✸ TWO MEETINGS ✸ SEE PAGE 2 ✸

Editorial

Llangollen beckons again from its dim violet valley (see the verse on page 8, translated by our former Chairman's grandfather). Cloudless or Cimmerian this time? A selection of *Porius*-themed walks is planned, and talks ranging from Dostoievsky to Tea.

The *Newsletter* brings one into interesting paths: our cover picture having led to the sympathetic biography of Ottoline Morrell by Miranda Seymour, Lady O's Bloomsbury caricature is now replaced by a charming eccentric sympathetic & generous woman, whose extravagant self-created persona, part actress part cultural missionary, really did help and inspire two generations of creative artists. TFP would seem the world's least likely person to be persuaded to visit her bohemian country-house *salon* at Garsington, but OM clearly recognised his wisdom and integrity. She may well have yearned for a friend who would have sympathised with her unconventional religious feelings – and who could be relied on not to gossip maliciously behind her back. We hope to see their letters one day.

Llewelyn's famous charm is nowhere more evident than in flirtatious letters like those to Naomi Mitchison. JCP appears in different aspects: as philosophical anarchist through most of his life; in Corwen after the War ('deep as a Welsh pool', as Stevie Smith described him); and twenty years earlier as journalist in America, producing what must have been a quickly-written tribute after the death of Hardy, craftily tailored to a magazine of history. On the technical side we have interesting insights into the realm of Digitization, and names given to the exotic machines which we see carrying the young Phyllis with her little Playter niece – ending with letters from Phyllis to this niece in later life.

ON OTHER PAGES

✸ TWO MEETINGS ✸

DORCHESTER — Saturday 9th MAY 2009

10.30 onwards Meet for coffee at Dorchester County Museum.
11.30 Talk by the Chairman of the Hardy Society on 'Hardy and Weymouth'.
12.30 Lunch break.
2.30 Discussion on *Weymouth Sands*, focussing on Chapter 13, 'Punch and Judy'.
4.30 Walk round Dorchester, as taken by JCP.

Contact *Chris Thomas* or *John Hodgson* for details (*see inside cover*)

LITTLE GIDDING — Saturday 20th June 2009

A day of Poetry in this historic place.
Glen Cavaliero will read his own poems and talk about JCP's.
Meet at 11.30 for noon start followed by
LUNCH and second session of reading and discussion.

Contact *Sonia Lewis* for details
01353 688316 or e-mail soniapotlewis@phonecoop.coop

Estimated cost to include tea/coffee and Lunch £15
Meeting trains at Huntingdon can be arranged.
Further information on Little Gidding and B&B at www.ferrarhouse.co.uk.
There is good walking in this area, and the Chapel is particularly noteworthy.

AGM 2009

This gives notice that the **Annual General Meeting of the Society** will take place at **11.00 am on Sunday 23rd August 2009** at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen.

All members are invited to participate in the AGM whether or not they are attending the conference.

Committee Nominations

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

All paid-up and honorary members may submit nominations. Each nomination needs to be made by a Proposer and a Seconder in writing, accompanied by the Nominee's agreement in writing (agreement in the form of an email is acceptable).

Nominations must be sent to the Hon. Secretary at Flat D, 87 Ledbury Road, London W11 2AG no later than Thursday 18th June 2009.

Honorary Officers

The present Honorary Officers are as follows

Chairman	John Hodgson
Vice-Chairman	Timothy Hyman
Hon. Treasurer	Michael J. French
Hon. Secretary	Chris Thomas

The one year term of all these Officers expires at the AGM on Sunday 23 August 2009 and therefore **nominations are sought for all four officers**.

Members of the Committee

Michael Kowalewski (Curator) and Stephen Powys Marks (Publications Manager) have two years to run of their three-year term of office.

John Dunn has one year to run of a three-year term of office

Anna Pawelko, Kate Kavanagh and John Powys will complete the final year of their three-year term of office.

Tim Blanchard has accepted a nomination to the Committee.

Nominations are sought for one new member of the Committee.

CT

Head-piece to Uncle Dottery *by T. F. Powys, wood-engraving by Eric Gill.*

This, and the companion tail-piece printed on page 8, were engraved in 1926 for, but not used in, an edition of Disraeli. The blocks later came into the possession of Douglas Cleverdon, the publisher of Uncle Dottery *(1930) in an edition of 350 copies: 'thinking them apt decorations for the story, he assumes responsibility for their insertion.'*

The Powys Society Annual Conference 2009
The Hand Hotel, Llangollen
Friday 21st August to Sunday 23rd August

'RAVISHING LIMBO'

In *The Meaning of Culture*, John Cowper Powys writes, 'We all move to and fro in a fluctuating mist of pseudo-verbal, pseudo-sensory images. These images are nothing less than the protoplasmic world-stuff of every kind of literature. Men of genius give shape to these floating nebulae, to these hovering simulacra, until some palpable organic form swings free in space. What has once been snatched out of the 'casing air' now moves through that air on its own orbit. Limbo is thus ravished; new 'worlds' are created; and upon the ambiguous coasts between mind and matter the wave-curve of beauty is petrified in mid-descent.'

This ravishing of limbo resembles but goes beyond what T. S. Eliot called 'a raid on the inarticulate.' John Cowper Powys's novels give shape and expression to fugitive sub-thoughts on the threshold of consciousness, but also create vast panoramas of the natural and social worlds, even cosmologies. The talks at this year's Conference at Llangollen, which concentrates particularly on John Cowper Powys, indicate the scope of his novels' imaginative range.

Our speakers are particularly international. Harald Fawkner comes from Sweden, and will offer insights into what he tantalizingly calls his entirely new interpretation of John Cowper Powys. Janet Fouli, whose edition of the letters between John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson was published by Cecil Woolf last year, is travelling to Llangollen from Tunisia. Angelika Reichmann comes from Hungary, and will talk on John Cowper Powys and Dostoievsky. Remembering also Powys's remark that 'with the exception of Dorothy Richardson, I feel that I owe a greater debt to Constance Garnett than to any other woman writer of our time', we are seizing the opportunity to hear the voices of Dostoeivsky's 'cruelly voluble' Russians in John Cowper's stage adaptation Garnett's translation of the *The Idiot*.

Theodora Scutt, T. F. Powys's adoptive daughter, will talk about her life in conversation with the T. F. Powys scholar Ian Robinson.

We will be organizing walks to John Cowper Powys's home in Corwen and round sites associated with *Porius* and *Owen Glendower*. It has become our custom to enjoy the warm hospitality and ambience of The Hand Hotel on alternate years, and we bid all members of the Society and their guests a cordial welcome to this year's Llangollen Biennale.

Subscriptions

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

Draft Programme

Friday 21st August

16.00 Arrivals
17.30 Informal reception; welcome by Chairman
18.30 Dinner
20.00 **Tim Blanchard: 'I *must* have some tea'": Drink, drugs and defiance in the novels of John Cowper Powys**

Saturday 22nd August

08.00 Breakfast
09.30 **Harald Fawkner: *title to be announced***
followed by coffee
11.00 **Angelika Reichmann: "Dostoievsky and John Cowper Powys – Influence without Anxiety?"**
12.45 Lunch
Afternoon: guided walks round Mynydd-y-Gaer or Valle Crucis.
18.00 **Theodora Gay Scutt in conversation with Ian Robinson**
19.00 Dinner
20.00 **Reading of scenes from John Cowper Powys's stage adaptation of Dostoievsky's *The Idiot***

Sunday 23rd August

08.00 Breakfast
09.30 **Janet Fouli: 'The Eternal Feminine: John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson**
11.00 **AGM** followed by a Powys Quiz and the auction of a watercolour painting by **Will Powys**
13.00 Lunch
15.00 End of conference and departure in afternoon

About the Speakers

Tim Blanchard, a former journalist, is now a consultant for a specialist education communications company, working with universities, business schools and research bodies. He came upon *A Glastonbury Romance* in a bookshop in 2000, and, like many admirers of John Cowper Powys, found a writer whose ideas were a strange and intoxicating echo of his own most secret thoughts. Tim has an MA in Cultural History from the University of York.

Harald Fawkner has been Professor of English Literature in Stockholm University since the mid 1990s, and is the founder of the department's Phenomenological Research Unit. He has published books on John Fowles and Shakespeare, as well as *The Ecstatic World of John Cowper Powys* (1986). A frequent contributor to the

Society's conferences, *The Powys Review*, and *The Powys Journal*, he spoke most recently at Llangollen in 2007, where his talk mn 'The Indifference of Nature – Realness in *A Glastonbury Romance*' showed the increasingly theological direction of his thought. He is currently completing a new book on John Cowper Powys. Harald Fawkner is also a keen gardener and member of The Peony Society.

Janet Fouli, after studying French at Exeter University, went to Tunisia and spent most of her career lecturing in the English Department at the University of Tunis, where she also taught poetry to students of English and US literature. Needing to qualify herself in English, she studied for a Diplôme de Recherches Approfondies and wrote a thesis entitled 'Structure and Identity: the Creative Imagination in Dorothy Richardson's *Pilgrimage*'. This was published in Tunis in 1995. Janet has written two student handbooks and over a dozen articles on literary topics, mostly published in Tunisian reviews, but also in the *Powys Newsletter* and *The Powys Journal.* She retired in 2005, and is now engaged in translating a book for a Tunisian historian, from French into English. Her edition of both sides of the correspondence between John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson was published by Cecil Woolf in 2008.

Angelika Reichmann was born in 1975 in Debrecen, Hungary. She graduated from Debrecen University in 1998 and gained an MA in English and Russian Studies. As a PhD student in the Comparative Literary Studies Program of the same university, she has specialised in Dostoievsky's influence on English and Russian Modernist novelists, more specifically on Andrey Bely and John Cowper Powys. She has been working for Eszterházy College since 2000, mainly giving seminar courses on twentieth-century English literature, literary criticism and academic writing. In 2003 her PhD research was supported by an Eötvös Scholarship granted by the Hungarian Ministry of Education, and she gained her doctorate in 2006. She has been publishing articles on Bely, Powys, and Dostoievsky since 1997. Her work also includes studies of Salman Rushdie's novels and articles on the Female Gothic (Angela Carter and Doris Lessing)

Theodora Gay Scutt is the adopted daughter of T. F. and Violet Powys. She has described her childhood in *Cuckoo in the Powys Nest* (Brynmill Press, 2000). Theodora writes: 'I was a very sickly child, so I wasn't sent to school (wasn't I lucky?) Being at home all this time, when I wasn't ill I learned to hand-milk, and to harness, drive and ride the neighbouring farm horses. I became, and am, deeply interested in farming. Daddy told me all he could about it. Naturally I'm also interested in literature; not much modern literature, though. My livelihood has mainly been working with dairy cattle, which pleased Daddy greatly – he didn't like it so well when I worked with horses. I think he was a little nervous of them. But there's always been a horse beside me; and, after Daddy died, a dog or two. I don't know why he wouldn't let me have one. That is me. My adoptive mother said I was a "tomboy" and didn't like me at all, but then I didn't like her either!'

The Powys Society Collection, Dorset County Museum

The Society normally meets the DCM authorities at least once a year, and on 9 December 2008 John Hodgson (Chairman), Chris Thomas (Hon. Secretary), and Michael Kowalewski (Curator) visited the Museum to meet the Acting Director Stephen Garland. Matters relating to the Collection were discussed, including arrangements for access to documents in the Collection; the well-being of the paintings in the Powys Room; the acquisition of a scanner/printer and copier for the Collection; improved links to the Society on the DCM's web site; and distribution/ sale of the Society's leaflets and material relating to the Powys Collection.

A new Director of the Dorset County Museum has now been appointed. Jon Murden takes up his post at beginning of April, and committee members will be meeting him in May.

In January we received a legacy from the Musgrave family, including the gift of a walking stick of Llewelyn's and an archive of photos and correspondence from Clifford and Margaret Musgrave with Llewelyn (*see* 'Meeting Llewelyn, *below*).

MK, CT

Meeting Llewelyn

Members may recall the interview with **Clifford and Margaret Musgrave** in *Recollections of the Powys Brothers* (ed. Belinda Humfrey, Peter Owen, 1980). Steve Musgrave fills in some family background for his parents, who were among Llewelyn's most devoted friends and perceptive admirers.

Clifford as a chief County Librarian helped Llewelyn with books for his work – they originally met when *Apples Be Ripe* was banned by an outraged alderman, and Clifford went to apologise.The friendship and correspondence continued from 1930 until the end of Llewelyn's and Alyse's lives. Clifford (at some risk, on a motorbike) visited Llewelyn in Switzerland. Margaret Musgrave (an artist) met Susan Maskery, formerly nurse to the Powys family, and relayed some interesting Powys nursery lore. Clifford, encouraged by Llewelyn's example, later published scholarly books on the Georgian period and the Brighton Pavilion.

Letters and other material relating to the Musgraves' friendship with Llewelyn (including a walking stick) have been bequeathed to the Powys Society Collection at the DCM.

