

Editorial

A lot to fit in this *Newsletter*—the Conference (Llangollen III), publication of Morine Krissdóttir's long-deferred Life of JCP, *Descents of Memory*, and of the newly edited Porius, and tributes to departed members and friends: Roland Mathias, Peter Christensen, Philip Callow, and in particular Sven Erik Täckmark, doyen of the Swedish JCP Society.

Some extensions to the last *Newsletter*: an extract from Will Durant's 'dithyrambic' panegyric on JCP and *The Meaning of Culture* illustrates Jacqueline Peltier's account of Will and Ariel Durant. The diary of Katie Powys, this time the only actual Powys voice, relates to her writing of *The Blackthorn Winter*, reviewed last time. Walt Whitman, a talisman to Katie, crops up in several contexts. In the next *Newsletter* we hope to expand on the discussion begun at the Conference on JCP's poem "The Ridge". If anyone would like to contribute views on the poem (in 500 words or so) please send them.

Subscriptions

A **reminder** for those who pay by cheque :: please turn to page 16.

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Launch of Descents of Memory

Morine Krissdóttir's *Descents of Memory, The Life of John Cowper Powys*, was published on 8th October, on what would have been JCP's 135th birthday, and the following day it was launched with a reading, as part of the Dorset County Museum's annual programme of literary lectures. The audience included members of the Museum's Society, with others from the Sylvia Townsend Warner and Powys societies, in the exhibition room currently showing John Hubbard's atmospheric near-abstract landscapes. Tea and wine were offered, along with copies of *Descents* and the new edition of *Porius* (two representatives of their publisher Duckworth were also there). Morine gave supper afterwards in her new home at Charlton Down.

Judy Lindsay, Director of the DCM, introduced the event. John Hodgson, who had been summoned to Kosovo by the United Nations (for whom he works as a translator), sent a welcoming letter. Neil Curry, one of the readers, was unfortunately in hospital, following an accident on the Kimmeridge Rocks, but the reading went ahead with Roger Peers (a former DCM director) as JCP, Morine as Phyllis and John Parkinson-Hardman as stand-in narrator.

Instead of the programmed *Ghosts on the Roof* (an arrangement from the 1939 diary, which the Powys Society will recall from the 1995 conference) they read more appropriately, and more cheerfully, excerpts from the 'Dorset Year', 1934-5, which Krissdóttir and Peers made into the magnificent coffee-table illustrated book published by the Powys Press in 1998. This reading gave a lively and often funny range over Powys life, from the discomforts of 'Rat's Barn' to the delights of Dorchester and Weymouth, ruinous trouble with libel cases to difficulties of lighting coal fires, walks in the fields around, the excavations at Maiden Castle, and views on *The Art of Happiness*. All these will be reappraised in the new biography, whose title was suggested by a poetic note made by the extremely old Powys lying in Blaenau Ffestiniog, merging the picture of Snowdonia opposite his sofa with 'nursery memories' of his parents, into a 'Weymouth Mountain of Snow ... Under which deep Descents/ Went down inviting visitation'.

KK

A review by Glen Cavaliero is on page 33.



River Dee at Llangar.

The Conference Llangollen 2007: “Real Reality”

This time, in contrast to our last two sunny Augusts there, Llangollen was truly Cimmerian – mist and rain swirling at intervals, Dinas Brân appearing and disappearing – not windy however and quite warm, no deterrent to walkers. A record 60-plus people came. The labyrinthine Hand Hotel was comfortable as ever, efficiently run by what seemed a handful of young people. The food excellent. The bar not exactly peaceful in the evenings but offering an appropriate experience of Welsh life in song. The town agreeable with its unequalled souvenir shops. Members followed JCP’s trails up the hills and by the river at Corwen, and enjoyed Llangollen’s prime sights, the house of the Ladies, Valle Crucis, and the castle high above. ‘Real Reality’ was subject to wide interpretation – from the reality of manuscripts to ‘domestic woodwork’, phenomenology and the poetic image. The Bookshop was exceptionally well stocked and well attended.

The news that **Roland Mathias** had died brought to mind earlier days in the Society with its strong Anglo-Welsh links.



The busy book room.



The attentive audience.

Peter Foss on the first evening succeeded in presenting bibliography as a fascinating and lively activity. ‘**This Reckless Enterprise**’ (as Alyse Gregory described it) was introduced by Louise de Bruin, reminding us of Peter’s devoted scholarship and his other talents as historian, poet and painter, and of his key role in preserving the continuity of the Society (taking on the job of Secretary at a difficult time), and his support to herself.

PF began by tributes to and anecdotes about his distinguished predecessors in the field – Lloyd Siberell of Cincinnati making the first LIP checklist for Louis Wilkinson’s *Welsh Ambassadors* (1936); the helpfulness of Melvon Ankeny, also in Ohio; E. E. Bissell and his indispensable archive, whose almost fortuitous legacy to



Peter Foss.

The Powys Society PF witnessed, and Margaret Eaton, happily with us at the Conference, who started the enterprise from her London bookshop in the 1970s–80s, passing it on to PF as her successor. Examples were given of the difficulties entailed – multi-titled pieces, misleading catalogue entries – with some puzzles still unsolved (‘Shadowlands’ on Ernest Dowson?); and speculation on the reasons for Llewelyn’s reputation being higher in America than in England, receiving wildly different reviews. Peter Foss’s ‘handsome and definitive’ *Bibliography* published by

the British Library gives the full story with many illustrations (some of these – covers with very 1930-ish nudes – are also in Larry Mitchell’s review in the 2007 *Journal*).

★ ★ ★ ★

Harald Fawkner’s talk on Saturday morning, ‘The Indifference of Nature – Realness in *A Glastonbury Romance*’, was, he said (referring to Sonia’s introduction) likely to ‘undermine assumptions’, since his outlook was now coloured by the ‘reformed’ Christianity of certain Welsh and Scottish thinkers, drawing on the early Puritan enthusiasts (‘most marvellous of revolutionaries’) in opposition to Swedish Lutheranism. He examined one chapter of *Glastonbury*, ‘The Christening’, in which negative, depraved, trivial, self-pitying, unscrupulous, ‘goofy’ and ‘trashy’ human elements are collected in sterile egotism (rejecting ‘christening’ – sanctifying) in contrast to the reality of ordinary domestic objects – ‘domestic woodwork’: the reassuring, wholesome and sane inanimate [*‘differently animate’?* KK] world of cups, doorways, boots, and boiled eggs (where christening is not needed).

HF developed this in the light of JCP’s double vision that pervades the strata of the novel, both ‘sanctifying’ places and things through magic and ritual, and presenting things (perhaps even more intensely) not only in

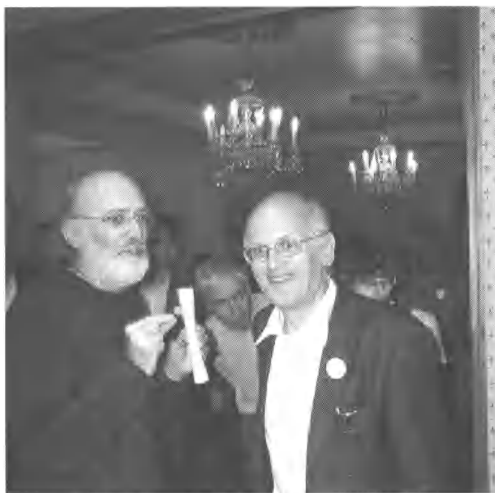


Sonia Lewis with Harald Fawkner.

relation to the characters but ‘as they are’, with sanctity (and pleasure, and humour) in the commonplace.

In discussion various paths were indicated, such as to what extent JCP makes ‘moral’ judgments in his novels, and the thread of ‘ordinary’ versus ‘special’ that runs through religion and art.

Tim Hyman introducing **Charles Lock** recalled his hundreds of essays, not all ‘academic’, on wide-ranging interests (on London, Klee, Bakhtin, Byzantium, among many) and his extensive research on JCP. This talk was on the influence, or shared elements (shared ‘realities’), of **JCP in the poems of Roy Fisher**, one of tonight’s readers.



Richard Maxwell with Charles Lock.

Fisher is one of those poets ‘famous for being unknown’. The rigorous critic Donald Davie placed him on a ‘watershed’ of modern British poetry, among others such as David Jones, Basil Bunting, and Hugh MacDiarmid – all of these being non-metropolitan (Fisher writes about Birmingham) and suffering from the ‘provincial’ slur (as in a way did the Powyses). CL quoted William Carlos Williams, often compared with Fisher: ‘I want to write a poem/ that you will understand.’

With Fisher as with JCP, a pool *is itself*, like ‘the round grey nondescript mere/ the author had left undisturbed/ right through the action’ in Fisher’s ‘Dream of a suppressed/ novel by John Cowper Powys’. ‘The nondescript silently fights for life.’ ‘Nondescript – indescribable. Dull – sublime’. Like Powys, Fisher exploits non-fulfilment: ‘Words most alive when least purposeful’. ‘Thinking straight shortens the temper’. He is a poet of the phrase, and the phrase has no finite meaning. Fisher’s poems are printed in no fixed order, thus avoiding a ‘career’. An analogy could be made with the vision of the monster in *Atlantis*, of ‘landscape upon landscape superimposed’ ...

John Hodgson introduced the evening’s **reading by two poets** who admire JCP and, like him, deal in transformations of the ordinary. **Roy Fisher** began with poems about poems, his jokey (or not so jokey) parody of ‘mission statements’ to the consumer, ‘The Poetry Promise’ (‘all poems are written in guidelines’), and ‘The long and the short of it’ (bits of poems ‘jumbled ... stuck as in a frying pan’). Among others he read the JCP-inspired ‘Masterpieces in my sleep’; ‘Staffordshire Red’ (the

landscape around Keele university, its 'nondescript clefts' illuminated); others from 'The Furnace' (Birmingham transfigured); and an extension of his other role as a jazz pianist ('clanging along in A flat playing fourths – I just wrote it down'). [*]

Penelope Shuttle began by reading 'In a Hotel Writing Room', JCP's least old-fashioned poem, chosen by Larkin for his *Twentieth-Century Verse* anthology. PS's discovery of JCP began with *Wolf Solent* – Wolf walking through fields at night – 'he was a leaf among leaves' – leading to her 'Voice of a Green Man' and other leaf-related titles: 'Verdant', 'A leaf out of his book', 'Herbal Warfare'. She read 'In the Pharmacy' by Peter Redgrove (the Wood Leopard moth 'built like a fat rabbit with



Penelope Shuttle and Roy Fisher

wings'); her own 'Redgrove's Wife' (about things she was not); 'In the Kitchen' (the redemptive energy of domestic objects, in the dark time of Redgrove's illness); 'In Cornish' (she lives in Falmouth); and the post-official 'found poem', 'Things You Can't Post' ('*Filth*').

Sunday morning brought a bracing French analysis, 'Encroaching Fields in *Weymouth Sands*'. **Florence Marie-Laverrou** (introduced by Jacqueline Peltier) is senior lecturer in the English department at the university of Pau in south-west France; her thesis was on *Wolf Solent*; and she has contributed papers to the periodical

* Fisher's poem beginning 'Masterpieces in my sleep. A dream of a suppressed/ novel by John Cowper Powys' is printed in *The Powys Review* 14 (1984). Links with JCP are pursued in Jeremy Hooker's 1986 review of Fisher's long poem 'A Furnace' in *The Powys Review* 19 – Fisher's energy of imagination, and 'sharp sense of the connection between outer and inner worlds'. 'A Furnace' quotes and refers to JCP, and in the dedication Fisher calls the poem 'an homage, from a temperament very different from his, to the profound, heterodox, and consistent vision of John Cowper Powys.' *Review* 23 (1989) has a review by Douglas Houston of a later Fisher collection ('provocative and stimulating ... able to delight and to irritate, to move and occasionally to baffle ...'), singling out 'Masterpieces in my sleep' as an example of Fisher's quirky humour, 'a modest tour de force'.

Etudes Britanniques Contemporaines dealing with JCP in relation to Rabelais, Bakhtin and Dorothy Richardson.

Introducing herself, FML expressed her pleasure at speaking to people familiar with Powys, with the chance to extend and eliminate frontiers. As a phenomenologist,

her talk sprang from the works and ideas of Maurice **Merleau-Ponty** (1908–61), whose *The Visible and Invisible* deals with the interpenetrations of corporeal (i.e. all) consciousness and forms of communication – the exchange of the seer with the seen, the toucher with the thing touched, the Self with the Other – the intersecting ‘fields’ of the various characters of the novel. Landscape is a reality inscribed on by points of view. Her examples concerned chiefly the ‘outsiders’ Larry Zed and Sylvanus Cobbold, whose dislike of his



*Jacqueline Peltier with
Florence Marie-Laverrou*

own bodily image prompts him to other forms of communication and exploration and identification, from cosmic mystery (bypassing ‘western’ subjectivity) to vicarious life in the touch of molehills, pebbles and sand. Boundaries are interlocked; relative not absolute. In Powys’s impartial narration, the characters and their surroundings are as much passive as active.

As has happened at conferences before, time ran short on the last morning. The Hand Hotel’s princely roast lunch, followed by early departures, curtailed discussion and also the promised picture auction (to be postponed).

