

LAST-MINUTE BOOKING FOR THE CONFERENCE !

Rooms (both *en-suite* and standard) are **still available** for the 2008 Conference — August 29th–31st at Chichester (see p.5).

Please contact Anna Pawelko urgently (tel 02920 418 813), **not later than August 7th**, if you would like to join us for what promises to be a very interesting weekend.

Editorial

The exceptional growth of leaves this summer encourages comparisons with the Powys Society. ...

This *Newsletter* consists largely of reports and contributions from members, and once again, of spotlights on pieces in the jigsaw of JCP's life and times, as reflected in his letters: in his 40s to Louis Wilkinson (with annotations by Chris Wilkinson, another of whose *Entertainments* we look forward to at the Conference); in his 60s to Dorothy Richardson and Emma Goldman (in new books from Cecil Woolf); and in his 80s to George Playter (to whose grandson we owe our delightful cover).

Ian Robinson discusses TFP and the Comic, theme of the meeting at Dorchester in May. Peter Foss disentangles the alternative titles in Llewelyn's published essays.

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Chairman's Report 2007–2008

In 2007, the Society, now forty years in existence, welcomed an unusually large number of attenders to its annual conference on 17th–19th August, and held for the third time at the Hand Hotel, **Llangollen**. Of our speakers, Peter Foss talked about his recently published bibliography of Llewelyn Powys; and Harald Fawknar from Sweden approached John Cowper Powys's visionary work from a new and personal religious perspective in 'The Indifference of Nature – Realness in *A Glastonbury Romance*'. Florence-Catherine Marie-Laverrou discussed *Weymouth Sands* from a phenomenological viewpoint, and Charles Lock spoke about John Cowper Powys and the poetry of Roy Fisher. Roy Fisher, who dedicated his book *A Furnace* to the memory of John Cowper Powys, read from his work on Saturday, alongside our longstanding member, the distinguished poet Penelope Shuttle. Arjen Mulder was unfortunately prevented from attending by an illness in his family, but will be coming to speak on John Cowper Powys's early novels at Chichester this August. At Llangollen, we also held a discussion on John Cowper Powys's late poem 'The Ridge', with reflections on the poem by Kieran McCann, John Dunn, and Cicely Hill (this ran out of time and has been continued in subsequent *Newsletters*). Our conference organisers Louise de Bruin and Anna Pawelko again ensured that the weekend was an enjoyable experience for us all. Feedback suggests that Llangollen remains a general favourite as a conference venue, and the Society intends to continue holding its conference there in alternate years.

The Society also held three other meetings during the year. On 24th November, Morine Krissdóttir came to the Friends Meeting House at **Hampstead** and responded to questions about her biography of John Cowper Powys entitled *Descents of Memory*. On 10th May, the Society held another 'Powys Day' at the Dorset County Museum in **Dorchester**. Fifteen members were present, for a discussion led by Ian Robinson and John Hodgson on T. F. Powys's novels *Kindness in a Corner* and *Unclay*, recently republished by The Sundial Press. We also read Kate Kavanagh's adaptation for radio of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, and at the end of the day paid a visit to the village of East Chaldon, Theodore's home for many years.

The Society's thanks go to Sonia Lewis for organising another meeting in June, at the Old Fire Engine House at **Ely**, where a dozen members gathered to discuss the recent new edition of *Porius*. Chris Gostick and Cicely Hill led the two innings of the discussion, held on either side of a fine lunch. Our president Glen Cavaliero was prevented by illness from attending, and John Hodgson acted as *porte-parole* for his thoughts on this mighty 'romance of the Dark Ages'.

From March this year, the Society has appointed Michael Kowalewski as Curator of its **Collection** housed in the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester. Michael hopes to be available as far as he can, with reasonable notice, to prospective visitors to this rich trove of books, manuscripts, and other Powys material. The Society intends to support him to the utmost in his efforts to encourage visitors to the collection, and

has approved the purchase of equipment. The collection has been extensively catalogued by Morine Krissdóttir, and the larger part of this catalogue is now available on the Society's new website. Already posted there are the parts of the collection devoted to John Cowper, TF, Llewelyn, and Littleton Powys.

Our former chairman Richard Graves, having expertly managed the society's **website** for many years, has passed this task to Frank Kibblewhite. After an interregnum during which domains changed hands, Frank has set up a fine new site, which includes a message board with the first reviews and discussions of Powys books, which we hope will grow. A Paypal facility will soon make it possible for visitors to the site to order publications online, and for new members to join the society. We hope that Frank's site will help attract the new and younger members on which the future vigour of the society will depend.

Volume 18 of *The Powys Journal*, the first under the editorship of Richard Maxwell of Yale University, with Charles Lock as Contributing Editor, has been placed with the printers and will be ready in time for our annual Conference at Chichester. At the same time, the Society is publishing a substantial monograph by Professor W. J. Keith of Toronto entitled *Aspects of Owen Glendower*, which will also be available at the Conference. Kate Kavanagh has again produced three fine newsletters in the course of the year. The attractive appearance of all the Society's publications is thanks to the expertise, taste and hard work of our Publications Manager, Stephen Powys Marks. We hope to be able to free Stephen of much of the physical burden of the distribution of the *Journal* and other publications, by associating the Society with a commercial book distribution service. This should also make it possible for the Society to undertake a wider range of publications.

The **committee** met three times in 2007–2008, at Timothy Hyman's home in London: in October 2007 and in March and June 2008. A fourth meeting is planned to take place at Chichester. Jeff Kwintner and Peter Foss have left the committee, and the Society thanks them for their contributions to its life with their wisdom and inspiration, on which we will continue to be able to draw. This year also sees the departure of Peter Lazare as **Hon. Secretary** after four years' service, and I would like to thank him for his unfailing cheerfulness and efficiency in his tasks. Our long-standing treasurer Michael French has agreed to serve for another year, and his steady wisdom at committee meetings has been especially valuable in guiding the Society through this year.

Many members have contributed to the life of the Society in the last year, writing in the *Newsletter* and *Journal*, or speaking up at our discussion meetings. There are also many who do not physically attend meetings, but who I hope benefit from their membership of the Society and find that it increases their enjoyment of the works of this remarkable literary family.

John Hodgson

Committee Nominations 2008–9

The following **Honorary Officers** have been nominated and have agreed to stand:

	<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Seconder</i>
<i>Chairman</i>	John Hodgson	Peter Lazare	Kate Kavanagh
<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	Tim Hyman	John Hodgson	Peter Lazare
<i>Hon. Treasurer</i>	Michael French	John Hodgson	Peter Lazare
<i>Hon. Secretary</i>	Chris Thomas	John Dunn	John Hodgson

The following **Committee Members** have been nominated by Society members and have agreed to stand:

<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Seconder</i>
Stephen Powys Marks	Kate Kavanagh	Shelagh Hancox
Michael Kowalewski	John Hodgson	Michael French

If approved, the Committee from August 2008 will therefore consist of:

John Dunn, **David Gervais**, **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter* Editor), **Michael Kowalewski** (Curator of the Powys Society collection at the Dorset County Museum), **Stephen Powys Marks** (Publications Manager), **Anna Pawelko** (Joint Conference Manager), and **John Powys**.

AGM 2008

The Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society will be held in the Cloisters Chamber of Bishop Otter College, College Lane, Chichester, at 11:00 a.m. on Sunday 31st August 2008.

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of the 2007 AGM – published in the November 2007 *Newsletter*.
- 2 Matters arising.
- 3 Report of the Hon. Secretary.
- 4 Report of the Hon. Treasurer and Audited Accounts, as published in the July 2008 *Newsletter*.
- 5 Appointment of the Hon. Auditor, Stephen Allen.
- 6 Report for 2007–2008 by the Chairman, as published in the July 2008 *Newsletter*.
- 7 To note the election of Officers and members of the Committee for 2008–9.
- 8 Date and location of the 2009 Conference.
- 9 AOB.

The Powys Society Annual Conference 2008
Bishop Otter Campus, University of Chichester
Friday 29th August to Sunday 31st August

‘OTHER DIMENSIONS’

Programme

Friday 29th

- 16.00 Arrivals
- 17.30 Informal reception; welcome by the **Chairman**
- 18.30 Dinner
- 20.00 **Glen Cavaliero: ‘That Goblin Race – the Powys Family Mystique’**

Saturday 30th

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 **Arjen Mulder: ‘Becoming John Cowper Powys’**
followed by coffee
- 11.00 **David Goodway: ‘John Cowper Powys, Emma Goldman,
and Anarchy’**
- 12.45 Lunch
- Afternoon: guided walks round Burpham or coastal Sussex
- 19.00 Dinner
- 20.00 **‘The Bride Who Pays the Organist ...’,** a reading devised by **Oliver Wilkinson** based on the diaries and letters of the Powys and Wilkinson families from 1912

Sunday 31st

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 **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
- 13.00 Lunch. Auction of a watercolour painting by Will Powys
- 15.00 End of Conference and departure in afternoon

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





*Two illustrations by George Charlton for the first edition of Mr. Weston's Good Wine:
above Patrons of the Angel Inn;
below Tamar Grobe in her bath attended by Jenny Bunce.*

Hon. Treasurer's Report for 2007

The accounts for 2007 are set out on the following two pages: they have been approved by the Society's Honorary Auditor, Mr Stephen Allen, and once again the Society is most grateful to him for his work and advice on behalf of the Society. I am pleased to be able to report that, if it is the wish of the Annual General Meeting in August, Mr Allen is willing to continue as auditor for another year.

The paid-up membership for 2007 was 259, essentially identical to that in 2006 (261), so, while the membership may have stabilised, it is still vital that members do

<i>year</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<i>paid-up membership</i>	315	292	287	279	288	276	261	259

all within their power to encourage those interested in the work of members of the Powys family to join the Society.

After taking into account the tax refund under the Gift Aid Scheme of £888 (£851 in 2006), our total subscription income in 2007 was £6,113 or 65% of our total income of £9,418 (69% in 2006). (The income figures for 2006 and 2007 are not strictly comparable due to different treatments of the income and expenditure from *Publications* and the *Conference* in the two sets of accounts.)

As in previous years, the largest part of our expenditure was on our two regular publications, *The Powys Journal* and three issues of the Society's *Newsletter*. In 2007, the net cost of producing the *Journal* and *Newsletters*, including distribution, was £3,457, a reduction of around £300 mainly due to lower *Newsletter* printing costs. The *Conference* at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen once again made a useful surplus of almost £1,100 (compared to a loss of £1,145 incurred on the 2006 Conference at Chichester).

Three very successful *Day Schools* were held in 2007 and the 2007 accounts include the costs of the 2006 Hampton *Day School*. Consequently, the 2007 costs of £312 cannot sensibly be compared to the £73 incurred for a single *Day School* in 2006. Additional costs were incurred in 2007 for website maintenance due to a change in webmaster, and there was also expenditure of £200 in connection with the Society's collection at the Dorset County Museum.

After taking into account movements in the value of publication stock, the accounts show an excess of income over expenditure of £4,317 (2006: £3,106) and an increase in the Society's net worth on 31st December 2007 to £18,069 (2006: £13,752). As in 2006, the satisfactory financial outcome for the year is aided by significant gifts to the Society and it seemed appropriate to transfer £5,000 from the General Fund to the Wilson Knight Benefactors' Fund to reserve these funds for specific projects. **The Committee would welcome suggestions from members for developments or initiatives they would like to see the Society undertake with these funds.**

Michael French

THE POWYS SOCIETY

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2007

INCOME ¹		£	£	£ 2006
<i>Subscriptions</i>	Brought forward from 2006 (9 members)	183		
	For 2007 (250 members)	5,042		
	Honorary members (12)	—		
<i>Donations</i>	Tax refund under Gift Aid	<u>888</u>	6,113	6,064
	Conference book sales	517		
	Pollinger/Halsall book sales	325		
	Legacy: Ms Gifford	500		
	Other	<u>77</u>	1,419	1,517
<i>Publication Sales</i>	Stock publications		321	486
<i>Conference</i>	Registration Fees	7,945		
	Less Payment to Hand Hotel, Llangollen	(6,640)		
	Other payments	(214)	1,091	(1,145)
<i>Other</i>	Bank interest		<u>474</u>	<u>247</u>
	TOTAL		<u>9,418</u>	<u>7,169</u>

EXPENDITURE ¹				
<i>Powys Journal xvii</i>	Cost of printing	1,427		1,488
	Cost of distribution	<u>425</u>	1,852	<u>284</u> 1,772
<i>Powys Newsletters</i>	Printing costs, Nos 60, 61, 62	1,298		1,476
	Cost of distribution	<u>307</u>	1,605	<u>541</u> 2,017
<i>Day schools</i>	Hampstead, 25th November 2006	51		
	Dorchester, 5th May 2007	60		
	Little Gidding, 16th June 2007	42		
	Hampstead, 24th November 2007	<u>159</u>	312	73
<i>Administrative Expenses</i>	Web-site hosting and maintenance	306		82
	Alliance of Literary Societies	15		15
	Collection at Dorset County Museum	<u>201</u>	522	97
	Officers' expenses	218		174
	Travel to Committee meetings	<u>294</u>	512	<u>267</u> <u>441</u>
	TOTAL		<u>4,803</u>	<u>4,400</u>

EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE **4,615** 2,769

DECREASE (INCREASE) IN VALUE OF PUBLICATION STOCKS ² **298** (337)

EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE
(taking stock movements into account) **4,317** 3,106

THE POWYS SOCIETY

STATEMENT OF FUNDS AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2007

GENERAL FUND ³	£	£	2006
Funds at 1 January 2007		3,752	<i>3,646</i>
Excess of income over expenditure		4,317	<i>3,106</i>
Transfer to Wilson Knight Benefactors Fund		(5,000)	<i>(3,000)</i>
Funds at 31 December 2007		<u>3,069</u>	<i><u>3,752</u></i>
<i>Represented by:</i>			
Stock of <i>Powys Journal</i> and books ²		1,070	<i>1,368</i>
Cash at Bank 31 Decembert 2007 ⁴	2,250		
Less subscriptions received in advance ⁵	(251)	1,999	<i>2,384</i>
		<u>3,069</u>	<i><u>3,752</u></i>
THE WILSON KNIGHT BENEFACTORS FUND ⁶			
Funds at 1 January 2007		10,000	<i>7,000</i>
Transfer from General Fund		5,000	<i>3,000</i>
Funds at 31 December 2007		<u>15,000</u>	<i><u>10,000</u></i>
<i>Represented by</i>			
Cash at bank		<u>15,000</u>	<i><u>10,000</u></i>

NOTES

- 1 Cash turnover in 2007: total receipts, £16,818; total payments, £12,210. After adjustments, relating to the cost of new publications stocked, existing publications sold, writing down of stock and subscriptions received in advance, the excess of income over expenditure was £4,317. (2006: £3,106)
- 2 The value of stock at 1 January 2007 was £1,368. During the year this was increased by £228 through the taking of new publications into stock (70 copies of *The Powys Journal* xvii for 2007 @ £3.25 per copy) and decreased by £526 through the sale of existing stock and straight-line depreciation of existing stock to zero after five years. This gives a total increase during 2007 of £298 and a stock value at 31 December 2006 of £1,070.
- 3 Society's net worth at 31 December 2007 was £18,069 (General Fund £3,069; Wilson Knight Benefactors Fund £15,000) (at 31 December 2006, net worth was £13,752).
- 4 General Fund cash at bank at 31 December 2007: £2,250. (Community Account £95, Savings Account £191; Base rate tracker account £16,964, less WKB Fund £15,000).
- 5 Subscriptions received in advance: from 2005 accounts; £37 [£18 one subscription for 2008; £19 one subscription for 2009]; From 2006 accounts £37 [£18 one subscription for 2008; £19 one subscription for 2009]; From 2007 accounts £177 [eight members for 2008].
- 6 All interest has been retained in the General Fund.

Michael J. French, Hon. Treasurer

AUDITOR'S REPORT TO MEMBERS OF THE POWYS SOCIETY

I have audited the financial statements in accordance with approved auditing standards. In my opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the Charity's affairs at 31 December 2006 and of the surplus for the year then ended and comply with the Companies Act 1985.

J. S. Allen (Chartered Accountant), 27th May 2008

The Powys Collection in the Dorset County Museum

from Michael Kowalewski

When John Cowper Powys in his *In Defence of Sensuality* called his ego an 'ichthyosaurus' he may have been thinking of the fossils he had come across on the Dorset coast, but prophet as he was, might not have foreseen that his immortal remains – his works – would one day find themselves in close proximity with the preserved real ichthyosaurus remains in the Dorchester County Museum. But it is fitting that this supreme archaeologist of the soul and his Dorset-loving and -living family, should be housed here, just a few steps from where JCP dwelt during the writing of his diary for the *Dorset Year*.

Having taken over the curatorship of the Society's Powys Collection in the Dorchester County Museum, I would like to invite more members to make use of this unique facility, and to breathe upon these fossils to give them life. Morine Krissdóttir, who has devoted years to cataloguing and ordering the collection, has left it in fine order. Her catalogue is now available on the computer at the Collection and can also be accessed via the Society's website. (*See below.*)

The Powys Collection is housed in two rooms in the attic – I hesitate to say garret – of the Museum, up a winding stair past ecclesiastical seals and through some corridors whose relation to the Gothic edifice of the Museum is by no means clear. There are two rooms, the outer with the computer, a display cabinet prominently featuring JCP's walking stick (a formidable cudgel clearly borrowed from the Cerne Abbas Giant) with some memorabilia, and paintings, mostly by Gertrude Powys, of the Powyses. A second room houses the guts of the collection. This consists of the two bequeathed collections of Francis Feather and E. E. Bissell, preserved integrally on opposite walls and consisting mostly of the published works, plus various donations from and to the Society. In the centre is a shelf of boxes containing Powysiana such as letters, typescripts, manuscripts, publishers' proofs, photographs and various memorabilia – JCP's passport, TFP's ration card and such-like. We may say therefore that the collection is in two parts – two virtually complete sets of the published works of and about the Powyses, and archival material. There are also Society papers and records, copies of the Powys *Journal* and *Review*, the Powys's ex-libris (I find Theodore's fascinating, a mixture of theology and radicalism) and a few – I emphasise few – more modern editions of the Powys corpus.

Any Society member or researcher on the Powyses is welcome to contact Michael Kowalewski on michael.sonam@btinternet.com or telephone 01935 83552 to arrange a time to visit the collection, which is open at the same times as the Museum: 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday to Saturday. I can then arrange any necessary permissions with the DCM. (This supersedes the information on the website about first contacting the Museum Director.)

The conditions of the bequests by Feather and Bissell and the agreement with the Dorset County Museum mean that there are some restrictions on the access to the material, so the Curator needs to be present while anyone is using the Collection. The Society is arranging for a new desk so this should cause little discomfort. At the moment copying of documents is possible but costly (20p) and involves my treading up and down even more flights of stairs. We hope to remedy this shortly by having our own copier.

As Curator, I hope to provide a short piece for each *Newsletter* about material in the Collection. Hopefully this will encourage people to make more use of this valuable Powys resource or at least benefit from its contents. I can only record my own epiphanic moment in the presence of Theodore's original neatly written manuscript of 'The Only Penitent', and hope that similar illuminations may await other devotees of the Powyses.

Michael Kowalewski

The Society's Powys Collection Curator

The Website

The Society's website (www.powys-society.org) has been recently redesigned and updated with the twin aims of keeping members informed of news, events and current developments, as well as encouraging general visitors to the site to discover more about this remarkable family, with particular emphasis on the three writing brothers. It is hoped that a percentage of new visitors to the site will become members. There is now the option of joining the Society and paying subscriptions online.

Of special interest to many will be the catalogued contents of The Powys Collection housed in the Powys Room in the Dorset County Museum, which can be viewed online by clicking on the appropriate links. New content will be regularly added to the site and suggestions, comments, messages and articles are warmly welcomed from all. These should be emailed to: postmaster@powys-society.org

Frank Kibblewhite

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



Discussion Meetings

Powys Day, Dorchester, May 10th 2008

Fifteen of us met on a fine day in the DCM schoolroom. John Hodgson our Chairman introduced Michael Kowalewski, a painter and scholar of Tibetan art living in nearby Melbury Osmond, who is to be our new curator of the Powys Collection. We were glad to welcome also Ian Robinson of Brynmill Press, long-time champion of TFP, from faraway Hereford, and the aptly named Jeremy Bird, a medieval musician, writer and bookseller, editor of a 'magazine of the occult'. We were there to discuss T. F. Powys as a comic writer, prompted by the reprinting of *Kindness in a Corner* (1930, one of TF's last books) by Sundial Press.

This proved a rich seam to mine. **Ian Robinson** spoke first: *see below*. **John Hodgson** saw the book as a comedy of manners, a "batty idyll" but with alarming developments – the 'corner' is the *grave*. G. Wilson Knight distinguished between *derisive* and *indulgent* comedy. Warmth and sublimity can come together in Rabelais, Cervantes, Mozart: but TF's vision is more bleak. He is suspicious of laughter (see in *Unclay*, the description of hunting as fun). Death is peace – a good thing: he is Christian without immortality. TF, the Nietzschean, is *beyond despair*. But Nietzsche also can be comic, in a racy way; TF has something of this. Lack of hope is liberating. Cosmic humour lies at the bottom of things. *Kindness* is not allegorical like *Unclay*. Like TFP in East Chaldon, perceived as a learned failure, protected by his class but at odds with society, his characters don't fit categories. They can be pathetic or tragic like Mr and Mrs Turtle, converted by Sexton Truggin to the charms of peaceful death.

Aspects of the book came up in discussion. A picture of studious clergy (Colin Thomas) – or satire on the eccentric Church of England? (KK). David Gervais finds TF more moving than Hardy, on similar territory. Michael Kowalewski finds another kind of comedy in TF, like that of Beckett, and sees TF as a Manichean, seeing a flawed creator-God confronted with human suffering. DG disagreed about Beckett – TF's humour isn't verbal, more about human feelings; Beckett likes one-liners, is a *stoic* comedian. TF is more like Cervantes. Louise de Bruin sees TF's world as coming *out* of suffering and despair. Michael K sees his kind of humour like Stanley Spencer's in painting – representations of spiritual states. The *un*-visionary concept of death is part of the scene (Ian R). He wasn't really a countryman (DG) – we shouldn't think of him as cosy. Graveyards are traditional English poetic subjects. He was interested in *apathy*, like Jane Austen. *And* raises plot-expectations like Jane Austen (Susan Rands). The comedy with the girls verges on the erotic. Lottie Truggin is a lovely character. Several new readers of *Kindness* puzzled over the identity of the 'witch' with a strange voice, followed by a car with headlights. Sylvia Townsend Warner? No – the Bishop in disguise. Was this too subtle for us?

After lunch at a nearby pub, those not obliged to leave by weekend railway

limitations boldly embarked, sight unseen, on a version of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* arranged by KK, originally for a radio production in the 1970s which did not happen. This turned out surprisingly well, with David Gervais as Mr W/God, Michael K as the Archangel Michael and the Reverend Grobe, Colin T as Mr Grunter, Susan R as Tamar Grobe, Mary Simmonds as Jenny, Jeremy Bird as his namesake Luke, Anna and Louise as the nice Kiddle girls, Richard Burleigh as the nastier of the Mumby boys, and KK as evil Mrs Vosper. John H provided verbal sound effects and roared as the Beast.

This was the fourth discussion meeting by The Powys Society to be held at Dorchester in recent years, and the third on TFP. (June 03 was on *Fables*, led by David Gervais; June 05 with John Williams, on TF's attitude to death and 'John Pardy and the Waves'). A dozen to 15 has been the usual turn-out, which seems a good number to ensure everyone having a chance to contribute. Suggestions are welcome for future subjects and locations.

KK

T. F. Powys and the Comic

A discussion-starter given by Ian Robinson at the Powys Society meeting in Dorchester on 10 May 2008, marking the reprint of Kindness in a Corner.

If we are looking for qualifiers for the work of T. F. Powys, quite a hard task in any case, *comic* is unlikely to be the first to come to mind, because other elements that go into his work attract more immediate attention. But the comic is not only common, it is *essential* to what he did, not 'comic relief'. In this he resembles Shakespeare. Hamlet could not be the great tragic hero of the language if *Hamlet* were not also one of the funniest plays in the language.

If I may be excused for mentioning a work my firm publishes, the development of the unique style of T. F. Powys can now be traced, thanks to Elaine Mencher's great editorial work of collection and elucidation, in the *Selected Early Works*. It is quite clear that T. F. Powys began (hard for one who was never an orthodox Christian) with an inchoate prophetic impulse, which got half-expressed in prose poems, mythically solemn works of fiction, and then in dialogues/meditations on all the books of the Bible. (Did he ever expect any of this work to earn him money?)

The first really characteristic book, and the first to be commercially published, the *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, has a different feel. A work of literature must 'contain an essential criticism of the morality to which it adheres', says D. H. Lawrence (*Study of Thomas Hardy*, chapter 9). Lawrence put this into practice himself in *Women in Love* and *Aaron's Rod*, where the characters who most nearly express the views of the author are subjected to criticism by other characters, in the latter case for instance in the form of a punch in the wind. Both sides are subjected to judgement. This happens for the first time in T. F. Powys, though in an odd way, in the *Soliloquies*. The Hermit

has the inspiration of seeing himself, as Mr Thomas, through the eyes of an 'immortal' young man who 'came from town' – two of the worst things that could be said of anybody by this author. 'Immortal' is a very bad thing to be: it means living successfully in the modern world with no consciousness of the omnipresence of death.

Comic is of course a word with a very wide range. In T. F. Powys there are different kinds of comedy, though rarely straightforward satire. The one I want to mention is what he discovered as something necessary to express the original meditative/prophetic urge.

For T. F. Powys's comedy is more than the subjecting of his ideas to criticism. His central device (if that's the word), repeated in a number of novels and tales, of making God one of the characters, is necessarily comic. Mr Weston can only be God as long as we bear in mind that he is at the same time an assiduous wine-merchant 'travelling' in Folly Down. But then he really is God!

