

## Editorial

One of the pleasures of the Newsletter is the different voices it calls up, even though in this number the letters of John Cowper to Louis Wilkinson (third and last instalment) has meant limited space.



*Jeff Kwinter and the  
President consider a point.*

It's good to find an ally in Michael Caines, a new champion for Theodore, whose original view of the Conference is on page 11. Literary societies are notoriously prone to the 'laundry-list' approach to their subjects – all good fun so long as we read the books as well ... 'Obsessions' with a writer, however, are perhaps an essential ingredient. The multi-headed Powys keeps ours balanced, we like to think.

There have been two events this autumn celebrating JCP: a new French book on his philosophy launched in Paris and an exhibition at Hillsdale, NY, USA, in which township he lived from 1930 to 1934 (page 17). Editor was fortunate in being able to combine a family visit to New York with a trip upstate, and to the modern library where excellently chosen extracts from JCP's writings (chiefly *Autobiography* and the Diaries) hung on the walls, with a good selection of books and other material

on display. Phudd Bottom looks very well cared for. The sun switched on to the treetops, the yellow leaves came floating down, the furry hills were multicoloured, the Grotto flowing as ever with white doves of colliding water. A spotted salamander lay dead on the road; deer ran, a heron flew. It is a happy thought that more people now may remember the man 'who noticed such things'.

KK

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## *Two Powys Days*

**Ely, Saturday 13th April 2013**

Our Chairman, Timothy Hyman, will lead a discussion of *Weymouth Sands*. The meeting will be held at the Old Fire Engine House, 25 St Mary's Street, a restaurant and art gallery in the centre of Ely situated close to the Cathedral. Welcome and coffee, in the upstairs sitting room, is at 10.30. Discussion commences at 11.00. Lunch will be served downstairs in the restaurant from 12.00 to 13.00. After a short break we will continue our discussion in the afternoon.

**Dorchester, Saturday 8th June 2013**

At the Dorset County Museum Library, Dorchester; an open Forum discussion and readings by members of their own selections from a favourite Powys book. This format was very much appreciated by members in 2012, so we would like to repeat it in 2013. The meeting commences at 10.30 for 11.00 start. Coffee and refreshments will be available during the day. Lunch will be from 13.00 to 14.00 at a local restaurant.

Both events are free although a charge will be made for lunch, which is optional, and we welcome voluntary contributions for refreshments during the day.

Everyone is welcome to attend. If you plan to participate in either of these meetings please notify Hon. Secretary Chris Thomas

by e-mail at <chris.thomas@hotmail.co.uk>

or by post to Flat D, 87 Ledbury Road, London W11 2AG.

### *Subscriptions*

The officers and committee members are very sorry to announce that the **subscription** has to go up from 1st January 2013. The reason for this is the increase in printing costs, and especially the cost of postage. The new rates are £22 for UK members and £26 for overseas members.

The best way for the Society to receive payments is by **Standing Order**. Will all members paying by this method please complete the enclosed "Amendment to Standing Order" form which is enclosed. Would those who pay by **PayPal** please amend the amount when their payment becomes due.

**Anna Pawelko. Hon. Treasurer**

***Websites and e-mail addresses: Please note that for consistency these are generally shewn between angle brackets < >.***

## *The Conference, 2012*

Another friendly weekend in the comfortable Wessex hotel. A sultry weekend with a tropical grey cloud-lid over Somerset. Still the Tor – unexpectedly glimpsed, an abiding presence – never ceases to amaze and impress. As Glen reminded us, this was the 40th Powys conference – he and a few others having been at the first, in 1972 at Churchill College, Cambridge.

The interesting talks this year included all three brothers. Good use was made in the brief heatwave of umbrella'd benches outside the dining room. The book room had a fine array, managed by Shelagh Hancox and Trevor Davies to whom special thanks.

There was a much enjoyed outing to Montacute and the former Powys home (the Vicarage now renamed Park House), thanks to Mrs Soames, who had previously showed us round in 1997. Cream teas for some, courtesy of the National Trust.

JCP's play *Paddock Calls* (1922) was the Entertainment, and this Paddock/Toad seems to have gone down well, thanks to stirring performances notably from Richard Graves and Chris Michaelides as the lovers. Pat Roberts, Mary Simmonds, Trevor Davies and Ritch Pawelko were the spirited young people, KK impersonated Lady Bracknell as the mother, Cicely Hill and P. J. Kavanagh provided Dorset folk wisdom and light relief as the old retainers. Tim Hyman (as Paddock his wone self) was the only one who also took part in the previous reading by the Society, in 1986. (See page 16 for Oliver Wilkinson's 1986 report.)

**Michael Kowalewski** (on Friday evening, introduced by Louise de Bruin), moved on from his memorable talk on Theodore's *Soliloquies of a Hermit* at Dorchester two years ago ('The Voice of God', see *NL* 70) and his long essay in *la lettre powysienne* (no. 21, spring 2011) 'JCP and the Re-sacralisation of the Secular'. He gave this talk the title (shorter than advertised) 'The Sacred Mindscape' of JCP.

In the cultural wars of his era, JCP was actually in the mainstream: born like most of the 'modernists' between 1865 and 1880, and maturing late as many of them did.

Modernists took on history as a substitute for religious order – seeing the eighteenth-century Enlightenment as reaction to religious wars, then turning mystical, then romantic, with German Romanticism and idealist philosophy brought to England above all by Coleridge. Later in the nineteenth-century, anthropology (as in Frazer's *Golden Bough*) brought us the concept of 'The Holy', leading to the idea of a sacred universe and openness to pagan beliefs. The search was then for a 'third realm' of free religiosity: spirituality without religion, untainted by dogma or social convention.

JCP was by nature a religious man, but never mastered his public/ private dichotomy. In *Religion of a Sceptic* he placed himself midway between fundamentalism and scepticism; in his books he approaches the sacred in various ways.

Of his alter-egos, the name Wolf, in *Wolf Solent*, suggests 'lone wolf'. In *Porius* the search is downward, to the substrata: vertical harmony rather than a melodic plot. Later, the 'Aether', interpreting Homer, is feminine.

JCP sees a Godless spirituality. Mythology lifts the commonplace into symbolic roles. He looks for sacredness in stones, as is done in the Himalayas – a purity of consciousness.

In discussion, David Gervais questioned the term 'dichotomy', seeing in JCP more of a dualistic approach between physical and mystical. Kowalewski sees both duality and unity, worship of physical nature and sublimation in the imagination..

John Hodgson recalled Matthew Arnold's definition of religion as 'morality tinged with

emotion', which JCP thought quite wrong. He enjoyed play, and its contradictions, in a Modernist way.

Tim Hyman noted how in visual art modernism before WWI turned to abstraction, with a post-war return to the physical.

Michael K said that JCP knew all this, in this sense was absolutely sophisticated. He knew the need to bow down. He could mock God in a divine way.

On Saturday morning, Tim Hyman introducing **Arjen Mulder** said he was amazed at AM's wide range: coming from biology and IT mediatherapy, author of one novel in Dutch and, in translation, *From Image to Interaction, meaning & agency in the arts*. His previous talk, at Chichester in 2008, was on the early development of JCP. He now turns to Llewelyn.

'Into the world and back again' was concerned with LIP as essay writer – 'updating Llewelyn in an hour'. AM dealt with LIP's reputation and the effect on it of his life-choices, along with the shifts in the persona he presents in his writing. His language also changed and developed – though AM can't always recognise Americanisms, or obsolete words. He sees from a continental viewpoint.

LIP, unusually, moved from cosmopolitan to local. What was lost, what gained?

LIP's journey is a complex story. AM acknowledged that he may be repeating the study by Peter Foss, which he hasn't yet found. There's no satisfactory available biography of Llewelyn, AM would love to see one. Meanwhile he imagines the novel that could be made from Llewelyn's life.

LIP's early writing is autobiographical: *Skin for Skin*, *The Verdict of Bridlegoose* – later he turned to English subjects, specifically Dorset.

*Skin for Skin* is a global book, in one voice and style, from one source. *Freshness* is his quality. He wants the reader to love him.

*Black Laughter* was published in New York. It's tough reading, there are nasty bits. It is not racist – his interest is in what he feels, explaining his English colonialism, explaining his errors (starting a bushfire, his provincial discourtesy). But who is he talking to?

He has no success and returns to England. Then again to America, with JCP, and is a huge success, much more into intellectual circles than JCP was.

What were JCP's motives with Llewelyn? He succeeded in releasing LIP's creative energies. But he spiked Llewelyn's books with idiotic titles – *Verdict of Bridlegoose* changed from *The American Jungle*. If only Llewelyn had stuck to it ...

LIP stylises himself a sort of tramp, sleeping on the roof, an English eccentric. He's more sophisticated, more self-aware, than JCP ever is. He appears in *The Dial* as a Modernist author.

What distinguishes him? It's his tone, fusing modern and ancient vocabulary, joy of life and consciousness of death.

JCP is *mythical*, belongs with the epic, with Homer. LIP *legendary*, with ballads, folktales, the Bible. Legends are local stories, not myths or allegory.

LIP could have embodied US-European culture. The 1920s was a time of old and new colliding, sparking.

LIP tried to upload old into new, from inside out. But with him old & new don't meld well (as they do with Dorothy Richardson or Proust). He achieved perfect fusion in *Cradle of God*.

LIP is the most personal of the Powyses. He made his own life legendary, unlike JCP who's always analysing, mythologising.

Alyse Greory was a professional, a power woman, LIP's editor and lifeline to modern

literature. For him the marriage was only useful – Alyse submitted to him. Then in 1925 he wants to go home, to his lifeline, his own land and the elements. For Alyse, this is a renunciation. She's blown away by the winds of White Nore, and loses her wits.

They come back to NY, and Gamel enters the scene. A triangle. Alyse takes charge. They journey to Palestine. Llewelyn gets ill, they move to Capri, he writes *Cradle of God*. Here he interprets the Christian/ Jewish heritage, a new way to study the Bible, as fables from the yearning of human hearts, the voice of deep hidden longings (the definition of legend). He writes for the audience of non-believers. But LIP, a born believer, would have been more interesting if he had stuck to faith, not his old-style atheist anti-religious hobby horse.

After this, urged by JCP, Gamel comes to England. She and Llewelyn enter her legendary poetic 'middle earth', their secret garden. Llewelyn starts *Love and Death*, his 'testament' to this. Gamel marries Gerald Brenan. Llewelyn writes letters to her, in her world, along with many Dorset-themed essays for periodicals.

Meanwhile Alyse's diary is a thick stream of bile, pity, self-hatred and the problems of first-generation feminists. They move to Switzerland. *Love and Death* continues, now less intense, more local, with more explaining, a different legend: remembering *versus* death. It is helped and introduced by Alyse, hiding her distress. Did she take revenge, removing mentions of herself, suppressing his personality? Material for a novel!

Discussion included thoughts on what's revealed by extant (in Cambridge) drafts of *Love and Death*; and on Alyse and Gamel, displaced Americans. Tim Hyman recalled that Phyllis Playter said she was *quenched* by British life. Peter Foss testified to the difficulty of tackling Llewelyn, so full of contradictions. He was both selfish and bewitching. But honest, with no hidden agenda.

**Marcella Henderson-Peal** (introduced by Charles Lock) gave a lively account of her researches into the many links between JCP and France and their complex tensions. She was gratifyingly grateful for the existence of The Powys Society as a resource for research. JCP has been quite comprehensively translated and discussed in France, and since the 1930s attracted a circle of readers with philosophical affinities, notably Jean Wahl and Gabriel Marcel, who elected him an honorary citizen of 'l'esprit français'.

MHP discussed JCP's writing on French writers, his professed dislike (in *Autobiography*) of the French language, the problem most (young) French men might find with an intelligence and imagination so different in kind, and the wide interlocking network of philosophers, translators, writers and teachers who have admired and written on him. Some of these are known to the Society – his translator Marie Canavaggia (often mentioned in JCP's letters), Catherine Lieutenant publisher of JCP's *Rabelais*, Christiane Poussier whose 'Meditation', *Encounters with John Cowper Powys*, is in the Cecil Woolf 'Powys Heritage' series. Other names – George Bataille, Diane de Margerie, Farza Mikhail called by JCP 'Cleopatra' – were probably new or less familiar to many of us listening. MHP's researches and the web of connections continue, promising to extend ever more widely. Meanwhile the short book *John Cowper Powys: une philosophie de la vie*, by Pierrick Hamelin and Goulven Le Brech (see note on page 23) shows the continuing interest in JCP's ideas.

On Sunday morning **Michael Caines** of the TLS (introduced by Glen Cavaliero) talked – reading from a laptop, an innovation for Powys conferences – about T. F. Powys and his publisher Charles Prentice, senior director of Chatto and Windus. Prentice's introduction to

TFP, by Stephen Tomlin, David Garnett, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, was with *The Left Leg*, followed by a flurry of stories, and TF remained with Chatto to the end.

Prentice played a considerable role (influencing e.g. the end of *Mr. Weston*), praising and making very tentative suggestions in his extremely diplomatic letters, mingling admiration and (for *Unclay*) rapture.

Not all Chatto's decisions, with hindsight, were helpful to TFP (he would have reached more readers with more Penguins), but Prentice was by all accounts an exceptional editor. Both Prentice and TFP were self-effacing, 'quiet men', and theirs was a sympathetic relationship.

MC described other Chatto authors fostered by Prentice (Norman Douglas, Raymond Carver) and the role (with its limits) of a loyal editor with 'friendly interventions'. He was however, unable to account for the unfortunate choice of title *God's Eyes A-Twinkle*, for a hoped-for revival of interest in TFP's stories in the 1950s. ('One is embarrassed to lend it!' – Glen Cavaliero.)

After the AGM, **Larry (J. Lawrence) Mitchell**, of Texas A & M University, gave an illustrated talk on the Cushing Library there and his own collection donated to it (see also NLS 57 and 58).

Cushing collections include the history of printing, military history, Mexican material (the earliest presses in the Americas), Cervantes, John Donne, eighteenth-century France, science fiction, Western americana, and modern British authors such as Kipling, Haggard, and Somerset Maugham. The JLM collection ('the modest collection of an academic') as well as the history of boxing, brings in additions to the Garnett family and Powys family holdings. These include: letters, poems, and an unpublished novel *Path of the Gale*, from Katie/ Philippa Powys; a manuscript of Llewelyn's *Glory of Life*; a family tree; and memorial photographs of TF's son 'Dickie'. Most of this material came via Matthew Handscombe and Margaret Eaton.



*Two of our speakers:  
Michael Caines, a  
newcomer to the  
Society, and  
Larry Mitchell,  
much more than just  
a familiar face.*

*(These and the photos  
on ages 8 and 20, and  
the upper back cover  
photo are by KK; the  
photo on page 1 and  
lower back cover photo  
were taken by Marcella  
Henderson-Peal.)*



## *The Powys Society Annual General Meeting* *The Wessex Hotel, Street, August 17th 2012*

**Present:** Timothy Hyman (Chairman), Peter Foss (Vice Chairman), Chris Thomas (Secretary), Kate Kavanagh (Newsletter Editor), Michael Kowalewski (Collection Manager), Stephen Powys Marks, Anna Pawelko (Treasurer), Louise de Bruin (Publications Manager), Trevor Davies, Charles Lock (*The Powys Journal* Editor), Glen Cavaliero (President), Shelagh Hancox, Jeff Kwintner and some 40 members.

**The Chairman** read a passage from JCP's letter to Louis Wilkinson, dated 14 September 1957, printed in *Newsletter* No.75, page 38, and commented on JCP's fine translation of the Roman Emperor Hadrian's poem beginning *Animula, vagula, blandula*.

### **Minutes of 2011 AGM**

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting for 2011, published in the November 2011 *Newsletter*, were approved.

### **Nomination of Honorary Officers and members of The Powys Society Committee 2012–2013**

Nominations to the Committee published in the July 2012 *Newsletter* 76, were approved. The Hon. Officers and Committee members from August 2012 to August 2013 will therefore be the following Officers: **Timothy Hyman** (Chairman), **Peter Foss** (Vice-Chairman), **Chris Thomas** (Hon. Secretary), **Anna Pawelko** (Hon. Treasurer); Committee members: **Jeff Kwintner**, **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter* editor), **Louise de Bruin** (Publications Manager), **Stephen Powys Marks**, **Michael Kowalewski** (Collection Manager) **Trevor Davies**, and **Shelagh Powys Hancox**. **Charles Lock** (editor of the *The Powys Journal*) serves as *ex-officio* member.

### **Report of Hon. Treasurer**

The Treasurer referred members to the presentation of the Society's Accounts for 2011 published in *Newsletter* 76 and confirmed that the Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2011 had been independently inspected and approved. The Treasurer referred members to the excess of expenditure over income and noted impact of rising costs in all areas on the bank balance of the Society.

### **Report of the Collection Manager**

The Collection Manager encouraged more members to visit the link to the Collection catalogue and description of the Collection located on the Society's website which also

## *Conference DVDs*

Details are the same as last year (including the price, £6) with the following differences only: it's a 2-disc set containing all five of the 2012 Conference talks. Previous years' conferences from 2008 onwards are also available. Cheques please to:

**Raymond Cox**, 4 Lulworth Close, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 2UJ  
e-mail <rymd.cox@gmail.com> tel: 01384 566383

includes contact details for the Collection Manager. The Chairman supported the Collection Manager's views and encouraged more members to make greater use of the Collection at the Dorset Count Museum. The Collection Manager said that he is happy to organise visits to the Collection at suitable times and noted that researchers using the Collection had reported to him that they found the Catalogue a very helpful aid to locating documents and that the material in the Collection very useful for purposes of research.

### **Hon. Secretary's Report**

**Membership:** The Secretary reported that 12 new members had joined the Society since August 2011. There had been no new members since June 2012. The Secretary reported that at the end of July 2012, 20 members had been removed for failure to renew, 1 member was deceased and during the course of the year 2011–12 there had had been 10 resignations. The current total paid up membership is 263. Despite the decline of membership numbers the statistics show that the Society is still inspiring interest world wide – mainly through our website and especially in USA. The Secretary informed members of an exhibition about JCP organised by the residents of Hillsdale, NY, and of strong interest showed in the auction of a private collection of letters from JCP to the nurse who looked after his son up until his death.

The Secretary encouraged members to renew their subscriptions as early as possible each year and pointed to the Society's Constitution which sets out date for renewal of membership dues. The Secretary explained that early payment and, if possible, setting up a Standing Order with a bank helps reduce costs and saves time and effort later on sending reminders.

