LONDON DISCUSSION MEETING

Saturday November 25th 2006 at 2.30 pm at the
Friends' Meeting House, 120 Heath Street, Hampstead, London NW3
Tim Hyman, Rob Timlin, and John Hodgson will lead a discussion into some of the paths taken and not taken in

Wolf Solent by **John Cowper Powys**

Please join on the day — contact John Hodgson (xhoni@yahoo.com) if you would like more details. The Friends Meeting House is 3 minutes' walk up the hill from Hampstead tube station (Northern Line).

Editorial

The Powys Society's 2006 Conference entered new territory in Sussex – the Powys connection being with John Cowper's early life near the Sussex coast, before and after he married (early chapters of *Autobiography* and parts of *After My Fashion* are set there). It was also some years since we met in a college campus. Bishop Otter College (once a theological training college) is now a red-brick cluster, expanding in a somewhat confusing maze of cement paths. Landmarks were the spire of the modern chapel (where a dance ensemble was rehearsing with top hats), and an elusive bar the size of an airport departure lounge. A spreading tree made a meeting-point outside the dining hall, where we dovetailed with a conference on global warming. Our lecture room, in the original older building with a surviving stained-glass window, looked out on a lawn with another of the fine trees that have been preserved. The new student rooms had neat bathrooms. The catering was perhaps a bit of a Curate's Egg – best marks for snacks at the reception, breakfast and coffee and certain tasty Rissoles. Weather was fine though changeable. ➢

ON OTHER PAGES

Our new chairman John Hodgson presided with calm, courtesy, and confidence, and it was good to see his predecessor Richard Graves also in the company. It seemed an exceptionally friendly scene. The list of members and guests ran to over 50, of which about 40 were members (several new or first-time or day-attenders) in our usual proportion of 2 to 1 men to women. The Book Room reported record sales. Saturday's walk at Burpham was a high point in every sense.

All thanks to the organisers, Peter Foss and Louise de Bruin, and to everyone contributing to this successful Conference. We look forward to next year in Llangollen.

Everyone seemed to enjoy the Conference , so no apologies for extended coverage in this *Newsletter*. No apologies either for devoting space to JCP's son. It is nice to know that Littleton Alfred Powys found the Burpham downs as inspiring as his father did in his way, and that he did well in his chosen life. The appreciation of the life of Littleton Alfred from the magazine of his Catholic training college (along with Susan Rands's 1992 article in *The Powys Review* 27/28) give a good idea of his nature.

The world of T. F. Powys was perhaps a fair target for Marxist interpretation in 1928, as John Hodgson reveals (*see* our back cover and page 47). Earlier, in about 1916, JCP's very different attempt to interpret TFP for American readers seems to have been abandoned (*see* page 52).

Reviews of the several recent Powys-related booklets which were on sale at the Conference may remind or alert others to these invariably interesting productions (available from Stephen Powys Marks).

With many thanks, as ever, to all contributors, and to the providers from the archives for their invaluable suggestions and help.

KK

The Powys Society AGM, Chichester, 27th August 2006

MINUTES

The AGM opened at 11 a.m., with John Hodgson in the Chair.
Apologies received were from Michael French (Treasurer), David Gervais (Vice-Chairman), David Goodway, John Powys, Jeff Kwintner, and Graham Carey.
Minutes of the 2005 AGM were passed without comment.
The Hon. Secretary reported 14 new or renewed members for the year (compared with 21 last year), bringing the membership to a nominal 290, but 280 as a realistic total allowing for defaulters on payment and losses from natural causes. This is slightly down from our peak of around 300, but seems stable.

The Committee met four times during the year, twice in London and once in Bristol, as well as before the present Conference.

There were two interim discussion meetings: in Ely (April 1st) when Glen Cavaliero spoke on a chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance*; and in Hampstead, when

Peter Foss spoke on Llewelyn's Diaries (these were reported in the July *Newsletter*).

The Chairman visited the Powys Collection in the Dorset County Museum with the Secretary in November 2005 and with the *Newsletter* Editor in May 2006.

Three new booklets were published by the Society: *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant and other essays* (a reprint of JCP's five essays in a 'Little Blue Book' of 1928); *JCP on Thomas Hardy* (a compilation), and the third edition of *Powys Checklist & Readers' Guide*.

Anthony Head has produced another two volumes in the Powys Heritage series published by Cecil Woolf: Llewelyn Powys's *Diary of a Reluctant Teacher* of 1908 (edited by Peter Foss), and *Two Powys Friends* (on Bernard O'Neill and Ralph Shirley, by Jacqueline Peltier).

The **Treasurer's report** gave the finances a clean bill of health.

Stephen Allen was reconfirmed as **Auditor**. Stephen Powys Marks reminded members that this service had been given us free for over 15 years; the AGM expressed its gratitude.

The **Chairman** reminded members that Glen Cavaliero is now in his twentieth year as President, and expressed our gratitude for his unfailing tact and support. [*Prolonged Applause*].

Thanks and applause too for the various officers [*and to himself for a successful first conference. KK*]

JH had only to add to his report published in the last *Newsletter* that the Society is continuing to organise interim meetings between Conferences. He has booked the Quaker Meeting House in Hampstead for 25th November for a proposed panel discussion on *Wolf Solent*. Sonia Lewis has offered to organise another Spring meeting in March or April, possibly in Ely again or in Little Gidding near Huntingdon. We would like to encourage the Dorchester connection with a Powys Day of one or two talks, at the Museum where our Collection is housed, with a Powys-related walk, possibly in Weymouth. This might take place in May, which being out of season would make it easier for those attending to find accommodation for themselves if they wished.

e-mail Addresses

With the April 2007 *Newsletter* we plan to issue an updated list of Powys Society members' addresses. For those members who agree we shall also include their e-mail addresses. As well as enabling members of the Society to e-mail each other, this would mean that I could e-mail people occasionally about events which are due to happen before they can be announced in the *Newsletter*.

If you would like your e-mail address included please could you let me know **by e-mail**: that way there's no risk of my mis-typing as I read your handwriting.

Please also let me know if you would like your details removed from the list to be sent out.

Thank you *Peter Lazare, Hon. Seretary*

Meanwhile, the Powys celebration at Sherborne School is to take place on November 17th. Richard Graves is to speak about the Powyses, and "The Unreturning Morning" from the 2003 Conference in Sherborne is to be repeated, organised by Peter Foss and Chris Wilkinson. The school will be in the audience so space is limited, but members wishing to attend can contact Peter Lazare for details.

The **Committee** welcomes its two new members, Anna Pawelko (our unofficial representative for Wales) and our Conference co-organiser Peter Foss who is returning; among his other qualifications are his earlier stints as Editor of *The Powys Journal* and as Secretary, with long experience of the Society and and its history, and his specialist knowledge of Llewelyn Powys.

Louise de Bruin, **Conference Organiser**, said that despite extensive searches nowhere new has so far been found that fills our criteria of Powys associations, comfort and low cost. We therefore propose a return to Llangollen next year; and according to our agreed system of Bank Holiday weekends in alternate years, next year's dates would be for the weekend previous to the holiday, 17th–19th August 2007.

The AGM was consulted on a possible venue for the following year, the Quaker Study Centre at Woodbrooke, the former Cadbury country house at Bournville in the Birmingham area. It has good transport communications, more convenient for our members in the North of England (some of whom found Chichester too difficult of access on a holiday). Although it has no special Powys connections, Gerard Casey frequently stayed there. Other possibilities to be investigated are Cambridge and Cirencester (both used in the past), but costs everywhere have gone up. Members on a show of hands showed willing to pay an increase, nominally up to £180. The charge to members must cover all the conference, though some extra contribution to fares for speakers from abroad might be a possibility.

It was agreed to include a questionnaire on the Conference in a future Newsletter.

Any Other Business

JH announced that Larry Mitchell, who has edited the ***Journal*** for seven years, feels next year's must be his last. Suggestions are invited for his successor and the whole matter of the *Journal*'s future. LM reported that Marius Buning was retiring from the *Journal*'s Advisory Committee, which may need restructuring. A continued connection with America and with Europe was strongly urged.

Kate Kavanagh said she would continue as ***Newsletter*** editor, other things being equal, and was thanked for this.

As *Journal* editor, LM said that a familiarity with e-mails was essential. The question was raised of listing members' e-mail addresses along with the postal list. Views on this are invited; meanwhile if members who agree would e-mail Peter Lazare, this would make it easier for him to pass on details of events and Society information.

JH/ PL/ KK

Talking & Walking – Chichester 2006 (KK)

"After Our Fashion: Powys Philosophies" was the theme of the Conference, with the emphasis mainly though not exclusively on JCP: John Gray's talk was on the three brothers, and Elaine Mencher's on Theodore's manuscripts could be said to have dealt indirectly with his attitude to life.

On Friday evening **Henning Ahrens** from Germany gave the opening talk, introduced by Sonia Lewis who recalled his first appearance at the Conference in Uppingham 10 years ago (where he spoke on Taliessin in *Porius* – he also came to Kingston Maurward in 2000, with 'Light and Darkness in *Wolf Solent*').

His subject this year was 'John Cowper Powys's philosophy revisited', chiefly referring to *In Defence of Sensuality*. He discovered *IDS* as a student, and recalled a warning from Ruth Amber that the bony hand of an astral JCP had been laid on him with 'I claim you!'. He became an addict, in thrall to the vision of those 'ichthyosaurus egos' lying on the mudbanks of life, a subversive elite outflanking modern western society by fooling it, in secret contemplation of sub- and super-human existence, from blindworms to gods, on wings of past and future – its message of *continuity*, linking all individuals, all forms of life – its rejection of *systems*, its affirmation of personal dignity, of the right to be happy, to be 'happily poor', to follow daydreams, to live from rock-bottom up. A philosophy, he concluded, that few can follow as JCP did himself.

Questions following the talk touched on JCP's expressed views of anarchism and communism (despite his avoidance of Isms); his insistance (in *Autobiography*) that his 'philosophy' (including that in his novels) was a practical means to coping with fear and pain, always based on feeling (rather than thought) and on the individual (rather than society – ants and bees are always negative). Some see the 'self-help' books as footnotes to the novels, but JCP took his 'lay sermons' seriously. Phyllis Playter admired his first and most systematic 'philosophical' book, *The Complex Vision*. Would JCP have sympathised with Greenpeace? someone asked. In the past, leaders of healing systems such as Gurdjieff paid respectful attention to JCP's way of seeing. John Hodgson recalled how readings of JCP have changed – from a herald of the 'Age of Aquarius' in the 1970s, through 'grandfather of Magic Realism', to prophet of Earth-consciousness and our present ecological concern.

Bishop Otter Campus: coffee under the tree.

John Gray on Saturday morning spoke on 'Three Powys Philosophies'. Introduced by John Hodgson who quoted the John Cowper-like image in JG's *Straw Dogs*, that we look at the world through eyes of mud (ie from our common protozoic origins). Of the three

brothers it is however Theodore that JG is on record (in the *New Statesman*, 3 Dec 2001) as admiring the most as a writer. (We may also recall his enthusiastic review of *Petrushka and the Dancer* in *Journal* v (1995).)

JG said he was attracted to all three Powys as non-scholastic and 'soul-rich'. Their philosophies are of the art of life, of 'living well', in the tradition of the ancient Greeks – Pyrrho, the Epicureans and Stoics. Of the three, John Cowper and Llewelyn were concerned to formulate and propagate; unlike Theodore they expressed their philosophy directly (as in JCP's *The Art of Happiness,* or Llewelyn's *Glory of Life*) as well as in their fiction (JCP's *Wolf Solent*, or LlP's essay 'A Pond' in *Earth Memories*). JG finds the Powys views of life more original than at first he thought.

All three abandoned the traditional Christianity of their clerical family. All valued contemplation above action as in the ancient world – as Epicurus and the sages of India and China sought the 'best life'. They expressed this paganism predominantly in Christian imagery.

Llewelyn called himself an 'epicurean', using the senses as the source of knowledge and goodness, but he would not have agreed with the ancient philosophers who saw bodily pleasures – such as food, competitive sport, or sex – as impediments to the true goal of wisdom, peace of mind. Love, travel, and nature were for him the means to ecstasy, as an end in itself, the true meaning of life, perhaps too a form of contemplation. JG finds a resemblence in LlP to Santayana (whom LlP read with Alyse Gregory).

All three Powyses, mature in the 1920s and 30s, stand apart from the political polarization of most writers at that time. Their concerns are with *individual* views of life.

Approaching JCP is like climbing Vesuvius. In *Autobiography* he mentions Pyrrho and calls himself (among other things) a sceptic, but Scepticism too is a means to personal tranquillity, not doctrine. In JCP's earlier work peace of mind is not the highest good: endurance yes, peace no. Not peace – an interior war, to gain – to *will* – enjoyment; tranquillity may be a by-product. JCP rejects mystical tradition, the dissolution of personality. He rejects totalitarian one-ness (In *In Spite Of* he compares the individual to a flock of birds). He describes ecstasy as non-moral, non-mystical, non-'poetic'. It is in the senses, in the material world, earth-directed, *magical.*

Theodore is the most hermetic of the three (JG read Alyse's description of him in *Cry of a Gull*) He is closer to religion than philosophy; to Greek and Russian religion; *apophatic*, using negativity as a medium to silence; paring down life in fables and parables. Is he a contemplative? His 'The Only Penitent' views death as somewhere between completion and deliverance; not a stepping-stone to anything but not *bad*: a pagan philosophy (as with Epicurus and Lucretius) in Christian dress. Unlike the other two Theodore is in no sense a missionary. He stands outside his own time as Epicurus did. He shares something of Meister Eckhart's idea of releasement, of giving up the will.

Points taken up in discussion included 'Epicurean' as also referring to Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) which all the Powyses admired; Montaigne as a modern Pyrrhonian; the element of *enthusiasm* in all Powyses, as with Santayana; all three being in their way preachers, as was their father; JCP's professed attraction to Kwang-Tse (JG referred several times to JCP's letters to Ichiro Hara); JCP's 'ecstasy' incorporating the non-human, plants and stones; TFP's quietism like Traherne's.

Next, on Saturday morning, Ian Robinson (of the Brynmill Press) introduced **Elaine Mencher,** imagining that in the twenty-second century when the name of Powys is mentioned (as it surely will be), Theodore's work will be known through Elaine Mencher's editing of it – an achievement all the more meticulous from being entirely self-taught, since in her earlier life she was better known as a pianist — an interpreter of Bach's Goldberg Variations. Brynmill's recent closely annotated edition of *Selected Early Works* is entirely hers.

In her talk 'Editing T. F. Powys' EM described her discovery of TFP through *God's Eyes A-Twinkle*, the collection of stories lovingly selected by Charles Prentice of Chatto and Windus (the peculiarly coy title was chosen by Theodore from a seventeenth-century poem). She found there a new view of the world, like the finest music compelling to joy: a gleeful poetic beauty, conviction and humour, irony that shocks and delights: honesty about man's volatile feelings for his creator – God as a cloud, as darkness, as a crumb eaten by a mouse.

She read in Richard Graves's biography of the mass of unpublished material, and when the Brynmill Press embarked on its project to publish a complete T. F. Powys, she sought out Mr Bissell's collection (now housed in the Dorset County Museum along with the collection of Mr Feather, as the Powys Collection). She also twice visited the archive in Texas.

The TFP manuscripts are complicated, with many changes of title and version, and widely dispersed so that collation is difficult. Errors in previous printings have been perpetuated. Photocopies are unclear. Examples were handed round of the five types of TF's handwriting which EM has categorised, from rough pencil notes made on his walks, through rough drafts to neat fair copies. TF's punctuation and paragraphing often followed speech rhythm and narrative logic rather than accepted norms, and for an editor were a matter of judgement; the guiding principle in Brynmill editions being closeness to the author's final intention.

