gone down, partly due to resignations (which might be a shake-out from past difficulties, although generally the explanatory letters I have received as secretary state that this is not the case), but also because our age-base is high. Consequently through altered circumstances and death, there is a disproportionate number who fall off through reasons to do specifically with age. The fully paid-up membership now stands at just over 290. It is a perennial fact that as a society we still have to break through that younger generation barrier, and at present I can think of no easy answer to that.

The Society's remit is to promote education and awareness of the three Powys brothers as well as the creative works of other members of the family. The emphasis over the years has been on John Cowper Powys, and this is only right in consideration of his stature as a writer as well as the volume of his output. But we want to give room to the other brothers too, and consequently, led by David Gervais, the Committee organised a **T. F. Powys Day** on 14 June 2003 at the Dorset County Museum, concentrating on the *Fables*. (See the previous *Newsletter*, no 49.) This was attended by thirteen members, including our former Chairman, John Williams, who contributed some sparkling and for me, revealing, insights into TFP's method. The day was altogether delightful and continued into the evening at Mappowder, where of course Theodore lived and is buried.

We were grateful for the hospitality of The **Dorset County Museum** (with tea urn to the fore) for the TFP meeting, but it was clear that there is a real problem of funding and staffing at the Museum, with implications for our own collection there. On this occasion for example, although we were able to admire the 'Powys Room' upstairs, with our portraits and display case, there was no means of arranging access to look at the archive room next door. One felt rather like Howard Carter standing outside the tomb of Tutankamun, the treasure hoard inaccessible only a few feet away. The whole question of the position of the society's collection at Dorchester has of course concerned the current committee (and previous committees) for some time, and we hope for discussion on this issue with the new Director at the DCM, Judy Lindsay.

A resolution at the last AGM was the election of our **new Treasurer**, and I would like to make mention of Michael French's apparently effortless management of the Society's finances since then. We are grateful too that Stephen Powys Marks continues as Publications Manager, and attends meetings in that capacity. We are also pleased to announce that Professor J. Lawrence Mitchell, whom we saw at last year's Conference, has agreed to carry on as editor of the *Journal* for the time being. This was proposed and seconded by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

But all these positions are voluntary and only for a limited time. The Society must be aware that the official posts are up for re-election each year, and all members are eligible to come on the Committee through the usual channels, and would be welcomed to do so. It is good to report that there have already been some volunteers who have been co-opted to the Committee until the next elections, but there will still be vacancies for Officers next year, as several of the present team would like to retire. Committee work is not hard, and the Officers' duties tend to be intensive for short spurts of time during the year. It is also fun when a Committee is working together towards a common goal and with similar minds. I myself feel it a privilege and honour to hold the position of Secretary for this period in the Society's history, but I will be looking to pass this mantle on to another member of the society in August 2004.

In the last *Newsletter* Sonia Lewis had a go at characterising our Committee. What emerges for me is a very Powysian characteristic – unworldliness mixed with unabashed openness. It reminds me of something Burton Rascoe said of Llewelyn Powys, whose *Verdict of Bridlegoose* was considered too candid for his sensitive American audience: 'Simplicity of mind is the only grave fault that Mr Powys can rightly be accused of ... It is a fault for which I have the greatest sympathy.'

4 Report of the Hon. Treasurer

This was published in the July 2003 *Newsletter*. Michael French pointed out some of the exceptional reasons that the society was in good financial health. This included the profits from last year's Conference, and the moneys from sale of books. He said that he expected the account to be roughly balanced after the publication of *Wessex Memories*. Members were urged to encourage new people to join, as the income depended on a sound subscription base. Michael thanked Stephen Powys Marks for his help on his taking over the Treasurer's role.

5 Report of the Chairman.

This was published in the July 2003 *Newsletter*. Richard Graves added that he felt encouraged that the last two years had had a stabilising effect on the Society, and that now he felt it was in good heart and ready to move on. He announced his intention to remain as Chairman for one more year. Sonia Lewis was thanked for her 3 years on the committee, and Louise de Bruin and Peter Foss were thanked for their organisation of the Conference. Chris Wilkinson was thanked for his splendid production the previous evening. Richard Graves expressed particular appreciation for the President, Glen Cavaliero, being present.

6 Election of Officers and Committee Members for 2003–4. This was duly noted as follows: **Chairman**: Richard Perceval Graves; **Vice-Chairman**: David Goodway; **Hon. Secretary**: Peter Foss; **Hon. Treasurer**: Michael French; **Committee**: David Gervais, Timothy Hyman, Kate Kavanagh, Jeff Kwintner, John Powys. There being two remaining vacancies on the Committee, Lorna Fisher (a new member) and Michael Scaife D'Ingerthorpe (a seasoned member)

were **co-opted** to serve: we offer them a warm welcome.

7 Appointment of **Hon. Auditor**. Michael French had written to J. S. Allen, and it was accepted that he was willing to continue to audit the accounts.

8 Date and Location of **2004 Conference**. This is to be held at Sherborne School, with both schools participating, during the last weekend of August (this is Bank Holiday weekend; the only time that could be arranged). Peter Foss reported that the Headmaster of the Prep. School was enthusiastic for us to be there, and had assured us that the accommodation was of Millfield standard or above. The main venue would be the medieval hall at the centre of the school complex. It was hoped the Conference would have beneficial spin-off effects both for the School and the Society.

9. **AOB**. Belinda Humfrey congratulated the Committee on their achievements but said that she was still appalled that **JCP's books** were still so hard to get hold of. She added that such a major novelist should be supported by more than 290 members! Louise de Bruin pointed out that major publishers (such as Penguin) had published Powys in recent years but some had already been remaindered. Tordis Marks remarked that **Littleton Powys** was an interesting person in his own right and that a slot should be allowed for him at the Sherborne Conference. Susan Rands asked about the difficulties of access at the **Dorset County Museum**, to which Richard Graves replied that it was important for the Officers to meet with the new Director, Judy Lindsay, as soon as feasible. David Gervais pointed out some of the drawbacks there, but Kate Kavanagh reminded us that there is still a plus side too, such as the collection's safe-keeping in its special room – and that after all it *is* (so far as we know) still accessible, even if the circumstances aren't as satisfactory as was previously hoped. The Secretary reiterated that he had found problems of access to the Collection and communication with the Museum, and that there were also questions of archival-quality care. Graham Carey reminded us of his suggestion of a **book of photographs** of the Powyses, an idea generally welcomed, if it could be got off the ground. Hiroko Keith asked about the position of students and **non-members at the Conference**, and it was stated that non-members were very welcome as guests or partners of members (and indeed there were a number here already). Richard Graves as Chairman thanked everyone for their questions and concerns, and asked for **any further queries** or matters to be e-mailed to him. Louise de Bruin as Organiser asked who might like to **return to Llangollen** in two years' time, and by a show of hands there was enthusiasm for the idea, as this year's Conference was thought to have been a great success.

The meeting closed at 12 noon, after which there was a discussion about whether JCP's Welsh or Wessex novels were superior – unsurprisingly, with no clear-cut conclusions, though it was felt that one had led on to the other, and that their world-views were sufficiently different not to compete.

PJF

Meeting with Dorset County Museum Director
Volunteer Requested

As most members will know, the Powys Society's Collection of Powys books, manuscripts and other items is on long-term loan to the Dorset County Museum (the DCM). The terms of this loan (drawn up by a previous Committee) are immutable for a number of years, but your current Committee feels that it is important to maintain a regular dialogue with the DCM so that the DCM and the Society can work together as effectively as possible in the interests of providing and maintaining the best possible access to the Collection.

Our Chairman Richard Perceval Graves and our Secretary Peter Foss therefore travelled to Dorchester on 16 October 2003 for a valuable meeting with Judy Lindsay, the new Director of the Dorset County Museum.

The somewhat grandiose plans of the previous Director having turned out to be impracticable, we were delighted to find that although Judy Lindsay has many interesting plans for the future, she also has her feet firmly on the ground – which makes her that rare combination, a pragmatist with vision.

In the short term no funds are available for a permanent Curator in charge of the various MSS Collections at the DCM, and Judy relies heavily (for providing access to our own Collection and for cataloguing the Collection) on the services of an immensely valuable volunteer who happens to be not only a current member of the Society but also our former Chairman Morine Krissdóttir (MK), to whose biography of JCP we are all much looking forward.

However, MK is a busy woman, and the Director agreed that it would be extremely helpful if the Society could find a second volunteer preferably living a little closer to the DCM who could also be a key-holder and who would be prepared to open the Collection on a regular basis for scholars and members of the Society.

A future volunteer would be working directly for the DCM but would clearly need to liaise closely with MK so long as MK continues with her own voluntary duties in connection with the Collection. The volunteer would need above all to be prepared to get to know the Collection well enough to be able to locate documents and other material for visitors to the Collection.

RPG

Conference Videos

Videos of events at this year's Conference (four talks and the Entertainment) are once again available, sponsored by the kindness of Jeff Kwintner, and can be ordered at £9.95 incl. p+p — enquiries to the Hon. Treasurer, Michael French (address inside front cover).

Committee news

The Committee held its usual short meeting just before the Conference. **Our President** Glen Cavaliero exercised his Statutory Right to be present and our Chairman Richard Graves was very pleased to welcome him. We were also very happy to see **Sonia Lewis** (who is leaving the committee) arriving at the last minute, despite fears that she couldn't make it. Peter Foss (secretary) and Louise de Bruin (organiser) had arrived the day before to ensure arrangements. There were some explanations of terms used in the accounts, and a **caution** from Michael French (Treasurer) that this year's extra-large *Journal* was also extra expensive. We admired the richly varied ***Journal,*** ranging from eighteenth-century Powys ancestry to a 'roman a clef' by Gladys Ficke (wife of Arthur, JCP's friend in upstate NY). The membership numbers are slightly down, largely due to old age. Several possible **new Committee members** have been identified and to keep the approved numbers it was agreed to co-opt in advance of the next electoral process. Arrangements for next year's Conference at **Sherborne** are in hand but are still fluid and open to suggestions. Peter Tait the headmaster of Sherborne Prep (a successor to Littleton Powys) is enthusiastic, and hopes to involve people from the school. The choice of the August Bank Holiday date (Friday to Sunday) doesn't suit everyone but is the only one mutually convenient. Ideas are sought for subjects for **future discussion meetings** like the one on TFP's *Fables* last June. Arundel in Sussex has been suggested as a possible place, but we do also want to keep up our connection with Dorchester. David Gervais agreed to read a TFP story before dinner on Saturday, to **commemorate the 50 years since TFP's death**.

