DISCUSSION MEETING

Saturday November 21st 2009 at **2.30 pm**

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

John Cowper Powys's *Lucifer: A Poem*

(written in 1905, published with a preface in 1956) [*see page 2*]

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

Editorial

As John Cowper Powys dominated the Conference, this *Newsletter* reminds us of two other voices: Llewelyn Powys in a reprint of one of his most attractive essays from *Thirteen Worthies*, and Theodore Powys in courteous mode, writing to his admirer Ottoline Morrell.

Tim Blanchard's talk on Tea made an lively start to the Conference and is repeated here. JCP's *Lucifer*, subject of our meeting on 21st November, links his Keatsian 30s with his reflective 80s. Lucifer (the Morning Star) also beams into the book on Keats which JCP worked at around the same time (first decade of the twentieth century), with its remarkable 'Epistle Dedicatory' to Betsy Plantagenet, a mythical maiden aunt (such as JCP always endowed with special powers), urging her not to be shocked by his 'Paganism' which could bring her 'a message of serious importance'.

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Annual Subscriptions — please see grey leaflet.

Lucifer at Hampstead

John Cowper Powys evidently retained some affection for his 'monstrous epic poem on "The Death of God"' written in 1905. In *Autobiography*, he writes, 'It was an extremely imitative poem, but since it was after all, a narration, I was compelled to be more original in it than I had ever been before in my verses' (358–9). In *Autobiography*, Powys states that the poem was uncompleted, but he allowed it to be published in 1956, and its final lines, in which Satan asserts the creative power of the individual against the tyranny of fate, would also have served the mature Powys as a point of arrival.

> I myself
> Am fate ... Chance and my own
> Will have begot this day. My will alone
> Shall gender what this prosperous day conceives.

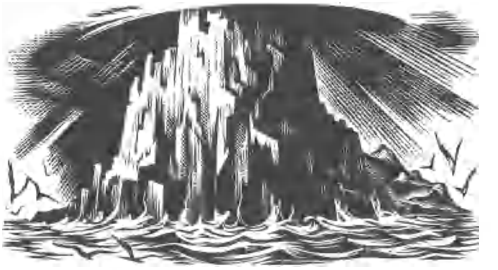
Although written when the author was thirty-three, the tone of *Lucifer* is of adolescent rebellion: it seethes with philosophical, poetical, and moral discontents. In later life, Powys liked to recall that this indictment of the Israelite God and his insipid saints was written in the cathedral close at Norwich.

Powys was evidently in search of a narrative form that would house a cosmic and mythological drama. God, St Paul, and St Augustine are there, alongside a whole array of classical deities, and the Buddha. But Powys cannot consistently inhabit this elevated sphere with comfort: there is slippage from high allegory into memorable scenes of urban industrial desolation, and the red flag is hoisted. The picaresque journeys round the multiverse – the word is already present – anticipate nothing so much as the fantastic narratives of Powys's final years

The verse is sonorous organ music, a vigorous nineteenth-century pastiche. 'Milton and Keats and Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, those four poets, and those four poets alone, seem to have been my masters and inspirers', Powys later recalled. There is indeed a lot of *Paradise Lost*, 'Hyperion', and 'The Scholar Gypsy', and far too much 'Dover Beach'. Powys's mature prose style is often a mulch of composted quotation from the literature of the past, and in *Lucifer* we see him only beginning to digest his romantic enthusiasms.

Lucifer offers plenty to talk about. Powys described it as 'the only poem of my own that I feel any temptation to pray that posterity may read'. Posterity is us, and we plan to read and discuss *Lucifer* at Hampstead on 21st November. JWH

JCP's 1955 preface to Lucifer *is on page 41. The text of Lucifer can be e-mailed or posted to anyone who would like it.*



Headpiece to Part I, by Agnes Miller Parker, reduced (see note by SPM on page 40).

A Gift of Books from Ray Burnham

At the end of September, Kate Kavanagh drove Chris Thomas and me down to Great Torrington in Devon to collect a gift of Powys books kindly donated to the Society by Ray Burnham.

Ray and his wife Joan welcomed us very hospitably to their book-filled house with its glorious views over the valley of the River Torridge, and we talked not just of the Powyses but Dostoievsky, T. E. Lawrence, and Trollope. Ray is a founder member of the Society, but has always lived far from Society events, first in the north-west of England, where he worked for many years as a mathematics lecturer, and for the last ten years in west Devon. He recalls being able to attend a meeting only once, at the Friends' Meeting House in Hampstead in the 1960s. However, he has maintained a close interest in the Society through its publications. We collected six carefully packed cardboard boxes of books by and about all the writing Powyses, and in expressing our thanks to Ray for his generosity to the Society of which he has been a member for over forty years, we are also pleased that he has kept back for himself copies of John Cowper Powys's great Wessex novels.

The books donated by Ray Burnham are detailed in an insert to the newsletter, and I hope that they will now give pleasure to a new cohort of readers.

JWH

Conference 2009: Llangollen, 21st–23rd August

We had good luck with weather again, and the now familiar Hand Hotel was a welcoming sight. Its charm has not faded, though single rooms tend to draw the short straw. Food was still good though a bit slow to arrive. The ambience still hearteningly Welsh, with a singing club in the bar (golden oldies) and a male voice choir next to the dining room (the Hebrew Chorus from *Nabucco*) an uplifting accompaniment to dinner. The customary thumping band on Saturday night blending with the rushing river Dee ... The AGM seemed happy to continue the plan of Llangollen every other year.

More than 55 people came, several for the first time. All the events demonstrated a 'Powysian' delight in difference, from academic to eccentric, with doubtless as many individual responses, including this one. We'll look forward to revisiting and unravelling more of these talks in the next *Journal*. Thanks to everyone who sent photographs.

Tim Blanchard (a new Committee member) kicked off on Friday evening with **'I *must* have some tea' – drink, drugs and defiance in the novels of JCP** – see page 14 for this interesting and entertaining talk. He gives us a social history of tea from its introduction in the sixteenth century as a rare and expensive commodity,

through to the introduction of tea-shops in the 1870s, by which time 'Tea' had branched into a class divide: 'Afternoon Tea' in fine china, with silver teapots and thin bread and butter, enjoyed in drawingrooms and summer gardens, as against Tea drunk with the evening meal after work, ending as a name for the meal itself (known as 'High' tea – or even 'supper' – to afternoon-tea folk). Both kinds of tea-drinking play their part in JCP's novels; and in reality, as we know from his diaries, 'Tea' the evening meal was the second occasion in his own day when he returned from a walk to talk and read with Phyllis. Tim notes that in the earlier novels tea-drinking seems to play a larger part than it does in the later ones. Had JCP become less English?

On Saturday morning **Harald Fawkner,** always an exceptional presence, took as his subject ***Wolf Solent* and the Death of Doctrinal Sensualism.** Introduced by Charles Lock, reminding us of Fawkner's journeys over long years into the interstellar depths of JCP's imagination, Fawkner took the image of a comet circling and approaching the Sun to represent the 'soul' of JCP's writing. In *Wolf Solent* – the break-point into the 'great' JCP – the hero advances into maturity by accepting, rather than contriving (mythologising) experience, then swings away again into the '*art* of forgetting'. Fawkner's reading ('as I understood it' – to quote Melvyn Bragg's useful phrase in his excellent *In Our Time* radio programme) has taken him from focusing on JCP's ecstatic moments, passing over what lay between, to a new interest in the 'unhappy' or 'ordinary' moments (which statistically far outnumber the ecstasies). Wolf's cult of sensation – Jason Otter's oriental idol – Urquhart's nauseating religiosity – all these combine and confront as Wolf – a deeply unhappy person – tends towards a new, 'non-frontal' attitude to life, transforming natural energy into reflected energy. The face of the tramp on the steps of Waterloo station, the essence of woe – something Wolf cannot contrive into his self-mythologising – becomes a reference point not only for Wolf but for human life – as suffering saviour perhaps, despised and rejected of men.

Fawkner among all the speakers prompts most questions in his listeners. This one detected a shift in the perception of the mysterious from aesthetic to ethical; also perhaps (in the revulsion from idols and from sensuality in religion), a post-reformation puritan sense at work – in Wolf ? in JCP ? or in his interpreter ?

Angelika Reichmann, from Hungary, introduced by Tim Hyman, called her paper **JCP and Dostoievsky, 'Influence without Anxiety'.** She traced the Russian influence in JCP's non-fiction and from there into the novels. Can there be influence without some anxiety? Theories of 'deconstruction' – 'every reading a misreading' – and their Freudian interpretation of an inevitably hostile father-son relationship between writers, don't allow for gratitude such as John Cowper's, openly expressed in his book on Dostoievsky and indirectly in his fiction, or for the way in which one 'strong poet' can absorb another without rivalry.

Four intersections were indicated: realism, the 'carnivalesque', intertextuality and confession. Dostoievsky's 'real reality', like Powys's, is neither social or 'magic'

realism, but an inner dimension of subjective reality containing an element of mystery. Both writers deal with personal devils and personal ecstasies in their characters, but while in the Russians there is tension between faith and doubt, Powys

people choose what to believe, and accept doubt (they invent their own religions). Both writers were fascinated by the Carnivalesque (lives or actions unconstrained by, or reversing, the 'normal', the 'rational' or the 'correct'). Powys's scenes of 'misrule' are generally more direct, more optimistic and ambiguous (more Rabelais-ish), unlike the sadness or bitterness of Dostoievsky's endings in *The Idiot* (when all that was built up in the book seems to crumble) or in JCP's favourite *Devils*/ *The Possessed* (when death clears the stage and the worst devil escapes). Both writers insist on 'intertextuality', a free hand with the raw material and methods of narration; in JCP's case including a collage of references to other writers. As for 'confession', neither has trouble with 'shamelessness' or self-denigration in their characters, and both explore motives beyond apparent 'reality'; but while JCP recognises the ruling importance in Dostoievsky's characters of *talk* for self-revelation, he passes over their confessional set-pieces and sense of guilt, preferring for himself indirect methods, comment from other characters as different versions of the truth, or metaphors through actions or from nature.

Charles Lock continued the theme with **Dostoievsky as revelation** in the recent book by **Rowan Williams**. JCP's book is not mentioned by Williams, but both writers treat Dostoievsky as in some sense a prophet, with an extra dimension. JCP in his final chapter hopes for this Russian's vision and sympathy in the post-1945 world-order. (In 'My Philosophy', however, written shortly afterwards, he says that he disagrees with Dostoievsky's idea that without christian conscience evil would run amok.) Williams doesn't present Dostoievsky primarily as Christian, but as a witness to freedom, protest and desire beyond the mechanics of this world.

The talk continued along esoteric paths, with connections beween the work of Bakhtin on Dostoievsky, the philosophy of mathematics, and 'Name Worshippers', a sect in the Russian church. Discussion brought in Dostoievsky's violent pan-Slavism in contrast to JCP's commitment to tolerance (to all except cruelty); also the greyness of all theory faced with the colour of the worlds both these writers create.

The sub-title of **Janet Fouli's** talk said it all, with **The Eternal Feminine: John Cowper Powys, Dorothy Richardson, the two silent spouses – and Frances**. She explained that it was Dorothy Richardson who led her to Powys, through the letter from Dorothy to a friend (p.136 in the recent *Powys and Dorothy Richardson* letters) relating a visit from JCP, Phyllis and The Black to her and Alan Odle in London in August 1937 (heavily coated during a heatwave, rescuing The Black from an attack by the dog downstairs, and describing Theodore's 'Susie' at the age of 5

reciting 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' 'more movingly than ever he has heard it').

Dorothy was perhaps JCP's only real, chosen, woman friend unconnected with romance. He would describe himself as a mental hermaphrodite for the purposes of fiction, and Dorothy had been the honorary 'son' in a family of girls; mental gender is a topic they discuss in the letters. JCP's upbringing made him uneasy with women, but the influence of Phyllis had been profound. Janet traced reflections from Richardson's ongoing *Pilgrimage* in JCP's books, and compared the methods by which the two couples achieved their necessary solitudes in marriage. Alan Odle's illustrations to *Morwyn* must be a sad loss.

There were in effect two 'entertainments' on Saturday – the first, before dinner, in the absence of **Theodora Scutt** in person, a selected reading from her letters, with commentary, by **Ian and Hilary Robinson.** If it was a Powys trait to mythologise their way of life, in an unmistakeable personal writing style, Theodora certainly counts as their equal.

After dinner we read scenes from JCP's dramatization of Dostoievsky's *The Idiot*, which seemed to come across unexpectedly well. JCP said that no author lost so much in being put on the stage, and not much is known about the few productions in the 1920s, but the residual melodrama is still entertaining (for the performers as well!).

Finally, on Sunday the AGM was followed by the auction of a small watercolour by Will Powys of an African view, and by a light-hearted (but not too trivial) Quiz on finer points of Powys lore.

KK

The Powys Society Annual General Meeting
23rd August 2009 at The Hand Hotel, Llangollen

MINUTES

Present John Hodgson (Chairman), Chris Thomas (Secretary), Michael French (Treasurer), Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter* Editor), Timothy Hyman (Vice-Chairman), Stephen Powys Marks (Publications Manager), Anna Pawelko, John Dunn, Tim Blanchard and some 30 members of the Society.

Apologies were received from Michael Kowalewski (Curator of TPS Collection).

Minutes of the last AGM (as printed in *Newsletter* 65, pages 4–6) were approved.

Nomination of Officers and Committee members The election of nominees published in the July 2009 *Newsletter* was unanimously approved. Officers and members of the Committee elected to serve for the period August 2009 to August 2010 are therefore: (Officers) **John**

Hodgson (Chairman), **Timothy Hyman** (Vice-Chairman) **Chris Thomas** (Secretary), **Michael French** (Treasurer); (Committee) **Tim Blanchard, John Dunn, Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter* editor), **Michael Kowalewski** (Curator of the Powys Society collection at the Dorset County Museum), **Stephen Powys Marks** (Publications Manager), and **Anna Pawelko** (Joint Conference Manager). **A seventh committee place remains open for nomination.**

Secretary's Report. The Hon. Secretary noted that since the last AGM the Committee had met 3 times and once by e-mail owing to unforseen circumstances. Membership of the Society was holding up well with 8 new members recently joined and 16 new members joining since last AGM with a number from overseas including Europe and the United States.

The Society has actively engaged with other literary societies such as the Thomas Hardy Society to help share information, raise awareness of our activities and encourage new membership. We have also worked to raise the profile of the Society by ensuring regular presence in literary reference books, circulate information about the Society at events, in bookshops and deposit copies of some our publications with a broad range of interested organisations and places with a Powysian association. Members of the Committee are planning to meet with the new Director of the Dorset County Museum later in 2009 to discuss arrangements for the upkeep of the Collection.