The prophets of these strange epiphanies are normally, in T. F. Powys, not of the educated classes. So it is given to Wold Grunter to speak, after carefully retrieving his lost boot, the prophetic line. "When life bain't," said Mr Grunter slowly, "death be". It takes that moment in the fable, the showing of humanity as the weeping clod, to allow his words to be not a cliché but a profound recognition of the truth of Mr Westons's best wine. So Sexton Truggin, in several short stories as well as *Kindness in a Corner*, is the central *prophetic* character, the one who expounds truth, however bizarrely. Mr Pim is a church clerk, not a sexton, but in the great Fable 'Mr Pim and the Holy Crumb' he is another man Langland would have called 'lewed', the one to whom God (apologetically) reveals himself. The pattern goes on right down to 'The Only Penitent' where it is still essential to the fable that the appearance of God, in the form of Tinker Jar, should be to the comic, though in this case not illiterate, Mr Hayhoe. Part of the effectiveness of John Death in *Unclay* is the comic element in the macabre, his having lost his commission and not knowing whom he is sent to unclay. (Did Ingmar Bergman read it? there are likenesses to the knight's chess game with death in *The Seventh Seal*.)

Epic is different from fable, the relevant difference being absence of comedy. (Are there any jokes in Milton's whole *oeuvre*?) I am unfashionable enough to admire Milton greatly, but not his depictions of God. A God who speechifies can only be convincing if the comicality of the idea is acknowledged.

T. F. Powys managed to learn a not-often-taken lesson from the New Testament parables and images, which are themselves frequently and necessarily funny: the man who buys a field and then goes to look at it, the other in the same parable who has married a wife and therefore cannot come to the feast; the image of the second coming of Christ as a thief in the night. None of Powys's images of God is more comic than the man in bed with his children being bothered at midnight by the friend trying to beg a loaf of bread.

But Powys's work, like the parables, is still religious, even theological. He could

not be tied down to a set of propositions or a creed: he showed forth what he called the 'moods of God', which vary, but which are genuinely 'of God'.

So: *Kindness in a Corner*. It is surprising how little this very idiosyncratic, characterful and recognisable author repeated himself during the amazing outpouring of the dozen or so years of his actively publishing life. *Kindness in a Corner* is the variant in which comedy is at the centre, and of a kind one does not always associate with this author. T. F. Powys does not resemble any of his contemporaries very much, but *Kindness in a Corner* occasionally reminds me of the batty idylls of Wodehouse, with Mr Dottery a sort of clerical equivalent of an elderly member of the Drones Club. But being Powys, the feeling is perhaps genial but not what anyone would call optimistic. Mr Dottery, who instead of being left in peace to be kind in his corner is cornered by the Bishop on the quite reasonable charge of neglecting his duties, is certainly not an 'immortal'. He wants to be left alone not only to enjoy his china tea

and cream and Mrs Taste's cooking, but to be kind in the presence of death. Lucretius inspires him to ask 'How can it be possible, when all things die with us when we die – every candle going out like our candle – to hurt and torment one another as we do, when we are, as we all must be, in present view of utter destruction?' *That* is not Wodehousean.

The story is one of those in which the central prophecy comes not from Mr Dottery's class but from Sexton Truggin, whose great delight is burying people because that is the best thing possible for them, though Canon Dibben disagrees. Truggin

persuades the Turtles, who live in the constant terror of death, that 'All who do lie here do wish to stay for ever. Don't 'ee listen to none of thik foolish risen talk, don't 'ee never learn to look up. 'Tis best to look down for comfort, for when a perfect state be reached, what more need be said or done?' This is not Christian teaching, but is still what I have called 'prophetic', and necessarily by way of the comic.

It is good to see *Kindness in a Corner* back in print.

Ian Robinson

Kindness in a Corner, with an introduction by Glen Cavaliero, is available from Sundial Press, price £11.99.



*John Hodgson, Michael Kowalewski and
Ian Robinson in discussion.*

Ely: 14th June 2008

A small group of ten members gathered in the comfortable upper room of The Old Fire Engine House in Ely on Saturday 14th June to discuss two early chapters of *Porius*, 'The Tent' and 'The Henog'. (Several members booked to take part had had to cancel, including Glen Cavaliero who sent a message of solidarity.)

We commented on the new authoritative edition of *Porius*. Surely this version leaves the Macdonald and Albrecht editions redundant? But there are things that remain unexplained. Why has the subtitle changed from 'A Romance of the Dark Ages' to 'A Novel'? What has happened to the dedication to JCP's brother Willie – 'Judah to Benjamin'? Why is there no reference to the Porius stone?

I still find the mix of racial differences confusing. Help however can be found in the essays in *Obstinate Cymric* as well as reference to H. J. Massingham's *Downland Man*. To some extent however JCP's acceptance of Massingham's theory of cultural diffusionism now looks outmoded. More relevant today is a reading of the text that does justice to JCP's position on authoritarianism, positivism, multi-culturalism, multiversalism and exploration of religious difference – 'Many creatures, many worlds, many gods, many futures' (p.126).

Chris Gostick expertly led us into the intricacies of the book noting that in 'The Tent', we witness the first major action of the novel, where Porius is introduced to a new world of luxury, wealth, and fascinating and seductive women. There is much humour here as well as a sense of tension and suspense. The key, though, is the tent itself and what happens in the tent – JCP's obsession with the male gaze, the descriptions of textures, and the colour of female clothing, filtered light, the sail like cloth of the tent, torchlight, the sounds of the aboriginal forest, the activity of animals and dogs. We wondered about the meaning of the 'Cretan screen' suggesting exotic Oriental and Byzantine influences – perhaps it can also be read as a kind of proto Arabic mashrabiyya, a wooden lattice screen found in domestic interiors of the Arabic world (but a strange thing to find in the middle of the aboriginal forests of Ynys Prydein!).

Cicely Hill rightly points to the central role of Pelagius. He is the inspiration for JCP's belief in the active powers of thought and the imagination – 'Man's imagination and not God's will is what creates' (p.149). But I think he must also express JCP's belief in the essential goodness of humanity: 'the spirit of every separate human soul'.

The Henog seems an assimilation of many things and an important character – the imagined author of the original Mabinogion, a story teller and Celtic *kyvardwyd*, a chronicler and romancer, a historian like Herodotus mixing fact and fiction, reality and magic. In this chapter we get a clear idea of JCP's Brythonic sympathies and the seamless way he incorporates classical references to evoke Porius's Roman ancestry – Plato, the Timaeus, Greek mythology, Mithraism and Gnosticism are mixed together with the Latin authors and orators of Porius's schooling. There are more echoes of

the world of late antiquity in ‘the pleroma of all civitas’ (p.125) which JCP uses in connection with the Henog’s views. The rationalism of the imperial Romanised world of Arthur stands in contrast to the magical sub-human figure of Myrddin Wyllt – a Powysian vision of technology versus anarchism.

After lunch we returned to debate the merits of Morine Krissdóttir’s theory of the alchemical meanings in *Porius* but we were unconvinced. JCP was clearly familiar with many alchemical ideas (derived from Paracelsus and Goethe) and possible alchemical keys might be uncovered in individual scenes such as discovery of the red child (the *rebus*) and Merlin’s rescue from the cosmogonic cavern on Snowdon (*lumen naturae*). But JCP’s creative method cannot be contained within the systematic symbolic framework of the seven stages of alchemy.

Passages were read aloud by John Hodgson (p.281) and David Gervais (p.83) that evoked the shifting tone and sound of JCP’s words, as well as the hypnotic rhythms and sensuous effect of JCP’s prose showing us that *Porius* is the elemental novel JCP always wanted to write. I was reminded of JCP’s comment on Faust that Goethe had achieved: ‘a magical closeness to nature’. This was a very rewarding day, full of discovery, ‘sensations of the unfathomable and infinite’ (p.105) and new insights into a difficult text.

Thanks are due to Sonia Lewis for arrangements and also providing suitable Powysian ‘Syrian fruits’.

Chris Thomas

Cicely Hill: *Porius* and Porius

In *Porius* JCP realises two of his declared aims – to tell a story and to write propaganda. His propaganda is for the supreme value of the unfettered imagination and the independent will. Words from Pelagius’s heretical chapter come to his hero’s memory: ‘Neither Life nor Death nor Love nor hate nor past nor Present – has any power to meddle with the individual will’ – and ‘a man should allow no preconception of any kind ... to come between his Soul and its instinctive striving’. The passage, or vehicle of understanding between the soul and its instinctive striving is the way of the Imagination.

Porius is aware of the presence of Pelagius throughout his hours between the Gaer and the Tent. In that brief – but in reality vast – time, he makes an inward vow – to free himself from the opposing influences of his mother and Morfydd. Then, snuffing up the intoxicating fumes of a Mithraic ritual torch, he experiences the wicked rapture of being for the first time in his life ‘absolutely and uncompromisingly alone ...’. The human imagination must never be robbed of its power to tell itself other stories, and thus create a different future.

The man who arrives that night at the tent has been resolutely considering these things which will change the course of his life. We can be misled by Powys’s

contrasting of his hero's quick and able mind with his massive and less responsive body into blurring the two – of seeing his clumsiness as part of his whole nature. But there is no confusion deep in Poriús. Poriús, like Powys, is a man who may waver but is never a wavering man. A man who may get lost in the forest but never a lost man. When he arrives at the tent, he has dealt ably and tactfully with a conceited young Arthurian horseman, with a fainting Myrddyn Wyllt. His is the only powerful, level presence in the chaos of the tent, where he is alert and aware: he notices lapses in protocol, he turns the tables in a politically charged exchange with Nineue. He controls his lascivious feelings towards her as he was earlier able to control the images that are part of his cavoseniargising.

In his study of Dostoievsky – the book he wrote five years before *Poriús* – Powys writes of the presence in Dostoievsky's work of a certain Something which may be called another Dimension. A sense of this something, he suggests, may lie in the author's conveying the psychic reality of the situation; and it rests, in Powys as in Dostoievsky, partly in [']the power to startle us and make us awestruck by the elements'. 'He can convey' he says of Dostoievsky, 'indirectly and as it were sideways and in words so few and simple that it is like a miracle, the taste and sharpness and bitterness of frost and fog ... the indescribable desolation of whirling leaves and drenching rain, and above all that terrifying loneliness that hangs like a malefic aura about certain spots on the outskirts of towns and cities.' In *Poriús* Powys demonstrates his power to conjure up this Other Dimension, not in city outskirts but in an ancient landscape; and the psychic atmosphere is evoked by his taking the reader directly into the consciousness of his hero. In the few hours before he enters the tent he has met a world of the unexpected and obscure. There are constant setbacks, reversals, shifting moods, contradictions and challenges to his simple quest of filling the elder Poriús's flask with water from St Julian's Fountain; a mood of nervous tension exists and prevails, but Poriús's reactions are extraordinarily controlled and calm.

Within the tent scene the reader is very much put in possession of the consciousness of Powys's hero. Few could not have felt as if they shared Poriús's hold on the multiple identity of Myrddyn as he slipped back into the elements, or that they too were holding the slippery enchantress Nineue. Powys writes of Dostoievsky as being a *medium* for his characters. He himself shares this mediumship. Both great writers watch with their imagining eye, and as they watch they hear, smell, taste what is happening, taking the reader with them almost as if he were cavoseniargising; and there is the sense in *Poriús* that Powys has been surprised by the appearance or doings of his characters as we are.

In the 'The Henog' chapter,

our friend found himself analysing, as he had never done before, the peculiar nature of this secret game of his. It certainly was a non-human indulgence; but there was no malice or cruelty or pride or unkindness in it ... It obliterated the future. It obliterated every sort of worry and responsibility ... It was above and below hate. It had nothing

to do with any *anima mundi* or any soul of the world.

Porius has been seen as having alchemic meanings. The Imagination is certainly Powys's, and his hero's, *sovereign substance*, the stuff of his Golden Age. Its "power house" (my word for it), the cauldron (the Mabinogion's word) is the place of rebirth, where all that our senses and feelings and thoughts and intuitions provide are the matter for its creations. From a free passage of these into our consciousness also come works of art — came *Porius*.

Postscript

In the conclusion to her Foreword to *Porius*, Morine Krissdóttir sees the hero, *Porius*, as 'running for ever and hardly knowing why', and John Cowper Powys as having been, at the time of the novel's writing, 'gloriously lost'. Much more time would have been needed for us to discuss this fully, but I tried to suggest that to my mind *Porius*, like Powys, was anything but lost. From the accounts of those who visited John Cowper in his very old age — and he had twelve years to go at the time he wrote *Porius* — it seems likely that, though tired and sometimes forgetful, it had been with the consent of a keen and unimpaired intellect that he entered his 'second childhood' and decided to allow fantasy to rule in the telling of his future tales, while his imagination was no less in touch than it had always been with his inner self — his *I-am-I*.

Cicely Hill



*John Hodgson, Chris Gostick, David Gervais and Peter Lazare
relaxing at the Ely meeting.*

All the world's a stage ...

Judith Stinton: *Weymouth & Mr. Punch* ¶

Mr. Punch came to Weymouth in Victorian times and has stayed there ever since. He took his place on the beach among the minstrels, pierrots and concert parties, outlasting every one of them.

This book traces the performing lives of Weymouth's Punch & Judy men – in particular the half-century reign of Frank Edmonds. It tells how Punch and Pierrot travelled from Italy through France and into England. It is the first account of their origins for more than twenty years, and the only one to explore them through the entertainment history of a single resort.

Weymouth would never have developed into a major resort were it not for King George III, who holidayed in the town for sixteen years: attending the little Theatre Royal on the Esplanade, bathing in the sea and taking the waters in the little spas which ringed the town. For without water, too, there would be no Weymouth.