The AGM was followed by a panel of three outlining their different approaches to JCP’s enigmatic long poem ‘**The Ridge**’, written in Corwen probably about 1952 when he was 80. (Two of the panellists had just walked the actual ridge of the Berwyns behind JCP’s home, as described in the poem. *see p. 8*)

Kieran McCann, taking up Wilson Knight’s suggestion that the Ridge represents Death, reminded us that to a walker every ridge reveals others. He did not think actual death was important to JCP, as it was not for the Epicureans: (we pass from void to void, punctuated by the life-forms we create). Satisfaction is in the living *process*: ‘The Ridge’ describes the process and its sensations, rather than a goal. JCP’s son Littleton described his father as rock-like, crying out that love laughs at death. JCP’s aim, or realization, was of *merging*, dissolving his self into the non-human world. KM sees the poem as a return to the primitive, the howl of a caveman. [**]

John Dunn sees the poem filled with puzzles, a polyphony of ideas – all JCP is there. JCP climbs in solitude. ‘Love’ – a Muse ‘born of an ash root’ – he takes to refer to Frances, thought to have influenced *The Complex Vision* which ends with a Utopia,

** JCP at the end of *Autobiography* calls himself ‘a man of the wind’, unlike *his* rock-like father.

a golden age (as the larch needles are golden, and ash roots give ‘honey sap’). The ‘unnatural law’ of ‘God’ may end; a sword is plunged into the clouds gathered by Zeus. The ‘horror within’, and fragments of the madness of Lear and Hamlet, point to tragedy. The end of the poem is dark, the conclusion not to be revealed.

Cicely Hill finds conclusions, or solutions, and other Ridges, in other JCP writings both earlier and later. Her view of the poem will appear in a future *Newsletter*, with we hope **other comments on ‘The Ridge’**. Editor would be glad to receive **contributions from anyone interested**.

KK

On the Ridge

JCP to Marian Powys Grey, 6 May 1951

... But just as I was turning to descend being content to be hearing curlews and cuckoos in the mist I was seized by a psychic compulsion which said: “Go to the sheepfold (at the final turn S.W. towards Liberty Hall) where at a stone standing-desk for the larger stones of its walls are smooth and flat – where the first sentence, the first page of Porius was written in 1942 Jan 18 nearly ten years ago! Well! at the Druid Stone a “Compulsion” made me, tho’ tired, ascend the Purgatorial Mount where I reached the Stone Desk of Jack the Talker the Preacher the Verbose One the Arch-Welsh Humbug. And when I got home cocksure certain I wd. find Porius what did I find? Nothing at all but an “ad” from Swan & Edgar Aunt Kate’s favourite shop!!! But at Noon the Book came: A Perfect Page-Proof !!!!



Kieran McCann, John Hodgson and John Dunn at the Stone Desk (Chris Thomas).

Honeymoon at the Hand Hotel

It seems to be a commonplace that new visitors to the Conference find everyone they meet there warm and friendly. I am no exception; I was overwhelmed by so many compatible presences. Having come to JCP many years ago as an eccentric and a misfit (and found solace there) it was surpassing strange (though not as purely disturbing as once it would have been) to be in such a large body of apparently sane people. As a result I forgot who I was (a ‘man at odds with the *whirled*’) and nearly relaxed into believing that ‘lite’ was almost possible. Consequently I fell gratefully upon any frictions (‘creative tensions’) in order to feel more real. ‘Placation of the magnates’ must stop somewhere short of suicide.*

Harald Fawkner, whom I came particularly to see (along with cheeky Charles Lock and the delightful Roy Fisher) did not disappoint with his prickly presence, stabbing ideas, and mysterious disappearance immediately after his missive (but not before very kindly signing my copy of his brilliant *Ecstatic World of JCP*.) During his talk he teased us with hints as to his new direction by mentioning one of Cromwell’s preachers, John Owen, and the important difference between Lutheran and Reform Protestantism. I look forward to his use of theology in interpreting JCP. In fact I detected interesting rifts around the relevance of Christianity to the Conference and I began to understand how the ructions of a few years ago could have occurred, given some of the strong personalities roaming around.

If I were to mention one of my interesting new acquaintances I would want to mention them all – what a disconcertingly wonderful experience! More of the same next year in Chichester and I’ll have to change my life-illusion; the relationship however, has only just begun ...

* ‘Love must stop somewhere short of suicide’ – from the film *Dodsworth* with Walter Huston. (TD)

Trevor D. Davies

Impressions

If I’m to put down in a few words my impressions of the first Powys Conference I’ve attended in my life, I am of course compelled to leave out what Prof. Charles Lock, elaborating on the work of Roy Fisher, ‘described’ as ‘non-descript’, the thing in an event that is beyond any actual description, and communicable exclusively by means of the poetical. So of necessity I limit myself to noting the describable and altogether ‘descript’ impressions that I am however so happy at being privileged to have been able to gather during my stay in magical Llangollen.

The first group of these impressions has certainly to do with the people by whom I found myself surrounded, persons so interesting and different – both from one another and from the rest of the world – and so kind; and, what struck me most perhaps, so passionately dedicated to their extraordinary task(s) of being the

‘mediums’ for the multiple messages of the admired authors. And I admit that I felt myself, because of my quite scarce acquaintance with the work of John Cowper Powys, and no acquaintance at all with that of the other brothers, as a child among grown-ups – from whom I have so much to learn!

And some of these persons gave some really wonderful lectures. And I really could not say which one I appreciated most. Beginning with the first, I was fascinated by the quantity and quality of the work invested in making such a comprehensive bibliography of Llewelyn Powys by Peter Foss, and above all by his ability to give such an interesting lecture upon a subject of such specialised scope and interest (especially for someone like me, who is totally ignorant of Llewelyn’s work). The following day’s lecture given by Harald Fawkner I found more than interesting: the originality of Fawkner’s reading of JCP struck me as something fresh and experimental in the best sense of the word, opening a potentially very inspiring field of interpretation, although I regret that I wasn’t able to put to him afterwards the many questions with which I was left. As for the following lecture by Charles Lock upon ‘John Cowper Powys and Roy Fisher’, I was completely charmed by the communicative and humorous erudition displayed by the respected professor, as well as by his underlying knowledge of the minutiae of English Literature and of the recondite processes of Literature itself. The last day’s lecture by Florence Marie-Laverrou on *Weymouth Sands* through the prism of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology was as original as Fawkner’s, full of fresh *aperçus* to be studied, and I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the lecturer for succeeding so admirably in giving such a complicated lecture in a foreign language, implying a terminology and a subsequent ‘manner of thought’ that are so intrinsically French. *Chapeau!*

I regret however very much that it was all over so soon, and in so abrupt a manner. For I found the Sunday panel discussion, about JCP’s mysterious poem, barely started when already finished, so very intriguing that when Cicely Hill was obliged to stop in the middle of her sagacious exposition, after the no less penetrating reflections of Kieran McCann and John Dunn, I felt not a little disappointed and sad. But most pleasurable events always end in such a way, said I to myself as a kind of necessary comfort.

The other group of my impressions relates of course to the scenery. But as it is hard in these matters to avoid the poetical, I’ll be very brief. I immensely enjoyed all the vistas, so new to me, feeling as if in some (quite Powysian) fairy-tale. I took some pleasant walks along the ‘firm, un-muddy, pebbly channel’ of the mythical Dee, and on Saturday I climbed, menacing weather notwithstanding, up to Dinas Brân, where, among the dark stones and surrounded by all the possible and impossible nuances of green and under the gusts of humid wind ‘coming from the regions unknown’, I hope I caught something of the spirit of the place that so inspired the greatest novelist of our time. Last but not least, I was very happy to find in the book sale some of his books that I was vainly searching for, and that I very much doubt I could have found elsewhere.

All in all, I'm so very grateful for having been able to experience all these beautiful and inspiring moments. Above all I'm infinitely grateful to John Hodgson for his more than kind invitation, which made all of this possible – and which, as it is, proved to be a real *initiation* as well.

Marko Gregorić
Zagreb, Croatia

The Powys Society Annual General Meeting
19th August 2007, at The Hand Hotel, Llangollen

MINUTES

Present John Hodgson (Chairman), Peter Lazare (Hon. Secretary), Michael French (Hon. Treasurer); Committee members, Peter Foss, David Goodway, Tim Hyman, Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter* Editor), Anna Pawelko; and some 45 other members and guests of the Society.

Apologies were received from Glen Cavaliero (President), David Gervais, Jeff Kwintner, Tony Atmore, Tricia Rhodes, and Herbert Williams.

Minutes of the 2006 AGM were approved.

The Secretary said that a **list of members** was in preparation: did members want this in the *Newsletter*? This was approved

The Treasurer's Report as published in NL61 was approved. We need initiatives for increasing membership, and (as we have funds) proposals for publications.

Auditor Stephen Allen was thanked and his re-appointment of Stephen Allen was approved.

Chairman's Report for 2006–7, as printed in *Newsletter* 61, was approved.

For the **Conference 2008** the Society will return to **Chichester**.

The Chairman said that a **meeting** had been arranged in Hampstead for **Saturday 24th November**. Morine Krissdóttir had agreed to speak on her JCP biography. We hoped also to arrange **another Powys Day in Dorchester** in the Dorset County Museum in May, and possibly another meeting in East Anglia.

Richard Graves's increased business workload meant that he could not devote as much time to the ever-increasing **Website** as he would have liked. Jacqueline and Max Peltier had agreed to take over the running of the site in addition to their own [*But see COMMITTEE NOTES (below)*]. **RPG** (our former Chairman) was thanked for all his work for the website and for the Society.

This year's **Journal** was the last to be edited by **Larry Mitchell** as he is retiring. Many thanks should go to him for his seven years' work. And welcome to **Richard Maxwell** who has agreed to take on the editorship, with **Charles Lock** as Reviews Editor. This maintains our American connexion – RM is a former Editor of *Powys Notes*, the journal of the Powys Society of North America.

Committee changes David Goodway, retiring, was thanked. John Dunn was approved as a new member of the Committee. [*The new Committee is shown on the inside cover.*]

Thanks were due once again to the **Conference Organisers, Peter Foss and Louise de Bruin**. Peter was retiring from this task, and **Anna Pawelko** would assist Louise de Bruin.

Any Other Business

The death of **Roland Mathias** was noted. **Belinda Humfrey** would write an appreciation of his writing on Powys and work on JCP in Wales. He was responsible for achieving the grants essential for her publications on Powys in the early days. Several members hoped for more **Welsh involvement**, especially in conferences at Llangollen. Advertising could be more effective in Anglo-Welsh magazines.

John Shapcott (Arnold Bennett Society) described the success of ‘themed’ conferences, and of inviting other members of the **Alliance of Literary Societies** (theirs was on writers and the First World War). People were interested in details of real life as reflected in writing. To attract more members you needed to widen the interest – ‘it pays not to be too precious’. Would this suit the Powyses?

Richard Maxwell was urged to revive links with American academics and universities with Powys archives.

A case was made by **Graham Carey** for inviting the Archbishop of Canterbury. While Rowan Williams is respected not only as a churchman, and all the Powyses have been seen as not incompatible with Christianity in its wider sense, most members would favour keeping the Conference secular.

The AGM closed at 12 Noon.

Raymond Cox has again made film records of the conference talks. DVDs are available from him (*see page 14*). Many thanks.

Committee Notes (a selection)

The Committee met before the Conference and on 13th October in London.

‡‡ At Llangollen on **17th August** John Hodgson read from the chapter on Dante’s *Inferno* in JCP’s *Pleasures of Literature* (p.268, ‘For devoted bookworms ... it is a comfort to remember ...’)

There had been no other nominations for the Committee, so John Dunn would join in place of David Goodway (retiring), and Tim Hyman become Vice-Chair in place of David Gervais, who steps down but remains on the Committee. Appreciation was shown for **David Goodway’s** valuable contributions to the Committee, also

as editor of *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*, and for his chapters on JCP and Anarchism in *Footsteps Beneath the Snow*.

The **Conference** was larger than usual, with over 65 attending. One speaker, Arjen Mulder, had been unable to come because of family illness. Charles Lock's talk would take his place.

All praise once more to the Hand Hotel which we hope will survive for future returns.

On **13th October** John Hodgson's text was from *The Art of Happiness*, the 'Works and Days' chapter (p.195): 'What everyone needs is some irresponsible undertaking ... some queer personal undertaking ...'

Interim meetings arranged so far are for **24th November 2007 in Hampstead**, with Morine Krissdóttir to talk about her book. On **10th May 2008** at Dorchester, another 'Powys Day', this time probably with one speaker and an organised walk. Sonia may suggest another meeting in East Anglia.

The **Treasurer** reported a £1000 + profit from the Conference. Discussion on how best to use this: on publications, on future Conferences (offering expenses to participants), on help with the Collection, or elsewhere.

The **Secretary** reported 6 **new members** since the Conference (Roy Fisher among them). The list of members' addresses still includes few e-mails. **Bill Keith's "companions"** to books by JCP can be printed by the Secretary on request. *See next page.*

As announced at the AGM, Richard Graves now has less time to devote to the **Website**. Jacqueline & Max Peltier are, however, for technical reasons unable after all to take it on. JH has obtained help to maintain it at present and long-term solutions are in progress.

Richard's lively presentation and his chairmanship will be fondly remembered.

The importance of the Website to recruitment was again emphasised.

Arrangements are in hand to help with putting the **Collection** catalogue-list on-line.

Peter Foss read his **publication proposal** for a Powys Album of photographs, on lines of those that have appeared about Benjamin Britten, Virginia Woolf, etc. This was approved. SPM thinks this could be a Powys Press book (like Mary Casey's diary), and will look into costs, aiming to break even. Other possibilities include the next Llewelyn diaries, for 1910-11 ('Diary of a Consumptive', much longer than those that have already appeared, a book rather than booklet); and Bill Keith's monograph on *Owen Glendower* (length of about half a *Journal*).

The **Handsombe Prize** is 'on hold' pending decisions on targets. David Goodway is researching.

Jeff Kwinter has decided to stand down from the Committee. We miss him but he will always be available for consultation, we trust.

KK

Full minutes can be seen on request to the Secretary.

'Companions' to books by John Cowper Powys

by W.J. Keith

If you would like to have any of the *Companions* printed you can of course write them on to a CD and take it to your local printers. Alternatively you can have this done by the Hon. Secretary. The cost varies according to the number of pages and the necessary postage. If you would like any *Companions* printed and wire-bound please send a cheque to Peter Lazare (address inside front cover).