Treasurer's Report (as printed in *Newsletter* 67, pages 8–9) was approved. The Hon. Treasurer said that the Society had received a donation of a large collection of books which will be offered to members in the forthcoming *Newsletter*. Proceeds from sale of the books will help to increase income.

The Society is presently in a strong financial position with overall income in excess of expenditure at £2,334. However this situation is largely due to the voluntary contributions made by members who are willing to give their time and effort to help the Society. The Hon. Treasurer said that we do need to think seriously about the future and possible extra costs we might incur if we need to call on external professional expertise.

A discussion followed with members about investment opportunities to help the Society increase income by earning extra interest. The Hon. Treasurer agreed that the current rate of interest received from Barclays is very low and the situation is complicated by arrangements that the Society requires two signatures on every payment. We cannot therefore enter into agreements that involve a single authorisation. The Hon. Treasurer explained it would be better to retain existing arrangements and await improvements in the economy before considering other ways of investing Society funds.

The Hon. Treasurer proposed that **Stephen Allen** should continue to audit the Society's accounts. The proposal was seconded by Graham Carey.

The Chairman's Report for 2008/2009 is printed in full in *Newsletter* 67, pages 2–4. The Chairman expressed his thanks for support from members and officers of the Committee. The Chairman noted that much of the work for the Society is done on an entirely free and voluntary basis and expressed his appreciation for this commitment as well as donations and legacies from members such as the large collections of books given to the Society by Morine Krissdóttir and Ray Burnham. Special thanks were also expressed by members to **Stephen Powys Marks** for his work on producing publications to a very high standard, and arranging reproductions of material in colour in *The Powys Journal*, to **Louise de Bruin** and **Anna Pawelko** for their hard work on organising conferences, to the **Hon. Treasurer** for help with financial matters and organising the book sale, to **Raymond Cox** for producing videos of the

Conference, to **Richard Maxwell** for producing an enlarged *Journal* with new high quality colour inserts, to **Kate Kavanagh** for producing three *Newsletters* with consistently interesting content, and to **Jacqueline Peltier** for untiring efforts to support the Society and promote the Powyses. Kate Kavanagh expressed personal thanks to **Stephen Powys Marks** for help with production of the *Newsletter*.

Louise de Bruin proposed that the Committee should write to **Michael Kowalewski** and thank him for his work on curating and managing the Collection. The Chairman also agreed to write to **Frank Kibblewhite** and thank him for his work on maintaining and developing the Society website.

Date and location of the next Conference. The proposed date of 20th–22nd August 2010 at the Wessex Hotel in Street in Somerset was approved.

Any Other Business **John Hodgson** said that he wished 2009–2010 to be the last year in which he will serve as Chairman and invited members to consider nominations for a new Chairman to take effect from August 2010.

Graham Carey proposed that the Society should consider making arrangements to erect a memorial seat dedicated to JCP located on Mynydd y Gaer (Caer Drewyn) above the town of Corwen. The Chairman explained that the Committee would consider this but the local Council and CADW (Welsh Historic Monuments) would have to be consulted to determine suitability of doing this.

The Chairman also responded to a proposal from members that a plaque might be attached to the wall of the house at 7 Cae Coed but this would also require consultation with the current owners. In response to concerns expressed by some members that a potential invitation to the Archbishop of Canterbury to speak to the Society had been dealt with unfairly (and to objections by others to apparent support for an established church), the Chairman said that the Society was non-denominational and that all invitations are considered without bias and on their own merits. An invitation to the Archbishop was not considered appropriate because Dr Williams had not previously shown any interest in the Powyses. The Archbishop was in a way present at this year's conference by proxy by way of discussion of his book on Dostoievsky. The Chairman agreed that in the light of shared interest by the author with JCP the Committee should consider writing to Dr Williams telling him about our discussions at this year's Conference and drawing his attention to JCP's book on Dostoievsky.

Members considered alternative future venues for the Conference, supporting a return to Llangollen in 2011 but proposing that the Committee should consider suitability of possible other locations such as a venue somewhere in the north of England. Members discussed the recent vacancy of JCP's house in Blaenau Ffestiniog which is currently advertised for sale and the opportunities this might offer the Society. Some members proposed that the Committee should investigate sources of funding and support available from the Heritage Lottery Fund or other sources to help acquire the property and turn it into a dedicated writer's centre. The Chairman did not think it would be appropriate for the Society to use its finds to acquire property.

Other events Members were informed of the meeting in **London on 21st November** (discussion topic: JCP's long epic poem *Lucifer*); and in 2010 of day events planned for **Cambridge** on **Saturday 24th April,** and in **Dorchester on Saturday 5th June**.

Chris Thomas, Hon.Secretary

A Happy Accident

***Tim Blanchard** writes on his first encounter with JCP and on-stage with the Society.*

The trains were so busy up to Chirk from Cambridgeshire that I spent hours standing up, squeezed at one point between a bunch of student campers (with tents, drinking beer), two cyclists (plus bicycles) and three nuns (with small hard suitcases). This is how philosophies of solitude are born.

I wish someone in particular had recommended the Powyses to me, a bookish grandparent or close friend, and I could have been forever grateful to them. But it was just an accident. Browsing in Heffers I saw George Steiner's comparison of JCP and Tolstoy and bought *A Glastonbury Romance*. There was something shocking about it, a shock of recognition and at its wild, unbuttoned truth – and unlike my reaction to so many books on the same scale, I didn't want it to end. While reading this first book I imagined JCP as an established great, an intellectual. The reality I eventually discovered was of course quite different, and far more interesting.

I studied history at York, mainly cultural history, and was originally a regional newspaper journalist, including time with the *Cambridge Evening News*, before crossing to the 'dark side' of PR, where I've spent most of my working life. It's not that different. I write a lot, for national newspapers and sector magazines – nowadays mostly about education issues.

I joined the Society about six years ago but this year was the first chance I'd had to write anything myself. I thought I could best offer something journalistic, and the fetish for tea-drinking – particularly the almost comical pursuit of tea in *After My Fashion* – jumped out as being a good place to start. I must admit I'd somehow forgotten about the consequences of offering a paper by August, and there was an element of surprise in finding my own name on the programme of speakers at Llangollen. I tried not to drink too much wine, because of the potential for disaster.

For a first-timer, the experience of giving the paper – and the questions it prompted – was a chastening one, and taught me a lot about the Society, that the level of knowledge and thinking is high. Thankfully people at the Conference are also interested, generous, funny.

I've always been suspicious of over-interpretation by 'professional' thinkers. Can't a Powys be a genius without weaving intricate patterns of meaning into every page, like a Joyce or a Nabokov, ripe for journal articles and citations? I was ready to be sceptical. But I thought each of the papers given was enlightening, searching and had that all-important core of sense and authenticity about it. Harald Fawkner was a highlight. Inspiring but challenging (for me) on paper, wholly engaging in the flesh.

It was a perfect place for an event, so rich with resonances of JCP – Dinas Brân looking too unreal to not be a folly built by a Romantic – and I'll go back to Llangollen. I exchanged the opportunity to visit Corwen for time to catch up with the Ashes - which I've regretted ever since, so I'll be back for that too.

Slow on the golden heels of afternoon
Up narrow streets long shadows crept and laid
Fingers, like moth-wings, on embattled walls,
On door-steps, ledges, cornices and scrolls,
And double-gloom'd old gateways' hieroglyphs.
Each open lattice as escutcheon bore
The slant sun, gules. The air was thick with dreams;
And Peace a visible presence walked the town. (141–2)

JCP's book on Keats (written *c.*1907) was in effect, like *Lucifer*, a manifesto for the 'New Paganism' – for Hope and Joy and Youth against repressive patriarchal religion and Victorian corsets. As Cedric Hentschel says in his preface to *Powys on Keats* (the selection published by Cecil Woolf, 1993), this was entirely in the Edwardian spirit of rebellion against one's parents. (D. H. Lawrence, similarly, in 1912 praises the 'Georgian' poets for their enjoyment of life, a breath of fresh air after Hardy's gloom.) For JCP 'Paganism' was a way of life embracing the cult of sensation, empathy with all creation including the inorganic universe, a robust sense of humour and a balanced pessimism; and these elements endure in his later philosophy. John Cowper and Llewelyn were both enthusiasts for Keats, and the proselytising notes in these early works of John Cowper still sound, more confidently, in Llewelyn's rousing call.

> And what is it to be possessed by the style of Keats ...? It is above all, to acquire the power of enjoying existence. Not merely of being happy or of being free from pain, but of enjoying existence, such as the sudden remembrance of a promised assignation brings to a lover. The sunburnt, fragrant beat of these rhythmic pulses; the slow, rich shore-moving roll of these oceanic tides, full of moonbeams and pearls, fill us with a strange and wonderful power. By absorbing this style, that is to say by drinking the blood of this son of the Sun, we make our own the greatest gift the gods have the strength to give us, or we to give ourselves; the power of pressing so tightly between our lips and fingers the grapes of Life, that the red juice runs down our wrists and stains the dew and the grass — the power of revelling so richly in Life's sweetness that we are content, in sheer excess of joy, to spill the wine upon the ground. ...
>
> (*Powys on Keats*, 107)

And in *Lucifer*, JCP's Satan encourages a condemned criminal:

Unwish
Nothing. Thou might'st have perished ere thy birth;
And fall'n on sleep before thou wast awake.
Thou hast known youth's hot flame. Earth's pleasant air
Hast breath'd, hast felt through natural human veins
The great Sun's kiss. Thou hast lived: is life to thee
A little thing? Is't nothing to have known
Sorrow and pleasure and desire and grief?
O youth, youth, youth, when will ye learn that life,

Mynydd y Gaer

A small fleet of cars transported other conference-goers further afield to Corwen where our 'ael' and goal was the summit of Caer Drewyn -- the impressive Iron Age fortress called by Powys Mynydd y Gaer – a name which you can also see on a local signpost pointing the way to the hill (*see back cover*).

Our route to Corwen took us through a landscape made familiar by repeated readings of *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*. Leaving Llangollen we went past the tiny community of Berwyn where the gaunt peaks of the Llantysillio mountain range could be seen in the distance, till we reached the picturesque villages of Glyndyfrdwy and Carrog, passing the heather and bracken-filled hilltops of Coed Pen y Garth, Craig y Rhos and Coed Bwlch Coch. Entering Corwen, which JCP in Porius frequently refers to under its other names of 'The White Choir' or 'The White Circle' we easily found good parking in the middle of town in the rather grandly named Corwen Interchange (a car park with facilities and a bus stop!). We crossed the Dee by a modern bridge. At this point the river is broad and deep. Willows bend low over the surface of the Dee creating shady spots, like the 'pools of Cybele', where lamprey, Atlantic salmon, brown trout and grayling can sometimes be seen. On the clay banks we looked for green woodpeckers and kingfishers that are frequent visitors here. Perhaps further downstream where the river is shallower there might be found a possible location for JCP's 'Ford of Mithras' which Porius uses to get to St Julian's fountain on the other side.

Ahead the great round mass of Caer Drewyn confronted us. Early fruiting blackberries in the hedgerows suggested Autumn was on its way. The ever-changing late summer light refreshed our eyes with the muted colours of yellow, green and purple that covered the surface of the hill. The colour schemes of JCP's Welsh novels devised by Wilson Knight came to mind – red and gold for *Owen Glendower*, and silver, grey and dark brown earth-colours for *Porius*.

Beside Corwen Leisure Centre we followed the course of a disused railway path where oak and elms grow thickly and the sound of blackcaps and warblers fill the air with their song, then skirted the edge of Caer Drewyn until we began to climb steadily up the north side of the hill, to a spot near the summit surrounded by the stone walls of the Gaer. Standing on a carpet of bracken, fern and gorse, we surveyed the spreading valley below trying to identify some of the locations in JCP's novel *Porius* in the panoramic view spread out before us. The Dee itself could easily be identified twisting round the town. We spotted Cae Coed, which JCP explained means 'the clearing in the forest' and the meadow he refers to in his abandoned novel *Edeyrnion*, known locally as 'Dol-pur-gresyn' or 'the field of unbearable pity' situated beside the original Pont Corwen, constructed in the eighteenth century, and perhaps another possible location for the 'Ford of Mithras'. Could the gap between the trees in the 'greenish black' ancient forest opposite us be the Path of the Dead leading to Y Grug, or 'The Mound' – the burial place of Iscovan in Porius? Turning north we could see the 'Swamp of the Gwyddyl Ffichti', the village of Gwyddylwern; and

looking down again at Corwen, on the other side of the river, its buildings seemed more like JCP's 'Brythonic dwellings' than modern houses. We could pick out Coed Pen y Pigyn, the hill behind Corwen church, a favourite destination for JCP on his daily 'round' and walk amidst the thick oak woodland above the town. We debated the location of Snowdon, but dark purple-edged clouds had suddenly descended and the tops of the mountains were no longer visible, so we could only discern its general direction.

As we spoke our voices were lost in the vast open space of the Gaer. Approaching the very top of the hill the cry of a buzzard startled me. A raven flapped its wings nearby. I thought of the croaking raven of Llangar, of Sycarth, Mithrafael and the descent of the Kings of Powys Fadog. I thought of Powys himself, for whom Caer Drewyn never lost its fascination, the omphalos of his imagination. I thought of Powys newly arrived in Corwen, 'a wayfarer from Dorset', ascending the 'purgatorial mount' situated high above the Dee Valley, and making his way to the ruins of an abandoned shooting lodge, called Liberty Hall, built in the early twentieth century by a local landowner, Lord Northborough. Here JCP erected stone 'stele' – memorials for family and friends – 'a regular burying ground of my Dead Heroes and Glory Ground of my Living Ones!' he told Katie. From here JCP looked back across the river at the Gaer. In his mind he had already filled 'the absolute blank' of Dark Age history with his own self-created stories and invented characters.

The Gaer, empty now, felt however preternaturally alive. The buzzard and the raven had fallen silent. The sound of the wind in the thorn trees and bracken was all that accompanied our descent to the car park. Somehow I felt that the past and the present were not so far apart. The image of the Mithraic Sun God, the lion-headed figure encircled by a serpent, the *deos leontocephalus*, the god of time and eternity worshipped in the Hellenic mystery religions, whose statue Porius glimpses in the Cave of Mithras but which left his 'religious sensibility' quite cold, rose up, fleetingly, in my mind. It then disappeared, and I thought I understood what Powys had meant: 'As the old gods were departing then, so the old gods are departing now.'

