Editorial

Weather at Llangollen favoured the Conference once again, with Dinas Brân presiding from its hilltop above the sunny woods. Hand Hotel was lively of nights with song and revelry, with the riverside terrace (tidied since our last visit) providing a retreat beneath the full moon.

This *Newsletter* might be described best as a Forum—possibly as an example of the happily inclusive nature of The Powys Society. Not much from Powyses themselves, this time. Conference notes for those who missed it. Personal Views all from relatively new members. A good many Reviews, and some extended less usual views of JCP: in the work of a French scholar, on the historical novels of his favourite Norah Lofts; and a South American meditation on the 'Ichthyan Leap' in *The Art of Happiness*.

Admiration and gratitude for the efforts of busy people on all sides, and especially to Chris Wilkinson for continuing his father Oliver's guardian-angel kindness to the Powys cause, once more devotedly mining the archives for a rich and rewarding Entertainment. Above all to Richard Graves, our ideal and 'thoroughly Powysian' chairman for the last four years. And welcome to John Hodgson.

KK

ON OTHER PAGES

The Powys Society AGM, Llangollen, 21st August 2005

MINUTES

The meeting began at 11 a.m.

Present:

Chairman Richard Perceval Graves
Hon. Secretary Peter Lazare *Hon Treasurer* Michael French
Committee members David Gervais, Timothy Hyman, Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter Editor*), Jeff Kwintner
Publications Manager Stephen Powys Marks *Journal Editor* Larry Mitchell
Conference Organisers Louise de Bruin and Peter Foss
and about 30 other members.

Apologies from: Lorna Burns, John Powys (*Committee members*), Susan Rands.
Minutes of 2004 AGM (as published in *Newsletter* 53, November 2004) were approved.
The Hon. Secretary (Peter Lazare) then delivered his report for the year.

Report of Hon. Secretary

I am pleased to say that 20 new members have joined The Powys Society in the last twelve months. This is a good number, and I hope the fact that it includes students and other young people will reassure those who have been troubled by the age profile of the Society.

As usual, the Committee has met four times in the past year. Meetings are summarised in the *Newsletter*, and full minutes are available on request.

By exchanging newsletters we have formed a link with the other literary societies at the Dorset County Museum. This enables us to advertise, and learn about, events which may be of common interest.

In November 2004 Richard Graves and I visited the Dorset County Museum and met the Director, Judy Lindsay, and Morine Krissdóttir, to discuss the management of the Society's Collection. Richard has touched on this visit in his Chairman's Report for 2004.

In June 2005 we held a very successful seminar in Dorchester on T. F. Powys's story 'John Pardy and the Waves'. This was led by Professor John Williams and attended by about a dozen people. At the end of the afternoon we visited the Museum and were shown the Collection by Judy Lindsay.

One of our members, Tim Blanchard, has been working on public relations for the Powyses. He is developing this along several strands. One of these is the possibility of a slot on Radio 4's *Open Book* next spring in connection with Morine Krissdóttir's biography of John Cowper Powys.

Three publications are being prepared by Stephen Powys Marks. These are: the revised *Powys Checklist*; a collection of five essays by JCP introduced by David Goodway, the title essay being *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*; and a selection of JCP's writing on Thomas Hardy.

I would like to take this chance to thank all those, both on and off the Committee, who have been so helpful to me in my first year as Secretary.

Finally I have a letter to read from our President, Glen Cavaliero:

Dear Peter,

This is to convey my apologies to the company for my absence from the Conference. The reason is the same as it was three years ago at Glastonbury—the overlap with the conclusion

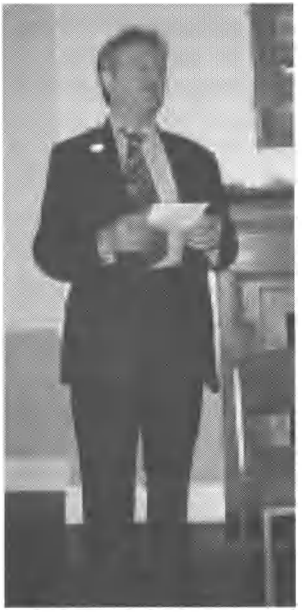
of the Summer School on which I am teaching here in Cambridge. I am truly sorry to be missing so many good friends, and not to be listening to what I know will be some very interesting lectures. But most of all do I regret being unable to pay tribute in person to all that Richard Graves has done for the Society. I have so much appreciated his enthusiasm, good sense and unfailing good humour, as well as his spirited lectures. ('Spirited' by the way was a term of high commendation among the Powyses.)

As to John Hodgson—I have known him long enough to value his care for all things to do with the Society's aims. I much look forward to his Chairmanship, and do hope that next year I will be able to enjoy the fruits of his first year in office. We are lucky to have such a worthy successor to Richard. And so—Au Revoir to the one and a warm welcome to the other.

Glen

The Hon. Treasurer Michael French said he had not much to add to the report and accounts printed in the last *Newsletter*. Figures were difficult to compare owing to the surplus from the Sherborne conference and the reduction in printing costs. **The previous Treasurer,** Stephen Powys Marks, added his approval of all the measures taken by the present Treasurer.

The retiring Chairman Richard Perceval Graves said that the prospect of a farewell speech was both difficult and unexpectedly emotional, so much so that he had decided not to make one. It was time to put the past behind us. He had been fortunate in the support of his present Committee and its advisers, also of previous members, Sonia Lewis, and of Peter Foss and Louise de Bruin as Conference organisers. He was delighted to welcome the new Chairman John Hodgson: a scholar, diplomat and former pupil of our beloved President. If he could have an epitaph for his four years as Chairman he would like it to be: *He left the Society in good Heart ...*



Richard Perceval Graves at the Conference.

The incoming Chairman John Hodgson then took his place. **Timothy Hyman,** standing in for Glen Cavaliero, then spoke of meeting Richard at the time of his 1983 Powys biography—in fact he had known him at school, and admired his previous books on Robert Graves and on Housman. He had swept into the Powys world, as Gilchrist did with his biography of Blake, surprised at the interest aroused. Tim himself had been prejudiced against biographies of all three Powyses together, but recalled his first meeting (aged 21) with Kenneth Hopkins, who when asked why he had written his *The Powys Brothers* (1967), answered, 'There can be many reasons for writing a book, and one of them is Money'. He now saw the point of the 'many-headed Powys'. Richard did a good job at a time that was difficult both personally and in the Society. He always seems to enjoy life and we hope he continues to do so. The memory will be treasured of his preposterously hammy performances in our Entertainments. It is good news that he will continue to manage our Website.

With John Hodgson Tim went back even further: John was completing his thesis when they met. He then disappeared to Kosovo, unavailable until suddenly reappearing in fabulous fashion, in demand for his expertise in Albanian at the Milosevic trial in The Hague. He has now retired to Stoke

Newington. He required some persuasion to become our Chairman but success came in the end and we are very lucky to have him.

John Hodgson said that he went back to the time of the first Powys conference in 1972 at Churchill College, Cambridge. As an undergraduate it was beyond his means (we need to keep the conferences affordable) but he was among giants. So, The Powys Society is a place where things come round. Like the Powyses it too is a many-headed monster, full of diversity: with wonderful talks and entertainments, personal enthusiasms and a splendid lack of 'Good Taste'—everything from deconstruction theory to Dorset pond life. All are listened to and their company enjoyed: academics and the far from academic mingling as rarely happens in the literary world. This is the result of the kind of writers the Powyses were. 'Powysian' is a word some dislike (as Glen says, it sounds too cultic, like a belief system) but it indicates an attitude to life, an intensity of sensation, a response to the natural world, a manner of communication between selves. It is not 'cultic'; it is important that it is out-going, often leading to other interests. It means hope, in mankind's plurality, in the Multiverse.

John thanked Richard for the panache of his style, his insight and humanity; and thanked the other members of the Committee for their various contributions (*applause*): Louise and Peter's conference organisation, Stephen's skill in desktop publishing, the work of the *Journal* and *Newsletter* editors. He hoped that all was now set fair, and asked for any comments from members. Like Porius he would now stride off thinking about authority coming not from the sky above or the ideas of minds, but from the earth and its soil exerting good instincts towards humanity.

AOB: Louise de Bruin gave out some notices and then spoke about the **2006 Conference.** This has been decided for the Bishop Otter [university] campus at Chichester, on 25th–27th August 2006. This is the last weekend in August and the Bank Holiday weekend, which will be inconvenient for some, but we agreed to alternate the last two weekends for those like Glen who can only make the last date. She reported a good reception from the organiser at Chichester, good facilities and a convenient situation.

Suggestions for the following year are requested. A **template** giving the conditions required will be printed in the *Newsletter*. Peter Foss reminded members of the difficulty of finding hotels with enough rooms at the height of the holiday season, especially near the sea..

Raymond Cox announced that his **video** made at this conference will soon be ready and available to members (VHS or DVD) at cost price.

Peter Tait (Headmaster of Sherborne Prep) reported on his efforts to encourage interest in the Powyses among his pupils. The Powys name will be on a new library and he hopes to get the sculpture of JCP from the senior school to display there.

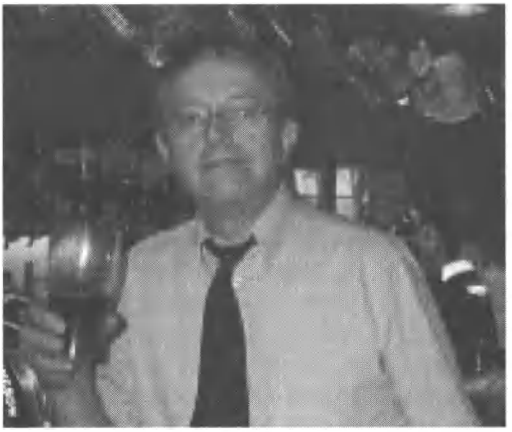
Stephen Powys Marks asked for suggestions for the **revised *Checklist*.** Members were reminded of the new publications from Cecil Woolf's **Powys Heritage** series (Llewelyn Powys's *Diary of a Sherborne Schoolboy* and *Making It New* by Michael Holliday), also the reprint of *Autobiography* announced by Duckworth for this autumn. Overlook Press in America now has 5 Powys titles on its list.

The AGM closed before noon, to be followed by a Discussion.

R.P.G. — He left the Society in Good Heart

Richard was clearly moved at the end of his stint as Chairman. He in his turn moved many of us for the benefit of the society.

I remember the first Committee meeting with him in the chair. It was slick, crisp and we began on time! We began with Richard reading an extract from T.F. From then on this was the format—the reading lest we forget why we were there but the detail of the 'who does what' clear and precise. He was always good humoured and laughter was also part of those meetings.



R. P. G at 'The Sailor's Return'.

His work on the website has been invaluable—new members coming almost entirely from this source—even I use it.

Thank you Richard.

Sonia Lewis

From the new Chairman

Asked for whom he wrote, John Cowper Powys said in an interview later published in *Obstinate Cymric*,

> I seem to write for a minority of very individual and rather odd characters who appear to be scattered through many countries—including Wales—and certainly through all classes in these countries.

Not perhaps a promising basis for a literary society; yet here we are, readers of John Cowper, Theodore, and Llewelyn, in The Powys Society. I was very touched to be asked to take on the chair of the Society, and particularly so because, although I have been a member since 1972, I have also lived abroad for many years and have not been able to take an active part in the Society for some time.

There are propitious times and places for reading a book. I first read *Wolf Solent*, that 'book of Nostalgia, written in a foreign country with the pen of a traveller and the ink-blood of his home' in a bleak and comfortless winter in Berlin in 1970. John Cowper Powys had been recommended to me by a former schoolteacher, Neil Curry (whom I next met when he came to talk to a Powys Society conference twenty-five years later). In Berlin I devoured all the Powys books I could find in the British Council Library, and before long I was trudging across muddy fields in Dorset, and

John Hodgson, at Sherborne 2004.

also discovering the austere pleasures of Theodore.

Glen Cavaliero, who supervised me at Cambridge, encouraged me to the John Cowper Powys centenary conference in Cambridge in 1972. George Wilson Knight, Angus Wilson, George Steiner, and Colin Wilson, were all ready to talk to a shy undergraduate. I also met many remarkable members of the Society, who seemed to me to share an intensity of response to the life-shaping influence of literature, a quality that I had recognised in the writing of all the Powys brothers, and as something present in their circle. The Society at its best has continued with a tradition started at this conference, with its encounters of the young and the old (perhaps the generation in between is too busy for literary societies), and also its exciting tendency to suggest avenues of reading in unexpected directions—whether towards Proust, Dostoievsky, Jakob Boehme, or Sylvia Townsend Warner.

The society's stated aim is to 'promote public recognition of the writings, thought, and contribution to the arts of the Powys family'. Down the years, there have been various attempts to square John Cowper Powys with the fashions of the times. At the time of the centenary conference, the Age of Aquarius had unsteadily begun, and there was opinion in the air that this time of occult stirrings and the beginnings of the ecological movement would be the moment for John Cowper Powys's popular breakthrough. The Age of Aquarius did not last long. John Cowper Powys was next advertised as 'the grandfather of magical realism'. Later, a critic delving into the rich compost heap of literary allusion that is a Powys paragraph might identify John Cowper Powys an early post-modernist. Now, he is the first psychogeographer. The truth is that as the reading history of John Cowper Powys grows longer, different generations have read him in different ways. He is one of Coleridge's great writers, 'who creates the taste by which he is appreciated'.

I hope that the Society can continue to cultivate the highest scholarly and academic standards, because it is not a middle-brow fan club. At the same time, our demanding and pluralist members see to it that scholars can never address one another in the jargon of academe, without being sharply challenged.

I hope that the society will cultivate its European and North American ties. It has for a long time enjoyed excellent relations with scholars and translators in France, Sweden, and the Netherlands. As a translator myself, I hope that we can foster ties of this kind with the lively Powys scene in Germany and other countries.

I hope the Society will expand its series of publications. T. F. Powys has found a staunch supporter in the Brynmill Press, and there is more of his work in print now than for many years past. The sheer length of many of John Cowper's books poses problems for prospective publishers. Yet there is the splendid news that the Overlook Press is shortly to publish the complete *Porius*.

I hope the Society will always be open and responsive to the wishes of its members, and as Chairman I promise to do my best.

John Hodgson

Committee News and Notices

The Committee met for the last time with Richard Graves before the Conference, and for the first time with John Hodgson on 15th October. At the Hand Hotel Richard Graves began with a poem by Theodore Powys from his 1912 Journal in the July *Newsletter* ('How can I my duty find ... ?'), and in Stoke Newington John Hodgson continued the Graves tradition with a reading from *The Meaning of Culture* ('the superficial is the real essence ...').

