◊◊◊◊ Two Powys Days planned for 2011 ◊◊◊◊ see page 8 ◊◊◊◊

Editorial

This *Newsletter* moves in various directions. As an extension of the Conference 'entertainment', on Powyses in Africa, Will Powys is seen by Elspeth Huxley, chronicler of colonial Kenya, by JCP in his diary for a week in 1934, and by Gerard Casey in his 'pattern of memories'. New books from Sundial have prompted essays on Littleton and Alyse Gregory. LlP – topically – is at his most elegant writing about Cardinal Newman; and letters to the Editor give a new dimension to the JCP Experience.

Another very enjoyable conference, with *A Glastonbury Romance* leading the field – a single book but spread wide and dug deeply by the speakers. Paul Weston embodied the magic/occult character of Glastonbury today, a legacy of writers, archaeologists, and explorers of the psyche and the landscape all through the twentieth century & continuing. (This aspect is well described in W. J. Keith's recent book.) It is a two-way influence, to and from the evocative myth-soaked configuration of hills and floodplain, and the enquiring or receptive minds of those drawn to it. Presided, we may think, by the two modern magi of the West – Freud calling spirits from the vasty deep of the mind, and Jung exploring and connecting human imaginations.

The JCP we know of was well aware of his power to influence minds – almost wholly benevolent in intention, most would judge, as was his outward later life; but equally aware of malice, mixed motives, and the dangers of dark forces (his mistrust

ON OTHER PAGES

of spiritualism, and of Aleister Crowley, is well known – and he could underestimate his own influence). He drew on these powers in his fiction, which has brought him into company he might or might not have chosen. (A surreally grotesque Glastonbury murder, described by Paul Weston, could have sprung from the darkest depth of Mr Evans's imagination). How far can writers be held responsible for what is extracted from them? Not, perhaps, for later growth-elements such as mind-altering drugs.

Magic, though a feature of the 'romantic' quest, was not a problem for our other two speakers on *AGR* (Fawkner & O'Hear). The range of human nature taking part in the book, and the patterns or non-patterns of human life as described there, with or without controlling superpowers, are surely enhancements of life.

KK

The Conference 2010

The Wessex Hotel, Street (constructed in the 1970s to host boxing matches) may not be picturesque or folkloric but it had many advantages. Bedrooms were very comfortable, bathrooms had real baths, food was good, the young Romanian staff obliging and helpful. There was a nice small bar, a convenient shopping street and easy access to Glastonbury. Useless to deny that the average age of the Society is rising: many of us treat the Conference as a holiday, and we do like our comforts ...

Two out of the four speakers were unknown quantities, at opposite ends of the Glastonbury spectrum. On Friday evening Chris Thomas introduced Paul Weston, who lives in Glastonbury, rightly referring to his encyclopaedic knowledge of the *mythos* and superlegends of the place. PW's most recent book is *Avalonian Aeon*: 'from Glastonbury Festival to 2012 – a personal occult odyssey' (others are *Mysterium Artorius* and on Aleister Crowley). *A Glastonbury Romance*, that 'astounding novel', is quoted on PW's website, with Louis Wilkinson's description of JCP's transfixing power and the vital force of his identity; also JCP's own statement of wanting to express the special myth of this place where the ancient earth goddess stirred her cauldron, the proto-Grail.

PW came to Powys originally through Colin Wilson. A special interest for him is JCP's 'Gnostic' view of a dual First Cause containing both good and evil (connecting with the esoteric supreme god Abraxas/ Abrasax, both God and Devil). His informal talk mainly dealt with the chance discoveries and coincidences that guided him to reading Glastonbury three times in a year. His favourite chapter is 'Maundy Thursday', with its scene of the feast at the Vicarage, Isaac Weatherwax's song, and John Crow's moonlit walk up Wirral Hill and fatal encounter with Mad Bet. On Saturday Paul led a group up this hill, via Pomparlès Bridge over the river Brue (site of John Crow's encounter with the dead cat, and his vision of Excalibur), and on to the end of

the ridge and the Holy Thorn (its ribbon tributes decorously tidy), with Chalice Hill and the Tor ahead, and the Abbey ruins below.

On Saturday morning, Harald Fawkner was not prepared to grant that *AGR* deals with the truly supernatural at all. It is essentially naturalistic, about human nature. Healing is natural, sympathy and pity are natural. Religion is supernatural, but no experience in *AGR* deals with the Soul – the 'real thing' – in the way that Wolf Solent's life is affected by the suffering of the face on the Waterloo steps. Mythology is not in itself supernatural, and fantasy is fantasy. In the multicultural life of *AGR*, the crisscrossed *affectivity systems* (Christianity included with the rest) are natural forces, human sensations (including visions). HF's chosen chapter was 'Mark's Court'. Geard, whether as Merlin or as Christian, depends on his animal magnetism: his 'Christ have mercy' is a human cry.

In the next talk ('now for something completely different'), Stephen Powys Marks described his researches into the neatly written, tireless Journals of his great-grandfather's great-grandmother, Caroline Powys (1738–1817), now preserved in the British Library. He has written a good deal on this ancestress already, especially in relation to Bath, where she spent much time and where Stephen now lives; and the conventional everyday life of this capable, observant, privileged woman gives a clear view of the social life of the time – clearer perhaps in its freedom from introspection and complex emotion, than the fiction of her acquaintance Jane Austen. We heard Caroline (KK providing her voice) suggesting that women might, if allowed to be instructed, be as capable as men of understanding technical matters – possibly more capable. We saw her marvelling at the efficiency of naval displays (hundreds of seamen manning the rigging, at lightning speed); noting the effects of an exceptionally hard winter in 1776 (ice ten inches thick, beer and cream frozen); and shedding tears at the departure to a far county of her daughter and grandchildren.

Saturday evening saw a re-showing of the screen test for JCP's debate on marriage with Bertrand Russell in 1929. Those of us who saw it last time, at Kingston Maurward (17 years ago ...) knew what to expect of JCP's surprising (indeed quite disturbing) appearance and body language: gleaming gimlet eyes, ferocious lower teeth, explosive delivery, hurling himself at the microphone like a strong fish in a net (or maybe like his lecturing performance, only with feet nailed to the floor). He clearly disliked the experience, as indicated by his final glares at the camera. If the Society can also acquire the half-minute surviving from the actual debate (this is probably what was shown on 'News Reel') it will be interesting to see whether he toned it down. Russell meanwhile, immobile in tweeds, against JCP already in his father's dinner jacket), delivered his argument for free love in measured monotone. (See page 11)

Africa was the setting for this year's 'entertainment', *The Untold Privilege*, a script compiled by Louise de Bruin with Chris Wilkinson, largely from letters between Will Powys and other members of the family who visited or worked with him in Kenya. Llewelyn of course went there for several years during WWI, chronicling the chal-

lenging physical work, the wild landscape and threatening animals, often dwelling on the cruel or pitiful elements of colonial life. Theodore's son Theodore Cowper ('Dicky') came out in 1924, until his devastating murder by tribesmen in 1931. Katie visited in 1933. Gerard Casey came to live there in 1938, with Mary joining him in 1946 after they married. Will brought his family to England in 1947, and Lucy returned with them for two years (bringing family furniture and ornaments from Montacute). Gertrude went there in 1949–50, and in 1957 Marian, crippled with arthritis but undaunted. The readings ended with Mary's diary describing the bells of Montacute church, tolling and ringing a full peal for Will when he died in Africa in October 1978, aged ninety. A series of screened family photographs accompanied the readings.

On Sunday, Anthony O'Hear, new to the Society, gave a packed, clearly argued and far-reaching analysis of *AGR* as a piece of serious mythologising. His starting point was the concept of 'romance' as quest and return, as in Wagner's *Parsifal*. *AGR* shares with that opera some typical themes of Romance – the roles of chastity, renunciation, compassion, the hero as holy fool (Sam Dekker) – but, unlike Wagner's synthesising, with JCP nothing is clear or straightforward. Weaving his myths into modern life, sensitive to the variety of life forms, conceiving luck and ill luck as magnetic forces, toying with his readers' expectations, JCP's Grail – the purification of sensibility – can be found anywhere and everywhere in the pantomime of life. And Evans' 'crucifixion', when in despairing solitude he has a vision of the world as being nothing but pain and malice, 'would not then be as blasphemous as it might otherwise seem, but rather an exemplification of the Aeschylean teaching, that it is by affliction that we are schooled in things of the divinity'.

At the AGM, tributes were paid to two sad losses to the Society. Glen Cavaliero spoke of Margaret Eaton, a supportive member from the earliest days, whose book shops were focal points of Powys studies. Charles Lock, a close friend of Richard Maxwell, reflected the shock of such a sudden and premature cutting-off of a friend and scholar.

Three Honorary Memberships were awarded, with grateful thanks and apprecia-

Glastonbury on view beneath the Tor.

tion: to our retiring Chairman, John Hodgson, who has overseen five Conferences, and to his predecessor Richard Graves, of the previous four, and to Stephen Powys Marks, contributor and Publications Manager over many years. Tim Hyman was welcomed as new Chairman. Michael French, stepping down as Treasurer after seven years, was thanked and applauded; John Dunn has agreed to take over 'for the time being'. Peter Foss (new Vice-Chair) was unable to be present, owing to a conflicting celebration of the Battle of Bosworth. Louise de Bruin will join the Committee. Charles Lock will take Richard Maxwell's place as *Journal* editor for this year, and join the Committee ex-officio.

A Glastonbury Quiz saw us off on a light note. Who wore a bowler hat? A purple bonnet? Who lived at The Elms? What book was Mr Evans writing? What was the name of Ned Athling's newspaper? What was JCP's original title for *A Glastonbury Romance*?

KK

The Powys Society Annual General Meeting
The Wessex Hotel, Street, 22 August 2010

MINUTES

Present: John Hodgson (Chairman), Chris Thomas (Secretary), Michael French (Treasurer), Timothy Hyman (Vice-Chairman), Stephen Powys Marks (Publications Manager), Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter* Editor), Anna Pawelko, John Dunn, and some 40 members.
Apologies were received from Michael Kowalewski (Curator), and Tim Blanchard.
The Chairman welcomed members to the 2010 AGM and invited Glen Cavaliero (President) and Charles Lock (*Powys Journal* Editor) to address the assembled members.
The President of The Powys Society said he wished to commemorate formally the work and achievements of Richard Maxwell; and to acknowledge with great thanks the commitment and dedicated work of the Society's departing Hon. Treasurer, Michael French.

The President announced he was delighted to be able to make awards of Honorary Life Membership of The Powys Society to Richard Graves, Chairman 2001–05, for his invigorating and inspired leadership and for his book *The Brothers Powys* (1983) which is now a standard work of reference; and to John Hodgson, outgoing Chairman in 2010, for his very hard work and leadership over five years; and to Stephen Powys Marks for his scholarly contributions to the Society, and his careful production of the *Newsletter* and *Journal*, achieving high standards of excellence.

The President extended grateful thanks to the organisers of the Conference, Louise de Bruin and Anna Pawelko, for helping to make this another very successful event.

He then spoke in appreciation of **Margaret Eaton**, who died earlier this year, a valued member of the Society and a good friend to many of those present.

Charles Lock next paid a tribute to **Richard Maxwell** whose death has been a shock and sadness to us all, and whose contributions to the work of The Powys Society and as editor of the *Journal* would be greatly missed. Charles said he wished to pass on thanks from Richard's wife and family for the condolences and offers of support they had received. It had been a

pleasure to meet them at the Conference last year. He reminded us too of Richard's other scholarly interests, his books on Scott and historical fiction, including his last work on W. H. Hudson and fictional autobiography. He invited the AGM to join with him in paying tribute to Richard's memory.

Minutes of 2009 AGM

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting for 2009 were approved.

Nomination of Honorary Officers and members of the Committee 2010–2011

The Chairman announced that the Committee of The Powys Society had appointed Charles Lock as Editor of *The Powys Journal* and as an *ex officio* member of the Committee. This appointment will enable closer contact between management of *The Powys Journal* and the activities of the Society and the Committee.

The Chairman explained that since John Dunn had agreed to take on the role of Hon. Treasurer for an interim period following the departure of Michael French, there are now two vacant spaces on the committee. He invited members to nominate and second candidates. Nominations may also be sent to the Hon Secretary in writing.

The nominations to the Committee as published in the July *Newsletter* were approved. The Officers and Committee from August 2010 to August 2011 are therefore: Officers: **Timothy Hyman** (Chairman), **Peter Foss** (Vice-Chairman), **Chris Thomas** (Hon. Secretary), **John Dunn** (Hon. Treasurer); Committee: **Tim Blanchard, Louise de Bruin, Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter* editor), **Michael Kowalewski** (Collection Curator), **Stephen Powys Marks, Anna Pawelko, Charles Lock** (editor of *The Powys Journal*). **Trevor Davies** has been nominated as a Committee member and co-opted for the remainder of the year. One further vacancy remains.

Report of the Hon Treasurer and audited Accounts published in the July 2010 *Newsletter.*

The Treasurer reported that the Society's accounts were all in sound order and invited questions from members if any of the published details needed clarification.

The Treasurer noted that membership of the Society is declining and that membership may fall below 250. The Society needs to actively consider more ways to encourage new membership. The Treasurer invited the AGM to formally agree the signatories to appear on Powys Society cheques: Chris Thomas, John Dunn and Timothy Hyman (only two signatures are required for each payment).

The presentation of the audited accounts and signatories were approved.

The Treasurer reported that Stephen Allen is willing to continue as auditor of The Powys Society accounts.

Hon. Secretary's Report

The Hon. Secretary reported that 14 new members had joined the Society since the last Conference in 2009 although this has been balanced by the loss of an equal number of members from non-renewal of subscriptions or for other reasons. Initiatives developed during the course of the last year, such as improvement to the website and the production of a new publicity leaflet, are aimed at increasing awareness of the Society and encouraging new membership.

Our new Chairman.

The Secretary also reported that the project to transcribe unpublished diaries of John Cowper Powys is progressing well and invited more members to participate.

Chairman's Report

The Report for 2009–10 was published in the July 2010 *Newsletter*.

The Chairman referred the AGM to the Powys Society Collection at the Dorset County Museum and encouraged more members to make use of the rich collection of materials. New items have recently been added to the Collection. The Curator, Michael Kowalewski, will be delighted to help give members access and explain where to find specific documents.

The Chairman expressed his personal thanks to Michael French as departing Hon Treasurer and acknowledged all his other work in helping to store and organise supplies of Powys Society publications.

Grateful thanks and acknowledgement were extended by the AGM to Stephen Powys Marks for maintaining high standards of excellence in production of *The Powys Journal* and *Powys Society Newsletter*. 2010 marks the last year of Stephen's involvement with the production of the *Journal* but he will continue to help produce the *Newsletter*.

The Chairman invited the AGM to extend thanks to Kate Kavanagh for producing Newsletters with consistently interesting content; to the conference organisers, Louise de Bruin and Anna Pawelko for helping to make sure everything runs smoothly at events, and to Louise de Bruin, with Chris Wilkinson, for organising and producing the Saturday evening entertainment at this year's Conference on the Powys family in Kenya, *The Untold Privilege: with Will in Africa*.

The Chaiman invited the AGM to express their thanks to Geoffrey Winch for ably managing the book room.

John Hodgson as outgoing Chairman said that it was a privilege to have filled the role of Chairman of The Powys Society for the last five years and it was now a great pleasure to hand over his role to Timothy Hyman, who has been closely associated with the Society since its beginnings. The outgoing Chairman paid tribute to Timothy Hyman, saying that apart from his scholarly studies of JCP, his style in painting also owed much to the Powyses, and that his sense of place and use of mythology have their roots in a Powysian aesthetic. The outgoing Chairman wished Timothy every success in his new role.

In accepting his nomination as Chairman Timothy Hyman said that he hoped he would be able to work with members and the Committee in a collaborative way. He also announced his intention to develop a new project to collect archival images of John Cowper Powys, with the intention of creating a database of material for use in potential future publications. Members were invited to submit suitable images to the Hon. Secretary.

The new Chairman thanked the departing Hon. Treasurer for careful use of funds in past years and expressed hope there would be opportunities to invest in more new ventures.

Date and location of the 2011 Conference

The venue of the 2011 Conference at the Hand Hotel in Llangollen was agreed by members. The date of the conference will be 19–21 August 2011. Members also agreed that a return to Street would be welcome for the 2012 Conference.

AOB

Louise de Bruin proposed the possibility at a future event of inviting Tom Laycock and Diana Johnstone, performers at a concert inspired by poems of Katie Powys, shortly to be held at East Chaldon.

Charles Lock proposed consideration should be given to publication of articles from *The*

Above *Anthony O'Hear.*

Left *Paul Weston conduting the Wirral Walk.*

Powys Journal on the Society's web site. Charles Lock also proposed changes to the *Journal* to include the use of more archival material and an extended review section . He invited members to recommend books with Powysian associations for review, as well as potential new reviewers. A wider scope in the *Journal*, with more material by and about the Powyses or those associated with them, might help to stimulate interest and encourage new members.