Chris Thomas

A coincidence?

On Saturday afternoon I joined the party that walked along the Canal to Valle Crucis, where we sat on the window seat in the Chapter House where JCP said he composed the first sentence of *Owen Glendower*. On our way we had met one after another three fine piebald horses, each led by a lad with whom they seemed to be in close companionship snd esch pulling a narrow-boat full of trippers. When I got home I looked up the first lines of *OG:*

Don Quixote might well have recognised in the gaunt piebald horse that carried young Rhisiart down that winding track towards the river Dee....

Susan Rands

Llewelyn Walk: 125th Anniversary, 13th August 2009

A hot sunny day, with a fine cooling breeze, welcomed us to East Chaldon this year, in marked contract to the squally rain we had enjoyed for the last walk. So it was particularly pleasant to sit out in the sunshine outside the *Sailor's Return* and greet old friends as they gradually arrived. In the event nine of us eventually assembled for a lazy lunch in the shady bar, although only eight later undertook the walk to the memorial stone, which is a little fewer than in recent years, despite the excellent weather. We were particularly pleased to welcome John Batten back once again; and Richard Burleigh was also able to join us for lunch, although pressing responsibilities prevented him from joining us for the walk itself. Time slipped quickly by in pleasant conversation, and it was already 2 o'clock before the traditional toast to Llewelyn's health was proposed and drunk, along with a few words in recollection of absent friends, on this the 125th anniversary of his birth – and the 70th anniversary of his untimely death in Switzerland in 1939.

Before heading up the track towards Chydyok this year we walked round to the nearby churchyard, where a small plaque has recently been placed to honour Janet Machen, close to that commemorating Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland, and near to Katie Powys's cross, which felt entirely appropriate. This was also a very good opportunity to remember Janet, who had been both a great friend and keen supporter of the Llewelyn Walk since its instigation. She is now very sadly missed, and we all had vivid personal recollections of her to share.

Setting off up the track at last, we were soon at Chydyok, where we paused once again, and Chris Gostick gave a short reading from Sylvia Townsend Warner's Diary for 1st June 1961, which recalls an eventful night she spent with Janet at Chydyok during a tremendous thunderstorm. This was shortly after Janet had taken over the lease of the cottage in 1959, so it was in her hands for almost 50 years, and it is particularly sad that her son Matthew has been unable to keep it on after her death. However, we later learned that the lease has been taken over by the family next door, in the larger house where Gertrude and Katey once lived. The Weld Estate is first doing some necessary renovations, including a new roof, but it is planned to keep these to a minimum in order to retain the unique atmosphere of the cottage, which will then be available for short lettings on a regular basis.

Continuing up the hill we finally arrived at the cliff top, where for once there was a glorious view out over the English Channel and across to Portland Bill, in the bright sunshine. Once at the stone the traditional wreath of Llewelyn and Alyse's wedding flowers was laid on the stone by Honor Timlin, and Neil Lee then read a passage from towards the end of *Love and Death*, which concluded with a suitable rallying cry to us all on such a wonderful summer's day:

> At the most the years left to me would not be as many as the autumn apples in an orchard sack. Let me then with the utmost deliberation treasure and measure out the days that still remained, holding myself aloof from the crowd's illusions, and let me

be, at need, more strictly controlled than the most starched moralist; that is, though able to give myself utterly to every indulgence when chance offered, able, no less, to be master of myself at a moment's notice when such discipline was called for; emulating not only the luxurious extravagances of Nature, but her austerity, her chastity also. (*Love and Death*, 288)

It was so pleasant up on the high cliff that we lingered by the stone for much longer than usual, before finally heading back again, with St Aldham's Head clearly visible in the far distance, and it was well after 5 o'clock before we all finally got back to the *Sailor's Return*, and as much in need of an invigorating cup of tea as was Wolf Solent at the end of JCP's novel! The afternoon was voted a great success by all who took part, and we shall be meeting again on the 13th August next year – whatever the weather! – so do join us if you can. Everyone will be made most welcome.

Chris Gostick

'I must have some TEA …'
Drink, drugs and defiance in the novels of John Cowper Powys

A talk by ***Tim Blanchard*** *at the 2009 Powys Society Conference*

Each novelist has their own world of things. Not just places and people, but objects, the most minor and ordinary of things which are most likely to bob to the surface of their imagination while writing. Such as the worn-out boots in Thomas Hardy. Dostoevsky's dirty handkerchiefs. Tolstoy's nibbled sugar loaf.

In the writing of John Cowper Powys this characteristic is more striking and perhaps more important than for any other novelist. As Margaret Drabble observes, picking on just one of his peculiarities: 'More bread and butter is consumed and more tea drunk in the novels of John Cowper Powys than the whole of the rest of English Literature.'

Tea is strangely Powys-like. In a way there seems to be no need for reflection or analysis of the point, any consideration of where and when tea is important in his writing – it just suits him. A cup of tea is the liquid equivalent of an exclamation mark. Its little jolt of caffeine brings a sensation of heightened awareness to what

might otherwise be something banal, and both tea and exclamation marks appear to be used in his novels as liberally as the other.

But for a novelist with such an obsessive feeling for the inanimate, can the prevalence of tea-drinking be just a writer's tic, a lazy reflection of his own days or the facts of early twentieth century life in England?

Contrary to first impressions, tea is really only prominent in two novels: *After My Fashion* and *Wolf Solent*. This paper explores why tea drinking is so important in those novels and the relevance to Powys's thinking – as well as what might have brought about an end to its importance so early in the run of Wessex novels.

It considers the importance of tea-drinking to plots; as one of the many drugs in the novels, and finally, as one of his many tools of defiance.

Tea-drinking has been an institution of English life since the eighteenth century, and is said to have reached its peak of popularity in 1931, when a typical person would be consuming nine and a half pounds of tea leaves each year.

But tea has not been a simple, monumental institution during that time. Its tangle of meanings provide some clues as to why Powys may have been attracted, consciously or otherwise, to the rituals, symbols and purposes of tea.

On its very first introduction to the general public in the middle of the 17th century it was advertised enthusiastically as curing anything from headaches and fevers to poor eyesight. But popularity changed the nature of attitudes to tea-drinking. For example, a pamphlet of 1706 by Dr Duncan has the title *Wholesome advice against the abuses of hot liquors particularly of coffee, chocolate, tea, brandy and strong waters*; and this was followed in 1757 – and perhaps illustrating how a degree of ferocity had entered the debate over the issue in the meanwhile - by Jonas Hanway, and his *An Essay on Tea Considered as Pernicious to Health, Obstructing Industry and Impoverishing the Nation*. This is one example of the tone of that essay:

> To what a height of folly must a nation be arrived, when common people are not satisfied with wholesome food at home, but must go to the remotest regions to please a vicious palate! There is a certain lane near Richmond, where beggars are often seen, in the summer season, drinking their tea. You may see labourers who are mending the roads drinking their tea; it is even drank in cinder-carts; and what is not less absurd, sold out in cups to haymakers! He who should be able to drive three Frenchmen before him, or she who might be a breeder of such a race of men, are seen sipping their tea!

From its first introduction, tea was regarded as being a harmful influence on the lower classes. As a drink at breakfast it was said to be not substantial enough to see them through the long working day, and in the afternoon only kept workers engaged in idling and gossip. William Cobbett in 1821 described it as 'an enfeebler of the frame, an engenderer of effeminacy'.

Tea was even said to be more of a danger to the moral welfare of the masses than gin and ale. Perhaps this was because it was such a new and insidious drug,

suspiciously foreign, and appealing to a much larger proportion of the population than alcohol – where at least the appeal and effects were so much more roguishly honest. But more likely – the disapproval was due to the way tea upset the economic balance of the nation. Tax revenues from the taverns were hit badly, and governments responded in a serious way. The duty on tea rose to 119% by the middle of the eighteenth century.

Over time, tea was co-opted by the upper and middle classes as a means of distinction. How tea was taken, when, where and among what type of company, made a powerful statement about the social status of those involved. The smallest details mattered. It became possible to be derogatory about someone's character, just by suggesting they might be the sort of person who put their milk in first. There was 'afternoon tea' in the homes of the wealthy: an opportunity to display a fashionable elegance, the best china and its dainty assortment of tea plates. While among the majority of the population, there was 'high tea': the main meal of the day, with platefuls of meat and veg and great pots of tea served like a kind of gravy to wash it all down.

The association of tea with the nineteenth-century temperance movement and the non-conformist church was important in changing its reputation from social threat to a symbol of decent living. Its respectability as a past-time became a key to allowing entry for women into more public places, across a wider social sphere. The tea-shops which began to appear from around the time of Powys's birth – the Express Dairy, Kardomah, and from 1894, Lyons – were among the first public places where women could go out without the need to be accompanied.

Tea-drinking, therefore, may have been respectable on the surface, but was also a licence of freedom and the possibility of adventure – and transgression – for women who had previously been confined to the home or at least by the presence of a husband or chaperone.

The history of tea, then, is full of contradictions: both a threat and a benefit to health. A drink and a ritual that has been super-refined by 'civilised' society but which always basically remains the drink of the masses. A form of social freedom, and also, through the creation of a tea-shop culture with its own conventions and economics, a bourgeois trap. This perhaps explains part of the instinctive appeal to Powys of tea-drinking, because its presence contains so many different barbs of meaning capable of lodging themselves into the minds of both writer and reader.

On one level, tea is just a feature of the novels which is a reflection of ordinary life – of course it is. Powys is a highly realistic writer. What he called the 'Marvels and Wonders', sometimes included in his novels, are not indulgent flights of fancy but specific challenges to conventional thinking. They are conscious and purposeful aberrations in what is otherwise a relentless, sometimes grim, attention to the real. The vision may be distracted, intensely Romantic, but the intelligence behind it is committed to facing the petty doubts, vanity and failures of reality. Characters do not

get away with anything. So it is unsurprising that details of everyday life are replicated, even if those routines may be basically uninteresting and undramatic; even if those details are a painful reminder of his own existence. Powys is certainly drawing on the facts of his own life for characters like Richard Storm in *After My Fashion*, whose dependence on a diet of bread and tea leads to the same agonies of dyspepsia.

Going further, tea-drinking could be seen as an important element in the making of the plots of Powys's contemporary novels. If a writer is fundamentally uninterested in the machinations of action, of overcoming adversity, of worldly success, where else does dramatic structure come from? Tea gets people into the same room without the need for a particular reason.

A good example is the 'Tea-Party' chapter of *Wolf Solent*. What else would have brought together the *grande dame* Mrs Solent with the Torps quite so straightforwardly? The instruments of tea-making are brandished like flags of reassurance, that this is neutral ground, a place of tea:

> "There's mother!" [Gerda] cried at length. "Fetch the kettle, Wolf!" ... Wolf, with teapot in one hand and the kettle in the other, vociferated a boisterous welcome, drowning the politer words of his mother.

But once together, the tea-making ritual itself acts as a clear gauge of the social divide between them – for example, through the great heapfuls of sugar at the bottom of each teacup, which makes Mrs Solent so alarmed. As a direct result of staging the tea-party, and by bringing the new character of Mrs Solent up to date with events and characters, Powys is able to create an effective focal point for what's happening in the plot as a whole, and highlight the crossing currents of the two families: the social pretensions, and the creeping insect-like threat to this new socially acceptable life from the 'young grocer' Bob Weevil. Here's a sample of the atmosphere that builds through the sips of tea:

> "What's Lobbie been doing lately, mother?" enquired Gerda...
>
> "Lob do 'ee say? Thee may well ask what Lob be doing, the young pert-mouthed limb! He be bringing his dad's hoar hairs down to Bedlam, and mine wi 'em, that's what the owl pellet be doing!"
>
> Gerda hurriedly enquired in a ringing voice whether Mrs Solent wanted any cake. "Pimpernel hadn't any fresh kinds except this. I expect you are so used to London confectionery, Mrs Solent --"
>
> "Sons are troublesome beings, Mrs Torp," [said Mrs Solent], "but it's nice to have them."
>
> "What has Lobbie been doing?" enquired Wolf, heedless of Gerda's frowns.
>
> "He's been going over with that imp of Satan, Bob Weevil, to Parson Valley's. His dad told 'en he'd lift the skin from's backside if he did it; but he was see'd, only last night, out there again."
>
> "It sounds very innocent, Mrs Torp," remarked the lady, "visiting a clergyman."

Tea is what makes scenes possible: enlightening, ironic, toe-curling scenes, like the meeting of Mrs Solent with her husband's hideous lover Selena Gault, or Wolf and Mr Malakite after discovering his incest. It's the acceptable means of overcoming the barriers of private and public concerns, of creating a convenient intimacy. In *After My Fashion*, Nelly and a stranger are able to reach the stage where they can discuss what's called the 'secret of life' as a consequence of the moment that cups of tea have given them.

This argument of tea-making as structural device falls down, however, in the face of a broader view of the novels as a whole. There is not enough consistency. There are more of his contemporary novels where tea is barely mentioned, let alone relied upon for plot, and Powys is more likely to use the idea of tea for no dramatic reason, or as the actual cause of drama to be snuffed out. Like this from Richard Storm:

> As for the "what next?" which must naturally follow this soul-snatching, he did not at that hour, so pleasant were the fumes of Mrs Winsome's tea, give a thought to the matter.

Instead, tea is important because it is one of the many forms of drug which occupy Powys's writings, one of the ways in which people, things and the world are bewitched: a device of everyday magic.

Drugs in themselves are explicit, implicit and a part of the experience of reading Powys. Whether intentional or not in the way they are devised, it could be said the novels are a form of drug in themselves, mildly addictive in how they provide sensations that can excite and soothe a literature-loving mind, a reader susceptible to philosophical ideas or a sceptic of the conventions of modern life. More specifically, a range of drinks – along with cigarettes – which can both excite and deaden, both 'uppers' and 'downers', are used throughout the novels.

These are especially obvious at moments of important decision-making or formative experiences. Alcohol, for example, is used as part of a ritual of crisis. Nelly of *After My Fashion* marks the break between her old life and the new with an unholy libation of port wine, drunk from a silver christening mug with the remainder spilt onto the earth. Johnny Geard comforts the terrors of Tittie Petherton with a glass of punch, not by letting her take a drink, but by hurling the glass to the floor in a startling offering to God.

