Important Notice

Annual Conference 2021 cancelled

Our annual conference in August will regrettably **not** take place. It seems certain that, even following widespread roll-out of the covid-19 vaccine, social distancing and mask wearing will remain a requirement for indoor events (assuming large group meetings are permitted), and this makes impossible any meaningful interaction. We have therefore organised a **special discussion meeting by Zoom video link** to take place on **Saturday 14 August 2021 at 15.00 BST**. The subject for discussion will be JCP's novel *The Brazen Head* (1956). There are more details about the event on our website.

Hon. Secretary, Chris Thomas

AGM

The **Annual General Meeting** of the Powys Society will take place **by Zoom video link** on **Sunday 15 August 2021 at 15.00 BST**. All paid up members of the Powys Society are eligible to participate in the AGM. The AGM agenda will be posted on the website and published in the July *Newsletter*.

If you wish to attend these meetings please notify **Kevin Taylor** at ksjer.taylor@btinternet.com who will be hosting the events and will send you joining instructions.

Hon. Secretary, Chris Thomas

We are looking for a volunteer to come forward to fill the role of Treasurer from August 2021 – please contact Hon. Secretary for more information – please see item for committee nominations on p.3

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Editorial

JCP wrote Introductions for love and for money, occasionally both.

*NL*102 is largely taken up with two introductions to books by two extremely different writers: to an early work by Gustave Flaubert, who became the pinnacle of French 19th-century literature, and to poems by Eric Barker, friend of Henry Miller on the dramatic Pacific cliffs of Big Sur, California. (This was JCP's first, longer, introduction to Barker – for the second, and more about Barker, see *NL*82). JCP shared Barker's sympathy with non-human nature. They exchanged letters for thirty years from about 1930; Barker visited Blaenau in 1959. Flaubert, on the other hand, is one of the writers JCP is on record as disliking (though perhaps not quite so much as Flaubert's successor Maupassant). But *November* was written when Flaubert was barely 20, ten or more years before he perfected his famous glacial detachment. JCP, who describes his own youth as a stage from which he later developed, looks more admiringly on the vitality of young Flaubert than on the perfectionist 'sealion' he turned into. Chris Thomas provides useful backgrounds to JCP's connections with both writers.

Also in 102 are tributes to Ian Robinson of the Brynmill Press, who with Elaine and Barrie Mencher did so much for T.F. Powys; and to Jim Morgan, a long-term JCP supporter. Another Powys connection is with Hugh MacDiarmid, suggested by Marcella H-P and by Tim Hyman (MacDiarmid incorporated long quotations from JCP's *Autobiography* in his own work). Ray Cox continues his exploration of Glastonbury trees. Robin Hickey describes memorials to the life of William Cowper, friend of the Powys great-grandfather and a poet they all admired; and Geoffrey Winch imagines Isadora, admirer of JCP, dancing over a frieze on the Arc de Triomphe.

On the back cover, Anthony Head's poem is a tribute to Chris Wilkinson (son of Oliver son of Louis), a much-loved Powys supporter who died three years ago. He edited and contributed to many Powys publications and letters, and enlivened our conferences with the entertainments he devised.

All past *Newsletters* now being accessible on the Website, it's a pleasure to note links to previous work.

*

A Zoom Meeting

Saturday 24 April 2021 — Discussion of T.F. Powys' *Fables*, *The Seaweed and the Cuckoo Clock* and *John Pardy and the Waves*. Discussion will be led by Paul Cheshire, following a theme provided by John Williams. Please visit our website for more details. This event will be HELD ONLINE by ZOOM at 15:00 BST (Max 1.5 HOURS to 16:30). If anyone wishes to join the Zoom discussion, please e-mail Kevin Taylor at ksjer.taylor@btinternet.com. Kevin will be hosting the meeting and will send you joining details in due course.

Committee Nominations 2021-2022

Nominations are invited for **Honorary Officers and Members of the Powys Society committee** to take effect from **August 2021**.

All paid-up members, including Honorary members, are entitled to submit nominations for the committee. Nominations must include the name of the **Proposer** and the **Seconder** and should be submitted in writing, or by e-mail, including a statement confirming the **Nominee's agreement**.

Nominations should be sent to the Hon. Secretary by e-mail to chris.d.rhomas@ hotmail.co.uk or by post to 87 Ledbury Road, London W11 2AG.

Nominations must be received **by Tuesday 1 June 2021.**

Current **Honorary Officers** of the Powys Society committee are:

Chairman Timothy Hyman
Vice-Chairman David Goodway
Secretary Chris Thomas
Treasurer Robin Hickey (**NB**: *Although Paul Cheshire's nomination as Treasurer was approved at the 2020 AGM, Paul and Robin later agreed to switch roles until August 2021. Paul continues in his role as web editor*).

Nominations are sought for the **four** positions of the **Honorary Officers** from August 2021.

We particularly need a volunteer to come forward to fill the role of Treasurer as Robin plans to retire from this position in August 2021.

Current members of the Powys Society committee are: **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter editor, with Chris Thomas*), **Dawn Collins** (*social media manager*), and **Paul Cheshire** (*web editor*), (whose three-year term of office will expire in August 2021); **Louise de Bruin** (*Publications Manager and Conference organiser*) who has one year left to run of her three-year term of service; **Michael Kowalewski** (*Collection Liaison Officer*) and **Marcel Bradbury** (who have two years left to run of their three-year term of service). **Anna Rosic** continues to serve as a co-opted committee member; **Marcella Henderson Peal** and **Nicholas Birns** serve as Honorary committee members; **Kevin Taylor** (*eBooks and Editor of the Powys Journal*) and **Charles Lock** (*associate editor of the Powys Journal*) serve as *ex-officio* members of the committee.

Nominations are sought for **three** vacant positions for **membership of the committee** from August 2021.

Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary

A Zoom Meeting

Saturday 19 June 2021 — Discussion of *Powys to Sea Eagle: The Letters of John Cowper Powys to Philippa Powys* (1996)

This event will be HELD ONLINE by ZOOM video link at 15:00 BST (Max 1.5 HOURS to 16:30).

If any member wishes to join the Zoom discussion, please e-mail Kevin Taylor at ksjer.taylor@btinternet.com. Kevin will be hosting the meeting and will send you joining details in due course.

There are around 200 letters from JCP to his younger sister Philippa or Katie (1886-1963). The letters cover a period of 50 years from 1911 to 1961 and provide a good introduction to the personal style of JCP's voluminous correspondence. These letters range over a wide variety of subjects from family and friends, to favourite books and writers (especially Whitman), as well as JCP's early experiences in America, his life in Wales, his daily walks, his progress with his own writing. They also give a vivid sense of JCP's deep sympathy with his sister's personal difficulties. The editor of the letters, Anthony Head notes:

In Philippa, Powys had an ideal correspondent, someone open to all avenues of thought, whose responses to the life of the senses and the spirit were, like her brother's, not subject to the restrictions of a certain religious dogma or metaphysical creed. Of all the Powys brothers and sisters, in many ways, as John Cowper liked to claim to her, they two were most alike.

Chris Thomas, Hon Secretary

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Paul Cheshire

Website News: The Powys Society Newsletters

All 101 *Powys Society Newsletters* are now scanned and available on the website. When I first announced this project to the committee, I told them I expected to complete the scanning by March 2021. In fact I completed the work in early December. It took less time than expected because I was able to streamline the process as I gained experience. Also, I only planned to spend one morning per week on this, because of a writing commitment which I wanted to allow time for. Well… (as JCP would begin a sentence) normally I start clearing cobwebs and rearranging books on shelves when I want to avoid getting on with writing; scanning old newsletters turned out to be ideal displacement activity.

Working backwards through the history of the Society has been fascinating. The article I was writing – mainly about Owen Barfield – led me to read Rudolf Steiner, who has a theory much like Yeats's 'dreaming back' that after death you relive your life backwards in a kind of dream that lasts about one third of the time you were alive. There is something very particular about going backwards: experiencing the effects before you see the causes. Reaching the origin – *Newsletter* No 1 December 1987 (two smudgy folded A4 sheets) – was like reaching the acorn seedling after having seen the fully grown oak. (Ozon's film '5 X 2' does this backward-time thing very well in the context of a marriage).

Scanning is different from thorough reading of course and – while making a mental note of articles to dwell on later – I mainly registered the succession of people being thanked for their service on leaving, before (in my backward motion) making their first appearance, when they say how unworthy they feel to be standing in the shoes of their predecessors. As Heraclitus might have put it: 'you can't step backwards into the same Society twice'. etaK and sirhC latest in the line of Newsletter Editors, I salute you!

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Chris Thomas notes: The complete historical archive of Powys Society *Newsletters* may be freely accessed on the Powys Society website at: https://powys-society.org/Newsletter.html Paul's reference to the way he worked backwards through the history of the Society and the process of 'dreaming back' events and memories described by Yeats (in *A Vision* and in the imagery of several of his poems) made me think of the way JCP described his own working method and the revision of his creations as in this extract from a letter to his brother Littleton describing the revisions to *A Glastonbury Romance*: *I've now finished the last chapter of my book & the last but one & am working (for I am now going Backwards, which is, as if God created the world, beginning at Man, & ending with the Ichthyosaurus!) on the last but one…* (letter from JCP to Littleton Powys dated September 11th 1931, quoted in *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, edited by Belinda Humfrey, 1972). See also JCP's letter about *A Glastonbury Romance* to Dorothy Richardson dated June 15 1932: *in my anxiety to make sure of getting my finale as I wanted it I worked backwards writing all those last long chapters… from the Flood backwards* (*The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson*, edited by Janet Fouli, 2008, p.64). I was also reminded of JCP's approach to his reading of Wilson Knight's *Laureate of Peace – On the Genius of Alexander Pope* (1954) which Knight dedicated to JCP – 'artist, teacher, seer, in admiration'. In a letter to Wilson Knight dated November 16, 1954 (quoted in *Powys to Knight*, edited by Robert Blackmore (1983) he said: *I've just read and read it working backwards*.

J. Lawrence Mitchell

Ian Robinson (*1937-2020*)

I am truly sorry to hear of the death of Ian Robinson. He is, of course, well known to Powys Society members, both for his own contributions to annual meetings and for his role as the public face of Brynmill Press of which he was the co-founder in 1970.

Ian was a self-professed disciple of F.R. Leavis from his days at Downing College, Cambridge, where he earned a double-first, and it was, perhaps, the Leavis connection that first inspired him to promote so effectively the case for Theodore Powys as a major writer whose work deserved to be kept in print.

Our meetings at Powys Society gatherings were primarily social and most of our communication was necessarily by letter in the days before the internet. We both devoted a lot of time to *The Market Bell* (1991), Ian's extensive notes to which are impressive testimony to his erudition.

But my favourite observation reveals a delightfully down-to-earth side of him. It is his comment about TFP's text: 'The effect of a text much closer to the author's manuscript, on the reader who knows this author, will be something like coming upon the true scrumpy after being used to the refined commercial product' (*The Market Bell*, p. 286).

J. Lawrence Mitchell's T.F. Powys, Aspects of a Life *was published by The Brynmill Press in 2005.*

*

Elaine Mencher

A Tribute to Ian Robinson

17th April 1937–30th October 2020

Ian Robinson was not only a great literary critic but also a wonderful human being, the two things being closely intertwined. He was incorruptible in every way, and his quiet modest demeanour covered a fearless, passionate and detailed response to what, in a host of essays and books, he showed to be the degeneration of the English language in our time, with its correspondingly demoralising effect on every aspect of our lives. In response to the news of Ian's death Bob Hayward wrote of the inaugural meeting of the committee of the Leavis Society, 'I wasn't quite sure who he was but his very unobtrusiveness dominated the meeting and there was no doubt who had most authority in the room.' Ian was author of a number of remarkable books on Chaucer, criticism of literature, language, philosophy and politics, which, though of piercing perspicacity and seriousness, are at times almost hurtingly funny. '*The Survival of English* (1973) is one of the most entertaining books on language ever

written. Its demolition of *The New English Bible* is especially good,' wrote B.R. Myers in the April 2008 issue of *The Atlantic*. Ian taught himself Hebrew and Greek the better to read the Bible.

