TWO DISCUSSION MEETINGS

§§ Saturday 10th May in DORCHESTER (on TFP and Comedy) §§

§§ Saturday 14th June at ELY (on JCP's *Porius*, chapters 4 and 5) §§

see page 3

Editorial

1974 and even 1984 seemed sufficiently historic to justify the two long reprinted pieces in this issue. R. H. Blythe's introduction to the Hogarth Press *Mr. Weston* gives a refreshing village-centred view of the scene – leading us to imagine what might have been if Mr W. had chosen to visit Suffolk and Blythe's Akenfield. JCP's notes on the *Porius* characters, with his draft incomplete introduction (for a later *NL*), were transcribed by the late Robert Blackmore in the 1974 *Porius* issue of *The Powys Newsletter* (*Four*) from Colgate University. (A more factual 'Historic Background' and shorter character list have appeared in all *Porius* editions.)

Biographies as we all know can range from hagiography to hatchet, balancing (or favouring) analysis and sympathy. MK herself in her 2003 talk (*see NL 48*]) 'The Figure under the Carpet' (an extension of Henry James's image of the limitations of biography, like seeing a carpet from the back), acknowledged the biographer's function both of sifting facts and finding the story in them ... avoiding the swings of both idealism and iconoclasm ... weigh[ing] up how much of life, art and design there is in a writer's inevitably 'adjusted' writings ... 'Truth is below.' She quoted

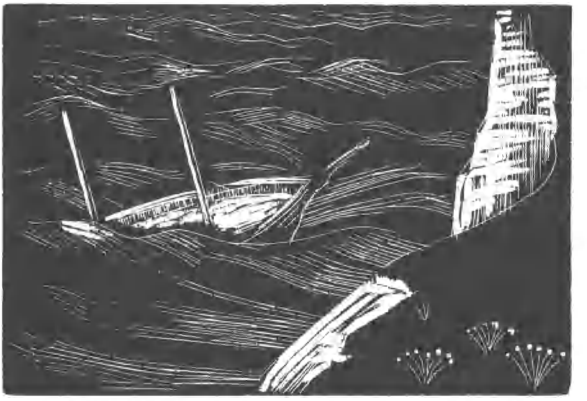
ON OTHER PAGES

Richard Holmes on the biographer's dual task: first to order the material and then to establish the imaginary relationship between the subject and the biographer.

Both the fact-sifting and interpreting are bound to be variously valued by readers, as reflected in the more informed of the public reviews of *Descents* that have appeared up to now – Margaret Drabble (*TLS,* 14th November 2007 – '*The patron saint of desperate inverts and creator of mythic masterpieces receives the biography that the psychodrama of his life deserves*'); John Gray (*Literary Review* December 2007 – '*The Dorset Proust*' – '*one of the most arresting literary biographies in many years*'); A. N. Wilson (*Spectator,* 15th February 2008, reviewing with the two new Cecil Woolf volumes of JCP letters – *'From a biographer, it would have been good to read a bit more well-deserved praise'*). Others, more ignorant of JCP and his work (as would most of their readers be) have tended simply to pick (often garbled) on the subject's portrayed eccentricities. A 'review of reviews' by Susan Rands is on p.22; Michael Kowalewski's personal view – on the theme of *ARACHNOMACHIA* – is on p.21, Tony Atmore's on p.24.

Cicely Hill's illuminating essay on 'The Ridge' appears at last, with a more personal response to the poem by Colin Thomas. New light is shed on JCP's spectral appearance to Theodore Dreiser, with light cast by Dreiser on the role of Phyllis in JCP's life. JCP seen as guru, in darkest wartime and from distant India, appears and reappears; and some curious publishing variants are examined.

Obituaries, sadly, for Marius Buning and for Peter Christensen.



G. M. Powys, wood-engraving for Rats in the Sacristy.

Subscriptions

If a **reminder** is enclosed for you do please pay your subscription **now**.

Two Meetings

Saturday 10th May 2008
Powys Day at Dorchester

A discussion meeting in the Dorset County Museum (High West Street, Dorchester DT1 1XA) will focus particularly on **T. F. Powys's *Kindness in a Corner***, to be republished by the Sundial Press on 30th March this year.

Programme

11.00 Meeting in the DCM for coffee, followed by discussion on **T.F. Powys as a comic writer** led by **Ian Robinson**, editorial director of the Brynmill Press, and **John Hodgson**, chairman of The Powys Society.

12.30 lunch (probably as before at Bojangles restaurant).

14.00 An informal reading of Kate Kavanagh's dramatisation for radio of T. F. Powys's *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*.

After the programme at the Museum, there will be an afternoon walk – depending on weather – possibly to TFP's East Chaldon.

Members and friends are warmly invited.

Intending participants please inform Hon. Sec. **Peter Lazare**, phone 01823 278177 or e-mail <Peter_Lazare@hotmail.com>, so that lunch bookings can be made. A contribution of £5 is requested from those attending, covering the talks and coffee.

Saturday 14th June 2008
at The Old Fire Engine House, Ely

A discussion meeting with Glen Cavaliero, Cicely Hill and Chris Gostick, on **two chapters from *Porius:*** chapters IV 'The Tent' and V 'The Henog' (pages 79–105 in the new edition).

Programme

Meet from 11 a.m. on to start at noon.

Lunch at the Fire Engine House.

Afternoon session chaired by Glen Cavaliero.

To book lunch and for advice on travel, phone **Sonia Lewis 01353 688316** or e-mail <soniapotlewis@phonecoop.coop>.

This group should be limited to 15.

Committee Nominations

Nominations are required for the Honorary Officers of the Society and Members of the Committee as set out below.

All paid-up and honorary members may submit nominations. Each such nomination shall be made by a Proposer and a Seconder in writing, accompanied by the Nominee's agreement in writing.

Nominations are to reach the Hon. Secretary Peter Lazare at 25 Mansfield Road, Taunton, TA1 3NJ, **not later than Friday 27th June 2008.**

Honorary Officers

The present Honorary Officers are as follows:

Chairman	John Hodgson
Vice-Chairman	Timothy Hyman
Hon. Treasurer	Michael J. French
Hon. Secretary	Peter Lazare

The one-year term of all these Officers expires at the AGM on Sunday 31st August 2008, and therefore **nominations are sought for all four Officers**.

Members of the Committee

John Dunn and David Gervais have two years to run of their three-year term of office.

Kate Kavanagh, Anna Pawelko and John Powys have one year to run of their three-year term of office.

Jeff Kwintner and Peter Foss have decided to stand down.

Nominations are therefore sought for 2 Members of the Committee.

PL

AGM 2008

This is to give you notice that the **Annual General Meeting of the Society** will take place at **11a.m. on Sunday 31st August 2008**, in the Cloisters Chamber of **Bishop Otter College,** College Lane, Chichester.

All members are invited to attend whether or not they are part of the Conference.

The Powys Society Conference 2008
Chichester Friday 29th August – Sunday 31st August 2008

'Other Dimensions'

Our 2008 Conference will take place at the Bishop Otter Campus of the University of Chichester, College Lane, Chichester, West Sussex, from 1600 on Friday 29th August to 1500 to Sunday 31st August (see enclosed leaflet for details and booking). The University was formerly a Church of England Teacher Training College, and we will hold our lectures in the congenial Victorian ambience of the old college. The campus has comfortable modern accommodation with single bedrooms with en suite bathrooms.

The campus is 15 minutes walk to the north of the city centre. Chichester is an ancient cathedral city situated between the English Channel and the South Downs. The cathedral with its imposing spire dates from Norman times, and is surrounded by elegant streets of fine Georgian houses. The Pallant House Gallery, is a unique combination of a Queen Anne townhouse and a contemporary building holding one of the best collections of twentieth-century British art in the world, with works by Edward Burra, Lucien Freud, Eric Gill, Andy Goldsworthy, Howard Hodgkin, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson, and many others. (See also *NL* 57, March 2006, page 4).

John Cowper Powys bought a house in the downland village of Burpham in 1902, and his son Littleton Alfred was born there. Many attenders at our 2006 conference in Chichester will remember our walk across the downs, along paths that John Cowper would have known, with expansive views over the Sussex Weald and to the sea, with readings from Powys's works *in situ*. For the less energetic, we hope this year also to organize a coastal walk through Felpham, where William Blake's cottage still stands.

The conference speakers include our president, **Glen Cavaliero**, who will talk on **'That Goblin Race – the Powys Family Mystique'**. The title of his talk comes from a phrase describing the Powyses in Sylvia Townsend Warner's diary, and he will look at the enduring fascination that the different members of the family, individually and together, continue to exert on readers. **Bill Keith's** talk, **'John Cowper Powys and "Other Dimensions": The Evidence of His Fiction'** will tackle the 'beyond-this-world' possibilities in John Cowper's work which have been little discussed, perhaps out of embarrassment, since Wilson Knight's highly controversial interpretations. Professor Keith says that his talk nevertheless will be 'primarily literary, *not* New-Age-mystical'. **Arjen Mulder**, in **'Becoming John Cowper Powys'**, will discuss John Cowper Powys's early novels from *Wood and Stone* to *Ducdame*, and **David Goodway** will discuss John Cowper Powys's relation to anarchist thought in his work, as treated in David's recent book, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*. **Chris Wilkinson** is once again providing an entertainment for Saturday evening, from the Powys and Wilkinson archives. An auction of a watercolour painting by Will Powys will take place during the weekend.

Provisional Programme:

Friday 29th August

Arrival – Reception – Dinner

Glen Cavaliero: 'That Goblin Race – the Powys Family Mystique'

Saturday 30th August

Breakfast

Arjen Mulder: 'Becoming John Cowper Powys'

David Goodway: John Cowper Powys, Emma Goldman, and Anarchism

Lunch

Afternoon: guided walks round Burpham or coastal Sussex

Dinner

'The Bride Who Pays the Organist ...'

a reading devised by **Christopher Wilkinson** based on the diaries and letters of the Powys and Wilkinson families from 1912.

Sunday 31st August

Breakfast

Bill Keith: 'John Cowper Powys and 'Other Dimensions': The Evidence of His Fiction'

11.00 **AGM** followed by a discussion led by **Timothy Hyman** on the usefulness of biographies of writers for literary appreciation, and auction of a watercolour painting by Will Powys.

Lunch

3.00 Departure

About the Speakers

Glen Cavaliero is president of The Powys Society, and author of *John Cowper Powys, Novelist* (1972). He teaches at the English Faculty at Cambridge University and is a fellow-commoner of St Catherine's College. His books of criticism include *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel, 1900–1939* (1977), *The Supernatural and English Fiction* (1995), *The Alchemy of Laughter* (2000) and studies of E. M. Forster and Charles Williams. The most recent of his seven books of poetry, *The Justice of the Night*, was published by The Tartarus Press in 2007. *Infinity Plus* writes that this collection 'occupies a special borderland itself, somewhere between personal reflection and archetypal memory, confession and dreamscape. Bold, lively, and capable of peeling back the robe of possibility with a voice as unobtrusive as it is startling, *The Justice of the Night* is nothing less than art.'

David Goodway is well known as a leading historian of anarchism and libertarian socialism. He studied at the University of London under Eric Hobsbawm, and published *London Chartism 1838–1848* in 1982. He was for many years senior lecturer

in history at the University of Leeds, and in 2006–2007 was Helen Cam Visiting Fellow at Girton College, Cambridge. His book *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (2006), includes two chapters on the anarchist philosophy of John Cowper Powys. Other members of the anarchist 'awkward squad' include Edward Carpenter, Oscar Wilde, Herbert Read, and Aldous Huxley. David Goodway is editor of *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman* (Cecil Woolf, 2008).

W. J. (Bill) Keith is Emeritus Professor of English at Toronto University. His extensive writing on Canadian literature includes *A Sense of Style: Studies in the Art of Fiction in English-Speaking Canada* (1989), and criticism of Hugh Maclennan, Margaret Atwood, Rudy Wiebe, and Hugh Hood. His books on English writing include *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside* (1974) and *The Poetry of Nature: Rural Perspectives in Poetry from Wordsworth to the Present* (1980). He has written widely on John Cowper Powys, and his readers' guides to *Autobiography*, *Porius*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, and *Owen Glendower* can be downloaded from the Powys Society website. The society will shortly be publishing his monograph, *Aspects of John Cowper Powys's* Owen Glendower*: Background and Introduction.*

Arjen Mulder, from the Netherlands, is a biologist and media theorist, and has taught at art schools in The Netherlands. He is member of the editorial board of *De Gids*, the oldest literary magazine in Europe, founded in 1837. He books include, in Dutch, *The Woman for Whom Cesar Pavese Committed Suicide* (2005), and several collections of essays on the relationship between technical media, physical experiences, and belief systems. In English translation, his work includes *Understanding Media Theory* (2004), and *Book for the Electronic Arts* (2000), co-authored with his wife Maaike Post. His book *Transurbanism* (2001), written with Joke Brouwer, is about the changing shape of modern cities, which have now become 'urban fields' in a state of continuous decomposition, 'continually reorganizing and rearranging themselves, expanding and shrinking'. He has a long-standing interest in John Cowper and Llewelyn Powys.

G. M. Powys, wood-engraving for Rats in the Sacristy *(slightly reduced).*

Obituaries

Marius Buning
(20th May 1930 – 11th January 2008)

The President writes:

With the death of Marius Buning the world of Powys studies has lost one of its most distinguished and perceptive contributors, while his friends have lost a companion of genuine warmth and charm. Elegant in appearance and debonair in conversation, he brought a touch of sophisticated stylishness to the Powys Conferences he attended; his geniality and obvious love of life were always a tonic. But he was also a deeply serious man, and it is a real loss that his proposed re-writing of his study of *T. F. Powys: A Modern Allegorist*, (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986) for a less exclusively academic readership will not now appear. His committed involvement with the work of James Joyce, Samuel Beckett and Meister Eckhart placed that of Powys in a context that was religious in its essence.

I had the honour of being one of the two promoters of his Doctoral thesis for the Free University of Amsterdam (where he had studied and taught for his entire career), and was present on the occasion of the awarding of his Doctorate in 1986. It was a real pleasure to us both when in my congratulatory speech I was able to convey the good wishes for his success sent to him by Theodore's youngest sister Lucy, who had a warm regard for him. That regard was shared by so many of us who were privileged to know him and to enjoy his friendship.

Glen Cavaliero

Charles Lock adds:

I last saw Marius on a visit to Amsterdam in May 2006. He was not in good health, had difficulty in breathing, and was wired to an oxygen supply. Yet, diminished as he appeared, as soon as he started to talk he was as cheerful and as intellectually exuberant as ever; I recall many conversations held over the years, in Weymouth, Mappowder and other Powysian or Theodoran locations, as well as in Amsterdam. In the spring of 2006 Marius told me of his sadness that he was no longer able to attend the Powys conference. Even more he regretted that he would have to miss all of the events arranged that year to commemorate the centenary of Samuel Beckett's birth.

In the past twenty years it was Beckett who was the centre of Marius's enthusiasm and fascination. In Beckett scholarship Marius's contribution has been considerable, and is widely acknowledged. The bilingual journal that he founded in 1992 and co-edited through eighteen issues, *Samuel Beckett Today / aujourd'hui*, has established itself as one of the liveliest and least doctrinaire sites of Beckett scholarship.