Another meeting was held on 1st November in London. Thanks were expressed to everyone for helping to make the Llangollen Conference such a happy one. It was decided to offer videos for sale as before; the one of the Entertainment thought likely to be the most requested. Arrangements for the next Conference at Sherborne were outlined, with likely costs and options (e.g., for one sit-down meal). This followed a caution from the Treasurer that although this year's Conference had broken even, the gap between income and expenditure was narrowing, and the Society should start thinking either of some economies (e.g. in the size of our periodicals) or the possibilities of raising fees. There was no consensus on these possible choices, which will need further discussion. Peter Foss reported considerable success in selling *Wessex Memories* to bookshops and other outlets around Dorchester, and further possibilities were put forward for the rest of the stock. It was decided to re-join the Association of Literary Societies. We discussed Richard's report of meeting the new director at the Dorchester Museum, with hopes of further voluntary help coming forward. The Treasurer also drew attention to the need for proper insurance cover: a concern prompted by his vision (as Gerald Brenan) during *Lost to the Common*

World, of Alexandra Btesh (as Gamel Woolsey) perched on a chair on a table. Stephen Powys Marks is still looking for storage space for the publications in the event of his moving. David Gervais again asked for suggestions of a Powys book (possibly a JCP *chapter*) as a subject for another discussion group, which he offered to chair.

Other news

David Goodway (our vice-Chairman) will be giving a talk on '**The One Powys and the Many: John Cowper Powys and his Siblings**' to the **York Bibliographical Society** on **Wednesday, 14th January 2004**. The meeting will be held in the Fresco Room, **Elmbank Hotel, The Mount, York**, beginning at **8pm**. All enquiries should be directed to the Hon. Secretary of the Y.B.S., Chris Weston, telephone 01904 708570.

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The latest **Lettre Powysienne** (no 6, bilingual) contains essays on the theme of the Feminine in JCP's writings, with a tribute to Gertrude Powys by the Editor Jacqueline Peltier who also writes on JCP's 'Elementalism', which ties in well with JCP's poem 'The Ridge' (reprinted in this *Newsletter*).

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The window commissioned by the **Hardy Society,** celebrating Hardy's Cornish poems and engraved by Simon Whistler, was dedicated in July. Several Powys Society members responded to the appeal for this, for which the Hardy Society sends many thanks.

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Professor W. J. Keith has donated his two **'aids to the reading of *Porius*'** to the Powys Collection (see page 43).

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Jean-Paul de Waegenaere has compiled an anthology of **botanical references** in JCP's books. 'The fascinating thing was not only the extent of the list, but the way in which JCP integrated these flowers, etc., in his narration, frequently giving them an essential role in the creation of ambience or in the understanding of the characters' psychology.' He would be glad to hear from anyone interested in this subject. He also has a special interest in the way these botanical names – and especially their country names like 'Traveller's Joy' (Bryony? Old-Man's Beard?) – have been rendered in French translations. His address is: Donderveldstraat 57, 1651 Lot, Belgium.

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Timothy Hyman's book, *Sienese Painting, The Art of a City-Republic 1278–1477*, is published by Thames and Hudson.

Llewelyn's Birthday, 13th August 2003

The Llewelyn celebration continues as a most successful and well-loved event, this year the largest gathering ever in its ten years, with twenty-two people from near and far enjoying the fabulous weather. John Batten gave the toast to Llewelyn's memory over lunch at The Sailor's Return. Eighteen people walked to the stone, where Chris Gostick gave a moving reading from *Earth Memories.* Leslie Harrison, a loyal friend of The Powys Society who died just a year before, was also especially remembered, and greatly missed. Janet Pollock once again welcomed all the group at Chydyok with much-appreciated refreshments, while she and Stephen Powys Marks reminisced about the Powys family, and childhood holidays spent with Gertrude and Katie, sitting round the table in that very room. It was a moving and memorable experience for everyone, and perhaps the best 'birthday party' (Llewelyn's 119th) ever. A fitting tribute to a literary hero, and one that surely will continue for years to come.

No human being should ever wake without looking at the sun with grateful recognition of the liberty of another day; nor give himself to sleep without casting his mind, like a merlin, into the gulfs between the furthest stars. We are all of us grossly constituted. To listen for a moment to the wind as it stirs the leaves of our garden trees, and to realise that this murmur was troubling earth vegetation before men were, and will be troubling it when they have gone, is to take knowledge of the breath of the infinite. It is a mystery, a sign for everyone, this movement of the planet's atmosphere. It dislodges the dust in the belfry where the owl stares and the loose board rattles. The nettles grouped by the farmyard wall sway to it, and in wide open spaces its music is not lost. No message comes

through our senses but is full of worship — the taste of brown bread and red wine, the smell of a field of dazzling charlock, the sight of swallows sweeping back and forth over the tilted roof of a barn, the cool fair flesh of a young girl's body, the liquid song of a blackbird in the white twilight of the longest day.

from Natural Happiness in Llewelyn Powys s *Earth Memories* (1930)

report by Neil Lee-Atkin, and photograph by Anna Pawelko

The Conference 2003 at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen, 29th–31st August

Llangollen proved a popular choice, for what everyone seems to agree was a very happy Conference. The weather helped – brilliant as in 1936 (see Editorial in the last *Newsletter*). The speakers were all differently interesting, the Entertainment a triumph, and goodwill reigned. Chris Wilkinson's *Lost to the Common World* cleverly distilled the Alyse–Llewelyn–Gamel triangle (with JCP and Gerald Brenan on the sidelines) into a potent brew, with Richard Graves reading as Llewelyn, visitors Pat Roberts (Alyse) and Alexandra Btesh (Gamel), Michael French (Gerald Brenan) and Glen Cavaliero (JCP). Even those who were familiar with this material, and still more those who weren't, were affected by this insoluble situation.

The Hand Hotel was less remodelled than predicted but all the better for that – clearly a thriving concern and a centre for lively local social life (senior karaoke, jazz and general weekend merriment in the bar). The view of Dinas Brân from the dining room rivalled last year's of Glastonbury Tor. The food was varied and lavish, served at tables by a bright young international staff; and (after the first lecture with explosive noises off from the service door) the Society took over a most suitable non-remodelled ballroom. The bedrooms (though still with no lift) were as comfortable as they had looked on previous inspection: intrusive-streetlight-free, outside-extractor-fan-free (rare qualities now in any hotel), and most of them with views over river and mountain, or to the neighbouring churchyard with the clock tactfully silenced till 6am – at which time several of us were roused by the dragon-roars of hot-air balloons drifting past at chimney-height in the early sun. The busy town was (for this visitor) a delight: souvenir shops for the connoisseur, a good bookshop and an enormous second-hand one, the church with its carved roof and vicar in Merlin guise, the canal and riverside walks, the house of the Ladies, and a lot of people enjoying themselves. Powys people climbed to Dinas Brân; walked to Valle Crucis; visited Cae Coed in Corwen; went to Llangar Church with its seat dedicated to JCP and the meadows beside the Dee where he used to walk.

Other personal views follow. **KK**

Janet Fouli

Llangollen is a picturesque village, though during the weekend of the Conference it was full of ice-cream-licking tourists and traffic jams. I should have preferred a quieter weekend. However, the Hand Hotel made us welcome while the Dee ran below and the ruins of Dinas Brân stood above: we were on Powys territory.

One always feels welcome at Powys conferences, and this one was no exception. I missed several absent faces, but was glad to see others that I knew, and made new friends. Hiroko Keith showed me the beautiful sketches she had made while on holiday in Tunisia; Graham Carey gave me a copy of his paper 'World Out of Control and the Inevitable Revolution' – a thoughtful document that deserves a wide circulation. Richard Perceval Graves told of the efficiency of 'The Lotus Eaters' in getting his children to sleep. On the first evening we emerged from the talk to find a local choir in the bar, sitting at the tables with their drinks before them and singing in harmony. They knew their songs by heart and had a large repertoire. Their presence provided some of the Welshness of our weekend, and their music was an unexpected but much appreciated addition.

I enjoyed all the talks. Dr David Goodway's talk was based on his editing of the correspondence between JCP and Emma Goldman (this will be published by Cecil Woolf, hopefully soon – next year?). JCP's idealism and Manicheism, presented here, would be present again in the discussion of his novels *A Glastonbury Romance* (by Professor Harald Fawkner), *Owen Glendower* (Professor Charles Lock) and *Porius* (Professor W. J. Keith). The speakers each chose a topic that organized the mass of their chosen book into a clear perspective. Professor Lock exposed the 'narrative vandalism' of *Owen Glendower.* I was struck by his comment that Rhisiart is often a deaf narrator. Professor Keith's talk, on 'magical mixings up' and the literary echoes present in *Porius,* was fascinating. I look forward to reading each talk when it is published.

David Gervais's excellent reading of 'Mock's Curse' represented Theodore; and Llewelyn's love affair with Gamel Woolsey was brought to life by an 'entertainment' devised by Chris Wilkinson. This was performed on Saturday evening and was for me the climax of the Conference. The texts, by Llewelyn, Gamel, Alyse, JCP and Gerald Brenan, were very well chosen and the readers gave a most convincing rendering. I am still haunted by the expression in Alyse's eyes in the photograph on the brochure.

Having to leave early on Sunday, I unfortunately missed both the AGM and the discussion. It seems to me that *all* JCP's books, the Wessex *and* the Welsh novels, are about 'Celtic voices, Celtic spaces'. I look forward to reading reports of the discussion.

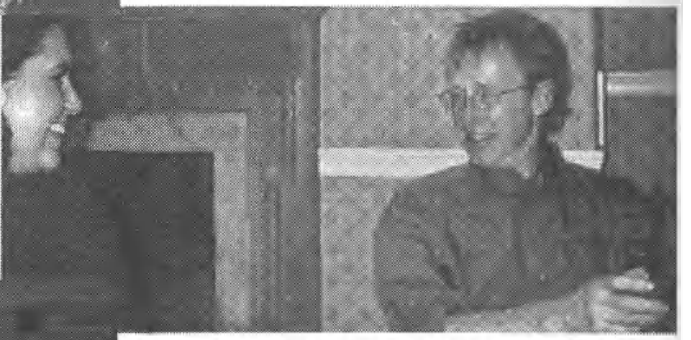
I left feeling richer for having been there, and having thoroughly enjoyed the whole weekend. I look forward to next year in Sherborne.

Janet Fouli lives in Tunisia, where her home just survived the recent floods. Her long-awaited edition of the Letters *of JCP and Dorothy Richardson is also in the Cecil Woolf pipeline.*

CONFERENCE 2003

Harald Fawkner, Cecily Hill

Stephen Powys Marks, Belinda Humfrey



Alexandra Btesh, Chris Wilkinson

Sonia Lewis, Lorna Fisher

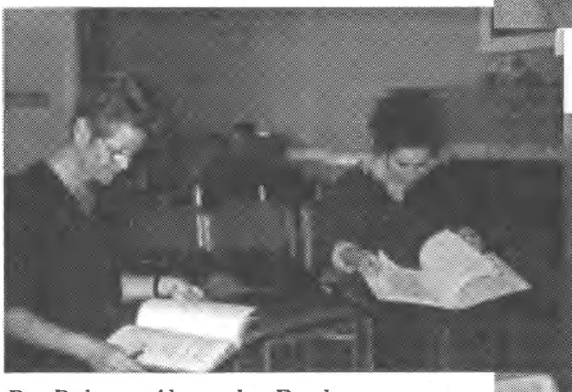
Richard Perceval Graves, Bill Keith

Peter Lazare, Robin Wood

Peter Foss, Louise de Bruin

Glen Cavaliero, Video cameraman

Charles Lock, Kate Kavanagh



Pat Roberts, Alexandra Btesh

David Goodway, Tim Hyman

David Thickbroom

This was my first conference and although I have been a member for six years I was not certain that I would attend this year. The venue was attractive. I know Llangollen and love North Wales and I live in Manchester. So it was easy to get to Llangollen. But something held me back.

