

LONDON DISCUSSION MEETING

Saturday November 29th 2008 at 2.30 pm

Friends' Meeting House, 120 Heath Street, Hampstead, London NW3

John Cowper Powys's "My Philosophy Up-to-Date
as Influenced by Living in Wales" from *Obstinate Cymric* (1947) [see page 26]

*For copies of the essay, and more information, contact John Hodgson (see opposite)
and if you can, let him know you will be there. TEA will be provided.*

Editorial

Our front cover shows JCP at his doorway in more relaxed mode than usual (or is he feeling the cold?) The back cover drawings by Elizabeth Muntz were preliminaries for her monumental head of TFP. TF's story 'The Outing' is undated, but has a nice period feel with a small aeroplane landing on a crowded beach. JCP's original unfinished Introduction to *Porius* follows the List of Characters in the last Newsletter: both were abbreviated in published editions. The three letters of JCP to Elizabeth Myers are taken at random from the 162 in the Powys Collection.

The Internet spins its web of information, astounding and unnerving to twentieth-century people – examples of its use here are given by Robin Wood and by Chris Thomas, our new Secretary. Meanwhile, from the last century, reactions outraged and sympathetic (respectively) to John Cowper and Llewelyn, from a poet who shares their landscape in upstate New York. Other contributions from members are on favoured Powys works and – of course – on the Conference, with its now traditional prelude, the meeting and walk on Llewelyn's birthday.

It was sad to learn of the Janet (Machen) Pollock – friend of the Powyses since the 1930s – has recently died. Tributes to her will be in our next *Newsletter*.

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Annual Subscriptions 2009

REMINDER to those who pay annually by cheque

The Treasurer would like to remind those members who pay annually by cheque (rather than by Standing Order) that their annual subscription for 2009 will be due on 1st January 2009.

The subscription remains at £18.50 for UK members and £22.00 (US\$45.00 or euro 30.00) for international members. If paying by cheque, please make the cheque payable to 'The Powys Society' and forward it to the Treasurer, Michael J. French, Wharfedale House, Castley, Otley, North Yorkshire LS21 2PY **by 1st January 2009**.

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

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

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

IBAN of the Society's account

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The Society's NAME

The Powys Society

The Society's ADDRESS

Wharfedale House, Castley, Otley, North Yorkshire, LS21 2PY, UK

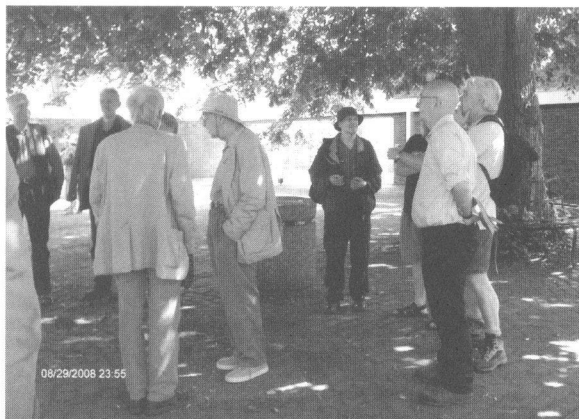
The Society's BANK

Barclays Bank, High Street, Glastonbury, Somerset, UK

SORT CODE of Society's bank

Society's ACCOUNT NUMBER at Bank

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



*On the campus
under the trees.*

The Conference, Chichester, 29th-31st August 2008

This year's Conference was a bit smaller than of late (about 40, including guests) but was generally agreed to be one of the happiest. Bishop Otter campus appeared little changed from two years ago: its building works seemingly completed, with new automatic doors on every side, complex entrance systems and orange security lights. Its greatest attractions are still the beautiful trees that have been spared and incorporated. Our president Glen was there, also Richard Maxwell from America, introducing his first *Journal*, and Bill Keith from Canada. On Saturday a cloudless sun – one of the few this summer – shone on the walk on the **Burpham** downs, again led by Kieran McCann, and on a visit to charming **Felpham** by the sea, led by Geoffrey Winch.

The four persuasive speakers were nicely contrasted.

Glen Cavaliero, who has been writing about the Powyses for half a century, speculated on the enduring fascination of this family, in everything from their distinctive appearance to their dedication to the utmost “livingness”: their enthusiasm, their selfhood, their joie de vivre. They were — all of them — life-enhancers.

We then focussed on different areas of the life and works of John Cowper.

Arjen Mulder (from the Netherlands) presented a witty and convincing interpretation of the four early novels, in terms of its main characters representing aspects of life that no longer suited their creator, who thus killed them off. From these failures came Wolf and his successors.

David Goodway enlarged on his introduction to the Emma Goldman–JCP letters (recently published by Cecil Woolf after 15 years in the pipeline), recreating the early-twentieth century American political scene in which Goldman and Powys had met, and recapitulating his talk five years ago on JCP and Anarchy.

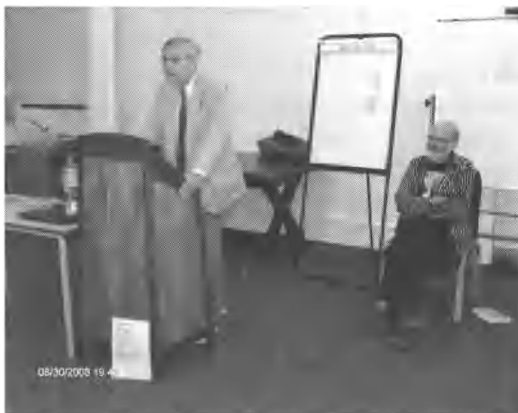
Bill Keith, who has become a veritable concordance to the Works, gave an interesting survey of textual references in JCP's fiction to the supernatural: through imagination (sensitive or creative) hallucination, teleporting, time-warp, the occult, the uncanny, and actual visions. Predictably, his conclusion was that for JCP all these held interest but the most powerful was the first, the infinite resources of the human spirit.

On Saturday evening **Chris Wilkinson's** lively ‘**entertainment**’, *The Bride Who Pays the Organist*, gave us a six-voice dramatisation of the marriage of his grandparents Frances and Louis, with Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, JCP and Llewelyn in attendance as interested parties.

The **discussion** after the AGM (chaired by Tim Hyman) this time proceeded on schedule. The subject, the usefulness of literary biographies, sprang off naturally with the pros and cons of *Descents of Memory* (Richard Maxwell, believing that people read biographies *first*, was happy to see it on sale in California with *Porius* alongside), and opened out thoughtfully. Literary biographies have grown ever more frequent and are generally much longer, and there have been some superb ones in recent years.

There are (to simplify) two main varieties, the more impersonal and fact-crammed (risking boredom), and those with a thesis (informative, revisionist or adulatory) in which the attitude of the biographer figures more or less strongly – sometimes changing in the course of the book. (A third kind is the Quest, usually for a previously little-known subject). Some prefer the first, giving facts and allowing the reader more scope for imagination; others enjoy the added character of the biographer, even if requiring pinches of salt. Skill of selection, tact and sympathy are biographers' essentials. Selection is not easy; neither is judgment of whom the biography is *for*.

KK



*Bill Keith and Richard
Maxwell.*

The Powys Society Annual General Meeting 31st August 2008 at The University of Chichester

MINUTES

Present John Hodgson (Chairman), Chris Thomas (Secretary), Michael French (Treasurer); Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter* editor); Anna Pawelko; Timothy Hyman; John Dunn, Stephen Powys Marks (Publications Manager), and some 35 members of the Society.

Apologies were received from Committee members David Gervais, Michael Kowalewski (new), and John Powys; also from Peter Lazare (outgoing Secretary), Peter Foss and Jeff Kwintner (retiring from Committee); Belinda Humfrey, Richard Graves (former Chairman) and Patricia Dawson.

Election of new Committee members and officers:

The election of candidates published on page 4 of the July 2007 *Newsletter* was approved. We therefore have a **new Secretary**, Chris Thomas, and two new voting members of the Committee (Stephen Powys Marks, formerly attending *ex officio* as

Publications Manager) and Michael Kowalewski (now Curator of the Powys Collection), replacing Peter Foss and Jeff Kwintner.

The Chairman said that he had received a letter of resignation from the Committee from David Gervais but proposed, in light of his illness, that the Committee should await his recovery and ask him to consider his decision at a later date.

Members agreed that the Chairman should write to the **outgoing Hon. Secretary, Peter Lazare**, and thank him for his work and support for the activities of the Society over the last four years.

Minutes of the 2007 AGM (as printed in *Newsletter* 62, page 11) were approved.

Treasurer's Report (as printed in *Newsletter* 64, July 2008, page 7) was approved.

The Hon. Treasurer reported that the Society accounts had been successfully audited by Stephen Allen; details are printed in *Newsletter* 64. He confirmed that accounts are in good order. Legacies have been received from donations of books, including a legacy of £500 from Stephanie Gifford, leaving extra income to the society of £460.00. Arrangements to add new signatories (Chairman and Secretary) to bank mandate for the Society accounts was approved by members.

Stephen Allen has audited the Society accounts for 18 years. Members agreed that acknowledgement of his work should be recognised by continued offer of free membership of the Society and that he should be reappointed as Auditor of the Society accounts.

There was a brief discussion about decline in numbers of members over the last few years but the Treasurer reported that the Society had reached a stable level at 256 paid-up subscriptions. Members agreed that the Society should ensure it meets its charitable status obligations and with some reserve resources use available funds to increase membership and awareness of the Powyses.

Secretary's Report The Chairman read from the outgoing Hon. Secretary's statement and reported that 20 new members had joined the Society since the 2007 AGM. There has been some decrease from natural causes.

Chairman's Report The Chairman's report for 2007-8 is printed in full in *Newsletter* 64, July 2008 (pages 2 and 3). The Chairman noted that Peter Foss should also have been named as organiser of the 2007 conference, and apologised for this oversight. This year's organisers, Louise de Bruin and Anna Pawelko, were duly thanked.

Date of next conference The proposed date of **21-23 August 2009** at the Hand Hotel at Llangollen was approved. This is the weekend *before* the 2009 August Bank Holiday.

Any Other Business

A **meeting** has been arranged in Hampstead for **Saturday 29th November 2008** (discussion subject: JCP's "My Philosophy" from *Obstinate Cymric* – copies available on request). **Saturday 9th May** has also been booked for another 'Powys Day' in **Dorchester** – programme to be decided.

Raymond Cox was presented with a signed copy of Bill Keith's book about Owen

Glendower in grateful recognition of his work filming conference events.

The Committee was invited to discuss most appropriate means of publishing **updated list of members**. This could be published annually in the November *Newsletter*. More members should be encouraged to include their **e-mail addresses**, to help make circulation of news about events easier. The Secretary invited members to sign on after the AGM or by emailing him.

Thanks were expressed by members and the Committee for work undertaken on behalf of the Society and recognition was given to: **Richard Maxwell** for his work as the new *Journal* editor to ensure continuity of the high standard of scholarly contributions; **Frank Kibblewhite** for responding expertly and quickly to enquiries sent to the Society web site, and helping to stimulate new membership; **Michael Kowalewski** for his new role as curator of the Society's collection, making himself available to answer queries and arrange visits and helping to publicise the catalogue and its contents; **Kate Kavanagh** for her work on regularly producing a *Newsletter* with constantly interesting content; **Stephen Powys Marks** for his work as Publications Manager, and especially for his great care ensuring publications are produced to consistently high standards. Kate Kavanagh expressed personal thanks to Stephen for their collaboration in producing the *Newsletter*.

Thanks were also expressed by members to the **Committee** for work during the year; and especially to the Conference Organisers **Louise de Bruin and Anna Pawelko** for their work in making arrangements for meetings and conferences and making sure they run smoothly.

The AGM closed at 11.45.



*The Conference Organisers,
Anna Pawelko and
Louise de Bruin.*

Conference Tales

Coming from Chichester

The landscape was steeped in a white mist that rolled in from the sea, covering the sun and submerging fields, trees and houses in a hazy womb-like atmosphere. Hundreds of gulls scoured the stubbled fields where huge bales stood on their ends like giant discs.

The train rushed across Southern England, carrying me back to Gatwick Airport after the 2008 Powys Conference. I took out the copy of *A Glastonbury Romance* I found in the Book Room, but left it on its side on the rocking table. The edition was from 1934, a copy John Cowper Powys himself might have handled, a great dark tome, longer and heavier than the Bible. My travel bag was weighed down with books, newsletters and journals – enough Powys-related reading for a year; my mind brimful with new impressions after two days of lectures, readings and encounters.

The carriage was packed with travellers with books, magazines and I-pods. It was easy to imagine them as sleep-walking through another Sunday evening. But every one of them was a universe of thoughts and sensations, fears and hopes. As the train glided through dormitory towns with rows of sleeping houses I felt like a character in a John Cowper Powys novel, full of memories and dreams, burning with ideas and obsessions.

When you read a text by JCP you see the universe through his eyes. I felt close to the great writer as I watched hedgerows merge in mist and a brown horse gallop across an endless field.

It was my first Powys conference and I wasn't sure what to expect. Would it be like a cult with the initiated suspicious of a newcomer or intolerant of anyone with less than total immersion in Powys world? Would they be divided by factions and cliques around the different brothers? As usual all such fears were unfounded; those attending the Conference were disconcertingly normal, friendly and welcoming!