Marius' interest in the conjunction, intersection or imbrication of modernism and mysticism is one that we shared, and that often formed the topic of our more contentious conversations. I regret now that I never fully engaged in a response to Marius's numerous essays on Beckett's reading of mystical writings. Happily, how-

ever, I was able to pay tribute to Marius's scholarship, and to his theoretical sophistication, when in 1988 I contributed an extensive review of his book on T. F. Powys to *Literature and Theology.*

Marius had plans to revise that work and bring it out in a form less specialized and less like a dissertation: one must regret that we do not have from him the elegant critical introduction to T. F. Powys that he could have provided. But Marius was always moving on intellectually, remaining loyal to his favourite writers but forever approaching them in new ways, realizing their hidden connections and affinities, and always testing the threshold of language and silence: the ineffable, the apophatic, the unsayable. On the announcement of Marius's death, issued by his family, this epigraph, from a poem by Beckett, is to be read:

> Go where never before
> no sooner there than there always
> no matter where never before
> no sooner there than there always

Through Marius's work we may hope that T. F. Powys and Samuel Beckett will always be companions, as they were for him, on the *via negativa* as it negotiates its devious path, through their time, and ours.

Peter Christensen

Michael Ballin writes (October 2007)

I was saddened to hear this week of the death of Peter Christensen whom I knew for a period of twenty years or more. He was a friend and academic colleague who had a reputation as an indefatigable attender and presenter at academic conferences. And it was at one of the first conferences held by the Powys Society of North America that I first met him. The Powys Society certainly benefited from his unstoppable energy and determination. He almost never failed to attend our conferences and presented papers at many of them, many of these subsequently published. The topics ranged through many of the major novels from *Maiden Castle* to *Owen Glendower, Porius* and *The Brazen Head.* I recall Denis Lane once commenting on the morally tough quality of Peter's critical approach. However, morally rigorous though his approach was, he had a deep love of Powys. I also recall his spontaneous enthusiasm whilst rereading *A Glastonbury Romance* of the beauty of the style and the moving appeal of that work.

Peter's presence will certainly be missed, and his contribution to a vast range of literary scholarship, criticism and appreciation. He interpreted his specialisation, Comparative Literature, very broadly. His appreciation of Powys was therefore in the context of all the major writers I know of in the modern period, together with ones I have not even heard of. I console myself with the knowledge that after resolving a number of personal difficulties in his life, he was especially active in the past couple of

years. He not only continued writing, researching and teaching but travelled quite extensively in Europe, the United Kingdom and Australia where he spent a sabbatical year characteristically doing a tough course in Australian literature. The last I heard of him before his death was this summer from the University of York in the United Kingdom where he was doing a course in medieval studies. One of Peter's essays, 'The Dark Gods and Modern Society: Powys's *Maiden Castle* and Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*' was published in Denis Lane's essay collection *In the Spirit of Powys*. I think there was much in the life and personality of Peter Christensen, his intellectual intensity, prolific writing and relentless energy, that could be said to be in that spirit, even though he was unfortunately nowhere near as long lived.

Peter Christensen took part in the discussion meeting on TFP's Fables *led by David Gervais in Dorchester in June 2003. There are contributions by him in* The Powys Journal XII (2002) *and several in* The Powys Review, *as well as in PSNA and American publications.*

Hampstead Meeting, 24th November 2007

About 25 people met at the Friends' Meeting House in Hampstead, to hear Morine Krissdóttir talk about her biography of JCP, *Descents of Memory.*

A practical question put to Morine concerned the difficulties of dealing with a big but independent American publisher like Overlook. After initial success in persuading its autocratic editor to reprint four unprofitable Powys novels, with the biography as bait for more, Morine had had to cut her book by a third, endured a two-year delay with a series of changing editors, and fell foul of computer incompetence in the matter of spelling differences, only by firm action preventing the 'light Americanizing' of her carefully restored edition of *Porius.*

No men are heroes to their valet, or their psychiatrist, so the *wisdom* of the subject himself was not open to discussion. Questions and points relating to the fiction included: whether the mythological and alchemical schemes traced in *Glastonbury* and *Porius* could be said to lead to any definite conclusions on what JCP deliberately intended, or believed? (MK: not specifically, but he used unconscious energies to keep himself this side of madness); is the golden vision at the end of *Wolf Solent* — or is the cup of tea – its true conclusion (i.e., JCP's final verdict)? (MK: all myths endlessly repeat themselves – each novel a new quest). How does knowledge of a writer's life affect reading their work? (MK came to the work first).

In discussion: does knowing the life get in the way, or help? A prime example where the knowledge helps (or does it?) being Llewelyn's *Love and Death. Ought* a work of art to depend on knowing about its creator? Could hearing about the life before reading the work put off a potential reader? Reading at different ages affects our view, as does repeated reading. Do we appreciate JCP more when young or experienced? KK

Glendower Re-echoed

Leading letter on the TLS letter page, 14th December 2007 (slightly cut)

Sir, — As someone who wrote a dissertation on the autobiography and Wessex novels of John Cowper Powys (University of Virginia, 1971) and published extensively on him in literary journals during the 1970s, I wanted to contribute the following addendum to Morine Krissdóttir's excellent account of his misfortunes at the hands of publishers, attorneys, and agents during the 1930s (which was reviewed by Margaret Drabble, November 16).

In 1972,1 was preparing to write an essay on Powys's *Owen Glendower* (1940), a two-volume, massively researched novel of the Welsh prince's revolt against Henry IV, and I learned that a historical novel on the same subject had been published that year by G. P. Putnams. This was Martha Rofheart's *Fortune Made His Sword* (published in 1973 in the UK as *Cry God for Harry)*. I quickly got my hands on a copy to see if Powys and Rofheart had used the same sources, but what I discovered was page after page of verbatim plagiarism. This was no accident: I counted more than a hundred such instances, extending over about 150 pages in the middle of the novel. I considered writing to Putnams directly but was advised instead to contact Laurence Pollinger, Powys's literary agent and executor, detailing the plagiarism, which I did.

I still have Mr Pollinger's reply, acknowledging the plagiarism, advising me as to the futility of seeking legal action against a rich American publisher, and suggesting to me as a remedy that I send some money to Phyllis Playter in Blaenau Ffestinion ... I sent her a $50 cheque, which was, I suspect, the last royalty ever collected by the Powys estate on one of the greatest (and strangest) historical novels in the English language.

David A. Cook *Department of Broadcasting and Cinema, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, North Carolina 27412.*

(An article enlarging on this may appear later.)

New Books

Cecil Woolf's two long-awaited *Letters* – **JCP and Emma Goldman (ed. David Goodway)** and **JCP and Dorothy Richardson (ed. Janet Fouli)** have at last appeared. Both these have special interest as they contain both sides of the correspondence. (See enclosed leaflet.)

The new edition by **Sundial Press** of T. F. Powys's ***Kindness in a Corner*** (1930) is due to appear at the beginning of April – in good time for the discussion meeting at Dorchester on 10th May – to be followed closely by another late work by TFP, ***Unclay*** (1931). Both books have exceptionally beautiful covers, of Samuel Palmer paintings. A second collection of Llewelyn's Wessex essays, titled *Still Blue Beauty*, is to follow from Sundial. More details from <www.sundialpress.co.uk>.

Two Meetings [*See page 3*]
The meetings arranged for Dorchester (10th May, on TFP) and Ely (14th June, on *Porius*) follow earlier ones that have been much enjoyed in other years, with thoughtful informal discussions, a good lunch and interesting surroundings. Members and friends are warmly invited. Please contact Peter Lazare (for Dorchester) and Sonia Lewis (for Ely) if you plan to join the group.

* * * *

Llewelyn Powys's essays in Sundial's *Durdle Door to Dartmoor* are given a two-page feature in the *Dorset Echo* – the same as Llewelyn wrote for – in their Saturday magazine for 8th March; with another scheduled for *Dorset* magazine in May.

Morine **Krissdóttir** has an article on the Powyses and her biography in ***Dorset Life*** magazine for February.

* * * *

Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson reports that **Faber and Faber** plan for a gradual reissue (probably in small editions) of all **JCP's fiction** other than Overlook/ Duckworth's Big Five (i.e., *Wood and Stone, Rodmoor, After My Fashion, Ducdame, Morwyn, The Inmates, Atlantis* and *The Brazen Head*). This is powerful news. Candidates now urged for *Autobiography, Pleasures of Literature* — and ??

* * * *

Mysteries of Amazon, continued.
Both books mentioned in *NL* 62 (p.30) materialised. *The Meaning of Culture* is a quality softback U.S.A. reprint (ISBN 978-1-4067-9453-3) of the 1936 Jonathan Cape 'Travellers' Library' edition (i.e., without the later preface).

'*Key to Happiness*', published in Delhi for Crossland Books by Indiana (2008, ©, 81-8408-193-6, price Rs 135) – attributed on the cover to John Cowper POWER (a nice variation on "Mr Powg"?) – is a softback reprint of *The Art of Happiness* (Simon and Schuster/ John Lane, 1935 – or Village Press 1975?) with a smiling western-dressed girl in lotus position on its cover (*see NL back cover)*. This replaces an earlier, cheaper edition (by Crest) with the same title, correct author, and cover of an Indian-dressed couple by the sea (*page 46*). Does this indicate an evolving New Indian Readership?

The ART of Happiness appeared in a 1960 paperback from JAICO publishing in Bombay. The blurb on the back is identical.

* * * *

W. J. Keith is preparing a **revised edition of his *Porius Companion*** keyed to the pagination of the 2007 edition (in addition to Colgate 1994). He would welcome any additions and corrections to the original version as soon as possible. These can be sent by e-mail to william.keith@utoronto.ca

* * * *

The **Swedish JCP Society's Newsletter no.10** is a memorial to Sven Erik Täckmark. Gunnar Lundin also writes on *Wolf Solent*.

* * * *

La lettre powysienne No.14 (autumn 2007) contains articles on 'Spiritual tension in *Glastonbury*', JCP and psychoanalysis, 'Ceramics and Literature', and on the Hungarian writer Bela Hamvas (1897–1968) who corresponded with JCP.

* * * *

Jeremy Hooker's inaugural professorial lecture, 'Putting the Poem in Place', at the University of Glamorgan on 11th December 2007, can be read on the website of the David Jones Society. He was presented at the occasion with a *festschrift*, 'Moment of Earth' (Celtic Studies Publications).

* * * *

As well as his long review in the *Spectator* (16th February 2008, on the biography and the two new collections of letters from Cecil Woolf), **A. N. Wilson** also quotes **JCP to Dorothy Richardson** in one of his Monday *Telegraph* columns, on the best way to read Wordsworth's *Prelude*.

* * * *

A **French** reissue by Points Seuil of ***Ducdame*** (*Givre et Sang* – Frost and Blood) is reviewed by Emily Barnett in *Les Inrockuptibles* (n.637, 12th February 2008 – a paper devoted to rock music and young people). '*A powerful and little-known work, like a more romantic D. H. Lawrence*' featuring '*a kind of Heathcliff haunted by desires for different women and by the wish to escape his destiny as aristo ... Powys's inspiration for the inner landscapes of his characters (recalling Woolf's) runs closely with the cosmic changes of their surroundings. The English countryside, exposed to the four winds, is both a metaphor for humanity (as with the Brontes) and a fold for occult forces – a belief that with Powys pushes animism to its limit.*'

Wolf Solent and *Autobiographie* have also been republished, by Gallimard.

* * * *

Bloomsbury Auctions held a sale of Powys-related material in August. Did anyone see it?

* * * *

Hugh Clayton hopes to offer more information about translations of the Powys siblings (see *Journal* XVI, 2006] – meanwhile somebody has tried without success to sell a Polish *Wolf Solent* on eBay ...

He also lists some Powys books which have been donated in the past year to the Oxfam shop in Marlborough, of which he is a volunteer. They include *Black Laughter*, *Mr. Weston*, *Modern Short Stories* including TFP and James Hanley, and the Macdonald (shorter) *Porius*: all good 'reading copies' in which the text is sound throughout but the bindings are either faded or broken or both (there are no dust jackets). Prices from £1 to £20 (for *Porius*).

He adds, 'If any of these are of interest, I can provide details and payment methods; postage is unlikely to exceed £1.50 for any except perhaps the two Porii, which are naturally somewhat heavier than the rest! Incidentally, the previous deputy manager of the shop was Pam Thomas, who used to write historical novels under her maiden name of Pamela Belle. She is indeed a great-niece of Louis Wilkinson, whom she described with a chuckle as "very much the black sheep of the family"!'

* * * *

Dr Frances Hogwood has inherited Powys books from her mother Marion Hogwood which she is offering for sale to members – please contact her at <fmhog@onetel.com> for a list.

* * * *

David Gervais will write in a coming *NL* on the excellent ***British Vision*** exhibition in Ghent, of which **Tim Hyman** was a curator.

* * * *

A 'snippet' from **Neil Lee**: 'My latest book, '*Weird, Wacky & Wonderful Derbyshire Folk – a Book of Tributes*' (by 'Tom Bates') will be published just before Christmas by New Age Poetry Press. It contains a chapter on 'The Derbyshire Powys' and a brief bio of the family and their literary and artistic achievements. Details on my web-site at <www.aboutderbyshire.co.uk >.'

* * * *

Jim Morgan's account of his working life, *Confessions of a Wage Slave*, takes him from North London between the wars, through WW2 as Bevin Boy and in India and Palestine, ending with happy retirement to Lyme Regis. It's a well-told historical document, a window on the twentieth century. Available from Serendip Books, 11 Broad St, Lyme Regis, DT7 3QD, 01297 or from Jim (Flat 1, Mill Green Court, Lyme Regis DT7 3PJ).

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Bellow, JCP, and America

I thought I understood why I had come to Paris. Writers like Sherwood Anderson and, oddly enough, John Cowper Powys had made clear to me what was lacking in American life. 'American men are tragic without knowing why they are tragic," wrote Powys in his *Autobiography*.' They are tragic by reason of the desolate thinness and forlorn narrowness of their sensual mystical contacts. Mysticism and Sensuality are the things that most of all redeem life." Powys, mind you, was an admirer of American democracy. I would have had no use for him otherwise. I believed that only the English-speaking democracies had real politics. In politics continental Europe was infantile and horrifying. What America lacked, for all its political stability, was the capacity to enjoy intellectual pleasures as though they were sensual pleasures. This was what Europe offered, or was said to offer. (*From 'My Paris' by Saul Bellow,* New York Times, *March 13th 1983 – thanks for this to Robin Wood.)*

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Indexes

An Index to ***The Powys Review*** 1–26 was published by The Powys Society in 1992; this covers all the numbers issued to members on behalf of the Society; copies can be purchased (*see inside back cover*).

Indexes of the Society's own periodals have been published as follows:

The Powys Journal: I–X in vol. X; XI–XV in vol. XVI;

Powys Society Newsletter: 1–25 in issue 25 (1995); 26–43 in issue 44 (2001).

Indexes to ***The Powys Newsletter*** (Colgate) and ***Powys Notes*** (PSNA) for 1970–2002 are obtainable from the *Newsletter* Editor. Indexes to our ***Newsletters* 44 on**, and some others, can be sent via computer .