Olden Llangollen: two views

From A Tour to North Wales, *1784:*

> The vale of Llangollen opens most beautifully, and is closed by a spiral and steep mountain, bearing on its summit the remains of Crow castle … The Hand-Inn being full, we put up at the Red Lion … the new Irish road passing through this place, enlivens and improves the inns … A guide led me by many a weary and slippery step to the top of the mountain where the castle stands; and often did I repent a road so tiresome; and to a stranger so difficult. Few remains of the castle are existing, as the country people throw down the stones; & have lately by these frolics kill'd some sheep. The well, at the top, still holds water; and on Easter Sunday, the whole of the parish who are able to get there drink of this water, and then rowl [*sic*] each other down the hill … .

(*Tours of England and Wales of the Hon. John Byng,* ed. C. Bruyl (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1934))

From the Welsh:

> One morn from Llangollen's dim violet valley
> Light-hearted I clambered to Caer Dinas Bran.
> O'er Cyncoyd and Corwen I saw the sun sally
> Ruabon's far ridges flushed from the dawn.
> As I look'd Berwyn's waters to silver were smitten
> And Dee danc'd in diamonds to left and to right … .

(*tr. from* Ceirog *by A. P. Graves, quoted in* Lovely Britain, *ed. S. P. B. Mais and Tom Stephenson*)
(*thanks to Susan Rands for finding these*)

Tail-piece to Uncle Dottery *by T. F. Powys, wood-engraving by Eric Gill.* *(see page 3)*

Janet Frances Pollock
February 26th 1917 — October 10th 2008

The sun streamed in on the 60 or 70 people gathered at Salisbury Crematorium for Janet's last journey on October 21st; we were welcomed by Janet's daughter Catherine. Her son Matthew spoke engagingly and with dignity on her 'Love of life', and her five grandchildren made their varied tributes or offerings in her memory, one on 'My Naughty Granny'. Tom Barrett spoke as a long-time neighbour, 'Never a cross word'; and Godfrey Brangham, representing The Friends of Arthur Machen, told us about Janet and her father, and especially her early life. With Bach to start and Mozart to finish the occasion, we were entertained with Louis Armstrong, Sidney Bechet and Edith Piaf between the spoken tributes. Altogether a fine send-off, with guests invited to Marsh Farm House for refreshments.

Stephen Powys Marks, representing The Powys Society

The President writes:

Janet (Machen) Pollock, the daughter of the writer Arthur Machen, was first cousin of Sylvia Townsend Warner, whose diaries and letters reveal how greatly she valued her – as well she might. Those who met Janet at past Powys Society conferences or enjoyed her hospitality at Chydyok, the downland home of Llewelyn Powys and Alyse Gregory, will know what an alert and incisive, warmhearted and humorous person she was; but they may not be so aware of her sense of social responsibility. Born in 1917, she was to help her cousin Sylvia and Valentine Ackland in their work for refugees during the Spanish Civil War; and during the Second World War she worked with the Red Cross in Italy. Later on she was to train as a social worker, and following her retirement she became a voluntary worker for Cancer Care. But her constructive practicality did not prevent her from encouraging the formation of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society and the Friends of Arthur Machen, of both of which she was a most generous Patron; and a good friend of the Powys family and to The Powys Society as well.

I last saw her two years ago when we lunched together in a pub near her home in Blackmore Vale. At eighty-nine her energy and enthusiasm were undiminished, as were her caustic wit and capacity to stimulate her companion. She will be badly missed, but her memory will continue to be a tonic to all those of us who were fortunate enough to know her.

Glen Cavaliero

Remembering Janet

***Peter Foss** writes:*

The second time I actually saw Chydyok (hidden away as it is) was in August 1981, when, trespassing as usual (before the age of 'permissive' paths and ugly steel gates), I wandered down from the gypsy track above the sea, and approached the house.

There, standing at the door, was Martin Pollock – most bemused to see another human being outside his gate – and at the bedroom window above, airing the bedclothes, was Janet Machen. I explained myself, and I will always remember how kind and interested they both were to find someone also fascinated in their retreat and in Llewelyn Powys. Martin showed me around outside – the shells and fossils set in the step of the back door, Llewelyn's Nordrach shelter decaying on the terrace above, and I was emboldened from then on to write to Janet and ask if I could stay. So began my 28-year association with the cottage, and frequent holidays there.

My contacts and communications with Janet were always concerning the house. After all, it was her lease (a 50-year lease from the Weld estate) and mainly for the use of her family, and she only allowed others to stay whom she knew and whom she felt were sympathetic to the place and its literary memories. For Janet, it represented one of those secret places, experienced at a formative moment, that determine the spirit and nature of one's life.

She first visited when she was still quite young, fifteen or thereabouts. Introduced by her cousin Sylvia Townsend Warner, this was where she first met Llewelyn (ill at the time, in his shelter), and Alyse (whom she so admired), and in consequence many of the writers and artists that came and went. She was, after all, the daughter of Arthur Machen – a man whom she loved but a writer for whom she didn't at all care (she told me this). Janet, in her positive and forthright way, much preferred the cut-glass intellectual wit of her cousin Sylvia, to the dream-landscapes of her father. I was disappointed since I rather liked Arthur Machen, but could well understand it, bearing in mind Janet's nature. (Ironically, Janet's facial resemblance to her father was remarkable.)

She once surprised me at Chydyok by visiting unexpectedly: I was with my friend Karen at the time (the couturier Victoria Whiteland), and when Karen emerged, Janet was so taken with her beauty that she couldn't get over the fact that I had been clever enough to come to this hideaway place with her. Janet always regarded Chydyok as the perfect 'safe house'. I assured her that Karen was 'a very good friend', but she would have none of it. 'You are quite right, my dear, you are in exactly the right place!'

Later still, she met me down at *The Sailor's Return* where she lodged the key for visitors, and we had lunch together. She was then wondering what she would do on the expiry of the lease, and there then followed the beginning of the arrangements for the Friends of Chydyok to participate in a time-share – a very satisfactory plan that has now, with her death, come to an end. I once tried to interest the Landmark Trust in the house, but I knew that Landmark's dealings with the Weld estate were tricky.

I always felt with Chydyok that Janet would leave her ghosts there, with those of the Powyses. It was full of her bits of memorabilia – untouched, in their allotted place, aging but timeless over the years – Martin's pictures, a very-thirties print of a cat owned by Sylvia Townsend Warner, an embroidery of a boat by Jon Craske, a Swiss mountain scene which had belonged to her mother ('She loved it and a clear

childhood memory is of it hanging on the wall above her', Janet had written on the back). There were also portraits of the Powyses, one of Llewelyn which was given to Janet by Valentine Ackland, and Llewelyn's ankh, made by the blacksmith, fixed firmly to the wall above the fireplace. The house was a time-warp, with as much as possible retained from the home Llewelyn and Alyse knew.

As for Janet herself; her letters were as forthright, earnest and staccato as her conversation. She had the most brisk way of ending a telephone talk with a determined 'goodbye' – never rude, simply indicating that nothing more was to be said and she would leave one in peace. In conversation, she tended to propel things along with questioning scenarios interspersed with a roguish humour. She was a lover of life (she loved that in Llewelyn, always a great hero), and maintained an engaged interest in everything around her. I think she was something of an epicurean; she would always uncork the wine if one called, even if only briefly in passing. She was drinking wine and eating heartily on the day before her death at the age of 91 in October last year at Margaret Marsh, the quiet farmhouse which she and Martin had bought in the meadows near Shaftesbury.

Janet could also be formidable. She had her decided views about life, and could cut through a deal of cant in the true Llewelyn fashion. I will miss her, and also Chydyok – now, it seems, lost to the family (and to the Powyses). Her ashes remain at Chaldon next to Sylvia and Valentine.

Peter J. Foss

(Janet Pollock wrote about the planned 'Friends of Chydyok' in Newsletter *62 (November 2007) p.18.* ***KK***

Young Janet with Llewelyn in his shelter.

A Silent Place

***Frank Warren** writes:*

For many years Janet allowed me, with my family and friends, the pleasure of staying at Chydyok. My first visit there was in September 1982, followed by many, many other remarkable weeks. The house (or cottage) could have been made a Powys museum. ... I remember Janet collecting us from Dorchester station in her trusty old Fiat, and driving us to Chaldon and on over Chalky Knap to Chydyok – if you have been over Chalky you will know what an effort that is! Reaching the cottage she turned the car and not waiting for a cup of tea was on her way back to Margaret Marsh! 'Memories ...' she said, and was off.

We remember Janet talking to us of meeting Llewelyn at Chydyok, coming over from White Nose to meet 'Lulu'. She was very young then of course; there can be very few people living now who met him. My small collection of poems, dedicated to Janet in 2005, was a tribute – in her words – to 'secret, silent lovely Chydyok which we feel ourselves to be part of ...'

Letters to Frank Warren from JCP (1956–59), *with afterword by Frederick Davies, is published in the Cecil Woolf series (1998). The two poems below are from* A Silent Place: On Chydyok, Dorset, and other poems, *by Frank Warren.* **KK**

Seen at Chydyok

Where is he going?
The old dog fox
Skirting the hedgerow,
Sloping along.
To Tumbledown
Or Chydyok Copse,
Ringstead, White Nose,
Or Holworth Rocks?

Searching around he sniffs
The air of morning.
The sun streaks his coat
With a soft brown shine.
Stiffening from afar,
He senses a human.
And is gone,
In a moment of time
Into dawning.

Envoi: Walking to Durdle Door (Wind Music)

The wind makes waves of the grass,
Aerial music hums from the five barred gate,
The metal rods give off a high pitched hum,
Beethoven "Pastorale" theme perhaps,
(A little out of tune)
The sheep stand and stare as I pass,
The wind makes waves of the grass.

TFP and Lady Ottoline

Lady Ottoline Morrell, the aristocratic, flamboyant hostess and patroness of the arts, and the philosophically minded reclusive writer, T. F. Powys, with a dislike of crowds and a taste for monotony, would seem at first sight to be an unlikely pairing. In fact however they shared similar interests in literature and kept up a correspondence with each other for more than ten years.

When not travelling overseas, Lady Ottoline and her husband Philip Morrell liked most of all to spend time in the Spring and Autumn touring Wessex in a second-hand Rolls Royce that 'roared like a menagerie of lions', regularly visiting friends in Bath, Wells and Dorchester. She carried a camera to record everything she saw. Dorset was one of her favourite counties – she had spent summer holidays in Studland in the early 1900s; T. F. Powys and Thomas Hardy were on their list of annual pilgrimages.

In the late Summer of 1924, inspired by the popularity of *The Left Leg* and *Black Bryony*, Lady Ottoline and Philip made their way to East Chaldon by way of Warminster, Shaftesbury, Blandford Forum, Corfe Castle, Wool and Studland, stopping on the way to see Thomas Hardy.

Lady Ottoline's entry in her diary for 6 September 1924 records her first meeting with TFP.

> ... we found it dreadfully difficult to find and it was stormy and raining part of the time – but it was beyond all words beautiful especially from Wareham to Wool—pine trees and heather and different levels of country—it looked like a wonderful faery land with the blue mists hanging over it. Children were bare and sad – and lonely – rather like Ireland. I should much love to return there and stay in the village.
>
> We went beyond Powys' house and had a terrible difficulty in turning—two farm people looked on in evident glee at our troubles. Then at last we found it and Powys came shambling out. He is grey haired with rather frightened sensitive eyes—and a very sensitive mouth rather a long upper lip—slightly reminiscent of Asquith's—obviously sensitive to sex and probably suppressed. His wife is a dear little woman, pretty and tiny and very nice. I thought he was over-anxious and nervous and very sympathetic. We got on very well I thought. There was a brother there—whom I didn't care for – a son – also a young Cambridge man – I cannot remember his name.
>
> He talks rather breathlessly—very tender hearted I imagine and an extraordinary sensitive reflective capacity—very timid. He is I should imagine far too over-shocked by the peasants and so is inclined to exaggerate their evil.
>
> We returned to see them again on Monday as we arrived so late—after so many contre-temps. I tried to tempt him to come and see us—but he says he is too shy and he is a great believer in regularity and monotony to allow creativeness. He is obviously imaginative. ...
>
> I hope we shall see them again.
>
> He was very interested to hear we had been to see Hardy—and he obviously admires him very much and would like to see him but is too shy to suggest it. Mrs T.

Hardy was not at all nice about him and said he had very much misrepresented the Dorsetshire peasants and that all his family were very unbalanced but I did not tell him that.

(Mrs Hardy was, nevertheless, friendly and helpful to all the Powyses.) The qualities of timidity and uncertainty that Lady Ottoline noted in TFP are reflected in the photographs she made of him on this visit, which show him looking self conscious, tense and posed uncomfortably at the table in the interior of Beth Car.

Lady Ottoline visited the Powyses again in May 1930, arriving in time for tea. She described 'his nice eyes when he gets over being alarmed ... He is absurdly timid. When I asked him why he hasn't a car he said it's because he's frightened ... Nothing will induce him to go out of the village ... We visited him again as they seemed to want it. And on this second visit they were more at ease.' Indeed the photos taken on this occasion seem to indicate a much more relaxed relationship.

But it was not until Lady Ottoline's last visit to East Chaldon, in Spring 1936, that her photos evoke a greater sense of familiarity and informality, and show TFP engaged in animated conversation with his aristocratic admirer. But by then, she says, he had given up writing, 'It seemed sad somehow' she reflected. 'His poor little wife is happy as they have adopted a little girl ... We went down with him to get some milk for tea and there was an old man there – very Dorsetshire with his heavy big Dorset face ... I should have liked to have returned to see him again but we cannot manage it ..."