**Website news:** Our webmaster has recently posted readings from JCP's letters and diaries made by Oliver Wilkinson and transferred from an early set of audio tapes. The webmaster welcomes digital files of readings of passages from Powys books made by members.

New entries and additions have have been made to the webliography (see page 24).

**Powys Society Collection:** The Secretary reported progress made on investigations into the future of the Collection and explained that, at the request of members at the AGM in 2011, a sub-committee had been set up, consisting of David Goodway, Tim Blanchard, Michael Kowalewski and the Secretary; a review had been carried out of possible alternative locations for the Collection; all relevant documents associated with the Collection Agreement had been identified; an informal legal opinion of the terms of the Agreement obtained and a report was presented in January 2012 to the full committee (this is also available to all members on request to the Secretary). The report contains details of next steps, and a list of options and recommendations. In the light of this information the Secretary explained that the committee now wishes to arrange meetings with the British Library, the University of Reading, Cambridge University Library and Exeter University Special Collections to identify possibilities for



*Marcella Henderson-Peal and the Hon. Secretary share a joke in the kitchen garden at Montacute Vicarage.*

the transfer of the Collection, and to discuss plans for the future of the Collection with Dorset County Museum by the end of 2012. Members approved this course of action. Michael Caines proposed that the Society should consider the University of Kent as a possible alternative location for the Collection. Richard Graves thanked the sub-committee and full committee for their work on these matters during the course of the year which was endorsed by members.

**Life membership:** John Hodgson nominated award of life membership of the Society to **Paul Roberts** (past Chairman) for his many years of dedicated work and contributions to the Society. The nomination was fully approved by members.

### **Chairman's Report**

The Chairman's Report for 2011-12 was published in *Newsletter* 76 (July 2012).

The Chairman referred to the recent sale at a public auction of letters from JCP addressed to Dinah White who had cared for JCP's son during his long illness. With the permission of the new owner of the letters some photocopies have been obtained for the Society.

The Chairman thanked Anna Pawelko for accepting nomination as Treasurer and for her very hard work managing the Society's accounts. The Chairman also thanked Stephen Powys Marks and Kate Kavanagh for their dedication in producing three excellent Newsletters, and invited all members to consider contributing any articles or news items to the *Newsletter*. The Chairman addressed thanks to the editor of *The Powys Journal*, Charles Lock, and to the Publications Manager, Louise de Bruin, for overseeing production of Volume XXII of the *Journal* and extended special thanks for the help of Jerry Bird in difficult personal circumstances following his recent bereavement. The Chairman explained plans by the Society to publish a new book about the writings of the Powys family by Bill Keith, and financial resources offered to Marcella Henderson-Peal to help her acquire digital copies of a collection of letters from JCP to Jean Wahl located in an archive in France.

### **President's comments**

Glen Cavaliero reminded members that 2012 was the year of our fortieth conference. Glen extended special thanks to Louise de Bruin and Anna Pawelko for their work as conference organisers and managers.

### **Date and Venue of Conference 2013**

Members agreed the venue of the 2013 Conference at the **Hand Hotel, Llangollen**, to take place from **Friday 16th to Sunday 18th August 2013**.

### **AOB**

**Charles Lock**, editor of *The Powys Journal*, said that he still felt, acutely, the loss of Richard Maxwell, the immediate past editor of the *Journal*. He passed on greetings to the members of the Society from Richard's widow, Katie. Charles noted the significant role of the *Journal* in the affairs of the Society which provides an important record of lectures and presentations made at Society events. Charles encouraged members to submit to the editor any news of mentions of the Powys family in published books and to recommend any recently published books which they believe are worthy of review in the *Journal*. Charles also made an appeal to members to volunteer for help with production of the *Journal* especially help with proof-reading of articles. Charles noted that he will be making a presentation on JCP and the novels of Iris Murdoch at the International Iris Murdoch Conference in September 2012 (see page 23) and hoped that this might stimulate new interest in the Powyses.

## Sylvie Vaudier: My conference

I came back to Street this year for my second Powys Conference. The first one was two years ago, also in Street, just beside Glastonbury. Why, having been a member The Powys Society for more than twenty years, did I decide to attend the Conference? Glastonbury is a magical name. For me, it refers of course to *Les Enchantements de Glastonbury*, the first JCP novel I read in the Gallimard edition and still one of my favourites. Another very important reason last time was the opportunity to see the only document known up till now showing JCP on screen, the film of the rehearsal of his 'Marriage Debate' with Bertrand Russell.

That journey from Paris to Street was a little complicated, but thanks to all the information kindly given me by Anna Pawelko, I arrived safely at the Wessex Hotel. The thought of seeing Glastonbury, Yeovil, Sherborne and so many places I had heard of associated with the Powys family was very attractive. I was a little anxious at meeting so many specialists in Powysian matters, and of not being able to understand the lectures fully; I had to face up to the fact of not being a specialist but just an amateur. I met with such a kind and warm welcome and it was so exciting to meet people who share the same interest as I do, which is quite unimaginable in France, that I decided to come back as often as possible.

So my second time was in Street too, with a much easier journey from London owing to friends I had met at the Conference. It was nice to be back at the Wessex Hotel in this friendly and warm atmosphere. This year, the Conference programme was particularly attractive, with a good balance between the three main Powys writers, and a special mention of JCP's French reception. On Saturday afternoon, the guided tour including Montacute House and Montacute Church was really great, being at the heart of Powysian landscape and mindscape. The evening reading of JCP's only known play *Paddock Calls* was a revelation. The professionalism and enthusiasm of Powys members made the performance a most comprehensive and lively rendition of this atypical work.

Attending a conference is a wonderful experience of meeting people and exchanging points of view on literature: a good stimulation for going on exploring Powys matters until next year.

*Sylvie Vaudier is currently in charge of editorial activities at the Musée de la musique in Paris. She is a life-long reader of John Cowper Powys and Theodore Powys and has been a member of The Powys Society since 1990. She is also involved in the transcription of John Cowper Powys diary (year 1940) for the Society.*



## *Michael Caines: 'Freelance' in The Times Literary Supplement, 19 October 2012*

The bells of the church in the Somerset village of Montacute can be heard as far away as Kenya – or they could at one time. It must be true; Sylvia Townsend Warner states as fact in her book on Somerset, published in 1949, that they may be heard ‘in the home of a Montacute man who had a record made of them for love of his birthplace’. I wonder if Will Powys’s record still exists; he is [was] the expatriate farmer whom Warner is talking about, a painter and the youngest son of the vicar of Montacute at the end of the nineteenth century.

Warner knew the Powys family well from the 1920s onwards, principally through her close friendship with T. F. Powys; Theodore Francis was the third of eleven siblings, Will the tenth. The eldest was the novelist John Cowper Powys. In between came Littleton the headmaster of Sherborne [Prep], then the lace-making Marian, the essayist Llewelyn. A Society to celebrate them – mainly the three most prolific writing brothers (‘JCP’, ‘TFP’ and ‘LIP’) – was established only a few years after John Cowper died in 1963 (both he and Will lived into their nineties). And in August this year, that Society held its fortieth conference – a round number that it chose to highlight only at the last minute, when it was pointed out to the President, Glen Cavaliero, during a coffee break. Given the usual run of disputes, disruptions and worse that can engulf such undertakings, forty conferences is good going. I joined them for the first time this year, as a guest speaker and recently signed-up member.

The Conference was held in Street, a small town just south of Glastonbury, some seventeen miles north of Montacute, and adorned with a useful ‘shopping village’ where you can sit and admire the kind of ordinary life that had Warner holding her nose (she adored Glastonbury, but not its ‘red-brick suburb of incomparable Nastiness’, or its industries ‘lodged in factories of no distinction’). The venue was a hotel that offered a pleasant welcome, décor of a certain vintage and even the opportunity for the cameo appearance, at the window of the ground-floor meeting room, of a local fellow keen to join in with the evening entertainment, a reading of JCP’s play *Paddock Calls*.

Ibsen and Cold Comfort Farm meet in *Paddock Calls*. Responding to this alarming combination, the interloper offered a little noise and some fine gestures. But he was no match for the readers with scripts inside the room, who included the biographer Richard Perceval Graves, the poet P. J. Kavanagh and the artist Timothy Hyman. Their accuracy in expressing the oddity of the piece was unfailing. *Paddock Calls* perhaps didn’t deserve such respectful attention, as was made plain by the delay for some serious corpsing during the second act.

Earlier that day, most of us had made the pilgrimage to Montacute, and found that it was still ‘all the colours of a honey-comb’ (Warner again; her Somerset combines something of the Baedeker spirit with her own idiosyncratic glee). The current owners of the former vicarage, where the eleven brothers and sisters grew up, had

kindly given in to our collective curiosity. By appointment, we descended, a gentle swarm, milling around the driveway, spilling on to the lawn; then funnelling through the hallway, overwhelming the rooms downstairs, loitering on the landing. Our curiosity runneth over. Tell us, we asked, have you lived here for long? Did you find scratches of Powysian graffiti under the wallpaper? Which of these bedrooms was Llewelyn's? He writes in one of his essays about being diagnosed with tuberculosis and breaking a blood vessel, and having the windows removed so that he can continue to take the air: 'for three weeks I lay on my back contemplating the bare elms and misty autumnal roof-tops of the town of Sherborne, from, as it were, some open barn-loft unprotected from the weather'. Sherborne – and here it comes, a pilgrim's pyrrhic deduction – surely, then, Llewelyn's bed faced east? And so on. May we take up a corner of the carpet to ascertain the presence of the original deal floorboards? This is where a pretty meandering pilgrimage will take you, if you're not careful: into taking up a corner of a writer's life, where you will not necessarily find anything to enrich your appreciation of the writing itself.

Not everybody likes this sort of behaviour. Those damn Powyses, some people say – have always said, in fact, since the days of detractors as damning as E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, J. B. Priestley and Stella Gibbons. Powyses are an acquired taste, even among some members of the Society that continues to celebrate them. John Cowper's long novels, Theodore's savage allegories, Llewelyn's rural essays: each has his champions, and I suspect there are not many readers who appreciate all three in equal measure. I'm principally a Theodorian, I confessed at the conference to any passing literary taxonomist who felt the need to place me, although – a tepid reassurance – I have learned to love Llewelyn, too. It is JCP, the most prolific of these brother writers, I find least appealing. This has something to do with his addiction to the contortions of a long-winded sentence, in which the ecstatic, streaming words end up teetering imprudently at the cliff-edge of grammatical acceptability, and that, at the end of a particularly excitable paragraph, in one of those terribly long books of his (but not as long as they were before he submitted them to his editor), elated by the inspiration of some especially Aeolian afflatus of dubious mystical insight, must inevitably conclude with the clinching cry of – a redundant exclamation mark!

For such heresy, my comeuppance came not in the course of delivering my unconvincing paper on T. F. Powys and his publisher, but during the discussion that followed. Few delegates dared to look me in the eye as I spoke, preferring to sit with bowed heads and closed eyes, abandoning themselves to a state of rapt meditation on the wonder of my eloquence. At the end, hubristically emboldened, I mentioned in response to a question from the back that I occasionally threaten family and friends with copies of stories by 'TFP' – I'm doing my bit, I suppose I was trying to say, to further our cause.

Which stories? somebody asked. Ah – good question. 'The House with the Echo'; 'Lie Thee Down, Oddity!' (Theodore used exclamation marks, too, it seems); and oh, many more, I wanted to say, waving the problem aside, dropping in perhaps one

more name – only to find that my mind had gone blank. Never mind sitting in judgement on JCP – I could not remember the title of any more of TFP's stories. I should have made some up. Or kept stammering about the two I had managed to recollect. Not only had I detoured, I seemed to be unable to stumble through the most basic of conference requirements – knowing one's subject. Perhaps I would get away with it? But no: the bored ones had awoken. They had a few more questions for me.

*Michael Caines has since written:*

During the question-and-answer session after my paper on T. F. Powys at this year's conference, I mentioned that in the past I had inflicted a selection of his stories on friends, in an attempt to explain what this curious obsession of mine was. But when challenged, I could only remember the names of a couple of the stories I had photocopied (all from *Twinkle*). In full, the list is: 'The House with the Echo', 'Lie Thee Down Oddity!', 'Mr Pim and the Holy Crumb', 'Nor Iron Bars', 'The Dewpond', 'A Christmas Gift', 'Captain Patch', 'No Room'. It would be interesting to know if any fellow admirers of Powys's short stories would agree with that choice, or what selection, of comparable brevity, they would make for anybody who had not read this particular Powys before.

*Theodore, the most original – most sophisticated? – of the Powyses, does seem to inspire most intense enthusiasm. Editor disagrees about JCP's long sentences, which – surprisingly – almost invariably in the end make grammatical sense. 'Corpsing', for those unfamiliar, is a theatrical term for infectious giggles. J. B. Priestley wrote a long and glowingly enthusiastic preface to JCP's Autobiography in the 1967 edition.*

KK



## *Dandelion Fellowship Annual Gathering*

It was the eve of Llewelyn's birthday as the sun set on this golden Olympic summer; the closing ceremony of the Games was being played out on the two giant screens on Weymouth sea-front as I sat on the beach enjoying the last rays of the dying sun and looked forward confidently to celebrating Llewelyn's 128th birthday in full sunshine on the morrow.

Alas, the closing ceremony also signified the end of the good weather, for it was cloudy, dull and heavily overcast when I arrived at The Sailor's Return in East Chaldon around 10:30 am the following morning for the August 13th annual gathering of the Dandelion Fellowship and the traditional Llewelyn Birthday walk.

On my way to the churchyard I had noticed a distinct lack of dandelions on the village green, and for the first time in almost two decades had difficulty finding enough of them to

make posies to lay in tribute at the final resting places of Katie Powys, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland, and our own sadly missed Janet Pollock.

It was especially pleasing to see that 'Katie's cross' had once again been repaired and lovingly restored. I suspected – and it was later confirmed by the man himself – that this was the work of society member John Sanders of Wellingborough, to whom all Powysians surely owe a debt of gratitude.

I left another tribute beside a simple upright slab of weathered grey Portland Stone which always invokes in me a sense of melancholy, for it marks the grave of Walter Franzen, an American friend of Llewelyn & Alyse who died whilst visiting them at the Coastguard's Cottages. The memorial stone bears the words chosen by Llewelyn telling of the tragedy which befell the unfortunate Walter on a May morning 85 years ago: *'In Memory of Walter Franzen of New York City who met death by falling in full sunshine from a cliff at West Bottom, May 26th 1927, aged 34. The glory of young men is in their strength & the beauty of old men is the grey head'*.

First arrivals for the gathering were Byron Ashton and his lovely wife Eirlys who had travelled from Caerphilly in Wales, and whom I encountered on their way back to 'The Sailor's Return' from St Nicholas' Churchyard where they too had been paying their respects. The first heavy raindrops were beginning to fall as I got back to the pub to be met by Bruce and Vicky Madge who had arrived shortly ahead of Richard Burleigh, and as the rain began to fall in earnest I had to agree with Bruce when he commented with arms outstretched that it was *'typical August 13th Dorset weather!'* We quickly joined Byron and Eirlys in the bar and watched through the windows as a storm began to rage outside, and shortly Rob and Honor Timlin arrived with waterproofs dripping, closely followed by Rosemary Dickens, her father Norman, and Dennis who had kindly driven them down from Salisbury. When John & Jayne Sanders arrived we had our regular *'Baker's Dozen'* or *'Thirteen Worthies'*, although John was currently having to use crutches owing to a prolonged bout of sciatica and would be unable to attempt the arduous walk up to Llewelyn's Memorial Stone.

By the time Chris Gostick and Linda had arrived to take our final number to fifteen, the weather had worsened, rain lashed the windows of The Sailor's Return, and low cloud had obscured the Downs and almost engulfed the entire village. This was a day which completely defied Llewelyn's description of August in his essay of that name in *'The Twelve Months'*. There was certainly no evidence of the *'genial opulence of the month of August'* in which *'each separate spearhead of bearded corn stands grateful in the sunshine'* to be found in East Chaldon on this August day!

However, in the same essay Llewelyn also writes, *'This happy holiday month is truly an august month for us in England. It is during its days of sunshine that people who have been labouring at uncongenial tasks all the year long are able to enjoy a few days, or even perhaps a few weeks, of leisure ... Holiday makers! That is a title that we should all strive to merit on this day. From the first crowing of the backyard rooster, with scarlet comb frolic and dry, our mood should be that of good fellowship. Fastidious reactions should not be indulged. We should cultivate an attitude that is broad enough to accept life's loosest humour. Our reciprocity with the light-hearted mood of the day should be strong to transform discarded newspapers into a litter left behind by the dancing feet of a riotous troop of dedicated Bacchantes.'*

And so it was that following lunch Chris Gostick opened proceedings by welcoming everyone to Llewelyn's 128th birthday party, reminding us why we were here, namely to honour Llewelyn's wishes under the terms of his will: *'that on each successive anniversary of my birthday, my friends may gather at The Sailor's Return to raise a glass in my memory'*. Chris also

paid a fond tribute to John Batten who had re-discovered the clause in Llewelyn's will in 1994, and had been instrumental in organising the first of the now traditional 'Birthday Walks', but who sadly was unable to be with us on this occasion. Finally Chris proposed the toast, 'to the memory of Llewelyn Powys' and we all raised our glasses in his memory.

The storm continued to rage; High Chaldon was wreathed in a thick shroud of sea-fog, and on the steep climb up the white flint-strewn track to Chalky Knap, the hedgerows were being whipped into a frenzy by the ferocity of the wind, and twin torrents of rainwater leaped and gurgled as they raced down the deeply rutted old cart-tracks towards the village crouching beneath the onslaught in the valley below. The brave, intrepid 'Friends of Llewelyn Powys' battled on courageously, stoically raising several more glasses to his memory in the bar of The Sailor's Return.

John Sanders commented somewhat uneasily that this was unprecedented; the Birthday Walk had always taken place whatever the weather. This prompted many to recall several

previous occasions when awful weather had soaked us to the skin but not daunted our spirits, and whilst it was pointed out that we were here to honour Llewelyn's wishes and that there was no mention of a walk in his will, Chris Gostick finally put it to the vote by inviting anyone who wanted to walk up to the Memorial Stone to feel free to do so. We drank several more toasts in memory of Llewelyn, before Chris invited me to give the annual reading, normally given at the Memorial Stone high on Chaldon Down with the short sheep-cropped grass beneath my feet, and now for the first time with my feet

on the stone-flagged floor of The Sailor's Return. It felt entirely appropriate to read the words written by a former regular customer!