Two Powys Days are planned for 2011

Brighton, Saturday 14 May

at The Friends Meeting House, Ship Street, Brighton, 2pm.
Terry Diffey, Emeritus Reader in philosphy at the University of Sussex, in conversation with **Timothy Hyman**, Chairman of The Powys Society. Followed at 7.30 pm, in association with the Brighton Festival Fringe, 'Powys in Sussex', a programme celebrating John Cowper Powys and his time in Sussex, with readings and new musical compositions by **Robert Carrington** and the Pastores Ensemble, inspired by Powys's works. There is no charge for the afternoon discussion but there will be a small cover charge for the evening event.

Dorchester, Saturday 11 June

at the Dorset County Museum. Speakers and subjects to be confirmed. There is no charge for this event except lunch which is optional.

Everyone is welcome to both events.
Please contact the Secretary as soon as possible if you wish to attend. E-mail to <chris.d.thomas@hotmail.co.uk> *or write to the address on the inside cover.*

The entertainment: John Hodgson, Sonia Lewis, Richard Percival Graves, P. J. Kavanagh.

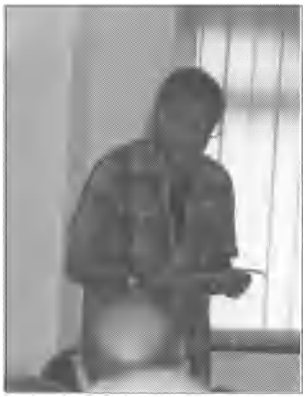
Kate Kavanagh suggested the Society could make efforts to stimulate membership in North America and encourage interest at institutions where there are large collections of Powysiana.

David Hill suggested the Committee and members might make a coordinated approach and follow up his personal earlier recommendations to the Folio Society, that they might publish titles by some of the Powyses. Theodore and Llewelyn were thought possibly more likely candidates than JCP.

Bill Keith proposed the Committee consider opportunities to develop a project aimed at cataloguing the paintings of Gertrude Powys, with the aim of creating an illustrated book about her life and work.

The AGM was followed by a Glastonbury Quiz.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary



Harald Fawkner.

Journals of Caroline Powys: Stephen Powys Marks & Kate Kavanagh.

Obituaries

Margaret Eaton

The President writes:

Margaret Eaton was among The Powys Society's earliest members and in 1972 attended the first of its conferences, at Churchill College, Cambridge. She was to serve on the Committee for a number of years, where her sound business sense and crisp humour were a valued contribution to its deliberations. Her dedicated work towards providing a definitive bibliography of Llewelyn Powys was to prove invaluable, while as a bookseller she was able to further the availability of the work of the family as a whole. Those fortunate enough to have visited her and her late husband Peter at Lillies, their bookshop country home in Buckinghamshire, will have seen for themselves what an admirable and welcoming chatelaine she was. While her debonair and elegant presence at conferences will be sorely missed, her intelligent enthusiasm and personal generosity are memories to treasure.

Glen Cavaliero

Remembering Margaret Eaton

It is a sad task to report the death on 7th July of Margaret Eaton, a member of The Powys Society from its very early if not earliest days. With her husband Peter, Margaret ran an antiquarian bookshop in Holland Park, and her many connections in the world of books brought many members to the newly-formed society. Jacqueline Peltier recalls that when she first went in search of Powys enthusiasts in England, she was advised to make Margaret Eaton her first port of call. Margaret was also a moving spirit behind the first issue of *The Powys Review*.

There is a photograph in Margaret Drabble's biography of Angus Wilson, showing the several Powysian Wilsons – Angus Wilson, Colin Wilson, and Wilson Knight, at the John Cowper Powys centenary conference in Cambridge in 1972. Just to one side there is Margaret's unmistakeably poised and elegant figure. I first got to know Margaret at a conference in Weymouth, when she carried me off in her car for tea at Mappowder with Lucy Penny, the youngest of the Powys sisters, with whom Margaret had a particular friendship. She was a wide, enthusiastic, and refreshingly un-intense reader, and her knowledge of Powysian family lore provided her with a store of affectionate anecdotes. She was a warm and cheerful presence at society meetings in Hampstead,

Margaret & Peter Eaton at Lillies

and an unfailing attender at conferences in the West Country.

After Peter's death, Margaret moved to Lillies, their rambling Victorian house at Weedon in Buckinghamshire which soon became stamped with her special personality. Llamas provided an exotic touch to the understated landscape of the Vale of Aylesbury. The local hunt was seen off her field with threats of legal action Lillies became filled with a vast, partially-sorted collection of books. Before and after tea in the conservatory, visitors would rummage in the shelf-lined corridors and rooms of the first floor, and come away with both valuable bibliographical rarities and tattered, enthralling paperbacks.

In her last years, Margaret returned to London, with mixed feelings. She continued to attend Powys Society conferences regularly, and her perpetual good spirits belied her diminished health. She continued to read voraciously, and I am still looking forward to her last recommendation to me a few weeks before she died (Simon Winchester's biography of the sinologist Joseph Needham, *The Man Who Loved China*).

Margaret loved reading all the Powyses, but Llewelyn was her particular favourite, and she requested a passage from Llewelyn Powys's *Impassioned Clay*, alongside poems by John Clare, to be read at her funeral:

> No sight that the human eyes can look upon is more provocative of awe than is the night sky scattered thick with stars. But this stillness made visible, this silence made audible, does not necessarily give rise to a religious mood. It may evoke a mood that neither requires nor postulates a God.
>
> On frosty January nights when I walk over the downs I feel myself to be passing through a lofty heathen temple without devil-affrighting steeple bells, without altars of stone or altars of wood.
>
> Constellation beyond constellation, the unaltering white splash of the Milky Way, and no sign of benison, no sign of bane, only the homely hedgerow shadows and the earth's resigned stillness under the unparticipating splendour of a physical absolute.

Our sympathies go to her daughter Ruth, her grandchildren, and all her extensive family.

John Hodgson

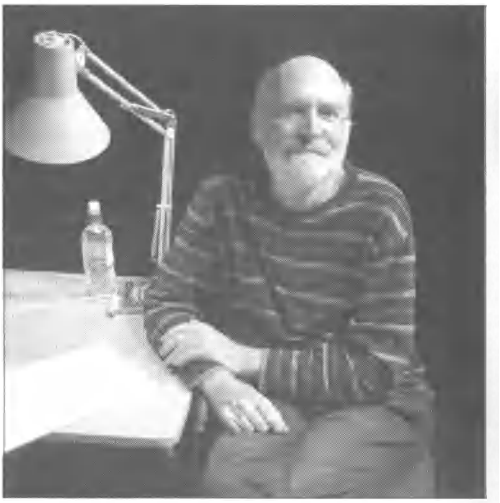
Richard Maxwell (1948–2010)

Richard Maxwell, whom I followed as editor of *Powys Notes*, died on July 20th, after a nine-month battle with cancer. Richard taught at Valparaiso University for many years and for most of the past decade had held a position at Yale. Like all truly dedicated readers of John Cowper Powys, Richard was not just a narrow cultist but also someone for whom Powys was one of myriad arteries through language, history, and imagination.

Richard was a truly wide and comprehensive reader, for whom no byway was too obscure. When I learned of Richard's death I was reading a provocative review-article by Frank M. Turner in the *Victorians Institute Journal*, lamenting that we had gone

away from Matthew Arnold's small circle of privileged texts and loosened the gates to admit, in canonical terms, all and sundry. No reader was a better reflection of the benefits of the broadening of the canon, though, than Richard; he delighted in Naomi Mitchison and Harrison Ainsworth, Anthony Powell and Mervyn Peake, the most obscure of Sir Walter Scott's novels, the rediscovered critical writings of Clara Reeve. His vision of literary study included old books and new theories, the subversive and the antiquarian.

Richard combined this, of course, with a thorough appreciation of the Big Names: Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Hugo. As this list shows, Richard was multilingual both literally and figuratively, and was one of the few people I have known truly worthy to teach in a Department of Comparative Literature.



Richard Maxwell at Chichester, 2008.

Richard was an incredibly genial, gracious man. He was erudite but not pedantic or pretentious, and had gentleness and a compassion that made him approachable whereas otherwise his sheer intellect might have made him intimidating. He was tremendously encouraging to me, and delivered even criticism in an affirmative, caring way; he was in academia to help people and to share knowledge, and he made those traits abundantly clear. He seemed to have friends everywhere, among academics and creative writers, literary types and common readers.

Richard's great *summa* on the historical novel came out last year, his co-edited *Companion* to the Romantic-period novel in 2008, and I really saw these years as Richard's coming into his own; still in the prime of his career, he seemed likely to have many more books in him. As abundant as his production has been, his early death robs us of so much more. But his sly humor and his ferocious energy as a reader of literature remain as inspirations.

Nicholas Birns

Richard Maxwell grew up in California, acquired his PhD at Chicago University, and taught for many years at the University of Valparaiso (Indiana). He joined the faculty at Yale in 2002. The Cambridge Companion to Fiction in the Romantic Period, *edited by Richard Maxwell and Katie Trumpener, was published in 2008*; The Historical Novel in Europe, 1650–1950 *in 2009 (both CUP). In his last year he dictated a novella dealing with the Cold War in Los Angeles,* Demonstration House. *Tributes from students described his unpretentious brilliance, his wide-ranging interests and life-enhancing kindness. He edited the PSNA's* Powys Notes *from 1990 and* The Powys Journal *from 2008.* (KK)

My Conference

Geoffrey Winch

Last spring I read, for the second time, *A Glastonbury Romance*, anticipating it would be central to this year's Conference at the Wessex Hotel in Street just across the River Brue from Glastonbury. As I did so many more facets and nuances were revealed to me than had been apparent upon my first reading, so I wasn't at all surprised to have even more drawn out by our speakers. First, Paul Weston on how the novel could become absorbed into one's own psyche and how, in his particular case, it synchronized almost entirely with the town's mythology. Next Harald Fawkner asked us to consider the naturalness to be found in the various regenerative modes JCP employed to carry the story along; then Anthony O'Hear delivered what was an excellent reason for me to read the book yet again (but not immediately!) for surely I must grapple further with those points of philosophy the work contains. It was Paul who also led our wanderings over Wearyall Hill (past long-horned cattle and short-shorn sheep) pointing out some of the significant landmarks that play their parts in the story – the group first gathering upon Pomparlès Bridge. I'm pleased to report, therefore, that the Conference proved a fine success for me at least as I now look forward to reading that very special Romance once again.

It is some twenty years since my wife, myself and our border collie, Roger, first rented the annexe at Park House (the former vicarage) in Montacute for a self-catering holiday. The holiday guide had indicated it was the former home of the Powys brothers of great literary

The Wessex Hotel, group after dinner.

merit. These brothers I had not come across before. I made a note to keep an eye open for their books and soon possessed a copy of *Maiden Castle*; others followed quickly and my collection of books by and about the Powys circle began. So when I was asked by JH if I would take responsibility for the book room at this year's conference, I was pleased to accept. It was a pleasure to be active in this small way especially at those times when trading was fairly brisk, a pleasure to see so many of those familiar books finding new homes.

Of course there were the other contributions to the Conference which must be mentioned – – not least Stephen Powys Marks' absorbing presentation of extracts from his four-times great-grandmother's journals. Caroline Powys's dedication to the occupation of journalist (in its original sense) was most apparent – and Stephen's enthusiasm for research was manifest in his meticulous preparation of background papers. Then Saturday evening's entertainment – extracts from Will Powys's correspondence, commencing with his travelling to Africa, and from other family members who visited him. As ever, these were presented by a fine cast of readers, having been seamlessly assembled by Christopher Wilkinson and Louise de Bruin. This was preceded by what for many was a remarkable event. I refer, naturally, to the short screen test for JCP's and Bertrand Russell's debate on marriage in 1929. Suddenly JCP was among us – animatedly talking to us; eyes, head, his whole body seeming to absorb vital energies from any invisible source he needed to call upon, while simultaneously delivering precise, illuminating words – ribbons of words charged with absolute self-belief. A fascinating few minutes indeed.

Mary Simmonds

The weekend began on a slightly stressful, and, you could say, synchronistic note given the subject of our Conference. I had arranged to travel to Street with Anna and Richard who live nearby in Cardiff, but when I was about to leave my home in Penarth early on Friday morning Richard called me to say that a water main had burst during the night flooding their road. However, the floodwater had already subsided by the time I arrived leaving only rivulets of water running through rust-coloured mud. We set off in a buoyant mood and as soon as we arrived at the Wessex Hotel the Powys magic began to work and we were all at ease.

Arriving early with Anna, our Conference co-organiser, meant that Richard and I had time to do some walking. Glastonbury beckoned so we followed the off-road route which took us along the bank of the river Brue with the Tor in view at all times. The Brue is a deep, narrow channel of water which stretches in a straight line towards the Tor. At one time it must have been a reen (the Welsh spelling) or rhyne (its Somerset form), an early form of swamp drainage. The milky mist that hovered over the flat former marshland created a mystical atmosphere and I almost expected to catch sight of some Medieval pilgrims along the way.

Street to Glastonbury was a good hour's walk so we opted to return by bus, in time for the start of the Conference. Anna and Louise had already welcomed everyone and allocated rooms which turned out to be very comfortable and well appointed. Some even had Jacuzzis! With everyone settled it was time to meet and greet Powys friends – old and new – over pre-dinner drinks. I relished my dinner after the long walk, and the wine and amusing company added to the enjoyment. It was soon time for our first speaker, Paul Weston, who talked about his synchronistic encounters with JCP's novels and his particular regard for *A Glastonbury Romance*, which he had read three times.

The bookshop was the first stop in the morning after breakfast to buy some Llewelyn books before listening to Harald Fawkner, who never fails to impress. His is an unique approach to the novels of John Cowper Powys and this criticism of *A Glastonbury Romance* was no exception. I look forward to the reading the transcript.

One of the high points of the Conference in terms of pure enjoyment was Stephen Powys Marks's presentation of his Great-great-great-great-grandmother Caroline Powys and her Journals. Extracts, read by Kate Kavanagh, were often laced with humour. Who can forget Miss Strahen, a dinner guest at Hardwick House, who according to Caroline, compensated for her ugliness with her intelligence and happy disposition!

The sun came out in time for the afternoon walk up Wirral Hill. Paul Weston led our large group to the locations where many important pieces of action in the novel take place. The first was Pontparlès bridge, the rather unassuming structure I had crossed the previous day now revealed as the scene of John Crow's vision of Excalibur. Then onwards up Wirrall Hill to witness, thanks to the clearer weather, the wonderful 360-degree view of the Somerset countryside. A few of us rounded off the afternoon by enjoying the tranquillity of the Chalice Well before hopping on the bus again and back to the hotel.

Dinner and good company were followed by more treats: firstly the mesmeric John Cowper Powys captured on film, ironically defending modern marriage in a debate with Bertrand Russell, then the evening's entertainment devised by Louise de Bruin and Chris Wilkinson. This was the story of brother Will's life in Africa, told through the words of his devoted sisters who travelled half the world to see him. Readings by Pat, Kate, Cicely, John, Richard, Sonia, Tim and Patrick, accompanied by projected photographs of the family in Africa, transported us to the slopes of Mount Kenya. The performances were so real that I felt that the spirits of those family members were with us in the softly lit room.

The warm evening meant that we could finish off a really enjoyable day with a glass or two of wine on the hotel patio. Admittedly we didn't have the view of the river Dee and Dinas Brân as we do in Llangollen but the company was still good. The morning came too soon for some of us, but revived by several cups of coffee, we enjoyed Professor O'Hear's philosophical interpretation of *A Glastonbury Romance* in which he draws parallels between JCP's and Wagner's treatment of the Grail story. All too soon it was time time to pack up and say goodbye for another year.

Tan tro nesa ffrindiau!

Christopher Uren

I first joined the Society in nineteen-eighty and within three years plucked up the courage to attend the Powys Society Annual Conference which that year took place in Weymouth, fitting start for any voyager into the world of Powys. I was very nervous at first, not having any literary background or credentials, but I found all the members present most genial and inviting. Having collected and read a large number of Powys books in the preceding six years stood my in good stead and I was able to participate in many a good conversation. At that time I was privileged to meet several people such as Derrick Stephens, Kenneth Hopkins, Isobel Powys Marks, Bill Degenhardt and many more. I attended four conferences in the early nineteen-eighties but then other work and family issues beckoned me away. I still continued to be an avid reader and collector of all things Powys.

Twenty three years on, still a member of the Society, a regular visitor to the Powys website, and with family responsibilities diminishing I was attracted to the idea of making a physical presence at a Powys meeting. This happened to be at Dorchester in May 2009. Here I met a few familiar faces and made many more new friends. I felt I had never been away. It was here that I first learned of the 2010 conference.

This year I again attended the Powys Day in Dorchester. Meeting someone who actually remembered me from the early eighties, I now felt that this was the time for my return to the Powys Annual Conference. Living in Cornwall, Street and Glastonbury are but a few hours' drive and I left home full of anticipation hoping to meet new friends and be reunited with old ones.