Lady Ottoline's frank discussion in her diary of her intellectual and emotional needs and her confession of inner loneliness, depict a divided self. On 29 October 1922 she recorded her feelings: 'I long for someone to talk to – to discuss life with and ones ideas and hopes and to stir up mine ... I have within me a gulf of desperate loneliness – and of longing to communicate with someone who is full of intelligence and imagination but here it is impossible.'

Perhaps it was this need to share her inner thoughts and feelings which led Lady Ottoline to find in TFP a surprising, sympathetic character, someone outside her usual circles with whom she could talk and correspond at some length.

*

Lady Ottoline Morrell (1873–1938 – pronounced Ottoleen Murrel) was a famous patron of the arts and doyenne of 'bohemian' hostesses in the early twentieth century. She used her charm, influence and aristocratic connections to champion the modern movement in art and literature, and gathered round her many writers, artists, intellectuals, and liberal minded thinkers. Her many friends included Augustus John, Lytton Strachey, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Siegfried Sassoon, Virginia Woolf and others in the Bloomsbury set. She was acquainted with Nijinski, Picasso, Prime Minister Asquith, Charlie Chaplin, W. B. Yeats, Robert Bridges, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, and many younger writers, and encouraged the careers of Epstein, Stanley Spencer, Aldous Huxley, E. M. Forster, James Stephens and Walter de la Mare.

She regularly entertained at her house in Bedford Square in London and after 1915 at her Jacobean mansion in Garsington near Oxford, which became a centre for pacificism during World War I. Lady Ottoline was a keen photographer of her famous contemporaries and kept a record of all her visitors neatly pasted into vellum bound albums. She married the Liberal MP Philip Morrell (1870–1943) in 1902, and although the marriage lasted till her death she embarked on some high profile love affairs, notably with Bertrand Russell. She was portrayed in Lawrence's *Women in Love* (1920) and Huxley's *Crome Yellow* (1921): Lady Ottoline accused both writers of betrayal by caricaturing her character. She was exceptionally tall and dressed in a theatrical manner, was endlessly discussed and often ridiculed but celebrated for beauty in her youth and always for her kindness. Nor was she without irony and self-awareness, for she inserted in her diary a cutting from an unidentified contemporary newspaper which described her as:

> ... one of the most remarkable personalities of her age, handsome with prominent features ... she inspires devotion and holds a court of brilliant original people. She affects bizarre costumes, wears barbaric jewels, is a marvellous conversationalist and an authority on post impressionist painting.

Miranda Seymour's biography (*Life on the Grand Scale*, 1992) briefly refers to her visit to TFP in 1930. Judith Stinton in her *Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset Landscape* (Black Dog Books, 2004) includes a reference to Lady Ottoline's visit to TFP in 1924. Lady Ottoline's photographic albums are kept by the National Portrait Gallery. All the photographs she made of TFP can be viewed on the web site of the gallery at www.npg.org.uk. – bizarrely accompanied by a quotation from JCP's 'The Ridge'. *Lady Ottoline's Album* (Knopf, NY,1976) is edited by Carolyn G. Heilbrun with an introduction by Lord David Cecil. Lady Ottoline's diaries are unpublished. The original volumes, hand-bound in vellum and paper are in the manuscript collection of the British Library. The correspondence between TFP and Lady Ottoline is held by the Harry Ransom Research Centre at the University of Texas.

Chris Thomas

Violet Powys, holding Susan, TFP and Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1936.

Theodore to Elizabeth Wade White — A Letter

East Chaldon Dorchester September 15th 1936

Dear Betty,

I was delighted to hear of your merry party in the Old Barn upon rough Cape Cod Hill. I am proud to have come into the conversation. True country people are alike everywhere. How nice it would be if Douglas had a little luck with his play. We are all very well and Sylvia and Valentine are quite happy. With love

yours ever

Theodore

***Fabian Heus** writes*:

The New York Public Library[1] holds the letters of Katie Powys to Elizabeth Wade White, which have been published in *The Powys Journal*.[2] The same collection also holds the letter above, to Elizabeth Wade White from Theodore Powys.

Elizabeth Wade White (1906–95) was born in Waterbury, Connecticut USA; the strongest element in her school education was English literature and poetry, and this with several visits had given Elizabeth a passionate interest in England and its people. Her connection to Chaldon was through Sylvia Townsend Warner whom she had met in New York in 1929. She first visited East Chaldon in 1935, when she met the Powys brothers.

As far as I could detect, this is the only letter Theodore had written to 'Betty', as he named her at the beginning of the letter. The handwriting on both the envelope and the letter undoubtly comes from Theodore, as was confirmed by both Elaine Mencher and Theodora Scutt. Peter Judd was so kind to search for more TFP letters in his archive of Betty's letters but found none from TFP nor from other members of the Powys family.

I am very grateful for the help and kind assistance of Elaine Mencher, Theodora Scutt and Peter Haring Judd in patiently answering my questions and providing me with as much addition information as possible.

NOTES

The Old Barn on Cape Cod Hill could not be identified, but Elizabeth was in New England that summer.

Douglas McKee, a good friend of Betty throughout their lives (information from Peter Judd), wrote a dramatization (*Good Wine*) of Theodore's novel *Mr. Weston's Good Wine.* The complete typescript, together with a letter from Douglas McKee (from E. E. Bissell's T. F. Powys Collection) is held in the Powys Society Collection, in the Dorchester Museum.

1 'Letters of Katie Powys to Elizabeth Wade White', Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

2 Peter H. Judd: 'Letters from Katie Powys to Elizabeth Wade White 1938-1954', *The Powys Journal* VII (1997), 77–115. For more details about Elizabeth Wade White, see Judd's article (p.114).

On Chaldon Down

His leave-taking was undetected.
With small, slow movements
He left the warm bed, the cosy room,
The comfortable cottage.

To drive out the darkness that surrounded him;
He tried to think of where he was heading
A door on the latch, a fire still burning,
And another bed ready and waiting.

As he strode out across the sleeping Downs
The cold night air caught in his throat;
It was as though he was forced to breathe in
The vast vacuum from between the stars.

And everything around him was dead.
Nothing to nourish, no warmth, no sound.
He was following a dim track that wound
Between black fields that had no end.

His heart suddenly hammered, afraid.
A red light blazed on the horizon
He was brought to a stop by something
Rising up in anger before him.

A huge moon was hauling herself
Up out of the ground
But as she pulled clear she drained of colour
And shrinking, cooled and hardened

To a brilliant whiteness that seemed
To condemn him, but, none the less,
Picked out his path in the chalk
To show the way ahead.

R.B.Russell

This poem appeared in Staple *magazine (issue 69/70). According to Ray Russell, 'it was inspired by the sight of the moon coming up one evening while I was staying at Chydock. It was bright red as it came over the horizon, and appeared to be absolutely huge. I'd been thinking about how Llewelyn might have seen the same sight, leaving Alyse to go over and see Gamel.' R. B. (Ray) Russell runs the Tartarus Press.*

Llewelyn to Naomi Mitchison
Letters 1927–37

***Susan Rands** writes*:

There are typewritten copies, some annotated and some with a few excisions, of eight letters to Naomi Mitchison (1897–1999) from Llewelyn Powys, at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Houston in Texas. They are part of the Malcolm Elwin Collection of Powys Brothers Materials sold by Bertram Rota in 1976. The type face has been recognized by Chris Wilkinson as Alyse Gregory's and the handwriting of the annotations as Louis Wilkinson's. The probability is that they were lent to Louis Wilkinson when he was making the selection published by The Bodley Head in 1943, and then to Malcolm Elwin for his *Life of Llewelyn Powys* published by Macdonald in 1946; and that after Elwin's death in 1973 his widow sold them to Rota.

The originals of these eight letters are almost certainly the eight from Llewelyn to Naomi listed in the contents of box IB ADD.8768 sold to Cambridge University library by an American dealer in 1989. No letters from Naomi to Llewelyn have yet come to light nor any mention of him in the as yet unsorted huge Mitchison archive at the National Library of Scotland.

There are two biographies of Naomi; the first *Naomi Mitchison: A Biography* by Jill Benton (then Associate Professor at Pitzer College in Claremont, California) was published by Harper Collins in 1990; and the second, *The Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison* by Jennie Calder, published by Virago in 1997. The first has no mention of Llewelyn. The second gives him one paragraph in which a salient sentence is: 'The Naomi that Powys portrays is charismatic and inspirational though at the same time there is a patronizing note which is less palatable'. Calder does concede, however, that in *You May Well Ask*, the second volume of her autobiography published in 1979, Naomi regrets that they had not made love. In a letter to Malcolm Elwin when he was writing Llewelyn's life Naomi wrote, 'one never minded being laughed at by him, anyway, because it was never done to hurt ... I expect he could be unkind, or at least he might like people to suppose that he could be, but I could never think of him as anything but infinitely kind ...'

In May 1989 Naomi gave a talk to The Powys Society about her friendship with Llewelyn. Unfortunately no one, so far as I know, took notes, and memories vary as to what she said. One remembers that she said that they had not made love because she was pregnant; another that she said that they watched the foxes going in and out of the holes in the Dorset cliff which was so suggestive to them that they did, and it resulted in one of Naomi's children.

Naomi was a woman of phenomenal energy, application and generosity, not unlike John Cowper's ideal woman Lady Charlotte Guest. Lady Charlotte produced more children, Naomi many more books. Both identified worthy causes and put great energy into supporting them. Not only were Naomi and Llewelyn both married at the time of this correspondence, both had other lovers with whom they were much

more deeply involved. In 1927 Llewelyn was forty-three and Naomi thirty – in their prime, one might say. By 1937 when it ended, Llewelyn was seriously ill and had only two more years to live; Naomi lived to be over a hundred.

Two of Llewelyn's letters were published in *Letters of Llewelyn Powys*. The first (Dear 'Mrs Mitchison', no. 119, p.134) on February 8th 1927 from The White Nose, Owermoigne, thanking her for her book *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (1925) presented after a visit, and describing the death of an oiled puffin that he and Alse had attempted to save; the second (no. 139, p.150) in December 1928 from Anacapri, after visiting Palestine.

The other six follow. All except one appear to be in answer to letters from Naomi. The word 'anonymous' in two of them seems to be in her handwriting.

Susan Rands

Six letters

I

White Nose
Warmwell
[*1927*]

My dear [Naomi *deleted, marked 'Anonymous'*]

Oh I did so love you for writing me this letter with the trouble of that meadow all upon the page like the petals of the blackthorn all wet with the rains of this exceptional month. I can only remind you that the tree does bear lovely fruit in the end, a feat that to me has always redeemed its treacherous flowering, so far less happy than the May.

[*Naomi*], brave, daring, darling, [——], your words with their ancient plaint so evoked for me the rareness of your personality. They were so sad and so gay, so tender and honest and sustained upon sweet reason. Oh! I am glad you melted and kissed me (him) Ha! what a sly slip was there—though it was more than he deserved. Good God what is the writing of history when you have in your arms a lovely girl all melting and unhappy with a cowrie shell from the beach of Tintagel pressed tightly in the palm of her hand? I swear it was more provocative even than badly made arrows.

I have read your book with so much delight. It is wonderful how you can send your spirit wandering into these ancient days, and upon my faith, make these dead bones live again. The imagination of most of us is so strictly confined. It is only yours that has won the freedom of the centuries. I thought the quotation you selected for Part III was unfortunate, but of course I would. You have a certain vein of mocking light humour that I am afraid will always be alien to my more sober mood. I do not dare to let any sophisticated raillery loose upon my illusions. I daresay I am not civilized enough. I like to be more hidden and escape from the lighted objective room to where

sober night insects are employed upon grave errands in the garden. This is natural to my simple suspicious nature but perhaps I shall become accustomed to the more challenging attitude from listening to you and admiring you so much.

Yours,

Llewelyn

II

White Nose, Warmwell
June 24, 1928

My dear Naomi,

... It will be a joy to me to see this little creature that has the high privilege of possessing eyes that are like another pair of eyes that I have always so much admired. ARP is now staying with us and walks over the downs with formidable steps. I spend much time now looking for worked flints and have involved him in this curious pastime. It is an occupation I would have enjoyed especially doing with you, one of the many occupations which in your company would give me so much delight.

Our crusade is postponed till the spring, but we now think of visiting Holland in August. I do hope you are having the lovely summer that I would wish for you. I killed an adder this afternoon. It was perhaps an ill thing to do. Was she not the symbol of our freedom?

Yours,

Llewelyn

III

White Nose
Warmwell
January 23rd 1930

My dear Naomi,

What an excellent letter from you! How lively, how full of wit and entertainment and yet how out of keeping with the grave and noble beauty of your head, you are a complicated creature. I always feel inclined to start out suddenly from a wayside ditch, like Elijah, and frown you out of your frivolities. Yet I suppose my manners on a

fine spring morning would hardly justify just such religious fury. It is lovely to think there is a chance of seeing you so soon. ... These cliffs are looking lovely and the primroses are out.

When they asked Protagoras whether there was a God he replied 'Life is too short for me to consider so obscure a problem.'