The book, with 240 pages and over 100 illustrations, is also a celebration of Weymouth, a unique place in the history of the seaside and of popular entertainment, and in literary life. The opening chapter is a discussion of John Cowper Powys's *Weymouth Sands* – with its exploration of memory, its use of the *Commedia dell'Arte* and its superb descriptions of the town.



¶ See enclosed leaflet for a *special offer* from the publishers, Harlequin Press. ¶

Faber finds John Cowper Powys

Faber & Faber is launching a ground-breaking new imprint, 'Faber Finds', headed up by editor John Seaton. The aim of this new venture is to restore to print a wealth of lost classics and authors of distinction. There will be over 100 titles available after 2 June, then they hope to publish up to 20 new titles every month. The first list contains some striking names: F. R. Leavis, Angus Wilson, Adrian Bell, John Betjeman and -- yes! -- John Cowper Powys. The initial list will include four of his earliest novels: *Wood and Stone*, *Rodmoor*, *After My Fashion* and *Ducdame*. A further four of his novels will follow shortly (*Morwyn*, *The Inmates*, *Atlantis*, *The Brazen Head*.) With the Overlook publications, this means that virtually all of Powys's novels will now be available to new readers as well as dedicated Powysians.

Faber Finds' bold initiative could spell the end of the out-of-print book. So many excellent authors, often with a small audience, remain out of print because until now to reprint a book economically has meant printing at least 2,000 copies. Faber Finds has taken the plunge and will make use of print-on-demand technology (POD) which allows print runs of between one and 50 books at a time. Using POD, a single book can be made for a single person and, moreover, can be made within hours of an order. It is perhaps the most exciting book technology of our time, but has been largely ignored by traditional publishers on the grounds that the initial costs are much higher than the usual paperback reprint. However, POD obviates the financial risks of large print runs and costly warehousing. While there is no dearth of fine books in need of resuscitation, as the editor ruefully points out, the more difficult part often is tracking down the copyright holder and clearing the rights. Fortunately, the Powys agent, Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson, immediately saw the potential of this new venture which is why John Cowper has pride of place on the initial list.

In the past, POD has had a poor reputation for producing editions of substandard quality, but this is decidedly not the case with Faber Finds. I have seen a sample paperback. It is a conventional size, nicely bound, with clear type and will be selling from £9 upwards depending on length. It will be printed by Anthony Rowe Ltd. (the fine company that printed *The Dorset Year*). One disadvantage is that the technology does not allow for changes to the original text or new forewords. However, the imprint has received high praise from prominent authors such as Julian Barnes, Margaret Drabble, Michael Frayn, P. D. James and many have already written pieces for the Faber Finds website. I was asked to write one for the Powys novels, and I was happy to do so, concentrating on *After My Fashion*, which I think is an astonishing one-off that particularly deserves a wider audience.

This is an opportunity for Powys lovers to obtain some of his long out-of-print novels. The books will be available to order through major booksellers, most internet-based book retailers and from the Faber Finds website. A complete list of available books can be found at www.faberfinds.co.uk.

Morine Krissdóttir

Letter

from Morine Krissdóttir

My initial reaction to the three 'reviews' of *Descents of Memory* (Newsletter, March 2008) was both amusement and sadness. Amusement at Susan Rand's slanted and ill-natured piece; sadness at Michael Kowalewski's erudite and passionate response to the biography. I certainly expected a strong, even outraged reaction from those for whom Powys was an oracle, indeed a guru, and I respected Tony Atmore's initial bewilderment. Powys, like all of us, had a public face which he presented to his disciples, but he would have been the first to admit that his craft began in what Yeats called 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart'. Ultimately 'those masterful images' of Powys's finest works are 'complete' because they hang *between* the 'staring fury and the blind lush leaf'. I make no apology for attempting to show the complexity of his entire being, which is revealed particularly in his diaries. These have not as yet been read in full by anyone except Powys, Phyllis and myself. However, he intended them for eventual publication; he wanted the antinomies of darkness *and* of light to be revealed. And Phyllis could easily have destroyed them after his death if she had felt offended or betrayed by his portrayal of her or, for that matter, of Powys himself.

What saddened me about Kowalewski's piece was his comment that the biography was 'Krissdóttir's revenge on Powys'. I have spent the last twenty years trying in various ways to re-awaken an interest in Powys. As Chairman, along with a committed executive, I worked to open up the Society to a wider membership; ten further years were given to cataloguing and maintaining an Archive of the Powys family that is unique in England. I have edited a selection of his diaries, written prefaces to various editions, spent several years editing with Roger Peers *The Dorset Year*. Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson asked me to assist him in clearing up the confused rights to John Cowper's novels so they could be brought back into print – a time-consuming job. I went to New York myself to convince the director of Overlook to republish the major novels of Powys. Editing *Porius* was an exhausting slog undertaken out of my love for that miraculous novel. Most recently I have been in close contact with the editor of Faber Finds and written a piece for their website to mark the advent of their republication of eight of Powys's novels. Why would I have devoted so much of my time and thought to this man if, in the end, I had merely wanted 'revenge'? I have kept my promise to Peter Powys Grey but I think that I have also fulfilled a life-time commitment to John Cowper Powys.

Morine Krissdóttir

Notes and News

See above. It is right that members should be reminded of Morine Krissdóttir's achievements in publishing, from which we have all benefited. But views of her biography, especially its end, seem to be irreconcilable, and it is sad if this extends to personal grievance. The best news now would be to hear of increased sales of JCP books in print. Extracts from more reviews of *Descents of Memory* and of the new *Porius* are on the Overlook (blog) website, and other reviews from members are in the forthcoming *Journal. Newsletter* will not pursue this subject. **KK**

Journal xviii will contain, beside reviews (Ballin, Hodgson, Keith, Lock) and several of the talks from the last Conference (Lock, Fisher, Fawcner, Marie-Laverrou), the intriguing titles 'John Cowper Powys's *great new art*: Intermental Influences in the Lecture Career' by Katherine Saunders Nash, and 'Picking gooseberries ...' by James Knowlson. There are three unpublished short stories by T. F. Powys with an afterword by Elaine Mencher, and a view by David Gervais of an unusual exhibition of British art, chosen with an essay by, among others, Timothy Hyman.

la lettre powysienne no.15 (Spring 2008 – bilingual) is largely devoted to **trees**. It includes JCP's poem 'The Ailanthus' and tree-related passages from his novels; 'The great pathos of trees' (Thomas Nydahl), extracts from Rémy de Gourmont (1858–1915, a favourite author of JCP's), and André Suarès (1868–1948), Proust, and Julien Gracq (1970); poems by Thomas Hardy (his last, 'Felling a Tree') and Robert Desnos (1900–45, victim of the Holocaust). There is also a long essay on *Wolf Solent* by Angelika Reichmann (Lecturer in English at Eger, Hungary) with two letters on reading that novel by Canadian Bernard Pageau; impressions of Powysian places in Wales, by Chris Thomas, and finally, trees in four *haiku* from the latest collection by Cicely Hill.

Translations: Patrick Reneaux, **Llewelyn Powys's** translator into French, has started his own press with a view to republishing *Skin for Skin*, *Glory of Life*, and *Rats in the Sacristy* (news from Sally Connely). JCP's *Wolf Solent* is again available in Dutch.

A call from the daughter of **Phyllis Harris**, who died recently, tells us that her ashes were scattered in East Chaldon, where her brother (a philosophy don at St Andrews) gave a reading from Llewelyn Powys.

Crescent Moon Publishing still displays its list of John Cowper Powys Studies, with a Yahoo Powys Message Group. Enquiries to cresmopub@yahoo.co.uk

The Powys Review 33/34: Belinda Humfrey hopes this will finally appear in time

for the Conference. It will include articles on *Atlantis*, JCP's Art and Aesthetics, the Powyses and the Phelipses, the 'insubstantial pageant', and 'Heathen Aborigines ... Sam Dekker and the Ineffectual Christianisation of Satisfaction'. Can the authors be guessed?

★ ★ ★ ★

Brynmill's T. F. Powys series lists four volumes of the novels, as well as *Selected Early Works*, J. Lawrence Mitchells's *Aspects of a Life*, and *Cuckoo in the Powys Nest* by Theodora Gay Scutt, TFP's adopted daughter.

★ ★ ★ ★

Peter Foss, now the acknowledged authority on the Battle of Bosworth, features in a TV film on display at the Bosworth Battlefield Visitor Centre in Leicestershire. He is working on a novel set in Romano-British times.

★ ★ ★ ★

Fame again: 44 across: 'British writer, one of three literary brothers, best known for *A Glastonbury Romance*' (General Knowledge Crossword, Saturday Telegraph, May 3rd 2008 – *See back cover.*) This is a repeat of last August's appearance – maybe Kate Mepham who sets the puzzle is an admirer? Next day (Sunday 4th May), the *Telegraph's* columnist Simon Heffer chose *Wolf Solent* in 'Books That Touched Our Souls' – 'This brooding work depicts England and the English temper, but also a man's struggle with his wife, mistress and mother.' He also chose *Ulysses*, *The Way of All Flesh*, Proust and Flaubert.

★ ★ ★ ★

Inspired by the Letters (see page 28), reading **Dorothy Richardson's** *Pilgrimage* (all 13 books of it) has been a revelation. 'Miriam' is just as enthralling as JCP says she is.

★ ★ ★ ★

A notable late appearance of **Mr. Punch** (see page 20) is in *You and Me* (Village Press, 1975, p.20), in the person of Mr Mo and his virtual 'circus': 'With absolute amazement we all watched him ... He *was* Punch. He *was* Judy. He even effected with the daintiest affectation and by a laughable twist of his body a transformation into Toby'

★ ★ ★ ★

'**The Multiverse**' (cosmological) on Melvin Bragg's 'In Our Time' programme (Radio 4, 21st February 2008) dealt with other worlds than ours, but raised interesting & dare one say poetic possibilities of envisaging space, time, multiplicity, infinity and existence (or non-existence) almost in the manner of JCP's fantasies. As Blake wrote: 'One thought fills Immensity' ...

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Richard Killam of Fairview Books and Collectables would like to dispose of a collection of books by the Powys brothers. Several of these are first editions, although mainly without dust wrappers. Please contact him for a list at: 1 Grosvenor Road, Baldock, Herts. SG7 6NX, tel 01462 892 791. Mr Killam is making a donation to the Society in appreciation.

The Real and the Ideal

John Dunn evaluates *Anarchism and the individual in the letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman*.

Powys and Emma Goldman, edited by David Goodway.
Cecil Woolf, London, 2008. 188pp. ISBN 978-1897967-84-3

David Goodway has been building up our expectations about the publication of this book over many years and the results will not disappoint. Apart from a brief passing reference to the Powys-Goldman connection made by George Woodcock in his *Anarchism* (1963), Powys's anarchist leanings were first seriously brought to light in Goodway's *The Politics of John Cowper Powys* in *The Powys Review* 15 (1985). We were later treated to Goodway's thoughts on Powys's individualist anarchist philosophy in *The Powys Journal* xiv of 2004. Then Powys was given a central position in Goodway's invaluable history of British anarchism, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* (2006). Now Goodway presents the concluding evidence in support of his long running thesis of Powys as anarchist. For here is Powys in his own words, a serious, politically aware writer, in correspondence with one of the best known anarchists of the twentieth century, Emma Goldman or 'Red Emma' as she was known, over the four eventful years from 1936 to 1940.

Goodway explains, in his informative introduction, that Goldman had seen the Russian Revolution at first hand and also the hand of Stalin at work in undermining the bid for freedom made by the anarchists in the Spanish Revolution. A succinct biography of Goldman is given, describing her life in the United States as that of an anarchist agitator and her disillusionment with Bolshevik Russia after her deportation there from the United States at the height of the 'red scare' in 1918. Thereafter, Goldman was 'nowhere at home', until a marriage of convenience gave her British citizenship in 1925. Goodway's introduction details the possible points of contact between Goldman and Powys in the United States before the former's deportation. However limited these were, Goldman thought she knew Powys well enough to write to him in 1936, having been given his name and address by their mutual friend, Maurice Browne, founder of the Chicago Little Theatre ... and so the correspondence began.

Goodway explains that Powys was not at his best here as a letter writer – I beg to differ. Whilst not to be compared with his literary backslapping of old and close friends, nor his intimate exchanges with lovers and siblings, the letters to Goldman do have a fascination for what they reveal about Powys as a serious political thinker,

* For special offer on both the books reviewed here, see the leaflet enclosed with Newsletter 63, or contact Cecil Woolf Publishers, 1 Mornington Place, London NWT 7RP, tel/fax 020 7387 2304.

quite apart from their value as an historical record of responses by concerned individuals to momentous contemporary events.

In a letter of introduction for Goldman, Powys described her as a philosophical anarchist. In another letter, he compared Goldman's philosophy with those of Kropotkin, Bakunin and Tolstoy. He later compared her efforts to break through 'our national peculiarities' of 'reserve & timidity & suspiciousness & slow caution', with those of Edward Carpenter. In other words, Powys was sufficiently politically aware to be able to draw readily upon key names from the libertarian socialist and anarchist canon.