My first surprise was in discovering that it wasn't just a celebration of three famous brothers, but an evocation of a remarkable family where all were creative. The Powys family were described as 'the goblin race' in a moving opening tribute from Glen Cavaliero. I needlessly feared the Powys Society might be too reverential in its approach, but there was plenty of rigour in the discussions, leavened with humour. The Society, in its events and publications, preserves and restores the rich literary heritage of the family, their partners and relations, and all they came into contact with, in a creative and life-enhancing way.

It was a weekend of many highlights – an analysis of JCP's early fiction and how he transformed himself from a mediocre writer into a great one; his political engagement with anarchism and friendship with Emma Goldman, and his treatment of the supernatural. Powys taught us to see natural and supernatural united in one expansive vision of the universe.

But the best part was the many interesting people I met and talked with. Then

there was the lovely city of Chichester with its bookshops and Roman ruins and the Cathedral with the Chagall window and the quiet Georgian streets. The Saturday excursion to William Blake's Cottage in Felpham and the J. C. Powys house in Burpham stand out. Then there was the Saturday night entertainment – a re-enactment of the Powys/Gregg/Wilkinson romance that evoked the complexity of relationships and love-making in the summer of 1912. It wasn't so much a love triangle as an expanding combination of interlocking relationships conducted before a battery of distorting mirrors.

My only complaint was that it was over all too soon. Suddenly it was Sunday afternoon with the canteen staff waiting to pounce on half-cleared plates as the gathering dispersed. But I hope the contacts and friendships will endure and will be renewed in future meetings and conferences.

These were my thoughts on this hazy Sunday evening with the light disappearing behind the glasshouses along the tracks. Somewhere out there among the hedgerows I could imagine the spirit of John Cowper Powys in his long overcoat, stopping to admire a flower, talking to his stick as he strode along the way.

After a while thoughts returned to the immediate – the high-tech world of garbled public announcements in the glass and plastic world of the international airport. But my world was enriched by the weekend in Chichester, my spirit strengthened for the return to normal life and the renewed struggle with the word.

Patrick Quigley



*Burpham: JCP's
former house from the
Duke's walk.*

Burpham: A Favourite Walk

JCP describes in *Autobiography* how, when he was living in Burpham, he developed a mania for all kinds of metaphysical systems. He describes his pleasure of reading Hegel's *Logoi* in Mr Colyer's 'War Field' amongst the healthy growing wheat and wild flowers. Love of nature and love of ideas all seemed to be bound up in JCP's mind with the same experience of sensual ecstasy, 'deep, and obscure and mystical'.

I thought of this when I joined Kieran McCann's well-informed tour of the Burpham landscape. We parked in the centre of the village opposite JCP's house hidden behind high flint stone walls and surrounded by an ancient Saxon earth bank. A good view of the house can be seen from the top of this mound where the Duke of Norfolk once stood and surveyed the No Trespassing sign erected by JCP which so offended the occupants of the George and Dragon.

It was warm and sunny as we walked down the Burpham lanes. There were blackberries in the tall hedgerows. We passed thatched cottages, and aromatic flower gardens and walked across fields smelling of wild thyme and marjoram and freshly cut grass, still wet and dewy after the summer rain.

We descended a stony path overgrown with vetch, and fumitory, till we reached the Gibbet Woods. Its cool and shady interior was dappled with little pools of sunlight. JCP thought the place so lonely he said he had never met a living soul there. On the other side of the wood we came to an open space. An immense panorama spread out all around us. We could see the location of the Norse shrine, Friday's Church, mentioned by JCP, and the clump of trees on the top of Iron Age hill fort of Cissbury Ring.

Afterwards we descended a steep field path to the little churchyard of St Nicholas in Burpham. 'This' said JCP 'was my favourite walk for ten years.'

Chris Thomas

Felpham: Blake, Myers, Sea and Tea A Powys Outing

Just as the sun shines on the righteous, so, in a summer notorious for its lack of sunshine, the sun shone on the members of The Powys Society on their Saturday afternoon excursion.

I joined Geoff Winch's guided walk to Felpham, and was most grateful to borrow Kate Kavanagh's spare sunhat!

*Group by Blake's
cottage in Felpham.*



We ambled through the quiet streets of this small seaside town (where was everyone?) and came to a side road close to the sea. The sea was concealed, tantalizingly, however, behind a high wall. Two curious structures stood, one on either side of the road.

We stood admiring the unexpected sight of two converted elderly railway carriages. One, inhabited by a holidaying or local family, was called *Mi shanty*. Geoff told us that Elizabeth Myers, that fascinating but unjustly-neglected novelist (come on, Persephone Books!), second wife of Littleton Powys, stayed here for a while in 1941. It was a happy and productive visit for her, despite air raid warnings and the sighting of 'little nazi planes' (one of which crashed nearby).

Much of the time, she worked on her Greek translations, particularly of *The Odyssey*. Geoff told us that she wrote in letters of getting drawn deeper and deeper into her Homeric dictionary, one alluring reference leading to another till she found herself spending all day in its pages.

I'd pricked up my ears at the mention of Myers' name. Way back in the late sixties, I read her remarkable first novel, *A Well Full Of Leaves*. It was given to me by Father Brocard Sewell, Carmelite monk, and editor of *The Aylesford Review*, where I published my first teenage poems; he was a great friend of my youth and in fact introduced me to my husband Peter Redgrove.

Geoff now led us to the seafront. Throngs of holiday makers were promenading, sunbathing and swimming. So this was why the streets were deserted. It wasn't long before Kate was in the sea, and a few of us paddled with great relish. The remainder of the group settled themselves, I'm happy to say, into a seaside café. This, as Glen our president remarked sagely, was straight out of central casting. And we were glad to join them for tea.

Fortified by sea-bathing, sea-paddling, and tea, we continued our guided walk, veering away from the sea and going through quiet and charming streets. We came to



*Penny Shuttle,
Tim Hyman,
Richard Maxwell.*

Blake's Cottage. He lived here from 1800 to 1803 (which means he was seeing angels over Felpham while William Wordsworth was writing his sonnet *Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802.*) I had always wanted to see Blake's cottage, so together with seeing Elizabeth Myers's converted railway carriage, two literary pilgrimage ambitions were fulfilled for me. Blake's cottage has been much extended and manicured since his day, yet I felt a living sense of the great poet and artist, and looked hard for one of those Angels of his, but they must have been off duty on this particular day.

Outside the cottage we enjoyed a short J. C. Powysian reading from Timothy Hyman, which rounded the afternoon off very fittingly.

Thank you, Geoff, for organizing such a wonderful afternoon, and for all the research you'd done, which added so greatly to the pleasure of our walk in and around Felpham on one of the few hot and sunny summer days of a rainy 2008; it was a most memorable afternoon indeed.

Penelope Shuttle

CONFERENCE DVD

This year's DVD of presentations from the 2008 Conference is available.

If you would like a copy (2 discs) the cost is £6. Please order from:

Raymond Cox, 4 Lulworth Close, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 2UJ
(cheques to R. E. Cox please, **not** the Powys Society)

"... OTHER DIMENSIONS ..."

DISC ONE

Gathering

The Cloisters Chamber, Old College Building

Talk: Glen Cavaliero: "*That Goblin Race – The Powys Family Mystique*" (55 mins.)

Talk: Arjen Mulder: "*Becoming John Cowper Powys*" (40 mins.)

Coffee under the trees

Total Time 1hr 37m

DISC TWO

Talk: David Goodway: "*John Cowper Powys, Emma Goldman and Anarchy*" (58 mins.)

A Powysian lunch

A Window for Other Dimensions?

Talk: Bill Keith: "*John Cowper Powys and Other Dimensions –*

The Evidence of His Fiction" (54 mins.)

Downland tracks and flowers near Burpham

Total Time 1hr 56m

Llewelyn's Birthday Meet

The 13th August was the 124th anniversary of Llewelyn's birth in Dorchester, and so despite the extremely poor weather forecast it was gratifying to find a dozen stalwarts already assembled in the *Sailor's Return* at East Chaldon at noon that day, watching the rain cascade steadily down the window panes, while the painted signboard outside strove to achieve a horizontal position similar to that of the *Sea Serpent's Head* on Portland Bill as picked out in the wavering headlights of the Jobber's Slug, so vividly described by JCP in the shipwreck chapter of *Weymouth Sands*. As always it was good to see a number of old friends once again, but also to meet one or two new ones too. The weather has been known to be poor for these meetings in the past, but even so we are invariably able to sit outside and enjoy a light lunch together even if not always in bright sunshine, so this was a unique occasion on which we all had to congregate in the lounge bar to drink the usual toasts – first to Llewelyn on his birthday, and then to absent friends – much to the interest of the many other patrons in what was inevitably a very crowded pub on a wet Dorset holiday afternoon!

The first of these meetings was arranged by John and Eve Batten in 1995 when they and a couple of friends met in Chaldon to walk to the stone to mark the occasion [see *Newsletter 34*], and although I was not present on that first meeting I have managed pretty well all of them since, on what has now become a regular annual pilgrimage. So it was a really great pleasure to find that despite the weather John Batten was able to join us again after having to miss the past two or three years himself. It was also good to have old friends like Richard Burleigh and Rosemary Dickens and her daughter join us for lunch, although sadly not this year for the walk itself. Somewhat miraculously, after a bowl of warming soup and a pint of excellent Dorset ale, for which the *Sailor's Return* is rightly renowned, the weather did manage at least a hint of improvement, and although it hadn't actually quite stopped raining, it gave every promise that it might!

Thus encouraged, a hardy eight of us braved the elements and trudged upwards along the steep and slippery track to Chydyok, collecting a small posy of flowers along the way, and marveling yet again at what a hard life it must have been for Alyse and Llewelyn and Gertrude and Katey to live in this lonely spot. We paused for reflection and to catch our breath outside the Chydyok cottage, which is looking really well cared for these days, thanks to all the efforts being put in to its upkeep by Janet Machen and her son and family. So far the walk had been fairly sheltered, with the deep fold in the downs shielding us from the full force of the weather, but by now the rain seemed to have stopped. So we pressed on once again, hardy as Victorian explorers, but we were severely buffeted by the full fury of the wind as we eventually emerged on to the Gypsy track, with Portland shimmering in the distance, and driving rain needles knifing into our faces! But I am proud to report that we all undauntedly pressed on, and eventually successfully made the stone.

This year all the cows that have been so curious about both us and the memorial

stone in recent years had been replaced by sheep, who ignored us completely! So Honor Timlin laid the small wreath of wild flowers on the stone, held secure by a large rock, and despite the wind I managed quickly to read a few words from one of Llewelyn's letters to JCP about where he hoped to be buried, before the paper disintegrated in the rain – words which were hurled beyond Lulworth and out over Tyneham towards St Aldhelm's Head the moment they were uttered – but which seemed singularly appropriate to the occasion. We then paused for the obligatory photograph, as gradually the skies (briefly) began to clear, and even a few fleeting rays of watery sunshine (even more briefly) appeared. So all was well, and the windswept party hurried back down the waterlogged track back to Chaldon, by which time our soaked clothing had largely been dried by the wind! In fact we were sufficiently dry by then to be able to accept Pam Gillingham's kind invitation to tea and cakes in her cottage without too much damage to the furniture, although this year sadly not in the garden. But we all squeezed cosily into the living room and a merry throng it was indeed! Well worth all the effort, and leaving us all with a great glow of satisfaction, not least as the record of these annual visits to the stone remains unblemished despite the regular vicissitudes of the Dorset weather. We have experienced poor weather on these events before, but nothing quite so severe as this year, and last year in fact was memorably sunny, so things can only get better again next year! This very informal meeting has now become a regular feature of the Powys calendar, so why not come along and join us? All that is needed is to turn up at the *Sailor's Return* in East Chaldon around noon on 13 August each year. You will be made very welcome, I can assure you.

Chris Gostick

*Llewelyn's
Birthday Walk:
the Group at
Chydyok.*



The Outing by T. F. Powys

When Mrs Follet looked into the bowl of wash up water, in which floated a few crumbs and a few tea leaves, she saw tall Church spires, all a-glitter in the sun, splendid cars in the shining streets, promenaders in fine clothes, donkeys with children on their backs, bathers splashing in the waves, and a great steamer sailing out into the bay.

Without this wonderful vision, every day was the same to Mrs Follet. Her widow's pension, after her rent was paid, left her with five shillings weekly.

"I was always a hearty woman," Mrs Follet told Mrs Moggs at the little shop. "'Tis a habit I be always used to, to eat, but it's only at the outing that I have all I do want."

As soon as Mrs Follet had said this she turned away in a hurry because Mrs Pegler had come into the shop.

If anyone wished to do an injury to Mrs Follet that person was Mrs Pegler. Mrs Pegler disliked the poor widow most heartily, her chief reason was that once a year Mrs Follet could really be happy.

To see anyone happy, even though it were a little child, troubled Mrs Pegler, who thought that if a woman was not making the beds, or going to church, she ought to be serving the meals.

Mrs Follet did none of these things, she had only one bed to make, and sometimes she would forget all about a table cloth.

That Mrs Follet should be really happy once a year, annoyed Mrs Pegler. For Mrs Pegler would herself be of the party, that was nothing less than the yearly outing of the Dodder choir, that though but a dreary day to the Reverend James Dibben and his wife, was to Mrs Follet a true and wonderful delight. But Mrs Pegler never saw her there without wishing her at home, for she always considered Mrs Follet's joyful behaviour upon that day as a serious danger. For so lively would Mrs Follet be, and her laugh so infectious, that old Tom Billing the driver of the wagon, who always had the day too, would laugh as loud as any, and forget where he was.