Ronald Blythe: 'God's Trip to Dorset'

(*Introduction to* Mr Weston's Good Wine, *Hogarth Press, 1984.*)

Theodore Francis Powys was fifty-two when this, his greatest novel, was published in 1927. He was already thinking of himself as a writer while still in his teens and working a small farm at Sweffling, Suffolk. Having been educated at an Aldeburgh school run by family friends, it probably seemed quite a reasonable thing for his parents to do to place this large, strong, seventeen-year-old in such a situation, to give him independence and to see what he would make of it. There were also considerable family associations in the area, for although Theodore's father, the Reverend Charles Powys, was obsessed by what he believed was his descent from Welsh princes, his mother was equally proud of her Norfolk descent from the poet William Cowper. Theodore had often spent holidays at his grandfather's Norfolk rectory, and what with the close companionship of his headmaster's son Louis Wilkinson, a young man who was to play an influential role in the lives of a number of the Powys children, there was a period during his early years when Theodore must have felt himself less West Country than East Anglian. But his brothers John and Llewelyn were never even partially deceived and with that passionate sibling intuition regarding each other's states of mind and emotional need which was to hold them close to the end, they came to regard Theodore in Suffolk as Theodore in exile.

In any case there could not have been a worse time, economically speaking, to be thrown into farming, than this 'coming down time' of the long agricultural depression. Village life was running into poverty and ruin, and a new kind of harshness was beginning to appear in rural society. Added to which, this son of the rectory, brought up in a secure, unquestioning Anglican orthodoxy, was discovering that he was the kind of person who would question everything. Question but not dismiss, not rout or not replace – which is by far the least comforting of all reactions to what one is told one must believe. It was easier for John Cowper Powys, who replaced the Trinity with the thousand divine essences of the universe, and for Llewelyn Powys, who became an atheist and free of all gods. Theodore's difficulty was to retain a mounting admiration for Jesus which was in proportion to his mounting dislike of God. What to do with God became the Powyses' main dilemma, as a moral and imaginative force, that is. John broke him down into sacred facets which caused every hill, stream, rock and plant to illuminate existence, Llewelyn eroticised him (which all three brothers did to a large extent) but Theodore catechised him, and never more brilliantly than in *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. The title comes from the scene in Jane Austen's *Emma* where the young rector Mr Elton, returning with Emma in her carriage when she knew 'he had been drinking too much of Mr Weston's good wine, and felt sure that he would want to be talking nonsense', has the nerve to make love to her. What is it that God gives his creatures? Theodore Powys asks. Is it dutch courage or a blurred vision, or an opiate? Or that bliss which pours from the fruit of the true vine? Men, particularly clergymen of course, having explained God for centuries, he now very respectfully

but firmly asks God to explain himself, which he does as well as he can, and certainly without talking nonsense. It is an audacious theme for a novel and perfectly sustained to the last page.

All three Powyses remained profoundly religious men who had, each in his own way, got themselves unchurched. This was in no sense part of the usual post-Darwinian dilemma and loss of faith but the result of their dramatic understanding of the mystical nature of what we call reality. The effect of the rejection of their conventionally imbibed Anglicanism was for all of the brothers one of expansion and release, for Theodore the heretic most of all. They recognised that they had made a collective advance into an exciting creed-less dimension and for the rest of their lives they shared the discoveries made there, including the sexual ones. Yet it remained a sacred dimension and the quandary for the modern reader is how to perceive and comprehend this triple-stranded Powys sacredness. Calling Theodore's novels and short stories 'black comedy', Llewelyn's essays and autobiographies 'erotic' and John's novels Celtic fantasies simply won't do. Powysdom continues to be a rare literary height because it offers some of the eternal views in an inimitable language. Writing of the brothers, the poet Peter Redgrove made the point that 'the occult or magical life, the life lived according to "a reality behind the veil", the Romantic or symbolic life, gets an exceedingly bad press in the serious journals of our age. It is the positivistic spirit that has prevailed, which claims that the surface reality apparent to our conscious senses is all that matters, and that there are no "unconscious" senses at all, through which the unseen influences [can be] seen. It has been difficult for scholars to accept that the magical view of life of so great a writer as W. B. Yeats was not just an aberration but his very core; and it is likely that the paganism of the brothers Powys has not helped them towards the wide acceptance which is their right.' This is true. It is fatuous to dismiss the core of a writer's imagination as a weakness or as something which can no longer be taken seriously, when it is clearly the centre of his art and originality. At the heart of all three Powys brothers lay what might be described as a Natural mysticism, that sensuous searching and probing of this life, this earth.

Theodore was the third of the Reverend Charles Powys's eleven children by his wife Mary Cowper Johnson and part of a triumvirate which has no parallel in English literature. Although so individual and so different, John, Theodore and Llewelyn project a unity, a blood vision which continues to synchronise whatever they are writing. They remain curiously undated too, even when, as with *Mr Weston's Good Wine*, nothing is spared to evoke an historic moment in 1923. They were near-contemporaries of Arnold Bennett, H. G. Wells, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster and John Galsworthy, but their names do not suggest a similar period connection. It is because by imposing a kind of religious timelessness on their stories and essays, they appear to have severed them from the chronological position in which one would expect to find them. 'The Powys Brothers' do not sound Edwardian, or Twenties or decadal in any way, they simply sound very old and very new, like a mountain

morning. It is still a disturbing business to become involved with them, and with Theodore especially.

He was born in Shirley, Derbyshire on 20 December 1875, where his father was the vicar. Ten years later the family moved to Montacute, Somerset, and into that myth-filled countryside which was to have such a lasting and profound effect on it. Theodore left school when he was fifteen, soon grew a large moustache which, wrote his friend Louis Wilkinson, made him look 'astonishingly like Nietzsche. I remember him as a heavily built young man with grey melancholy eyes. His manners were courteous to the point of what seemed to me an ironic deference. Always he was a countryman ...' Wilkinson added that he also saw in Theodore a mixture of fantasy and cruelty, benevolence and poetic sensitiveness, plus a 'goblin humour'. Already he had begun upon that long dialogue between himself and God which he was to bring to such a brilliant conclusion in *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. He wasn't happy and would rarely ever be. In 1902 he went to write in a cottage at Studland on the Dorset coast. Shortly afterwards he met his future wife, a practical, good-hearted and uneducated village girl named Violet Dodds, telling his brothers, 'I don't want anything intellectual. I want little animals' roguery. I don't like ladies.' It was Violet's famous talkativeness and her *entree* to a great range of colourful rural experience which brought him into imaginative contact with a whole new world of rural drama. In 1907 his first book, *An Interpretation of Genesis*, was privately published, after which he turned to fiction, and a long stream of novels and short stories, all of which were rejected. But in 1926 he published an essay called *Soliloquies of a Hermit* in which he sees himself as a 'priest' and a kind of secular mystic, someone who is always on the alert to 'catch God in His own thought', and this too shows him moving towards the darkly witty God-or-man argument of *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. About this he summed himself up in a caustic thumbnail portrait. 'Mr Thomas is married, and he digs in his garden ... [He is] what we call in polite world, "a crank"... Mr Thomas used ... to brood in odd corners and try to hatch a little God out of his eggs – a little God that would save his type, the outcast monk type.' These years of toil and neglect were brought to a halt when a friend introduced him to a writer some eighteen years his junior, and who as yet had had nothing accepted. Her name was Sylvia Townsend Warner. It was she who immediately understood his uniqueness and excellence, and who got the influential David Garnett to bring his work to the attention of Chatto and Windus. The celebrated country stories then began to appear in rapid succession; first *Black Bryony* and then on via *Mockery Gap* and *Mr Tasker's Gods* to his masterpiece.

In his remarkable collective biography *The Brothers Powys,* Richard Perceval Graves quotes Sylvia Townsend Warner on the way in which Theodore worked. His 'books grew like stalactites and stalagmites. He deposited them, secretively and methodically – a process taking place in a cave. After breakfasting, rather late, and leisurely, he went off to the parlour, sat down before a large solid table, read for half an hour (usually in the Bible) and then set to work. He wrote uninterruptedly for

three hours or so, put his work back in the table drawer, and began again, where he left off, on the following morning ... When I happened to pass the window, I saw the same grave, dispassionate countenance, pen moving over the paper, dipping at regular intervals into the inkpot.'

T. F. Powys's maternal ancestor, William Cowper, could have provided the initial idea for *Mr Weston's Good Wine* when he began a hymn with 'God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform' and ending it with, 'God is his own interpreter, and he will make it plain'. The Deity in the guise of a travelling salesman selects an average English village in order to inform himself of the current state of the world. *Has* he made it plain? – that is the recurring question. Life, death, good and evil, time and timelessness? The reader is invited to come to judgment. God, alias Mr Weston, [in]ages past started something which he now needs to take stock of. Not wishing to create too much interest in a country parish, he drives to it in a Ford van labelled 'Mr Weston's Good Wine', but as this is 1923 it creates interest enough. Especially as Mr Weston's assistant is a staggeringly good-looking young man who is clearly the same person as that painted on the sign of the Angel Inn. The date is 20–21 November, a significant one, for it is the week before Advent, and Mr Weston could be thoughtfully getting his visit over before there is another arrival. The Sunday of the week of Mr Weston's visit would have been called 'Stir up Sunday' by the inhabitants of Folly Down, from the first line af the collect, 'Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people,' and stir them up Mr Weston certainly does, but also himself in the process.

What he witnesses, understandingly, forgivingly, and guiltily, is a marred creation, and what he offers is not the possibility of perfection but a palliative. To be human is to be flawed, badly or slightly, but imperfect all the same. His wine cannot, or perhaps must not (or 'what's a heaven for?') mend these flaws, but it can make them privately tolerable and publicly less damaging. What Mr Weston offers, in fact, and here lies the essence of the T. F. Powys heresy, is not the wine of salvation but the wine of comfort. Strict to his quirky Christianity, the writer drew comfort from the weekday liturgy in Mappowder Church but refused its chalice on his deathbed.

The novel opens in the market-town of Maidenbridge which serves as the prelude for the main drama of life which, of course, always takes place in a village. Mr Weston's course is to consult his assistant on everybody who walks down the street or emerges from a doorway. The atmosphere is one of ennui and an exquisite provincial dullness wittily observed. What T. F. Powys achieves here is a view of the town as the rustic eye sees it, a community caught up in a broader but not necessarily more dramatic rhythm than that of the countryside. After it has been tantalisingly set in motion for a few brief pages, the whole place disappears until the last sentences of the novel, when Mr Weston, deputising for the author, says, 'We have forgotten Miss Nancy Gipps.' She is the first of those 'affectionate and forgiving' women who populate Powys's erotic imagination, and who he can hardly bear to fall into the clutches of the mainly brute males who either ignore them or pursue them like

quarry. Miss Gipps loves Mr Board the Mayor of Maidenbridge, who could scarcely be less worthy of her. The first girl whom Mr Weston and Michael actually encounter is the one they run over on the way to Folly Down, a mere child who, of course, is at once restored to health. But Michael muses on her future:

> 'A human girl-child is a creature set in a dish for time to feed upon. She wears garters, frocks, and petticoats, and later, frills and pink ribbons. She walks out on the seventh day of the week and sighs for a pair of holiday trousers. They meet and embrace, and amuse themselves as best they may for a few short years, and then they fall sick and go down to the dead.'
>
> 'And what harm is there in that?' asked Mr Weston, guiding the car carefully round a corner.

Before Mr Weston drives down into the hamlet which is to be the representative of all the countless groupings which Christian men have formed on the earth, he stops the car to stretch his legs 'and walk upon this pleasant hill'. Blake's question is answered. Those feet have walked upon England's mountains green. The triumph of *Mr Weston's Good Wine* is achieved by the utmost delicacy of its references, a kind of definite feather touch. This is where it entertains yet is simultaneously profound. Mr Weston-God, who had 'risen, as so many important people do, from nothing', and who 'had once written a prose poem divided into many books', and who can say, 'How often I have to remind you, Michael, that in our trade report the women come last. Ours is the only business, you know, that they do not dominate,' is both Creator and his critique in one. While he puts Folly Down to rights, its people – his creation – are able to tell him a thing or two.

T. F. Powys's English village is far removed from what we have been told by others in fact and fiction. It is his own village-bred sights and deeds and dreams reduced to the common pattern of country life and made to animate an insular community. The characters are all the things he fears or desires. Some are gargoyles, some medieval saints. Class is barely relevant and is kicked around like a piece of meaningless finery. A fiercely protected gullibility reigns. To challenge the general acceptance of what has to be believed would be like cutting short the ramblings and point of some self-satisfying old tale. Everybody knows his or her place, but it is the place in a game. Nobody stops playing when someone gets hurt. T. F. Powys's most brilliant comic invention is Folly Down's gargantuan ignorance, its meticulously maintained state of unknowing. To possess a vision which went beyond the parochial view of life would be a terrible handicap in Folly Down. Was this the reason why Mr Grobe the rector did not send his daughter Tamar (the height of the author's girl-fantasies) away to school? Or was it simply sloth? Tamar's ignorance of the facts of life did at least allow her to marry an angel unawares, so perhaps her father did right.

Before this apotheosis beneath the oak tree, Michael, now in his role of Recording Angel, presents the local inhabitants, one at a time, to Mr Weston, who lovingly assesses which of them needs the wine of comfort, strength and hope, or the wine of oblivion; who needs a not too clear view of reality and who needs the cup to speed

him beneath the waters of Lethe. Except for the rector, who doesn't believe in God and who has a benign notion of his fellow men, Folly Down is roughly divided between those who put all the ills of the world down to the Almighty and those who put them down to human lust, or 'wold Grunter', as they call their gravedigger-sexton. Mr Grunter is the village scapegoat or sin-eater, a role he silently accepts; although quite innocent himself of the debaucheries attributed to him, he carries in his person both the guilt and the gallantry. In a small place, you can't go around blaming everybody for every wronged girl, so you blame only one – 'old Grunter', or human failings personified. The villagers are made to reveal their entire characters through their sexuality alone and, contrary to what the Christian religion insists, Powys's God finds this natural enough. What is hateful to him is male cruelty in the pursuit of sex and the blunting of tenderness in some older women. Mrs Vosper, who procures girls for the layabout sons of the squire, is a heartless, voyeuristic bawd who, it has to be said, also procures keyhole excitements for the author himself. But they are artistically deliberate excitements, and all part of a black comedy in which Powys's creative eroticism has to find literary expression. His unmarried girls drift about the lanes in peril and innocence, his married women are house-bound drudges with sharp tongues in their heads. Jenny Bunce, the landlord's daughter and maid at the Rectory, who is the epitome of all good and lovely village girls, is, by the grace of Mr Weston's wine, brought most joyously to the arms of an untypical man, the rather girlish himself Luke Bird (alias St Francis) who, after losing his job in the brewery by preaching teetotalism, now spends his time bringing bulls and sparrows to Christ.