Costs for printing, binding and postage are:

	UK	Europe	Elsewhere
<i>Owen Glendower</i>	£3.50	£5.50	£7.50
<i>Porius</i>	£3.50	£5.50	£7.50
<i>Glastonbury</i>	£3.70	£5.70	£7.70
<i>Autobiography</i>	£4.20	£6.20	£8.20

Please make cheques out to Peter Lazare, **not** the Powys Society.

For non-UK orders please pay in pounds sterling through a bank in the UK or by International Giro or by Sterling International Money Order.

Peter Lazare

Conference DVD

Copies are available of presentations from this year's Conference in Llangollen.

The DVD consists of 3 talks:

- Peter Foss: *This Reckless Enterprise* – The Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys
- Harald Fawkner: *The Indifference of Nature* – Realness in A Glastonbury Romance
- Florence-Catherine Marie-Laverrou: *Encroaching Fields* in Weymouth Sands

Also:

- Poetry readings from Roy Fisher and Penelope Shuttle.

(Alternatively, VHS copies are also available.)

The cost for one copy is £6, of which £2 will be donated to the Society.

If you would like a copy please send a cheque to:

Raymond Cox (**not** The Powys Society) at
4 Lulworth Close, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 2UJ

(for further information phone: 01384 566383; or e-mail raym-@tiscali.co.uk

Raymond Cox

Annual Subscriptions 2008

REMINDER to those who pay annually by cheque

The Treasurer would like to remind those members who pay annually by cheque (rather than by Standing Order) that their annual subscription for 2008 will be due on 1st January 2008.

The subscription remains at £18.50 for UK members and £22.00 (US\$45.00 or euro 33.00) for international members. If paying by cheque, please make the cheque payable to 'The Powys Society' and forward it to the Treasurer, Michael J. French, Wharfedale House, Castley, Otley, North Yorkshire LS21 2PY **by 1st January 2008**.

Rather than paying annually by cheque, UK members may prefer to change to paying their subscription by Standing Order: the Treasurer can provide the appropriate form or it can be downloaded from the Society's website:

[<www.powys-society.org>](http://www.powys-society.org)

International members may wish to be reminded of the details of the Society's bank account to enable them to make direct inter-bank transfers:

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The Society's BANK

Barclays Bank, High Street, Glastonbury, Somerset, UK

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If any member has any questions or difficulty about their annual subscription, do not hesitate to contact the Society's Treasurer, Michael French, at Wharfedale House, Castley, Otley, North Yorkshire LS21 2PY (Telephone 01423 734 874).



Llangar churchyard.

A Llewelyn Pilgrimage

When John Batten, then secretary of the Society, wrote a short piece in the *Newsletter* for April 1995 to enquire if any of the membership might be interested in gathering at *The Sailor's Return* on 13th August 'to drink to Llewelyn's memory' and speculated whether it might become an annual event, could he really have envisaged that – a dozen years later – such a meeting would still actually be happening every twelve months? It was in that same piece that John outlined what had prompted the idea by quoting from a bequest in Llewelyn's last will and testament dated 31st October 1933.

It is also my wish that the sum of £100 be invested in trust, and the yearly interest paid to the nearest public house to Chydyok, with the provision that on 13th August each year, the interest be spent in free drinks for anybody who enters the tavern after seven o'clock in the evening.

How much the intervention of the war occurring so soon after his death hindered any investment and implementation of a plan of that nature would be hard to determine but, needless to say, for those gathering at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries at midday on that date, the drinks have to be paid for.

Of course, celebrating Llewelyn's birthday by raising a glass in his honour is – in the case of most of those attending – merely the prelude to the main part of the programme. For them, a walk via Chydyok to the site on the cliff top of the memorial stone carved for him by Elizabeth Munz is *de rigueur*. (Coincidentally, John's



At Llewelyn's stone

back row from left to right *Anna and Pam Gillingham, Honour and Rob Timlin, Linda Goldsmith, Neil and Jason Lee, Paul Gillingham and Chris Gostick;*
around the stone *Marie and Jed Redman with their dog and Rosemary Dickens.*

(photo, Rosemary Dickens)

original suggestion followed extensive discussion in the previous four *Newsletters* about the inscription on the stone.) Nevertheless, what every walker wonders beforehand is how kind the weather will prove.

In the summer of 2007, when, more often than not, outdoor activities have been marred by either rain, wind or low temperatures – or any permutation of the three – Monday 13th August turned out to be one of the season's most pleasant days. The sun shone, no precipitation fell and, true, there was a breeze – but how often is the air still on the Downs, especially when the downland is by the sea?

Uncannily, the tally of pilgrims who arrive at the pub almost always equates to the magical baker's dozen – so apt a figure in the context of this particular Powys's literary output. This year was no exception. Recently, photographs of those who make the trek to the memorial record their images for posterity and appear in the November *Newsletters*; yet, no list of names preserves their identities. It struck me that on the occasion of Llewelyn's one hundred and twenty-third birthday, this might be a worthy inclusion. In no particular order but retaining any familial or close ties of friendship, they were: Richard Burleigh, Pam Gillingham and her daughter Anna, Jed and Marie Redman (this was Marie's first visit), Neil Lee and his son Jason, Chris Gostick and Linda Goldsmith, Rosemary Dickens and Denis White, my wife Honour and me.

Part of the tradition accompanying the proposal to toast Llewelyn's health or memory – whichever seems the more appropriate – is to make reference to those usually present at these gatherings but for various reasons are not. Unfortunately, John, the initiator of the meetings and who would normally be the proposer, was one of the absentees. However, there could not have been a better stand-in than Chris and after allowing us to remember another founder member, Eve Batten, who sadly died in December, informed us that John hoped to join the throng next year. John Sanders – probably the most consistent attender – was also not there; he was recovering from a nasty accident having been knocked from his bicycle. Other notable faces missing were Bruce Madge, Janet Machen and Morine Krissdóttir.

For the walk itself, although Richard – owing to a bad back – was left to guard the fort, we were joined by Pam's husband Paul and son Fred. The latter only came as far Chydyok, where Rosemary and Denis rejoined us having travelled that stage of the journey by car. So the number who eventually stood round the memorial stone was still thirteen, even if slightly differently constituted. The customary flowers, including yarrow and ground ivy, were then laid on the stone. For the reading, instead of something by Llewelyn as invariably chosen in the past, Neil selected part of an article by JCP on his brother which had first appeared in *The Century Magazine* in September 1925 (and subsequently reprinted in *The Powys Journal* xv). Brother John had written, and Neil read:

Llewelyn, in plain words, is a poetical materialist with an unconquerable zest for life – for life on any terms. But an ingrained prejudice, amounting to actual hostility, toward anything supernatural, mystical or metaphysical, narrows the scope of his

shrewd and quizzical reactions even more completely than did the scepticism of his master Montaigne. The poetical element, in his materialistic zest for life, is the dominant background to every one of his impressions; and this poetic element takes a very definite form in his mind—a form that is repeated again and again, with small enough variation, in all his writings.

As the words sounded in the air high on the Dorset cliffs and several of us gazed out over Weymouth Bay to the Isle of Portland, the audience listening to Neil swelled as we found our backs gently butted by the heads of a doughty group of Friesian cattle, inquisitive to know why this corner of their grazing area had proved sufficiently attractive to be invaded by small party of human beings. They remained curious enough to appear in the background of the subsequently taken photographs, adding a peculiarly agricultural flavour to the proceedings.

Back in Chaldon everyone was invited to tea in the garden of the Gillingham's cottage, thereby forming a delightful finale to a splendid day. Sitting there enjoying the cakes and company two things struck me. First of all, if I'd wondered earlier about John Batten's thoughts looking forward twelve years, what might be those of Llewelyn, eighty-four years after adding that bequest to his will? The other point I reflected on was how much the congenial atmosphere we all shared in the garden that afternoon strongly recalled times at Keeper's Cottage in Montacute when blessed by the warmth and hospitality of John and Eve.

Rob Timlin



Chydyok as it used to be.

Friends of Chydyok

From Janet Pollock

As you know, I have been thinking about the future of Chydyok for some time and have now arrived at a plan, which I would like to try out for a year with your help.

The annual cost of running Chydyok is £6,500, which includes a very small contingency fund for replacements and repairs. Matthew, Di, Catherine and I are

prepared to contribute £2,500 to this, which leaves £4,000 outstanding.

Several friends have kindly indicated that they could be interested in joining a Friends of Chydyok consortium to keep the house afloat. The contribution depends on how many are able to go ahead. If eight could join up and are prepared to contribute £500 at the beginning of January 2008, this would entitle each of you to a month a year at Chydyok, free to visit there and to lend it to friends. We will work out methods of sharing if this plan goes ahead. Matthew and Di will continue to look after the house and garden and deal with any problems. I will continue to make the bookings. If this arrangement goes ahead, we will review it in the autumn of 2008 and decide whether to continue for another year.

No one must feel under any pressure to contribute. It may well be that this is a natural time for our long association with Chydyok to end and if so we are very fortunate to have had 50 wonderful years there.

The Barn, Marsh Farm House, Margaret Marsh,
Shaftesbury, Dorset. DP7 OAZ
Tel: 01258 820479

Janet writes (6th October 2007)

My awareness of Chydyok and the Powys family began in 1934. We were staying with my mother's niece, Sylvia Townsend Warner. She had been introduced to the Powys family by Stephen Tomlin (Tommy) along with David Garnett. It was in the 'thirties I came to know the Powyses well, through Martin Pollock and his father Rivers [*a friend since Cambridge of Llewelyn Powys*].

It was in the 'fifties that the Mackintoshes who were farming there asked if I would like to rent Chydyok from them. Alyse had just left and they were caring for Chydyok. Many years passed and my family and relatives stayed there often, and then friends of theirs, and so it went on happily. The Weld Estate who own all the land around would not consider selling for understandable reasons.

There is now a need to look ahead and the idea of Friends of Chydyok has taken shape. I had imagined that the Powys Society might like to be involved and wish to support the scheme ... I think in the first instance to contact me is easiest. If the response is a good one the cost will be reduced.

Llewelyn Powys with Alyse Gregory lived at Chydyok 1931–36; Alyse returned alone at the end of 1939. Gertrude and Katie Powys lived next door from 1924. Gertrude died in 1952; Alyse and Katie left in 1957. KK

Peter Christensen

We have just heard of the death of Peter Christensen whom some of us will remember from the discussion meeting on TFP's *Fables* at the DCM in June 2003. An obituary by Michael Ballin will be in the next *Newsletter*.

Obituaries

Roland Mathias

1915–2007

Jeremy Hooker writes:

Roland Mathias was a man of all-round accomplishments and achievements, whose modesty would not allow him to make claims for himself. He was a great teacher, in and out of school. He was a leading figure among the small group who established Anglo-Welsh literature as a field of study. As critic, editor, and committee-man, he served this subject admirably. He was a major poet.

I was one whom Roland encouraged. He published my early poems in *The Anglo-Welsh Review*. When Alan Clodd accepted my first book of poems, *Soliloquies of a Chalk Giant*, for publication, Roland read the collection in typescript, and helped to determine its final shape. By giving me books to review and publishing my first essays in *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, he set me on my way as a literary critic. He could be humorous at his own expense as a committee-man, but in fact he was one who got necessary work done, selflessly, and therefore helped other writers in their careers. I shall never forget how, when he was Chairman of the Welsh Arts Council Literature Committee, I heard him give a speech of thanks to a fellow member. I was sitting next to Sam Adams, who whispered to me: 'Doesn't he do it well!' Sam's words were exactly right for the speech, and for all Roland's activities as writer, editor, and public servant.

Roland Mathias was a meticulous and challenging literary critic. This may be seen in his work on John Cowper Powys: in essays in which Mathias, who was a trained historian, takes Powys to task for 'trifling' with history in *Owen Glendower*, and in his book, *The Hollowed-Out Elder Stalk: John Cowper Powys as Poet*. My recollection of Alan Clodd's intentions for his Enitharmon Press series of Powys studies was that they were to be quite short. Kenneth Hopkins's *Llewelyn Powys: An Essay* was a study of 68 pages. My *John Cowper Powys and David Jones: A Comparative Study* was 54 pages. Roland's study of John Cowper Powys's poetry was more than twice as long, at 158 pages, than the other two studies put together! This was not, I think, the intention of the series; but the only way Roland knew of doing anything was thoroughly. He was in consequence a first-rate critic. He was what every writer wants in a critic: a close reader, who seeks to understand the work in depth and in detail. Roland was something rarer nowadays too: a man with a moral vision. He was a Christian, a nonconformist, with a Puritan's moral seriousness. This meant that he asked uncomfortable questions of the writers he studied – not that he imposed his beliefs on them, but that he asked about their seriousness and their consistency. But he asked far more of himself than he did of others.

In my view Roland at his best, in poems such as 'A Last Respect', 'Porth Cwyfan', 'Brechfa Chapel', and 'Tide-reach', was a great Puritan poet: a poet whose Welsh landscapes are historical landscapes, in which he raises issues of need and meaning in

the relation between man and God. He was a poet in the tradition of Welsh praise poetry, who remembered and celebrated his people. With the complexity of his language and his allusiveness, he could be a very difficult poet. I found the density of some of his earlier work baffling and infuriating. But although he never became easy, his later poetry, from *The Flooded Valley* (1960) onwards, increasingly gained in clarity and power. His language, like Robert Browning's and Gerard Manley Hopkins's, could be gnarled, strenuous, muscular, at times richly sensuous. Yet he could begin a poem: 'God is who questions me/ Of my tranquillity ...'. This, indeed, was the key question of his life and work. He was, in the Puritan sense, a man on trial. Those who knew him and learnt from him gained immeasurably from the way he lived and worked in response to what he believed God asked of him.



