Editorial

Golden-brown Sherborne, ultra-English small town, neat as a chocolate with the abbey and school buildings its hard centre: a good place for a conference. Its organic shape must have been a help to new pupils finding their way: the geography of our dormitory house, corridors new-painted in computer-screen turquoise, was considerably more complex. Below the barrel-roof of the dining hall, young King Edward VI stood looking a bit embarrassed, pinker in the face than he must have been in his short life. Bank Holiday Friday night complete with bouncers and police outside each pub; but not so hard around Sherborne/ Ramsgard to imagine the country a century ago, with the odd-shaped hills, long views, thatched villages and mazy lanes, in the golden age of walkers, bicyclists and butterfly collectors. As we left on Sunday, the school yard filled with gleaming classic cars and a holiday crowd, with a redcoated brass band at one end and barrel-organ tunes at the other.

Sherborne School may have changed; the Prep School certainly had: much bigger, mostly day pupils, and of course girls. Mr Tait gave good account of the necessary compromises between modernising and history, regulations and common sense. (Coming from New Zealand probably helps.) His goal, encouraging the children to think. Littleton's method was helping them to notice things (MacNeice again: *Busts of the usual schoolroom came alive/ and the dull schoolroom clock went faster, faster,/ as Owen made the swallows loop and dive/ from the high belfry louvres, and so brought/ us children to our senses, which were five.*) Another Littleton legacy, a chestnut avenue providing conkers, was a happy thought.

Pat Roberts singing solo in the Entertainment is a lasting memory from this weekend – the school song JCP sang in his last days. This *Newsletter* is largely devoted to Conference Views, balanced (it is hoped) by a Littleton postscript; a chewy 1930s appraisal of Theodore; more of JCP's (fairly) early 'letters home'; and again a heartfelt account of the memorial walk on Llewelyn's birthday.

ON OTHER PAGES

CONFERENCE
2004

Glen Cavaliero, Peter Lazare, Richard Perceval Graves

In the Powell Theatre foyer

In the Dining Room

In the Bar

Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe, Peter Birtles, Anna Pawelko, Jacqueline Peltier, John Dunn

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society, held in the Powell Theatre, Sherborne School, 11am, Sunday 29th August 2004

Present The Officers, members of the Committee and about 35 members of the Society.

Apologies were received from John Powys, Jeff Kwintner, Lorna Fisher (Committee); Patricia Dawson, Jean-Paul de Waegenaere, Rosemary Dickens, Belinda Humfrey.

Minutes of the 2003 AGM were approved as published in *Newsletter* 50, November 2003.

The Chairman (Richard Graves) referred to his report printed in the last *Newsletter* (52) and introduced our new Secretary, Peter Lazare. We also have a change of Vice-Chairman, with David Gervais taking over from David Goodway (who remains on the Committee).

The Chairman thanked Peter Foss for his excellent work as Hon. Secretary over the past three years. He also thanked Peter Foss and Louise de Bruin for their tremendous efforts in organising the Conference, and passed on the welcome news that the two of them had volunteered to continue to organise future conferences. This would make life easier for the new Secretary Peter Lazare, to whom the Chairman extended a warm welcome in which everyone present heartily joined.

He also repeated our thanks to Peter Tait, headmaster of the Prep School, for suggesting and helping with this Conference, and for his excellent talk.

He confirmed that although he had originally agreed only to stay three years as Chairman, in order to spread the changes he will stay for another year until the next Conference. Candidates for the chairmanship should therefore be proposed during the coming year.

The Hon. Secretary (Peter Foss) then delivered his retiring report for the year.

The current **committee** has met four times during the year since the last AGM: on 1st November, on 21st February, on 3rd July, and on 27th August (before this Conference). During the course of these meetings a number of important issues were discussed involving the current state and future of the Society.

Among these, as will be made clear in the Treasurer's Report, and as published in *Newsletter* 52, was the **financial state** of the Society. It had always been the policy since an in-house Publications Report of 1989 that the Society's ***Journal*** and ***Newsletter*** should take up the major part of the Society's regular income (90%), but that this had increased somewhat beyond that percentage meant that remedial action had to be taken to limit the size and scale of these publications.

There is no doubt, however, that *The Powys Journal* and the *Newsletter*, taken together, constitute the society's flagship productions. There cannot be any society anywhere of this size that produces such substantial and important publications as a matter of course each year, and the Committee still feels that these are our main

links with the majority of our membership, who receive these publications in return for their membership payment. Decisions were taken, however, to keep the scale of the publications in reasonable check (the *Newsletter* should be ideally around the 40-page mark; the *Journal* around the 150–170 page mark), and other decisions were taken regarding the annual subscription (as outlined by the Treasurer). It seems to me a matter of pride and wonder that we have to talk about the publications not being too long, since it indicates not just the wealth of the writings and literary connections of the Powys brothers but also the wealth of desire to talk and write about them!

Also under discussion throughout this last year were matters regarding the Annual **Conference** (such as dates and venues), and the question of **membership numbers**. As previous committees will testify all these matters are perennial topics of discussion (even of angst), and the AGM might have its opinion on these, which it would like to share. What, for instance, is an ideal date for our Conferences – early August, late August (probably coinciding with the Bank Holiday), or early September? And what about membership? How can a small society with a few voluntary officers hope to go out into the great wide world evangelizing for The Powys Society? On looking into comparisons with other societies of similar numbers and length of years, it seems that we are on a par, but equally, we probably do more publications than other literary societies of a similar size (and fewer events). I am not sure unless we get the media interested that there are vast numbers of people out there wanting to join us. Perhaps we need a Reality Powys–TV show. We do have a steady interest, mostly through the website. The present honorary and paid-up membership for 2004 stands at 298.

Our Conference this year has taken up more time than in previous years for a variety of reasons. Next year, in accordance with a show of hands at the last AGM, we hope to return to The Hand Hotel, Llangollen, and we are grateful that Louise de Bruin has agreed to be Conference Organiser again. Other venues have been looked at but they are very often unsuitable and expensive, though we do hope to find one in Sussex for 2006.

An activity of the last year was a meeting at Cheltenham devoted to a **discussion** of *Wolf Solent*. This was led by David Gervais, and was attended by about a dozen members. We hope to continue the pattern of scholarly but informal meetings in different locations devoted to particular works of the brothers.

Another task that has occupied myself over much of the year is the follow-through of sales of ***Wessex Memories***, published this time last year. In the Autumn of 2003 about £250-worth of books were sold by hand to shops in Dorset. There was a great deal of interest in the book and most outlets took several copies on as straight sales. But this was hard work and cannot be done on a regular basis. What the Society needs is a skilled volunteer marketing strategist for its publications, and I think I am right in saying that none of the present Committee are terribly good at that kind of thing. However, *Wessex Memories* has now almost sold out; many sales came through the appreciative full-page review by Tony Head in the *TLS* and through a recommendation in *The Countryman*. There were also exchange leaflets sent out through the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society and the William Barnes Society, and a review in the Richard Jefferies Society *Journal*. When the remaining 40 or so are sold, the book should have broken even.

A concomitant effect of the publication of *Wessex Memories* was that a **benefactor** has come forward to fund the publication of **another Llewelyn Powys book**, which will cover the total print-cost and all work involved on it. This grant, of course, is very

much welcomed by the Committee (particularly as it involves no cost to the Society, although at present envisaged to be published by the Society), and will be coordinated by Tony Head and myself.

One of the last acts of the current Committee was to join the **Alliance of Literary Societies** for a small fee, which enabled us to be represented on their website, to receive their publication, *The Open Book,* and to benefit from the networking body which it incorporates.

This is my **last Report to you as Honorary Secretary.** Little did I think when I came into the society in 1973 (for many years a sleeping member), nor when I came onto the Committee for the first time in about 1981, nor indeed when I came onto the Committee for the second time in 1989 – little did I think that I should end up as Hon. Sec. Nor did I think that (or covet it) when I was *Journal* editor, with Louise, from 1990 to 1995, and in 1996. And I certainly didn't think that when I put up for election in the year 2000 (the post, as you may remember, was for Vice-Chairman, and the odds of being elected were slender to say the least!) But the whirligig of time brings in strange changes. The best thing I did in all those early days was probably to keep very quiet (or at least that is what I preferred), but if there was any lasting benefit to the Society of my having any association with it, it was the day in August 1992, when I approached Mr Bissell to ask him if he would leave his collection to The Powys Society (as it was said at the time, without my personal knowedge of Ted Bissell and preparing the ground, his gift to the Society would not have happened. I am still proud of that coup). Apart from that I don't think I have done anything out of the ordinary – merely kept things ticking along – and I am aware of many things not done as Secretary, which given more time and means, might have been done.

At the beginning of this last session, the Committee was worried that it seemed both the Secretary and the Chairman were going to be stepping down. I am happy to say that Richard has decided to stay on for this year, and I am even happier that a very good member agreed to be nominated for the position of Secretary. I would like to thank all the members of the Committee over the last three years, with whom it has been a pleasure to work.

I was looking for a quote to sum up this occasion – I even looked in my W. H. Smith's Diary, where each page provides a thought or quotation for the week – but all I could find, for this week, were the Duke of Wellington's words at the battle of Waterloo, 'Always make water when you can!' So without further ado, I would simply like to hand over the reins of power (a floppy disk) to my successor, **Peter Lazare**, and wish him well. Thank you.

Peter Foss

The Treasurer (Michael French) referred to his report as printed in the last *Newsletter* (52). He expressed our gratitude to J. S. Allen who has agreed to continue as **Auditor**.

Election Officers and Committee were elected unopposed. The Committee now consists of 11 members including the 4 Officers and the two previously co-opted members (Lorna (Fisher) Burns and Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe). Stephen Powys Marks is Publications Manager, Louise de Bruin and Peter Foss are Conference Organisers.

2005 Conference A return to the Hand Hotel, Llangollen, has been approved and provisionally booked for **19th–21st August 2005** (the weekend before the Bank Holiday). The Committee recognises that for some members it means a

considerably longer journey, but the popularity of the 2003 Conference there was in its favour, as was the prospect of easier organisation and the comfort that a hotel provides.

AOB Jacqueline Peltier reminded us that **Professor Keith's 'Companion' notes** to *Porius* have now been joined on the Internet by his Notes to *A Glastonbury Romance*. These very helpful commentaries are open to continuous revision, and readers' suggestions sent to Professor Keith (or to JP) can be incorporated. The 'Companions' will be kept up to date on the Society's and on her website, and can be printed economically as booklets (some examples were brought to the conference. She congratulated Professor Keith on his work and thanked him on behalf of all the Society.

In answer to questions, the Chairman said there was no change in the position of the **Collection in the DCM**. The conditions agreed by the Society in its contract with the DCM continue. The Museum is said to have acquired more volunteer help, though not specifically for the literary collections. He has confidence that the new Director, Judy Lindsay, understands the situation, and hopes to discuss it with her on behalf of the Society at regular intervals.

There was no other business, and the meeting closed, to be followed by a discussion on 'Creative Schooldays'.

Powys Journal *offers*

Members who wish to complete their run of the Society's Journal are reminded that back numbers of *The Powys Journal* are available from the Treasurer at a cost of £5.00 per volume (inclusive of postage in UK: international add 10%).