Practically everything discussed is covered elsewhere in this *Newsletter*. Peter Lazare read a letter from Glen, who hopes to be with us next year if the conference date is later. Chichester having been decided on for the 2006 conference, the Bishop Otter campus seems suitable and helpful, and plans going ahead—details to come in the next NL. The new printer for the *Journal* is satisfactory. The planned three Society publications are nearing completion (*see the green leaflet with special offer*).

We hope to hold at least one interim event next year, in Dorchester and/or London.

KK

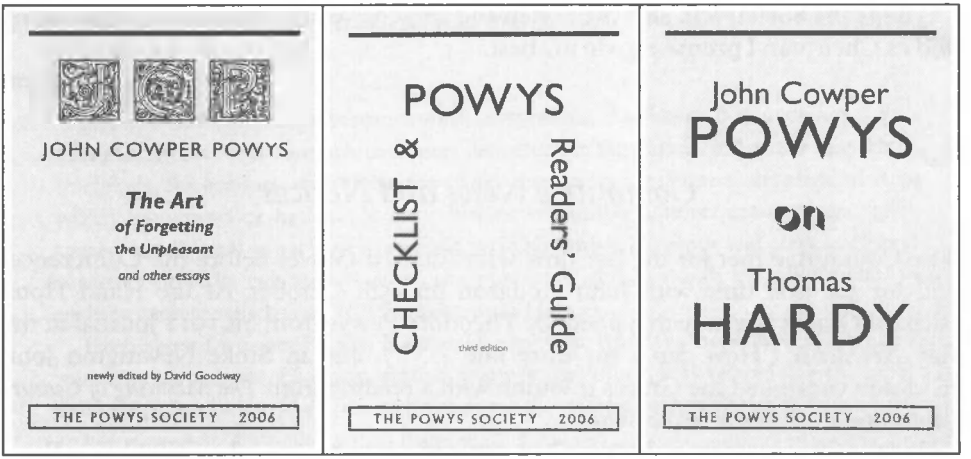
LIST OF MEMBERS

We intend to enclose with the next (Spring) *Newsletter* a list of current members with their addresses. This will be purely for use among members and is not meant to be forwarded to any other person or organisation. Members are asked to LET THE SECRETARY KNOW by the END OF JANUARY 2006 if they DO NOT wish to be included on the list.

Peter Lazare, Hon. Sec.

HOTELS

The Committee is always on the lookout for possible **Hotels** to investigate for a future conference—i.e., for approximately 40 people for 2 nights full board (Friday afternoon to Sunday lunch), with suitable lecture facilities, for the last or next to last weekend in August. This is of course difficult, given the date. But please look out, take note and let the Secretary or the Organisers know of any possible Hotels (or other sites) in your area. There must be some other Hands?



The Society's Publications

As well as the regular programme of newsletters and *Journal*, the Society is publishing three booklets in January 2006; they will have the same format as the *Newsletter*.

An **order form** is enclosed, with a **special offer** if you buy all three books; the prices shown apply until January 15th, after which our list prices will apply.

One The first of these is a selection from what John Cowper Powys wrote about Thomas Hardy whom he greatly admired, ranging from informal comments in letters to his long critical essay printed in *The Pleasures of Literature* (1938). The selection for ***John Cowper Powys on Thomas Hardy*** was made by Kate Kavanagh, and is introduced by our President **Glen Cavaliero**. We hope that members of the Hardy Society will also buy lots of copies.

Two **David Goodway** has edited a re-issue of JCP's ***The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant and other essays***. These five essays first appeared in 1928 in the series of 'Little Blue Books' published by Haldeman-Julius in Kansas; the books were produced on very poor paper and are extremely scarce. Of the five essays, two were reprinted in *Elusive America*, edited by Paul Roberts (Cecil Woolf, 1994), while the title essay only was reprinted by the Village Press in 1974. So our booklet is the only location for the whole collection, with David's illuminating introduction.

Three Our own ***Powys Checklist and Readers' Guide*** is now woefully out of date; it first appeared in 1991, compiled by Alan Howe, who was also responsible for the second edition of 1996. While keeping Alan's guidance substantially as he devised it, the *Checklist* has been extensively revised and extended by **Stephen Powys Marks** for this third edition. Since 1996 there have been major additions in several

directions: many new books published by Cecil Woolf, including his series of 'Powys Heritage monographs', begun in 1998; two new newsletters, from France and Sweden; the continued good work of the Brynmill Press; and the Society's own publications, not least the continuing regular issue of the *Newsletter* and *The Powys Journal*.

In designing the books I have tried a new unifying scheme for the covers, using an old favourite san-serif typeface, Gill Sans, for the main lettering, contained between a cartouche for the Society's name at the bottom and a bar of balancing weight at the head. The typefaces for the text of the three books is more traditional, the *Checklist* retaining its original Baskerville, Bodoni used for *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*, which is similar to that on the cover of the original Little Blue Book, and another favourite old typeface, Bembo, for *Powys on Hardy*.

Please buy our books.

Stephen Powys Marks

The Brynmill Press

You will also find enclosed a leaflet offering Brynmill Press's books at 25% discount for members of the Society; in order to ensure that this is restricted to members you should **send your order to Stephen Powys Marks** (address inside back cover), BUT the **cheque should be made payable to The Brynmill Press** which we will forward with your order: we are simply acting as a post office in order to encourage sales of their excellent books. There is no time limit.

See page 27 for review of Prof. Lawrence Mitchell's *T. F. Powys: Aspects of a Life*, and reviews in *Newsletter* 55 and *The Powys Journal* xv (by John Williams and Larry Mitchell respectively) of Elaine Mencher's fine edition of *Selected Early Works of T. F. Powys*.

Powys Heritage monographs

At the Conference we had on sale two new books from Cecil Woolf's series of Powys Heritage monographs: *The Diary of a Sherborne Schoolboy: Llewelyn Powys's Diary for 1903* (edited with an Introduction by Peter J. Foss, 36 pages) and *Making it New: John Cowper Powys and the Modernist Tradition* (by Michael Holliday, 24 pages). We still have copies available, the Llewelyn Powys Diary for £7, Holliday for £6, post free. We are **offering both together** for £11.50 (a saving of £1.50). The Society will get a commission on these sales. *See pages 33 and 34 for reviews.*

Please send your cheque, payable to The Powys Society, with your order to Stephen Powys Marks. Please do this before January 15th, as the books will returned to the publisher after that date.

Letter: A Tribute to Gerald Pollinger

When I inherited the literary estates of Llewelyn Powys and Malcolm Elwin in 1984, I understood next to nothing about the management of literary estates. In 1989 I moved the Llewelyn Powys literary estate from the Society of Authors to the management of Laurence Pollinger Ltd (the Malcom Elwin estate had been managed there since the end of 1967).

I wrote countless letters to Gerald and asked scores of questions and he always answered both letters and questions. He taught me a lot. I learnt from him the differences between ownership of material and ownership of copyright, and a great deal more besides. His letters were always very prompt in reply—outstandingly so. It was very reassuring and a great comfort to know that he was *there*—was always there—and to know that one's queries would be answered. We seldom had need to telephone; the great exception being when that extraordinary statement about the Powys literary estates appeared in *The Bookseller* at the end of March 1999.

Gerald and his wife Jean came on a visit to us at Sedgebanks one hot sunny summer afternoon in the late '70s or early '80s—I forget the exact date—and we much enjoyed their visit. I miss greatly the reassurance of his presence in the office and the promptitude of his letters. He was a staunch friend and helper.

Sally Connely

The Conference — Personal Views

First Conference

As a member of a mere two years' standing, I was attending my first Conference and, although the programme had been clearly set out, I was not quite sure what to expect. Not that I was new to the Powyses. JCP has been a lifelong interest, ever since I browsed as a child through *In Defence of Sensuality* and *A Glastonbury Romance*, which were on the bookshelves at home! Most of the books there, including these two, had belonged to my mother's brother (another Jack), who had been killed on naval service in the Second World War and had obviously been a great reader with a very eclectic taste. My introductions to Theodore and Llewelyn came a little later. As a high school English teacher in western Kenya in the seventies I chose *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* as a set text for A-level (it went down surprisingly well). At about the same time I came across *Ebony and Ivory* (appropriately enough) in a Nairobi bookshop

I arrived late on Friday in Llangollen, owing to mechanical problems with my car, just in time for the last part of the first lecture. So I missed out on the opening proceedings. It wasn't really until the following morning that I began to feel part of the Conference, as I listened to the lectures and talked to people in the intervals and at lunch. The afternoon drew me further in, sharing the Dinas Brân experience with

Kate and Patrick Kavanagh (who kindly provided the transport) and a number of others. The evening entertainment was highly enjoyable, taking the form of a dramatized reading of extracts portraying Oliver Wilkinson's time at drama school and his reactions to his father and to JCP. Things really seemed to be getting into a swing, but unfortunately the next day—a mere half day—was the end of the Conference, with an excellent final lecture on TFP's prose and the AGM followed by some discussion of place in the lives and works of the Powyses. The Conference seemed to be over almost before it had begun.

So how would I sum things up? I suppose (despite what I said in my opening sentence) that what I was hoping to find was some feeling of the *spirit* of the Powys brothers, above all of John. The spirit was not entirely missing, I felt, but the emphasis seemed to be on the academic study of the Powyses' writings rather than the living experience embodied in their lives and works. I have nothing against academics; indeed I am one myself, albeit in an EFL, not a literature, department. But I would have liked there to have been more of a celebration—perhaps also a reaffirmation—of that unique Powysian vitality.

I wonder what the Powyses themselves would have thought of the Conference (or of the Society!) if they came back to life. Glad that at least some people still valued their books no doubt, but perhaps somewhat ambivalent about the actual content of the proceedings. JCP, as we were reminded at the entertainment, had a very different idea of criticism from the academic ideal. Would 'The Return of the Powyses' make a good theme for a future entertainment? Despite these misgivings, I did enjoy the Conference. The setting was idyllic, the weather balmy and the company congenial. I met some interesting people and heard some stimulating ideas. I will certainly come again.

David Hill

Sociology and storytelling

The titles of the papers at this year's Conference had struck me as unpromising, being off-centre from my personal Powys preoccupations, but in the event I found them far more interesting than I had anticipated. This was largely because of a shared feature—the space given to general matters of literary history and criticism, before homing in on the Powys material. I enjoyed them all immensely, and an indication of their engaging quality was that, for several days after the Conference was over I found myself carrying on a mental debate with the issues that had been raised.

The first two titles cited JCP works from his Welsh historical and late fantasy periods and this did not bode well for me. My commitment is entirely to the contemporary sociological novel—I eschew historical novels, science fiction and fantasy (except in children's books, it has just occurred to me)—and my few attempts at JCP in these genres had resulted in the usual rapid abandonment. I was, however, fascinated by Charles Lock's use of *Homer and the Aether* to point out the absence of interiority in the characters of literature prior to the novel, and immediately thought

THE CONFERENCE 2005

The reception.

Graham Carey (standing), Colin Thomas, Richard Maxwell, Tim Hyman.

David Gervais, Larry Mitchell, P.J. Kavanagh, Tim Hyman, Richard Maxwell.

in the foreground,
Barrie and Elaine Mencher;
behind, *Peter Birtles, Peter Tait,* [...], *Ian Robinson.*

(with apologies to those not identified)

THE HAND HOTEL LLANGOLLEN

The speakers

David Gervais
introducing Ian Robinson.

Tim Hyman
introducing Charles Lock.

Charles Lock
introducing Richard Maxwell.

Barbara Ozieblo
(introduced by Richard Percival Graves, photo Graham Carey).

of one of my favourite passages in *The Iliad*, when Achilles hears of Patroclus' death and throws himself on the ground and heaps dirt on his head. When I first read it I thought how wonderful it would be to be able to let oneself go like that when news of a feared death arrived, instead of just feeling.

My own theory of why the novel appeared when it did has been that it is a parallel development in literature to the experimental method of controlled observation in science, making of the novel a sort of sociology—an imagined experiment in which observable characters, with observable beliefs and in observable social circumstances, are thrown together (under plot), and the author argues for a convincing outcome. So I now have to ponder why this other change, making the observation of thoughts and feelings part of the melange, should have occurred at much the same time.

My view of the novel of course accounts for why historical, fantasy and sci-fi novels for me fail the test of personal interest (or *vice versa*), but I was immediately engaged by Richard Maxwell's linking of *Porius* to 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel'. I can still recite by heart a long excerpt from it, beginning 'Breathes there a man with soul so dead ...' and ending '... the bard may draw his parting groan', which I learned from a schooldays' anthology, but I was not aware until now that it was part of a long chivalric narrative poem. Richard's placing of JCP's historical novels in an English tradition of teaching history (and morality and politics) through storytelling was of especial interest to me in that he discussed Charlotte M. Yonge, an extremely active writer in the Oxford Movement, as a major early exponent. Yonge, like JCP, is a shamefully underrated and neglected writer in the great European sociological tradition in her contemporary novels of mid-Victorian family life. Richard almost persuaded me that I should attempt both *Porius* and her histories for children.

There was much sociological meat in Barbara Ozieblo's talk on Alyse Gregory and Gamel Woolsey. Thanks to The Powys Society I had read Woolsey's novel *One Way of Love* since the last conference and been struck by the trailing off of a formerly self-sufficient woman, after leaving her marriage, into a hollow and miserable independence punctuated by brief and unsatisfying sexual relationships. This depressing progress was very much a theme in Australian new wave feminist novels of the 1970s, and seemed to undermine the feminist thesis that women were harmed by dependence on men. However, the lives of these two women did seem to support the thesis. My fondest memory of the Conference, because of its bizarreness, is arguing with Barbara, Sonia Lewis and Penny Shuttle on top of windswept Dinas Brân, amid the haphazard ruins, as to character or loss of it in Alyse Gregory, a previously successful and independent woman, in allowing herself to be subdued into typing a faithless Llewelyn's manuscripts.

Ian Robinson's placement of TFP within a long tradition of English religious writing did something to reconcile me to him after the nasty experience of reading *Mr. Tasker's Gods*. Prompted by his talk, I am at last reading *Piers Plowman*, and am interested to find in Langland the same virulent animosity towards the servants

of the church as appears in TFP's writing. The Saturday evening entertainment of readings from the correspondence of Oliver Wilkinson and his mother, Frances Gregg, and others of the circle, was a potent reminder of how stunningly articulate a private writing tradition can be, and paired nicely with Barbara Ozieblo's talk in revealing another talented woman of the Powys group who was effaced by domesticity.