Roland Mathias, from website, by courtesy of the University of Wales.

Philip Callow

1924–2007

Jim Morgan writes:

I first met Philip in the 60s at the house of Ron and Mary Hall in Bovey Tracey. As I recall we both stood for a while staring out of the window not finding anything to say. Both shy and I awed to be in the company of a real living writer and moreover one for whose work I felt a strong affinity. We were both working-class lads, Philip from the industrial midlands and I a soft southerner, London born and bred, our education aborted by the outbreak of war.

The first of Philip's books I read was *Common People* (1958). It made a hit at the time and was acclaimed by such luminaries as J. B. Priestley and V. S. Naipaul. Inevitably, since the book's 'hero' was working class and its setting a provincial bohemia, Philip's name became linked with the so called Angry Young Men. But I instinctively knew his work was a cut above theirs and its working-class tribalism. I longed to write to this wonderful man who felt so fiercely what I felt and could express those feelings with such force and simplicity. It wasn't until *Pledge for the Earth* with its dedication 'To John Cowper Powys in North Wales' that I dared to write – for wasn't Powys my guru? So began a correspondence and a friendship which lasted for over forty years.

Philip passed my letter on to Ron Hall who had met John and Phyllis in the flesh. He replied immediately and so I was drawn – Ducdame – into a magic Powysian circle. Philip and Ron, 'two Coventry kids', were a famous duo in Powysian annals, mentioned in the 'Letters to Louis Wilkinson' and 'Letters to Henry Miller' to which Ron wrote a preface. John writes to Miller in 1956 urging him to read *The Hosanna*

Man by Philip Callow ‘whose circle of working class artists and writers in Coventry we have corresponded with for a long time, and we have met the Hosanna Man himself’. Alas, Philip, so his wife Anne tells me, seldom kept letters. Those to Ron – whose death at 56 was mourned by Philip with an elegy in *The Powys Review* 17 – were sold to an American university.

Philip was always generous with his books, sending me copies on publication, accompanied by a letter or card. Looking through these old letters it is distressing to be reminded how often he had to fight against depression. He had always before, phoenix-like, arisen from abysmal depths to live and write again. But not this time. Years of therapy, drugs, even ECT, couldn’t free him from its durance. Sometimes when his step-daughter Jane visited bringing her new baby Connie, a shaft of sun broke through.

The last few weeks of his life were passed in a nursing home where he had a nice room overlooking a pleasant garden. Sadly, Anne wrote that ‘it doesn’t seem to matter where he is as long as people are kind to him’. The staff there were kind and the home was nearer for Anne’s visits. It was good to know that she was at his side when death took him.

Few of the obituaries make reference to his poetry. His poems seemed to have come as natural as breathing, never forced or literary. His old friend, the novelist Stanley Middleton, in a Foreword to *Testimonies, New and Selected Poems* writes of ‘their clarity, immediacy and timelessness’. I believe there is to be a posthumous collection from John Lucas’ Shoe String Press: *The Solace of Stars*. I love that title, there’s an echo in it of Philip’s great biography of Walt Whitman, *From Noon to Starry Night*.

Philip Callow’s elegy for Ron Hall, with a letter from Jim Morgan, is in The Powys Review 17, p.81. His memoir of his youth, Passage from Home was reviewed in NL 46. JCP’s letters to Ron Hall were prepared for publication by Jeff Kwintner. Some extracts will appear in a future Newsletter. KK

Philip Callow contributed ‘Thoughts on Death’ to The Oldie, in June 2002. It ends:

A writer’s devious nature is not easy to live with, and after my death, I should like to return as a ghost in order to reward my wife in some way for her forbearance, if the lords of death will allow me. I hope when my time comes I will summon up some courage. I am comforted by the thought of Walt Whitman, lying paralysed for years, who could even joke on good days about his slipping hold on life, telling his young Boswell, ‘As Miss Nipper says in *Dombey and Son*, I don’t know whether I am temporary or a permanency: I don’t know whether I am to stay or move on.’



Sven Erik Täckmark
Honorary Member of The Powys Society
26th April 1916 – 27th September 2007

A TRIBUTE BY CHARLES LOCK

Sven Erik Täckmark's was a regular presence at Powys Society conferences through the 1970s and 80s. Long-term members of the Society will recall Sven Erik and his daughters among the cast of unlikely characters who have lent atmosphere to its meetings. We met at the conference held in Weymouth in 1976: I was struck by the quality of Sven Erik's rather massive 'thereness', imposing for one so diminutive in stature.

Sven Erik had an unrivalled claim to distinction: he had travelled from Sweden to visit John Cowper Powys in North Wales as long ago as 1938. In the 1970s the Society had a number of members who had known John Cowper, some of them then in their seventies, but almost all of them had made his acquaintance in the post-War period, and most in the 1950s. Their recollections of Powys were thus primarily of visits to Corwen in the early 1950s or to I Waterloo, Blaenau Ffestiniog, where Powys had moved in 1956, at the age of 83. Sven Erik could recollect a much younger Powys, aged 65, and could talk of an entire week spent in Corwen, with daily visits to Powys's home at Cae Coed. It was after that visit that John Cowper in his letters would address Sven Erik as Erik the Red: a Viking had been expected, and the one who appeared was thus humorously named, by unlikeness. As the years went by, so Sven Erik's recollections of that visit passed from the distinctive to the unique, and thence to the legendary. When I last saw Sven Erik, in Stockholm earlier this year (see *Newsletter* 61, pp.24–5), it was across sixty-nine years that his memory traversed to the event that had given to his life shape and purpose and strength, and solace.

Sven Erik Pettersson was born on 26 April 1916 to a poor family in Malmö in the south-west of Sweden. As a child he moved to Stockholm. Aged fourteen when his father died, Sven Erik left school and worked at menial occupations. For many more years, if not throughout his life, Sven Erik would be prepared to work in any capacity in order to make possible what mattered to him. After two years as a messenger and baker's boy he was able to enrol in a 'folk high school', designed to bring back into education students who had left school early and wished to resume their studies. Between 1932 and 1936 Sven Erik attended two of these high schools. It was then, in 1932, that he first came to study the English language, and English was to remain (as he described it) 'a mania': and a way of escape from a dull, constricting childhood.

Though he graduated from high school in 1936, Sven Erik was still unable to pursue further education and resumed a life of miscellaneous occupation. In 1944 he was admitted to the Institute for Social Work in Stockholm, whence he graduated with a vocational diploma in 1946, and this enabled him to work in asylums and shelters: he had an extraordinary affinity for the down-and-out, and boundless sympathy for those less fortunate than himself: often, in his case, though he would

never have supposed thus, only marginally less fortunate. In 1951, having set out to master Latin to the prerequisite level, Sven Erik was admitted to the University of Stockholm; he graduated in 1955 and thereafter held a number of positions in Stockholm high schools as a teacher of Swedish and English. Before this formal education, however, came the revelation that motivated Sven Erik's ambition. In 1937 he had found and read a book entitled *Modern Själskultur*, the translation into Swedish by Alf Ahlberg (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 1935) of John Cowper's *The Meaning of Culture* (1929). Though this was read in Swedish, Sven Erik's study of English now had a specific purpose, and John Cowper's books were read with devotion. To the end, however, Sven Erik would maintain that it was the philosophical books, rather than the novels, that had meant most, and to which he returned frequently.



*Sven Erik Täckmark
in the 1930s.*

No thorough study has been undertaken of John Cowper Powys in translation; the timing of Sven Erik's epiphanic reading prompts enquiry as to how the translator decided that *The Meaning of Culture* needed to be put into Swedish. Alf Ahlberg (1892–1979) was primarily a historian of philosophy with a strong interest in German; he would later publish (in Swedish) books on Goethe, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. He had no scholarly interest in English literature or philosophy. *The Meaning of Culture* was at that time being read in Germany, among intellectual circles, for Thomas Mann comments on the book (though there was no German translation) in a letter of 1934. Thus Sven Erik, who like most Swedes of the time had acquired German as his first foreign language, came across John Cowper during the one period when he had a European reputation, especially in Germany. Though Thomas Mann was by no means as enthusiastic as was Sven Erik about *The Meaning of Culture*, the conjunction is worth mentioning, for Thomas Mann was Sven Erik's other great and lasting favourite among authors: indeed, the novelist he most admired.

In 1937 the same publisher, Natur och Kultur, brought out *The Art of Happiness* in a Swedish translation, *Lyckans väsen*, by Hanna Diedrichs, who was a regular translator of English literature. But there the translation into Swedish of the works of John Cowper was halted, until resumed by Sven Erik almost forty years later. Not until 1994 was Alf Ahlberg's translation reissued (by Studiekamraten's publishing house), under a new and more accurate title, 'Kulturens mening'. The events of 1939 would explain a temporary pause, but it is hard to understand why nothing else was translated into Swedish during John Cowper's lifetime: such a detail of translation is of no small significance when the language concerned is that in which the Nobel Academy conducts its deliberations.

Inspired by his reading of *Modern Själskultur*, Sven Erik contrived to find employment in Britain in the spring of 1938, undertaking 'light household duties' for a lady in Hemel Hempstead, Mrs Lorna Brown, who admired Walter Pater (and had not been anticipating the company of a young Swedish man). From his duties in Hemel Hempstead Sven Erik was able to take a week off in order to pay his respects to John Cowper. John Cowper himself was most attentive and sensitive in offering a range of possible hotels and guest-houses, of which the least costly, Mrs. Peake's, was chosen. Sven Erik travelled by train to Corwen on 28 May:

I met Powys at Corwen; he came down to the station, carried my suitcase to Mrs Peake's, where I stayed for a week. Daily rambles with Powys each morning and tea in the afternoon. I recited Swedish poetry for him; Fröding was his favourite.

The mention of Fröding recalls my own deepening acquaintance with Sven Erik, brought about when I was appointed foreign lecturer in English literature in the Swedish town of Karlstad, in Värmland. Between 1980 and 1982 I would visit Sven Erik in Stockholm, and on one occasion he and his daughters stayed with us in Karlstad. Powys's letters to Sven Erik had not yet been published, so I had no access then either to them or to Cedric Hentschel's extremely informative introduction (on which much of the detail in this obituary depends). Cedric Hentschel, Chairman of the Powys Society 1982-87, had met Sven Erik in Sweden during the War, when he had himself lectured on John Cowper at the University of Uppsala: see 'Cedric Hentschel (1913-2005)' in *Newsletter* 55 (July 2005), pp.13-16.

The volume edited by Cedric Hentschel, *Powys to Eric the Red: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Sven-Erik Täckmark*, (London: Cecil Woolf, 1983), appeared the year after I left Sweden, and elucidated much. Gustav Fröding was a native of Värmland, and the new residential district of Karlstad in which we lived was within the parish of Alster, whose manor house was Fröding's family home. All the streets in the area are named after characters in Fröding's poetry: ours was *Korporal Storms väg*. And so, on that street, Sven Erik recited to us a number of Fröding's poems, as he had recited them to John Cowper; alas, until I read the letters I was mystified by the link between Powys and Fröding as, outside these letters, Powys nowhere mentions Fröding, whose name was anyway quite new to me. Sven Erik's friend Gunnar Lundin tells us that 'The Clown Clöpöpsky' was Powys's favourite among Fröding's poems: I recall no street of that name in the vicinity.

Sven Erik's recollections of his week in Corwen continued to glow; one of those walks he was introduced by John Cowper to James Hanley, whose novels he grew to admire, and about whom he later gave a talk on Swedish radio. After that visit in 1938 Sven Erik never saw John Cowper again, though they continued to correspond for twenty years. In 1946 Sven Erik married Inga Belfrage, a teacher of French, from a family of Scottish descent that had been distinguished in Sweden since the 17th century. Two daughters were born, Eva in 1946, and Ann. The next visit to Britain was in 1947, when Sven Erik visited the West Country to see the settings of Powys's

novels. There he met John Cowper's sisters Gertrude and Philippa at Chydyok, and Llewelyn's widow Alys Gregory.

That same year he took advantage of an opportunity provided by the Swedish state to change one's family name free of charge: the telephone directory was getting cluttered with Petterssons, Nilssons, Johanssons and such. Those who had common names were allowed, indeed encouraged, to replace them by others more obscure. Thus 'Eric the Red' (as Powys always addressed him after his visit: 'Sven' was for some reason utterly shunned) took on the name Täckmark: this means either a covered or a beautiful 'area of ground', and had been found in some old book, though which one was not recalled. His new name became him; at one point (in the early 1970s) he bought a small patch of ground, a 'mark', near Dover, as he was passing by on the way to a Powys Society meeting: he never saw the land again before selling it, but enjoyed the sensation of owning a bit of England.

John Cowper's letters are unfailingly admiring and encouraging in tone, as with almost all of those addressed to correspondents much younger than himself. (Another of Powys's young admirers and correspondents, the novelist Philip Callow, died on 22 September 2007.) In these letters Powys is clearly conscious of his role as the distinguished author. In September 1947 John Cowper writes of what he's just learnt from the dictionary about an etymology:

I'd have liked to have told this to old Hardy for it was this sort of thing he told me when I first saw him when he was middle-aged and had just written *Tess* & I was in my early twenties and had just left college! ... this was in the Last Century!—think of that Eric ...

So time extends, and extends us. John Cowper enjoyed the admiration of the young, but no doubt hoped that ambitious writers would enjoy some of that success and recognition that, in Britain, Powys had failed to achieve. Yet those who admired Powys, and in whose literary future he invested much faith, and lengthy letters of advice and encouragement, seldom realized the implied promise.