Wolf Solent makes his questionable deal with Squire Urquhart over a bottle of ancient Malmsey, an event significant enough to be singled out as a focal point and the chapter title of 'Wine'. The 'nectareous' Malmsey is like a medicinal potion with powers to be exploited:

> Wolf laid his hand on the stem of his wineglass and stared sombrely at the rich, purplish umber of its contents. Never had he tasted such wine! He felt irritated with Urquhart for not letting him enjoy it in silence - savour every drop of it – draw it into his heart, his nerves, his spirit ...

The idea of the historic and exceptional drink is pursued at one of the dramatic

peaks of *Glastonbury*. When Mr Evans finally gives in to his sadistic fantasy of an iron bar crushing a human skull, the arrangement is toasted at the Pilgrims' tavern. He does it with a previously unheard of 'full tumbler' of 'Our Special', what Powys calls 'a species of old sack that the years had converted into a liquid gold that was heady and heartening to a degree unparalleled'. However noble, in this context the Old Special has the potential of evil, described as the 'Drink Perilous', a 'deadly nightshade'.

But however ambiguous alcohol is made to appear, it is not a poison. For example, when Sylvanus drinks the whimsical 'Meliodka', a concoction made by the young girl, Melia, based on her readings of Russian history:

> No one but Sylvanus, who seemed to have the digestion of a sea lion, would have prepared for the most important meal of the day by even sipping such stuff; but Sylvanus disposed of no less than three whole liqueur-glasses of it, while the three girls stood in a row before him, watching him with a mixture of pride and consternation.

And *Glastonbury*'s Tom Barter plans to replace all of his dinners with a diet of whisky, after what he describes as 'a delicious drowsiness which flows through him like a ripple of warm etherealised honey'.

Compared with the potency of these various brews, tea seems fairly insipid. But Powys would agree with Thomas de Quincey in *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, where he argued that

> tea, though ridiculed by those who are naturally of coarse nerves, or are become so from wine-drinking and are not susceptible of influence from so refined a stimulant, will always be the favourite beverage of the intellectual.

Drunkenness may be a consolation, a heavy bludgeon of a drug when an escape is needed, but it is also portrayed as dulling the ability of the drinker to respond to life.

In novels based on a philosophy of the sovereignty of heightened awareness over any other kind of experience, 'progress' or material gain, the crudity of alcohol is a problem rather than a solution. For Powys, there is already more than enough which is dull and ponderous in bourgeois existence. For example, champagne only makes Richard Storm feel 'helplessness and weakness', as he makes what's called a 'feeble effort' to pull himself up from the effete luxuries offered by Elise Angel.

The devilish villains of *Owen Glendower* are made careless and impotent by alcohol, as when Hywel Sele loses political influence at Court by his 'rambling attack', when he's 'too drunk to gather [the] import' of what he hears, eventually having 'imbibed so much that he was forced to withdraw himself for a moment'.

The hero Rhisiart is similarly caught out, as 'from [his] muddled wits the fumes of that fatal metheglin dissolved like smoke'. Netta in *Ducdame* ruins herself with alcohol, corrupting what had been natural and untouched in the eyes of Rook Ashover: 'Her breath, heavy with liquor, spoiled the scent of that divine air, which floated in upon him as if over thousands of leagues of newly sprouting grass.'

JCP has also been explicit about his attitude to the limitations of powerful drugs in *A Philosophy of Solitude*, where he says:

> If there is a malevolent spirit in the cosmos... the best revenge upon such a spirit is not to cry: "Hell! Let's have a drink!" but with Machiavellian cunning to slip aside from the crowd and allow those simple, primitive, eternal aspects of nature which require no sophistication to be your healing draughts of Lethe ... Violent alternations of ennui and pleasure destroy, as by degrees they do destroy, our power to respond to the magic of the universe.

In its unsophisticated way, tea assumes a unique position. Other non-alcoholic drinks simply do not work, even those with similar effects. There are no lingering raptures over coffee, it is merely a functional thing and part of a social event. Anything else is dismissed. For example, Mrs Shotover in *After My Fashion* when she sets out to condemn the land of Coca-Cola: 'What's their word for those horrid mixtures they all swallow?' she says '"Soft drinks"!'. And so, the characters of Powys's novels seek out tea and its modest, ordinary heightening, in the same way as they look to the sky, to windows and old fence posts, for fresh draughts of happiness.

Tea is not used as anything as obvious as a symbol or metaphor in the novels we are discussing, but something more informal and suggestive, the kind of recurring element that provides a rhythm to he story.

In its rudimentary appearance, its vegetable leaves, the relation of tea to the natural world is evident to see. In this way tea is a means of imbibing some of the pure, unfussy qualities of nature. This relationship is suggested by many of Powys's descriptions which echo the same sensation of infusion and absorption. Wolf describes his 'mythology' as being like an 'escape into a deep, green, lovely world where thoughts unfolded themselves like large, beautiful leaves growing out of fathoms of blue-green water'. Richard Storm is affected by an 'encroaching spell of sheer physical well-being, emanating from every object within sight, [which] covered him with a pleasant cloud of leafy vegetable contentment.' At one point, Storm is almost dunked like a tea bag:

> He bathed himself in the beauty of those rolling hills and those rich pastures. He drank in, through every pore of his skin, that magical air, those blue skies, those soft languorous mists, those warm, fragrant rains.

After My Fashion is surely the peak for tea-drinking in terms of its career in the novels. At moments tea becomes the fuel of the novel, the subject of longing, of quests. Like this:

> A desperate desire for tea awoke in the heart of Richard Storm. It occurred to him very strongly that a considerable part of his present depression arose from the absence of this beverage... "Tea I must and will have," he said firmly to himself, "but heaven knows how I'm going to get it! I can't quite shake the old fellow to bawl in his ears, "Get me some tea!""

Later in the novel, Nelly suffers the same desperation: 'I must have some tea,' she cries. And when fulfilment comes we hear about the enjoyment of it in terms of connoissieurs. Nelly's nature-loving father drinks 'enormous cups' of it, 'sugarless' and 'milkless'; in his tour of tea-shops and those hospitable farmyards, Richard Storm enjoys what he says is 'cup after cup of the divine nectar' and looks forward to 'the epicurean pleasure of a carefully considered discussion as to where they should have tea'.

The deep yearning expressed in this way in the novel is closer to the spiritual than the physical or material. Tea-drinking is basically used to demonstrate a proposition that life is at its richest and most significant when experienced in its simplest forms, as described in this morning scene from the same novel:

> It was always a luxurious and pleasant moment for Nelly, when after a knock as gentle as her round knuckles could administer, the all-competent Grace brought her hot water and tea. It was delicious to lie with closed eyes, still half-wrapped in the filmy cloud of sleep, while the sweet airs floated in through the open windows, mingled with the crooning of the dove and the reedy call of the blackbird.

Lack of desire for tea is a sign of a weakening grip on life itself. We can only expect the worst for the novel's hero in the final pages of the book when Storm is offered tea and Powys tells us, ominously, that he is 'only ... able ... to swallow ... a single cup'.

The thread of spiritual emotion inspired by tea-drinking is continued into *Wolf Solent*. Wolf responds to the 'faint rarefication of thought', the 'heightening of life that came from his tea drinking', not only because of its gentle stimulant, but the memories found as a result of taking part in the practice itself. Here, Wolf is drinking tea alone:

> drinking it from a particular china "set" belonging to his grandmother, a "set" called Limoges. Beside him was a book with a little heap of entangled bits of seaweed lying upon it, which he was separating and sorting. There came a moment when he suddenly realised that the book, beside which was his teacup and upon which was the seaweed, was *The Poems of Wordsworth*.

But it's the closing section of Wolf Solent that suggests a further level of significance for tea-drinking. The final words of Powys's novels are typically momentous, the conclusion of a human tragedy or the spectacular reaching for worlds which live just beyond the possibilities of words. And yet here, in what is no less a book of philosophical struggle and complexity, the conclusion is this: '*Well, I shall have a cup of tea ...*'.

Is it an uncharacteristic ending? It could be argued that the reference to tea makes the ending as heavily-weighted in significance as any other. The resignation, specifically related to tea-drinking, is a determined act of defiance.

The lines of contest are marked out throughout the novel, pitching the luxuries of the high-class tea-rooms of Pimpernel's against Wolf's solitary, anti-social ecstasy on the other. At the same time as Wolf loses the battle over his mythology, he also loses to the conventions of modern life and its aspirations. The trips and orders from

Pimpernel's are all part of his wife's desire to domesticate, to aspire, to join a respectable bourgeois world. It is a world personified by the all-careless and all-comfortable Lord Carfax, who signals the completion of Gerda's social adventure in a single visit at the end of the book. He finally makes Wolf's isolation complete, sitting down for tea and Pimpernel cakes, Gerda sitting on his knee. Even his mother has decided to open her own 'grand and new' tea-shop, thereby making what had been an elemental and sentimental pleasure of family life, rich in resonance, into a business venture.

'Well, I shall have a cup of tea …', says Wolf. The 'I' is important. It is not a case of joining anyone for tea, of assimilating any part of himself; he does not care whether Lord Carfax is still there or not. His tea is solely for his own enjoyment, anti-social and an offence against society. The Powys-hero characters consistently avoid the crowded tea-rooms. Richard Storm is said to 'hesitate for a moment between two rival tea shops which faced one another across the narrow street. But there were cheerful citizens of Selshurst drinking tea in both of them, and he continued on his way.' Wolf feels 'sick with dismay' at the thought of his mother's shop filled with 'tourists from Exeter'.

Tea-drinking is an act of defiance against convention, against those 'modern inventions' of science, when drunk in isolation or among sympathetic, understanding minds, when a world of powerful sensations can still be accessed through its simplicity.

The tea fetish in these two novels is meaningful, suggestive and playful, but not serious. Like much of Powys's writing, it is a set of ideas and meanings which are part of his ironic vision of twentieth-century life. Tea and its social rituals – whether dressed up or stripped down to the basics, celebrated or revolted against – are part of a joke. Amidst the most delirious rapture, the plunges into dark psychology, the realisation of the headiest truths, what matters to the characters of Powys's novels – and to people in general – are the details of real life. So they sit alongside each other, the ordinary and the extraordinary, making one and the other both sublime and ridiculous at the same time. It is the kind of bathos which Powys finds irresistible.

Perhaps inevitably, as an idea, tea finally runs out of magic in Powys's novels – long before he turns to writing about cultures of a distant past. *After My Fashion* and *Wolf Solent* were both written in America, during his time as an itinerant lecturer, travelling from city to city. All the novels of this period of living in America are immersed in memories of an English countryside. In the same way he calls upon an English ritual in tea-drinking, as a way of recapturing a particular way of life – not to romanticise it, but to savour its contrasts, especially between its relationship to a class system and the snobbery of some aspects of English life, rubbing up against and putting into relief his own philosophies and experiences.

Powys appropriates one of the major social components and symbols of English civilisation, and does a 'malice-dance' all over it. That's why he's swigging cup after cup of the stuff – extracting any kind of enjoyment he likes from it. He's mixing with

all the wrong types – he's snubbing the posh tea shops – he's making tea only for himself, drinking it alone.

In the end, the argument is completed. Powys doesn't need to make the point any longer, he doesn't get the same sensation from its memory or its presence as a joke and a jibe. Or perhaps it's even simpler than that, and he just doesn't find the joke funny anymore.

Tim Blanchard

News and Notes

Two Powys days are planned for next year: in **Cambridge** on Saturday 24th April 2010 and in **Dorchester** on Saturday 5th June: details in the next *Newsletter.*

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The new revised edition of **Margaret Drabble**'s *A Writer's Britain* has an admiring paragraph on JCP (page 179) whom she discovered since compiling her original book in the 1970s. 'His evocations of the sublimity of Snowdon and Cader Idris and Lake Bala have a Miltonic grandeur, but he also had the keenest eye for the smallest botanical detail ...' JCP also got into Woman's Hour (BBC radio 4, 15th June) in an interview with Drabble and the Welsh poet Gillian Clarke: Clarke praising the descriptions of North Wales quarrying by the Welsh writer Kate Roberts, Drabble saying that in the 1979 book her 'way in' to the grim sublimity of the slate mountains had been through Tolkien, now superseded by JCP (a 'born-again Welshman') with the magnificent landscapes in *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*.

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Duckworth's current plans are to publish the paperbacks of *Descents of Memory* in January 2010 and of *Maiden Castle* in February 2010.

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To commemorate the seventieth anniversary of Llewelyn Powys's death on December 2nd The Sundial Press is publishing ***Christmas Lore and Legend: Yuletide Essays*, by Llewelyn Powys,** gathering fourteen of the author's Christmas writings together in a single volume of which twelve are previously uncollected. They were originally published in a variety of journals, both local and national, and date from the 1930s. Published in paperback, this attractive volume is available at £6.99 post-free from The Sundial Press, 46 The Sheeplands, Sherborne, Dorset DT9 4BS or online at www.sundialpress.co.uk . Due in the New Year: **Littleton Powys**: *The Joy of It* with an Introduction by Peter Tait and **Alyse Gregory**: *King Log and Lady Lea* with an Introduction by Anthony Head.

* * * *

The *Daily Telegraph* for 28th September devoted a large article to the probable official relocation of the **Battle of Bosworth** (where King Richard III was killed in 1485), to 'a site first proposed by **Peter Foss**, the historian, in 1990'.

Peter Foss also writes: 'Earlier in the year I visited the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham – a modern gallery space in a wonderfully-conserved fine old school building in Oozells Street ... Usually the sort of exhibitions there would not interest me at all, but this time they had several large rooms devoted to the 'Tale-pieces' of **Thomas Bewick.** This was a revelation – the tiny size of them, the beauty of the woodcuts, and the excellent space given to the display. We were handed large magnifying glasses to peer at the details, if we wanted. In a further room was a film show – a video interview and talk with Professor Iain Bain, the leading authority and collectoof r of Bewick, and to my surprise and delight as the camera scanned the titles his collection of books, the lens dwelt lovingly on Llewelyn Powys's little book on Thomas Bewick.'

This little book, published in 1951 by the Gravesend Press, Lexington, Kentucky, USA, reproduced Llewelyn's essay on Bewick from *Thirteen Worthies* (1923, reprinted by Redcliffe Press, Bristol, in 1983), reprinted here on page 41.

JCP often mentions Bewick and his fascinating illustrations.