The thought of being amongst a large number of people whom I did not know, amongst literary people too, held me back. But recently I was in Reid's Bookshop in Liverpool and was speaking to Gerard, one of the two brothers who run the shop. We were speaking about John Cowper and I found a real enthusiasm and delight arising in talking about John and his novels. Gerard loved the man but found the books daunting. My enthusiasm was kindled and within two days I had phoned Louise and had booked a place on the conference.

I have known and read JCP since 1977 and felt immediately that this man was writing for me. I first read *Wolf Solent* when I was walking the Offa's Dyke path and Llangollen is a staging post along this long distance walk.

Arriving was interesting. I looked around trying to spot who might be on the Conference. A man immersed in a book in the hotel foyer? A man with a bright, smiling face, sharp featured with very marked laughter lines? There was a sense of people knowing each other. There was warmth and some excitement. I realised that I felt at ease and welcomed by those I met and so could relax and enjoy whatever might happen.

The reception was intriguing and enticing with a brief conversation with a visiting retired professor with strong opinions about a certain edition of a JCP novel. Very literate conversation abounded with subjects and themes passing quickly and engaging conversations about writing. It was an atmosphere of excitement and great interest for me.

The talks were very distinctive with a feeling of shared knowledge of a history, of knowing what has come before. This seemed to lie behind, or underneath, the reception of the talk. Those giving the talks could assume a shared enthusiasm, a patience and a tolerance towards the subject.

At this Conference JCP's Welsh novels were the subject of the last two of the talks. His philosophical anarchism the subject of the first, and a strong critique of *A Glastonbury Romance* the subject of the second. These were the first live talks I have heard on JCP and they were in their very different ways stimulating and thought-provoking. I have the habit of making notes of most talks that I attend and doing this helps to fix them in my mind. I would have enjoyed more discussion and time to bring out the ideas in the talks.

But even so there was much intellectual stimulation. I was especially engaged by the connection I made between Dr Goodway's talk on philosophical anarchism and JCP'S 'mind tricks', and Professor Fawkner's talk on the lack of receptivity and responsiveness between the characters in *A Glastonbury Romance*

and the reduction of experience to that of sensations. I found a strong connection between these two very different talks. It seems there is much scope for further investigation into the differences and parallels between JCP's 'lay sermons', as Timothy Hyman described them, and his novels.

I was quite struck when Professor Fawkner began his talk by comparing the disruption of Christ's teaching as being something beyond the disruption portrayed in the experiences of the characters in *A Glastonbury Romance*. I felt a little intimidated by this potential energy portrayed in Christ's teaching in the talk. I am a Buddhist and have felt the Buddha's teaching to be deeply revolutionary and beyond the institutionalised teaching of the Christian church. This revelation of potential power in Christ's teaching was not what I expected. This was the most disturbing of the talks for me. It undermined some of my assumptions.

The talks by Charles Lock and W. J. Keith were full of delights and insights and revealed aspects of their respective novels which were very suggestive and creative. They deepened my appreciation of the novels and opened up new avenues of exploration.

The Saturday evening entertainment intrigued me. I did not know the story of the affair between Llewelyn and Gamel. It was an enjoyable and eventually quite moving evening. I overcame my impatience wth Llewelyn's obsession and began seeing him with JCP's brotherly tolerance. I really appreciated Richard Graves' extravagant, moist, even succulent, but very sympathetic portrayal of Llewellyn's

Air balloons from the hotel (photo: Anna Pawelko).

longings. Pat Roberts' restrained reading of Alyse's journal was memorable. I realised that my interest in JCP had been limited to his novels and I had little interest in the many friends and connections which he had. I realised there was a whole world of connections which could be explored. I am unsure whether I will explore it as it could be a distraction from the writing themselves. It is the writings which bring me to the Powyses and without the writings my interest would be much less.

The Conference was a very enjoyable experience both intellectually and personally. I feel that I have made new friendships and met a very positive group of people. One last point: I do feel that there should have been a book launch of Peter Foss's book of Llewelyn's essays. This is a lovely book and deserves celebration.

Lorna Fisher

The 2003 Powys Conference was in essence a social event yet it was the content of the lectures that most impressed me. All of the talks were very stimulating even from the point of view of someone who had not read everything by JCP, let alone even touched on the brothers. This did not matter. Themes emerged and were discussed that I could relate to my own reading.

Charles Lock explored the way that, through characters, JCP readers often mishear important things being told to them. I had already noticed this in *A Glastonbury Romance* where the important events in the characters' lives are mentioned in hindsight, as if the publishers had lost a chapter. JCP encourages readers to dwell on the seemingly insignificant minutiae, wherein the stories lie. Such extraordinary detail can not easily be applied to major events when a publisher's page-count is to be adhered to.

Professor Keith spoke on *Porius*, encouraging me to re-try the novel. This, like much of his writing, stands on the shoulders of the many great works that JCP had read. Indeed his genius as a writer was confirmed by the lectures as much as by the variety of people the Conference had attracted.

Conference delegates varied in their reading experience and this made for an extremely open and friendly atmosphere. Those of us new to the Conference quickly felt very at home in the crowd and comments or questions of any type were felt to add to the value of the discussions.

I think it is fair to say we were all mesmerised by the short story by T. F. Powys about the mental disintegration of a man reflected in the dismantling of his home. The tone of David Gervais's reading was just right, echoing the eerie simplicity of the fable.

The weekend benefited from beautiful sunshine, enabling many of us to enjoy the views from Dinas Brân above Llangollen. I had not realised *en route* to Llangollen, that this was the setting for the opening of *Owen Glendower*. When I returned home, I reread the passage with greater appreciation. I am sure there

will be more places to visit around Sherborne, which will bring alive the Powys landscapes.

Lorna Fisher, who has been co-opted as a new member of the Committee, is an in-house librarian for a law firm in Bristol. She was introduced to JCP by an article by Margaret Drabble in The Daily Telegraph *in 1999, and joined the Society on the strength of the website and its advertisement for the Conference. She has so far been reading the Wessex novels, as she lives in the West Country herself, and intends to turn to the Welsh ones in due course.*

Robin Wood

At long last the Powys Society returned to Wales! For so long there seemed to be little interest in the idea and then the 2001 Conference was sadly cancelled.

Llangollen was very appropriate of course, not only because it is so close to Corwen, but because it stands beneath the ruined fortifications of Dinas Brân, associated by John Cowper Powys with one of the ancient Welsh gods, who 'became either saints or devils in the Christian era'. Llangollen is also within an hour, or so's, walk from the ruins of the Cistercian monastery, Abbey Crucis, where Powys began *Owen Glendower* in April 1937, and of which, in 'Wales and America', he said, 'never — not even at Glastonbury — have I felt the spirit of what Spengler would call the Spring-time of our Faustian Culture as powerfully as in this holy ground.' On Saturday afternoon, most members of the Society visited Corwen, and the nearby beautiful riverside church of Llangar, a regular destination for JCP's walks.

This year's Conference was a clear success, with beautiful weather, good food and accommodation, along with stimulating papers and conversations. The Hand Hotel, in the centre of town, right next to the River Dee, was a good choice, and the manager and staff made us very welcome. Louis de Bruin, the Conference organizer, is to be congratulated, along with Peter Foss and the rest of the Committee, as are also the previous Committee of the Society, for the initial idea, and Chris Gostick for originally researching the venue. Indeed things went so well that there are plans to return to Llangollen in 2005. There was, however, perhaps a little false advertising in the Conference's title, 'Cymric Spaces', as there was less attention to John Cowper Powys, Wales and his Welsh novels, than I had expected; but the fact that Jeremy Hooker was unable to participate no doubt helped to create an imbalance. That said, David Goodway provided a stimulating beginning to the Conference with his paper on John Cowper Powys, Emma Goldman and anarchism. I recognize the difficulties faced by the organizers of these conferences and the amount of hard work that goes into making them successful! The other speakers – Harald Fawkner from Sweden, Charles Lock from Denmark, and Bill Keith from Canada – also made me want to get back to re-reading JCP.

As is frequently the case the focus was mainly on John Cowper Powys, though David Gervais gave, as an addition to the printed programme, a fine reading of a story by Theodore, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his death on 27th November 1953. Then on Saturday night Chris Wilkinson organized, and took part in, an entertaining, if disturbing, dramatic reading, based mainly on letters, about the triangular relationship between Llewelyn, Gamel and Alyse. I regret that I did not get the opinion of any of Llewelyn's admirers following this very damning view of his relations with women! Acting friends of Chris gave excellent performances as Gamel and Alyse, while spirited performances also came from the President, as JCP, and the Chairman, as Llewelyn. Effective lighting and atmospheric music added to the scene.

The Conference rounded off with a discussion of the question 'Which are superior – the Welsh or the Wessex novels?' While quite rightly the overall unity of JCP's works was noted, it is clear that the move to Wales was a source of major inspiration, and the decision to write historical romance suggests that JCP could not have been able to continue writing about the contemporary West of England after *Maiden Castle*. It might have produced a better, and more appropriate discussion, if the topic had been one more narrowly focussed onto *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*.

The perennial question of how to get more works of the Powys family, but especially John Cowper, published and read, also arose during the debate. In fact, it seems to me that more paperback and hardback versions of JCP's novels are, or have recently been, in print, than for a while, and I believe a new and revised paperback edition of *Porius* is planned by a major publisher. There does, however, seem to me to be less critical attention to the Powyses in literary journals than in the past. I was sorry to learn that Morine Krissdóttir's biography of JCP will not be out for a couple more years. Sadly the important Powys–Richardson, and Powys–Hanley letters seem unlikely to appear in the near future. And there are, I believe, other collections awaiting publication.

My major regret was that the Conference was so short – is there any interest within the Society to returning to the longer weekend? – and that I did not myself take the opportunity, as some others did, to stay longer in this most beautiful part of Wales, with its strong associations with John Cowper Powys, James Hanley and others, and lots of interesting walking.

As always a highlight of these conferences is conversation with Powys enthusiasts, and while it is always good to see familiar faces it is also always stimulating to encounter new, or newer, members. A number of familiar faces were missing, some possibly because of the recent unpleasantness within the Society. An added bonus to these conferences is often the setting, and I regret missing the 2002 Conference in the vicinity of Glastonbury. The 1999 Dorchester Conference was particularly memorable for the excursion to Montacute, including visiting the Vicarage – and the surprise of being invited inside by the owner — as well as up

Ham Hill and to Montacute Pond. This was then followed by a superb tea at the Battens'! I also have very fond memories of my first Conference, which was in Sherborne, and was most interested to learn that the Society will be returning next year to this very beautiful town. I understand that the accommodation in the school has been upgraded since our last visit. Hope this venue will lead to a record turn-out of members!