Mrs Pegler claimed knowledge and kinship with the highest Society, she had once for a month or two been housekeeper to Lord Bullman. And so she could well afford to toss up her head when she passed Mrs Follet, and toss it she did.

Mrs Follet had sadly offended her; to sing "Home Sweet Home" at a choir outing, when of course only Liturgical harmony should be used, and then to throw kisses to a workman in a field, what could be worse?

"Such a vulgar pauper," Mrs Pegler called her.

To a plain simple person, a mere looker on at the play, but one who fears that the sorrows of the world, are more than the joys, the belief that this is so, may be shaken a little by the sight of Mrs Follet with the children on the joyful day. For even the most sober must laugh with her then, for there she is, happy, and will ride the roundabouts, dance with any vendor of wares who will take her hand, paddle in the sea, as though

her name were Doris, and then walk in the town to gaze in a serene ecstasy into the shop windows.

At the tea too, all, except Mrs Pegler, must laugh at what Mrs Follet said, and on the return journey how she kept all as lively as when they first set out, and how she would sing "mid pleasures and palaces" when they reached Dodder. ...

Every year on the Ninth of July when Mr Dibben had finished his toast and marmalade, and was sipping his coffee, he used to say sadly to his wife, "We cannot really, my dear, afford to entertain everyone at the outing. It really costs too much."

"We had better leave out Mrs Follet," Mrs Dibben used to reply.

But Mr Dibben did not like to do that, and so Mrs Follet was still allowed to go.

But now with Mrs Pegler come to Dodder it was likely that Mrs Follet would really be left out. For it was now only Mrs Pegler visiting at the Rectory, no one but Mrs Pegler. When the invitations to the outing were to be sent out, Mrs Pegler was at the Rectory to give her advice. And when Mr Dibben said, "We cannot really, my dear," (to his wife) "afford to entertain everyone at the outing," Mrs Pegler replied, "I should like to know what Mrs Follet has to do with the choir or with the Church either for that matter."

"She has always gone with the children," Mr Dibben answered.

"But she never goes to Church," said Mrs Pegler.

Mr Dibben scratched his left ear, and looked a little mournful. He used to enjoy Mrs Follet's happy laugh.

"But think of the expense dear," observed Mrs Dibben. "Mrs Follet eats as much as all the rest put together."

"And she disgraces us all," cried Mrs Pegler. "I shall never forget the last time she went into the sea, singing a hymn. All the respectable people near moved away. Only one simple creature, in deep black, stayed to look at her, and when she saw Mrs Follet she laughed till she cried. I believe Mrs Follet could deprave a whole town with her naughty manners."

"She shall not go," said Mr Dibben decidedly.

No woman should live in continual monotony, she must pine and be sorrowful if nothing Joyful, no happy sight or sound comes to her. All the year Mrs Follet looked forward to the one day of her pleasure, and out of that day she would cull enough happiness to last her all the year.

Where the ivy clings about a cottage chimney, and where the sparrows' nests in the old thatch may have sheltered a thousand broods, the woman who dwells within the low doorway, always knows of something that holds her luck. This may be a black cat, or a little painted image, but the luck of Mrs Follet came to her with a great bird. For in bygone days when Jim Follet, who for ten years now had been at rest, came a-courting, a large bird settled in the same field that Jenny Follet saw now—the bird was a heron. Mrs Follet, whose mother had lived in the same cottage before her, had

ever since she was a child called that field hers. It was a wide level down exactly in front of her cottage, that ended in the heath, so that a little child might easily get lost if she went far into it.

Mrs Follet could never forget that heron, nor what it brought to her. For the heron had not been there many moments, before young Jim Follet came along in his careless way, for he was newly come to the village and intended to marry the first girl who was kind to him. Jim threw a stone at the heron, and then seeing Jenny at her cottage door he spoke to her, and was so well received that within a month the wedding bells rang, for Jim was no dallier in matrimony.

Mrs Follet had the heart of a child, there was no need to tell her to become a child again in order to be saved, she was never anything else, and she never tired of the hope of seeing that heron again. She never knew what the bird was, but that did not matter, because she knew it guided Jim to her. Even now she used to look at the field, as if she expected another great bird to come. Not that she would ever have married again. She had no wish for another man. All that was in the cottage reminded her of her husband, and she often fancied that she could see him still sitting in the great chair by the fire. On any winter's night, and especially about Christmas time, she was sure he was there, and when the grandfather clock struck ten she could hear him yawn and begin to unlace his boots.

The field in front of Mrs Follet's cottage never changed its look, unless the snow covered it, or else it would smile a little when yellow hawkweed covered it in the Summer. The field was a grazing ground for sheep and so was never mown. It was parched now to a brown colour, but that was only as though one saw the earth more and the grass less. Jenny Follet had been as happy as a lark with her husband, and the days fled away like grasshoppers, she grew old in a moment, and now her husband was gone and her children too, and she only survived.

Every human being has some hidden resting place in which to lay down a tired spirit. The remembrance of a moss covered stone, a haunt of the curlew, or the roots of a great forest oak, may ease the agony of a dying one, and when trouble came to Mrs Follet she always turned to look at the field.

Mrs Follet now finished wiping the cups and the plates. She always regretted being so hungry, so that all her bread went so quickly, and left only a few crumbs to throw to the chickens.

She was all excitement now, for that very morning at eleven o'clock she expected the invitation to come that was to give her her day's happiness. She had already spoken to everyone of what she meant to do, and had put a penny a week by for the frolic. For twenty years she had gone, for though as Mrs Pegler said she had nothing to do with the church, yet, what child could have enjoyed itself without Mrs Follet?

Mrs Follet went up the little staircase to her bedroom, then she looked out of the window at the field. The sky was cloudless, a perfect blue. It was just such a day fifty years before that she saw the slow flight of the heron, and how oddly its long legs touched the field.

With such a sigh, as only the hoped for happiness could give, Jenny Follet, dressed herself in her holiday frock, smiled in the glass, came downstairs and was all expectation for the coming of the invitation.

She peeped out of the window, between the two flowers that she had so carefully watered that morning, for she did not wish them to be thirsty while she was enjoying herself. Of course she was sure that the letter from the Vicarage must come, it had always come, at least for so many many years. But the moments went by, she almost thought that she saw the hands of the clock move. Then she thought the messenger from the Vicarage knocked—she hurriedly opened the door—No one was there. Soon she saw someone coming, her heart leaped—It was Mrs Pegler, perhaps she was bringing the message. But Mrs Pegler went by looking scornfully at the window as if she said, “What is it you wait for Mrs Follet, what have you to do with the Church?”

And Mrs Pegler tossed her head and went on.

“Don’t I enjoy myself?” said Mrs Follet, “and that’s more than she can ever do,” and each moment she expected the letter to come.

Alas, Mrs Follet soon knew what Mrs Pegler’s hate had done for her, because the invitation never came.

It was not long before the wagon that carried the Children to the Weyminster sands went by. Old Tom Billing was giving all his attention to the horse because Jenny Follet was not there. But the old man looked in no very gracious humour that morning, as if he missed something. The children too, that were always all gaiety when Mrs Follet was there, singing and calling to one another as was their wont, were now all of them silent, for Mrs Pegler sat amongst them. Little Topsy Brine, the youngest of them, found her situation next to Mrs Pegler so uncomfortable that she began to cry.

It was not only Topsy who cried, for Mrs Follet when she saw her yearly happiness was not to be, wept too.

When the rumble of the wagon was quite gone out of hearing, she recovered herself a little and wiped her eyes, and doing as she always used to do when she was in any trouble, she looked out at the field.

Old age had weakened her eyes, but when she saw in the distance what she thought to be a bird, her hopes revived a little. Suppose another heron were to come what would that mean to her?

She looked between her window flowers and watched the bird in the sky. It grew larger making a queer humming noise until it swooped down and came to rest in the field.

“The Bird again,” cried Mrs Follet excitedly.

But seeing a young man step out of what she had taken to be a bird, Mrs Follet became aware that what she had seen alight upon the field, was only one of the newly invented flying machines.

She was almost crying again, when a knock came at the door. And a stranger asked

politely for a little water. Seeing how red and swollen her eyes were, her visitor inquired what the matter was, and why she had been crying.

"I am not invited to the outing," she said, holding up her handkerchief to her eyes again.

No one, unless it was Mrs Pegler, could see Mrs Follet without loving her, the young man begged her to tell him her trouble.

"Is that all?" he observed when she had done. "I am flying to Weyminster myself, you must come with me, I fly like an angel."

"To heaven," cried Mrs Follet.

"If you wish it," said her friend.

In a few moments they were started, this fine bird rising from the field as gaily as the heron when Jim cast his stone. As soon as they were up, Jenny Follet began to behave in the same frolicsome manner as she used to do in the wagon. She made the same jokes that the children had always laughed at, and looking downwards she was sure that she saw Mrs Pegler, and described that lady and her superior ways so that her companion could hardly stay on his seat for laughter. Mrs Follet was now in her full glory as she always used to be in the wagon on the way to the town. She was worth looking at as a happy woman should always be, and worth listening to, so that no one near to her could help enjoying themselves. It was owing to the extreme joy of his passenger, that the young driver disregarded for a moment how near the town clock was to him when they reached Weyminster, and so touching the clock with the right wing of his machine, he was forced to descend suddenly upon the sands. A little too suddenly for Mrs Follet, for when the driver lifted her out, as tenderly as if she were his own mother, he knew that she was dead. But whether she died from joy, or from the crashing of the machine, who could say?

The children under Mrs Pegler's direction were hurried home that day, earlier than usual, so that the same wagon might return again to fetch the remains of Mrs Follet. The same driver went too, and owing perhaps to a glass or two on the way, now that he had Jenny in the wagon, even though she was dead, Tom's spirits that were so gloomy in the morning began to revive, and as he entered the village he sang in the finest manner, just as Mrs Follet used herself to do when her joyful day was ended—"Home Sweet Home".

NOTES

When Louise de Bruin very kindly sent me the booklet 'Memories of Mappowder' by Eileen White, the photograph of 'Trip to Weymouth' on p.15 immediately reminded me of the trip to 'Weyminster' in the unpublished story 'The Outing'. So here is the story, taken from the 9-pp. AmsS in the Hanley Collection housed in the HRC. It is signed and addressed *T. F. Powys/East Chaldon/Dorchester* at the top of the first page, signifying a final version. One of TFP's rare semicolons is to be found in paragraph 10.

There is also an 11-pp. pencilled RD of the story in the Bissell Collection, Dorchester, with, according to the catalogue, 'a transcription by Bissell'. This transcription is based on my own original deciphering. One of Mr Bissell's letters concerning this can be seen on The Powys Society website, under 'Collections'.

In the Chatto & Windus Archives, Reading University Library, a Tms of 'The Outing' is referred to in a list of short stories returned to TFP by C & W. So far I have not come across it.

Mrs Moggs keeps the shop in TFP's novel *Mockery Gap*, and *Mrs Pegler* appears in the short story "A Bottle of Lavender" (*Captain Patch*), where she is mercilessly cruel to newly widowed Mrs Poose. "Mrs Pegler never knocked. Wherever she went she went to find fault."

Theodora Scutt tells me that 'a charabanc was often called a waggon and was usually pulled by a horse or horses; but I should think Eileen's was motorised, for although horses could certainly pull a charabanc to Weymouth, they couldn't do so at any speed and it's about twenty miles—they would take all day just to come and go. Daddy's charabanc, which was probably also going to Weymouth, would be drawn by horses. . . One can get an awful lot of people into an ordinary waggon!' As 'The Outing' was written in East Chaldon, the waggon probably left from there, the 'Dodder' of the story. Theodora tells me 'Chaldon is seven miles from Weymouth, which is why Daddy's "waggon" would have been pulled by horses. Get there easily in an hour.' Ian Robinson remembers 'a Sunday School outing on a horse-drawn farm cart just after the war when fuel was scarce. Perhaps there were as many as 50 children on it.'

paddle in the sea, as though her name were Doris: Theodora states, 'Doris was Violet Powys's half-sister. I think she did like playing about in the sea, on the few occasions when the poor child saw it—she had a most unhappy life and died when she was barely fifty.'

mid pleasures and palaces begins the song 'Home, Sweet Home', words by John Howard Payne, music by Henry Rowley Bishop.

"Mid Pleasures and palaces" though I may roam,

Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home;"

become a child again in order to be saved: Matthew xviii. 3.

There is a tall clock tower near the beach in Weymouth (no doubt the Weyminster of the story). Louise de Bruin describes it as 'a big Jubilee Clock on Weymouth Esplanade, put there for Queen Victoria's Jubilee. It is a wonderful piece of Victorian craftsmanship and a great landmark.'

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Louise de Bruin for sending me *Memories of Mappowder* by Eileen White and borrowing the photograph of the 'Trip to Weymouth' for reproduction in this *Newsletter*, to Eileen White for lending the photograph, and to Theodora Scutt for answering my queries. I am also grateful to Ian Robinson and Barrie Mencher for proofreading. For the use of T. F. Powys's manuscript 'The Outing' I am indebted to The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin.

Elaine Mencher

*An Outing to Weymouth,
from Eileen White's
Memories of
Mappowder
(see next page);
the charabanc is stand-
ing in front of the Post
Office, waiting to leave.*



Memories of Mappowder

by Eileen White: some extracts

Louise de Bruin writes:

Eileen White was born in Mappowder in 1928 and has lived there ever since, although in many different houses and cottages. Her father, Kenneth Trevett, was a wheelwright and carpenter, and her mother Bessie was everywhere in the village where help was needed: it was she and Lottie Garrett, another village woman, who laid out Theodore Powys after his death.