Friday 31st July, 1936: *I brought the T. T. Bewick's* Birds *as a present. The T.T. was thrilled at having a Bewick of which I've told her so much & explained ever since we met how deep a role from early childhood this book with its unequalled Vignettes has played in my Culture. It has all England's true country life & 'country matters' in its brutal, grim, ghastly, terrible, exquisite, sad, cheerful, lovely, fairy-like, solemn, traditional, humourous & with such a sense of the mystery of half-seen, half-felt, passed-by things of no importance as you go about the country. Stumps, logs, grasses, plant off-shoots, twigs, tussocks, pools, rock-pools, old walls, old posts, old desolated gates, old gibbets, cruelties to dogs and the same by dogs to others — graves, graves, Graves! ...* [in *Petrushka and the Dancer,* p.217]

* * * *

Sheila Lahr, daughter of Charles Lahr '**Theodore's favourite publisher**' (see p.27) in her book *Yealm* describes being taken with her sister by their mother for a holiday in East Chaldon, in 1933. They stayed in 'a large bleak house named "The Hut" which during term-time houses a progressive school'; met Sylvia and Valentine and 'Theodore and his wife Violet who is wheeling their adopted fair-haired infant daughter Susan in a push-chair. "There was once a little girl" T. F. Powys says to me ... "And each time she looked in the mirror she grew uglier."' Might this story have continued with a kinder fairy-tale twist? No chance: 'I recognise this as a Convent-style moralising against vanity. I am angry at this white-bearded Patriarch who is "getting at me"'. *Yealm* can be read on the 'Militant Esthetix' website run by Lahr's grand-daughter Esther Leslie. (Thanks to Frank Kibblewhite for pointing to this feature in 2006.) *Yealm* is a term from the art of thatching. In its dedication the book is described as a 'sorter-biography, a word coined by Ivy Litvinov to mean memoirs which are a mixture of fact and fiction'. Like many 'daughter's testimonies' this is an astringent view of an alternative society in conventional times: a focal point for intelligent, foolhardy, brave and useful people. Chris Gostick's booklet describes it clearly and dispassionately. In Larry Mitchell's *T. F. Powys: Aspects of a Life* (Brynmill, 2005, page vi) there is a photograph taken in 1932 of a group with

TFP, including Charles Lahr peeping knavishly over Francis Powys's shoulder.

* * * *

Christiane Poussier, whose *Encounters with JCP: a Meditation* is one of the two latest Powys Heritage booklets from Cecil Woolf, is a long-standing member of The Powys Society. She is the translator into French of many books by JCP, both published and in waiting, from *Confessions of Two Brothers* in 1982, *Petrushka and the Dancer* in 1998, to *The Owl, the Duck and Miss Rowe! Miss Rowe!* in 2007 and the essay on Rémy de Gourmont from *Suspended Judgments* in 2008. Her co-translators have been Anne Bruneau and Nelly Markovic (translator of *Encounters* into English); and Jacqueline Peltier (to whom thanks for this note) has worked with her on many occasions. She lives and works in a village not far from Poitiers, and learned English for JCP's sake.

Her essay looks upon JCP as a personal relationship, as many readers do and which he certainly encourages. Its added interest is that she is French, with an un-pre-judging view that allows her both to analyse and sympathise with JCP's peculiarities and his rewards.

* * * *

An article by Susan Rands in *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries* (March 2009), on a production of *The Merchant of Venice* in January 1895 at **Montacute Vicarage,** is an extract from a longer essay in the latest edition of Belinda Humfrey's *Powys Review* that we hope soon – at last – to see. It was acted by the young Powyses with the four Phelips childen from Montacute House. John (Jack) was Shylock, Littleton (Tom) Antonio, Theodore (Bob) the Duke and Tubal, Gertrude Gratiano, Bertie Lorenzo and May Jessica. Both JCP and Littleton describe these theatrical occasions. In old age JCP recalled Mr Phelips and his beloved 'little Clare' Phelips (see poems in the last *Newsletter*).

* * * *

Diana Crossman writes of her pleasure at reading in **Littleton Powys**'s autobiography *The Joy Of It* [1937] the chapter describing Montacute in the 1880s, the vicarage, its garden, the village and its surroundings. 'My father was born in Stoke-sub-Hamdon in 1884 and this was the scenery he would have known and loved. Littleton's childhood seemed idyllic ... As I continued to read a folded sheet of paper dropped out of the pages. It was a letter to a Mr David Lewis, written by Littleton when staying at the Castle Hotel in Llandovery in 1936.'

The letter is thanking for a reunion luncheon of old boys from Littleton's time as a master at Llandovery College (1902–5) – '3 members of that old fourth form and three such delightful representatives. I was particularly grateful to you for having got Prys Jones to come ...' In his chapter on Llandovery Littleton tells of this 1936 visit, a return to recapture the spirit of the place before writing about his early years there, chronicled in his diary-letters home.

* * * *

From Tom Bates (Neil Lee): ... We had a wonderful time at East Chaldon on

Llewelyn's Birthday. A group of us came down from Derbyshire, including two 'first-timers', and camped overnight at Osmington Mills.

Dandelion Club news: We now boast an international membership, with two members in Australia, and our latest recruit in Tenerife! In a recent internet discussion about Llewelyn's favourite authors, Ken Fisher, who is President of the Tenerife Library Association recalls the name of Walter Pater, and writes: 'Like Llewelyn, Pater's main influence was Epicurus, and also like Llewelyn, Pater and "style" are synonymous. Apart from style another thing Llewelyn and Pater had in common was that they both died at 55 years of age! I came across him (Pater) when studying Kilvert, where I also read that the great uncle of the Rev. Charles Francis Powys became the first Lord Lilford, that the 4th Lord Lilford was also Founder and first President of the British Ornithological Society, and that his son John Lilford Powys (1863–1945) was a cricketer who played for Northamptonshire against India in 1911, and President of Northamptonshire County Cricket Club for 18 years and its major benefactor for almost half a century. Has anyone come across him in the brothers' writings?'

Stephen Marks comments: The chart in *NL* 43 shows the connection between CFP and 1st Lord Lilford. CFP's father was Revd Littleton Charles Powys, his father, Revd Littleton Powys, the younger brother of 1st Lord Lilford (1743–1800), created Baron only three years before his death. The 4th Lord Lilford's books on birds are well known in bird circles and I think enormous. I wondered briefly, when preparing my article in this year's *Journal*, whether a copy might have been at Montacute, but I think most unlikely, as they would be extremely costly, on subscription only: this could be checked in the list of subscribers if one could locate a copy. I know nothing of the other exploits of the Lilford family, as I have not been tempted to explore either birds or cricket ... What an extraordinary reach the Dandelion Club has !

* * * *

The Sylvia Townsend Warner Society *Newletter* no 19 (Summer 2009) prints an inscription (originally written in a single column) from Llewelyn to Sylvia and Valentine, dated November 1935, found in a copy of *Dorset Essays* belonging to Claire Harman (biographer and editorof STW).

Subtle Pair
Dark and Fair
Rest Still
Under the Hill
Every day
Is for play
Every night
For delight.

It is human
For a woman
To scold
Young and old.
Which is moral
Breeds sorrow
Like a worm
In a churn!

Be free
As the Sea
Mock the Moon
Late and soon
Till Life is done
Worship the Sun.

Review

T.F. Powys's Favourite Bookseller, the Story of Charles Lahr, by Chris Gostick. 32pp. ISBN 978-1-907286-01-8.
Encounters with John Cowper Powys, a Meditation, by Christian Poussier, translated from the French by Nelly Markovic. 28pp. ISBN 978-1-907286-00-1.
London: Cecil Woolf, 2009. Powys Heritage series. £6.00 each.

When I first met Charles (or Charlie) Lahr in 1967, four years before his death, it seemed appropriate he was running the bookshop of the Independent Labour Party, since in old age he had slipped back into the world of far-left groupings (the ILP having disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1932) that had sustained him after his arrival in London in 1905. Born Karl Lahr in the Rhineland Palatinate, he had fled aged twenty to England to avoid military service, working in a bakery and then as a razor-grinder.

Throughout the interwar years, though, he owned with his wife Esther (*née* Archer, anglicized from Argeband) a notable bookshop in Red Lion Street, Holborn, much mentioned in literary memoirs of the period, becoming the firm friend of such writers as Hugh MacDiarmid, James Hanley, Liam O'Flaherty, H. E. Bates, Rhys Davies, Malachi Whitaker and Olive Moore as well as the painter William Roberts. John Cowper Powys visited in 1929, noting in his diary:

> Went to Theodore's favourite German bookseller in Red Lion St and signed a lot of my books. He is publishing a book of Lawrence's wh is very rough & crude & violent and angry and plebian and obscene [*Pansies*]... . He corresponds with Violet and gets them an honest penny by selling Theodore's books (signed). I gave him some roses for his wife. I liked him very much. It was the smallest shop I have ever been in.

In the mid-twenties Lahr had published the six issues of the *New Coterie* for its three editors. Although (*pace* Chris Gostick) he had little if any editorial input, this was how he came into close contact with two contributors, D. H. Lawrence (by then in France) and T. F. Powys, whom he would visit several times a year in Dorset. Striking out entrepreneurially he began to publish off-prints from the magazine as strange, unglamorous limited editions, no fewer than five in the case of Powys, but one including an original story, 'A Strong Girl', together with a fine portrait drawing by Roberts. *Christ in a Cupboard* followed in 1930 as one of eighteen Blue Moon Booklets.

Another Blue Moon Booklet was Philippa Powys's collection of poems, *Driftwood*. Lahr also published the first volume of poetry by Laurence Powys, that is Francis Powys, Theodore's son. To complete the connection with the Powys family, one needs to go further than Gostick does and say that in 1931 an essay by Llewelyn Powys was announced as a 'Blue Moon Octavo' (yet there couldn't have been a worse time than at the trough of the Depression to launch such a venture). Llewelyn was to tell Kenneth Hopkins that *Now That the Gods Are Dead* was originally written

for Lahr, although thirty years later Alyse Gregory corrected this to *Glory of Life*.

Gostick's pamphlet is in general well-informed and well-researched. However, portions of text get repeated, and there are errors and misspellings: for example, the poet John Gawsworth appears as 'Gawsworthy' and P. R. Stephensen, Lahr's Australian co-conspirator in his dealings with Lawrence, is repeatedly named as 'Stephenson'. Few people who knew Lahr well are still alive and Gostick is understandably much reliant on the testimony of the two daughters. But he goes too far, captured by them in Lahr family wars in which they take the side of their mother, hard-done-by according to them.

Lastly, Gostick, while struggling valiantly with Lahr's youthful anarchist activism, has no interest in the political dimension. Entirely missing is the distinctive – and unusual – politics of Lahr's clientèle: ILP, anarchist, heterodox Marxist including (very importantly) Trotskyist. If Lahr can be said to have discovered any writers, they were not only Rhys Davies but also George Woodcock, the future historian of anarchism and leading man of letters in Canada, a tiny collection of whose poems he printed in 1938. But Lahr also attracted Africans such as Jomo Kenyatta and the novelist Peter Abrahams, as well as two notable West Indian revolutionaries with whom he became intimate, George Padmore and C. L. R. James, the latter a commanding figure in Caribbean literature and thought.

*

Christiane Poussier's 'meditation' consists of reflections on JCP's relations with his family and the women in his life, his way of living and ways of thinking. This attractive piece is always stimulating, sometimes penetrating, and well worth reading.

David Goodway

David Goodway's article on Lahr, acknowledged in note 6 of Theodore's Favourite Bookseller, *was in* The London Magazine, *1977.*

Thomas Bewick's last tail-piece, full size (see end of Llewelyn Powys's essay).

Llewelyn Powys: Thomas Bewick
from Thirteen Worthies *(1923)*

On the bookshelves of almost all English houses which possess country traditions one can make sure of finding editions of Bewick's *Birds* and *Quadrupeds*. The three volumes may not often be taken down, but there they are ready to hand should ever an uncommon bird or animal make its appearance. Old-fashioned people are particularly fond of these books ; one fancies they find the actual name "Bewick" reassuring, the very sight and sound of it, so essentially English. Their instinct is perfectly right, for when one looks again at these famous engravings they do seem to express in a most exact and intimate way the particular romance, if we may call it so, which we associate in our minds with the English countryside.

This romance is not easy to define, possibly it can be appreciated only by people who have lived all their lives in the country. It has to do with the indefinable delight and relish of the long-drawn-out seasons which they have known from childhood; it has to do with the very smell of the damp autumn air when there is continual dripping from the bare branches on to coloured leaves — with the very tang of frosty mornings when the first cat's-ice is upon the roads — with the bite in the air when the weather-vanes are pointing north-east for days together, and the water in tanks and butts is solid ice: it is what gives to so many wayside objects, such as milestones and sign-posts, that wistful, almost articulate, look — causing one to fancy that they cannot have been altogether oblivious of the generations which have passed them by.

In reading the early chapters of Bewick's autobiography one at once recognises the influences which helped to develop his homely earthbound genius. He was often present, he tells us, "at the worrying of foxes and foumarts and otters and badgers," and would go "to the sheep on the fells through wreaths of snow, with a bundle of hay on his back and his pocket full of oats." He liked to sit by the fireside in the late evenings listening to old North Country stories and memories of folk dead long ago, "whose lot it was useless to sigh, the winds having blown over their graves for many ages past." As a small boy he had a mania for drawing ; he would work with a piece of chalk in the church porch at Ovingham and on the hearthstone of his home, often, so he tells us, "scorching his face" there when the fire was more than usually hot. At fourteen he was apprenticed to an engraver in Newcastle, and for the next five years was employed in engraving coffin-plates and the brass faces of grandfather clocks, occupations one imagines curiously coinciding with the natural bent of his thought, as we have come to know it in his woodcuts. When the time came for him to set out for Newcastle it was, he writes, "with bitter sadness" that he said good-bye "to Mickley Bank, Stubcross, the whinney wilds, the woods, rivers, and especially to the old hollow elm which had sheltered the salmon fishers from many a bitter blast." But he often revisited his home, walking to Cherryburn, "which for many years my eyes have beheld with *cherished delight* . . . with its holy hedge, and well, and two ash-trees grown from the same root."

> I thought nothing in those days of leaving Newcastle at seven o'clock on a winter's evening, the worst that fell from the sky never deterred me from taking a journey. To be placed in the midst of a wood in the night, in a whirlwind of snow, while the blasts howled above my head was sublimity itself.

One hardly wonders, after reading this, that travellers battling against the elements in their wayfaring is a recurring theme of his tail-pieces: with their antique hats, their hedge-sticks, and their old clouts about them, they make their way along a thousand windswept, rain-drenched roads.