I first met Ian in 1957, when he and my then future husband Barrie Mencher were reading English with F.R. Leavis at Downing College, Cambridge. It was the beginning of a lifelong friendship which was fed by a mutual passion for literature and music, and the sheer delight of critical freedom; a God-ordained friendship. Typically, Ian was not impressed when he was awarded firsts in both parts of the English Tripos. As the years passed, Barrie and I had increasing reason to thank God for Ian's selfless loyal friendship, including during Barrie's long grievous final illness – when Ian repeatedly drove between Hereford and Leeds during continuous crises – and afterwards when he supported my dealings with the authorities concerning the medical failures of which Barrie had been a victim.

In 1970 – from a conviction that there were books that deserved publishing that would never get published by commercial publishers or the universities – Ian, whilst serving as Senior Lecturer at Swansea University, co-founded The Brynmill Press with David Sims. They published works of criticism, poetry, philosophy and fiction, beginning with the quarterly review *The Human World* (1970-1974). In 1982-1986 Ian published and edited *The Gadfly*, another quarterly. In 1990 the press started its T.F. Powys Edition, Ian having recognised the originality of Powys's genius in a wide range of works when the general public was aware of little but *Mr Weston's*

Ian Robinson, Elaine and Barrie Mencher and John Hodgson at the Chichester Conference in 2006

Good Wine – no doubt because it was published by Penguin. Between 1990 and 2003 Brynmill published the finest of Powys's previously unpublished works. At the beginning of the series Ian wrote, 'Theodore Francis Powys is widely recognised as one of the significant English authors of this century. His originality is shown by the difficulty of describing the form of fiction he developed: not simply allegory, or fable, or novel, but a genuine prose art, meditative, religious, shocking, and with a rich vein of humour for which he is not always given credit.' And at the end of the series he wrote, 'With William Langland and John Bunyan, T.F. Powys is one of the three great English fabulists.' 'In contrast to those who wrote the *New English Bible*', he said, 'Powys showed how the style of the King James Bible might be given a new life in the prose of the twentieth century.'

It was on Ian's bookshelves in 1974 that I first met T.F. Powys's books. I began to read *God's Eyes A-Twinkle* – a Chatto & Windus anthology of Powys's stories which inspired me to read all the published Powys works I could find, then to search for all the unpublished ones, of which there were many. Ian was already aware of the existence of the unpublished novel *The Market Bell*, having marked a student's dissertation on one of the manuscripts. Being privy to my searches, he said it had always been his dream to publish a complete T.F.Powys. Thus was born *The Brynmill Press T.F. Powys Series*, giving me access to collections of unpublished manuscripts and typescripts in Warwickshire, Texas and Bulawayo. It was necessary to compare all the material available in order to select the final versions of works worthy of publication to pass on to Ian for his approval. I expected the novels, short stories and essays, etc., to be published in the usual way and was surprised by the scholarly editorial material which Ian worked on and which came to involve me, too, as his editorial assistant. We were in complete accord in decisions such as printing the editorial apparatus at the end and preserving Powys's idiosyncratic punctuation. To have conventionalised the latter would have destroyed its unique expressiveness.

Ian took as critical an interest in typesetting as in editing and we were both concerned for presenting Powys's work as handsomely as possible. When he asked me to select and edit Powys's early works, his fine typesetting was a blessing. How he could teach and write his own masterly books at the same time, I'll never know. Eventually it did become too much, and his writing took priority over the running of the Press. Although he continued to typeset the Powys books himself, Barrie, to quote Ian, 'was Company Secretary, effectively in charge, for some years from 1992 onwards when otherwise the company would have liquidated.' As one result, by 2008 Ian had produced his late quartet of books under the title *Coming to Judgement*, in which an all-encompassing lack of judgement in our present culture is surveyed and held to account in his inimitable, at times piercingly funny, way. Were it possible, to the prophets in the first book of the quartet, *The English Prophets*, I would add the name of Ian Robinson.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Duke Maskell, who, with his experience as erstwhile Director of The Brynmill Press Limited, was able to make useful suggestions and corrections, and for his assistance with the Bibliography. I should also like to thank Chris Thomas for an easy and pleasant email correspondence.

N.B. For a fuller account of Ian Robinson's work outside Powys studies, see the Wikipedia entry (perhaps made by Ian himself) at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ian_Robinson_(author)

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From TFP's Journal
April 26 1912

(selected by Elaine Mencher)

I thought I saw God walking in the garden of my mind. *
He said, "I am the sudden feeling of delight
I am the wonder of longing, the wonder of desire.
In man's day joy I am,
I am his sorrow in the night
When he is cold I am the fire,
When he eateth I am the bread
Without me no man could see,
I am the sleep of man
And I am Death and I am life."
And I said What am I?
"Thou art the dweller in life," he answered,
"Only know Me and thou shalt live."

* * * * *

And for a moment Behold all around me God was alive.

*

* *And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day* (Genesis iii,8)
Journal extract quoted from TFP's Selected Early Works*, 2004, Vol.1, p.240*

Chris Thomas

A Bibliography of the Publications of Ian Robinson

With thanks to Elaine Mencher and Duke Maskell for contributions and help compiling titles. This bibliography is not a complete listing of all Ian's writing and publications but aims to offer readers an idea of the range of subjects he wrote about, including literature (especially his contribution to the study of T.F. Powys's life and work), the condition of language, linguistics, politics, religion, philosophy and, as Ian's colleague Duke Maskell notes, "always as if they didn't have to be treated as separate, self-contained specialisms but might belong to Carlyle's 'science of things in general' ".

The Brynmill Press (co-founded by Ian Robinson and David Sims)

The Human World (1970–1974), a quarterly Review (the first publication of the Brynmill Press)

Editions of works by T.F. Powys published by the Brynmill Press

Father Adam, 1990/2002, edited by Ian Robinson. (A previously unpublished novella). The second edition includes additional editorial material including an account of the story's genesis by Elaine Mencher. The 2nd edition was reviewed by Glen Cavaliero in *The Powys Society Newsletter* 48, March 2003.

The Market Bell, edited by Ian Robinson, Elaine Mencher and J.L.Lawrence Mitchell, 1991. (A previously unpublished novel). The second edition was revised and reset in 2006.

Mock's Curse: ***Nineteen Stories***, previously unpublished stories selected and edited by Elaine and Barrie Mencher, 1995. (*Mock's Curse* was reviewed by John Williams in *The Powys Journal*, Vol. V. 1995. See also reply to the review by Elaine and Barrie Mencher in *The Powys Society Newsletter* No. 27, April 1996).

The Sixpenny Strumpet, edited by Ian Robinson and J.L.Lawrence Mitchell, 1997 (includes 'In Good Earth', 'God', 'The Two Thieves' and 'The Sixpenny Strumpet'.

***Selected Early Works of T.F.Powys*,** (in two volumes) plus manuscript and typescript facsimiles in separate folder, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Elaine Mencher, 2004.

Works by other authors published by Brynmill Press associated with TFP

Cuckoo in the Powys Nest*, *A Memoir, by Theodora Gay Scutt, 2000.

T.F. Powys: Aspects of a Life by J. Lawrence Mitchell, 2005.

Other works by Ian Robinson

Chaucer's Prosody*, A Study of the Middle English Verse Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, 1971.

Chaucer and the English Tradition, Cambridge University Press, 1972.

Survival of English*, Essays in the Criticism of Language*, Cambridge University Press, 1973 (reprinted 1974 and 1975, reissued by the Brynmill Press 1981, reprinted 1988).

The Decline and Fall of Mr Heath*, Essays in Criticism of British Politics* (with David Sims), Brynmill Press,1974.

The New Grammarian's Funeral*: A Critique of Noam Chomsky's Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Review of *After Babel* by George Steiner (with references to TFP and JCP), *Spectator,* 1 February 1975.

The Gadfly, A Quarterly Review of English Letters**,** edited by Ian Robinson, February 1982-November 1986, Brynmill Press.

The Gadfly Literary Supplements, edited by Ian Robinson who also wrote some of the contributions including *A Lenten Pleynte to the English Bishops*, 2015 and *Swift: Madness and Art* (no date).

Prayers for the New Babel*, Criticism of the new Church of England Alternative Service Book* (1980),1982.

Richard II and Woodstock**,** 1988.

My Native English, *Criticisms of an Unnecessary Crisis in English Studies*, edited by Ian Robinson and Roger Knight, Brynmill Press, 1988.

The Establishment of Modern English Prose in the Reformation and the Enlightenment, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

A Considerable Body of New Prayer Material*, A half-yearly Review* published by the Prayer Book Society. No. 44, Summer 1998.

The New Idea of a University (with Duke Maskell), Haven, 2001.

A Tribute to Francis Feather**,** Powys Society Newsletter 55, July 2005.

An **interview** with Ian Robinson conducted by Kate Kavanagh, *The Powys Society Newsletter* 55, July 2005.

T.F.Powys and the Renewal of English Prose, *The Powys Journal*, Vol. XVI, 2006 (a lecture given at the Powys Society Conference in Llangollen, 21 August 2005).

Coming to Judgement:

I. *The English Prophets, A Critical Defence of English Criticism*, 2001, ISBN 0-907839 66-5

IIA. *Who Killed the Bible*, 2006, 2nd edition (2014) revised with a new concluding chapter

IIB. *Holding the Centre* (2008)

III. *Untied Kingdom* (2008)

The Homilies *Appointed to be read in Churches*, revised and introduced by Ian Robinson and John Griffiths, (Sermons on Christian doctrine and life originally published in the sixteenth century), Brynmill Press, 2006.

T F Powys and the Comic, *The Powys Society Newsletter* 64, July 2008.

How to Read Shakespeare's Verse**,** Edgeways, 2019.

Selected contributions to other publications

Penguin History of English Literature edited by Boris Ford (Ian contributed an essay on ***Shakespeare and The Royal Society***).

The Question of Style, ed by Peter Mullen, Edgeways, 2000 (Ian contributed an essay ***The Real Common Worship***).

What is Wrong With Us? Essays on Cultural Pathology, edited by Eric Coombes and Theodore Dalrymple, Imprint Academic, 2016 (Ian contributed a chapter entitled ***Politics as Language: Language as Politics***).

Chris Thomas

F.R. Leavis, Ian Robinson, TFP and JCP

Our late President, Glen Cavaleiro, described the circumstances in which he composed his book on JCP (*John Cowper Powys, Novelist*, OUP 1973): *It was written at a time when the influence of F.R. Leavis and his disciples was at its height: high seriousness, adult maturity, social relevance, an earnest attitude to what was all-envelopingly referred to as 'life', were the fashionable literary credentials. Leavisite critics were extolling the work of T.F. Powys at his brother's expense.* (The Powys Society Newsletter *53, November 2004, p.37*).

F.R. Leavis (1895-1978), was Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge, from 1937 to 1962; he was an inspirational teacher of English literature, an influential literary critic and co-founder with L.C. Knights of the important critical periodical *Scrutiny).*

Glen's aim in his book was to demonstrate and defend JCP's status as a great novelist. He concluded his article in the *Newsletter* by saying he wished he had given his book the title of *John Cowper Powys: the Novelist* but his publisher suggested it would be better to entitle it *John Cowper Powys*: *Novelist* which was intended to be *an eye-catcher challenge to F.R. Leavis's book on* D.H. Lawrence (*D.H. Lawrence: Novelist,* 1955).