With love

Naomi you are wonderful to have another baby. I do honour you. I say like John Paston did to the Duchess of Norfolk that 'thy fair belly is worthy enough to carry a young Lord.'

Yours,

Llewelyn

IV

White Nose,
May 11th, 1930.

My dear Naomi,

Thank you so much for answering my letter so quickly and so thoroughly. Your pamphlet was read with great appreciation. What a bold, generous girl you are! How gaily you use your flint axe and yet what a sensitive and tender spirit is revealed under your deer-skin mantle! I came upon passages that were very restoring and how charming were your references to those women who love to feel life flowing in and life flowing out of their lovely bodies. You are a very rare woman, Naomi. You are a poet and a very gallant and good girl. We do nothing but look for worked flints all day. This pastime has become a mania with me.

Sometimes as I pass over these fields with bowed head I think of the little red fox who is surely maturing and wish for its good fortune and hope that it will not too much trouble its sweet mother.

Yours,

Llewelyn

V

Chydyok, East Chaldon
Feb. 14th 1932

My sweet Naomi,

What is this about an operation? I had no idea you were ill. Oh, I am concerned. I do pray these rascal doctors have done no mischief to your brave Pagan body. I had rather have heard of you falling into the power of Billy goats, or high treading cock ostriches or the great JEW fish than of these gentry with their grave looks, head shakes, and gaping purses! Oh! do confirm Dick's card and say you are safe, and gay. This is most devilish ill news.

By the grace of God we still remain well. We are merry enough in our new house. We like it better than White Nose and have given up all claim to it except as a

store house for some large pieces of furniture and even these we do not let alone because this afternoon we went there to recover some chintz that belonged to a Chesterfield, Alyse liking the look of it. It must have been in Achurch if not Lilford and smelt curiously of the past. I tore it from the sofa, cutting it sometimes with my knife and wondering to myself what 'sport' it had witnessed, but perhaps they never played hand in and hand out in those days, and yet they must have at all times and in all places, for in all creation there is no flower, no fruit more entrancing than 'the fancy' of a lovely girl. In some countries they hold it indecent to show the finger tips and in others the navel is a centre point of shame. Good God! what a rogue's letter is this and I only meant to send you my most civil love.

Lulu

VI

Chydyok, Chaldon Herring
January 5th, 1937

My dear ['*Anonymous*']

Your problems are not worthy of the wit of a fox. Of course you must get all the happiness you can get out of the affair. You must be as sweet as possible to your boy's girl and must hurt her as little as possible, but remember that no injury is felt that is not known and in a year's time you will only remember your happy moments. You are perfectly justified in stealing her mushrooms if you are not seen doing it. Be as happy as you possibly can—leave your conscience locked up in your cellar below flood level and don't let it out till you want to let it out, in the meanwhile live under the direction of your sensitive intelligence. Don't you let him worry you about being inconsistent. The art of life is made up of being inconsistent and full of casuistic compromises. It is very important for you to remain rich.

Of one thing I am certain, it would be a mistake to leave [——]. Stick to [——]. Be a good wife to him and a good mother to your children and at the same time whenever the mood is upon you—away to the bracken. What a lovely description you gave of the 'green fields of Wales'. Oh dear, I envied him and envied you those dawns. I do hope you have had happy times this last week. Always snatch at fleeting happiness and cover up the place where you have been lying with friendly rushes and nobody will see.

With love from
Lulu

Our **two meetings,** in Wessex and East Anglia, promise to be happy events as in other years. **Powys Day** in **Dorchester** (Saturday 9th May) will include a talk on **Hardy and Weymouth**, discussion of the Powyses' links with these, a discussion on *Weymouth Sands*, and an evening walk. *The Dorset Year*, that fascinating illustrated edition of JCP's diary for 1934–5, published by the Society in 1998, is essential reading. Members may recall a walk with diary extracts, in the steps of JCP and The Black, at the Conference when the book appeared. JCP's walks around Dorchester are mapped in *The Dorset Year*. The 'Weymouth' chapter in *Autobiography* describes JCP's early memories of it as a Good Place. Several of Llewelyn's essays about Weymouth are in Sundial Press's *Durdle Door to Dartmoor* (2007) and *Still Blue Beauty* (2008). Weymouth was about as far as Theodore willingly went. He could be seen with his family sitting on the seafront deckchairs.

At **Little Gidding** (Saturday 20th June), appropriately in a place of historic poetic associations, **Glen Cavaliero** will discuss the poems of JCP and read from his own. His most recent book of poems is *The Justice of the Night* (Tartarus Press, 2007).

* * * *

from **David Solomon**:

I enjoyed Neil Lee's piece, 'A Matter of Love & Death', in the November *Newsletter*. It is with some misgiving, however, that I have to disillusion him. His copy of *Love & Death* from Kessinger Publishing is, alas, not unique. I purchased fifteen copies of this edition, myself, so that I could give a presentation of this book to my fellow-members at a meeting of a reading group in Highgate, London. As, evidently, both Mr Lee and I love this book, we can perhaps take comfort from the fact that there are a few more copies in circulation than we might have thought.

* * * *

A. N. Wilson's late lamented 'World of Books' column in the *Daily Telegraph* was devoted to JCP's *Autobiography* on Monday 20th October 2008.

> Last week I gave a young friend *Wolf Solent* by John Cowper Powys. She returned from an Italian holiday completely entranced by the book, and now I glow with some of that inner warmth that must possess an evangelical Christian who has brought a soul to the Lord. Why do so few people know about this great, great writer? I wonder, for example, why his *Autobiography* is so little known ... the autobiography of this great writer, written when he was 60 and had just retired as a wandering lecturer in America, is beyond doubt one of the great books of the 20th century ...
>
> [T]hough the life and character of the author of this *Autobiography* is completely extraordinary, the appeal is universal. Few human beings have ever been *like* this author ... such is his observant genius, that it is not hyperbolic to place him, in this book, alongside Wordsworth and Goethe themselves as egotist-observers not just of their own experience but of the whole business of being a sentient human being on this planet.

* * * *

The 'Learned Journals' section of the **TLS** (October 31st 2008) carried a review by **P. J. Carnehan** of *The Powys Journal* xviii (with references to earlier volumes). Carnehan goes in for gossip about Chatto and Windus, and notes the *Journal*'s 'outward, connecting impulse' of extensions to the already large Powys family. 'Some of the material may not be entirely exciting but that old Powys thrill has not gone.' There is a quotation from Llewelyn (Carnehan's favorite of the brothers, perhaps) who 'receives more biographical than critical attention' and is under-represented compared to his brothers, in particular JCP who as usual hogs the volume. Samuel Beckett may not have appreciated T. F. Powys, but the three TF stories are a relief, with their 'typical, uncanny simplicity'.

* * * *

Neil Lee-Atkin has produced the first **'Dandelion Club Newsletter'** for his 'Friends of Llewelyn Powys' group – a handsome computer-produced 52-page booklet, containing information on Llewelyn's life and philosophy with excerpts from Malcolm Elwin, Reginald Marsh and H. J. Massingham; also reprinting Neil's own tribute to Chydyok (from *la lettre powysienne*) and his 'interview' with Alyse Gregory compiled from a letter to Jack Rushby (in *PSNL* 24, April 1995). An interesting article is on LlP as a Rationalist and the connection of his philosophy with Unitarian Humanism, including a meeting with Muriel Hilton, a friend of Elizabeth Myers and admirer of Llewelyn and JCP, author of *Matches in the Darkness* (ed. John Rowland, 1970) in which JCP is quoted in a chapter entitled 'The Magic Bonus'. Contact Neil Lee Atkin at 43 Crich Road, Inkersall, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S43 3SG, e-mail revneildatkin@sky.com.

* * * *

from ***Paula Kuitenbrouwer:***

I recently started to read *The Great Books* by Anthony O'Hear, 2007. To my surprise I found some lines of JCP on page ix. I think it is great if great writers like Anthony O'Hear (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Buckingham, Director of the Royal Institute of Philosophy and Editor of the journal *Philosophy*) start their books with JCP. Kind greetings from a former Powys Society member.

http://web.mac.com/kuitenbrouwer

Anthony O'Hear's dedication is:

> "To read great books does not mean that one becomes 'bookish'; it means that something of the terrible insight of Dostoievsky, of the richly-charged imagination of Shakespeare, of the luminous wisdom of Goethe, actually passes into the personality of the reader; so that in contact with the chaos of ordinary life certain free and flowing outlines emerge, like the forms of some classic picture, endowing both people and things with a grandeur beyond what is visible to the superficial glance."
>
> John Cowper Powys
>
> For Chris Woodhead, fellow pilgrim, fellow reader.

Editor has failed to locate the quotation.

Chris Woodhead spoke on Wolf Solent *at the 2002 Conference at Millfield.*

from ***Elaine Mencher***

In *The Journal of D. H. Lawrence Studies, Volume 1, Number 3 (2008)* The D. H. Lawrence Society has published some 'new' letters. One from Charles Lahr to D. H. Lawrence, 8th February 1930 contains the following paragraph:

> I am enclosing my latest: *Poems* by T. F. Powys's youngest son. I think he is a promising lad and I can sell 500 copies of them easily at 2/6 each.

The accompanying footnote reads:

> Lahr published *At the Harlot's Burial: Poems* by Laurence Powys (pseudonym of Francis Llewelyn Powys) in March 1930; DHL must have received an advance copy. He liked 'the poems by the Powys boy' (vii.644).

DHL died in Vence on March 2nd 1930. Francis ('Laurence') Powys (1909–98) sent 30-odd poems (dated 1988) to Elaine Mencher in Sept. 1991, which are still unpublished. 'The Poetry of Francis Powys' by John R. Williams is in The Powys Journal XI *(2001). KK*

* * * *

Residents of North London may have spotted a headlined letter in *Camden New Journal* on 5th February, with a photograph of JCP. **Cecil Woolf**, as a veteran reader and publisher, writes: 'Looking at a recent compilation entitled "1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die", I was astonished and saddened to see how many fine writers are no longer judged worthy of inclusion. It would be invidious, perhaps, to list some of those with as many as 10 books that we "must" read before we die, but I would like to mention just a few fine writers who in any other country could not fail to be recommended – Richard Aldington, Compton Mackenzie, John Cowper Powys and Norman Douglas. Douglas (who was of Scottish-Austrian parentage) is the subject of a research centre and a biannual conference in Bregenz, Austria. John Cowper Powys is celebrated by the happy few in Powys societies in this country, America and Scandinavia. A. N. Wilson ... deserves high praise not only for his own work but for his valiant championing of the writing of J. C. Powys.'

* * * *

Chris Scoble (author of *Fisherman's Friend*, the biography of Stephen Reynolds) sends mentions of JCP in the letters of **Jocelyn Brooke** (1908–66), written to a friend in 1943 (while serving abroad in the Medical Corps). 'I can't help thinking John Cowper Powys is an underrated writer ... But the only person who ever agreed with me was Stevie Smith. I should like to read *Wolf Solent* again one day ...' He comes across an old copy of *The Adelphi*: '... It is curious how entirely apolitical the culture-racket was, even as late as '31. This particular number is full of Lawrentiana, J. C. Powys on Dorothy Richardson, Middleton Murry on Shakespeare, and a sort of vague religio-psychoanalytical "Humanism". Marx is not mentioned. Imagine anything equivalent nowadays!' Faint praise, but Brooke's 1956 essay 'On Re-reading *A Glastonbury Romance*' in *The London Magazine* is more complimentary, albeit through gritted teeth, with many a 'yet' — besides providing the celebrated description of *Glastonbury*'s opening paragraph as 'the Becher's Brook of English fiction' (persevere to chapter 4, he recommends to those resistent to JCP's style, and get a second wind.) 'Mr Powys, once one has surrendered to his spell, can get away with

almost anything'—'an imaginative intensity unrivalled by any living writer, yet ...'—'Yet ... a masterpiece, the great English epic of sensuality and cerebral perversion, an omnibus-volume of inspired graffiti ...'—'Not a "great" novel ... yet ... a work of genius.'This early bi-polar view of JCP set the apologetic tone for many in the future. *Yet* Brooke's mythologising treatment of his childhood in *The Orchid Trilogy,* with its fetishes, manias and ecstasies, is often reminiscent of JCP's in *Autobiography.*

* * * *

John Roberts notes a quotation in Claire Harman's biography of Sylvia Townsend Warner from STW's diary for 5th August 1939 after staying at Beth Car, recording Theo's opinion of *Wolf Solent*: 'he thought John kept teasing his characters, not like an "honest sadist", but lecherously'.

* * * *

Marko Gregorić presented ***Wolf Solent*** on Croatian Radio Wednesday on 25th February from 10.30 to 11.05pm, during the 'World Prose' (*Proza svijeta*) programme. His introduction to JCP and the novel was followed by the well known actor Zlatko Ožbolt reading Marko's translation of the chapter 'Rounded by sleep' and of part of the following chapter 'A game of bowls'. Marko points out that in 2008 his translation of the essay on Wordsworth in *Pleasures of Literature* was also read on Croatian Radio, and that he hopes this year to continue with two or three programmes on *A Glastonbury Romance.*

* * * *

Adrian Leigh (17a Clifton Terrace, Brighton BN1 3HA, tel. 01273 326515) has for sale a 1st edition of *Confessions of Two Brothers* that belonged to Philippa Powys. £30 o.n.o to appreciative home.