The hotel seemed very functional at first, but within a very short time, with the conference in full swing, it became a very cosy venue and I cannot emphasise too much how friendly and helpful were the staff. The Conference went off to a good start with 'A Personal Approach to *A Glastonbury Romance*' by Paul Weston. This focussed on the mystical nature of Glastonbury, prompting a hot debate in the bar afterwards, something I am sure that John Cowper himself would have enjoyed. Next morning after a hearty breakfast we were graced by the presence of Harald Fawkner with his talk, 'Modes of Regeneration in *A Glastonbury Romance*'. This offered a Naturalistic approach, almost a complete contrast to that of Paul Weston, prompting yet further hot debate.

The next presentation came as light refreshment to the heavy philosophy. Stephen Powys Marks gave a fascinating study of his family tree, concentrating on the not-so-well-known other Powys branch of the family. Stephen's mother, Isobel, was a 'double-dyed Powys' as her father A. R. Powys married Dorothy Powys from this other distant branch of the tree. He focussed on Caroline Powys, a keen 'journalist' who gave us a fascinating insight to late-eighteenth-, early-nineteenth-century life of the gentry at that time.

In the afternoon we were given a guided tour up and over Wirral, 'Wearyall', hill by Paul Weston. From here one can see the whole expanse of Glastonbury new and old, and at the northern end the canvas on which was painted the chapter 'Maundy Thursday'. I could almost picture Mad Bet running off down this hill. In the evening we viewed the much anticipated short film of the screen tests John Cowper Powys and Bertrand Russell. We were then treated to a slide show and readings from the Powys sisters of the visits to brother Will in Africa.

The following morning we were treated to an excellent presentation by Anthony O' Hear revealing his philosophical interpretation of *A Glastonbury Romance*. The conference concluded with the AGM and a Powys quiz. Lunch followed then we had to say our 'good-byes' and off home. I would certainly recommend attending the Conference to all who have not done so. It is quite an experience and the members who attend are a good cross-section of society but possess that spark that all true Powys lovers possess.

Anthony Head

JCP on film

The film of the 'Marriage Debate' rehearsal between John Cowper Powys and Bertrand Russell was unearthed in 1993. Paul Roberts' speculation in his volume *Singular Figures* (1989) that some footage of the rehearsal might have survived set me off on a search for it, at a time when I was compiling a list of Powys materials held in US archives (in pre-Internet days, a laborious process). I learned from a friend in the US that the Fox Film archives were held by the University of South Carolina and it was there that the film was found, and I was able to purchase a copy of the footage in video format. Given that this film was recorded only two years after the first 'talkie', *The Jazz Singer* (1927) with Al Jolson (which was at any rate the first full-length Hollywood movie featuring spoken dialogue) it has borne up remarkably well.

The debate took place on Friday, 13 December 1929 at the Mecca Temple in New York before an audience of about 2,000 people. The background to the debate (from JCP's perspective) is revealed in the 1929 Diary entries for November 8, 11, 15, 28 and December 5, 6, 9, 11 and 13. These entries make it clear how John prepared (or not) for such events – he seems rather nonchalant, or just supremely confident in his own abilities. Both JCP and Russell were old hands at public debates, and neither of them thought much of this one. As the Diary reveals, the debate was not the only thing on John's mind that day. After the debate Russell, apparently, slipped away immediately to catch a boat back to England, arriving at the port five minutes before the gangplank was raised.

In *The Powys Review* 13 there is a useful article by Carl Spadoni on the reprinted *Is Modern Marriage a Failure?* (1983), but the opening statement, that this was the only encounter between Powys and Russell, is not true. Despite being contemporaries at Cambridge, the debate was the first time they had met, according to JCP's *Autobiography*, but it was not to be the only time. John was favourably impressed by Russell, if not by his arguments. He mentions him in friendly terms in a letter to Louis Wilkinson of 1 September 1955, and Richard Graves notes in *The Brothers Powys* (1983) a letter of 14 July 1958 in which John mentions a visit from Russell and Gamel Woolsey (with whom Russell had once been, or tried to be, romantically involved) when both he and Russell were living in North Wales. There are other references in late letters to a visit by Russell and his wife, and to how John practiced phrenology on him, to Russell's quiet amusement. What the two octogenarians talked about and whether they made any reference to their verbal jousting of three decades earlier is, alas, lost to us forever.

There was an obvious irony to the debate in that the man speaking in favour of marriage is one whose marriage had failed and who was secretly cohabiting with another woman, whilst the man arguing that marriage is a failure was one who had such an obvious attachment to the institution that he married four times! Another point to make is that neither of the speeches rehearsed in this footage were actually

used in the debate itself, according to the published account, and the closing remarks on the day by both men were completely different. It's particularly interesting that Russell, in his final remark in this rehearsal footage, should say that the question is not whether marriage is a failure but whether *modern* marriage is a failure, as this was precisely the point which the chairman of the debate, Heywood Broun, in his closing remarks, chastised both speakers for not really addressing. (The actual motion of the debate – narrowly *resolved* – was 'That the present relaxing of family ties is in the interest of the good life'.)

Broun, incidentally, was a well-known radical journalist, who was once dragged before the House Committee on Un-American Activities to face the usual charges of being a communist, which he denied. The jacket blurb to his extravagantly titled biography describes him as 'perhaps the most towering of the journalistic legends pre-dating the Second World War'. He put his career on the line to fight for clemency for Sacco and Vanzetti, campaigned against literary and theatrical censorship, and spoke out against anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. He was obviously a man, in some ways, after JCP's own heart, but disappointingly his biography makes no mention of either JCP or Russell – so this debate was clearly no big deal for him either!

When I first showed this footage at the Conference in 1993, I had thought it was unique in that it must be the only such footage made or surviving of John Cowper Powys 'in action'. I now know this is not the case and that a 33-second clip of JCP at the real debate also exists. It would indeed be interesting to compare John's somewhat embarrassed performance here with what he was like 'live'. I also originally thought this footage might have been used to publicise the debate, but now I very much doubt it was. I suspect it was mainly a rehearsal for technical purposes, to enable the technicians better to record parts of the real debate in New York.

Is Modern Marriage a Failure: A Debate, *with an introduction by Margaret Moran, was reprinted in a limited edition by Warren House Press in 1983.* [*see below*]

The Diary of John Cowper Powys for 1929, *edited by Anthony Head, was published by Cecil Woolf in 1998 and is still available from the publisher.*

Heywood Broun: The Life and Career of the Most Famous and Controversial Journalist of His Time *(1975), by Richard O'Connor.*

We hope to learn more about the unique extra half-minute. This may be what was shown on the 'News Reel' – see back cover of NL 70 *KK*

The End of the Debate

JCP ... The real truth is that we all feel, the moment we approach this symbol, this ritual, this situation—I will not call it a sacrament, though the word sacrament meant the oath taken by a Roman soldier to his cause—that it has a stoic, stark, austere, rather than a springtime, ideal, sentimental, shadowy connotation. But I put that aside; let it be no

sacrament; let it merely be the coming together of a man and a woman, and, I contend, quite apart from children, that as years go by, this thing is the most fulfilling of the nobler nature, the subtler nature, the more imaginative nature; yes, Mr. Russell, and the more *rational* nature of human beings, than any other great institution of modern times! Together they dig in; together they experience; together they feel; together there is this tragic tension. But, after all, in the final issue, something emerges, a tenderness toward the other, a pathos in regard to the other, a strange feeling that only comes in marriage; that this other human skeleton, clothed in flesh like your own and yet not like your own, did not ask to be born into this bitter world any more than you asked, and the same curse of being born into the world at all lies upon her, lies upon him; and out of a real marriage emerges not mere poetical, springtime idealism, but that human virtue, the greatest and the last of all, that used to be called pity.

Chairman Broun: That will be all the speaking because my watch says two minutes to eleven, which means that it is about twenty-five after. After all, the two debaters didn't really touch upon the question, "Is Marriage Modern?" Both assumed that marriage as it exists today is modern. I think there could be another debate some other night; I don't know when. I want to make one point about modern marriage. I am assuming that marriage at the present time is not modern. As I understand it, two people go into a church together, and they come out one. I believe there are realms, mystical realms in mathematics, realms of which Bertrand Russell knows, which I don't understand. But to a man who never quite got through college, you can't put one and one together, and get one—you must get two. Until two people go into church, and two people come out, I won't feel that marriage is modern.

Thank you very much.

John Cowper Powys, a still from the film (see also the back cover).

Neil Lee-Atkin

Llewelyn Powys' 126th Birthday Party at East Chaldon

The Llewelyn Birthday Walk, incorporating the annual meeting of the Dandelion Club (The Friends of Llewelyn Powys) took place on Friday August 13th when a happy throng of celebrants from far and wide gathered at noon at the Sailor's Return in East Chaldon, to celebrate Llewelyn's 126th birthday.

Considering that this annual event, inaugerated in 1994 by John Batten, is free of any membership requirements and is open to all, it would be expected that attendances would fluctuate from year to year, and indeed they do; yet it is remarkable that on no less than *ten* of the previous fifteen occasions there has been the proverbial 'Baker's Dozen' of us in attendance, and this year was no exception: 'Thirteen Worthies' once again constituted the birthday party!

The Dandelion Club welcomed new members Byron and Eirlys Ashton who had travelled from South Wales, and Sean and Debbie Lowe who had driven down overnight with me from Derbyshire, and it was good to renew old friendships with Ged Redman from Somerset and Richard Burleigh, and John and Jayne Sanders from Wellingborough. It was a nice surprise to find that Rosemary Dickens was well enough to attend and we were grateful to Dennis for driving her down from Salisbury, along with her father Norman, who at 93 is possibly the oldest person to walk up the hill from Chydyok to Llewelyn's Stone high on Chaldon Down, and who surely deserves our heartiest congratulations on his achievement. Well done Norman! As those of us who are familiar with the long and sometimes steep climb up the uneven, rutted flint strewn track have discovered, the older one gets, the steeper it seems – and the greater the sense and feeling of triumph upon finally reaching the Stone ...

Prior to the meeting several of us walked to the churchyard and paid our respects beside the small cluster of stone tablets, one of which bears the names of Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner, whilst another alongside marks the final resting place of Janet Pollock, with beside it the simple wooden cross bearing the initials K.P.

Back to the Sailor's Return and Chris Gostick opened proceedings by welcoming everyone, and paying tribute to John Batten who first discovered the request in Llewelyn's Will that ... *the sum of £100 be deposited at the Sailor's Return, so that on the occasion of my birthday my friends may drink to my memory,* and who instigated and led the first party to fulfil that request, but who sadly couldn't be with us on this occasion, having been kidnapped by his grandchildren and spirited away to the Norfolk Broads for a fortnight. Apologies were also received from Rob and Honor Timlin who were absent owing to a last-minute family crisis, and our sincere good wishes were expressed in return. Chris invited us to raise our glasses to Llewelyn's memory, and we then drank a toast to 'absent friends' before setting off over the

village green towards Chydyok Road and the climb up and over Chalky Knapp to Llewelyn's Stone high on Chaldon Down.

Nine of us paused and moved aside on the first steep climb up to Chalky Knapp to allow the car driven by Dennis to bump its way slowly past ... and looked enviously at Rosemary and Norman waving gleefully from the back seat as they disappeared up the track in a cloud of dust.

We gathered outside the gate at Chydyok and listened as Chris read an excerpt from *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner* (edited by Claire Harman, 1994) for the dates 1st to 3rd July 1961, which record an evocative weekend spent with Janet Machen shortly after Janet had taken over the lease at Chydyok: she writes of *the horse-drawn hay-carts carrying the harvested barley, rattling down the lane in the late mid-summer twilight.*

Chris paid a special tribute to Janet (Machen) Pollock whose leasing of Chydyok from the Weld Estates over a fifty-year period, and generosity in renting it out, had allowed many of us the privelege of staying in Llewelyn and Alyse's side of the house and experiencing its unique atmosphere. As he spoke we gazed up in admiration at the splendid new roof, wondered if the recent refurbishments had changed the atmosphere inside, and speculated about the cost of a week's rental in what is now an upgraded and improved 'holiday cottage'. Ged Redman also expressed concern about the whereabouts of Llewelyn's iron ankh, which for many years had stood resplendent above the old fireplace in the front room and has now been removed.

The weather had been kind to us so far, but as we walked up over Tumbledown the storm clouds began to gather. The warm August sunshine disappeared and was replaced by a leaden sky as we crested the hilltop and went though the final gate onto the coastal footpath above Bat's Head, with Portland still in clear view to the south-west. Fifteen minutes later as we turned the corner by the Obelisk Field and Llewelyn's Stone came into view, Portland had completely disappeared as the first raindrops began to fall, and by the time everyone had gathered around the Stone and I had opened Elwin's *The Life of Llewelyn Powys* to read from, the heavens opened and in seconds everything – and everyone – was soaked. There is no shelter from the elements on High Chaldon, so those of us who had the fortitude to bring coats quickly donned them, whilst those who didn't got very wet indeed! The rather hurried reading was taken from p. 192–3 of Malcolm Elwin's *Life* and consisted of a review of *The Cradle of God* by Percy Hutchinson, published in the *New York Times Book Review* in the late Autumn of 1939. It concluded:

> *From the ranks of the many authors of the day possessing talent, possessing great talent, and using it greatly, Llewelyn Powys stands out as having little of talent, but as gripped by that rare and indefinable thing we call genius.*
>
> *Granting the unsafeness of prophecy, it is all but safe to say that long after much of what is written today has passed to dust and been forgotten, page after page of this Dorsetshire poet who writes in prose will claim literary attention, as many writers of the past claim attention still, for understanding and for strange beauty of utterance.*

An about-turn and swift retreat ensued as the final words were spoken and the rain chased us away, ceasing only when Chydyok came into view as we crested Tumbledown and started down the track back to East Chaldon. Richard Burleigh had gallantly held the fort in our absence and welcomed us warmly back to *The Sailor's Return* where, wet and somewhat bedraggled, we reflected happily on the day's events, before saying our goodbyes and pledging to meet again one year hence, once more to raise a glass in memory of Llewelyn Powys, and to share the pleasure of renewed friendships.

Group of walkers at Chydyok.

Bookshops

A number of bookshops stocking Powys books (mostly of rare editions) have sent their details.

Bevis Clarke, Clearwater Books, 213b Devonshire Road, Forest Hill, London SE23 3NJ; 07968 864791 <www.clearwater_books.co.uk>

John and Stella Birchall, High Barn Books, High Barn, Rabbit Lane, Gressingham, Lancaster LA2 8LP; 015242 21198
<High.Barn@btinternet.com> <www.highbarnbooks.co.uk>

Peter Ellis, 18 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE; 020 7836 8880
<ellisbooks@lineone.net> <www.peter-ellis.co.uk>

Julian Nangle, Nangle Rare Books, 11 Fordington Green, Dorchester DT1 1LU; 01305 261186
<julian@nanglerarebooks.co.uk> <www.nanglerarebooks.co.uk>

Dafydd Timothy, Siop y Morfa, c/o 'Blaen y Coed', Ffordd Derwen, Y Rhyl, Sir Ddinbych/Denbighshire LL18 1TR; 0773 6543156
<dafydd@siopymorfa.com> <www.siopymorfa.com>

Llewelyn Powys: Africa's Wisdom

It was in the jungles of Africa that thought, with its profane detachment, was first separated from instinct, and men and women learned to appreciate the profitable increment that can outwit destiny by prevision and bring under a tentative discipline Nature herself. Vast tracts of time had already swept over the earth before this lucky enfranchisement was won. Think of the long age of the reptiles; think of the unchallenged domination of these dread dragons with cold intestines! Think of the debonair lives passed by the birds in the trees! Think of the unrebuked gluttony of the hyenas in dim caves; the preoccupied industry of precise insects on the shadowed sides of symmetrical leaves; and then consider the awakening of the human brain, critical, calculating, and carping—an apex point of all the senses, indicative of an unpredictable future.

What a victory was gained with each uncertain advance towards consciousness. For a myriad mornings the sun had come slanting over flat flapping leaves; during a myriad noons the water of forest streams had murmured past the obscure crevices of lonely rocks; and then at far intervals, now here, now there, as these hairy fools swung through branches, or with deft fingers grubbed for tuber roots, a flickering wakefulness would take the place of dreaming hours—and behold! a new conviction would suddenly be present, and though the tongue was as yet unskilled the heart would cry: "I am alive; I am alive" ...

Nature wears no disguise. She is at work always in the open. The vegetable world, dumb and deaf, during each rainy season shows its terrible power. It invades each open space. None can hold it back. It works by night and by day, and red fire alone can stay its muffled progress. In and out through its dense undergrowth slide feline creatures with spots like stars on their coats, and with padded paws fitted with hooks sharper than steel. Their glassy eyes stare through the leaves with competent intention. At the slightest movement, at the slightest sound, their ears, thickly furred around the base, twitch forward until the exact moment has arrived when their unreasoned calculations can find expression in a single fatal rush ...