John Cowper was not further translated into Swedish, and Sven Erik was by no means the only one of Powys's admirers who failed to create a wider following. Sven Erik was intensely active in the 1950s and 1960s, teaching and writing and participating in Stockholm's literary circles as translator, reviewer and broadcaster. It was only some years after John Cowper's death in 1963 that he began the serious mission of translating Powys into Swedish. *Wolf Solent* appeared from the Stockholm publisher Coeckelberghs in 1975, followed by *Ducdame* (*Dårarnas*



dans: Dance of Fools) in 1977. *Wolf Solent* was issued in two volumes, as it had been in the first edition from Simon & Schuster, though in Swedish each of these volumes has its own title: *Koltrastens sång* (The song of the blackbird) and *Att uthärda eller fly* (To endure or to quit). Sven Erik also translated *Weymouth Sands*: one section 'Lodmoor' was published in Coeckelbergh's journal, *Jakobs Stege*, in 1977. But the publisher proved somewhat indecisive and the translation remains sadly unavailable. Not to be deterred, through the 1980s Sven Erik continued to work on the translation of *Autobiography*, which Coeckelberghs announced as due in 1992, but then, once again, failed to issue. This great work (a great work in itself, and a monumental task for its translator) has now been revised with the help of Mikael Nydahl, and will (should) be published in the near future. In 2004 the translation of *A Philosophy of Solitude* (made with Gunnar Lundin) appeared (from the publisher Ariel) as *Ensamhetens filosofi*.

In 1990 an exhibition of Sven Erik's personal collection of materials relating to John Cowper Powys was shown at the Carolina Revivida, the celebrated University Library in Uppsala: the Library published a catalogue of the exhibition, *Den otidenslige och den aktuella* [The timeless and the topical]: *John Cowper Powys (1872–1963): Sven Erik Täckmarks Specialsamling, presenteras i en utställning i Uppsala Universitetsbibliotek, 6 november–1 december 1990*. That volume and the exhibition itself received considerable notice in the Swedish press, and rightly so: for this was the first exhibition anywhere in the world to be devoted to John Cowper Powys. It was opened by the distinguished Swedish poet, Carl-Erik af Geijerstam (1914–2007), who, through Sven Erik's initiative, had addressed The Powys Society some years earlier.

The Uppsala exhibition aroused such interest that the collection was shown again at the Library of the University of Gothenburg the following November. Coinciding with the Gothenburg exhibition, a special issue of the Swedish journal *Studiekamraten*, dedicated to Powys, appeared in 1992, with contributions from scholars around the world, almost all of them translated into Swedish by Sven Erik himself. (An excellent review of this by Cedric Hentschel is in *The Powys Journal* II, pp. 222–8). It was arranged by Sven Erik that I should speak on John Cowper at the exhibition's opening, as well as at Uppsala and other universities. That was my first visit to Sweden since 1982, and I owe much more to Sven Erik than an enjoyable tour, for it was the impression received then that induced me to accept a professorship in Scandinavia in 1995.

After moving to Copenhagen I was able to keep in contact with Sven Erik in the expectation of more frequent meetings. In 1996 Sven Erik attended the public defence of Janina Nordius's dissertation at the University of Gothenburg: the examiner was Belinda Humfrey. By 2004 Sven Erik was too frail to attend the public defence of Eivor Lindstedt's dissertation at the University of Lund, with Harald Fawkes as the examiner. Sven Erik much regretted his inability to be present, and took a keen interest in the various reports he would receive of this and other events. He was deeply gratified by the formation in 2000 of the John Cowper Powys Society

of Sweden (*John Cowper Powyssällskapet*), of which he was elected, properly and inevitably, the Honorary President.

Sven Erik's life was far from easy, and his extraordinary endeavours were not to be met with much conspicuous success. The sufferings he endured give some measure of his courage and determination. He lost both his wife and his eldest daughter, each by their own hand: the mother when her daughters were still young, the older daughter Eva in 1986. Sven Erik was left to take care of his younger daughter until the very last years when she was provided with sheltered housing. His care for Ann was a marvel, carried out with an unfaltering sense of the harmony between concern and decorum.

Together with Sven Erik, Eva had run an antiquarian bookshop on Åsogatan in the 1970s and 80s, with some success: of all his occupations, it was there, as a second-hand bookseller, that Sven Erik was perhaps most at home. Through all the hardship, the cruel personal losses and the professional frustrations, it was, he insisted, John Cowper's philosophical books that had sustained him. They gave to his personality a vigour and freshness and enthusiasm that was determined to enjoy, and if not that, at least to endure. Even at 90 he was adamant that he was not ready to quit. His last two or three years, in an old people's home, gave him a renewed sense of the pleasures of reading.

Sven Erik's abiding achievement in the Swedish literary world is that of a translator, and it is a translator's fate, like a dentist's, to be noticed only when things go wrong. Though not an academic, Sven Erik's dedication bore exceptional fruit in Swedish universities. The number of doctoral dissertations on John Cowper Powys submitted to Swedish universities over the past twenty years probably exceeds that of all those submitted in the rest of the world. It is not a coincidence, nor one unrelated to Sven Erik's endeavours, that (entirely against the academic grain, to say nothing of literary fashion) the Chairs of English Literature at Stockholm and Copenhagen should both currently be occupied by Powysians.

I cannot here forbear to tell a story of my lecture at the University of Uppsala in November 1991. I had spoken about John Cowper at the University of Gothenburg, and gave a very similar lecture at the University of Stockholm. On the third day I lectured on John Cowper at the University of Uppsala, in its dignified, even august setting. Some fifteen minutes into my lecture there were noises from the front row, increasing in volume with an unmistakable tone of disapproval. After some awkward minutes Ann rose to her feet, turned to the audience and declared: 'This is SO bloody boring', and out she stomped, the heavy door slamming shut. The chair of the proceedings was as they used to say non-plussed, but the lecturer carried on unperturbed. Afterwards the Chairman presumed to congratulate me on my compo-



sure. I replied that Ann was quite entitled to find my lecture rather tedious: she had heard this very same talk three times in three days and it was getting a little too familiar even for me. And Ann had after all been in the audience for most lectures delivered to the Powys Society: she belonged to the Powysian audience, as to the Society's ambience. I rehearse the anecdote now out of respectful and concerned affection for Ann, and to give some sense of how much was achieved 'in spite of'. For Sven Erik, endurance, as preached and practised by John Cowper, became a watchword, a principle of defiance, one maintained to the end with dignity, and with generous, unflinching compassion.

Sven Erik Täckmark passed away at the age of ninety-one in the evening of 27th September 2007, in the home on Tideliussgatan, in Södermalm, the area of Stockholm where he had lived all his adult life. There he had received at last some of the care and attention he had so freely given to others: he was most appreciative of that care, and of the possibility he was given to read again his most treasured books from Swedish, German and English literature: above all, of course, the works of John Cowper Powys. Perhaps not inappropriately, Sven Erik, who left no estate, was given a pauper's funeral; this took place on Thursday 25 October at Skogskyrkogården (the Forest Cemetery) to the south of Stockholm.

Charles Lock acknowledges with gratitude the help received in the preparation of this obituary from Gunnar Lundin of Stockholm, Jacqueline Peltier, editor of la lettre powysienne, and Lars Gustaf Andersson, Chairman of the John Cowper Powys Society of Sweden.

From Lars Gustaf Andersson

Dear friends, yesterday Sven Erik's funeral took place in The Chapel of Hope, at The Woodland Cemetery, south of Stockholm, one of the most beautiful settings in the area. Around twenty friends were there, and of course Sven Erik's daughter, Ann. There were several flowers and wreaths, and a wreath from The Powys Society in the British colours. The funeral service was civil (I do not know if it is common in England as well) with no priest, but a civil celebrant, reading an obituary over Sven Erik, and also reading some poems that Sven Erik's old friend Lars Krumlinde had chosen. Though the secular nature of the ritual, we sung some hymns which Sven Erik loved, among them 'Härlig är jorden', which is a very popular Swedish funeral hymn, originally German ('Für die Zukunft der Menschheit' – 'For the Future of Mankind'). Afterwards we had coffee at a nearby place with Ann and all the friends. It was a meeting full of joy and happy memories. I can also inform you that a young filmmaker now is completing a short documentary on Sven Erik; it will be released during the spring. I will inform you about that later on.

On behalf of the Swedish John Cowper Powys Society I would like to thank you all for your support. For questions concerning formal or legal matters, I think that Gunnar Lundin is the one who can help you best <lg.lundin@bredband.net> ; he lives in Stockholm and has contact with the trustees of Sven Erik and Ann.

Best wishes from Lars Gustaf Andersson

News and Notes

Durdle Door to Dartmoor

Twenty-six of Llewelyn Powys's finest Wessex Essays to be published by The Sundial Press during November 2007
paperback of 160 pages, £ 9.99. ISBN 978-09551523-0-6
Further details from <www.sundialpress.co.uk>

ANW Does His Bit again!

The publication of *Descents of Memory* brought A.N. Wilson on JCP to Radio Four's 'Open Book' on 14th October, to give a spirited recommendation of why we should all read (in Mariella Frostrup, the presenter's, words) this 'New Age guru of the last century' and his massive teeming novels, with Drabble, Steiner, and *Martin Amis* (a new one) among his admirers.

A paragraph from *Wolf Solent* was read (the alder-root seen from the train, a phallic serpent – emblem of secret life). Wilson gave us *Glastonbury* – a passion play, a study in mass hysteria (JCP interpreting his time; JCP as lecturer with gifts of the gab up there above Hitler or Billy Graham). Sex always a central theme (JCP one of the few able to describe it adequately – see the scene with Philip Crow).

Frostrup – Heavy going? Some give him *silliness* as an attribute. ANW – Of course! He describes what goes on in people's heads, and a lot of that is silly. He describes human oddness. He *was* silly too – a kind of clown. *Weymouth Sands* has a character a bit like himself, Sylvanus Cobbold, a preacher and a real nutter, slightly silly and creepy too but with great wisdom. Often very funny, too, like the washing-up scenes in Wilson's favorite, *Maiden Castle*. Anyone who hasn't read these books before they die is missing a lot.

Fame at last

JCP has achieved distinction as a **crossword clue** (14 down, 'British novelist, author of *A Glastonbury Romance*' – *Telegraph Weekend General Knowledge*, Saturday 18th August). (Quoted from memory – did anyone keep it? – KK)

Mysteries of Amazon

Listed: John Cowper Powys: *Key to Happiness* (CREST publishing). *The Meaning of Culture* (READ Books 2006) (paperbacks). Are they by any chance related?

Writing the Grail

The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief by Richard Barber (Allen Lane 2004) devotes several pages to *A Glastonbury Romance*, via Naomi Mitchison (*To the Chapel Perilous*, 1955) and Arthur Machen (*The Secret Glory*, 1915) and on to T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. 'To describe and encompass such unbounded concepts requires a canvas of heroic proportions ... Of [its] reality and cosmic power there is no doubt: the Grail and the power that it represents are constantly at work among the affairs of men... it

is this... which is Powys's contribution to the modern image of the Grail.... [The novel's] cosmic view of the Grail was to be deeply influential, and its realistic passages do indeed invoke something of the curious mixture of commerce and high idealism that seems to characterize the recent history of the Grail.'

Thanks for this to Susan Rands.

The Powys Review

Complete set 1977–97 available, £25. Contact John Roberts 0207 712 2346 (w) or 0207 609 7677(h), Holloway, North London. [Note: this includes the three double numbers, 27/28, 29/30, 31/32 which were not issued to members of the Society as part of their subscription, but published by Belinda Humfrey in 1992/93, 1995 and 1997.]

Letters

A Mystery Solved?

From Neil Lee ('Tom Bates'), Sept. 2007

The value of this little book [*The Immemorial Year*, LIP's 1909 Diary] and the painstaking research and unparalleled knowledge of its editor is shown thus:

Since reading Elwin's 'Life of Llewelyn Powys', and Graves' 'The Brothers Powys', and being a native of Derbyshire, I have travelled to Shirley several times trying to locate **Bowbridge Wishing Well**, where Llewelyn was said to have walked with Marion Linton. Dr Foss clearly shows why Bowbridge Wishing Well proved so elusive in Note 163, 'Alice Linton (Marion's mother) later moved to Bowbridge, near Mackworth'. Thanks to Peter Foss, I can now resume my search in the right place!

Further: The diary entry for Friday 3rd September reads: "**Wirksworth. Bellowed for an ostler at the Crown. Drank tea in a little upper room. Looked at the stone face over the door of the church as it leered obscenely at God's altar over the head of Canon Gell**".

Commenting on this entry in his 'Notes to Diary' (note 164, p.63), Dr Foss states: 'The Crown Hotel, the main coaching inn in Wirksworth Market Place, now housing the Wirksworth Heritage Museum & Centre. This is an enigmatic entry. There is a fine Saxon carving in Wirksworth Church showing Adam and the serpent and the Tree of Life. The serpent could be said to be 'leering', though as this is on the wall in the north aisle, it hardly looks towards the altar, and besides which the monuments to the Gell family of Hopton, Derbyshire, are situated in the north aisle choir. It is not clear why Llewelyn refers to Canon Gell, since the Gells were baronets not incumbents.'

I think I can shed some light on this 'enigma'! The Crown Hotel in Wirksworth, is now of course, the Wirksworth Heritage Centre and Museum. Serendipity lends a hand here also, for the 'little upper room' where Llewelyn 'drank tea' is currently home to a display of sixty 'Derbyshire Village Guides' written by 'Tom Bates'!

Further, the 'stone face over the door of the church' which 'leered obscenely at God's altar over the head of Canon Gell' is a depiction of a Saxon lead-miner, found at nearby Bonsall in the 19th century and removed to the 'mother' church at Wirksworth. The Gells of Hopton Hall were baronets, but the family also boasted at least two clergymen, indeed Revd John Philip Gell (1816-98) was sent by Dr Arnold of Rugby School to assist with education in Tasmania and became Chaplain to the Governor of Tasmania – his father-in-law, the famous Arctic explorer, Sir John Franklin. 'Canon Gell' is simply a misreading of Llewelyn's original entry; it is actually Canon Gem. Revd Canon Hubert Arnold Gem was Vicar of Wirksworth from 1901 to 1913. Mystery solved!