Early Works, of which she is most proud, reveals TF's often tortured spirit, in disturbing but remarkable predecessors of *Soliloquies of a Hermit.* EM quoted *Black Bryony*: 'the upward paths of fire'. Regrettably, Brynmill's contract with the copyright holders has now come to an end and the future of the series is uncertain. Meanwhile we have the new revised version in paperback of *The Market Bell.*

On Saturday evening the reading of ***The Sin-Eater,*** a short drama written in 1921 by T. F. Powys with Stephen Tomlin (printed in Brynmill's *Early Works* of TFP), was

introduced by Barrie Mencher, who gave the stage directions. It exhibited a range of performances through realism (Belinda Humfrey and Pat Roberts as the mother and daughter), mild caricature (Glen Cavaliero as the Rev. Moneypenny), melodrama (Richard Graves as the sinful father), and a funny voice (Kate Kavanagh as a demonic little girl) – to the real thing with Brian Hewlett of *Archers* fame, hair-raisingly convincing as Mad Tom the Sin-Eater himself. Pat Roberts's unprompted final scream at the fires of Hell made an electrifying end.

Autobiography

Bill Keith was sadly unable to come to the conference, so his paper on 'Coming to Terms with *Autobiography*' on Sunday morning was read for him by **Tim Hyman**. **John Hodgson** reminded us of the credentials of both: W. J. Keith's books on the British rural tradition, and his on-line 'Companions' to *Glastonbury* and *Porius*, and Timothy Hyman's as a painter (sometimes featuring Powys themes), his books on painting and as curator of exhibitions – also of course contributions from both to Powys Society publications over many years.

WJK proposed to consider *Autobiography* from two angles – in part as a devil's advocate. How good a specimen is it, deserving of its high reputation, and how reliable is it as a guide to JCP's life and character? JCP himself said that he planned devices not formerly used by autobiographers, but these are not always followed. His purported leaving out of women in fact meant only his family, partners and close friends; there are many short vignettes of female characters (like one of the mad person showing him round Court House – this quotation causing the reader to collapse in infectious mirth). JCP said he was not writing to justify himself as Rousseau did, but he does do this in his final chapters. His geographical chapter headings are misleading as he jumps about in time. The book is not memorably organised.

As for accuracy, he himself admits an autobiography 'cannot tell all' and he was well aware of the 'Freudian censor'. There is a good deal of fictionalising, inaccurate memory (where this can be checked), and conflation of events (deliberate or careless) – e.g. Louis Wilkinson's differing accounts of their meeting with 'Baron Corvo' in Venice, or of JCP's scandalous lecture on religion in Cambridge. JCP said he was treating himself as a fictional character, and many have regarded the book as a disguised novel. JCP also described it as a secular confession – which it is, of weakness, absurdities and embarrassments rather than the 'mental sadism' he accused himself of (and, of course, leaving out any of these there may have been in his unmentioned private life). To his brother Littleton he uses theatrical vocabulary: 'the only Villain is John his wone self'. Is *Autobiography* then neither narrative or philosophy but a performance act, as if on a platform (where he says he revealed himself most completely)? WJK quotes JCP's description of being possessed by his subject, of his 'greatest' lecture on Strindberg to fifteen bemused Californian society women. *Autobiography* seems spontaneous as his lectures were. But he calls his lectures a

'great new *art*'.

Its sprawling nature may make *Autobiography* technically 'flawed', but the question is not how 'good' the book is but how best to read it. For WJK its pattern is like a poem, with associations of themes and images, forward and back. One theme is *magic*: himself as magician; as a child (acting the Lord of Hosts); during surgery in America (astounding the nurses); identifying with Taliessin the shape-changer. Another theme is *madness*, and ways of fighting for sanity: as a ninny, a fool, and the zany who makes an art of foolishness. The imagery of the book coheres even if its form doesn't. 'Autobiography' is misleading: it can be read as a gigantic *lecture* about himself. Like Whitman, he 'contains multitudes': 'who touches this touches a man'.

Discussion of *Autobiography* was deferred to the panel following the AGM.

In this, **Susan Rands** (author of the Powys Heritage booklet on JCP and the Lyon family) thinks JCP's account of his life is pretty accurate; she had relied on it a lot, trying to explain the peculiar hold of tiny T. H. Lyon, his future brother-in-law, over tall JCP. She took issue with two things in the Keith paper: one that Louis Wilkinson may well have been no more reliable a witness than JCP was; the other with Keith's example of JCP's doctoring facts, saying that he took up with the *rowing* crowd at Cambridge when there is a photograph of him with his brother Littleton in a *rugby team*. It could have been that JCP played rugby just once as a favour to his brother (and she finds this photograph dubious anyway); while he was definitely close to T. H. Lyon who was the *cox* of the college boat. (Lyon, a builder of churches, guarded his reputation. He may have reappeared as Drom in *Porius*.) JCP can't be said to *lie* in *Autobiography* – except about his marriage, mentioning it as happy.

Jacqueline Peltier (author of a new Heritage booklet on two Powys friends, Bernie O'Neill and Ralph Shirley) said that for her, *Autobiography* was fiction. She emphasised its *humour*, and selectiveness of facts. A famous passage on JCP's horror of femaleness, provoked by his retriever Thora, leaves out the fact that the dog was a present from his wife Margaret. Tim Hyman read this passage from the 'Southwick' chapter ('A gulf of femininity opened beneath my feet ... I could no longer enjoy the singing of the birds. They might be feminine birds!' – p.222 in Picador ed.) producing gales of laughter once again. JCP wrote following his thoughts as a solitary walker thinks. He had no plan to pay off old scores.

Glen Cavaliero made the point that it was important to remember the circumstances *Autobiography* was written in. JCP was in a thoroughly happy state. Three major novels were done; he has found his perfect companion in Phyllis Playter; he was living out his life-illusion. The book is an *apologia* – but also a *celebration* of his life, hence its humour and sense of a happy ending, even when it describes painful times. It was written fast; England was beckoning and JCP felt he should go back, despite being happy where he was: the following years were not so easy.

Autobiography seems less odd now (e.g., about sex) Tim Hyman said, than when he first wrote about JCP 35 years ago. Now he reads it as part of his own autobiogra-

phy ('as many do' – Larry Mitchell). The theme of *epiphanies* counts for more. TH read JCP's ecstatic moment looking at the wall in Trumpington, near Cambridge (very Proustian – J. Peltier). JCP's son Littleton had a similar ecstasy, on the Downs (Louise de B – *see* page 36). Various members commented on JCP's ecstatic moments being grounded always in material things (only the 'peak experiences' in *Complex Vision* are more schematic). He conveys these moments in words despite saying it can't be done on paper. He seldom writes of himself as a writer. Llewelyn too, also writing autobiography, Peter Foss reminded us, referred to Goethe speaking of a 'real truth' beyond facts; a spiritual journey. JCP's was an intellectual journey too. And a journey to overcome unhappiness, purging his apparent (and comic) social ineptness (a zany needn't be inept), anticipating criticism. The Powyses' self-portraits were of their life-illusions. Theodore tolerated Sylvia Townsend Warner's encouragement of 'her' eccentric Theodore up to a point, but was uncomfortable with it in print; 'Mr Thomas' in *Soliloquies of a Hermit* was his own creation of himself.

Bishop Otter Campus.

Above Burpham

On Saturday afternoon nineteen people embarked on the five-mile walk round Burpham led by **Kieran McCann,** on paths followed in his website about JCP in Sussex, with readings chosen from his wide knowledge of JCP. This proved an uplifting experience in exceptionally clear light, in sun with dramatic clouds moving across the immense view, across grass dotted with black-faced sheep, to orange stubble fields and the line of sea in blue distance. A light column of rain approached from far off, swept across and left the sunlight clearer than ever. Back in Burpham, those who could still walk were welcomed into JCP's former home (now called Frith House, opposite the pub with its excellent beer) by its present owner Simon Brett, the crime writer: its paved front garden with scented herbs and back garden hidden by a flint wall below the prehistoric bank.

Three readings on the walk were: a description of the downland from JCP's 'unpublishable' novel 'Work Without a Name' (by KMcC); from *A Philosophy of Solitude* (page 148) on how a sedentary position dulls the senses (Rob Timlin); and from *The Complex Vision* on 'the illusion of dead matter' (Penelope Shuttle).

Conference Video

A video is available of the complete presentations at this year's conference:

1. John Gray: "Three Powys Philosophies"
2. W. J. Keith: "Coming to Terms with JCPs *Autobiography*"
   (read by Timothy Hyman in the absence of Prof. Keith)
3. Henning Ahrens: "John Cowper Powys's Philosophy Revisited"
4. Elaine Mencher: "Editing T F Powys"
5. A Reading of the play *"The Sin-Eater"* by T. F. Powys and Stephen Tomlin, with Richard Graves, Belinda Humfrey, Pat Roberts, Kate Kavanagh, Glen Cavaliero, Brian Hewlett and Barrie Mencher

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John Dunn: A Contemplative Conference

In John Cowper's footsteps, we trod the Leper's Path of the *Autobiography* that led from Burpham 'over the bare open hills' to 'an eminence on top of the downs from which the sea, some half a dozen miles away, was clearly visible'. Our Saturday afternoon group of Powysian pedestrians, ably led by Kieran McCann, reached the edge of the Gibbet Woods where the woodland petered out in ragged fashion along the shoulder of the down. Here were the 'margins, ... edges, borders and thresholds – between woodland and downland' that John Cowper had loved. He said he 'must have come here a hundred times a year for about ten years' and now we stood there too in veneration of his former presence. For here John Cowper found a preserve of 'self' from the troubled 'non-self' of disquiet in the marital home that we would also later visit. Here he strode the slippery edge of madness, an aspect of John Cowper's life that we touched upon in the Sunday morning discussion of the *Autobiography*. Could facts be reconciled with a fluid form in this record of a life blurred by vagueness and artistic heightening? The questions raised by W. J. Keith's words would not be pinned down with easy answers. Was it a secular confession in the first person, a foil to the third of the great novels, or a bookish extension of John Cowper's performance art form, a *dithyrambic* analysis, a lecture about himself in which he

reoccupied his former self? Or did the *Autobiography* stand apart from the 'non-self' of facts as a spiritual journey of 'self'?

Nor was the realisation of 'self' a privilege John Cowper held to himself, as Henning Ahrens explained in the opening talk of the weekend. John Cowper held entry to the élite of the eccentrics open to all, a lonely fulfilment of the soul available to ordinary men and women anywhere and at any time; a substantial egoism, not a superficial individualism. John Gray developed the theme on day two, relating how the Powys brothers shared with the ancient Greeks an understanding of philosophy as a guide to living, with contemplation rather than action at its heart. Self-proclaimed Epicurian Llewelyn sought to cast out superstition and encourage others, like him, to live for the moment, for to fret about death is to banish tranquillity. After drawing parallels between Llewelyn's and Santayana's philosophies, as he did between John Cowper's and Pyrrho's, John described John Cowper's approach to contemplation as a thing that must be fought for in an inner war, and Theodore's apophatic theology as one in which death is the end, a deliverance from life, not an entry into eternity. For Theodore, will was not at the centre of life, rather the giving up of will.

In the writings of the brothers, we have contemplation made accessible: something not to be taken for granted. The adventures of the words let loose from the mind could be many, as shown next by Elaine Mencher when she guided us through Theodore's notes made on walks, his first rough drafts in ink, his early hand, the neat medium later hand and the final copy, large and clear. She laid bare not only Theodore's method of composition, but also her own near-collaboration with the author across the gulf of years, as she eased the final text to light from behind an opacity of illegibility, unconventional punctuation and undefined paragraph spacing from widely dispersed manuscripts. Yet still, the written word is not always enough, as ably demonstrated by Barrie Mencher's production of *The Sin Eater* on Saturday night. How better to bring the Theodore–Tomlin collaboration to life than by a world première that held us all enthralled one way or another. Yes, the next generation would suffer as a consequence of the sins of the father, but of greater allegorical significance would be their continued suffering due to the unholy alliance of church and business. Moneypenny was no accidental choice of name for the minister and the interests he protected by turning a blind eye.

There were rightly few distractions to our contemplative mood from an unpretentious Chichester University campus that served our purpose well. It was good to be amongst other selves, drawn briefly from the multiverse into this one place by a common Powysian bond. And those of us on those downland hills above Burpham, wet from a shower of gentle Summer rain, shared also with John Cowper, perhaps, a fleeting moment of inner tranquility.

(John Dunn is the author of a booklet, Flight to Reality *(ISBN 0 9547212 5 X) on the Wessex Novels of JCP; see review in* NL *56.)*

Patricia Dawson : Assault-course bonding

I came, to misquote, empty headed to the conference table and there found, as usual, more than I deserve – so many people whom I like. Under the rigours of the hotch-potch style of architecture that we find in such campuses (campi?) we suffer as we would have in their predecessors the early monasteries, built for the mortification of the flesh. Having experienced it in Bath and Norwich, I knew that it does nothing but bond members. Tested at the refectory table, I thought of a title for a play: 'The Bin Eater'.

God provided fine weather; allowing for good conversation even on the assault course between buildings. Each year I am happier that Richard Wilson Knight persuaded me to join the Society.

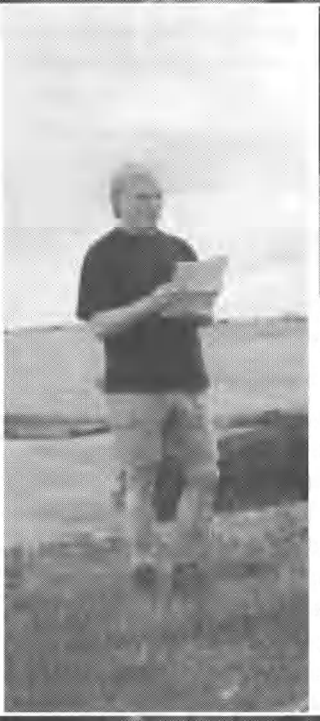
I especially relished the last morning, Tim Hyman's brave and brilliant performance standing in for W. J. Keith. The subject was JCP's *Autobiography*. His work remains my special interest.

The Committee.

Novice-appeal

Michael Gray writes that he came to Chichester feeling a bit of a fraud, with minimal knowledge of the Powys family apart from Peter Foss's Hampstead talk on Llewelyn's diaries. But the organisers were to be congratulated on devising a conference that was as appealing to a novice as it clearly was stimulating to the initiated. Nor was he disappointed in the strong and interesting personalities he found there ... He has now joined the society and is reading *Wolf Solent*.

He also notes: 'When Bournville [the Quaker Study Centre in the Cadbury house] was mooted as a possible venue for the 2008 conference, it was implied that it would be bereft of Powys associations. Whilst Birmingham obviously isn't in Wessex, Bournville is in that part of the city annexed from Worcestershire a hundred or so years ago, and is about twenty minutes from Bromsgrove where Llewelyn was a "reluctant teacher". Even bettter, I believe a future instalment of his Diaries will reveal that as a teenager Llewelyn had a crush on 13-year-old girl called Angela Carter, who was on holiday in Studland. Her home was one of those glorious late-eighteenth- or early-nineteenth-century houses on the Calthorpe estate in Edgbaston, just 10 minutes from Bournville, and Llewelyn visited.'