As Elaine Mencher notes in her Tribute to Ian Robinson, Ian read English at Downing College in 1957 with F.R. Leavis. The influence of Leavis's teaching of English as a discipline of thought and belief in a 'living principle' or living reality can be traced in all of Ian's writing – in a lecture on Leavis he gave at University College Swansea Ian described himself as a Leavisite *disciple – that ancient and honourable title*. This influence extended to Ian's admiration for T.F. Powys and his strong dislike of JCP's novels.

In an interview in *The Powys Society Newsletter* 55 (July 2005, p.25), Ian declared: *TFP is one of the three great English fabulists and central to the last great flowering of English literature, and he ought to be read as widely as Lawrence, Eliot and Joyce*. To provide some critical context for Ian's estimate of the literary significance of T.F. Powys's work it will be helpful to recall some of Leavis's own salient comments on TFP.

We may take Mr T.F. Powys today as the successor of Hardy: he is probably the last considerable artist of the old order (he seems to me a great writer). It does not seem likely that it will ever again be possible for a distinguished mind to be formed, as Mr Powys's has been, on the rhythms, sanctioned by nature and time, of rural culture… Mr Powys's disillusion belongs to the old world, and the structure and organisation of his art are according. (New Bearings in English Poetry, 1932).

It is a mark of the genuine nature of Mr Powys's creative gift (his work seems to me not to have had due recognition) that he has been able to achieve a kind of

traditional relation to Bunyan – especially of course in Mr Weston's Good Wine. (*The Great Tradition*, 1948).

As a writer of tales [D.H. Lawrence] *belongs with Hawthorne, Henry James and T.F. Powys (who has never had the recognition he deserves…)* (*D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, 1955).

F.R. Leavis also contributed a review of TFP's *Kindness in a Corner* to *Cambridge Review* (9 May 1930) and Q.D. Leavis cited TFP in *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932).

Ian Robinson's dislike of JCP's work was expressed openly in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* (30 May 1975) in a response to George Steiner's favorable review of JCP's *Letters to Iowerth C.Peate* (*TLS* 16 May 1975). Steiner had welcomed the JCP letters because, he said, they *show Powys at his most characteristic: humorous, modest, voracious for new knowledge, engaged…in transmuting himself into a true and obstinate Cymric…*and *show his wondrous isolation from the world*.

Ian, however, derided JCP's *interminable outpourings*. What mattered most to Ian was that *in the centenary year of the great English writer Theodore Francis Powys, the name "Powys" should in your columns be taken as a matter of course to refer to his elder brother ...* An exchange of letters ensued in the TLS, with Charles Lock responding to Ian's letter with a defence of JCP's reputation as a novelist (*TLS* 6 June 1975). The correspondence is now a matter of historical interest for as our late President observed in his note in *The Powys Society Newsletter* 53: *he* [JCP] no *longer needs defending in the way that he did when I wrote my book.*

*

Obituary

Alfred James Morgan 1925 – 2021

by Neil Atkin

It is with sadness that we record the passing on January 21st at the Shire House Residential Care Home in Lyme Regis of long-standing Powys Society member Alfred James Morgan, in his 95th year.

Jim, as he was known to his friends, once described himself as *a cockney of Welsh extraction*; he took pride in his Welsh roots, and was fond of relating that according to family legend his great-grandfather, Morgan Morgan, was once the `Step-Dancing Champion of South Wales'.

Jim began his working life as a 14 year old `runner' (messenger boy) at Lord Kemsley's London offices on Grays Inn Road, running the gauntlet of German bombs during the Blitz, of which he writes in his *Confessions of a Wage Slave* (2007): *Looking back over a long career of distinguished failure I have to admit this was the best job I ever had*.

He had decided to become a journalist, until fate intervened in 1944 when he was sent to his beloved South Wales and became a `Bevin Boy' working underground at Deep Duffryn Colliery in Mountain Ash. A year later Jim received his call-up papers, joined the Army and became a supply clerk based in London where he remained until the war ended. He was then promoted to Sergeant and posted to India, where he spent six months seconded to the Indian Army and stationed at GHQ in New Delhi. He avoided Partition and the massacres which followed by being shipped to the Middle East and found himself in Cairo, where he volunteered to join the 6th Airborne Division as a parachutist – and ended up celebrating his 21st birthday as a clerk in the Battery Office of an artillery unit in Palestine. Demob finally came in 1948 and Jim shipped from Haifa back to his beloved North London, lamenting, *All I had to show for my years in the Army was an ability to touch-type and a demob suit.*

Nevertheless, the ability to touch-type guaranteed employment, and whilst his leisure time was spent browsing the anarchist bookshop in Red Lion Street, and listening to the soap-box orators at Lincolns Inn Fields, he also joined the Holiday Fellowship in Red Lion Square where he met his future wife Joan and enjoyed several holidays in Wales. They were married at the local church in Hayes, Middlesex on July 6th 1957, and Jim became a Civil Servant, working as a Social Security Inspector first at Feltham, and then for the remainder of his working life at Uxbridge before retiring and moving to Lyme Regis in 1987.

Jim Morgan aged 90

An avid admirer of JCP, he attended a gathering of like-minded Powysians around 1968 at Norwich, where he struck up a life-long friendship with Jack Rushby, Philip Callow and Ron Hall (Philip & Ron becoming known in Powys circles as the `Coventry Kids' from references in JCP's letters to Henry Miller).

Jim mirrored JCP, his literary hero, becoming an inveterate correspondent and we exchanged hundreds of letters over a 28 year period from 1992 until his final letter, found on his desk following his death and kindly forwarded to me by Ruth Hall. I had the pleasure of visiting him & Joan several times at their home in Lyme Regis and we became firm friends. Jim always claimed that his only true

ambition in life was to be a poet; he sent me this, which I saw for the first time three days after his death.

> There's no going back, the road is closed.
> What happened to the dream – did it fly while I dozed?
> Life is not – not what I supposed.
> So many faces, so many lies,
> Whatever happens when one of them dies?
> Somebody laughs, somebody cries...

RIP Jim Morgan, poet. 1925-2021

A note about Jim's account of his working life, Confessions of a Wage Slave*, appeared in* Newsletter *63* (*March 2008*)*, News & Notes, p.14. Jim's obituary for Philip Callow is in* NL *62* (*November 2007*)*, p.21; his obituary of Ron Hall in* The Powys Review *17* (*1985*). Ron Hall and JCP *is in* NL*89* (*November 2016*).

[KK/CT]

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News and Notes

AGM 2020 Minutes

Peter Lazare submitted a correction to the minutes of the 2020 AGM as published in *Newsletter* 101, November 2020: *Re the final paragraph, I was the one who raised the topic of appointing a new President. Richard* [*Graves*] *did join in after that and vigorously proposed Tim for President. I agreed that Tim would be excellent, and also proposed Richard as an equally good choice*.

St Catharine's Magazine 2020

The annual magazine and report of St Catharine's College, Cambridge, for 2020, includes an obituary of our late President Glen Cavaliero, photos of Glen as an ordained priest in the Church of England, and at home at Portugal Place in Cambridge as well as a tribute by his colleague Rev. Canon Hugh Searle.

Cosmology, Mythology and Literature

Professor Elmar Schenkel has contributed a new article, in German, on mythology in literature from Blake to Tolkien (including JCP) for the *Arbeitskreis Vergleichende Mythologie* (Research Group for Comparative Mythology) available at www.vergleichende-mythologie.de/kosmologie-und-literatur. For details of Elmar's other recent references to JCP see News and Notes in *Newsletter* 100, July 2020.

A Portrait of JCP

In October 2020 Auctioneers Cheffins in Cambridge offered for sale a portrait of JCP based on the famous photograph of JCP, *c.*1929, by Sherill Schell. Schell's photograph of JCP appears on the back cover of the 1961 Macdonald edition of *Wolf Solent*. The catalogue of the auction sale records that the painting, oil on canvas, is by R. Russell and was previously in the collection of Eric Stevens of Hampstead in London. Eric was married to Joan Stevens (who died in 2015) and they traded together as booksellers.

The Magic of Detachment

Dawn Collins informed me last year that she had located the original holograph manuscript of JCP's essay *The Magic of Detachment* advertised for sale at the advanced book exchange (ABE books) by Charles Agvent a dealer in rare books, manuscripts and autographs in Fleetwood, PA, USA. The dealer gives a description of the manuscript: '*23 pages written on rectos of separate 8-1/2" x 11' sheets, SIGNED in the byline, with numerous additions and deletions throughout…Paperclip staining at upper edge of first and terminal pages, occasional small tear or chip. Near Fine*." No information about the provenance of the manuscript is provided. *The Magic of Detachment* was first published in *The Aryan Path* in October 1933*;* it was reprinted in *Powys Review,* Vol.15, 1984/1985; in *NL*51, April 2004 (p.10); and in *la lettre powysienne* No. 29, Spring 2015.

Jan Morris

Travel writer, journalist, historian and novelist Jan Morris died, aged 94, in November 2020. When a new edition of JCP's historical novel *Owen Glendower* was published by Overlook Press in 2002, *Powys Notes* (March 2002) quoted her comment: *One of the most fascinating of all historical novels about one of the most tantalising of historical figures*.

Michael Seidenberg (1954-2019)

Michael Seidenberg died on 8 July 2019 (see his obituary in the *New York Times*, 15 July 2019 at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/15/books/michael-seidenberg-dead.html). Michael was a keen collector of rare, signed first editions of JCP including artefacts and ephemera associated with the Powyses. He operated a 'secret' bookstore from his private apartment on the Upper East Side of New York which he named Brazenhead Books inspired by JCP's novel *The Brazen Head*. He usually had a good selection of Powys titles for sale. We published an article about Michael's bookshop, and a description of a visit to the store, with photographs, by New York resident David Stimpson, in *Newsletter* 90, March 2017, p.38-41.

William Blake and Johnny Johnson of Norfolk

I recently came across an interesting sidelight concerning JCP's maternal great-grandfather Dr John Johnson (see also Robin Hickey's article 'William Cowper' in this *Newsletter*). In 1800 the sculptor and book illustrator John Flaxman (1755-1826) introduced William Blake to his friend the poet William Hayley (1745-1820). Hayley employed Blake on a variety of engraving and illustrating projects including the production of portrait miniatures. In September 1800 Blake left London and moved to the little village of Felpham in West Sussex, where Hayley was also living and working on his *Life of Cowper* (published 1803-1804 in 5 volumes). Hayley invited John Johnson to provide details of Cowper's career. Hayley also employed Blake to engrave the illustrations for the book including the portrait of Cowper by George Romney. It was probably at this time that Blake met Johnson. Blake was commissioned to paint a portrait miniature of Johnson (watercolour on card) in 1802. This is still extant and can now be seen at the Cowper and Newton Museum in Olney [**see illustration**]. Blake liked the medium of the miniature and claimed he had a great many orders for more work of this type. How amazed JCP might have been if he could have seen this portrait of his great-grandfather by one of his favourite poets! For more details of Blake's work as a miniaturist see the article 'William Blake's Portrait Miniatures for the Butts family' in *Blake – An Illustrated Quarterly*, Spring 2009, at http://bq.blakearchive.org/42.4.crosby.

CT

The Blake miniature of J. Johnson , from the Cowper and Newton museum in Olney

Clifford Tolchard (1908-1980)

In 1975 Jeff Kwintner's Village Press printed *Letters to Clifford Tolchard* from JCP, with a memoir of their first meeting in Corwen in 1942. A slightly different version of this meeting can now be read on the blogspot *Joyceance*, 11 December 2015, managed (in Dutch) by **Hans van der Bos,** posted by the singer Hilary Reynolds, who is a niece of Tolchard's wife. Tolchard moved to Australia in 1962. With thanks to Julia Mathews for directing us to this site.