John Bunting (*see cover of NL61*)

From **David Goodway**:

... And so finally to John Bunting. Did you ever see an article I published in the *London Magazine* in 1977 about Charles Lahr, the London bookseller who also published some of TFP's stories as well as the poems of 'Laurence' Powys and Philippa Powys? Bunting was a junior member of the extensive, talented and extremely interesting circle which gathered in Charlie's shops. All I know about Bunting is that (in addition to being Daniel George's son) he worked for Barrie & Rockcliff [publishers] and I assume for James Barrie before the merger (and I'd be very surprised if this wasn't why the latter published Kenneth Hopkins's autobiography, *The Corruption of a Poet* (1954), which contains a very great deal about Lahr *et al.*). I also remember him ringing out of the blue but regret I can't recall what about. This would have been in the 1970s when I was attempting to find a publisher for a memorial volume for Charlie (with absolutely no success other than Alan Ross wanting to print an expanded version of the introduction). I certainly submitted the book to Barrie & Rockcliff, expecting a favourable response, yet I'm fairly confident the call was not about this. He also had extraordinarily small handwriting. My delay in telling how little I know is partly because I wanted to talk to Charlie's younger daughter, Oonagh, expecting her to provide lots of detail, but was astonished that she seems to know even less than me. Sorry ...

The Arnold Bennett Society

The organisers are seeking proposals for papers marking the Centenary of Bennett's *The Old Wives' Tale* for its Conference on 7th June 2008 in Stoke-on-Trent.

Enquiries may be made to John Shapcott, ab.conference@btinternet.com. Please send 200 word abstracts for 20-minute papers by mid-January 2008.

The complete announcement can be obtained on request from the Newsletter Editor.

Reviews

Descents of Memory: The Life of John Cowper Powys

by Morine Krissdóttir

Overlook/ Duckworth, New York–Woodstock–London, 2007

480pp., £25. ISBN 978-1-58567-917-1

By Glen Cavaliero

John Cowper Powys is a challenging subject for a biographer, and Dr Krissdóttir had her work cut out when she embarked upon this book. Her training in psycho-mythology provides her with the appropriate equipment for analysing the nature of Powys's parental and familial background, and enables her to discuss his various sexual inhibitions and remedial strategies with clarity and insight, especially in connection with his evasive role-playing in relationships with women. The opening chapter of *Autobiography* forms the basis of her investigations, and she examines how the boy John Cowper fought a battle against fear, sometimes drawing mazes in which to protect himself, and fantasising that he possessed magical powers, while 'the relationship with his brothers and sisters became a way of sorting out his relationship with ... the parental inhabitants of his internal world'. Here was a man whose entire life expressed 'a desire to impose his world on the world of adults'. It was to be a life-struggle containing elements of both tragedy and comedy.

Dr Krissdóttir relates this endeavour to his novel-writing in a manner familiar to readers of her study *The Magical Quest*; she is at home in the world of archetypes and thus is sympathetic with this aspect of Powys's creative imagination, having an intuitive acceptance of his underlying realm of myths and marvels. As much as W. B. Yeats Powys was interested in the possibilities latent in the wearing of a mask; but in his case that mask was a self-defensive game played with himself as much as with others. As his biographer admits in a brilliant interpretation of *Autobiography*, 'If it is presented as factual history ... it is a fabrication.' But she goes on to comment that 'in the process of remembering ... events are reconstructed, turned into that secret myth by which one knows one's self, one's soul.' The charting of the growth of Powys's personal myth through his process of remembering and re-creating those recollections in his fiction is the substance of *Descents of Memory*.

The book draws on a number of hitherto unpublished sources, most notably all of Powys's diaries and that of Phyllis Playter, together with his letters to her and those exchanged between members of the Powys family. Fresh light is thrown on Powys's marriage, disposing of some of the wilder speculation concerning that subject, and on his tangled and often painful relationship with Frances Gregg and Louis Wilkinson. Among the significant factors that come to light are the powerful influence of both Marian and Theodore Powys on John Cowper, and the effect upon him of his sister Katie's mental breakdown, as well as the temporarily disruptive result for the family of Littleton's marriage to the outspoken Elizabeth Myers.

Indeed, the Powys family mystique comes in for a good deal of critical scrutiny, some of its members incurring the dismissive comment that they never grew up. John Cowper himself would have had something to say about that remark!

But none the less his own childish incompetence where money was concerned, together with his reckless generosity, contributed to the dire financial straits in which he and Phyllis lived for much of their life together, though Dr Krissdóttir also shows how canny and purposeful Powys could be where the projection of his literary persona was concerned. She also describes his gastric torments unflinchingly. Powys lived with this kind of physical indignity for much of his life; it explains the sympathy displayed in his novels for the physically and nervously afflicted. As for his lecturing, this book makes clear what a necessary burden this became for him as he grew older and was having to support two households; and there are disturbing accounts of his exploitation by ruthless agents. Such a prolonged career as a public speaker, not to say performer, did not make for simple relationships in private life, as can be seen in the tragi-comic pages of his extraordinary diaries. One feels that Margaret Powys and Phyllis Playter might have had a good deal of sympathy with each other in this regard.

Sincerity in one's inner life can conflict with sincerity in the outer one, and nowhere in Powys's fiction is this made more evident than in *Maiden Castle*, a novel which, significantly, both Frances Gregg and Phyllis Playter much disliked. For in it Powys both displays and castigates, yet finally refuses either to condemn or defend, his self-referential manipulation of women whom he had made into images in his mind and allotted roles to play in his personal mythology – a role that Frances at any rate resisted with fury. But as this biography shows, Powys was at once fighting for his life-illusion and obeying his personal daemon. It is not the least of the book's merits that it should preserve so even-handed an approach to the pains and tensions involved in this particular attitude to life. Phyllis Playter's role as lover, companion, muse and critical commentator, not to mention her management of his business affairs and housekeeping, was at a great cost to herself; but she is never portrayed as a mere victim of masculine exploitation. For she loved deeply and was loved deeply in return.

When it comes to Powys's written work the novels clearly hold first place in his biographer's estimation. She barely mentions his poems; while the poetic element in his make-up tends to be subsumed into the psychic mythology by means of which his personal character is portrayed. There is, for instance, no mention of that moment of illumination by the ancient wall on Coe Fen in Cambridge, which Powys considered to be one of the turning points of his life. The awareness of mystery in his response to landscape is an important element in the appeal that his novels have for many of his readers, as the writings of Jeremy Hooker and C. A. Coates have made clear. Places as well as people were significant for him, in their own right. His cultivation of sensuous responses was vital to his hold on sanity.

Such moments of timeless contemplation are at the heart of the philosophy he propounds in those 'pot-boilers' of which Dr Krissdóttir tends to be dismissive,

impatient perhaps, as was Phyllis Playter, of the inevitable interruption they occasioned to the composition of his novels. Verbose and repetitive they may be, but they secured him a grateful body of readers, whom they had clearly helped; and they did keep that pot on the boil, besides voicing John Cowper's desire to share intuitions that he personally believed in, and which armoured him in his battle against fear. In this context one may regret the scant attention paid here to his book on Rabelais, with its eloquent defence of the spirit of laughter, so greatly commended by Wilson Knight.

The relationship between Powys and his admirers is something that deserves attention; and the very brief account of his final years would have been enriched by reference to Frederick Davies's first-hand account of them in *The Powys Review*, and to Belinda Humfrey's *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*. Powys's visitors ranged from Elias Canetti and Angus Wilson to the Derbyshire coal miner Bill Lander. All sorts and conditions of men and women made friends with him.

Dr Krissdóttir's account of Powys's novels, however, is full of insight, that of *After My Fashion* being especially acute. She cites it as an instance of the way in which he deployed his characters as expressions of people in his own life. 'Nell is mostly his wife Margaret, but there are glimpses in her of his dead sistier Nellie, and she is passed around between Storm and Canyot just as Frances was.' But none of his people are used to polish off old scores, any more than his novels are what are wittily referred to here as 'punching-bag fiction'. As for the final stories, Dr Krissdóttir interprets them as sexual fantasies slipping out of control with the onset of old age. It could be that this was the consequence of how 'Powys lived almost exclusively in his interior life of symbolic connections ... caring little who followed him.' *Descents of Memory* is no mere eulogy. As the author confesses, his novels 'both attracted and repulsed me – they still do'. That this should be so is at once the source of the strength and the limitation of her book.

Limitation, not weakness. One must applaud the sheer energy and skill with which the material of this biography has been absorbed, arranged, analysed and lucidly set forth and annotated, (though for newcomers to Powys's work a bibliography of secondary sources would have been useful). A number of biographical issues are clarified, notably the Glastonbury libel case and its consequences, while again and again one comes across comments that go straight to the point. There is, moreover, an informed sympathy with those eccentricities and rituals which formed the mainstay of Powys's life-illusion and which continue to lay him open to the mocking scepticism of the materialistic majority. Dr Krissdóttir may be scathing about members of his family and some of his friends, but rarely is she so about John Cowper himself. She champions him even when, and indeed because, she does not indulge him.

As to the biography's limitations, they may be the result of its very concentration on John Cowper Powys's interior life, and its dependence upon his diaries and confessional writings. One thing that is lacking is a sense of the pleasure that he took

in the liberating comradeship of men; another is something that may not have lain within the author's sights – the impact that Powys had upon his readers and the influence that his books, and not his novels only, exerted upon such a variety of people from diverse nationalities and walks of life. His was largely a subterranean reputation, not gained from participation in the literary life of his time, through conferences and academic lectures, popular journalism or broadcast talks. His semi-eremital existence guaranteed his literary integrity; while the warmth and friendliness he exhibited to those (occasionally unwelcome) people who came to view him or to sit at his feet ensured that he was one author who in addition to being revered was also loved. The clownishness in him was productive of a sense of comedy and of empathy with every form of human limitation. However striking and majestic his appearance may have been, there always lurked within him the vulnerable mischievous child whose triumphant battle with his fears the author of *Descents of Memory* has charted with such meticulous and dedicated care.

This book was first published in America, where the word 'axe' is spelled 'ax'. For the English edition the Search and Replace mechanism was set to work and has added an 'e' to every appearance of 'ax', with the result that the Johnson family lived at Yaxcham, and the reader is confronted with 'taxeation', 'climaxe' and so on. This must be as infuriating for the author as it is irritating for the reader: do copy editors no longer exist? I would have thought their responsibility for avoiding such blunders would be axeiomatic.
(sic) GC

The Immemorial Year: Llewelyn Powys's Diary for 1909
edited with an introduction and notes by Peter J. Foss. Illustrated.

The Powys Heritage Series 13, Cecil Woolf, London, 2007

68pp., £9.00. ISBN 1-897967-84-5

By Paul Roberts

1909 was a pivotal year in the life of Llewelyn Powys, the year in which he contracted the tuberculosis which was to characterise the remaining thirty years of his life and which, according to Louis Wilkinson, was to bring about that heightening of the senses which made him a writer. The beginning of the year found Llewelyn engaged in the early stages of his ill-fated lecture tour when, despite the support and encouragement of his brother John he was often embarrassed and more often disappointed by his failure to emulate his brother's easy dominance of the lecture hall. Returning to England in the second week of April, Llewelyn hurried back to the security of his family in Montacute and spent a happy month with his brothers and sisters, including a visit to Theodore at Beth Car, where Francis had recently been born. In May, still having failed to find a career after the debacle in New York, Llewelyn took up an invitation from Littleton to join the staff at Sherborne on a temporary basis and he spent the next month or so engaged in some pleasant and

undemanding school-mastering. In July came news that John Cowper's health had collapsed as a result of overwork and the effects of his enduring gastric troubles and Llewelyn, perhaps glad to find an opportunity to return the kindness and solicitude of the brother he revered, acted swiftly to take charge of the situation, ensuring that he spent time in a nursing home and doing his best to divert him from his life as an itinerant lecturer into 'writing for the papers'. Indeed, in an amateur way, Llewelyn did his best to promote John's stories, reading them aloud to family and friends at every opportunity and submitting poems to magazines, all without success.

Once the crisis was over, Llewelyn once again set off to visit friends in Derbyshire and then, in September, returned to Sherborne to teach. It was here, on November 3rd that he suffered the first of those haemorrhages which were to mark the onset of his tuberculosis. Now it was John's turn to take charge of the situation once more, persuading his parents that Llewelyn's only hope lay in the expensive treatments he would receive at Clavadel in Switzerland and, once they had agreed, it was John who travelled with him, caring for him with enormous tenderness. And so, Llewelyn's 'most immemorial year' closes in the 'cursed rarified [*sic*] air – distilled in the white belly of the Alps' as he lies pierced by 'the dagger of death'.

When judging a published diary two questions must be addressed: Is it a satisfying literary text, quite apart from any biographical interest, which can delight, entertain or enlighten the reader? and, Do we learn anything new about the diary's author?

In the cases of *The Immemorial Year* the answer to the first question must, sadly, be no. With the exception of occasional phrases there is nothing here to indicate the great writer that Llewelyn was to become, a writer whose genius is still not fully appreciated even among those who admire other members of his family. The Llewelyn Powys who has the unique ability to capture the urgent physicality of the moment and yet achieves this in a style so beautiful and crafted, the Llewelyn Powys for who can use his vast and flexible vocabulary to portray every nuance of movement, is nowhere to be found here in the brief and often confusingly elliptical records of places visited and people met. How, for example, might this entry for March 12th have appeared in John Cowper's diary?

Read Shelley and saw Jack off. More excitements in the house. Went with Miss Perot to Picture Gallery. Saw tavern scene, a little pale-faced girl in red. Passed by runaway horse. Worked at Shelley.