(photo by Neil Lee-Atkins)

The selected reading was from *Impassioned Clay* (p.110-11):

Nothing is more unsure, more vacillating, more treacherous than is the mind of man. Its conclusions have their origin in unaccountable under-swells of feeling. We must not look here for stability. Thoughts are like swan's feathers riding upon ripples, like seagull feathers adhering for a moment to autumn thistles. In a day, in an hour, a man's philosophy may entirely alter, and his sincerest words turn to a lie. We have no roots. We swing over a no-bottom pond. We clutch frantically at moss. Only one thing is true. We pledge our glad and loyal spirits to a transition of moods of a breath's duration. Life alone is to be celebrated. The wisest of us and the most foolish of us spend our days in clapping our hands and snatching at butterflies in pied coats.

The boys and girls who give all to desire, who squander the strength of their bodies, the strength of their feelings, in 'the fine and smooth and enticing motions of the flesh,' are in no way to be reprehended. It may well be best to spend rashly what one has to give. Old men are for the most part insensitive and wicked. Possibly it is best to die young. A scrupulous husbandry often affords a sorry lesson of misapplied effort. Let us take what comes, let us fling ourselves at life with the rush of a lion on the Athi plains. Let us use wisdom where wisdom may be used, but ultimately let us be obedient to destiny, to our own destiny, seeking it out as a young gull seeks the sea.

Christianity has from the first been opposed to natural happiness. Its word is one of abnegation. "Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." True lovers of life cannot but stubbornly resist such doctrines. The visible world as it is revealed to us by the senses, the world of millet-seeds, of wild honey in the comb, is all we know and all we shall ever know. As Tiberius answered long ago, when his advisers had a mind to instigate religious persecutions, "If the gods are insulted let them see to it themselves".

We said our goodbyes over pots of tea and coffee, wishing each other well and promising to meet again next August, and whilst the storm had abated considerably, it was still raining as we left the Sailor's Return to go our separate ways, though remaining united in the spirit of true friendship.

*Neil Lee Atkin*

PS —Yes [after the mouse episode – see NL 76, p.16] The Sailor's Return seemed smarter, cleaner – the stone slate floors shone, and the exterior too seemed to have undergone a bit of a make-over, new signs inviting use of the grass as an over-spill car-park, and new tubs of flowers adding colour to the frontage, but I couldn't testify to the new landlady's conviviality ...

## *Paddock Calls in 1986*

Item 7 in a 2-page typed *Newsletter* issued to members of the Society in late 1986 or early 1987 recorded an earlier reading as follows:

Mr Oliver Wilkinson has provided the following report of the Autumn meeting:

" A reading of Paddock Calls by John Cowper Powys was organised by Oliver Wilkinson in Liddon House, South Audley St., London, at 2.30 pm on Saturday, December thirteenth, 1986. The reading was produced by Frank Shelley, the actor and Director (notable, too, for his work as Director of the Oxford Playhouse).

The cast rose to an interesting, and even exciting, occasion. They were: Dr.Glen Cavaliero (Sir Robert Sark), Mrs Susan Rands (Mary Ann, Lady Sark), Timothy Hyman Esq. (Horton Sark), Mrs Joan Stevens (Alice Sark), Miss Julie Gibson, of the Bristol University Drama Course (Betty Stalbridge), Mike Quentin, a professional actor (David Jones), Dr.Bernard Jones (Rev.John Paddock), Miss Susan Huxtable Selly (Undine Paddock), Frank Shelley Esq. (Durnie Odcombe), Miss Susan Huxtable Selly (Jane Odcombe), Ron Ferguson (Narrator).

The reading also established performance copyright. One cannot, of course, judge the play fully except in full performance. It would be most interesting to see it in 'Sunday Night Performance'. Those who took part in the discussion included A.St.J.Bax Esq, Miss Marie Laure Guihard, Alan Robert Howe, Esq., Michael Everest Esq., Gavin Henderson Esq. and Tony Parker Esq. The help of Paul Roberts, the Secretary, was also appreciated in making this a happy occasion."

## *A Dinosaur In Their Midst*

*On September 22nd an exhibition opened at the Roeliff Jansen Community Library at Hillsdale in 'upstate' New York, on John Cowper Powys's years (1930-34) living at Phudd, near Harlemville, in the 'town' of Hillsdale in Columbia County. The event was organised by two members of the library's Local Authors committee, Jay Rohrllich, historian of the town, and Maureen Rodgers of the legendary Book Barn nearby. A lecture was given by Nicholas Birns, professor at the 'New School' in New York and former editor of the Powys Society of North America's Powys Notes. Members of our Society were thrilled to hear of this event (as JCP might say) and contributed all they could.*

∞ ∞

*from Jay Rohrllich*

All went wonderfully yesterday ... A great turnout for Nicholas Birns' lecture (more than 75 people, very large for our community), and they spent much time perusing the materials. All agreed that Birns was spellbinding ... no notes, a passionate immersion in all facts and impressions of Powys. We spent a lot of time together in the Phudd Bottom neighborhood, spoke to people who knew Albert Krick, his neighbor and helper (we have a tape of a conversation with him about Powys). The exhibit will be up for a couple of months. It was very exciting.

Dear Powysians,

Our exhibit is attracting lots of attention. As I told you, Nicholas' lecture was very well attended and the reviews were all spectacular [*Hudson Register-Star*: "History Happened Here: A literary volcano comes to Columbia County"]. Everyone was dazzled by his erudite and passionate presentation. Here are some pictures from the exhibit. We had many of Powys books and copies of the small journals you sent us. The posters contain particularly pithy quotes from Powys, and there are a number of photographs of him, Phyllis, and the Simon and Schuster editors. Conrad Vispo reproduced his web blogs in book form which are marvelous, and he also made a poster of photos of Powys country with quotes from the diaries about the particular spots pictured on the poster. All in all, a wonderful experience, and we appreciate all the help you gave us.

With warm regards, Jay Rohrllich

∞ ∞

*from Nick Birns*

All went wonderfully yesterday ... the library door was propped open by a door rock (picture attached) which I thought provided a particularly Powysian mineralogical cast to the whole event!

*Nicholas Birns is Associate Teaching Professor at Eugene Lang College, the New School, NY, where he teaches American and British fiction. He was editor of Powys Notes, the journal of the Powys Society of North America, from 1995 to 2002, and organized the most recent American Powys conference in New York in 2001 (see NL44, pp.9-12).*

from Maureen Rodgers

The initial purpose of our local authors committee (Jay and I), was to bring attention to the richness of this region's literary past. After successfully shining the spotlight on James Agee and then Peter Dufault, it was time for J.C.Powys. Over the years there have been steady requests in the book store for books by J.C. but used copies are hard to find. It was wonderful to see so many local faces at our event as well as Powys aficionados from afar. After Mr. Birns' wonderful presentation, and the viewing of the newsletters, books, and Conrad's journal, there was renewed interest in the author's works, and his life in our community. Those new to his work seem to be starting with the *Autobiography*, or *Glastonbury Romance*. I am in the midst of *The Pleasures of Literature*, a battered but signed copy, dated Nov.1938 Corwen, Edeyrnion, North Wales, and inscribed 'Dedicated to Marian by her oldest and most doting lover'.



*Nicholas Birns & the JCP exhibition, Hillsdale Library. (photo, Jay Rohrllich)*

*Maureen Rodgers's Book Barn is a magical place, a whole house of connecting rooms entirely lined with books, in the middle of a wood.*

**Conrad Vispo**, a naturalist and writer based near Harlemlville, is engaged on a major educational project, studying the changing interaction between nature and humans in the Hawthorne Valley, Columbia County, which includes Phudd and its surroundings. His website charts various walks he has taken, with one based on extracts from JCP's Diaries. He describes the opening of the exhibit in the new library at Hillsdale, the local small town. (With thanks to Jacqueline Peltier. This letter addressed to her appears in la lettre powysienne, no.26.) Conrad Vispo's work is found at <<http://hvfarmscape.wordpress.com>>

from Conrad Vispo

First – the husk or skin, i.e., the library itself where the event was held. Erected about 1 year ago, it is a modern, 'environmentally-friendly' structure situated in what used to be a farm field (and hence perhaps something of a comment on changing land use). A giant green reading chair sitting in the parking lot is its most conspicuous label. The building itself is a high one-story structure with modern angularity and a play of roof angles. Inside, one finds the shell has translated into ample natural light (which quickly faded yesterday evening – winter's coming) and yet also something of

the feel of a modern drug store with aseptic straight lines of shelves. It is surely functional and perhaps it can develop its personality.

Shortly after it opened, somebody took a couple of pot shots at the glass of the front door. I don't know if they ever figured out who did it or why; in my mind I associate it with the clash between the long-term culture of largely Republican farmers and hunters, and the more recent, more Democrat, more urban arrivals (Powys was part of the an earlier wave) who are trying to redefine the landscape, as all committed residents would. These are the circles who can talk about New York City boroughs and streets with a familiarity that the long-timers might reserve for back roads, burnt-down barns, or fishing holes.

Over the hill beyond the library stands the imposing building with pillared facade that used to be the regional school. A decade or so ago, the district was centralized and students are now shipped to a modern set of buildings (located in another former farm field) that look like a small college campus (although with a hint of the tightness one might associate with a prison). The large former school still stands empty, it grounds hosting the occasional tractor pull.

People arrived. I hope somebody took a better count than me – I guessed about 50 showed up, mostly in couples and singlets. White-haired (English) Maureen, of the local — long-established and well worth rooting in – used bookstore, welcomed us (my wife and son and me); she co-organized the event with Jay Rohrllich. We recognized some people although circles quickly extended beyond our own. It is hard to put a finger on the fashion, but there were here both the clothes of the full-time residents and of the week-enders, subtly distinguished by turns of collar, throws of scarves, eye wear, foot wear ... But all relaxed – one felt little strain of presentation, other than the healthy concern of the organizers that the event should be a success which it certainly seems to have been.

The 'adult' chairs were soon exhausted, and, as the audience extended back into the children's books section, late comers satisfied themselves with the half-sized chairs of young readers, the ones that make you feel young again but also, perhaps, realize that old bones aren't as accommodating as new ones. For it was not a young audience – most faces well over 40. Not really old either. It was the generation which has garnered enough resources to have a home in the country, or which now has a house now largely empty of children, or who have had some tie to a certain type of literature. There were only a few of the older generation such as Peter Dufault, the poet, and perhaps an couple of others; but most were somewhere in between: a town supervisor; the couple who currently own Phudd Bottom; teachers from the Harlemville Waldorf School; a local botanist and her husband, a Town Judge; and many whom I did not know, some of whom clearly had heard of Powys before this evening.

After a few words from a library organizer who emphasized how this was an example of the library's motto 'Imagine, Learn, Connect' (or something like that, i.e., enlivening musty volumes and the use of the space to bring people together) and

after some ultimately unsuccessful (but also unneeded) attempts to get the microphone to work, Jay introduced the speaker, Nicholas Birns, recounting how the only description of Hillsdale (the 'town' Harlemlville is located in) from a certain 1930s book on New York State was a mention, on page 400 and something, of Powys's former residence here; and mentioning how, as he tried to organize this event, he was pleasantly surprised to find an active and energetic European Powys following. I think many in the audience were surprised to find this still-living enthusiasm for a writer who, although he had lived in our midst, few of us have read. Jay is an energetic man and his own excitement at uncovering Powys was clear and contagious.

Prof. Birns has a professorial air and one could well imagine him in the classroom. His lecture was 'tight' (in the good sense of being well-structured) and delivered with enough punch lines to keep the audience engaged. He presented a literary biography peaking of course with Powys's residence in the town [*i.e.*

'townland', district] He did a nice job of presenting Powys as an interesting personality that, while eccentric perhaps, might be well worth meeting and probably would not have bitten off one's head. He opened with a short, recorded excerpt of Mr. [Albert] Krick reminiscing about Powys and his 'secretary' Playter. One heard an old but well-oiled voice recalling Powys in everyday terms as perhaps not an ordinary sort, but not the worse because of that. Prof. Birns introduced Powys's canon not as easy but at least as diverse and perhaps intriguing. One came away almost feeling as if not to tackle at least one book would be a show of cowardice (this morning I, at least, invested in getting *Petrushka and the Dancer*). As a measure of his success, there were ample end-of-lecture questions: Was Powys familiar with Rudolf Steiner? Are his war lectures available? How did he (Dr Birns) become interested in Powys? What efforts at publication are underway and which languages is he available in?

The evening ended as we recessed with a small reception (and, I think it was agreed, fine fare). Jay had done a good job of selecting and printing Powys excerpts that often but not solely touched on his connection to the physical landscape. The display of Powys materials I think helped emphasize that while Powys may be currently somewhat obscure, he was not unloved. This is not a matter of trying to elevate a rotten potato just because it is home grown, but rather of unearthing something that has been long buried and might, just might, once dusted off, turn out to be a treasure chest for some.



*Reading Wolf Solent,  
Hillsdale Library.*

*As Conrad tells, what in 1930 was mostly a solid farming community of smallholdings, dairy and hay-producing, has over 80 years mutated into more woodland, fewer farms (some producing exotics like rice), and holiday homes. It needs a certain mental effort to re-imagine the landscape of JCP's walks, with the hedges and the lichened wooden fences atop the already crumbling stone walls, pictured in *An Englishman Upstate*, now vanished, and with open fields where now maple trees have encroached to the edge of the (recently asphalted) road. But in many ways the affinity with England (especially Dorset) still remains, and so does the spirit of the place, both welcoming and with a touch of mystery, that JCP noted and loved. (Visiting in May, or in October as lucky Editor has just done, misses out the unEnglish climate extremes.)*

*Treasure chest or no, the resurrection of this alien creature from the past must have been like reanimating the bones of a large (herbivorous) dinosaur. JCP was happy here, despite housekeeping difficulties – maybe too involved with real life in the place to turn it into fiction, but few square miles can have been brought more alive than this one, day by day in his journal over four years.*

*KK, with thanks to Chris Thomas and all contributors*

### ***From the JCP selections displayed at the exhibition:***

Hillsdale was Powys's 'Utopia', as several contemporary newspapers celebrated. He wrote extensively about the peace and happiness he experienced in his home at the base of Phudd Hill, which he named 'Phudd Bottom'. He kept detailed diaries filled with his fascination for the flowers, animals, stone walls, streams, trees, and people near his home. Powys believed that happiness derives from an ability to experience sensation, particularly that which involves an immersion in nature.

*"The coolness of sheets, the warmth of blankets, the look of the little blue flames dancing on the top of a fire of hard coal, the taste of bread, of milk, of honey, of wine or of oil, of well-baked potatoes, of earth-tasting turnips! –the taste of the airs, dry or moist, that blow in through our opened window, look of the night-sky, the sounds of twilight or of dawn, the hoarse monotone of a distant pinewood or of pebble-fretted waves—all these things as one feels them, in the mortal pride of being able to feel them at all, are the materials, eternal and yet fleeting, of the art of being a man alive upon the earth...the man whose interior consciousness is forever obstinately writing down, in the immaterial diary of his psyche's sense of life, every chance-aspect of every new day that he is lucky enough to live to behold!"*

In Hillsdale from 1930-34, John Cowper Powys found happiness. Here is his diary entry from December 13, 1930:

*Got up at 7.30. 'Twas very cold. Saw the sun rise or rather half-rise. Very cold. Very cold. Very cold. I am by nature too restless and impatient even to stand staring at the beautiful Ridge that I like so well and the pale gold sky till it comes up. But I*

*watched every detail of its rising except the second of its first emergence over the Ridge. Gold light on the Waggoner house is the first sign — or rather on the East side of the great Waggoner Barn — and then on the hill up there and on the hedge and trees up there. Next on the top of Phudd as you see it over our house. The sun comes up that curious, steel-blue, blinding light that you can scarcely look at ... but when it first appears in full circle you can see round the blue-blinding circle inside, or rondure inside, a yellow band of candle-flame light not blue or blinding at all. Tis as if you were looking into a gold ring or a round port-hole into a blazing eternity that by reason of its blindingness takes on a milky, metallic, blueish colour. Finally, the full sun hits our little house and makes it gleam white as a shell, white as England's cliffs, white as the Dog's teeth, white as Bone! Then does our house appear like a Light-House or a coastguard's house or even like a ship. I walked up and down thrilled with happiness ...*

Soon after Powys and his companion Phyllis Playter arrived in Hillsdale, her journal entry stated: "J. was so happy — all the time. . . . It is such a simple and profound well-being — like a child's or a dog's or a horse's or a cow's. . . . I was very happy too."

## *Notes, news and letters*

*With thanks to all contributors*

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**Apologies** for a confusion of names in NL 76, page 14. **Anthony Gibson** is the author of *With Magic in my Eyes: West Country Literary Landscapes* (Fairfield books 2011) with its excellent photographs and a section on the Powys family, with special attention to JCP's *Wood and Stone*. **Peter Tolhurst** of **Black Dog Books**, an independent publisher 'specialising in literature and the arts, often with a sense of place', is the author of *Wessex: A Literary Pilgrimage* (1999), which fully covers the Powys family. Black Dog's most recent offering is *With the Hunted*, selected writings of Sylvia Townsend Warner, acclaimed by the *TLS* (a review will follow).

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**Timothy Hyman** our Chairman was interviewed in the Royal Academy magazine (August 2012): 'As artist in residence at Maggie's Cancer Caring Centre, Timothy Hyman RA is a healing presence, writes Richard Cork.'

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**John Gray's** *Point of View* broadcast on Radio 4, Sunday 29 July, called 'Theodore Powys and the Paradox of Immortality' took as its subject a quote from TFP: 'The longest life may fade and perish but one moment can live and become immortal.' The transcript can be found online.

★ ★ ★ ★

The 6th International **Iris Murdoch Conference**, organised by the Centre for Iris Murdoch Studies, took place at Kingston University, Kingston upon Thames, between 14th and 15th September, 2012, with presentations focused on Murdoch's later works of fiction and philosophy. Over one hundred delegates attended a well-programmed conference which covered a wide range of subjects including the relationship between Iris Murdoch and neo-theology, contemporaneous female philosophers, Jung, theatre and mythology. **Charles Lock**, editor of *The Powys Journal*, and Professor of English Literature at Dept of English, University of Copenhagen, Denmark, delivered a plenary lecture, '*Baggy Monsters*' – *John Cowper Powys and the late novels of Iris Murdoch*. Charles reports that the response to his lecture was very gratifying. Many of the delegates told him that the lecture had inspired them to read JCP for the first time and felt that he had given them an insight into why JCP's works mattered so much to Iris Murdoch. See also Charles Lock's article in *The Powys Journal* xi (2001), 'The Sublime and the Giggly – On Iris Murdoch and John Cowper Powys'.