THE 2006 CONFERENCE

Clockwise spiral from top left* *discussion panel: Tim Hyman, Susan Rands, Jacqueline Peltier, John Hodgson *Jacqueline & Max Peltier *Henning Ahrens *Louise de Bruin, Peter Foss, Conference organisers *Ian Robinson, Elaine Mencher, Barrie Mencher, John Hodgson* P.J. Kavanagh, Larry Mitchell *Kieran McCann, walk leader *Brian Hewlett, Anna Pawelko*

Clockwise from top left*_Glen Cavaliero, Stephen Powys Marks*on top of Burpham Down*Peter Tait, Larry Mitchell*Richard Perceval Graves, Kate Kavanagh, Susan Rands, Belinda Humfrey*Sonia Lewis, Peter Lazare, P.J. Kavanagh*Timothy Hyman, John Gray_

Marcella Henderson-Peal : First Party

Definitely not like one's first day at school but rather one's first birthday party (a festive atmosphere, people you don't know but who are somehow familiar, some you do) – is there such a thing as Powysian god-parents, in which case, thank you Jacqueline and Glen for introducing me to this new extended family! So, yes, it was a party or rather a celebration of all that is Powys. It was all I had expected and hoped for, having been prepared for the occasion by the *Journal* and videos. The talks were fun and fascinating, eye-openers on different perspectives, and several completely in key with the fields of research I am interested in – sensations and realities in the Wessex novels.

If I were to give a title to those three days it would be 'In Defence of Individuality' in the noble, questing, questioning, 'sensational', Powysian sense. The Society is not a group but a cluster of idiosyncratic individuals linked by a common 'revelation', all with their own interests and intellectual sensitivity, each with their own relationship with one or more of the Powys brothers and family but also with their specific understanding of the works thanks to years of extensive and in-depth reading. They all contributed to giving me a closer and clearer idea of my own relationship to (in my case) John Cowper. Interacting and interactive individualities in progress, but an amused, fond, however sometimes puzzled, progress.

I thoroughly enjoyed Kieran McCann's choice of a walk across the Downs following JCP's footsteps. Each reading was appropriately chosen and timed and even a well-read sheep mouthed its appreciation of a somewhat misogynistic passage (or might it have been an indignant ewe?) – JCP may have understood Sheepish, I am afraid we could not, try as we may. The play reading was great fun and we were all quite taken in by both the professional and the non-professional actors despite the fact that though TF may have been a genius in many ways he was not an over-excellent playwright! The auction was also a great idea as well as being beautifully led. It gave me the opportunity of outbidding Max Peltier over Mount Kilimanjaro just enough to make a game of Art, be it powysian art!

My whole life now has had a distinct Powys tinge (or would it be tang?) added to it.

I drove back listening to the tapes that Kate had kindly presented to me and they have made more of an impression on me than I would have expected. Now that I am back home I am extra careful when I happen to unearth a worm in my gardening proceedings as one never knows who a slow-worm may have been talking to the day before. Something has happened to the rhodopsin in my retina too. Every animate and/or inanimate being or thing has now taken on a new dimension and I am not quite sure what other rhodopsin-bearing plants or stones might be seeing in you and me. The world and Nature are all eyes now thanks to John Gray!

Thinking of Llewelyn and while the weather is still mild, I have taken to sleeping outdoors, wrapped up in a Rhisiart-style Welsh blanket, absorbing the magnetic

forces of the foothills of the Pyrenees in star-kissed cosmic slumber, breathing in every atom of surrounding elements and sensationalising every whoosh of our local owl. And talking about our hills and mountains (which also include pre-Christian burial mounds) I thought I must tell the members of the Society that when the vicar of our local Basque village church gives his flock his blessing at the end of mass in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, he also adds in the name of the Goddess of the Rhune (the name of the highest of our local mountains), and may she protect you! I wonder what Theodore would have made of that?

It would be difficult to establish what stage I have reached in the evolution of my ichthyosaurus self, but scale by scale I'll be getting closer to JCP's view of the world. Every time I shall attend future Powys Society events, I am sure to be seeing the world more and more ecstatically and/or through reptilian 'eyes of mud'. I have already tried empathising with our resident lizards, which is in fact very relaxing. ...

I was more than surprised at how a very heavy bag of newly purchased Powys-related books was allowed through the customs at Stansted airport unquestioned. Little did they know what powerful time-bombs I was carrying overseas nor that there were fifty seemingly harmless individuals leaving Chichester with odd Bible-like romances in their pockets, to spread a new order of Life-Illusion throughout Britain and Europe ... May all the organisers of my first 'Powys Experience' be thanked warmly here both for their kind welcome to all the newcomers, group-managing expertise and great sense of humour!

Susan Rands : A Powerful Metaphorical Drama

Responses to Theodore's play 'The Sin Eater' were very mixed; some found it bathetic and others too unpleasant. To me it is a powerful metaphorical drama on the theme of the sins of the fathers being visited on the children. By modern standards Mr Lock's sin of extra-marital dalliance is not so great as it would have seemed in a small village in the 1920s; that he failed to acknowledge, and neglected, the illegitimate son that resulted is greater; that he hobnobbed with the minister pretending that neither had happened is perhaps the greatest sin of all: he locked up his secret. This surface respectability contrasts with what is really happening and has happened. When his sins are revealed he is taken ill and dies.

The greatest sufferer then is his legitimate daughter, Eva. Firstly her betrothed, Harry, breaks off the engagement when he hears the rumours, then she is heart-broken when she realises the truth, for she had loved, even idealized, her father; then she has to face the fact that 'Holy Tom', the village idiot and Sin-Eater, is her half-brother. The play ends with them together eating the 'sins of the father', and Eva beginning to suffer the same agonies ending in madness as her brother; together they burn in hell, the metaphor for their suffering, the hell from which their act of eating his sins is supposed to save their father.

One wants to know more of the tradition of sin-eating, one that intrigued John Cowper as well as Theodore. In *Owen Glendower* the sin-eater whom Rhisiart first meets in the kitchen of Valle Crucis, and to whom he gives a bone with meat adhering to it, and a half-cooked cake, he meets again much later, in 'the place where they put the dead' in Harlech Castle. This sin-eater's appearance and function is the same as Theodore's one, but he has no provenance and no metaphorical dimension; in these senses he is both less and more real.

Theodore's 'Holy Tom' is similar to the traditional Tom o'Bedlam with his 'host of furious fancies', and was poetically portrayed by Brian Hewlett (formerly, as it were, Nick Carter in *The Archers*). Pat Roberts succeeded in the very difficult part of Eva, and Belinda Humfrey was convincing as the well-meaning ignorant mother, but most memorable was Nancy the apple-eating and intrigued schoolgirl, sister of Eva's fiancé, who brings Harry's messages. Does the apple-eating stand for eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, or her visits to the Lock house? Intense with desire to deliver the message correctly and then to see the effect, Nancy's 'Harry *says* ...' is with me still!

Not noticeably consumed ...

Tony Atmore *views a first Conference in the light of JCP's long presence in his life.*

The year 1955, looking back to it over five decades – how far distant in time and sensibilities the fifties seem to be – emerges as an *annus mirabilis* for that now remote and shadowy me. Born in Cape Town, at school in England, back to university at the Cape, then hitch-hiking from there to England – ages before gap years and backpacking, such ventures were considered mad and courageous – I was training as a teacher, preparing to return to central Africa as an Education Officer; I met my future wife, then aged thirteen; and I bought *A Glastonbury Romance,* at the bookshop in the eponymous town. At the tail-end of an adolescent romance with the Roman Catholic Church, long before the Vatican Council, enchanted by the Latin and incense and holy water and gorgeous colours, I was on a solitary pilgrimage to find the thorn tree planted by Joseph of Arimathaea. I hadn't heard of John Cowper Powys, but as I was in Glastonbury it seemed only right and proper to buy his *Romance.* I read it with heightened relish – the myths, the Grail among others, the heady sexuality – many of us took much longer to grow-up in those days – the intense inner-lives, the great winding pulsating sentences, the mosses and bluebells and stones and cows and fishes and trees, and so much more – I hadn't come across anything remotely like it, vast as it was. I devoured it like pagan manna.

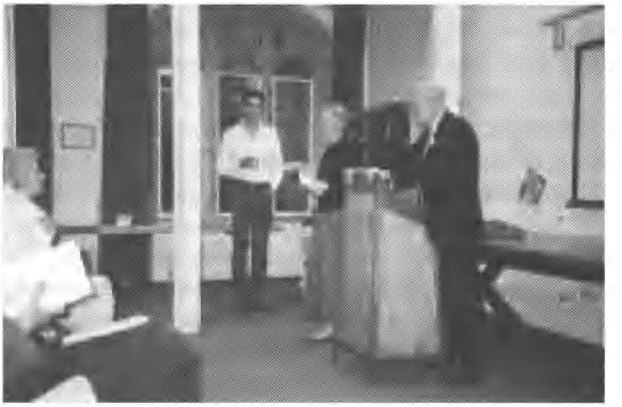
I was hooked, I was going to say like Sam's Tench, but no, if anyone got hooked that Glastonbury winter's morning, it was Sam by the Tench. I got hold of the other John Cowpers, and some of the Theodores and Llewelyns, I joined The Powys

Society in its early days. Yes, love at first bite, but although hooked, it was by no means all lines and sinkers. My relationship with John Cowper – and it was entirely bookish, much to my present regrets – was like one of those great tides on Chesil Beach, highs and lows, like the moon through so many John Cowper windows, waxing and waning. After some years being a young big bwana in colonial Africa, I became an academic historian in London, I delved into radical politics, protesting and endlessly debating the mechanisms for the future inevitable return to the Garden of Eden (not that it was then expressed in such naïve terms), in particular the downfall of Apartheid in South Africa; ideologically assertive, but also a well-trained and dedicated historian, engaged with discovering sources and discerning patterns. While so driven, I discarded John Cowper, finding him a long-winded old humbug, uttering uncorroborated nonsense, an extravagant con-artist; even, I am ashamed to admit now, a bit of a fascist. After a time, I would be drawn back to the old Magus, only to consign him yet again to the junk-yard part of my mind. Those times I was in love with him, I occasionally put out feelers to the Society, to attend some of its activities, but these were feeble tentacles, their longings unconsummated. One concern has been my shyness, my agoraphobia, strictly speaking my demophobia – and for me a crowd need only be three or four strangers.

So life flowed on, ever faster it seems, into 2006. I had conscientiously renewed my subscriptions to the Society, so when in March the first of this year's *Newsletters* arrived, informing me of a meeting to be held in Ely to discuss the May Day chapter of *GR*, this good news for me had to be an epiphany. I have long and close ties with Ely – my mother-in-law was the novelist Sybil Marshall, who lived, until she died last year, just across St Mary's Street from the Old Fire-Engine House. This then was the time to bite the bullet and gird my loins, so I called Sonia Lewis and said I would come. Hastily I took down and dusted off *A Glastonbury Romance*, re-reading the May Day chapter and then the whole of the book, backwards and forwards from that chapter. The impact of *Glastonbury* on the mid-seventies me has been more profound, more moving and more immediate than when I first had the book in my hands all those decades ago. After listening spellbound to our President's exposition of May Day, and thoroughly enjoying the discussion, and meeting a roomful of Society members without being noticeably consumed by them, I decided to attend the annual conference.

If Ely was a paddle in the toddlers pool, this was an immersion into deeper waters. My verdict – although this was for me a pretty large crowd of people, of extraordinary people (extra- because they would not be Powysians if they were ordinary) – yes, I enjoyed the three days, and yes, I regret all those wasted years and missed opportunities. I regret my never venturing out, other than through their books, into those English and Welsh towns and villages then still dwelt in by living Powyses. The society is an extended Powys family, and like all large far-flung families, can be daunting to the very distant relatives. This distant relative, however, was welcomed with kindness, forbearance and tolerance. It was fun to put well-known names to faces, and faces in

Newsletter pictures to flesh and blood bodies. It was slightly intimidating to realise the sheer bulk of the accumulated knowledge of, and understanding and dedication to, the Powys cause, as evidenced by the members present, both in the serious business of talks and discussions, and in the many more relaxed moments. Professionals (if I may use that term for academics, publishers, family historians) exchanged views and feelings with amateur enthusiasts; although I am aware that at times the former have come in for a little flak from the latter, in truth the Society could not continue to function without both. The Conference, so well-organised and run, was indeed a family reunion.



Henning Ahrens introduced by Sonia Lewis and John Hodgson.

The title for the theme of the Conference, 'After our Fashion: Powys Philosophies', was well-chosen. There is not a little irony, quirkiness, ambiguity, about it. You're not likely to attend a learned gathering to discuss 'After my Fashion: Kant's Critique of Judgement' (but perhaps you are, in the early twenty-first century). What is meant by 'Philosophies'? Can you have a philosophy without the production a large body of philosophical writings? The academic answers for all three Powys brothers must be 'no'. But does it matter that their 'philosophies' are scattered in novels and essays and pot-boilers, so long as what they have to say still resonates among at least a few of us otherwise stranded mortals? For me, John Cowper's philosophies are like footnotes to the novels, and the themes of his philosophies are elaborated by the novels' characters.

Reflections on *In Defence of Sensuality* were delivered with quiet feeling and dignity by Henning Ahrens, young (by the norm of our Society, I'm afraid to say), handsome, his intensity under strict control, the passion of a novelist and poet resonating with another great writer. I had just finished *In Defence of Sensuality* coming down in the train from London, so Henning's ardent endorsement struck an immediate chord. He had been hooked on John Cowper as a young man, as I had been, but what a command of English to be captivated in his youth by *A Glastonbury Romance*! He

spoke of John Cowper's shameless egoism, how resistant he was of systems and structures. His was the philosophy of a writer, an aristocrat of the imagination; so much is hidden away in his books, in alleyways and gardens. Henning and his lady graced our gathering.

Professor John Gray on the Three Powys Philosophies, was so mild-spoken (occasionally a little too soft for my aging ears), in this respect like Henning, but the glint in his eyes, like the eyes of a hovering eagle, betraying the cutting-edge of his talons ready to tear asunder the pomposity of those who elevate God or Reason or Science as the sole arbiter of Truth. As in *Straw Dogs*, he has profound and interesting and necessary things to say, expressed in understated terms. John Cowper gives us not interior peace but psychological war; enjoyment, not tranquillity. His and Theodore's ideas are more sophisticated than we might think, and, as far as the world of utilitarianism and capitalism and consumerism is concerned, none of the brothers can provide us with much hope for progressive change or genuine improvement. John Gray introduced me to the works of George Santayana, especially to his one and only novel, *The Last Puritan.*

Professor Keith's contribution, 'Coming to Terms with John Cowper's *Autobiography*', was delivered in his absence (because of a severe throat infection) with skill and intelligence by Timothy Hyman. The paper was an erudite and finely balanced assessment of this remarkable work, which had many elements of fiction, of lecturing and acting, the tricks of a master magician. We then had a panel discussion on '*Autobiography,* Memory and Myth'. Written in the early 1930s, on the heels of *Glastonbury* and *Weymouth*, the *Autobiography* must be a rare example of such a work being written without the benefit of extensive archival material: that is, my assumption being that most autobiographers have a mass of personal stuff to hand, whereas John Cowper, at Phudd Bottom in the wilds of upper New York State, had little. So he relied very largely on memory and Phyllis, and it didn't much bother him that his memory played all kinds of tricks on him or on us, his readers. It's hardly surprising that the *Autobiography* deals with many of the themes of the novels, except that the hero is John himself, and not Wolf, John Crow/ Sam/ Evans/ Geard, the Jobber or Dud No-man. It's a gigantic almost spontaneous drama about the chaotic personality of John Cowper, with he himself playing all the lead-roles. To employ another analogy, the *Autobiography* is the Reveries of a Solitary Walker.