For a reader, surely what Peter Foss calls the 'simulated diaries', accounts written up later from the diary notes, are far more satisfying.

What, then, do we learn of Llewelyn Powys from the diary? In terms of the larger picture, there is little here that is new, no startling revelations, nothing that might cause us to re-evaluate his life and work. But to concentrate on Llewelyn's text alone is to miss the point for, although Llewelyn provides the kernel, the flesh of this fruit is to be found in the astonishing editorial work of Peter J. Foss. What we gain from the interplay between Llewelyn's original text and Foss's introduction and annotations is an extraordinarily intimate portrayal of the *texture* of Powys's life at this, its most

crucial point. This, surely, is the point and the value of this excellent publication.

Having attempted some editorial work myself, I can only stand in awe at Peter Foss's heroic efforts in tracking down every possible reference and in bringing his vast and encyclopaedic knowledge of the life and works of Llewelyn Powys to bear on the present text. Surely there can be no-one who knows Powys better than Peter Foss and no more devoted and energetic advocate of his importance as an author. That Foss is a gifted author in his own right is an added benefit, for his introduction is very fine and what might, in other hands, have been rather stuffy and pedantic notes are elegantly wrought and of interest in themselves. Though we learn few new *facts* about the life of Llewelyn Powys from his diary we gain enormously in our understanding of what it must have been like to be Llewelyn and that is a remarkable feat.

This is not, however, the kind of book that a commercial publisher would have issued and, yet again, as admirers of the Powys family, we find ourselves indebted to Cecil Woolf for his courage in pursuing what can hardly be a profitable field and to Anthony Head, General Editor of the excellent Powys Heritage series, a series to which this is an essential addition.

A topographical note by Neil Lee is on p.31. KK

Porius—A Novel, by John Cowper Powys
newly edited by Judith Bond and Morine Krissdóttir,
with an Introduction by Morine Krissdóttir
Overlook/ Duckworth, New York–Woodstock–London, 2007
480pp., £25. ISBN 978-1-58567-366-7

On the new Porius

By Chris Gostick

What a great autumn! First we have Morine Krissdóttir's long awaited but quite excellent biography of John Cowper, which at long last really does get to grips with both the underlying contradictions and yet the undoubted epic grandeur of this quite extraordinarily accomplished writer. And as if that were not enough, after a wait of over 50 years, we now have the full text as JCP originally conceived it of what is arguably his most satisfying and completely realised novel of all: *Porius*. Don't be daunted by its apparent size and complexity, just let John Cowper take you by the hand and lead you into a magical world from which you will ever after be reluctant to leave! In the full power of his maturity this is a monumental achievement, and undoubtedly one of the really great novels of the twentieth century. Whatever else you have to neglect this year be sure not to miss either of these two extraordinary books! But many will also understandably wonder why they should now be considering paying out another £25 for this new Overlook *Porius*, when they spent at least that if

not more only a dozen or so years ago on the Colgate Press edition, which was also supposed to be a complete version. Can this new edition really be so very different? Well the answer to that question is both yes, and no! But before addressing these issues in more detail, I must first declare an interest, for as a result of my own personal disappointment with the Colgate edition I have always been amongst those pressing for this new version, and indeed was fortunate enough to be able to do some of the initial work by examining the surviving *Porius* manuscript, now at the University of Texas, and the two surviving typescripts, one at the National Library of Wales, and the other at Colgate University, during research for my forthcoming biography of James Hanley.

Many of the issues with the Colgate Press edition of the novel have already been effectively identified in various papers by Professor W. J. Keith and others, and largely arise from the complex history of the book, which JCP laboured on for the better part of ten years, together with the savage cuts and revisions that were required before the emasculated novel was finally published by Macdonald in 1951. That history is well explained by Morine and Judith Bond in their Editorial Notes to this new edition, and don't need to be repeated here, except to say that it is beyond doubt that the version of his book JCP hoped to see in print was that of the corrected typescript of the novel now held at Colgate University. This was one of two identically corrected typescripts sent respectively to Macdonald in the UK and Simon & Schuster in the USA, and this latter was subsequently sent to Marian Powys in New York after it was rejected by Simon & Schuster. This copy eventually found its way to Colgate University Library, exactly as John Cowper completed it, and now forms the basis for the new Overlook edition.

The Macdonald typescript, on the other hand, was the one used by JCP to make the drastic cuts and inevitable rewrites required for the eventual UK publication, and it is this that has resulted in much of the later confusion. The revised and brutally abridged typescript used to set up the print for the 1951 edition was subsequently destroyed by Macdonald, but the many discarded and often heavily corrected pages remaining from that abridgement were retained by JCP, and these eventually ended up in the Bissell Collection and are now in the Powys Collection at the Dorset County Museum. In attempting to produce a definitive edition of the novel the Colgate Press text incorporated at least some of the changes made in both these surviving typescript pages, and the Macdonald edition, as being later corrections to the text by JCP himself, and therefore his likely final thoughts on the subject. But close reading of his letters and diaries for the period make it quite clear these changes were only made in an attempt to retain the essentials of the story while reducing it to about two thirds of its original length, and were not in any way part of JCP's original intentions for the book. So the first crucial editorial decision must be: which of the various potential texts to use? And this new edition wisely favours the original surviving corrected typescript.

However, the use of this typescript also produces problems for an editor, although

these are rather more those of style than content, and result at least in part from JCP's often rather cavalier attitude to composition and punctuation, much of which was left to his typist, the long-suffering Mrs Meech in Dorchester, to provide. She inevitably was more concerned with producing an accurate rendition of his idiosyncratically scrawled manuscript, and so only lightly punctuated, and was not too concerned with consistency. As a result many errors (such as the inconsistent use of initial capitals for certain words and the italicization of others, or the almost random use of British and American spellings) as well as erratic punctuation crept into the completed typescript – and although JCP corrected at least some of these errors, he understandably expected that a publisher's editor would eventually do the bulk of the work on his corrected typescript. Similarly, names of people and places tended to change in the course of the long compilation of the novel, and not all of these were corrected in earlier editions; one particular example is that of Amreu ap Ganion's wife Lela, who by the end of the novel has become Lelo! [Colgate Press pp. 178 and 774 respectively, for example].

Perhaps even more important are some of the narrative inconsistencies, such as the way in which Rhun ap Gwrnach's spear later becomes a sword; but there are many others in both previous published texts. One specific example may illustrate the problems facing any editor rather well: on p. 39 of the corrected typescript, when Porius meets Mabsant ap Kaw for the first time in the forest, he is clearly described by JCP as being dressed in blue and gold livery, as is his horse and pennant, but by p. 44 this has changed to blue and *silver*. In the Macdonald published text this has been changed yet again, and is now *green* and gold in both places [pp. 22 and 25], and the published Colgate text does the same [pp. 23 and 26]. Although this part of the typescript has not survived, presumably this was a change JCP made himself when he did the revisions for Macdonald, possibly to match what he'd described a few pages later as the Emperor's green and yellow imperial colours [typescript p. 129, Colgate Press p. 73]. The new Overlook version accepts all these changes, but they are illustrative of the sorts of careful editorial decisions that are necessary to create a consistent narrative. Personally I'm rather sorry to have lost the blue and silver of the typescript!

Individually none of these things are particularly significant, but cumulatively they quickly create a very confusing and fragmented text, which sadly was one of the major irritants of the Colgate edition. Thankfully, the careful editing of this latest text has largely overcome these problems, and as a result it significantly improves both the flow and readability of the novel, which is one of the great joys of this new Overlook edition. Not only does the book read well, it also looks good, and feels much more comfortable in the hands – far less than the heavy brick of the Colgate Press edition. Overall it is a superb achievement, and while the Colgate version was undoubtedly a brave attempt, there is no doubt that if you want to read *Porius* at all then this new Overlook edition really must be the one to choose. Congratulations to everyone involved on a really great achievement.

Will Durant and JCP

Will Durant's Adventures in Genius (Simon and Schuster, 1931) is both a self-help book for those wishing to achieve 'culture' ('One Hundred Best Books for an Education' – a four-year reading course) and an admirably clear, balanced and positive series of essays on the 'Greatest' (thinkers, poets) and some of those giants of the early twentieth century now mostly like the Titans cast into Tartarus (Spengler, Keyserling, Anatole France). With John Cowper as the last of the 'Adventures in Literature' Durant pulls out all the stops. 'Portrait' is the first of three sections on The Meaning of Culture (W.W. Norton, September 1929) – its enthusiasm surely not all to please Simon and Schuster (to whom he had originally recommended JCP with Wolf Solent, published in May 1929).

Will Durant: *Adventures in Genius*

CHAPTER III: JOHN COWPER POWYS: Portrait

I have discovered a living philosopher, abounding in wisdom and beauty, and I would share him with the reader. It is not right that these essays should be confined to blowing trumpets for long-honored names; it is just that they should introduce to a wider friendship a strange and unheralded Plato from the remoter lanes of the City of God.

Picture him, first, as we have seen and heard him, so many of us, on the public platform: tall, thin, ungainly, angular, a very Michelangelo of the rostrum; long arachnid legs, long simian arms, long restless pseudopodian fingers, the Word made not flesh but bone and naked nerves; the stooping carriage of a solicitous giant, the proud head of a Welsh Jove flashing perpetual lightning, the obstinate chin of individuality, the large nose of genius, the trembling mouth of the poet, the gray curly hair that no more brooks set forms than the man himself, the eyes startled and piercing, hunted and hunting, tossed and pulled about with things vividly seen, haunted with mystery and frightened with understanding—but whose adjectives except his own could describe him?

And what speech! There is nothing in our generation like it, nothing equaling it in Gothic splendor of ornament, in sensitive perception and penetrating thought. At first hearing a medley of amazing phrases and epithets, meaning nothing to the dull; then an unfurled cloth of gold, sparkling and shimmering with beauty, and blinding the mind to the body of meaning whose gorgeous raiment it is; then the mirror of a complex vision unintelligible and unutterable; then, piece by piece and tone by tone, the Oriental mosaic and music of a philosophy as profound as Spinoza's and as kindly as Christ's. His name is John Cowper Powys. In his veins runs the blood of the poets Cowper and Donne, with that of a stoic clergyman who transmitted to his unbelieving sons his ineluctable piety. He lives and moves on this earth in our time and state, as like a banished angel as Li-po, that we may know what genius looks like face to face, what Shelley might have been without delusion, or Keats without

despair. Some of us have known him for years, and know that we have never known him at all; a sensitive and solitary spirit, driven into urban seclusion perhaps by some harsh blow of fate of which no word escapes him; a spirit unique, untouchable and profound, too aristocratically proud to give itself quite away or be too readily understood. After all, if a man has scaled zenith and sounded nadir, how can he make himself intelligible to his fellow-men, souls brushing by in obstructive conversation, ships passing beyond hail in the night?

At the first moment when our temperament encounters another temperament, all these delicate feelers retreat and curl up, drawing inwards and curving back like the feelers of sea-anemones. If the nature we are encountering be unsympathetic, all that we shall present to the intrusion of the stranger's approach will be a shapeless jelly-like substance; but if this other mind turns out to be akin to our own or possessed of something in common with our own, then, by slow degrees, these spiritual antennae of our secret being will reappear, and will begin to expand and shimmer in the wave and the sun of that other's comprehension. [*The Meaning of Culture*, New York 1929, p.226]

It was *Wolf Solent* that revealed to us part of this secret soul, through passionate meandering poetry-prose and fiction-autobiography; but there the portrait was obscured by its own complexity, and modestly subordinated to the pervasive verdure and odor of an England which Powys loves more than himself. Here, however, in what hasty wayfarers may have mistaken for a minor book, here in *The Meaning of Culture* is the man himself, open-hearted and clear through the protecting distance of print, telling us what we so long wanted to know—what he feels about the world and man, about the earth and love; expounding that subtlest and least phraseable of things, an artist's philosophy, all the profounder, so much the closer to the innate contrariness of life, because it has no system, offers no syllogisms, and surmounts every category of mere thought; all in all so rare and refined a vision of outward and inward reality as one reader has not found elsewhere, by eye or ear, in contemporary letters.

I wish to expound this philosophy without criticism, to quote from it lavishly enough to whet the appetite for deeper drinking at its source, to pass on to the reader this intoxicating cordial which here the indifferent providence of chance has brewed for those poor souls who are cursed with the love of beauty and the thirst for truth. I do not propose to sit in judgment upon the gods.

After a long quotation (from page 167), the final section ends:

... Such understanding and such art speak for themselves; it would be folly to add anything to them, or to take anything away. Here and there one would enter petty dissents: culture need not be so eremitically individual, and may have about it a sociability, a *camaraderie* and a Rabelaisian earthiness, such as must come hard to an Englishman, even when he is the finest Englishman that one has known. But perhaps never again shall we come upon a book from which we shall have to deduct so little before incorporating it part of the very ritual of our trust and aspiration.

And what style! What a vocabulary!—resonant and startling with the tang of unworn words; rich as an Oriental weave in riotous colors caught and held firmly in restrained designs; music like Schumann's, mystical and weird, esoteric and subtle, fathomless and divinely mad. Here is the finest American prose since Santayana; pages of beauty that should never be forgotten; prose that intoxicates and yet arouses; prose so lit up with fancy and rare speech as to be very poetry. "The place occupied in older times by poetry," Powys writes, "seems in our day to be occupied by imaginative prose" [p.39]; Well, here it is; here is a poet sensitive to all beauties and meanings beyond any other writing on our soil in our time; a poet unashamed of his sentiment in the face of a world made unprecedentedly coarse by a million mechanisms and the sudden flight of the gods.

He tells us that we should read a great book "very slowly, following carefully every single page, saturating ourselves with its very atmosphere till it becomes a portion of our inmost being" [p.212]. This is such a book. I have tried to read it faithfully in that way; and no words that I have could express my gratitude.