He also displayed an appreciation of what anarchism really meant. 'How weird it is for Emma Goldman's friends', he wrote, 'to be fighting "for the government" when you think of it!' This tone of irony, however small, is never entirely absent from Powys's voice when he is questioning Goldman about what a future anarchist state might be like. If Goldman's friends were to defeat fascism, how would they face the challenges of being an isolated enclave of anarchism? Which authorities would deal with the imports and exports? Who would divide the profits made from exporting to the other districts of Spain and other countries? These are astute questions from Powys, whose own perception of a post-revolutionary anarchy was that it would be a world system or nothing, a system without buying, selling, or exchange. In this context, his questions to Goldman were telling indeed. This was not the pupil of anarchism at the feet of his master, this was a serious political thinker (anyone who has read *The Complex Vision* knows as much), not letting on that he knew as much as he did. (Goodway himself notes that whilst Powys expressed to Goldman his ignorance of anarchism and anarchist writers, he had in fact read the individualist anarchist, Max Stirner and had known the libertarian socialist, Erskine Wood.) And how did Goldman answer him? She did so by avoiding the main thrust of Powys's questions. Of course she was right to respond that anarchism would not have a 'centralised authority', nor would it profit from production and distribution. What she failed to answer was how such an isolated Utopia would survive in an otherwise capitalist world. Powys knew anarchism was not possible under such conditions. Goldman, with all her heroic idealism, could not allow herself to think that.

It was Goldman's 'saintly' idealism that ultimately found itself at odds with the old 'ichthyosaurian' Powys. Nothing could have been further from Powys's Stirner-influenced egoism than when Goldman wrote that she had found in Spain a way 'to realize the ideal and ideas for which I had struggled all my life'. 'Realize the ideal', how those words must have jarred with Powys. Max Stirner opened the concluding chapter of *The Ego and His Own* with the words:

Pre-Christian and Christian times pursue opposite goals; the former wants to idealise the real, the latter to realise the ideal.

The opposition of the real and the ideal is an irreconcilable one, and the one can never become the other: if the ideal became the real, it would no longer be the ideal; and, if the real became the ideal, the ideal alone would be, but not at all the real.

The point Stirner went on to conclude was that, in striving for the ideal Man, the individual is lost. 'All higher essences must be shunned if my feeling of uniqueness is to survive. One's concern can only be with the unique one, one's self.' It was probably this dictum of Stirner's that was at the heart of Powys's personal philosophy of solitude.

When Goldman requested Powys to contribute a propaganda piece to *Spain and the World* she was, unwittingly, giving Powys a platform from which to exclaim his own brand of anarchism. The resulting piece was *The Real and the Ideal*, a work not only with a title lifted straight from the pages of *The Ego and His Own*, but very likely the most telling and succinct statement of Powys's political philosophy we have and, therefore of immense importance to Powysians. Goodway astutely includes it in full, chronologically slotted in amongst the letters. The purposeful choice of title is also proof positive that Powys not only read, but was influenced heavily by Max Stirner. In short, even though Goodway does not acknowledge the fact, I believe *The Real and the Ideal* vindicates his long-held thesis about Stirner's influence on Powys.

In Powys's *The Real and the Ideal* it is the individual that counts, not ideals or ideologies. Notably, it is not the engines of destruction devised by tyrants and demagogues that Powys cites as the greatest threat to humanity, but the onslaught of the media.

The unhappy individual who tries to obey his conscience is besieged over the air and through the press by the most crafty, insidious, corrupting, lying propaganda, made possible by wireless, cinemas, and newspapers, that has ever been exerted in the history of our race, to swamp, drown, pervert and hypnotize every attempt he makes at thinking for himself.

Powys emphasised that to 'think for yourself has become today the one unpardonable sin', whether the prevailing ideology was communism, fascism or democratic capitalism. The latter was, for Powys, just as much a threat to individual freedom as that of any dictatorship, only more invidious.

Powys comes across as a realist in this piece and the most he could offer Emma, by way of propaganda in this exposition of his own brand of anarchism, was to say that even if the Spanish anarchists were to be 'bombed into annihilation', then at least it could be said they had offered 'a living experience' to which humanity might return in the future.

In addition to the excellent introduction to this correspondence, Goodway offers the reader copious and scholarly notes to each letter, imparting a wealth of information about the individuals and places included. In the thoughtful afterword to the letters, Goodway states that 'one problem is the extent to which Powys really did understand the theoretical basis of anarchism ... Had Powys ... really become an anarchist?' Having read these letters, I would say it is now clear that Powys did have a theoretical understanding of anarchism *before* he corresponded with Goldman.

Goodway has done future studies of John Cowper Powys an enormous service in expanding widely upon Woodcock's passing reference to the connection between

Powys and Goldman. There can no longer be a balanced understanding of Powys's life and work that does not take his political thinking and closely related philosophy into account. *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman*, is not only a joy to read, but beautifully produced and a pleasure to hold. A short read it might be, but it possesses enough stimulating and important content to make it priceless to anyone with an interest in Powys's politics, philosophy and thought.

John Dunn

'The noblest and most intellectual woman'

Marcella Henderson-Peal is moved by the 'unorthodox orthodoxy' of a profound friendship in letters.

Powys and Dorothy Richardson, edited by Janet Foulis.
Cecil Woolf, London, 2008. 272pp. ISBN 978-1-897967-27-0.

JCP, p.20: *...You, my friend, are like a priestess ... and to the priestess (as well as to the priest) one instinctively, I without knowing why, finds oneself confessing.*

JCP 21, p. 62 : *... the letters of yours which I really enjoy most are the ones that are the most personal and that give a picture of you and A.O's days in their most peaceful though so laborious routine ... ever beyond the loveliest praise of Glastonbury or the most illuminating and stimulating criticism.*

DMR 49, p.152: *'... my letters ... are communications bubbling within...'*

JCP 42, p.113: *'... as we put it to each other while reading your letter, there are no two people we are more completely at ease with and more without any ruffle or restraint or hindrance with than we feel with you ...'*

JCP 19, p.56: *'It's that indestructible profane relish, that heathen glow over anything and everything that smoulders up in you ... that does so suit the Welsh spirit of 'In Spite' in my heart.'*

Out of all the John Cowper Powys correspondence series edited by Cecil Woolf, the 76 letters he wrote to Dorothy M. Richardson, 'the noblest and most intellectual woman', and the 64 letters and 40 postcards he received from her between 1929 and 1952 (also including excerpts from John's diary), are among the most touching, caring and revealing ever written. They make up the story of bosom minds befriended in mutual understanding, despite geographical distance and World War II, between two of the twentieth century's most unusual authors. Both Phyllis Playter and Alan Odle from their self-appointed background positions discreetly but genuinely shared this friendship in twin kinship.

The letters encompass all aspects of both writer's lives and thoughts, small

domestic details and ‘merry chat’, such as DMR advocating All-Bran and eye-massage and JCP quite openly mentioning his enemas, the female mind, spiritual issues and comments on world and family news. Both authors participated in the proof-editing and critical reading of each other’s manuscripts, with related concerns over publishers as well as informative discussions on the art of narrative. Also included are their views on contemporary authors and well-loved writers, poets and philosophers such as Wordsworth, Dostoevsky and Rabelais (to name but a few).

This exchange triggers discussions on the throes and pleasures of writing their ongoing books. ‘How could you discover that about the later portion of the book [*Glastonbury*] being in some way less organic than the earlier portion’ (JCP 22, p.64); and again ‘Glastonbury ... opposing Glendower as one mighty headland opposes its fellow across the bar. But if I could keep only one, that one would be Glendower. For here is the theme made to your own hand. ... what I do find amazing ... is the depth & the width of the imaginative sympathy there revealed. (DMR 64, p. 190). Yet Dorothy was not such a fan of JCP’s work as her husband truly was and would conceal this by using her pen to convey Alan Odle’s appreciation. After reading *The Pleasures of Literature* – and she much preferred John’s essays – Dorothy writes ‘John, write no more novels ... keep now to unmitigated human history, experience, the tale of tales, irreversible, not to be monkeyed with even by the magician of magicians’. (DMR49, p.152)

John Cowper’s own respect for Dorothy’s work and her influence on him runs deep when he writes in his first letter: ‘ ... except for Wordsworth & Walter Pater it is from your philosophy that I have, among our English writers, got the most for my furtive cult of pure sensation ...’.

John Cowper and Dorothy share his ‘elementalism’, ‘the worship of the Inanimate as the best substitute for God’, and this is also illustrated by charming and deeply felt descriptions of situations, places and details of nature beautifully expressed as early as in DMR’s third letter to JCP (p.17) when describing the Walnut Tree inn on Romney Marsh:

... with a rich dark-brown-varnished-wood bar parlour and low windows where the ripe autumn sunlight comes in through leaves – comes in green-&-gold into the rich dark interior – gold light reflected from old brown varnish, you know John. But without people, the first having being one’s little lonely self, what would that absolute gold be?

Dorothy Richardson (just as Phyllis) has the ability of drawing JCP out: she prods and questions his mind, his spirituality thereby exposing her own, and these discussions on philosophy and religion are possibly the most fascinating of all. Here is Dorothy commenting on ‘The Bible as Literature’: ‘... all the study-labour, & tough-labour of your life is projected alive ... in emphasizing the humanity of Jesus, his human limitations ... you still leave Him, for me, at the Centre, as the centre ... the meeting place of Man & God’. (DMR 50, p.155). Or again, on Solovyev: ‘... he is ... more sharply aware ... of the necessity of orthodoxy together with the need for

ceaseless development and reinterpretation ... excelling in seeing the error of Thomism & the dangers of formal logic' (DMR 86 p.221). She challenges the self-named 'John, John, the parson's son' (p. 202) for '... your repudiation of "Deism" & amply tolerant of as many "Gods" as you choose to muster' (DMR 83, p.218). John writes earlier on: '... I do think I have exhausted my own interest...in this question of the dualism of Good and Evil – But ... merely to approach such a provocative place as Glastonbury wd set me off again! However, I suppose I could deal with a certain vein of the mystic – not exactly the occult – but just, just stopping short of that !' (JCP 3, p.19) — to which Dorothy replies that 'L. [D. H. Lawrence] and I agreed that the artist's link with religion is nearly quite entirely aesthetic ... It is the artist's way through what Blake meant when he said 'A tear is an intellectual thing'.' (DMR 4, p.22).

And again, John on the occult and spritualism:

Yes, I agree absolutely with every word of what you say about the long memory of larger and older consciousnesses, in some mysterious sort of contact with ours... I've got a curious mania for antiquity in continuity in one spot of the earth's surface... it goes back to total Obscurity and Mythology fading away too slowly to be caught at any point for certain between reality & unreality and between history & legend (JCP 66, p. 208 & 209).

JCP and DMR definitely felt very comfortable with each other like brother and sister in unorthodox orthodoxy. For nowhere else except maybe to Llewelyn (but certainly not in *Autobiography*) has JCP ever been so honest and outspoken and divorced from the public eye or any provocative 'showing off'.

May all our thanks be given to Janet Fouli. In editing and giving Powys-lovers and Richardson fans such a gem, in other words Correspondence As Literature, she has given the reader a unique chance of enjoying a holistic appreciation of both John Cowper and Dorothy Richardson, offering a first hand opportunity to find incredibly rich material for thought and research without any of the subjective appropriation that is the unwitting wont of all critics, biographers or academics, however honest and discreet. Here is John's own voice, John at his best, in other words, John as Himself.

Marcella Henderson-Peal

Marcella Henderson-Peal lives in Paris and teaches English at Paris 12 university. She is currently working at the Sorbonne on a PhD on John Cowper Powys: 'Spiritual Tension, Sensation and Reality'. She is married with two daughters.

Two more summers
JCP to Louis Wilkinson, 1914–1915

JCP's 'Failure at Oxford' (see NL 60, March 2007) was in July 1913. The Wilkinsons moved to Italy in June 1914; Oliver Wilkinson was born in January 1915. The friendship with Louis continues in letters, which should be read with the more revealing simultaneous letters from JCP to Frances in Jack and Frances. At this period JCP's lecturing season in America was normally from September to April, with his annual visits home based in Burpham. His son young Littleton was 12 in 1914. War was declared on August 4th 1914. Llewelyn Powys worked at their brother Will's sheep farm in Kenya from 1914–19. Thanks again to Chris Wilkinson and his Archive for these revealing glimpses of lives and times.

June–November 1914: Italy, Death, War, New York

John Cowper Powys to Louis U. Wilkinson Esq. (all these letters addressed to Villino Manzoni, Fuori Porta Pispini, Siena, Italy)

Wednesday [Burpham? 14/6/14?]

Thanks for your letter my dear. Your apartment sounds singularly attractive.

Pomegranate trees! I [have] never seen one: are their [*sic*] fruit on it? I am greatly amused by your discovery—thus late—of the value of the christian Virtues. That fowl in the corner though—but you know, anyhow, how it dies—go ahead, emulate Manzoni!¹ (the type of all standard authors) Who has ever met anyone who has read *The Promesi Sposi*? But the name has a classic sound.

So I was clairvoyant for once—& well may I have been! One gets to be so—sometimes—I await - or +—no or yes—with no little anxiety. Of course I note inviolable secrecy—I've had my lesson mon ami in that direction & am not likely to err again—& yet if ever I sinned again what doors—O Eumenides of retribution!—are there left to be shut?

Mrs Powys remembers the letter & thought she placed it with the rest that awaited my arrival—but I did not find it with them. She must have misplaced it somewhere. She swears she did not destroy it. What a letter it must have been, that won three soldi, and adumbrated the conversation that left “falling back on what” an unsolved question!