Eileen is a wonderful story-teller with an amazing memory on which she now almost entirely has to rely since she has lost most of her eyesight. When I went to ask her permission for quoting the extracts below and using one of the photographs, she told me how the booklet due to its size could only hold so many of her memories, but that she regretted to have to omit how Violet Powys had made all the difference to her wedding-day. Violet, being one of the very few women in the village whose house had electricity, had offered to iron her wedding-dress and lent her all her family silver to make the big table in the Village Hall, laid for the wedding guests, look really festive. She also gave Eileen as a wedding-present, a little silver brooch in the form of a spider with a pretty gem for a body to fasten her wedding-veil to her hair, telling her this little spider would bring her luck in her married life. And it did!

[...] This was the day that Theodore Powys came to our village and, of course, he was the famous writer, a member of the Powys family. We didn't know at the time much about him. He came to live in the little lodge by the church and with him was his wife Violet and daughter Theodora, but we always knew her as Susan. (She always asked us to call her Susan.) We became quite friendly with the Powyses, especially my sister, Jean, who was a friend of Susan and they had a pony each and rented a field together. My dad put up a shed in the field for the two ponies to use in the winter and they used to go riding together, and probably foxhunting. They had a fine time together and they were the greatest of friends.

Mr Powys and Violet were wonderful people and they often went walking together. Mr Powys was a biggish man with soft, grey, curly hair and he usually wore a trilby hat. He would take his walking stick and walk along the Plush road with me and listen to the skylarks at the edge of the woods. He was a very interesting man; he liked to talk all about the countryside. I would tell him lots of little stories about Mappowder; he was always interested in everything. It was lovely old times.

I remember one time I took up some flowers to grandfather's grave and Mr Powys was in the graveyard, talking to a man in Arabian dress; I was surprised, I'd never seen anything like that. I got to the grave and put granddad's flowers on it. I was trying to keep down quietly and creep away and he said, 'Come on over here, Eileen, and come and meet this gentleman, shake his hand. You will always remember shaking the hand of Lawrence of Arabia.' I don't know if it was Lawrence of Arabia, I expect he was pulling my leg about that. I know he knew lots of people. The only thing I knew about Lawrence was he used to go past us on his motorbike. Can't never

say I've seen him because we had to keep tight into the hedge not to be knocked over. We'd just feel the wind of his motorbike go by and that was about it.*

Violet Powys was a lovely woman. If she saw us she'd have me in, make me welcome. We would have to have afternoon tea and sit and chat and Mr Powys would join in. Yes, it was lovely old times. Mr Powys liked to go to church at 8 o'clock in the evening. We knew where he would be always sat in the church and he often sat on the seat in the churchyard; sometimes he would sit on one of the outside seats and spend time there in the sun. Of course, when he came to the village, others seem[ed] to come with him. There were quite a few empty houses up for sale then. In one of the houses came Mr Powys's sister, Mrs Lucy Penny, she bought a cottage and she was a very gentle lady, a lovely lady, and a couple of months later came three Miss Cox's, these were Mrs Powys's aunties – Misses Gertrude, Maud and Minnie – three spinster ladies. They were lovely.

* *TFP was certainly pulling Eileen's leg, since Lawrence of Arabia had died in 1934, six years before the Powyses moved to Mappowder.*

Memories of Mappowder is very well printed as a booklet of 48 pages on good paper with quite a few photographs, among them one of TFP. The booklet is for sale (£4) in Mappowder church; all proceeds going to the church.



The Post Office, Mappowder, from an old postcard.

The Powys Collection

*Two pieces of authentic Powysiana that have been placed
on the shelves are these brief letters*

The one by Theodore is to Roy Worvill, who seems to have normally corresponded with brother John. We presume that JCP must have asked Worvill to buy some of his brother's works. There are some letters by JCP to Worvill in the Collection.

The letter by John to an unidentified 'Dr Nicholas' somehow ended up in Mt Alison University in the USA and has been donated to us by the University. Peter Foss's Bibliography of Llewelyn mentions an article he wrote for The Vegetarian in 1915, but this one seems to be about rather than by Llewelyn. As Llewelyn had died three years earlier the number referred to may have featured an obituary, which would be worth tracking down.

Michael Kowalewski

East Chaldon

Dorchester

November 17th 1939

Dear Mr Worvill,

Many thanks for your letter. I shall be delighted to sign the Photo. You are a most noble buyer of books.

I only hope that you allow yourself proper food, you must spend a fortune on Books. As Miss Matty said about her green tea in 'Cranford'—'You must not hurt yourself in buying.' My head is about the same thank you. My wife and little Girl are quite merry. I trust that you will keep away from the guns and bullets.

Yours sincerely

Theodore Francis Powys

7 Cae Coed

Corwen

March 11th 1942

Dear Dr Nicholas

No I hadn't seen this article on my brother Llewelyn in this Vegetarian paper—& tho' I have seen the picture I am v.grateful to you for thinking of sending it along.

Yrs truly

J.C.Powys.

A **Finding Aid** for the contents of **Newsletters 1 to 64** has been compiled by **Stephen Powys Marks**. This is available by post printed, or online as a PDF file which you can print on 9 A4 sheets or simply keep on your computer for reference. If you would like a copy please e-mail Stephen at sm@gotadsl.co.uk for a free online copy or send £2 (payable to The Powys Society) for a paper copy from him at **23 Cleveland Walk, Bath BA2 6JW**.

John Cowper Powys and the World Wide Web

In his study of JCP's early experiments in literary fiction Paul Roberts said: 'For a long time ... I felt a need to know exactly when it was that John Cowper Powys first travelled to America, and spent long hours trying to find the information I needed. Eventually the answer appeared in the small print of *The New York Times* ...'¹

Ten years after Paul Roberts made this discovery I wondered whether other documents might exist that also contain details of JCP's first voyage to America. This seemed possible especially since the development of new web-based research tools, digitised databases, and new online searchable resources have made it very easy to retrieve more data and information in the public domain that previously has only been available in hard copy.

Some genealogical and family history web sites can be especially helpful with this kind of research. For instance www.ancestry.co.uk holds a vast reservoir of online historical records, including the UK census collection, voter lists, records of UK births, marriages and deaths from 1837, military records, directories, British phone books, memberships, trade and street directories, wills, topographical dictionaries, gazetteers, and newspapers, periodicals and other publications as well as immigration records and New York ships passenger lists from 1827 to 1950. Passenger lists have also been published on www.findmypast.com enabling you to search for individuals who travelled on vessels departing from the UK on long distance voyages to North America, Australia, Canada, Africa and elsewhere between 1890 and 1939.

Although you will need to pay a subscription fee to receive this information there are many local libraries, archive centres and family history centres which can provide free access to the data on these web sites.

It occurred to me that theoretically it ought to be possible therefore to use these databases to trace the entire transatlantic crossings of JCP over a thirty year period as well as look up the records of other Powyses who regularly travelled backwards and forwards from the UK to USA and Africa. To some extent this is true but there are



Mappowder street scene in an old postcard.

limitations to what you can do because some records are not complete and not all have yet been uploaded. However a quick search of available information produced a long list of Powysian journeys including the original ship's record of JCP's first sailing to America in 1904 with the names and professions of all the passengers.

The manifest of incoming passengers on the *Ivernia* informs us that John Powys, lecturer, entered the USA in January 1905 with \$150.00 and that his final destination was with 'friends' at 111, S.15th Street, Philadelphia, the University Extension Society. What is puzzling is that in the passenger list, compiled in the UK, his profession is given as a mechanic! In the same list Arnold Shaw's profession is also given as a mechanic so perhaps this was some sort of clerical shorthand used by the Cunard Line or perhaps just an error. Passenger lists of later journeys correctly identify JCP either as 'writer' or more normally 'lecturer' although his middle name is sometimes misspelt and appears as Cooper or Couper.

These bare unadorned facts may seem on the face of it trivial and unimportant but the 1905 documents assume a highly symbolic meaning in the context of JCP's own personal mythology: '... the notion came to me I was bound on some occult, mysterious errand, an errand of tremendous importance in the spiritual history of this planet ... as if I were a mouthpiece of Camelot, and Carbonek, and Stonehenge, and Paladour, to the people on the further side of the ocean ...' ²

It seemed necessary now to view images of the *Ivernia* and other ships JCP sailed on. www.greatships.net is a good place to start. Pictures of the *Ivernia* reveal a four-masted vessel with a single tall funnel, in fact one of the tallest ever constructed for any ship. The *Ivernia* was built to meet the growing demands of mass migration from continental Europe and it had its maiden voyage only four years earlier on 14th April 1900. What emotions might have suddenly seized JCP when he later heard of the fate of the *Ivernia*, now a troop carrier, 'lost in the war'. ³

Looking at images of the ship how easy it is to imagine JCP leaning over the edge of the second class lower deck as he contemplated: '... the foam flecked, marble streaked mass of water move—for so it appeared to me to do—in one vast flowing volume towards the land I was leaving ...'. ⁴

Other facts relating to JCP's journeying come to light from these lists. In September 1938 JCP and Phyllis planned to visit Llewelyn in Clavadel, travelling via Cherbourg, but arrangements were cancelled at the last minute when his brother, Willie, who was on a visit to Cae Coed, was rushed to hospital with a perforated ulcer. The *Queen Mary* which embarked from Southampton on 14th September 1938 *en route* to Cherbourg still however included in its complement of passengers both Mr John C. Powys and Miss Phyllis Playter who had each paid £2.00, tourist class, for the channel crossing.

Despite the obvious benefits of digitisation these cases demonstrate that electronic sources of information need to be used with some care and should be supported by other documentary evidence. ⁵

Another very useful resource for Powysians is www.nationalarchives.gov.uk. This

is the UK Government's official archive which includes original papers and documents of the Public Record Office, the Historical Manuscripts Commission, and the Office of Public Sector Information as well as digitised files and a host of archived websites which will help you locate documentary evidence, primary and secondary sources as well as locating collections of original Powys manuscripts, letters, and books.

Two powerful search engines on this site, *Archives to Archives* and the *National Register of Archives*, enable users to browse and locate the details of repositories and collections with original Powys material in England and Wales as well as overseas.

By selecting the drop-down menu on the home page for 'Search the Archives', choosing 'advanced search' and inserting JCP's name in the box for 'Personal Name', I quickly found thirty-three matches for catalogues, contact details and links to the websites of all the major (and some less well known) collections of Powysiana in the UK and in the USA.

There are links here to the Dorset County Museum, the National Library of Wales, Colgate University Library, Huntington Library, Syracuse University Libraries, the Churchill Archives Centre, Oxford University Archives, Columbia University Libraries, Leeds University Library special collections, the University of Michigan library, the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas, Austin, Cambridge University Library, the University of Calgary, Liverpool Record Office and Shropshire archives.

Perhaps the most useful feature of the search engines are some links that also take you directly to the clearly labelled contents of the Powys catalogues in each of the collections. This is a real help when trying to identify and find relevant materials.

Access to downloadable data, such as online documents, is available free when using the terminals situated in the reading rooms of the National Archives located at Kew.

Does anyone else have other tips about using web-based searchable resources containing material related to the Powyses?

Chris Thomas

NOTES

1 Paul Roberts, *John Cowper Powys, Margaret and Lily: The Evidence of the Syracuse Manuscripts* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1998). Paul Roberts identified that JCP sailed to America from Liverpool on 24th December 1904 and arrived in New York on 3rd January 1905. See also Paul Roberts, *The Ideal Ringmaster ... Geoffrey Arnold Shaw* (The Powys Society, 1996), and his Introduction to *Evasive America* (London: Cecil Woolf, 1994).

2 Powys, *Autobiography* (1934), 439.

3 *Ibid*, 440. The *Ivernia* was torpedoed and sunk off Cape Matapan in Greece on 1 January 1917.

4 *Ibid*, 439.

5 See letter from JCP to Llewelyn 8th September 1938, *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Llewelyn*, Volume 2 (London: Village Press, 1975), 256; letter from JCP to Frances Wilkinson, 10th September 1938, *Letters of John Cowper Powys and Frances Gregg*, Volume 2 (London: Cecil Woolf, 1996), 129; Morine Krissdóttir, *The Descents of Memory* (New York, London: Overlook Duckworth, 2007), 335.

News & Notes

The **meeting at Hampstead on 29th November** will discuss John Cowper's 'My Philosophy Up to Date' essay from *Obstinate Cymric* (1947). Anyone who would like a copy of the essay, please ask John Hodgson.

This essay was written during the time when Powys was writing *Porius* and explores many of the philosophical ideas that underpin this 'Romance of the Dark Ages'. It is one of the most powerful statements of Powys's own life philosophy as it developed in his later years. (JH)

"In my earlier days when reality was either devilish or divine, either attractive or repulsive, and before the appearance of the psychic nebulae that now keep tantalising me with hints and glimpses of elements that include and transcend both these simple categories, I used to visualise my "animula vagula" as a irreducible, unsplittable atom, in other words as a miniature but impregnable fortress, into which I could escape at will. Now, on the contrary, just as if I perceived some dangerous threat to this atomic me, I have myself exploded myself into so many fragments, that they are no longer fragments but have become aerial waves of mist through which the enemy's bullets or bombs or bolts or spears can pass without affecting me ..."

★ ★ ★ ★

Bill Keith's booklet on JCP's *Owen Glendower* is also available from John Hodgson.