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A new (forthcoming) book by **W. J. Keith** has the title *Ultimate Things: Religion, Myth, and the Powyses*.

★ ★ ★ ★

**Juanita Casey**, whose visit to John Cowper on May 3rd 1957 was described in his letters, died on October 24th. See *Newsletters* 75 p.29 and 76 p.17.

★ ★ ★ ★

*la lettre powysienne* no. 24 (autumn 2012, bilingual) contains a poem by JCP written in 1917 at a low point in his life, probably at Bloomington, Indiana, uncovered there by Marcella Henderson-Peal, who writes a commentary. 'Wallalone' is a primal cry of anguish, a sinister 'world-disturbing moan', that the poet hears and fears in all things. He regretted the poem was left out of *Samphire*.

There is an essay on *The Complex Vision* by Goulven Le Brech, an extension of his chapter in *JCP: Une Philosophie de la Vie* (see below); a second instalment from Frank Kermode's 1947 study in *The Welsh Review*, 'The Art of Theodore Powys, Ironist', placing TF with Fielding and Swift; Conrad Vispo's account of the JCP exhibition at Hillsdale (see page 17) with two of his brilliant nature photographs illustrating quotations from JCP's Diary; and, as usual, interesting notes and international news of publications.

★ ★ ★ ★

*John Cowper Powys : Une Philosophie de la Vie* by Pierrick Hamelin and Goulven Le Brech (Editions Les Perséides, 125pp., 15 euro. ISBN 978-2-915596-83-0) was launched on October 2, 2012 at Librairie L'Écume des Pages, Boulevard Saint Germain, Paris. The book examines JCP's philosophy of life chiefly through his non-fiction (with special attention to *The Complex Vision* and *In Defence of Sensuality*), in the first section (by Le Brech) chronologically and in the second (Hamelin) as an ABC (*Bonheur, Culture, Dormir, Effort ... Gentleman, Humour, Illusion vitale, Joie, Kwang-Tse* (Kouang-Tseu) ) ...

★ ★ ★ ★

*from Michael Caines*

T. F. Powys appears as one among almost fifty 'key authors' in *The British and Irish Short Story Handbook* by David Malcolm (published in February 2012 by Wiley-Blackwell), alongside contemporaries such as Sylvia Townsend Warner, A. E. Coppard and Richard Aldington. In a separate section, Malcolm discusses the fable 'John Pardy and the Waves'; he makes an error in implying that *Fables* and *No Painted Plumage* are completely different books.

★ ★ ★ ★

**David Goodway's** updated edition of *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow* is reviewed in *TLS*, October 26th 2012: 'the treatment is as deeply felt as it is deeply researched'.

★ ★ ★ ★

**Jeff Bursey** (author of *Verbatim: A Novel*) has a long review of *A Struggle for Life*, the new Sundial Press book of essays by **Llewelyn Powys**, in *The Winnipeg Review* (August 16th 2012).

★ ★ ★ ★

Shelagh Hancox notes that the biography of **Enid Starkie** by Joanna Richardson (1973) contains several letters from Alyse, 'an incomparable friend'. Her last letter ends: 'dearest Enid ... the one real failure in your life would be to lose at this juncture confidence in yourself.'

★ ★ ★ ★

*from Michael Kowalewski*

In a NYRB review of Hilary Mantel's *Bring up the Bodies* (a book I utterly detested and couldn't finish) the reviewer gives this quote: 'our forefathers the giants left their earthworks, their barrows, their standing stones. We still have, every Englishman and woman, some drops of giant blood in our veins.' I don't see from where, other than JCP, Mantel could have got this.

★ ★ ★ ★

### *New from Sundial Press*

Two new Sundial books have obliquely Powysian interest.

*A Cage for the Nightingale* by **Phyllis Paul**, with an Introduction by **Glen Cavaliero**. Admired by John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter, Phyllis Paul is one of the great neglected writers in English literature.

*Patterns on the Sand* by Gamel Woolsey, with an Introduction by **Barbara Ozieblo**. Gamel Woolsey's second, previously unpublished novel.

Details from <[www.sundialpress.co.uk](http://www.sundialpress.co.uk)>

★ ★ ★ ★

### *Webliography*

Our Powys Webliography has recently been updated. New items include entries for the papers of Eunice Tietjens, Will Ransom and Fanny Butcher at the Newberry Library, Chicago; the records of *The Little Review* at the University of Wisconsin; the papers of Reginald Marsh and Jerome Blum at the Smithsonian Institution; the papers of the Fortean Society at the University of Charlottesville, Virginia; the papers of Paul Jordan Smith at UCLA; the Sarah Bixby Smith Collection at Rancho Los

Cerritos, Los Angeles; and the papers of Charles Erskine Scott Wood at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California. For more information about these and other listed collections with Powys related documents please visit our website at <[www.powys-society.org](http://www.powys-society.org)> and click on the link to 'A Powys Webliography'. CT

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### **Letter**

*A note on a footnote*

#### **from Glen Cavaliero**

In a letter to his wife on the September 19th 1943 Evelyn Waugh includes among scraps of news the fact that 'Bugger Powys is to marry Miss 'Waughterfall' Myers.' (*The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory, London 1980, p.170). The editorial footnote offers 'Probably Stephen, Baron Lilford (1869–1949) who never married.'

Such an error exhibits the self-enclosure of a metropolitan literary world which blithely ignored the existence of the Powyses, an indifference that they themselves reciprocated. It also reflects Waugh's immersion in aristocratic society – after all was not this Powys a Baron? As to Miss 'Waughterfall', she clearly is Elizabeth Myers, a protégée of Evelyn's father, the publisher and man of letters Arthur Waugh: it looks as if her rather gushing epistolary style has become a family joke. As to the disconcerting nickname bestowed upon the worthy Littleton Powys, it presumably relates to the scandal when Evelyn's elder brother Alec, a pupil at Sherborne School, was at the age of seventeen asked to leave, following the discovery of his homosexual attachment to another boy. The term 'bugger' suggests that Littleton, headmaster of the Prep School at the time, may have been involved in Alec's expulsion, the term suggesting on Evelyn's part a brother's retaliatory indignation. Two years later Alec was to publish his best-selling novel about boarding school life, *The Loom of Youth* (1917) to the outrage of schoolmasters and clergy up and down the country. In 1965, however, its author was invited back to his old school and to deposit the manuscript of his no longer scandalous book in the school library. Evelyn Waugh's biographer Selina Hastings fails to indicate whether the invitation was accepted. Can Peter Tait provide us with further information?

*Glen's comment has been forwarded to the appropriate editors.*

KK

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### **Letter**

*Irish connections*

#### **from Patrick Quigley (September 14th 2012)**

Hello to Powys friends and forgive me for putting you together in a group. It's hard to believe the Conference was nearly a month ago, so swiftly do we settle back into the normal routine. The speakers were enjoyable as always, but the social aspect is one of the best features of the weekend. Saturday night is one of the best times to engage with people and for this reason I wasn't able to endure the three hours of *Paddock*

*Calls* in a stifling room. It would've been better to stop halfway and read the rest of the play the following year.

Is it my imagination or does the autumn come rushing in faster after each conference? Nature seems to conspire with our over-mechanized society to dull the senses by speeding everything up. At times like this I enjoy reading a JCP novel for the sense of slowing-down time by deepening my perceptions. He helps this reader to ground himself in a frantic world.

I've been busy with *The Polish Irishman: the life and times of Count Casimir Markievicz* ... I discovered The Powys Society has no presence on Facebook. There's a lot of trivia on FB, but it can be a useful tool for sharing photographs and news. You could 'stream' portions of talks live from the conference to people like Bill Keith and others who couldn't be present.

I thought my Markievicz story was completely removed from the world of the Powyses, but there was at least one link. One of Casimir's best friends in Dublin was James Starkey/ Seamus O'Sullivan who edited the *Dublin Magazine* (1925–58) which published many articles and reviews by and about the Powys brothers, especially work by John Redwood Anderson. It was the best source of information and material on the Powys circle in Ireland for many years.

I've kept up with the Powys world by reading Llewelyn's *Love and Death*. I find it overwritten in places, but few can have written so movingly of the joy and pain of love and the intensity of perception brought about by that sweet torment – I especially liked the way he could weave poetry and place-names into the text.

My friend, James Crowden, joined the tour of Park House in Montacute and shared his local knowledge with some of the members. He is a poet and publisher of the Somerset-based Flagon Press (no marks for guessing his favourite drink). He is not steeped in Powys lore, but he has worked as a shepherd near the village and has offered to bring The Powys Society on a tour of Ham Hill and places with Powys associations. Maybe something for next year.

I'll end with a note on Maiden Castle. I was in Dorchester for Peter Tait's well-received talk to the Hardy Society on his book *Florence: Mistress of Max Gate*. I only had time for a short visit to the site, but it really was a different zone from the cultivated fields below. A wonderful place.

Warmest wishes to Powys friends.

*Patrick Quigley's The Polish Irishman ... (a biography of the husband of Countess Markievicz who took part in the 1916 Rising) is published by The Liffey Press at 19.95 euros.*

## *JCP to Louis, January 1959 – April 1962*

*As edited by Louis Wilkinson, with some extra passages from Robert V. Lancaster's unpublished edition. Notes by LW are initialled. RVL additions in the text are in square brackets, unattributed, with supplementary notes from RVL initialled. Other notes (initialled) by Chris Wilkinson and KK.*

January 5th, 1959

O my dear! we've had such an awful time answering letters. I would like to know who invented the trick of putting only a twopenny stamp on the letter and then leaving the envelope "open" as they call it – or not stuck up or licked up. Whereas as a matter of fact inside these unsealed "open" envelopes coming for tuppence is to be found a card that when it is opened contains room for an extremely long letter! Thus I have had to pay 3d over & over again and put out a long proper answer to a long improper letter into an envelope and lick it up. Not that I ever really do lick envelopes or stamps as I see others do ...

I do love that name "Battle" and Phyllis is impressed by it too. No, I never knew that it meant the Battle of Hastings. O how right you are about this queer ignorance of our family over words like Herts and Hants and Hunts — O how good of Oliver to do this for Katie's Play, for she will be thrilled if it comes to anything, and even if not she will be so grateful to you and him.

... George Peabody Gooch, of whom I was so in awe at Cambridge, is still writing for the papers though he is older than I am. I went once to stay with him and his mother.

That is a good story about Lulu and Balmoral and Bernie's remark [LW: *Llewelyn Powys had asked "what is Balmoral?" and someone present exclaimed "What! don't you know that?" "I wish to God I didn't!" said Bernard O'Neill.*] ...

Our friend Gilbert Turner, the Librarian of Richmond, is a great friend of Ethel Mannin who was I think the wife of Reginald Reynolds [LW: *who had just died*]. He must have been a most engaging eccentric.

Theodore's picture has been looking at me all this month. In a way I think I was always rather afraid of Theodore. I remember fighting fiercely to separate him and Littleton when our parents brought us to Barmouth and we three climbed Snowdon together.

... Well, those Letters of ours have gone all over the world. I keep hearing of them from the Antipodes. Yes, Professor Shapiro wrote to my old cousin ... She's wonderful on genealogy. She explained to me that I was a Fourth Cousin of Rose Macaulay.

My book on the Iliad called "Homer and the Aether" will come out in Feb. Is it spelt February" or just "Febuary"? ...

Well, here's to you. I've finished "All or Nothing" and started another.

yr J

January 12th, 1959

Think of your dining at Exeter College with Jonathan Wordsworth and finding the Dons so young! I can only recall one young don at Corpus, Cambridge. When my Father first took me there the only person whom he knew was the old Butler who kept the wine, and I knew him to the end of my stay there and used to visit him at his house. The Master [LW: *of Corpus Christi College*] had been a lecturer in my Father's day. They called him Teddy Perowne and he was mighty old, but later my wife's brother-in-law Pearce became Master and he couldn't have been more than 40 ...

I saw in the Daily Telegraph this morning that the Duchess of Northumberland teaching her children to ski (whatever that is) broke her thigh-bone, just the same bone that my brother Littleton broke in his bedroom and died of the result. But I don't think this Percy lady will die ...

I expect I told you I am reading Chaucer aloud to Phyllis in the evenings, in the Everyman Edition which is wonderfully edited [*so that all the difficult words are explained in the margin*] ... Someone has today sent me a lovely little paper book of the Essays of Elia with a picture of Charles Lamb in the beginning. What a subtle face he has, and he does look a born genius! It's called the "Wallet Library" and these Essays have an Introduction by Augustine Birrell — an excellent Introduction. I wish I could remember more than I do of Augustine Birrell, but his name comes to me with an agreeable familiar ring.

Well, I've finished my "All or Nothing" about making a new star with Dorsetshire earth mould carried out into Space by the Cerne Giant and now I am starting another Story, but I've written already 5 different beginnings to it! So it hasn't advanced very far so far. Today I've only answered letters tho' I long to make a 6th beginning —

yrs as was and will be —

[*Jabberwocky*] John

January 21st, 1959

... O but I do so love what you tell me about this little girl of Two!\* Her chuckling and murmuring the sound of your name or whatever childish sound she substituted for your name. I am delighted that you've made friends with this tiny thing of two. It bears out just what I'm lecturing on to everybody ... I say that it is those who have just entered this mad world and those who before long will be leaving it who understand each other best of all! They wave to each other and murmur each other's names just like your little girl did yours ...

Aye! but I like so much, and so does Phyllis, that Dorset way of calling Inanimates "He". Phyllis remembers Mr Lucas [*LW: of East Chaldon*] saying of some plant — "He do bide in earth till Spring be come, then he do come to air."

Think of your nearly losing your Ring and, when it was found, Sylvia Fripp, the two-year-old's mother, saying "I expect he tried to tell you where he was." O yes, I always associate you with that Ring that your Mother gave to your Father when they were engaged to be married 100 years ago.

No, I won't call the Canavaggia ladies — I almost said "lassies" — "girls" any more; I expect it is that the word "girl" is to me the most provocative word in the language.

I hope tonight to read the beginning of my new story to Phyllis who has still got a bit of a cough, I'm sorry to say, and has far far far far too much to do. It is about two young men of 25, one wanting to pretend to be God and one wanting to pretend to be the Devil. My heroine is three years old.\*

Love from us both —

J.C.P.

\* [*and very like your little girl of 2! and her reactions to those two pictures of you by Tony Bland at our door. How she was grave and even scared by the front-face one of you but when she saw the profile one how she chuckled and murmured ...*] RVL. See cover of NL75 (KK).

[January 21st, 2nd letter]

I forgot to return this letter, so, rather than destroy the first envelope, I'll enclose it in a second one. Alas, with all this rush of letters to answer and of hovering visitors to pretend to welcome with joy, or by hook or by crook to stave off, Phyllis will have no time to listen to my story till this — 'Godde pardon them in Christe's name' as Chaucer would say — this devilish storm be overpast!

Do you remember the "Summoner's Tale" in Chaucer? What sport we'd have had in the Prep at Sherborne over this tale! Fancy this poem of the first of all our great English poets, printed as we have been told from our infancy by Caxton, being almost entirely about a Fart! I'm not very clear, even now, what a "Summoner" was, but he represented monks and convents and friars and preachers in some sort of way.

I've just read old Doctor Johnson's attack on Lord Chesterfield where he says your lordship is like a man who refuses to help someone drowning but once they swim to shore helps him so heavily that he can hardly get home!

I yield about saying "girl" — but I do like the expression "old girl" ... I would always be ready to say about my aunt Dora, for instance, "She was a darling old girl".

Once more I'm your old Jack out of the box.

January 31st, 1959

... Here I be on my back at this window whose broad sill is filled by my collection of the Portraits of all the people whom I have respected most in my life. The only ones I haven't got are Tom Jones, Alice Shirley, Ralph Shirley, and my nurse Maria Brocklehurst who taught me astrology and palmistry. I've just added to these pictures one of our Queen when she visited a Homeopathic Hospital and one of D. H. Lawrence. They are all so crowded up together that I can only see the head of Queen Elizabeth the First and only the ——— But I could go on too long — I open all my letters with Lord Shaftesbury's Skewer which some lady gave old Littleton — tho' I can only just see the very top of the Philanthropist's head above my little picture of Gertrude ...

Yes, it is interesting, the different ways our particularities and peculiarities display themselves. I wonder if we decided upon some great Judge of human nature like St Augustine or Freud or Sainte-Beuve or Plato or Chaucer to judge you me as to which was the greater Egoist, what such a Judge would say. We won't bring in God or Saint Peter because I don't think either of them are good judges of egoism, and I'd be scared to bring in Jesus because he'd probably condemn us both with a sweep of his hand ...

One of our best friends round here, Raymond Garlick and his wife Ellin and their boy Jestyn are going to adopt a baby girl, & Phyllis and I have been going through Lady Charlotte Guest's Mabinogion stories, which are really Ancient British Mythology, like stories about Zeus and Hera and Pallas Athene, in order to discover a girl's name that we would choose for this little new-comer into our circle of friends if we had the choice — but O! there are so many more boys' names than there are girls' names! I wonder if that would be true of the early mythology of every country? And what would be the reason? [*Not a mania for homosexuality I am sure!*] I think probably because [*putting Lady Charlotte out of it, for she only translated*] it was men who wrote the stories. Sappho is the only ancient writer I know who wasn't a man. She was wonderful and I have only to think of her to say to myself Swinburne's wonderful verses in the metre she invented. You certainly beat me in giving Swinburne his due as a poet long before I

did. O yes, I am always saying to myself — “... And I too, full of the vision, Saw the white implacable Aphrodite, Saw the hair unbound and the feet unsandalled, Saw the reluctant wings of the doves that drew her ...” \*

Yours always[and so says Phyllis], John [the Fool].

\* [“... looking backwards, Looking with necks reverted back to Lesbos, back to the hills whereunder shone Mytelene!”] Swinburne, Sapphics (1866) RVL.

February 11th, 1959

... We asked a friend [Dr Mabel Pearson] now living in Connecticut to send us Lolita & we got it a few days ago ... But, oddly enough, to my astonishment I found it dull! ... A story in which the chief point is the man’s suffering caused by the maddeningly tantalizing loveliness and provocativeness, the teasing sex-awareness of a child not yet in her “teens”, lacked any exciting spell to lure me on ...

The odd thing is that I not only find Lolita dull — I can hardly contain my impatience to learn what Phyllis thinks of it — but I also find the other most famous and popular book of the present day, namely “Doctor Somebody” — by Pasternak, likewise dull! Both these men, Nobokov author of “Lolita” and Pasternak author of “Doctor Z”, are Russians; yet my favourite, far far my favourite of all Novelists, after Sir Walter Scott and Jules Verne and Harrison Ainsworth (all three of which were books of my youth) is Dostoevsky, also a Russian! ... [“... You are right. What would Theodore have made of Lolita? ...]