One of the issues that seemed to me to arise from these talks was a distinction between what, for want of better terms, can be called egotism – John Cowper constantly called himself an Egotist – and individualism. An egotist works things out for himself, he creates his own private *zeitgeist,* not at the expense of others, of society as a whole (but, it could be asked, what about the expense of the Powys brothers' long-suffering women folk?). The individualist pursues his own thing, he 'gets a life', he chooses a life-style, he picks (and discards) religions, new-age-isms, philosophies, off the supermarket shelves, without caring a damn about how he affects other people. The egotist John Cowper gave of himself to other people with glee and gusto,

gives himself in his works to us. None of the Powyses had any truck with systems and structures. Does this greatly matter? What happens to philosophical systems or beliefs, and practices founded on them? Think of the sillinesses of latter-day Marxists or Existentialists. On a less elevated level of lunacy, Gurdjieff or Ouspensky I think was mentioned. At third or fourth hand systems become debased and fake, if not downright dangerous. The Powyses have left us their books and other writings, embedded in which are their ideas and feelings about life and death and the meaning of things. All we have to do is to dip into these honey pots and then, hopefully, be able to share our experiences with fellow Powysians and hope to spread the simple but necessary good news a little wider. Thanks are due to in this respect to Margaret Drabble for her big John Cowper heave.

The odd person out (if she'll excuse the phrase), as far as the talks were concerned, was Elaine Mencher on 'Editing T. F. Powys'. This, for me, was the first big surprise of the Conference. Elaine has had no formal training as an archivist, literary historian or editor, yet her devotion and sheer physical stamina and fortitude in tracking down obscure Theodore manuscripts, particularly in the US, and then editing difficult and sometimes contradictory versions, are amazing. I was fascinated by subjects about which I was wholly ignorant – the task of archival editing and the publishing of Theodore's less well-known works.

Undoubtedly the *pièce de resistance* and second surprise for me was the reading of 'The Sin-Eater', the short play by Theodore and Stephen Tomlin. It really was a marvellous, deeply moving reading (it was strange to recognise the voice of Neil Carter from the Archers in the character Holy Tom). By the end of the short performance, I was stunned and appalled, glad for once I was staying at a hotel. I just wanted to get away by myself, didn't want to chatter after such a harrowing experience. Certainly, I now have a greater respect for the genius of Theodore. A few weeks later, while rereading *Maiden Castle*, I came across John Cowper's remark about Dud No-man (p 96, 1990 edition), 'the truth is that his ten years of contact with this piece of obscure wood-carving ['the dark, cracked, worm-eaten visage on his bedpost'] had endowed it with all that was least admirable in his own nature. The thing had become a sort of sin-eater to him ...'

Why do I love John Cowper? Because he excites me, delights me, at times infuriates me, inspires me. There are occasions when sparks from his ecstasies kindle my own imaginations and feelings. I for one need – occasionally, yearn for – leading lights to guide me into a safe haven, albeit the entrance to an unknown and mysterious land ...

I'm glad I came to the Conference, It was nice to meet the other participants, it was good listening to the speakers and the performers, I relished those moments when, by chance, intuition, will, the excitements, the enthusiasms, even perhaps the few minor ecstasies came winging over the aether. Yes, I enjoyed all this. After my Fashion. Or, as the great Tommy Cooper used to say, 'Just like That'.

Ringstead Bay at down.

A Pagan's Pilgrimage

Celebrating Llewelyn's 122nd Birthday

A 'pilgrimage' is described in my dictionary as, 'the journeying of a pilgrim to a shrine or other holy place, or to a place venerated for its associations' – and as an ardent admirer of his work and pagan spirit I have come to regard the annual six-hundred-mile round trip to East Chaldon to celebrate Llewelyn Powys's birthday, and along with others, to raise a glass to his memory, as my own personal pagan's pilgrimage.

This year on Sunday August 13th, a gathering of ***thirteen worthies***, or perhaps more appropriately, ***a baker's dozen*** of us met at the *Sailor's Return* in East Chaldon to celebrate the 122nd anniversary of Llewelyn's birthday.

I was accompanied on this year's epic adventure by my son Jason, known throughout the Central TV area as 'Jason the Druid', and brought up on a diet of Llewelyn's rationalist philosophy and love of the natural world, and as eager as I was at his age (37) to 'walk in Lulu's footsteps'! With Jason acting as navigator we left the Peak District of Derbyshire just after midnight and drove in torrential rain through the night; poor visibility was my navigator's excuse for getting lost in Lichfield – and then taking us the wrong way up the M42, however after passing through Kings Bromley three times we eventually – and quite miraculously – found ourselves welcoming the pre-dawn light in Dorset around 5am on Sunday morning!

Unwilling to waste one precious moment of our proposed 24-hour trip we set off immediately to visit 'places venerated by their association' and began at **Durdle Door**, recalling Llewelyn's swim through the famous arch almost eighty years previously. After Lulworth Cove, we visited West Lulworth, seeking the cottage beside the Weld Arms which Gerald Brenan and Gamel Woolsey once rented before

taken over to see him and the 2nd day had 6 hours with him ... Old John read and recited poetry practically the whole time, Hiawatha, Edgar Allen Poe, Walt Whitman and Keats, and I had such a lovely letter from the Victim — "It was all too wonderful for words. I now have a sense of completion." That will be their last meeting.

LAP's Wordsworthian 'Ode' is printed in JCP's *Letters to a Japanese Friend*. In February 1957, to Ichiro Hara whose own son had recently died, JCP also describes this last visit: 'My son and I knew each other in and out completely ... my companion Miss Phyllis Playter fed him with a silver spoon and I read to him his favourite poems ...'

(Special thanks to Louise de Bruin, Anthony Head and Susan Rands for help over this. KK)

Littleton Alfred Powys (on right) with Fr Essex and Fr Devas, March 1951.
(See The Powys Review *27/28, page 66. From a snapshot by Mrs Kathleen Tranter.)*

The following appreciation of the life of Littleton Powys appeared in The BEDA Review *in September 1955.*

Priest and poetry-lover: Fr. Littleton A. Powys

by Michael Hanbury, O.S.B.

This year's *Clifton Diocesan Year Book* shows, opposite to the Diocesan Obituary – a list of secular priests of the Diocese who have died since 1925 – a small photo of the Rev. Littleton A. Powys, whose first anniversary occurred on February 16th this year. He is the only priest so distinguished, and it was undoubtedly a happy choice thus to commemorate a convert whose work in the Church was cut short before he could gain fame and responsibilities commensurate with his gifts. Much good he did, but in a largely hidden way, and as his active priestly life was limited to seven or eight years he became known to comparatively few.

There was indeed much to edify in his life, and also some things that were unusual, more especially the poem he composed under most difficult circumstances, shortly before his death. Altogether, it seems that a short sketch of his life and character, to supplement the obituary notices in the *Times*, the BEDA Review and one or two local papers, may be acceptable. My own knowledge of Fr. Powys was slight: for what follows I have to thank several relatives and friends who knew him very intimately indeed.

His first distinction was as the only son of Mr. John Cowper Powys, famous as writer and lecturer: an author whose books, it must be added, are of a highly individual and unorthodox kind from any Christian point of view. Mr. J. C. Powys

with us owing to Eve's continuing ill health. Chris recalled John's many years of devotion and passionate support of the Society and reminded us that it was John Batten who had initially started this annual gathering eleven years previously following his discovery of the terms of Llewelyn's will, i.e., that 'the sum of £100 should be deposited with the landlord at the *Sailor's Return*, so that on each successive occasion of his birthday, his friends could gather together and drink to his memory'. A wholehearted vote of thanks, which Chris promised to convey when he called at Montacute on his return journey home, was sent, along with our very best wishes to John and Eve.

Both Morine Krissdóttir and Janet Pollock spoke eloquently, and we were reminded by Chris Gostick that Janet had kept the Powys connection with Chydyok alive for over fifty years, generously allowing access to members of the Society, many of whom had enjoyed the rich experience of staying at Llewelyn's former home since her tenancy began in 1953. Chris proposed a vote of thanks and Janet, looking as elegant as ever, received the well merited gratitude of us all.

Group at the stone.

Finally, Chris proposed the toast and we all raised a glass in Llewelyn's memory, before ten of us set off on the annual walk up the Chydyok Road towards High Chaldon, leaving Morine, Janet, and Richard Burleigh behind to enjoy the less strenuous delights of the pub. In John Batten's absence, Chris Gostick and Bruce Madge led the way up and over Chalky Knap and along the rough track trodden by so many Powyses, and which seen from the Five Marys resembles a thin white snake crawling up the steep hillside; and that's exactly what we did – crawled up the steep hillside – which appears to become steeper every year!

Rob Timlin, Chris Gostick, Bruce Madge, Honour Timlin placing flowers on the stone.

We called briefly at Chydyok, where Janet's son Matthew was busy working in the garden, and noted that a corner of the barn opposite had recently been converted into a modern office by the Weld Estate. There was a stiff breeze blowing by the time we sighted the familiar obelisk on the hilltop, and the clouds had temporarily obscured the sun as we gathered together beside

Llewelyn's memorial stone which stands in a corner of the field just off the old Gypsy track, facing out over the Channel, with Portland in the distance.

Chris and Honour both placed posies of flowers on the memorial stone, weighing the stems down with flint to save them being blown away in the wind, and once again, feeling immensely privileged to be invited, I read an extract from Llewelyn's work, choosing 'The Grave of a God' from *A Pagan's Pilgrimage*, which begins:

> *There is, perhaps, a certain simplicity in the desire we have to visit the burying-places of great men. Century after century the earth has gathered them into her belly and it is possible, we imagine, to catch from these cradles of treasured dust moments of high meditation.*

And concludes appropriately:

> *And everywhere men, minute and brittle as grigs, go about their occupations, thoughtless and bewitched, each one of them to be wrapped presently in a shroud. Only at long intervals are men born capable of understanding. Small wonder therefore that we should be easily persuaded to gape over their sepulchres.*

Neil Lee August 2006
(photos by Neil and Jason Lee)

To Susie at her Christening

January 22nd 1933
by Uncle Lulu

Chrisom child
Gentle, mild,
Bring joy
Not annoy
To Violet

I will be
To thee
Susie
God father,
Though rather
Sea free
Sun free
Lord of Earth
For thee.

Obituary
Francis Berry (1915–2006)

Francis Berry, who has died at the age of 91, was one of the few literary academics consistent in his advocacy of the stature of John Cowper Powys as a major writer. He spoke to the Powys Society at the Buxton conference of 1976 on 'John Cowper Powys's Justification of Phantasy' and attended two other conferences between then and 1991; but he only ever published 'J. C. Powys and Romance', in Belinda Humfrey's collection, *Essays on John Cowper Powys* (1972), although appending there a memorable poem, 'For a Ninetieth Birthday', written in 1962 for a celebratory tribute broadcast by the BBC Welsh Home Service. [*See also* NL 45, page 48]

Berry was born in 1915 in Ipoh, now part of West Malaysia, his father working on a rubber plantation. His mother died while giving birth and he was brought up by the father he hated. Back in England he was educated at Hereford Cathedral School and Dean Close School, Cheltenham, where G. Wilson Knight was teaching English and a lifelong friendship between the two developed. He left school at sixteen and was articled as a solicitor's clerk, but Wilson Knight's brother, the classicist Jackson Knight, was responsible for him being admitted in 1937 to read English at what was then the University College of the South West, Exeter. War service in Malta intervened before he graduated in 1946 and was appointed to a lectureship at the University of Sheffield, where he was eventually promoted to a chair, working alongside William Empson. From 1970 until his retirement in 1980 he was Professor of English Language and Literature at Royal Holloway College, London.

His critical works include the British Council booklet on Herbert Read (1953), *Poets' Grammar: Time, Tense and Mood in Poetry* (1958) and *The Shakespearian Inset: Word and Picture* (1965). *Poetry and the Physical Voice* (1962), arguing for a close connection between the speaking voice of a poet, its timbre and range, and what is written, was particularly admired. Focusing on Milton, Shelley and Tennyson, he suggested that 'each of these poets conceived and "wrote" in terms of his own voice – not, probably, as it actually was, as it actually sounded to others, that is, but as the poet himself heard it, or experienced it, or...as he supposed it to sound to others when he was employing it to good effect'.

He was also a creative writer himself and published his first volume of poetry, *Gospel of Fire*, as early as 1933. Later volumes were *Murdock and Other Poems* (1947), *The Galloping Centaur* (1952), *Morant Bay and Other Poems* (1961) – containing a long poem inspired by the so-called Jamaican Insurrection of 1865 – *The Ghosts of Greenland* (1967) and *From the Red Fort* (1984). A substantial *Collected Poems* appeared in 1994. His poetry has had some discerning supporters, such as Philip Hobsbaum who considered him a 'master of the long poem' and that he exhibited 'a range and tonality of voices' that put him among 'the great dramatic poets', while Edward Lucie-Smith, who anthologized him in *British Poetry since 1945* (1970 and 1985), commented: 'A difficult, uneven, and therefore almost by definition neglected

poet...the very opposite of an "academic" writer, though he teaches English at a university. Often clumsy, he can generate great intensity in his visions of the historical past... [His] language is essentially mimetic, expressive language – language forced to become the event it describes'. Berry was especially drawn to the Viking and Icelandic worlds, publishing in 1977 a novel, *I Tell of Greenland*, the supposed autobiography of a Norse Greenlander and participant in the expedition to Vinland.

He was three times married. His son, Scyld Berry, is cricket correspondent of the *Sunday Telegraph*, and previously for the *Observer*.

David Goodway

News and Notes

Neil Curry's talk at Dorset County Museum on 21st November was entitled 'Christopher Smart, Genius or Madman?'.

* * * *

Jacqueline Peltier recently gave a talk to the **George Borrow Society** on 'Two English Eccentrics: George Borrow (1803–1881) and John Cowper Powys (1872–1963)', in St Deiniol's Library, Hawarden, North Wales. The library was founded in 1889 by Gladstone, and the large red stone building, Grade 1 listed, was built in 1902 as a memorial to him. It is also a residential study centre holding a large collection of theological and other books.

The talk was well received by the Borrow Society, and stimulated much interest among its members. Comparisons were drawn between both men's love of walking as not only a physical but a spiritual need. Another bond uniting them was their sympathy for gypsies, seen in Borrow's semi-autobiographical novel *Romany Rye*, and in Powys's Gipsy May in *Weymouth Sands*. They each had a great knowledge of Welsh literature, and both writers described the setting of the castle of Dinas Brân which has a special significance in *Owen Glendower*. Similarly they both describe the Great Stone Circle at Stonehenge with feelings of cosmic excitement and rapt wonder.

Jacqueline rounded off her talk with 'Those giants, George Borrow and John Cowper Powys, who bear the true mark of genius, have indeed much to offer us in these times of appalling materialism, of poor spirituality'. *(report by Anna Pawelko)*

* * * *

***The Market Bell* by T. F. Powys** (edited with notes by Ian Robinson assisted by Elaine Mencher, with an Afterword and account of Manuscripts and Dating by J. Lawrence Mitchell) was published by Brynmill on 5th October. This revised edition in paperback (it replaces the original hardback of 1991) has been entirely reset in the nearest modern methods can come to the Monotype Caslon used so

successfully for this author in his lifetime.

Ian Robinson recently called T. F. Powys 'one of the three great English fabulists'. The editors maintain that 'he perhaps has more in common with Bunyan and Milton than with any of his contemporaries, and is unique in the modern world in his creations of love, death, good, evil and the divine. *The Market Bell* comes from the wonderful decade in which most of Powys's work appeared, but was left unpublished (like the later *Sixpenny Strumpet*) because its pictures of evil were too strong for contemporary taste. *The Market Bell* is also beautiful in its pictures of the good, and ought to take its place alongside the great English achievements of the 1920s.'

But honestly your work is before you and not behind you and I think you are a damn fool to have thrown The Market Bell into a desk because I am sure you are no judge of your own work and that its very probably the best thing you have done yet.

Liam O'Flaherty to T. F. Powys, 8 September 1925

"I don't think that you will find that my books lie."