A well in your garden and a parapet—I try to fancy how you arrange yourselves there—That locked up room has its significance—One meets with locked rooms as one gets older—indeed the keys & handles of doors have lately come to bulk very large in my existence—you inside, I outside!² This “increased possibility” & complication of + produced curious vibrations in my mind—

Affect^{le} greetings to yr mother

yrs J.

Forwarded to Hôtel Il Leon Bianco, San Gimignano, with a message on the envelope from Louis's mother: "All well. Very glad of F's card: CEW"

[Burpham, 31/7/14]

My mother died yesterday. I enclose Lulu's letter & telegram. I left her on Sunday and she died on Thursday. I wish now I had stayed but there seemed no immediate danger then. Indeed she walked to church on Sunday morning.

Lulu talks about shivering fits in another note so it must have gone to her heart. It is difficult to help various kinds of remorse but the fact remains that she deliberately chose this kind of death in preference to the agitation of an operation. I am only thankful it was so sudden for her—It was certainly exactly what she wished. It was a good thing Aunt Etta was with her.³

The fact remains that she has escaped very quickly and easily considering everything—you can't helping wishing one thing and another—but she is safe out of it at any rate, and that is the great thing. I am just starting for Montacute and I will write again from there.

Her interests had so detached themselves from her old little cares and she had got into so clear a mood that I feel as if I had only just found her to lose her. But she is well out of it.

Of course she has been thwarted & battered by a thousand things out of all her original spirit—but I think lately she has had some quite happy hours.

Well, my dear, you will know well enough how it goes; so I needn't say more.

Love to Frances. & your mother & Madonna.⁴

I sail on the Lusitania on the 19th of Sept.⁵

I'll find out those addresses for you if Gertrude remembers.

Yrs J.

Bertie & Dorothy are down there.⁶



*The Revd C. F. Powys and Mrs Powys.
(See additional note ¶ on page 40.)*

[Burpham? August 16th 1914]

I've just got your letter dated the 4th.

I do hope you are all right.

I may have to start on the 12th instead of the 19th. There is a desperate rush of Americans trying to cross.

[this description of his mother was printed in NL 48, April 2003, p. 32, in another selection from the Wilkinson archive]

Yes, my dear I miss my mother in a way that it would be very difficult to analyse — She was remote, ironical, submissive, and very cold; at the same time teased by a thousand objective cares for her family which she lacked the affectionate warmth to turn from annoying duties into friendly pleasures. She had cold deep obstinate romance, secret and almost savage, a romance that tunnelled itself inwards, and — like a reed with roots under water—was happier by night than day.

She had a look sometimes—wistful—like a planetary spirit vexed and fretted — and laughing, and imprisoned.

She had a fragile merriment, like a wounded deer watching in deep water the reflection of the arrow in her flank—

She hated, with an abysmal hatred, sunshine, prosperity, healthy energy, and above all success. When she was happy at rare times it was like one of those fragile and enchanted moths that go from hedge to hedge with a dread even of moonlight.

She lived always in a large cool dark cavern—and alone—and when anyone came near she hated them though when they went away she loved them—and even while she hated them she knew that the sun was on their side and that her resistance was hopeless & mad. But it was then that she went on and the more hopeless and mad and wicked it was—the more she did it—her defiance of the “All” that ought not to have come forth from the “Nothing”—& yet she was doomed—she who had a madness for being left alone—to have eleven earthy great children!

I do hope all is well. Love to Frances. & to both the mothers.

[Burpham. Sept 6 1914]

I've just got your letter & F's, for both much thanks. Certainly, in her writing, the particular sentence of mine she quotes has a more than odd look. I must indeed have rambled on. Yes I'll tell Arnold about your appearance next Summer and also of the chance that you may appear much sooner if any Austrian army crosses the border. I don't think however that this is within the bounds of possibility. Austria is out of it already & a good thing too. I start on the Mauretania on the 19th.⁷

Lulu was in the highest spirits but with a gesture of nervousness about his lungs—for the rest he loved the remote risks.⁸ I wonder what really is going to happen—who can tell? I shall have little time for letter-writing now till I start. I shall start from Montacute. I am anxious about Gertrude left alone for the autumn.

There are still the strangest rumours going about, but time will reveal—give my love to the two mothers.

Yours Jack.

[See letters 64–65 of same date in Jack and Francis – mostly factual about wartime conditions (the unfairness of moral-blackmail voluntary enlistment vs conscription) & the siblings. Letter 65 ends ‘Frances went through my brain and left there the impression of [a] little field of ashes in the middle of which sticks a spike of ice which, because ashes are very cold, can never go away ...’]

[Montacute. Sept 17 1914]

Equinoctial gales of terrific force! We can’t here [*sic*] from Lulu till he gets to the Cape.

I’ve just taken my son back to Sherborne. Willy’s dogs became devoted to him & retrieved shot sparrows. They are now hovering sadly round me dreading the moment when there is no one left to hunt with. I think I like them better than Whisker. Montacute is strangely desolate without either Lulu or my mother—but I have continually a certain feeling of relief that this and the other thing or incident or event or situation can’t harrass her any more.

I have no doubt you are quite right my dear about her pride. She certainly required some and of a deep kind to deal with all she had to deal with. I would give a lot to have one long days [*sic*] absolutely free conversation with her about everything. She was an adept at steering aside any sort of talk that approached her hidden attitude to things and people. I told you how she said to me “Lulu says that your father is selfish—I wish you to remember that he is a child” Both she and my mother [*sic*] lived isolated but for different reasons—my father because he is afraid of committing himself and looking a fool—my mother because she knew that not a single person she knew would ever really understand what she felt, not any one. Nor as a matter of fact would she have talked of her real attitude to anyone; because even if they did understand the deep pits and recesses into which her fierce prejudices and desperations burrowed—the very talking of these things would have made her hate the person to whom she talked and the more they understood the more she would have hated them for understanding and this hatred would itself have changed the nature of the things she was feeling even at the moment.

I think that if Mrs Phelps⁹ had been less of a Norman and had been able (she was always extraordinarily nice to her in her brusque way but it was not the way to appeal to her) she might have been made much happier by having some friend of her own age to talk to—but Montacute House only threw her back more savagely upon that region where are the roots of the Ash tree [Y]gdrasil.¹⁰

I must confess to you my dear that I’m a little touched now & then by my father’s isolation his memory is giving way—he stumbles and fumbles for words—
[rest of letter missing]

[New York. Oct 6 1914]

Your letter to hand my dear asking for papers and books—I’ll send some. I’ll also send you if I can my pamphlet answering Münsterberg—¹¹

May & I have taken a flat together which will be nicer for her and I think quite as economical for us both¹²

—I saw James¹²—He has a job at 12 dollars and hopes for one soon in the Junior Offenders' Bureau at 20. He had seen nothing of Rowena or Mistress Noye and not much I fancy of Vera. His last acquisition so his friend "Coss" tells me is a person called Rosa—a stenographer.

Our venture in Boston is beginning in a small way; but Arnold who is there, running it, seems quite contented with the outlook.¹⁴ The weather is lovely. This flat is airy and very sunny but looks out on the back of 11th. Street. But it is very new and has electricity and all the hot water one can possibly want.

I'm glad you wrote to Lulu.

The papers here are on the whole Pro-Allies; May has consequently become less so.

I am pretty often in New York till Xmas when I go to Chicago & Kansas City. I am shortly off to Troy. So far I have not very many lectures.

It is strange here without you two. May & I harmonize quite agreeably however.

What a good thing that Frances is in such excellent spirits. But this absence of news must be trying and how you two get on without your mail I cannot think. It is July then that you propose to come over here? I think the war must be over by then; but it will not be easy for any of our armies when they start invading Germany.

I long to read your novel my dear—you must, but of course you will, have it finished long before we meet.¹⁵

I wonder if I shall be able to write anything this winter.

We have encountered Theodore Dreiser and like him extremely.¹⁶

I observe that the paper says that volunteer farmers are fighting in East Africa¹⁷—where is Lulu now?

Well—bless you both. J.

[New York. Nov 3 1914]

I hope you are all all right. I don't know whether Turkey's entrance on the scene will push Italy into it or not. Nor do I know whether if it does that will mean your leaving Italy. I should think probably it will not: as at Siena you are far enough away from the frontier: & it will not be Austria who will invade.

Dreiser took us to a mad party in a weird up-town house where to my astonishment I was accosted by Gertrude Traubel.¹⁸ I had completely forgotten her and when she said "What is my name?" I couldn't think who she was. She has not yet acquired those compensating charms of intelligence and grace which will recompense the loss of youth; but perhaps she will acquire them now she has left her parents & is looking for work in New York. One of those chanting fellows who do the stunt of rendering poetry "as it ought to be rendered" recited some wild middle-west productions of a certain Lyndsay who seems rather the vogue.¹⁹ One of these had its interest — It was a bacchanalian reversion of a "black gentleman" to the jungles of the Congo: and the

chorus as howled by the reciter out of the shadows of a sort of alcove was really quite alarming—Something about “Mumbo Jumbo will Hoodoo you”!

There was a fine row at St Marks 2nd. Ave on Sunday—Mr Guthrie²⁰ found it necessary to lose his temper—in my defence—against a rather pathetic celebralist who was not altogether wrong. However our good Guthrie is capable of howling down the protests of half the asylums in America. While this hullabaloo proceeded I was listening to the pitiful sorrows of your poor little Mamma Batty. Do, for the Lord’s sake, send her a decent letter! She is not contented with post cards—and she looks 50 years older—Even my inflexible heart (so hard against these unsatisfactory relations) was affected—No one could help being—She was thin as a lathe and ash-colored as the dead—someone or other connected with her had died, I fancy. Atkins is now head of Brooklyn Institute Dr Hooper being a corpse.²¹

We’ve sold over a Thousand copies of “The War & Culture” but we shan’t make a penny till the whole first edition is sold out, owing to the necessity for sending the copies post-free to the “Trade”. However after the 1st. edition it will be all to the good—but that limit may not be reached. We have cloth copies for 60 cents each & upon those we ought to gain something.

On All Soul’s Day travelling down here from Boston I was constantly preoccupied with my mother. On my arrival I found a letter from her from the Dead Letter Office²²—forwarded via Seville, Siena & Rome dated May 13th.—

Lulu has reached Mombasa the end of his journey. Now we shall hear soon whether he can be with Willy or not.

May comes back here to lunch & I have to wash up & get that meal ready. In the “Titan” (Wh I’ll send you) Dreiser has such an amusing description of the Little Theatre circle at Chicago. One of them Stephanie Platow is the girl who is with him now. She was the “Elaine” you may remember.²³

The weather on the Atlantic has been terrific. The Lusitania was quite late.

I was extraordinarily pleased to get Frances’ letter. James tells me that he has heard too. If she only knew how pleased I was she would write again.

Good luck—Best love to all—Yrs J.

NOTES to Summer 1914 (Chris Wilkinson)

1 Count Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873), Italian poet and novelist, was the author of the classic-historical romance *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed) 1825–27, set in Spanish-occupied Milan during the 17th century.

2 Despite arranging the marriage of Louis and Frances, Powys was still madly in love with Frances and bombarding her with letters (See *Jack and Frances* Volume I, Cecil Woolf, 1994). His constant attentions had sometimes oppressed the couple and on occasion they had had to make it clear that they wished to reserve some privacy for themselves. ‘Clairvoyant’, ‘increased possibility’ etc. refers to news of the conception of Oliver, to be born in January 1915.

3 ‘Aunt Etta’, Henrietta Johnson (1856–1934), a sister of Powys’s mother.

4 Louis’s mother, Charlotte Elizabeth Wilkinson (1842–1931) and Frances’s mother, Julia Vanness Gregg (1858–1941, nicknamed ‘The Madonna’ by Powys) were both visiting the Wilkinsons in Siena.

5 The ocean liner, S.S. Lusitania, was sunk by a German submarine on 7th May 1915 with the loss of 1,200 lives, including some US citizens; its destruction helped to bring the USA into World War I two years later. It was only in the 1970's, when the original shipping manifests were published, that the American and British governments were forced to admit that 'war materials' were included in the cargo.

6 Another Powys brother, the architect Albert (A.R.) Powys (1881-1936), with his first wife, a distant cousin, Dorothy Powys.

7 Built in 1907, the S.S. Mauretania vied with the S.S. Lusitania for the Hales Trophy, an award presented to the ship making the fastest Atlantic crossing. War between Britain and Germany had been declared on August 4th.

8 Llewelyn was embarking for Kenya to join his brother William.

9 Mrs Phelps was the wife of the squire of the Elizabethan mansion, Montacute House, situated next to the Powys vicarage. She and her husband, William Phelps, had always been very hospitable to the Powys family.

10 In Norse mythology, Yggdrasil ('The Terrible One's Horse'), is a gigantic ash tree that links and shelters all the worlds of Norse cosmology.

11 *The War and Culture*, written in reply to the Professor Münsterberg's pro-German arguments in *The War and America*, was later republished as *The Menace of German Culture* by Rider in England. JCP to Llewelyn, 6th October 1914: 'I shall get attacked by Germans over here right enough, when they read my answer to prof Munsterberg, an appalling pedant and the most conceited high-brow I've ever encountered.'

12 82 West 12th Street, New York. Marian Powys (May) had come to New York at the beginning of 1914.

13 James Henderson (1885-1957), son of a rich American undertaker, and a one-time suitor of Frances Gregg. He appears frequently in JCP's letters.