As soon as his apprenticeship was over he returned to his father at Cherryburn. It was at this time that he went walking half across Scotland. In his realistic way he tells us how the idea of the tramp first came to him. "When fishing on a hot day in June, I suddenly gave up and laying down my rod awhile, I then tied it up, and walked home: having resolved to see more of the country, I requested my mother to put up some shirts, sewed three guineas in my breeches' waistband and set off that afternoon and walked to Haydon Bridge."

In 1776 he went to London for a year, but he has little good to say for the place: one suspects him of spending most of his time in the "Hole in the Wall" with his North Country friends. In 1784 his father and mother died, the former on 15th November, which, as the old egoist quaintly records, was the very day on which he began the business "of cutting the blocks with the figure of a dromedary" for his book of *Quadrupeds*. The book was published in 1790 and was an immediate success. The first volume of *Birds* appeared in 1797 and the second in 1804.

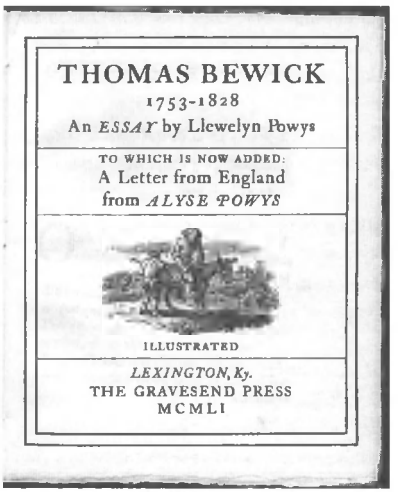
The subjects he chose for his engravings are for the most part of the earth earthy. They are blunt, direct and shrewd, and many of them could hardly be called "genteel," to use a phrase of his time. They give one the impression of being never far removed from the ploughed fields and honest mud of Northumberland. No one in quite the same way as Bewick has entered into the rude habits and instincts of people who live in direct contact with the soil. It would seem that he derived a peculiar satisfaction from portraying them in all their roughness and uncouthness.

Clodhoppers, drunkards, gluttons, such are the folk he so often catches in some careless, unconscious moment to perpetuate for ever: a fat, gross farmer in his cellar, the spigot out of the barrel, and he too drunk to stop the flow of liquor; a drunk man lying insensible at the roadside. He likes also scenes which indicate callousness and savagery in man or beast; a stray dog limping off and three men after it with gun and sticks; a forgotten sheep nibbling at the twigs of a broom outside a deserted, snow-covered mountain hut; a cat in a tub drifting out to sea, the wretched creature on its hind legs peering into the water, its cottage home still just in sight on the shore, and darkness coming on. All the untoward accidents and quaint happenings of village life afford an ample field for his craft; a blind old man saying his grace and a cat the while stealing his porridge; an eager sportsman coming down to the river-side after a bird he has shot, the wounded bird escaping unseen by an overhanging bank; a man tracking a hare in the snow, the animal, small as a pin's head, crossing a field in the

distance; a traveller by moonlight nervously peering into a darkened recess by the roadside, the place full of shadowy goblins.

Many of these pictures have for their motive the transitory nature of things upon earth: it would seem that Bewick's mind was abnormally conscious of this. The idea evidently haunted him. "All things flow away, nothing remains"; he could never rid his old North Country head of this melancholy conception. Like the writing on a sundial, Bewick's engravings are never weary of reminding us that "Life is a shadow." Ruined churches, forgotten tombstones, tottering monuments appealed to the old rogue's humour better than anything; he likes to engrave the flat slabs with such words as "*Firmum in vita nihil*" "*Partitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*". Thus he will draw a monument "erected to commemorate a splendid victory" and have a donkey rubbing its backside against it and all so exquisitely done that one can imagine that one sees the animal's grey hairs coming off on the moss-grown surface.

But possibly the most original of all his vignettes is placed at the foot of the page describing the Kingfisher. It is in Bewick's best mood and style and would be recognised anywhere as his handiwork — a man is seen walking at night-time in the direction of a distant church, a full moon is in the sky, on the man's back is a black kite-shaped burden which on closer scrutiny is seen to be a coffin inscribed with the words: "A wonderful fish." When one observes that this picture is placed under the Kingfisher, and is evidently intended to remind us of another kind of fishing which daily takes place under the sun, one is given to marvel at the grim attitude of this Newcastle tradesman in the face of happenings which, when clearly understood, have made many wiser men quail.


THOMAS BEWICK
1753-1828
An *ESSAY* by Llewelyn Powys
TO WHICH IS NOW ADDED:
A Letter from England
from *ALYSE POWYS*
ILLUSTRATED
LEXINGTON, Ky.
THE GRAVESEND PRESS
MCMLI

Title-page 5¼ x 4¼ inches.

Bewick died in 1828. The very last tail-piece he did was of a coffin being carried from Cherryburn down to the Tyne, where a moored boat is waiting to bear the dead body of Thomas Bewick across the water.

This essay of Llewelyn's so appealed to Joseph and Lucy Graves, that they reprinted it at their Gravesend Press in Lexington, Kentucky in 1951 in an edition of 500 copies (see The Gravesend Press, A Bibliographical Confession, *Kentucky, 1960); its title-page is reproduced here (courtesy of Stephen Powys Marks).*

Alyse's 'A Letter from England', occupying seven of the book's little pages is itself of much interest; it is reprinted on the next page. *SPM*

Alyse Gregory: A Letter from England

When the brothers and sisters of Llewelyn Powys (a family of eleven) were "naughty" the governess sent them, often crying, in to their father, and he, instead of punishing them, would get down a volume of Bewick's "Quadrupeds" and leave them to turn over the pages while he went on writing his sermons. Their crying soon ceased.

Perhaps no other writing of Llewelyn Powys better conveys his intimate love of the countryside, and his appreciation of deep dug, idiosyncratic characters, than does this little essay of his on Bewick, and how it would have charmed him could he have known that it was to be lovingly commemorated by one who treasures in a similar manner the past with all its rare traditions. For although my husband travelled extensively and wrote on a variety of subjects, he remained at heart a countryman, born and reared in English soil, following closely in the footsteps of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Indeed, in spite of his admiration for, and close affinity to Charles Lamb, so inveterate a champion of the city as against the country, Llewelyn could never wholly overcome his suspicion of the townsman.

It would be difficult to name a writer of his, or our present generation who has more resolutely carried forward, with the difference becoming to a later day, the rich traditions of English prose—shrewd, poetical, ardent, and uncontemporaneous. The values that he upholds are those that exist at all times and in all places, and although every serious writer must hazard eclipse according to the literary modes of the hour, it is posterity that gives the final verdict.

His message was a simple one, but one too easily forgotten in a machine age, an age that bids fair to destroy all simplicity and gentleness of life. He liked to call himself an old-fashioned liberal and he hated tyranny of every kind, whether it came from the right or from the left. In matters of religion he was a confirmed sceptic. He considered the clue to existence was to be found in the poetic vision and that no purpose on life was of more consequence to the individual than love. The chief literary influences that helped to mould his thoughts were, he was wont to say, Lucretius, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Robert Burton, Charles Lamb, Walter Pater, Thomas Hardy, Guy de Maupassant, and Marcel Proust.

It was always a source of pleasure to him to recall that he owed his first recognition as a writer to America, and he many times paid homage—notably in The Verdict of Bridlegoose*—to a country which had welcomed him with so much generous hospitality. As a young man, freshly graduated from Cambridge, he had been invited over to the States to give a course of lectures in English literature, and on one occasion he recited* When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd *at a Whitman anniversary on the same platform from which Woodrow Wilson delivered an address. His second visit was in 1920 when, after five years spent in British East Africa as manager of a stock ranch, he sailed for New York with his famous lecturer brother, John Cowper, and began to earn his living as a writer at the age of thirty-six. His first book—*Ebony and Ivory*—brought him some reputation, and this was strengthened by the appearance of* Black Laughter *and a life of Henry Hudson, the explorer.*

After our marriage in 1922, my husband and I sailed for England and lived for five years in a coast guard cottage on one of the wildest promontories of the Dorset coast. From there we visited Palestine, and this trip was the inspiration for several books.

In 1936 a recrudescence of his old disorder—pulmonary tuberculosis, contracted as a young man—decided him to go to Switzerland where he spent the last three years of his life. He was able to go on expeditions into the mountains and to come into intimate touch with the daily life of the peasants, and his close and delighted observations of the birds and beasts, the Alpine flowers, and local customs are commemorated in a volume called Swiss Essays, *published posthumously.*

My husband died of a hemorrhage of the stomach caused by a duodenal ulcer on December 2, 1939 at the age of fifty-six, and his ashes are buried a short distance from his last home on the Dorset downs. The spot overlooks one of the noblest headlands of the South coast, "where for thousands upon thousands of years the sunlight and the sea and the masterless winds have held tryst together", and it is marked by a rough monument of Portland stone on which are carved words chosen by himself from Isaiah: "The living, the living he shall praise thee", words that could hardly be more fitting for so ardent a life-long worshipper of the visible world.

Theodore and Lady Ottoline

These letters between T. F. Powys and Ottoline Morrell take us up to the Morrells' first visit to the Powyses at East Chaldon in 1924 (see NL 66, pp.13–15). To be continued further.

Permission courtesy of The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, USA.

East Chaldon, Dorchester, Dorset
July 23 1923

My dear Lady Morrell

David Garnett has just written to tell me you have read the 'The Left Leg' and praise it very charmingly.

I live so quietly and hear so little, that I am quite overwhelmed with gladness at the moment because of what you said in your letter to David.

I feel a little nervous about these books sometimes, and I want very much to be reassured that they aren't too horrid.

The medium you know being a lump of clay, it does shape itself out a little oddly at times, and then I get a little afraid of it.

But I don't feel afraid just now with your praise so happily come to me.

I do hope to meet you one day and I thank you very much for inviting me to Garsington.

I am trying at a longer story now, that is, longer than the ones Chatto and Windus are bringing out in the Autumn and Spring. I hope I shall get it finished by the late Autumn and then I want to come to London and that journey may give me a chance of meeting you.

I am very sincerely
Theodore F. Powys

The Manor House, Garsington, Oxford
Thursday July 25

My dear Mr Powys

You cannot [tell] what immense pleasure your letter gave me . . . I am staying away in London in very alien surroundings . . . which are very upsetting .. & your letter arrived like a message from the real world. Thank you so much for writing —I felt so strongly about your work that I had to write to David Garnett.

It is very strange and beautiful but only the strangeness of reality I mean the real that one sees with the eyes of Imagination — which is often so profoundly everyday - & True & not fictitious - but only the Imaginatively Sensitive can know it — & this you say. The things that slide from heaven — like Rays of sunlight — & you so delicately weave the two worlds into each other — which are of course never separate — except in most people's minds they ebb & flow into each other don't they?

No. They don't. They are always united — only the fantastic & unseen & spiritual is veiled at times —

I feel I could write on for pages — boring you with all the thoughts you have given me & all the praise I should like to shower — Yes — your material is mud — but I suppose that is the case

with all real creators. They work the mud & rock into something unique & beautiful & something of Form eternal.

But Village life is perhaps very unwieldy mud, more so than socalled civilized Life — and yet it has greatness [&] passion. I simply think you have done wonders — or it has done wonders in your hands — worked itself out [&] grown into a New creation — but you must have agonized too in its growth.

I hope you will really come & see us — I may have to go abroad in Oct for a time — to be under Dr in Germany.

Would it be possible to come before — but I know any interruption is devastating.

It is so Nice of you to have written. I cannot get over it — I think the Cash Story has cut itself into me most profoundly. I know all the characters — intimately.

Yours most gratefully,
Ottoline Morrell

I return home tomorrow — to my village — Thankfully — Forgive the scatterbrainedness of this letter. It is Grosvenor Square Life that does it.
Have you any other work — that I might see — or must I patiently wait —

East Chaldon, Dorchester, Dorset
July 29 1923

My dear Lady Morrell

You have made me feel quite grand and proud with your generous praise of "The Left Leg".

I am grateful; because I should like very much to believe a little more in the transformation of the common mud into something more exciting than what we just look at.

Today my wife and I sat upon a hill, a very little one, and watched the village. A small black dog crossed the green and then a young person, who laughed, and who wore a red cap.

I wonder if you have a little hill to rest upon and watch what happens next.

I have got the proofs of "Black Bryony" now to correct and so I expect this one will be out in about two months time. I hope it won't disappoint you when it appears. In a sort of way its quite different from the one you have read.

I shall try all I can to get to London, a little earlier than I proposed. And when I decide about any dates I will write to you.

Thank you very much for your invitation, I do hope I shall be able to do this journey before you go to Germany. They are wonderfully clever these Germans

I mustn't say too much about my coming to you because when it comes to the point of my starting I generally end by staying where I am.

Yours ever

Theodore F. Powys

I am afraid I haven't any M.S.S. that is readable just at this moment, so I fear you will have to be a little patient for a month or two until "Black Bryony" is ready.

East Chaldon, Dorchester
November 20th 1923

Dear Lady Ottoline

I wonder if you are in England.

If so we might meet as I expect you sometimes have to be in London

We are going to London for a few days between the 7th and the 14th of December.

I should have loved to have seen your home near Oxford, but this time I shall not have a chance to go so far.

Perhaps another day?

I thought I would just write in case you might be in London one of those days.

Yours ever

Theodore F. Powys

East Chaldon Dorchester
November 30th 1923

Dear Lady Ottoline

I am so glad that you may be coming through London on the 13th or 14th of December.

Our address will be,

c/o A. R. Powys, 13 Hammersmith Terrace, Hammersmith, London W. 6.

My wife and I both look forward to seeing you if it could be managed.

Your invitation to Garsington for that week end the 15 to 17th — we shall anyhow have to return to East Chaldon then [—] is too kind a one, for me to shout out a rude No against.

If we see you I will explain, and then you will be able to tell me if, in any way at all, we could possibly be a worry to you or to your husband if we did come for those two nights.

Anyhow we could talk about it.

Yours very sincerely

Theodore F Powys

I shall be very excited to know what you think of "Black Bryony".

I was very interested that you have had a letter from my sister. We will talk of that too — I think it is awful how the Germans are suffering.

East Chaldon, Dorchester
May 5 1924

Dear Lady Ottoline

I really feel most ungrateful, I feel a wretch.

I have always been so extremely pleased that you took an interest in these book[s] that I do feel such an unkind one to refuse your very gracious invitation. I simply can't get myself to move. A thousand fears seize me when I think of going anywhere, even to the most beautiful place in the world where such kind ones live.

I would sincerely like to come but there it is — I always like the thought of a visit before hand but when the time comes near I never go.My wife thanks you very much indeed, she is so used to my saying No that she sees it can't be helped.