Discussion meeting:
'My Philosophy Up to Date as Influenced by Living in Wales'

A small but articulate group met on 29th November at the Friends Meeting House, Hampstead, to discuss JCP's essay in *Obstinate Cymric.*

KK led off, describing the essay as an endearing work, a 'free-rolling leviathan'. According to JCP (in a letter to his sister Katie) it was 'the best thing I have ever written': a not unusual pronouncement by him on recently finished work — especially on the more unusual, like *Morwyn.*

This essay is perhaps the nearest we get to JCP's voice – written straight off (it seems) on successive days in different moods and frequently repeating (with variations). You have to enjoy the Spirals as they come round (just as he saw human progress as a spiral).

He is recycling ideas that recur throughout his non-fiction and fiction too. Chief among them are:

— the unique individual 'I', alone in space and time with the blank wall of the future,

along with the infinite other unique 'I's, animate and inanimate, requiring both Humility (at the I's insignificance) and Pride (at its uniqueness);
— hatred and denial of any controlling 'absolute' authority imposing One-ness, whether the brainwashing by religion(s) and science and self-elected 'superior people', or the Freudian doctrine of an unknown, unreal, 'unconscious' dictating to us against our free will;
— and belief in the essential benevolence of non-brainwashed humans and their shared 'common sense' ('philosophical Anarchism').

With these ideas in mind, JCP explores techniques for training yourself to enjoy what life offers – such techniques as imagining yourself as a worm, grasping your ankles and thinking of your skeleton, enlisting wise spirits of the past, entering into details around you, and connecting with the endurance and indifference of nature.

Typical branches and asides take us into such paths as the role of humour, gender differences, the possibility of an afterlife, the possibility of Progress, the uses of craziness, misinterpretations of the word 'Love', the uses of Prayer, mental tricks for the control of demons, the superiority of the number 4 over 3 – and of course in this essay, Welshness. His saving watchword throughout is 'It All Depends'.

We can think of 'My Philosophy' in relation to JCP's other non-fiction, from *The Complex Vision* through *Confessions of Two Brothers, In Defence of Sensuality, The Philosphy of Solitude, The Art of Happiness, The Art of Growing Old, Mortal Strife, Dostoievsky, Rabelais,* and on to *In Spite Of* – via essays such as 'The Magic of Detachment' (1933) and 'The Unconscious' (1949) – and of course through the fictional characters who speak for him. Is there a progression? Do the books and essays contradict each other at all? The voice in them varies, from confiding to castigating, but opening any of them at random you are likely to find one of these same 'My Philosophy' themes – anti-'Love', pro 'common sense' or whatever.

It is helpful, though not essential, to remember the circumstances of his life in 1946-7.

He was about 75 – a lot of Past to choose to recall or forget. He had reached the penultimate stage in hindu philosophy – 'into the forest'. Not yet the next one, the begging bowl of serious old age; but a stage of endurance, inevitably, with enjoyment a kind of duty.

He was neither rich nor widely famous. But he was reasonably healthy, still able to go for long walks. He had found his life's companion and lived with her for 25 years. He lived a chosen life, in a small town in Wales, with impressive natural scenery. His books were not profitable, but they were published. He had achieved his ambition of producing a shelf of romances, with more to come. *Porius* was in progress.

People close to him had died, but he kept contact with many survivors through letters. He kept up with the news. He was writing at the end of a war whose full horrors were still being revealed.

We also have to remember his Victorian clerical upbringing (all those conventions

to get rid of) and that he lived in early twentieth-century America (all those political ideals). His education gave him a classical and general European culture, which he could assume was familiar to most of his readers. And the early twentieth century was a time when many public personalities wrote about their 'philosophies' – at least their views on life: think of the different voices of Shaw, Chesterton, Unamuno, Lawrence, Orwell ...

Finally, does he make sense today? Some of his battles may be won, but there are new complications. In some places we may have to transfer imagination – 'religion' to include Islam, the horrors of science to include the Holocaust. The Wales he knew must then have had a more self-contained identity. JCP's voice is so immediate, it is sometimes quite hard to remember how long ago he was writing. With all his eccentricities, he talks sense.

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How does Wales come in to it? Anna Pawelko (of Cardiff) has difficulty with JCP's whimsical ideas of Welshness. The meeting discussed JCP's views on the Welsh and Christianity, his notion that Wales is a paradise for children and the way this seems to run counter to our stereotype of Wales with its sober-minded chapel-going routine.

As an example of JCP's ideal Welshness, KK read the sentence from 'My Welsh Home', another essay in *Obstinate Cymric*, in which he finds Homeric echoes in a farmer's elusive smile of acceptance under provocation. '*Leave it to Chance*!'—*How alien a mood, under the impact of a wrong, does this seem to the righteous indignation that I feel in my English blood, or to the long-cherished wrath that I note in my Irish contemporaries*! ...*So may I learn to retort to the injurious, if only I live long enough for this mountain-rain to elementalize away my human malice* ...'

*

Would his philosophy (he asks) have held up if instead of living among Welsh mountains he had been 'bounded in a nutshell' – in a bed-sit in Wolverhampton? Would he (as Hamlet says he would) have counted himself 'king of infinite space' – or would he have had 'bad dreams'? The group imagined that he – and the philosophy – would have survived.

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John Dunn referred to *The Complex Vision*, often thought an odd one out among the 'philosophical' books, but in his view in a line of continuity with the rest.

*

Opinions varied on the extraordinary first page of the essay with its long set of dualities (14 '*versus* Love's). **John Hodgson** drew attention to some of the more interesting and ambiguous of these. *Imagination versus will* is a key dualism and key theme of the essay. But some of the dualities seem quite startling as well. Is there a value-order of words? Is the first term the positive one? Are positives and negatives locked together, or does one cancel out its opponent? Is it always clear which of the two JCP prefers?

The essay has many very long sentences – you feel that this is how he thought, and spoke and lectured. The punctuation marks hold the sentences together and help to follow his train of thought: surprisingly seldom this is difficult.

What does Powys mean by 'updated'? The challenge for the reader is to identify if there is anything new that JCP is saying. Has Wales changed or developed his point of view and his attitude to existence? JH concluded that there is a development, and that there is something new in his philosophy. He felt that this is JCP updating himself since the ending of *Autobiography,* which seemed like an end-of-term assessment of his experiences, having moved to upstate New York.

The key to the 'My Philosophy' essay is the duality of Imagination compared to Will. In *Autobiography* he talks about premeditated will, but here he says experiences of ecstasies can't be achieved by willing them into existence; he is abandoning a previous philosophy of the will in favour of something less easily excitable. He is now in a calmer mood.

A clue to this might be the analysis of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' (p.164), and the relationship between man and nature. JCP's philosophy, in 'its present nearness to Nature and Reality', feels no need for 'God'. This is JCP adapting his life to starker circumstances, not striving for ecstasy but '*transferring reverence* ... to the forms of life that are immediately around me' (p.146–8). George Steiner says JCP is a sacramentalist: he doesn't despise the husk, he accepts the body, he is trying to be democratic ... This is leading to *In Spite Of* and his views there against being a *superior person*, as if he doesn't want to absorb other people's thoughts. It is JCP in his profane and secular mode. He reads Rabelais and Goethe and Whitman and Homer because they are physical and profane. He talks about immersing himself in the cosmic flux of existence, of *ravishing things*. He is polytheistic, he believes in many gods (this is a theme of *Porius*).

JH highlighted dualities he thought most interesting, such as *animation versus sanctity, propitiation versus truth, shrewdness versus cleverness, faith versus certainty* – this last one is a classic religious duality, but in *religion versus science* both are 'bad' so not necessarily divided.

In JCP's other works, dualities are necessities, like Love and Malice in *The Complex Vision:* both required. (Has the Welsh rain dissolved his malice?) The first page of the essay shows him trying to make his mind clear – to rid his mind of cant.

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The meeting discussed some of the techniques JCP recommends, like trying to feel like an insect – a traditional mental exercise for an eastern spiritual disciple. But this is a smoke screen, for he also sees himself as a magician: 'a godlike magician on the crest of the wave of world creation'.

His techniques can sound practical as sports psychology: imagine yourself winning, contending and achieving. His ideas of imagining oneself an insect or a primaeval animal – the ichthyosaurus ego – connect with his childhood dreams of being very small.

JCP discusses *imaginative roots*, as something we are looking for when we have no natural ones (like Iain Sinclair exploring the past and the buried layers beneath the surface of modern London); as a way in to the elemental world. He is writing at a

time when people still often didn't leave their villages, unlike America where everyone's lineage is mixed. At Phudd Bottom he had been much closer to neighbours; in Wales he feels isolated, inhabiting the country of a conquered nation.

He reflects on becoming a universal person. He adopts strange racial theories about the aboriginal pre-Celtic Welsh, and their origins in Iberia and Africa. Some of this was the common stock of diffusionist theories of civilisation popular at the time, such as in H. J. Massingham's *Downland Man*, which JCP read and refers to. He is conscious of the weight of western tradition and wants to adopt something that is different, elemental; he links this to his attraction to African Americans, tramps and dispossessed people. He wants to associate himself with those less well off (referring to the cautionary tale of his sister Gertrude, who once turned away some tramps who were later found dead of exposure). But the Welsh would resent being seen like this. JCP colonises the Welsh with himself and his own ideas, as if he looks around him and sees himself reflected in the mountains, rivers, heathery uplands and eyes of the Welsh people – he calls the Welsh introverted and secretive, but is perhaps talking about himself.

What about other Welsh voices ... e.g. Huw Menai (JCP's introduction to Menai's poems, *The Simple Vision* (1945), is also in *Obstinate Cymric)*. Is South Wales a different country?

JCP said he was converted by Wales to becoming an 'aristophanic feminist', committing himself to more of his feminine side. [*There is unfinished work on Aristophanes in the archive – see 'The Acharnians'*, The Powys Review *XIV, 1984*]. Some of these ideas get taken up in *Porius*, which is an anti-classic work in its tuning to other realms, other pre-classical times.

JH pointed to JCP's reference to 'superstitions' of eternity and the unconscious, and to the way he subverts schools of criticism like Freudianism. He denied the existence of the unconscious because he could not believe in an unexamined stratum of repressed feelings and negative horrors and memories as the source of *conscious* actions. There were however many things he would agree with Jung about, such as the idea of a collective unconscious and a collective memory. For JCP, the 'dark void' at the back of our mind should be a source of positive power. But 'from the beginning, God and the devil [*i.e. false ideas of 'Conscience' and 'the Unconscious'*] have attacked us from the rear. They have taken advantage of the fact that our minds *function outwards into Nature ...*' and filled the void with (unreal) demons. (p.177)

The discussion ended with uncertainties. The essay ends on a note of positive optimism, like that in 'Pair Dadeni'. Despite the horrors of the war and the difficulties of the times, there are changes taking place under the earth: we are entering a new Aquarian age, a new Spiral with its – albeit minimal – advance. But if this statement of belief in the essential goodness and decency of man – essential (or is it?) to the anarchism he professed – is itself an absolute, isn't the conclusion an ultimate contradiction?

KK, JH, CT and others

A sense of direction

***Gunnar Lundin** writes :*

That last chapter of *Obstinate Cymric* was rewarding reading. Some, a good portion indeed, of Powys's modus vivendi is ingrained rather early in his life, but later there are nuances, new angles, accents, depending both on new views of ancient things and occurances and on 'maturity'. New elements are added. The emphasis on a system may be more prominent. Goethe's logos to Eckermann 'keep your sense of direction' is for me one of the clues to a 'philosophy' whose chief aim is spontanity and simplicity. In the third book of my trilogy [*of essays and aphorisms*] , published last year, 'In movement' is called 'Green and grey', meaning a combination of youth – never be older than twenty years – and maturity, including a bit of Dostoievski as well as English humour. 'Clear your mind of cant', as Dr Johnson says – a fundamental motto also for Powys. I have always, ever since my first trip to London – a week in the YMCA, in Soho and Brighton – felt myself at home in the English human climate, which could also deal with grey rainy faintly snow-smelling days like these in Solna at the present time. And from a foreigner's point of view it is not strange that the descendants of Dr Johnson and Boswell could be so different as Jane Austen and Powys. To take theories cum grano salis is a way to preserve your salt. In *Obstinate Cymric*, accomodating to your circumstances is an entirely human device.

Béla Hamvas and John Cowper Powys
A Symposium in Hungary

***Jacqueline Peltier** writes:*

My interest in the Hungarian writer Béla Hamvas was triggered by the 'Six Letters' JCP wrote to him, published in the 1993 *Powys Journal*; subsequently Hamvas was presented in *la lettre powysienne* 8, 14 and 15. In November 2008, the Hamvas Society invited me to the commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the philosopher's death in Szentendre, a little city about half an hour from Budapest, with its peaceful squares, narrow lanes, old palaces and baroque churches, much loved by artists and painters.

Dr Angelika Reichmann, who wrote her PhD on *Wolf Solent*, and teaches English literature at Eger University, had contacted me at the end of 2007, because of her interest in Powys. When she knew I was coming for the commemoration, she very efficiently organised a symposium on Hamvas and Powys to take place a few days earlier.