Robin Wood joined the Society many (25?) years ago (before that first Sherborne conference). He did a PhD on JCP's Welsh mythology at the University of Wales in Aberystwyth, and has published articles on JCP in The Powys Review, The Powys Journal *(including the latest),* Powys Notes *(USA) and* The New Welsh Review. *He took early retirement from the University of Newfoundland in January 2002 and is currently working on James Hanley as well as on* Porius.

The Hand Hotel across the River Dee
(photo: Anna Pawelko).

Review

Llewelyn Powys, Wessex Memories, *edited by Peter J. Foss.*
The Powys Press, 2003. ISBN *1 874559 27 9. £9.95; £10.95 abroad.*

The publication of this book is a major event, since it is, to all intents and purposes, a new Llewelyn Powys volume published over sixty years after his death. It consists of twenty-four essays and articles, many of them originally published in what are now relatively inaccessible places such as the *Dorset Daily Echo* and the *Western Gazette.* Two ('Lodmoor' and 'Hedgecock Memories') have appeared in *The Powys Journal,* but the vast majority of them have not been reprinted until now. Moreover, others are published from typescript, and on one occasion Peter Foss has even pieced together an essay from manuscript fragments. Indeed, the essay in question, 'Worked Flints', seems to me one of the best in the book.

With one or two exceptions, these essays were written in the last decade of Llewelyn's life, and in my opinion they display him at his best. This is a book that belongs on one's Llewelyn shelf alongside *Dorset Essays* and *Somerset Essays.* The pieces themselves are generally shorter, but, like the earlier essays, they focus on places ('The Chesil Beach', 'Chainey Bottom') and people ('Betsy Cooper', 'Gypsies at Weymouth Market' with occasional literary-critical articles on writers in Wessex ('Robert Herrick', 'The Wordsworths in Dorset'). Llewelyn was, of course, a fine stylist, but the style in his earlier books can become somewhat self-conscious; on occasion one feels that he is straining for a 'beautiful' effect or imitating his beloved writers of the seventeenth century, employing some of their archaic words and old-fashioned constructions. Not so here; in these pieces he almost invariably writes directly, with a wonderful clarity and control.

In his short but informative introduction, Foss places Llewelyn firmly within a line of non-fiction rural writers, especially emphasizing the similarities of his writings with the work of Richard Jefferies. These essays show this resemblance clearly – in more ways than Foss has the space to discuss. Both were victims, for instance, of the dispersive effects of library classification; Jefferies' books were divided between 'fiction', 'agriculture', 'natural history', etc., while Llewelyn's may be found under 'fiction', 'Africa', 'religion', as well as 'essays.' It has taken readers and commentators a long time to recognize the cohesiveness of their best work. Both, of course, suffered from some form of tuberculosis, and wrote passionately under the continuing shadow of death. Moreover, this particular volume makes it possible to extend the comparison still further. Llewelyn, confined to his bed for long periods during the last years of his life, was unable to write on rural matters out of his *immediate* experience. As a result, like Jefferies, he was forced back on memory, and most of these pieces have a poignant

backward-looking quality, people and places viewed through the vivid but often saddening glass of recollection. Again and again, also like Jefferies, an initial memory leads naturally into more general thoughts about life in a lost past.

Peter Foss has edited this collection with diligence, care, and unobtrusiveness. This is a book prepared for the general reader, without the distractions of footnotes, but at the end he provides succinct annotations giving information about the provenance of typescripts and an account of his editorial procedures. Because many of these essays first appeared in the columns of newspapers, paragraphing has been altered to suit the book-page format, and occasional omissions and rearrangements have been made. The editing is expert – and loving. The essays are not presented in chronological order of writing (though Foss gives such information, when available, in his notes), but are arranged subtly and sensitively so that, as often as not, the end of one essay leads easily and intriguingly into the opening of the next. Llewelyn, I think, would have been pleased.

As all his readers are aware, Llewelyn was an obsessive quoter, and his references are often decidedly obscure. Understandably, Foss identifies some but by no means all of these citations. Personally, I would have liked a little more of such annotation. Thus the specific location of the quotation from William Barnes in 'Dorset Ovens' (from 'Blackmwore Maïdens') might have been given, and it would have been helpful to point out that the closing words of 'Montacute Mills' are an unacknowledged quotation from the opening scene of *As You Like It*. That is, however, a pedantic, nit-picking detail. Foss has properly concentrated on making the book attractive to handle as well as a pleasure to read, and this is as it should be. The cover reproduces one of his paintings of the Dorset cliffs in full colour, and each essay is introduced with a neat and evocative Bewick-like engraving in black-and-white. This once again is reminiscent of the pleasant reprints and new collections of Jefferies that appeared from Lutterworth Press in the late 1940s – also sixty years after the writer's death – illustrated by C. F. Tunnicliffe and Agnes Miller Parker. It is a tribute to Foss that he can stand such comparisons.

Wessex Memories is a more modest production than the lavish *Dorset Year* of a few years back, but is just as important. In these days when publication is more and more dependent on commercial viability, the existence and standards (both literary and artistic) of the Powys Press are matters for celebration and gratitude.

W. J. Keith

Llewelyn on Morwyn

A postscript to '*Louis and* Morwyn' *in Newsletter 49 (pp. 34–39)*

Clavadel, October 29th 1937

My dearest John, —We have finished *Morwyn*. It has been a book of great interest to both of us. I think it is a remarkable book, which old Bertie would have called a 'notable' book, and we have both been won to your point of view and it will go hard if I do not myself have a thrust at these medicine men as the years roll by. I was impressed by your plea and I think this book will mark a certain stage in the *moral* sensibility of our race.

It contains some noble passages, but you have not learnt yet that *restraint is power*, and I think it would have been more effective if you had been less excitable and extravagant. I found as I read passages to Lisaly I was continually under the compulsion to leave out words and sentences so that the page I was reading might sound the firmer. I agree with old Littleton not in the sanction he gives to 'laboratory research or what Jack calls vivisection,' but in thinking the Rabelais section is a little over done. I think you had done better if you had not made such a conventional figure and not 'lifted' the style from the great book which was a lazy device.

L.C.P. I think objected to your chat about love-making. This did not offend me, but I was sometimes 'bothered', to use Bert's phrase, by a certain farcical element that crept in, especially in connection with the young man and Judge Rhadamanthus and his broken sceptre.

But the book stands, and will always stand, as a magnanimous document. It is a volume full of divine imagination and it haunts the mind. I would have liked you to have given us a clearer vision of the Elysian Fields—how wonderful when you described the roof of Hell with those wisp clouds passing, passing—and how wonderful the barking of the dog and the cowering clinging fright of those two before the Welsh prophet, like clinging eels in the presence of a white heron, and the great lake with its silent waves and the Alder trees and those beasts and the smell of the ghosts, and Socrates washing his hands and the speech of the Mackerel and the *Tear of Tityos*—small wonder that L.C.P. recognized that I could never have written it.

I do not place it with *Glastonbury Romance* but very high. It is a classic—a temple built with mortar mixed with blood such as Tamburlane liked to use, it forms a terrible cement even though some of the plaster is given to crumbling like the plaster that used to slough off from the back of the summer house! ...

From Letters of Llewelyn Powys *ed. Louis Wilkinson, 1943, no 266. Llewelyn's letter to Littleton (no 267) also makes a postscript to the exchange of letters about Louis's* Welsh Ambassadors, *in* Newsletter *48.*

John Cowper Powys: The Ridge

Canto I

Aye! What a thing is the passing of Cronos, the angular-minded,
Dragging us all along, leaving us all alone,
Leaving such fields unfurrowed, such corn-shocks unbinded,
Flying sometimes like a bird, sinking sometimes like a stone!
What was that Age of Gold long ago that one of the Muses
Put into Hesiod's head prone on his face with his sheep?
And which of them was it? Aye! But his spirit refuses
Just as of old to say what goddess disturbed his sleep.
She comes to me too this Muse who found Hesiod sleeping
To me as I climb this hill and leave the wood for the wold,
But like that old farmer-sailor her name I am keeping
Locked in the bin of my heart, shut in the keel of my hold.
As I climb I can talk aloud like the Heedless Blurter of China
Chanting without reserve my De Profundis of truth
Caring not if my voice has the major-tone or the minor,
Or if it murmurs in age what it should have shouted in youth—
Or if its tones resemble the leaves of a garden suburban
That refuses to sigh like a swamp, that refuses to rear like the sea
But insists that a man goes as mad in a bowler as under a turban
And that hearts that can bleed over wine can break over tea.

As I climb I can think aloud without rousing the fury
Of those who wish that all souls but their own were dead;
Don't they know that each man in himself is a judge and a jury,
And we all have webs of spiders under our bed?
I know myself as a toad when they swear I'm a dragon
I know myself as a midge but they swear I'm a wasp,
'I could say such things'—but get me a tag to tag on
To prove that I'm a prize slow-worm and not an asp!
But I'm wriggling and shuffling now whatever they call me
Up through the autumn wood to the mountain land;
And though it is easy enough for me to meet what appals me,
I carry a horror within me that few can withstand.

Note:. It seemed appropriate after the Conference to reprint this poem, probably written c.1952 at Corwen. It appeared in *The Powys Review* 13 (1983/4), with an Interpretation by G. Wilson Knight. KK

And I find the sheddings of larches when first they start falling
Suit my saurian nature as a drug to my fear;
With the greenness of spruce I can sweetly lotion the mauling
I got when I burst from Bedlam to come up here.
Gold the rent ceiling through which the azure emerges
A floor of gold is the ground—on gold I am setting my foot.
Yet these are the same larch needles that when the sap rises and surges
Burst like an emerald dew from the tree top down to the root.
And the funguses scarlet-red that had only death-dots on their faces
Lie all spongy and white, wrinkled, dissolving and done.

'What's left', all cry as I leave the wood, 'that nothing erases?'
And the bog-moss groans to the gorse: 'Only the earth and the sun.'.
But surely at last there'll reach us some world-destroying convulsion
With fire roaring above, with fire roaring below,
Systole and diastole, in fatal embrace and repulsion
Till, through a burnt-out void, the winds that lead nowhere blow —
'Nowhere, you say?' cries a thin small wind like a mouse through a door-chink,
'Where is your somewhere pray towards which I could lead?
We winds are the leaders to nothing, I tell you, from nothing we shrink
Than to be slaves to a something of which we've no need.
The winds I would have you remember aren't the same as the air that projects them
Any more than the waves, flames and sand of your mother the earth
Are the same as the living bodies whose purpose protects them
In creating from nothing at all the mystery of birth.
Fire must feed on something and I am one something that feeds it,
Feeds it with me as fuel, dissolves it in me as flame.'

'But of your mother the air, little wind, that you cleanse and she needs it—
You and your mother, small wind, are you not the same?'
Then as through the boards of a hutch by all rabbits deserted
The little wind shrieked in my ears: 'No more than you are the same—
You, bone of a body with ghost of a spirit inserted—
As the air, water, fire and earth you call by your name!'
'I yield, little wind, I yield! There are things that transforming
Other things are themselves transformed into marvels new,
And the foetus warmed in the womb is more than its warming
And the atoms are less than me and the air you come from than you.
I yield, little wind', I murmured. 'Yourself and the air and the motion
That whistled you out of her depths to trouble the land and the sea
Are no more really the same than I am the same as the potion
Of electrons and photons and mesons that make up the body of me!'