I suppose you don't ever stay in Dorset. Motor cars go along all roads now very quickly. If you were near and could come to East Chaldon for a night or two or even for a few hours it would be very delightful.

Yours very sincerely
Theodore F. Powys

East Chaldon, Dorchester, Dorset
June 10 1924

My dear Lady Ottoline

I was delighted to have your letter, because I was most anxious to know what you felt about "Mark Only". I am extremely glad that you think so well of it.

I am often despondent about these stories and your kindly praise does me a world of good.

We hope very much that you will be able to come here one day — send us a telegram or a message and we will be ready. I should so enjoy it if you came.

I am immensely excited you should have given the books to Maxim Gorky. I haven't heard anything about a Russian translation. There was some talk of a french one of "Black Bryony" but I suppose that must have fallen through.

It was good of you not to think us rude for not coming. I enclose a photograph that was taken in the village. It isn't our cottage - Our cottage is rather ugly - like a dolls house.

I wonder whether Mr Hartley wrote the review in the Spectator- there haven't been many so far. It would be splendid if you wrote a review for Mark Only

Yours very sincerely.

Theodore F. Powys

East Chaldon Dorchester
September 2nd 1924

Dear Lady Ottoline

Thank you very much for your letter. I am delighted to hear that you are starting upon this little tour and mean to come and see us. Either Friday, Saturday or Sunday will suit us excellently.

My wife will be delighted to give you tea — I am so glad that you managed to fit us in, I think you will both admire this village. The weather does look better now —

Yours very sincerely,
Theodore F. Powys

East Chaldon Dorchester Dorset
October 1st 1924

My dear Lady Ottoline

I was delighted to have your letter, and I thank you so much for the Keats. I know there is a great deal in the letters that will please me, and I am very pleased to read the preface to "Endymion" that we talked of.

Certainly everyone who leaves East Chaldon does go into darkness, but when you went we had our share of it. But who ever advised you to go up that hill? If we had known you were there, we would have watched — only I had no idea you would try that way.

Of course I haven't been to Max Gate. I believe that Mrs Hardy keeps dogs who might mistake me for an American, and even with a letter in my hand I do not believe that the maid would admit me. But for all that I will try and go one of these days.

Thank you very much for getting some more photographs to send us — that will be amusing.

It is excellent news that you may come another day and stay in the village. I believe the lady — Mrs Wey who lets the best rooms, is quite a good cook. You could buy little ducks and chickens. I am so pleased that you enjoyed reading Tess again. My wife and I send you and Mr Morrell our very best wishes.

Yours very sincerely

Theodore F. Powys

Please come when ever you are able. We enjoyed those two afternoons very much indeed. Thanks again a thousand times for the books.

Lucifer, *Headpiece to Part III, by Agnes Miller Parker,*
(see note by SPM on page 40).

Lucifer, Keats and Paganism

JCP's long blank-verse poem *Lucifer* (1905) in Keatsian style – with a shared ancestor in Milton – is not much dwelt on in the context of his life and works. Long-winded and literally old-fashioned it may be, but it also has charm and vision, besides its interest as a period piece. Like Keats's unfinished 'Hyperion', its theme is the cyclic victory of one dynasty of gods over another. It takes *Paradise Lost* into modern times: Lucifer/ Satan, escaped from Hell or reincarnated, now in heroic form, is determined to overcome the emaciated giant Jehovah, and remake the world. He seeks help from Mother Earth, from Pan and his nymphs, from Keats's 'Bacchus and his pards' and from a useless Buddha; giving help and advice in his turn to a condemned prisoner, a perplexed youth, and a band of red-flag-wielding demonstrators. He emerges god-like, powerful and alone.

Some of the most effective moments are descriptions of scenery, chiefly very English despite the 'cosmogonic' events. A downland in high summer:

> Feathered grasses threw
> Shadows clear-cut as lace-work, and the sky
> From zenith to horizon held no cloud.
> O'er a wide plain the highway passed; then rose
> Abrupt and lost itself in the blue haze
> Of an high upland, bare of hedge or tree.
> Midway across the plain stretched the broad road
> Hedgeless on both sides, like a level spear
> Dividing the hot fields. Here the sun blazed
> Without a check and under him the earth,
> Beneath her flaming poppies and bright corn,
> Crack'd like a scoriac desert. In this place
> Dust round him, dust upon him, the burnt grass
> Dust-sown his seat, a dwarfed and withered thorn
> Propping him, Satan sat.
>
> (*Lucifer*, 130)

A cathedral town – *Lucifer* was written on a visit to Norwich, JCP tells us:

> Richly in horizontal beams the sun
> Fell on that city square. Gables and towers
> Burned fiery red, and motes of golden dust
> In archways, porticos and cavernous doors
> Like waves of wanton elves glimmered and danced.
> Few passed that way but felt within their blood
> The influence of the hour. A touch more soft
> Than music stole along the ancient eaves
> And blessed the pavement underneath men's feet.

Slow on the golden heels of afternoon
Up narrow streets long shadows crept and laid
Fingers, like moth-wings, on embattled walls,
On door-steps, ledges, cornices and scrolls,
And double-gloom'd old gateways' hieroglyphs.
Each open lattice as escutcheon bore
The slant sun, gules. The air was thick with dreams;
And Peace a visible presence walked the town. (141–2)

JCP's book on Keats (written *c.*1907) was in effect, like *Lucifer*, a manifesto for the 'New Paganism' – for Hope and Joy and Youth against repressive patriarchal religion and Victorian corsets. As Cedric Hentschel says in his preface to *Powys on Keats* (the selection published by Cecil Woolf, 1993), this was entirely in the Edwardian spirit of rebellion against one's parents. (D. H. Lawrence, similarly, in 1912 praises the 'Georgian' poets for their enjoyment of life, a breath of fresh air after Hardy's gloom.) For JCP 'Paganism' was a way of life embracing the cult of sensation, empathy with all creation including the inorganic universe, a robust sense of humour and a balanced pessimism; and these elements endure in his later philosophy. John Cowper and Llewelyn were both enthusiasts for Keats, and the proselytising notes in these early works of John Cowper still sound, more confidently, in Llewelyn's rousing call.

> And what is it to be possessed by the style of Keats ...? It is above all, to acquire the power of enjoying existence. Not merely of being happy or of being free from pain, but of enjoying existence, such as the sudden remembrance of a promised assignation brings to a lover. The sunburnt, fragrant beat of these rhythmic pulses; the slow, rich shore-moving roll of these oceanic tides, full of moonbeams and pearls, fill us with a strange and wonderful power. By absorbing this style, that is to say by drinking the blood of this son of the Sun, we make our own the greatest gift the gods have the strength to give us, or we to give ourselves; the power of pressing so tightly between our lips and fingers the grapes of Life, that the red juice runs down our wrists and stains the dew and the grass — the power of revelling so richly in Life's sweetness that we are content, in sheer excess of joy, to spill the wine upon the ground. ...
>
> (*Powys on Keats*, 107)

And in *Lucifer*, JCP's Satan encourages a condemned criminal:

Unwish
Nothing. Thou might'st have perished ere thy birth;
And fall'n on sleep before thou wast awake.
Thou hast known youth's hot flame. Earth's pleasant air
Hast breath'd, hast felt through natural human veins
The great Sun's kiss. Thou hast lived: is life to thee
A little thing? Is't nothing to have known
Sorrow and pleasure and desire and grief?
O youth, youth, youth, when will ye learn that life,

Life only, only to live, is worth all shocks,
All sorrows, all defeats!

(*Lucifer*, 127)

And from Llewelyn:

> There is no wiser word than to eat and to drink and to be merry. No word that we hear spoken, no gesture we see should be lost. In moments of profane love we should be possessed by an ultimate rapture, our spirits under their foolish bewitchment, awake with gladness, knowing the high fortune of so tender, so savage, so God-like an experience! The simplest actions should be undertaken with a full realization of their significance, as uncommon opportunities of natural piety never to come again. To pour out water from a jug, to break bread, to open a bottle of wine, are lordly offices.... No occasion of our lives but should have its solace. It were wise for a man to spend long hours upon his knees weeding a parcel of ground or smelling the mould. We should even go to our garden jakes in a spirit of gratitude that we can perform this just function of nature. We should not so much as rest in the open country without a prayer in our heart, a godless prayer sent out upon its crooked way for the rich guerdon of simply being alive.
>
> (Llewelyn Powys, *Glory of Life*, 1934)

Note by SPM Although written in 1905, Lucifer *was not published until 1956 by JCP's main post-war publisher, Macdonald (of which the dedicatee Eric Harvey was a Director), in a signed limited quasi-private-press edition of 560 copies. It is illustrated with seven wood-engravings by Agnes Miller Parker (1895–1980); the original engravings have the caption 'The Death of God Part I* [etc] *AMP' written in pencil by the artist. They comprise a vignette on the title-page (not reproduced) and a headpiece to each of the six Parts of the poem; these are attractive pieces, but really not achieving the sheer beauty and fineness of her best work which was done between the wars for the Gregynog Press and others. Five of the six headpieces are reproduced in this* Newsletter*; the sixth to Part VI is a mountain scene similar to that on page 2. The engravings are reproduced from an inherited set in my possession.*

Lucifer *was reprinted by the Village Press in 1974, with the engravings and the same pagination.*

Pencil caption to original engraving: 'The Death of God Part II A M P'.

John Cowper Powys
Preface (1955) to Lucifer *(1905)*

GRATEFULLY AND AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED
TO
E. R. H. HARVEY, M.C.

To anyone like myself whose whole life has been dominated by poetry there is a peculiar interest in reading a poem written by myself as long ago as "Lucifer" was written. I am able to verify this date in a very simple and most personal way. In the first year of my possessing a cottage to live in of my own, a cottage that was in Burpham, near Arundel, in Sussex, there was born in that cottage my only offspring, namely my son, Littleton Alfred Powys. This was in 1902 and I was writing this particular poem when he was three years old, that is to say, in 1905. He was born in August of 1902 and it must have been in the summer of 1905 that Mrs. Powys and I travelled together with our young son from Sussex to Norfolk to visit my mother's sisters in their house at Norwich. I recall pondering on this poem and composing the bulk of it during this visit; but I also remember very clearly and quite definitely adding certain passages to it after returning to Burpham, paticularly the passage where I suggest that Satan left his finger-prints upon the petals of the wild convolvulus.

That I am correct about this date is proved by the fact that I can remember very clearly several occasions when my mind was full of the composition of this poem taking my little son for short walks in two particular directions. The first of these was towards the Cathedral, for my aunts' house was in the Cathedral Close; and the second towards the river, and indeed along the bank of the river, which also was very near. It may well be that the wild insurrectionary scene, when a red flag of revolt is torn from the hands of an aged orator and becomes entangled in a pinnacle of a church, was no prophetic vision of the dividing of our contemporary world into a capitalist half and a communist half, but a natural association of aged idealists, of whom there were several famous ones at that time, with the city of my mother's parents and grandparents.

JCP about 1896, painting by Gertrude Powys.

The particular one of all my mother's sisters to whom as a family we were especially devoted was my aunt Theodora Cowper Johnson, whom from childood we had known and adored, as few aunts ever have been adored, as "Aunt Dora", and it is of her and of her mother, Mary-Anne Patteson, who was my mother's mother

too, that I cannot help thinking when I try to recall my feelings as I struggled to imagine "Lucifer" under the shadow of Norwich Cathedral.

It is as natural as it is lawful for an old romancer and poetry-lover to take a peculiar interest in his work of half a century ago; and what particularly arrests my attention today in the style of this audaciously-conceived "Lucifer" is the fact that the rhythm and imagery of its verse is so clearly the work of someone whose head is filled to overflowing with verbal echoes from the narrative poems of Milton, Keats, Tennyson, and Matthew Arnold.

"Lucifer" was written at the time I was preparing — and preparing very industriously and carefully — my Extension Lectures, given in this country under the auspices of Oxford and Cambridge and London Universities, until I transferred these recitative performances, which were more like those of an actor than a lecturer, to the new world. It was under the management of one of the best friends I ever had, G.Arnold Shaw, himself the son of a famous Oxford University Extension lecturer, that I eventually settled down to spend thirty years of my life in American railways, looked after by the nicest "coloured" persons I have ever met. But it was before any of this dramatic travelling, whether at home or abroad, that I composed these cosmogonic adventures of the Biblical Adversary of Jehovah.

It interests me to note that although, in my long years of lecture-travel, it was Shakespeare and Walt Whitman and Poe I was always quoting, in this, the only long poem I ever wrote, there is not the faintest trace of the influence of any of these. Milton and Keats and Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, those four poets, and those four poets alone, seem to have been my masters and inspirers. Much of Wordsworth and Coleridge and Shelley I knew by heart and passionately loved to descant upon, and prophesy upon, and play the psychic medium for, and even try to body forth in desperate gestures the hidden messages therein concealed; but this poem, the only poem of my own that I feel any temptation to pray that posterity may read, was, I can clearly see now, composed solely, wholly, and exclusively under the influence of Milton and Keats and Tennyson and Matthew Arnold.

I have lived long enough to have watched the effect upon youthful minds of several quite different schools of modern poetry. But I seem to recall that it was Matthew Arnold himself who said that the art of poetry will never die, but that poetry of some sort will always be composed and enjoyed, because it depends upon nothing less than the instinct of self-preservation in the human race itself. This view of poetry is certainly one that will appeal to those among us who can still turn from their response to the poetry of the hour, however shocking, however striking, however startling, however obscure, to enjoy the poetry of Homer or of the Book of Job.

It is significant that it should be by the use of symbols that poetry throughout the ages, as Goethe hints at the end of "Faust", that great poem of his which you might almost say he composed out of the stuff of the whole of his life, has prevailed as the best interpretation of the riddle of this weird "universe", or "multiverse", that man has yet been able to reach. Poetry expresses a reality deeper than thought and deeper

even than feeling. We hover hesitatingly between what is revealed to us as "truth" by religion and what is revealed to us as "truth" by science, while the real mystery of life is to be found neither in religion nor in science, but purely, solely, and only, in poetry.

Well! And what is poetry? what is this third aspect of cosmic reality which reveals so much more of the hidden life of nature and so much more of the baffling processes of human history, with all its advances and retreats, its recoveries and recessions, than either religion or science? Well! We have at the start to remember that there are two subjects here. There is *poetry* in the sense of whatever in the whole world of things is *poetical*; and there is *poetry* as a separate and distinct art by itself.