As part of the Society's mission to widen the appreciation of the works of the Powys family, the Society is prepared to offer educational and charitable institutions complete sets of the *Journal* from Volume I (1991) through Volume XIV (2004) to those institutions who take out institutional membership of the Society (£25.00 in UK, £35.00 overseas) for 2005. (Postage in UK £9.00, International £27.00). If any institution wishes to review a specimen copy of the *Journal*, the Treasurer would be pleased to send one on request.

While the Society would hope that an institution would continue their membership in future years, the commitment would be for 2005 only and this would entitle the institution to receive Volume XV of the *Journal* when published in September 2005.

The Committee would be grateful if members could bring this offer to the attention of any institutions with which they are associated.

Annual Subscription 2005

Members are reminded that their annual subscription for 2005 is due on 1st January.

The Treasurer wrote in early November to all members who pay by Standing Order enclosing an amended Standing Order form to reflect the increased subscription payable from 1st January. It would be very helpful if members could return this amended Standing Order form to the Treasurer promptly to ensure that their bank makes the correct payment in 2005.

Members who pay by cheque should ensure that their payment reflects the new rates of subscription: £18.50 for United Kingdom members; £22.00 (33.00 euros or US $40.00) for international members and £10.00 for students.

MF

Committee News

The Committee met as usual before the Conference, on **Friday 27th August**, in one of the old school rooms surrounded by school Honours Boards (this was to be used as the Book Room). The Conference organisers, Peter and Louise, explained the difficulties of this year's arrangements. The Committee commiserated and appreciated their good humour and sangfroid; and were relieved that they would stay on as a team for next year. Kate described the (minimal) changes at the Hand Hotel when seen in June. It has a new manager with whom the organisers have made preliminary contacts. Richard also especially thanked David Gervais for taking over at very short notice from Jeremy Hooker, who had been planned to speak but had to withdraw because of illness. We were sad that Jeff Kwintner was unwell, but glad to hear he hoped to come for one day. (Lorna Fisher, on the eve of her wedding, would also be able to able to appear for part of the time.) We were delighted that Peter Lazare has come forward to take over the Secretaryship, and grateful to Richard staying another year as Chairman to avoid a double change. Charges to day visitors were decided (£10 per lecture, or if joining at the new £16 rate, lecture charges waived). Posters had been placed in the Tourist Information Centre, and some local people had already asked for tickets. The Chairman gave the usual reminders of welcoming unfamiliar members, and of no smoking anywhere indoors (the bar on the first night proved an appreciated exception).

The next meeting was on **Saturday 23rd October**, at Richard Graves's new house in Bristol. Richard began with a reading from 'Lucifer'. Michael French (Treasurer) reported that this year's Conference had cost less than expected. (The conferences aren't planned to make a profit, but if they do it is good to have

some reserve for the opposite case.) With the rise in the subscription rate the financial position was healthy enough for new publications to be thought of. Revised Standing Order forms are on the way. More efforts are being made to place the stockpile of *Journals* appropriately. *Wessex Memories* has now paid for itself, thanks to sales efforts by Peter Foss. Agreements are being reached with David Solomon for the next Llewelyn publication (a selection of his best writing). A meeting at the DCM is proposed for November. We intend to try to make the Collection up-to-date with copies of publications from the last few years, where possible by donation. We agreed to join the other literary societies in the DCM (Hardy, Barnes, Warner) with a view to reciprocal arrangements. We discussed the legal requirements for a revised Members' address list to be sent out as in previous years: members would need to opt in rather than out. The Constitution as finally revised should also be sent out again. It was felt that some procedure should be brought in for members at the AGM to approve newly-elected Officers. The out-of-date *Check List* needs modernising; Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe has volunteered to look into this. **The Hand Hotel, Llangollen, 19th–21st August, is agreed for next year's Conference** and the Organisers will start negotiating. We will hope to hold another Discussion Meeting next year, possibly again on T. F. Powys – Llewelyn's turn to wait for his new publication. A meeting on JCP and D. H. Lawrence has been suggested. We authorised Larry Mitchell to place an advertisement for the Society in the forthcoming Literary Journals number of the *TLS*.

KK *(an informal report – official minutes can be seen on request)*

Sherborne School: the garden, with Richard Perceval Graves, Larry Mitchell.

From the New Secretary

I would like to thank Peter Foss for his kind transfer of the post of Honorary Secretary and for his invaluable guidance. I am also thoroughly relieved that he and Louise de Bruin will continue to organise the annual conference.

From the moment I first wandered into the Book Room at the start of the 2002 conference at Millfield I found myself drawn to The Powys Society. In its community I feel at home; and with the allegiances of the members to one or more of the brothers, and with the fascinating questions that the writings raise, there is scope for endless debate and elucidation. So that the gatherings of the Society make me think of lines from Ezra Pound's "Exile's Letter":

And they made nothing of sea-crossing or of mountain-crossing,
If only they could be of that fellowship,
And we all spoke out our hearts and minds, and without regret.

In his Secretary's report at Sherborne Peter spoke modestly of having kept things 'ticking over'. If I can keep things ticking over nearly as well I shall be very pleased.

Peter Lazare

The new Hon. Secretary.

Conference Views

Sometimes? Never?

I wondered if this was a conference I wanted to go to – schooldays of the Powys brothers?

The Powys Society began to assemble, old friends and some new faces. 'How was your year?' Buzz; anticipation.

I was given a shared but secret number. The blue door's code opened onto uneven flagstones and a dark passage. Lights flashed on as I walked to room six. On opening the door I saw high windows and beyond, a small courtyard. The notice-free notice boards and shelf bed felt bare and desolate.

Outside in the exquisite late summer light the golden buildings gleamed. Within, in the barrel-vaulted dining hall, Edward VI presided with scraggy legs in red hose – just a boy!

That evening in the dark 'cinema' we were invited to 'lift our eyes to the hills' and to 'suffer little children'. T. F. Powys was the brother who struggled here. The hills around were heavy with rain clouds and the atmosphere was wet – Dorset wet.

Morning began with Dostoyevsky, D. H. Lawrence, Rabelais, Dickens, Cervantes, Jane Austen, JCP, TF *et al.* Our minds were expanded, broadened, enriched. Vicarage Childhoods: acrobatics, humour and above all the novelists' 'imaginative generosity' kept us spellbound. I was warming to this Conference.

Now for Sherborne, the place. I suspect few considered walking to Montacute and back but the Abbey, bookshops, lanes and teashops had plenty to offer. I had hoped to spot a soaking wet JCP, but as always he was just around the corner.

In the traditional entertainment, 'The Unreturning Morning', we listened to these Powys boys and were drawn into their world – the school song, the headmaster's report and letters home. Were they happy? Sometimes? Never? On our last morning we walked in a gaggle to Sherborne Prep up an avenue of Horse Chestnuts planted by Littleton in his days as headmaster. He had planted them knowing of boys' need to play 'conkers'.

How would we have been? How were we in our schooldays? Glad to have been beaten? Purged by the system, did we now believe in harshness? Unaware of privilege or unaware of underprivilege? We were now about to depart, the better for having been for a few days together at Sherborne. I went to my room. It had become my own. I said my goodbyes. I had enjoyed my Sherborne Schooldays.

Sonia Lewis

A fan-like leaf; full moon; a dragonfly

Almost forty years after discovering *Wolf Solent*, my first taste of J. C. Powys, in Staines library, I followed in Solent's footsteps, taking the train from Waterloo

west to Sherborne. It was to be my first Powys Conference. I arrived early and explored the town, pulling my wheeled suitcase behind me until it was time to check in.

At the reception in the foyer of the Powell Theatre it was a curious but very welcome sensation to meet people who were avid Powys readers. Usually when I tell someone I'm reading a book by one of the Powys clan I have to explain who they are – but here everyone already knew, of course, and indeed had their favourite among them. After dinner we heard a detailed and fascinating account from Professor John Williams about the child-men in T. F. Powys's work and also about TF's complex attitude towards God. Does God, TF appears to ask, need humankind to forgive him for creating a flawed world? Next morning, after breakfast in the Old Schoolroom where the brothers had their lessons, Dr David Gervais took us on a wide-ranging voyage through the many affinities between JCP and writers like Dostoievsky and Dickens, and his place among them. In a discussion that followed we talked about JCP's sense of humour: while having dinner with friends whose dining table had a wobbly leg, the hostess commented that they were having a *balanced meal* – to no response from JCP. However, the piano-playing clown Jerry Cobbald in *Weymouth Sands* attests to JCP's comic-perception.

After lunch I paid an all-too-rapid visit to the Abbey. The choir were practising – their voices soared into the fan vaulting of the roof. I admired the beautiful modern stained-glass west window, with its vivid green Tree of Life. The afternoon was free, and Kate and Patrick Kavanagh took Cicely Hill and me to the ruins of old Sherborne Castle, where we walked around the great devastation of stone under an atmospherically threatening sky, and looked across the lake to Sherborne Castle, the house, set among a Capability Brown landscape. We then toured the house. The family's crest is the ostrich, and ostrich ornamentation figured throughout. Sir Walter Rawleigh had been a former inhabitant. We admired his pipe, big as a hookah, rough-hewn apparently from a single branch. Very memorable was the beautiful ancient Ginko Biloba tree in the grounds near the tea-house. I picked up

The Society visits Sherborne Prep.

one of its fan-like leaves to preserve in my diary.

Evening consisted of a recital in speech and song, accompanied by wonderful slides of the brothers, based upon their time at Sherborne School. This vividly evoked JCP's anguish, Littleton's immediate sense of belonging, and Llewelyn's adolescent struggles with sexuality and religion. Afterwards, as I walked back to my room, I saw the full moon shining down on the graveyard of the Methodist church, and I remembered these lines from JCP's *Sonnet*:

O none the less remember when my star
Falls upon eclipse to write upon my tomb,
He that lies here was happy when a child.

So maybe he was not unhappy all the time at school.

On Sunday morning, Peter Tait, headmaster of Sherborne Prep School, talked about Littleton Powys, a former headmaster. I was particularly interested in this, as I am an admirer of the novels of Elizabeth Myers, Littleton's second wife. We were given a fine tour of the school. I enjoyed seeing Louis MacNeice's name on the Honour Board, and the portion of a door on which the Powys boys had practiced their carving skills. On the way back, I saw a huge, incandescent, Powysian dragonfly.

At the discussion following the AGM, dreadful stories of school punishments came to light. I remembered how quiet and peaceful my girls' secondary school had been, after the hurly-burly of my primary school that until the war had been boys-only and still showed it. So we came to the Conference's conclusion. Having made new friends, and met up with old friends again after many years, I made my way to the station where a number of conferencees were also waiting for the London train, enabling us to prolong acquaintance and look forward to the '05 Powys Conference in Wales.