T. F. Powys to Mr Clarke, 2 May 1929

(*Obtainable from Brynmill Press,* ISBN 978 0 907839 93 4. 394 pages, £14.40)

* * * *

Hester Craddock and ***The Blackthorn Winter*** should even now (November 2006) have appeared, from Sundial Press <sundialpress.co.uk>. ***Mr. Weston's Good Wine*** is announced by Vintage Classics for this December (ISBN 0099503743). ***Autobiography*** did not appear in August as announced by Duckworth: their latest information is that it has been postponed for a year, as also has the long-awaited *Biography*. ***Glastonbury*** meanwhile is to be reissued.

* * * *

The Autumn number of ***la lettre powysienne*** is devoted to Weymouth and *Weymouth Sands.* It includes an account of the town in the 1950s (J. Peltier); an analysis of the appearances and disappearances of characters in the novel (J.Therstappen); an informed guess at the piano piece played by Jerry Cobbold to beguile Perdita (R. Carrington); and the convincing though possibly controversial essay by L.Pashka interpreting the novel in terms of the sado-masochistic scenario of Punch and Judy (originally given at the 1989 Powys conference in New York).

* * * *

Michael Kowalewski asks: Was any member of The Powys Society at the Ham Hill Fayre? One of the stories enacted by the wonderful giant puppets for the finale of the Fayre was based on a Llewellyn story, **'Nancy Cooper'** (published in *Scenes from a Somerset Childhood*), narrated with some verve by the story teller at the Fayre while a giant puppet of Nancy was paraded around.

* * * *

Our front cover, **'Swan'** by Peter Lazare, is part of a series of his Swan paintings. The subtle nature of Swans extends beyond – in this case literally – their capture in a frame. Our apparently tranquil creature may be not so distantly related to the tragic bird in Baudelaire's late poem 'Le Cygne', searching in vain for water in a dry gutter –

Craning his head on his convulsive neck/ Towards the sky... my great swan with his lunatic gestures/ Ridiculous and sublime ... (translation by PL, comments by KK)

* * * *

An account of East Chaldon and its inhabitants seen by a visiting child can be read in *Yealm* by **Sheila Lahr**, daughter of Charlie Lahr of the Progressive Bookshop in Red Lion Square and The Blue Moon bookshop. See the Militant Esthetix website. (*information from Frank Kibblewhite).*

Letters

from **Susan Rands**

A Matter of Fact

Richard Maxwell, in his interesting essay on *Porius*, 'A Game of Yes and No' (*The Powys Journal* XVI,94) states, '*A Glastonbury Romance* features an iron bar; it is used to (inadvertantly) crush the skull of the unfortunate Cordelia Geard.'

The only person killed by the iron bar in *AGR* is Tom Barter. Not only is Cordelia not killed by it, but she prevents, in a memorable scene, her husband Mr Evans from taking part in the plot of Mad Bet and Codfin to kill John Crow (Macdonald ed. p.103ff). Cordelia is very far from being an 'accidental victim'. She is a purposeful and triumphant director of events. Does this invalidate the theme of the paper? Yes and No!

from ***Barrie Mencher***

Reading *The Sin-Eater*

It would be ungracious of me to complain about a single remark made in the course of an otherwise generous report on the website of the Conference play-reading of T. F. Powys's and Stephen Tomlin's *The Sin-Eater*, but I admit to being a little troubled and a lot puzzled by it. Whoever wrote the report introduced a parenthesis to the effect that Brian Hewlett's reading was so good that it risked making the play itself seem better than it is.

Now then, since Brian read the words and followed the stage directions as to tone and expression accurately, there can be no logical consequence other than his having done justice to the potentiality Powys and Tomlin created: Powys for the dialogue and Tomlin for the 'dramatic mechanism'. Certainly an actor can fail to express what the author intended but I cannot see how he can surpass the author, if he simply delivers the text as it is written, which no one has disputed Brian did. No, it may be that we amateurs, whilst doing all we could, did less than we should, but that is another matter.

* * * *

Who was Stein?

Sally Connely *writes (referring to the question by Stephen Powys Marks in the last* Newsletter*) that the many book jackets designed by 'Stein' for Macdonald included, beside the ten titles by JCP, those for Malcolm Elwin's* The Strange Case of Robert Louis Stevenson *(1950) and* The First Romantics*; also for* Wuthering Heights *and* Moby Dick *(the latter outstandingly good). Stein was a Second World War refugee, head of the art departent of a major advertising agency where SC once encountered him for a job interview:*

Malcolm Elwin, the literary adviser to Macdonald's for 21 years, and general editor of the Illustrated Classics *(see JCP on Sterne in NL58)*, considered Stein to have been the best artist the firm ever employed. He gave an impression of tense, concentrated, rather severe vigour and energy. He probably had his own reasons for wishing to remain anonymous. So far as I knew, no one ever knew him as other than 'Stein'.

[*This still leaves the full name of 'Stein' unanswered, assuming that 'Stein' was not itself a* nom-de-brosse. *It surely must be possible with such a leader in the field for his name or full name to be found: I shall press on; in the meantime, many thanks to Sally. SPM*]

* * * *

Wizzie and Dud

Carey Hamblett *encloses her letter to* The Guardian:

Re: "The English Degenerate" [article in *The Guardian*, 12.08.06]

I greatly enjoyed Margaret Drabble's magnificent celebration of J. C. Powys. However, she seems to have overlooked the fact that, most notably in *Maiden Castle*, he wrote with tremendous empathy for his female protagonists who, talented and intelligent, were trying to make their way in a difficult world. The men, on the other hand, are invariably hide-bound in tradition or political fanaticism. I am working on the screenplay of this book and probably the first person to adapt one of his novels. It is my interpretation that Dud Noman pays for Wizzie Ravelston's release from her circus job to save her from exploitation by her boss Funky and he had not considered at the time he was 'purchasing' her although later feels as though he had. As is the case with most of Powys's couples, the relationship between Wizzie and Dud is complex and ambivalent.

However the controlling energy of the novel is her feisty independence and courage to leave, not only him but also her child, to make her own life in America. Space does not permit further mention of the numerous well drawn female characters of Powys's works.

Yours, Carey Hamblett

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JCP's son clearly inspired much love and devotion in his family, friends and parishioners. He appears frequently in the letters and Diaries, notably in letters to Llewelyn and in the diary for summer 1929, when JCP spent time with him and Margaret in Folkestone (where Littleton had his first job as a clergyman) and in the country near Burpham. Oliver Wilkinson says (in *Jack and Frances*, Vol. 1) that Littleton Alfred had a good-humoured, ironic manner with his father, 'not lacking in respect or affection, but ensuring an ease of relationship ... there was love between them'. They seem to have made the most of their seldom times together – see *Newsletter* 49 for their happy few days in Valle Crucis, in April 1941. When Littleton became a Roman Catholic priest (in 1944), JCP told Louis Wilkinson:

> God, I like the idea of having a real priest of so old a "pathetic fallacy" for a son ... If your son gets steadily nicer to you as mine does to me we're a lucky pair of odd begetters ... I tell you, my dear, that my son is ever so much nicer, wiser, & more harmonious with his progenitor (incredibly so!) than he was as a clergyman (Anglican). We get on like a house on fire ... Think of your son as an actor in the old Shakespeare Secular and mine an actor in the secula seculorum, oldest of all Mystery-Plays!

An interview by Susan Rands with Mrs Tranter, the daughter of Father Littleton's housekeeper, in *The Powys Review* 27/28 (1992) shows him as popular and good at his job of organising a parish, during his year at Dursley, Glos, in 1950–1.

The *Aylesford Review* (Winter 1962–63) has articles by two women who helped LAP by reading and writing as his remorseless illness closed in. Dinah White came to help originally as a typist; after he could no longer speak he pointed to letters on a board with a peacock's feather. As his 'Ode to the West Wind' progressed she sent the completed lines to JCP and his uncle Littleton, 'two grand old men' whom she afterwards met. Brigid Boardman, a fellow-patient in the nursing home where LAP died, describes his sufferings and his courage.

> We would read aloud in the evenings. His choice of books was decisive, and each was read from the beginning of the preface to the very end. We read books of nature and on astronomy – anything in fact that would evoke that praise for the glories of creation which was his chief weapon in the battle with his disease ... Those black nights of terror and despair were the aspect of his disease which he feared the most. The weather affected him, and I welcomed the sun as never before; sunshine could do more for him that any human agent.

The Summer 1957 number of *Aylesford* also has a tribute, by Elizabeth Hamilton.

In 1953 Littleton senior, writing to Ichiro Hara, describes the last meeting of Littleton Alfred (already unable to speak) with JCP:

> My nephew Littleton vi (the Catholic Priest) who is slowly dying of "creeping paralysis" was taken by some friends (a Baptist Minister and his wife) to their home in Cheshire, which was in reach of Corwen where his father lives. On 2 days he was

taken over to see him and the 2nd day had 6 hours with him ... Old John read and recited poetry practically the whole time, Hiawatha, Edgar Allen Poe, Walt Whitman and Keats, and I had such a lovely letter from the Victim — "It was all too wonderful for words. I now have a sense of completion." That will be their last meeting.

LAP's Wordsworthian 'Ode' is printed in JCP's *Letters to a Japanese Friend*. In February 1957, to Ichiro Hara whose own son had recently died, JCP also describes this last visit: 'My son and I knew each other in and out completely ... my companion Miss Phyllis Playter fed him with a silver spoon and I read to him his favourite poems ...'

(Special thanks to Louise de Bruin, Anthony Head and Susan Rands for help over this. KK)

Littleton Alfred Powys (on right) with Fr Essex and Fr Devas, March 1951.
(See The Powys Review *27/28, page 66. From a snapshot by Mrs Kathleen Tranter.)*

The following appreciation of the life of Littleton Powys appeared in The BEDA Review *in September 1955.*

Priest and poetry-lover: Fr. Littleton A. Powys

by Michael Hanbury, O.S.B.

This year's *Clifton Diocesan Year Book* shows, opposite to the Diocesan Obituary – a list of secular priests of the Diocese who have died since 1925 – a small photo of the Rev. Littleton A. Powys, whose first anniversary occurred on February 16th this year. He is the only priest so distinguished, and it was undoubtedly a happy choice thus to commemorate a convert whose work in the Church was cut short before he could gain fame and responsibilities commensurate with his gifts. Much good he did, but in a largely hidden way, and as his active priestly life was limited to seven or eight years he became known to comparatively few.

There was indeed much to edify in his life, and also some things that were unusual, more especially the poem he composed under most difficult circumstances, shortly before his death. Altogether, it seems that a short sketch of his life and character, to supplement the obituary notices in the *Times*, the BEDA Review and one or two local papers, may be acceptable. My own knowledge of Fr. Powys was slight: for what follows I have to thank several relatives and friends who knew him very intimately indeed.

His first distinction was as the only son of Mr. John Cowper Powys, famous as writer and lecturer: an author whose books, it must be added, are of a highly individual and unorthodox kind from any Christian point of view. Mr. J. C. Powys

moreover is the eldest, and now the only survivor, of that remarkable literary trio, the Powys brothers, whom at least one critic of repute has compared with the Brontes. Not from a religious point of view, however, for all three Powyses have turned away from the Church of England in which they were brought up, and have evolved religions – or irreligions – of their own. [*Note:* I am told that Mr T.F. Powys returned to Christianity in the last two or three years of his life.] The late Mr. Llewelyn Powys, in fact, was in some of his writings aggressively anti-Christian. There were Christian influences from others of the family certainly: Fr. Powys' mother, an Anglican, followed him into the Catholic Church, and it may be said that the "Powys brothers" are descended from three generations of parsons on *both* sides of their family. Yet even so it is clear that, for a Catholic priest, Fr. Powys came of unusual parentage.

The main facts of his life may now be briefly recalled. Littleton Alfred Powys was born on August 30th, 1902, at Burpham, near Arundel, Sussex, and educated at Sherborne, having for headmaster at the prep. school there his beloved uncle and namesake, Mr. Littleton C. Powys. Altogether he was eight years at Sherborne, leaving in 1920. His uncle and onetime headmaster describes him as "a very affectionate warm-hearted boy, very fond of children". At school his chief interests lay in Natural History and Poetry; though not very good at games, he shot well and was in the Sherborne VIII. He left Sherborne for Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, a college to which his father and both grandfathers had gone before him. On leaving Cambridge he worked for a year or two in the office of his uncle, Mr. T. H. Lyon, an architect, but then decided to seek Holy Orders. After studying at St. Stephen's House, Oxford, he was ordained to the Anglican Ministry in 1928. First a curate at Folkestone till 1930, he soon returned to St. Stephen's House as Vice-Principal, a post he held from October 1930 to March 1936, leaving to become rector of Wiston in Sussex. On the outbreak of war he became a chaplain to the Forces, and saw service in France until the evacuation of the B.E.F. [*at Dunkirk*].

Then came a big change in his life, for in this year, 1940, he was received into the Catholic Church. I have heard little as to how he was led to this step, but evidently his time as a C. F. [*Forces chaplain*] in France helped him a good deal. A cousin of his writes that he would often say that when he was in France he felt he was putting up a "rival altar". He had, too, the same authority tells me, "a great sympathy and liking for French literature, people and spirituality", and for an Anglican was conspicuously at home with all three. After his "reception" he went to study at the Beda, then on account of the war domiciled at Upholland [*in Lancashire – normally in Rome*]. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1944.

And now as to the man himself. To begin with his exterior, he was tall, fair and, from childhood, strikingly good-looking, with which went an easy, affable manner, making him a "persona grata" everywhere. He was always much sought after for parties and social gatherings of all kinds. "Handsome is as handsome does," however, and judged from that more exacting standpoint also, he emerges equally triumphant. He seems in particular to have won golden opinions from all under whom he worked:

here, in illustration, are three of them. Canon G. A. Michell, former Principal of St. Stephen's House, Oxford, his Anglican theological college, writes:

> His outstanding quality was an exceptional degree of innate charm, which was felt by people of all ages and classes, who "took to" him at once. He struck me as having an *anima naturaliter Christiana* – a simple child-like faith. As a student he showed signs of real interest in his studies, and I anticipated that, given the opportunity, he would pursue them. As Vice-Principal he was unfailing in the fulfilment of his duties, and his popularity with the students was a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the establishment.

At the Beda [*a training college for mature candidates for the priesthood*] where, to some extent, he had to begin all over again, Fr. Powys endeared himself in the same way. Mgr. Duchemin, so long the Rector there, in sending me a copy of the obituary notice that appeared in the *Beda Review*, writes that it expresses well what he felt about Fr. Powys, adding:

> He was a splendid student and never showed any feeling of "loss of dignity". He had held good positions when in the Church of England. He was liked by the other men and I found him a delightful companion.

Finally, Canon Hackett, the rector of St. John's, Bath, under whom Fr. Powys worked for most of his priestly life, sends the following impressions:

> I chiefly remember Fr. Powys for his apostolic vigour, zeal and profound sympathy for all sorts and conditions of people. He took infinite trouble in helping people -- disregarding the toil involved. I have known him to come in completely exhausted after seeing one and then another party to a problem or quarrel. Above all he loved children, and with them he was a child too – indeed in no figurative sense but literally, carrying on real conversations even with the tiniest tots. I remember hearing some of these conversations and there was not the least sign of pose or condescension on his part. He was always planning events for little children, and before they came off held long consultations with them: their opinions were invoked and they were given an active part to play.
>
> He had real gifts as a preacher, or rather as a teacher. He never sought rhetorical effect, but he explained and enlarged upon Christian teaching in such a way, and employing short, simple words, that he never gave a hint of ambiguity.
>
> He was tireless in the instruction of converts; never wearying as he guided and shepherded these good people engaged upon what was for so many of them a great and terrifying adventure, as they left behind so many of the landmarks they knew. He was truly an "alter Christus".