★ ★ ★ ★

Suggestions are welcome for the planned Powys day in **Dorchester on 9th May 2009**.

★ ★ ★ ★

Literary societies may be the last defenders of written words, but the Electronic World is becoming *normal*. How many Powys Society members use *e-mail*? A show of hands at the AGM suggested half. (If you do, it would be helpful to send one to the Secretary).

★ ★ ★ ★

la lettre powysienne in its next (October) issue – bilingual of course – will centre on Alyse, and her descriptions of the three brothers (from her 1950 Diary), plus short extracts from Theodore and Llewelyn's works. It will also contain a glamorous photograph of the young Alyse, taken (probably) when she was training as a singer.

★ ★ ★ ★

The 'bagg theatre' company in London (The Young Vic Genesis Project) are exploring the possibility of staging a **dramatization of Unclay** in January next year – 'a development workshop – an intensive exploration of the book's dramatic potential, culminating in a work-in-progress showing to an invited audience'. E-mail mailbag@baggtheatre.co.uk

★ ★ ★ ★

A Popular Choice

'My Essential Reading List' by **Philip Pullman**, in Waterstone's Table of 40 favorite books (*The Times*, 30th August 2008) included *Wolf Solent*: 'Powys evoked the English

landscape with an almost sexual intensity. Hardy comes to mind, but a Hardy drunk and feverish with mystical exuberance.' (*Wolf Solent* has a wide appeal – see NL64 (p.24, 'Fame Again') for a similar choice by Simon Heffer in the *Telegraph*, also NL51 p.25). Among the other authors selected by Pullman were the Brothers Grimm, M. R. James, William James, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Flann O'Brien, Pessoa, Rilke, Ruskin, Wallace Stevens, Hergé (i.e. Tintin), and Arthur Ransome.

★ ★ ★ ★

Merry Meet magazine, a non-profit-making 'Independent Journal of Folklore and Paganism' edited by Jerry Bird of Dorchester (who came to the meeting last May) contains serious news about ancient sites, history, stories and reviews. No 31 includes a long article on Maumbury Rings, with Thomas Hardy's account of the dreadful end of Mary Channing (written in 1908), and a review of *Descents of Memory*.

Modestly priced at £1.75: subscribe to 51 Prospect Road, Dorchester DT1 2PF.

Letters

Neil Lee-Atkin reports from Derbyshire (27th August 08):

[...] Five members of the Dandelion Club [*Friends of Llewelyn Powys*] visited Shirley six weeks ago (Saturday July 5th), walked around the village, visited the church which has Rev. C. F. Powys's name on its 'List of Ministers', and walked to the vicarage, which is no longer owned by Viscount Tamworth, but was sold three years ago and is now in private hands. The first Dandelion Club Newsletter is still in the embryo stage, where it's been for almost a year; I simply haven't had the time as I've published two books in twelve months and spent most of it promoting sales at a variety of village halls, Probus Clubs, Women's Institutes etc. However, my last book is currently at the printers and due to be 'launched' at the end of September. By the New Year the promotional work will have slowed to a trickle and I'm only accepting engagements up to the end of July 2009 – and after that, I'm retired – which hopefully will allow me the opportunity to devote much more time to my Powys pursuits; that's the dream-plan anyway, the reality may be slightly different!

Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe (7th August 08) writes:

In the last 24 hours I have seen a reference to JCP in *Cambria*, a magazine evidently being publicised at the Eisteddfod (where I went last Saturday) by having back issues given away. In the Jan–Feb 2005 issue there is an article by Harri Webb (1920–94) entitled 'The Image of Owain Glyndŵr'.

In the age of Sir Walter Scott, Glyndŵr began to figure in imaginative literature.

Appropriately enough, in view of his foreign policy, his first fictional appearance is in French. *La Belle Sorcière de Glan Llyn*, published in Paris in 1821, seems to have been a ripe specimen of the historical novel of its day, featuring as contemporaries of Glyndŵr a gallery of good chaps who included Dafydd ap Gwilym and Twm Siôn Catti [sic]. This trend has continued into our own times, notably in the enormous novel about Glyndŵr by John Cowper Powys. (p.24)

Robin Wood (from Canada, 9th/27th August 08) writes:

[...] I was especially interested in the letters from JCP to William Playter – and the cover photo! – as just a few days before I’d discovered Phyllis’s half brothers using ancestry.com [...]

I also found, on the free Rootsweb site, family details for a Benjamin Franklin Playter, born Whitchurch, Ontario, Canada, 1841, who died January 1933. [*Phyllis’s father*]. More information on Franklin Playter and the Toronto Playters can be found on the web, as you’ve probably already discovered.

What I find especially interesting is that Franklin Playter’s second wife Mary (Minnie) Hawley, would have been about 24 when she married him, whereas he would have been around 50 (*Descents* indicates they married around 1891). Phyllis was 26 when she met Powys, who was 49, in March 1921.

I also found amongst other things (using ancestry.com), the record of Marian Powys’s naturalization in 1944 as an American citizen, under the name of Marian Powys Grey, as well as Phyllis Playter’s passport application in 1923. Also a draft registration card for JCP, with the Americans, in October, 1918. [...]

RW adds details from a 1910 census (showing Phyllis aged 15) and an 1880 Federal census showing her two half-brothers George (b.1872 – see JCP’s letters to him in NL64) and Clarence (b.1878); also samples of information on the eventful life of Franklin Playter (1841–1933) from a *History of Crawford County, Kansas* (1905) and *History of the State of Kansas* by William G. Cutler (*Banks and Bankers of Crawford County, Girard*). A newspaper article (by Randy Roberts, 2001, in *The Morning Sun*) on ‘Early-day Pittsburg’ (one of several Pittsburgs) states that this city came into existence because of Franklin Playter, a 24-year-old Girard banker, who constructed the railroad through the local coalfield, encouraging mining, immigration of workers, building and industry. There’s a book on the Franklin’s Toronto ancestors: *The Playter Family of Whitchurch* (1995) by Wesley B. Playter, and Wikipedia gives details of the Playter estates in Toronto. (KK)

Literary Territory

Peter Kane Dufault (American poet, b.1923) has lived for many years in Hillsdale, NY (Colombia County), along the road from 'Phudd Bottom', JCP's home from 1929 to 1934. Alan Devoe (a nature writer whose books include Phudd Hill) previously owned PKD's house and bought Phudd from JCP in 1934.

Dufault (though an admirer of Millay) views the earlier literary residents with some suspicion. His antipathy to JCP is clearly a clash of styles (Autobiography isn't always the best to start with – many don't see its humour, and are puzzled by its famous avoidance of women). I am sure, however, that John Cowper would have liked Dufault's poems, rooted in the landscape, branching into metaphysical speculation, many about birds and trees – "nature poetry for grown-ups" as it has been called.

Arthur Davidson Ficke (1883–1945, pronounced "Fickie") appears in John Cowpers's American diaries, as does the Steitz family. Edgar (Lee) Masters, once-famous author of Spoon River, rented a barn nearby one summer.

JCP was friendly to all, but the diaries suggest that invitations to JCP and Phyllis from the Big Houses, Ficke's and Edna Millay Boissevain's, were a bit of a challenge, as were the surprise appearances of these 'beautiful people' on the road past Phudd. They were the glamorous bohemians of the pre-WWI New York literary scene. Alyse Gregory describes staying with Llewelyn at Edna's 'Steepletop' in 1929, in uncomfortable circumstances. Gladys Brown Ficke used to pass by Phudd on horseback, Edna and Boissevain in their dashing car. Gladys was fascinated by JCP and painted his portrait – see the article by Melvon L. Ankeny on her roman a clef in The Powys Journal XIII, and 'Powys in Mexico' by Ben Jones in The Powys Review 21.

Ficke, like Llewelyn, was a former lover of Edna Millay. It was he who found the cottage at Phudd for JCP and advanced the money to buy it. His last years were in pain from throat cancer. His monumental stone is still there in the woods.

The letters quoted below were to P. J. and Kate Kavanagh in the 1970s, with Dufault's 'verselogue' prompted by discovery of a more congenial Powys. With thanks for permission. (Peter Kane Dufault's poems are published in England by Wörple.)

KK

RD 2 Hillsdale, NY Dec 25 '76

[on reading JCP's Autobiography, given him by PJK after they met]

Dear Pat,

Of one thing I am certain—that the winter-goldfinch we almost had in hand was not the spirit of John C Powys. If that spirit is currently wearing feathers it's either some shambling plum-colored cassowary with ankles bigger than its hocks, or a vulture of some kind. My God, I can't stand this guy! I think it's notable, for one

thing, that in some 400 pages he's uttered maybe two sentences worth quoting! And what is this exasperating coyness of his about his Ma? Did he spring ... from the brow of his old man? Not even a mention of the word "mother", though her progeny fills the book! And the same for his poor wife! I'm going to have to read Glendower & Glastonbury now just to see if so demented, misshapen (inwardly), perverse & craven a character can actually breathe life into anything rather than blast what life there was to start with.

I suppose when he wrote it his opinion of himself was so high he figured it could stand such a ballast of self-denigration; but when that's all you see of him, you see a monster not a man. However, I toil on, (1) because I have not come to the New York part yet, and (2) because it would be as immoral to turn down a free book as a free meal, and (3) it would be ungrateful.—And I certainly am grateful—on a couple of counts: First, for your kindness; second because the book has opened my eyes to the truly infinite and inconceivable variations there must be on the human theme! So help me, I never, in my innocence, dreamed there could be such a person, even allowing for a bit of "Cymric" hyperbole, and the gulf between Victoria and Richard Nixon ... So, I am repelled, but fascinated.

There's no sign of life in the old house yet—nary a footprint in the snow. ...

England, Thursday (? 1977)

... this one was about the Powys letters I read in Sevenoaks—Llewelyn's letters to Gamel Woolsey—many of which were written when he was visiting brother John in the little house we peeked into on your visit. And they were written in much the same state of mind I've been in for two years. Same place, same problem. I begin to wonder if there is something in those kames and hollows that funnels into them the light of crossed stars. ...

Graves and Men of Letters

Do you remember, by chance,
ARTHUR DAVIDSON FICKE's grave
in the brush there off Wolf Hill?—a stone
longways like the lid of a vault
and only the name on it—
as though of such weight in the world
it were epitaph enough? "De mortuis
nil nisi ..." Still, the man—
or name, I never knew him—
angers me when I think of Carl Steitz,

but a boy then, a farm boy,
climbing up FICKE's hill
with his sonnets and tales for the Great Man
to pass on,
and being told only to burn them.

He burned them
and wrote no word more. While FICKE,
shining up there
like a joke-Jove on a parade-float,

rained down his own eminently
combustible *belle lettres*, and hob-nobbed
with Powys, Millay and Masters.

That mighty stone, that slab
fit for a king is lost now
in a tangle of sumac and alders.
I don't "lean on it as I write" —
though I wish I could, being homesick
in far-off England—yet mind it,
finding that name again here
(and weathering better too)
in a book of old Powys letters,
Llewelyn's ...

Near forty years back,
he and his brother, John Cowper, and Edna
Millay and Edgar Masters—and yes,
ARTHUR DAVIDSON FICKE—
walked over the ground we know,
and walked it together, the same
hawk-hung and tumbling hills;
and are dead now, every last one of them,
under one stone or another
Llewelyn's—but how to fit
the faint fritillary noise of "letters"
to matter that in some dimension
lies harder and heavier than hewn stone
and more than I, or he, could bear? If FICKE
"lives" yet a while in the world
it won't be because of stone
but this harder stuff, this black-hole-
gravity of Llewelyn's grief
over a young girl—his absent
aphrodite and angel. There
Ficke's name got frozen by chance
like an ant in amber: "Arthur
... Ficke was present as well."

I begin to wish here in England

among men-of-letters, I'd myself been one,
seeing there's little we can hope for or suffer
not already caught between covers
somewhere

for our instruction. Would I,
if I'd ever read *all* of Llewelyn,
and seen where it led him, have taken
that licence in love he boosted
as "life-accepting"? The pretty
poplar he planted—snuffed his sun out
and pried his house clear off its sills,
and his life with it. He's the answer
to Blake's "angel": There is no light love.
If it's love, it'll break your bones,
or someone's. And blood; I'm afraid
is the best solvent for ink.
Even I—and surely Llewelyn—
knew of Troilus, Antony—and what help
were they?

No. It's stronger than stone, this thing
that, if we love ourselves,
can cut and haul stone to prove it; and
if we love another, forget
the stone tablets of the Law itself
and bury them under the heart's wild
sumac and alder.

Very well, Llewelyn, I accept life —
though it prove unliveable. Let it end me;
I will not end *it*—Too
much less a man of letters—
too much less a gentleman—
than lonely Carl Steitz, the farmer,
who wrote no more, thanks to FICKE;
but read every book there was
for twenty-odd years and one morning
put a hose to his Chevy's exhaust-pipe
and "died as quietly as he had lived".

PKD

JCP on Porius

(This preface, unfinished, perhaps a draft, is taken like the List of Characters (in NL63) from the transcript by R. L. Blackmore in The Powys Newsletter 4 (Colgate, 1974–5). Both were replaced in the published editions.)

“PREFACE”—or anything you like—to PORIUS

Whether we are addicted to reading history or not, I fancy we all, both learned and ignorant, have our favourite historic age and our most detested historic age. My own favourite of all is the epoch so often described as the Dark Ages.