JCP and French Literature

An extension of JCP's view of Flaubert: *NL*49 (July 03) prints JCP's view (in a 1938 letter) of Flaubert's disciple Maupassant: *Since I read him so passionately in my twenties, he means nothing at all. I think his method artificial, his materialism limited and narrow, his imagination defective, and his style forced and tiresome* ... Following this is a totally opposed view of Maupassant from Llewelyn (*a very great writer... compassion purged of sentiment*!).

John Gray: Feline Philosophy

(pub. Allen Lane, 2020) Do not be deceived by the title and the handsome portrait of my 'Black' on the cover of a recent TLS – this is indeed a study of cats (as opposed to humans) but also a run-through of human philosophies (generally foolish or mistaken) over the centuries. Cats, it seems, do not fantasise or delude themselves. They ruled in ancient Egypt, were demonised in the middle ages, and inspired many writers from Johnson and Smart to Berdyaev and Doris Lessing.We can learn from their example of otherness.

KK

from Mike Walmer:

A new edition of JCP's *Up and Out* (1957) was published by Zephyr Books in November 2020. For more information please visit my website at: https://www.michaelwalmer.com/titles/zephyr-books

from Rachel Hassall (archivist, Sherborne School):

W.E. Powys

As the least published of the Powys brothers, members might be interested to know that a copy of his article 'Some Notes on East African Sheep Farming', published in the *East Africa Agricultural Journal* (September 1939), is available as a pdf on the School Archives website https://oldshirburnian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Some-Notes-on-East-African-Sheep-Farming-by-WE-Powys-1939.pdf. In the last paragraph, Will reveals his philosophical approach to sheep farming in Kenya:

> *The beginner will have many disappointments. I beg him not to be discouraged by the holocausts and calamities that may fall on his flocks. Sheep all over the world have a habit of dying in numbers at times. An evil spirit descends on them in the form of disease, drought, fire, water; or a hyena, on a dark night, may tear to pieces a score or more; wool prices may drop suddenly and drastically, and, as suddenly rise again. Sheep have a remarkable capacity for recovery and for making a quick increase. Just when you think you have lost all, with the help of one good season you will again find yourself the owner of a fine flock and a good wool cheque.*

[See *NL*71 for more on Will Powys, KK]

Littleton Charles Powys

I recently purchased a second-hand copy of Littleton Powys's autobiography *Still the Joy of It* (1956), in which I found two handwritten letters from Littleton to Gilbert Phelps (1915-1993), who as Talks Producer at BBC Bristol engaged Littleton to give two radio talks in 1946 and another in 1947 [Littleton's talk in 1947 was called 'A West-Countryman in Arizona' and was broadcast on Wednesday17 December on the Home Service (West) **CT**]. In a letter to Gilbert Phelps dated 14th March 1953, Littleton makes reference to his nephew Peter Powys Grey, mentioning the time he had spent in Salzburg and his wedding at East Chaldon: '*I was especially interested because my young American nephew, Peter Powys Grey, spent one summer there [Salzburg] when they were starting the scheme. He had just taken his degree in English at Harvard and he went to Salzburg particularly to help with the library and of course he had photographs of the magnificent castle with a lake in front of it as far as I remember. He came straight to my sister's in Dorset where his girl from America joined him (I think in 1948) and they were married in the little Chaldon Church. I acted as the best man & also gave the girl away.*' A full transcript of the letters can be found at: https://oldshirburnian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Littleton-Charles-Powys-correspondence-Sherborne-School-Archives.pdf

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Rachel Hassall

John le Carré and the Powys brothers

Tim Roger's article 'The Sherborne Prize Poem 1939-1949' (*Powys Society News*, 2001) highlighted Littleton and John Cowper Powys's ten year joint-adjudication of the English Verse Prize at Sherborne School, a prize that John Cowper had himself won in 1891 with his poem 'Corinth'.

At the end of their ten-year stint as prize adjudicators, Littleton and John Cowper both wrote articles for the School magazine (*The Shirburnian*, Lent & Trinity 1951 issues) about the poems they had judged during their term of office, extracts from which Tim Rogers included in his article (for the full text of Littleton and John Cowper's articles visit https://oldshirburnian.org.uk/the-powys-family-at-sherborne-school/judging-the-english-verse-prize-1939-1949-littleton-powys-and-john-cowper-powys/).

One of the schoolboy poets mentioned by Littleton in his article was David Cornwell, whose poem, 'The Dream of the Deserted Island', they judged in 1948 to be the best poem entered that year. Littleton and John Cowper could hardly have guessed that this 16-year-old schoolboy would go on to become one of the best-known authors of his generation, writing under the pen name John le Carré.

Littleton praised 'The Dream of the Deserted island', saying 'It showed great imagination and was full of pleasing poetic imagery. It was a joy to read with its musical rhythm and mastery of vowel sounds'. The poem was written in free verse, a poetic form that Littleton described as being part of 'the swing to the left, by which I mean to experimental verse without form and often obscure'. A number of the schoolmasters disapproved of a poem written in free verse winning the prize and in his defence David Cornwell together with five others wrote to the School magazine (*The Shirburnian*, Summer 1948) asking for the criteria of the English Verse Prize to be expanded to include free verse, adding that 'the future poets of Sherborne should be allowed and encouraged to express themselves in the form that their thoughts demand, and remain unfettered by the necessity of subjecting them to a style that is both incongruous with, and unsuited for, modern ideas'.

Photograph of David Cornwell aged 17 at Sherborne in 1949, when he left the school. David Cornwell/John le Carré died on 12th December 2020, aged 89.

Having read in Tim Rogers' article Michell Raper's excruciating account of being summoned by Littleton in 1942 to visit his home in Priestlands to discuss his winning poem (also available at https://oldshirburnian.org.uk/the-powys-family-at-sherborne-school/judging-the-english-verse-prize-1939-1949-littleton-powys-and-john-cowper-powys/summer-1942-a-welsh-poet/), I contacted David Cornwell to ask whether he had undergone a similar experience. Evidently, seventy-two years later, the occasion remained clearly etched in David's memory! He too had been invited to tea at Priestlands to discuss his poem and remembered the occasion as being rather like being prepared for Confirmation. Littleton, he said, had a very rich voice and was very emotional. In his biography of David Cornwell (*John le Carré. The Biography*, 2015), Adam Sisman mentions that David too was presented with an enthusiastic letter from John Cowper (although David wrongly remembered it being from Llewelyn). Unfortunately, David didn't keep John Cowper's letter but remembered that it included the line 'The boy has IT', and that John Cowper had underlined 'IT' three times!

David described his poem as being 'shockingly bad' and that his housemaster, R.S. Thompson, detested the poem and announced this view at house prayers.

David said that 'Unusually, he [Thompson] was dead right'. But does this mean that Littleton and John Cowper were wrong? I think rather that their choice of a free verse poem demonstrates that even in their mid-70s they remained open-minded in their appreciation of evolving poetic forms. Thankfully, David Cornwell's early literary experiences at Sherborne School did not deter him from putting pen to paper again.

Rachel Hassall is the archivist of Sherborne School – see another note by Rachel about William Powys and Littleton Charles Powys in News and Notes in this issue

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Chris Thomas

JCP and Flaubert

In September 1931 JCP was busy making revisions, changes and cuts to *A Glastonbury Romance*. Progress on his Glastonbury project was however suddenly interrupted by the arrival of an invitation from a small publisher in New York asking if he might provide an introduction to a new English translation of an early novella by Flaubert called *November*. The novella was written in 1840-1842, whilst Flaubert was still a law student, but was never published in his lifetime. The story was published posthumously in France in *Oeuvres de jeunesse inédites, oeuvres diverses, Vol. II, 1838-1842, Appendice aux Oeuvres Completes*, Louis Conard, 1910. In his introduction JCP notes that Flaubert's story was *printed in the French edition among his Premières Oeuvres*. He is probably referring here to Flaubert's *Premières Oeuvres*, Vol II 1838-1842 which was published by Bibliotheque Charpentier in 1914 although he is unlikely to have consulted this volume.

Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) was born in Rouen in northern France. He spent most of his life in the village of Croisset, situated on the banks of the Seine close to Rouen, where he lived in a large house with his mother and young niece. He travelled widely visiting Brittany, Corsica, Marseilles, Italy, Switzerland, the Middle East, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Rhodes, Constantinople, Greece, London, Algeria and Tunisia. Flaubert studied law in Paris but he always wanted to be a professional writer. In 1844 the onset of illness and repeated epileptic attacks enabled him to give up his studies, and retire to Croisset where he devoted himself to his writing. Flaubert's most famous and influential work, *Madame Bovary*, was first published in *La Revue de Paris* in 1856 and in book form in 1857. The novel is considered a masterpiece of nineteenth century literary realism and had an important impact on 20th-century writers such as Proust, Joyce and Nabokov. *Madame Bovary* was however prosecuted for obscenity although Flaubert was acquitted of all charges.

Flaubert's most important other books include *Salammbô* (1862), *A Sentimental Education* (1869), *The Temptation of St Anthony* (1874), *Three Tales* (1877) and *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1881). Flaubert's novels range from the bourgeois realities of provincial life in *Madame Bovary* and *A Sentimental Education* to the pagan and exotic setting of ancient Carthage in *Salammbô* and the satiric comedy of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*. During his life Flaubert made friends with other major nineteenth-century novelists such as George Sand, Zola and Turgenev with whom he exchanged correspondence and who used to visit him at his house in Croisset. Maupassant thought of himself as a disciple and Flaubert's literary heir. Flaubert was also greatly admired by the literary critic Sainte-Beuve as well as by Baudelaire, both of whom wrote favourable reviews of *Madame Bovary* [1]. Nearly a century later, by the 1930s and 1940s Flaubert's reputation was very high. He was considered the founder of the modern novel and praised for the purity of his style. In the 1950s writers such as György Lukacs and Erich Auerbach scrutinised in detail Flaubert's place in the history of literary realism [2]. Other critics however dissented from the popular view of Flaubert. F.R. Leavis, for instance, in *The Great Tradition* (1948), considered Conrad to be a greater novelist and Henry James, in an essay on Turgenev in 1884, whilst recognising in *Madame Bovary* a great work of art, attacked Flaubert's obsession with formal style: *he imparted something to his works (it was as if he had covered them in metallic plates) which made them sink rather than sail…He wished to produce perfect phrases…He looked at life altogether as an artist…But there was something ungenerous in his genius. He was cold…*[3].

November, with its semi-autobiographical elements which JCP acknowledges, draws on Flaubert's adventures in Marseilles and seems to anticipate some of the features of *Madame Bovary*. The story was not widely known in the early 20th century. JCP notes: *this work unknown to the English-speaking world*. He even worried at one point if it could be the authentic work of Flaubert. He wrote in his diary on 3 October 1931: *we wondered if the Flaubert tale were a fake & how to save our face if it were* [4]. Nor was the story originally fully appreciated in France. The literary critic Emile Faguet [5], for instance, did not mention the novella in his popular study of the writer (first published in 1899 and translated into English in 1914) although he does cite a letter in which Flaubert refers to the story. On the other hand Flaubert's friend, the author and amateur photographer Maxime du Camp (1822-1894), included a discussion of the work in his literary memoirs [6].

Although conscious of its technical imperfections and stylistic weaknesses, Flaubert ranked *November* amongst the most important of his early compositions written before *Madame Bovary*. He later proudly showed the manuscript to Baudelaire and to the Goncourt brothers [7]. Modern critics also rank the story highly as Flaubert's first serious major work. Francis Steegmuller called it *his most accomplished work*

so far [8] and the great Flaubert scholar, Jean Bruneau, considered it *le chef d'oeuvre de sa jeunesse* [9].