I do love your attack on Francis Thompson. Was it James Thomson who wrote “The City of Dreadful Night”? “There is no God — No Fiend with Names Divine Made us to torture us — if we must pine, It is to satiate no Being’s Gall —” ... \*

O yes, it was a fellow called Tertullian, whether a saint I doubt, who said “I believe because it is impossible”.

Yes, that was very wise what Somerset Maugham told you he did — answer a stranger’s first letter ...

O how I’d like to write an article accusing the “New Yorker” of starting the drawings with those awful long [triangular] noses, and condemning every one of our comic illustrators who use these dull, stupid, silly, absurd things! Our modern age has clearly lost all real sense of humour. What would Dickens say? What would Congreve say? What would Garrick say? What would Chaucer say? Do our little boys and girls regard these preposterous Noses as funny? I can’t believe they do.

... My old Catherine Barham Johnson told Professor Shapiro that there were no direct descendants of Donne. I got that all wrong myself — but she told me that she was descended from Donne’s grandfather.

“Angharad” is what our friends the Garlicks have called this baby. They’ll surely have to call her “Cariad” for short — wh. is Welsh for “little love”. I prefer both F’s in “Ffestiniog” to be capitals but as long as there are two it’s all right. One alone is like our English “v”, as in “in vino veritas”.

Last night Phyllis heard the conclusion of a new play by Samuel Beckett, a writer we both think highly of.

No, I never knew of that John Cooper who became Giovanni Coperario [a *seventeenth-century musician*] but Phyllis did know about him.

Yes, I would love to have that article upon Juanita [LW: Mrs Berlin, later Casey]. After my

long afternoon in this room with her and her child. I have always felt very fond of her.

"Homer and the Aether" is to come out on the 27th of this month — yes, Feb 27th.

No more margins [*this side of the grave!*], so I stop. Love from us both, old friend —  
your J. C. P.

February 16th, 1959

... Phyllis has been reading "Lolita" for a couple of days. She feels exactly as you do about the end. She feels it spoils the book, such a rotten end. What she has enjoyed and has spoken of to me, all along as she has been reading it, has nothing to do with the girl or with sex but has to do with the numerous passing little vignettes of Life in America which she finds very good indeed. But she tells me that there was, when she lived there and was at school at Boston, a regular cult for young girls which she says probably had the sex appeal underneath but it was never referred to or allowed to appear, so to say, on the surface of social intercourse.

Your letter came first post, that is at 8.15 this morning, just before my little walk of a quarter of an hour — for I always wait till the post comes before setting off ... Yes, Phyllis feels that the rough rude blunderbuss-satire and brutal though clever-enough jesting at the end of the book ruins its effect altogether and becomes a sort of ballyhew-boisterous satirical farce.

O yes! I meant our present reigning Queen Elizabeth the Second [*LW: as being among the photographs in his room*]. I like the Queen Mother awfully but this picture of the Queen I so specially like we cut from some paper when she was visiting a Homeopathic Hospital. My mother brought us all up upon an enormous Box or Chest she had in her bedroom of Homeopathic drinks and pellets. And I have been reading a Miss Laird's description of all that our present Queen does in a day till I've got quite fond of her. I am like the Vicar of Bray and a staunch believer in the illustrious House of Hanover. Glamis Castle, the home of the Queen Mother, whom I admire greatly, always scares me rather because of that Monster who lived in it. I think one of the Ladies of that Castle long ago had such a mania for a particular Horse that the Monster was the result. I detect in Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, a decided Stuart expression, but little Anne looks a perfect little Hanoverian princess.

[*What you say about Beckett and Waiting for Godot and those Boots! does certainly tickle my fancy.*]

... I have just shown Phyllis this letter & she says I have not got her view of "Lolita" at all correctly. She says she would love to talk to you about it but she is so overpowered by letters and visitors just now that she hasn't time to write to you a more exact description of what she feels about "Lolita" and about Nabokov's descriptions of America and of its attitude towards little girls. If only she could talk to you she would make it clear. One day I hope that may happen to you, & you & she will be able to talk it out. I got it wrong, I expect, in the way you so well called in your letter "phenomenal obliquity".

Well! my dear, O. K. for now — ever and always your bungling old one

J. C. P.

March 27th, 1959

Good Friday

Phyllis and I will try in various directions to see if we can get a "Porius" for this Australian gent by name of Mr West; but I doubt if we can get one — but we'll try, for the good man is certainly a terrific Fan of mine — but oh! how different from his idea of me as a striding be-striding Gargantuan Colossus the real man is! [*You came nearer than anyone, my dear, when you*

said I was a mixture of Boswell and De Quincey — that is exactly right. Phyllis agrees. She has been carrying about with her a ... paper edition of De Quincey and I expect I've told you how exactly his lost tart Lily [sic] reminds me of my lost Tart Lily ...] It's really comical how the authorities punish the women for soliciting and not [us] for having them ...

Phyllis was so tickled that when I reached that sentence in your letter which said that Oliver had got real help from Ribbons and Winder about his Income Tax, I read those two words as the name of a girl — Irene Fox ...

O my dear, for the first time in my life \* I've been reading Montaigne, in the Oxford translation, and I am simply thrilled by him. His father's name was Pierre Eyquem and his father gave him a property called Montaigne. His favourite motto was [“What do I know?”] “que sais-je?” I'd no idea he was so good. He beats all other essayists — Hazlitt, Coleridge, etc — hollow! I keep reading passages to Phyllis ...

[I am convinced — this is entirely my own idea and I am proud of myself for having been the first to think it \*\* — that when Jesus on the Cross cried out “Eloi! Eloi! Lama Sabachthani”, which is always translated “God! God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” what Jesus really decided in his mind was that he had fooled himself all his life about God and that in reality God didn't exist.]

Well! good luck and love from both. Yesterday Phyllis sent off to Macdonalds my new story “All or Nothing”.

ever yours sub specie

Bean Stalk John & Phyllis

\* There are chapters on Montaigne in *Suspended Judgements* (1916) and *Pleasures of Literature* (1938), with frequent diary references to reading him.

\*\* Tell this to Llewelyn! [KK]

April 7th, 1959

... It is simply extraordinary how precocious little girls are. My first great love was little Clare Phelps at Montacute who was a little girl who always sat on my knee, and when someone said, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” she replied at once “Marry Jack” ...

Do tell me, my dear, the actual day and hour of your Birth? I was born at six in the morning and I think that's why I always wake up now at six and always get up at seven ...

I feel personal fury when I read in the paper of these constant crimes against little kids ... It's correct, I think, to call our age degenerate because these lecherous men lack the guts and the daring to attack grown up people, so they ravish and murder little boys and little girls.

We've just, Phyllis and I, discovered a fascinating book called Memento Mori by Muriel Spark. Alyse would be thrilled by it & I rather fancy it would amuse you too, though it's all about Grannies, dozens of Grannies!

I do indeed pray Coombes's book on Theodore will be published. I'm glad you feel as you do about his lady.

Yours ever as always J.C.P. & so says my P.P.

April 14th, 1959

... PROBLEM — what a word that is! And now in the papers today it is always always appearing! Our age is an age of [murdering children and of] trying in vain to solve problems. Yes, this is really a degenerate age. In the Middle Ages they had no problems and if you were a Blue

Beard like Gilles de Retz you just tortured to death 250 children and confessed to it before you were executed because you wouldn't do what John Duke of Brittany told you and you were scared God would put you in Hell if you didn't confess before you died. "Who are you?" St Peter would say at the Gate. — "I am Gilles de Retz, but I have confessed all my sins." St. Peter: "Enter Heaven then." \*

*[I have worked it out with the Mathematics I was taught by Miss Osborne in Dorchester (where by the advice of Colonel Oldfield we learnt French by reading the Malheurs de Sophie \*\*\*) that if Phyllis is able to post this tomorrow you will get it at Alyse's before you leave for Malcom Elwin ... I wonder how I got it into my head that you said I was a mixture of Boswell and De Quincey ...]*

... I had exactly De Quincey's feeling for tarts, and my Lily was lost just as his was lost. I shall never till I'm dead forget her. And I do think it was "one up" for my wife *[Margaret]* that she let me invite Lily to spend a week-end with us at Burpham. I doubt if many wives would have done that. But our house-maid from Manchester refused to take up to Lily her morning cup of tea. "You never hired me to wait on whores!" so I had to take Lily's cup of tea up to her bedroom from the kitchen. *[My wife also and my son too ... both of them accepted my living with Phyllis.]* My son paid us a visit at Corwen just before he died of that awful disease (I forget its name) when every muscle you've got dies one after another. He had to sleep with a man-nurse so that he could be turned over in bed when he got cramp. He got a Baptist friend of his to bring him to Corwen and since then I've always regarded Baptists as my favourite sect. I don't consider our old-fashioned Church of England (if you cut out High Anglicans) as sectarians at all.

O yes, Phyllis and I have got that book Son of Oscar Wilde by Vyvyan *[LW: Holland]* ... I have still a devoted love for Oscar which is odd considering that I haven't a shadow of Homosexuality in me ...

My friend Doctor Schott of San Francisco was in Paris when Anatole France died — that occasion when the Dadaists (have I got that correct?) danced & sang for joy! But Dr Schott saw them digging the hole 6 feet deep for Anatole France's coffin and he persuaded them — for it was dark — to sell him the lantern that they had used at the bottom of that hole when they lowered the coffin. And he used to bring it to our room in Patchin Place.

Now I must get my Concise Oxford Dick-John and see the derivation of "problem". — From Greek "pro-ballo" to throw in front of. So I suppose what fate throws before us is what the word "problem" means. Well, my dear, I hope fate won't throw anything in your way when you are on some tour, or in my mountainous landscape as I lie looking out of my window at this moment when this hydro-electric pumping of mountain torrents up and down is going on. I can see eleven lights which makes me think of the Rev. C.F.P.'s eleven children, only one of whom died young.

Yrs in eternal recurrence as Nietzsche would put it,

J.C.P. *[Phyllis is downstairs or she would join. RVL]*

\* a common delusion, unless he truly repented!

\*\* a popular French children's book of cautionary tales. *[KK]*

May 8th, 1959

*[Aye, my dear, but I veritably do rejoice in your description of the new Duke of Westminster ...]*

... I am so interested to hear of the movements of Bernie's Jill. *[LW: Bernard O'Neill's adopted daughter, then about to go to the U.S.A.]* I did like her so much & so did Phyllis when she

visited us. Think of her flying from New York to stay with Deirdre [LW: my daughter] in Sacramento, California ... [O yes! Phyllis begs me to ask you what the words *Le Vin d'une Nuit* mean, printed on a bottle of *Vin Rosé L'Estabel*? Aye my dear! and I am so interested to hear of your African Stick Tocomoco! \*]

I am thrilled to think of your being so beautifully entertained by Vyvyan Holland and his wife and Merlin — what a splendid name! — their 14 year old boy, Oscar's grandson!

I warrant you are being questioned if there's actually to be a film about Crowley! Aye! what memories that Film will call up! I enclose your clipping about it.

Phyllis went last night to a Film about Dostoievsky's Brothers Karamazov. We both are greatly interested in Francis' [LW: his nephew, son of T. F. Powys] novel [for how boyish and youthful it is!].

Ever your old one ...

\* LW explained it was the name of the wood it was made of.

May 12th, 1959

[O my dear, how I love your expression, "We all have our little ways." By Zeus and Cronos and by Rhea and Hera, we sure all do! ...]

... Last night we were listening to a sort of choreographic scene on the BBC between Hugh Burden and a girl we both have a fondness for and attraction to — though we've never met her, nor do we know anyone who knows her — namely, Stevie Smith. I've never [never, never, never ...] in all my many days listened to a gal or a gairl or, as I always say, a gurl whose voice, whose singing, whose acting, whose pretty fooling & teasing and titivating and tittytatting attracted me more. If anyone said to me "What girl would you like to come and sit in your corner armchair in this room while you ask her questions from your couch by the window" I should say "Stevie Smith".

O yes, I agree with Mrs Muriel Stevens that our Letters are a continuation of my Autobiography. Think of her dreaming about Lulu making Toffee for her [and kissing her. I have no memory at all of Lulu's making toffee] at Montacute or anywhere else. In fact, to confess the honest truth, I have not the remotest idea what Toffee is. I would chant "O don't strike the gong for this Tiddlewink Toffee! What I like & long for is a good cup of Coffee!"

O yes, and if someone asked you, my dear, "Who are the five greatest men you've ever met?" what would you say? I would say "Dreiser, Charles Chaplin, Henry Miller, Bertrand Russell, & Hardy."

I'm getting fonder and fonder of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

[Well! Ta Ta! for now —]

your old J & so says Phyllis.

I love Crowley's "I'd give it & more, In this planet of boredom, For a girl who's a whore and is proud of her whoredom."

May 25th, 1959

... No! you did not tell me about Mr Degenhardt (known in the photo world for his Zeiss invention) who says that Lulu's writings changed his whole life after the 2nd World War when he was in melancholy despair ...

Think of that actor who played one of the tramps in Waiting for Godot liking Oliver's Play so much. What a shame that he was too tied up with the BBC to take on Oliver's Play ...

No, don't 'ee bother about getting me any reviews of any of my books, not even of the "Homer Book" or of our "Letters", for I seem to have climbed into or fallen into — I don't know which! — a sort of Nirvana where (lying on my back at this window and looking at the Mountains ...) I am serenely at peace.

But O it does so please me, what you say about Degenhardt being restored to happiness from despair by Lulu's writings.

Phyllis says that today is the hottest day we've had yet. Certainly the sun is blazing down. I walked up there by our Waterfall for about a quarter of an hour this morning.

Macdonalds are to take my "All or Nothing" — then I've finished another Space-Travel book called "You & Me", and now I'm in the middle, my dear, of yet another book and I've got to the 5th chapter of it — it is called "Ghosts" and is all about 3 man ghosts and one girl ghost wandering about the world and first exploring what is left of Hell now that "God" is dead with the help of the Devil!

With love from us both, my dear, and convey our love to Oliver and all his family from your old Fuddydud John — yes, and Phyllis remembers them all, O so well.

June 5th, 1959

O but I am so glad you warned me about Ibsen's Ghosts. I had entirely forgotten that! And when I read your letter to Phyllis she entirely agreed with you that it would be wise to change that title. I thought of aura and essence and emanation; and then Phyllis suddenly thought of Eidola the plural of Eidolon. Think of her thinking of that! I had forgotten that word, but now that I've looked it up in my Homeric Dictionary it seems just exactly the right word. It says:

εἰδωλον — illusive image — phantom — shades of the dead that flit about in the lower world — Why! that's exactly what I want!

Aye! but I'm so interested in what you say about the Revised Modern Marriage Service, where most carefully every word that might suggest sex is left out — such as "those who have not the gift of continence" and "for the procreation of children".

I love to think of you drinking wine with Enid Starkie. I like to associate you two together. She must be what I call an absolute darling.

Yes, you are right about the title "Ghosts". I must change it ... My memory is getting damnably confoundedly blastedly bad. I must be more careful. I have still forgotten Ibsen's Ghosts!

Think of Bridget (13) and 5 year old Roland [*LW: two of my grandchildren*] being the only kids at the moment under that Paternal-Maternal Prolific Roof. Do give them all their fuddiduddish dottish throw-the-candle-in-the-waste-basket dotard, old Uncle John's devoted love ...

We have just had a visit from Elsa Barker-Mill bringing a friend with her, an awfully spirited girl called Gertie — and today Gamel [*LW: Woolsey, wife of Gerald Brennan*] arrives, and in a week Gladys Ficke [*LW: widow of Arthur Davison Ficke*] is coming. It is now raining, so I didn't go my usual walk but I hope our Waterfall will be enlarged by the rain.

I see I've spelt Ibsen "Ipsen" wh. looks so extremely queer as I look at it now that I see it's wrong. Aren't I getting dotty in my head. Well, as long as I'm happy I don't care!

By the way it does interest me to hear you like sitting and lying in the sun so much. Heavens! I wouldn't do that for anything!

Yrs as ever John

June 20th, 1959

No, my dear, I had not heard before about Coombes's Book on Theodore having been accepted for publication by Barrie & Rockliff & that it may be published this very Autumn. Jesus Holy! but this is indeed good news!

Yes! I think your suggestion of "Four Ghosts" is good for my present book which has now reached its 100th Page of Foolscap. But unfortunately I have so entwined the title I've now invented for it with the text of the book that it would be impossible to change it without re-writing the whole bloody thing which I certainly shall refuse to do. The title is now "Real Wraiths"... Yes, Phyllis thought of "Phantoms" just as you have done. But I have not read a line of the book to her yet so that she has no idea of it except from what I tell her ... "Eidola", as you say, might be mistaken for a girl's name and a very nice name it would be! I'd love to have a grand-daughter called Eidola. O I do wish my son hadn't gone in for this awful motor-cycling! If he hadn't he'd be alive now and I'd so love to have him alive that I'd be content to have no grandchildren because of his being a Catholic Priest. We weren't like Father & Son at all! There was nothing Paternal or Filial in our attitude to each other. We were as devoted to each other as two brothers or as you and Llewelyn were at Cambridge. And this had always been so since I bought him a huge Bill Bruin to play with, at Arundel, when he was a baby at Burpham where he was born. He's now buried with his mother in Bath. We used to tell each other every detail of our sexual peculiarities. We were just like two boy-friends interested in each other's peculiarities. He was converted to Catholicism by a French Abbé during the War to which he had gone as an Anglican Padre — and then he had 4 years of R.C. training in the Beda College wh. was then in Lancashire somewhere, but now it has gone back to Rome.

... I don't wonder that the mother of that 6 week old Baby — how I wish I could hold that Baby on my knee! — was amazed when you told her that there were 170 years between the births of two people you have been with during your life — 170 years! I love that quotation of yours — "All Stars are Angels but the Sun is God". Who was it who said that? [Swinburne].

The politest man in Blaenau has now arrived with his Milk Car. His name is Evans. But the man we get our Milk from is Williams.

I think my quarrel with the Sun is due to my having only one working eye. My one eye — the left one — hates the Sun unless it sees it out of a shadowy place as it does here as I lie writing at this window.

We have now got two important girl-visitors hovering about. One is Gamel \* whose maiden name was Woolsey & I like to think of her being descended from Cardinal Wolsey.

No more margins so John stops jawing — with our love, J.C.P.