I like everything about this age. I like its indeterminate frontiers. The Homeric Age we know. The Periclean Age we know. The Middle Ages we know and the Age of the Renaissance. Of all these, ignorant of details as we may be, we could roughly—roughly I say!—indicate a beginning and an end. But when did the Dark Ages begin, and when did they end? It is hard to give even a rough estimate and I myself have heard two of the most learned of modern historians disagree on the date of the Dark Ages to an extent of several hundred years! I have therefore, as a background to the sort of tale I wanted most to tell, elected, at a plunge or a dive, an epoch in the very shifting and evasive heart of this shifting and evasive epoch.

But what is there in this heart of the Dark Ages so curiously fascinating? First its



P. K. Dufault on Phudd Road.

remarkable resemblance to our own epoch. Secondly its rich beautiful mysterious fusion of so many cults, traditions, races, languages, religions, and above all its blend of all the horrible, delicious, beguiling, fascinating decadences of the dying classical world with all the startling, childlike, magical, shocking, crazy beginnings of nobody-then-quite-knew-what kind of a Christian world.

A novelist is a fool if when trying to write an historical romance he doesn't select as his background an epoch where he can imagine himself living and where he would be happy to live. Such is my precise case with the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Centuries whereas I would hate and loathe to live in the Middle Ages or in the Age of Pericles or in the Age of Queen Ann! Now I very quickly had the wit to discover what suited me particularly well in the heart of this shifty tumultuous chaos of an age; namely the fact that in one specially privileged portion of it there were surviving, and, as we say, "extant," no historical documents at all! In the middle of the fifth century there is a work in Latin of Saint Patrick and in the middle of the sixth century there is a work in Latin of Gildas. But the last two decades, let's say, of the fifth century and the first two decades of the sixth century, that is between Patrick and Gildas, there is for my private enjoyment as a story-teller nothing but a beautiful, a heavenly, blank!

And now please observe, wily reader, how long before your humble servant, like a crafty hunting-hound of a tale-hunter began sniffing at these felicitously darker-than dark years, heart of the Dark Ages, the greatest of all historical romancers, namely the unpredictable anonymous story-telling of humanity itself, had seized upon this space of forty years; this generation is a generation of which there remains no history. Need I remind you, reader, that it is just about now that there bodied itself forth, or adumbrated itself amid the hieroglyphic symbols upon those sea-swept, shell-strewn sands of time: nothing less than the whole legend of King Arthur and his Knights, nothing less than the whole legend of the three Merlins, Merlin Ambrosius, Merlin Emrys, and Merlin the Savage or Myrddin Wyllt, nothing less than that portentous and enigmatic legend of Taliessin, Chief of the Bards of the Island of Britain.

Now at this epoch—and for my story I have taken only one single week —there were two very voluminous men-of-letters on the continent, Sidonius Apollonius, Prince-Bishop of Auvergne in Gaul, and Cassiodorus of Brutium in Italy the Roman secretary of Theodoric the Ostrogoth; and though the Western Empire had fallen and the Roman Senate only lived on in a sort of half-life, while very slowly the Bishops of Rome began to take to themselves, by a sort of natural law as Pontifex Maximus, the old authority of the Caesars, the new centre of classical civilization was at Constantinople where Anastasius with his Monophysite leanings wore the purple.

Now even the most unhistoric-minded lover of old books and old stories knows perfectly well that round the figures of Arthur and Merlin and Taliessin, not to speak of such figures as Peredur, or Parsifal, and Galahad, or the High Prince Galahalt, and Vivian, or Nineue, the lady who betrayed Merlin, there rages and has raged for a thousand years the most frantic and furious controversies. Who exactly were these Beings, when precisely and where precisely, did these mysterious Personages flour-

ish? Well! In these matters the only thing for a romantic-minded and yet realistic-minded novelist to do is to steer his skiff boldly ahead, following his own instincts, while at the same time he keeps a wary eye upon the more dangerous-looking of the reefs and shoals through which he sails.

But why, it may be asked, in the midst of this darkest epoch of the Dark Ages have I confined this story within the limits of seven days; that is to say from October the eighteenth [to] October the twenty-fifth of the last year of the Fifth Century? I will tell you why. Because in my own experience of reading historical romances I have found that the thing which destroys the reality of it more than anything else are those terribly long epochs when the author steps forward in person and gives us large generalized accounts of the passing of the years. Now I personally felt, as I was passing through each of these successive days and nights, that I was really there—*moi qui vous parle*—whether the person whose body and mind I inhabited like an indwelling good or evil spirit was a man, woman, or child; and this sense of being really there would have been completely destroyed for me if I had permitted those long tedious cardboard years—about which we already imagine we know all there is to know! —to be trundled past me and my characters in tedious university-library-succession like old catalogues in a book-barrow.

And now for the story itself. It appears to be an historic fact that, several generations before this story begins, a Roman Emperor or a Roman General decided, in order to subdue the most rebellious of the native tribes of this district, who were, as is well known from many sources, the Gwyddyl-Ffychti or Gwyddyl-Ffctiaid, to transfer—and this method for the subjugation of troublesome rebels is not unknown among us today—a formidable tribe of pro-Roman collaborators from further north. The chieftain thus tempted to move with his tribe from a more northern region, by the lure of richer lands and better hunting and fishing, was the Brythonic chieftain, Cunedda, whose sons undoubtedly gave their latinized names in Welsh forms to this particular district; and who seems to have been successful in aiding the Roman Legions quartered at “Deva,” now Chester, and at “Uriconium” in what is now Shropshire, to cope with these outlaw “Gwyddyl-Ffychti.” But before our story begins these Legions had been withdrawn to the continent and the ruling Romanized Brythonic descendants of Cunedda had a hard struggle to retain their authority in what is now North Wales.

But at this point it is important to point out to my reader that the majority of the aboriginals of this part of North Wales were neither Gwyddyliaid (Irish Celts or Goidels) nor Ffychtiaid (or Picts). They were Iberians and they came original[ly], as the syntax of the Welsh language shows, through Spain from North Africa. The words of the Welsh tongue are Celtic; but its syntax is Berber and non-Aryan. These are the true Welsh aboriginals. These are the people designated in my story as the “Forest-People”. It is likely enough —indeed that is what I assume here—that when they arrived they found already established here the mysterious race called the Ffychtiaid or Picts whose own previous enemies had been in all probability the first aboriginals

of all, namely the Giants, who may very well, although nearly exterminated by these Ffychtiaid, have lingered on in the higher mountain ranges. Now it seems likely enough that when, at least a thousand years perhaps before the Celtic Brythons, the Gwyddyliaid or Irish Celts—"Gwyddyl" being still the Welsh for Irish—followed the Iberians as invaders, their common hostility to these same Iberians drove them into the arms of the Ffychtiaid or Picts, with whom they may very well have freely married, thus introducing into the chaotic confusion of this "Malebolge" of unhallowed and yet infinitely fascinating Darkness the familiar presence of those ubiquitous bandits on the borders of all pre-historic orders, to whom the old chroniclers invariably give the name of "Picts and Scots."

In the oldest Welsh tales Arthur is invariably called "Emperor," not "King," and the historic implication of this seems to be that he represented after the Legions left Britain some definite official link with the old classical world, if not with the Rome of the uneasy Senate and the ambitious Popes, at any rate with Constantinople; and as to Arthur's fabled Knights may we not associate them with Roman cavalry, and their early success with the Saxons' complete ignorance of what Mr. Gladstone in an un-Homeric mood called "the resources of civilization"?

But if between the heartless and mellow decadence of the classical world and the harsh and verjuiced birth of the Christian world there was in this island a fascinating overlapping of racial traditions, when we come to religion the delicious and humorous confusion, a life and death tragedy for many, reaches its climax. Here and there we can well imagine a lost descendant or disciple of the ancient Druids or "Derwyddion" still surviving in the forest-recesses. Here and there in more populated spots near the halting places of the Roman roads and where the Roman ferries and fords crossed the larger rivers there would most certainly have been, lingering on into the Christian system, the sworn votaries and heroic convenanters and desperately ascetic warriors of Mithras, that rival of Christ who came so near to snatching the New World from the Son of Mary. And even within the new faith itself there were deadly and terrific differences: Pelagius, for instance, that philosophic originator of the humanistic trend of ideas that later we associate with Erasmus and Rabelais and even with Rousseau, ideas as shocking to Luther and Calvin as they were to Saint Paul and Saint Augustine.

Thus when I looked about for a brief space of months, and finally for as small a drop of time as seven days, or as what our ancestors—those worshippers of Chthonian or Underground or perhaps more correctly of beyond-the-waters Divinities—preferred to call "wythnos" or eight nights, I naturally hit upon a week in the autumn of A.D. 499 when, judging from various allusions in his enigmatic and mysterious poetry, it is possible to imagine Taliessin, our greatest poet previous to Shakespeare, beginning his career as a boy. As to Merlin, Merlin of the three great shape-shiftings, Merlin Ambrosius, which, being interpreted, only means Merlin the Immortal, Merlin Emrys the Builder of Stonehenge, and Myrddin Wyllt or Merlin the Savage[:] this undying discovery, this imperishable creation of the genius of our

Welsh ancestors, I have as much right to introduce here, “like a god from the machine” as the author of Job had to introduce the Voice of Jehovah or Goethe’s Faust first to capture and later to exorcise that “queer son of chaos” Mephistopheles!

And now let me come closer to my actual story and its characters. Cunedda is an historic personage, and Mynydd-y-Gaer, or the “Hill of the Camp,” with its huge ruins of a pre-historic encircling wall, still overlooks the little town of Corwen. It is the indignantly-impassioned Gildas, from his monastery in Brittany, who half-a-generation later denounces by name Maelgwnor “Malcunus” [of] the old palace of Deganwy who is the direct historic descendant of Cunedda; of him, save to refer to him as a child with a tutor, I have nothing to say. My descendants of Cunedda, treated as a younger branch of this royal tribe of North Wales, are all pure invention. So is the Henog, or aged teller of tales, the happy notion of whose imaginary official position in South Wales I shamelessly stole, while lacking both the desire and the scholarship to follow him further, from that daring controversialist, Mr. Timothy Lewis of Aberystwyth. It was natural to make my dying hermit Brother John so old that he could as a youth have attended the death-bed of Pelagius whose own death likewise may well have been that of an extremely aged man.

The princely names of my entirely imaginary younger branch of the House of Cunedda are appropriately local; and it is easy to show their relationship to one another. Edeyrn the son [of] Cunedda married Creiddylad the Giantess and their son was Iddawc, called the Apostate because of his break with the Church, who married Indeg the eldest of the Four Sisters who in their “Llys” or Palace in the rocky forest at the back of the town of Corwen exercised an illegal, un-official, unlawful pre-historic authority, supported by the hidden Druid or “Derwydd,” over the Iberians or Forest-People of the district of Edeyrnion, as this particular district is called even unto this day. The three younger sisters of Indeg who by her marriage with Iddawc became the Lady of the Gaer outlived for years both Iddawc and Indeg and were always spoken of as “the Aunties” or Modrybedd, the plural of the Welsh word “Modryb” which means “aunt.” Iddawc and Indeg had two sons, Einion and Brochvael, and one daughter, Alarch the Fair. This daughter married Gwrnach, the fastest runner in all Edeyrnion but the son of a liberated Greek slave from the great Roman Camp at Uriconium, and not only had a son called Rhun who in his turn was the fastest runner in the province, but after the death of a second babe became—according to the Brythonic custom which forbade royal mothers to suckle their own children—foster-mother to little Porius, the only child of Einion the eldest son of the dead Iddawc. Porius’s mother was Euronwy, the daughter of another Porius who was no less than a Roman Patrician of the first rank, who after the departure of the Legion he commanded came with his faithful centurion to live with his daughter now the Lady of Gaer. Brochvael the younger brother of Prince Einion ab Iddawc has lost his Irish wife Kymeinvoll, who was nicknamed “Kymeinvoll Gwyddyles” or “Kymeinvoll the Irishwoman”, but has as their daughter the girl Morfydd who is the heroine of my tale as young Porius is the hero.

These two first cousins, both grand-children of Iddawc the Apostate and Indeg the elder sister of the three “Modrybedd,” are betrothed, and it becomes the natural wish, when trouble is in the wind between the Iberian Forest-People and the Romanized Brythons of the Gaer, of the parents of these young people to get them married, as a wise political move, as soon as possible. Although dutifully content to be betrothed to the young heir to the Principedom of Edeyrnion, Morfydd herself is in love with her other cousin, their childish playmate, Rhun, who when the story begins has lost both his parents and is living, as Porius’s brother-in-arms, at the Gaer. Morfydd has what five centuries later would be called a “lady’s bower” at the top of a little tower in the corner of “Ty Cerrig,” Brochvael’s House of Stone. Brochvael himself though younger than Porius’s father Einion, the ruling Prince, is already an elderly traveller and book-collector and has been a friend of the writer Sidonius, the Bishop of Auvergne in Gaul, has met the precocious young scholar Boethius in Rome and has corresponded with the learned Cassiodorus, the Ostrogothic King’s Roman Secretary, in retirement at Brutium. Brochvael’s classical tastes in literature were inherited by his son Morvran to so perilous an extent that the local priest, a man of fanatical piety, has already succeeded in having this Morvran murdered by a group of passionately zealous young devotees shocked by the lad’s Lucretian blasphemies.