If I can be allowed the space, I would like to add a comment of my own to the Sunday morning discussion on the influence of place in the works of the Powys. For me, perhaps as an Australian who encountered English towns and countryside in literature long before I saw them in reality, there are some writers who stand out as writing about very specific localities, so much so that one feels one cannot really know the novel without seeing the place itself, while in others although it is very definitely England, there is not that specificity that requires a pilgrimage. JCP is very much in the first category, and it was as a result of a visit to Sherborne to 'see' *Wolf Solent* that I heard of The Powys Society. *Weymouth Sands* produced the same strong impulse, and to a lesser extent *Maiden Castle* and *A Glastonbury Romance*. Another writer in this category is E. H. Young, whose novels are set in the Clifton area of Bristol, with the action constantly invoking an abrupt divide between country and surburbia created by the gorge of the River Avon, crossed by the famous suspension bridge. I was delighted, when I visited Bristol to make material this imagined world, to find that, a hundred years later, that rupture had not been obliterated by urban sprawl. By contrast, Ford Madox Ford's *Parade's End*, for example, is definitely England but is not controlled by a particular locality, and so creates no such need. Unlike contributors to the Discussion, both in the panel and from the floor, who argued for a strong effect of place in the novels of TFP, for me he belongs in this second category. Reading *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and *Mr. Tasker's Gods* gave me no feeling that a very specific bit of England was involved, and indeed when I visited East Chaldon a year or so ago it did not even occur to me that this and the surrounding hills was the setting of his novels and of the *Fables*.

I was pleased to be prompted to visit Llangollen by the Conference, as it enabled me to see the house of the famous Ladies and the probable site of an early Roman British victory over the invading Irish and/or Picts in about 429 under Bishop Germanus, but it did create problems of access and exit because of the inevitable failure of bus and train services to connect as intended. I was delighted with my hotel room, which had the features I most look for—a high ceiling and a large window with an aspect—in this case a view of the mountain slopes above Llangollen. Last but not least, as this was my second conference there was the pleasure of renewing acquaintanceship, mostly over excellent meals, with members I had first met a year ago.

Lucy Sullivan

Ideas I almost came away with ...

My first Powys Society conference passed in a pleasurable state of mild bewilder-

ment, which was no doubt added to by my reading *Porius* at the time. I wasn't quite sure what to expect—what sort of people both read the Powys brothers and feel the urge to attend an annual conference about them? At any rate, my interest in the Powys brothers is as an enthusiast rather than a professional, and I was determined, and succeeded, in using the conference as an opportunity to thoroughly enjoy myself.

I have been asked to say a little about myself. Originally from Carlisle, I currently live in Chelmsford and work in Witham—former home of Dorothy L Sayers—writing a financial newsletter. I came to the Powys brothers through *A Glastonbury Romance*, and, *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* aside, my reading had prior to the Conference been restricted to JCP. It is perhaps unexpected, then, that the brother who has occupied my thoughts most since the conference is Theodore. Over the weekend I kept hearing Theodore referred to as 'bitter' and 'vicious', which, combined with Ian Robinson's fascinating talk, led me to get round to picking *Mr. Tasker's Gods* off my shelves. Perhaps I was also influenced by the fact that my hotel room at Llangollen looked down onto the graveyard. The book is certainly vicious, but also brilliant, not quite like anything I have ever read before, and possibly even touching on something profound. I may even have an inkling about what Philip Larkin meant when he said he thought Theodore to be the most moving of the brothers. I found a secondhand copy of *A Glastonbury Romance* almost immediately after reading an article about it—otherwise I doubt I would ever even have noticed it on the bookshop shelf—and, in a similar way, immediately after finishing *Mr. Tasker's Gods* I came across a copy of *Mockery Gap*. Not that I am suggesting this to be anything other than coincidence.

One of the things I most enjoyed about the Conference was the new writers and ideas I almost came away with. Not only Theodore and Alyse Gregory, and a small pile of books by Llewelyn, but the names of a great number of authors, painters and musicians biologically unconnected to the Powys family. I say 'almost', because on crossing the border back into England I immediately forget practically everything I had been told, and perhaps will need to return to Llangollen to recapture them.

Greg Robinson

A Chairman Dances to Powys's Tune

(from John Shapcott, Chairman of the Arnold Bennett Society)

Arriving at a conference held in a hotel, members of the Arnold Bennett Society are wont to consult Bennett's guide to the 'modern hotel' in *The Old Wives' Tale*:

> ... the type of the Hatfield [hotel] lingers with ever-increasing shabbiness. In 1866, with its dark passages and crooked stairs, its candles, its carpets and stuffs which had outlived their patterns, its narrow dining room where a thousand busy flies ate together at one long table, its acrid stagnant atmosphere, and its disturbing sensation of dirt everywhere concealing itself, it stood forth in rectitude as a good modern hotel.

The Hand Hotel had fortunately moved on since its coaching inn days, although

the 'crooked stairs' still retained a certain masochistic charm for anyone overladen with suitcases. But after consulting a map at several levels and turns we eventually reached our room. With a window overlooking St Collen's Church and graveyard it had a suitably Theodorian feel to it. More than once was I tempted to a quick glance out of the window expecting to catch sight of John Death skirting the headstones on his way to participate at the Conference. So high up and out of general circulation did I feel that I wondered whether the Bennett Society Chairman had been assigned the misgendered role of madwoman in the attic, doomed to espouse the literary values of alternative texts judged the wrong side of the Clay binary, too Clayhanger and insufficiently Unclay.

All such gloomy thoughts evaporated in the friendliness of the reception, followed by the first of The Hand's enjoyable meals. Imagine the excess of partisan joy when at one meal I found myself talking to two dedicated Bennett readers. I soon realised my mistake, however, in sitting next to Kate Kavanagh, for she dispensed with introductory niceties and cut straight to the editorial bone: 'Perhaps you would like to write something on the Conference for the next *Newsletter*?' I was sufficiently schooled in semiotics to be able to decode 'perhaps' and thus it was I realised that the Mafia tactics employed by our own Society's *Newsletter* editor fell into the category of the Societal Universal.

There remains a lingering belief that the main purpose of a literary conference is to listen to learned talks, followed by erudite discussion. 'Wow', to use my favourite critical technical Beat language—all four principal speakers held my attention and sparked my curiosity, reaffirming the ontological nature of Conference as substance. At one point in Richard Maxwell's talk, when he mentioned Katie Trumpener's book *Bardic Nationalism*, I had to be physically restrained from leaping up and joyfully exclaiming 'Oh yes, and do you recall her footnote 59 to Chapter 3 in which she argues that the dialectic between the national tale and the historical novel remain[s] foundational to realism as late as Arnold Bennett's *Old Wives' Tale* ... ?'

And then there was a near excess of joy with Saturday evening's reading 'Player Kings' in which the cast created a magical atmosphere of privileged intimacy in which spirits materialised under the arc lights and cried once again in sheer delight of each other's, and our, company. The ghost of JCP emerged Wolfit-like upon a stage too small to bear the commanding presence of Richard Perceval Graves's performance. More Hamlet than ham, I was left wishing for more. Such a contrast to the oh so sensible, oh so heartfelt letters of Frances, read by Pat Roberts in a performance that held together this web of male egos. Thanks also to Peter Foss, Chris Wilkinson, and Robin Irving for this magically moving evening.

To leave Player Kings and move next door to the bar did not so much destroy the magic as dismiss it as belonging to a world long-lost. Amplifiers at full blast, the imitators of Tom Jones and Frank Sinatra assaulted eardrums and sensibilities in a sustained campaign of worship to the god Tinnitus. And yet the bar was crowded and merry—never was the title and epigraph of JCP's *Ducdame* more appropriately

realised than in the presence of The Hand's karaoke machine. And so I leave the green green grass of Llangollen and face the editor's final curtain, which falls at 715 words. You did it your way, and the Bennett/Powys enthusiast loved it.

John Shapcott

Committee members 2005: David Gervais, Jeff Kwintner, Kate Kavanagh, Tim Hyman, Richard Perceval Graves, Peter Lazare, Michael French.

The Conference — Notes

Some notes on the talks

With the exception of Ian Robinson's on Theodore, the talks this year were more like voyages round their subjects than formal lectures.

Charles Lock's ***Powys and the Aether—The Homeric Novel*** discussed the differences between 'good prose' in the Flaubertian sense ('le mot juste') and prose as used by Dostoievsky and most novelists in the English tradition. According to Bakhtin (writing on Dostoievsky) a novelist's prose need have nothing to do with status as a novelist—so JCP's dreadful prose style needn't be a hindrance. (cf. 'I like my slip-shod style', and his castigation of the dullness of academics, in *Autobiography*).

CL defined the difference in kind between Homer's narrative (derived like all classical literature from the spoken voice) and post-eighteenth-century novels written to be read silently (even by women), that developed multiple voices, simultaneous inner and outer reality, simultaneous actions—Homer has no 'meanwhile'—all of which JCP employs in his 'novelistic', familiar, style, including his retelling of *The Iliad.*

Prose versions of Homer and other classics were frequent in the mid-twentieth century, often best-sellers, in wartime or post-war paperbacks. JCP's concentration

on Homer increased through the 1940s and 50s. In his introductions to eighteenth-century Laurence Sterne, written at about this time, he analyses Sterne's 'language of silence' corresponding to the muteness of reading. Secret aesthetic laws involve us—the readers, posterity. With Homer we are listening puppets. With novels our reading evolves as we read. Novels were invented for readers to hear their own voice. Or silence.

Richard Maxwell in ***Rescuing Time in Porius*** explored JCP's interest in historical fiction, via Scott's 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' (his favourite, with the melodramatic illustrations which were shown us), Rousseau, and the Victorian educational tradition of historical fiction for children (C. M. Yonge, Henty, Ainsworth, E. Nesbit, Kipling, etc.)—frequently with child-heroes, frequently violent, hinting at sex in footnotes; liberating imaginations but with familiar features such as an unknown poetic hero emerging to power. JCP reverted to much of this familiar tradition in *Owen Glendower* and *Porius:* in this sense he is not idiosyncratic but his own overlaying of the tradition caused puzzlement to 1950s reviewers. 'Lay of the Last Minstrel' is especially significant—its creepiness, both serious and childlike, its bizarreness. These prefigure the mystery and supernatural elements in *Porius*: an obsession with bodies—weird children—the giants—the final unearthing of Merlin from the surreal figure of Nimue.

In *Porius* time flickers (as in a poem by Mandelstam, 'The Horseshoe Finder') with a binary stystem, give & take, yes and no—in the spirit of a child's game—from tiny details to re-enactments of classical legend. To understand *Porius* we need to build up nets of associations, of which the Victorian childhood tradition is one, and see how this regressive movement connects to other dimensions. Questions following this talk took up among others the themes of adult-child crossover in modern fiction—eccentricity vs. the 'child' in JCP—possible childhood memories of wet-nurses explaining a haunting by nipples—JCP's 'games' avoiding the facts of life—the idea (as in Scott) of the sorcerer's Magic Book.

Barbara Ozieblo's theme ***The Friendship of Women*** drew on letters between Alyse Gregory and Gamel Woolsey, a devoted friendship which continued throughout their lives, keeping alive the memory of Llewelyn whom they had both loved; while their own writing analysed the relations of women to men and to each other. It was a friendship based on honesty, despite the depiction in AG's *King Log and Lady Lea* of a triangular relationship in which honesty is said to go under in face of rivalry and/or conspiracy between women.

Independent women such as these are often reproached for sacrificing themselves to their partners (typing for them, etc.). In Barbara O's view these two would always have had problems in their lives, perhaps different ones and possibly more, even if they had been born later or had not married.

Alyse's letters to Gamel are constantly about what she is reading. She downplayed her earlier life, her training as a singer, involvement with suffragette movement, management of the *Dial.* In her novels women, even if rival lovers, are equals, but her

tolerance in life is not always echoed—several women characters end in death. She wrote on the 'problem' of marriage; the tension between solitude and certainty, the process of ageing. Gamel Woolsey (who grew up as a Southern Belle, albeit one who wrote poetry), in her novel *One Way of Love* (which she denied was autobiographical) also deals with solitude, loneliness (not the same thing), and in friendship between women across class-divides in a stifling society.

Alyse and Gamel met seldom after their fateful summer of 1929, although they lived until 1967 and 1968 respectively; but they could talk in their many letters with what Alyse called a perfect understanding, exchanging love and encouragement in the face of sadness, pity and remorse.

(*Alyse Gregory's novel* Hester Craddock *is to be reprinted by Sundial Press—see leaflet with this* Newsletter.)

Ian Robinson's lucid presentation of *T. F. Powys and the Renewal of English Prose* traced the development of modern prose as a servant of the new world of science—to state what is true. The ironic mood requires this norm, in order to be different from it—in fiction we have to distinguish what is 'straight' information or not. This creates difficulties: is irony the same as lies? Does 'myth' mean untruth? Bunyan had this problem with the Bible, but cultural stories are there to help us to live.

TFP, neither tragic nor comic, is a Fabulist—even more of a challenge to prose. *Mr. Tasker's Gods* was called 'realistic'—i.e., unpleasant. But TF is comparable in the modern world to Langland or the Book of Job. Impersonal 'prose' can escape into prophecy, the poetical, 'purple patches'. Jokes subvert it. We can now trace TF's development of his unique language in *Early Works*. A false start was in Biblical language, which combines uneasily with the modern. *Soliloquies of a Hermit* achieves a voice (nearer to Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*). The change from first- to third-person brought in humour and allegory. His mature prose is unlike anyone's, natural-sounding, not precious or mannered: un-ordinary. His prose only occasionally falls into the trap of blank verse; sometimes into alliteration like *Piers Plowman*. His sentences often end with regular cadences like the prescribed endings of Latin Papal Bulls. Some of his stylistic mannerisms are parodiable: *upon* for 'on', *or ever* for 'before', *'tis', 'hath'*, etc. He comes alive when read aloud, as the Bible does. IR drew attention to the *beauty* in TF's writing: 'a flash of life and death in unpropitious times'. He analysed the rhythms of late TF prose and its balance of narrative with short and with complex sentences, and with expressive speech (as in 'Mr. Pym'); its use of dialect for comic effect and for varied tempo. Comparisons were made with among others T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence.; and in the questions following the talk, analogies with Traherne, Austen, Jeremy Taylor, Boehme ... . A densely packed talk which we can look forward to revisiting in the next *Journal*.

KK

Discussion: 'The Centre and the Circle'

A **discussion** followed the AGM on the influence of place—of where they lived—on

the life and work of the Powyses. I have attempted to pull together some of the main threads but not necessarily in the order in which they occurred. Significantly we all remained in our places after the AGM, the Committee facing with the new Chairman in place and the remainder in rows with the ex-chairman re-placed!