As comment on this, the cousin of Fr. Powys already quoted, himself a member of an Anglican religious community, [*i.e Hamilton Cowper Johnson*] says: "His pastoral instincts were very strongly developed indeed", and adds: "I think that this was one reason why he was quite sure that the secular priesthood was his vocation, because of the continuous and varied ministry from individuals and families that this guaranteed him".

The leading traits of Fr. Powys' character have now been shown, but there are other sidelights that increase one's knowledge of his personality. Canon Michell, to the tribute already quoted adds that he was "psychic" and goes on to say:

His experiences in that plane were infrequent, and merely odd. I remember the following incident. One day in May, 1934, we motored to a place thirty miles from Oxford; I had known it all my life and though the house was shut up, I wished to visit the garden. He had never been there before. A day or two later I referred to the trip and remarked on the beauty of the rhododendrons. He said "yes" rather casually, and then "what a very fine monkey puzzle that was!" I, thinking he was speaking of a tree we had passed on the way, and that I had not noticed, said "Where?" He expressed astonished incredulity at my lack of observation; and proceeded to explain in accurate detail the exact spot in the garden where he had seen the monkey-puzzle; and finished by saying "You surely must remember it". I could only reply: "I remember it very well indeed, but my uncle had it cut down about twenty years ago".

Canon Michell also mentioned a very different kind of experience that Fr. Powys had had eight years previously, and which took place on the Downs near his home at Burpham.

This, except that it began with a bright light that forced him to his knees, was indescribable and of unknown duration. It left him completely assured of the goodness of God, and in peace of mind as to the problem of innocent suffering.

Canon Michell says that so far as he knows this was the only experience of the kind ever granted to him, and that he regarded it with "great gratitude and complete humility". Humility indeed is the touchstone for the genuineness of such happenings, and one would like to know more of what seems to have been a true mystical experience, one that left precious and lasting effects in the soul.

With humility, there generally goes the gift of humour; and I am told that Fr. Powys had a very great sense of humour, and a delightful capacity for laughing at himself. His humour, too, when applied to others, was always free from malice. After his six years curacy at Bath, during which – as *The Times* said after his death – "he worked with that abounding love, energy and enthusiasm which were his outstanding characteristics", Fr. Powys was sent to Dursley, Glos., as parish priest, but in the year following moved to Peasedown St. John in Somerset. Here he served two chapels, one at Peasedown and one at the neighbouring village of Wellow. Fr. Powys had to rough it a good deal at Peasedown; there was no presbytery and he had a bed-sittingroom in a miner's cottage, where there were five young children. In other respects too his work in this parish was difficult. And then his illness began. For an account of this, I cannot do better than quote his uncle, Mr. Littleton C. Powys, now of West Pennard, near Glastonbury, who, living not far away, was able to keep in regular touch with him. Mr. Powys writes:

> In the spring of 1951 he had a motor cycle accident in which he damaged his right shoulder. And so in 1952 when he complained about the muscles in his right hand, the trouble was put down to this accident; but later on that year the same trouble showed

itself in the other hand. He then, as it was inconveniencing him at his work, went to a specialist on those things, and there he heard that he was suffering from a progressive disease of the nerves which would gradually upset the muscles of the whole body, and that he must give up his work.

It must have been a great shock to one who had always been a healthy man, thus to find himself in the grip of a disease that would lead by degrees to ever greater helplessness till becoming fatal. One feels that he must have passed through a Gethsemani-like struggle to adjust his mind to it, for this he evidently did. His uncle continues:

That was in the early summer of 1952; for till the autumn of that year he was still able to drive his car. He was taken into St. Teresa's Hospital at Corston near Bath, and there the Matron and staff and the Chaplain, Fr. F., were very kind to him, and as he was still able for a time to move about on his legs he was happy enough in the beautiful natural surroundings of Corston.

He used to come regularly to see me and have tea and a talk, and then when he found he could drive no more, Fr. F. used kindly to drive him ... These little meetings were always happy affairs and they were never without laughter. But gradually the disease progressed and he had to have a male nurse to help him; and I found it very difficult to hear what he said. He was no longer able to go into the country except in a wheeled chair, and it was then that he devoted himself to Wordsworth's poetry and told me he was learning the whole of "Tintern Abbey" by heart, so as to be able to say it to himself by night if he could not sleep.

The Powyses, are all great nature-lovers – nature-worshippers they might be called in some cases – and mostly they have a strong taste for poetry also, and sometimes a gift for writing it. Fr. Powys was no exception: his special fondness even at school for both nature and poetry has been remarked already, and he was a man who changed singularly little. No doubt as he progressed spiritually he found God more and more in both these pursuits. Then, in the final stages of the disease, he felt a desire to write a poem himself. His uncle says:

About five weeks before he died he decided himself to write a poem dealing with the natural elements which he loved, called "An Ode to the West Wind". I could not see how he would manage it, for he could not write and I could not hear what he said. But at this moment it happened that a Catholic girl [*Dinah White*] had offered to help at Corston, and from then till his death she never failed him, coming whenever she had any free time.

This helper had a wonderful gift for understanding him, and so in this way a poem of nearly a hundred lines was written and, after Fr. Powys' death on February 16th [1954], printed and published by his uncle. Beginning:

Rain-panoplied Enchanter of the sea,
Blow o'er the black wastes of Atlantic waters,
And in the fury of thy travel, rouse —
Majestic for the battle with the shore —

Waves that will make leviathan in fear
Dive to uncharted deeps ...

it goes on to describe some of its writer's favourite country scenes, and ends finally with an affirmation of his Catholic faith in the Mass.

Hard by within a stone cast of the barns,
Once stood a Saxon church, but there remains
Hardly a standing stone; and yet a man
May pause and pray, and wonder to himself
Where the Priest stood, and with anointed hands
Uplifted God to God.

It was really a remarkable and gallant feat so to compose the poem, albeit unfinished, under these almost impossible circumstances, and words from a moving letter written by the helper at Corston to Mr. Littleton Powys shows this more clearly still. She is referring to her intuitive gift for knowing what Fr. Powys was trying to say. "I cannot really explain why I could understand Father so much better as a rule than others could," she writes, but goes on to give at least a clue –

> I could really understand the feeling Father had of wanting to prove that he could do something as well as other people in spite of his disabilities. So with Father's determination to do something, and my determination to help as much as was

Two Poems by Littleton Alfred

(From mss in the Powys Collection. The first, with small variations, was printed in The Powys Review *14 (1984), under the title 'A Poem for his Father on his Birthday, 8th October 1948')*

To My Mother dead & my Father Alive (1948)

Whether the wind had slain it or the stars
Or the cold snow or banks of trodden grass
Bordering white roads upon the chalky hills,
Or tides of rivers salted by the sea
I knew not, only felt along my bones
Some substance of me die within the womb
That carried me and clothèd me with being.

Rocklike thyself, thou who has gotten me,
Stand by the high rocks where the Ravens call
And in some secret confluence of the hills.
Cry out and shout to the encircling air
That we have known a love that laughs at death,
And on the edge of the before and after
Have lived and loved and smelled the mossy places
Splashing thro' pools on muddy mountain paths.
Cry out the prayer! and let your lone voice rumble
Over the mountins, that the silence after
May hold it there living tho' yet unheard —
A sound unheard, as of the earth's own motion
Or of the sunbeams lighting on the stones
Forever unheard, yet forever there!

L.A. Powys

Dreams

Deep in the utmost reaches of the Heart,
In man's unfathomable depth of Soul
There gleams a distant light, a secret flame.
Small, like a star that dwells obscure, apart,
Small, but illuminating all that mighty whole
Of his Ethereal being, small and unfelt,
Till on some silent evening when the bat
Flickers on wizard wings around the barn,
And in the misty distance, waveringly,
A bell faint-heard upon the listless air
Calls with a magic note, he feels it glow –
Burn hot within him; then all Human care
Seems far away and the Great Spirit World
So close that even familiar objects grow
Strange and unearthly; that old twisted tree
That old familiar elm, which as a child
He gazed upon each morning wonderingly,
Takes a new aspect, seems uncouth and wild
Against the quiet of the purple sky,
Like some abysmal Demon new from Hell!

And then in silvered silence comes the Moon,
Wide-eyed and old, wise servant of the eve
To bathe the world in weird, elusive light;
And through the stillness once again the bell
With clearer summons, imperious Divine
Echoes sheep-bleat upon the hill. And soon,
Mellow and clear, rich as well-seasoned wine
Flowing across the leafy April fields
The rapturous music of the nightingale,
Enfolding all beneath an enchanting spell,
Reaches man's inner soul, and bears it off.

Those are rare moments, when the body yields
To the high-soaring spirit; when lone and pale,
Foiled by the weight of sad mortality
It reaches wildly after higher things
Like one who peers, distracted, down a well
Where in the depths some sacred thing lies hid
He'd guarded with his life – yet deep it fell
By some unlucky chance, and there he stands
Distraught, and in Despair; his straining eye
Sees but its mocking image, yet it knows
That underneath the painted imagery,
Amid the mud and slime it shines and glows,
That Gem, that Pearl, inestimably priced!

Thus is it that in dreams we strain above
Our common daily life; our soul grows strong;
Our flame burns brighter, and a deeper love
Of Beauty flows within us, and the Song
Of Birds at sunrise, and the pleasant noise
Of flowing water and of rustling trees
Fills us with living ecstasy – we poise
Breathless with Joy, twixt Earth and Heaven!

Reviews

The Diary of a Reluctant Teacher: Llewelyn Powys's Diary for 1908
edited and with an introduction by Peter J. Foss
Powys Heritage Series (General Editor: Anthony Head)
London: Cecil Woolf Publishers, 2006. 60pp., £8.00. ISBN 1 897967 49 7

This is the second and, one hopes, not the last of Llewelyn Powys's diaries to be edited by Peter Foss for Anthony Head's Powys Heritage series. Those who have read its predecessor, *A Sherborne Schoolboy,* will recall with some affection the nineteen-year-old's account of his final term at that (by him) beloved school, and of his subsequent return to family life at Montacute. Its brevity only serves to make it more evocative and its frankness the more endearing, but even then the 'sunny' young Llewelyn was a troubled human being, torn between his sexual impulses and the moral teaching of his religious upbringing.

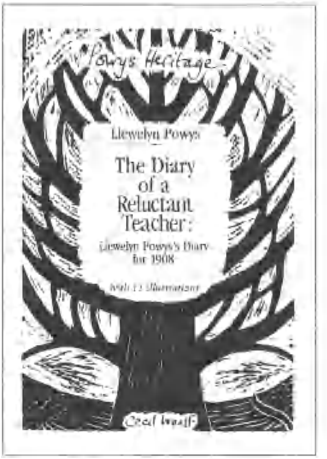
The same tension can be found in a more acute form in the diary kept five years later while he was, first, a schoolmaster at Bromsgrove in Worcestershire and then a private tutor in the Wiltshire town of Calne. The latter post was in the household of the wealthy family whose name was known all over the country as the manufacturers of Harris sausages and other porcine products – the Pig Kings as the disrespectful Llewelyn called them. Unlike its predecessor the Diary covers an entire year; its entries are terse, being confined to a small pocket-book, one week to a page. Terse it may be, but it is none the less revealing: the twenty-four-year-old young man is discontented, sexually confused and decidedly reluctant to embark on a career in the world outside. At the year's end we find him arriving in New York for his unsuccessful lecture tour in America, and very much in the shadow of John Cowper Powys and Louis Wilkinson. Readers of *Welsh Ambassadors* will be amused to learn that there was indeed to be a lecture on Mrs Humphry Ward, sandwiched between ones on James and Kipling – the very one which JCP was to send up so outrageously.

Dr Foss again provides a perceptive Introduction: he must be the most thorough and dedicated critical exponent that Powys's work has as so far found. He examines the way in which this diary was elaborated in the version to be offered as Llewelyn's contribution to *Confessions of Two Brothers*, 'thrown together with John's help in this period 1914–1916 ... an exaggerated and contrived revisiting of his life in these years, composed in part for "shock" and to promote a "pose".' The Notes are thorough and informative; and I have only found one slip, the reference to Lexie Ashover as a character in *Wood and Stone* rather than in *Ducdame* – a point only worth making in that it was Llewelyn who, according to Malcolm Elwin, had a hand in the shaping of the latter novel.

As to the Diary itself, as in a series of flashlights it gives us a picture of country walks and games of tennis with *jeunes filles en fleur* that hovers on the borderline of the erotic, a picture not unlike that portrayed some thirty years earlier in the diaries

of Francis Kilvert. Llewelyn's own bouts of ill humour, instinctive happiness and physical temptations and delights are all frankly set down, albeit so briefly and allusively that a reader has frequently to deduce from between the lines what is going on. But what above all one derives from the diary is the essence of youth in all its vigour, spontaneity and troubled restlessness, other family members playing their part, the elder brothers primarily as mentors, the sisters as companions of his long walks in the Somerset countryside. There is one poignant glimpse of Weymouth, on a visit with his employers, a case of being in the right spot in the wrong company; and again and again we come across phrases indicative of the writer Llewelyn Powys was to become. 'Walked in the Norton lanes and delighted in the warmth of air and the aroma of Sunday blouses.' The pages of *Love and Death* grew out of such an observation, with its characteristic blend of poetry and sensuality, one that is very much its author's own.

Glen Cavaliero



Two Powys Friends: Glimpses into the Lives of Bernard O'Neill and Ralph Shirley, by Jacqueline Peltier
Powys Heritage Series (General Editor: Anthony Head)
London: Cecil Woolf Publishers, 2006. 36pp., £7.00. ISBN 1 897967 54 3

In Louis Wilkinson's satirical novel, *The Buffoon* (1916), the character based on John Cowper Powys, Jack Welsh, has been describing, gleefully, extravagantly, and with malice, the work and behaviour of Raoul Root [Ezra Pound] and his cohort of poets. He is talking to Edward Raynes, the 'buffoon' of the title, a character based on Wilkinson himself:

> Edward was wondering how far Welsh had coloured the complexion and distorted the features of this newest of new circles of *les jeunes*. It was his way, of course, to colour

and distort.

"What are you thinking?" Welsh asked abruptly, and Edward veraciously replied:

"I was wondering if you were giving me true impressions. You don't always, you know. But I'm inclined to believe that your judgement is singularly clear about people outside your own set, that you have the keenest eye for all their little foibles. You convince yourself all the more, you see, that way; convince yourself, I mean, that yours is *the* circle, that you and your friends are of the blood royal, and the others pretenders. Isn't that it?"

"Why of course mine is *the* circle!" Welsh opened his eyes. "Who could compare this Raoul Root with Tom Fielding [Tom Jones] or Willie O'Flaherty [Bernard O'Neill]? You must meet O'Flaherty; he has real genius. The most delicate, the most imaginative, the most fastidious, the most distinguished spirit! I tell you, my friend, it is the most distinguished circle."

"And you," Edward twitted him, "the pivot of it all! The most distinguished of all positions in the most distinguished of all circles! I am envious, I tell you, my friend, I am envious..."

The problem for any biographer of members of the Powys 'circle' – particularly those who were not celebrities themselves – is that a truthful portrait is bound to fall short of the brilliant but unfettered eulogies given them by John Cowper Powys in his *Autobiography*. They will always be upstaged and outshone by the glitter of the magician at the centre.

Dr Bernard O'Neill, a long-standing friend of the Powys family, presents a particular difficulty. Modest and retiring, overshadowed by an extrovert wife on the domestic front, and distracted by a large clientele of 'panel' patients demanding all of his attention during his evening surgeries and on home visits, 'Bernie' has long evaded a detailed identification. But, by combining dithyrambic extracts from John Cowper with the many crumbs of information she has hoovered up from an impressive variety of other sources – and there are far more than I was aware of – Jacqueline Peltier has now given us as complete a picture as we are ever likely to get. In addition, she has skilfully uncovered much new information, including a fascinating description from Bernie's granddaughter that reveals a side of him not seen before: Bernie the general practitioner, mixing with great precision and bottling up his medicines on the kitchen table. 'The white stuff was for all stomach ailments and the brown for coughs and chest troubles, and they both seemed to work!'