Penelope Shuttle

A vaporous aura

The early morning mist that enveloped Sherborne Abbey and School on Saturday August 28th presented a picture from the windows of Abbey House that, but for the odd car parked here or there, would have been recognised and enjoyed by John Cowper or Littleton Powys when they were in residence there. This vaporous aura in Sherborne, *Wolf Solent*'s Ramsgard, was appropriately Powysian and perhaps being in the centre of the town itself, with taverns and tea-shops at hand, instead of on a more isolated campus, contributed both to *the good attendance and conviviality at this Conference.*

Four talks and an evening's entertainment was just the right balance for a two-day event, and I found them all deeply engaging. John Williams offered a close textual (and typographical) reading of aspects of T. F. Powys's language, while David Gervais, standing in at a moment's notice for Jeremy Hooker, discussed John Cowper as a figure of stature in European literature, rather than from a

narrower 'Eng. Lit.' perspective, a direction in which JCP studies should surely be pointed. A. N. Wilson gave an engrossing and at times moving talk on 'Vicarage Childhoods', and it was only a pity the ensuing discussion had to be cut short for lunch. A judiciously scheduled free afternoon enabled conferees to visit places of interest in the vicinity or to wander around the town. I chose to revisit the Abbey, in particular the graves of the ninth-century kings Aethelbald and Aethelberht, brothers and predecessors of Alfred the Great, the reputed founder of Sherborne School (and but for whose final victory over the Danes at Ethandun [Edington] 30 miles to the northeast there would be no English language as we know it and celebrate it in the writings of the Powyses), and then to repair to a blissfully deserted tea-shop around the corner.

If the Conference had a highlight, it was Saturday evening's entertainment, a cleverly dramatised 'sequence of words and music' about the Powyses at Sherborne by Peter Foss, ably produced by Chris Wilkinson, whose reading of passages from Littleton's *The Joy of It* in particular brought out some of the latent and neglected qualities of the book and made me want to return to it immediately. The accompanying pamphlet, too, was a collectible piece of Powysiana in its own right, containing some hitherto unpublished photographs, including a wonderful cover shot of Willie and Llewelyn as schoolboys, the latter suggesting suppressed intimations of Hooray Henryism.

Littleton was the subject of the last talk on Sunday by Peter Tait, headmaster of the Sherborne Prep, who presented a more rounded view of this often dismissed brother while tactfully noting the peculiar oppressiveness of *too much optimism*! This was immediately followed by a tour of Acreman House, where all the Brothers had at one time or another been, and though it had obviously altered in some ways it was still possible to get a sense of what it must have been like a century or so ago.

The discussion that followed the AGM, ostensibly on 'Creative Schooldays' but which in fact turned into a forum for the airing of various views on the English Public School 'system', brought the Conference to an appropriately spirited conclusion. I'm sure I would not be alone in expressing gratitude again to the organisers Louise de Bruin and Peter Foss, who have also agreed to arrange next year's gathering back at Llangollen. The Conference remains in good hands. The inevitable regret at not having enough time or opportunity to talk to everyone present was partly compensated for by the pleasure of making new acquaintances and being able to put a few more faces to names. My only disappointment occurred later, when I noticed at the back of the Sherborne School Information Guide, free copies of which were available, a page entitled 'A Selection of OS Alumni'. There were actors aplenty – Jeremy Irons, John Le Mesurier, Lance Percival, Jon Pertwee. The politician and athlete Chris Chataway was there, as was the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead and the Enigma code-breaker Alan Turing. Among writers, there was John Le Carré, Cecil Day-

Lewis, and even the gossip columnist Nigel Dempster. But not a Powys Brother in sight. I wonder whether, in the wake of such an enjoyable Conference involving the cooperation and participation of the School, now might be a good opportunity to tactfully address these omissions?

Anthony Head

Stones and heroes

Sherborne is a town of yellow stone and yellow tap water, dominated by the Abbey and the School. There were no boys in straw hats populating the town during the Conference, but having passed through the archway leading to the School courtyard we were transported into the Powys era. It was easy when sitting in the dining hall, beneath the painted statue of King Edward the Sixth, to imagine our literary heroes there in bygone days. Though the atmosphere was congenial to us diners, we considered the various miseries suffered there by some of the Powys brothers, and this subject was one of the Conference themes.

The lecture by John Williams was on 'The Redemptive Language of T. F. Powys's Writings', examining links between Psalm 121 and Madder Hill, which features often in Theodore's work as a symbol of atonement. Our next talk, delivered by David Gervais, looked at John Cowper Powys's connection with the European literary tradition rather than the English. As we were in Sherborne it was appropriate that *Wolf Solent* was considered. David thought that Wolf's inviolable character likened him to Cassius Clay, with Wolf's refusal to give in or give up being in contrast with Hardy's fatalistic approach.

A. N. Wilson's lecture brought us to the subject of vicarage childhoods, and he began by amusing us with the changes of use suffered by the vicarage in the present day. Gone is the parson's study with its floor to ceiling books, replaced by padded ottomans, *Country Life*, Zanussi and Nigella. In earlier times Greek was read and the food was frugal. Perhaps an ideal breeding ground for budding novelists? There followed a comprehensive list of authors who had known vicarage childhoods, including the Powyses, Brontës, Kingsley, Dryden, Wilde and Tennyson. Such a blessing that the clergy are not celibate!

Our Saturday night's entertainment was another splendidly engineered production devised by Peter Foss, who gave us a sensitive portrayal of Llewelyn. The performance opened with a rousing delivery of the old School song, embellished with many Vivats, delivered by Pat Roberts, and continued with words from JCP's *Autobiography* describing his eccentric mastications, convincingly delivered by our Chairman. The whole was illustrated with schoolboy photos of the brothers – a very enjoyable evening.

The final talk was held in the Sherborne Prep School on the subject of Littleton Powys, and given by the current headmaster, Peter Tait, who is a member of the Society. It is a shame that his enthusiasm is not echoed by the staff of the Upper school who seem to have little interest in the Powyses. Peter's pupils

are taken to the Powys room in Dorchester Museum as an introduction to the family, surely a good plan for continuing interest in the brothers. We were shown around the buildings of the Prep School, obviously much changed from Littleton's time, although a board inscribed with Powys graffiti has been preserved.

The discussion that followed the AGM brought up the subject of the misery suffered at English Public Schools by the boarders. Tim Hyman likened his experience at Charterhouse to living in a fascist régime, and others echoed this feeling. But it would be a shame to end on a sour note for what was another very stimulating weekend. I could talk about the antiquated showers in our accommodation and the after-hours drinking in the dorm that a few of us enjoyed as we watched the moon sail past the stone mullioned windows. Both interesting and fun, although the showers were a bit too interesting. If you have never been you are missing a great weekend.

Anna Pawelko

Prisons, viewpoints?

Living in Wakefield I always welcome the opportunity to travel South. Brought up in Corfe Castle, Dorset is my County. I cycled all over it as a teenager. So the town of Wolf Solent was a good place to be, though no basins in the school's spartan rooms and shared uni-sex toilets must remain a serious concern for us all!

Dramatised Readings are becoming very much part of the Powys Conference, and I was pleased to be asked to take part in this year's as Louis MacNeice. Selected from many sources, diaries, letters and published works, it portrayed the school life of the Powyses at Sherborne from 1883 when Littleton and John first arrived, brought there by their father when W. H. Blake was the Headmaster. With the scenes set by a Narrator, we were taken back through the medium of the Powyses' own recollections to that first day, then to their relationships with other boys, their growing awareness of the town and its landscapes beyond, and John's developing alienation, ending with his speech described in his *Autobiography*. Llewelyn and Bertie were to join them. Then Willie. Theodore was to spend only some four terms at the Prep School. Here, entering the rough and tumble of an English public school, were the sons of a Vicarage Childhood – the very same that A. N. Wilson had portrayed so amusingly and succinctly in his talk. It was as always John who stamped his forceful personality on the evening, rendered with authority by Richard. But the other boys also shone through: Littleton, the rock for the insecure Theodore; Llewelyn and his raging hormones: Bertie with his woodwork, and lastly Willie with his love of ratting.

It was a great pleasure to read the extract from Louis MacNeice's poem 'The Kingdom'. Here Littleton comes into his own. For MacNeice he was Headmaster: a tower – a symbol of contained strength – for a quiet self-absorbed child, just as he had been earlier for Theodore. How can we explain Littleton's personality

when paired with his more complex brothers? Perhaps he chose that role as a foil, or even as a place of safety. 'Towers' are dungeons, prisons, viewpoints. They become ruins like the great gate in old Sherborne Castle, or that round structure amongst woodland seen on the left as you journey beyond Plush towards Piddle Hinton. Beneath 'The Joy of It', which was his?

Leaving Powys country for Stonehenge and the North, I found myself asking whether their weren't two Powys Societies. The one, Public School, published and academic – the majority; and the other to which I myself belonged, working-class in origin and self-educated. Theme for a future end-of-Conference discussion perhaps? But no. We are all working-class now and after the formal, what else is there but self-education and the intuitive questioning of the one who journeys.

Wolf Solent's Old Age

Companion to pavement and stream
Wolf, restless as Autumn,
An old spirit, offers footfalls,
A hand's touch, a last gaze,
To streets shadowy as woods
Branched along the distant ridge.
Always stranger seeking space
The meadows beaten in silver.
A railway display still recording
The last train closes the search
Where voices crowding out the heart
Are thorns spiking the dusk
Like stars trapped in a wintering lake.

Colin W. Thomas

Discussion: Not so creative

Following the AGM, the discussion on '**Creative schooldays**' tended predictably to individual histories. There was some surprise at the high percentage of members from boarding schools, but little surprise that so many of those – articulate males over 50 ? – produced more negative than creative memories: the JCP vs the Littleton experiences. 'Gulag & Custard' was the kinder of remarks. A few boarders spoke up for their schools, with some praise for creative music and drama departments. Representatives of the (we are told) more recent, gentler, more evolved – even co-educational – traditional boarding school, were lacking. The only sport this reporter remembers mentioned favorably was ice hockey. But how much of the negative experience came from the boarding, rather than the school itself? It was pointed out from the platform (and murmured from the floor) that despite their painful failures, fee-paying boarding schools were a

privileged experience, providing small classes, often first-rate teaching and facilities and many advantages, even if (now) not necessary social advantages, for those able to enjoy them.

What might be called the negative creativity of boarding – i.e. appreciating the rest of life by contrast – was signalled, but not much followed up. Enhanced appreciation of home? This was denied by one sufferer. (It is true too that the contrasts can be counterproductive, with unreal idealisation of Home leading to disappointment.) Enjoyment of simple comforts? (as the schoolboy JCP imagined taking in the milk on one's own doorstep to be the utmost life had to offer.) Enjoying weather? Food? Sleep? (Laziness? Greed?) Not taking pleasures for granted could be a creative result – flip side of the legend about old-time public-schoolboys, schooled in discomfort and grief, having no problems with prison or battlefields. The contrary effects of boredom and restriction could improve concentration, when it worked. A teacher from rule-free pupil-choice Dartington noted that it was the ex-public-school types who chose to stay in bed. There were the usual indefensible defences of corporal punishment (a.k.a. rule by pain, fear and humiliation) as an education in fair play.

Day School experiences were less vocal – because less uncreative? For some with a family tradition of teaching, school was a normal state; others positively enjoyed it, made friends for life. The 'time between' – travel each day between home and school – was a bonus for observing things. For many (from all kinds of school) education began where school stopped. One inspiring teacher could create much.