John Hodgson began the discussion, saying that Llewelyn of all the Powyses was the most widely travelled. Kate responded that she felt he was often at his best as a travel writer. Talk of Llewelyn soon ended as Larry Mitchell reminded us that Theodore was the one who remained 'in place' in the West Country, initially living in Studland but moving because it was too busy for him. Theodore of all of them was the most involved with the together/apart phenomenon. JCP and Llewelyn grew more like him in this.

Theodore wanted the myth and backed into the limelight (Tim Hyman). Tim continued, pointing out that JCP's West Country novels were mostly written elsewhere. There is a great deal of Ordnance Survey in Powys. Ian Robinson said that no-one had yet mentioned Hardy whose novels could be constructed around railway timetables. We were looking at JCP's Wessex, not Hardy's.

With the Welsh novels it's Time-displacement, not place (Peter Lazare). JCP alone makes the Welsh connection. But he abandoned his modern Welsh novel (Peter Foss). Stephen Powys Marks said that his grandfather ARP actually hated the whole idea of the Welsh connection (which came from the Powys father). David Gervais said that Celtic influence could be felt through Yeats (young JCP admired Yeats) and that the *Mabinogion* was popular with Victorians like Tennyson (who, incidentally, stayed at the Hand Hotel). John Hodgson wondered if this was part of the question of being at odds with the modern city (though JCP liked small towns). All the Powyses were anti-technology. JCP was the one who retreated physically—to Wales—but it was a retreat into himself, he does not disappear (David Gervais). JCP had a blood-feeling for places—his move to Wales with Phyllis was also a practical one (Patricia Dawson). JCP is Celtic—all through the novels (Colin Thomas). JCP was also cosmopolitan and international. Let's not forget his involvement with politics in America, and with the New York scene. But he really retired—not like Theodore the Sage of Chaldon (Tim Hyman).

Two members attending from the Arnold Bennett Society made contributions about the sense of place being one of THE ways of looking at novels. Did the Powyses need hills? No—see *Rodmoor*. Eco-poetics are central throughout (John Shapcott). There's history too in real places with JCP—hence the libel suits.

Tordis Marks felt sure that country places were in the family's deepest nature—from the beginning. Jacqueline Peltier commented that Phudd Bottom emanated great spirit for JCP. He identified with the Indian spirits. The Powyses have a microscopic world-view—insects, stones—compare Edward Thomas's eco-poetry (Penelope Shuttle). It's not good for the mind to lose touch with nature (John Hodgson). A murmured comment from Patricia Dawson—'there is much to be explored about the feeling of place'. JCP was a medium, he could put himself

anywhere. Peter Tait offered the Polynesian word Turangawaewae—meaning a place with which one most identifies, the experience at one's heart, making one's own place.

JCP did put a spoke in his own wheel, not getting publicity (Louise de Bruin). Llewelyn was very popular in 1920s America, people were amazed when he abandoned fame for a cottage. But he was homesick ... (Peter Foss). TF needed publicity to pay for his family. But he has to be read as a fabulist, if not he's disadvantaged by his narrow setting (Larry Mitchell). JCP was fed by Great Books—many modern, and European (David Gervais). He was European! (Colin Thomas). Is it a good thing to be a European novelist? (Barrie Mencher).

More and more was said and I began to lose the plot but an early point made by David Gervais seemed to me vital—THE MIND IS ITS OWN PLACE.

Perhaps this discussion became somewhat wayward but members showed their excitement at the opportunity to participate. With apologies to the many people who contributed whom I have failed to mention and to those who feel I have misrepresented them.

Sonia Lewis

Player Kings

A well-orchestrated conversation, of Powys- and Wilkinson-related attitudes to the theatrical. Chris Wilkinson read *Young Oliver*; Richard Graves, *Old Oliver* and *JCP*; Pat Roberts, *Frances*; and Peter Foss, *Louis*. Chris and Peter devised the links between *The Tangled Tree* (unpublished letters between Oliver and his mother Frances Gregg), JCP's *Autobiography*, 'Louis Marlow''s disguised autobiography *Swan's Milk*, and letters of JCP to Louis Wilkinson and to his brother Llewelyn (with a dash of *Morwyn*). The programme was decorated as usual with interesting photographs (Young Oliver on the cover in costume as what appears to be a Genie).

Pat Roberts and Richard Graves

Oliver, aged about 20, cured of TB, is at the Embassy theatre school in London, living in digs. Frances sends him tuck, clean clothes, advice on acting and against the wiles of ladies in lodgings. Oliver is to meet his father Louis for the first time in ten years: Frances advises him to go to one of Louis's lectures first, to see what he is like. The two Wilkinsons have lunch in Soho; Oliver admires Louis's beautiful red hair and his very young new wife. What an odd person for Frances to have married ...

JCP, an actor all his life, practised as an infant on his long-suffering brother

Littleton. Both JCP and Louis (alias 'Dexter' in *Swan's Milk*) made an art of lecturing—a profession much like acting. 'Convert them!' was JCP's recipe for success; sex-appeal was Louis's. Oliver (a born letter-writer, as was Frances) describes the efforts by staff in a luxury hotel to tie his dress tie, in the manner of a Feydeau farce; then the drama of JCP's performance at an anti-vivisection meeting; finally JCP's touching and excessive gratitude for Oliver's ludicrous attempts to find the correct railway carriage for the return to Wales—'an inexhaustible well of kindness'.

Chris Wilkinson and Pat Roberts

The very entertaining Entertainment was especially valued by those of us who knew and loved (Old) Oliver. Surely those letters must be published.

KK

Peter Foss, Chris Wilkinson, Pat Roberts and Richard Graves in Player Kings.

Conference Video

Members interested in a visual record of parts of this year's Conference in Llangollen may order either a VHS tape or a DVD disc.

Sequences River Dee at Llangollen; Hand Hotel; Reception; Introduction; the Book Room; parts only of the Discussion, parts only of three lectures (Charles Lock; Richard Maxwell; Barbara Ozieblo), the COMPLETE lecture by Ian Robinson and the COMPLETE dramatic presentation 'Player Kings'. There are additional scenes taken at Blaenau Ffestiniog (views, the outside of JCP's house and adjacent stream), Castell Dinas Brân and Valle Crucis Abbey. (Please note that the 3 lectures only partly recorded merely reflects the length of the overall recordings and not the presentations themselves!)

The running time is 3 hours 46 minutes—a full winter evening's viewing!

State whether you want the VHS or the DVD.

NB (1) If the DVD is required, this was copied onto DVD in the 'minus' format. Please check that your player can accept this format. It should be all right as the disc was 'finalised' to play on other players, but it is not guaranteed. If it won't play please return the disc and I will replace it with the VHS.

NB (2) In order to get as much footage as possible the recordings were made using the LP format instead of the SP. This results in a slightly less defined picture quality—not a problem with static presentations, as with the lectures for example—but it also regrettably compromised some of the sound quality as well, for which apologies. (Any future similar projects will be recorded in SP!) It is suggested using a low volume, which will help, apart from the Discussion section. Nevertheless, I hope as a record of the Llangollen Conference members will find it of interest.

Cost £6 for the VHS and £7 for the DVD. The prices are to cover the cost of the VHS/DVD plus postage.

This will include a £1.50 donation to the Society.

Please send a cheque/postal order payable to **Raymond Cox** (not The Powys Society), 4 Lulworth Close, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 2OJ. Print your address please. Allow a week or two for dispatch. There is no reserve stock of copies as they will be made to order. If there are questions/queries telephone 01384 566383 or e-mail: raym-@tiscali.co.uk

Raymond Cox

Dorchester, 4th October

Richard Graves gave a talk on the Powys Brothers in the Dorset County Museum as part of its series of Literary Lectures. The lectures (tea and biscuits included) are held in the Museums's agreeable central hall with its Roman mosaic floor, its ironwork painted terracotta and aquamarine, sedan chairs and cider presses standing around. There were about 40 in the audience, including half a dozen Society members. The Museum's director Judy Lindsay introduced.

As this talk was an 'introduction' to the Brothers Powys, RPG kept less to the works and more to the Powys characters. For a taste:

> When I consider the Powys Brothers, the principal quality of which I become immediately, strongly, almost terrifyingly aware is of their bravery. Faced with depression, despair, madness and the prospect of death, they not only endured, but transmuted their bitter experiences into a body of literature which includes words of hope, words of understanding, words of defiance.

and

> Why is it that John Cowper appeals so strongly to women? Not entirely, I suggest, because he understands women so well; but because of his strength, his almost superhuman ability to sink deep into himself and into the whole physical world about him, to become like a rock, a stone, to derive pleasure even in Blaenau Ffestiniog, on a bleak winter's day surely one of the most depressing places in the world, to look up to the encircling mountains and find strength, to look up to the storm-clouds and find beauty.

Many of the stories were of course familiar to some of us, such as JCP's childhood traumas (the stick thrown in the lake and consequent dread of policemen, the disturbed tadpoles and the magical laurel axe, the school bullying and its famous exorcism). Illustrating JCP's fear of his own magical powers, RPG read an early poem, 'The Ship'; and on sleeping devils of cruelty (which all the brothers had to deal with), Albertus Magnus in *The Brazen Head*. All the brothers learnt to balance negativity and destructiveness in their lives (JCP's neuroses, TFP's depression, LlP's illness) by making creative use in writing of the anxieties themselves, and celebrating visionary moments to set against destructiveness.

The final quotations were from Llewelyn's last message from his deathbed, on the glory of life; Theodore as priest of the vulnerable in *Soliloquies of Hermit* ('the soil where God practises his moods'); and the Towers of Cybele image from the end of *Glastonbury*, the indestructible Earth Mother nourishing the human spirit.

KK

Llewelyn's Birthday 2005 was a modest event compared with last year and other years. Sadly, Eve Batten's illness meant that John Batten, the founder of this celebration of Llewelyn, was unable to be there, and neither were other regular attenders, the bad weather not encouraging.

Notwithstanding, a near-dozen people (including our then Chairman) met at The Sailor's Return to drink to Llewelyn's memory, and a valiant few made it to the Stone in rain, wind and mist, to be revived with tea at Chydyok.

With thanks to John Sanders and others for the report and photograph.

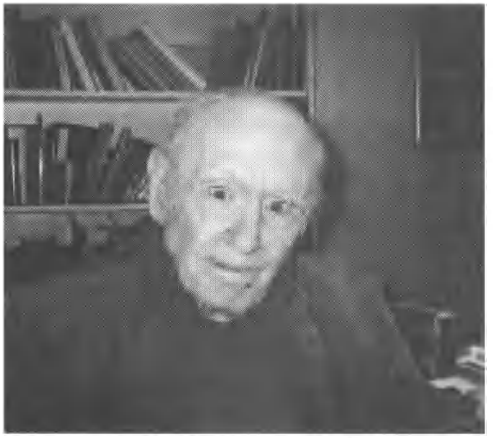
*

A painting (a cliff landscape) by **Gertrude Powys** was recently sold for £340 at Hy. Duke & Son, Art Auctioneers of Dorchester.

*

The text of ***One Hundred Best Books*** by John Cowper Powys (1916) must now be the most accessible of all his works, as it can be obtained free on the Internet by downloading from the website <www.gutenberg.org/etext/12914>. This is one of a wide range of out-of-copyright works being made available by the 'Gutenberg Project', based in the United States (there are no other Powys books, though).

*



Sven Erik Täckmark celebrates his ninetieth birthday next April. This photograph was taken in Sweden last August by Charles Lock

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An article by Morine Krissdóttir on **JCP and Wales** is to appear in the Welsh magazine *Country Quest*.

*

Apart from the three booklets from The Powys Society due to be issued in January 2006 (*see* page 8), **new publications** this year include *T. F. Powys: Some Aspects of a Life* by J. Lawrence

Mitchell, our *Journal* editor (from Brynmill); the two new Powys Heritage booklets, an essay by John Dunn, and *A Dorset Utopia* by Judith Stinton (from Black Dog Books)—not directly Powys-related but sociologically very interesting. All of these are reviewed on later pages.

*

Awaited are the two reprints from a new imprint **Sundial Press**: novels by Alyse Gregory (*Hester Craddock*) and Philippa Powys (*The Blackthorn Winter*), each with new Introductions (*see* leaflet), the first of a new and much-to-be-welcomed series of from Frank Kibblewhite. Duckworth's reprinting of *Autobiography* (in association with Overlook Press in USA) will be the first for ten years.

Reviews

T. F. Powys: Aspects of a Life
by J. Lawrence Mitchell
The Brynmill Press, 2005. 169pp, £14.40 (post-free). ISBN 0 907839 86 X

T. F. Powys is an intrinsically elusive subject, a man who protected the heart of his mystery. As J. Lawrence Mitchell acknowledges, 'we know all too little about TFP's early life and less still about the forces that shaped his mental life'. With the publication of this book, however, we are in a position to know more about both the man and the influences upon his work. The main 'aspects' Professor Mitchell illuminates are: TFP's education, his years as a young man farming in East Anglia, and the support he received in his initial literary endeavours from his friend Mrs Stracey, dedicatee of *An Interpretation of Genesis*, about whom little was known before Professor Mitchell undertook his researches. Other aspects helpfully considered include the publishing history of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* and *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* and TFP's preoccupation with death, a preoccupation integral to his being, but reinforced by the murder of his son, Dicky, in Africa.

The story of T. F. Powys's life is all the more fascinating for his reticence and the myths surrounding it, such as the idea that he was a 'hermit'. Professor Mitchell shows that 'TFP was remarkably lucky, as a writer, in his friends and acquaintances'. Whatever his early sense of having disappointed his parents and of inferiority to his Cambridge-educated brothers may have been, this was also true of the support he received from family members. Family, of course, is crucial to understanding any of the Powys brothers. Yet to my mind it is a pity that Professor Mitchell begins the story of T. F. Powys with a detailed account of Powys family history reaching back a century and more before his birth, since the vast array of names and connections is as bewildering as the cast of characters in a Russian novel. It is when the focus switches to TFP himself that, for me, the book comes to life.

Professor Mitchell carefully reconstructs the chronology of TFP's education, an

endeavour that lends credence to his view that 'it would barely be an exaggeration to say that his real education did not begin until after he left school'. He shows, indeed, TFP learning about the land and farming as a young man in East Anglia and at the same time developing his literary and philosophical reading—taking, as it were, instead of his brothers' Cambridge studies, a course in sheep and mangolds, and the Bible and Nietzsche. TFP experienced failures as a farmer, as many did during 'The Great Depression' in British farming, but Mitchell demonstrates that the idea that his life as a farmer was comprehensively a failure is a myth. Indeed, the ultimate success of TFP as a writer depended significantly on his first-hand knowledge of work on the land and rural culture—knowledge he owed to his years farming in East Anglia.