As an art in itself it is, first of all, essentially what is called *mythological*. It unearths and re-embodies all those strange symbolic legends of figures, forms, culminations and catastrophes of the remote past that are so monstrous, so mysterious, so gigantic, that we shrink from them with a sort of pre-natal terror. It is to the poetry of mythology, and not to either science or religion, that we owe that vast obscure cosmic emotion that stirs within us and gives us back the childhood of our race when we read of these dimly-recorded and remotely-rumoured Beings, divine, bestial, super-human, sub-human, creatures of earth, fire, air, water, whose huge chaotic struggles with one another make up the substance of the Story of Life. These are the everlasting fairy-tales of all the most ancient tribes of men, and by bringing these forward poetry stirs up, rouses, and revives within us, however ignorant we may be of any particular legend or fairy-tale, the whole weird, grotesque, montstruous, miraculous *story*, for all its stages are within us, of the long-drawn-out, groping, deperate, tragical-comical avatar of earth-life at which our pathetic race has now arrived.

And in the second place we get in poetry, and this especially touches the heart of an old story-teller, that particular secret of the cosmos that goes deeper than any religion or any science. I mean the hidden feelings of every individual among us, whether man, woman or child, and we should include every living creature on earth, whether such feelings are sensible and good or crazy and wicked, such as are entailed by the complicated predicament of being alive in a world like ours.

No one can deny that religion has persecuted people in the past, is persecuting them still, and may go on doing so for a long time in the future. No one can deny that in the practice by science of vivisection, and of other experimental methods, causing the sensitive nerves of living creatures to suffer excruciating pain, there is something that outrages the soul. What a comfort it is, therefore, to discover that, whenever we feel this special heightening and deepening of our response to life which has acquired the name of "the poetical", we are making use of a response to life that is as old as the granite rocks and the sandy deserts, as old as the salt seas and their remotest shores, as old as the moutains and their secretest valleys, and yet never persecutes for the sake of truth or tortures for the sake of knowledge.

And how many incarnations the spirit of poetry has! I fancy it was Goethe who once called architecture "petrified music", and we must all confess that the Art of Dancing, the Art of Drama, the Art of Sculpture, the Art of Music and the Art of

Song all overlap one another and make use of one another; while the human soul makes use of them all and in every separate case does so to the limit of its emotional response. It is strange how each one of the supreme Arts has the power of attaining, by means of its own particular approach, to this poetic mystery of life. Just as every masterpiece of painting gives us, along with the vision of form and colour it reveals, the peculiar ecstasy we all experience now and again from nature's landscapes, so the precise yet mystical movement of the everlastingly revolving notes of that "music of the spheres" in the mineral world, that harmony which exists in the gyrations of primal matter itself, corresponds in its ultimate dispersings and reassemblings with that harmony in our human souls to which Shakespeare refers in the *Merchant of Venice*. While a great painting represents sometimes a lyrical chorus of curves and colours, and sometimes the eternal passivity of a tremendous granite rock, confronting in its planetary solitude the risings and settings of uncounted suns and moons, so we can all of us derive some special poetical appeal, whose exact nature we can never precisely define, from some favourite sculpture, music, play, dance, or building, as well as from some favourite landscape. This passing emotion of ours may justly be called a poetical feeling. But where poetry itself, as an art in its own right, has the advantage over all other arts, lies in the fact that its medium is language. When we mortals use language, however shamefully we may abuse it, we use the Word, the Logos, the Oracle, the Prophecy, the Immortal Jest, by means of which the individual human soul communes with another human soul, and through this "other" with the whole human race: yes, with the human race as it was, as it is now, and as it shall be, world without end.

Is it not a strange thing and possibly a very significant thing that the two greatest poets of the world, Homer and Shakespeare, should have, in a sense, lost their personalities in expressing the personalities of us all? And what is the meaning of this? The meaning of this is that no religious teacher — no, not the most inspired of all, and no scientific discoverer, no, not the most imaginative of all — has come to represent what might be called the reaction of the whole human race to the pleasure and the plight of our general situation as has the poetry of Homer and the poetry of Shakespeare.

There are three English words that are electric with explosive prejudices and riddled with insoluble mysteries, namely Truth, Beauty, Goodness; and each of these has its associated opposite, namely Illusion, Ugliness, Evil. Oh, how well we know what any particular neighbour of our would instinctively feel about each of these three pairs of opposites, though he or she might be too cautious or too kind to say what they felt! No two of us when we utter the word "poetical" are thinking of quite the same thing; and instinctively we are aware of this. The word "poetical" goes so far and so deep and has such a varied meaning that we can apply it to any piece of prose, to any piece of music, to any piece of sculpture, to any building, and to any landscape, just as we can apply it to any living creature. But the grand proof of its being a much deeper and much more universal symbol of our life upon earth than either the word

"Truth", or the word "Beauty" or the word "Goodness", lies in the fact that the "poetical" includes in itself all the three opposites, the opposite to Truth, the opposite to Beauty, and the opposite to Goodness. In other words, for a thing to be deeply poetical it must contain both truth and illusion, both beauty and ugliness, both good and evil. That all great poetry does include all these can be proved by the poetry of both Shakespeare and Homer.

Poetry belongs to every race of mankind from the beginning. John Redwood Anderson, in a poem I particularly like, has described one of our possible ancestors, the aboriginal ape-man, sublimely inspired by the rising of the sun. We know too well how science tortures such animals under the excuse of medical philanthropy. But we may doubt whether the shudder of blind terror, with which these planetary cousins of ours watch the instruments of torture being brought to the place where they are tied up to be experimented on, can be regarded as part of the natural cruelty of life, like the bones of a sheep devoured by a wolf or the skin of a man-roasted ox, and therefore a proper subject for poetry. Horrible cruelties have passed this censorship of ours, such as the flaying of Marsyas by Apollo, and the appalling punishments inflicted upon the enemies of Zeus, such as Ixion's Wheel and the Stone of Sisyphos and the torment of Tantalos and the vultures of Prometheus and of Tityos; but hovering around all this mythological cruelty there is so much of the imaginative terror of the old fabulous dreams of the beginning of our race that some universal instinct in us separates it from the deliberate and cold-blooded cruelty of certain scientific experiments.

Undue and unfair attacks are continually being made on modern poetry by old-fashioned poetry-lovers like myself who find the eccentricities of modern verse difficult to do justice to. But when once we have got it lodged firmly in our minds that there are deep psychological reasons as well as purely musical ones, as Redwood Anderson shows in his as yet unfinished work on English Metre, for all the old classical musical rhythms and their modern variations, we have at least a smooth and massive promontory from which to plunge into this ebbing and flowing mystery. The fact is we've got here a double problem on our hands; for we not only have to decide what the essential nature of what we call the "poetical" really is, but we have to decide also how far in the composition of what we call "poems" it is possible to break all previous laws and make absolutely new experiments. But for myself I think we must boldly plunge — and, when we've done so, swim and float and dive, in the "foam of the perilous sea" reached from our "magic casement" in both directions! Yes, we must swim against the tide up-stream towards the poetry at the beginning of our human consciousness. And we must also swim with the tide down-stream towards the unknown future of poetry upon this earth.

John Cowper Powys
Corwen, 1955

How did all those **V***'s pop up ?*

In the latest *Journal* you must have noticed in the leading article by our President half-a-dozen capital 'V's where there ought to have been double 'ff's. At first I was very worried that my computer was behaving erratically, because these were the only occurrences, but I have now pinned it down to a simple error on my part. Unfortunately, there are quite a lot of typographical errors in that issue but this is not the place to deal with them nor will they affect your understanding: I want to concentrate on explaining, as indeed I can, how 'ff' became 'V'.

When the Editor has sent me the basic texts he has edited after receiving them from the authors, I format them using a typeface called Caslon. There are several versions of Caslon: mine is Adobe Caslon which seems to me the best version available for digital setting; this was designed by Carol Twombly, a leading type designer, as a revival of William Caslon's classic types, and issued in 1990. It was designed directly in the digital medium and based on letters cut by Caslon in the early eighteenth century.

Typefaces come in *fonts*, with upper and lower case alphabets, numerals, points, symbols and accented letters; fonts often come in four weights providing upright or Roman characters, and *italic*, **bold** and ***bold italic***. My Adobe Caslon (like most fonts today) provides lining figures (in line with capitals) and two of the five standard f-ligatures, like this (all four lines are shown here in the *Journal*'s Caslon):

1234567890 fi fl (linked or ligatured fi fl)

1234567890 fi fl **1234567890 fi fl** ***1234567890 fi fl***

I prefer to use Old Style Figures (like lower case letters), and the full set of f-ligatures (Plantin, used in the *Newsletter*, has its Expert set for the same facility):

1234567890 ff ffi ffl (linked or ligatured ff ffi ffl)

1234567890 ff ffi ffl 1234567890 ff ffi ffl *1234567890 ff ffi ffl*

This means that I have to use a different set of letters; this is called an *Expert* font. The most modern fonts available, including Adobe Caslon, have a very different way of handling this, with fonts called *Open Font* which contain everything in one big font, but the computer I am still using for our publications (Macintosh System 9, with PageMaker 6.5) can't handle them. My new Mac can (System X version 5, with InDesign CS3), but I have not faced the challenge of recreating the necessary detailed formatting instructions on the new computer or the differences in working in the two layout programmes. InDesign has a great many features which are familiar to me as a user for nearly twenty years of PageMaker, but some features were adopted from QuarkExpress, the other serious layout programme; some of the most familiar operations are a little more complicated in InDesign because it offers more choices.

Now we come to it: I can establish detailed formatting instructions for any paragraph, including typeface, type size, type weight and style, text centred for headings, justified or aligned left or right, tab-stop positions, space after a paragraph, and, crucially for this outbreak of cap 'V's, whether the first line is indented or aligned left.

A particular collection of instructions constitutes a *paragraph style*, and, as my experience increased, the collection of paragraph styles, the *style sheet*, also increased until there are now well over forty different specific paragraph styles, each with a short name. The first of the extracts shown below is in a style called *body* for the general run of text in the measure (text width) set for the *Journal*; after setting all the text I do a global change through the whole *Journal* of 2 letters ff in the basic Caslon font to ligatured ff in the Caslon Expert set; the key I have to type for this is cap V.

The first version is how it was set as *body*, with changed f-ligatures, but faced with some essential textual changes at a very late stage, this and some other indented paragraphs had to have their indents removed, so I changed its paragraph style in the style sheet to *base* which is the starting point on which other paragraph styles are built. The result of the change from *body* to *base* was to revert to the typeface specified for *base*, i.e. Caslon, losing the f-ligature inserted from Caslon Expert, as shewn in the lower version of the paragraph, which is how it was actually printed on page 12.

> In the complexities of lace the self-sufficient circle relies on straight lines to enclose it and thus afford it further scope as part of a complex pattern. One may perceive an analogy with the relation of the self-conscious individual to such a firmly knit group as the Powys family which, when gathered into a circle could, ironically, constitute a threat of imprisonment.
>
> In the complexities of lace the self-sufficient circle relies on straight lines to enclose it and thus aVord it further scope as part of a complex pattern. One may perceive an analogy with the relation of the self-conscious individual to such a firmly knit group as the Powys family which, when gathered into a circle could, ironically, constitute a threat of imprisonment.

The V in the second line is obvious, but in fact one other f-ligature reverted to its components. In the first line 'self-sufficient' reverted to 'self-sufficient'. It would have been very easy and very quick to check that the change in paragraph style had not affected anything. Sorry. Fortunately there were no numbers in these paragraphs, or they would have reverted from OSF to Lining as well.

Another feature of *Expert* sets which I use fairly often is their differently weighted and proportioned *small caps* (top) – not just smaller versions of the capital letters:

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ (Adobe Caslon Expert, lower case)

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ (Adobe Caslon, Sh-Cmd-H lower case on Mac)

(Some other specials available in Caslon: ct fh ff ffl ft st *ct fh ff ffl ft st k v w AQWX*)

Maybe you do not think all this matters, but I do, and it is this and a host of other details of setting and formatting which go to create our attractive publications.

Stephen Powys Marks

Revising the Checklist*: a request for help*

Stocks of our *Powys Checklist & Readers' Guide* are running low, so rather than undertake the major task of overhauling the whole book we are planning to reprint it exactly as it is and to produce a Supplement which can be slipped into the new copies and also supplied to anyone who would like one. The main purpose it to bring it up-to-date, but if there are corrections or additions needed to the existing text, information on this would not come amiss.

We want your help, so before preparing the Supplement we are asking you to tell us of anything we should know about. We already know about those listed here; these are given in short form, just to identify them, but there will be more detail when the Supplement is printed early in the New Year.

Regrettably, we have to stick to English-language publication.

The last page contains a guide to finding Powys books: this is out of date, and we need new information, including access to publishing on-line and by 'print-on-demand'.

You can help us by letting us know of anything before the end of the year. Please send your information to Stephen Powys Marks, preferably by e-mail (but not telephone); *see below*.

Society's publications

Newsletters 57–68, *The Powys Journal* XVI–XIX
John Cowper Powys on Hardy, *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*
Aspects of John Cowper Powys's Owen Glendower, by W. J. Keith

Other publications

la lettre powysienne 11–16
John Cowper Powyssällskapets 9, 10
Llewelyn Powys Bibliography, by Foss (2007)
Descents of Memory, by Krissdóttir:
Porius, ed Bond and Krissdóttir (2007)
Cecil Woolf publications in Letters series (a) and in Powys Heritage series (b)
a — *Powys and Dorothy Richardson*
a — *Powys and Emma Goldman*
b — *The Diary of a Reluctant Teacher, LP's Diary for 1908*
b — *Two Powys Friends: … Bernard O'Neill and Ralph Shirley*
b — *The Immemorial Year, LP's Diary for 1909*
b — *Encounters with John Cowper Powys: A meditation*
b — *T. F. Powys's Favourite Bookseller: The Story of Charles Lahr*
Sundial Press
— *Still Blue Beauty*, *Durdle Door to Dartmoor*, *Unclay*, *Kindness in a Corner*
Faber Finds:
— reprints of six JCP novels: *After My Fashion*, *Atlantis*, *The Brazen Head*, *Ducdame*, *The Inmates*, *Morwyn*, *Rodmoor*, *Wood and Stone*
— reprint: *John Cowper Powys and the Magical Quest*, by Krissdóttir
Weymouth and Mr Punch, by Stinton
Flight to Reality, *The Wessex Novels of John Cowper Powys*, by Dunn
Anarchist Seeds beneath the Snow, by Goodway (2 chapters on JCP)
The Historical Novel in Europe, 1650–1950, by Maxwell (references to JCP in Part III)

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