One night, towards the end of my sojourn, I went out alone into the forest. I wished never to forget the lesson I had been taught. It was too dark to see the fretted ferns at my feet. I came to a place where there was utter silence, and, lying flat with my face on the ground, I took counsel with my spirit. Out of Africa man had first emerged, and to Africa he must turn for ultimate wisdom. We chafe to little advantage. If we look for rewards beyond our senses we shall be gulled. There can be no quittance beyond the experience of each fugitive moment. The feverish unrest that we know as life is beset on all sides. Life flutters upwards for a moment, only to be plunged back into dust and darkness. Make no doubt of it, there is no understanding or compassion in the plighted clouds. Man has no higher perquisite than to contemplate all things with a poetic passion intense and desperate. The honey bird will lead us to where the

golden dropping honey of our days is best to be found. We remain children of Nature. It is enough to have experienced seasons of conciousness, however swiftly passing they may be. The wisest philosophers pleasure themselves with a pastime that is little better than cozenage. The secrets of Nature will never be disclosed. We have been granted a flash of sight of an instant's duration in a universe accidental and infinite. In meads cooled each night with lustral dew, and under summer skies, we fulfil the legendary fairy tales of our lives. Then all is forgotten, and there is stillness, there is silence, there is nothingness.

from Damnable Opinions *(Watts & Co., London, 1935. No record of previous publication)*

Elspeth Huxley: Powyses in Africa

This book comes late in EH's series of books about Kenya, on her childhood there and her visits as a writer in the 1930s and after Independence. It is a collection of portraits of the mainly British settlers in East Africa in the early twentieth century, and their relations with the African inhabitants. She deals with the early days of Will in 1914 and the arrival of Llewelyn Powys as the 'unlikely but congenial' manager to Galbraith Cole (who 'regarded his new manager with wry amusement') – 'To maroon such a man amng the crudities of African farming was rather like pitching a maestro with a Stradivarius into a village brass band ...' (98).

Huxley's chapter 'The Powys Saga' is partly devoted to the failed attempts to bring to justice the murderers of Theodore's son in 1931; but chiefly celebrates Will Powys, and his wife Elizabeth, as shining examples among the settlers of the rewards of hardihood and hard work. Veterans of WWI were allotted 'undeveloped' land, which might or might not contain the essential water:

> One man was lucky. He drew a block of one thousand acres in the district of Timau which had on it a spring,

Will Powys, self-portrait.

Kisima. This was Will Powys, Galbraith Cole's manager. When he had saved enough money he bought twelve hundred Somali sheep and drove them to Kisima, taking all his belongings, including a wool-press, in an ox-wagon which toppled over the side of a dam, releasing his hens from their crates and cracking the wool-press. At Kisima it was so cold two hundred of the sheep died during their first night there. He managed to rent land at a lower altitude and moved the sheep in time to save most of the rest. This was in 1925. Then he returned to Galbraith Cole's to complete his contract, leaving the sheep in the care of a young nephew, until he could settle permanently at Kisima and start to breed up his sheep with merino rams as he had learned to do at Kekope.

Will Powys was one of those men who, like Galbraith Cole, had a natural affinity for sheep and displayed a skill amounting to a form of genius in their management. That half-true definition of genius as an infinite capacity for taking pains applied in his case exactly. He was held in the grip of what is today known as the Protestant work ethic, and lived as austerely as a monk. The white-washed mud-and-timber cottage that he built at Kisima still stands: two rooms, no ceiling, and his bed a bullock-hide stretched between four posts. Four a.m. saw the start of his day. Before dawn, he would be off to some distant dip or shearing station, or perhaps to track down a lion that had seized a steer, or to carry out a post-mortem on a sheep. Much of the land round Kisima had been abandoned, or never taken up, because of lack of water. Bit by bit, Will Powys bought it up and gradually developed it by means of pipelines and dams, and stocked it with sheep which, by judicious breeding, turned in time into almost pure-bred merinos.

Fortune favoured him a second time when he found a mate whose tastes, character and hardihood so closely matched his own. (133–4)

Elizabeth Cross, decorated for gallantry for her work as a nurse in WWI, also drew land in the lottery. She built herself a shack in the Ithanga hills alone with a grey pony and a white bull-terrier (136). Later, she made a new start on a thousand acres of untouched bush in Tanganyika, but eventually returned to Kenya and met Will. Their household with their children is described as a merry one as well as hard-

Elizabeth & Will Powys.

working, with a taste for practical jokes (136, 138).

Despite lean times and credit freezes, Will Powys gradually added to, developed and consolidated his properties. He ended up with three separate but interdependent units which together totalled about 83,000 acres and supported 29,000 sheep and 7,000 cattle. There was also wheat at Kisima, two crops a year; Galloway cattle imported from Scotland and a property at Malindi on the Coast. This busy, productive, hard-working family life sounded, despite troubles like drought, diseases, thefts and predators, almost idyllic. 'We are all as happy as can be,' Will wrote, 'and deal with all the difficulties that crop up together.' (138)

Throughout his life he took no part in politics, but Elizabeth became a strong supporter of the Capricorn Africa Society [*an attempt at western-style power-sharing*] (138).

Will Powys was first and last a farmer, not an intellectual; nevertheless the creativity that ran in his family was in him too. In undeveloped countries, farming is in itself creative; with virgin land as his canvas, the farmer translates his vision into fields and pastures, crops and cattle, as an artist will apply his paint. The artist in Will expressed itself both in husbandry and, like his sister Gertrude, in paint. He painted the landscapes he loved, and used to offer a picture as a birthday present to each of the children. 'Choose any scene you like,' he would say, 'and I'll paint it for you.' The child in question would pick a scene and he would set up his easel. 'Somehow or other,' Delia told me, 'Mt Kenya nearly always seemed to come in.' In old age Will would sometimes tire before he completed a painting, and call on his servant to finish it off under his direction—in the tradition, perhaps, of those Old Masters whose pupils would fill in the details. All his pleasures centred on his family, his sheep and cattle and his properties: Kisima, Ngare Ndare and II Pinguan. 'Don't you ever need a holiday?' someone asked him. 'But all my life has been a holiday,' he replied.

Also in old age he acquired another skill: the shepherd learned to play the flute. ...

He died in 1978 in his ninetieth year and was buried beside Elizabeth and Charles in Nanyuki churchyard. The year of his birth was that in which two Austrians, Count von Teleki and Lieutenant von Hohnel, set eyes on Lake Rudolf, the first Europeans to do so. Such has been the speed of change. (139–40)

rom Elspeth Huxley's Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya *(1985) (courtesy of Chatto & Windus)*

Will and JCP at Phudd, 1934.

JCP's Diary, February 10th to 19th 1934

Saturday, February 10, 1934
[...] Took Black to Grotto before breakfast & also again at 4 o'clock and worked upstairs while the T.T. cleaned the house with the vacuum-cleaner and began all her preparations. This is the worst of it. Her agitation before—Willy being a stranger to her. Well! well! let's pray it will go off all right. I set out with Albert in the big car to meet them & Peter and Elizabeth rode in front with Albert. Elizabeth has green eyes and a battered face but she is very very nice—quiet—very shy with a stammer from nervousness which is very appealing & beguiling. I felt she was rather pathetic but the T.T. says she has plenty of spirit to cope with life. The T.T. got them a wonderful dinner of a Krick chicken and we opened a bottle of Madeira given us by Mr Theobal [*sic*] which the T.T. liked better than any wine she has ever tasted. As for Willy himself I am thrilled by him far more far more than I expected to be. He reminds me of my mother very often. We all sat up until 12. Will and I took Peter up to the Steitz.

Sunday, February 11
Warmer Warmer Warmer!
Up at 6.55. Saw the sunrise. Did the things. Peter who is really very nice here & very good—(He is now busy with the T.T.['s] Jigsaw Puzzle) went to the Garbage with me & all the rigmaroles out there. Then I took the Old & Willy & Elizabeth to the Grotto & showed them Hemlocks and Hickories & the Platanus of Cos. Came back by the Krick meadow there the "Old" caracoled very hap[pi]ly round us. Marian met us in our field. She is in wonderful health and in very good spirits in fact in radiant spirits. After breakfast Peter fed the Starlings & Willy & Elizabeth looked at the Flower Book while Marian looked at the Bird book. Peter came past Rex this morn without qualms tho' he barked at him he says. Marian took Willy & Elizabeth to the Waggoner hill . . hoping to see the Catskills. I do really think the T.T. has got through the worst.

Willy has brought me a wonderful oak stick—I am more thrilled by this than by any present I have ever had. He climbed into an Oak at Lucy & cut it with his hook or axe. Lucy was fearful lest he should fall down. It is a club! It is very very formidable. It is a wonderful stick and it is an Oak-stick. I think it is a sort of "Sacred" Yes I think of it as a sort of "sacred"—O I hope I shall keep it till I die! it wd. be hard to lose it - for sure. Took them all in the afternoon to the Precipice and then down to the "bent" grass field then to the Dangerous Well which scared old Will, then to the Steitz lane & home by Gibbet Tree and "lying down" fence. We had a wonderful Volentiâ Tea Tangerines & Ginger & Madeira wine later. I came to bed at Twelve. Their voices were so merry, especially Marian's as I listened to them from the Attic!

Monday, February 12
Warmer Warmer Warmer a Spring day. ...
Found the Parlour Fire very low & instead of leaving it with the draughts I poked it down & shook it down & lo! it went out! Just think of that! With Marian, Will, Elizabeth & Peter on the scene. Fire gone out! [...] I went for a walk to Grotto with Black & with Marian alone. Strong & happy & full of Resolution & Indepen[den]ce as she is I thought her countenance looked pinched & contorted and her nerves strained tho' her cheeks were so blooming and her spirits were radiant. We had a very happy breakfast. Then they all went off sledging in the flat lot. Both

last night & the night before I went with Will to take Peter to the Steitz. As we came home Rex came near to biting Will. And Will explained that he is not very fond of dogs and distrusted them—just as I do myself [.] I keep noticing resemblences between myself and Will. I also seem to see him as resembling Theodore especially in his humour—I've heard him say things exactly in Theodore's tone.

To High Wood & Tintern Abbey with W & E. Marian & Peter went after lunch. W & E drove with them.

Tuesday, February 13

[...] The wind is North West Did all very liesurely [*sic*] with all Rigmaroles! Will wrote a letter to Lulu. Elizabeth studied Sears Roebuck and then Willy came with me and was amused as I led up the river on the virgin snow on the ice of the river by the Alders. He enjoyed the snow with such an ecstas[s]y! last night the T.T. said how she admired Willy that he was exactly like Captain Lingard & has a non-human expression in his eyes. She is simply thrilled by him and that is the truth! [...] Willy & Elizabeth walked beyond the old cemetery beyond Paul Curtis' farm where Lulu used to go and as far as the late Mr Lemon's stone house or stone hut. They did enjoy it! [...] Will & I went alone to the Lutheran Pond—home by Lesbian Tree & the Second Post Hill. Read St Agnes Eve at night and also about the Jobber & Perdita—

No Hurting Went such a cold walk with Will alone!

Wednesday, February 14,
St. Valentine's Day—Ash Wednesday
2 Below Zero on our thermometer. Cold.
Up at 6.15 and the T.T. woke up very agitated about the Pump which seemed sticky to her in its sound. She dressed downstairs. I dressed upstairs. She did the stoves, as far as shaking & poking down goes, & I carried the Ashes out & did all the things hurriedly. And the little T.T. did sit over kitchen stove looking so terribly forlorn & wretched with her hair loose & such a sad expression. I hugged her & pressed little oval head and by degrees she got happier especially after a cup of tea & an oaten biscuit. Our oaten biscuits are a success but our two friends like so partiarlay [*sic*] the T.T.'s thin bread & butter. I did all & then went with Will to Prometheus Stone—& as we walked Will told me about putting lucky stones in a cleft near a very dangerous piece of Jungle and about the expression "Mungu y Showery!" Let God see to it . . Let it be as Homer wd. say—a care to "μελέι", τοίς θεοίς—a care to the Gods!—Let it be God's Look-out! Mungu must deal with thik little job! Then at Breakfast on this Valentine's Day Feb 14th 1934 we discussed seriously and most earnestly the Idea of going to live with W & E in Africa. The T.T. thought of it first! The T.T. would really like it. Yes she would really and truly like it! really & truly like it. I have always known she liked the idea of a landscape with wild animals in it. And she wd. have no housework at all and no zero weather and we would have no people with literary ideas! She likes Elizabeth very much & so do I; especially when she has that very provocative stammer which is one of her shynesses.

Went with Will & the Black to visit Mr & Mrs Freehan & they liked them as much as I hoped they would and that wonderful room of theirs with a window looking out our way! Then went on with old Will & the Black up past Ficke's towards the Uzener Farm but the drifts were too heavy & we had to return as we came[.] But Will stopped and drew a sketch of the view from beyond Arthur's Spinney—with the Mountains and Curtis' wood.

Thursday, February 15th

Up at 7 o'clock. The T.T. [*who was unwell*] had more sleep towards the latter part of the night. I did not shave & I did all in haste. Elizabeth has been wonderful in getting the meals for us without aid & washing up. The T.T. has slept a good deal. This has not been such a bad time as sometimes. Went with Will to the Platanus of Cos. Met old Paul Curtis at the burying-ground. He got out to talk to us. They set out about 12 o'clock for a long walk & made a sketch of Ray Becker's Barn or of that other Barn cottage where I once visited that old man who said he was a Cameron. They visited Mr Curtis after their dinner at the Steitz and talked about sheep and cattle. They like Mr Curtis very much.

At five Will & I and the Black set out and went the Round by the Lutheran church and visited Mr Waddle's Dam. I have explained to Will that I would sooner not decide to come to Africa. Though in the end it is possible that it will be the best thing to do but yesterday the T.T. had a reaction against it largely for my sake. She would herself like it as a trip but not as permanent and of course my mind finds the idea of calling it just a temporary visit takes the heart out of it. I can only call up my real spirit when I think of it as permanent. Will told me about his relations with the ex-husband of Elizabeth. [...] We talked of their difficulties and of my difficulties and then I read all the Odes of Keats! Will has painted that picture he sketched and it is one of his very best if not his best.

Friday, February 16th

[...] Will & Elizabeth got up early and she got him his breakfast for Carl was to take him to Hudson. This they did and he brought back as presents to the T.T. [a] beautiful bunch of fragrant pink Stocks and a Cineraria in a Pot. [...]

Elizabeth actually walked to the Ridge that is the boundary of our Horizon—what a girl she is! I am astonished at her. What spirit! What courage! What an aristocratic accent—and what a pretty mouth with the upper teeth beyond the lower always the nicest sign and one which I share me wone self!

Will & I & the "Old" had a lovely late walk by the thin moon wh. was lying on her back [*drawing*] and we entered Mr Ray Becker's house and I looked with amazement at his valuable chairs and looked at that romantic cedar thro' the Tiny panes. He got a lantern and took us past the most beautiful and romantic Barn I have seen in the whole of my life, very tall & untried by paint or mending yes untried by any tricks & as high as a house [at?] the base—then up & up & up towards the sky a great black wall with a little window with panes like the house had. And then Ray Becker pushed himself thro' a crack like a little postern into a castle & old Will went after he but the Black & I were outside—My coat was too thick . . I could not squeeze in so Ray Becker made an entrance for me & I went in—there in a dark straw-floored place were a dozen great wooly sheep & a ram & Will caught a sheep by hind leg & Mr Becker caught the ram & Will felt their wool holding the lantern to them and he talked knowingly to Mr Becker then we said goodbye [.] When we got there Mr Becker was getting water in a pail from a black hole by the roadside—wh. was his water-supply. It was lovely coming back by that lonely lane.

After tea I played chess with Will—a fine game of Chess and after that I did read to them my Dorchester chapter in Autobiography. Was late to bed 12.30. Felt very tired but I did so enjoy playing chess with Will!

Saturday, February 17th

[...] old Will was working so hard at his painting that he took no account of time at all and an

hour and a half seemed to me [*sic*] like ten minutes! "How quick you've been!" he said to me when I have never been slower, when I was an hour over garbage & over the old papers & the ashes not to speak of shaving. But so absorbed was Will in the Study painting that it all seemed like ten minutes ... he was rapt. He was absolutely lost to the world. He was working at a picture taken from Arthur's spinney of Curtis' wood & the Mountains. Then I begged this kind & good Elizabeth—this simple-minded brave aristocrat—to go for eggs & butter which she did willingly.

Then I went with Will & the "Old" to the Grotto. On the way he told me about the Kikuyu natives and his best "boys"—Their names are hard to recall one sounds like "jow" & one like "mengara" and one like Carew. "Jow" is the one who can count 20 000 sheep by means of sticks & marks on the dust of his legs! At breakfast old Will held us simply entranced while he told of his first adventures in Africa & of being put out at Sunset in a plain and of an animal like a leopard coming out of the bushes and of the maduran Seymour who said he wd. buy all cows in world & larn 'em to whistle & of how the natives used to click at him & he would chase them on his pony into the thorn bushes and they always escaped. He told me how the natives were afraid of the snow-topped mountain because the ghosts Marsi kept there the ghosts of cattle & how he told them he would go up & raid those ghost-cattle and how on a dangerous path they always put stones on the branches for luck as we used to do on the Yeovil road but they never took them away and by & bye they fell down in heaps under the trees Mungo v showery! Mungu v showery! Let it be a care to Mungu! "Let it be Mungu's little affair!"