The 'mysterious' Mrs Stracey emerges from this book as, for a period early in T. F. Powys's writing life, 'his audience, his critic, his Muse even'. During the years of their friendship he worked his way through the Old Testament, producing 'well over two thousand manuscript pages of biblical interpretation'. By carefully considering the evidence of Mrs Stracey's work on TFP's manuscripts, Professor Mitchell indicates how she helped him to purge 'himself of the archaic biblical language and style of his earliest phase'. We may never know more about Mrs Stracey or about TFP's relationship with her than Professor Mitchell has been able to discover, but the evidence he adduces suggests that he is right to describe her as a significant influence upon Powys's achievement of 'a style of limpid clarity in which the biblical element was thoroughly assimilated'.

An emphasis recurs in *T. F. Powys: Aspects of a Life* with which I would take issue. It may be observed when Professor Mitchell says TFP 'learned to write his way out of religion ("the only subject I know anything about") and into life'. I don't think the opposition here between religion and life is one that TFP would have accepted. It was his brother Llewelyn who described him as 'to his very marrow bone a puritanical visionary'. Professor Mitchell, however, writes of Llewelyn as 'the risk-taker, the womaniser, the *bon vivant* that a secret TFP would dearly have liked to be'. It may or may not have been so, but the normally careful Professor Mitchell surely goes too far in claiming to know what 'a secret TFP would dearly have liked to be'. The emphasis is certainly wrong when Professor Mitchell describes Gerard Casey's 'readiness to indulge discussion of the Theodorian canon of writers: Richard Baxter, Jacob Boehme, Meister Eckhart, William Law and, of course, Jeremy Taylor'. The Gerard Casey I knew wouldn't have 'indulged' discussion of these religious writers, he would have eagerly participated in it.

But there will be differences of emphasis in discussions of T. F. Powys, not least because the originality of his serious yet comic treatment of religion results in profound and provocative ambiguity. With the help of Professor Mitchell's book, the man himself however can now be seen more clearly as he guards the heart of his mystery.

Jeremy Hooker

Theodora Scutt discusses *T. F. Powys: Aspects of a Life*

I have just finished reading Larry Mitchell's book, 'T. F. Powys'. Larry is an excellent writer, and his research is not merely done with unusual thoroughness, but with obvious and extreme interest in the subject. I wish I could say I'd enjoyed reading it. I suppose I couldn't be expected to, any more than I enjoyed writing 'Cuckoo in the Powys Nest'; after all I knew Daddy and loved him, and I wrote my book in an endeavour to show what manner of man he really was, which wasn't at all the sort that some people seemed to think. The thing that, to me at least, stands out clearly from Larry's book, is a thing I've always suspected; that Daddy's depression and utter lack of self-confidence were the things that caused his 'failures' in life—I'd call them his withdrawals. Perhaps that's the same thing.

Larry is right that it's infuriatingly difficult to find out anything about his life as a farmer—and he told me precious little about it even though he knew how interested I was—but he did tell me that what gave him his first idea of giving it up was the awful attack of flu that swept the whole country at that time; everyone on White House Farm had it, not all at once, but the ploughman took it as Daddy recovered, and couldn't finish ploughing a certain field; he worried so about this that Daddy, as the only man on his feet, finished the job himself. This meant a lot of walking, and some lifting of a heavy plough, and doing so, when he should have been resting, strained Daddy's heart: that's what he told me. I don't remember whether I remembered to tell Larry or not; if I didn't, I should have. And he wasn't, Daddy went on, at all happy to give orders to men to do work that he couldn't do himself. Farming was in the doldrums at that time; he was scared to bits of owing his father money; and he'd got hold of the writings of that damned Hazlitt, which encouraged him to make the worst mistake of his life. Given time, his heart came more-or-less right; given time, so did farming; but Daddy didn't give them time. It isn't easy to succeed at farming, especially if one has genuine, personal ill-luck; Daddy lost a favourite mare and a beloved dog. Farming is my only interest and the only thing I can do, but in his place I might have given up too. But farming gives one the time, and the incentive, for meditation, at least it did so in the days of the horse; and certainly one can write as well. Giving up farming gave Daddy the certainty that he was a failure, and that remained with him all his life.

Larry has made a few very minor mistakes, like writing 'Eccleston' instead of 'Edelsten' for the name of Daddy's doctor in his last months, and saying that Daddy's Book of Common Prayer is in the Bissell Collection when in fact it's in my bookcase, but he was just given wrong information and it's of no matter; in everything that does matter he is only too exact. I'm not surprised that Daddy's mother was a depressive; she must have had the most appalling married life. I know she had servants, but—eleven children that lived! good grief; and small wonder she passed on her destructive depression to the child who was her closest companion. To be a woman in those days must have been evil indeed; no wonder either that only one of her daughters married,

and her son brought up his adopted daughter to see men and women as equal, the only difference being (and it's one worth consideration) that it's the women who actually bear the children.

I didn't realise that Daddy felt so strongly about his lack of conventional education; he certainly contrived to educate me, even teaching me a little Latin—unfortunately he knew no French. This will be why he avoided society and why he made a less than sensible marriage; his wife, while not being in love with him, was extremely possessive and did her best to separate him from his family and all his friends; she was even jealous of his books and his writing. In fact he married a highly attractive girl (so Louis Wilkinson, who disliked her even more than she disliked him, told me) but it will be without doubt why he didn't seriously consider Maidie Stracey: he felt himself inferior. Francis, wrong about a good many things, was right about that—Daddy was attracted to her. I rather think she may have been to him. But one didn't hear much about the Straceys in our family; Violet had no time for them. Why? well, when she died, Mrs Stracey didn't leave Daddy any money! I don't myself, see why she should have. But Violet's second name was Money, and she was forever at Daddy because he wasn't rich, though we can't have been all that poor as she nearly always had help in the house.

Oh dear, poor Daddy—and then 'Dicky"s murder—I can't discuss that. I fear Daddy did know what really happened. He almost never spoke of 'Dicky'. He didn't speak of those things that really hurt. Violet was inclined the opposite way and I remember going out for a walk with Daddy after she had been going on and on about her grief; and after walking in silence past the churchyard, Daddy said very bitterly, 'A blaring cow soon forgets her calf!' and he said no more, merely answering my childish chatter (I must have been about twelve) by a quiet 'yes, Susie', or 'no, Susie'. It was his tone that made me remember his words. I don't think he was quite fair to Violet, whose grief was genuine enough, just different from his; but what I did and do think is that a sensitive woman would have seen that to talk of his lost son gave Daddy great pain, and that if she felt she must talk, she'd have done so to somebody else.

Yes, I have seen happier marriages, particularly my own.

What we would have done without Sally when Daddy died, I do not know; nor without our neighbours the Kellys. Except to say that when Daddy called out 'Belle, Belle!' and tried to point, it was Belle O'Neill he was greeting, that's for sure—I'd best make no remark upon that time. I was so sorry for and grateful to Sally, and I dislike Francis so much (and I didn't like his mother much, either) that I might well be unfair to somebody. I'll conclude by saying again that Larry is a damned good writer and the book, to anyone not emotionally involved with T. F. Powys, is extremely interesting and enjoyable to read. I find it interesting myself, just very painful. That can't be helped. Well done, Larry!

Theodora Scutt

Flight to Reality—the Wessex Novels of John Cowper Powys
by John Dunn
Milton Keynes: Study Press, 2005. ISBN 0 9547212 5 X

John Dunn's monograph, *Flight to Reality* is a lively critique of John Cowper Powys's Wessex novels in the light of Powys's anarchist philosophy. Its view is that the novels are themselves a critique of this philosophy and even subvert it.

Dunn takes as his springboard Powys's debt to the 'individualist anarchism' of the nineteenth-century German philosopher Max Stirner (examined by David F. Goodway in *The Powys Journal* XIV). It is not hard to see the congruence of thought between Stirner, for whom nothing existed but the individual ('Only I am not an abstraction') and Powys's multiverse of a myriad personalities. 'Apart from personality, apart from personal Will, there is no such "ultimate" as Matter, there is no such "ultimate" as Spirit.'

Dunn also looks to a Marxian critique of Stirner to subject the Stirnerite egotistical vision to the kind of social realities that Powys brought to bear on his philosophy in his novels. Dunn recalls Angus Wilson's tribute to the accuracy of Powys's portrayal of the social realities of his time. For Dunn, Wolf Solent is 'the propertyless "gentleman", cast adrift on the seas of an increasingly money-driven world in which the propertied and working classes express the same human alienation'. As it turns out, in Dunn's words, 'the ego is not an entity alone; individuality is social.' The Stirnerite, anarchist solution represented by Wolf's life-illusion, his mythology, in fact makes him impotent to act.

Characteristically, Powys chooses characters who are socially marginal or at odds with society. *Weymouth Sands* is littered with the defeated, the self-consoling, the emasculated, the alienated, strewn in the wake of the novel's forcefully personified onward thrust of capital.

Dunn leaves his analysis of *A Glastonbury Romance* to the end of his monograph, out of the chronological sequence of the Wessex novels, and it is here that his distinctly un-enchanted, if not disenchanted analysis of Powys is most startling and suggestive. Dunn takes the novel not as a vast panorama of a myriad autonomous human consciousnesses, under the unpredictable influences of a transcendental dual-natured first cause, but finds the book 'a boundless expanse of dependencies and interdependencies' that arises simply and more prosaically, out of William Crow's estate. The novel's shape, placing William Crow's burial so solidly in the foreground, taking so long to move to Glastonbury, would give strong support to Dunn's reading. Geard's religious revival with its tourist trade and knick-knacks is a distinctly prophetic 'commodified religion', financed by William Crow's legacy. Few characters do not exist in some state of dependence on Crow capital in its various forms, perhaps only Owen Evans and the Dekkers, the latter 'members of a declining, soon to be extinct clergyman caste'. The final flood may be one that 'washes over ideological difference', but the main survivor has nothing to do with the Grail, or the

dreaming towers of the Great Mother Cybele, but is 'the personification of capitalism, Philip Crow'.

John Dunn's book has been available at auction on e-Bay, but it can also be ordered, in a slightly less Stirnerite way, from the author at <www.studypress.com>

John Hodgson

A Dorset Utopia: The Little Commonwealth and Homer Lane
by Judith Stinton.
Norwich: Black Dog Books, 2005. 144 pp. £11.95.

Judith Stinton first burst upon the Powys scene in 1988 with the publication of *Chaldon Herring: The Powys Circle in a Dorset Village* (Boydell Press), a fully researched and fascinating account in which numerous notables of earlier times, from Chaucer and John Bunyan to the Duchesses de Barri and d'Angoulême, from the Tolpuddle Martyrs to Thomas Hardy, briefly appear; not to mention the long list of eminent personalities of the last century who had some unexpected association with this remote village. Now Judith has as it were done it again with *A Dorset Utopia: The Little Commonwealth and Homer Lane*. The scene is Batcombe, another isolated Dorset village, high on the chalk escarpment and overlooking the whole extent of the Blackmore Vale, a magnificent view. I happened to visit it, and the tiny church of Hilfield just above, fifteen years ago; and, with no foreknowledge, could feel a special atmosphere.

Homer Lane was an American with advanced ideas on how to treat delinquent and disturbed children by getting them to partake in the running of their school (hence 'little Commonwealth'), and to develop manual rather than academic skills to give them confidence. His ideas influenced the much better known A. S. Neill and also Bertrand Russell. His name appeared in distinguished company as W. H. Auden wrote:

> Lawrence, Blake and Homer Lane, once healers in our British land
> These are dead in iron for ever, these can never hold our hand.
> Lawrence was brought down by smut-hounds, Blake went dotty as he sang,
> Homer Lane was killed in action by the Twickenham Baptist gang.

One of Lane's friends was Ethel Mannin, close friend also of Louis Wilkinson and correspondent of John Cowper Powys. She tells us in the final chapter of her autobiography, *Sunset over Dartmoor* (1977), '... the freedom of the child which Neill and Bertrand Russell and Homer Lane—and a handful of others—strenuously preached, the modern child takes for granted ...' Where Homer Lane gave hope to sadly disadvantaged children, similar work continues today at the Friary of St Francis, on the same site as Lane's Flowers Farm (leased from the Sandwich estate). It is a gripping story; Peter Tolhurst of Black Dog Books (whose own book, *Wessex: A Literary Pilgrimage*, was launched at the Powys Conference in 1999) is also to be congratulated—in spite of no index!

Susan Rands

Making It New: John Cowper Powys and the Modernist Tradition
by Michael Holliday
London: Cecil Woolf (Powys Heritage series), 2005. ISBN 1 897967 93 4

Michael Holliday first read John Cowper Powys after he found a copy of *A Glastonbury Romance* in a second-hand bookshop, with the inscription 'Please do not read this book. It is the Bible of a heritic [*sic*]—it will "damn" your soul and strangle your spirit.' Undaunted, or encouraged by this inscription, he bought the book, and *Making It New: John Cowper Powys and the Modernist Tradition* is fruit of his engagement with Powys, and is the latest publication in Cecil Woolf's immensely valuable 'Powys Heritage' series. The title is Ezra Pound's Imagist battle cry: Powys and Pound knew each other, at least through Frances Gregg, and they both appear as characters in Louis Wilkinson's *roman-à-clef, The Buffoon*. It would be interesting to know more about their relationship. But at first sight, at least artistically, there seems little to attach Powys to the modernist enterprise. Powys liked old things, liked to assert, in a very pre-modern way, the timelessness of the poetical. Poetry grows with age, 'Poetry is composed of a certain traditional body of feelings about life; a body which has gathered by slow adhesions into a presence of values, nuances, discriminations, to which must conform what every nation and every age may add as an indigenous quota of its own.'

Holliday aligns Powys with those such as Lawrence and Forster who take 'a pessimistic reading of modernity', while noting that Powys was no pessimist, despite the aeroplanes of *Wolf Solent* and Philip Crow's capitalism, and was not even a cultural pessimist, if only because he was inclined to see modernity as a transient aberration. Holliday also with total justice aligns Powys with those writers, such as Joyce, whom Virginia Woolf identified as 'revealing the flickerings of that innermost flame that flashes its messages through the brain', despite the orotund and conventional syntax that Powys generally uses to describe thought processes. It is interesting that Powys's confines his occasional experiments of 'stream of consciousness' to characters who are not naturally reflective, such as Philip Crow and Euphemia Drew, quoted here.