So I boasted. But hearing these voices and all these mysteries sharing,
I creaked like a crab in a crack, I swished like a snake in the grass,
I gaped like a village-fool or bedlam-idiot staring,
I yawned like a newt in a pond, I brayed like a dazed jack-ass.
For the corpse of a man and a fly have the same preposterous issue,
Parasites eating men, parasites eating flies;
And small as these creatures are, so sweet is their tissue
To parasites smaller still they're the Milk of Paradise.
Suppose we all uttered together, we men and maggots and midges,
One appalling howl from each body and heart and head,
Would not the scoriac caves and all of the glacial ridges
Echo with: 'Curse it — and die !' Echo with: 'Happy — the dead!'
'And what will you cry?' croaks the mud. 'And what will you wail?' scrapes the gravel.
'When the ripples roll on,' laughs the sand, 'at Jupiter's nod?'

'You will hear in due course, my friends, when the hour comes to unravel
The skein of our quenchless hate for Matter and Life and God!'
Those are the wicked spells wherewith nephelegeretay *Zeus*
Has, since he conquered Time with bolts more stupid than stone,
Fooled and enslaved and perverted to his own incredibly base use
Everything that had life from a midge to a mastodon.
Matter engenders sex and sex spends its strength in devising
Shrines for the sacred three, Matter and Life and Home;
But a wave, a wave, a wave in the vast dim gulf is arising—
Wait! Only wait! Only wait! It will sweep them away in foam!
Whisper it whisper it whisper it, to each thing that has being!
Whisper it to the bugs, whisper it to the fleas!
Tell it to things so tiny they have no eyesight for seeing
To things that scrabble and scratch, to things that tickle and tease—
The Word has gone forth through Space, yet no man wrought it or brought it,
Through Space and the stars in her roof, through Space and the seas on her floor,
And all things in fire, earth, air, and all in the seas that have caught it:
'Shake off God's love and God's hate and God's unnatural law!'
Where are the ancient gods? Let them come in their black clouds and white clouds!
O how they rise from the depth! O how they dive from the height!
And the dead come gibbering back to enjoy themselves in their night-shrouds,
And the prophets dance in their joy and the soothsayers whirl through the night!

And what in me says 'I am I', this silly old John as they call me
Edging my way uphill, bracken behind and in front;
I, the brother of fleas and of gnats. What on earth will befall me
When I get to the top of the ridge and have borne the brunt?

A skeleton topped by a skull and arms like a windmill in working
And the soul of a baby louse, and the heart of a hound,
Watching the dead-brown bracken, how some of it shivers in shirking
The treacherous lash of the wind and some of it soaks on the ground.
But keeping my eye on the ridge, an eye that can see from its socket,
For an eye can be rusty and dead like a key in a swinging door,
I tell myself there's a hope—though God and the Universe mock it—
That when I have reached that ridge I shall find my love once more.
For the wretchedest thing alive has its own mysterious 'other'
Its other that answers its howl, its other that answers its groan,
Its other that's nearer to it than brother or father or mother,
Its other that out of a million worlds is for it alone.

John is my name, old John. It's a name not unknown in man's story,
And yet I'm not Prester John or John who cuddled with God
Or Son-of-the-Piper John who could only play in his glory
'Over the Hills and away', nor am I the royal sod
Who swore we might 'Have the Corpus' of every man he imprisoned,
Nor John of the Cross, nor John of Thelerna nor that Jack Straw;
I am the Common John, the John unbedizened,
The John who can eat dry bread and sleep on the floor.
John is my name, old John, and there's one particular reason
Why I should climb up here and aim at that crest.
I'm playing a trick on no-one; I'm plotting no treason;
To be at the Death of God is my single quest.

I had a true love once but they took her away for thinking
Thoughts against God and for making me think the same.
But in my dreams she comes back and now life is sinking
Perhaps she'll come back for good. I've forgotten her name.
Born of an ash-root she was, a tree-elemental,
But her soul went deeper down than the tree-sap goes:
Into the rock it went, the rock occidental,
Where deep in a mineral bed the River Kaw flows.

'Ridge of all ridges!' I groan, while I watch a cloud-chain like a cincture
Sinking down on the ridge, stretching from east to west,
'What in the Mystery's name, is that Tint, that ineffable tincture,
Soft as a buried urn, dim as a last year's nest?
Brown as a blade of bronze that the waves of the ocean have rusted
Bedded deep in the ooze, sheathed in a chasm of silt;
What is that dubious tint, with those gluey shadows encrusted:
Like tar-beads in fir-bark? Was a sword plunged there to its hilt?'

I share, I share the enchantment with midgets and maggots, the wonder,
The more than wonder, the merge, the solution, the fusion, the fling,
The losing myself in a colour that's like hearing bells during thunder,
Or smelling frankincense, blood on an angel's wing.
Do you think my enchantment's not shared by every minutest amoeba?
That the dung-beetle doesn't feel it, as he pushes his way through the dung?
But this colour's not hearing or smelling or feeling either, mein lieber,
It's the sight, it's the sight of the stain that covers the bung,
That covers the mouth of the bung, the bung of super-submersion,
The bung of a golden drop that's beyond all the hope of man.
And what if the colour up there should mean an utter reversion
Of all the illusions of life and the whole of God's plan?
What if it were the colour of God's extinction,
The colour of Matter's end and the final sweep
Of all we know to a vortex of indistinction
Of all we are to a sleep within a sleep?

What if the Night-Mare Life were the Dapple of Sancho
Thrown off the buttocks of God and herself plunged down
Into what's hid by Life, as the Prophet Blanco,
Tells us the stars are hid by that other clown?
Howl, scream and shriek! You madmen from every quarter!
You're now proved right and all the sane proved wrong!
Let Hobdance foot it now with the hangman's daughter!
And Mahu pipe while Modo beats the gong!
Up to the ridge, old heart! Let come what may come!
Alla kai empes! *'All the same for that!'*
Let all the gods like Puppet-Players play dumb!
'Dead—for a ducat dead!—a rat! a rat!'

Canto II

All of a sudden ice-cold as a polar-bear-skin
Grey mist fell upon me shutting me all around;
Without was a world of wonder I had no share in
Inside was the grey cold grass and a whispering sound.
Moss and gravel and naked whistling heather,
Withered bracken, whinberry, foliage wet.
I felt like a beast that had come to the end of its tether,
Like a last red flush in the west when the sun has set.
'Infinite darkness', I thought, 'before of myself I am conscious.
Infinite darkness', I thought, 'after I'm done for and gone!

I am washed from the hands of existence even as Pontius
Washed off the blood of Jesus and hurried on.
There's not a louse in the sacred beard of Moses
But yields to the same annihilation as I.
There's not a worm in the poorest of Sharon's roses
But has its hour like me and like me must die.
I can see the path and I'm still alive and climbing;
Is it nothing to be alive and be able to climb?
The labour of lifting the feet and the labour of rhyming,
Is not their power the art of marching in tune with Time?'

But what are the things on which this rhythmical marcher marches?
Stalks of heather so old that they look like bone;
Leaves of bracken bent into filigree arches,
Beds of emerald moss and pillows of stone,
And little opaque pebbles like eyeless sockets
And crumbs of gravel the colour of mouldy bread;
And roots of old dead thorns like exploded rockets,
And whinberry leaves that are turning a curious red.
And like cut curls from the beard of an aged Titan
Wisps of lichen under the stalks of ling,
And ferns so green that trampling can only heighten
Their greenness into something beyond the Spring —
But what is this? I climb and in tune with my climbing
I tread the little mosses beneath my feet —
And I rape the virginal words to round off my rhyming .....

'And the song that I am is unended — but yet complete.' (A suggested last line, by a reader.)

'The Ridge' was first printed in January 1963, in *A Review of English Literature*, edited by Norman Jeffares. This number was devoted to JCP, with contributions by Angus Wilson, Henry Miller, J. B. Priestley, Dominique Aury, Iowerth C. Peate and Wilson Knight, as well as Kenneth Hopkins on TF and R. C. Churchill on Llewelyn. In his Editorial, the critic and Anglo-Irish scholar Norman Jeffares wrote:

> The attention [to the Powyses] is timely both as a gesture of respect to a writer now in his ninety-first year and a sign that criticism ... is taking fresh bearings and rediscovering aestheticism. The fact that many of our contributors in this issue are themselves creative writers first, critics and scholars second, is significant. Some of the criticism which was, admittedly, so influential and so effective in the fifties was crabbed in style and

written for specialists and indeed often about specialists. It had the appeal of novelty; it had new specialised audiences; and perhaps too much attention was paid to it.

There are signs of a returning largeness of view. And this is apparent not only in criticism, but in other more important genres. Have we perhaps begun to emerge into a new, more generous period of writing where human values will reassert themselves?' [He quotes Synge, in 1908, describing early twentieth-century poetry as 'flowers of evil and good', i.e. emotional but unrealistic: 'It may be said that before verse can be human again it must learn to be brutal.']

... In becoming brutal in an inhuman way, however, we can lose our knowledge of the flowers of evil and good. They, too, can be made convincingly of washable plastic. But, if we are to recover humanity, we cannot be equally easily sponged clean into the self-contained hygiene of unemotional, unimaginative chit-chat. This is why, whether or not we regard some of his novels as over-long, or some of his poems as tending to Whitmanesque inflation, we cannot but salute the imaginative scope, the passion, and the largeness of vision of John Cowper Powys. His is work which draws a response from those who can write, and can themselves take a large view of literature. He is a reminder that there are other worlds than those of the Lilliputian.

An abridged version of 'The Ridge' – leaving out sections 4 ('What's left'), 5 (But of your mother'), and 10 ('I had a true love'), 11 ('I share') and 12 ('What is the Night-mare') – is in *The Oxford Book of Welsh Verse in English*, chosen by Gwyn Jones (1977). It also appeared, with a French translation by F. X. Jaujard, in *Granit* (1973).

G. Wilson Knight in *The Powys Review* 13 sees 'The Ridge' as 'an attack on death', relating it to *Mortal Strife*, *Maiden Castle*, and *The Mountains of the Moon*. Following Powys through his various sensations, rather than a coherent explanation, 'we end, significantly, because our key is in the process and not in the conclusion, not in the nouns but the hyphen, without an ending.'