Will & I & the Old went to the Lutheran Church via the Grotto & back the same way under the Moon & stars. Noted Orion in the East & I think Cygnus in the West. In the evening Will beat me at chess. He imitated the roar of a Lion & ma[d]e Sintram arch his back. A letter came to Elizabeth from her little girl. Will is always in the study painting. They suit us so well that the T.T. cried out I wish they were staying here for a month! Never has she said this of any other living people!

Sunday, February 18

Up at 6.20 down at 6.35 Showed Will & Elizabeth the Sun rising. It rose at 7.5 and took exactly 3 minutes ere the full circle of it appeared. So at 7.8 it had completely appeared over the ridge. I kissed their countenances all illuminated by the Sun. [...]

We had a lovely breakfast but a hurried one waiting for Carl to come on foot & take them on foot to see the sheep of Mr Curtis in the barn with the golden weather-cock in Harlemville. Mr Curtis (not Paul) but the son of that blind old man who is said to have had Indian blood—the Squire of Harlemville! Carl came in very friendly & the "Old" did greet him. The T.T. suggested when they were gone that I should give Will my Hickory Stick but I do not think I can endure to part with it—besides it is very short!

At breakfast they spoke of looking about in Wales where she has relatives & in Abbotsbury too for lodgings for us when we come. The T.T. has always leaned to Wales & in Wales we would be further away from all relations! And I could go & stay with Lulu and yet remain "independent" So perhaps after all after all, we shall go to Wales which is so dear to the heart of the T.T. and was her first idea—& there when I have collected a lot of "the Authors" as Mr Evans would say I shall really be able to write my great work on Welsh soil. & maybe Elizabeth could make all smooth for us there, even as Mr & Missy. Think if it should work out that Will was the one really—he & his lady—to decide & make smooth our Destiny! The T.T. has

finished Lulu's waistcoat & has got from her mother the most lovely of all quilts, a patchwork quilt, to give W.E., for their bed in Africa. What a genius for presents the T.T. has!

Went with Will & the Old to Tintern Abbey and back by the Stone of Fal. In the evening I read the Shirley chapter of my Autobiography.

Monday, February 19, 1934

[...] Down dressed at 6.35. Did all pretty liesurely. Called the little T.T. She got up soon. Called old Will. He got [up] at once. Made tea with Will for Elizabeth. She got up. Will went into his Studio and finished a fine picture for Mrs Krick. One of his best! His hot-sand pictures are, I think, better than his green grass pictures or I suppose I should say green- trees- pictures after Rain.

Albert & Dora came bringing the good news that Conrad Uzener has given them a Candle-Mould & Hattie has got it. So they need not after all go to Clum's—whose light I showed Will from Tintern Abbey last night. He will only make a sketch of Kricks & of Phudd Bottom from the Quarry Hill. Took Will & Black nearly to Platanus of Cos & so home. [...]

We had a lovely breakfast Will telling of the 25 Rams from New Zealand at 20 pounds each they have bought and of Australia having the best Rams of all. He said that Lulu could not bear to talk of buying selling Rams or sheep remembering how he was bullied at Cole's. I talked of my difficulties with the Publishers ... & asked old Will's advice. He said not to sign up for Autobiography till I had got what I wanted. Last night I read to them about the return of Odysseus & the dog Argos & the swineherd. The wind is South today. It is warmer. Really warmer. Old Paul Curtis that Man of Iron very kindly came with a drawing he had made for them of how they might build a particular kind of cattle-stall. Will talked to him about sheep & cattle & astonished him by telling how they could get all their food for themselves—at the rate of three acres to a sheep! Then they went to the Quarry Hill to sketch the house & the Krick's house from there. [...] They all came back from the Steitz with that Mould for Candles and it is the very one that old Mrs Steitz used to use when that was how they were made [.]

Will got Elizabeth to sing the Welsh National Anthem which was certainly the first national air that has made us cry. Both of us cried when they were driven off by Albert. Thank the Lord they came! [...] This has been of all visits the one by far enjoyed the most by the T.T.

Glastonbury: all ready to go up Wearyall Hill.

JCP to Gerard Casey, 4th October 1938

[Corwen] 4 October 1938

Dear Gerard

Phyllis & I are so pleased that you think you really (if Capt Baker approves) will come & be our guest yug Ughorwen for some days not too short! What I would myself suggest during your visit is that—only I'd have boldly to tell Will this when the moment comes!—you should hear if you can get it out of him, as one Irishman of Catholic upbringing to another!, what exactly were young Gerald Hanley's difficulties with my brother out there. He is now aiming at starting as a writer & meanwhile is living with his brother James for whom Phyllis & I have deep affection & respect.

Gerald is a charming boy & a brave one but he is a born Intellectual and a born Artist and politically a Pacifist & a Red.

All I can get out of my brother—for both he and Gerald are very reserved as to the difficulties that did occur between them—is that Gerald is a fascinating lad but essentially more interested in writing and painting and political theories than in the actual work of a Ranch like that huge place out there—and Gerald likes expressing his ideas.

Now my brother Will as you'll quickly see is like one of those Conrad characters; if you've read Conrad?—like an older Lord Jim or Captain Lingard; regarding "the boys", as they call the Natives, and his flocks & herds, and the wild animals, as all elements in a miniature (& not so very miniature either) Kingdom, of which he is the just, silent, formidable and ubiquitous King!

Gerard Casey in 1940

Now there's no doubt that Kenya offers great scope for anyone who has a touch of silent formidable statesmanship but you need a touch of Fortinbras in you as well as Hamlet!

An Intellectual with the conscience and ideals of a Red and a Pacifist and a preference for reading and drawing above the work of the ranch even if such a one is kindly and willing is not exactly the thing.

Now you are naturally silent averse rather than keen to express your deepest feelings. Your conscience which I know is very sensitive is like my own a personal not a political conscience.

I fancy too that Will's somewhat inar-

ticulate formidableness is not the sort of thing that would offend you any more than the massive arbitrariness of some powerful un-self-indulgent Prior who at heart was simple & honourable, just and magnanimous would rouse in you quick feelings of revolt if you were a young monk.

Will has come to have the look of some African Native Chief whose remote ancestor was brought up among Lions!

There is absolutely nothing about him of that crude & vulgar brutality of so many (?) white Settlers.

He has made up his mind never really to leave Africa. But he does like his own ways as we say!

Well! You will see. 'Tis a straw thrown on the stream of chance & fate to get you here—but you'll need all your instinct both about yourself and about Will — if anything serious is to come of it.

As to my secret confidence in your eventually writing (if you're not killed by a lion like my nephew who was a bit too daring) this is not affected in the least by the thought of an African epoch for you; for like my own family I can see you are one who develops very slowly.

It might be that you & Will will take to one another instinctively & understand one another instinctively. You are both dark horses both silent both with a touch of the Quixotic and both a different type from the average expressive artist of the "Intelligentsia"!

As long as in the very depth of your personal conscience you "got Will's number" & on the whole approved of his methods of governing his miniature Kingdom and felt an instinctive confidence in the man I don't fancy there would arise many difficulties.

But of course no one really can sound the effect of one personality upon another.

I've just read this letter to Will's wife Elizabeth & she is delighted with my picture of him!

The only thing she quarrels fiercely with—so I've put a query there!—was when I said so many of the White Settlers were vulgar & brutal! This I got from the books of Brother "Lulu"!—but Elizabeth points out that it was in quite a different part of Kenya where "Lulu" was & of course we know that Brother Llewelyn has his quick prejudices, tho' of a "social" rather perhaps than a "political" kind!

But listen—Will will not be here till Wednesday the 12th and he will be here till Monday the 17th so I suggest—with the approval of his wife who will not be here then—that you come & stay in Corwen as our guest from Wednesday the 12th till Monday 17th. You'll then be able to have some walks & talks alone with Will.

With love from P. & me—

your old Meddler with Fate! J.C.P.

JCP's letters to GC, 1937–40 are in The Powys Journal *v (1995, pp. 153–75).*

... John had written from North Wales: "Come to meet brother Will. I'd like you to meet him ... it may be you will—as they say—'cotton' to each other." That was early in 1938. The letter found me in Dorset at Punknoll where I was pruning trees. A week or two later I was climbing the hill to 7 Cae Coed in Corwen to be welcomed into their home by John and Phyllis. Will came across the room to meet me. An unmistakable Powys head. Eyes detached and searching suddenly lighting to friendly acceptance, touched by a hint of amusement. I was to remember that look—and meet it again from the eyes of Lucy and Katie years later at our first meetings. The swift acceptance was to remain unchanging—no shadow of turning—ever.

Soon I was walking over the high slopes of the Berwyn and being invited to join Will on his African farm. No flicker of hesitation from me.

Evening came down and a game of chess was suggested by John. He looked on as the game was played, his face quick with excitement, head etched against the uncurtained windowpane. Gusts of rainy wind blowing across the darkened hills of Myrddin Wyllt were dashing against the black glass. Repeating and repeating mantra-like words echoed across my mind:

> Give yourself up to the wind and the rain and the night:
> in the indrawn breath of matter is a word that may change all ... *

I do not remember how that game of chess ended—there is a sense in which it has gone on through the years and still remains to be ended.

I was next to see Will stretched out on his bed in a reed-thatched wattle and daub hut on the northern slopes of Mt Kenya. White and frail after a haemorrhage from a duodenal ulcer. The issue was life or death. Always indomitable he won slowly through. As he convalesced more games of chess followed as they did in still pauses over the years to come.

More memories came crowding—Will riding interminably (as it seemed at times) across vast African plains tawny in the sunlight against tangled ranges of mountains dark blue in the distance; calling leopards along wooded valleys at nightfall; calling wild dogs to death in sunlit forest glades; marking lambs in dawnlight: unconcerned as a rhino slowly lumbered by; tracking lions, buffalo, cattle thieves; bantering shepherds, cowherds, near-naked honey-hunters over gravely shared pinches of snuff; riding with Katie under Walt Whitman's Head on the high moorlands of Mt Kenya, then after a picnic in Katie's enchanted wood, coming down to see a herd of elephants just above Kisima sending jets of sparkling water from a deep rainpool over their calves in full-moon light; initiating a somewhat nervous and bewildered Katie into the mysteries of correctly marking bales of wool for shipping to England; or guiding her in the shared sorting and classing of superb Merino fleeces; watching the great wains laden with wool drawn by teams of up to sixteen oxen as they set off on their week long return journey to railhead; safaris with Will, Elizabeth, and Mary across the wild desolation of lands down to the coast; wandering among the ruins of

ancient Arab harbour-towns—entrepots of the slave trade; wading out into the surges of the Indian Ocean to swim under the rising sun.

Memories too of Will as the years gathered—sketching, painting: giraffe, zebra, antelope, gazelle, camels; birds, butterflies, moths; monstrous baobabs—any tree contorted into desperate crippled form; frogs, toads, tree-frogs; bizarre insects, lizards, chameleons; elephants, crocodiles, hippo, ant-bears; endlessly trying to capture in colour the glaciated north-facing form of Mt Kenya in all its weather-haunted moods; or the sheer tawny cliffs along the south-facing form of Lolokwi, innumerable rivers, lakes, crags, swiftly captured likenesses of friends, black and white ... all Africa and its prodigies was grist to Will's mill.

Always absorbed, intent on the moment; always kind, courteous, sensitive at every level to the needs of all around him. As sceptical as his brother John in the face of the claims of possessive 'love' either human or divine. One day a huge tortoise came lumbering through the scrub. Someone had painted in large white letters on its domed shell, "God is Love". At his word the tortoise was caught and brought to him. It was his whimsy to wash out the word "Love" and paint in its place the word "Good". That done the creature was released to wander again through the bush to carry its modified message for all with eyes to see.

Will shared close affinities with John. (It is of some interest that Lucy, Katie, Will rarely called him 'Jack'—almost always 'John'.) In the affinities however were differences of emphasis. Once he remarked to me—having just finished a re-reading of John's *Autobiography*—"we are very alike except that *he* is excited by girls' legs and *I* by lion's tracks". He was not impressed by J.C.P.'s claims to 'sadism' (or indeed by any of John's pretensions to any greater wickedness than the common peccadilloes flesh is heir to)—"the only 'sadist' in our family was Llewelyn ..." When I wrote to him after John's death, speaking of the scattering of the old white magician's ashes on Chesil Beach and quoting a line on Homer by Antipater of Sidon "The uttering head that groweth not old", Will replied, "Yes! those words fit old John like a cap—especially when he was angry with Jehovah". He would speak of John as "my old brother who keeps no secrets" and would speculate with wry humour on "what would happen if *I* kept no secrets".

His quiet, ever-present, sense of humour was very Theodorean. He would on occasion read a story by Theodore with much chuckling. Once after reading *Mark Only:* "Yes, I'm like him in some ways but I'm not so frightened ... but *Mark Only* ... !!!" The amused look conveyed all where words failed.

Describing Marian, by that time crippled by arthritis, holding court as she was wont from the bed in which all of them had been born—this had come out to Will in Africa after his father's death—in the course of her visit to him at Kisima, he remarked: "I'm still the little brother—she raps out orders just like a cross between Moses and Nietzsche".

Spirited and courageous to the end—a brittle frame of loosening bones—he would be lifted into his Land Rover by Kagwema his African friend and driver for one more

and still one more drive over the wide earth he so loved and blessed through a long life of wrestling with Africa's unpredictable utterly testing vagaries.

In a late letter to Lucy he wrote out for her words taken from Isaiah: a comment on his accumulating and distressing physical afflictions and his approaching end:

> But the word of the Lord was with him—precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little there a little, that he might go and fall backward and be broken and snared and saved and taken.

On a great slab of unhewn granite over his grave are the words:

WILL POWYS
Born at Montacute Somerset
Died at Ngare Ndare Timau
3 • 3 • 1888 4 • 10 • 1978

The pastures are clothed with flocks
the valleys also are covered with corn
they shout for joy: they also sing.
Psalm 65

A peal was rung for him at Montacute—it had been his pride that in his youth he was one of the team. I went up into the Tower with two of his grandsons, Michael and Francis, to watch the work—and feel the swaying of the Tower to the surging tumult of joyous sounds ringing far out over the fields and woods he knew and loved so well as a boy.

Lucy in Africa

Images, too, sharply etched in memory of Lucy in Africa: at Ruka's Drift on the edge of the Ngare Ndare forest. An old buffalo stumbling slowly down to drink at the river under the full blaze of the noon sun—Lucy quietly reaching out her hand protectively to the tiny child beside her though her gaze never wavered from the great blind beast stooping over the black water. Lucy at sunrise on the banks of the Uaso Nyiro river looking mischievously from Will to Charles as Charles showed her his hat bitten through by a hyena in the night and the tracks of the savage creature running close to the camp-bed where she had been lying. Lucy listening intent and absorbed to a lion roaring:

> The music of a lion strong
> that shakes the hill the whole night long,

or listening to the long whistling swish of storks gliding down from the high ridges of Mt Kenya to roost in the cedars at the forest's edge …

from The Powys Review *24*

Timothy Hyman : Gerard Casey

Obituary in The Independent, *20th November 2000*

Gerard Casey, poet and farmer: born Maesteg, Glamorgan 15th March 1918; married 1945 Mary Penny (d. 1980); died Blandford Forum. Dorset 21th October 2000.

When he wrote *South Wales Echo* (1973), the long poem for which he is probably best known, Gerard Casey could already look back on an extraordinary life, spent mostly in Africa. But the existence he found his way into over the next quarter-century was almost unimaginably different. Alan Clodd, his first publisher, recalls: "He was a wonderful man. I think he was almost a saint."

Living obscurely in the Dorset village of Mappowder, he continued to publish, but he never saw himself as a "writer". And it is as a prophetic personality that Casey will be remembered by a wide circle of friends.

Brought up in a Welsh mining town during the Depression, he left home at fifteen, working first in a Bristol factory and then as an unpaid forest warden, beginning a life of reading and contemplation. A correspondence with the novelist John Cowper Powys led to contact with his brother in Kenya, and by 1938 he was Will Powys's assistant at Kisima.

After a Second World War spent mostly with a camel patrol in the Somali wilderness, he visited Lucy, a Powys sister, in Dorset, meeting her daughter Mary; they married a week later. For the next 15 years, with only occasional trips to England, he farmed 24,000 acres on the slopes of Mount Kenya. But he also built up a formidable library, learning Sanskrit and Greek (reading Homer would become a daily ritual) and following a religious quest that ranged from the Vedas to Ramana Maharshi, from Eckhart to Barth.

Gerard Casey, drawing by Timothy Hyman.