Behind the mouldering trouble between the Gaer and the Forest-Palace or “Llys” of the “Modrybedd” or three maiden “aunties” supported by their hidden Druid or “Derwydd,” there are serious national struggles going on. There are now in Britain two invading armies of Saxons from Germany, one led by Colgrim and one by his brother Bardulf; and there are also two insurrectionary movements spreading rapidly all over this Island, one of these a spontaneous banding together of all the common people of Britain under the significant name “Cymry,” or comrades, as against both the proud Brythonic Princes and the Emperor Arthur with his Imperial Cavalry of princely young horsemen; and the other, a revolt against Arthur as Emperor, secretly headed by the son of his own sister, Medrawd ap Lew ap Kynvarch, as representing the general dissatisfaction of the aboriginal Iberians or “Forest-People” with both Rome herself and her Romanized Brythonic admirers.

My story begins with the news reaching the Gaer of the arrival at the aged Brother John’s hermitage of a large and formidable embassy from the Emperor Arthur, including a group of the most fashionable of all the young horsemen at Arthur’s court: including Peredur, and Owen the son of Uryen, and Cynan the son of Clydno, and the High Prince Galahault of Surluse. This embassy was led by Merlin himself, the great Shape-Shifter, in his usual travelling disguise as a “Herdsman from the South”, and with him he brings his sister Gwendydd and also the fatal Pictish or Ffychtiad sorceress, properly called Nineue, but in the late mediaeval romances, followed by Tennyson, called Vivian. When my story begins Porius its hero is already thirty. His cousin and foster-brother Rhun ap Gwrnach, who is a few years older, has inherited from his father the son of a Greek slave not only feet as fleet as those of Achilles, but a simple, passionate, puritanical young soldier’s cult for the god

Mithras, who seems to have had not a few worshippers from the Middle East among the Legionaries at Uriconium, before the Legion left for the continent; and he has made for himself in a suitable Cave among the rocks near the sacred river of Edeyrnion, the thrice-holy Dyfrdwy, or “Divine Water,” a small but entirely proper and traditional shrine to the god Mithras. Thither accompanied by his devoted hound, who is as loyal to him as he is to Mithras, Rhun has acquired the habit of retreating, there to indulge his secret puritanical worship.

Of “the three Aunties” or “Modrybedd” whose ancient palace in the forest was called “Ogof-y-gawr” or “the Giant’s Cave,” it was the eldest, Ysyllt, who was in closest league with the hidden Druid or “Derwydd” against the Emperor and against the Brythonic principedom of the Gaer. The second sister, Erddud, was troubled by an incestuous passion which she had always found difficult to control for her younger nephew, that is to say for Brochvael the philosophic traveller and classical scholar, while the youngest of these Iberian Princesses, all of whom had preserved by the magical aid of their hidden Druids and in defiance of the more modern father-to-son tradition of both Brythons and Romans, something at least of the immemorial Matriarchy of their remote Desert-home in Marakesh of the Berbers [—] Even the youngest of the “Modrybedd,” whose name Tonwen meant the white wave, was over seventy. She had been enjoying for half-a-century a secret love-affair or platonic friendship—and even these old lovers themselves would have been puzzled to say which of these two things it was—with none other than a refugee-son of the famous Gorthyvyr the Blessed, himself the son of the fatal Vortigern but not the son of any Saxon princess. This son of the Blessed Gorthyvyr under an assumed name had been living for an incredible number of years—for he was much older than even the youngest Princess—in a queer hiding-place, half-way down a precipice between the “Llys” or Palace of the “Modrybedd” and the sacred river Dee, which perhaps from the very days when such monsters existed was called Ogof-y-Avanc, or the Avanc’s cave.

A Christian reader or shall I say a Tennyson reader—as indeed I am myself—might at this point hesitatingly and modestly enquire; “But, my good sir, what about the Holy Grail? And what about Sir Galahad ‘whose strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure?’” Well, blest reader, I will answer both these questions, beginning with the latter. Well! as to Sir Galahad, I only had to begin my studies of the old Welsh volumes dedicated to these matters and to little else, to discover that this whole business of the “purity” of Sir Galahad was and is a made-up job, and not made-up by any good bard or trustworthy chronicler either!

But the “Holy Grail” is a very different matter. Here I entirely agree with the incredibly old and very likely classical tradition associating the condition of chastity with the guardianship of a Divine Mystery. And my agreement has been forced upon me by one bitter aesthetic disillusionment after another. Again and again have I read clever brilliant lively literary male exponents of these profound secrets of life upon the earth in the history of our sex-cults and sex-ceremonies. What we need to explain

these things, is a Vestal Virgin. For when a man takes a woman and his seed enters her and mixes with her seed the maternal element in her at once begins to spoil the purity of her detached and super-sexual angelic Vision. Thus we need a Virgin to explain these Mysteries or at least a devoted scholar-spinster—Aristophanes seems to suggest as much as this—to deal with the mythical and perhaps actual association of sex in humanity with the mystery of seed and sap and corn and grapes and bread and wine. When it comes to sex in mythology we men seem only able to haul up fathom-deep buckets of pseudo-scientific psychoanalytical deep-sea ooze, or to start off with poetical tags such as: “she is older than the Rocks on which she sits”—or “Diana queen of heaven with crescent horns” or “Di, quibus imperium est animarum, umbraeque silentes” [“]et chaos, et Phlegethon, loca nocte, tacentia late[”]— But our Egerias in their numinous retreats, wherever these may be, neither deal in fashionable psychoanalytics nor in literary similitudes. Nor have they any such necessity; for by the laws of the great creative nature they all share in their being a touch, a taste of the Pomegranites of the ancient Persephoneia and are thus initiated without the necessity of calling upon either Prophets or Poets into the Ritual of the “Feast of the Sowing.” It is therefore in pursuance rather of our reserved Miss Weston than of either the disillusioned Malory or the courtly Tennyson that I felt compelled to describe “the Feast of the Autumn Sowing” in the way I have done here.

As far as I have been able to gather from my favourite authorities where all is so controversial, there were about twenty to thirty years between Arthur’s victory at the Battle of Badon and his death or, as some would say, his vanishing at the Battle of Camlan; so that much could happen to both Poriüs and Morfydd between the end of my tale and the end of Arthur and Medrawd.

One final word. I couldn’t [not*] have enjoyed writing this book and to my mind the obvious enjoyment of the author in his invention, interpretations, discoveries, and reproductions plays the most important part of all. This doesn’t at all mean that the story should necessarily have a happy ending. Sometimes a tragic ending with sweeping destruction and catastrophic overthrow is really the best end for all. Nor does it mean that there mustn’t be horrors and appalling grotesqueries. These remain dramatic and exciting and profoundly revealing. They are

(Thus the MS ends in mid-sentence in the middle of page 28 of the hand-written “Preface.”

* An emendation seems necessary. In view of the excitement about Poriüs expressed in his letter to Miss Muller, Powys probably intended to write “I couldn’t have more enjoyed writing this book.”—RLB)

Bread not Cake
JCP to Elizabeth Myers

Elizabeth Myers (1912–47) and John Cowper only met in letters. She married his brother Littleton (1874–1955) in October 1943. She first read JCP (In Defence of Sensuality) in 1931 and first wrote to him in 1941. The following letter is his first answer to her, the other two are random choices from the 162 from JCP to Elizabeth in The Powys Collection at the Dorset County Museum. A selection of her letters to JCP is in The Letters of Elizabeth Myers, by Littleton Powys (Chapman and Hall, 1951). Morine Krissdóttir's Descents of Memory (pp.357–70) quotes from others, dealing with JCP's incautious suggestions for Elizabeth's help with publishing, and problems arising from her review of Llewelyn's letters and from Alyse Gregory's of a Myers novel. NL 43 (July 2001) contains part of a letter from JCP written in December 1942, urging her to go to New Mexico in a effort to cure her tuberculosis; and reprints the story 'A Case of Life', the 'Pa and Ma' story that JCP liked. 'Elizabeth Myers: The Background', by Anthony Glynn, is in NL 29 (November 1996). The Powys Journal IX has another story, 'The Threshold', and the talk on Myers given by Anthony Glynn in 1998. See also page 10.



*Elizabeth Myers,
by Gertrude Powys,
1944 (detail).*

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire
North Wales March 14 1941

Dear Elizabeth Myers

Your wondrous little letter did indeed thrill me with the most happy feeling a writer can have except when the gods use him as their reed for some very special message! Yes you'll be interested to know that my reaction to those two stories (so absolutely different)—as they were—were as absolutely different. I was moved almost to tears well! as near as I ever am except by the old classics; suddenly turned on—upon some modern situation or place or event — by the Pa and Ma one -- whereas the other had no such effect!

For some reason the other left me cold ... but it wd be hard to explain exactly why ... But the Pa and Ma one is *Splendid* ... Perfect! to my feelings! And especially was it so naturally and so convincingly good (I didn't find the wedding dress tale convincing somehow) when that tiresome Sam was the one to say just the right thing! And when I tell you I was so affected by the Pa and Ma tale—oh especially the way Ma wd have taken it as the way life was; I must add that, as an artistic genre, I detest short stories [--] I wish I could forbid their publication! they are to me as Lamb says of backgammon boards, bound to look like books—they are biblia-a-biblia tales that are no tales [--] to me a short story [*sideways*] is a contradiction in terms [--] to be a good & exciting story it must have a proper length ... Short stories are like monkeys dressed as giants. I can't abide them tho' of course now & again there comes one—like this Pa & Ma of yours.

Yours

very sincerely

I.C.Powys

P.S. I presume you are not either the wife or the daughter of that wonderful writer about India in the days of the Great Mogul? But perhaps your [*sic*] a grand-daughter of the great Cambridge Occultist?

(*L.H.Myers, 1881–1944, author of The Near and the Far—no relation—also corresponded with Elizabeth. F.W.H. Myers, 1843–1901, father of L.H., was a founder of the Society for Psychical Research.*)

7 Cae Coed
Corwen
Merionethshire
N.Wales Nov 18 1943

My dear Elizabeth

How dear of you to send us this carbon of your Review [*of Llewelyn's Letters edited by Louis Wilkinson*]. I am taking for granted we can keep it?? you'd have said "Return" wouldn't you—if you meant Return? 'Tis wonderfully well done—God! I don't

[know?] how you manage save by a sort of second nature to be so good at this sort of thing! You beat me hollow: but then so did Llewelyn himself (always) & so does old Littleton: for in his nature sketches & obituaries—on Nature & on the Death of his old school-mates—he has a firm and a sure hand. Tis only when he’s defending Miss B (not Miss Beale, for she is of those righteous who need no defence!) that he doesn’t quite satisfy my exacting demands, but after all nil nisi bonum mortuouus! is it? L will know? you & I are better at Greek nor Latin eh?

It’ll be interesting to see how far living with a born writer like his present wife affects his own writing—whether it discourages him or encourages him or paralyses him or starts him off on some completely new tack ??? Certainly Llewelyn & Alyse encouraged each other & kept each other “improving” but on the other hand—some—there are—Dorothy Wordsworth don’t you think? yes! I [—] at it—and Mr Lewis—that noble old Philosophic Biographer of Goethe who so gallantly looked after dear Georgie Eliot alias Auntie Marianne Evans! was as a writer a bit browned off by his devotion to his companion.

You’ll have to (or old Littleton’ll have to) write me a minute, faithful and exact account of your first meeting with Louis Wilkinson! What of course Llewelyn couldn’t very well say in his scoldings of “The Archangel” as Theodore always called him about his tone to me was what I consider the chief factor of it all; though when I talk about it with Louis & these letters have brought it all up again he won’t allow that to be the main element in it as I hold—(I could prove it was for it has all ended after her death & we are now affectionate friends)—is the simple fact that I was over-fond of his first wife. Tis a case (as most always) of cherchez la femme! As to his calling my Father a Sadist which and naturally enough doesn’t endear him to old Littleton any more than the brick he dropt about Marian endear him to her! In human life all is personal & all that isn’t sex touchiness is (1) religious touchiness or (2) race-touchiness and old Louis’s mother Miss Emra [?] was a Latin i.e. a Portuguese family. Between old Littleton & Louis Wilkinson the very Stars in the Zodiac become personal [?] & the horns of the Ram in the one clash with the horns of the Bull in (as you might say) in the other! (for I don’t myself know their different Houses or dominant influences).

From my point-of view ((for all life is an anarchy of personal taste & I’m mightily glad it is for I am temperam[ental]ly awed by & opposed to circles! I can’t make them even or round; even with cigarette smoke! [*inserted* If I were mathematical I wd. like to □ the ○ !] I like W. Whitman’s Square Deific better & I like the Pythagorean sacred no 4 better than the Trinitarian & Hegelian 3 ! Tho’ I am superstitiously scared of even numbers and for luck prefer odd but I grudge it to them that I do & take it out of them when I can!))—from my point of view Louis is himself so completely normal in sex without a flicker of homo-sexuality or sadism or masochism or any other perversion the most normal man conceivable of men by men or thro’ men with nothing absolutely nothing of the woman in him (whereas I’ve got a woman’s soul; or rather a sturdy little girl’s soul a little Dorrit’s soul!) No wonder I get on Louis’s

nerves as women get on men's nerves or as little—but I get into waters too deep for me ... Selah!