'The Ridge' is not least a very good description of a late autumn walk. The 'Ridge' is one of the landmarks on Powys's walks at Corwen. To Katie, October 1952: 'I am like you in the things I'm proudest of ... i.e. where I can go on my own feet ... [...] This peculiarity we both inherit from CFP [...] He always used to say 'I like to be independent' ... & that's all he could say to describe his feelings! But when it comes to the expression of the feelings aroused by being independent—such as JCP going up to the two curious posts or stele—as Homer calls them—on the top of the ridge confronting Liberty Hall over that huge trackless pathless

expanse of dead bracken & fading whortleberry & dead heath and heather [...] we have to go to the power of poetical words derived through MCP from the excitable brown-eyed family of "forefather Donne" ...' To Louis Wilkinson, December 1952: 'It's a terribly icy, cold to the keel, sort of gale-tost boat-at-sea day today. A carrion crow thinking of bones barged into me before I could get into the gully in the wood—a steep-fir-rooted, mossy, dead-leaved, grey-rock'd ascent to the open hill-side of the slope of our Berwyn Ridge. But I got into it & soon got warm scrambling on hands & knees up up up up, inventing as I climbed this ditty —damn! no! I've forgotten it now ... Give our love please to Joan, for whom I have a special ferny tree-root under her name "up there" where I climb everyday from 8.30 to 10.30 a.m.' (Louis notes that he quoted this paragraph in a radio broadcast.)

In 1952 JCP (80 in October) was writing *Atlantis*. It was a time of illness and deaths in his family, also a time when 'some world-destroying convulsion / with fire roaring above, with fire roaring below' seemed not unlikely from the threat of nuclear war.

Gate at the top of the path behind Cae Coed (1995).

Three Powyses on Conrad

from A Conrad Memorial Library: The Collection of George T. Keating *(New York, 1929). Among other contributors to this collection of essays were Edward Garnett, Ford Madox Ford, John Galsworthy, Hugh Walpole, Liam O'Flaherty, and Arthur Machen. With thanks to Peter Foss for suggesting this.*

T. F. Powys on Conrad's *Lord Jim* (1900)

In that heavenly dream of Lucian, that seized upon him as he slept in the dead time of night, two women laid fast hold of his hands and contended earnestly for him, each saying that he was hers. The one was a homely, sturdy dame, with her hair ill-favouredly dressed up and her hands overgrown with a hard skin, the other a well-faced wench of comely proportions and handsomely attired. And so Lucian, having been finely beaten for using a carving tool too crudely, chose the dainty maiden to go along with, who promised him all good things with little toil.

The same two women must have appeared to Joseph Conrad—perhaps when he had given himself up to the idleness of a haunted man who looks for nothing but words wherein to capture his visions—the one saying, 'I, boy, am that sailor's art. Follow me as one of my family. Thou shalt be maintained in a plentiful manner.' And the other, 'I, sweet child, am Imagination. By my assistance thou shalt be clad in such a garment as this is'—showing the mantle she wore herself, which was very gorgeous to the eye— 'and I will set such marks and tokens upon thee, that all men shall stand gaping to read thee, admiring and wondering at thee, blessing the power of thy pen and thy father's happiness to beget such a son.'

Conrad, knowing that Truth itself is One—one for all men and for all occupations—bid the two women, who had each a hand upon him, to buss and be friends, and then kissing each of them upon the lips, invited both the one and t'other to his bed, saying heartily that there was no need for them to fight over him because he belonged to them both.

After he had embraced each of them in turn, he told them—walking up and down his room the while—that no great work can ever be completely a wonder of art, unless each of the two women gives her kindly assistance to it. And so, embracing the pair of them again, he bid them stay with him. And they stayed, ceasing to quarrel, for each took her share, and endowed Conrad with her own qualities, and his love of the fair face of Imagination could never make him unfaithful to the hard and wakeful toil of the sailor's life—for the rougher woman has as good a heart as the other. Each woman, too, gave to him of her own freewill —for no force will compel either to yield what is hers, unless she is willing—the freedom of her own city. The one the city of toil, the other the city of Glory.

There have been some of the greater writers who have enjoyed the favours of both these wonderful women, but I know of none other besides Conrad—unless, perhaps, it were William Blake—who remained faithful to each until the end.

There was Hardy, who learned to build houses, to lay brick upon brick by a proper method, and to let the plumbline down, so that nothing jutted out unbecomingly—for a lesson learned early from the rougher dame can go a long way—and so he built up his mighty novels and his immortal poetry. John Bunyan, too, as all readers of *The Pilgrim's Progress* know very well, kept these two girls always in his employ, the one teaching him how to mend a kettle and many another matter, while, from the other, he learned how to get a sight of God's heaven and the path thither—and so he wrote down his vision.

No book that Conrad has written shows more clearly than *Lord Jim* that both these ladies were his bedfellows. Jim himself is the most significant of Conrad's creations. He loved him—one can feel that plainly enough—not as the old parson in Essex fancied his sailor son, but as himself.

One can get a look at Conrad's soul in this book—generous, full of love for all men, and even ready to give, eyes half-shut, with dull cars, a word of praise. That Jim pleased Conrad is shown clearly, because Jim is so real a character. We hear his footsteps, we see him beside his girl, while the Patusan sky was blood red, immense, streaming like an open vein.

Conrad's pity rises high in *Lord Jim,* like a huge silent moving wave, that breaks at last with the crash of a final tragedy, leaving behind only a rather shapeless brown-coloured mound, with an inlaid neat border of white lumps of coral at the base, and enclosed within a circular fence made of split saplings, with the bark left on. The wave, though it breaks and vanishes, rises again—for the fair lady of imagination is immortal—and whoever chooses can view once more the immovable forests, rooted deeply in the soil of everlasting time, soaring towards the sunshine, everlasting in the shadowy might of their traditions.

One cannot wonder that Conrad, sitting silent in his study, should be shocked if brought back too suddenly from some far sea or country, to which his genius had carried him. There he would sometimes find the great peace, where all movement in the world had come to an end, and how hard for him to be broken in upon by a general's daughter!

The deep and silent calm, the everlasting beauty of the sea, together with its uttermost cruelty, go with Conrad where he goes, and so deep and vast a beauty must lead to death. The faith that guides Jim up that terrible river—where there was no wisdom in thinking that an alligator was a log of wood—leads on to certain destruction. No matter whether 'tis Doramin's hand or Brown's that fires the shot. The child-like face, the Jewel, is death—the sea brings him there ...

But Conrad had no wish, as some of us have—overborne by our own sorrows—to tumble the world down into a gulf of nothingness. 'The human heart,' he says, 'is vast enough to contain all the world. It is valiant enough to bear the burden, but where is the courage that would cast it off?'

Of Conrad's devotion to women one might say much. He portrays them as wonderful creatures, beautiful, lonely, and a little idolatrous, and it is hard to

believe that Jim's Jewel wore a chemise. But, whatever underclothes Conrad's young girls wore, and they are nearly always to be seen in white—as Dr. Johnson would have had his harem—they can always be known as Conrad's. He was their father, their spouse, their adorer. And have they not now—the girl in Lord Jim was his favourite perhaps—met him to crown him with a garland of leaves and flowers, where no general's daughter can break in to annoy?

I think it likely enough that Conrad found it a lighter task to tell a tale solely of the sea, than to work and pound the mud and clay of the land into a story. The storms and calamities that overtake a ship compel our interest. In a moment one is surrounded by waves like towers, the written words become a great noise and a shouting, and a man in danger there is always a hero. No one who is washed overboard in a storm is dishonoured. A rogue drowned in the deeps is a fine figure and becomes a pearl.

... Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange ...

Lord Jim will not be forgotten. It goes into the unknown places of the earth, it delves under its obscure surface, showing the horror, the hunger, that is in the soul of man. Always unrest, the wish for some other grave. And Conrad, when he went, waved his hand, but not sadly, at his stories, as Stein waved his at the butterflies.

Llewelyn Powys on Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' in *Youth* (1902)

To those of us who know Africa a story by Joseph Conrad which has for its setting the unregenerate pear-shaped continent could not fail to arouse an especial interest. Our attention is alert to learn what so great an artist has to say of this astounding country which, like an enormous earring suspended from an Ethiope's ear, lies pendant below Europe. What kind of impression did he carry away from this vast tract of the earth's surface whose inhabitants are black as so many mining devils let loose from the coal fields of hell? "Heart of Darkness" gives us our answer.

Never was the great writer's insight clearer, or his craft more sure than when he wrote this masterpiece. Out of its pages a "black laughter" rises to the stars. Here we find an author who has not evaded the sinister implications of this land of the Congo, of the Niger, and of the Zambezi. He sees Africa prostrate in her travail, he sees her with her fecund matrix contorted by a monstrous bringing to birth, and with her lips giving utterance to a cry charged with a mysterious and fabulous misery.

In truth, this feral country is an accursed inheritance. It would seem that a cloud of doom is forever suspended over its swaying tree tops, over its abrupt escarpments. This doom is graven upon the mask-like countenances of its

inhabitants of these negroes with their slaves' heads. It is audible in the screams, the hoarse shrieks that issue from the equine, wideagape mouth of the zebra when it feels the terrible taloned weight of a lion bearing it down in the darkness. It may be observed in the calculating merciless bead eyes of the roosting birds, as savage as griffins, attached each one to its tree by hooked claws.

Joseph Conrad visited Africa, he saw, he heard, he understood. Yet the continent's shocking utterance could be borne, perhaps, if cruelty alone held sway there, if its dark cry was not strangely mingled with a note of infinite inexpressibly wild beauty, like the untamed immemorial calling of the plover heard fresh and clear at the very hour of murder. Who, indeed, can gainsay the dangerous loveliness of those shadowed forests, the trumpet-shaped flowers, the festooned branches decorated with swaying monkeys? What invention could rival the wonder of the giraffe carrying her mute, bizarre body with such high grace over the scorched veldt? Here, as ever, good and evil, ugliness and beauty, dance across the magical plains of life hand in hand.

Superficial people visit Africa and return uninstructed. It was not so with Conrad—he saw it, he heard it, he smelt it. In fact, what distinguishes a really great writer from his imitators is that such an one is never, no, not for a single instant, taken in by the superficial appearance of things. Such fishermen ever sink their lines deep. It is not their pastime to flick at the surface of the stream of life. Down, down, down, down go their leads, down to where with their bellies flat on black mud, the eels of truth move backwards and forwards slippery and evasive. Popular writers, and especially is this the case with those who take Africa as their subject, present us with a completely meretricious view of life. They cry peace, peace, when there is no peace. They offer to the corrupt palates of the crowd, false dishes. Well do they know that the roots pulled fresh from mould have a bitter taste.

The exploitation of Africa by Europeans is one of the iniquities of our age, but it requires the sensitiveness, the imagination of a Joseph Conrad to see this and with a dispassionate and terrible artistry to make us see it also. There is, however, no spirit of propaganda to weaken the force of his story. His comments are innocent of any moral taint. He extends towards the lamentable situation of Africa an interest detached, unimplicated, and philosophic. Like all deep thinkers he has understood long ago that it is necessary to regard life in the light of a spectacle, of a spectacle with infirm foundations. And it is for the very reason that his approach is always aesthetic rather than moral that his writings have so great a value in advancing the cause of what is sensitive and religious in opposition to what in life is obtuse, base and inert.