Holliday recalls Powys's support for James Joyce at the trial of *The Little Review* for obscenity, and his admiration of *Work in Progress*, 'though I am far too unscholarly to understand a single word of it'. The earthy physicality of *Ulysses* undoubtedly left its mark on Powys's fiction: Wolf Solent's morning ritual, leaving his sleeping wife in bed, preparing breakfast, visiting the privy, reads like a Powysian running commentary on Leopold Bloom.

As Holliday's title indicates, modernism has now itself become a tradition. Many of its classics, long accepted, perhaps now commodified, have lost some of their power to startle. Holliday goes on to discuss Powys and Lawrence, citing Angus Wilson's praise for Powys's restless literary exploration producing 'idiosyncratic masterpieces' into his seventies, compared to Lawrence's later work in which he was

content 'to shout the same cry more loudly'. Holliday is surely right that Powys is often at his most modernist in his rejection of modernisation and modernity, but whether it is helpful to call *A Glastonbury Romance* a 'classic Modernist novel', I am not so sure.

John Hodgson

The Diary of a Sherborne Schoolboy: Llewelyn Powys's Diary for 1903
edited and with an Introduction by Peter J. Foss
London: Cecil Woolf (Powys Heritage series), 2005. 36pp., £7.00. ISBN 1 897967 04 7

On Wednesday 28th January, 1903, Llewelyn Powys packs the necessary belongings to return to school for his final term and records in his diary, 'Came back to Sherborne for the last time. I feel sad when I think it really is the last term here where I have been so very happy.' During the term he studies industriously if a little grudgingly for Cambridge entry ('Begun my work, seven hours a day. It is hard to work when others play'); reads Coleridge, Hazlitt, Lamb, Poe and Tolstoy in addition to the set course-books; is elected and contributes to the new and much-respected literary society ('Crusoe thanked me, saying that "it was the most eloquent essay that had been heard by the Duffers for many years"'); plays football and rugby; catches mumps but soon recovers and is prone to frequent colds; and, in true Powysian fashion, writes letters and goes for many walks in the countryside around Sherborne though rarely, it seems, alone. It is also a period during which, and despite an all-embracing Christian upbringing, Llewelyn experiences increasing religious doubts ('My faith is in no way formed yet'); encounters the seductive allure of epicurean philosophy ('What shall I do? Taste the sweet honey; the fair pleasure that the sons of men can give me?'); and with disarming honesty chronicles affairs of the heart and struggles against lusts of the flesh ('He had a bath in the evening. I saw him to bed. My God! I love! I love! What a magic there is in a charmed touch—from one who has thy heart ... surely love heightens my endeavours to be pure.') As one might expect with a notebook diary, the writing throughout is suffused with an energy and spontaneity more akin to a pencil sketch or rapidly executed watercolour than a fully worked-up oil canvas such as Llewelyn later achieved in the poetic prose of his published work; what the reader is sometimes quite unprepared for though, given the year in which it was written, is the candour of its many intimate revelations and it is not merely for formal reasons that this diary is marked very boldly with the word 'PRIVATE'.

This is the ninth in the evolving Powys Heritage series under the general editorship of Anthony Head and the first to focus solely on Llewelyn. In way of an unintentional prelude, A. B. Gourlay's *The Powys Brothers at Sherborne School*, published seven years earlier as the second issue in this series but originally delivered as a talk by Kenneth Hopkins in 1974, set the scene when Gourlay wrote: 'Versatile and prolific writer as he later became, Llewelyn never set out to compose a formal

account of his schooldays. But springing from his affections for Sherborne are many scattered references in his writings, including a school diary.' This is the diary of which approximately two-thirds originally appeared in Malcolm Elwin's *Life of Llewelyn Powys* (1946), where Elwin accurately describes it as 'a document of adolescence'. This obviously prompts the question does a schoolboy diary of barely sixteen sides in A5 booklet format deserve a separate edition?

Elwin's biography is now long out of print (although second-hand copies are not too difficult to find) but this new version provides for the first time the full text of the diary and corrects some of the misreadings in Elwin's transcription. Additionally, and most importantly, it is accompanied by a characteristically illuminating introduction by Peter Foss who helpfully supplies numerous but unobtrusive endnotes-one hundred and six to be precise and not one of which is superfluous—so that no individual, place, game or archaic name is allowed to pass unexplained. Llewelyn Powys has no finer advocate than Foss whose scholarship is rooted in diligent and meticulous research, constantly unearthing new facts concerning his subject's life and revealing fresh insights into his subject's writing in a most engaging manner, so that the reader's understanding and appreciation of the 'youngest writing brother' is greatly enhanced. One instance from numerous examples of Foss's perceptive commentary scattered throughout the introduction is when he explores the dynamics of the intimate feelings that Llewelyn had for other boys at the school:

> It is interesting to speculate on the nature of these friendship 'crushes' of Llewelyn's at school. They were clearly more than passing infatuations born of sexual frustration. Llewelyn's whole *raison d'être* in relationships (as borne out in later life) was to explore *intimacy*. This was not just with regard to the person who was the object of his interest and affection, but in a parallel measure, self-reflexive too, that is with regard to the *intimate* in himself. Llewelyn was eager to *know* himself, to know himself in relation to others, and to understand how far he could go with others in exploring the nature of friendship *per se*.

The Diary of a Sherborne Schoolboy, also notable for being the only published contemporary account of school life from the five brothers to attend Sherborne main school, contains five illustrations and follows the same attractive format as its predecessors although it does perhaps seem a trifle optimistically priced. It is only slightly marred by a few oversights in its final proof reading: it is not *Montacute Rectory* but *Montacute Vicarage* and T. F. Powys died in *1953* not in *1954*, and so on, but these minor slips will not deter any prospective purchaser for this is a welcome addition to any Powys library. One looks forward with great enthusiasm to the eventual publication of further early diaries from Llewelyn so ably introduced, transcribed and edited as this one.

Frank Kibblewhite

Peter Foss's edition of Llewelyn Powys's 1908 Diary (with Introduction, annotations and illustrations) under the title 'The Diary of a Reluctant Teacher' is forthcoming from Cecil Woolf in 2006.

Powys Heritage monographs

The Powys Heritage series of booklets published by Cecil Woolf was launched in 1998 with a monograph by Paul Roberts on John Cowper Powys's relationship with his wife Margaret. Over the past twenty years Cecil Woolf has produced numerous volumes relating to John Cowper Powys, most notably a continuing collection of the latter's letters to various correspondents. The idea for a series of booklets was based on the publisher's long-standing Bloomsbury Heritage monographs, and although these are unsurprisingly both more numerous and sought-after than their Powys equivalents, the Powys Heritage series has now grown to ten titles, consisting of a variety of biographical studies, memoirs, critical essays and, this year, the first of Llewelyn Powys's early diaries.

The series aims to publish original work by or about the Powys family which, for reasons of length, content or style, might not be suitable for publication in *The Powys Journal* and for which there is no other obvious outlet, as well as to provide an easily accessible body of sources for researchers. Many of the booklets contain photographs and illustrations never previously published.

Titles published to date

1 *John Cowper Powys, Margaret and Lily: The Evidence of the Syracuse Manuscripts*, by Paul Roberts (1998).
2 *The Powys Brothers at Sherborne School*, by A. B. Gourlay (1998).
3 *The Powys Family: Some Records of a Friendship*, by Glen Cavaliero (1999).
4 *Alyse Gregory: A Woman at her Window*, by Jacqueline Peltier (1999).
5 *Lord Jim, Lady Tim and the Powys Circle*, by Chris Gostick (2000).
6 *John Cowper Powys, the Lyons and W. E. Lutyens*, by Susan Rands (2000).
7 *We Lived in Patchin Place*, by Boyne Grainger, edited and introduced by Anthony Head (2002).
8 *John Cowper Powys, T. S. Eliot and French Literature*, by David Gervais (2004).
9 *The Diary of a Sherborne Schoolboy: Llewelyn Powys's Diary for 1903*, edited and introduced by Peter Foss (2005). ‡
10 *Making It New: John Cowper Powys and the Modernist Tradition*, by Michael Holliday (2005). ‡

All titles are available from the publisher at 1 Mornington Place, London NW1 7RP. Tel/Fax 020 7387 2394. ‡

Any suggestions or enquiries about the Powys Heritage series should be sent to the General Editor, Anthony Head, c/o 1 Woodfield Gardens, Highcliffe, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 4QA or by email to <ahead@gol.com>

Anthony Head

‡ *See page 9 for purchase of Nos 9 and 10 from the Society at a special price.*

Michel Gresset (1936–2005)

Jacqueline Peltier pays tribute to a French scholar with a deep understanding of JCP.

It was in September 1961 that a young and talented teacher of English, accompanied by his wife, came from France to Blaenau Ffestiniog to pay his respects to a very old writer he greatly admired: John Cowper Powys. Later Michel Gresset was to remember:

> The impression left by this very simple and proud couple, caught in a space reduced to the original nest, but compensated by the dimension of a fascinating past, imperiously brought to mind some forgotten and heroic cult, somewhat anachronistic, of which John Cowper was the priest, in druid-like fashion and Miss Playter the elected, discreet and devoted Vestal.[1]

Michel Gresset was influenced by Jean-Jacques Mayoux, another great admirer of Powys who had taught at the Sorbonne, and also knew Dominique Aury[2] who was influential in making Powys better known in France. French academics were already aware of the works of Powys at the time—Marie Canavaggia had drawn Bachelard's attention to *Wolf Solent*, and two other philosophers, Jean Wahl and Gabriel Marcel, had mentioned him. Michel Gresset showed a keen interest in the work of John Cowper Powys all his life. The crowning event was the 1973 publication of *Granit*, a handsome volume of almost 500 pages, devoted to JCP, edited by Michel Gresset, François-Xavier Jaujard and Diane de Margerie. It covers the whole of JCP's life, with portraits, testimonies, essays, translations of some of his writings (including 'My Philosophy up to date', 'The Ridge', in English and French, and some Letters) and a precise bibliography of Powysiana at the time, both in Great Britain and in France.

Photo (1994)
by courtesy of Claire Gresset

In the eighties I attended his 'workshop' at Paris VII University and wrote my dissertation[3] under his direction. He would often draw the attention of his students to some aspect or other of Powys's work, which he thought striking, original or which brought to mind some apt complement to his own talks. But apart from his written work on Powys (to which I will return), he gave only three 'official' lectures on John Cowper Powys: in Dijon, 1963; Lille, 1965; Charlottesville, USA, 1967.

Alas for Powys, in the seventies, after some important articles in different French reviews, Michel Gresset turned his attention to another literary giant from the other side of the Atlantic, William Faulkner, whose work

became pre-eminent in his life. He thus contributed numerous articles and ground-breaking book-length studies to Faulkner, among which one may cite *Fascination: Faulkner's Fiction, 1919–1936* (1989) and *Faulkner Chronology* (1985). Faulkner's noted biographer, Joseph Blotner mentioned in his writings the influence of the *French Faulknerian school.* Michel Gresset also co-sponsored the International Faulkner Symposium which he started in Paris in 1980. Up to 1997, when illness caught up with him, he led a very busy academic career; was at East Anglia University for a year in 1982; often went to the United States as 'visiting professor' in universities such as Colgate, Stanford, San Diego and Harvard, but also attended international conferences on Faulkner in different countries (Germany, Italy, Japan).

An outstanding scholar and teacher, Michel Gresset was also extremely active in promoting the profession of literary translator, an occupation to which he brought his knowledge, passion and a requirement for utter faithfulness to the text. He translated or retranslated many of Faulkner's books into French, mostly for the prestigious *Bibliothèque de la Pleiade* and he also brought attention to other Southern writers such as Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, Fred Chappell, Shelby Foote. His own work in that field is enormous. This said, I would like to draw attention to some of his work relating to Powys that I am aware of (but the list might not be complete):

'John Cowper Powys, notre contemporain', *Preuves*, September 1964.[4]

'Les rites matinaux de John Cowper Powys' (JCP's morning rites), *Cahiers du Sud*, n° 386, 1966, 44–9. (Later incorporated in 'John Cowper Powys, les rites et l'humour', *Granit* 1/2.)

'Les Acharniens', a JCP mss,[5] translated by Michel Gresset, *Cahiers du Sud*, n° 386, 1966, 91–109

'Le Rôle de l'humour dans la création littéraire de John Cowper Powys', (The role of humour in JCP's literary creation), *Etudes Anglaises*, n° 25, (Autumn 1966), 76–103. Incorporated in 'John Cowper Powys, les rites et l'humour', *Granit* 1/2.

'Finnegans Wake' (from *Obstinate Cymric)* translated in collaboration with Didier Coupaye, in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, February 1968. It is followed by a long critical essay 'John Cowper Powys', in which Gresset takes stock of Powys's main novels and essays as well as of the corpus of criticism around him at that date.

'Adieu à l'Amérique', translation from 'A Farewell to America' (*Scribner's Magazine*, XCVII, April 1935), in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, May 1972, 69–90.

'Ma Philosophie à ce jour', (My Philosophy up-to-date as Influenced by Living in Wales, from *Obstinate Cymric*), translated in collaboration with Didier Coupaye, *Granit* 1/2, 368–403

'Powysiana' and 'Morwyn', extracts (in translation), in *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, July 1974.

'Letter from France', *The Powys Newsletter* 5, 1977–78 (Colgate University Press), 25–7, in which Michel Gresset sums up the history of JCP's publication in France up to that date: 'JCP is no longer a writer for the very happy and very few. Or, rather the circle has now widened in such a way that it can safely be said that the quality of his French audience has changed with its quantity. Now at last, students come to me for theses or even dissertations on his work instead of my feeling that I have been reading, talking, writing and translating alone and in vain for almost twenty years.'

In all his articles he showed the greatest empathy with Powys, and his analyses are

deep, well-informed, precise, with illuminating comments. For example, in his article 'John Cowper Powys, notre contemporain', Gresset considers the three paragraphs in *Autobiography* on ecstasy,[6] as essential to a deeper understanding of the novels and he comments:

> I think Powys here, very simply and without any pedantry, underlines two or three major ideas, concerning the nature of ecstasy; first its physical quality: "that tingling up-flow of exultation" is perhaps one of the best definitions ever given of it; then, the essential part played by memory (as in Proust, as in Wordsworth); lastly, Powys has ecstasy springing up from a collision, a clash, a contrast, an essential conception when examining the literary crystallization of ecstasy, the metaphor. Is thus evoked the tradition of the great Anglo-Saxon symbolists to which Powys without any doubt connects.[7]

Following his commentary on this passage in *Autobiography*, which deals with interior states of being, Michel Gresset reflects on the impact such states may have upon the external world:

> Today's reader, [*in 1964*] disregarding possibly "the magic secrets", will concentrate on this propensity of an "organism" to communicate. Thus, "reading Powys is to explore creation"[8] takes on a double meaning: for it is not only the process of mineral, vegetal or animal creation that Powys invites us to explore, but above all that of literary creation itself.[9]

Jacqueline Peltier

NOTES

1 'John Cowper Powys', *Le Mercure de France*, August-Sept. 1963, 276–7. Reprinted as 'Thrène' (Threnody) in *Granit* 1/2 (1973), 43–4.