The substance of the novella is slight although there are features that might have attracted JCP such as the nameless hero's self-analysis, his introspection and his reflection on his sensations as well as Flaubert's descriptions of landscapes and sea-scapes. Flaubert observed about his story: *the action is nil…the whole thing is psychological analyses and dissections. Perhaps it is very beautiful, but I am afraid it may be very false and rather pretentious and stilted* [10]. Interestingly, JCP also comments on the neurotic and paranoiac state of mind of the hero of the novella and refers to Freud. In the first part of the story the hero looks back on his youth when he yearned sentimentally for love and passion. He experiences what Baudelaire would later call '*le goût de l'infini*'. The hero recalls his affair with a prostitute, his initiation into sexuality, and how he later became disillusioned with life. In the last part of the story the narrative shifts to the third person and we learn more about the hero's *weltschmertz* and ultimately his death. The story is imbued with the atmosphere of nineteenth-century romanticism and one can easily detect the influence of Flaubert's favourite authors at this time such as Goethe, Chateaubriand and Hugo.

JCP did not have any close affinity with Flaubert's writings but nonetheless he seems to have briefly put aside the manuscript of *A Glastonbury Romance* and happily accepted the commission to write about one of Flaubert's less familiar works, but not with any enthusiasm or sense of personal commitment, especially as he had earlier criticised Flaubert's objectivity and obsession with literary stylistics. The money he received for his work would however have been very welcome [11].

JCP's writing progressed rapidly and was completed in a few days as the entries in his diary testify [12]. Phyllis was on hand to offer her comments and assistance:

28 September 1931

I have written to say I will write an article for a new Novel called 'November' by Flaubert!

2 October 1931

The T.T found herself speaking of Flaubert…I have written my Flaubert.

5 October 1931

The T.T… launched out into typing my Flaubert essay & was teased by my charlatanism & laziness & anything's good enough tone of mine.

11 October 1931

There was red in the sky and a feeling of romance and of curious windy and rainy memories…The T.T. even in exhaustion spoke so eloquently of Flaubert and his power of evoking that feeling that sponge of the Soul.

The Flaubert story, translated by Frank Jellinek [13] with illustrations by Helen Ansorge, including JCP's introduction and an epigraph by Montaigne placed below the title: *Pour niaiser et fantastiquer,* was duly published by The Roman Press, New York in 1932 and reprinted by John Lane the Bodley Head in the UK in 1934. Frank Jellinek's translation, without JCP's accompanying contribution, was reprinted with a new introduction and notes by Francis Steegmuller, published by the Serendipity Press in New York in 1966 and in the UK by Michael Joseph, also in 1966. JCP's introduction has never been reprinted since 1934 although an extract appeared in Derek Langridge's *John Cowper Powys*: *A Record of Achievement* (1966, page 124), and it is briefly quoted on the flyleaf of the Michael Joseph edition.

JCP was not an obvious choice to write an introduction to *November* but the editors of the Roman Press may have had him in mind because of his reputation as a lecturer on literature, and perhaps also for his chapters on French authors in *Visions and Revisions* (1915), on Rabelais, and in *Suspended Judgments* (1916) on Montaigne, Pascal, Voltaire, Rousseau, Balzac, Hugo, Maupassant, Anatole France, Verlaine, and Remy de Gourmont. Apart from the writers in *Suspended Judgments* JCP read widely in French literature (Villon, Valery, Jules Verne, Proust, Paul Bourget, Zola, Stendhal, Bergson, Gide, Cocteau, Simenon, St. Beuve, Rousseau, Villiers de l'isle Adam and Romain Rolland). Yet as David Gervais notes *One does not particularly associate Powys with French literature…he wrote about a surprising number of French writers…though he wrote neither as an expert or a Francophile, he brought an unfailing enthusiasm and openness to the subject* [14]. We also get an idea of his taste in French literature from a list of favourite French authors he gave to Frances Gregg in a letter to her dated 15 October 1913 [15]. Although he never produced an extended essay on Flaubert or mentions *November* anywhere else, JCP does comment in *Suspended Judgments* on Flaubert *en passant* but it is only to dismiss what he calls Flaubert's *exhausting* manner and his *literary objectivism*. In *One Hundred Best Books* (1916) he also refers critically to Flaubert's obsession with pure style, with the *mot juste*, with his 'art' and 'artistry' which seem to have so strongly alienated JCP: *How many luckless innocents have teased and fretted their minds into a forced appreciation of that artistic ogre Flaubert and his laborious pursuit of his precious "exact word" when they might have been pleasantly sailing down Rabelais' rich stream of immortal nectar or sweetly hugging themselves over the lovely mischievousness of Tristram Shandy*! [16] In the introduction JCP makes no mention of his real feeling towards Flaubert's ideas about 'art', although he does refer to Flaubert the 'artist' and to his *glacial objectivity*. He prefers to focus on *November* as *a prose poem of cerebral sensuality and satiety* and its *intimate, personal and even lyrical* elements. We know in fact that JCP held the same view of Flaubert in 1933 as he did in 1916, as he wrote to Dorothy Richardson about Flaubert's aesthetics: *my infinite weariness at the mere thought of 'the Art of Flaubert*' [17].

At the end of the introduction JCP alludes to the anti-social *bad moods* experienced by Flaubert and the nameless hero of the novella. Sartre makes the phenomenon of these seizures the core of his exhaustive existential analysis of Flaubert's life and work, identifying them as a hysterical reaction to Flaubert's relationship with his family [18]. Flaubert himself referred to his stupors and seizures as 'nervous attacks' which he described in a letter dated 27 December 1852 to Louise Colet [19]. This is a topic that would certainly have been of some personal interest to JCP, for according to Phyllis Playter JCP himself suffered from epileptic fits during his life in America until these nervous attacks ceased in 1934 [20].

JCP's essay is full of ideas and striking images such as his metaphor for Flaubert's physiognomy: *the bearded head of a monstrous sea-lion*. The introduction reads well, reminding us of JCP's role as a great lecturer on books and authors. But scholars of the time would probably have thought his effort unacademic and unprofessional.

A modern edition of *November*, translated by Andrew Brown, with a foreword by the South African novelist Nadine Gordimer, is available from Hesperus Press. For reference and comparison readers may also wish to see examples of Flaubert's other early literary work in *Early Writings*, translated by Robert Griffin, University of Nebraska Press, 1991. Apart from works by Enid Starkie and Sartre (whose lengthy study of Flaubert, *The Idiot of the Family*, required 5 volumes in English translation published between 1981 and 1993), there are good biographies of Flaubert in English by Herbert Lottman (1990) and Frederick Brown (2007). Readers may also wish to enjoy *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) by Julian Barnes, a fictionalised account of a quest for the identity of Flaubert and the real parrot that inspired Flaubert's story *A Simple Heart*, in which the dying heroine confuses her pet parrot with the Holy Ghost.

Notes

1. Baudelaire's review was published in *L'Artiste* in October 1857. In the same year Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* was also prosecuted for obscenity. He was fined and compelled to remove six poems from his collection that had offended the judges. Michel Lévy, who published *Madame Bovary,* also published Baudelaire's translations of Poe and the 1869 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.
2. See *Studies in European Realism* by György Lukacs, 1950 and *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach, 1953.
3. *Partial Portraits*, 1888. See also David Gervais, *Flaubert and Henry James: A Study in Contrasts* (1978).
4. *The Diary of John Cowper Powys 1931* (Jeffrey Kwintner, 1990, p.242).
5. Emile Faguet (1847-1916) was an author, literary historian, literary critic of the *Revue Bleue* and drama critic of the *Journal des Debats*. We know JCP read and admired Faguet's books for he mentions him in his diary on 19 October 1932 and describes how he used to borrow his books from the library of the wealthy art collector Ned Warren in Lewes whom he used to visit with Harry Lyon when he was living at Court House: *I discoursed to her* [Phyllis] *too*

then on the merits of Emile Faguet as the best of all Critics, recalling how I borrowed him at Lewes from the "Ned Warren" House in ancient days. It's possible that JCP may also have read Faguet's contributions about the contemporary French literary scene in his regular column, *Le Livre a Paris*, which appeared in the international review *Cosmopolis* published by T.Fisher Unwin between 1896 and 1898. In 1906 JCP delivered a lecture on French literature in Lewes which may have been suggested by Ned Warren (*Sussex Express*, 13 January 1906).

6. *Souvenirs Littéraires*, Vol. I, 1892 (1882-1883), p. 166-167
7. Enid Starkie, *Flaubert, The Making of the Master* (1971 (1967), p.94). Enid Starkie (1887-1970), French scholar, author of classic biographies of Baudelaire and Rimbaud and a Fellow of Somerville College, Oxford, was a friend of Llewelyn and Alyse Gregory. She acquired a copy of Emile Littré's *Dictionary of the French Language* (1863/1873) for JCP, which helped him with the writing of his book on Rabelais. JCP paid a tribute to Starkie in letters to Louis Wilkinson: *I admire Enid Starkie most of all the literary ladies of our country* (22 May 1958) and *I am so glad you agree with me about Enid Starkie. I think she is a perfect darling. I think of her daily when I glance at my bookshelf and see that huge Littré French-French dictionary in 4 folios. I could never have translated Rabelais without that* (30 May 1958) – see *Newsletter* 76, July 2012.
8. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857*, selected, edited and translated by Francis Steegmuller, 1981, p.16.
9. *Les debuts littéraires de Gustave Flaubert*, 1831-1845, 1962, p.284
10. Quoted in the introduction by Francis Steegmuller to *November*, translated by Frank Jellink, 1966, p.8-9.
11. JCP occasionally provided introductions to other authors as well as to books by his friends and colleagues such as John Redwood Anderson and Eric Barker, which provided extra income. See for instance excerpts from JCP's introduction to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1947) in *Newsletter* 57, March 2006.
12. All these quotations are sourced from *The Diary of John Cowper Powys 1931* (Jeffrey Kwintner, 1990, pp.236-249).
13. The only other earlier English translation of *November* which I have been able to locate is an incomplete version of the story included in an appendix to Vol 2 of an edition of the *Complete Works of Gustave Flaubert* (10 volumes), published by Simon Magee, Chicago, in 1904.
14. David Gervais, *John Cowper Powys, T.S. Eliot and French Literature* (Cecil Woolf, 2004, p.5).
15. *The Love Letters of John Cowper Powys and Frances Gregg*, edited by Oliver Wilkinson (Cecil Woolf, 1994, Vol. One, p.62-63).
16. John Cowper Powys, *One Hundred Best Books* (1916, p.16).
17. *The Letters of John Cowper Powys and Dorothy Richardson*, edited by Janet Fouli (Cecil Woolf, 2008, p.77).
18. J-P Sartre, *L'idiot de la famille*, Vols 1-3, (Gallimard, 1971-1972).
19. *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, 1830-1857*, edited Francis Steegmuller, 1981, p.177-178.
20. Frederick Davies, *Recollections of J. C.Powys and Phyllis Playter* (*Powys Review* 19, 1986, p.63).

Drawing of Flaubert aged about 15

Flaubert aged 25 in 1846

John Cowper Powys

***Introduction to* November, *a novel by Gustave Flaubert* (1842)**

The real mystery of Flaubert: how difficult to solve it is! And here comes, for English readers, an added figure to the queer tapestry of his genius. This work of his, unknown to the English-speaking world, is a beautiful and exciting revelation of all the suppressed passions, manias, obsessions of this extraordinary man. What a curious perfume rises from these pages, as from some old passionate letters of the age's grand-parents, revealing in their meticulously written script how much more vitality, even in their negations, their nihilisms, their life-denials, that Balzacian era possessed than ours!

The curious thing about this early work of Flaubert's – printed in the French edition among his '*Premières Oeuvres*' – is that it strikes us now as being so definitely a forerunner of all his later productions. One after another of the characteristic Flaubert "motifs" are preluded in it; and something, however, that is more subjective, more intimate, personal, and even lyrical, than he permitted himself to indulge in later, as his hardening and tightening hatred of the "bourgeois" and the commonplace banked up and hypostatised his natural inspiration.