He recalled this period as one of intellectual pride, and his most dangerous association was perhaps with the "gnosis" of René Guénon, enemy of "The Modern World". Casey was also active politically. He would eventually turn his farm into a co-operative with his African staff, and he worked as vice-chairman of Capricorn, towards a gradual transition to African independence.

All this came to an abrupt end when, in his late thirties, Casey was struck down by endemic encephalitis, resulting in long periods of appalling suffering, immobilised in hospital, often raving. Almost a decade later he emerged to an altered world view. In the depths of illness, he had heard a regular chanting of the Lord's Prayer, "as though spoken by another".

He spent much time among the Quakers at Woodbrooke, at Selly Oak in Birmingham, and it was here that he began to record the babble of inner voices that would eventually become *South Wales Echo*. The poem is dedicated to David Jones, but Casey's "heap" is all about disorder and fragmentariness.

His conflict was always between a desire for a more or less orthodox tradition (he would contribute to Kathleen Raine's *Temenos*) and such artists as Van Gogh and Herman Melville, to whose more individualistic work he was also strongly drawn. He was brought up a Roman Catholic (he often referred to himself as a "spoiled priest"), but his deepest love was for the Homeric world, and it was in that spirit that he embarked on the series of translations from Cavafy, Seferis and other modern Greek poets, collected in 1990 as *Echoes*.

The sudden death of Mary Casey in 1980 left him stricken. He continued to live beside her mother Lucy, and grew increasingly interested in the world of T. F. Powys, whose 1929 *Fables*, long out of print, were re-published at his own cost. With the help of a friend, Louise de Bruin, he also began to publish the poems and novels of Mary Casey. One of his finest essays, "The Shield of Achilles", first published in *Studies in Comparative Religion,* was dedicated to de Bruin. In 1997 a fascinating collection of his letters, *Night Horizons*, came out in America.

Gerard Casey had a remarkable gift for sweeping away all trivial conversation and creating a moment of intense face-to-face encounter, sometimes hard to bear. His wife Mary once said to me, "I'm pretty strong meat, but, compared to Gerard, phew!" The first time I visited him in Dorset in the early 1970s, I was walking quietly beside him when suddenly his enormous voice rang out in violent crescendo.

He had been speaking of his opposition to the vein of fastidious detachment represented by Plato, by his wife (who had written a novel about Plotinus) and by Augustine (referred to in *South Wales Echo* as "the 'umbug of 'ippo"). "What these fools don't realise is that in five seconds the Almighty can make you cry out LIKE A HOWLING WOLF!"

The echoes of that howl seemed to reverberate far beyond Bulbarrow.

Charles Lock's long essay on ***Gerard Casey*** *is in* The Powys Journal *XI (2001). His review of Gerard Casey's* Night Horizons *is in* The Powys Journal *VIII* (1998). Echoes *was reviewed by John Williams in* The Powys Review *26 (1991). GC's own contibutions to* The Powys Review *include his tribute to Will Powys* (Review *4*, 1978–9) *and memories of Katie, Lucy, and Will in* Review *24.*

Glen Cavaliero's tribute to ***Mary Casey*** *is in* The Powys Review *7 (1980–81). Mary Casey's* The Clear Shadow *(poems) was reviewed by Kim Taplin in* Journal *III (1993), and her* A Net in Water *(journals) together with a selection from the book, by Jeremy Hooker in* Journal *V (1995).* Full Circle *and* Christophoros *(poems, 1982) were reviewed by Kim Taplin in* The Powys Review *12 (1982–38) and* The Kingfisher's Wing *(her novel based on Plotinus, 1987) by Glen Cavaliero in* Review *21 (1987–88).*

Mary Casey : Two poems from Africa

Windy Hill

the sheep have gone away from Windy Hill
everywhere the grass grows long
lost the little paths they made from mound to mound
the cunning ways they found down the cliffs
between the rocks that barricade the valley

no smell of damp fleeces in the morning
no evening bleatings of the anxious ewes
whistlings and smoke from shepherds' hearths
please the solitary slopes no more only
untiring winds sing a thin sorrow

Africa 9.3.69

After the storm

I hold my hands a wimple for my eyes
that I may see the vision of the day
the egrets in the trees the six
white swan-white triangles in-
verted sails
the heaven washed new
and earth a paradise
diamonded in clear shining after rain

upon dazzling air they spread and preen and stroke
their silver wings
upon the cottage roof the thatch is dark
and in the open doorway stands
a straight green-mantled sunflower
with his head reaching the bristly
edges of the thatch

the sun has fled
the flowers bow their heads one to the other
the birds shake off the snowflakes from their wings

Africa 25.11.71

Frank Kibblewhite : 'Potted Herring' in Chaldon Herring

Numerous are the ways that individuals discover a Powys. For singer Diana Johnstone it was to be Philippa. Holidaying in and around Lulworth she eventually found herself in East Chaldon. Following a sign for 'Writers Walks' around the village – 'Every Wednesday, June to September, a five mile guided walk around the rolling landscape that inspired members of the Powys family, Sylvia Townsend Warner and others' – she arrived too late for the walk itself so decided to explore St Nicholas Church and was struck by a collage by Elizabeth Muntz of the Nativity.

Outside, two chance meetings in the churchyard and later in the village, with people who were obviously passionate about the village and its history of the writers and artists who had lived and worked there, she first encountered the name Powys! Fascinated by tales of these 'extraordinary inhabitants in this extraordinary village' and particularly intrigued by accounts of Philippa, she was lent a copy of *Driftwood*. These poems immediately struck a deep and resonant chord and it wasn't long before that joyous sense of discovery, empathy, spiritual affinity and 'coincidence' resulted in a hastily organised concert. Less than three weeks later, on Saturday 28th August 2010, an audience of around fifty, including Louise de Bruin and me, gathered in St Nicholas to listen to Diana, and Dorset-based folk musician and playwright Tim Laycock, present 'Potted Herring, A Nostalgic Evening of Songs and Poems from Coast and Land in Celebration'. The first half of the concert consisted of fine renditions of traditional and sensitively self-penned songs, with Diana on acoustic guitar and Tim playing concertina and hand bells, interweaved with suitably evocative poems of shore and sea.

The second half continued in similar vein but this time interspersed with a selection of Philippa's poems, including 'The Under-Cliff', 'Cowslips', 'To The Blue Butterfly', 'At Dusk', 'Tangible Life' and 'To Gertrude', the last of which prefaced Diana's own delicate and moving song to her sister, 'Spinning'. Just before the audience were invited to join in for the finale, and Tim's internationally acclaimed song 'Row On', Diana concluded with her own setting to music of Philippa's 'Ploughing' (which would unequivocally merit inclusion on her next CD album).

It had been a unique, utterly enchanting evening of spontaneous kinship and many discoveries to which that all-too overused word 'magical' would most justifiably apply. Of the ten copies of the Society's edition of *Driftwood* that Louise and I had brought, a copy each went to Diana and Tim while the remainder were eagerly purchased by members of an appreciative audience, many of whom subsequently headed off to the village hall by the gates to St Nicholas for a splendid supper. Over wine, good food, laughter and convivial conversation, Diana, Louise and I also discovered that Tim had adapted 'A Poor Man's House' by Philippa's great love, Stephen Reynolds, for the Sidmouth International Festival, performed in the Manor Pavilion in 1992 and again in 2005. It seemed it had been an evening of coincidences, or perhaps not: Louise had inscribed in Diana's copy of *Driftwood*, 'There are no coincidences!'

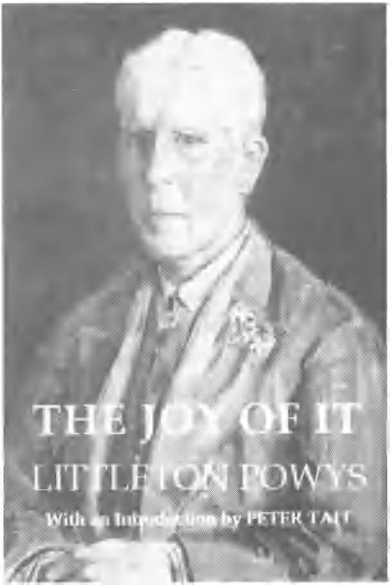
Outside, we all gradually dispersed, melting into darkness as a swift wind raced through the valley.

Anthony Head

The Joy of It, by Littleton Powys
Sundial Press, 2010. Hardback, 256pp. ISBN 978-0-9551523-7-5. £25.00.
(A hand-numbered limited edition of 100 copies, of which 90 are for sale)

Among the various autobiographical writings of the Powys family, Littleton Powys's *The Joy of It* tends to be the most overlooked. One obvious reason is that Littleton was not a 'writer' and left no significant body of literary work that would attract a readership or otherwise compel attention. Perhaps another is that he was not interested in the sort of self-mythologising and shape-shifting at which his brothers were so adept, as evidenced in John Cowper's *Autobiography*, Theodore's *Soliloquies of a Hermit* and Llewelyn's *Skin for Skin* (and just about everything else). Littleton spoke, and spoke out, plainly and inoffensively, and precisely for this reason *The Joy of It* is an invaluable text to gaining a fuller understanding of the Powys family, and as a balance, if not corrective, to some of the views not only of John and Llewelyn but of early Powys biographers like Heron Ward and Louis Wilkinson.

Indeed, among the half-dozen reasons Littleton gives in his Preface for writing these memoirs are to counter comments in the press and other books that he felt distorted the truth about his parents and siblings, and to compare his own temperament specifically with that of his elder brother as expressed in *Autobiography*. He was especially close to John, despite the latter's secretiveness in certain matters relating to his personal life, from their shared childhood and schooldays to the Norfolk trip they made in their late fifties, and into their old age when Littleton would visit John in Wales. The divergence in their lifestyles was really set in train at Cambridge, where, as Littleton wrote, 'John's ways were not my ways, nor his thoughts my thoughts, nor (with two or three exceptions) his friends my friends.' From university Littleton, unlike his brother, went on to become a pillar of the community, and if in consequence he was occasionally the butt of family humour, it's worth remembering that without their pillars communities tend to collapse. It is not difficult to see why he was his father's favourite or why John addressed him as 'Best of the sons': in addition to his sense of public duty, Littleton displayed a familial responsibility not always in evidence in some of his siblings, often coming to their financial rescue.



The frequent designation of Littleton as the most 'conventional' of the brothers brings with it a suggestion of dullness. Littleton was anything but dull. In appearance he was strikingly handsome, always elegantly dressed and with a flower in his buttonhole, and his deep clear voice was put to especially good effect when he read the lessons in Sherborne Abbey. If that was all there was to him he would hardly have attracted in his late sixties the attentions of the young

Elizabeth Myers, who at half his age became his second wife. But as she noted: 'Littleton never fails to tell you something interesting about life and the world. Every conversation with him extends the horizon of your mind.' It is our loss that Littleton's forte was conversation rather than literary creativity; in particular, his knowledge of botany and ornithology, abundantly evident in his book, probably surpassed that of anyone in the family.

Littleton's views and lifestyle were antithetical to those of the family friend and bon viveur Louis Wilkinson, and there was often an undercurrent of tension between them. Littleton had objected to certain parts of Louis's *Swan's Milk* and this tension was probably exacerbated by *Welsh Ambassadors*, which appeared in 1936 and in which Littleton, as Llewelyn thought at least, came off badly. 'The book does outrage to the ethos of his circle,' Llewelyn wrote to Louis, 'and he will dislike being in any way involved with it.' But he shortly mentioned also that Katie had told him Littleton did not seem at all personally disturbed by the book. Perhaps he was already writing his riposte, for in August that year Llewelyn told Louis that Littleton was reading his autobiography to him, and passed a judgement that stands the test of time: 'It is unexpectedly good – rational, unaffected, charming – objective and unintellectual. I think it will be mightily appreciated by many readers.'

Littleton and Louis were to meet six months later, in February 1937, when Gertrude Powys had a showing of her works in London. Louis immediately wrote to Llewelyn: 'Littleton was charming to me at Gertrude's Private View. He talked with me in the most friendly manner, and at parting held my hand and pressed it to his side. I was delighted & amazed. What magnanimity!' All the Powyses had magnanimity, but Littleton had it in spades and it's one of the many qualities that shine through in *The Joy of It*. Another is gratitude for his own happy life and for the glories of Nature. In many ways Littleton's is a deeply religious book, though not indeed in any conventional sense. Not long before his death he wrote to Ichiro Hara, '"He findeth GOD, who finds the Earth He made" is the background of my Faith' – and it had always been so. 'He was a lover of life', Oliver Holt wrote of him. 'To have been born into the world at all – a world so full of radiant and manifold beauties – he regarded as an immeasurable privilege, and his whole life was an unbroken act of praise.'

The world evoked in *The Joy of It* – of gentlemanly conduct and fair play, of individual responsibility, of a largely benevolent Nature – may seem sadly remote in an age when we are constantly encouraged to believe that Britain is 'broken' (a view Littleton himself would have given short shrift). But that world is not entirely gone. There are still good schools, there are still well-mannered people, there are still natural beauties in abundance. What seems to be rarer these days is an attitude – the shameless capacity for simple delight that Littleton, like all the Powys siblings, possessed, and that makes his book all the more remarkable.

This new hand-numbered limited edition of *The Joy of It*, the work's first republication in hardback, is significant for several reasons. It corrects certain misprints, errors and solecisms in the first edition; it has a perceptive and informative introduction by the current Sherborne Prep headmaster Peter Tait; it is beautifully designed and produced, with coloured endpapers and marker ribbon; and its striking blue dust jacket is a perfect frame for the wonderful portrait of Littleton by Gertrude Powys that adorns the cover and which, as far as I know, has itself never before been published. It seems unlikely that *The Joy of It* will ever again be reissued, but certainly not in an edition as distinguished as this, a true collector's item.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a book like this even being written today, a memoir which celebrates childhood and schooldays, family and friendships, and Nature above all – and all without a trace of cynicism or bitterness or self-pity. Littleton maintained his feelings of

gratitude even in bereavement with the loss of his first wife Mabel Bennett from cancer and then of Elizabeth Myers from tuberculosis, and when illness and age set in during his last painful years.

Typical of the many incidental but movingly evocative revelations in the book is when Littleton relates how on recently opening his schoolboy copy of Horace's *Odes* he noted what he had written in the margin nearly half a century earlier: 'Powys minor, and a happy life is his.' *The Joy of It* is a record of one man's enduring gratitude for that life and happiness, and it is this quality more than any other that gives this engaging work its distinctive charm. Whether he was Mr Powys, headmaster of Sherborne Prep, or 'Tom' to his siblings, or 'Owen' in his old pupil Louis MacNeice's 'Autumn Sequel', 'Rejoice, rejoice' was always Littleton's motto: '*... on two sticks/ He still repeats it, still confirms his choice/ To love the world he lives in.*' The evidence of that love is abundant in *The Joy of It* and this superb new edition constitutes a fitting tribute to its author and, through him, to the whole Powys family.

See *Newsletter* 52 for more about Littleton (KK).

Patrick Quigley

Literary Somerset, by James Crowden
Flagon Press, 2010. £18.95.

I bought *Literary Somerset* before visiting Street for the recent Powys Society Conference. It was my first visit to the town and I wanted to know the literary background. Who could guess that Robert Bolt (screenwriter of 'A Man for All Seasons', 'Lawrence of Arabia', etc.) taught at Millfield School, Street, in the 1950s? As did John Le Carré in 1954 before he took up spying and fiction writing. An earlier teacher at this lucky school was John Jarmain, a young poet killed in World War 2. Who else will tell you about the Nineteenth Century Eureka Machine in the Clark's Shoe Museum that can write a verse a minute?

James Crowden's book is much more than a literary guide-book: it is an encyclopaedia of the many forms of literary endeavour in Somerset from the anonymous eighth-century author of 'The Ruin', a poem on Roman remains in Bath, down to present-day rock star, PJ Harvey. Crowden is a poet who lives in Chard and whose work is rooted in Somerset life and customs. His book, *Ciderland* (2009), tells all you need to know about this ancient and civilized industry.

The Powys family and Montacute are included with generous space given to Phillipa/ Katie alongside her famous brothers. He tells about her secret lover, the fisherman she met on the clifftops. There are other illuminating mini-essays on T. S. Eliot (ashes interred in East Croker); the Waughs (like the Powys family another Somerset literary dynasty), Hardy in Yeovil and many others. There's a fascinating mini-biography of John Cleese (born Weston-super-Mare, where else?) who went on a Himalayan trek with the author.

Despite the cover picture of the photogenic Glastonbury Tor, the book ranges far and wide. Crowden goes up and down every valley, scours every village and seaside villa for literary remains. As a result this rich volume approaches literary life from a refreshing variety of angles. A small sample of chapter headings include such gems as: 'The Romantic Lot – Swanning around the Quantocks'; 'Eminent & Eccentric Clergymen'; 'Social Reformers', 'Orators & Rabble Rousers' and 'Hacks and Scribblers'.