Having interviewed everybody, taken a look into the church (the first time he has ever been in one), and seen the two extremes of human conduct, plus that large middling section of it which does nothing very good and little that is awful, Mr Weston shakes his head, which of course is as white as wool, and asks himself, 'Where did I go wrong?' In creating the world and the need for each generation of its living creatures to replenish themselves? In not seeing that all men were given a far greater share of God's finer feelings? Saddened, self-critical, Mr Weston's conclusion is that Man since the Fall having become on the whole incorrigible, his love for him is best expressed in healing, or diverting him from the excesses of his waywardness and instincts, or in drugging him when things become unendurable. And so, in faultless allegorical language, Mr Weston does his Folly Down round while time stands still. A perfect balance is struck between the novel's wit and satire, and its profundity. There is nothing comparable to it. Now over half a century old, it joins the classic tales of the English countryside, as well as being one of the most penetrating statements on the role of the Christian God in the post-Constantinian era.

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Descents of Memory

Michael Kowalewski : a reader's view

If one were to do in reality what JCP did in imagination, namely to transfer Montacute House (Squire Urquhart's manor in *Wolf Solent*) to Bradford Abbas (King's Barton), the shadow of that lucid pile would pass over the Somerset Village of East Coker. East Coker is the resting place of the ashes ('old fires to ashes') of the poet T. S. Eliot, whose poem of the same name begins 'In my beginning is my end'. Montacute and Bradford Abbas were also the beginnings of JCP – in one brought up in the other conceived – and it is entirely right that JCP's beginnings are bisected thus by that other anti-modern modernist, who artistically is almost at the opposite end to Powys. Symbolic rightness seems to occur throughout JCP's life, which was charmed and charming to a unique degree and charged with spirits of place and ancestry and a sense of earth, in which most of his contemporary modernists could find only a Waste Land. It is I suppose equally fitting that Powys's first full-size biography should also find its beginning in its end. For it is in her last chapter that Morine Krissdóttir reveals the motive for her Powysian quest of Mad Johnny.

In her Epilogue, entirely appropriately called 'the Grief the Rage and the Ashes', the biographer comes out and identifies herself openly in telling the story of the last days of Peter Powys Grey, nephew of JCP, who died by his own hand in rage, madness and grief. Krissdóttir clearly associates his tragic death with the influence of JCP who used to draw mazes for the young Peter which had no exit. Krissdóttir puns on the double meaning of entrance – entering and enchantment – from which image she weaves her conception of Powys as a magician and fantasist, a pied piper to the psychically broken who led them through a Mountain into madness, oblivion and intoxication. This book is Krissdóttir's revenge on Powys for the destruction of his nephew and, as she plainly feels, the confinement (she notes the multiple meanings of the term herself) of his TT, Phyllis Playter, who is portrayed with a sympathy so strong it amounts to a Powys-like identification.

The original maze-maker of course is a spider. Spider has a very benign image in Native American mythology as the origin of the universe woven from its own entrails, a figure of the Maya of consciousness draped over the Void of Heaven. But in the West the spider is sinister and a weaver of disasters, temptations and treachery. The Void is the void of death, dissolution, oblivion, death and witchcraft. *Descents of Memory* is the battle of two spiders, Powys and Krissdóttir, for whose maze is the more entrancing. *Descents* is her maze and her cave of descent (again in all senses of the term), and in it Powys becomes the captured fly or the pale knight by the grotto. Every fact she digs up from the cobweb-like attic of Powysiana is a snare to entrap him, every detail a needle stuck in his effigy, every letter is one that killeth. At the end of it Powys stands, like the secular world after the Enlightenment, as noted by so many writers, and which Powys fought with every power of his being, disen-

chanted and bleakly exposed in the desolation of reality.

Everyone has their own John Cowper, this arch-fetishist becoming himself a fetish for those who feel healed and wholed by him. The corollary is that there are as many Powyses as there are readers, indeed more, for each reader is a multiverse and does not take kindly to 'other' Powyses. And on reading MK's biography there occurs very soon a sense of being violated, and one understands for the first time what a Muslim must have felt about *Satanic Verses*. For let there be no mistake: Krissdóttir's *Descents* is a descent into hell and a burning, flaying, piercing of the ju-ju puppet Petrushka-Powys, which she has stitched together to offer as an expiatory sacrifice to more modern gods than JCP's. She writes that she was advised to write to get Powys 'finally out of her system'. She has certainly done that and will probably apply her enema to many others. But she has also gutted Powys out of his own system. Like Petrushka there is just a broken puppet at the end, without any interior.

Those of us who felt that Powys is a positive magician will find his ashes burnt through by the fire and sword of Krissdottir's *analysis* whose Greek meaning is dissolution. The ashes of the Waste Land have triumphed over 'Old Earth Man'.

Susan Rands: JCP Descending – a review of reviews

The earliest of the reviews of *Descents of Memory* appeared in *The New York Sun* on 3rd October. Curiously, it was by Paul Dean, the head of English at the Dragon School, Oxford, pre-eminent among preparatory schools. He says that Powys has a 'coterie of readers', and that neither *Descents of Memory* nor the new *Porius* is 'likely to win new converts'; the biography, he says, 'reveals an outlandish figure ... who remained in Wales for the rest of his life devolving first into increasingly obtuse (*sic*) literature of alchemy and finally sexual infantalism and voyeurism.' Mr Dean has not invented this; for those who do not know Powys it is an impression that *Descents of Memory* can give.

Another American review, by Patrick Kurp ('a writer living in Houston'), appeared in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on 21st October. He too is plainly no admirer of John Cowper's work but commends Morine Krissdóttir's 'scholarship and thankless dedication ... she appears to have read every word of Powys that survives ... an accomplishment that merits authorly sainthood.'

In England the review in the *Western Daily Press* of 2nd November, apparently unsigned, states simply and fairly a few facts about John Cowper and his biographer and quotes her as saying, 'I'm just hoping the biography will help more people to dive into his work.' (As the above reviews indicate, this is unlikely.)

On 10th November our editor's review appeared in *The Tablet*, the Catholic weekly, and it is pleasing that a friendly account of John Cowper (who was attracted to Catholicism) should appear there. Kate does her best to show both his appeal and the biography's; her lively account is fair and kind in a Christian spirit.

Probably the most damaging review was Peter Sandford's in the Saturday *Telegraph*, 8th December 2007, where the headline says he 'wrestles with the complexity and obscenity of John Cowper Powys'. Sandford's impression of Powys, as he appears to him from the biography is of 'a monstrous man', 'remorselessly unattractive'.

At the opposite extreme, in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 14th November, Margaret Drabble writes fulsomely of both John Cowper and the biography. She makes a few errors of fact; John Cowper's writing was far from illegible; it was remarkably clear, however large and wild it became at the end of his life. 'Morine Krissdóttir enters into his secret world of dark intensity,' says Drabble,' and manages not to have been driven mad.' This gives an entirely false impression. There was nothing mad about John Cowper, Morine says so herself; he makes sense of what is maddening.

In the November *Newsletter* Glen, our dearly loved President , who actually knew John Cowper, is as always generous and tactful, but he does remark, somewhat ruefully, that the account of JCP's 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* in which Glen's own account appears. Glen met JCP fifty years ago and has published extensively on him, yet no acknowledgement or reference appears in this biography. Nor is there any to Richard Graves's *The Powys Brothers*, published twenty-five years ago; yet if one compares the two one quickly sees how closely Morine followed Richard's story line and organization. One example, however, of a telling difference: Richard attempts a description of *The Complex Vision*; Morine dismisses it as 'unreadable'; she also dismisses most of John Cowper's poetry yet she quotes a fairly ordinary verse and calls it 'a lovely thing'. Rightly does A. N. Wilson in *The Spectator* (16th February 2008) say that 'much of the literary criticism in *Descents of Memory* is pedestrian, and unlikely to awake a passion for the great books in one that has never tried them.'

Margaret Drabble says that Morine is too discreet to insert herself into the narrative. This is not so; the whole story is set within her relationship, albeit brief, with John Cowper's nephew, Peter Powys Grey. The impression given is that Peter was a lonely lunatic whose condition was caused by his unbalanced uncle.

Few reviewers mention the curious epilogue containing Morine's final letter to Peter, asking for his last journal; he has already given her all the others. Two members of The Powys Society spoke at Peter's memorial service at St Clement's church, New York (*see* NL *17, November 1992*): Charles Lock (then engaged on research for his own biography of John Cowper), and Morine who identified herself as Peter's mythological "stone-bearer" – surely a 'multi-layered role' which may be variously interpreted. 'Wisely,' as Jeremy Hooker remarks in *Planet*, 'she leaves the reader with questions, not answers.'

Descents. The title was disconcerting. Surely, I thought, memories ascend – from your past, up into the conscious mind and the imagination. Descents seemed negative a word, a downgrading of a life. I leafed through the book, as is my wont, and then read the Epilogue. What an ending: 'The Grief and the Rage and the Ashes.' Oh God, I could hardly believe what I was reading. Morine Krissdóttir's short friendship with John's nephew Peter, her visiting him in a psychiatric hospital in New York in 1991, for two days listening to him talking with intensity, with rage, with defeat. His mother Marian and her brother John had let the little boy think that the uncle was his father. John had entranced him in his maze, just as he had entwined Phyllis within his magic games. Neither Phyllis nor Peter could escape, there was no way out. For Phyllis this was in part at least self-willed: she loved him. The boy Peter had no choice.

By Peter's bedside MK notices the Viking chess queen she had given him before, which Peter had glued to a flat stone and inscribed 'Reine de la Couronne Brisé/ Guide pour tous Pèlerins/ Fous et Obstinés'. Later she writes him a heartrending letter. She cannot guide him, she says, but she will tell the story of the house of Powys. To enlighten him, to release him, she does not say. 'Someday I will make sure that the dismembered is remembered.' Within a year, Peter had committed suicide. Peter has the last word in *Descents*, and the first, in MK's dedication: 'For Peter and "pour tous Pèlerins/ Fous et Obstinés"'

MK – and Peter – seemed to have encased John, if not in a maze, then in a cocoon-like nest containing John's memories. The blame for Peter's psychosis and his subsequent suicide seems to be put, if not wholly, on his uncle John. I wondered if I really wanted to read this biography of one man that ends so disastrously for another. I felt angry, misled, bewildered. Why should I be lured into an extraordinarily private friendship between two people about whom I knew hardly anything, who accused John, a hero who I thought I did know quite a lot, of a selfish, heinous deception?

Appropriately, I was reading MK's (and Judith Bond's) latest edition of *Porius* at the same time. *Porius* 'Novus' bucked me up no end, so I returned to *Descents*. The first few chapters provided little reassurance. The infant, the school boy, the young man John emerges racked by his self-proclaimed Fears, manias, convoluted and thwarted sexualities, grim fantasies, jagged relationships. There seemed little relief of lightness, not even John's description of his ecstasy induced by the grass and green moss and yellow stone-crop on a wall near Trumpington Mill, a scene in *Autobiography* so dearly-loved by Powyslanders. Then the dreary American years and early writings. MK ascribes John's first large-scale stories – *Wood and Stone, Rodmoor* and the others – to his attempts to grapple with his demons, to come to some kind of terms with them by fictionalizing them so that the actual writing their words on paper might exorcise them. The John that MK presents so far seemed to me insufferably selfish, at times bordering on the insane, his writings deterministically mechanical, dictated by his manias.

I soldiered on. John never managed to exorcise his demons (did he ever really want to?), they merely took different shapes and expressions as he grew older and tried to relate to his family and to his increasingly large circle of friends and lovers, 'à la Lulu' or 'cerebrally'. But slowly, step by slithery stepping-stone across these tumultuous waters yes, I *was* experiencing widening ripples of epiphanies. What MK was striving for was percolating into my muddy mind – not only striving towards, but what she was miraculously achieving: the transformation of John the tortuous man into John the miraculous poetic story-teller. Step by step, she was summoning up John's multiverse for me. The transition came with (naturally) *Wolf Solent* and Phudd Bottom. And with Phyllis. Up till then MK had somehow enmeshed me in the negative, bleak, meaningless, fruitless universe of John as he strove desperately and not very successfully to survive in the here and now of his time, the maze imposed by his circumstances and by himself. Now, she was taking me by the hand, by my eyes, into that remarkable imaginative labyrinth (more benign than a maze), the magical amalgam of bodily and mental and psychic essences which produced those masterpieces of creative endeavour.

The alchemy perpetrated by MK was working, the baseness of much of John's life and the ordinariness of his writings was being transformed to gold, to the ripple of new mountain water, to the greenness of moss, the transmogrification of John the fractured human man to John the creator with his words of magical yet realised multiverses. MK hasn't got much to say about his ecstasies, perhaps feeling they were more invented than real. She probably omitted the Trumpington Mill ecstasy as one of the countless number of incidents in the *Autobiography* which were John's imaginative memories. But her transformation of John was in itself a small ecstasy.

So, after a rough ride (like his interminable railway journeys criss-crossing America) I returned to my old John, but to a John whose life has been enhanced for me by a critical and tough, yet also a kindly, investigation. By the end of the hand-held journey it seemed that I had been reading a hitherto unknown John romance, that *Descents* is a story about John, as *Porius* and the others are, a second *Autobiography*. MK has greatly added to my enjoyment of John's Grand Books, to my understandings of them, to my love of them. Her erudition is wide-ranging: she has led me into unread or forgotten literatures of poetry, epics, myths, alchemy, psychiatries.

'Fiction,' I read recently, 'works by partial depersonalisation: Scott's anonymity "was a way of turning his personal experience into impersonal fiction"' [*Guardian* Review, 26th Jan 2008]. John's stories are light years away from such depersonalisation. MK writes 'So far as he was concerned, criticism of literature which has nothing to say about the impulses that drive a writer forward "becomes as dull and unenlightening as theology without the Real Presence"'. One can greatly enjoy the experience of reading the grand Powys fictions knowing little or nothing about the author. But to begin to understand the theology of John's Real Presence – not only his amazing life but also the vast range and well-remembered readings – is for me to

greatly enhance this enjoyment.

One feature of MK's story of John's lives and works is her comprehensive (and indeed unexpurgated) depiction of his labyrinthine sexualities, sadisms and masochisms, of his erotic imaginations and fantasies. In our times – the times in which *Descents* has been published – the frontiers of accepted and permitted sexuality have changed dramatically since the long nineteenth century which John inhabited. The sexual aspect of John is now an oddity of history, and I for one am pleased that this has been preserved in print. So I would like to applaud MK's valiant portrayal of John Cowper Powys's bizarre and thrilling sexualities (she can't always have been easy about some of these). Yes, thrilling, squeamish about them as some may feel. So much of these sexualities were stirred into the cauldron of his stories. John was a sexually highly charged man; so are his Grand Books.

By the end of MK's book, I understood the title, *Descents of Memory*. In a clue subtly concealed from the less observant reader, the word appears in what is probably the last piece of John's writing: 'Revisited often by both my Mother and my Father, each full of separate memories of the Weymouth Mountain of Snow surrounded by Sea-Sand under which deep Descents went down inviting visitations'.