2 See *la lettre powysienne* 10, 'Dominique Aury'.

3 'American Landscapes in *John Cowper Powys's Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*', *The Powys Review* 18, 1986, 48–59. I had been fascinated by these Letters, published in 1975 by Jeff Kwintner, which I was fortunate to find in a Quartier Latin bookshop.

4 *Preuves*: an intellectual left-wing monthly, with a political position close to Albert Camus.

5 In fact, the incomplete manuscript of a book JCP started to write in the fifties, on the comedies of Aristophanes, given by Phyllis Playter to M.G., later published in *The Powys Review* 14, 1984, 60–71. See also the Introduction to *The Acharnians*, by A. J. Brothers, p.68 in the same issue.

6 The passage quoted by M.G. is in 'Weymouth and Dorchester', *Autobiography*, Colgate Univ. Press, pp.41–2, starting with 'This queer expression …' up to 'dualistic nature'.

7 'John Cowper Powys, notre contemporain', 76.

8 'Homage to Powys', G. Wilson Knight, *Yorkshire Post*, October 6, 1962, 12–13.

9 'John Cowper Powys, notre contemporain', 77.

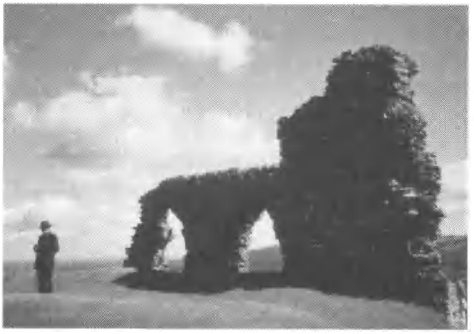
Phyllis, 1979

She had given up
a country, a career,
and respectability
to live with a genius
in a village, when she
preferred cities.

Now alone and in
her eighties, ankles
swollen and a
Woodbine cough, she
begs us to stay a
little longer.

She wants to hear
about our family
and regrets that
she had never had
a child.

Patricia Dawson



The summit of Dinas Brân, with P. J. Kavanagh.

John Cowper Powys and Norah Lofts

Susan Rands investigates JCP's favourite escapist reading.

On 21st January 1946 John Cowper, then living at Corwen with Phyllis, wrote to Louis Wilkinson,

> What I like far best in my writings are my longest novels and romances because I tell myself stories then and just ramble on, losing myself and my ——personality in those I am writing about—just exactly the same delicious escape from reality as when I read exciting stories of the sort I especially like, such as those of Mrs Norah Lofts probably unknown to you!

Who was Norah Lofts and why did John so much enjoy her work?

She was born Norah Robinson, the eldest daughter of a farmer, at Shipham in Norfolk in 1904. Her forebears had been farmers for many generations and this is apparent in the accuracy of her references to the land and the seasons, horses, dogs and cattle. In 1923 her father died and the family moved to Bury St Edmund's where their house was opposite the Girls' County Grammar School which Norah attended. She enjoyed English and History but like John Cowper could not understand mathematics. From an early age she was a great inventor of stories. On leaving school she gained her Teacher's Certificate at Norwich Training School, returned to Bury and taught at the Guildhall Enfeoffment School. In 1931 she married Geoffrey Lofts whom she had met at the local dramatic society, and they had a son, Clive. In 1948 Geoffrey died, and a year later Norah married Robert Jorisch, a national expert on the growing and processing of sugar beet. In 1955 they bought Northgate House, a large elgant house in Bury, the setting for many of the stories. Norah was a town councillor with special interests in conservation and the underprivileged. Tall, elegant and auburn-haired, she was yet a very private person who hated travelling, although she did go to the States four times in connection with her books.

After many rejections her first novel *I Met a Gypsy* was finally published in 1935 by Methuen. The plot description may give an idea of the 'excitement' that appealed to JCP:

> It began in the old King's time—the mating of a gypsy woman with a Tudor lord—a strange union that resulted in an even stranger line of descendents. Beatrice was the first, a novice who left the Church to live in a desolate inn on the Norfolk coast. And after Beatrice came the others, innkeepers, harlots, adventurers—a wild strain of people whose fortunes carried them from Guinea to the Arctic, from British India to the territories of a Chinese War Lord.

The book was immediately successful and Norah Lofts had no difficulty in finding a publisher for her subsequent work. Although she often changed publisher (Methuen, Macdonald's, Hodder and Stoughton, Gollancz, Peter Davies, Michael Joseph, with many later Corgi paperbacks) she never changed her agent, Curtis Brown, and she published one book and sometimes two every year of her long life.

For our purposes these fall into three groups: the thirteen she published before John Cowper's letter mentioning her in 1946, most of which he probably read; the fifteen she published between then and John's death in 1963 which he might have read but we have no evidence either way; and the twenty-nine she published between 1963 and her own death in 1983. It would be interesting to know whether she read JCP's work. There is a similar large white heroic hound in *Afternoon of an Autocrat* to the hound Drudwyn in *Porius*, but that is not much to go on.

Her second novel *Here Was a Man* (1936) is a straightforward historical novel about Sir Walter Raleigh. It is told in thirty short chapters, each titled with the setting and the date, and like nearly all her work is extraordinarily readable, the descriptions brief and apt; for instance, here is the Mermaid Tavern, the scene of Raleigh's meeting with Drake (and with Shakespeare and Marlowe too):

> The mermaid stared out over the narrow cobbled street at the tall twisted chimneys of the house opposite. Sea salt still gleamed in the cracks of her, and the curve of her neck lifted in a way that proved that she had been intended to grace the prow of a ship, not the door of an inn. Above her head was the pale washed February sky barred with thin smoky clouds and decorated with one bright star.

—or fifteen years later, Raleigh leaning from the Tower where he is imprisoned sees the first snowdrops, 'eloquent of the many dead who have noted and loved them in past years and now do so no more'. The well-known Elizabethan lyrics fit naturally into the story as Norah Lofts tells it.

Her third book *White Hell of Pity* (1938) is modern, as is the fourth, *Requiem for Idols* (1938). This is one of the only two that John, in his published letters to Louis Wilkinson (5th February 1946), mentions by name, and the only one he did not like:

> That Requiem book of Mrs Lofts is the only one of her works, a modern one, that I couldn't read! So I beg you not to judge her by it. Anyway she is in my style, not yours. Romantic, idealistic, simple, old-fashioned, exciting, adventurous. She just suits me!

The clothes, cars, servants and smoking date it, but the theme, the fate of the three sisters and the friend of one of them, is still relevant. I think it is brilliant, but John never did like to observe women talking to each other!

Of the thirteen books Norah Lofts published before 1946 I have found and read seven, and the only other modern one, also short, is *Lady Living Alone*, published under the pseudonym of Peter Curtis (1945). Although Norah Lofts can create heartless and immoral characters like the protagonist of this tale, she almost always gives a psychologically credible provenance for their wickedness, and her plots are inventive and compelling.

These characteristics are particularly manifest in her two novels about the early American settlers. *Blossom Like the Rose* (1939) is set in 1679, and *Road to Revelation* (1941) covers a period from 1812 to 1840. In both, the characters suffer appalling deprivation and ill-treatment before they start their trek, and worse hardship in the form of exhaustion, disease, starvation and attack by Indians on their journey. In *Blossom Like the Rose* Indians slit the flesh on the chests of the two main protagonists

and by the loops thus formed string them up on trees. One, of superhuman strength and endurance, manages to free himself and then to free his mate; the episode is described in detail, step by step. An author's note assures us that 'Because I have been accused of having an over-inventive mind, I should like to say that Eli's feat of endurance on page 272 has been equalled in real life.' Norah Lofts is very good at wounds, fights, deprivation and endurance. The last page of this book seems to have a political, socialist, slant that glosses the rest: Puritanism and Socialism are seen to have much in common; the upper-crust characters, virtuous and charming though they are, desert the community. Was this to please its publisher, left-wing Gollancz? And possibly the reason for a different publisher for the next book?

Several of Norah Lofts's books were inspired by her background reading. A note to her second American novel tells us that 'I wish without delay or reserve to acknowledge my debt to George R. Stewart, author of *Ordeal by Hunger*. To that beautiful and incomparable study of human beings in the grip of circumstance I owe not only the impulse to write this story but the geographical and other detail which made the writing possible ...' Lofts invents an outstandingly noble and unselfish character, Mehitabel Smith, who might have written the diary *Ordeal by Hunger*. The story is told from the point of view of two saintly characters, and two villainously selfish ones; all four are entirely credible, their natures shown to be formed by experience working upon genes. Their experiences are horrific, and the compelling question to the reader is how can, will, the characters survive?

The technique Norah Lofts employed in *Road to Revelation* of developing the story through the eyes of several characters in succession, which John Cowper also does, she uses again in *The Brittle Glass* (1942). It is the story of a girl inadvertently involved in smuggling in the Fenlands between 1781 and 1865, told first through the eyes of her deeply affectionate and trustworthy spinster aunt; then of her suitor, impoverished and genteel, a cad on the make; then of a good-hearted gentleman smuggler; and finally of the envious governess. This novel is typical of the form Lofts used in much of her later and better-known work such as *Bless This House* (1954) and the trilogy of *The Town House* (1959), *The House at Old Vine Street* (1961) and *The House at Sunset* (1963)—600 years in the history of a house from medieval times till 1955.

Powys's favourite of Lofts novels was *Michael and All Angels* (1943), as he told

Louis on 5th February 1946 before Louis was going to see her.

> Do convey to her thro' her friend that I am not in my senility when I declare myself a great Fan of hers. My favourite is 'St Michael & All Angels'—but she is *not* in your style. I have read every word she has written, except Requiem!

On 6th May 1947:

> Phyllis & I were absorbed in every word you said about Norah Lofts. Her book with some title resembling 'Michaelmas Night' is far, to me, the best of her works. You are certainly fully justified & it shows *discernment*, I think, to have what we sportsmen call "spotted" the "psychic medium" note in this lady.

and on 7th June:

> I was so thrilled by your visit to Norah Lofts! Yes, do read her book 'St Michael & All Angels' (I think it's called) about One Day and a Night at an Inn. I'm sure you'll be very pleased. Of all stories in the world ever written save one or two in the Old Testament more is crowded into a small space—it's a masterpiece of crowding tightly many *exciting* scenes! It is real true top-notch sexual-pathological MELODRAMA such as my soul loveth! It is as good as this book Phyllis & I have just finished, which also is after my heart, by this —— Existententialist [*sic*] Jean-Paul Sartre ...

At 250 pages for twenty-four hours, *Michael* rivals the 870 pages for four days of the Colgate *Porius*. It is set in 1817, though you have to be quite well awake and do a little sum to realise this. It was a time of terrible brutality in the navy, and the drama centres round the arrival at the inn of a horribly sinister perpetrator of cruelty, intent on blackmail of the owner, a decent chap. The heroines, Harriet the admirable but pockmarked innkeeper's daughter, and Effie the seduced scullery maid, are wonderfully drawn. Nothing in the setting or characterization is out of keeping with the period, and the events in each room of the inn can easily be imagined as a scene in a play; they have a pictorial quality. This is most economically achieved for Norah Lofts is much less discursive than many novelists; above all one is eager to know what will happen next.

Hester's Room (1940), written between the two American novels, seems from the description I have seen of it to have a similar plot to *Michael and All Angels*; *You're Best Alone* (1943) is modern, and *To See a Fine Lady* (1945) is set in Georgian times. *Jassy* (1944) was made into a successful film which some may remember and which the author herself approved.

Of the fifteen books published between 1947 and 1963 I have read only five. The first, *Silver Nutmeg* (1947) is a gripping tale of the East India spice trade inspired, like *Road to Revelation*, by Lofts's reading.

> The irresistible desire to write a book about the nutmeg islands of Banda came upon me when I was reading H. W. Ponder's book *In Javanese Waters*. There in one short chapter was outlined a romantic, bloodstained history that called for exploration ... There were 'Glove' marriages and 'Company's daughters' and nutmeg smuggling, and native risings ...

Curiously, in view of Powys's reference to Old Testament stories concerning

Michael and All Angels, Lofts's next book was a non-fiction account of *Women in the Old Testament* (1949); with *A Calf for Venus* in the same year. The next that I read was *Bless This House* (1954), her son's favourite. It was Book of the Month in America and sold 75,000 copies. It is the tale of a beautiful house built with loving care in the reign of Elizabeth I and its history until 1953. One is presented with a vast number of very cleverly sketched characters, none of whom manage to live happily in the house in a manner worthy of it, although one is left with the hope that the last couple will. The next book, *Afternoon of an Autocrat* (1956) is an exciting and complicated tale set in England at the time of the enclosures, the early Methodists and the Hell-Fire Club. Although she did sometimes write about well-known historical figures, Norah Lofts more often wrote about men, women and children in the humbler walks of life, and shows in remarkable imaginative detail how the movements of the time must have affected them. The latest of her novels that I read was *The House at Sunset* (1963), the last of the *Old Vine* trilogy, which was reprinted in 2000. The setting is probably inspired by a house in Bury that Lofts knew well. This last volume covers the years from 1740 until 1955, during which the house is constantly altered, added to and divided as it becomes a refuge for a huge cast of characters such as Powys could create, many of them as down and out as those of Dickens or Dostoievsky. Norah Lofts's sense of period is brilliant and there is no lack of suspense though there is no story as such. Finally the house is threatened with demolition but is saved to become a children's home; this is an echo of the ending of *The Brittle Glass* where the heroine uses her fortune to found a school which is to be excellent in all the ways that the one she suffered from herself never was. In these novels it is the good that men do that lives after them, the houses they built and the hedges they planted. Norah Lofts encompasses all the interests of local history long before they became fashionable.

Since I have not read any of the novels of her later years I cannot discuss them, and I have read only one of her non-fiction books, a concise and most readable account of *Domestic Life in England* from Norman times to the present day (1976). Her sources are impeccable and she gives a bibliography for further reading, but for the average reader she is herself much more palatable than these. Her other non-fiction works are *Queens of Britain* (1977) and *Emma Hamilton* (1978). Many of Norah Lofts's books were reprinted as Corgi paperbacks in the 1970s, but despite her readability, almost none apart from the 'Old Vine' trilogy have been reprinted since then. As there is a large collection of Louis Wilkinson's letters at Colgate University Library, I am hoping they may be able to produce letters describing his acquaintanceship with Norah Lofts.