Almost anyone who was anyone in English Literature (and many from Ireland) feature in the book. You wouldn't expect Jeffrey Archer to make an appearance – grew up in Weston-super-Mare; or John Steinbeck – he lived for a year near Bruton while researching his *The Act of King Arthur and His Noble Knights* (1956) Still in the fantastic vein, J. R. R. Tolkien honeymooned in Cheddar Gorge and used the scenery for Helm's Deep in *Lord of the Rings*.

At this stage I'm scratching my head to discover who isn't included. I'd love to read more about the Revd Joseph Wolff who started life as the son of a Rabbi, became a Church of England clergyman and walked naked for 200 miles across Afghanistan. Who could invent something like that? If you're looking for story ideas go no further! This is the ideal book to dip into for the sprightly-written entries and the many beautiful illustrations. My favourite is a photograph of 90-year old Hope Bourne, nursing a wounded bird. She lived in remote cottages with her chickens and her trusty Winchester rifle and wrote several books on nature.

Modern life is often presented exclusively in urban terms. This book celebrates our long literary association with landscape (as does the work of the Powys clan). It is exhaustively researched and lovingly presented and makes an ideal present for any time of the year. It will be an indispensible companion on those future Powys conferences in literary Somerset.

Barbara Ozieblo

King Log and Lady Lea, by Alyse Gregory

Sundial Press, 2010. paperback, 224pp. ISBN 978-0-9551523-8-2. £9.99

Alyse Gregory (1884–1967) is one of the many as yet unrecognized American women modernists of the early twentieth century who unfortunately suppressed her ambitions in order to fulfill the role of the ideal wife according to the precepts of nineteenth-century 'true womanhood'. Her second novel, *King Log and Lady Lea* (1929), candidly discusses the options available to women at the time. It opens with a marital breakfast scene which introduces the reader to Mary and Richard Holland. Mary, who recognizes that after two years of marriage 'her experience had closed in about her and was contained only in the figure of her husband' (4), likens herself to a 'wounded gull shot while flying over a swamp' (5) – the same bird that years later would lend its name to the title of Gregory's diary. In spite of this self-knowledge, willing to forsake her writing, betray her well-developed artistic tastes, and sacrifice her peace of mind, Mary throws all her intellectual and vital energy into ensuring her husband's well-being. In order to afford him some distraction from the quiet life of the country, she invites Celia, a young woman he had known before his marriage, to spend a few days with them. The amorous triangle that ensues and the final tragic death are narrated by Gregory with psychological insight and poetical intensity.

Gregory had made her position as to modernist experimentation clear in her reviews for the *Dial*, of which she had been Managing Editor till her marriage to Llewelyn Powys. She wanted language to be 'simple and selective', capable of expressing a clear thought, and she objected, for example, to what she saw as a lack of 'dignity, simplicity, and restraint' in H. D.'s prose.[1] *King Log and Lady Lea* does not always achieve the simplicity and restraint that Gregory sought, veering, at times, dangerously close to melodramatic sentimentality, but the invisible narrative voice, strictly channelled through the consciousness of the characters, is distanced

and controlled in spite of the torments of agitation that Mary, Richard or Celia occasionally surrender to. Gregory is sufficiently in command of the narrative to allow for subtle moments of comical insight, such as when Celia praises Mary's playing the piano, and Richard, who had never considered his wife in any way talented, is surprised – and feels 'his own importance enhanced in consequence' (29). New York, where part of the novel takes place, and the countryside are also portrayed as experienced by the characters: for example, we are not told that Richard ran up the steps as he pursues Celia toward the end of the novel, but that 'The tracks above as he took the last step up the curb seemed to descend upon his head, the pavement to rise up like a perpendicular plane' (181): thus the city participates in the human drama that unfolds on its streets. Similarly, in one of the many scenes in the country, nature is made into an active element in the minimal plot: 'When would the first yellow irises come, and the pickerel weed, they (Mary and Celia) wondered, hoping that both would be together to view them, for each drew away with fear from the thought of separation' (85).

As Anthony Head in his sensitive introduction to the Sundial edition of this novel states, there is 'an undeniably personal nature' in the events that Gregory recounts in *King Log and Lady Lea*. However, the novel cannot be considered a model for Llewelyn Powys's *Love and Death: an Imaginary Autobiography* (1939); Gregory's novel is not a Proustian reclaiming of 'the significance of past life through creative reordering', which is how Peter Foss presents Powys's novel.[2] Rather, Gregory is attempting to exorcize – and imaginatively compensate for – a very recent past and its impending reiteration. The novel can be read as an attempt to come to terms with the anguish that her husband's infidelities caused her but also as an attempt to justify her tolerance of Powys's insensitive behaviour – and to imaginatively explore the possible results of a woman leaving her husband.

Although it is generally assumed that the novel is based on Llewelyn Powys's relationship with Gamel Woolsey, Gregory's letters home reveal that she was already busy rewriting her first draft in September 1927 – and feeling fairly optimistic that it would be much more successful than *She Shall Have Music*, her first novel.[3] The direct inspiration for *King Log and Lady Lea* would have been Powys's affair with Betty Marsh, a young woman he had known before he married Alyse Gregory; Powys did not meet Woolsey until after their return to Patchin Place in November 1927. In an undated letter to Malcolm Elwin, Gregory explains how, soon after her marriage to Powys, she had agreed to Betty's visit, thus establishing a precedent for the later relationship with Woolsey. She had always valued her independence and solitude and by giving her husband the liberty he sought gained a certain measure of freedom for herself – a license she would never take advantage of. Although in *King Log and Lady Lea* she examines the consequences of conjugal freedom, the novel is more fictional than autobiographical. If, as Jacqueline Peltier in *A Woman at her Window* rightly points out, descriptions of Celia coincide with the descriptions of Gamel Woolsey in *The Cry of a Gull*, this is because Gregory would continue rewriting her novel till it was published at the end of 1929,

incorporating characteristics of the woman who was indeed to become one of her closest friends.

The question of a lesbian relationship is inevitably raised by *King Log and Lady Lea*; Rosemary Manning remarked on this possibility, but dismissed it, saying 'That her (Mary's) relationship with Celia is lesbian is hinted at, but is unimportant. The story's power is in the alliance of these two women against the man they both love'.[4] I agree with Manning that this is not a significant issue in the novel, which is much more than an examination of female friendship. The themes of the novel focus on fear of the natural processes of life: ageing – particularly for women – and death; on the total solitude of human beings that is never fully assuaged even by the beauty and variety of nature; and on the impossibility of real communication and interpenetration with others – achieved in nature but rarely by humans. It is also about the sexual life-force of women that post-Victorian society strove to deny, and the lack of understanding between human beings and particularly men and women.

Gregory does not focus exclusively on how female friendship empowers women in her attempt to understand human behaviour; her capacity for psychological insight and her admiration for Freud's theories does not allow for a simple resolution to the human triangle created by Richard. Mary does not want to hurt her husband by leaving him suddenly; although she recognizes that her life had folded in on itself after marriage and that she had lost – and misses – the independence of mind and action that she had previously enjoyed, on some level, she still loves Richard and pities him. Celia's allegiances, however, have turned exclusively to Mary and, through Celia, Gregory captures the fears, insecurities, and jealousies that plague all relationships. Pity and jealousy lead to a series of fraught, almost melodramatic scenes that culminate in a tragic street accident. Mary's sense of obligation to Richard, and her inability to fully confide in Celia because she sees her as thirteen years younger and so a rival on the sexual arena come close to destroying the women's friendship. And yet Gregory ends the novel on an optimistic note; a tune spiritedly played by an Italian band offers Mary a promise of fullness of life, and – we hope – a renewal of the bonds of friendship.

The title, *King Log and Lady Lea*, might appear puzzling: Gregory confided in her mother that it did not fully please her but that she had not been able to come up with anything better. The phallic log – representing felled virility – and the fallow lea of the title dispel any hints of a lesbian focus to the novel, and concentrate on the sterile male/female relationship. King Log could be a reference to Aesop's Fable of 'The Frogs who Desired a King', alluding to women's presumed need of a master, as expressed by Herr Hugo von Stirner in his cameo appearance in chapter nineteen of the novel. But Gregory herself gives us another possible interpretation: she prefaced the first edition of the novel published by Constable in 1929, with two quotations, the second a variant of the nursery rhyme:

> London bridge is broken down,
> Dance over my Lady Lea;
> London bridge is broken down,
> With a gay ladye.

Lady Lea – sometimes spelt Lee – has been variously identified, but could be Lady Margaret Wyatt, a childhood friend of Anne Boleyn who accompanied the doomed queen as she awaited her fate in the Tower. In that case, and Gregory's erudition was far-reaching, the reference could be to the loyalty of women's friendships.

The other quotation, the first four lines of Shakespeare's Sonnet 41, 'Those pretty wrongs

that liberty commits' seems to exonerate infidelity as a trifling misdemeanor. Although the betrayal in *King Log and Lady Lea* is committed by Richard, it is Mary who, true to social prejudices, feels guilty. She takes responsibility for having invited Celia, for being older and therefore of less interest to Richard, for enjoying her newly-found female friendship with Celia, for being angry at Richard's callous behaviour. At no point does her husband even entertain the thought that he has done wrong; he is incapable of seeing the events from her point of view or of understanding how he has hurt and offended both her and Celia – nonetheless, Gregory, by her sensitive portrayal of Richard's tormented mind, makes him into an amiable character whose predicament rouses the reader's compassion. Mary's obligation was to construct and safeguard his faith in his virility and in his social and artistic talents; the moment she strays from this path, his sense of identity is shattered: he finally sees himself as 'a figure puerile and insignificant ... .To whom could he cling? Who was there to comfort him? ... He was a Philistine, a failure' (18).

King Log and Lady Lea rehearses imaginatively the opinions on marriage that Gregory expressed in her diaries and, more publicly, in articles published in literary journals in the early twenties and in *Wheels on Gravel*, a collection of essays that came out in 1938. 'The Dilemma of Marriage', an article in the *New Republic* on 4 July 1923, is a radical statement against monogamous marriage and the unequal treatment of women in a nation that had just recently, in 1920, given women the right to vote. Gregory, who had fought for suffrage, and who by this time was living with Powys, but not yet married to him, audaciously affirms that 'It is hardly an exaggeration to say that most monogamous marriages are compromises based upon mutual illusion, and maintained by fear' (15) – and fear is one of the essential components of all the relationships in *King Log and Lady Lea.* By 1938, when she published *Wheels on Gravel,* which includes an essay of the same title, her views had been tempered by her experiences with Powys and by time itself, although she continued to believe in the polygamous nature of humankind and in the positive aspects of polygamy. To add weight to her argument she turned to Nietzsche, whose Dionysian joy of life she struggled to make her own, a joy she projects onto Mary: 'Life means for us constantly to transform into light and flame all that we are or meet with'.[5]

However, Gregory – as is Mary – is fully aware of the tension created by the need for tenderness and security as opposed to this need to live adventurously. She insists that a woman who loses the love of her husband/companion to another woman should not feel belittled, for such a loss bears no 'stigma of dishonour' (76), and the suffering caused by feeling 'her own worth annulled' and seeing herself 'shorn of every charm' (75) can be combated by 'intelligence – intelligence and more intelligence' (77). And yet, as she had written in *Wheels on Gravel*, 'Women create the illusions in which men thrive and themselves perish in the illusions they create' (63). In her earlier, imaginative, recreation of the theme, the women do not perish: Richard's obvious infidelity stirs Mary to reflect on how and why she has transformed herself from the independent, fearless woman she had been before her marriage, to virtual non-existence: 'she had nearly vanished altogether' (41) as she says of herself. But at a critical moment in their relationship, Mary reflects that 'If he no longer loved her she had nothing to lose in being herself' (49).

The carefully prepared and designed Sundial edition of *King Log and Lady Lea* makes this novel by Alyse Gregory available after many years to the general public, and together with *Hester Craddock*, her third novel, published by Sundial Press in 2007, should do much to affirm Gregory's position as a modernist writer of stature. *King Log and Lady Lea*, a study of infidelity

and the struggle to overcome fear of solitude, is still valid today and probably more likely to attract readers than the later novel.

NOTES

1 Alyse Gregory, 'A Poet's Novel', *The Dial*, November 1927, 417-19.

2 Peter J. Foss, 'The Proustian Equivalent: A Reading of *Love and Death*', *The Powys Journal* VIII (1998), 131.

3 Gregory's letters to her mother are held in the Beinecke Library of the University of Yale.

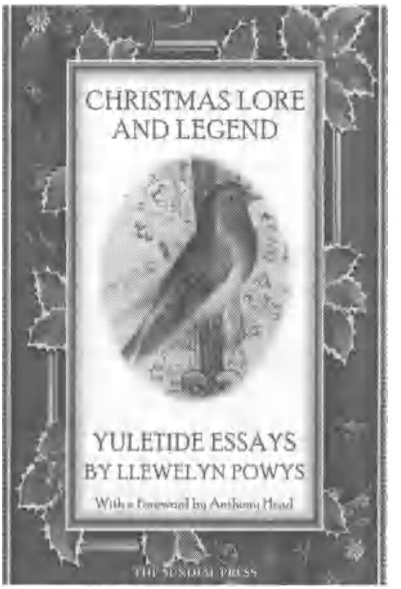
4 Rosemary Manning, 'Alyse Gregory: A Biographical Sketch based on her Published and Private writings', *The Powys Review* 3 (1978), 90.

5 Alyse Gregory, *Wheels on Gravel* (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1938), 73.

Neil Lee-Atkin

Christmas Lore & Legend:Yuletide Essays, by Llewelyn Powys
with a foreword by Anthony Head
Sundial Press 2010. paperback, 96pp. ISBN 978-0-9551523-9-9. £6.99.

Christmas Lore & Legend is a collection of fourteen previously uncollected 'Yuletide Essays' by Llewelyn Powys, although five of them have previously been published in books which include *A Baker's Dozen* (2); *Dorset Essays* (2); *The Twelve Months* and Kenneth Hopkins' *Llewelyn Powys – A Selection from His Writings*. The remaining essays were previously published in newspapers and magazines during the 1930s, with about half of them being written in Switzerland during the final three years of Llewelyn's life, and they are collected here in book form for the first time.



This is the third book of 'collected essays' from the Sundial Press by this author, following *Durdle Door to Dartmoor* and its companion volume, *Still Blue Beauty*, and the publishers are to be congratulated, for as all devotees of Llewelyn Powys know, apart from *Wessex Memories* (2002) and Cecil Woolf's 'Powys Heritage Series' of diary publications selected & edited by the excellent Peter Foss, in recent years any previously unpublished Llewelyn Powys material has been – and remains - as rare as frog's feathers!

Of course it is regrettable and little disappointing to those who collect his work that any new title with Llewelyn Powys named as author should contain *any* previously published material at all, yet considering that it's seventy one years since his death, it's almost inevitable that this should be the case as the volume of his work -- especially that which constitutes publishable material – becomes exhausted. Perhaps then, we should be thankful for small mercies and welcome this latest publication into the canon of his

books, remembering that it could also be an introduction to the author for someone who is only initially interested in the lore and legend of Christmas! For even if the author's name meant nothing, the startlingly attractive cover alone would most certainly catch the interest and attention of such a person, for it bears all the festive hallmarks of the 1930s period Christmas with the ubiquitous Robin and sprigs of holly against a merry red background, and looks for all the world like the fattest Christmas card you ever saw. Dare I hint that it would make an ideal Christmas gift?

The book benefits from an intuitively written and extremely perceptive foreword by Anthony Head, whose brilliant summation of this collection of essays can neither be gainsaid nor surpassed when he writes:

> Rich in imagery and anecdote, woven through with local lore and personal reminiscence, these Yuletide essays bring vividly alive the customs and character, the sounds and tastes of earlier generations and are informed by the lively curiosity and deep nostalgia that typify Powys' best work.

'Rich in imagery and anecdote' is true of all his work, but oft repeated anecdote constitutes a blemish on an otherwise flawless page, and there are blemishes here which include the repetition of both anecdote and phrase in several of the essays. Of content and style they represent a mixed bag, with the author's virtues and faults paraded together; well-balanced lyrical sentences marred by the use of an obscure word or phrase, one or two mixed metaphors, the striving for effect with an over-indulgence in exclamation marks ... !

Equally, those who are familiar with Llewelyn's best work will recognize instances where his normally unique style becomes affected – doubtless influenced by writing for a specific readership, but nevertheless disconcerting; and given his avowed and much vaunted pagan rationalism, some of these 'affectations' are incommiscible. And whilst some may feel that two or three of the essays lack the quality of construction and crystal clear coherence normally associated with Llewelyn, others may be bemused by comments which would seem to indicate the author's tacit acceptance of some of the tenets of Christianity.

Criticism apart, some of Llewelyn's finest work is also represented here, perhaps nowhere more so than in the very first essay, 'The First Fall of Snow' when, reminiscing about his time in Africa, he writes:

> I have felt the earth, our ancient Mother Earth beneath my feet, tremble and quiver in an ecstasy of childbirth under the sweet persuasion of those torrential down-pourings; but never once did she attain to such mysterious power as when, at rest under a covering of snow, she lies with the appearance and potency of a sepultured goddess who is in truth dead and yet retains that upon her ivory forehead which is equivalent to immortality.