No very creative conclusions were reached, and a lot of creativity-potential remained unexplored. Certain schools of all kinds are surely more helpful than others; some kinds of teaching more encouraging – not to mention that some people *enjoy learning*. As always, Luck (JCP's goddess *Tyche*) plays a creative part. With Powyses in mind, I'd like to have gone into the value of Stoicism (did old-style social-conditioning ever really work?); and the effects on originality (and creativity) of having to live in a conforming tribe. Also, whether daily parent-experience is, on balance, helpful to future writers – if nothing else, as a contribution to realism. What old-style public schools exclusively offered was team games, a social tribe, and relief for the parents. Of the six Powys brothers, how many of them (two?) were helped by their schooldays? Would JCP, would Llewelyn, have turned out differently from being educated at home with their sisters? (who, paradoxically, might have been longing to go away to school.)

Maybe we need to re-think this discussion space for future conferences. The time between AGM and lunch is limited; the AGM AOB shouldn't feel hurried, and discussions need time to get going. More organized maybe, with questions suggested in advance? Or possibly Schooldays is an uncreative subject.

KK

David Goodway, Glen Cavaliero, A. N. Wilson

John Hodgson, Antony Head

P. J. Kavanagh, Bill & Hiroko Keith

Robin Wood, Cicely Hill

CONFERENCE
2004

Lucy Folkes, Raymond & Patricia Cox

David Thickbroom, Michael French, Colin Thomas

John Hodgson, Anna Pawelko, Sonia Lewis

Jeff Kwintner, David Gervais

Louise de Bruin, Peter Foss, Jacqueline Peltier

News & Notes

The ignorant Editor would welcome any information about the **cover photograph** of the **head of JCP** that presided from the platform at Sherborne, or about any others of the recorded sculptures of JCP. The list so far is: (1) Sherborne (the same – surely? – as the frontispiece to Langridge's *Record*, 'by Miriam Bryans', no date); (2) the one in the photograph with Dreiser (*Review* 6, cover and p.16); (3) Joachim Karsch, 1938 (*Review* 7, p.45); (4) Jonah Jones, 1957 (see *Essays on JCP*, and *Review* 27/28, p.15); and (5) Oloff de Wet, 1963 (as displayed in Jeff Kwintner's bookshop – see the Village Press booklet, 1974). Sherborne and de Wet look to me the most lively, but photographs are deceptive.

* * * *

David Gervais's **talk in Dorchester** on October 5th was unfortunately cancelled, because of ill-health.

* * * *

A. N. Wilson's book column in the Monday *Telegraph* has already included three Powys-related subjects in his alluring inventive style: a tribute to T. F. Powys (he recommends *Mr. Weston* and *Kindness in a Corner*); a condensed 'Vicarage Childhoods'; and (1st November) 'Through the past darkly with Powys', on the influence of Max Stirner and *Porius* as prophetic history.

* * * *

The new Oxford ***DNB*** articles on JCP, TFP and LlP are by Belinda Humfrey, the late Bernard Jones, and Peter Foss respectively. JCP rates a portrait.

* * * *

Lace and Lace Making by **Marian Powys** was republished by Dover Publications (March 2002, ISBN 0486 41811 1). 'Comprehensive, profusely illustrated book, written with charm and enthusiasm'. (No information, however, of the Greenwich Village exhibition said to be (planned?) at the Metropolitan Museum, N.Y.)

* * * *

Glastonbury ('the literary masterpiece'), *Maiden Castle* ('the classic novel, unabridged for the first time'), *Weymouth Sands* ('A modern classic of psychological insight and humanity') and now *Owen Glendower* ('One of the most fascinating of all historical novels') are all still **in print from Overlook.**

* * * *

Gamel Woolsey's *Death's Other Kingdom* (her experiences of the Spanish Civil War) has been reprinted (paperback) by Eland Books (ISBN 090 787 119 4).

* * * *

Margaret Drabble's tribute to Angus Wilson, mentioning the causes he championed, ranging 'from homosexual law reform to anti-apartheid ... and also the reputation of neglected writers like John Cowper Powys' is included (p.133) in *Well Remembered Friends, Eulogies on Celebrated Lives*, ed. Angela Huth (John Murray, 2004).

* * * *

Others may have noted (if only from reviews) the close resemblence to ***Mr.***

Weston's Good Wine of *Mr Golightly's Holiday* by Salley Vickers (Harper Perennials). Frank Kibblewhite who has read the updated story reports:

> 'On an afternoon in mid March ... an old half-timbered Traveller van drove into the village of Great Calne.' In my local bookshop a few weeks back I was drawn to a copy of *Mr Golightly's Holiday* by Salley Vickers largely on account of the book's cover which featured a detail from Samuel Palmer's *The Magic Apple Tree*, when I read the opening sentence above. Within a few pages of Mr Golightly's arrival in the Dartmoor village it becomes clear – though it is never explicitly stated – that he is an incarnation of God the Father.
>
> Unlike the wine-merchant, Mr Weston, Mr Golightly is a writer who, needing younger readers for his best-selling book, intends to rewrite it as a television soap, but is continually interrupted by his new neighbours with dramatically soap-operatic problems of their own involving sex, violence, child abuse, absent fathers, an escaped convict, truanting, divorce and death. The cast includes Mary, a virginal barmaid, Luke, a writer, a rogue builder, a jargon-spouting woman vicar, a lesbian teashop owner, several other contemporary comics and a widow traumatised by disembodied voices.
>
> So Mr Golightly ends up spending all his time writing e-mails to his aides (Martha, Mike and Raphael) and replying to gnomic messages from an anonymous correspondent, eventually identified as his creation, and ancient adversary 'with destroyed starlight for eyes'. Eventually Mr Golightly realises that the adversary has developed a faculty for human affection which he never implanted, and concludes 'There are many ways in which my characters are superior to their author.' Then his angels fly him away in a fiery car !!!

A note by the author at the end of the paperback edition admits, 'It has been pointed out to me that a [*sic*] God in the shape of a middle-aged man also visits an English village in T. F. Powys's *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. As Mr Golightly and Mr Weston would probably agree, there is nothing new under the sun and I can only say that the idea came to me independently.'

★ ★ ★ ★

Susan Rands (our Glastonbury correspondent) sends some recent cuttings.

From *Dorset Life*, an inspiring picture of Canon Westcott, Headmaster of Sherborne School (1892–1908), in the part of Saint Aldhelm in the 1904 **Glastonbury pageant** – see *The Joy of It* (p.232) on his 'reign of love and steady progress'.

From the *Central Somerset Gazette*, reports of the launch of a biography of Alice (Alys) Buckton (1867–1944), owner of **Chalice Well** 1913–44 and organiser of many educational and artistic activities there. A 1922 silent film of her pageant, 'Glastonbury Past and Present', has been unearthed from the National Film Theatre archive and shown this year. A memorial service will be held at Glastonbury on 11th December.

From the *Fosse Way Magazine*, a letter from M. J. Protheroe, on the Arthurian evidence and the 'Glastonbury mystique', ends: 'Perhaps J. Cowper Powys got closest to capturing this 'mystique' in referring, in his great novel, *A Glastonbury Romance*, to the 'feminine emanation' of the place, which he even identified with

'a person' – the 'Woman of Sorrows' 'with Christ in lap'. When the Marian, rather than the Arthurian, significance of both the Abbey site (and also the Tor?) is more widely acknowledged, then Glastonbury may yield what Geoffrey Ashe once called its 'elusive final secret'. *(See Editorial in* Newsletter *46.)*

* * * *

A letter from Graham Carey suggests we might hold a conference or a meeting in **D. H. Lawrence** country, with a view to discussing the human territory that DHL and JCP share, with their interesting differences. The Committee agreed it could make a good theme, possibly for a smaller group with some DHL representation. JCP's view of DHL can be seen in *The Powys Review* 16 (from 'Sex in the arts: a symposium', 1932). DHL (*d.*1929) is very unlikely to have come across JCP's work, but at this distance they can be seen as in some areas fellow travellers. (See Glen Cavaliero, 'Phoenix and Serpent', *Review* 2/3.*)* Graham cites the article in the TLS, February 8th 1974 [anon. – by?]: *He is among our most perceptive writers about sex, its drawing power, its earthy joys, its unattainable perfections, confused disappointments, endless delusions, the petty rifts and sundering chasms it sets between the desirer and the desired. He is a prober through and beyond sex which he came to see in its fruitfulness and sterility alike as an inexhaustible source of mental and spiritual energy, without which we cannot realise ourselves* ... (Could this have been said about Lawrence?)

DHL admirers in The Powys Society might comment.

* * * *

Dr Frances Austin-Jones, whose husband was Dr Bernard Jones, a long-standing member of the Society, has placed a number of Powys books in a **sale** at Lawrence's of Crewkerne, **20–21st January**. She also has *JCP: A Man in the Corner* (James Hanley, Village Press booklet) and *The Scapegoat* by T. F. Powys (story photocopied from MS, privately printed 1966 by Peter Riley, no 47/70) available to any members who would like to make her an offer. Her address is The Red House, East Stour, Gillingham SP8 5JY, email: Foaustin@aol.com

* * * *

La lettre powysienne 8 (bilingual) is devoted to *Wolf Solent*, with articles from Hungary, Germany and Sweden as well as France. Details from the powys-lannion website, as also for W. J. Keith's **'Companions' to *Porius* and *Glastonbury***, which are on both Powys sites. Readers' comments on these can be sent to Professor Keith and there will be regular revisions. They can also be printed as booklets, on request.

Littleton: An Alternative View; Another School Song

'The Unrelenting Morning' *made excellent choices from a large amount of material. One passage that escaped the net was Littleton's more sober account of JCP's extravagant farewell performance at Sherborne familiar to us from* Autobiography *(chapter 4, pages 155–6). We have to remember this took place in* the century before last ...

I always wondered at his intellectual endeavours, and knew his character was far stronger and more formed than mine; but with other boys he had no authority. The house evening preparation work of the lower boys, known as 'Hall', was done in the dayroom, and was supervised by senior boys known as 'hall-keepers'. As my brother and I had gone up the school rapidly, this duty early fell on our shoulders. In fact I believe I was only just fifteen when I became a hall-keeper. John always had the utmost difficulty in keeping order, whereas, such is the strange psychology of boys, I had no trouble of any sort. This I knew was no credit to me; it was a power given me by Nature, just as the gift of words had been given to John. But an occasion arose at the end of John's time, when this gift, which he had in such abundance, was used with great effect.