For me, after reading *Descents* and rereading *Porius,* there is a wider context for memory *descending*. John's memories seemed to drop down, down into the depth of his psyche, and when it came to his writings, he had to retrieve the images in this cauldron of history – his own and humanity's – of myth, of folk memories, of psychology, of sexualities, of alchemy. But what are the images that are revealed? When John was a child, writes MK (413), 'it was for John a vision of a golden world; by pressing his knuckles against his eyes, he would be "transported into Elysium". The deeper into the underworld of his mind that he went, the darker the images became.' Phudd Bottom was aptly named – John's turgid memories like his turds, his phudds, blocking his inner functions, until forced down and out, miraculously and disgustingly, becoming some of the very ingredients of the imaginations of his stories. Miraculous enough to enlighten the dark images. In *Porius*, *'a strong lechery-sweet smell of fungus'* came to Brochvael, *'which partook of the nature of death.'* But then the god of Fortune *'made his appearance through a yellow mist',* which then transformed itself, so Brochvael *'allowed his imagination to tell him ... into something resembling the golden lid of a golden cauldron'.* (406)

John includes Cauldrons in *Glastonbury Romance* as well as in *Porius* (and in most of his other novels), as episodes in the strong currents of these romances. But he cannot leave these vignettes without enveloping them in the majesty of his poetry, so that they become etched, chiselled into the cauldron of my memories by the impact of his imagery. The pearl at the heart of his Great Novels is the sheer poetry of his writing. John poured his manias, his memories, his readings, his magicianship, his most secret ecstasies and demons in books which are prose-poems first and last. Here is one from *Porius*:

(Porius's) eyes were fixed on a clump of greenish white moss that clung to the edge of

> a small trickle of water, a trickle whose drip-drop made so faint a sound that it was only audible in the pauses of their human talk ... it seemed as if that greenish white moss were a greenish white passage leading into the secret roots of life. (549)

Chris Gostick told MK that she must write JCP's biography, 'to get Powys finally out of your system'. 'Hopefully', she writes, 'the necessary magic has been performed, and John Cowper is now lodged instead in the imaginations and psyches of the readers of this biography'. For me, this expectation has been more than met; I've had to move to larger premises to house these heightened imaginations and psyches.

I think I can understand now why MK has given Peter the last sentence in the book. Perhaps even John would have 'clappit the hands with glee,' knowing that he too was 'un pèlerin fou et obstiné'. For me, another pilgrim, the dismembering – MK taking apart of John's full-of-contradictions psyche – was at times painful, but now I can look back on *Descents* – as I can on all John's Grand Novels – with grateful remembrances.

Cicely Hill: 'The Ridge' and the Other

John Cowper Powys's ridges are all ancient and endurung places, usually crowned by Scots firs or having fir trees near them. They are places of magical influence and possibility, where the earth – always held sacred by Powys – has been mysteriously charged with human history, benign or malign and correspondingly to be feared or revered. Powys describes the ridges, and the hills and mountains which share their properties, as 'heathen'.

Apart from his Journals 'The Ridge' is his only autobiographical narrative work. The ending could only have been fictional, so it is unfinished. Written in about 1952, probably after a walk on Berwyn Ridge, Corwen, it is an obscure work. Berwyn Ridge itself, a far less powerful entity within the poem than its fictional predecessors, is associated with them by two compelling themes – the climber's will to the destruction of tyrannical power and his hope for reunion with an unidentified platonic 'Other'. In other works by Powys, before and after, these themes are linked and combined.

In 'The Ridge', Nature is described in her moods and minutiae, but nowhere with the reciprocal sense of Wolf Solent's insights as he looked toward Somerset, or Rook Ashover's ecstatic visionary moments in an enchanted Dorset lane. Nature is, rather, the background to thoughts and memories; to a prolonged gesture of challenge and endurance. The poem marks a time when poetic imagination begins to give way to fancy. The style that emerges is an uneasy confessional rhetoric.

In *Autobiography* Powys writes of a 'Druidic hypnotism of speech' he used for Geard of Glastonbury, 'derived from the sacred hills of Glastonbury Tor, Cadbury Camp ... from the peak of Snowdon';[1] it was the voice he used as a lecturer to conjure up a *rapport* with his audiences – a magician's and an actor's voice. But the words of the climber in 'The Ridge' seem not to arise from the imagination which created Geard of Glastonbury and *A Glastonbury Romance*. He blurts notions and memories as they come to his mind. His audience is the solitary reader.

Porius, published a year or so earlier, shares 'The Ridge"s theme of tyranny – the power of God and religion, of established authority and all that can rob individuals of such happiness as chance might otherwise allow them. This particularly applies to family. But, where *Porius* brought a feeling of resolution at its close – Myrddin Wyllt had spoken of the limited duration of any tyrant's rule and spoken fiercely against family, Taliessin had looked forward to an 'ending forever of the God sense, the guilt sense' – these things still revisit the mind of Powys as he climbs the Ridge. God has appeared in earlier writings as the author of a bungled creation, as a dualistic First Cause whose own good and evil answers that of His creation; and as a man-made deity whom – considering Powys's conviction of the power of mind to effect, if not to create – it might have been easier to set up than bring down, even by the concerted howl of all creation.

Powys was generous in his own response to Christianity and the priests of the Church. He could see happiness in his son's Catholicism, and Wolf Solent would seem to speak for his author with:

> How extraordinary it would be ... if there really were an incredibly tender and pitiful heart ... just outside the circle of time and space! ... But did he want such a thing to exist? Not even to want Him ... would seem an outrageous cruelty to all the Tilly Valleys in the world ... "And yet I don't believe I do want Him," he murmured aloud, as a sparkling of cold raindrops fell upon his clasped hands from the tree above.[2]

The calmness of Wolf's admission contrasts with the climber's restless questioning. The God Powys reviles and would have dead is the God whose priests are Drom in *Porius* – 'his kiss enslaved the person kissed to the person kissing ... the kiss of everlasting peace, the kiss of unutterable sameness, the kiss of pure divinity, the kiss of *anti-man*...';[3] and, within a classical context, Enorches in *Atlantis*, whose mystical Eros/ Dionysus love and intoxication render unimportant 'ordinary self-control, ordinary kindness, ordinary decency ... ordinary generosity...';[4] and the repellent and sadistic Gewlie in *The Inmates*, whose utterance 'One God ... Instead of life there will be only God' [5] reveal him as a mean sharer of the faiths of Drom and Enorches

(some aspects of which Powys may have come across, in gentler and more innocent guise, at school and at home) .

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Two-thirds of the way through 'The Ridge' are the words:

> I tell myself there's a hope—though God and Universe mock it
> That when I have reached the ridge I shall find my love once more
> For the wretchedest thing alive has its own mysterious 'other'
> Its other that answers its howl, its other that answers its groan,
> Its other that's nearer to it than brother or father or mother
> Its other that out of a million worlds is for it alone.

And, later in the canto:

> I had a true love once but they took her away for thinking
> Thoughts against God and for making me think the same.
> But in my dreams she comes back and now life is sinking
> Perhaps she'll come back for good. I've forgotten her name.

Reunion with the platonic 'other', the missing half of the self, the *anima*, is a dream perpetuated by longing. The meetings of the purest Powys 'others' – Wolf and Christie in *Wolf Solent*, John and Tenna in *The Inmates* – are marked by a low-key ecstasy, not found elsewhere in Powys, though in mood resembling the prolonged sexual ecstasies of John and Mary Crow, the cousins in *A Glastonbury Romance*. The Platonic dream, as a union of self with (almost) identical self, is of its nature incestuous and likely to be discouraged by convention. In 'The Ridge' the identity of the Other is coded, not surprisingly in an author who self-censored his autobiography to exclude all women (gentlemanly good manners should perhaps not be discounted as one reason for this).

Richard Perceval Graves writes of Eleanor Powys, John's sister who died of appendicitis at the age of thirteen:

> Despite the seven years between them, she was mature for her age, and he felt strongly drawn to her, recalling that: 'My ideal future was to be a famous actor living with Nelly and always acting with Nelly, for she and I were *alike exactly* in our mental life, our emotional life, our imaginative life and our erotic life. We turned from one to another of these and *kept them apart*.'[6]

The language here is intense though it is always as well to remember John Cowper Powys's cerebrality. Nelly's death, recalled in *Ebony and Ivory*, tells of John's announcement to Llewelyn that Nelly had been 'taken away by the angels'. This is also recorded in *Confessions of Two Brothers*, where Llewelyn remarks, 'I know now that it was only the way he put it, that he does not believe in angels and never did.'[7] It took an ear as innocent as Llewelyn's to miss what might well have been grief-stricken sarcasm. Sixty years on, in 'The Ridge', 'they took her away' echoes these words which themselves have their echoes. *Visions and Revisions*, published in 1915, contains Powys's probing appraisal of the correspondences and profound differences between himself and Edgar Allan Poe.

I was a child and she was a child
In that kingdom by the sea;
But we loved with a love that was more than love,
I and my Annabel Lee;
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me ...
So that her highborn kinsmen came
And bore her away from me ...

But our love it was stronger by far than the love
Of those who were older than we,
Of many far wiser than we,
And neither the angels in heaven above
Nor the demons under the sea
Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
Of the beautiful Annabel Lee ...

Love is a word Powys treats with care since *Wood and Stone*, where, together with 'sacrifice', he opposed it to power and pride. 'Has it been noticed,' he asks in his essay on Poe, 'how inhumanly immoral the great poet is?'[8] For Powys, usually undismayed by the droll differences in people's lives, particularly their sex lives, and refreshingly disinclined to explore their psychological origins, 'immorality' is a strong word, referring almost always to cruelty and the exercise of power. He sees it in Poe as the longing for the object of possessive love to become unchangeable through death and enshrined through fantasy – a chilling mixture of love and control. It implies denial of change – for him a denial of life itself, going against his deepest convictions, against the Homeric way, the Tao, and his own natural promptings.

Like everything that happened to John Cowper Powys, Eleanor's death will have been absorbed into the power-house which was his imaginative genius: widening his scope, intensifying his sensibilities, adding to the complexity and richness of his work. Like Poe, he had a morbid imagination. It is hard to imagine that his sister would not have remained the erotic companion of his solitude; and that her memory, if he had allowed it, could not have made of her an idea locked in time – a metamorphosis delicious to Poe but distasteful to Powys. It is quite possible that by changing the person and character of the 'other' from one great novel to the next, he diminished the power of actual memory. From the time of *Ducdame* the invasion of the platonic dream by the shadow of death is not dispelled but is treated with great care. After *Rodmoor* – a decidedly Gothic story – Powys counteracts what he names in Poe 'death hunger' with humour: in *Wolf Solent* the necrophiliac overtones of the grave-digging scene are dispelled by an air of mediaeval comedy. By the time when he wrote 'The Ridge', vivid memories may have broken through his wisest censorship.

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Ducdame is the first of the great novels where a ridge appears in a magical ambiguous

role to be repeated through most future works. Heron's Ridge is central to the novel which, set in Dorset, yet has the ambience of Montacute. The hero, Rook Ashover, views Heron's Ridge with feelings of kinship and apprehension – it is the focal point of stifling ancestral power. The clay heart of the ridge is a vehicle for the fanatical will of his mother and uncle who, descending the hill, she southward, he northward, arrive at a point where 'an electric current sent in a bee-line through the clay heart of Heron's Ridge would have connected the figures.'

What Rook 'required of life was not an impassioned love with an equal mate, but certain faint, vague, elusive ecstasies that were entirely unspiritual, and entirely depersonalized.'[9] Though not to be seen as his 'other', Rook's dying brother Lexie would seem to answer this need better than any of the women in the story. Their close bond reflects John's closeness to his brother Llewelyn, and the 'twist of fate' which in *Ducdame* causes the younger brother to outlive the elder excludes, at a stroke, any sentimentality that could otherwise have attended the death of Lexie.

Wolf Solent and Christie Malakite are the first unmistakeable fictional Others. Their intense unspoken brother-and-sister relationship has exactly the quality John Cowper described when speaking of his sister Eleanor. Family pressure in different forms overshadows both Wolf's and Christie's lives: for Wolf in the legacy of his parents' strife, for Christie in incestuous family complications. They both suffer the quiet meddling of well-meant self-appointed authority.

As Wolf looks out from Poll's Camp, two images contend for the mastery of his thoughts: the camp where he is standing, and Christie's window. He contrasts the ancient hill and the valley of Somerset – 'the thing I love best of all' – and ponders on the powers of Poll's Camp, unable to understand the 'nature of what it threatens'. But *Wolf Solent* is a story of Wolf's illusion, which he recognises and prizes within a world skewed by his 'mythology' – the notion of himself on the side of good against evil. His most unperturbed and lucid moments are in conversation with Christie; their times of philosophical talk are times of rare and unparalleled happiness. Wolf's ecstatic vision of Saturnian gold near the end of the story is not unlike Rook Ashover's state of changed consciousness in *Ducdame*. His earlier conjectures and broodings over what Poll's Camp threatens are now irrelevant: the threat to himself came only from himself. But this state of enlightenment could not possibly have happened if he had allowed Christie their longed-for night together. Not because Christie is, as has been suggested, aligned with evil, certainly not because she is associated with incest – a circumstance which, in itself, Wolf is relatively relaxed about – but because she is associated with death, its presence signalled by 'whiteness', a green lamp, a mirror, and the evocation of a dead mother and sister, while Christie lies with her hair spread loose about her. Wolf refuses this consummation, and even if his motive seems obscure and his action perverse, as Christie declares it to be, the book ends on the note of wholeness which Powys's judgment infallibly dictates.

The Inmates was written around the same time as 'The Ridge' and is the last of the

novels to include a 'Powys hero' – a character recognisably John Cowper Powys. It is also the first (*Morwyn* being a special case) to include surreal, rather than merely eccentric or grotesque characters. These weird creations express opinions and arguments set out in earlier and later works, and seem simply to show their maker's move from the guidance of imagination to the play of fantasy in old age. The unnamed ridge in *The Inmates* – 'an ancient fortification surmounted by a couple of gigantic Scots firs' – is ever-present and benign, and can be seen from the east window of Glint, the insane asylum where John Hush and Tenna Sheer have been committed. Looking back on his first day there, John Hush recalls how he'd seen Tenna's face with the ridge and the two firs as its background in the Spring twilight, and they'd first exchanged words. In a moment of crisis he says the syllables of her name as if it were 'some ancient prehistoric evocation understood at once by dehumanized presences, hovering about the ridge of the two Scots firs.'[10] Tenna is in no way associated with death, though very much with rebellion – against the father she has tried to kill. The rules of Glint separate John and Tenna most of the time, perpetuating the platonic dream and the mood of inaccessability their romantic exchange requires. So it is that when they emerge from Glint, to face the sun rising between the firs on the ridge – in the company of a spaniel dog, off to join a travelling circus – though they have defeated sadistic power and evaded goodwill in the form of rescue by helicopter, their optimistic departure together is somehow disappointing.

The Mountains of the Moon, written some years later, is a fantasy of old age, taking place in a realm where everything is subject to the storyteller's surrealistic whim. 'The Ridge''s quest for the death of God – sketchily resolved in *Up and Out* when a humorously perplexed Deity asks the advice of two young people on remaking His destroyed world – has been abandoned; but the quest for platonic union prevails and is exactly described.