14 The University Lecturers Association of New York, founded by Arnold Shaw, John Cowper Powys and Louis Wilkinson. JCP to Llewelyn, writing on the same day (6/10/14): 'Arnold ... is at the moment in Boston running a daring venture of lectures at a huge Halle there.' (*Letters* p. 161)

15 *The Buffoon*, written by Louis Wilkinson with Frances Gregg's help, contained lampoons of Ezra Pound, 'H.D.', Henry Lyon and others, including one of John Cowper himself. In ignorance of this, Powys was helping them submit the book to the publisher Alfred A. Knopf. It was published in April 1916.

16 Theodore Dreiser (1871-1945), who became a close friend of John Cowper. 'How clearly I recall my first introduction to Theodore Dreiser!' he wrote in *Autobiography* at the start of a fulsome tribute. 'It was when he lived on West 10th Street; where his couple of old rooms on the ground-floor, with big open fires, receded from the front to the extreme back of the house. He was that day attired in a blue over-all smock, such as French workmen wear, and to find a desk suitable to his colossal manuscripts he had made a writing-table out of a grand piano.' (See also note 23 below, and 'Table-Talk' in NL44)

17 William Powys (1881-1978), the youngest of the Powys brothers, volunteered to join the East African Mounted Rifles in January 1915, just a year after emigrating from England. Llewelyn, who sailed for Africa in September 1914, stayed until 1919 to look after the farm at Gilgil, eight thousand feet above sea level.

18 Gertrude Traubel (1892-1983), music teacher, archivist and historical annotator, was the daughter of Horace Traubel, a close friend of Walt Whitman. Amongst other projects, she edited her father's diary, *With Walt Whitman in Camden*, first published by Mitchell Kennerley in New York, 1914.

19 Vachel Lyndsay (1879-1931), a poet from Illinois. 'The Congo' was his most famous and popular poem. It imitated the pounding of drums in its rhythms and was written to be chanted:

... Listen to the yell of Leopold's ghost / Burning in Hell for his hand-maimed host.

Hear how the demons chuckle and yell / Cutting his hands off, down in Hell ...

Listen to the creepy proclamation, / "Be careful what you do,

[All the o sounds very golden. Heavy accents very heavy. Light accents very light. Last line whispered]

Or Mumbo-Jumbo, God of the Congo,

And all of the other / Gods of the Congo,

Mumbo-Jumbo will hoo-doo you ...

20 William Norman Guthrie (1868–1944) was one of the American Extension Lecturers in Arnold Shaw's University Lecturers Association. Years later (October 1927) JCP tells Frances: "I have got to speak for Isadora Duncan's Memorial Service in St Mark's. I cannot tell you how I hate Mr Guthrie and St Mark's ..." and in November: "... Guthrie's church was all I anticipated. What a wicked masquerade!" Dr Guthrie visited JCP at Phudd in 1932.

21 Called originally The Apprentices' Library, the Brooklyn Institute was founded by the philanthropic distiller, Augustus Graham, in 1823. The first programme of evening classes started in 1843. Franklyn W. Hooper (1851–?), who was responsible for a massive programme of reorganisation, was director from 1889 to 1914. Charles Atkins (1876–?) was Powys's and Wilkinson's first Lecture Manager before taking over as head of the Institute that same year.

22 Stray mail was forwarded to the Dead Letter Office, where postal workers acting as detectives would try to discover their correct destinations. For security reasons the Post Office Department preferred to employ retired clergy. Women were also preferred to men for their better analytical powers. At around this time 7 million dead letters were received annually.

23 *The Titan* (New York, John Lane Company, 1914) was written as a sequel to Dreiser's *The Financier*. The description of the 'Garrick Players', based on the set at the Browne's Chicago Little Theatre, is not particularly edifying. Stephanie Platow is clearly modelled on the actress, Elaine Hyman (who later took the stage name Kirah Markham). The central character, Henry Worthington Cowperwood, while living in an expensive uptown house with his wife, Aileen, takes a flat in the artistic quarter, to house his new mistress, Stephanie ('a Russian Jewess'); just as Dreiser himself, living uptown with his wife, Sarah, had taken a flat in Greenwich Village to house his new mistress, the Jewish Elaine Hyman. (See *NL44*, November 2001, pp 22–29.)

June–August 1915: Burpham, Siena, USA

*John Cowper Powys to Louis U. Wilkinson Esq. (c/o G. Arnold Shaw, 1735 Grand Central Terminal Building, New York City, U.S.A. — (Forwarded to c/o Mr. A. Somers Kappella, Somers Point, N. J.) ["OPENED BY CENSOR" sticker on envelope]*¹

[Burpham. June 23 1915]

So you're off my dear—well—I think you're wise—I hope you'll find a pleasant house by the sea as you say.

Let me know what happens—I shall be anxious to hear.

Well it will not after all be long before we meet—

I see that Dorothy's brother, David Powys is wounded.² Newell Graburn has been hit again, in the thigh, and is in Chelsea hospital.

Lulu is going to send me his contribution to our little volume to censor—I bet it will want a bit of censoring. Theodore seems to have surpassed himself for it in his own peculiar vein.³

Lulu is not altogether pleased with the climate of the place where he is. He says its like England. I wonder what spot in the world would really be the best place for his permanent cure—Natal? California? Japan? He ought not to be in a place where it rains as often as it seems to where he is—

My novel is just beginning to move a little. It will be extraordinarily interesting to see how it differs from yours. Perhaps it would be most pleasant not to show one another either of them till they are actually in print.⁴ That would give a finality to the difference and also to any similarity. I am not having any chief central character at all —& hardly any psychological analysis. I'm bringing in only Theodore, the Catholic, and Lulu; with any definiteness. The rest are remote and imaginary—

Well—love to Frances & a kiss to my god-son⁵

J.

JCP to LUW (c/o Mr. Somers Kappella, Somer's Point, New Jersey, U.S.A.)

[Burpham. 3/8/15]

So glad you are so well settled & that F & O[liver]. are none the worse for the change. My dear I am now rushing this damned novel to its conclusion in the next five weeks so tell Frances that I will not write more but I will put my energy entirely into the book and then when its done I hope to sail on the 11th. Sept on the Philadelphia⁶ & we will meet & discuss both your story & mine. We can do that without reading. I ought to be in New York before the 20th according to this.

So I won't write any more—do nothing but this confounded work. I think I'll call it Wood & Stone. How does that hit? Don't say you don't like it—for it exactly suits the contents. I trust Arnold will agree to it. Yes. I hope he will publish your work. I simply long to see it in print.⁷

You certainly seem to have found a charming retreat. I am glad. Give them both a kiss. & give my love to Madonna.

Good luck my dear. J.

O I forgot to tell you the latest news of Lulu. He is acting as a sort of Farm Overseer under another man—a person called Cole⁸—The Hon. G. Cole, son of, or brother of, the Earl of Inniskillen—he gets 6 pounds a month with meat & milk. and is near Lake Elemental full of Hippos & Rhinos. He rides horses. He looks after 6000 cattle & 12,000 sheep. He lives by himself in a bungalow near the house of Cole who seems somewhat of a queer one. Willy said in his last letter that Lulu was much better. I fancy he is annoyed at not getting well entirely—but better considerably he must be to do all that. I suggested to him California but Gertrude is strongly of opinion that East Africa has not had a fair chance yet, & she may be right.

Your descriptions of the fruit & climatic conditions sound most attractive.

But O dear I must not ramble into these matters or into any of our subtle controversies—It is for me to slave sans cesse at this curst novel. I must & will get it done. God strike me dead if it isn't the devil of an effort though.

Heigh ho! what we do do, for the sake of I don't know what!

I kiss your companions once more. J.

[notes overleaf]

NOTES to Summer 1915

- 1 The Wilkinsons had sailed to America from Italy in July 1915.
- 2 This could be 'Davie' Powys, brother of Dorothy Powys (?1891–1968) (see *Powys Society Newsletter* No 31, p.27).
- 3 Arnold Shaw had suggested publishing a book entitled *Confessions by the Six Brothers Powys*, giving his deadline for contributions as 1st August 1915. By June it was decided that only three brothers would contribute—John Cowper, Theodore and Llewelyn. In the event Shaw rejected both John Cowper's and Llewelyn's contributions, publishing only Theodore's in January 1916 as *The Soliloquy of a Hermit*. John Cowper's and Llewelyn's 'confessions' were later published by Claude Bragdon's Manas Press in February 1916, as *Confessions of Two Brothers*. (See Charles Lock's review of the re-publication in 1982 by Sinclair Browne in *The Powys Review* 12).
- 4 *Wood and Stone* was published by Arnold Shaw in New York in November 1915, later by Heineman in London in 1917; *The Buffoon* by Knopf in April 1916.
- 5 Oliver Wilkinson, Frances and Louis Wilkinson's son, was born on 28th January 1915.
- 6 The 'S.S. Philadelphia' was a ship of many names, having begun as the 'City of Paris', before being re-named the 'Paris', the 'Philadelphia', the 'USS Yale', and the 'USS Harrisburg'. It was converted to a troop carrier in WWI, only finally renamed 'Philadelphia' in 1919, when it resumed carrying passengers.
- 7 The Hon. Galbraith Lowry Egerton Cole (1881–1929), the third son of the fourth Earl of Enniskillen, had served in the South African War and was one of the first farmer-settlers in British East Africa. A PS to this letter gives Lulu's address as c/o Hon. G. Cole, Gilgil, British E. Africa.

¶ The picture just visible in the background of the photo on page 32 could well be the portrait of Charles Shaw Lefevre, created Viscount Eversley in 1857, which used to hang in the dining room at Montacute Vicarage. Lefevre (1794–1888) was one of CFP's godfathers, and was the nephew of CFP's paternal grandmother, Maria Priscilla Shaw (1752–1833). SPM

'your old brother Jack'

Five letters (1947–58) from JCP to Mr George H. Playter, Phyllis's older half-brother, at 582 Oregon Street, Palo Alto, California USA. With thanks to Robert Bell, son of George's daughter Marion.

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire,
N. Wales
Great Britain
July 16 1947

My dear George,

How excellent of you to send me this clipping from San Francisco so crowded with exciting things. Heavens! But I've clean forgot about that hat! But the name "Mechanics" brings a great deal back—aye! How many memories not only of Phyllis herself but of Noel Sullivan a nephew of the Senator for that district in those days—& of Doctor Schott whose dentistry I daresay is still in Mission Street—for I believe

& hope for he's a tremendous character! he lives still, & Colonel Charles Erskine Scott Wood with whom I once stayed in Portland but who with Sarah Bard Field who may be alive still but no longer in San Francisco for they moved to a place Los Gatos far south of Los Angeles! & it was there that Colonel Wood died over 90 I think some ten years ago.

But in those days when I lost my head for Phyllis & my hat (apparently) taking it off to Miss C of the Mechanics! Colonel Wood & Sarah Bard Field lived on that Russian Hill of wh. The Russians at the United Nations Meeting were prouder, I fancy, that they are today!

[same address]

March 30 1950

My dear George

Aye! But I did indeed enjoy that Welsh news so well illustrated. Phyllis and her Mother have you and yours very much in mind & are hoping to write—but O dear! The poor dears have every moment taken us with what might be called literally the everyday struggle! You see over here not only is “help” hard to come by & very expensive; but all those inventions & “gadgets” of one kind and another that make it easier for housewives doing their own housework with you,—over here are unobtainable tho' we have got a “Hoover”! And on the top of these 2 little “ribbon-development” “jerry-built” houses to be looked after Phyllis has lately (as with only one eye now I have to humour the remaining one when it shows a tendency to go on strike as it is apt to do at 8.30 p.m. when I want it to go on at its job till 10.30 p.m.) Yes poor dear she has lately had to type and gum & glue & paste with God knows what care & what careful scissors and her old Corona portable bought in New York a quarter of a century ago at full blast & very often at full stop! joining up the cuts in my long latest romance about Corwen in the year A.D.499 in the days of Arthur & Merlin & Taliesin & Sir This & Sir That & God knows what Dragons & Devils in human shape and with worse than diabolic or antediluvian names – in other words with old Welsh names! For as a result of 15 years study I now (slow as I am with grammar & syntax) have learnt to read the old Welsh chronicles of the days before the first Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf and long before Chaucer! Isn't it queer how Welsh which very few Welshmen can write in today for it is like Chinese in having a colloquial Welsh; and a sort of mandarin or academic Welsh which a few speakers on the BBC can talk in & a very few Welshmen can write in, whereas the colloquial Welsh is very much alive and about a million Welshmen talk in it still! But what I study is this very old Welsh far the earliest native British language and the words mostly Celtic with a few of Latin origin from the Roman occupation & a few (still fewer they are) from the Iberian language of North Africa first cousin to Egyptian a language that is not like the Celtic and is not Aryan at all nor Semitic (from Shem). It is Hamitic (from that son of Noah whose name was Ham in the Ark! & who was near to the first Black Men and Negroid Men!!

Yes my dear George your two ladies often talk to me about you & I can see they

have a real clannish attachment & affection but Mrs Playter is awfully shaky & Phyllis finds her hands so full that I do all her writing. I am her secretary – and she is my editor in chief!

Both ladies often tell me about your daughter and her daughter so let me convey their love to them too!

With love from all 3 of us your ever affect^{ed}. Jack.