There were in the house at that time a number of vigorous, noisy, unintellectual boys, who made John an object of ridicule and at whose hands he suffered much. I had of course fought his battles to the best of my ability, but to little purpose. One day there had been an intensive bout of ragging, and that evening the Housemaster was to be absent from supper and prayers. John told me that he intended to seize this opportunity and make a speech to the house which would put a stop to all the baiting and fooling which had made his life miserable. I besought him to do nothing of the sort, for I felt sure it would only result in more trouble. But he was absolutely self-confident and no word of mine could divert him from his purpose. So he told the Head

The photograph of Littleton aged (at a guess) about 22 is the one that should have been placed at lower right on page 32 of the last Newsletter.

of House what he wanted to do and received his permission. After prayers the head boy explained that Powys major had somethng he wanted to say to the house; this most unusual and unexpected pronouncement produced absolute silence. Whereupon John stood up and in a speech lasting some ten minutes ridiculed himself and his idiosyncrasies, and made fun of his aggressors, making their behaviour seem childish and stupid; then, becoming serious, he appealed for unity in the house, and drew a picture of the ideal house in which there would be freedom, and give and take, and room for boys of every sort however strange their oddities.

Then suddenly he brought his speech to a close, and crossing the room offered his hand to the ringleader of his persecutors, who, an unimaginative well-meaning youth, overwhelmed by John's eloquence readily seized it, and his example was followed by the rest of the conspirators. There was a general shaking of hands and from that day onwards Powys major had peace. Words for once had won the day. *(from* The Joy of It, *pages 69–70)*

Peter Tait, present Headmaster of Sherborne Prep, giving his talk at the Society's Conference.

Two essays on Sherborne and the Powyses worth revisiting: Oliver Holt: 'Littleton Powys' in The Powys Review *1; and Robert Hands: 'Sherborne's Forgotten Literary Heavyweight' in* Newsletter 36.

Littleton chose not to follow his brother's views on school songs (Autobiography, *114) but JCP would surely have approved of the last lines.*

Letter

From Terry Little, 57 South Avenue, Sherborne, Dorset. (September 2004)

For a recent member of The Powys Society it was indeed opportune that this year's Powys Conference was held in Sherborne, my birthplace ... I enclose a copy of my old School Song (Foster's Grammar, Sherborne) with words by Littleton Powys. He was a Governor of the school in his later years. I remember well his natural dignity and gentle but steadfast demeanour ...

I think he was also a Governor of the Lord Digby School for Girls, but I'm not aware of any other school songs he wrote. I first encountered the Powys name in the 1950s at school, and a little later at a local second-hand bookshop at Greenhill I purchased 'Walt Whitman, a study' by John Aldington Symonds, for the princely

sum of one shilling. Inscribed under the cover in pencil was 'Llewelyn Powys – Acreman House' (this was probably the summer term of 1909 when he helped out Littleton at Sherborne Prep School). In the book are a couple of pencilled notes: on page 122, 'JCP & LP, 2070 Chestnut, Philadelphia. Wiltsport (?) Buildings, 1909', and on page 142, 'Trent churchyard June 1909'.

I was born at Lenthay, JCP's 'Lenty'. After living in London for 35 years I returned to my Sherborne 'roots' to live again in the house of my birth. No sightings yet of the 'Girt Worm' – but I've walked in Lenthay Common for many years, and I once saw a ghostly sight in a misty Autumn sunset – two 'spirit' hounds gambolling momentarily there! As a child I attended Abbey Primary School which was next door to 'Wildman's' House, and I walk Powys Lane daily on my way to the town.

Richard Foster School Song

Nestling mid the Hills of Dorset
In the Vale of Yeo,
Lies the pleasant town of Sherborne
Founded long ago.
In this famous town of learning
Stands the school that we
Think the best and hold as dearest
Of all schools that be.

CHORUS
Therefore raise we loud our voices
And sing with all our powers
Him, whose memory we cherish
In this school of ours.

Full three hundred years have vanished
Since our founder's day,
He who loved the boys of Sherborne,
Loved and helped for aye.
So All Hail! To Richard Foster
To whose vision clear
Owe we now the Education
Offered to us here.

Thanks to Richard Foster's goodness
Here we work and play,
Learning lessons that will help us
This and every day;
Learning all the wondrous mysteries
That our books contain;
How to live our lives most fully
By use of hands and brain.

How to hit the winning sixer,
How to kick the goal,
How to make the wickets scatter
With that fast ball we bowl;
How to face the struggle bravely
When things all go wrong,
Showing that our games have made us
Generous, just and strong.

Soon the world will call our service,
Gladly let us give
All the best that we have learnt here
To those with whom we live.
We'll be straight in all our dealings,
Loyal, clean and true,
And count the sins of cruelty
The blackest we can do.

Littleton Powys

JCP — Letters from Abroad (1899–1914)

(More letters home: compare with what he distilled forty years on, in Autobiography.)

To his mother, aged 26, after going to Paris, Jan. 4 1899

Court House — Sunday

My dear Mother

I came home yesterday after a very pleasant ten days in France. Half the time I was with B. O'Neill the other half alone. I had smooth weather on both crossings and a very lovely day yesterday returning — Dieppe is a fascinating old sea port; quite different from anything one sees in England and the way the train went slowly through the main street, while people sold oranges through the windows seemed most foreign. Norman scenery is very like Somersetshire only more hilly and with poplars instead of elms — the rivers are of the muddy kind and the farmhouses built of stone.

I stopped a night at Rouen coming back and felt quite in the middle ages. There are two magnificent churches there (forgive this quick writing) the Cathedral and St Ouen. Both of them very impressive especially the inside of St Ouen which has pillars of that peculiar grey-green which is the prevailing colour in Westminster Abbey. There is a great deal of very beautiful stained glass as old as 1400 I should think; in St Ouen especially, and big round windows in the West fronts as in Notre Dame but the finest in that kind at Rouen Cathedral where the window looks like a great wild rose touched with a golden sunset. In the Notre Dame window is too much dark blue which gives it rather a heavy appearance.

I stayed in the Rouen Cathedral from two till six till they had lit some of the lights. The coming on of twilight in any church is always beautiful but especially in a Catholic church because the quiet footed black robed nuns in their white hoods and the tattered populace with little children kneeling at the oratories — the women bare headed except for white caps; the men in loose blouses — the quaint old folk who sell tapers and the bowed-down beggars at the door together with the smell of incense and the far off sound of some service being chanted in a distant aisle, the passing of an old white haired priest like of Shakespeare's Friars on his way to the Confessional.

The mystery and sacredness of the whole atmosphere gives one a complete sense of unity with the Past and satisfies the child in the man and the man in the child in us. One thinks of William the Conqueror; of the fairy stories about the Saints, of perfect knights and gentle ladies, of robber barons doing penance, of old Popes with their fine taste for art and their deep craftiness until nine centuries roll back.

The Louvre is an enchanted palace. You would give anything to see the pictures. I cannot give you any idea of their perfectness. There are a whole gallery of Titians, Veroneses, Coreggios and Giorgiones, the glow and gorgeous colour of which takes your breath away. Then in the middle of them will appear a pure and

simple Raphael with fresh cool tints like a spring of mountain water in an oriental garden. There are some fine Watteaus too and Fragonards (a contemporary of his) which are full of the peculiar feeling belonging to the eighteenth century: its lightness, its gaiety. There are some beautiful early Italians, two Botticelli's especially — very characteristic — one quaint Fra Filippo with lizards and bulls and sheep and grass and straw and shepherds and knights and all manner of loving things rejoicing with Mary and an honest Joseph with a short face like Sir Richard Steel. The Venus of Milo passes description it goes beyond one's hopes altogether which does not often happen.

But I must not go on indefinitely — enough. I had a most delightful time and a good stepping-stone towards Rome (dont be frightened) I mean the city.

With love to Father and with love to Gertrude and all

your affec son John

*(*Autobiography, *'Court House' chapter: 'I was still living at Court House when, leaving "The Catholic" — even as one would leave one's Father Confessor — to guard my castle in my absence I set out alone with Bernie, to spend a fortnight in Paris. "The Catholic" told me afterwards that he was singularly tickled by the extreme naivety of my letters home, extracts from which were daily read to him ...' (309–10. A later visit to Paris with Gertrude and Will (434–7) was less efficient.)*

From Rome, postmarked 24 April 1899. (The two following letters were printed in The Powys Newsletter *6 (1983), ed. R. L. Blackmore, Colgate University Press, USA.)*

My dear Mother

Willie and Margaret went this morning to a great festival at the church of St Joseph where they heard some beautiful music and saw an individual dressed in such gorgeous robes that they took him for a Cardinal. For myself I walked round and round the Forum until I was tired. This afternoon we all sat on a wall in the Forum Boarium while Margaret sketched the Temple of Fortune. One is not troubled there by foreign sightseers, the old Jewish quarter used to be near and now the people of that part are more picturesque and more native than elsewhere in Rome. The view of the Aventine with its ruins and churches, palms and cypresses, of the Tiber with the remains of an old Roman bridge stretching out into the water, of the medieval tower of S Maria Cosmedin (built in the 8th century) of the old house of Cola Rienzi and lastly of the round Temple of Hercules, make that wall one of the most delightful seats of Rome.

While Willie took Margaret to have tea; I made my way to the Pyramid of Cestius where the graves of Keats and Shelley are. I came to locked iron gates over which or through which I could see the Pyramid of a dark grey colour surrounded by tall cypresses and fir trees and all manner of gorgeous flowers in pots, or rather I should say the iron gates led into a cemetery separated from the Pyramid by a high wall and full of trees and flowers. Here is the grave of Shelley overhung with white roses and two huge laurel wreaths given probably by the Italian government

who venerated him as an upholder of liberty. Keats's grave is in a corner of a more deserted little plot quite under the Pyramid without trees and without flowers. I had considerable difficulty in getting in. The girl who answered a bell which hung over the iron gates outside the cemetery explained to me that for some reason or other the Cestius part was shut. I walked back to the nearest shop and got change filling my pockets with coppers. These I presented in handfuls to the girl who at last opened a little gate in the wall and I was at the goal of my pilgrimage. There is a small white tombstone with a rough edge at the top and on it the words Here lies what is mortal of a young English Poet who on his deathbed in the bitterness of his heart at the malicious power of his enemies wished that there should be written on his grave — Here lies one whose name was writ in water. Only violet leaves covered the grave, no wreaths and no flowers. I am going to buy a large laurel wreath to put there with a line of his own last sonnet "Bright star, would I were stedfast as Thou art."

Your affectionate John

*(*Autobiography, *'Court House': 'I rushed off by myself into a flower-shop and bought a laurel wreath so enormous that I was much put to it, even with the voluble driver's help, to get it into the vehicle. Clinging to the rim of this Olympian offering I was driven in triumph to Keats's grave where I proudly placed it — and more than a whole year later a traveller assured me that its remnants, embronzed leaves and twisted wire, were still to be seen.')*

Hotel Avanzi, Via Capa le Case, Rome
May 1st [1899]

My dear Mother,

We were very glad to be back again in Rome last night for although certain things at Naples are wonderful and unique one does not feel as happy there as here. Margaret has been made quite ill by the jolting in the uneven streets of Naples. She is asleep now but if she is not better when she wakes I shall buy her some medicine from the English chemist. We shall start on our journey on Thursday or Friday and hope to reach England early on Monday.