Eger is a small town, dominated by an ancient fortress, surrounded by vineyards producing famous wines, such as Tokaj. The symposium, which took place in Eszterhazy College, a handsome 18th century building, provided an occasion to

discuss the importance of Hamvas, who had been disowned and banned during the Communist era. His work is now being rediscovered in Hungary. But it was also a golden opportunity to introduce John Cowper Powys and his books to an audience consisting mostly of students belonging to the Philosophy and English departments.

Béla Hamvas had been familiar with Powys's works since the 'thirties. He had written a book on English literature in which JCP had his place, and it was due to his influence that *Wolf Solent* was translated into Hungarian. There was a profound kinship between the two authors, which Powys in his first letter to Hamvas had named their 'affinity of mind'. They had just enough time to exchange a few letters (*The Powys Journal* III, 157–76) before political events in Hungary from 1947 onwards forbade Hamvas from having contact with the outside world. These letters show what could have been their relationship, had the political situation been more favourable. Hamvas' own letters to Powys have so far unfortunately not been found.

The lectures were held in a very elegant room, under a portrait of Prince Eszterhazy. Dr Katalin Thiel, head of the philosophy department, a renowned specialist of Hamvas and also familiar with Powys, underlined the feature common to both writers, that 'of the differentiation of irreversible external time and reversible internal time'. The writer Zoltan Danyi, who works closely with Antal Dul, the literary executor of Hamvas, evoked with restrained emotion the impressive personality of the Hungarian philosopher. Angelika Reichmann chose to concentrate her lecture on *Wolf Solent*. Shunning long fastidious quotations, she adroitly used pictorial equivalents based on paintings by Waterhouse, Bosch, Caravaggio and Dalí, but also on 'Mid-river: the Bearer', a painting by Timothy Hyman, which had made a deep impression on her when she saw a reproduction in *The Powys Journal* VIII (128). Her talk concentrated on Wolf's tragic fate, underlining two intertwined themes, that of a Golden Age (the field of buttercups) as opposed to the pigsty, an image of death and dissolution: 'They pave the way for the formation of Wolf's newly found identity as a tragicomic, somewhat clown-like figure, who can have many faces and participates in the continuous role-playing of his solitary carnival. The metaphor for this ever-transforming, fluid identity is the river, which is actually inherent in the playfully telling name of the title-hero.'

In my talk I endeavoured to indicate the extent of the affinities between Powys and Béla Hamvas, but I also tried to explain, choosing short passages from his works, the nature of JCP's particular genius, concluding: 'The world as seen by Powys is his own. It was painfully won out of his battles with his own complex, protean personality and its varied layers of manias, fears, frustrations, strange obsessions, his challenge to fate and to the Deity he named "the First Cause". Powys is not a "literary" author, he is not concerned with formal perfection. He was a writer by inner necessity and therefore never attached much importance to his style, which can sometimes be extravagant; he never considered himself an "artist".'

The lecture will be published in the March issue of the University's English language review *EJES* (*Eger Journal of English Studies*).

John Cowper Powys, Anarchism and Max Stirner

*The following is extracted from 'John Cowper Powys, Emma Goldman and Anarchy', **David Goodway**'s lecture to the 2008 Powys Society Conference at the University of Chichester.*

I first spoke to The Powys Society at the 1984 Conference, University of Exeter, when my subject was 'The Politics of John Cowper Powys'. When the text was printed in *The Powys Review* 15 (1984–5) I promised in a footnote 'to explore further John Cowper Powys's individualist anarchism in another paper' (p. 52). The paper, however, did not materialize until the 2003 Conference at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen, with 'A Cult of Sensations: John Cowper Powys's Life-Philosophy and Individualist Anarchism'. This was published first in *The Powys Journal* XIV (2004), and then in edited form as chapter 5 in my *Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow: Left-Libertarian Thought and British Writers from William Morris to Colin Ward* (Liverpool, 2006). The earlier talk,'The Politics of John Cowper Powys', was split across *Seeds* chapter 6 ('The Spanish Revolution and Civil War – and the Case of George Orwell') to a second chapter (7) on Powys ('The impact of Emma Goldman and Spain'): in this I wrote for the first time about Powys's fiction.

My edition of *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman*, finally published in 2008 by Cecil Woolf, would seem to reprint much of this material in the introduction and afterword, but the fact is that this volume was held up for very many years (at least fifteen) ... I had expected the situation to be reversed and the Powys–Goldman correspondence to come out long before *Seeds*, intending (as I warned Cecil) to collect in the latter all that I had written on Powys.

What I have argued is that Powys was a natural libertarian and, specifically, that renewed contact with Emma Goldman in 1936 was responsible for exerting a major influence on his thought, enabling him to reformulate his political and social outlook in terms no longer markedly at odds with his basic personal philosophy. By 1939 he could assure the Rhondda poet, Huw Menai, that 'I've long been a convert to Anarchism as the only real liberty, & without question the system of the Future ...'; while in print he was calling himself an 'anarchistic individualist' and three years later committed himself to the 'social ideal' of 'Philosophical Anarchy' (*Seeds*, 153; *Letters*, 153).

Had Powys really become an anarchist? In 1939 he wrote to Louis Wilkinson: '... the Anarchist Ideal ... is of course the perfect one ...'; but also

> Of course really ... the truth is that the Anarchists alone are right. But the worst of that is that they are too good to be true (*Seeds*, 159; *Letters*, 160).

Morine Krissdóttir quotes the latter when she comments (very reasonably): 'His long friendship with Emma Goldman and his own predilections made him sympathetic to the anarchist cause, but he considered that "they are too good to be true"' (*Descents of Memory: The Life of John Cowper Powys* (2007), 355).

Yet there are two anarchist positions to which it may plausibly be maintained Powys adhered. First, he was an individualist anarchist – or 'anarchistic individualist', to use his own words – not just in the late 1930s and 1940s, but from the years before the First World War, throughout the period when he was a Communist sympathizer, and down to the 1950s and his death in 1963. Secondly, there is philosophical anarchism: the 'social ideal' of 'Philosophical Anarchy'.

'Philosophical anarchy' and 'philosophical anarchist' are terms much favoured by Powys and by them he seems to mean a thoughtful or intellectual anarchism or anarchist – of these he always approved – as opposed to a mindless and violent activism or agitator (of which he did not); but this is not a useful distinction. Rather philosophic or philosophical anarchism is best understood as the standpoint that anarchism, that society without state or government, is the ideal, but that it is not really practicable, at least not at the present. This is Powys's belief in the early 1940s in *Mortal Strife*, *The Art of Growing Old* and even the much gloomier *Dostoievsky*. I go so far as to argue that his supreme fictional achievement, *Porius*, is his most anarchist novel, with four libertarian themes running throughout the book.

I had thought Powysians would consider I was guilty of gross exaggeration in all of this. So it was with particular interest that I found John Hodgson in his review of *Seeds* not only agreeing but arguing that I 'don't go far enough' in my analysis of Porius (*Journal* XVII (2007), 148). It was also reassuring (if surprising) to read A. N. Wilson discussing *Porius* in similar terms to mine in *After the Victorians: The Decline of Britain in the World* (2005), which I only read after *Seeds* had gone to press. He quotes extensively from what I describe (*Seeds*, 171) as the 'anarchist lesson' Myrddin Wyllt gives the pageboy Neb:

> 'Listen, child. Do you think obedience is a good thing?'
>
> 'Am I to say the truth?'
>
> 'Of course'.
>
> And Neb, the son of Digon, boldly shook his impish head. 'No master, I don't. It's what cruel people do to children and animals.'

Neb proceeds to ask what turns a god into a devil and receives the answer which, says Wilson, is 'really Powys's Credo':

> 'Power, my son. Nobody in the world, nobody beyond the world, can be trusted with power, unless perhaps it be our mother the earth: but I doubt whether even she can. The Golden Age can never come again till governments and rulers and kings and emperors and priests and druids and gods and devils learn to un-make themselves as I did, and leave men and women to themselves! And don't you be deceived, little one, by this new religion's [*i.e. Christianity's*] talk of "love". I tell you wherever there is what they call love there is hatred too and a lust for obedience! What the world wants is more common-sense, more kindness, more indulgence, more leaving people alone …'
>
> (*After the Victorians*, 520–21)

The anarchist writer this exchange makes me think of is Alex Comfort, but Wilson claims it is Stirnerite: 'Though often associated with Nietzsche … John Cowper

Powys was really most influenced, philosophically, by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Max Stirner'; and 'Powys is never more Stirnerish [*sic*]' than in Myrddin Wyllt's and Neb's conversation (*After The Victorians*, 520).

My assumption is that Andrew Wilson had picked up what I'd written – in the *Review* and *Powys Journal* articles – but it is John Dunn who has been most influenced by these: in 'Flight to Reality: The Wessex Novels of John Cowper Powys' (*The Powys Journal* XVII (2007), previously published as a pamphlet with the same title (Milton Keynes: Study Press, 2005); also in 'The Real and the Ideal', his review of *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Emma Goldman* (*The Powys Society Newsletter* 64 (July 2008), previously posted on his blog, www.johndunn.me.uk). The review is by turns immensely flattering and sharply critical.

In 'Flight to Reality' John Dunn repeatedly describes Powys as a Stirnerite. I wish to make clear, though, that I have never done so and do not believe he was. My contention is that the amalgam that is Powys's life-philosophy is 'a major, liberatory body of practical advice which converged with Stirner's egoism and the individualism of other anarchists, but without being intellectually indebted to them' ('A Cult of Sensations', *Journal* XIV, 75; repeated in *Seeds*, 121).

Powys was certainly familiar with Stirner's famous book, *The Ego and His Own*, which first appeared in English translation in 1907, when it was published in New York. He employs, interestingly, its non-sexist title *The Ego and Its Own* and links it to two of the authors he most esteemed, Dorothy Richardson and Montaigne, while mentioning a third, Pater. In *Dorothy M. Richardson* (1931) he says:

> The chances are ... that ... it will be left to some more reckless and daring thinker than any produced by our generation to do full justice to the new gospel of the art of life which these nine volumes [of *Pilgrimage*] contain ... a whole new way of taking life is revealed here for those who have the wit to catch its drift. ... They contain the seed of a new philosophy of the senses, indeed of a new philosophy of life. That crude, disagreeable and yet suggestive book, Max Stirner's *Ego and Its Own*, might have inaugurated this philosophy. It missed its aim, as did also the work of Walter Pater, by a certain curious distance, on account of his masculine scrupulosity and his masculine fastidiousness ... (*Richardson*, 32)

In *The Pleasures of Literature* Powys goes further, commenting:

> It is, indeed, hard to overrate the moral and philosophical importance of the particular kind of egoism advocated by Montaigne. It is *The Ego and Its Own* of Max Stirner; only in Montaigne's case this super-individualism is mitigated by his reverence for the Laws of his Country, by his love of the old traditions, by his hatred of innovation, and by his profound distrust of the insane logic of that dangerous tyrant, the human reason. [*PoL*, 329]

Powys had also contrasted favourably a fourth revered writer with Stirner in *Suspended Judgments* when he assesses Rousseau's 'emotional, feminine, psychological kind' of 'anarchy' as 'far more dangerous' than that of 'a genuine and logical anarchist, such as Max Stirner' (*Seeds*, 100–01; *Letters*, 157, 159). These three

statements are scarcely those of a follower of Stirner (the only other reference to Stirner in Powys's entire *oeuvre* is a minor one); and I do not include Stirner among the 21 key figures whom I consider influenced the emergence of Powys's life-philosophy – of whom I regard the most important to have been Wordsworth, Keats, Rousseau, Pater, Goethe and Chuang Tzu.

The clincher for John Dunn in establishing Powys's Stirnerism is the title of the 'Spain and the World' article, 'The Real and the Ideal', published in May 1938 (which I include in *Powys and Emma Goldman*, 106–09). He points out that the concluding chapter of *The Ego and His Own* begins:

> Pre-Christian and Christian times pursue opposite goals: the former wants to idealize the real, the latter to realize the ideal. ...The opposition of the real and the ideal is an irreconcilable one, and the one can never become the other: if the ideal became the real, it would no longer be the ideal; and, if the real became the ideal, the ideal alone would be, but not at all the real (*The Ego and His Own: The Case of the Individual against Authority* (New York, 1963), 362.)

Dunn claims that the title, 'The Real and the Ideal', was 'lifted straight from the pages of *The Ego and His Own*; and further: 'The purposeful choice of title is...proof positive that Powys not only read, but was heavily influenced by Stirner' (27). The problem is this. There is no proof that Powys chose the title (the manuscript isn't extant); and I actually believe it improbable he would have done, as few – if any – writers of articles for daily, weekly or monthly periodicals get to do so. Who then would have been responsible – for words required to stretch over two columns only? Most likely the editor, the young Vernon Richards; or possibly Emma Goldman herself, who had solicited the contribution. Goldman was an admirer of Stirner (although not a Stirnerite), and her Mother Earth Publishing Association had sold *The Ego and His Own*: 'The book contains the most revolutionary philosophy ever written, its purpose being to destroy the idea of duty and assert the supremacy of the will, and from this standpoint to effect a "transvaluation of all values"...' – as advertised in Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York, n.d.).