\* [whose husband Gerald Brenan carried her off from our Lulu who had a real passion for her and who had to choose between leaving Alyse for her or going with Alyse to America — and the other is Gladys Ficke, the widow of Arthur Ficke who was born in Davenport, Iowa, and went to Harvard where he became a great friend of Wytter Bynner —] RVL.

June 29th, 1959

My dear, O yes, I've heard of Biro pens ... What my pen is I don't know — though it isn't an ordinary pen with a separate nib. Its nib is golden and has the word Swan on it and below the word Swan the number 6. But I have to dip it in the ink-pot. I like the idea of writing with a Golden Pen. Perhaps mine is a Fountain Pen like yours. I'll ask Phyllis ...

We both took a queer fancy to Gladys Ficke whereas in the old days [at Hillsdale] we were

both afraid of her. She has changed incredibly. She explained this change, for we have been quite frank with her about it, as purely and entirely due to psychiatry. She says Psychology is dull, stupid, and all a tedious abstraction; but psychiatry can give a new secret power over life. She has made great friends with some particular psychiatrist and spent a long time by herself in his study which was full of psychiatric books. She certainly had completely altered, and become a totally different and very nice person. It's quaint how Phyllis and I always fall in love with the same people! We did so with those two [*Canavaggia*] sisters, Marie and Renée.

I am so glad you like Real Wraiths [*as a title*]. That's a great comfort to me.

The most mysterious friendship I know in history is between Joan of Arc and Gilles de Retz, the wickedest man who ever lived.

You have beaten me, my dear, over Swinburne. I now like him far better than I do Shelley. You were right there & I was a fool!

What you say about converts to Catholicism having some sexual peculiarity is exciting ...

[no signature]

July 5th, 1959

Aye! but how hugely tickled I was yet am by your exciting letter of the 2nd of July! Well! here I am writing with a Golden Nib newly dipped in ordinary Ink. I love to hear what you tell of that little Toddler of 3 who keeps her Mummy up to the mark. It will be so very interesting to follow her future career and see what sort of a girl or gairl or gal she grows into.

Yes, I still keep repeating to myself that unequalled poem of Swinburne's in the Sapphic metre — And I do & so does Phyllis thank you so much for these typed transcripts from his poetry ...

Our latest Visitor was a gent called Mr Hoffman, a Bearded fellow ... He was so much (if his Beard had been shaved off) the living image of Jeremy Taylor, author of "Holy Living and Dying", that I got the book out of the shelf to show it to him. In the front of this book I find written in my father's hand "Mary Cowper Powys, October 1871, from her father and mother", and below there is this — "and given to her eldest son John by her fifth son Llewelyn on Trinity Sunday or five days before Midsummer — Barnaby Bright, all day and no Night — June 1935 — at Chydyok."

Yes, I am going on with my Real Wraiths story and I have now got them to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean, whence descending a seven miles long stair case — or deep-long, I should say — they find themselves out of the water and into the air again, the air of a land I call "Pachydermata" ...

How I can see, old friend, that famous Ring on your finger as I think of you writing. I shall never forget that baby of six weeks old who I watched recently discovering its own hands — holding them up — first one and then the other, and turning them round to examine both back and front. "What on earth have I got?" it seemed to say. "These are not wings. These are not fins. What funny things are these? And they are mine! I can turn them round!" This baby's name is Angharad. O yes! my dear, do send us a few more type-scripts of Swinburne's poetry; and we thank you, both of us, for letting us keep these.

Yrs as he is now & hopes he may still be at 97 or a 100!

JCP

My old cousin in Norwich dictated a most lively letter to me when she was 97 last April.

July 23rd, 1959

... I do indeed thank you for this splendid letter and for all these splendid lines from Swinburne. I sure am converted to Swinburne as the Poet par excellence of Love-Making!

[*LW: I had included quotations from 'Tristram of Lyonesse'*]

I am enclosing a letter [*LW: with allusions to Swan's Milk and Forth, Beast*] from Mrs Lorna Carter of Enfield who has been sending me Photos she has taken of the Houses where C. Lamb and where Keats lived. I well recall my admiration for that School Master in Enfield Cowden Clarke's book on Shakespeare — far (to me) the most enlightening Book on Shakespeare ever written ...

I have just been reading Jacquetta Hawkes's "A Land". And I'd love to know what you think of it, for these Monsters, Dinosaurs and Ichtheosaurs, are very exciting and pleasing to me. O yes! and the Tyrannosaurus [*I had forgotten he! RVL*]. I think she says — and this is interesting — that Dorset was one of the first portions of England to emerge from the Ice Age. That justifies my making the Cerne Giant my hero in "All or Nothing".

I'd like to know which of all your books you like the best? Of all mine I like "Porius" and, second to "Porius", "Atlantis". But I may like "All or Nothing", when it comes out, the best of all.

We have just had a visit from Isobel [*LW: Powys Marks*] and her friend and neighbour Elizabeth Harvey — a very very nice girl. We both liked her mighty well. The two girls' names that seem now to suggest power, competence and beauty and charm are Elizabeth and Joan. It pleases me so much that Jacquetta Hawkes, writing of what the Earth was like three hundred million years ago, has to quote old Wordsworth just as Shelley's second wife, in Frankenstein, had to do! [*I love to think of Giles Wordsworth, his great, great, great nephew, being the only rival of your grandson Christopher, and of*] Captain Eliot Crawshay-Williams [*who is*] now dying of a stroke in gentlemanliness.

The gods bless thee and keep thee. The goddesses, especially Pallas Athene and Hera, lift up the light of their countenances upon thee & give what thou wantest most!

Always your old J.C. Powys & his wise girl P.P.

I love to think of that little one [*LW: a girl of three*] singing outside your window, your little Troubadour ...

July 31st, 1959

What a perfect story! this one you tell in your good letter today about this mysterious note from a little girl which was put into your letter-box — "This house is Haunted, signed Billy Bones" — and your little Toddler's sister telling you that the little girl who had written it had sent a message to you that "Billy Bones's wife is Milly Bones and Louis Bones is their Baby". When it was really the sister who had written it! What marriages among the young of the West Country!

Phyllis will enclose a word of welcome for you and your friend Jimmy Stern and his German wife towards the end of September. As for me [*my wone self*], dates make no difference. I always rejoice to welcome anybody with German or Jewish blood — O yes! and Phyllis knows all about Lady Harris \* — and I certainly love your phrase here — "a rare [*old*] bird of plumage"! I would love to set eyes on her! And I love what Carlos Grace said to you, "You're the cleverest and stupidest man I know". I swear you are perfectly right about you and me resembling each other in that peculiarity. I have showed well what a fool on one half of me I am ... Just think of

your boy cousin long ago crying out to you "O you vague ass!"

I have finished my Story about what nowadays they call Space Travel, entitled "You and Me". My other book has been accepted by Macdonalds and I have been paid its Advance Royalty but whether it'll come out late this year or early next year I don't think He who used to be called God but has given up his job for ever would know any better than I do. I have also finished another Novel which is one of my favourite writings, called "Real Wraiths" — O yes! I asked you about that and you told us about Ibsen's "Ghosts". God! how I do forget! Now I'm starting another story called "Two and Two" about a couple of girl-friends who are deadly enemies.

... What is your favourite modern Book quite apart from your own? Mine is "Atlantis and the Giants" by Denis Saurat. Phyllis has already read "Lolita" to me, sent from France to us, and I am presently going to start reading to her a big heavy book called "Voss" ...

always your alter balta halta salta palta zalter Ego —

Jack out of the Box.

\* *LW: Frieda, Lady Harris, whose paintings of the Tarot Cards have been exhibited in Oxford and in London.*

August 6th, 1959

*[Aye, my dear, what amusing and terrifying trains of thought your letter calls up! I expect I shall be tempted to act like a Butler, and say "Does your Ladyship smoke?"]* ... I hope I shan't feel awkward when I show Lady Harris my picture of D. H. Lawrence and talk of Frieda his wife who treated him so well and wrote of him after his death so well. The name Frieda always makes me think of her. Another danger to me would be to talk about Frank Harris and ask her whether she is any relation of his? Well, my dear, we'll see you all in late September.

We had a very happy and easy visit from Anthony Bland and his wife and a lady who was a Cousin of W. B. Yeats, so I was in my element in quoting some of his poems.

Some lady has just written to ask me where I found that beautiful name Perdita and it was Phyllis who answered that she was a character in Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale". My memory is really giving way for I had completely forgotten that play of Shakespeare's. It was a surprise to me to hear that he ever wrote a play called the Winter's Tale! I shan't forget The Tempest with Ariel and Caliban and Prospero. But I have entirely and absolutely forgotten Coriolanus.

Well! So long! It'll be heavenly seeing you.

yrs ever and always Jack a bit funny —

August 12th, 1959

My dear, Phyllis has been to the "Abbey Arms" and got those Rooms you wanted in September. Yes! my blunders & mistakes and fantastic imaginations about names really might lead me into the most terrifying "alder swamps", as my father told me "Pengwern" meant, which is the Welsh for Shrewsbury. "Pen" means "Head", Head of the Alder Swamp which "Gwern" means.

I keep thinking of your friendship with that little Toddler and her play-serenades with you. O I adore Toddlers!

No! in my youth I never heard the word "lunch" at all, or luncheon either! It was always dinner at mid day and supper in the evening [*LW: at Montacute Vicarage*]. But tea at 5.30 was the chief meal of the day with us always.

I had to write in my Diary this morning “Funked my Walk” because it was raining, but now the Sun is out blazing and I see the oldest of Grandmothers in the neighbourhood making her way with her stick slower than I’ve ever seen anyone walk before.

... I may make a complete fool of myself with your lady [*LW: Lady Harris*] but I’ll try to be cautious as well as courteous, and she may say after you leave, “What a silent old Hermit your friend Powys is! I always thought the Powyses were a lively lot. But you never know with queer families like theirs, do you?”

O my dear, but it rejoices and cheers my old heart, and Phyllis’s too, to think of you & your friends being here those three days and coming in and out of our couple of rooms.

I must remember that I am a Hermaphrodite with a lot of the feminine in me. That accounts for many of my peculiarities. The Book I am now beginning, “Two and Two”, could only have been written by a Hermaphrodite. Do we say “by a Hermaphrodite” or “by an Hermaphrodite”? Phyllis is out now so I haven’t got her to appeal to about “an” or “a”.

[*unsigned*]

August 18th, 1959

Yes, Will [*LW: his brother*] is safe here & has had two long walks already over hill & dale, and we have just had him tonight for supper & now he’s off to the Abbey Arms in Ffestiniog ...

I’ve got the “Winter’s tale” open now at that page — “O Proserpina! for the flowers now that frighted thou let’s fall From Dis’s waggon ...” I can see however, my dear, that you know Shakespeare now better than I do. I’ve forgotten, forgotten, forgotten, forgotten! Too many things! Not only Shakespeare & Perdita’s flowers!

Well! it will be exciting to see you all ... The 22nd to 25th remain in my mind very clear ....

[*Well, Ta Ta for now.*] Love from us both —

Jack in the Box again.

August 25th, 1959

Here is your letter along with O such a lot! But I’ll respond to yours first. Phyllis is rather thinking — if only this very thick Fog, called “Caddug” by the Welsh, who call ordinary Mist “Niwl” which is pronounced “Neool”, moves off a bit — of going on the Bus to pick up Redwood Anderson’s Gwyneth, for they are back near here for a couple of months, and take her to a place in Denbighshire, I think — tho’ I never am safe & sound on Geography — called Port Meirion, a little (newly built by Clough Ellis) sort of architectural mimic-antique Fortress where is an aesthetic sale-room (full of artistic objects collected by the above-mentioned architect Clough-Ellis whose own stately home is nearby) and which can there be bought by visitors who have anyhow to pay 2/6 merely to enter the grounds of this rare spot, or, as I would say, who have never been there, this ——— [*sic*] place!

I’ve got a hell of a lot of letters to answer after this brief acknowledgment to thee thy wone self, one from Mrs Asta Fleming Sullivan who lives at Ashville, Mass. and who is in high spirits because she has had a letter from Mr Boris Pasternak the Unique. Now I can see out of my window a little girl in Blue Jeans and another little girl in Red Jeans. Phyllis knows the origin of that word “Jeans” but I always forget this [*tho’ there’s no forgetting the effect upon pure-minded Jack-at-his-window of these tight feminine trousers!*] ... Every day some new memory of some old Nursery Rhyme or other crops up in the crickly crankly head of my present memory and I say to myself “I am the Man all tattered and torn who kissed the maiden all forlorn — (or is it

married the maiden all forlorn?) who milked the Cow with the crumpled horn, who tossed the Dog who worried the Cat who killed the Rat who lived in the House that Jack built!"

Well, I must have been asleep when Milk came, for it is now a quarter to 4 and it generally comes at 3 p.m. So I'd better not try and go on with what now comes into my head — about a "Squire's Son who loved a Dairy Daughter dear who lived in Islington —" \*

ever your old [*a bit Dotty*] John

There's a lot of what our Squire here calls "Chin-wagging" going on within my hearing somewhere in the Road. But no one has yet knocked.

Anthony Bland writes that he has bought from Jonah Jones his bust of me!

Yes! Phyllis has been gone two hours — But she'll be back, I hope, between 5 and 6.

\* *Is he thinking of the song, 'The Bailiff's daughter of Islington'?* [KK]

September 4th, 1959

My dear, we are so glad you haven't forgotten Port Meirion because Phyllis does so enjoy going there ...

What you tell about Lady Queensberry la Petite Marquise is very interesting. What a story of baby Lord Gawain Douglas being Sick and the nurse soothing him & carrying him off and the footman clearing it up! I've got a mania, an obsession for Babies which is as mysterious to me as it is to Phyllis, but Phyllis humours it. She brought — but I've probably told you this over and over, for I have what I read in stories to be the chief weakness of old gents — the tendency to repeat repeat repeat repeat! — she brought one to see me wrapt in its Mummy's shawl — & I bent over the Shawl and lectured it on itself just as I lectured Bertrand Russell on himself, when he came up to this room for half an hour, to the delight of his 4th wife, a very nice lady from America — and at the end this baby of six months thrust out a tiny finger thro' the Shawl for me to kiss. The day before yesterday a baby of 3 months and a half came in a car & they wouldn't bring him up, so I got into the car and moved my head backwards and forwards over his head till I made him go to sleep. Then when he woke up he thrust his hand, such a little little hand, into his mouth — and well knew I, for I've got an instinctive understanding of the thoughts of babies, what that meant. He was hungry and wanted his Mummy's Nipple. So I made them drive off so that he should have a good feed as they drove him home. I used to have an absolute horror of Nipples — even of my own tiny little ones which I used always to compel and force and make myself touch with the tips of my fingers before I went to bed, to punish myself for all my silliest cowardices.

Think of your persuading Will to take Cold baths & that he found they did him good ... Yes, O yes, do send us that article by Jimmy Stern on his being taken to see James Joyce. We'd both love to read it.

Yes, that indeed is true as you say — that if you had to live as I do & I had to live as you do we'd soon be knocking together at Heaven's Gate — & maybe St. Peter wouldn't let us in, thinking we were a pair of lunatic Homos!

Well — [*Ta! Ta! for now!*] I'm longing to see you —  
yrs over the garden wall the oldest fool of all —

Jabawok Jack with 3 ghosts on his back!

September 11th, 1959 [*My Mother's Birthday*].

I do indeed thank you, my dear, for this exciting article about James Joyce by Stern. I've

hugely enjoyed it — every word of it — already; and I've read it to Phyllis who feels the same about it. It will be exciting to see you all on Tuesday Sept 22 ... Yes, I remember well reading things of Lord Dunsany and liking them very much ...

What interesting events you record in this letter. I like to hear of those "Ballad Girls" \*. One of them with two boys 14 & 11 who slept out in your garden with Sleeping Bags — and the other Ballad Girl you drove to see near Studland with her two sons out there. I like to think of your having the sort of bathing in the sea you like so well, and which you had so long ago with Theodore at Studland ...

Well, my dear, in happy anticipation of September 22nd,  
yrs as always with love from both of us

J.C.Powys.

I've been very active with my Stories ... and now I've reached chapter 8 and page 80 of the new one called "Two and Two".

\* *LW: they had visited JCP with me early in the last war, when they were young girls. Phyllis Playter named them the "Ballad Girls". The visit is referred to on p.99 of the 1935-56 Letters.*

September 28th, 1959

O my dear what nice letters you wrote us both! ... And now I'll tell you about Timmy Hanley [*LW: wife of James Hanley*] for we are both so thankful you went to see them. It was entirely owing to Hanley that we came to North Wales. He came to see me when we lived for half a year in Dorchester, under the protection of Hardy's widow — his second wife née Dugdale. Timmy Hanley's maiden name is Langton and she is a direct descendant of the brother of Archbishop Stephen Langton in the time of Henry 1st. Her ancestry justifies my grand dogma that the real aristocracy of Britain are not Dukes or Earls or Lords but plain Mist'ers. The Shirleys of Ettington were thus. There is always some little village going back long before the Norman Conquest in these cases — like Mr Oakover of Oakover with whom I used to stay when I lectured at Ashbourne near the River Dove where Isaak Walton used to fish. The village of Oakover goes back to the coming of the Anglo-Saxons. I can so well recall at Montacute, above the choir-stalls where we used to sit in church, a monument that read "The Rev.S.Langton, Rector of Pylle, Incumbent of Stoke, and Vicar of this Parish", who must have been one of her family. Liam [*LW: Hanley*] is Phyllis' and my God-son. We are very fond of him. He is on some popular Newspaper in London.

The Hanleys used to live within easy reach of Corwen where Phyllis & I lived for 20 years. O my dear but we did so enjoy your visit. I was greatly enamoured with Mrs Stern. How rare to know a girl half German and half Russian. O I did like her so! And Phyllis felt just the same for her husband, who gave me my Stick called Duffy which I carried (I almost said which I wore) on Sunday, yesterday.

What you tell me about your little Toddler neighbour at Dove Cottage always delights me. I am certain that there is a deep link between Babies, Toddlers of 2 and 3, and old gents like me. Those who are coming into this world and those who are going out of this world (though I want to live ten years more) understand each other ...

I was so pleased to hear about Oliver and Margaret and their family.  
ever your old John o'Dreams.

October 2nd, 1959

I was so delighted to get this letters from you, my dear, with this wave of affection from Oliver & Margaret and all the family in and out. I love to hear every word you say about young Clare [*Crisp*] remembering every word I said, especially about Clare Phelps, my first little lady-love! Yes, the Crisps are indeed a nice family. I haven't heard those words "Happy Returns!" [*LW: his birthday was on October 8th*] since I was a small boy in Shirley Vicarage, pretending as I walked down the lane to the Church that I was the Lord of Hosts, just as later at Montacute I pretended to be the Queen of the Fairies.