As we came in to Rome by the train last night we passed all along the great aqueducts which give one a splendid feeling of coming to the capital of the world where the people are (or were) supplied with water on such a magnificent scale. I do not think that any city I shall ever see again will have the same effect upon me as Rome — the huge ruins of the old world here have a power over all that is best in one to an extent which no mere beauty or novelty or charm could ever have. No intervening events seem really to have been strong enough to destroy the great Classic world. Calm and quiet it remains and will remain as long as this little planet — But you are tired of hearing me harp so long upon the same string —

I saw some English sailors in Rome the other day. They seemed to be taking a

great interest in all they met with. There are numberless jackdaws here and swallows, the latter we continually see circling round the ruins; we have seen a hawk on the Via Appia and heard a nightingale on the Janiculum. I am going to see the Vatican sculptures again today if Margaret is well enough to be left. We have a very pleasant room here and the people (landlord and lady and waiters) are as kind as possible

Your affectionate John

*(*Autobiography, *293–7; JCP later visited Rome with his brother Bertie, coming from Spain in 1914 (401–4).)*

To Littleton from Florence, autumn 1909, aged 37, with Gertrude, after illness. Autobiography, *chapter 9, 'Europe' (385–6, 388–9; Mrs Curme p. 251). Littleton did not go abroad until 1923 – also for reasons of convalescence.*

C/o Signora Cozzi
Via Trebbia 2 III
Florence

Well my dearest Littleton we're most lucky — having found an admirable and surprisingly cheap lodging and an equally excellent restaurant just opposite — in the vaulted cellar of a Palace — Via Trebbia is a very narrow street like those to be found in Dore's illustrations of Rabelais but we are high up and have first rate rooms where we are both very merry well-contented and gay as anyone could think — Our landlady with two daughters each nicer than the other is an Italian Mrs Curme [*JCP's elderly housekeeper at Court House*] — really and truly — her only fear that in her ignorance of our talk she should not give us exactly what we want — We owe our good luck to Louis W. for though his particulat landlady was not available a friend of hers by chance present, escorted us herself here —

David Gervais talking at the Conference, with John Williams).

Here we are so happy we shall stay nearly all the while: Louis's opinion as to the cheapness under careful choice is proved true & more pessimistic views of the matter stand refuted by experience.

Fear not that I am going to describe anything — at least not in this letter — but we've already seen Benevenuto Cellini's Perseus and the Medici Venus and Giotto's tower — and have walked over the old bridge covered with houses like old London Bridge — and have strolled at our liesure [*sic*] down long dark Pergolas of Ilex and Bay in the Boboli Gardens of the Pitti Palace. The Cypresses — you know how they grow, like dusky flames of great buried candles, — seen from so many places, & seen against church and river and hill & sky, please me mightily as Lulu says. —

My general impression was startling (when we arrived and celebrated our recovery from an abominable journey under many annoyances and nearly starved) for the roofs of all the houses and the domes and roofs of the churches especially by the Cathedral called Il Duomo (their St Paul's) are <u>red</u> made of big red tiles which look monstrous fine against the blue sky — which hasn't as a matter of fact been <u>quite</u> blue today but just a little grey — Please note the scrupulous honesty of this confession; and so believe all else I say to the very Letter — without doubt — another thing I was struck by straight off — was the great projecting eaves twelve or more feet, seems so of <u>all</u> roofs — also of red tiles — again, very insignificant chimneys and many almost flat roofs — this with faded colour-washed walls and the size of the tiles gave me an <u>oriental</u> impression like those pictures you see of the Holy Land!

Give my best love to Mabel & also to our friend Zulu
"Who is with" you & yours
ever and ever dear to
Jack

To his mother from Spain (where he met Louis and Frances) May? 1914. Mrs Powys died in July.

Madrid Palace Hotel, Thursday night

Well my dearest here I am in Madrid. The rain & cold followed me all the way to the border — it was pouring with rain at Irun where the countries join. In spite of this, the journey had its interest. I was exhausted with the brief glimpses I got of the old royal castles of Amboise and Blois. Pater refers to the melancholy seignorial woods of Blois in "Gaston", I think. The river Loire also seemed to me to be a river of beauty & stateliness — & at Bordeaux of enormous width across, and with shores that made me think somehow of the Susquehanna — a very different stream.

In the continental sleepers you go sideways — not head or feet first, as in American trains. I had first a Portuguese & then a Spaniard as my companions &

they were both kind enough to pronounce words to me. It was amazing — when I first woke up — to find myself in a hot sandy plain with the sun beautifully blazing & cornflowers & poppies & that rock-cistus like a bush, which you have in the terrace, and herds of great brown goats & many oxen ploughing fields like sand & silhouetted against the blazing blue sky many lovely donkeys tethered by long ropes to posts. Long dusty white roads crossing great plains with not one hedge & only clumps of olive trees & some sort of Pine not unlike a Scotch fir & sand everywhere & and out of the sand poppies & cornflowers. Lots of magpies I saw & hawks & jays & some birds I had never seen before — in fact one that struck me as the most amazing bird I have ever seen — what it was I haven't the least idea. But you can guess with what relief I escaped from damp fields with that charming deep long green grass & rain-drenched hedges into this semi-African desert of granite & sand & real hot sunshine. I kept talking to myself as I sat on a little corridor seat, close to the window to miss nothing, "Jack my friend", I said, "you are now in a place that really suits you — be therefore thankful to the Heavenly Powers & never again curse your fate!"

From a noble Spanish statesman (whom I addressed as if I were unworthy to address him) I learnt that the mountains in sight across this hot sandy plain with snow (which did not please me) were the Sierra de Guadarrama. Certainly I learn Geography by rapid degrees just now. I am going to start for Toledo at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning. I got here just in time to have an hour in the Prado. The Titians here are the best I have ever seen not to speak of Velasquez & El Greco. I'll write again my dearest & send you some picture cards.

Love to Father & Ll & G.

*(*Autobiography, *'Europe', 416–33.)*

(Letters from Mappowder and the Bissell collection. With thanks to L de B and the DCM staff for copying.)

A. N. Wilson talking, with David Goodway.

Death-Wishes: William Empson on T. F. Powys

Readers may find it interesting to see how T. F. Powys was viewed in 1933 by this then young but already respected critic – though we may now feel that a good deal of TF's humour – and ambiguity – eluded the attempt to pin him down.

(Sir) William Empson (1906–84), poet and critic, was renowned for 'his practice of relating literary works to their socio-cultural contexts ... analytical clarity ... stimulatingly speculative manner and axiomatic succintness' [*OC2OCLE (1996)*] in such works of criticism as *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930), *Milton's God* (1961) and *Using Biography* (1984). Qualified praise from this formidable source was praise indeed.

Empson considers TF's work, with its favourite theme of death, from the points of view of literary tradition, of social values, and of its underlying belief or philosophy. He later included TFP in *Some Versions of the Pastoral* (1935), in the chapter discussing 'Proletarian Literature':

> *On the other hand, nobody would take the pastoral of TFPowys for proletarian, though it really is about workers; his object in writing about country people is to get a simple enough material for his purpose, which one might sum up as a play with Christian imagery backed only by a Buddhist union of God and death. No doubt he would say that country people really feel this, and are wiser about it than the cultivated, and that he is their spokesman, but the characters are firmly artificial and kept at a great distance from the author.*

Empson develops the theme of the 'Death-Wish' (a Freudian term) in the unpublished essay notes collected in 'Death and its desires' (1933), published in *Argufying, Essays on Literature and Culture* (ed. John Haffenden, The Hogarth Press, 1988). He turns to T. F. Powys after discussing 'dirt lust and corpse lust' in Freud and in Oriental religions, the cult of 'perversions' in nineteenth-century Romanticism, and the question of what relation if any the merit of a work has to one's personal distaste for the different forms of 'death-wish'. He admits the difficulty of separating 'perversion' from 'normality', and of identifying it in the case of each artist, and of making allowance for the reader's personal tastes (*'The combination of Freudian understanding and puritan sentiments is liable to be paralysing ...'*). 'Perversion' (i.e. the enjoyment of what is 'normally' disagreeable or destructive) may take the form of something to be admired: Keats's melancholy Odes or Shakespeare's battle-rhetoric can be diagnosed as 'perverted', as forms of the death-wish, but have been read for generations as noble or sensible. Contemporary authors, Empson feels, present more uncertainty, as in the case of T. F. Powys. TF writes perpetually about death, praising it 'in a somewhat sniggering manner', which can puzzle a reader as to whether this is supposed to be fine or offensive. TF's method

> *is to make demure use of the language of Christian consolation and put behind it only a vague Buddhist sense of the value of emptiness, and there is a quite*

conscious game with necrophily when he makes his rustics feel that it is a fine thing to be a nice corpse treated in a tidy and loving manner.

Empson, however, feels that someone who writes well about death should show more definite ideas on the subject.

Empson judges TFP's 'ironical game with death' to be the best of his writing (whereas *Soliloquy of a Hermit* is for him *'diffuse Anglican sentimentality'*, though he excuses TF for this on the grounds of being *'one of Nature's parsons'*). Calling TF's death-involvement a 'game' does not for Empson deny the emotional force behind it, nor that *'we can be seriously stirred when the grossly distorted villagers talk noble Biblical prose.'* He also distinguishes TF's 'death-wish' from those of nineteenth-century writers who present themselves as if their experiences were unique, with themselves as Christ-like figures; and on the other hand from the 'clinical' kind of analysis of personal stress exemplified by Poe. Powys's effect, for him, is *'at once cosy and universal'*, with a style drawing as much from Samuel Butler as from his admitted influence, Jane Austen.

Empson's analysis turns to the beliefs (or lack of belief) underlying TF's methods of dealing with death in his fiction. *'It would be arguable that he talks about death merely because loss of faith leaves him no other solid way to talk like a Christian'* (as Mr Grobe, the parson in *Mr. Weston*, talks about Eternity because he no longer believes in God). He identifies the two aspects of 'death-wish' – for peace and for destruction – exemplified in two of T. F. Powys's Fables.

In the story of 'John Pardy and the Waves', the tramp-like character's search for happiness ends in the sea, where the waves promise him both the joy of being dissolved and the chance of destroying. Empson sees a historical (or satirical) trick here, making us see the tale as a mad alternative religion. It is

at least as funny as it is fearful, and no doubt one of the main and typical places to deal with the literary death wish would be the joke.

Far from 'perversion', however,

the effect is single and noble, and Pardy accepts his new career of destruction with the air of a Bodhisattva setting out to labour on behalf of the world.

'The Only Penitent', on the other hand, Empson takes as an example of TF's weakness, since the 'grand notion' of God confessing to having created sin and cruelty and ultimate death, and being given absolution for this, is weakened by being contrasted to the villagers' superficial social ideas of 'sin', instead of the real sins of cruelty that TFP so often describes 'with frightful power':

IF one of them had been brought in here we should feel the force of the Christian paradox about God taking on himself the sins of the wicked; that would be too Christian ...

TF, for Empson, depends on how you read him. Simply as entertainment, his 'sly corpse-lusts' and 'tired wish for peace' tell 'a minor truth' about human, and in particular rustic, minds. If you feel he is telling you more profound truths about life, you may find what he says unpleasant and react against him.