The voice of a fey Elemental named Helia reaches sixteen-year-old Rorlt through the heart of the Moon's ridge – just as the imaginary bee-line connected the family-obsessed couple in *Ducdame*. Unlike Rook Ashover, the owner of the voice has been totally free of all parental presence since the very time of her birth: she is the child of the Sun and the Moon. The diminutive runnel through which her voice reaches the young climber was once the path of a stream flowing through to her garden. The two set off to meet on the summit of the moon's ridge.

As Rorlt approached the summit:

> He felt as if he *were himself* a portion of all he looked at, and yet he felt that, looking at himself... he was all the same only looking at *half himself* ... And the other half, the half with whom it was now the one imperative need of his life, of his being, of his body, of his soul to unite, was the girl whose voice he had heard and had answered!... She redeemed him from insane loneliness.

The moment of their meeting was 'a moment of death in life and life in death, where a new being came into existence who was neither a new boy or a new girl but was a fresh experience of that *energeia akinesis* ... that makes for us the blessedness of

the unknown.'[11]

In *In Defence of Sensuality* Powys devotes half-a-dozen pages to a description of this kind of encounter, identical in many of its terms to the one in *The Mountains of the Moon* but clearly prompted by a present or recent experience of his own. He had met Phyllis Playter a few years before. If his sister Nelly was no longer the constant companion of his living world, her 'coming back' more fleeting in time, yet the memory of their extraordinary friendship can never have lost its potency and, it seems likely, overtook him on his walk on Berwyn Ridge. 'I've forgotten her name' looks, at first reading, like a transparent untruth, but makes sense as the remorseful reaction we feel when a vivid memory overtakes our forgetfulness.

When Rorlt's journey began he it was not Helia he was seeking, but his incestuously desired sister. His sister has found a lover, someone she knew long ago; this pair make love and talk metaphysics and he tells her how he longed for 'someone, anyone, of my own age, with whom I could exchange ideas and talk about everything and discuss the whole business of life on this crazy orb.'[12] The mountains of the moon are clothed with mosses and ferns and lichens, with herb-Robert, potentillas and self-heal. Like Rhun and Morfydd in *Porius* the lovers recall a badger's sett in a hollow fir. The moon, their hearth and home, is really the earth of our world.

Two pairs of 'platonic Others' have met on the Ridge of the Moon. Anyone visiting John Cowper Powys's home at Corwen may have seen a diminutive tunnel where a stream appeared and ran through Phyllis Playter's garden: an irresistable thing for a storyteller like John. When he wrote of the electric line through the heart of Heron's Ridge, thirty years earlier, he had not yet seen this stream; but as it has been noted of JCP, he sometimes saw things before he saw them.

NOTES

1 *Autobiography*, Macdonald 1967, Picador 1982, 462 (chapter 10, 'America').
2 *Wolf Solent*, Macdonald 1961, 412; Penguin Classics, 427–8 (chapter 19, 'Wine').
3 *Porius*, Colgate 1994 p.658; Overlook 2007, 574 (chapter 27, 'The Homage of Drom').
4 *Atlantis*, Macdonald 1954, Chivers, Bath 1973, 192 (chapter VI).
5 *The Inmates*, Macdonald 1952, Village Press 1974, 262–3 (chapter 14, 'Midsummer Dawn').
6 *The Brothers Powys*, Routledge & Kegan Paul 1983, 31; quoting letter to Philippa Powys also quoted in 'White' by Diane Fernandez, in *Essays on John Cowper Powys* ed. Belinda Humfrey, Univ.of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1972. See *Letters to Sea-Eagle*, 228.
7 *Confessions of Two Brothers* (1916), Sinclair Browne 1982, 184–5.
8 *Visions and Revisions* (1915), Macdonald 1955, 198.
9 *Ducdame*, Grant Richards 1925, Village Press 1974, 306.
10 *The Inmates* as above, 265, 280 (chapter 15, ' "On all fours" ').
11 *Up and Out/ The Mountains of the Moon*, Macdonald 1957, Village Press 1974, 211, 214.
12 as above, 191.

The Ridge—a Meditation

by Colin W. Thomas

> He who wishes to strengthen his spirit,
> Must abandon reverence and submission.
> ('Growing Strong' – C. P. Cavafy, tr. Aliki Barnstone)

What follows is a meditation brought into life by this late, perhaps unfinished, poem, not read by me until recently or even approached through the musings of others: a personal response then.

John's 'The Ridge' has the feel of a requiem, not for a death, but for all the energies of knowledge and creative power now passing from him. Looking back from the upslope of his climb he peers into himself to grasp defiantly at the signatures of his long age. Hesiod visited by the goddess who would lodge with him too; and that curious De Profundis of truth, which implies that his way of seeing, of judging, or responding, of passing on to others, is his purposeful muse, and has been the most integral, the most sincere, that he could attain. Time, like one's shadow, never leaves us. Eventually we become inwardly fluent and detached from the wills of others, and even meet the complexities of scholarly and intuited experiences with indifference. 'Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord' – the first line of Psalm 130. Here: that convictions about reality and its many children can be subsumed from the heights of a climb towards a summit which must leave us in only one place, at once new and yet old, and seen endlessly through the lenses of consciousness. In the truth of living and becoming, the one certainty, neither major nor minor (note the musical terms here), is acceptance of fate. Simplicity of the mind may be reached, but we strive a pathway ever alone.

What of those leaves? I recall T. S. Eliot's metal leaves from Little Gidding, suddenly suburban, in the wild terrain of a Welsh mountain. Here are tones (another musical term) like those dead unsighing leaves that refuse to rear like the sea waves: the labours of a life can often seem mere dead leaves. Mind is now in its winter. The apparel of flesh and bone, thought and word, has left the fecund autumn behind.

The exertion of climbing drives away the conflicts, jealousies, rivalries of the rabble. Avoid the judgements that lay you low! In the end we all face the dusts of neglect, the webs of decay, that our animality is as frail as the sparrow in the storm! It may be that in the long exertion upwards, we can encounter the inevitable with a defiant gesture, but inside confrontation is permanent and no escape is the governing rule. Nevertheless, let that vibrant spirit sing without constraint, even if no one can hear its song!

What of this being 'saurian? It carries a furtive energy, even the hint of primeval violence, with John of the Spirit, not one confined within an ideology or belief; and with a want to destroy those powers if they spring like Athena fully formed out of the

heads of humanity. Tear all asunder if the spiders of imposed tradition or faith make their webs from leaf to leaf or branch to branch. The ever green larches in their watching, are more worthy of acceptance, offering in the gold, the sap, of consciousness and vision, a better companionship.

And the fungi more unseen than seen? Amid the world's detritus, growth and cleansing will always be constant. The earth and the sun's authority bears us on.

Then apocalypse. Old men become prophets. John's language develops tensions: embrace and repulsion – like the tides of being – tear at us. The four elements are offered, but it is air that speaks. I remember Llewelyn's Ankh which in the Egyptian mind could represent the four winds. This storm personifies capricious will and its frantic diversions. They sweep like furies from the primeval swamp – these winds of misrule, of nihilism! They fan the passions of the spirit and body, the fires of identity. The ghost within him resonates like this outer power that has sprung from the saurian pit. They cleanse him also of loss and guilt.

John is alive with matter that is endlessly transformed. All being is alert with presence. Trees, fungi, spider, parasite, crab, gnat, louse, are all brother with this uphill trudging John in his isolation and approaching oblivion.

The poem has become a *danse macabre* in which John hurls defiant gestures as he mounts towards the 'cincture of clouds': contempt for God's love, hate, and his unnatural law. We are thrown pell mell into a Nietzschean void of man alone without divinity, with the mental comforts we accrue to keep the irrational in tow and not too much out of control.

This invigorating climb has become at once intense, indulgent, self-parodying and pleading. Not only is John a man of the storm, blown about by his sensibilities, he is Sisyphos bearing his burden of self, and not over anxious that he will see it fall from his grip when the summit of the mountain is reached.

Soon we are in the world of Die Walkure with ash root and 'sword plunged there to its hilt'. Or are we with Arthur? Who is this 'true love' taken from him we wonder? She seems Diotima to Sokrates. Diotima to Holderlin's Hyperion. Who are 'they'? Is John allowing himself to identify with the wounded Philoktetes in this loss? Whoever: it is this phantom that must return to him and remain his companion in his journey to the heights. She is saurian also with a soul that reaches away even to geological darkness.

Upon the ridge John will be master, stillness reached. But even there all is transitory and return. The will to strive dies. The summit only remains like one of Plato's Absolute Forms throwing its shadow over the world, aloof and inhuman. Thus in his ardent walk towards the void does John leave us brimming with a mind's guest and the myriad creatures of metaphor.

The Characters in the Book

Porius. Only child of the reigning Prince of Edeyrnion and great-great-grandson of the Brythonic Chieftain Cunedda. He belongs to a younger branch of the House of Cunedda, whose elder branch rules over the Province of Gwynedd and has its fortress at Deganwy. Porius's home is the fortified Hill-Camp called *the Gaer* overlooking the little market-town of Corwen situated on the eastern bank of the river Dee or "Dyfrdwy" which means "Divine Water". Porius has just recently celebrated his 30th birthday.

Morfydd. Daughter of Brochvael, brother of the reigning Prince, and betrothed to Porius. Her name is pronounced "Morfyth"—the "th" like that in "the". Her brother Morvran has been murdered by a band of especially fanatical Christians encouraged by the local Priest. Brochvael had been a traveller in Italy and Greece and had collected books in Rome and Constantinople and had taught both his children Latin and Greek with the result of turning Morvran into a violent atheist. There was a tendency to atheism in the family; for the father of Prince Einion and Brochvael, Iddawc ab Edeyrn, had for his rebellious attitude to the church acquired the appellation of "Apostate".

Prince Einion. Porius's Father, a capricious despot who has quarrelled with his wife, feels apparently only contempt for the seriousness of this son Porius, and shows himself more sympathetic than was proper in his position to the three old spinster "Aunties" or *Modrybedd*, a word pronounced *Modrybeth*, in their league with the hidden Druid, or "Derwydd," pronounced *Derwyth*.

Princess Euronwy. Porius's mother, a cousin of the Emperor Arthur and a niece of Arthur's Father, Uthyr Pendragon. Her father, the old Roman Patrician Porius Manlius who was formerly Commander of the Roman Legion at Uriconium, now lives with her and her husband Prince Einion in the Gaer Hill-Fortress.

Rhun. The son of Alarch-the-Fair who married, for love, the beautiful athlete, the fastest runner in Edeynrion, Gwrnach, the son of a freed Greek slave who was a Legionary in Uriconium. Alarch, Rhun's mother, was not only Porius's aunt but Porius's Foster-Mother, for after the death of a baby of her own it was her destiny, according to an old Brythonic custom, to suckle the heir to their House. Alarch-the-Fair was dead, however, long before my story begins, and so was Gwrnach, her husband. Their son Rhun, therefore, now a man of a little over thirty, for he was a few years Porius's senior, lived with his foster-brother in the Gaer and was Porius's only intimate friend. He had inherited from his father Gwrnach, the son of a freed Greek slave, not only the muscles and the agility of the fastest-footed warrior in Edeyrnion but also his religion, which, as was the case with so many Legionaries from the Middle East, consisted in an austere and what today we would call a puritanical worship of that dangerous rival of Christ, the god Mithras. As everyone in the Gaer was well aware, Rhun ap Gwrnach had converted an ancient Cave near a much-used Roman Ford, of which he possessed the traditional Ferry-man's rights, into a very appropriate Cavern-Temple to Mithras, where be placed his Image side by side with an Image of the Homeric Cronos, as seemed natural to the grandson of a Greek; for singularly enough this Mithras Cult, so dear to soldiers, was

traditionally associated with Images of Saturn or Cronos, in gold and ivory, and sometimes with the Serpent of Eternity twined about them.

"Three Aunties" called **"the Modrybedd"**. These are three very aged Princesses, all three over seventy, descended from the aboriginal Iberian queens of "the Forest-People" whose traditional authority was based upon a special kind of Matriarchy. The ancient palace of these three princesses had become a centre of hidden and occult rebellion against both the Brythonic Princes of the Gaer and the Romanized Emperor Arthur. The eldest sister of the remaining three, and this they had never ceased to regret, had married the Brythonic Prince Iddawc the Apostate, father of the reigning Prince and of Brochvael, and grandfather of Porius and Morfydd. The names of the "three Aunties" were Yssyllt, or "Iseult", Erddud, pronounced "Erthud," and Tonwen. Yssyllt the eldest is specially under the influence of the hidden Druid; Erddud, the middle one, is torn by an unnatural passion for her nephew Brochvael; while Tonwen the youngest has had for half-a-century a platonic love-affair with a mysterious old warrior, living incognito in the Cave of the Avanc between their forest-palace and the River Dee, who is in reality a lost offspring of none other than Gorthyver the Blessed, that pious son of the fatal Vortigern.

Brother John. It can be seen how many open and hidden struggles of a social and political nature must have been seething and swirling all the time round this very aged heretical hermit of a pre-historic lake of terrifying legends, called St. Julian's Fount, in the heart of the forest. Brother John was anathema to "Minnawc Gorsant" the priest of Corwen, a town whose very *name* he was changing from "the Ferry" or "the Market" of Mithras, and whose first church he had been building with his own hands for several years.

Brother John had played the part again and again of a philosophical peace-maker between the Romanized Brythons and the rebellious Gwyddyl-Ffichti—or Gwyddyl-Ffychi—the "t" and "y" in these names being interchangeable—as well as between "the Gaer" as the Brythonic centre, and "Ogof-y-Gawr", as the Iberian centre, of those two opposed races. But the Priest of the newly-named town of Corwen, with that same savagely orthodox band of Brythonic zealots whom he had roused by his eloquence till they murdered the atheistic Morvran, was only waiting for a chance to rouse their fury against this old Pelagian, who as the recognized hermit of Saint Julian's Fount had been Porius's private teacher from the boy's earliest years. Pelagianism had indeed sunk deeply into Brother John's soul, for in his own extreme youth he had been an ardent personal disciple of the very aged heretic and had accepted absolutely his chief doctrine, which might perhaps be roughly defined as the humanism of Erasmus combined with a Rousseau-like belief in the *essential goodness* of ordinary men and women.

Brochvael. Morfydd's father, whose dwelling was called "Ty Cerrig" or "the House of Stone", was an elderly traveller and book-collector who had been a friend of that voluminous letter-writer, the Bishop of Averne in Gaul, and had even met in Rome the precocious boy Boethius, and had corresponded quite a lot with Cassiodorus the retired Roman Secretary of Theodoric the Ostrogoth. Brochvael's classical tastes in literature had been inherited by his son Morvran to so perilous an extent that the local priest, a man of fanatical piety, had been successful in having this Morvran murdered by a group of young enthusiasts on account of his atheistical blasphemies.

Myrddin Wyllt. I fancy even the most unhistoric minded lover of old books knows

perfectly that round the mysterious figure of the semi-historical semi-mythological Merlin the controversy has not ceased as to the real identity of this extraordinary personage. Now it might reasonably be enquired how it came about that when I selected for the epoch of time to be taken up by the physical and mental events recorded in the present story, the darkest epoch of the Dark Ages, and placed these confused and chaotic days, whose physical atmosphere it was necessary to make as congruous as possible with their psychic one, in the autumn of that year, I felt impelled to limit the span of time thus visualized to the brief extent of seven days? Well! I will tell you. I did so because in my own experience of reading historical romances nothing so dismally and tediously destroys our interest as when great lumbering weeks and months and years, full of turning-points of history weighing them down and us down with them like so many milestones made of adamant, have got to be fumbled and rumbled through somehow while every vivid dramatic personal string ceases to vibrate.