Susan Rands

I am most grateful for the help of Norah Lofts's son Clive, and of Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St. Edmund's. The photograph is reproduced by courtesy of Clive Lofts.

*

Some brief quotation from Michael and All Angels *may give a taste of* ***Norah Lofts***.

The heroine:

Will watched Harriet for a moment without speaking. As always, her movements gave him pleasure ... Her long white fingers moved over the paper circles, the egg white, the labels, the scissors, with the grace of dancers performing some complicated steps which long practice had made easy. She never fumbled, never touched an article unnecessarily, and as each gleaming pot, reddish-amber in colour and clear as crystal, received its white cap and its label, she pushed it into line with the others with an orderly gesture which was, Will thought, pure Harriet.

Even apart from her hands, Harriet Oakley was, from the back view, a very trim and attractive figure. Her hair, almost primrose in colour, was simply dresed for the morning's business and drawn up from a smooth white nape which ran in a lovely line to her slim shoulders. She wore a dress of dark mulberry colour and, because she was working, a small muslin apron whose wide strings, crisp from the iron which Effie had wielded at eight o'clock last night, encircled a neat round waist, and stood out behind in a stiff butterfly bow ...

There was nothing to prepare the observer for the shock which was inevitable when she turned her head. An exceptionally severe attack of smallpox had turned a pretty little six-year-old girl into a sight from which the sensitive eye must shrink ... Harriet Oakley was hideous.

A dramatic moment with the villain:

'You'll *what*?'

'Marry that yellow-headed girl I talked to this afternoon. Why, what's wrong with that? She wouldn't be anybody's pick. But I could do with a woman to see to my comforts. And an attractive piece'd be no use to me. I'd enjoy taming her, too ... Look out. I shall shoot.'

'Shoot then, you —!' said Will between his teeth, and was halfway across the hearth, undeterred by the fact that Smail had raised the revolver and that his finger was at the trigger, when behind the fat man's chair the door which formed the second, seldom-used exit from the Little Parlour opened, and Harriet herself swept into the room.

Only her eyes betrayed that her arrival was not due to accident; the grotesque painted mask of her face covered all other sign of emotion ...

and a conclusion reminiscent of the role of tea with JCP:

Just as Harriet, the coffee-pot in both hands, succeeded in pouring the three cups of coffee, the sun broke through and sent a shaft of yellow light over the red garden wall and into the window of the Little Parlour.

There was little to show that the twenty-four hours which lay between this morning's first visitant ray and yesterday's had been in any way momentous ... But

the real changes, the battle scars, the buds of new growth, the life-streams whose course had altered, all these were hidden as Will and Myrtle and Harriet, all unusually talkative, because words can be shutters as well as windows, drank their coffee and sat in the sun.

*

As JCP told Louis, 'both Theodore and Louis are born writers whereas I am a born orator & preacher, and also a born Story-Teller. Neither Lulu nor Theodore are readers of Fiction, whereas I read nothing else! Or rather Phyllis reads to me every night all the most exciting modern fiction except detective tales—although we both greatly admire and enjoy 'Simenon' in translations, but his crimes are the worst part of his wonderful long-short stories ...' *JCP's recommendations ran from Sartre and Greene to Elizabeth Goudge's* The White Witch *and Mary Norton's* The Borrowers (*so-called books for younger readers*).

We can speculate on whether JCP was attracted more by what he had in common with Norah Lofts and other successful popular writers (in-depth characters, heroism, quaint details), or by what her novels offered (neat plots, historical-social 'realism') which his, by choice or otherwise, did not. Writers that Lofts is known to have admired, Waugh, Maugham, Cronin, du Maurier, Lehmann, Dick Francis—all best-selling story-tellers, most of whom could be described as 'realistic', possibly also as 'romantic' or 'idealistic'—were not ones JCP especially mentions in the letters to Louis (apart from Somerset Maugham, 'that admirable craftsman and honest cod').

Did he enjoy reading 'modern fiction' as a kind of specialized entertainment, as Phyllis enjoyed the cinema, or Littleton a rugby match? Or did he think of all *story-telling as a craft, or as entertainment, in the same way, and the extra dimensions that some had, as his own had, just as a matter of degree?*

Ironically, for this reader (would others agree?) the story-telling, what's-going-to-happen-next element is about the least important thing in JCP's novels. You can read each of the long JCP chapters almost as a separate book. Many people have described consuming Glastonbury *over time, in small sips. If you go back to the books after a gap, it seems (fortunately) not to matter much whether you remember the plot: as JCP is unfailingly unpredictable, there is no point in guessing forward, and the endings are no more important (often playfully random) than what has happened before. His characters being built from their inmost being outwards (be-ers rather than do-ers), it isn't very important, either, what actually happens to them. (See* Newsletter *54 for JCP's speech to Foyles Luncheon, on Character being the single most important thing in novel-writing.)*

KK

The Ichthian Leap—or the duty of happiness

(from La Nación, *Buenos Aires, 7th June 1984, tr. KK)*

Every age has its special evils, its special illnesses and problems, physical and metaphysical; sufferings whose natures need to be diagnosed in order to suggest their remedies and solutions. We may think of Ortega y Gasset's *El tema de nuestro tiempo* ['The subject of our time'], and think too of an essay by the remarkable English humanist John Cowper Powys, 'The Art of Happiness' (*El arte de la felicidad*), no less important for being less well known. For Cowper Powys, the critical illness of the twentieth century can be interpreted as depression, a state that may afflict women or men of our time, individually or collectively.

Depression attacks our physical and moral energy, through its various weapons of fear, apathy, disillusion or despair, and those of us who have experienced these sensations in ourselves know that they lead to exhaustion and indifference to everything around us. It is supremely important to realise that this illness, which may seem to us something intimate and personal, is in fact a disease spread throughout the civilised world, and in certain latitudes with greater virulence. The meeting of latitude and longitude in our great city [Buenos Aires] seems to be an exceptional point of affliction from this disease. I shall make use of some insights by Cowper Powys in an attempt to suggest practical clues to combating it that I have myself found useful.

According to Powys, the reason for these psychological and spiritual disorders of ours is closely linked to our living in an age of transition—I would almost say mutation. Piet Mondrian, that modern master of painting (a contemporary of Powys), held that this transition has shifted the weight of evolution from the natural world as a whole into the strict limits of the human mind. The former process of things from nature into the mind now takes place in reverse, from the mind into nature. This cosmic variant gives rise to intellectual and nervous tension of an unfamiliar intensity, afflicting those individuals who are sensitive to it—the antennae of the species—with anxieties previously unknown, or rather of a kind previously encountered in different areas of human life.

It is above all important to keep in mind that what seems to the sufferer a personal affliction is more like an epidemic affecting millions of human beings. This does not alter the fact that its cure depends very largely on individual efforts. The illness that we have diagnosed is caused by mental overloading, from individual to universal. Most cases, of course, can and generally should have treatment on the psychological or physiological level, but we are here venturing to deal with the spirit.

The sufferer has, in Cowper Powys's philosophy, three choices of action. Powys invents names for these three different techniques. First, the *Ichthian Act*, so named from the Greek *ichthus* for fish (the symbol used by early Christians to represent Christ) as it is like the leap of a fish into the air and back again into the water. (This reminds me of images used by our poet Marechal to describe illumination: '*the*

Messiah, growing as a fish'—or the fish saying to the floating weed, '*I am not borne by the current/ I scale the rapids to the river's birth'*—or '*catching a finned dawn in my childish net'*.) The *ichthian act* is a desperate leap by our soul, out of the gloom that we have merged into a single heavy mass, which allows us, however briefly, to look down and realise that it is not impossible to escape from the dark surface.

Second is the *Act of De-carnation*. This requires less energy. It could paradoxically be called a passive act, of thinking ourselves separate from our bodies, so as to contemplate our identity and its troubles from the outside. To distance ourselves from our selves and float like a cloud, doing nothing, only looking ... (recalling the 'Coplas' of Jorge Manrique, *'how life goes on, how death comes on, so quiet ...')* From here, with a degree of detachment, we can look down and see the limits of our condition.

Thirdly, the *panergic act* refers to Aristotle's 'akinetic energy', whereby we transfer our mental processes into our sensations, concentrating on them with all our accumulated energy. We can take refuge in small pleasures and everyday satisfactions, reminding ourselves that feeling well has also been part of our reality, and, through the memory of this, that it is not impossible to get out of the slough of despond.

All Powys's suggested acts are based on the possibility, however incomplete, of controlling our own thought processes. Whichever 'act' we intend to try inevitably requires some will on our part to attempt it.

One of the traps we set for ourselves can be asking what justification there can be for happiness in a suffering world. It is worth noting the difference between happiness and pleasure. Powys is no epicurean, despite the element of egoism in his suggestions. His acceptance that human destiny consists in happiness as opposed to the misery of depression goes far beyond those pleasurable sensations whose memory can help rescue us from a useless negative state. It is the kind of happiness that might be felt by a saint or a mystic, in no way detaching itself from human destiny and suffering. Anyone who achieves this kind of sanctity (as Saint Francis did) lives far from depression and anxiety; on the contrary, these angelic beings are to be recognised by the great happiness that emanates from them, springing from what they feel within themselves. Even physical pain does not blunt this ecstatic spiritual energy.

Likewise, the other kind of suffering, soaked in self-pity, is equally far from pain endured nobly and generously. The disease of our time opens the way for the dishonest forces of negativity and denial of anything creative, noble or healthy in the human spirit. Let us not be deceived, the kind of depression we are dealing with can lead not only to self-destruction but to the destruction of others and all around us.

This may perhaps be the key. As there exists a 'state of grace' in which we derive positive energy from outside (as religious people know), so there also exist unhappy states in which we absorb the terrible accumulation of dispersed negative energy, on which depression and anxiety feed until their victim sees them as normal. We can all

see the results of this. Professional and medical help may do much, but we slso need defence against attacks on the spirit. Not everyone can call on religion; the disease itself can alienate such sources of help. We have to help ourselves, and Cowper Powys can support us.

If we can realise fully that by giving way to negative states we are contributing to the unhappiness of the world as well as damaging ourselves, and that by not resisting depressive thoughts we are allying ourselves with dark forces, this can alert us enough to make the effort to help ourselves and through ourselves those around us. Depression and despair invade our minds disguised as realism, drain the source of our energy and deprive us of faith in the value and dignity of life: of everything that makes us human.

Love of life need not mean a preoccupation nor a rejection of the idea of death, that inalienable condition of life on earth. We can accept the thought of death as natural, not a destiny to be feared but something to be incorporated another way. It could be as illuminating as life, a freedom, a promise of rest, a thing as comfortable as sleep after a long day. Our right to happiness should banish the idea of death as a terrifying monster. We could wake to light like that of a new day.

We may have worse fears than death. The 'ichthian leap', 'de-carnation', the 'panergic act', may help us to transcend anxiety, bearing in mind that watchword of the Evangelists, 'Have no fear'. We have been told that when aeroplanes first approached the speed of sound they shook so violently that their pilots held them back, until one accelerated, burst through the famous barrier and emerged safe.

Whether leaping, floating, or taking refuge to escape from our trouble, according to our available energy, one thing we need is a sense of humour. It can be caustic and pointed humour, like that of Baltasar Gracian (*'Never convey bad news, still less receive it'*); it could be our capacity to laugh at ourselves, since nothing more than laughter disconcerts the spirit of negativity; it could be joining in the cosmic shout of laughter we can enjoy along with Rabelais or Shakespeare or some of the Thousand and One Nights, at the more ludicrous aspects of our human condition (remembering that if the sublime comes close to the ridiculous, the ridiculous is equally close to the sublime).

The important thing is that in whatever state and with whatever technique, we should be perpetually alert, ready to dodge the attacks of that great falsehood, despair, of fearful doubt disguised as cynicism. As William James demanded, 'Are we made sad by our misfortunes, or do misfortunes happen to us because we are sad?' That there are bad things in the world is a reality we cannot be ignorant of. What we have a right to ask is how much space we should let them have in our minds. Drowning ourselves cannot keep others from drowning. If sympathetic pain is a burden to us, losing our own happiness will not lessen others' suffering, or in any way affect true compassion.

And on the other hand, searching to the depths of ourselves as we must, to our utmost capacity, we may discover that the ultimate reality of the universe is not

negative; that on the contrary, goodwill lies hidden in the deepest depths: something cheerful, something positive, whose nature is perhaps too mysterious for our limited reason to grasp, but which perhaps can be revealed to our deepest feelings. Love, at its furthest reach, having passed through suffering, may hear in the marrow of life itself a song of joy which no trouble has the power to silence.

Such is the message, in its own way, of *The Art of Happiness.*

Rafael Squirru

Rafael Squirru (b.1925) is an Argentine poet, art critic and essayist.

Head of John Cowper Powys (artist unknown), now at Colgate University.
(photo by Isabelle Schmitt)

The House in Chicago

Mostly, I remember all the books
And statues—the one of Powys—
Culling the light above the centuries of shelves;
And how the sun, pushing through velvet draperies,
Made little amber forests on the rugs.

The hearth was broad and oaken, one to pace by;
Logs blew up sudden storms of praise.
The porch, designed for scope,
Sat up high to see the winter sunset
Smouldering like some far-sounding battlefield
Whose cannons smoked immortal gold.

And it was in that house,
Beneath an old bright-fruited lamp,
Inlaid with plums and pears,
Congealed forever in a juiceless harvest,
That you read your poems.

Night after night, I heard them;
And they stung me—
As if some great imported traveller
Had scared up all the dust upon a country road.

Marcia Lee Masters

The 'statue' in this poem must be the Head of JCP that passed from Edgar Lee Masters to Theodore Dreiser (see NL 54, page 10, and The Powys Review *6). It is now at Colgate University, N.Y., USA. Richard Maxwell (to whom thanks) adds: 'Marcia Lee Masters's book of poems is really about her feelings re her father's disappearance—he seems to have abandoned the family, gone off into the night. No more Powys, no more bust in the book, after this one (early) appearance.' Marcia's father Edgar Lee Masters appears frequently in JCP's early Diaries (e.g., July 1930). His* Spoon River Anthology *(1915), a portrait in verse of a rural Illinois community, was an immense popular success; now less famous than it once was but still (as it deserves) an American classic. Essays on Masters by JCP are in* Elusive America *(Uncollected Essays, ed. Paul Roberts; Cecil Woolf, 1994). Thanks too to the PSNA* Powys Notes *9/1 (1993–4).*

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