At the same time, the suggestion of playing a joke on the reader is itself a grand and traditional part of the 'death-wish' theme – as with the imbecility of a clown giving insane insights, or the medieval flowering of the macabre as in Holbein's 'Dance of Death'. '*It might be said that you have to believe in immortality before you can be macabre in good taste ...*' – which would dispose of the reason for disapproving of T. F. Powys on the grounds of bad faith, in playing with an idea he does not believe in. Even so,

> *anything about death however silly and artificial might safely be argued to be very fine. I daresay while pretending to talk about death the man is coming to some sort of balance between charity and a sense of social values.*

TF's social values, in his writing, are of course based on his rustic characters (indeed, '*death like the clown is a sort of perverse figure of the pastoral*'). Empson casts doubts on the realism of TF's views of village people (comparing these with his, Empson's, village experiences ... '*His early books are obvious records of shock at finding himself unpopular in the village ...*'). In TF's fiction, however,

> *What you are to feel is that the simple people are in a way the best, the nearest to the truth about life; and yet that if this is borne firmly in mind a social structure can be rightly based on them, with people better in another way at the top. The rustics include all the other virtues as it were in solution, and therefore they can accept their society without feeling it to be too unjust ... This is the side of the books that Dr Leavis has praised very rightly in* Scrutiny ...

If that is what the books are about, Empson argues, TF's 'indefatigable game' of talking about death, the 'death-wish', must be a mask for something else. In that case, TF's degree of sincerity of belief is beside the point.

> *If you read him like this, his whole work is based on death-wishes only so that the death-wishes may be made trivial by comparison with the values which grow in their shadow.*

According to Empson, TF can therefore be said, in this 'social' area, to be '*very safe from attack: he occupies all the strong positions of the fort of the death-wishes*'.

However, Empson remains unhappy with the various and often incompatible philosophies in TF's treatment of death.

> *Powys will use what anybody has said. The Fables use an idea of rudimentary and corpselike consciousness of all matter (again a Buddhist conception though not exclusively so) which allows the state of death to be treated as a humble but profound sort of life, the sort most pleasing to God and a conscious satire on the triviality of the living. But he certainly uses in other stories both the ideas of death as merging back into the divine origin and as a complete assurance of escape. 'I cast all men into the pit', says Jar* [in 'The Only Penitent'], *'they become nothing'. The point is that death-wishes of that sort aren't even impressive unless they drag other things into them, and in the right way ...*

Returning to 'The Only Penitent', Empson is sorry to have to decide that this story goes the wrong way about it – if, that is, you take the story seriously. Taken

seriously, the climax of the fable, that God takes on himself all sins, pretends to be blasphemy, but is in fact God's forgiveness of sins. Empson's objection is that this effect fails, because there is no real sin in the book. The little bawdy jokes are about things that TF himself does not consider sinful. What he could very well have made convincingly cruel and painful in the sexual amusements of the village (such as abortion or infidelity) are carefully kept at a distance, as 'pastoral'. Empson finds this a disappointing trick, typical of the 1890s and intellectually dishonest, like Wilde confusing 'sin' with scandal – not what he really thought but acting the 'wicked artist'. *'Powys's "naughty jokes" are a shockingly poor preparation for the enormous issue he tries to raise as a climax – if he put his idea of evil into the book it wouldn't stand the strain.'*

To sum up, Empson's evaluation is that TFP's presentation of the values of rustic life, and the serious intention of his 'games' – if that is what it they are – outweigh his tendency to triviality and monotonousness; but he still falls short of being 'very good indeed' because of the deliberate ambiguity built into the writing. One can read him in different ways and, for Empson, *'the different ways do not add up. But it is a massive achievement in its way.'*

(With thanks to David Gervais for suggesting this.) ***KK***

'The Unreturning Morning': Peter Foss, Richard Perceval Graves, Peter Lazare, Pat Richards, Colin Thomas.

Discovering T. F. Powys: A Powys Publisher

When I married my wife in 1966, I acquired a whole new family, including Uncle Lol, who, it turned out was a great admirer of an author I had never ever heard of. Although I was born and lived in Dorset until my teens, the Powys Brothers seemed unknown to the locals, teachers or librarians, and I found out about them while living in London, not Dorset. The books all seemed impossible to find: I had to buy expensive and scarce copies to be able to read TFP at all. Things improved when Jeff Kwintner of Village Press started his huge reprint programme to get the Powyses back into print at low prices.

With my wife I ran Trigon Press for many years, and one day decided to reprint a couple of TF's early works. *Mr. Tasker's Gods* was published in an edition of 1,000 copies in late 1977. I had no money, so getting this done for £1,000 was scary enough: but even more scary when I discovered that the whole of the UK only really needed 400 copies ... Later on, in '79 at the Frankfurt Book Fair, I met a chap who said he would buy the remainder 600 copies from me as 'Australia is keener on literature than the Poms'. Towards midnight he confided that he was 'Mary Martin', which made me wonder a bit about who I might have met. He was, he explained, Max Harris (of Angry Penguin fame, taken in by the Ern Malley poet scam) and his bookshop chain was Mary Martin.

The sale got me out of trouble, but TF never made any money, just broke even. One cross customer used to ring me up regularly to buy 'another' copy of *Mark Only*, which was announced from Trigon but never issued. Somewhere in the world of ISBNs and library lore there is a phantom book, which was recorded, but perhaps never deleted. Stop searching for that reprint!

Roger Sheppard

'The Unreturning Morning': Christopher Wilkinson, Colin Thomas, Peter Foss.

A Letter from Glen Cavaliero
Revisiting John Cowper Powys: Novelist *(OUP 1973)*

Dear Kate,

The other day you were wondering what I now felt about *John Cowper Powys: Novelist*, a book I wrote over thirty years ago. So I re-read it, and here is the result.

The book has dated in at least two respects. Most obviously it takes no account of *After My Fashion* (1980) – surely the most precious paperback in the Powys canon? – nor of the complete version of *Maiden Castle* (1990); and if the possibility of a complete *Porius* is at any rate mentioned in an appendix, I none the less find it frustrating that accounts of these books are omitted from one that was undertaken with a view to vindicating the claim that JCP was a major novelist and not simply an eccentric cult author in the literary hinterland.

Ironically, that very purpose accounts for the other aspect in which the book may be said to have dated. It was written at a time when the influence of F. R. Leavis and his disciples was at its height: high seriousness, adult maturity, social relevance, an earnest attitude towards what was all-envelopingly referred to as 'life' were the fashionable literary credentials. Leavisite critics were extolling the work of T. F. Powys at his brother's expense and the championship of Wilson Knight cut little ice with the Cambridge school, he being regarded as extravagant and freakish and altogether over the top. In such an intellectual climate it was impossible to ignore the contentions of the current pundits, with their emphasis upon a 'great tradition' defined by the morally engaged novels of Jane Austen, George Eliot, Conrad and D. H. Lawrence. None the less, I *knew* that Powys was a great novelist and set out to demonstrate it to the opposition on their own chosen terms. To that extent the book is of its time; but it served its purpose. Oxford published it and John Brebner's book coincided with it and editors saw the possibility of a review – which thanks to Angus Wilson and George Steiner the books received. After that JCP was respectable enough for me to be asked to supervise dissertations on him for the Cambridge tripos!

What would I now wish to change? Very little in the way of actual alteration, but rather more where critical emphasis is concerned. Morine Krissdóttir's work on the symbolism, Harald Fawkner's on the philosophy would have to be taken on board, as would Jeremy Hooker's and Herbert Wlliams's discussion of Welsh influences. And of course umpteen articles have enriched my understanding. I would be more outspoken as to Powys's faults as a writer, now that he no longer needs defending in the way that he did when my book was written. For his faults are a part of him and call for understanding. But do such judgements matter outside the world of literary critics and the politics of academe? I think they do: Powys is one of our supreme champions of the sovereignty of the human imagination, and the novels dramatise the implications of that contention. All his writings follow that path – which is why I now wish the book were called *John*

Cowper Powys: the Novelist, so as to acknowledge his other writings by implication. (Its title was my publisher's idea, not mine: he thought it would be an eye-catcher challenge to Leavis's book on Lawrence.) However, I stand by what I wrote in the book itself, and it remains the only one so far to describe in detail Powys's methodology as a novelist and the particular aesthetic quality of the world he creates. I continue to read him with enormous pleasure and with the regularity I accord to Dickens, Scott, and all the other English novelists I love so well. He, like them, is inexhaustible.

Yours, Glen

Review

David Gervais, *John Cowper Powys, T.S. Eliot and French Literature.* London, Cecil Woolf Powys Heritage series, 2004. ISBN 1 897967 63 2. 44 pp.

This is an exhilarating little book, as vigorous and wide-ranging as David Gervais's talk to the Conference at Sherborne this summer. Powys was temperamentally averse to literary confrontation, and would certainly never have engaged directly in argument about writers he loved. But Gervais pits Powys and Eliot against one another in the ring of French literature, with some startling results.

Powys and Eliot were quite close contemporaries. Powys admired Eliot as a poet, certainly for the 'vividly realized spiritual desolation' of *The Waste Land*, but otherwise does not seem to have taken any great interest in him. Eliot never features in Powys's frequently-intoned, and mobile, lists of his favourite authors. It is hard to imagine Powys warming to Eliot as a critic. For his part Eliot, as far as I know, never expressed any opinion of Powys at all. Clearly the two represent entirely different views of life and literature. When Powys wrote *The Meaning of Culture*, he dealt entirely with the inner life of the individual; Eliot's *Notes Towards a Definition of Culture* are about entirely different issues in the life of society. Where Powys is effusive, digressive, and personal, Eliot is disciplined, clipped, and with a strong sense of the classical. It is precisely because it is so startlingly hard to set up a dialogue between Powys and Eliot that Gervais' book becomes so worthwhile.

Powys's writing on French literature is scattered widely throughout his works. There is the massive book-length *Rabelais*, and a host of essays on French writers – the focus is always on the creating individual – from every stage of Powys's life. Taken as a whole, his writing shows a very different range of appreciation to that of either Eliot, or Lytton Strachey. Powys's France is an earthier place, dominated in particular by the warm, humane, and indeed redemptive presence of Rabelais. Gervais points out how Rabelais union of faith and scepticism, of the

elevated and the gross, reappears in Powys's fiction, as in the down-to-earth sacramentalism of Geard of Glastonbury. But there is also warm appreciation of Villon, Montaigne, Balzac, Hugo, Rousseau, and Proust, alongside some characteristic gaps in Powys's enthusiasms – no Racine, Molière, Flaubert, and only a somewhat querulous relationship with Voltaire.

Gervais writes that 'if Powys's response to French writing is unusually frank this is partly because he does not make a fetish of its Frenchness. Literature to him was its own kingdom, not a series of competing national cultures.' This is good to remember. Powys was much absorbed in the influence of landscape and place on the imagination, and even of ancestry and possibly 'race memory', but he never deals in cultural stereotypes. His enthusiasms range freely over national borders, without self-conscious cosmopolitanism. But unlike Eliot, he has very little sense of literature as an expression of cultural community. Rather, a reader forms a relationship of individual intimacy with a writer he or she loves.