Devouring the book at a single sitting (as I did) tends to highlight the 'blemishes' and makes its faults more apparent, and in accord with the publisher I would agree that it's *rather like a box of chocolates that shouldn't be eaten at one go but dipped into and savoured one by one.* Although for the devotees of Llewelyn Powys *Christmas Lore & Legend* will be a welcome addition to the literary canon of this most controversial of the published Powys Brothers – and despite the fact that the author's unmistakeable style is indelibly stamped on every page and runs through it like the lettering in a stick of seaside rock -- it is doubtful that it will be regarded as one of his *better* books.

Llewelyn Powys : Cardinal Newman

The centenary of the Oxford Movement may well have suggested to us a re-reading of Newman's *Apologia pro vita sua*. We owe this beautiful and noble book to the honest rudeness of Charles Kingsley, and we are told that while Newman was writing it he was "constantly in tears, and constantly crying out with distress." The book was finished in seven weeks, and every page of it gives evidence of an imaginative style, an intellectual excellence, entirely beyond the reach of the two celebrated confederates of his Oxford years.

Our attitude to conventional religion is so altered from what it was in the nineteenth century that it has become difficult to interest ourselves in these far-off canonical wrangles. Indeed, for many of us it is only possible to approach them through Newman's transparent art. There is, however, something besides the high literary standard of his writing to reward us. Newman's mind resembles a sharpened willow wand in the hand of a religious diviner which is for ever revealing living water under the holy ground of his cloistered garth. He seems to have no professional prudence, and at a moment's notice his errant intellect will be occupied with those primary speculations of philosophy that have a relevance for all men and for all women.

It was perhaps the extreme sensibility of his nature that drove him, when confronted by the facts of strong life, to take refuge in medieval dreams. His upbringing and education encouraged him to accept the fundamental beliefs upon which Christianity is based, and with these beliefs left unquestioned he was able to allow his sincere casuistries to play freely upon the intricate fabric of book-theology. Two quotations should suffice to indicate the kind of premisses upon which he erected the fair Vatican of his mind :—

> Revealed religion furnishes facts to other sciences, which these sciences left to themselves would never reach. Thus, in the science of history, the preservation of our race in Noah's ark is an historical fact, which history never would arrive at without revelation.
>
> That there had been already great miracles, as those of Scripture, as the Resurrection, was a fact establishing the principle that the laws of nature had sometimes been suspended by the Divine Author.

When due allowance has been made for such large claims, we are at liberty to take unqualified delight in his swift perceptions, in his dangerous thoughts that do not hesitate when occasion offers to glance backwards and forwards over the abyss as swallows might dart over a no-bottom pond filled with slippery vital eels. As Thomas Aquinas did, as Pascal did, Newman exercised his faculties to find credible justifications for the superstitions of the Faith. In undertaking such a task it was inevitable that a mind as keen and as sincere as his should constantly be aware of "the dreadful plausibility of scepticism." It was his comprehension of this that rendered him, even after Father Dominic had received him into the Catholic Church, uncomfortable to

conventional orthodoxy. He was a man of genius who could never be relied upon to comb or curb his damaging speculations. For Newman there were "two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings, myself and my creator." His soul belonged to God, but his mind, though dedicated to the cause of his adoption, was in some indefinable way free until the day of his death, the mind of an atheist, the mind of an angel!

Newman continually forgot his obligation to ecclesiastical discretion, and with terrifying loops swooped from the gates of heaven to the gates of hell. An inner conviction led him to be more certain of the existence of God "than that I have hands or feet," though to his reason the accredited assumption remained unapparent.

> Of all points of faith, the being of God is to my apprehension encompassed with most difficulty. . . . I try to put grounds for certainty into logical shape. I find a difficulty in doing so in mood and figure to my satisfaction.

and again :—

> Were it not for His voice speaking so clearly in my conscience and my heart, I should be an atheist, or a pantheist, or a polytheist.

When the theologic soundness of one of his essays was impugned at Rome he is said to have remarked, "Hannibal's elephants could never learn the goose-step." Again and again he broke bounds, relying on his inspiration rather than upon dogma. There is often something prophetic about his conception of the human case, though it remained beyond the power of his vision to take away the winter of his desolation.

> If I looked into a mirror, and did not see my face, I should have the sort of feeling which already comes to me, when I look into this living busy world, and see no reflexion of its creator. . . . The greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration; the curtain hung over his futurity . . . the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design . . . all this is a vision to dizzy and appal, and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution.

Newman's own response to the mystery was to see each manifestation of the visible world in the form of a parable. He was a man in love with the invisible, and to him the whispers of mystical feeling were far more audible than were the cries of a jay.

> Natural phenomena are both types and the instruments of real things unseen. . . . Certitude is a reflex action; it is to know that one knows.

But he was not content to let the matter rest there. Throughout his life he applied his edged mind to presenting his personal spiritual realizations in forms of persuasive and exact argument.

To him the presence of pain and cruelty, the mystery of evil, could be explained in only one way. The human race "is out of joint with the purposes of its creator . . . is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity." The existence of the Catholic Church is God's method of retaining in the world "a knowledge of Himself," and its infallibility is happily adapted as a working instrument for the throwing back of "the immense energy of the aggressive, capricious, untrustworthy intellect." The caprice

and energy of Newman's own thought were certainly rash and thorough enough. In an early sermon he wrote :

> I do not shrink from uttering my firm conviction that it would be a gain to the country were it vastly more superstitious, more bigoted, more gloomy, more fierce in its religion than at present it shows itself to be.

As a kind of preamble of the formal credentials of the Catholic Church he pronounced:

> The Catholic Church holds it better for the sun and moon to drop from heaven, for the earth to fail, and for all the many millions on it to die of starvation in extremest agony, as far as temporal affliction goes, than that one soul, I will not say, should be lost, but should commit one single venial sin, should tell one wilful untruth, or should steal one poor farthing without excuse.

Would it be possible to illustrate better the peril of sacerdotal thought when even a man like Newman feels in no way abashed by such "extremities" ? What frenzy is this to endeavour to superimpose upon life, upon life intractable as a thick-necked zebra, the bit and bridle of dogmas? What has religion, that state of wonder and gratitude, to do with these inhibitory provisions of civilization? Surely there is some justice in the exclamation of Lucretius : *Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.*

For two thousand years the Christian Churches have had at their service the best minds of each age, and yet even so it is not easy to give credence to their anthropocentric explanation of life. The riot of the universe, with its star streams and star clouds, with its unpredictable electrons and quivering wave-groups capable of aggregating into forms of vegetable life, animal life, bird life, fish life, insect life, microbe life, as conspicuous for ferocity as for brevity: life living upon life, the cow destroyed by the lion, the grass by the cow—and this tumultuous torrent of sap and blood under the spell of hate and desire existing apparently at hazard, disorder rising out of order, discipline out of rebellion; heartlessness here, compassion there, intermixed at random, all at odds, all rushing forward into an unknown future pell-mell, does not suggest that a cosmogony too closely identified with man's wishes is likely to approximate to the real metaphysical solution. Newman's mind, obsessed by his preconception as to the truth of Catholic philosophy, nervously reluctant from the notion of a world unprotected by Christian revelation, unprotected by the "pre-eminent and prodigious power" of Catholicism. We do not wonder that as a young man holding such views he could not bear to look at the tricolour on the poop of a French vessel in the harbour of Algiers. It was the past that he loved. He wished antiquity to be constituted as the final arbiter, and it was perhaps because he appreciated the weakness of such an attitude that he came to have "fierce thoughts against liberals." "Bees, by the instinct of nature, do love their hives, and birds their nests," and even monastery doves, for all their pink feet, will show aggression. It never seemed to have occurred to him that it might well be through the very " pride of reason" he so much hated that society might be adjusted more equably, sickness to a large measure eliminated, the barbarous iniquity of war ended, and happiness be

brought to the earth. It is impossible not to regret his bias. He manfully tilted against the forces of evil, but he was shackled from the first with holy fetters. He endeavoured desperately to find logical cogency for his faith, never suspecting that viewed from a wider angle there was, under the shadow of eternity, small difference between his painful solutions; the real contest between cruelty and generosity, between good and evil, lying far below his doctrinal conundrums.

Perhaps to Englishmen it is his repudiation of the Anglican Communion that rouses most interest. He describes how he was first haunted by the suspicion that the Anglican Order was a mere "national institution," and that the Church of Rome, with all its "dominant errors," was, in fact, the "One Fold of Christ." "He who has seen a ghost cannot be as if he had never seen it." The results of the publication of Tract 90, when his name

> had been posted up by the Marshal on the buttery-hatch of every College of my University, after the manner of discontinued pastry-cooks

sent him into retirement at Littlemore, where for several years he reconsidered his position.

> Anyhow, no harm could come of bending the crooked stick the other way; in the process of straightening it, it was impossible to break it.

Alas! the Anglican crozier snapped.

> I cannot tell how soon there came on me but very soon—an extreme astonishment that I had ever imagined it to be a portion of the Catholic Church. . . . When I looked back upon the poor Anglican Church, for which I had laboured so hard, and upon all that appertained to it, and thought of our various attempts to dress it up doctrinally and esthetically, it seemed to me the veriest nonentities . . . it may be a great creation, though it be not divine, and this is how I judge it . . . and as to its possession of an Episcopal succession from the time of the Apostles, well, it may have it, and, if the Holy See so decide, I will believe it, as being the decision of a higher judgment than my own.

Cardinal Newman takes his place in literature as the last lucid defender of the romantic obscurantism of the Middle Ages. To the end of his life he used his genius to bring into subjection the "wild living thought of man." A Christian, he once declared, must always remain "a mystery" to the world. I know of few figures in history who warrant this utterance more than does he himself, "this creature of emotion and memory" who so eminently united in his lovable and luminous being the attributes of the subtle Schoolman with the simplicity and the passionate sincerity of the true saint.

from Damnable Opinions (*London: Watts & Co., 1935. First published in* Congregational Quarterly, *January 1934.*)

To the Editor: A little story

28th August 2010
Dear Kate Kavanagh,

I really don't know if it's worth writing this letter. For one thing, I haven't much to say. For another I can't know how you will receive it.

In 1962–3, I was working as a feature writer on the daily magazine programme of Southern Television in Southampton. A colleague who liked my work recommended me to the *Sunday Times* as a potential contributor to their magazine section. I was interviewed. A long limbo followed. Then I was told I was being matched with an excellent photographer to do a photo feature about an important Welsh author – John Cowper Powys, who was old, frail, brilliant and not expected to last much longer. I read everything I could lay my hands on by and about him and the following week we drove up to Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Powys was indeed frail. In fact he was bedridden. Though it was a warm day, he received us wrapped up in numerous blankets in his bed. Everything about him spoke of the end of days except his eyes. I've no recollection what colour they were. But I still remember how bright. They held mine most of the time as if he was speaking to me with them, rather than through his voice. A voice that rose and fell like a fishing smack in a storm. At times, when it descended into a trough, it was impossible to hear him. Then it grew strong again to match his stare. I don't think anyone has ever held my eyes in such a wrestler's grip.

I didn't get much out of him. He was either unable or uninterested in talking about himself, his work or anything that might have mattered to the *Sunday Times* or to me. There was, I recall, some chat about the weather, his room, what he ate and the countryside around Blaenau.

Meanwhile the photographer slunk around the room, shooting off a lot of film. But they were all bedside shots. We tried to persuade him to come outside where we could get shots of him sitting against the stonework or standing by the gate, or against the surrounding panorama. He didn't want to. And the woman, whom I recall as being his housekeeper but who may have been his wife, who floated in and out of the room throughout, serving us tea and toast, checking that we were not overtaxing him, positively forbade it.

Then he beckoned me to come closer. I couldn't get any closer except by sitting on the edge of his bed, which I did. This is roughly what he said: 'You see that corner, over there above the window.' (He pointed to the wooden rail that ran around the wall above the wallpaper.) 'That's where he always starts. He's not there now. You'll have to wait . . . . Ah there he is. Look, he's on his horse. There he goes. See him? It's Dick Turpin. You know about Dick Turpin? And that's his black horse . . . .' (He named the horse.) 'Always on a black horse. Look! There he goes, along there and along there. That's where he comes down, right down, nearly to the floor. Then up again. Now he's going back. Watch! He's going back to where he came from. Don't you see?'

He traced the fantasy journey with his finger, occasionally looking round at me.

That, I'm sorry to have to tell you, was it. (Although the illusion went on a good half-an-hour). I remember that during one of his housekeeper's?/ wife's? appearances there were some reminiscences about a lecture tour in the United States to which he contributed some rational comments.

As you can imagine, the photo-feature was never published. In fact, I never finished writing

it. When the *Sunday Times* learned that the only pics were of him in bed, they aborted. I no longer have the piece I wrote. Two weeks later, I was reading his obituary in the dailies.

I always thought what I saw was a sorrowful ending to the life of a brilliant writer, a writer's writer as is often claimed. I've never written anything about our meeting until the present letter.

This e-mail was prompted by your review of Morine Krissdóttir's *Descents of Memory*, in *The Tablet*. Of course that was some time ago. I considered writing then (i.e. November 2007) but decided not to. I had seen him during his final descent (amost certainly the last journalist and possibly one of the last people to do so) and reckoned my recollections were out of order. Why write a letter which might 'desecrate' his memory when I really had nothing substantive to say? I was also much moved by your last sentence: 'John Cowper died happily, floating free, having serenely mastered the art of growing old.' That was how, I too, would like to remember him. Hence my silence.

I found your review a couple of days ago when I was searching for a lost book. I thought to myself: surely The Powys Society should make the decision about how he should be remembered. They are far more competent than I.

So here for what it's worth is my account of how I found him. I still find the memory sad.

My very best wishes,

Malcolm Feuerstein.

PS: For thirty years after the Powys 'interview', I made documentaries as a writer-director for BBC, ITV, Channel 4 and the Central Office of Information. Twelve years ago, I came to live in Israel where I now write novels.

29th August

Dear Kate Kavanagh,

Of course, if you find anything you'd like to quote please go ahead.

It's funny how things come together. Had I rediscovered your *Tablet* article at any other time, I would probably not have written. But we are on the verge of the Jewish New Year when you have go round 'righting' yourself with anyone you may have wronged. I felt that hanging onto the information I possessed was wrong. Hence I contacted you through the narrow window of opportunity that was available. Your reply was a dividend. It made me acknowledge something about myself of which I was not consciously aware. You observed that I must have been young at the time I met JCP. You were right. Thinking it through, I realised that the e-mail I sent you was written by that same young man and not by someone who had had plenty of time to reflect. You see, although I admired and felt sad for him, I was also resentful. This was because he had spoiled my chance of writing a brilliant article for the *Sunday Times* magazine. How? By being old, bedridden and delusionary. I think I blamed him for being old! There's one sentence in my letter that gives all this away.

You, on the other hand, saw him more truly as a loveable elderly man living in a twilight zone but still able to communicate, even to the extent of having fun, having mastered the art of growing old. Certainly, the visit of Oloff de Wet (in 1963!) reveals a very different character.

My prejudice showed, I think, when we left Kensington for the small town in the Carmel hills where we still live. I had to get rid of 1,500 books out of a library of 3,000 because my wife said that that was all I could bring. Among those I left behind were all my books by and about him (including *Wolf Solent*!). I think now that I left them because he had spoiled my stroke.

I have held this sad antipathy for a great man for the best part of forty years without being aware of it. This is the season of the year when I must make amends. Since he is dead, I cannot do that. So I shall right the resentful wrong I did him symbolically by reading him all over again.

My very best regards,

Malcolm Feuerstein.

Ancient Powys, photo by Douglas Glass.

News & Notes

Confessions of Two Brothers (1916) can now be heard as a **Talking Book** – in Australian – at <www.archive.org/details/confessions_of_two_bros_kf_gp_librivox1>

* * * *

A book on Elizabeth (Cross) Powys, Will's wife, has recently been published. Details will follow.

* * * *

A Roman camp has been uncovered near **Bradford Abbas** (alias 'Kings Barton') – a field Wolf Solent might have traversed ... (from Michael Kowalewski)

* * * *

JCP gets a mention as 'one who knew and wrote about the magic of both places' [Llangollen and Glastonbury] in the *Newsletter of the Society of Ley Hunters* (August 2010) in a review of *Valle Crucis and the Grail* by Ian Pegler, a dowser. (from Raymond Cox)

* * * *

From Ken Rex: I have inherited a quantity of **Powys Books** from my late Aunt, **Ivy Rex,** who was a member of your Society until her death in 2001. I am pleased to offer for sale the books as itemised: email <kenrex@houghton2758.fslife.co.uk>. In addition I have a quantity of Powys Society Journals and other miscellanea I would like to dispose of. I would like to sell them as a job lot, price negotiable and will deliver to within 50 miles of Crewe or buyer may view and collect. Telephone number is 01270 668161.