Think of Clare remembering that I wore 4 waistcoats! I've got all four on at the minute though the sun is shining on my old phizz ... I love to think I was born in the same year as Aubrey Beardsley and Max Beerbohm ...

I've just been reading a very good Magazine called Encounter and it describes all the horrible cruelties told by Suetonius about the Emperor Tiberius. He evidently was a far crueller and more horrible sadist than even Gilles de Retz, and compared with him the Marquis de Sade was no worse than many. Isn't it quaint that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the reign of Tiberius? The best human being parallel with the worst. I had no idea Tiberius was such a fiend. Far worse than poor old Crowley! They called him the Goat because he was hairy all over. Aye, but he must have been an absolute Monster!

Give my great love to Isobel. I love the way one of my Norfolk relations — I forget who at the moment — sends her "dear love". That is just what Aunt Dora and Aunt Annie and Aunt Etta used to say — "this brings my dear love" [*What other kind of love did they have?*] It is now just six and the Sun is going down ... Of course both our loves to Isobel.

ever your old John [*O'Dreams*].

October 19th, 1959

... I love to think of your having such pleasure at Winchelsea sea-bathing with the Ballad Girl — sea-bathing & lying [*naked*] on the beach in the sun! I love the description you give of the ecstasy that sea-bathing gives you. I am so glad you took Isobel to "The Aspern Papers" made into a play, and that it was so good. Isn't it pathetic, the desperate struggle Henry James made for five years to write a good play and couldn't, couldn't, couldn't, and now any one of his stories seems to be able to be turned into a successful play! Isn't that "one of those things"! By "those things" we mean the tricks that this St.-Paul-invented "God-of-Love" [*at whom I just spit!*] habitually plays on us poor mortals.

No! as you well know, my dear, and say well, Nothing — no, not even the sport, or as the girls say nowadays, "the fun", of a Debate with you \* would induce me or persuade me to have any connection at all with Television! I think Television has done more harm to proper Readers and to proper Books and to the education of our young than anything has ever done since our ancestors came out of the Sea! So let my confounded old voice die away forever in private curses ...

O but I do like to think of your having your forehead — that portion of you which is more characteristic than any other — touched with a bony relic of St. Anthony. Aye that is interesting to both Phyllis and me, the resemblance you noted between Gamel and [*one of*] Beardsley's later girls.

Our united love [*to "thy wone self"*] as ever,  
John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Player.

Isn't it an interesting coincidence that Eric Harvey my Publisher [LW: at Macdonalds] should have a wife called Phyllis and that her father & grandfather should both have been Mayors of Glastonbury? They visited us recently and he said that my book "All or Nothing" would be published at the end of this year or the beginning of next year.

We've had two successive Nights of pouring rain so our old Waterfall that was only a trickle 3 days ago is now rushing down splendidly!

\* LW: a proposal had been made that we should debate or converse on Television.

October 28th, 1959

... What you say, in sympathy with my hatred of "Tely", pleases me mightily. Well! think of your friend Cecil Douglas going through all that with his charming daughter craving to look at "Tely"!

Heavens, my dear, but this morning Phyllis & I are recovering from the most terrible day & night we have ever had in this little town. A Thunderstorm! I could do nothing but weakly and feebly quote King Lear! Deluges of Rain and constant Lightning — some of it Forked Lightning — And the Lightning put out our electric heaters and electric light — leaving us in darkness! Phyllis had to search her cupboards in desperation for candles. Three electric bulbs were out of action. At last she found two candles! I had one and she the other. It was difficult for me to use the Water Closet (or Lavatory or Toilet as they call it) because I had to balance the Candle ...

I went my quarter of an hour's stroll this morning between 8.30 and 8.45 and saw our Waterfall more terrific than I have ever seen it before. Whirlwind and Whirlpool together made our Sycamore bow & scrape before them & sent all the toddlers as it sent me to bed. And even Phyllis herself came to bed much earlier than usual, and this morning there was Snow on the Mountains — the first Snow.

We are now daily being begged for inflammatory and burnable objects of cardboard & of wood in preparation for the Fifth of November. I've got now three books finished but not typed, ready for the future ... And I've begun a new book which I do so enjoy writing in which I personalize every piece of furniture, including the carpet, in this tiny room.

[unsigned]

November 9th, 1959

My dear, I had no idea that your mother lived till she was 89, two years older than I am now ...

Yes, that wonderful old lady in Norwich [LW: Mrs Barham Johnson] dictated such a joyous letter to me about Lucy's [his sister] visit. She enjoyed, she said, every moment of it, and was so delighted with Lucy's ways. I wonder if she'll live these 3 more years till she's 100 ... [I always say "I'm going to pump-ship" to Phyllis when I descend the stairs and she has just told me how in Boston she used to see water being pumped out of ships in the harbour and it came — the water — as if the ship itself were pissing!]

Your tale of this November Wasp in your bedroom terrifies me very little. My Horror is Spiders and I shall recall to my dying day how grateful I was to Phyllis in Corwen for killing a big one in our bedroom.

The sun sets here at 4.15. He's just gone down behind the Mountains as the Hydro-Electric workers come home. Today is a day of Leaves. They are being blown everywhere.

I have just had a letter from Faith [LW: widow of his brother A.R. Powys (1881–1936)] that I have found difficulty in answering properly, about what to write on a silver plaque inside the church where our Bertie is buried. \*

Love from us both — your old J.C.P.

\* *The inscription was on a slate tablet carved by Reynolds Stone. [KK]*

November 21st, 1959

... Tonight I had a shock: for quite suddenly when there was no wind at all and not a drop of rain and no idea of thunder or lightning every electric light in the place went out! I knew I should soon hear Phyllis's step on the stair. And so I did and presently she came in and lit the candle behind me. The candle is in the silver candlestick which my mother always would take from the table in the hall at Montacute Vicarage to carry upstairs to her bedroom, while another one, also of silver but of a less ornamental make, was the one my father would take to go up a little earlier ...

Can you tell me how old my mother was when she died or my father when he died? I remember Ellen Childs [LW: a servant at the Vicarage] washing him and telling him not to be sad as he would soon meet Mrs Powys again ...

I have named that book "Three Wraiths", the one which you warned me to avoid naming "Ghosts" as Ibsen had collared them. And now I've got pretty far on with this new one — "Topsy-Turvy", Topsy being the heroine and Turvy the hero.

Marian's son Peter Grey [LW: his nephew] has been paying us a visit as you know, and he brought me — did I show it to you when you came here recently, I wonder? — a head-piece or Tartar Cap from Moscow. This head-dress I have sworn not to wear till Dec 1st but after that I shall wear nothing else on my head.

O what was the name of that wife of your friend James Stern? I did like that girl so and revered her wisdom and insight. Yes, she quite awed me.

... Well! with love from us both, your dotty old J.C.P.

December 3rd, 1959

... Yes, I fully agree with your admiration of Bertrand Russell ... Phyllis saw in the Publisher's Announcement that Mr [Harry] Coombes's book on Theodore is coming out in the spring ...

Did I tell you that I have had quite a long correspondence with Luis Bonito Ribiero of Marinha Grande, Portugal?

The Turvy and Topsy of my present book are the souls or spirits of pieces of furniture in this little upstairs room where I write by the window. My idea started with an attempt to emphasize the remarkable livingness of separate pieces of furniture in a room wherein you habitually live and work.

The book I've been reading to myself lately — the only book — is the Religio Medici [by Sir Thomas Browne, of Norwich, Norfolk]. The peculiar rhythm of its prose I think is equal to some of our noblest poetry. [The best chapter in it is entitled *Hydriotaphia, or Urn-Burial*.]

Love from us both

yrs as ever

J.C. Powys

[RVL includes here an undated letter from Phyllis Playter to LW:

My dear Louis – Jack had the letter from Faith about the plaque and answered it before we heard of Lucy's suggestion. He naturally fell in with Faith's idea as he always does and never thought of any other. We haven't heard any more since then — but our Richmond Library friend, Gilbert Turner, wrote of working with Faith on the wording of the inscription.

Yes, certainly I think it is admirable of Bertrand Russell — and of A. J. Ayer too — to appear on television. And I wonder at their willingness to put up with the pretensions of the Television people and their high-handedness in dominating them as well as the assumption of the public that their insatiable craving can command the appearance of anyone and everyone.

But Alyse goes to the Pierce's [*to watch TV*] — you go to someone — and I go round the corner to my neighbour's married daughter's, whose husband delivers coal for the co-op and who will be two years paying for their television — in order to see and hear Bertrand Russell — or in my case — Jung (neither of whom would have been viewed by the owners of the television if we hadn't been there, perhaps? Certainly if I hadn't been there.)

There seems something odd about this position. In the past the drawing-room would never have depended on the cook or the coals-man — if they wanted to hear Dickens or Mr Gladstone — It must be significant — but of what? ]

December 11th, 1959

... I return that little poem about the Duke of Windsor and Thomas Hardy [*LW: a parody by Max Beerbohm*]. I so well recall seeing a photo of them together when I was in the Public House just opposite where Phyllis and I lived for a whole winter before we found our house in Corwen ...

Neither of us knows if Masefield is still alive but Phyllis I think rather thinks he is. But far the oldest of all our writers who is undoubtedly alive is Eden Phillpotts [*sic*] whom Hardy liked so much in person, though I doubt if he gave his writings much attention. But I know he liked him himself particularly well. He is well over 90. I fancy something like 97 ... \*

It's my cousin's daughter Mary who is writing the Life of my great-grandfather who looked after the poet Cowper.

... I am so very glad you agree with me about the livingness of our familiar furniture ...

Love from us both

Phyllis and Jack.

\* *John Masefield, 1878–1967. Eden Phillpotts, 1862–1960. [KK]*

December 17th, 1959

... I must obtain one day all those Parodies by Swinburne. I may have got somewhere his complete works. I must ask Phyllis as I have to do nowadays about everything. If someone said "The other night I dreamt I saw a fight between God and the Devil. Do you know who won?" I could probably answer at once "I must ask Phyllis". I'm delighted with each of these examples of parody you give.

O yes I know Eden Phillpotts is still alive because I am in constant correspondence with his daughter Adelaide. Phyllis had a letter from her today. She married an American from Boston called R. Nicholas Ross whom I know very well indeed — too well to go into him here. But one

day when we are with you again I'll ask Phyllis to describe him to you ...

I am reading a lovely book to Phyllis about Shelley, or rather about Shelley's second wife Mary Godwin — and I read to her lately a book called Witch House by Evangeline Waloon Ensley.

Good luck, my dear, till we meet again [*or exchange letters again*].

Love from us both & good luck for 1960 when it comes!

John in and out of the Box.

January 11th, 1960

Well, my dear, I take it you are home again at Dove Cottage. We have this morning, sent us from Dulverton, Somerset, a bottle of Vermouth which was packed in such a way that it was all broken when it arrived & no Vermouth left. This was sad to Phyllis as she is very fond of Vermouth.

[*We had a visit yesterday from Mr Jack Jones and Mrs Edith Jones, and David and Roger, their sons, and David's girl-friend Jane, and Phyllis treated them all to a good Midday lunch at the North Western Hotel, and a cup of tea later before they returned home to Corwen.*] Jack Jones is suffering cruelly from Arthritis which seems to take the place of that old Gout we used to read about ... Is Christopher [*LW: Wilkinson*] still at that Big School on the South Coast between Hove and Shoreham? — near Portslade where my old friend Alfred de Kantzow used to live — the one who wrote

“Rocks, stony rocks, who lie about in silence,  
Brooding thro' ages, solemn and sublime,  
Let them emerge from lethargy with violence,  
Let them adore the author of all time.”

I don't think that's quite correct, but it's pretty nearly so.

The first job of my life was two girls' schools — I mean lecturing at them — in Hove, and I used to walk there and back from Southwick where I lived over the Grocer's shop of a Mr Pollard. Grocers all thro' my life have been a greater help to me than any other people! My mind — well! you can see from the way I write — is getting more and more shaky and losing more and more of its memory of places & faces and people and things — of recent date — not of my school and college days, for I can quote Horace and even the beginning of the Iliad, and the prologue to Chaucer's Canterbury Tales which I must have learnt at School.

There's a good example of my mind's collapsing condition in my telling you things again — repeat — repeat — repeat — repeat — that I must have told time & again before!

Love from us both, my dear:

ever your old John the Fool.

I have just written “The End” to my latest story. I am longing for the appearance of my “All or Nothing” which Eric Harvey the Boss of Macdonalds is bringing out soon. I am now beginning another one [*the fifth which I've got unpublished ... if they come out one a year I shan't worry ...*]

January 21st, 1960

Just think, my dear, of your not being 80 till the end of 1961. So if I'm ten years younger than my old Cousin Mrs Barham Johnson of Norwich you are nearly twenty years younger than she is!

Aye, but I love to think of Swinburne's line "the supreme evil, God". I am glad you told me of that! I find myself constantly muttering Shelley's lines:

"O world! O Life! O Time  
On whose last steps I climb,  
Trembling at that which I enjoyed before,  
When will return the glory of your prime?  
No more! O never more!" \*

Those lovely Sapphics of Swinburne you told me of I have now learnt by heart and this too I often find myself repeating

"All the night sleep came not upon mine eyelids"  
and ending with ... "Shone Mitylene." \*\*

O yes! my dear, both Phyllis and I say the same about your Lady Harris's visit to us here in the Summer, we will give her a hearty welcome and we beg her to bring with her her Kashmirian Attendant whom we long to see.

[*Gee Whizz! my dear*] What a lunch you had at that 18th Century White's Club! \*\*\* ... I agree entirely with the producer of that Film about Oscar Wilde. If it was simply entitled by his name only a few people would come — people like us — but if it is called "The Trial of Oscar Wilde" the general Public will come crowding to see it. And that is as it should be. So I implore you to agree to calling it "The Trial of Oscar Wilde".

What a lovely name Gwenol is! Yes, whichever lady it was who was cured by Olive Oil [LW: *after reading of its curative effects in Letters 1935-56*] I sympathize with entirely. Nothing helps so well in my case in keeping at bay my duodenal hurting. I had a fine wine-glass three quarters full of it at breakfast today.

You should see our Waterfall today! It is much bigger than I have ever seen it all the five years we shall have lived here come May 2nd. It was because yesterday the ground was covered with Snow while today the Rain has washed all the Snow away.

[*That Bristol University must be a splendid institution. That Gypsy Nativity Play was a grand idea.*]

Love from us both  
ever your old Jack.

I'll repress any silly and naughty instinct I may have to repeat [*repeat repeat repeat RVL*] — but that's what Old Age does, it causes Dotty old Gents to repeat, repeat!

\* Shelley: 'A Lament' Original 3rd line is 'Trembling at that where I had stood before'.

\*\* see note at Jan 31st, 1959

\*\*\* LW: *when the projected Oscar Wilde film was discussed by four interested guests of Lord Alfred Douglas.*

February 3rd, 1960

Your letter, my dear, began with what always pleases me so particularly — I mean the way you and Katie understand each other.

About Oscar & the "Trial" all I can say is I pray you are right and I am wrong. I do agree with you heart-whole that Oscar's whole character and genius are together so attractive and absorbingly fascinating that it does certainly please me much more to think that he is so well known and well loved all over the world that the two words "Oscar Wilde" are in themselves enough.

I am now reading aloud to Phyllis a book called "Write me from Rio" by Charles Edward Eaton. It is a North Carolina Book, for that's where the author comes from ... But it is about Rio de Janiero in Brazil.

I have just had a letter from Douglas Glass the Photographer of famous men who originated in New Zealand and is now far the most famous Photographer of famous men we've got in this country. he is coming to pay us a visit on the 17th or 18th ...

I love to think of Christopher eventually inheriting [a legacy] and, as you say, at 18 he might [would] hardly know how to deal with it.

Do tell me who wrote

"Not all our songs O friend

Will make death clear or make life durable." \*

I've never heard those words before ...

My fourth "Space-Travel" novel which I am now writing is called "Cataclysm" and I have got to the place in it where the Kanawitakons, led by a rascal adventurer, are attacking a Castle ... [A rascal adventurer called Gee Wizz with a fleet of barges from the land of Kokolu is attacking the castle of the Kanawitakons. No! I've told you that the wrong way round! It is the Kanawitakons who [are] led by the Rogue Gee Wiss [sic] and the castle is the Home of the Zed family Granpapa Well Zed, Mr No Zed and Mrs Yes Zed and the boy Ve Zed whose boy-friend young Why has just arrived on the scene in time to see five of his family buried up to their necks in the earth while Gee Wizz dances up & down from one head to the other till they are all dead. I wonder if this shows a tendency in me to revert to my old sin of Sadism, as when on Sunday at Northwold when everybody was at Church I cut up earthworms with my pen knife.]

Well, my dear, I must go on writing this novel. But I keep repeating to myself the poems of Horace [my favourite poet] — though I sometimes substitute Catullus ['Soles occidere ... nox est perpetua una dormienda'. O I do love that gerund ... meaning 'it must']

[unsigned]

\* Swinburne: 'Ave atque Vale'

February 13th, 1960

.... Yes, you and Lulu are I know all out for shortness [LW: in writing] whereas I am, I confess, all out for length!

Yes, you, my dear, and you alone, purely by quoting the right lines from him, have made Swinburne one of my favourite poets ... But I never thought that Shelley could be "mawkish" or show mawkishness! Do for heaven's sake give me an example of what you mean by that ... I learnt from that book about Mary Godwin ['A Child of Light'] what a devil and mean brute Shelley's Father was.

Yes, I will certainly tell you all about Douglas Glass's visit after he has come & gone.

Lucy has just sent me a photo of Lulu, taken when he was at school at Sherborne. I always remember sending him a Letter Card — the first of those hateful things I ever used — and in it I remember writing the words "the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red", and then I heard that he had had his first T.B. Haemorrhage — when he was working as an under-master at Brother Littleton's Prep. at Sherborne. I remember, O so terribly well, writing that letter card at the Post Office in Yeovil.

At the moment, 4.45 p.m., the sun has gone down in the middle of the Ash Tree and I have just repeated, as I always do, the words "ἤλιος ! Lulu! Lulu! ἤλιος !" I think of how he once

came, aged 3, to the drawingroom window at Montacute where at the open window I was reading Le Motte Fouqué's "Theodolph the Iclander" — or Theodoric the Iclander, I forget which — and Lulu at 3 looked exactly as if he had been dropped out of the Sun.

Just think of Christina Rossetti inking out the words "The supreme Evil, God"! [*O I do so agree that God is the Supreme Evil!*]

Yrs for more evers and alwayses than the Supreme Evil ever invented

John, & so says Phyllis though not in the same words.