“Dated”, as critics have come to call it now, may be his ferocious passion for flaming horizons, swooping eagles, rosy-legged storks, blue seas full of pearls and coral, velvet-skinned fruits, balconies and green-tipped arrows; but nothing so furiously summoned forth can be without an eternal response to the deluded human breast. Against these sumptuous and terrific backgrounds, concentrated in their material evocations, are the four-square revelations – touch, sound, smell, taste, all employed with his intense power of vision, conjuring up the residual reality – of familiar rustic vignettes and seaboard scenes, of the normal life of humanity, from which, like a mad sorcerer upon the magic carpet, his imaginative passion whirls him away!

But Flaubert’s vast disgust for ordinary human life, his thunderous cravings for “some place else” and for “better bread than is made from wheat,” does not only endow his unshaking artist’s hand with a cold fury of verisimilitude where he is depicting dead leaves falling into the November mud or cattle moving their ears to brush away the autumn flies, it also touches with a gigantic fastidiousness of distaste the very amorousness of his protagonists.

No one has described satiety with the Babylonian gusto of Flaubert. And yet in his own case – for brief and limited were his physical journeys – satiety followed nought but cerebral dreams of empurpled pleasure.

But what dreams they must have been!

This is where *November* is so revealing and so profoundly personal a work.

What he handled with a glacial objectivity such as still amazes us as a mere aesthetic “gymnastic” in *Madame Bovary*; what he projected with infinite travail through his volcanic brain – torn from his loins and entrails, for the man seemed devoid of all emotionalised nerves – in *Salammbô*; what he fused together, like a diabolic conjuring trick, smoky, fuliginous, obscene, in *The Temptation of St. Anthony*; he let loose, let go, in *November*, in the long rolling, thunderous, sultry rhythms of this book.

There are indeed so many of the peculiar Flaubert tones and colours crowded together in *November*, that it is as if the Master had decided to test his work, not only “through his gullet” in his study, but in carrying it to a fantastic limit.

The mystery of Flaubert! No, there will never be another like him. That glacial disgust at all manifestations of normal life combined with that necrophiliastic mania for death and for all the hideous circumstances and paraphernalia of death – what an inspiration for a genius to labour under!

But how much – save for those occasional hollow lapses, like a great bassoon gone cracked, when he attempts the spiritual, the sentimental – is the whole thing “of a piece.” Had the really tender, the really poignant, been introduced into the scenes between the Prostitute and the introverted Nympholept, had there been a

touch of crafty Anatole France irony, or of neurotic Dostoevsky psychology, the orchestration of the two major themes "I loathe," "I want," would have been lost. In the nostalgic yearning with which the man greets a Piedmontese organ grinder, evocative to him of something far away and "different," and again in the deadly disillusionment with which the idealised life in the country is exposed to him as that world, seen so lovingly by prisoners out of their cell windows, but found by them when they return to their freedom *as it is, harsh, muddy, cold…decked with rural police to prevent their plucking the fruit if they are thirsty, adorned with game keepers if they wish to kill any game, carpeted with gendarmes if they wish to take a stroll and have no passport*; in both these moods it is the great Objectivist who brings forward the alternating craving and disillusionment of his pessimistic presuppositions.

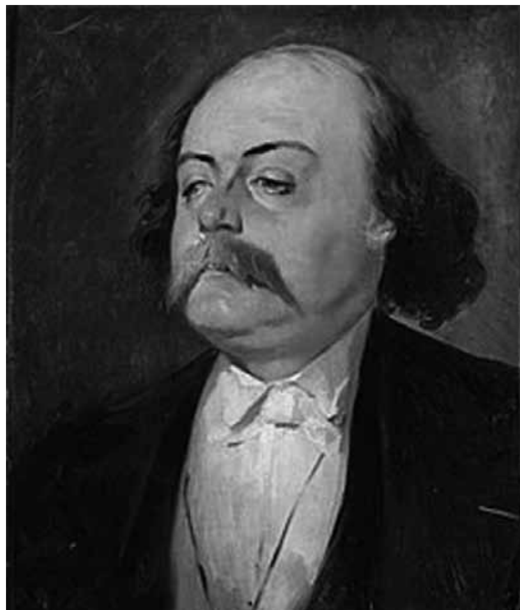
He chose his subjects from very far and from very near, and in this there is something profoundly French; for this race of peasant proprietors and prudent "rentiers" have always responded to both the intimacy of enclosed Nordic gardens – Flaubert's sole form of exercise seems to have been pacing his terrace – and the mysterious horizons of the Orient, its pyramids, pagodas, palanquins and pestilencies, as if between the cool rustle of their silver poplars and those hot leonine breaths from the burning sands there was a mystic attraction, like that of Heine's pine trees for its tropical palm!

And how individualistic it all is! When one considers the stormy social pressure, like the mass of turbulent waters under the keel of a vessel, that weighs upon the aesthetic conscience of our contemporaries, it seems as if it were almost because of the absence of some imaginative social nerve that this man and this woman could not live out so desparately their ego-centric lives.

It is not only the bad moods of his hero, it is his own bad moods – anti-social moods, unpardonable from our modern view point – that he hesitates not to express. *Passionately attached to the beautiful,* says our author of his melancholy hero, *ugliness repelled him as a crime*; and then Flaubert adds in his own person – *Indeed an ugly being is really an atrocity, an object of horror at a distance, of disgust at close quarters; when he speaks you suffer; if he weeps, his tears irritate you; you want to hit him when he laughs, and, silent, his motionless face seems the seat of every vice, every baser instinct.* What vitality must have surged up in this sedentary pessimist to endow him with the gall to utter such a heathen sentiment. Flaubert as an artist was always breaking new ground. Every work of his was in a certain sense a "tour de force." What renders *November* so fascinating a treasure trove is the fact that in it he has written a prose poem of cerebral sensuality and satiety which is one of the first life histories of a paranoiac case, a subject which since Flaubert's time has become so sympathetic a theme with writers. And in

comparison with these modern neurotics what life energy emanates from this handsome degenerate, and how lacking he is in any real malady of the nerves as we know nerves after Freud and the rest.

Watching the flowing tide of our own devitalised contemporaries' work, it is a glorious shock to find suddenly, rolled across the pebbles at our feet, a book like this. It is as if amid all the gleaming shoals of herrings and mackerel who live and move and have their being in the waters of our day there should suddenly emerge the bearded head of a monstrous sea-lion, as surging up from the deeper waters of nineteenth century vitality, Flaubert reappears upon the scene!



Flaubert as "monstruous Sealion", aged about 35. Portrait by Pierre Giraud, c.1856

*

Eric Barker

Three Poems

from ***The Planetary Heart*** (1942)

Fallen Cypress

Encroaching seas have taken toll at last
With penetrations fatal to its strength.
Long years has it withstood them, long and long,
While below on the rock-strewn beach
The bulk of granite boulders slowly waned
Caves hollowed with patience infinite as eternity,
And rocky cauldrons deep and deeper scooped
To hold the boiling surf.

Torn from their earthy bed
The great roots writhe, naked and desolate;
For centuries they grew, thrusting ever deeper
Into the cool dark for life,

And well the earth yielded:

This is the body of a Titan, a huge-limbed ancient

Warring with the gods no more,

But like Hyperion fallen, brooding on lost strength

And days of glorious empire undermined;

Nights gone mad with storm

When each strong fibre braced to meet the wind,

Thrilling with fierce life,

Sharing with the granite cliffs,

Heaving dark, streaming shoulders from the trough,

The shock of pounding seas —

And mornings, made for a tree's long dreaming

When the white armies of the seas had fallen back,

And a quiet wind whispered through the cypress shade.

How many years have here their shadows cast!

How many tides have come, and ebbed, and flowed again,

Leaving deep records soon for time to fade!

What seaward-facing days have ended with this fall!

One night the sea will come, calling with a deeper voice,

And bear it far beyond its ancient home

And drown all trace in one deep burial.

Seaweed

(To John Cowper Powys)

Rising, falling with the waves,

In and out of cool sea-caves,

Streaming long, sea-sensuous leaves

In the shoreward swell that heaves

White above wave-shouldering rocks,

(Like the Nereids' brown sea-locks,

Or some old sea-monarch's daughters')

Through the downward-streaming waters . . .

Or beyond the swell that laves

Slippery rocks and cool-mouthed caves,

Where anemones cling and cluster

In wave-iridescent lustre;

Where white sea-shells glisten and gleam

Through the downward-pouring stream;

Where small sea-crabs crawl and feed

In green, filmy webs of weed;

Where the wave-lights quiver and glide

Along an old sea-cavern's side . . .

With the ebb and with the flow

Far from sight of land they go,

Glossy beds, all frond-unfurled

In an amber-litten world,

Abandoned to the ocean's roll,

Rolling ever to the pole,

With the ebb and with the flow,

Round and round the world they go . . .

They have seen the wake of whales,
White behind their flukéd tails,
Theirs the only tracks to see
On a wide, unhavened sea,
Seen them pass and never stay,
Holding their sea-furrowing way
Steadfast to some far sea-home
Where their great, black brothers roam . . .

Floating, drifting ever on,
Past horizons men look on;
Isles that knew an ancient glory
Lost in myth and pagan story;
They have gone by night and day
On a vast and unknown way,
Others, like them, met and mingled
All their lustrous leaves, and lingered,
Floating in the wine-dark swell
The ancient poet knew so well!
There they linger many a day
Ere they part and drift away,
Abandoned to the ocean's roll,
Flowing ever to the pole,
With the ebb and with the flow,
Round and round the world they go.

The Dark Inanimate

From the dead and lichened tree,
From the silent, sun-warmed stone,
What a power has come to me
Since I rested there alone!

More than human tongues can speak,
Strangely trees and stones relate:
In the Dark Inanimate
Dwelleth what my soul would seek.

Did I dream the stranger mood?
Yet did nothing seem unknown:
Proteus-like did I transude
Through the pores of wood and stone.

Quietness of the fallen tree,
Still endurance of the stone
Entered in through flesh and bone,
They were next of kin to me.

I have been long ages now
On the high and lonely hill.
Still the sun shines on my brow
And the wind goes by me still.

And eternities of days,
Aeons of the silent dark,
All have left their aging mark
In their immemorial ways.

But Death's footfall in the grass
Is as nothing to me now,
Closely I have heard him pass,
Felt his breath upon my brow.

His is but a deeper balm,
But a longer sleep to be,
Endless night on stone and tree,
Folded on the hills of calm.

Powys and Barker

In Newsletter *82, July 2014, we published two poems by the Californian poet Eric Barker (1905-1973), with JCP's introduction to Barker's 1955 collection* Directions In The Sun; *also a note by Henry Miller extracted from* Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymous Bosch. Newsletter *83, November 2014, contained a full article about Barker by Anthony Head. Although born in England, Eric Barker emigrated to California in 1921 with his family where he became associated with the group of writers in Henry Miller's circle of friends in Big Sur. Barker was deeply impressed by JCP's writing, and first wrote to him in 1932 expressing his admiration. Their correspondence lasted until 1959. JCP's letters to Eric Barker can be consulted at the George Arents Research Library at Syracuse University.*

JCP rated Barker's poems very highly, finding in his work a sense of strong personal affinity, and praised his poetical style and adherence to tradition. He especially appreciated what he called his "verbal devices", his "elemental consciousness", and his intense awareness of the inanimate world. JCP provided introductions to two volumes of Barker's verse: The Planetary Heart (1942 -- *a poem "Seaweed" is dedicated to JCP*), *and* Directions in the Sun (1955). Newsletter *82 reprints the second, 1955, introduction* (*a longer version from an unpublished ms is printed in Paul Roberts'* Elusive America, *1993*). *NL82 also includes a short poem, 'In the Wind', from the book, as well as the memorial poem to JCP* (1963) *about Blaenau Ffestiniog, from Barker's* Under Orion *(1970). Barker dedicated his 1958 volume of poems* In Easy Dark (*with introduction by Henry Miller*) *to JCP.*

Anthony Head's article on JCP and Barker in NL*83 provides helpful information about their connexion: he confirms, for instance, that Eric Barker visited JCP in Wales in 1959. An added note says that we hoped to publish JCP's 1942 introduction in a future Newsletter. Now prompted by an e-mail message from Powys Society member Pat Quigley requesting an opportunity to read JCP's first introduction, we are pleased to reprint this here. The text has kindly been provided by Anthony. This introduction is recorded in Derek Langridge's book* John Cowper Powys: A Record of Achievement (1966) *and in* A Bibliography of the Writings of JCP *by Dante Thomas* (1975), *but has never been reprinted elsewhere.*

Eric Barker

We are also printing three poems from Barker's 1942 'The Planetary Heart', quoted by JCP: Seaweed' and 'Fallen Cypress' (his favourite) and 'The Dark Inanimate'.