How admirably, for example, he reveals to us the first sinister impressions received by Marlow, "a most discreet, understanding man," on landing at the Company's station, far up the river of death in Central Africa. So wonderfully does he conjure with his words, it seems that we ourselves follow the scorched

path leading up the hill, with our own eyes observing the "undersized railway-truck lying there on its back with its wheels in the air" (that single stroke paints with the sureness of genius the desolation, the imbecile waste inseparable from European enterprise in Africa when prompted by rich absentee financiers endeavouring to add to their wealth by an unscrupulous exploitation of black ivory) until we reach the place where Marlow was overtaken by the chain-gang, by those six fettered convicts who went by "without a glance, with that complete, death-like indifference of unhappy savages."

Conrad is not taken in by talk of "the white man's burden." No one appreciates better than he the incongruity, the anomaly, the malign injustice of superimposing our Western notions upon these natural children of the sun. "They were called criminals. and the outraged law, like the bursting shells, had come to them, an insoluble mystery from the sea."

And what a picture he gives of the white settlement when once it is reached! We can never forget the chief accountant of the company in his "high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots" stepping out for a moment "to get a breath of fresh air," the expression sounded wonderfully odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk life, or sitting at work in his hut "built of horizontal planks, and so badly put together that, as he bent over his high desk, he was barred from neck to heels with narrow strips of sunlight."

With the illuminated insight of a poet Conrad sees in visible images the desolation of abomination that has fallen upon the continent with the invasion of the white man. "But as I stood on the hillside, I foresaw that in the blinding sunshine of that land I would become acquainted with a flabby, pretending, weak-eyed devil of a rapacious and pitiless folly." He watched the white traders wandering here and there with their absurd long staves in their hands, like a lot of faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence" and he sees their victim the overburdened carrier "dead in harness, at rest in the long grass near the path, with an empty water-gourd by his side. A great silence around and above."

In Africa death weighs light as a vulture's feather. A negro more or a negro less, what does it matter? The black Gods of the hippopotami of Lake Elmenteita have no counting-out rhyme. Their monstrous craniums harbour no brains. They have eyes of bright mica, and hearts of stone. A thousand sparrows could fall to the ground and never one would be missed, a thousand black mortals could grow crooked in death and never one be numbered.

How Joseph Conrad in a few words can sketch in a character for us! He will lay stress on some physical feature and behold he has made dry bones live. We ourselves have surely seen managers with a smile such as he describes, "an indefinable, faint expression of his lips, something stealthy—a smile—not a smile—I remember it, but I can't explain. It was unconscious, this smile was, though just after he had said something it got intensified for an instant. It came at

the end of his speeches like a seal applied on the words to make the meaning of the commonest phrase appear absolutely inscrutable."

And ever behind the shallow contemporary drama being played upon the stage of this "tenebrous land invaded by these mean and greedy phantoms" there can be heard the beating of the great tragic "heart of darkness" of Africa herself, old as the world, tragic, formidable, and impotent to die.

The murmur, the articulation of this measureless land when it has once been heard cannot easily be forgotten. Joseph Conrad, by the power of his incomparable style, causes us to listen once more to the ancient melancholy rumour. We are made to heed it "in the tremor of far-off drums, sinking, swelling, a tremor vast, faint: a sound weird, appealing. suggestive, and wild—and perhaps with as profound a meaning as the sound of bells in a Christian country," or it may be in the midnight splash of the hippopotamus audible to Marlow in his rusty engine room, or in the unceasing soughing of the great forests unaltered from the "earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on the earth and the big trees were kings."

Peter Foss's essay 'Llewelyn Powys: The Heart of Darkness', on Llewelyn's African experience, is in The Powys Review 9.

John Cowper Powys on Conrad's *Chance* (1913)

Chance is the only one of Conrad's greater masterpieces that has his adopted country for background. And yet he has succeeded in saturating this astonishing tale with that same breath of the "wild sea-banks" which was destined to cling, like the poignance of some brackish hyssop, about everything he wrote.

Great virtuoso of the salt sea as he is, there is proof here that his favourite element could fling its"murmurs and scents" across English lanes and London streets as well as up the swampy recesses of perilous Malay rivers. For after all, as with every master artist of our race, his essential subject is neither land nor water, but the rooted fidelities and ebbing passions of the frustrated yet invincible heart of man.

All through *Chance*, like a tossing reef-bell caught on the wind across salt-marshes, there is present that peculiar intimation that so stirred the mind of John Keats when he came upon the line in Lear—"Hark! Do you hear the sea?'—and indeed, perhaps just because his professional knowledge is held here in check, it might well be claimed, putting *Almayer's Folly* aside, that the two great land romances, *Chance* and *The Arrow of Gold,* are his finest creations. For it is in the heroines of these two books, in Flora de Barral and Doña Rita, that he has limned with his most delicate precision that peculiar type of evasive girlhood, life-wounded, self-penanced, which it has been his lot to add to the "typical women" of Dostoievsky and Turgeniev and Henry James. Here indeed is a revelation of the secrets of another ocean, not less capricious, not less mysterious,

than those which are sailed over in ships!

Critics there have been, and doubtless will be again, capable of carping shrewdly and maliciously at the almost hypnotic sorcery which this particular type of girlhood seems to have cast over Conrad's imagination. But the ancient craft of following the sea has its own exclusive clairvoyance; and it may well be that no eye but the eye of a sailor can do justice to the proud aloofnesses, the shrinking recoils,of these young victims of life! The patient scrupulosity with which Conrad intersperses the reluctant silences of these Ritas, Lenas and Floras, their flashes of temper, their self-lacerations, their ambiguous monosyllabic retorts, with signs and tokens that carry us deep down to where the very Faustian "mothers" dwell, is not an aspect of his art of which the reader can capture the secret at a casual glance! Something of the same lonely reserve, in which some drop of unearthly ichor has fallen and been distilled, stolen, one might think from the other side of the moon, characterizes Captain Anthony also. He, with Lingard and Lord Jim and Heyst—how one wearies, by the way, at the repetition of that unlucky phrase "the son of the poet, you know!"—embody that particular essence of quixotic loyalty, the aristocratic fastidiousness of which reverts to some shattering moral shock in early life; just as the chaste capriciousncss of these young women, "curdled by the frost from purest snow" and hanging "on Dian's temple," reverts to some emotional shock in their extreme youth.

Captain Anthony's archaic chivalry—and truly about all these heroes of Conrad's there is something sternly aloof from our easy modem values!—culminates in an impression of the man that is filled in with a rich velvety brushwork, as if in old oils, suggestive of Titian or Van Dyke. This "portrait" effect is artfully enhanced by the method in which the story is told; the dramatic situation being repeated, as it were, in many mirrors, each one more enigmatic than the last; so that the vision we get of the courtly captain remains "indirect" to the very end, as if caught in the tempered mellow light of some old royal gallery. And what depth, what haunting chiaroscuro, is evoked by this very "indirection"I We are sometimes half-abashed as we catch in the eyes of this proud seaman that peculiar look of wistful inscrutable reverie (just as if he were some nameless "Gentleman with the Glove" looking dreamily out at us from his gilded frame), which seems to hold the noblest of all masculine reserves beneath its shy nonchalance.

No work of Conrad's has so close an affinity with the art of Henry James as this book. The abominable governess revelling in her diabolic ferocity in that desolate house by the seaside; those fluctuating impressions borne in upon the watcher on the pavement outside that London hostelry; our first startling introduction to Flora at that fantastic and yet whimsically domestic country house -- all these scenes have in them the disturbing vibration, the intense malice of provoked curiosity, where casual trifles become "cloudy trophies" of impending disaster,

such as we know so well in *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl.*

Other scenes, however, such as De Barral's dismissal from the prison-gate and his conveyance in the cab to the wharf's edge, carry us into regions altogether outside the Henry James world. Here we arc borne along in that great, jolting,enchanted caravan of undiluted romance; to which certain sulky and exacting critics still refuse their imprimatur! Sometimes Scott, sometimes Victor Hugo, sometimes Stevenson, float pell-mell before us, in wild fragments of stirred-up memory, as the wayside omens rise and gather and pass, by carriage-window, ferry-deck, or boat-sidel

But the real begetter of scenes of this kind, of which Conrad's books are so full, scenes where shameless melodrama is lifted into the sphere of pure poetry, is the old eternal vein of child-like imagination in the human heart itself! Woven into the caustic, sophisticated, aristocratic texture of his artful prose, this vibrant Ariadne's Thread is the clue that leads young Powell to rush down from his spy-hole on the deck, just at the critical moment. Thus and in no other way do such things occur in the ballads and fairy stories from the beginning of time, and all the critical realists in the world cannot destroy such a tradition. Faintly perhaps a protest does arise from our less ensorcelled aesthetic sense, when, at the end of the story young Powell discovers a middle-aged Flora and makes her his wife! But this also is consonant with the romantic instincts of just those readers who will have found the subtle methods of our author too "indirect" for their taste at the beginning of the book. Not often can even the greatest genius please the sophisticated and the unsophisticated *at the same moment.* That Conrad should please them both so well *in the same book* is a sign of sufficient mastery!

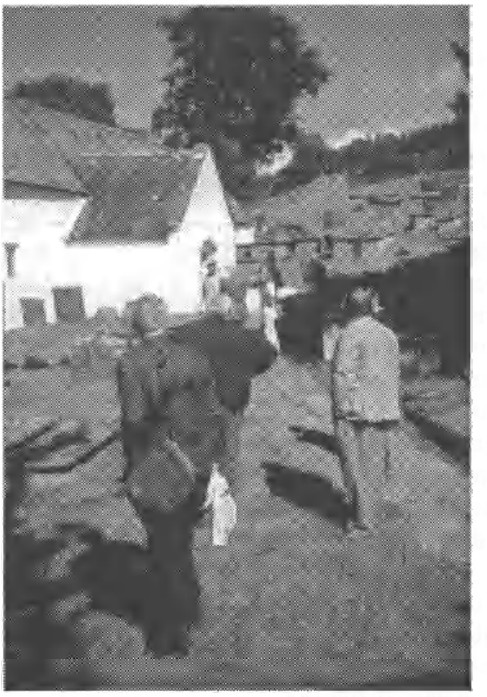
After all, does not this great man's unique charm lie in this very mixture in him of cynical worldly wisdom with an incurable boyish zest for grandiose stoical gestures? With the disillusioned shrug of a battered Odysseus who has caught the sly curve of the Sphinx's lips and the weary droop of her eyelids in many a midnight watch between Bangkok and the Cape, he turns away from all the accredited consolations. Life is not to be justified from any point of view but that of a beautiful, sorrowful, mysterious, crazy spectacle! Yet, for so quixotic a passionist, the part of this spectacle which still retains most of the high glamour of youth iswhere some much-enduring hero at the end of his tether turns from the siren-reefs and the lotus-isles and steers right onward, "stemming nightly to the pole."

De Barral himself, Flora's strange parent, is a striking example of Conrad's flair for weird obsessed human beings. They entcr into all his books, these hunted megalomaniacs, protesting, gesticulating, as the tide carries them from jetty to jetty in the backwaters of the world. He must have marked them down and followed them, these lamentable figures, in every dock-harbour of the Orient; followed them with the dreamy, quizzical, sea-purged eye of a mariner-on-shore.