March 1st, 1960 [*Shrove Tuesday*]

Well, I am so glad to hear that Oscar's son has been collaborating with you in his "Trials", which are as you say well worthy of being in the plural, for he sure must have had "trials" all his life, particularly with the gent you refer to! [*LW: Alfred Douglas*]. I wish I knew more about Mr Ken Hughes [*LW: author of the film script*] ... It is remarkable and significant, this great difference between the present day and those times of 60 or 70 years ago.

... Do you know what the word "Shrove" [*actually*] means? Phyllis has just been explaining to me very clearly the meaning of the word curiosity compared with the word inquisitiveness.

It interests me greatly what you say about Shelley having effeminate but not feminine softness ... But I feel you go a bit too far in using the word "mawkish"...

[*O here's a sentence from a letter Phyllis has just had from Mrs James Hanley, née Timothy Langton ... 'We had a wonderful talk. I fell completely for Louis! What an enchanting person to talk to! — so compatible!'*]

Yrs as ever & always

John Cowper Powys.

March 8th, 1960

Well, may dear, I am greatly tickled by your "Don't forget that you've forgotten that you always did forget"! ... GeeWhizz! I'd love to read an Essay of yours on just why my memory is so jumpy! ...

I do hope you will get your Lady Frieda driven by her Kashmirian with you beside her to visit us this coming Summer. And I rejoice that you liked Tim Hanley so well. I always say she is the nicest real aristocrat I know.

Well, it [*sure*] is good news that Isobel is coming to stay with Katie next Friday and may be able to stay with you.

The best event that occurred for me lately was a long letter from Eric Harvey my Publisher asking me what I am now writing and saying that my book "All or Nothing" would come out in May. On May 2nd Phyllis and I will have been five years in this little house.

Love from us both, still your John, the man with "the Good Forgettorry", which the Doctor in Chicago said was the absolutely healthiest thing anybody could possibly have!

Yrs ever J.C.P

March 22nd, 1960

This letter of yours, my dear, about Isobel's visit and about the early letters of Freud \*, is of great interest to me. Phyllis and I have been having an excited and ardent conversation on this point you bring in about the Common Man being so bottled up in his own immediate daily concerns that he cannot extend his interest to the larger aspects of this puzzling world in which

we live. We are both very interested though we are a little divergent from each other in our attitude to this particular point. Where I think, but I may be wrong, for male and female minds never follow the same lines of thought in any discussion, but where I think we agree is that the whole evolution of human thought, of human imagination, of human invention, of human ideas, of everything that creates the history of human thought about War and Peace and Man and God and the Devil and Right and Wrong and Sin and Death and Good and Evil and so forth, is the working of the Common Man's thought ... \*\*

Aye! but I did so greatly admire your friends Jimmy Stern and his wife Tania. I've never seen such a purely intellectual forehead as that girl has ...

[no signature]

\* *LW: I had been reading these letters in the typescript of the translation by James and Tania Stern. Freud writes of the difficulty that he finds in contact with the "Common Man", whose arduous work and poverty act, in Freud's view, as almost insurmountable barriers. He is writing in Austria, some time before the First World War.*

\*\* [Who invented Hell and Heaven? The Common Man. Who invented God and the Devil? The Common Man. Who invented the difference between Matter and Mind? The Common Man. Who followed at once *en masse* Darwin's whole idea of Evolution? The Common Man. Who has the reverence for individual Great Men that makes us all bow to Napoleon and Hitler and Marlborough and Churchill and Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus and Caesar and Constantine, and Cleopatra and Goethe? The Common Man. Who now assures us that Scientists know all and that Science now dominates the world? The Common Man. Who wrote the History of England with the ways of William the Conqueror and the story of Alfred and the Cakes and Canute and the sea-waves and — Well, enough of that! ] *RV/L* — followed by an illustrated tale by JCP of his 'superonic foolishness', attempting to suck up his raw egg after it spilt onto a plate.

[*LW: A severe attack of influenza and its after-effects upon J.C.P. caused the discontinuance of these letters until July.*]

July 2nd, 1960

Well, my dear, I don't feel as if I'd written to you or heard from you either for a Long while.

We have now got staying in our neighbourhood but leaving next Monday — Gamel Woolsey. We knew her mother in Patchin Place, New York City ... She is descended from the brother of Cardinal Wolsey. We have lately had a visit from my Boss and Patron Mr Eric Harvey who brought his wife Phyllis and his two youngest children both about seven, called Juliet and Richard. I fell quite in love with Richard, the darlingest little boy I've ever had to talk to up here, where I lie by the broad window-sill on my couch and where I have that picture of you holding your hat, which I particularly like. I've got here too a lovely picture of Lulu when he was at the Prep, wearing a big white collar and big black silk tie, and I've got a good picture of the Queen and also of our Gertrude and of my parents and my brother Littleton and of Isobel my brother Bertie's daughter, and of D. H. Lawrence.

Today we had a visit from Mrs Olwen Caradoc Evans whom we both like & I did not fail to point out to Gamel Woolsey and to Olwen Caradoc Evans that our doll called Olwen is now having a new set of clothes made for her.

The thing I like watching most from this window \* is the mountainous Curve against the sky where the southern Peak of our Mountain Range, the Moelwyn which the Welsh call Bach

or Little, ascends to the northern Peak called Mawr or Big. I can see on my right in the middle of the second row of books starting from the one nearest the ceiling those Four great Folios that your friend Enid Starkie, who gave you good wine, procured for me.

Love from us both, your old John and his Phyllis.

We are both thinking of Katie in the Weymouth Eye Infirmary [*LW: she had had an operation for cataract*] and we have just heard from Lucy who had just seen you.

I am still too weak from Asian Flue to leave the house & go for any walk, but Phyllis is much better.

\* *he later moved downstairs, see November 16th [KK]*

July 13th 1960

... I do indeed look forward eagerly to the [*LW: Francis and Sylvia Beaufort-Palmer's*] visit with you towards the end of September. We are both thrilled, my dear, to think of seeing you then.

Well, this is an exciting letter from you [*What a meeting of Titled Potentates that was you got in for!*] ... I expect I told you how I heard of the death of Oscar? I was with my big bitch-dog Thora in the guard's van when at some little station a boy came along the platform called "Oscar Wilde is dead!" The guard and I and my dog too, moved by our emotion, lay on the floor of the guard's van weeping. It was my Mother who first told me about Oscar, she went to hear him speak in Dorchester where he laughed at the way people painted roses on their coal-scuttles in their drawing-rooms. She removed hers as a result of that speech of his ...

We have had Gamel Woolsey here tho' not sleeping with us.

I've got three or four other newly written & newly typed books all ready for publication. We had such a nice visit from Eric Harvey now the Boss of Macdonalds Ltd., only a few days ago with his wife whose name is Phyllis and her two 7 year old twins, Richard and Juliet. I made great friends with Richard.

Yours as ever, looking forward O so much to your September visit! and so says Phyllis.

J C Powys

[*Aye but I do so love that cry of your toddler Susie about her Puppy, "She's a she and she's all mine!"*]

September 4th, 1960

Well, my dear, I am so sorry about the illness of your friends Beaufort-Palmer and I hope they'll recover quickly. As far as we know no one else is coming to visit us this month until Isobel comes for a day or two on the 30th of September. We may have certain visits round my birthday Oct 8 but otherwise if you find you can come later on, just let us know. [*LW: the visit had to be further postponed.*]

Please send my love to Oliver and I am very interested to hear of Christopher's girl Veronica.\*

[*Yes, we had a nice long letter from Katie telling us how she felt but saying though she could write easily and well she could not yet read a word. How devoted she is to Lucy — and no wonder either. O how well I remember Lucy looking out of the Nursery Window at Montacute Vicarage!*]

We had an unexpected visit from Giles Wordsworth yesterday and I was again so struck by his face when I saw it approaching (thro' the window up here in my writing-room) because it seemed so extremely to resemble yours! He told us he'd been with you recently. Both Phyllis and I do like him so very much. I showed him the edition of Wordsworth given me such a short

time before they died by my wife and only son who are now at rest, if the dead do rest, in the Roman Catholic cemetery in Bath.

yrs always as ever, & so says Phyllis,

John C. Powys

\* first wife of Chris Wilkinson. [CW]

November 16th, 1960

I am now lying on my back in Phyllis's Parlour on the Ground Floor of our tiny dwelling, listening to news on the BBC of which I understand very little indeed and also to the "Forecasts" about the weather which don't affect me very much though I have sufficiently recovered from the attack of Asian Flu we both had to make it possible for me to have gone up 13 or 14 times to the foot of our waterfall which has been overflowing lately, and to sit on a cloth cap which I carried up there along with old Littleton's stick which I call "Sherborne".

As I lie here now at twenty past six in the evening I look at Lulu's Ankh which he brought from Egypt — over the door into the room — and at Dick Turpin on his horse, at the top of the cupboard above the clock, and then at the wooden bell which Will's daughter Rose brought to us from Kenya, and which is from the neck of a Camel. Then I look at a space on the wall opposite me where Phyllis puts the Electric Shaver when she shaves me. Then I look at another empty place where I always imagine seeing Robin Hood and Friar John and Maid Marian and their gang of wayfaring Bandits.

I expect I told you all about the visit we had a fortnight or so ago from Eric Harvey and his wife Phyllis and his seven year old twins Richard and Juliet. He is now the owner of Macdonalds Publishers, for all the Macdonalds have gone away.

Well, my dear, do thank your Oliver's family, Judy & Jane & them all, for sending me their love, and give them this parlour-full of love in return. Alyse Gregory wrote to us of how very much she had enjoyed your visit — as indeed everybody you ever go and see evidently does.

[unsigned]

December 16th, 1960

My dear, we are both of us, Phyllis and I, shocked & greatly saddened to hear from Katie of the death of the lady [LW: *my housekeeper (Sylvia Fripp)*] who lived next door to you with those fascinating little children and who was found for you by Mrs Gill.

What are you in heaven's name, my dear, going to do now? We both, your old John & his Phyllis, are equally shocked by this startling event.

John C.P.

[RVL includes here a letter from Phyllis Playter:

My dear Louis,

I am so shocked to hear of this latest blow to your life. It seems unbelievable that you should again go through this experience of sudden death. It almost makes you believe in God — since I am accustomed to a cruel and malevolent conception of such a Being from Jack.

What will you do? And what will become of those lovely little children whose conversation you used to beguile us with sometimes in your letters. I am so sorry and dumbfounded by it. We have only heard the bare fact.

With love and very great dismay — Phyllis. ]

Undated. Postmark December 30, 1960

O my friend, I do pray that things have begun to work out better now for you. I was feeling still too weak from my attack of Asian flu to be able to deal with your latest letter, but I do hope that Phyllis will be equal to getting this scrawl safe into our Post-Box.

Now there has just arrived — well, I say “just”, but he has been here already for more than an hour — an official Framer of little Pictures and Portraits. I am now waiting in Phyllis’s Parlour downstairs till she returns from being escorted by him down to the Post-Office whence she wants to despatch a huge box of things of one kind and another to Alyse in her home near Exeter.

I have definitely decided myself never again to leave our tiny little Half-House for any purpose. Recently for about a couple of months I have regularly gone for a walk before breakfast between nine and ten a.m. — if the morning is a.m. (but I’ve never acquired the certain knowledge as to what is a.m. and what is p.m.). Here she is home again! but she forgot to post our letters in the Box so now she is off to do this. — Here she is! home again; for good and all, thanks be!

Our BBC is now talking about a “Merger” and a “Murder” but I am so slow-witted especially about Murders and Mergers that they sound very much alike.

Well, my dear, do forgive me for being such a bad correspondent and please do tell me where you are now and what is happening to you and also any exciting news about your son and your grandchildren. O I do so envy you having grandchildren!

yours ever and always

John Cowper Powys

Undated. Postmark 27 January, 1961

Well, my dear, we were both, Phyllis and I, so pleased to get this letter from you. It is certainly exciting about Susan’s [*LW: T. F. Powys’s adopted daughter (now Theodora)*] being so thrilled with her Father [*LW: Count Potocki of Montalk*] and rushing off with him to where he lives in the South of France; and the two children [*LW: of my late housekeeper*] are living with their grandmother.

I like to think of you staying with Joyce Gill at Park Farm near Dove Cottage and of her helping you in making your permanent arrangements.

It certainly is an amazing thing, this change of attitude of Violet [*LW: widow of T. F. Powys*] to Susan’s father from regarding him as the worst possible rogue and an abominable rascal and now liking him so much. Your description of him is very interesting to me and I particularly like to hear that he is an admirer of Rabelais. I shall always be so proud that this group called the “Friends of Rabelais” have put my book on him in the chamber where he was born.

With both our love

yrs as ever J.C.P. and Phyllis —

[*Louis Wilkinson’s transcription of JCP’s letters ends at this point. A few more follow in Lancaster’s transcription. Extra notes by KK and CW*]

Tuesday, February 28, 1961

My dear, I do indeed thank you for this letter of none other than Harry Lyon! [*JCP’s brother-in-law, who was at Cambridge with him, a fervent convert to Anglo-Catholicism*]

“Harry Lyon, Harry Lyon, can you sup upon the Sacrament? — Yes I can sup upon the Sacrament, Sippy-Suppy goes the Sacrament!”

Think of your writing to us on January 30th. I do hope your applicants for the annexe to Dove Cottage are now happily contracted with and fixed up.

We have just had a letter from Barcelona in Spain wanting a copy of one of my novels for a series of contemporary books which they are publishing; so we have suggested one or two that we could send them.

I am interested to hear that Oliver's Christopher was to be married on Feb. 9th and that Judy will be married sometime in June. I don't fail to notice that you don't like Judy's man as much as you like Christopher's Veronica \*; but I am thankful to hear he is very devoted to Judy. I am certainly glad also to hear that Christopher earns quite a fair amount of money; tho' he is still studying at Bristol University.

I am interested in what you say, A.M. meaning Ante-Meridian and P.M. meaning Post-meridian.

Well, my dear, Ta Ta for now, but we both pray we'll see you later. I like the idea, and so does Phyllis, of Mr and Mrs Quick, she 60 and he 65 —

Good luck, my dear, and we both long to see you again —

your old hop o' my thumb JCP always and ever.

\* *both these children of Oliver later divorced and remarried.* [CW]

April 4th, 1961

O my dear, I do so much like your quotation from Edith Sitwell's Introduction to Swinburne, whom she calls "One of the greatest poets that England [*has produced*]".

Both Phyllis and I are indeed pleased with those lovely Canavaggia girls, Marie and Renée,'s Preface to T.F.P.'s Unclay and for their sending you an Xmas greeting along with it, and for your also getting a nice card from our brother Willie in Kenya.

Yes indeed! What Swinburne says about Theism is certainly fascinating to read. I like what he says about its being like Buddhism but without the elaborations of Buddhism.\*

Yes — thanks for asking, my dear, Phyllis and I are both in good health and good spirits — though I have flatly refused to leave this little half-house to go out for even the smallest walk towards our big waterfall until the Summer comes.

I am so glad to hear that Edith Sitwell, in spite of her being a Convert to Catholicism, does not attack Swinburne's views on Theism.

With love from us both, J. Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter.

Please send our love to Christopher and the girls. O how I wish I had grandchildren.

\* *A letter from Swinburne to Theodore Watts, August 29, 1874, concerns belief versus scepticism or atheism. The comparison with Buddhism was LW's — [RVL, from a LW letter.]*

July 2, 1961

How are yourself and your family? It seems such a long time since we exchanged a word. I have just written a letter to a Mr Neville Braybrooke about a short novel of his that is to be published by Secker and Warburg, entitled "The Idler".

We are expecting next Wednesday, which will be the Fifth of July, a Japanese Professor called Ichiro Hara, of Tokyo, Japan, with whom I have corresponded for a great many years. \* Phyllis has got a room for him in the North Western Hotel, but we have asked a Car Driver called Knight Griffith to meet him at Llandudno Junction and bring him to our house here for some kind of Supper before returning him to the room in the North Western Hotel.

I have just finished reading the first chapter of Arnold Bennett's Old Wives Tale.

I do hope, my dear, you are comfortably established where you are and that you have heard good news from your family from where they are down south. I often hear news of you from both my sisters, Katie and Lucy.

[no close]

\* Powys to a Japanese Friend, letters of John Cowper Powys to Ichiro Hara (*March 1953–February 1962*) edited by Anthony Head, was published by Cecil Woolf in 1990. Also included is JCP's preface to Ichiro Hara's two-part edition of *The Meaning of Culture*, published in Japan in 1958. [KK]

October 11th [1961]

My dear Louis ...

I was very glad to have your letter. I like to think of your staying with Oliver and I'd like to hear more of this new house of his.

It was sad that we haven't been able to see you this summer, but I hope someone will turn up who will want to drive you here before long.

I am indeed interested to hear of Jimmy and Tania Sterne having been with Henry Miller lately in this country.

Whatever happens this brings to you, old friend, Phyllis's and my love.

Always your faithful Jack.

[undated, postmarked 25 April, 1962]

My dear Louis ...

If there is now anyone with a car near enough to you to make it possible to drop you in here to pay us a little visit please don't hesitate to let them do so. I do so greatly long to see you again and to have a word with you about our original meeting and just how it came about.

I did so enjoy seeing my brother Will and I am so glad to hear that you saw him too.

I pray it's not getting cloudy now. It doesn't look quite as warm and sunny as it did when I first woke up at four o'clock this morning. [sic]

It is wonderful how well Phyllis Playter understands and humours my quips and cranks, and how little she lets them interfere with my happiness and the ease of my life and of the moments when I have to pump-ship.

As I lie on my bed I look at what my relations and friends wrote about your going together to the Memorial Service to Bertie in the little Church at Winterbourne, and at Dick Turpin upon Black Bess, and at the 'Ankh' which Lulu brought to give me from Egypt, and I can now describe all its 3 parts clearly — \*\* [*Drawing of ankh as symbol of conception: 'Yes, inside the lady. The man's balls and the man's penis'*].

\*\* According to Google, this interpretation was presented in 1869 by Thomas Inman, as representing 'the male triad and the female unit, under a decent form'. A parallel interpretation is of the river Nile entering its delta — both symbolising (re)birth to new life. See also Angus Wilson's 1962 visit, in *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*. [KK]

*The correspondence on both sides, in Colgate archive, ends here. JCP died 13 months later on June 17th 1963. Louis made several broadcasts in his 80s. He lived on alone and with Oliver's family, with increasing difficulty, till he died aged 85 in September 1966* [CW]