History "in the making" is the beating of individual human hearts, the machinations of individual human brains, the creations and destructions, the imaginations and aberrations, of individual human nerves. And when we read, as dear Mr. Green in his "History of England" loved to inform us, that *men thought* or *men felt* so and so, our individual hearts sink down to the bottom of weariness, knowing as we do by our own "old wives" instinct if not by any more masculine intelligence, that "men" *qua* "men", in this John-Richard-Green sense, never *have* and never *will* "think and feel" in that sort of cool, deliberate, generalizing fashion! It occurred to me, therefore, that by crowding things into the shortest possible space of time, or, let us say, by selecting a swiftly evaporating segment of time wherein a great many epoch-making events were happening, and just leaving the waves of the centuries before and the waves of the centuries after, to reduce the seven days of my hero and heroine's experiences to their due proportions, and their hopes and fears as to their unknown future to we same proportion as our own hopes and fears, suspended between *our* past and *our* future.

What I have just said about these seven days in the year 499, from the 18th of October to the 25th, is curiously relevant to the character of Myrddin Wyllt, otherwise "Merlin the Wild", whom I have chosen as *my* Merlin in this tale in preference to Merlin Ambrosius or "Merlin the Immortal" and to Merlin Emrys whom we associate with royal authority and also with the building of Stonehenge; and it is relevant to *my* Merlin, or Myrddin Wyllt, because of my association of this mythic Person with the Hesiodic and Homeric Deity who was the Father of Zeus or Jupiter, namely Cronos or Saturn, whose name by an unbroken tradition has come to be connected with what is called the Age of Gold. All the best Welsh scholars seem to be agreed that, as in so many cases in regard to the Greek gods, all these three Merlins, and doubtless there are several others, are in reality the representatives, in different regions and epochs, of one over-all Deity, the supreme Deity in fact of Britain, whom of course it might he more correct to "equate" with the Homeric Zeus, "Father of Gods and men," but whom, for various reasons that seem weighty to me, I prefer to "equate" with Cronos or Saturn, the father of Zeus.

Taliessin. He is always spoken of as "Pen Beirdd, Ynys Preydein," or "Head Bard, of the Isle of Britain." It has been one of the most difficult tasks of Welsh scholars for the last couple of centuries first to disentangle his authentic poems from the many unauthentic ones that have been attributed to him, and second to decide upon the particular epoch in which he lived. His poetry is so curiously and weirdly original and so totally different from the other primitive Welsh bards, that it holds a place entirely of its own in the literary history of our planet. It has

certain characteristics however that distinctly remind a reader of the poetry of Walt Whitman. But except for Walt Whitman I can see no resemblence to any other poet in the world. It is this extreme originality of his verse and its possession of such weird, odd, startling characterics and attitudes and ideas, that makes it easy for a writer who is no poet to imitate, as I have here.

The question of the *date* of Taliessin's life is one of the most difficult of all biographical riddles. But I think the battles of Mryen of Rheged and his son Owen with the Teutonic invaders who in the middle of the sixth century seem to have successfully established themselves in the Midlands, but whose defeats by Uryen and his son when they attempted to advance further West are celebrated again and again by Taliessin, justify me in introducing the Bard into these seven days of the last autumn of the Fifth Century. This would have been contrary to what our most cautious authorities hold about this date if I had made him a grown up man. But by making him a boy and his patron Owen the son of Uryen an extremely young man, I give them both time to arrive at mature manhood before the verse of the one and the heroism of the other are ripe for the part they were destined to play.

Medrawd, who is Tennyson's Modred, is as much the mediaeval villain of the Arthurian story as King Mark is the mediaeval villain of the Tristram story. It is however only necessary to go back to a few of the early Welsh chronicles to realize not only that the Emperor Arthur of ancient Welsh history is a completely different person from the King Arthur of the French Romances and of Malory, but that the "wicked" Modred falls into a completly different category and turns into something *almost*—I won't say *quite*—like a Cymric nationalist, challenging and defying the authority of this Brythonic prince Arthur ab Uthyr together with all the Roman influences he represents, on behalf of the more aboriginal races of this Island. My own reading of the secret of Modred is much more personal than either of these, and might even be called *metaphysical*, since I attribute to this strange being many of the psychological characteristics of the Goethean Mephistopheles, making him in fact, like that "queer son of chaos", raise his "infernal fist" against the whole system of creation.

The Henog. Sylvannus Bleheris, Henog of Dyfed in South Wales, is an unhistoric personage, whom I have arbitrarily introduced, though not without a hint from that daring contemporary Welsh writer, Mr. Timothy Lewis of Aberystwyth, in order to link the mythological background of my story with the Four Pre-Arthurian Branches of the Mabinogi. These four tales gathered round the figure of Pryderi may well be regarded as by far the most original work of this kind, in spite of their being in prose, given to the world since the poetry of Homer. And what I assume in *my* story is that this immortal prose-epic about Pryderi was the work of Sylvannus Bleheris, Henog of Dyfed.

Lot-El-Azziz. This wandering Jewish Doctor, with his Moabitish wife and two young sons, comes by destiny and chance to share the abode of Brother John after the old man's death with the boy-bard Taliessin. Not only does his Hebrew philosophy based on some occult version of the Talmud contrast violently with both orthodox and Pelagian forms of christianity, but it also clashes still more indignantly with Rhun's Mithraism and with the literary and antiquarian attempts of the artful Henog to revive the half-forgotten heathen deities of prehistoric Britain. A monotheistic worshipper of the exclusive Jehovah, a specialist in "the Law and the Prophets", saturated in all the occult secrets of the Talmud and the Cabbala, Lot-El-Azziz soon found that it needed all his personal integrity and his deep mystical Hebrew piety—these things much more than his remarkable gifts as a physician—to

establish him among the Emperor's Horsemen, as well as among the Brythons of the gaer, and to make it possible for him to champion the One God of Israel against the old Henog's plurality of heathen deities.

The Druid and his Brother. The hidden Druid, or Derwydd, pronounced "Derwyth", of the Berber-descended, or Iberian, Forest-people, with their Non-Aryan blood, was called Gogfran Derwydd ap Greidawl Derwydd, and his brother was called Llew. These two weird Beings lived in an underground chamber beneath the Mound of "the Little One", otherwise "y Bychan", the local pet-name for the most successful of all the Gwyddyl-Ffichti outlaws, who had resisted the Roman Legion at Uriconium. The existing Druid, whose name was "Gogfran" or "Cuckoo-Crow", possessed an extremely cynical, detached, and scientific mind, and was a master in many recondite arts, both "black" and "white". His brother Llew on the contrary was addicted solely to the pleasures of erotic and alimentary satisfaction; apart from which a curious inertness possessed him, an inertness which would have been his death had he not been protected by a devoted attendant called Morgant whose half-brother Drom eventually became the attendant of Brochvael, the brother of the reigning Prince.

The magic arts—whether "black" or "white"—inherited from the earlier generations of Druids, or "Derwyddion", were of so secret and indeed of so forbidding a nature, that even the present chronicle dare only hint at some conceivable connection between the constant prostration of Llew, the Druid's sensual brother, and the final re-incarnation of "the Little One" of the haunted Mound, this arch-enemy of the Roman Legion, in the shape of a living and breathing child, taken, dare we hint, from this inert over-sexed body of Llew where it may have been "inseminated" by Gogfran Derwydd himself. That this sinister conjecture, not altogether out of keeping with the end of the Fifth Century, is not devoid of plausibility, is proved by this re-incarnated "y Bychan"'s association with Porius's second-sight vision of the Battle of Camlan, that half-historic encounter in the South-West wherein Medrawd was killed and Arthur vanished.

Sibylla. Sibylla, born a true and typical Gwyddyl-Ffychti in that "Gwern", or swamp of Alder-trees, which is now one site of the village of that name, must have been an embodiment of that wild attractiveness and reckless charm which it is so easy to imagine the coupling of the Goidelic Celts with the aboriginal Ffychtiad bringing to birth. The girl became at an early age the mistress of a certain Saxon spy sent to gather information about this district, whose name was Gunhorst. This oddly-matched pair had one child, a remarkably clever little girl called Gunta, between whom and Neb-ap-Digon, the disillusioned worldly-minded little boy who was in reality the devoted and loyal page of Myrddin Wyllt, although in appearance he was the page of Gwyndydd, Myrddin Wyllt's sister, there soon grew up a passionate and profoundly subtle alliance.

But it was entirely beyond the restless and exploratory nature of Sibylla to remain content even with the Saxon chieftain Colgrim's most intimate henchman. Nor could her very definite affection for her child Gunta keep her out of adventure. She began crossing the path of the reigning Prince, Einion ab Iddawc, the husband of Euronwy, the niece of Uther Pendragon. And though she was not an easy character to enthrall there seems no doubt that she was enthralled by Einion ab Iddawc, who was at that epoch the handsomest prince in Britain. But Einion was as changeable as she was herself, and as soon as Sibylla realized that thie affair had become a unilateral one, she snatched at an opportunity offered by chance and did her best to

seduce Brochvael the Prince's brother. When we leave her at the end of the story she has established herself with none other than Rhun ap Gwrnach in the ancient "Llys" or "palace" of Ogof-y-Gawr.

Nesta ferch Aulus ("ferch" is "daughter of"—as "ap" or "ab", short for "mab", is "son of") was the only child of the old ex-centurion who was the servant of the equally old Porius Manlius, the Roman Patrician, who was our hero's grandfather. Nesta's loyalty and support was given whole-heartedly to Morfydd, especially after Morfydd's marriage to Porius, when she was most in need of such help.

Gwythyr. This lad had become betrothed to Nesta-ferch-Aulus about the same time as Porius had become betrothed to Morfydd-ferch-Brochvael, and he had also become, by reason of a series of lucky chances that threw them into close intimacy, as much of a devoted adherent of Porius-ab-Einion as his wife was of Morfydd-ferch-Brochvael.

Teleri. Like all royal or princely courts the little court of "the Gaer," or of "Mynydd-y-Gaer", "the mountain-camp", contained one or two eccentric characters "who did", so to say, "nothing for their keep." Such a one was the girl Teleri, who had never been quite normal in her wits but who had quickly become, under the influence of Prince Medrawd, Arthur's nephew and heir and deadliest enemy, worse than unsealed in her mind. Medrawd's abysmal pessimism had an especial appeal for Teleri, who from nightly wanderings about the Gaer had a direct personal knowledge of what went on in those dark and silent corridors, and between chamber and chamber. Thus it came about that through this unhallowed waif, denounced by the church, violated by Medrawd, and protected by nobody but Morfydd and by Blodeuwedd the Owl-Maiden, it became known to the former of these that Euronwy, Porius's mother, had *not* permitted Medrawd to share her bed.

Neb-ap-Digon. This little satirical, sardonic, disillusioned, sophisticated page of the Emperor's Court has from his infancy dedicated himself to the service of Myrddin Wyllt, to whom he has a unique and absolutely disinterested devotion. At first he is suspicious of our hero, the young Porius, who is the Hercules or Samson of the tribe as well as the heir to its princedom, but by degrees he [was]won over to him and in the end, after his Master the Great Magician, and after his girl-friend the little Gunta, he is ready to serve him to the death.

Gunta. This child of the Saxon or "Sais" adventurer Gunhorst, and of Sibylla the Gwyddyl-Ffychtic, resembled her mother in her tricks and devices, and, child as she was, in her sex-appeal; while she inherited from her Teutonic father the unshakable "heart of oak" of his Saxon forests. She was quicker than her boy-friend Neb in acquiring faith in Porius, but when once she did that young Hercules justice she became as faithful to him as she was to her infant-doll.

Owen-pen-uchel. A famous horse-breeder and trainer of hunting-dogs who deserted the service of the child Maelgwn or Malcunus, the historic head of the House of Cunedda whose palace was at Deganwy, and who when he grew up became one of the luckless objects of the monk Gildas's fulminations. It was to this Owen, or Owain, that Rhun owed his devoted hound "Prudwyn", and that the old "Incognito" of the Avanc's Cave who perished with the youngest Princess of the "Modrybedd" owed the dapple-grey mare to whom the Emperor himself in the hour of battle gave the Germanic name "Valkyrie." Destiny decided

that it was this man alone who was to accompany young Porius when at the last he leaves Edeyrnion to join the Emperor at the Battle of Badon in Gwlad-y-Haf, or Somerset.

Afagddu. This old retainer of the Princes of the Gaer who is revealed as being in reality Ulffyn of Gaer Caradog bears the name of that hideously ugly son of the earth-goddess Ceridwen who was one of the few survivors of the fatal Battle of Camlan which took place thirty years later than the Battle of Badon and at which Arthur and Medrawd perished, and unquestionably must have borne some psychic relation to this unearthly creature. It was undoubtedly his non-Aryan Berber blood that impelled him to rally to Medrawd as the champion of the Forest-People and as the legitimate heir, and *therefore* the natural enemy, of Britain's Romanized emperor.

Drom. Morgant and Drom when we first encounter them during Brochvael's visit with Sibylla to the Cave below the Mound of "the Little One," are the half-brothers whose fate it is to serve the Druid and the Druid's brother. When however the Druid is killed by the Saxons, Morgant remains, not perhaps for the purest motives, but still remains, faithful to the Druid's Brother, who, whether connected with the creation of the infant "Bychan", that real and new "Little One", or by reason of some inherent imbecility in his constitution, is always in a semi-comatose condition. But Drom, who is clearly a homo-sexual person if not an actually androgynous one, and whose figure has the soft curves of a woman's, becomes the servant-friend of Brochvael, who in his classical travels has been influenced by certain classical aberrations.

But Drom's personal beauty is not his only remarkable characteristic; for as a christian he embodies a heresy far more daring than that of the moral Pelagianism of Brother John. In the spirit of some of the most imaginative of modern protestant mystics, he is convinced—though the orthodox regard his claim as blasphemous insanity—that the actual spirit of Christ, or even the actual soul of Christ, inhabits his body; and that therefore his words and deeds when he is most himself are the words and deeds of Jesus.

Dion Diomedes. This man is an adventurous Greek Merchant, Captain and Owner of his own ship, a ship now anchored in the Thames near the White Tower of London, who has brought the Jewish Doctor and his Moabitish wife to these shores, but who, the moment he sets eyes on Myrddin Wyllt's sister Gwendydd, decides to supplant Rhun in her ambitious and self-interested affections, and to persuade her to be herself, rather than the Mithraic Rhun, the British representative of the Case for the Annulment of Pelagius's Excommunication at the Court of Constantinople.

Nineue, the Ffichtiad Sorceress. This character is in many ways the most interesting in the book. She is Vivian, the well-known wicked sorceress-love of the Tennysonian King Arthur. But she is much more than Vivian. As her name, Nineue-ferch-Avallach, or Nineue the daughter of Avallach, suggests, she may be associated with all those mysterious goddesses who in Wales are connected with deep pre-historic lakes and in Somerset with the mystic island of Avalon or Glastonbury.