I will conclude with a quotation from *Rabelais* (1948), cited by John Hodgson, and which I'm extremely disappointed to have missed when writing *Seeds*. It shows just how anarchistically Powys was thinking – it's exactly the kind of thing that my final subject, Colin Ward, believes (and myself also): 'We know only too well how the sanctity of religion and the sanctity of the family have come to be closely associated with authority from above, while authority from below has been perverted to mean authority from the Devil instead of authority from the sound and good instincts of the masses of common men and women' (John Cowper Powys, *Rabelais*, 362).

David Goodway

Thomas Hardy and His Times

By JOHN COWPER POWYS

English novelist, literary critic and lecturer *

Unlike Balzac, who according to Henry James was essentially a historian, Thomas Hardy, although possessed of considerable antiquarian curiosity, concentrated his whole nature upon that quarter of England which he was the first of moderns to name Wessex. His reactions to the contemporary history of his country were of that deeper, slower, more instinctive kind that belong to a rural as distinguished from a metropolitan life. The "alarums and excursions" of great public events did reach him, but they reached him through the medium of the diurnal rains and fogs and frosts, the leisurely noons and the slow twilights, of one particular spot upon the earth's surface.

Thomas Hardy was born on June 2, 1840, in a thatched cottage, which has remained to this day practically unchanged on the edge of Egdon Heath, in the small hamlet of Upper Bockhampton, a mile or so from the old Roman town of Dorchester, the capital of the county of Dorset. After a solid local education, at least as classical as the one Shakespeare had in his boyhood, Hardy attended lectures in King's College, London, and was speedily articled, as a practising pupil in architecture, to John Hicks, who was especially interested in ecclesiastical buildings. With Mr. Hicks he remained from 1856 to 1861 and then, for the four most malleable years of his life, from 22 to 27, he worked in the architectural offices of Sir A. Blomfield, a gentleman for whose talent and character he always expressed the utmost respect. The important role played by architecture in Hardy's aesthetic development received an external stimulus in 1863, when he became a prize man of the Royal Institute of British Architects. It was at this period of his life, exiled from Wessex, that he began writing poetry, the art which, as we all now know, he regarded as a great deal superior to the art of the novel.

His first published story was *Desperate Remedies*, which he wrote, under Meredith's not very wise advice, with meticulous care for the plot interest. There is much to be said, for and against, the almost fantastic emphasis upon plot which he subsequently developed and it is probable that Meredith's hurried words, as a publisher's reader, only accentuated what may well be regarded as an architectural bias in his handling of the art of fiction.

When it comes, however, to the obscure question of the effect of contemporary history upon Hardy's reserved, indrawn, locality-obsessed nature, it must be remembered that these detached ironic-tragic works were composed in one of the most momentous epochs that England ever passed through. It is strange to recall that the months that preceded the publication of his first novel were those months of extreme tension between Great Britain and the United States over the matter of the part played in the war between North and South by the Confederate ship Alabama, allowed to sail from a British port. One can imagine the excited chatter that flowed with the brown ale in many a Dorchester tavern while *Desperate Remedies* was being revised by its author, but what cared the rooks in the Yelham woods, what cared the starlings in Fordington Great Field, or the carters of the Mayor of Castcrbridge as

* *from* Current History *(New York), March 1928 (vol XXVII, no. 6, pp 829–31). Hardy had died in January 1928.*

their lumbering wagons creaked along those lanes leaving scented wisps of hay in the high hedges, even though, in an angry Senate at Washington, Mr. Stunner, head of the Committee for Foreign Affairs, thundered furiously at Mr. Gladstone's Government?

The final touches to Hardy's next volume, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, the book in which he first showed that he had really found his method, a method evocative of as mellow, as ripe a flavor as the pippins in any West Country orchard, must have been given when in the country across the channel the end of the Franco-Prussian war resulted in the Third Republic. It was then that in the House of Commons Sir Charles Dilke and other truculent republicans — while the Prince of Wales lay sick almost to death — were proposing a reduction of the royal salary. No English novelist has caught as Hardy has done the quaint savour full of its own homely rusticated romance, of our peculiar English attitude to the House of Hanover, and one may be sure that these rhetorical republican gestures won scant sympathy from that compact kestrel-hawk head bent now over the pages of a sly realism antedating many a famous continental cult!

But in 1874 appeared a far greater book than this, none other than *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and it is not perhaps "considering too curiously" to imagine the relief with which quiet people all over the land turned to Shepherd Oak's whimsical courtship of his proud Bathsheba to escape the grandiose fluctuations of Disraeli's Arabian Nights diplomacy. Thomas Hardy, for all his Dorset respect for George III's grand-daughter, was never an imperialist. The England he loved and represented was the Chaucerian, the Shakespearean England, the England of the insular, white-cliffed, indigenous tradition, of barton, garth and turnpike, of Candlemas twilights and Lammas dawns, of Pack-Monday Fairs and Guy Fawkes bonfires!

Meditating upon Hardy's philosophical detachment in the midst of an England so stirred up by militarists and politicians, one wonders what sad, sardonic thoughts flitted through that skull, now turned to ashes in its solemn "Hydrotaphia" at Chaucer's feet in the Confessor's Abbey, when all the Jingoes of the land were welcoming Lord Beaconsfield home from Berlin, triumphant protector of the Turk; home to his hypnotized "county families" and his Orient-obsessed sovereign? But he has himself answered this question. For in 1878 appeared *The Return of the Native* with its background of Egdon Heath, of a Wessex seen, one might almost say, *sub specie aeternitatis* and its foreground of the simple grandeur of the vexed heart of man, as Shakespeare had limned it in King Lear!

As one turns over the faded pages of Punch, with those queer pictures of bygone fashions and excitements, one cannot resist thinking how true are Goethe's words that a great man is linked to his passing age rather by his weakness than by his strength. Little enough of such "weakness" was in Thomas Hardy; and one cannot help feeling, in comparison with other writers of his time, how his books hit us now with so undated, so unmoded a weight, over the heads of that fantastic, bustling, self-satisfied generation, whose images those "sere and yellow leaves" call up from the past.

In a significant reaction from the tricky banalities of imperial policy in 1870, from Sir Bartle Frere's ridiculous little war, for example, against Cetewayo, King of Zululand, Hardy's imagination turns in his *Trumpet Major* to the heroic age of Nelson and Bonaparte. Nelson meant as much to Hardy as he meant to Conrad; and this was because Nelson's character had that undying English element in it, that element that might be called the "Platonic Idea" of the actual soil of England, a secret essence, rising up from those deep plough-lands, whimsical and yet tragic,

reckless and yet tender, of which there was, one fears, little enough in the transitory activities of a Sir Bartle Frere or a Sir Garnet Wolseley!

A GREAT NOVEL

With the opening of the nineties, notorious as the apogee of Oscar Wilde, Aubrey Beardsley and *The Yellow Book*; in the two years separating the death of Browning from the death of Tennyson, Hardy was occupied with the final revision of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. This famous work had already appeared in an expurgated shape—the confession scene, for example, entirely omitted —in *The Illustrated London News*; but with its appearance in book form it lifted him to a literary niche equal to that of the greatest men of letters then living in any country. The scenes in Talbothay's Dairy, fragrant with the breath of cattle, brimming with the saps nnd juices of rain-soaked vegetation; the scene on Salisbury Plain, tragic, taciturn, monumental, the scene where Angel and Liza-Lu mount the hill above Winchester with their heads bowed; to surpass these things one would have to leave prose altogether and turn to the noblest poetry.

With both Tennyson and Browning dead —those great pious interpreters who stood between agnosticism and the faith of our fathers—the sombre pessimism implicit in Darwin's teaching began to prevail. Skin by skin the intellectual minority stripped itself of the old Victorian panaceas, of the old sentiment, of the old aplomb!

At the very moment when President Cleveland hurled his challenge to Lord Salisbury over the affair of Venezuela; at the very moment when President Kruger defied the new imperialism of Cecil Rhodes, Hardy flung down in *Jude the Obscure*, published in 1896, an intense, vibrant arraignment of the whole system, moral, social, theological, of the conventions of his time. The Puckish whimsicality, the mellow, metheglin-sweet humor of his earlier novels congeal and precipitate themselves in *Jude the Obscure* into a veritable stalactite of pity, a piercing frozen cry, like human tears turned into some appalling pendant of anguish; so that the book becomes perhaps the saddest book ever written by mortal pen.

Seven years after this, when *The Well-Beloved*, a work more bizarre than any he had written, had completed the cycle of his novels, the death of Emma Lavinia, Hardy's first wife, left him a solitary figure in that house on the Stafford road, facing the south wind and the Ridgeway tumuli. But in 1914 at the outbreak of the war he married his second wife, Florence Emily, the gentle and intellectual lady who comforted his troubled spirit and kept him alive for his lovers and disciples till within three short summers of his ninetieth year.

HARDY AS A POET

Three wars during his long lifetime made their indelible marks upon Hardy's mind. The first of these only reached him in rumors from the past; but no writer has dealt with the supernatural awe, excited by the flame of Bonaparte, as mystically and intimately as he has done, both in *The Dynasts* and elsewhere. The manner in which he reacted to all three wars, whereby the power of England was imperiled, was neither imperialistic nor pacifistic. It was concentrated and individual rather than gregarious. This can be proved by a comparison between three separate poems; the first entitled *The Alarm*, which has to do with the French war; the second entitled *The Souls of the Slain*, which has to do with the South African war; and the third, *Men Who March Away*, inspired by the World War. In all these we find the chief stress laid upon the particular emotion binding the soldier to the woman or the women he has left behind.

There in something singularly harmonious and satisfactory to the mind in Hardy's career—so few external events of the

usual biographical banality, such deep, unthwarted, unfrustrated reticence! Here, as with Shakespeare, his life is in his work. From the year 1860 to the year 1928 he was expressing those innumerable tragic-humorous reactions to the human predicament which make up the substance of this strange eventful poetry in which far more than in his more popular novels his genius is revealed.

As one compares the piety of earlier Victorian writers with Hardy's Promethean challenge to the opposeless will, the change of tone serves us as a memorable striking of the dark clock of Time. If the skeptical doubts of the "impercipients" among us fall upon sadder, graver, more tolerant ears, as they reach us today, than they carried when *The Illustrated London News* could not bring itself to publish *Tess* in its entirety, the difference is due no less to him than to the great scientific writers. Like some lonely woodpecker's beak repeating its blows upon the bark of a sapless tree his unconquerable hostility to the illiberal beats upon the most indurated and knotted heads.

The Wessex novels form a kind of classic viaduct from the ponderous forums of the Victorian age to the hurly-burly of the modern market place. But the final overtone of Hardy's attitude to life hovers above all these changing fashions. The soil to which he remained faithful all his days, and in which his heart has now been laid, rewarded him for his stubborn fidelity. By a passionate love of the Particular he attained the Universal. By an intense scrutiny of the hedgehog upon his lawn he approached the secrets of the Zodiac!

(thanks to Chris Thomas for retrieving this topical piece)

Thomas Hardy.

Review

Aspects of John Cowper Powys's Owen Glendower, by W. J. Keith

The Powys Society, 2008, pp.96, paperback, ISBN 978-1-874559-35-1. £4.75

Owen Glendower is the first book of JCP's that I read and is my favourite. It was therefore especially pleasing to read that Bill Keith refers to it as one of Powys's finest achievements. As a literary critic he sets out to 'convey the nature of a magical literary achievement'(80). He appreciates JCP's unusual and somewhat unorthodox writing, suggesting that the only comparable writer on Owen Glendower himself is Shakespeare.

The preface sets out the author's intentions, as 'a basic introduction to *Owen Glendower* ... intended as much for general readers as for literary specialists'(4). This study is in eleven separate essays, reminding the reader of the various ways of entering the book. The sections range from 'The History of Wales before1400', 'Anachronisms', 'Glendower's Magic', and – for me one of the most helpful – on the *Mabinogion*. It was easy to move from section to section, either in order or at random. For example at the end of section 3 ('Novel or Romance') we are told that the topic of Walter Scott is to be dealt with in section 5, thus enticing the reader to try that next.

Bill Keith is consistently generous towards JCP for his 'idiosyncratic notions of human origins'(7). Others have been less considerate, but for those who might find 'the forest people', 'aboriginal herdsmen' and 'pictish aboriginals' a stumbling block, Bill Keith is there to help. At the same time due credit is given to JCP's 'determination to bolster his narrative with historical accuracy'(16). The explanation of the structure, in terms of an historical framework acting as bridge passages to the pageant-like big scenes, will surely instruct all readers including the 'literary specialists'. I found myself wondering if it is literary specialists who are more inclined to find JCP exasperating and therefore less accessible.

Bill Keith's conclusion is masterly – he rises to the challenge of JCP's own conclusion to *Owen Glendower*. He never loses sight of the 'imaginative and creative' (8) aspects of JCP. An interesting coincidence occurs when Bill Keith discusses Northrop Frye's writings, and a further digression shows that Northrop Frye was considerably influenced by Wilson Knight who also linked JCP with Shakespeare, because they 'probe beyond the immediate and the material towards what they recognise as a mystery at the heart of things' (85).

I was fortunate to spend a day at Biddles where the book was printed and bound. It is a thoroughly presentable little volume and all credit should go to John Hodgson and Stephen Powys Marks for its production. The Society is indebted to Bill Keith for such a full and readable study. It should be on sale alongside the book.