But of course I know it is so ridiculous to call my Father a sadist that it doesn't annoy me because I'm not annoyed by huge Bricks so much as by innuendoes—Good God! Louis knows no more about Sadism than my Father did & that is Nothing! I am the most predestined sadist in our family tho' Llewelyn had a faint faint tincture of it but I inherit it from my grandfather Johnson & he from the Donnes & they for so it says in the life of John Donne (did you know that your Littleton was descended from a real live Canonized Saint?) are descended from Saint Sir Thomas More so it may be that when the author of Utopia moved his beard out of the way saying it has not committed treason he was expiating certain flickering sadistic temptations wh. crossed thro' his mind as he watched his master's little games with his 8 wives! *[[inserted* No one who isn't a sadist themselves can have one least idea what it is. They confuse it with Brutality which is totally different and which is much worse. That chap Deacon was not a sadist at all -- He was just Brutal—]]

[sideways] Well I think Ragwort is going to win & beat Pink Champion as the Last Flower & the roses have already won in P's garden!

Well my dear ones

must stop

Yours truly, ever ever afft.

& fathful

John

7 Cae Coed

Corwen

Merionethshire

N.Wales Tuesday Dec 7 1943

My dear Elizabeth

What a very nice letter! in every way nice is this; & full of such exciting interest & important news—personal philosophical & religious & literary!

I am filled with hope about his taking some of these verses of poor old Huw from your heartening words which do restore indeed my confidence that these verses are not too sad or pessimistic especially as he knows miners & mining conditions & had been down (more than I have—or ever shall!) an actual real Pit. Aye - but I did so enjoy & ponder on every word of descriptions of you & Littleton spending your days & nights spending the two twilights together so satisfied beyond the use or wont of so many pairs of lovers alack! alas!

I am so glad at all you say about that friend Mr Howard Spring having read & criticised the Swift book and that you have not fiercely resisted, as most of us authors do, every one of his criticisms!

As to my emphasis upon and obstinate indulgence in my zany tricks & contortions I am glad you give me a kind of imprimatur & nihil obstat as long as I don't "go up in

the air” at your referring to other sides of my nature—Yes yes I am not inclined or if I am I will try & restrain the inclination to quarrel with you for not letting me be all zany! It’s a mania, a prejudice, an impulse (I daresay a perversion even) but it’s terribly mixed up with everything else. To Exaggerate is very nearly like breathing with me I expect!

I have read & so has Phyllis this most interesting reader’s opinion or what ever technically we call your enclosure recommending for publication this book about LaotZe God! I never shall be able to dare to try to use that proper pronunciation! I am so very pleased you recommended it so strongly & I am sure after these cogent arguments they will publish it.

Our Jewish friend has given me some Razor Blades so don’t put them any more at the head of my long list wh. (you understood didn’t you?) was only a list (necessary in these difficult days of unsatisfied wants) for your Magnaminity—Heavens it sounds like a title (as if I’d said “your Grace”) to select from—or rather to add another & wider mesh as it were to Elizabeth’s Book Fishing-Net!

As to you & Littleton’s dear idea of an anthology from Johnny the Sagittarian’s wild flings (hit or miss) at the ganzen güten schönen & the chaos demoniac ugly of this strung-along anarchical multiverse—Let us I implore ye both think over such a thing very very very carefully before we before you Elizabeth, following my rescuing diver, dive into this new idea.

For I must hurriedly and at once reveal to you that I am profoundly prejudiced against and hostile to all anthologies of prose. God! I can’t abide them. I hate the very look of things! Prose surely? surely? is a very different thing from poetry. I adore all poetry anthologies especially Palgrave’s Golden Treasury & the Oxford Book—but prose is a thing—well! to me it is! that you have to go slow over & take it in long goes—and besides any good prose work is the whole thing from beginning to end—isn’t it? Surely it is? An anthology of prose resolves itself into a set of purple patches or at the best a lot of savings logoi aphorisms epigrams—Now I fully believe your book of the sayings or aphorisms of A.Waugh is well worth doing, & this is a different thing—I am sure—more like the conversations of Goethe if you see what I mean—I mean more in that category—than an anthology eh? But your old John the Scatterer or John the Shooter at Random can only be (anyway that’s how he likes to be!) taken in the large, so to say! & in bulk—like bread not cake! and I feel this about all anthologies of prose it’s like eating nothing but cake!

O I do feel so strongly about this—the dull parts (not to speak of the aberrations into—and into—and into—!!) the dull parts (I say) are—like “plain surface” in architecture absolutely essential to the tolerableness of the work—so that I feel these purple patches in a prose-anthology of course aphorisms & logoi is different, but John is not an aphorismatical or epigrammatical writer (far from it!) He is a long-winded writer & this “long wind” of his is part of the best part (perhaps more than that) of his work.

But my dear Elizabeth I would be thrilled (one day when your more original works

need be rested from for a holiday into critical appreciation tho' in that too a person like you (who loves W. Pater too) can be very much themselves!) for you to write an absolutely frank searching witty poetical daring appreciation & criticism of Elder Brother Johnny's works. Do do do this while we are all alive & kicking. One two three four five Catching fishes all alive! Why did you let them go? Because they bit my finger so!

Both P & I were hugely delighted twas the wittiest thing you've ever said or has been said by anyone in criticism in a letter to me on serious topics—such serious topics as make old Littleton [*drawing of short-haired ?E.M. with raised-arm salute, "agnosco!"*, *wild-haired figure pointing accusingly*] hold up his hands! I mean when yes I mean when you said that Dostoevsky was too much for Christianity; and Christianity was too much for John Cowper! which is exactly the profound truth. Well I must stop tho' I'd love not to—But I'll [*sideways*] have the thrill of writing to old Littleton tomorrow I hope anyway Thursday for your two dear letters yours posted on the 3rd & his on the 4th came together on the Sixth!

yrs

ever

John

Literary Magic

Another view of JCP's 'The Ridge'

'The Ridge' is open to all manner of interpretations, capable of tickling the fancies of each and every inhabitant of Powysland. On the surface it's a story filled with puzzles and messages, a sequential narrative, a Quest, the goal of which – death, the return of a golden age? – hangs inconclusively at the end: 'But what is this?'

I'm in the middle of the new edition of *Porius*, and as well as grappling manfully with its plots and messages, I find myself being inspired, enthused, not by the linear sequence – Porius did (or thought) this, and Myrddin appeared – but by John's literary magic, what he actually writes, in phrases, sentences: how he cajoles, seduces, 'rapes' us with words. The story is the peel of the fruit, the shell of the nut – inside, the flesh, the kernel, the Box to be opened by the Pandora-Reader.

This I imagine is the essence of his Magic: "Look, Reader, here's my latest story, my serious poem about Death, but, hey presto, look again, and now you have mosses and old heather stalks, funguses, opaque pebbles, winds, tints in the sky, as previously I have given you ambiguous-coloured stubble, bowls of bluebells, and seaweed, stones and walking sticks, enemas, the dace and roach in the Wissey – I, John, your author, regarding everything that happens with the sort of misty, hazy interest *from below*, such as the life of stones would feel for vegetable life, vegetable life would feel

for animal life, and animal life for human life -- and these are the things, the matters which, if you'll let them (and I'll help, if I may) can bring you intimations of joy, contentment: even, if you're up to it, ecstasy."

So on the outside here is the gaunt figure of the eighty-year-old John bursting from Bedlam below, climbing through the woods and up over the moorland towards the Ridge, conversing with himself and with the little wind, in fearful and 'confused contrarieties', encountering Gods, his Love, and other Powysian Beings en route. Inside, a phantasmagoria of creatures and plants, faintly erotic, and colours, sounds, winds and clouds, each one proclaiming the nowness of life, each having a worth, a value not on human rational scale.

'For the corpse of a man and a fly have the same preposterous issue,/ Parasites eating men, parasites eating flies;/ And small as *these* creatures are, so sweet is their tissue/ To parasites smaller still they're the Milk of Paradise.' Please, pause here and consider: the *tissue* of parasites tasting like the *Milk of Paradise*! I assure you old John is not being cynical here, or wayward or daft. This is his truth. And there is much more - not only what the poem might mean, but what John actually writes. Read and reread these lines: 'I share, I share the *enchantment* with midges and maggots, the wonder,/ The more than wonder, the merge, the solution, the fusion, the fling,/ The losing myself in a colour that's like hearing bells during thunder,/ Or smelling frankincense, blood on an angel's wing.'

'And ferns so green that trampling can only heighten/ Their greenness into something beyond Spring.' *Beyond Spring*! 'I tread the little mosses beneath my feet.' In *Porius*, Sibylla listens to a lecture from Brochvael, on their way to the scene of her willing rape/sacrifice (which in the event didn't occur; and she already had a small daughter): 'She heard those words not so much with her mind as with her whole body. Yes, and with more than her body! She heard them with the obscure pressure of her thin sandals upon the dark soft moss.' (227) Later in the book, Porius lying with the last *cawres* (giantess) 'on a strip of grass and moss, mixed with delicate small ferns . . . discovered what it meant to take a ravisher's possession of yielded virgin soil.' (479)

John eschews the usual literary devices of metaphor and simile. He means what he writes, his words are the fruits of passion: 'I rape the virginal words ...'

Tony Atmore

A Matter of Love & Death

Apart from publishers, bibliophiles and book dealers, perhaps only a fanatic - or a fool - would own four copies of the same book? I am neither a publisher, bibliophile or book dealer, and yet I have four copies of *Love & Death* by Llewelyn Powys, which I guess, makes me a fanatic! When I say 'four copies', I mean four English copies, all

separately published by different publishers on different dates, viz: in 1939, 1941, 1950... and 2007! Intrigued? Read on...

First published in London in May 1939 by John Lane The Bodley Head, *'Love & Death – An Imaginary Autobiography'* by Llewelyn Powys was regarded by many, including the author himself as his best book. Powys hailed the book as his 'Testament', and in a letter to Gamel Woolsey six months before its publication, claimed that he had 'more pleasure' in it than anything he had ever written: "It is by far the best book – the simplest, strongest and most poetical" [Foss: *A Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys*, p.84] Alyse Gregory, in a very honest and perceptive Introduction acknowledges what many critics see as a flaw in her husband's writing, when she notes '... "the luxuriance of the imagery sometimes overbalances the main thought of the sentence, just as fruit too heavy on the branch may bear it down and mar the shapeliness of the tree". But she adds, rather ambiguously, "And yet it would be difficult to find in English literature any book with which this one by Mr Powys' could be compared". Difficult indeed – unless of course, one has three other copies!

Commercially the book was not a success, the English critics generally panned it, and to make matters worse, shortly after publication World War Two broke out, and then the author died. An American edition was published two years later in 1941 by Simon & Schuster and the American critics were much kinder. Two or three rave reviews doubtless helped to improve the sales figures, and thus the book was perhaps more successful in America than its original English counterpart had been. John Lane The Bodley Head published a Uniform edition in 1950, which was virtually a reprint of the 1939 original, except for the revised and shortened Introduction by Alyse Gregory. This 1950 Uniform Edition was my first copy, the first of seventeen!

I well recall my first reading of the book, which I acquired from a Cardiff bookdealer at the rather extortionate price of £30 in December 1990, and emulating and shamelessly paraphrasing my literary hero promptly inscribed (in light pencil!) 'To Neil from Neil, Christmas 1990' on the front fly-leaf. I began my first reading on New Year's Eve 1990, and was so enthralled that I sat up all night, finishing the book after breakfast on New Year's Day 1991. It became my favourite read, and wishing that others might share the experience, I began to loan it out with the almost inevitable consequence that it became 'lost'. I purchased another copy in a Powys Society book sale – a 1941 first American edition by Simon & Schuster which had once belonged to Kenneth Hopkins, which I decided, I would never loan out – and so began searching for cheap second-hand copies for my friends on the internet. So far I have tracked down thirteen such copies and distributed them, keeping the English & American first editions and an almost mint 1950 reprint for myself. My search for the elusive signed first edition remains fruitless, but whilst recently trawling the internet I was astonished to find a site advertising a copy of *'Love & Death – An Imaginary Autobiography'* by Llewelyn Powys' published in paperback in May 2007!

There was no image of the book, priced at £11-54, and no indication of the name of the publisher, but it was available via Amazon from The Book Depository, based in

Gloucester. Intrigued, I contacted Pollinger's to ask who the publisher was but no one seemed to know – and so I did the obvious thing, and ordered a copy. It duly arrived by post a few days later – an exact copy of the Simon & Schuster first American edition of 1941, except it is a paperback with an awful garish yellow cover: superimposed on the front, a white box containing the words in black lettering, 'Love And Death: An Imaginary Autobiography' (ISBN 1432594583). The author's name, black letters on the yellow background are at bottom right.

The back cover bears the red-rose motif of Kessinger Publishing, and *Love & Death* is included in Kessinger's 'Rare Reprints' series, which lists over fifty different genres alphabetically on the back cover.

At last, *Love & Death* had been republished, and I no longer needed to hunt for copies; if acquaintances wished to act on my recommendation, they could now buy new copies for themselves. Alas! It was not to be, for as had been suspected, Kessinger had published without the prior permission of the copyright holder, and yesterday I learned that publication had been discontinued and Kessinger Publishing had withdrawn the book after being contacted by Pollinger's, who hold the copyright on Llewelyn's literary estate. So... it's back to the search for cheap copies of *Love & Death* on the internet, and that elusive signed copy for the 'new 2007' edition proved to be an illusion, it hasn't been republished after all -- it was all a mistake...

However, I suppose I have to be grateful to Kessinger Publishing, who only sold one copy of *Love & Death* before they were forced to withdraw it from their publication lists, for search though I might in the years ahead, I know I already have the rarest copy of *Love & Death* on the planet!

Neil Lee



Phudd Hill in Winter.