(*Will Durant: Adventures in Genius, Simon and Schuster, New York 1931 pp.301-15*)



Photo of JCP and Will Durant, probably taken on 1st September 1929 after lunch at the Schuster house, Glenhead, Long Island (see 1929 Diary).

(from Turning the Pages, an Insider's Story of Simon and Schuster, 1924-1984, by Peter Schwed (Macmillan NY, 1986)

Diaries of Catherine Philippa Powys

*Some extracts from the diaries kept during the years she was thinking about
and writing The Blackthorn Winter (1927–32)*

April 23 1927 Theodore told me to write a diary again—A diary, what is a diary? Only a repetition of days and what you do with days. [...] Now I am so old as 40 I feel less and less inclined towards strangers and towards ordinary teaparty conversation. Gertrude paints with increased skills and has made some important living pictures and portraits of this country and people. Mother would be amazed if she was now alive to hear how well-known Theodore and Lulu are in the circle of literary writers. Willie is still in the far land of Africa. Jack and May are still in America. May's child is nearly 5. He was with us last year. Old friends have gone whom my old diaries used to know except our great and beloved Bernie, but new ones have come forth.¹ I have done some writing but my farming has failed; and as I am slow and uncertain in my writing it is of no commercial value. Thus the good my life is to mankind is NIL.

April 25 Yesterday morning I tried to arrange my mind ready to continue my present story. We hoped Theodore would come but he never did. We had dinner and I rode Josephine. We cut along the Roman road to the big Ringstead cliff, where we cantered up as far as the White Nore. Returning as we came, I saw no sign of Lulu or Alyse and Gertrude had not even started when we got back so I was able to walk over Tumble Down to meet them with her. We passed the Gipsies' encampment and I picked out of the ashes of the fire a spoon which I pocketed [...] Gertrude walked back a little way with Theodore and Violet and I went with Lulu and Alyse. We said very little but when I gave Lulu my MS about the Stripping Shed at last (as he had promised to read it before I went to Ireland) he was I felt bored and made excuses about his work etc. If only I had not taken his promise literally for I would on no account have passed it to them. I am too sensitive about my writing for people to read it when they don't wish to do so ... However I felt disappointed but read afterwards some wise words of Pater's: 'So exclude Regret and Desire', but still I disagree for I feel if a person feels intensely he can not prevent regretting or desiring ...

May 1 [...] Read Alyse's manuscript, which to me is extraordinary good.² I always so enjoy the analytical manner in which she writes. The only flaw being the descriptions of the many meals. After finishing I could only go to the Mound and lie straight down in clover for her power of handling her characters so outreaches mine and I feel I have no right to take her time.

May 3 Typed out two of my poems for Willie.

May 5 [...] Met Gertrude just above the Thorn Tree beyond the Iron Latch Gate. We came past the bluebells. At the Mound we met Beatrice and the child going for sticks.³ The arrival of Gipsies hurried them home.

June 2, Sidmouth It is wonderful to see Bob going out to sea at night in the full wealth of the setting sun, but I do not seem to see nearly so much of him.⁴ I took Nan Woolley on a trip as far as Sidford. They like Josephine. Oh, I wish my mind would only revive so that I could write ... I seem so heavy and dull.

July 4 I spent two mornings going with Lulu through my 'Stripping Shed'. How hard I have worked at it and now he says it does not go with the other two parts. No doubt he is right for I wrote it at a different pitch—which was very difficult to maintain. Now it lies on my table waiting to be retyped. I feel so disinclined to go through it again myself. I wish I could find some one sympathetic to deal with it for me. Oh, how Molly could have done something to it.⁵

March 1928 [...] However the first two chapters of my 'Driven Passion' which Jack has called by a new name have been taken by *The Dial*—which is really of far greater significance as that paper is of high literary value.⁶ But still strangely I do not feel so elated as perhaps I should. It is because it is really a delivery of my soul, and to have brought it forth is the chief importance, not what others think about it. Theodore says he understands what I mean. This Sunday he came and we had a happy hour in my room. [...] I wrote a piece which was in my mind but since then I have been going on with my *Gipsy Novel* which is really far too long, and I am not very satisfied with it; in fact I feel at times a fool to go on wasting my time at writing for I am so bad at spelling and so slow at expressing myself.

June 1928 [...] My story is finished. [...] I have a young seagull the Peacocks picked up. I have been reading Isadora Duncan's life from which I got a lot of pleasure and now I am in the middle of Marcel Proust's 'Cities of the Plain'. And I have also read 'Jean Christophe' by Romain Rolland. I like it well but I feel it is not so good as I expected. There is so much to go through. It does not seem condensed enough.

August 1928 I have been home nearly a month. How differently the days go here. I seem to do nothing of interest. I can't get on with my writing. My 'Driven Passion' has been criticized by an American publisher. He says he would like much more written in it. I don't quite know how I shall manage that. Lulu and Alyse have fled away from us again [...] The few days before they went were pleasant for we saw quite a lot of them with the Wilkinsons and the Sunday night when I went as far as the Millers with Louis and Nan was pleasant.⁷ They are encouraging about my writing but oh, it is so slow and I feel I have achieved nothing in my life.

February 1929 I have had my play typed and 'Nancy'.⁸ I have started my Batemoor story and have been trying to reconstruct 'Driven Passion'. I have been reading plays by Webster and Tourneur and I am so glad I finished my own 'Quick and Dead' before I had because otherwise I would have been influenced by them. I like them much better than Shakespeare. They have power and the deepest philosophy, the best reading of the season, I consider. Though I enjoyed 'Desperate Remedies' by Thomas Hardy. Theodore says he thinks he could read Jane Austen over and over again easier than Thomas Hardy. I don't know myself.

1930 My first novel printed—Constable
My first poems printed —Lahr

April 1930 Chydyok [...] Gamel and Alyse have been through my last story. Gamel appeared quite to like it though it is probably not her natural style, but Alyse was full of objection—why I could at first not make out thus I was wounded and hurt so that each night brought regret and unhappiness, since the walk when with Lulu and she I crossed to the bus

at Osmington Mills, when the only joyful moment was when Lulu and we listened to the Chiff-chaff in the Willow. But since she has come and looked the writing over with me and I realized certain of her reasons. I began to understand and instead of being painful our hours together were extremely pleasant and greater love than ever spread over myself for her personality. There is a force in Alyse that no one can combat with. How I admire! How the things I criticize in her become nil before her greatness and singleness of purpose. Really and in truth I adore her. To me if you can get beyond her sting, you are far rewarded. How indebted I am to her for her help with my writing. For without her I could never have launched my books. She and Lulu were the first to encourage, except my own great friend Stephen Reynolds and Gertrude.

★ ★ ★ ★

I have been once or twice with Theodore but what I did value were those days when he crept up to Chydyok before Gertrude returned from Norwich and we had some moments together in my room and walked down the Valley again. They were moments of great value. First to feel he came of his own accord, next to enjoy him without the presence of other personalities and then to listen to his words and above all to hear his praise of my book [*The Blackthorn Winter*] which to me seems really impossible knowing how he never likes the ordinary novel.

'The Blackthorn Winter' has been advertised. Oh may it bring us luck. Mike and Nancy whom I wrote about first in the Barn that summer when Gertrude painted Mr Pollock.

Christmas has come and gone. It is the last week of 1930. A year of unknown fortune to myself and would that others could say the same. At last my efforts have been crowned with success. My first novel and my poems have flown from the Ark across the great waste of water—to be liked or disliked. My thoughts have blossomed to be plucked though my nerves seem more shattered and stranger than ever. Yet in between I have been more contented than I have been since Steve died. I feel as the weather at present: violent gales of short duration with intervals of sun and an amazing quiet ...

May 21 [...] Still on my way back from the Blacksmith I dared to call on Molly and leave an answer for Sylvia concerning my 'Sorrel Barn'. Her help has faded to no more than saying she prefers me as a poet, that she feels all the time the thwarted soul of a poet. It is simply because she does not care for a love story, but my denial of love needs a fulfilment and I can only achieve this in the Novels. I have no lover though my entire life is one long wish for the true companionship of one.

September 1 1931 [...] Louis and Nan are come next door. She has a silly little dog. But I loved to see her again. I am sincerely fond of her. I like to talk with her. They come in most days. But it's all very formal. I have had two happy minutes with Nan. But it is difficult to concentrate because of Louis and the silly little dog. I want her alone. I have so much to talk to her about.

September 5 [...] I went down with Nan to get butter with Josephine. We read my poems in the Rising Sun. A privilege I much appreciated as there was a rainstorm outside and I had shelter while Josephine was being shod. I am really fond of Nan and amused by Louis but the sound of his voice disheartens me. Nan is like some character in a book—unexpected and charming. She is wonderful with the affects of her dresses. She looks like some wonderful picture. With her you can see the real science of dressing.

October It is strange having Lulu and Alyse next door but wonderful. Lulu gave me his newest book and Alyse gave me hers.⁹ Really too good of them.

November 20 Lulu has gone to Lulworth for two nights and Alyse is writing. She is not happy with the reception of her novel which is to me a damned shame as I think extremely highly of it and to me it surpasses mine entirely. To read her works always makes me aware of my inabilities to stand as a writer.

November 27 Fine after the wild wind of the day before. Heard a thrush sing and a blackbird. Reading JCP's 'In Defence of Sensuality'. Interests me very much. Lulu says he is depressed that his last book 'Impassioned Clay' has not sold better. It makes him disinclined to write any more. I told him it is wrong to let a fertile field lie fallow. If he thinks he ought to give up writing how much more ought I. Didn't I hope my 'Driven Passion' could have been printed but no, it and so many other years' writing lie dusty in the cupboard—to want to be burnt when I am buried. Still I write on whether right or wrong like any odd little stream which has to empty its water in the vast space of the sea.

January 1932 I rode over to see Mrs Miller. I love seeing her all unexpectedly. I imagine I am Arthur Selwyn, really content to see her.¹⁰ There is romance in the cottage. Nan and Louis appeared the night after the gale. Nan full of schemes for her future house in the country. She intends to have a horse to ride. She agrees with me about the finish of 'The Path of the Gale'. I wish I could have had her in my room to talk longer alone. They liked my new poem. ...

The cruel destiny of fate is that our Nan has closed her eyes on us all.¹¹ Flown to the Unknown ——— It seems to have happened at Watchet. Poor Louis. Oh, would I could bring her back. She was one who bore me more and again true love than most. Poor unlucky Louis.

NOTES

1 Bernard Price O'Neill, a friend of all the Powyses. See: Jacqueline Peltier, *Two Powys Friends: Glimpses into the Lives of Bernard O'Neill and Ralph Shirley* (London: Cecil Woolf, 2006).

2 *King Log and Lady Lea*, published in 1929 (London: Constable and Co. Ltd).

3 Beatrice, wife of the carter. They lived in the adjacent cottage. When the carter family left, the cottage was empty for a little while till Llewelyn Powys and Alyse Gregory moved in.

4 Bob Woolley, Sidmouth fisherman friend of Philippa. See: Stephen Reynolds, *A Poor Man's House* (London: Macmillan and Co, 1908).

5 Valentine Ackland.

6 'Phoenix', published in *The Dial* vol. LXXXV, no 2, August 1928.

7 Nan (the novelist Ann Reid) was Louis's second wife. It was Nan who found a publisher for Philippa's novel *The Blackthorn Winter*. The Millers were friends who lived in Ringstead. They were the inspiration for *The Path of the Gale*, one of Philippa's unpublished novels.

8 One of several earlier titles for *The Blackthorn Winter*.

9 *Hester Craddock* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1931); republished by The Sundial Press, Sherborne, 2007.

10 One of the characters in *The Path of the Gale*.

11 Ann Reid (1900–32) died in Watchet within hours of catching influenza.

Thanks for this to Louise de Bruin.

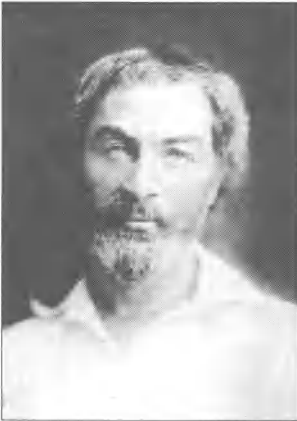
Walt Whitman

A portrait of Whitman, her lifelong inspiration, seen in venerable old age (actually barely 70) was given to Katie by JCP. A message on the back reads: 'Philippa Powys from John Cowper Powys. This was drawn in that house you went into, a year I think before Walt Whitman died and the artist, then a boy-pet of Walt Whitman's, gave it to me when—he told me he got Whitman to sign it—he himself was a fairly old man.' The picture is signed 'Percy Ives, Camden, Dec 21 1887', with Whitman's signature. On the mount is written 'a souvenir of appreciation to John Cowper Powys from Percy Ives, Detroit, November 2nd 1915.'

A newspaper cutting of the photograph of a younger Whitman was in JCP's edition of Whitman, marking the place of 'Chanting the Square Deific'.

Walt Whitman was born 1819 on Long Island, d. 1892 at Camden, near Philadelphia. The Camden house and his restored birthplace (in Huntington, NY) are both now Whitman museums. Philippa/Katie visited New York from November 1923 to April 1924. KK

John Hodgson writes: Philip Callow (*see Obituary p.22*) was the author of an exuberant and robust biography *Walt Whitman, From Noon to Starry Night* (Allison & Busby, 1992). This book notably takes seriously Whitman's long career as a jobbing journalist, and anchors Whitman's visionary Manhattan in the teeming everyday political and commercial life of the city. Perhaps taking his cue from JCP, Callow relishes the vein of charlatanry in Whitman, 'this blend of seer and insurance salesman'. The book is a work of love and enthusiasm, superbly professional, and deeply personal.



*Walt Whitman, daguerrotype, c.1854,
from Philip Callow's biography.*



*Whitman aged 67,
drawing by Percy Ives.*