It is a difficult task to touch the familiar things of life with the strangeness of the

deeper truth; but Conrad when he transports his bewitched derelicts to shipboard and jungle-swamp is only doing by means of a romantic *legerdemain* what nature does for us with no trick at all! We are all marooned upon the islands of our dreams. "All dote—all are mad"—as Democritus Junior has it. Some recover themselves by the help of *Chance*. Some build for themselves "campongs" of patient impassivity. Others, like poor Almayer, take a shorter way. It is because all these lonely proud people of Conrad's imagination are so lamentably and so pitiably alive, that one comes to feel as if the final verdict upon them were neither with the author nor with the critic; but rather—to quote the last words of his first and perhaps his greatest book—with Allah himself, "The Merciful! The Compassionate!"

JCP wrote on Conrad in Suspended Judgments *and in* Autobiography – *'soon after this – miracle of miracles! – the yearly appearance began of one or other of Conrad's romances'. He recalls* Chance *in letters to Katie as the book he 'bothered' his mother to read, unsuccessfully.*



In Llangar churchyard (the seat dedicated to JCP is at the top on the right).

Lucy Sullivan: a view of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*

David Gervais's introduction to T. F. Powys's *Fables*, printed in the July *Newsletter*, set me thinking again about *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, which I had only recently finished reading for the second time, after an interval of 45 years. I had remembered nothing of the first reading other than a feeling of non-engagement and perhaps incomprehension, and my father's doubtful comment on seeing me with the book (a new Penguin reprint), that he (the writer) was a peculiar fellow. In the meantime, I had read my way through JCP's peculiarities with delight, and had wondered if perhaps he had meant brother John.

But the second encounter appeared to justify his words. Although the 'novel' was clearly a fable or allegory, I had no success in identifying an acceptable underlying moral schema or social theory. David Gervais's words seemed entirely true, that 'In so far as a Powys fable has a moral at all, it is one that is set down obliquely and asks to be treated with circumspection. Far from making us feel complacently knowing, it is likely to leave us with the sense that we are floundering in quicksand.' There seemed to be little satisfactory difference in the characters' fates, between the saints and the sinners. However, the insight provided by the discussion of the *Fables*, and the information that TFP was a serious believer who read from the Bible as a preparation for writing, suggested that the justice administered by Mr Weston should be seen in a different light.

The oddity of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, for one accustomed to the post-Enlightenment sociological novel, is that it is prepared to give its characters' problems resolution in the next world, rather than this one, thus both maintaining that we may have desires which cannot be satisfied on earth, and that the next world has a relevance and reality equal to this one's. The Vicar and his daughter have yearnings that cannot be fulfilled without a change in the natural order, and there is apparently no problem about cutting their lives short in order to satisfy them. Mr Grobe is given what he longs for, reunion with his wife, through his own death, and Tamar's love of an angel once consummated on earth requires that she die for the fulfillment of her heart's desire. Mrs Kiddle is solaced for the death of her daughter on hearing that she has been seen as an angel in heaven – she does not need her back on earth again.

It is an effort to adapt one's mind to this conception of resolution, just as, in the world's terms, it is difficult to adjust to the concept of justice propounded in Jesus' Parable of the Vineyard, in which the reward (of God's love) is equal for those who have laboured all day and those who have arrived just before closing, but on reflection it obviously must be so. It is only in the absence of this effort of re-orientation that Mr Weston's rewards for the saintly and punishments for the sinners do not seem so very different.

The core of the allegory can then be seen to relate to the proper exercise of sexuality, which is argued through the juxtaposition of three distinct sexual cases

or species and their respective fates, as administered by Mr Weston:

(1) the spiritual, represented by the Vicar and his daughter, who are transubstantiated;

(2) the animal, represented by Mrs Vosper, the Mumby boys and the Kiddle girls, who are punished or brought to heel; and

(3) the healthily human, combining the two former, represented by Luke Bird and Jenny Bunce, who are assisted and given fruition.

The sin Mr Weston has come to eradicate is promiscuous or overdone sexuality. It is notably not overdone drinking. (Perhaps the cordiality awarded to alcohol is intended to guard against charges of illiberality and prudery – the dangers it affords had temporarily become less obvious as a result of the strenuous efforts of the various temperance movements). The chief villains are not wayward girls (the Kiddles), or even young men as seducers (the Mumbys), but the Mrs Vospers, mature adults who corrupt the young with their preaching of a youthful promiscuity which they have not ventured to practice themselves.

Given the predominant stability of sexual practice until the 1960s, one might wonder why TFP felt it necessary to produce a fable of this nature. There was, however, already an increasing promotion of the detachment of sex from marriage in elite theory – by such writers as D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley and Bertrand Russell. Those who like myself grew up in the 1950s and were exposed to the intellectual milieu of universities will recall the atmosphere of sexual unrest emanating from some of those who taught us, and the extent to which what was not yet practised was preached in the material we were given to read and study. A. S. Byatt's *The Virgin in the Garden* accurately depicts the lustful academics of the period, usually not quite daring to make the final move to put their beliefs into practice – that came a decade later. I imagine it was even less generally evident currents of this liberated morality that TFP was responding to, and damning, in *Mr. Westons's Good Wine*.

It was quite a surprise to recognize in Mrs Vosper the type of the adult promoter of teenage sexuality, primarily through 'sex education', who was so much among us in the 1970s, 1980s and early nineties. The phenomenon is well-described in the following letter to the *British Medical Journal* (Findlater, 1992), as these propagandists sought to use the AIDS epidemic (which finally arrested them) in their cause:

> In his editorial Richard Smith writes of a meeting of social engineers of indeterminate status at Leeds Castle. This faceless group's purpose is to change people's attitudes in some unspecified way that is supposed to promote sexual health – a term used without definition. The intended propaganda offensive seems to be but an intensified and more explicit version of the sort of thing in place now, replete with a jauntier but equally meretricious alternative slogan to 'safe sex'. The wish is to encourage 'a more erotic, positive, and diverse kind of sexual behaviour' as a contribu-

tion to the struggle against HIV. In the front line as a general practitioner and a parent, I thought this approach wrong 30 years ago and feel sufficiently vindicated to prophesy that it will continue to be counterproductive: it has been accompanied by increasing promiscuity, abortions, venereal disease, and broken marriages.

TFP's allegory makes careful distinctions in its judgments, providing different fates for the prime instigator, Mrs Vosper, and her youthful pawns, whether accomplices or victims. Of particular interest is the role and assessment of the simple, unexceptional member of society, represented by Mr Grunter, who is prepared to be carried along by the attention, even notoriety, achieved by pretending to be at one, even participant, with the progressives. Although they are important to the success of the campaign, serving to disguise its real engine in a theory foisted on the young rather than in proven adult practice, they are apparently to be forgiven, perhaps because they will readily conform to decency again, once the source of evil has been defeated. TFP appears to regard Mr Grunter as more sinned against than sinning.

A final query: my 1957 Penguin edition gives no acknowledgment of the source of the title, a quotation from Jane Austen's *Emma*. Is this a publisher's omission? The context is in part appropriate, for it was 'Mr Westons' good wine' that induced in Mr Elton the imprudence to press his unwelcome attentions on Emma; but it also destabilizes my interpretation above, suggesting its production of folly, in place of Luke Bird's good fortune – but perhaps that is only realistic.

Lucy Sullivan writes from Windsor, NSW, Australia.

*This isn't the line the Editor would take on the characters (*cruelty *is surely Mrs Vosper's chief vice?) or on the main theme of* Mr. Weston *(more to do with the ways God and human beings perceive themselves and each other) but the subject of conventional vs. liberated or 'natural' morality, and what's presented as the social norm, is undoubtedly an interesting one with all the Powys writers. Our next year's conference at an English Public School might produce other thoughts on this.*

Sidelight: Glenn Gould

Another JCP admirer revealed: the pianist Glenn Gould (from *Lost Property*, the memoirs of Ben Sonnenberg, editor of the literary magazine *Grand Street*). Gould had just read a story of Sonnenberg's about a psychopathic elevator operator.

> Glenn said,'If someone can write beautifully, why would he choose a subject like this?' I thought that was odd. Then he told me his favorite writers were W. H. Hudson, R. B. Cunninghame-Graham and John Cowper Powys, and I thought that was still odder ...

Two Aids to the Reading of Porius

At the Powys Society Conference at Llangollen in August, I deposited with the Hon. Secretary copies (print-out and disk) of two aids to John Cowper Powys's *Porius* on which I had been working for some years. The idea is that these should be placed in the Society's archives and made accessible to any member or serious students who wishes to consult them.

The first and more important is entitled 'John Cowper Powys's *Porius*: A Reader's Companion.' It consists of just over a hundred computer-size pages, and is an alphabetical listing along the lines of the late Robert Kunkel's 'John Cowper Powys's *Porius:* A Partial Glossary of Proper Names' that appeared in *The Powys Journal* in 1998. The difference, however, is that it attempts to be relatively comprehensive (indeed, it includes entries on most of the names listed at the end of Kunkel's article as 'omitted from the Glossary'); moreover, it is not confined to 'Proper Names'. I have attempted, in addition, to identify literary and biblical quotations, to explain references in Welsh, Greek, Latin, and other languages, and to add any information that I have found helpful in coming to terms with the novel/romance. There are therefore quite extensive notes on major figures such as Porius himself, Myrddin Wyllt, Taliessin, and the Henog. The annotations are keyed to the complete text of *Porius* published by Colgate University Press in 1994.

The second document (of similar size) is entitled 'The Text of *Porius:* Corrections and Emendations'. This listing, by page- and line-number, offers corrections to the decidedly imperfect text of the 1994 edition. It corrects obvious misprints (whether JCP's or the editor's are not always clear), and provides a first attempt at submitting the text to standard copy-editing procedures. Alternative spellings have been rendered consistent, and punctuation (while maintaining JCP's idiosyncratic practice wherever possible) has been adapted when it stands in the way of the reader's comprehension. I have not been in a position to consult manuscripts or typescripts, so much of the document is tentative, but members desiring a clearer text, or puzzled by odd usages, might well find it useful. To quote the end of my introduction, '... as a result of these efforts (imperfect as they undoubtedly are), I have found the reading of *Porius* much more enjoyable and profitable when using my corrected text. I offer these corrections and emendations in the hope that others will have the same experience.'

Both aids, though in a relatively complete state, doubtless contain omissions and errors. (I have failed to identify all quotations, for instance, and my knowledge of languages and literatures other than English leaves much to be desired). I hope that readers who detect errors or can provide additional information will let me know. Ideally, the texts will be updated from time to time, and eventually provide comprehensive and authoritative glosses on this major and complex literary work.

It is my hope that the Society will be able to initiate a process by which members and advanced students can obtain copies at the modest cost-price of reproduction and postage. These have been enjoyable 'retirement projects', and I have no wish to profit from whatever circulation they may merit.

W. J. Keith

Professor Keith's two 'Aids to the Reading of Porius *' have now been deposited with the Collection.*

A walk by the River Dee.

Subscriptions

The annual subscription to the Powys Society, due on 1st January, has remained unchanged since 1994 at:

U.K. £13.50 International £16.00 Student £6.00

We are very grateful to all those members who have paid their subscriptions for 2003.

Michael J. French