[1 Waterloo]

Tuesday November 22nd 1955

& My Daily One Day Diary published by Collins says that today at 5.29 p.m. it is the half-moon & my Diary (published by Collins) has a picture of this Half Moon with a human profile leering out of its crescent in a mocking way!

[drawing of half moon with face]

I notice as I turn over the pages of this 1955 Diary that Phyllis's Birthday on Nov 29th it is full Moon at 4.50 p.m. and somewhere, if I am correct, we recently read in the papers that on this particular Full Moon of her birthday there was some sort of a little Eclipse. I pray this is only a very very negligible one, & will only mean that some friend who was intending to pay a visit had to put it off!

Your letter across the one ocean and the whole Continent of America from California & Oregon was a most interesting & an excellent letter my dear George and I enjoyed it quite as much as Phyllis. I think you are the best letter-writer of the family and I appreciate this as the best letter-writer of my family. My old brother Littleton over 80 has just died—thank the Lord quickly & easily!—so the oldest of my family now living is a lot younger than I am and so many of my vividest memories are of days before she was born! I speak of my sister Marian Powys Grey of the Lace Shop in New York whose big Book on Lace & how to make it beats all others & will I daresay outlive all her 3 or 4 brothers' literary works! We both more and more know and like this extraordinary town surrounded in the shape of a Horse-Shoe by high Mountains except to the South from which the mist & rain generally come; while the wind generally follows the sun which we don't see rising but only setting in the south-western gap of these mountains!

Well! May the fates be as kind to you my dear George as they certainly have been to your old brother Jack.

[1 Waterloo]

Tuesday Aug 20 1957

My dear George,

I always love hearing from you, you who are really the only one I feel at home with of Phyllis's family. Tho' I did used to feel very friendly with her Cousin Marie of Toronto with [whom] I used to st[ay] when I lectured there and was always a[...] nice to me indeed she [had] quite a m[ania] for Brita[in] and British [...] She must [...] been very [...] to Phyllis [...] the old [...] [I] often catch [Ph]yllis alluding [to] her and saying "Cousin Marie used to [...] this or that".

[But] you are [good], George dear, [...] it pleases me much to feel that [(both) so near of an age!) [...] me these cuttings—which I have found [...] interesting.

This little printed [...] ren] of yours always gives me such a queer satisfaction.

Yrs always and may we both get happier as we get older!

Phyllis and I are wonderfully well considering my years and her wonderful activity & endurance of all the burden of giving visitors O such a lot of them constant cups of Tea—when by herself (you bet) she sticks to coffee! [...] always J.C. Powys

[1 Waterloo]

Thursday May 8th 1958

My dear George

Your clippings and your Comments on them are most interesting. Yes I do agree with you and so does Phyllis that Bertrand Russell is wrong over this point he makes about our extinction by H-Bombs. It makes me think how I debated with him in New York on Marriage. But I do like him very very much & I like his face. His face is my favourite face of all our present day writers & sages. I am so interested to see Priestley's face here among your clippings. We had Phyllis & I a visit here in Blaenau from Jacquetta Hawkes, Priestley's wife. I like this clipping by Bennett Cerf about Boston being a state of mind!

O my dear George and how I do agree with you when you say in your remarks on Bertrand Russell—"There will be enough representatives of genus homo left to start over again even if the devastation is as colossal as the most ardent pacifist fears." Yes! You are right too about it being a most significant comparison to compare Priestley with Mencken. Yes I will beg Phyllis when next she gets one to send you any exciting clipping from the New Statesman.

Yes! Stanton Delaplane's San Francisco Postcard is amusing. But remember my dear George—I am so impressed at your being older than I am for I so often feel too old to be amused by anything. I feel something like Victoria when she said "We are not amused." We are. Anyway you beat me entirely when you ask me to interpret this clipping about Hossplayers. No I have [no] idea what a Hossplayer is! so I am as puzzled as you are why this Kealy went to those races and back to Japan.

Well my dear George all the best from us both, yrs always, JCPowys

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





Secret religion

Jackson Petsche, a new member in North America, on discovering JCP

Two quotes enthralled me in the first chapter of John Cowper Powys's *Autobiography* and let me know that I had encountered something new, and someone who may have felt as I had. 'My whole life ... has been one long struggle with fear, self-created fantastical fear' was the first. The second was: 'My dominant life-illusion was that I was, or at least would eventually be, a magician.'

For someone who has often suffered from fear and anxiety, and has sought a means to escape this world we call everyday reality, these words seemed to speak from beyond the ether. When I came to read Powys's magnificent novels I began to realize that these two quotes summed up much of what was behind some of the most unique fiction ever penned; for the Powys landscape is a world inhabited by characters warring against fear and seeking to be magicians. Powys wrote, 'What is a magician if not one who converts God's "reality" into his own "reality".' Many of Powys's characters, arguably all of his characters, are seeking to find their own reality.

What makes Powys so unique, what he describes that no other writer I know of describes, is what I call the 'secret religion' of his characters. And this 'secret religion' is often the means to finding that other reality. Wolf Solent, with his 'mythology', is the most obvious example, but so many of his creations share this strange, personal religiosity. John Crow with his paradoxical unbelief and mystical absorption of the land in *A Glastonbury Romance* represents, alongside Wolf Solent, Dud No-Man, and Magnus Muir, Powys's blend of skepticism and innate mysticism.

John Crow's experience at Stonehenge, where he rests his head upon the altar stone proclaiming 'This is England', illustrates the core of Powys's philosophy; namely, that the highest mystery lies within the land, the stones, the trees. The inanimate has power in Powys's world. Although John Crow is skeptical of, and even antipathetic towards, John Geard's plans for a mystical revival in Glastonbury, it is John Crow who receives the vision of the mystical sword of Arthur.

It is the paradox of skepticism and a belief in the absolute power and mystery of Nature and the inanimate that keeps the secret religion secret or hidden. Wolf Solent won't let anyone in on his secret 'mythology' because it is what saves him, and he cannot afford to have it questioned. All of the Powys heroes, as G. Wilson Knight has dubbed them, fight a madness that seems imposed upon them by the world. One example is Wolf Solent's dread of the sight and sound of motorcars and airplanes; the modern world crashes in and attempts to invade his mythological, sensual love of Nature and the inanimate. However, Powys's greatest example of the fear of madness is in *Weymouth Sands* when Magnus Muir has an epiphany of powerlessness wherein he realizes that if he thinks about the vivisection that is conducted on the dogs at the lunatic asylum he will wind up in the asylum himself.

The 'secret religion', then, is the innermost psyche of every modern man or woman that fights against modernity as it represents cruelty (in the name of modern science, i.e. vivisection), and a callousness towards Nature. A world where the train is more important than the blue-bottle fly, which accompanies Wolf Solent on his journey in the first chapter, is a dangerous world to an imagination like Powys's. The 'secret religion' also fights against dogmatic belief such as Geard's ego-driven Christian mysticism and Red Robinson's communism in *A Glastonbury Romance* (no matter how enticing these systems might be). The 'secret religion' proclaims that, like William Blake, one must create one's own system or be enslaved by another's. This is why Wolf Solent's 'mythology' must be kept secret: because it is so personal. Wolf can only reach out into Nature with his 'mythology' when he is embraced in the solitude of his own soul or psyche.

Reading Powys has allowed me to enter into the solitude of my own soul, like any great literature that is captivating. But what has made reading Powys such a rewarding experience has been the feeling that I am sharing in the 'secret religion' of his characters. The secret religion has become public; it is shared with another. The reader then becomes a magician as well. Powys was a storyteller like the Henog in his novel *Porius*. He shared the myths of his times by making up his own as he went along.

Jackson Petsche is a mature student from Portland, Maine, USA with degrees in religious studies and English. He came to JCP via Colin Wilson, has sought out and read many of the books but has met no one else who has read him. He can be contacted at 83 Mellen Street, Portland, Me 04101 USA jacksonpetsche@verizon.net

Letter

Peter Foss clarifies the titles of Llewelyn Powys's recently published essays.

I wanted members to know — which I am sure they do anyway — that this last year has been an exceptional one for Llewelyn Powys publications. I am not only talking of my own *Bibliography* and *The Immemorial Year* (which, I might add, provides so much new information on John Cowper Powys as well as Llewelyn at that crucial period of their lives in 1909), I am also referring to the publications by Frank Kibblewhite's Sundial Press, of selected essays of Llewelyn, in two handsome collections.

These two books, *Durdle Door to Dartmoor* (2007) and *Still Blue Beauty* (2008), are handy in size, in softback format and attractively priced. They come with very useful short introductions and wonderful covers, depicting paintings by Nicholas Hely Hutchinson. The design of the cover of the second collection, *Still Blue Beauty*, is, in my view, most beautiful.

The first collection, *Durdle Door to Dartmoor*, contains 26 essays, and those among the best, collected from *Dorset Essays*, *Somerset Essays*, *Earth Memories*, *A Baker's Dozen*, and even one from my 2003 collection, *Wessex Memories* ('The Swannery-Bell at Abbotsbury'). The second collection — the one with the wonderfully evocative deep blue cover — contains 26 more. This time seven are taken from *Wessex Memories*, and fifteen from the other collections mentioned.

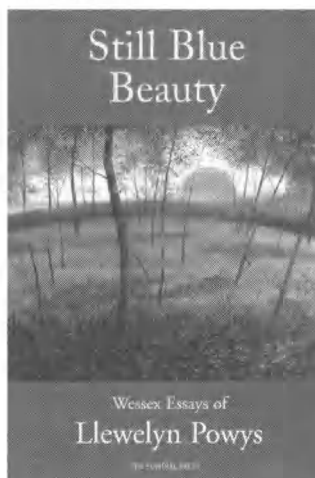
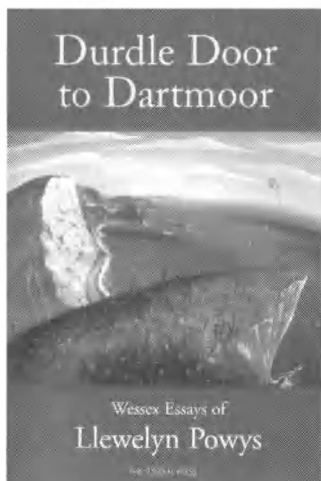
But here I must add a *caveat* and explanation. In the Introduction to the book, the editors note that the 'texts of some of the essays differ slightly here from those in earlier collections, sometimes reincorporating phrases or passages that were in the originally published versions but were dropped or modified for the collected volumes.' That is fine in itself (and I made slight alterations too in *Wessex Memories*), but that is the only clue we are given to the changes that have been incorporated. More serious, though, is the change of titles of some of the essays. As the editors say, some have been given more appealing titles, and four others, which have not before been collected, are presented here for the first time in a collection, but under different titles from their original publication.

Now this presents a bibliographical problem, in that none of these essays is specifically identified in its original form and so none can be readily identified from my own *Bibliography* (although all are included in it). Therefore (since I for my sins am the bibliographer of Llewelyn Powys), I would like to add an addendum to *Still Blue Beauty* (2008) for future reference, and identify the relevant essays included. In the list that follows I give the number and title of the essay as it appears in the book, followed by the title it goes under in its earlier collected version or its first publication. I also provide the reference number in my *Bibliography* for anyone who wishes to follow up all citations.

- No. 5. 'A Stonehenge in Miniature' = 'Poxwell Stone Circle', *Dorset Essays*. [E222]
 No. 6. 'The Father of Dorset' = 'St Ealdhelm', *Somerset Essays*. [E239]
 No. 9. 'A Royal Rebel' = 'A Royal Failure for Whom Men of Dorset Died', *Dorset Daily Echo*, 11 April 1936 (previously uncollected) [E301]
 No. 10. 'Somerset Names' = 'South Somerset Names', *Wessex Memories*. [E413]
 No. 14. 'The World is New!' = 'Inland', *Mercury: A Review of the Arts in Wessex* no. 9, Autumn 1950 (previously uncollected) [E436]
 No. 15. 'A Visit by Moonlight' = 'A Downland Burden', *Wessex Memories* [A32]
 No. 16. 'Shaftesbury — Champion of the Poor' = 'The Work of the Great Lord Shaftesbury', *Dorset Daily Echo*, 18 August 1934 (previously uncollected). [E234]
 No. 17. 'A Wish for Freedom' = 'A House of Correction', *Earth Memories*. [E193]
 No. 18. 'Athelney – In the Steps of King Alfred' = 'Athelney', *Somerset Essays* (the original published title was 'In the Steps of Alfred'). [E326]
 No. 22. 'A Foolish Razorbill' = 'One of a Thousand', *Wessex Memories*. [E167]
 No. 23. 'A Richer Treasure' = 'What Are the Fairest Flowers of the Season?', *Dorset Daily Echo*, 23 April 1938 (previously uncollected). [E380]
 No. 24. 'Weymouth Memories' = 'Childhood Memories', *A Baker's Dozen*. [E395]
 No. 26. 'Dorchester Lives' = 'Dorchester Characters', *Dorset Essays*. [E238]

I should add that this does not arise in *Durdle Door to Dartmoor* since all 26 essays retain their original titles from the collected versions. Quite apart from this bibliographical discrepancy, the importance of these Sundial Press books is that they are bringing Llewelyn Powys to a large new audience in the West Country (and beyond). They are in all the bookshops, have been reviewed widely in the region and, I believe, are selling well. Bravo!

Peter Foss





*Llewelyn Powys in New York, 1928,
photo by Doris Ulmann.*