Sonia Lewis

Sonia Lewis's 'Re-reading Owen Glendower' *is in* NL*44 (November 2001), with other*

views of the book. Owen Glendower *was reprinted at that time by Rob Stepney and is now available from Overlook/ Duckworth, and of course via Amazon & Abe.* KK

Red Die: A Dorset Mystery
by Roger Norman
Sundial Press, 2008, hardback, ISBN 978-0955-1523-1-3. £14.99.

The Sundial Press, which recently reprinted novels by T.F. and Philippa Powys, here present one by a contemporary writer who likewise knows his Dorset well. Set in 1916, *Red Die* is a strange and haunting story of a deserter from the Western Front. Jack Yeoman makes his way back to his Vale of Blackmore home, only to become a prey to eerie, apparently supernatural events that seem to have a bearing on his own predicament. But the book is no mere parable, and the writing conveys the sense of a physically substantial world, in places suggesting the work of Alan Garner, not least in being at times teasingly complex and enigmatic. The country between Shaftesbury and Cerne Abbas provides a romantic setting, with frequent references to places familiar to Powys readers, such as Buckland Newton, where both Katie and Francis Powys ended their days (no mention, however, is made of Mappowder, where Theodore and Lucy, and Gerard Casey, were to live). *Red Die* has a powerful atmosphere generated by human as well as landscape factors, and maintains an element of surprise up to the end. This is the kind of book that John Cowper, I suspect, would have enjoyed greatly. I know that I did.

Glen Cavaliero

An Elephant in the Library ...

***Max Peltier** writes:*

I made the rather surprising discovery after reading a *New York Times* piece last October, on a new repository of digitized books, that there exist any number of digitized Powys books on the web which, although they can neither be read nor printed for copyright reasons, can be searched for a given phrase, which can be quite useful if you are looking for a particular quote within one or more books, or indeed for various other reasons.

At the time, in the excitement of reading the article, I quite easily found a catalogue in which the Powys books appeared, but when I went back some time ago, I could not for the life of me figure out how I had found them. So I wrote to the library at University of Michigan and they very politely explained what I should do. Their reply arrived at the same time as the *New York Review of Books* issue with Prof. Darnton's article.

Digitization

Although the importance of the ability to search for a given word or phrase within the digitized text of a book should not be over-estimated, it could conceivably be useful to ascertain that the words 'life illusion' appear twice in *A Glastonbury Romance* (on pages 261 and 962 in the 1933 Bodley Head edition, as indicated, by the way, in Bill Keith's *Companion*) and thus be able to discover the particular contexts in which the notion appears. Also – and this is a real-life example! – if you suspect the quote:

> Between worm-life and god-life every human soul is suspended; what the lonely soul must shake off is the man-made idea that certain virtuous practical activities are the main purpose of his conscious life. There is only one purpose of all conscious life, and that is to grow calmly, steadily, quietly more conscious! It is in loneliness alone that the human soul can achieve this inner growth.

occurs somewhere within *A Philosophy of Solitude*, it can be helpful to be informed immediately just by searching for 'worm-life and god-life' that such is not the case, whereas going back to *In Defence of Sensuality* the same search finds this passage page 119 of the 1930 Gollancz edition.

Robert Darnton, in his article 'Google & the Future of Books' published in the February 12–25 edition of the *NYRB*, gives a fascinating overview of the situation he feels has been created by a recent settlement between Google and the authors and publishers who were suing it for alleged breach of copyright. The case had been brought following the digitizing by Google of millions of books residing in various major research libraries, the digitized texts of which were then made searchable online under Google Books via the internet. As Prof. Darnton points out, the terms of the settlement run to 134 pages and 15 appendices in strict legal language, so that he concludes, if only for this reason, that nobody can really predict what will actually happen in future, leaving those with the shared common goal of wanting the

collections of research libraries to be opened up and made available to readers everywhere, with vigilance as maybe the only workable tactic.

Viewed from the United States, essentially all the works of the Powyses are still copyright material, so that the situation described by Prof. Darnton probably explains why Google Books only offers 5 searchable works by JCP. However, in October 2008 13 major US universities came together to found the **HathiTrust** (from the Hindi word for elephant) with precisely the goal of making 'the digitized collections of some of the nation's great research libraries available for all' (see their website at **<www.hathitrust.org>**). There are at this time 25 participating universities, and HathiTrust announces that 2,572,831 volumes have already been digitized of which 379,533 are in the public domain. It also states that 'Access to materials in the repository is determined by (1) copyright law and (2) permissions granted by individual rights holders.'

HathiTrust does not have the money and manpower available to Google so that there is currently no single global interface to the body of content in the HathiTrust repository. However, some institutions have already included bibliographic records for HathiTrust digitized material into their own catalogues. The searches mentioned above within works by JCP were carried out using the **Mirlyn** interface to the University of Michigan libraries (the appendix below indicates briefly how Mirlyn can be used for such searches of the works of any author when they appear as digitized material in this catalogue).

Using Mirlyn for the first time, it was quite a surprise to discover that for JCP there are 66 HathiTrust records corresponding to some 55 digitized books, with at times records for more than one edition, together with other records for various prefaces etc. by JCP. The digitized and therefore searchable books include *Autobiography* (3 different editions), the major novels (with the two editions corresponding to the two paginations for *Glastonbury*, the 1933 John Lane The Bodley Head edition and 1955 Macdonald edition), various philosophical works, many of the Cecil Woolf collections of letters, the 1930 diary. For Llewelyn there are 33 Mirlyn records, and 26 records for Theodore.

It thus remains to be hoped that HathiTrust will not disappear from the scene leaving Google as sole access provider. I forgot to mention that the validity of the settlement with Google, still subject to approval by a US District Court, is primarily a matter of dividing profits.

Appendix : Access to Mirlyn

Go to **<http://mirlyn.lib.umich.edu/**. Click '**Advanced Search**' in the usual navigation bar. In the screen which appears, type for example "john cowper powys" in the '**Author**' box in the top half of the screen and tick the '**HathiTrust Digital Library only**' box in the lower '**Refine further**' half of the screen, then click the '**Search**' button in this same lower part of the screen. The bibliographical records for digitized JCP material appear. Clicking on the link for any record then gets you the

screen for the book in question with a search box and 'Search' button for text within that book (phrases in "..." if required). Patience may then be required while the university computers find time to bring you your list of pages; the university doesn't have Google's apparently unlimited computing power, but the results always come through (all of the above will obviously work for other authors). A word of warning: as in Google Books, the digitized texts are obtained by scanning and character recognition, and so may not be perfect. Imperfect printing of the physical book scanned or just words from a foreign language may constitute a challenge for character recognition: '*à quatre*' for example is found neither p.1094 in the 1933 *Glastonbury* nor p.1045 in the 1955 *Glastonbury*. Beware false negatives!

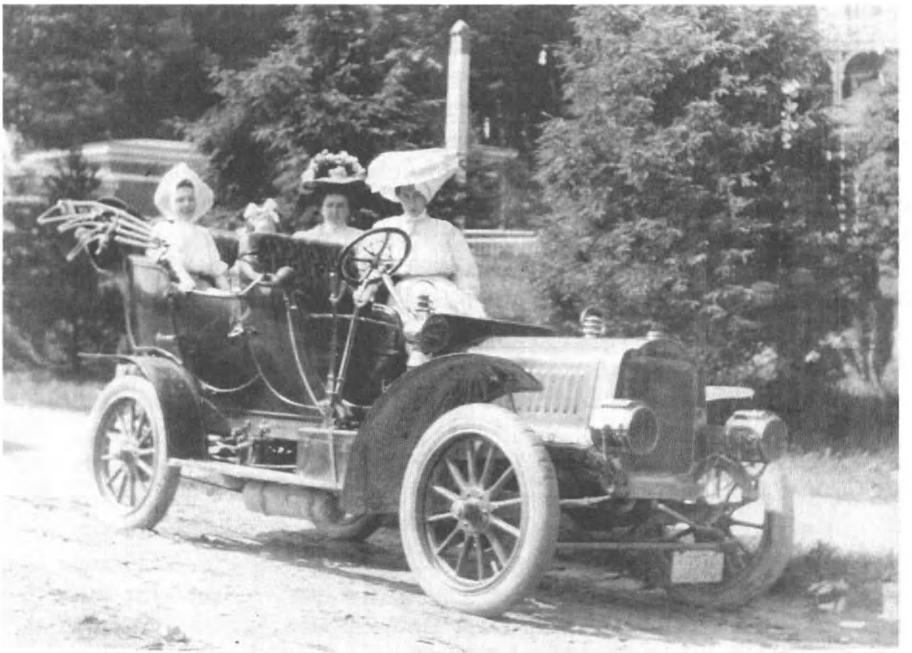
Horseless Carriages

from ***Robert Bell*** *(Phyllis Playter's great-nephew – see also NL 64). With thanks again.*

This is in regard to the photo I sent to you last month of my mother, Marion, and her aunt, Phyllis, sitting in a car (*see last page*). A friend (a retired Lockheed engineer and ancient auto aficionado) has made an educated guess that the car is a 1906 or 1907 Columbia Electric, manufactured in Columbus, Ohio. My guess is that the picture was taken in 1908 in Joplin, Missouri, where my mother was born, and that in the picture she is 5 years old and that Phyllis is 15 years old.

Just for fun I'm fed-x'ing you two more pictures. The first is of Phyllis sitting in the back seat of a gas-engined Lozier with Marion to her left, partially hidden by the front seat (*see over*). The two formidable women wearing the American version of Victorian headgear are my mother's grandmother and mother. How did they ever negotiate a brisk breeze?

When my wife and I and my mother visited Phyllis in 1976 I could see that the ten years difference in their ages had not changed the relationship much from how you see them in the photograph of the car when they were 5 and 15 years old. One the adoring niece, the other the fascinating, sophisticated aunt! They got along famously but the difference was still evident in their 70's and 80's which I found both interesting and amusing ...



Phyllis and her Niece

Two letters to her niece Marion (Mrs Mark Bell), from 1958, show how attached Phyllis always felt to her family in America. Phyllis's mother had died in 1953. In September 1958 Marion had told of the death of her father George Playter, the son of Franklin Playter's first wife (see JCP's letters to George, in NL64). George sent magnificent food parcels to Corwen after the war.

1 Waterloo, Blaenau Ffestiniog, Merioneth, N.Wales
Saturday September 6th 1958

My dear Marion ... You don't know how constantly you have been in my thoughts—I went through so much the same thing with mother's illness and death—the worst experience I have ever had—the strain—the emotion—the pity for her plight—and my own endurance strained almost to breaking point so that I wondered how long I could hold out—and I didn't have a newspaper job as you had as well! As you say it is the pictures of the last that are so hard to bear, and that blot out all the other memories. I used to try desperately to make myself re-live all my memories of mother from my childhood on, when she was happiest and so much more herself—but how thin and unreal they seemed compared to the last tragic ones that seemed engraved on my mind. I haven't yet got over their precedence to all others—but I have got over the ones of father's death, so it shows they do recede with time. ...

I think it is a terrible thing that death should have to be such a torment for the one

dying and those who have to bear it looking on—and who would do anything to release them if they only could. ... You would think when medicine has done so much to prolong life and ease suffering, it would not be allowed to happen—and I feel sure something will be done to this end sometime. But it does come to an end—and death becomes a longed for blessing. He had you—as mother had me, and that is everything. ...

November 13th 1958

My dearest Marion

Your long letter of Nov 8th with the pictures came this morning and I cannot—I will not—let another day go by without writing ... I hardly expected to hear from you again and it was such a solace to me to get it. I have thought of you so much, and the thought of your father's being gone suddenly comes into my mind—as I am doing all sorts of things with all these people I am with, who know nothing of my life—with such a mournful sadness. Jack liked him so much. I can share my feelings about him with Jack, who is—you know— the same age as your father. ...

I am so pleased to see these pictures. You don't know what a white mist envelops everyone but you and your father—to me—having never seen any of them. ...

(PP examines the photographs Marion has sent while JCP reads the letter aloud. She is fascinated by one of a spinning wheel that she knew from her childhood, and remembers an ancestral cradle offered to her by a cousin in Toronto, that she regrets refusing.)

... I read every word about the old desk and the bed and who is to come in to your father's house with avid interest. As I did about your own house. I haven't known anything and I can't tell you what a difference it makes to know these things. ...

Jack was pleased at your rejoicing at Senator Knowland's defeat. He could never bear him. Who will be the Democratic candidate at the next election? What has become of [?] Kerfauver? I haven't heard one word about him for such a long time. The papers here are full of Nixon's arrival in London—I grudge all this fanfare and ceremony to propitiate America—being bestowed on Nixon.

O Marion it is wonderful to have this link with you now with your letters!

We have had relays of visitors—still going on—in spite of the winter which usually puts a stop to them in this faraway cold place. Our colds haven't completely gone, partly because of having no rest, and the weather of course. That is the reason I haven't written. But everything does finally come to an end and surely this year's visitors and our colds will too before long.

It was lovely having this long letter but I know how full your life is and don't expect them—they are just good fortune when they come.

With my love always

Phyllis

Phyllis Playter with her niece Marion in a Columbia Electric, about 1908.