CT with KK

John Cowper Powys

Introduction to

The Planetary Heart *by Eric Wilson Barker (The Wings Press, 1942)*

I have not had the privilege of meeting either Mr. Eric Barker, or his wife, the well-known "Dancer from the West". I lay stress on this because though a human misfortune, it has enabled me to externalize my soul and send it wandering through these remarkable poems without having to pay the price, so familiar to all conscientious critics, of having to compel even the most ideal image of the author to evaporate into thin air.

Such redoubtable "eidola" of writers known personally to their critics are often distracting and disturbing; and what I want to do is not only to isolate and examine *in vacuo* this new collection of poems, but to estimate its relation to the provocative and self-confident school of modern poets that has recently brought the opposed virtuosity of our separate hemispheres into such intimate association; and finally to indicate my own quite personal and no doubt prejudiced response to the aspects of Mr. Barker's work that appeal to me most.

At this moment the gods themselves – both the Christian and Heathen ones – are composing poems to be, as Homer says, enjoyed by the generations to come. Good hope is stirring; but meanwhile we see the uprooting of customs, the enslaving of peoples, the birth of such weird grubs of dismay from the carrion of greed, as might well drive a poet to despair. Few apparitions at this grim hour deserve more lively attention from the lovers of books than this curious phenomenon known as "modern poetry". And on no subject are the divergencies of opinion more violent.

Two great English critics of half a century ago uttered diametrically opposite predictions upon this crucial question. Walter Pater hinted that the special art of modern times would turn out not to be poetry at all but *imaginative prose*; while Matthew Arnold declared with the full weight of his portentous but engaging dogmatism that the instinct of self-preservation in the human race itself would see to it that real poetry should not perish.

The epigrammatic *mentalism* of the New Order of Poetry took T. S. Eliot's famous "Wasteland" as its ambiguous model. But T. S. Eliot has arrows in his quiver that his disciples dare not use; and although this school is supported by an aggressive and brilliant group of self-confident journalists, its intellectual obscurities have created an ever-widening gulf between modern verse and the imaginative receptivity of the common mass of poetry-lovers. This latter with an unsatisfied craving based on its traditional response to the inspiration of the past takes not the slightest interest in the New Poetry.

The truth is that the poetry of simple sensation has been killed by the mental puzzles. Our new verse-men are intellectuals. What they make use of in their lively sallies is the intellect. An old-fashioned poetry-lover, that is to say a person who all his life has regarded certain magical and inspired lines of Shakespeare and Milton and Keats as the *non plus ultra* of this divine art, would, if he were speaking "across his heart", admit that much as he wondered at the mercurial deftness of these riddling hits, and humbly as he puzzled over their cabalistical realism, the truth was that though it struck him as wonderful, it did *not* strike him as poetry. It was staggering, it was brilliant, it was shocking. It displayed the trapeze-antics of a mentality whose toes were in its tympan; but it didn't touch the emotional sensibility which our race has cultivated for five thousand years!

This particular sensibility, shared by so many, and left so unsatisfied today, is by no means a limited or narrow thing. It is in fact a complicated orchestral thing. It is a synthetic potentiality of response by many instruments. It includes reeds and strings, brass and wood; yes! and a thousand undertones and overtones such as cannot be caught or counted in any epigrammatic category; undertones, overtones, half-tones, tones that are twenty times rarified echoes of scarce audible breathings, all come together in the complicated imaginative response of the most ordinary men and women to what they have been brought up to regard as the only authentic poetry.

Nor is this traditional poetry, answering to this traditional expectation of our inherited human emotions, devoid of the power of development. The possibilities of its development are as rich and complicated as the emotion-charged traditions of its long past are deep; and it must be noted that with all the fatal frigidity of its influence on the verse of others, the work of the famous emigré from St. Louis, like the sparkling beauty of a devastating hoar-frost, is never itself without its own deer-tracks and cattle-trails from the great tradition; and though these are thrown into sardonic relief by a certain cruel, and one is almost tempted to say "snobbish" attitude to the ordinary man's feelings, *that they are there at all* indicates as wide a difference between this dangerous reactionary and his revolutionary disciples as between the philosophy of the Hegelian "Right" and the philosophy of the Hegelian "Left".

But if the response of the ordinary man to the complicated emotional and imaginative "ensemble" which he has been brought up to call "poetry" is an extremely diffused and indefinable one, the New Verse is the re-verse of this. The New Verse is too purely mental ever to be *really* deep or really subtle. As we know to our cost, it is often obscure; but it is only so because its whole *raison d'être* is to puzzle out for itself at every pause in its game, some new twist or business of focussing its camera. This mania for unemotional mental imagery and cold-blooded psychological analysis is not without precedent in the long history of our literature. Nor would it be hard

to indicate the particular epochs in the past from which our modern school draws encouragement for its wilful avoidance of those "simple, sensuous and passionate" emotions which inspire the sort of poetry that the "self-preservative" instinct of our race is destined to keep alive. But that these brilliant versifiers have deliberately broken away from the main current of poetic tradition is certain; and what has so greatly delighted those of us who already know something of Eric Barker's work is that he has refused to follow them.

Lovers of the sort of poetry that has a tradition behind it of five thousand years will detect at once that they are in their native element when they open this book. The first poem they plunge into will reveal it, like the taste of a fresh spring to those whom a long drought has confined to the water-butt.

But since it is the prerogative of the main tradition and mid-stream of English poetry to diffuse itself wide and free through many different levels of human life we must be prepared to make quite clear to the hesitating younger generation around us why it is that we rejoice to welcome the challenge of Mr. Barker's "planetary soul" as it deliberately chooses poetical sensation as the subject for poetry rather than psychological and mental acrobatics.

Among real poetry-lovers, however, there are bound to be some whose taste has narrowed even further than this as they have grown older; and among such I must include myself. Whether my friend, Mr. Benjamin DeCasseres, who also derives a deep and special pleasure from Eric Barker's work, will agree with my present approach I cannot be certain; but since he and I have so many other prejudices in common I think there is a good chance that he may. Let me hasten to declare boldly therefore that it is as a poet of the *Inanimate* that Eric Barker appeals to me with special intensity. What I have been somewhat laboriously and in a very roundabout manner struggling to do in prose Eric Barker has done lightly and easily, and as it were with his left hand, in poetry. For here indeed we approach one of the supreme mysteries of this divine art; namely that it can express in unmistakable, unequivocal, incontrovertible words all those subtle, marginal sensations floating about the coasts and horizons of our present spatial-temporal consciousness which are the most profoundly intimate and yet the least clearly *intellectualized* portion of our human life. These are those marginal-magical sensations that have nothing to do with philosophy or religion; nothing to do with conscience, nothing to do with our social responsibilities or with our duty to our Family or our God. They are the moments of the "in-breathing of Brahma" when the driving wedge of the force we might call "Love-to-live" and the burning edge of the force we might call "Live-to-love" have both drawn back their insatiable horns blunted and bedeviled.

This same cult of the Inanimate, stretching our human limitation to the end of its tether, has always been a recurrent element in the tradition of our island poetry, a

tradition which is, it must be remembered, nobly, beautifully and most wholesomely *mongrel*, being of Iberian, Celtic, Roman, Norman, as well as Anglo-Saxon origin. It is of necessity an irrational cult, trailing off in one direction towards the sub-human, and in the other towards the super-human, and nowhere has it received what might be called a more comprehensive atmosphere and climatic response than in the case of the American genius. We get it in Walt Whitman. We get it in Edgar Lee Masters. The poets who remain deaf to it are those whose minds are so active and brilliant and epigrammatic, that although they move, as all human creatures are fated to do, between earth and air and water and fire, those curving *windrows* beyond the marshes and the sand-dunes, that lifeless rubble of sea-shells, sea-gluten, and sea-flotsam, "melange my own, the seen and the unseen", between land and water, mean no more to them than "a foul and pestilential congregation of vapours" or the painted background of a disquieting and provoking play.

To turn poetry into the "bon mots" of an insatiable intelligence, to turn it into a series of social, political and psychological aphorisms is the remorseless purpose of most modern talent. We know what the indignant spirit of the author of "Moby Dick" would feel if confronted with this phenomenon. Well! In these poems of Eric Barker's we can escape for a while from these throbbing intellects, these pounding brains, these battering-rams of de-bunking wit. Nor are the intimations from the Inanimate, the far-drawn feelings and enchanted avenues of forgotten memories, opened up for us by Eric Barker, things that can only appeal to the intellectual and sophisticated among us. My whole point is that in reverting to these feelings again and again throughout these poems Mr. Barker is riding the full-brimmed middle stream of the main tradition of British poetry. We do not need to be particularly clever or particularly subtle, we do not need to be initiated into any historic or recondite cult by any goldsmith of literary art, to share the emotions described in this book. They are common to us all, these emotions. Moreover, and this is surely hardly less significant, they almost seem to approach the mysterious borderland between *our feelings* and the feelings of the sub-human portion of the "poor creatures of the earth".

It was my own and my brother Llewelyn's destiny at one epoch of our life – a life at that time deeply interfused and involved – to live, under the aegis of our old friends Colonel Erskine Scott Wood and Sara Bard Field and in close touch with Doctor Walter Schott, in various guest-houses of Sausalito. Thinking at that time of keeping house together somewhere in Marin County we explored San Rafael and its environs in all directions, visiting every vacant shanty and hut. I need not remind an experienced reader that of all things in the world nothing engraves the peculiarities of a strange landscape more indelibly on the imagination than the thought that in the near future we may very likely be associating every one of our daily impressions

with some particular locality. "Here, by the edge of these salt marshes," a poet like Eric Barker will say to himself, "I shall watch this same sun make his summer and winter arches according to the revolving seasons and rhythmical orbits of matter; and I shall – " For every lonely sand-dune and every isolated rock and every solitary wind-swept tree will draw our soul towards it with a reciprocal recognition, as if long ago and in another life we had known these things!

Between Mr. Barker's Religion of the Inanimate and all pyrotechnics of epigrammatic mentality there is a great gulf fixed – the gulf between the transitory and the eternal, between the theories of men and the feelings of man, between the Idea that endureth for a moment and the Sensation that abideth forever.

Like all true poets, whose poetry "moveth altogether if it move at all" and whose whole nature –not excluding that portion of us that Miss Stein calls our "stupid being" – finds a way of expressing itself in their best work, Eric Barker adapts his cadences and his metres to the quality of each separate poem. In other words he can write in unrhymed free verse as easily as in the traditional metres. Indeed, my own favourite poem in this whole selection, "Fallen Cypress", is a poem as completely outside the traditional forms as any of those little masterpieces in the subtle music of human discord that we enjoy in Mr. Masters' "Spoon River".