But as the fatal mistress and more than sorceress-paramour of Merlin, or as we name him here Myrddin Wyllt, she becomes inevitably connected with that pre-Homeric pre-Hesiodic Greek Mythology about which Myrddin Wyllt, fancying himself a re-incarnation of "crooked-counselling Cronos", is constantly brooding. What particular pre-Homeric ancient Greek

goddess we should presume to associate [with] Nineue I have deliberately held myself back from dogmatically declaring, since the more real the supernatural characters in "Porius" have become to their present chronicler, the less he dares—that is, to speak plainly, the less *I* dare—associate them with any fixed academic place in any fixed academic mythology.

(JCP ms, transcribed by R. L. Blackmore in 'The Matter of Porius', The Powys Newsletter *4, 1974–5,* Porius *issue. Colgate University.)*

JCP's "Apparition"
Theodore Dreiser's Version

The story of JCP's seemingly paranormal appearance to the American novelist Theodore Dreiser in his New York study when he was himself in his home at Phudd Bottom is now fairly well-known. It was popularized for Powys readers by G. Wilson Knight *in The Saturnian Quest* (London: Methuen, 1964, 128). Knight reproduces a second-hand account from *The Gift of Life*, the autobiography of W. E. Woodward, an American businessman and author, published by E. P. Dutton in New York in 1947 (65–6).

As a source, however, this version leaves much to be desired. It occurs within a book that otherwise focuses almost exclusively on Woodward himself. The chapter in question is entitled 'I Wonder What Happened'. Dreiser is said to have told Woodward about the incident in answer to a story, just described in the book (63–5), of one of his own apparently psychic experiences in early life. He had spoken to a stranger, claiming to be from 'Porto Rico', among the few spectators at a village baseball-game, though no one else saw such a figure, and the local hotel-keeper denied that any visitor had stayed there the previous night, as the stranger had maintained. All this took place when Woodward was an early teenager.

The two stories are not in fact at all similar. The main point of the JCP/Dreiser story is that JCP announced his intention beforehand. Besides, they were both adults and friends when the incident occurred. No reason exists for the Woodward encounter, which is no more than an unexplained mystery. Moreover, the stranger did not disappear; the two merely separated and went their separate ways. There was no hint of anything unusual until Woodward's reference to a visitor was subsequently challenged.

The whole context of the story involving JCP is somewhat suspect. *The Gift of Life* is highly anecdotal, and one gets the impression that Woodward likes to 'improve' a story; indeed, he says as much at one point, and writes elsewhere in the book of jokingly making up incidents and conversations. All in all, it is unreliable, but has been accepted in want of any alternative version. Glyn Hughes, in an article first published in *Prediction* in 1975 and reproduced as an appendix to the edition of JCP's letters to him (London: Cecil Woolf, 1994, 72–5) offers a version so close to Woodward's as to verge on plagiarism. Oliver Marlow Wilkinson introduced some alterations of detail in an interview with Herbert Williams for his biography of JCP (Bridgend: Seren, 1997, 89), but basically retells the same story. Frederick Davies, in his recollections of JCP and Phyllis Playter (*Powys Review* 19, 1986, 62), claims that Dreiser published an account in *A Traveller at Forty*, but this is an error. The book was published in

1913, and Dreiser didn't meet JCP until 1914. Moreover, I have failed to find any reference in Dreiser's subsequent autobiographical writings.

All this is frustrating. However, in 1993 Louis J. Zanine published *Mechanism and Mysticism: The Influence of Science in the Thought of Theodore Dreiser* (Philadelphia: Univesity of Pennsylvania Press), which drew attention to Dreiser's own version of the story, still unpublished. This reference seems to have eluded the attentian of Powysians. According to Zanine, 'Powys once claimed that he could project "the essence if not the substance" of himself over a great distance, and offered to prove his ability. He instructed Dreiser to be alone in his room at midnight and to look for a sign.' What happened then is narrated in Dreiser's own words:

> Almost precisely at the hour of twelve, within a minute or two either way, first his eyes and then his face and shoulders and arms appeared, as though he were standing directly before me. I was not so much amazed as particularly interested by the peculiarly penetrating look which was in his eyes at the time, as much as to say, "You see? What did I tell you?" Then it was gone. (Zanine 119)

The source is a typescript from the Dreiser Papers in the Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania, given as 'Untitled TS, Box 177, Charles Fort folder, #1, 9–10.'

It is reasonable to suppose that, given JCP's reluctance to discuss the matter, Dreiser decided not to publish the account during his friend's lifetime – and he died seventeen years before JCP. He presumably wrote it soon after the event, which must have taken place in the late 1920s or early 1930s, while Woodward, writing in 1946, heard the story from Dreiser 'a few years ago' (65). The basic details are not very different from Woodward's but are more specific, and carry much greater weight on coming at first hand from Dreiser himself. Since it represents a somewhat disturbing, yet intriguing incident in JCP's biography, it is important that we now know of the existence of a more authoritative source.

W. J. Keith

Dreiser to Powys

To John Cowper Powys

Hotel Pasadena, Broadway at 61st Street, New York, N.Y.
March 24, 1926

Dear Jack

Where art thou? Walking to & fro in the earth? We are at the Hotel Pasadena 61st & Brdwy. (Telephone Columbus 7127). I have read your book. [*Ducdame*] (Marvellous!!) I did not read it until recently because I was so wearily enmeshed or submerged in my own that I could not. But once to it I could not let it alone and soon reached the end. I like it because it is so interpretive of your viewpoint—so full of, I will not say a brooding so much as a warrior melancholy. A group of such books would most certainly place you in a noble frame. And how about the serpentine Kansan. Has she decamped or can she be lured by a Hindoo flute? Helen says that she can & will get up a grand supper or dinner to be served in this suite and we can argue even as Rook and Hastings. Wilt come? Or, artist in Fez or Dahomey? At any

rate write. A word. I would like to hear. Better to see. And Helen says the same to both of you. I bow— I beat my head upon the floor[.]
Dreiser

To John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter

March 26, 1926

Fairest Jack!
Oh Serpentine Kansan!
The deal is on for Tuesday night. You are to report at 6:30. If you can endure drinks— drinks you shall have. And boisterous and threatening argument—as to the temperaments & intentions of binderskeets dancing on the fifth invisible ring of Mercury. (Trans-galaxite spaces.) And the modern sphinx from the banks of the Kaw will look us all down with inscrutable and tolerant eyes.
Well, that's that. It['s] fine to know you are here & coming.
Bows —
Genuflections
Hand kissings
Profound & vigorous swaying of the smoking censer[.]
Dreiser

To John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter

West Loraine [Street], Glendale, California
April 12, 1939

Dear Jack: Dear Phyllis:

How? I moved out here last November (about Thanksgiving) and have been working here. Rejoined Helen at Portland & drove down. The world is so crazy that I think it is best to forget it — to fit oneself into a very limited area or village and avoid the hoop-la and bluster and strut of the international and national puppet shows. We are to die anyhow, or be robbed, or deceived so why bother to gather in groups or halls and discuss the matter. Eventually, it may be that each will have to go armed — jungle fashion. If so we will not need to read newspapers. We will know our ever present danger and jungle-wise be attuned to it.

I think of you two so much— together in your little house — and wish all good things to befall you. I see Corwen, and the heather carpeted mountain above; and the valley, and the river, and know you have as good a world as any anywhere. The felicity of a true mental companionship! To how many, in any century, does that come? If one has ever experienced it — even the memory of it is sustaining.

This strange world! The more I contemplate it the more I am sure the wildest legend is beyond its wildness. Neither Lucifer nor God are impossible. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard what yet is — has been — will be. Our little chemical and physical probings! They lay a path to a dragon's lair and a witches' heath — leaving one lonely and a-cold.

And yet as I write there is a car in the garage, a morning paper on the table, automatically heated and electrified everything. But just the same an ironic magician behind it all, whose wilful, half-mad eyes gleam dimly through cars & walls and tall buildings. A flash of his eyes, a clap of his hands and it will all be gone — all.
Love and enduring fortune to both of you
TD

(from Letters of Theodore Dreiser: A Selection, *edited by Robert H.Elias, vols I and III (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959). With thanks for permission. Another letter from Dreiser to JCP is in* NL 44 *, following 'Table-Talk' by Chris Wilkinson, about the ship-board séance in which Powys and Dreiser took part, in 1915 or 16.* The Powys Review *no 6, 1979-80, is largely devoted to Dreiser and JCP. Marguerite Tjader's essay on their friendship quotes from these and other letters. Dreiser visited Corwen in August 1938.)*

Indian Tributes

JCP professed dislike for Hindus (based on a Cambridge acquaintance – see letter to Louis Wilkinson quoted in note to 'Failure at Oxford', *NL* 60, 39) – but at least one admirer from the subcontinent, who as a student in America had heard him lecture, recognised him as a fellow-theosophical spirit:

> A great saint, mystic, occultist, philosopher, poet, novelist rolled into one. Briefly, a great Yogi ... It is as a great occultist and mystic, a man of inner illumination who has discovered the path to the divinity hidden in him, that Mr. Powys's writings should be read, enjoyed, pondered over and applied in daily life ... His written word as the spoken has the magic of creating an ethereal world, scintillating with light, lifting his reader to a new dimension of experience." *(John Cowper Powys, a tribute by Kewal Motwam – The Journal of Sociology, University of Jabaldur, 1962, presented to JCP on his 90th birthday. In Bissell collection in DCM.)*

And not only in the East. An article in *Prediction* magazine of October 1941, 'Teachers of Today: John Cowper Powys, the Yoga of the West' by W. M. Whiteman, claims:

> The main trend of today is a departure from late 19th and early 20th century rationalism and a re-exploration of the realm of the spirit. Here one of the most interesting contemporary teachers is John Cowper Powys. His message is not easily presented as an argument to the reason ... But he offers a lifeline in the chaos of today, he presents a philosophy, one might say a religion, adapted to these troubled times when old pillars of faith and conduct crack and we seek earnestly for some footing in a dissolving world.
>
> Powys is a Welshman. He has the gloominess of the Celt. He is obsessed with the desperate misery of life, which he sees as waves of melancholy and pain beating hourly upon the human soul. But like many earlier philosophers he sees it not only as a personal need but as a moral duty to fight off this misery and to make happiness as the first aim in life. Saints may try to reform the world. It is the business of the ordinary

man to concentrate himself on growing steadily happier. Powys denies that this is an unworthy or uninspiring aim. He seeks a particular kind of magical happiness, deep draughts of it, flowing straight into one from the universe, from the basic mystery of life. No one, he declares, would dare to call the happiness of a lover, a saint, an artist or a mystic uninspiring ...

In *In Defence of Sensuality* [1930] ... Powys describes a mental attitude which enables him not so much to achieve a positive happiness as to blunt the edge of everyday unhappiness ... It is a course of treatment rather repugnant to the more robust and less imaginative English character ... [But] in *The Art of Happiness* [1935] ... he passes to more active resistance ... He calls them tricks, but it would be equally correct to call them religious acts ...They are something more forceful than meditation, more courageous than escapist daydreams. They can be described as the Yoga of a western mystic, not ascetic but sensuous. The Indian Yoga finds his escape from the pressure of the world through a gymnastic of the body, wherein the strict control of the flesh brings a freeing of the spirit. Powys releases the spirit from its fetters by controlling the mind ...

The author describes the 'mental postures' suggested by JCP (such as the 'ichthyan act'):

... Always be on the lookout for phenomena which stir up something rich and strange in the soul, for living substitutes for that religious awe in the presence of life which in these materialistic times is falling ... These movements are symbolic milestones along our difficult way. They are the acts of worship in an age-old religion of which Powys presents us anew with a key, but in which every man is his own priest ...

(*With thanks to Chris Thomas and to Anthony Head.*)

Two Indian versions of 'Key to Happiness'
(*i.e.*, The Art of Happiness, *1935*)
here and on back cover. (*See News & Notes, page 12.*)

On the back cover of these editions:

"Life is life and it is the business of the individual to be happy in life itself, not to require perpetual bonnes bouches from Fate and gala days from Chance." This is the main theme of Mr. Powys' KEY TO HAPPINESS. The only axiom he wants the reader to accept at the start is the basic maxim that our thoughts at least are, more or less, under our control.

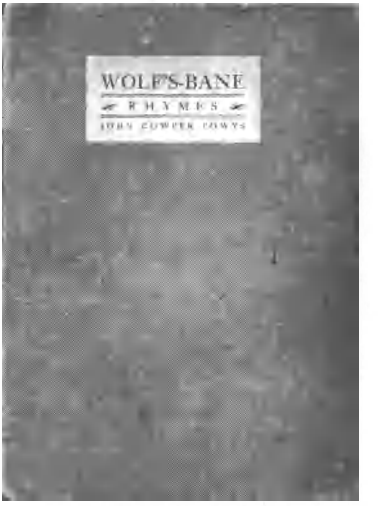
The author sets out to show the reader the different ways of achieving happiness. He also deals at length with happiness from the sex angle.

He devotes a chapter to the woman who wants to live happily with that extra-ordinary creature man; and another to the man who wants to achieve happiness in spite of the fact that he is living with a woman.

WOLF'S-BANE

RHYMES

JOHN COWPER POWYS



Wolf's-Bane: Two labels

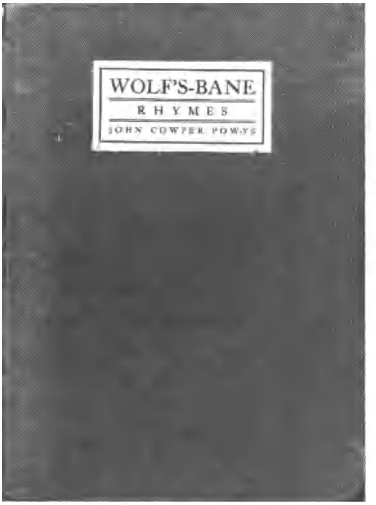
Dante Thomas in his *A Bibliography of the Writings of John Cowper Powys* (1975) notes that there were two different paper labels on the cover of JCP's volume of poetry, *Wolf's-Bane* (1916).

He quotes Siberell as stating that the "very first 100 copies of this book to reach the publisher had a beetle design upon the paper label; later issues of the first printing had the white paper, plain label."

Here they both are with the labels at full size, the covers at 30%. I could not find any other differences in the two issues of the first edition.

I would not call the ornament a "beetle design", rather a printer's flower of a standard type. I think the publisher Arnold Shaw was right to produce a more considered design with the border and without the rather ineffectual flowers, and if Siberell thought they looked like beetles, even more reason to dispense with them!

The bindings of both are in very poor condition, as one would expect with this type of paper-covered boards; one is missing the backstrip completely and its boards are detached, while the other lacks part of the backstrip, but they make up for this with their inscriptions, "*May from Jack*" in the earlier, and "*Gertrude M. Powys/ Easter 1916*" (in GMP's hand) and "J.C.P." (JCP's) in the later version .



Stephen Powys Marks

WOLF'S-BANE

RHYMES

JOHN COWPER POWYS