By coincidence, Ralph Shirley, the Powys cousin, was born in the same year as Bernie O'Neill and died just one year before him. Despite editing the *Occult Review* for nearly forty years, and writing several books, his private history is even more obscure than O'Neill's. Nevertheless Peltier has amassed sufficient references to create a much fuller picture of him than we have so far seen. Included also is a splendid and revealing photograph of him with Llewelyn Powys, taken around 1910, that matches John Cowper's description of him, 'with his spacious forehead, Viking moustache, and pure Saxon eyes – eyes that 'melted with love and kindled in war'.

There are now twelve intriguing titles in the Powys Heritage series, all of them indispensable to members who wish to enlarge their knowledge of the Powys story.

Chris Wilkinson

Forgetting the Unpleasant, Remembering Hardy

Two Powys Society Publications:
The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant, and *Powys on Hardy*

Original 'Little Blue Books' are scarce: their staples are rusty, and their cheap acidic paper is brown and crumbling, but in their day millions were sold throughout America. John Cowper contributed ten titles, and David Goodway's introduction to this new edition of *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant and other essays* (1928) includes fascinating information about this extraordinary left-wing publishing venture, in the causes of civil liberties, pacifism and racial and sexual equality, and propagating great literature.

This is Powys at his most populist and indeed politically committed, and he seems to have found political engagement altogether easier in America than in England, speaking out in the defence of the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti and the trade unionist Eugene Debs.

Powys's tone is never more pressingly intimate that when he is addressing the broad masses, and he specifically appeals to individual readers among the crowd. He is perpetually conscious of reading as a solitary, often 'furtive' activity, and the tiny, genuinely pocket-sized 'Little Blue Books' would have been ideally suited to anyone who, like Powys, liked to carry books about as cherished talismans and read them in incongruous places. (This is interesting to do: Milton in Pizza Hut; Bashô on Thameslink.)

The title essay of this booklet, 'The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant', is also intensely personal – how can psychological equilibrium be maintained in the face of enemies both inner – 'the howling mandates of conscience', and outer – 'the raw material of horror', 'the maggots and the lice, the torture-chambers and the slaughter-houses'. In *Wolf Solent*, the sinister Mr Malakite shrieks on his deathbed the word 'forget', contradicting Wolf's unctuous suggestion of 'forgive'. 'The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant' was written at the same time as *Wolf Solent*, and explores philosophically many of the themes of the novel – the struggle for personal 'life illusion':

> Such a 'vision' need not be any traditional religion. It need not be any social panacea. It need not be any intellectual or esthetic dogma. As long as it emanates from the spontaneous integrity of our unique self, as long as it is ours, ours entirely and not another's, all will be well. We need ask no more of it than that it should be our very own, the expression of our inmost identity both for good and evil. And that it should bring with it the sacred art of forgetting.

This new edition of *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant* also includes the four other

essays of the original booklet, two republished here for the first time. 'The Real Longfellow' identifies the poet's authentic 'faint, magical notes' that are almost swamped by his 'moralistic bathos' – the problem being that 'Longfellow could never bring his piety into harmony with his imagination'. 'The Perfect Gentleman' attempts to adapt an aristocratic ideal to a democratic philosophy. Aristocrats are made by good manners, and 'the greatest of all American aristocrats was Walt Whitman'. 'Walled Gardens' is an essay in psycho-geography or perhaps *feng shui*, about the supposed effects of different building styles and materials on human relationships in England and America; 'The Wind that Waves the Grasses' is a rhapsody on the subtle intimations carried on the air to sensitive ears, but the essay's exuberance overpowers its evanescent subject.

John Cowper Powys on Thomas Hardy is a selection from John Cowper's *Autobiography*, letters, and literary criticism. Glen Cavaliero's introduction describes the contrasting temperaments of the two writers against their common Dorset background, and Kate Kavanagh provides a narrative thread connecting the extracts. In 1896, the young Powys sent his first book of 'copy-cat verses' to Hardy, and received an invitation to Max Gate. Hardy subsequently visited Montacute. 'That morning I remember announcing to my father and to all the family that the greatest writer *then living on this earth* was coming to visit us!' Powys recalled his powerful impression of his first meeting with Hardy in his *Autobiography*, nearly forty years later. 'Frail as an elf Mr. Hardy was, but his hands were the hands of a master-craftsman and his great greenish-black eyes, dark as those of Leo xiii, gleamed forth like the eyes of a gerfalcon over his hooked nose and military moustache.'

The images of Hardy as 'elfin', alert to the caprices of chance, and 'hawk-eyed' recur in Powys's essay on Hardy in *The Pleasures of Literature*, reprinted here. It is one of his most eloquent pieces of literary criticism, intrepid in its philosophical sweep. Powys allies Hardy with Shakespeare as the great pessimist of our literature: 'The main driving force of his genius is a philosophical arraignment of the ways of God to Man.' Powys praises Hardy's 'indignant sympathy with a suffering world'. 'He saw the ivy killing the tree, he saw the weasel killing the rabbit, he saw the trees strangling each other as they contended for light and air, he saw the sportsman wounding the pheasant and the collector bringing down the rare migratory bird.'

Often the qualities that Powys admires in Hardy are those that he learned to cultivate himself. Hardy's landscapes, writes Powys, 'are the landscapes rather of a draughtsman that a colourist', emphasizing outline, silhouette, relief, and the presence of the 'half-abstract, half-concrete entities' of dawn and twilight.

It is a pleasure to find this widely-scattered writing on Hardy brought together in such clear focus. The booklet forms a tribute by a great Wessex writer to the master he revered, and is an ideal introduction to the many lovers of Hardy, who may be unfamiliar with John Cowper Powys.

John Hodgson

Jeremy Hooker, *Cut of the Light: Poems 1965–2005*
Enitharmon Press, 2006. £25 hardback. ISBN 1 904634 27 3

Throughout Jeremy Hooker's work there is a fecund sense and understanding of time and place. In his early and assured sequence, *Soliloquies of a Chalk Giant,* we are reminded at the outset of what chalk *is*: 'petrified creatures swim in its depths'. And while the chalk giants of Somerset and Dorset may seem vastly ancient to us and to come from a time when 'neophytes [trod] an antique measure to the antlered god', as one of them freely and tellingly admits:

> You call me old,
> But to the wind I am
> A novelty.

There are times in this sequence when Hooker seems to be speaking to us directly through the voices of the giants, but more significant are those moments when he appears to identify with the landscape as a whole, to be its voice piece, and yet at the same time it is as though the language itself were a living entity and he is its servant.

> I am bound to the place
> By its language.
> * * *
> When I am dead the language
> Will shed me. Till then
> It takes something of me
> Wherever it goes.

In an essay entitled *Poem and Place* (1981) he wrote, 'Poetry of place after Wordsworth cannot be understood, I believe, outside a context of loss.' Even Wordsworth's individualism, he explained, was 'rooted in a common humanity', a shared belief in an ideal of order, which we no longer have; this being why poems of place so frequently tend to become elegies, and if not for a specific person, for a lost time.

The elegiac tone is engagingly present in his 1987 collection *Master of the Leaping Figures.* It is caught in deft vignettes:

> Among lime trees, the pale yellow
> of a solitary street lamp left on
> dying in the light of the leaves.

and in moments of quiet sorrow:

> I too once lived here
> I shall say.

Yet within what he has called 'the inexhaustible stream' of time, he also seeks to celebrate the uniqueness of every living thing and moment. 'A moorhen lands ripping the surface to silver.'

In *Our Lady of Europe* (1997) the tone has become darker. In a poem called *Pictures of Bruges,* we read:

I remembered the child's question,
after we had visited a monastery.
"If they believe God is light
why do they live in darkness?"

But darkness is not only to be found in the gloom of monasteries. Time and again Hooker shows us that the dark violence of humankind is played out against a backdrop of such natural beauty as we hardly deserve. *Island Cemetery* is one such poem and so magnificent I wish I could quote it in full. The island is Grey Monk Island off the coast of Holland. Its cemetery houses 'the dead of two wars and many nations'. Each grave has been lovingly decorated with sea-washed shells, white and blue. We hear the sounds of the sea and the hum of the bees. We smell the resin from the pine trees. And then there are the birds – oystercatchers, curlews, gulls.

This is their world, and was
in the beginning – the same and again the same,
where they pipe and shrill and cry
whether monks keep the hours
or bunkers are built on the sand
and the dead wash ashore or drop from the sky,
mangled and burned.

There is so much going on here and presented to us with such economy. The contrasts of the wartime bunkers and the cells of the monks; that slight hint of biblical language and then the sheer brutal realism of those closing lines which nothing has prepared us for.

It is a pity that Enitharmon Press did not include the prose essays with which Jeremy Hooker concluded *Master of the Leaping Figures* and his most recent collection *Adamah*, particularly the latter in which he has some interesting things to say about his sequence *Groundwork*. He tells us that in his earlier work he regarded *ground* as being actual ground, chalk, soil and shingle, which he sought to explore as a total environment, human and non-human, but he has since become less sure of where he belongs and of what our 'foundation in metaphysical reality is'. He is now more aware, he explains, of *groundlessness*.

The poems in this sequence look different: the lines are longer and they are more fluid. What he is doing is questioning the strangeness of what it is to be human. A *Collected Poems* is often a volume to be dipped into, skipped about in, but I feel very strongly that *Cut of the Light* needs to be read from start to finish, so that you can feel how one collection grows out of another. And when we get to the end there is a new voice and a new sense of narrative, which tells us, I am so glad to say, that there is clearly still more to come.

Neil Curry

John Hodgson: T. F. Powys in Russia

In East Chaldon on 3rd May 1927, T. F. Powys received an unexpected parcel from Leningrad, forwarded from Chatto and Windus, containing a Russian translation of *Mr. Tasker's Gods*. 'I have heard nothing whatever about this translation', he wrote to Charles Prentice. 'I am very pleased that it has appeared. I think it would be well worth our while to send to this lady at once, to the address she gives, a set of the remaining novels.'

It comes as a jolt to learn that T. F. Powys's subversive satire on human vanities was successful in Soviet Russia. The correspondence with Lydia Slonimskaya, Powys's Russian translator, now in the Powys Collection at the Dorset County Museum, describes how the editions of *Mr. Tasker*, and later *Mockery Gap*, in print runs of 4,000 in each case, were entirely sold out. Paper shortages prevented reprints. Slonimskaya also refers to an edition of *The Left Leg*, by another translator, but I have found no trace of this. Yet it is perhaps a sign of a more restrictive cultural climate in 1929 that the State Publishing House balked at the darker mysticism of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*.

Lydia Slonimskaya *née* Kun (1900–1965) was a direct descendent of Pushkin's sister Olga, a fact of which she was extremely proud. She married the Pushkin scholar Aleksandr Slonimsky, a member of an extremely talented Petersburg family. One Slonimsky brother, Mikhail, became a well-known Soviet novelist, and another, Nicolas, emigrated to the United States and became an eminent composer and musicologist. Nicolas Slonimsky gives a spirited account of his early family life in his autobiography, *Perfect Pitch* (Oxford University Press, 1988), and is commemorated in an orchestral piece by John Adams, 'Slonimsky's Earbox'.

Lydia also translated Jack London and Theodore Dreiser (official Soviet favourites) and, from the French, Jules Verne and Guy de Maupassant. But her chief delight appears to have been her family history. Nicolas quotes a letter from his brother Aleksandr in 1939, 'Lida is immersed in the history of her ancestors in the Pushkin family, and she fell in love with her great-great-grandfather, Sergei Pushkin. She copies all of Sergei Pushkin's correspondence with Olga Pushkina, his daughter, a sister of the poet.' Lydia's edition of Pushkin family correspondence, translated from the French, was eventually published by the Pushkin House Museum in St Petersburg in 1993, nearly thirty years after Lydia's death. It is dedicated to the memory of her son Vladimir, who died in the siege of Leningrad.

The crowned pig that adorns the title page of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* (reproduced on the back cover) is uncannily prophetic of a later satire. The authorship of the introductions is not stated. My thanks go to Rob Mackenzie for translating the introductions, and to Elaine Mencher for showing me T. F. Powys's letter to Charles Prentice.

26/IV – 27

Dear Sir,

I send you a copy of my translation of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* – in Russian "Kumiri Mistera Taskera". Please let me know if you have got my letter and the book.

I shall be also very glad to obtain your other novels.

Yours very sincerely,
Lydia Slonimsky

My address: Leningrad, Petrovskii Ostr., Petrovskii pr. d.2 kv. 8, Lidia Leonidovna Slonimskaya

20/V – 27

Dear Sir,

Thank you very much for your kind letter and the sending of your other novels, which reached me quite safely yesterday.

I hope that the *Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo* [State Publishing House, *Gosizdat*] will not have any objections to the translation of them. In a fortnight I will let you know the results.

Yours very sincerely,
Lydia Slonimsky

30/VII – 27

Dear Sir,

I am very sorry that I could not let you know any news about your novels earlier, but I have got the answer from Moscow only now. I shall translate the *Mockery Gap*. *The Left Leg* is already translated and I shall try to get you a copy. For some reasons *Gosizdat* had found the other three novels not quite suitable for translation.

I should feel very obliged if you kindly let me know the meaning of the words "thik" and "wold". I must also know what is that "b... fisherman". I think that during the work I shall have other questions and I hope that you will be so kind as to answer them. The translation will be ready in the end of September.

The first edition of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* is already out of print and in autumn will probably come out the second. I like your novels very much and it is a great pleasure for me to translate them. I should be very very glad to obtain the photograph of the author. I am very sorry that I write in English so badly and that I cannot tell you all what I feel and think about your novels.

Yours very sincerely,
Lydia Slonimsky

21/I – 29

Dear Sir,

I learned about the apparition of your new novels. Perhaps you will be so kind as to send me a copy of them. I will be so much obliged to you for them. A year ago I had sent you by post my translation of *Mockery Gap* but I had no answer, though I

expected that it had reached you safely. I hope that your new novels thanks to their subject would also suit for translation into Russian.

With kind regards and best wishes,
Yours very sincerely,
Lydia Slonimsky

12/IV – 29

Dear Sir,

Please excuse the delay in answering your letter, but my child had been very ill and I had no time and no powers to write any letters.

The copy of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* I had got very long ago and sent you my thanks for it. But it could not be accepted to translation into Russian not of my fault. The first editions of *Mr. Tasker's Gods* and of *Mr Caddy's Ducks* [*Mockery Gap*] were entirely sold, but the lack of paper stopped the second. Your books are read here by advanced workers and by representatives of the intellectual class.

I hope that you will send me the fables as soon as possible and that they will suit for translation into Russian.

Please excuse my English. I know I write awfully. If you did a little understand Russian, I would write you many, many things.

With kind regards and best wishes,
Yours very sincerely,
Lydia Slonimsky

Please write to tell me if this reaches you.

Introduction to the Russian edition of Mr. Tasker's Gods, *translated by L. L. Slonimskaya. Gosudarstvennoye Izdatelstvo* [*State Publishing House*], *Moscow and Leningrad, 1927.*

The famous English individualist Carlyle, discussing the concept of the "symbolic pig" in one of his books, defines the sense of ownership as follows: "Everything that you can take without risk of being hanged is yours".

This pitiless and brutal moral principle, so characteristic of the upper and petty bourgeoisie during the early period of their enrichment — which is known as primary accumulation — forms an inseparable part of this book, which might be called a "book of petty-bourgeois hypocrisy".