Eliot has different purposes in mind. It was he who introduced to English currency Mallarmé's dictum that the task of the poet is to 'purify the language of the tribe'. Eliot uses French literature to promote a critical position – to dispel Georgian fog with symbolist precision, and to change a cultural view. Curiously, although it is Powys who wrote of 'shamelessly appropriating' writers for his own imaginative ends, it turns out that he has fewer axes to grind than Eliot, who in his way is much more selective and personal. Gervais calls his admiration of classicism 'a way of managing experience, of doctoring it.'

Gervais admits that his account of Eliot's criticism is not nuanced or fair, but Eliot has had a long run. His criticism is now less read than it was. The Eliot who has endured is much closer to Powys's, the poet of *The Waste Land*, with what Powys called its 'emotional-sardonic rattling of the tin cans of the world's rubbish heap'. There are plenty of waste lands in Powys's writing, *terres gastées* of the spirit which, ultimately, are healed and redeemed. In this sense, Powys and Eliot in fact embarked on similar spiritual journeys. They took as their starting point the nineteenth-century collapse of religious faith, and reached out to mythology and the accumulated traditions of Western (and indeed Eastern) literature to discover how life might be seen anew. Gervais writes that for Powys, 'Rabelais's clarity is not a distancing of oneself from life but a way of accepting and forgiving it.' In contrast, Eliot may look armour-plated with decorum, while his political and religious preoccupations seem increasingly discredited and implausible. Powys's insatiable appetite for literature still communicates itself, while Eliot in his sterner moods may appear dustily respectable.

John Hodgson

The talks were nicely contrasted, versions of how unconventional elements fit in to the World or not.

John Williams described TFP's innocents, child-men vicars or doomed lovers (child-like rather than children) in their Bunyanesque symbolic landscapes: the sea for suicides, hills for yearning and rescue – or Hills of Difficulty. They acquire dignity, as, conversely, TF's wide reading allowed him to be familiar with the famous Great and cut them down to size (as 'the first shall be Last' – even God, as a broken doll in *Soliloquies of a Hermit*). Intertextuality is always in play, between rich cultural referencess and simple language.

David Gervais also stressed wide reading and references, in this case JCP's, fitting better in a European than an English context. JCP's special relationship with Dostoievsky is not surprising: Dickens (translated early) was also a favourite in Russia. Such novelists turn prosaic things into poetry, as Wordsworth does. The nature of goodness, the transforming magic of memory, the mystery in people, are their subjects, their unfathomable iceberg, even when there is social satire on the surface. JCP's Owen belongs here: elusive, unfathomable, unpredictable. Dickens, Dostoievsky and JCP are a progression. They share a tension between comedy and tragedy, a play instinct. Dostoievsky is also part of the English inheritance, much nearer to JCP than Hardy is.

British novels tend to pathos, not tragedy. For JCP, greatness and poetry lie in immense vitality, like Goethe's, or Blake's. Hidden vitality is stronger than stoicism: JCP's characters have secret lives, aren't totally visible, as Nature also has mystery, embodying the sensual in the spiritual and vice versa. It is JCP's inclusiveness, his empathy with such ambiguities, that sets him apart from other novelists, even when – as with Lawrence, for example – he shares many of their themes.

A. N. Wilson traced much in JCP, and the resilience of the heroes of his novels, to the small world of an English boarding school: his courage in confronting, enduring, and the essential art of hiding things. The Powyses were Children of Parsonage, not the Church: in JCP it is his father who recurs, and the Wessex novels revisit his father's parishes. The Eng. Lit. 'A team' would have been decimated, by a long list, if our clergy had been celibate. The country clergy were a caste, set apart socially, relating to both gentry and village, living in large but generally frugal houses like the Tennysons' in Lincolnshire, where books were plentiful and clothes passed down, and children wandered free. A perfect training ground for independent minds.

JCP attributed his 'difference' to Welshness, but it was typical of a Parsonage child. Rose Macaulay described JCP's face as ascetic like a priest's; his sensuality

would have precluded that career, rather than his views of religion which (typically for a vicarage child) would have been taken for granted and possibly seen as comic, like bodies for doctors. Clergymen in JCP's books are often good people, even inspired. His social world is comic, but his imaginative generosity, his sympathy with unusualness and absurdity (in contrast, say, to Evelyn Waugh), protects from the commonplace. Cowardice, for instance, is attractive. But JCP's duty to happiness would clash with Puritanism, as happened with the two Dekkers in *Glastonbury*. In a Parsonage vs. Eros contest, Eros wins.

KK

Llewelyn Powys: 120th Birthday Celebration

In glorious sunshine outside the Sailor's Return in East Chaldon at noon on Friday 13th August, around twenty of us (and a dog!) gathered to celebrate the 120th anniversary of Llewelyn Powys's birth. Prior to the gathering, a small group visited the churchyard and noted that the restored simple wooden cross which marks Katie Powys's grave had recently been carefully cleaned and oiled. This we discovered, was the work of Society member John Sanders, who had tended the grave early that morning (after leaving Wellingborough at 3.30am!) for which he surely deserves our gratitude and a vote of thanks.

Following lunch, John Batten gave a passionate, eloquent and well received address, repeating the specific request contained in Llewelyn's will, 'that the sum of £100 was to be placed in the care of the landlord at the Sailor's Return in order that his friends could drink to his memory on each successive occasion of his birthday' – a request that had not however been implemented, Alyse probably thinking, with the war and rationing, that it could be better spent! Afterwards John proposed the toast, before we set out to walk up the long, undulating flint-strewn track from the village to the Powys's former home at Chydyok Farm, set high in a fold of hills on Chaldon Down.

Cresting Chalky Knap with Ann & Beck leading the way.

For the first time since inaugurating what has become an annual event, the indomitable John Batten was unable to lead the walk, so Ann and I, ably

assisted by Beck, our four-legged companion, led the way – at a much slower and more leisurely pace than in previous years. The familiar tall chimneys of Chydyok came into view as we crested the hill known by Llewelyn as 'Chalky Knap', and rested awhile from the long uphill climb to admire the sweeping sheep-filled sea-valley which stretched before us in emerald splendour, and down which the winding grey track fell steeply, before climbing upward again to the cluster of familiar farm buildings now visible on the southern horizon.

As we approached up the steepening track from the north Chydyok looked somehow different, and Gerald Redman pointed out that the old cherry tree

which had stood in Gertrude's garden had been cut down, along with one or two others. This accounted for the new aspect, for the removal of the trees had exposed the substantial north face of the house to view. Illness had sadly prevented Janet Pollock from joining us this year so we were unable to gain access to the house, but after Beck had fallen into Llewelyn's pond – and discovered for herself that *'good hope lies at the bottom'* – we walked around the freshly cut turf admiring the layout of the garden terraces, and speculating about the exact location chosen by Llewelyn for his original wooden shelter on the edge of Tumbledown. The wind stiffened as we walked towards West Bottom along the ancient coastal path which crosses the top of Chaldon Down, and the Isle of Portland disappeared, dissolving in a blanket of sea-mist as a squall of rain swept toward the coast and engulfed us as we arrived at Llewelyn's stone. Just when I thought I'd escaped the superstitious ill-luck of Friday the 13th unscathed, I found that my thin cotton clothing was no match for the elements. Within seconds I was soaked to the skin and shivering with cold, and to my acute embarrassment I discovered that the rain had rendered my thin garb transparent!

The rain and the wind together conspired to scatter the pages of my already tattered copy of the 1937 Rationalist Annual, from which I intended to read a passage by Llewelyn on '*How I Became and Why I Remain A Rationalist*' across the downs – and John Batten had inadvertently driven off with the bouquet of Llewelyn & Alyse's wedding flowers which he had picked to place traditionally on Llewelyn's stone! However, Morine Krissdóttir saved the day by thoughtfully picking a spray of wild flowers, and Chris Gostick placed them on the rectangular block of Portland stone, which is both a memorial to Llewelyn Powys and marks his final resting place.

I read a passage from the remains of the 1937 Rationalist Annual in which Llewelyn avows his rationalism, beginning:

> *One of the first memories of my life was that of being shown by our nurse Emily a projecting platform at the top of the Hollow Lane at Montacute, which she told us was used by my eldest brother for preaching sermons to her and to the nursemaid. This platform was known as 'John's Pulpit', and I have heard many sermons since from this same preacher, both on natural and supernatural subjects. Prayers and Bible-reading, Bible-reading and family prayers – what ennui I have suffered at such gatherings, and at the Adult School, and at church! And yet how in middle life I find myself less repelled by the Evangelical and Non-conformist approach to Christianity than by that of the High Church clergy with their exploitation of magical rites ... How often did I try to better myself at 'the Holy Table'! Such suppers, however, were not for me. If I tried to pray or to examine my spirit with mystical meditations I would be sure to find my mind gone blackberrying before I had been at it five minutes.*

And Llewelyn concludes with,

> *The final secrets of existence are forever beyond our range. Let us save our breath for the cooling of our porridge and concentrate upon the improvement of our mundane conditions. Our prime obligation, however, is to see that we ourselves are happy. The pursuit of personal happiness should be for us an inextinguishable, unending life-quest ... What is life worth if we are not to be happy in it, enjoying our bread and cheese, and for long intervals idling in the sun?"*

I call myself a Rationalist, yet it seems to me that there is a spiritual dimension to what we do here each year on this day of Llewelyn's birthday. We may all have our individual reasons for being here; for my part, this is an annual pilgrimage to the last resting place – the shrine – of the Master. Like many, I had puzzled over King Hezekiah's words from the Book of the prophet Isaiah, carved on this stone by Betty Muntz 57 years ago, and I recalled my first visit when I stayed at Chydyok for a while and experienced for the first time what Llewelyn often referred to as an 'ecstasy'. Perhaps it was only my imagination, but the very atmosphere seemed redolent with a timeless magical quality and I imagined that I felt Llewelyn's presence everywhere – that I was treading in his footsteps, and sharing something that was very special. It was only then that I understood the reason for these

words on his Memorial Stone and the reason why Llewelyn chose them himself, and made the bequest in his will.

Llewelyn may well have lacked insight and empathy when it came to human relationships, but he had tremendous natural vision and foresight – and it dawned on me when I first came here that Llewelyn foresaw this – he foresaw that a small number of well descended souls whom his writing, and his bold, unwavering spirit which glorified life and accepted death on equal terms, had touched, and enriched their lives in some inexplicable way, would gather here, thus honouring his last wishes, and would raise a glass to his memory. The words carved on this stone are, I believe, true testimony to his rationalist philosophy – they are a reminder of our mortality – and *a clarion call to the Glory of Life.* In this way Llewelyn made certain that each occasion of his birthday would become a Celebration of Life. So on the occasion of the 120th anniversary of his birth, we raised our glasses: to the Celebration of Life and to the memory of Llewelyn Powys, repeating the words on the stone – *The Living, the Living, He shall praise thee* – and completing the verse with – *Llewelyn Powys.*

The rain and wind abated as we made our way slowly back to the Sailor's Return. Each of us was presented with a gift of honey from Somerset hives, and in bright sunshine we said our goodbyes and went our separate ways. It was refreshing to see a number of new faces this year, although some remain nameless to me as they had left by the time we got back and regrettably I had missed the opportunity of making their acquaintance. Perhaps we shall meet again next year?

Neil Lee