In this book, everything is forbidden and everything permitted. Everything is forbidden to the poor, for poverty is a vice and a crime, and even the church itself thinks nothing of setting the poor man outside the law. On the other hand, everything is permitted for the rich and those who are amassing wealth, since social hypocrisy always manages to cast a veil over crimes committed for money or justified by money.

The growth of the English petty bourgeoisie in its historical development was associated with a fierce religious struggle. The principle of free competition required freedom of religious conscience and, at its very start, this simultaneously overthrew both the spiritual power of the old dogmatic Anglican Church and the power of

monarchic absolutism. Thus, the English bourgeois revolution of the 17th century was religious in nature, and the English bourgeoisie has retained to this day strong, deep "Christian" traditions.

This "Christianity", which is extremely artificial in construction and historical in its organization, in fact boils down to Carlyle's "cult of the pig". And, in actual fact, "Mr. Tasker's Gods" typifies its moral code.

The present book may, with full justification, be ascribed to a genre of literature that succeeds in both painful castigation and courageous exposure.

It depicts for us in grim hues the provincial England of the present day, whose "modernity" is reflected only in the fact that its priests and doctors now use cars and motorcycles to travel about. Provincial England is still shrouded in the impenetrable gloom of class life and class contradictions. There, the cult of the symbolic pig keeps man at the level of a self-satisfied animal, differing from his four-footed fellows only in that he is organised, recognises the need for hygiene, and loves life's comforts. If "old" England had nothing besides this petty bourgeoisie, one might say that its historical cycle was completed, and that Mr. Tasker, who is as fat and rosy as his beloved idols, might die in peace on his dung heap — the pile of money that he has accumulated.

England (and, all the more, humanity) has nothing to expect from this class. Fortunately, it is not this class — and the awareness of this should help the reader overcome the feelings of melancholy and pessimism that this book may generate in him — it is not this class that will decide the fate of its country and of the world as a whole. In England, millions of other people also live, belonging to a different race, and belonging to a different class that does not pay homage to the symbolic pig. Two or three hours' journey from Mr. Tasker's farm, one will find coalmines. There, luckily for the future of mankind, live and work the mighty tribe of the English mineworkers ...

Introduction to the Russian edition of T. F. Powys's Mr Caddy's Ducks [Mockery Gap], *translated by L. L. Slonimskaya. Biblioteka Vsemirnoy Literatury* [*Library of World Literature*]. *Leningrad, 1928.*

Powys's book *Mr. Caddy's Ducks* is a grotesque work that ridicules the petty-bourgeois atmosphere of the English village. It is not a novel in the generally accepted sense of the word — it contains no heroes, but merely depicts the social environment: petty people, trivial interests, primitive needs, shallow passions. Naturally, for such a book the author did not need accurately drawn characters, — it was sufficient for him to provide masks for the various deformities found in life, highlighting one main feature of each such mask.

For example, Mrs Pink is described with emphasis on her tiny nose, which was so small that she found it difficult to find when she wanted to blow her nose, while the beard of the well-to-do farmer Mr. Cheney is so long that "he would button it into his

coat". Similarly, in the mental organisation of his characters Powys sharply emphasizes one particular quality, required not so much to define the character of the person in question, as to produce a particular composed picture of English village life.

The most important event in the village of Mockery Gap is the quarrel between the Prings and the Pottles. Each of the warring parties has her own pedestal, from which she haughtily gazes down on her opponent: In the case of Mrs Pottle, this is her marble clock, while for Mrs Pring, it is her lame cow and black hens.

The village aristocracy consists of the Pinks and the Pattimores. The dim-witted Mr. Pink is a proponent of lofty ideas of universal forgiveness, whereas Miss Pink is the personification of superstitious terror. Vicar Pattimore is a man of ambition, who by means of his sermons and by denying his wife conjugal affections forges his way ahead towards a deanery. His wife is faint with longing for "sinful love" and motherhood. In this dismal society, each person is assessed not by his or her actual qualities, but by their imagined capabilities. Mr. Pring gains honour for himself as a trustworthy postman, Mr. Gulliver wins renown as a famous traveller merely because of his surname, while Mrs Topple is considered to be a good children's governess, whereas in actual fact she is capable only of caring for her bad leg. The lazy cynic Mr. Caddy, who blabs out the village's "secrets of the bedchamber" to his ducks, is held in high regard by his neighbours as a wise man and an expert on the sea, of which they are so afraid that they do not even venture to take a stroll along its shore.

The rocky island of the Blind Cow serves as a symbol of this dismal life. It is named after a real blind cow that drowned in the sea because it could not distinguish seawater from fresh, nor the deep sea from a shallow stream. The people of Mockery Gap also live like the blind, until they meet senseless deaths at sea, on the roads, or in their own beds. The "clever people" are no better than them, and appear in this small corner of the world to amuse themselves and satisfy their petty ambitions. For example, the rich farmer Mr. Roddy, on finding some of the small white shells that cover all the surrounding shores in such profusion, calls them "Roddites," and thereby makes a name for himself. Using printed leaflets, he delivers lectures on geology, while Mr. James Tarr regales his audiences with scientific papers on the number of seats in the village church and how many bells there are in its tower. In passing, he manages to mystify the dim-witted inhabitants of Mockery Gap: He inspires Miss Pink with the fear that some monster will appear out of the sea; in Mrs Topple he arouses an overwhelming desire to find a healing four-leafed clover; he persuades Mrs. Moggs of the need to acquire a pair of white mice, and he orders the crowd of children, who in the book perform the role of the chorus of antiquity, to wait for the arrival of the mysterious "Nellie bird".

The absence of a main character also accounts for the novel's lack of a plot. Against the general background, individual masks, conversations and feelings briefly appear and, having momentarily held the reader's attention, then disappear. Taken together, all this creates a picture of dull, meaningless life that is neither enlightened

by a single communal idea, nor given colour by any noble impulse. Small-minded love of self, sordid curiosity, envy, primitive sexual instincts, stupid swagger and self-conceit, and superstitious terrors — this is all that the author found in the lives of the villagers of Mockery Gap.

It is useful for our reader to learn what kind of stagnant swamp stench lingers in the "backwaters" of that country, in which wealth and culture, powerful technology and world trade are used not to serve the broad masses of the people, but to increase the power of a small handful of capitalists bent on enriching themselves.

Introduction by John Cowper Powys to T. F. Powys's The Soliloquy of a Hermit

(New York Arnold Shaw, 1916)

Autograph manuscript in the hand of John Cowper Powys: a draft of an unused introduction to TFP's The Soliloquy of a Hermit. *It is incomplete, either through loss of last section, or because it was abandoned. Transcribed by J. Lawrence Mitchell, April 14 1988, from ms. in Berg Collection NYPL.*

Never was I in a more difficult position.

I know a little of the great American Public, and I know—most dear and equivocal brother—a little of you, but how I am to perform the duty of bringing these opposite spheres of knowledge into relation with one another is more than I can tell.

The obvious role of a door-keeper to open the door, and to do so without forwardness or fuss;—to open the door and get discretely [*sic*] out of the way—This at least I hope I can accomplish—And yet there are certain things, certain swiftly insinuated introductory warnings, that I would like to breathe into the ears of this portentous Public. This Public whose Hospitable House of Thought you are disposed to enter, with *your strange little book.*

I should like to warn them that the *words of Hermits* should be heard with ears purged of grosser and more aggressive sounds; that they had best be listened to when the house is hushed at midnight; or better still, when the very streets are silent, in the early hours of the dark dawn.

It is perhaps hardly in my own interest[ed] that I thus convey to them the appropriate hour for receiving you; the hour when the low-voiced oracular message you bring has its best chance of obtaining a response. For what will become of me, of me and my shameless rhetoric, when once this ambiguous whisper of yours has found a lodgement in their clear brain? Perhaps you do not remember that particular September day, when, between the burned-up furze and the cliff's edge, amid the fluttering of those curious butterflies, which—to show off my knowledge—I named

for you as "grey-eyed Underwings". I tried to put into words my own poor reaction to your Delphic murmurs? You said afterwards—let me remind [you] of that at least—that I had indicated a profound sense of discomfort under those whimsical revelations.

Well! so perhaps I did—it is always a little irritating to a man of letters to be reminded of his end. It is more than irritating when such a reminder is brought to one by a near relative. Like that old Shakespearean rascal on his death bed, we public orators are loth to cry out "God! God! God!" till our fingers begin their last fumbling.

Nor was it only—only,—I suspect—the whisper by the unwelcome "Veracities", as that spoil-sport Carlyle used to call them, which then beset me with a disagreeable [*sic*] shock. You are—after all, you know, my younger brother. You are indeed the eternal *third* brother of the Fairy stories; the one born with a "caul",—whatever that may be,—and the one who, in the end, gets the Princess.

I don't think you will ever get a Princess—I should be extremely disturbed if you did. But the mere fact that you were born—as I have said—is a sufficient reason for me to find it not altogether agreeable when you thus launch out on a way of thought so singular, so eccentric, so elusive,—so contrary to the sound Horatian maxims, which, as becomes one who formerly knew Latin, I have felt it my duty to pour into your ears.

The unfortunate thing is that this American Public is already tinged in spite of its iron and steel, with a certain inveterate mysticism. I spend my days and my nights see[?k]ing to counteract this weakness, and uphold the classical standards of Ovid and Voltaire.

And here you come—you *third brother* of the fairy stories—and begin countermining my mines. It is beside the point to remark that we are both of us, mere little infinitesimal drops in the great Bucket—or Melting Pot, if you will,—of American ideas. You were always more prone than I to the weakness of humility—But even my vanity is ready to admit that neither your amazing advocacy of Galilean principles nor my elaborate reversions to Argos and Thebes are likely to delay for one single second the great tide of New York's contemptuous and self-sufficient life. But though this is true, there are, you must understand, a few ill-fated persons, mostly extremely young or extremely old, who have been persuaded to follow me into the Garden of Epicurus—

Now I must beg and implore you, as you pick your way among the crowd, to refrain from disturbing the naïve Attic faith of these, my neophytes in Common Sense!

It is distressing to me to think of their unclouded brains—from which the demons have been driven.

Wolf Solent—*a Penguinry*

Having just acquired my fifth different Penguin printing of *Wolf Solent,* I was struck by the variety of presentation. In these five paperback volumes there are four different cover pictures in volumes belonging to three differently named series, with three ISBNs, in two different sizes. The first edition of *Wolf Solent* appeared in 1929; it was reprinted in 1961 by Macdonald with a new Preface by JCP, probably the last writing by him for publication during his lifetime.

The text was reset by Penguin, including JCP's Preface; this text was then reprinted unaltered, as far as I can tell, until the latest reprint of 2000 in which the type is slightly enlarged and the whole is enhanced with a new Introduction by A. N. Wilson. Title pages vary slightly, but it is the presentation to the outside viewer which is most intriguing.

I have listed the editions in the order in which these particular copies were produced, with help from a new work of reference, *The Penguin Companion*, revised edition compiled by Martin Yates (Penguin Collectors' Society, 2006). (Measurements are to the nearest eighth of an inch; covers are all reduced to 43% of original).

If anyone comes across other versions of the cover I would like to hear of them.

1 dated 1964, 7⅛ x 4⅜ in, with detail of 'Landscape of the Vernal Equinox' by Paul Nash (collection, Lady Lane) — 'Penguin Modern Classics', ref 2182, no ISBN (the first Penguin printing), 10*s* 6*d*

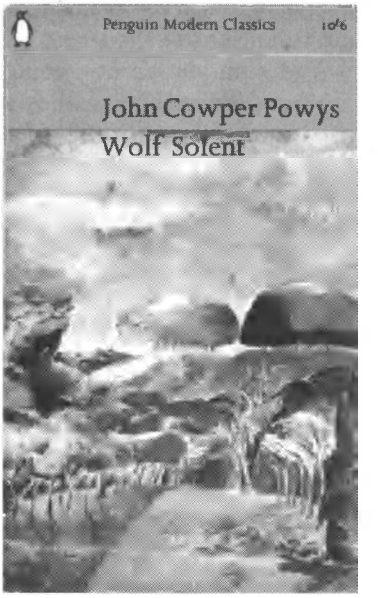
2 'reprinted 1976', 7⅛ x 4⅜ in, with 'Entrance to a Lane' by Graham Sutherland (Tate Gallery) in panel under title — 'Penguin Modern Classics', ISBN 0 14 00.2182 5, £1.25

3 'reprinted 1976, 1978, 1982', 7¾ x 5⅛ in, with detail from 'Winter Scene' by John Nash (Dundee Museums & Art Galleries) in panel under title — 'Penguin Modern Classics', ISBN 0 14 00.2182 5, £3.50

4 dated 1964, shown as 6th printing but actual date not shewn; not before 1990 as included in series launched in 1990 (see Yates, 151), 7¾ x 5⅛ in, with Sutherland's 'Entrance to a Lane' over whole of cover with laid-on title panel — 'Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics', ISBN 0-14-018174-1, £7.99

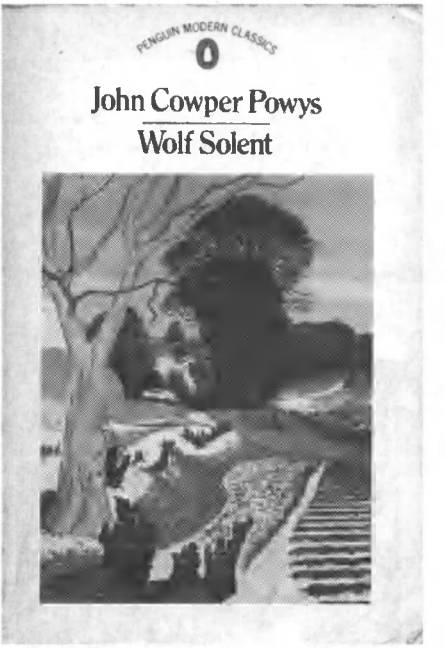
5 dated 2000, 'reprinted with new introduction in Penguin Classics', 7¾ x 5 in, with 'Dandelions' by Simon Palmer (private collection) full width over bottom title panel, with Introduction by A. N. Wilson — 'Penguin Classics', in format with silver covers described by Yates (93) as 'Penguin Modern Classics, Second Series', ISBN 0-14-118399-3, £9.99

Stephen Powys Marks



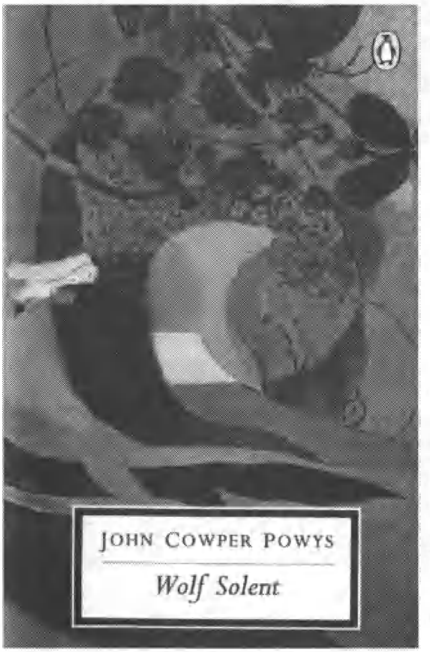
Cover 1.

Cover 2.



Cover 3.

Cover 4.



Cover 5.

Clockwise from top left*Rob Timlin reading on Burpham Down walk*waiting to set off: Honour Timlin, Penelope Shuttle, Marcella Henderson-Peal, Rob Timlin*a full house for "The Sin-Eater"*Colin Thomas, John Gray*David Hill, Anna Pawelko, Louise de Bruin, Jacqueline Peltier*John Hodgson, Patricia Dawson*Belinda Humfrey, Susan Rands, Marcella Henderson-Peal*Tordis Marks, Henning Ahrens, Isabel Kupski