It sometimes happens that the particular "message" of a great popular poet *is itself* the cause, rather than the simplicity of his admirers or the cleverness of his detractors, why some far more original, far rarer, far more recondite quality, implicit and involved in every fibre of his work, has often to wait for at least a century ere it wins any adequate recognition. At any rate my own secret feeling is that this is what has happened to the unusual selection of words and of the subtle rhythms of words wherewith Walt Whitman "celebrates", as he calls it, a certain class of inanimate objects that in themselves are the reverse of striking or charming or gracious. What objects are these? St. Paul in his Categories of the Living calls certain entities "the offscouring of the world". Well! *These* are, so to speak, the offscouring of the Inanimate; and they are especially to be found where the two contrasting elements of our planetary globe confront each other – that is to say between land and water. Now there are tracts and spaces all along the coast of Marin County, California, where Eric Barker lives, as I well recall from my frequent excursions with Llewelyn and Doctor Schott, that especially lend themselves to these inanimate amphibia and elemental fragments of terraqueous matter. And although our poet writes on many themes, quite as natural and proper as these for the handling of a poetic sensibility that has rejected the fashionable temptation to be epigrammatic at the expense of the Imaginative, and psychoanalytical at the expense of the Metaphysical, it is in my opinion from the wind-swept sand-dunes, the desolate salt-marshes, the tidal estuaries of his strange sanctuary of the Two Twilights that he draws his rarest inspiration.

And eternities of days,
Aeons of the silent dark,
All have left their aging mark
In their immemorial ways.

But Death's footfall in the grass
Is as nothing to me now.
Closely I have heard him pass,
Felt his breath upon my brow.

His is but a deeper balm,
But a longer sleep to be,
Endless night on stone and tree,
Folded on the hills of calm.

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ZOOM meeting, 5th December 2020

This Zoom was on the final chapter of JCP's *Autobiography*: 'There's a Mohawk in the Sky!' (a quotation from Vachel Lindsay, we learnt).

Chris Thomas gave us a good introduction in the last (101) *Newsletter* to this chapter covering the four years (1929-34) spent in Columbia County, New York State, 100 miles from the city; reminding us of the essays reprinted in *Elusive America*, the letters and diaries, other memoirs, and related studies that give a many-sided picture of JCP at this time.

What is missing in *Autobiography*, of course, and amply supplied in the Diaries ('fairy tales' though they may be), is the essential presence of Phyllis Playter (her own occasional journal entries make good chords). People and neighbours (almost all with names) fill the diaries, though here their appearances are limited by courtesy. His tributes to past friends are a farewell to the city and his former lecturing life. His father and Llewelyn are never far away.

At the well-attended Zoom, Tim Hyman and Belinda Humfrey agreed on the unevenness of style in the last chapter, ranging from unconvincing propitiation (of Ficke, the poet who found him his house) to the magnificent finale (which Hugh MacDiarmid copied *verbatim* into a poem of his own – see below). For Tim, JCP is an *educator*. Maybe it is a lesson that we can (or should, or need to) include both these elements (in style as well as life ?).

Anyone who has been there (as this Editor has often had the good fortune to do) can visualise JCP's life in the landscape of Columbia County, despite the changes

in a near-century: stone walls now crumbled, woods engulfing former farmland, farming almost extinct, old families replaced by second-homers. The coloured maple trees, steep leaf-covered slopes, narrow streams and creeks, sudden wide views, narrow winding roads, human-sized rocks and waterfalls, remain, as do wild flowers and lichens. JCP saw it as a landscape of old-world human romance, of journeys, journey's ends, 'mystic omens of the way', and human continuity. The last element, inevitably, may now be less, and there are No Trespassing signs, but hills and woods still seem welcoming, softer than the steeper, wilder scene across the Hudson river: much like the undisturbed English landscape the Powyses knew. A good place for sinking into one's sensations, as JCP recommends, at the brink of the modern age. (Could he have done this in New Mexico or the Rockies?):

> *Suppose machinery* does *extend its sway, suppose science in the hands of minority-dictators* does *more and more dominate us, suppose the great battle of the future, with its own particular "good and evil", comes to be the struggle of the individual to be himself against the struggle of society to prevent him being himself, what we shall have to do will only be what the saints, lovers, artists, mystics have always done, namely* sink into ourselves and into Nature *and find our pleasure in the most simple, stripped, austere and meagre sensations.*

New York and its people are fading, and he has escaped the constrictions of England, but in Columbia County he has had *the full unhindered swing of my personality*. Meanwhile, *Autobiography* gives us glimpses of former selves in America, in his *more reckless, more sophisticated* days of the Little Theatre, his efforts to adjust to an alien land forcing him back on to the simplicities of his father, the dualism in him between *innate and almost savage realism* and *the imaginative, poetic cult whereby I have romanticised and idealised my life*; with his moments of vision -- from a wall in Cambridge or the Spanish Steps in Rome – and, ultimately, his conviction that *the astronomical universe is* not *all there is... And now it seems as if it had taken me half a century to learn with what weapons, and with what surrender of weapons, I am to begin to live my life ...*

Chris Thomas read us another view of this last chapter, with an extract from JCP's diary:

> Sunday, 20 May 1934. *When I read the end of my chapter XII to the T.T. she did not think it was good – too abrupt! So I have been desperately re-writing the end & now the T.T. feels that it is too optimistic though at her word I did allude to the Neutral Good-and-Evil First Cause; but swept it aside by the motion* [sic] *of a "Power" among other Powers ... the Prometheus Christ ... " against whom, in spite of all atrocities, – the evil in the Universe fights a losing battle". The T.T. fancied that I had described Columbia County without*

inspiration & also regretted that I had not introduced some of our neighbours but these things it was too late to change alas! There it is! It was all I could do to change the end of the chapter and get a hawk's survey of my existence from further back than America adventures. This I did – under her instruction, manage to do.

*

Marcella Henderson-Peal

John Cowper Powys and Hugh MacDiarmid

During last August 15th's zoom discussion of the Pageant chapter in *A Glastonbury Romance*, one of its threads triggered a little side-research whilst the discussion was under way (I was thinking of Teilhard de Chardin's concept of *noosphere* in relation to all the voices and thoughts, past and present, hovering above Glastonbury during the Pageant). As often is the case, the internet led me to an interesting connection. An article in French concerning the French poet Paul Valéry and Scottish poet, essayist, and political activist Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978) popped up. It appears that Hugh MacDiarmid had told the author of the article during an interview that the word *esplumeoir* he had used was an interesting word he had picked up from reading JCP. Thanks to William J. Keith and Jacqueline Peltier's excellent work on their *Reader's Companion* to *Autobiography*, we learn that HMacD could have been inspired by this word referring to Merlin/Myrddin's 'disappearance'. *Esplumeoir* is discussed in some detail in *A Glastonbury Romance* (pp.169–70). It is a favourite word and concept of JCP, who employs it in a number of books, including *Morwyn* (199), *Owen Glendower* (889 – cf. the term *Difancoll* here), *Porius* (699), and *Obstinate Cymric* (9). It also appears in *Autobiography*, p. 643.

Members of the Powys Society may know of other references to Hugh MacDiarmid by JCP or any additional material that may lead to more connections. Chris Thomas has pointed out that MacDiarmid mentions JCP both in his essays and in his autobiography, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas: Being the Autobiography of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Christopher Murray Grieve, 1943).

JCP and HMcD are among the 'Celtic' authors to have inspired Kenneth White's 'Geopoetics' studies and are quoted in his doctoral thesis, defended in 1979 at the Sorbonne, the title of which is *Intellectual Nomadism*. Both JCP's and MacD's broad views were reflected well beyond their writing into active participation in public social and political debate.

Chris Thomas

JCP, Autobiography and Hugh MacDiarmid

In our discussion of JCP's *Autobiography* in December last year our Chairman, Timothy Hyman, said that some passages from the *Autobiography* appear in Hugh MacDiarmid's long epic poem *In Memoriam James Joyce*. I was intrigued and following Timothy's suggestion looked up the poem. I found the relevant passages in *Autobiography* reproduced, slightly paraphrased in some places and versified by MacDiarmid in the part of the poem called *The World of Words*. MacDiarmid's poem, *In Memoriam James Joyce*, constructed in six parts, was written in the late 1930s and early 1940s whilst MacDiarmid was living on the remote island of Whalsay in Shetland. It was not published until 1955. MacDiarmid was a great admirer of Joyce, to whom he felt indebted for his multilingual approach to writing and whom he addresses personally, one Celt to another, in *In Memoriam*: *Welcome, then, Joyce.* (In other poems MacDiarmid also directly addressed two of JCP's favourite writers – Dostoevsky and Charles Doughty). He was an eminent modern poet who ranks alongside Eliot and Pound. MacDiarmid was also a self-confessed mystic, atheist, Marxist, and member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (which he joined in 1934). He emulated Joyce, Pound and Eliot by frequently appropriating unattributed allusions, quotations, and unfamiliar words, in Sanskrit, Welsh, Greek, Hebrew, Chinese and the Scots language. He was an omnivorous reader of all types of books on a variety of subjects inserting the names of authors and the titles of books or essays in his poems. This sometimes led to accusations of plagiarism. His intention was to create what he called a world language, an endeavour he believed he shared with Joyce: *this is our task making what a moving, thrilling, mystical, tropical, maniacal, magical creation of all these oppositions*, he declared in *In Memoriam*. Although he doesn't mention JCP's source material in the body of the poem, the *Autobiography* is cited in MacDiarmid's *Selected Poetry* (1992) edited by Alan Riach and Michael Grieve, in *A Note on the Author's Use of Sources*.

Hugh MacDairmid

MacDiarmid's appropriation of source material by JCP, which he used to demonstrate their shared vision of life, can be found in the *Selected Poetry* volume

with the section starting *Ah Joyce,* immediately below the title heading of *The World of Words,* and commences with the paragraph at the bottom of page 648 in the Macdonald edition of the *Autobiography* (1967), continuing on pages 649 and 650:

> With natures like ours [JCP writes: *With a nature like mine*] in which a magnetic fluidity
> That is neither 'good' nor 'bad' is forever
> Taking new shapes under the pressure of circumstance
> Taking new shapes and then again
> As Kwang makes Confucius complain of Laotzu
> 'Shooting up like a dragon'.

MacDiarmid then skips the rest of the paragraph and continues uninterrupted, copying with some minor amendments the first half of the following paragraph from page 649 beginning:

> But taking my life as a whole
> And hovering with the flight of the hawk
> Over its variegated landscape
> I believe I detect certain quite definite 'streams of tendency'
> In that unrolled map,
>
> Moving towards the unknown future.
> For one thing I fancy the manner I have allowed
> My natural impulses towards romance and mysticism
> To dominate me has led to the formation
> Of a curious gap or 'lacuna'
> Between the innate and almost savage realism
> Which is a major element in my nature
> And the imaginative poetical cult
> Whereby I have romanticised and idealised my life.

MacDiarmid omits the rest of the paragraph in *Autobiography* and proceeds to the next paragraph beginning:

> In this realistic mood I recognise
> With a grim animal acceptance
> That it is indeed likely enough that the 'soul'
> Perishes everlastingly with the death of the body,
> But what this realistic mood, into which
> My mind falls like a plummet
> Through the neutral zone of its balanced doubt,

Never for one single beat of time can shake or disturb
Is my certain knowledge,
Derived from the complex vision of everything in me
That the whole astronomical universe however illimitable
Is only one part and parcel of the mystery of Life,
Of this I am as certain as I am certain I am I.
The astronomical universe is not all there is.

MacDiarmid's quotation of JCP's original paragraph ends here. At this point MacDiarmid may have felt unable to follow JCP who continues in *Autobiography*: *…but whether this certainty implies the survival of any portion or any degree of my own consciousness after death is a very different matter; and of this, I confess, I am not certain*.

In his autobiography *Lucky Poet*, 1943, p.3, MacDiarmid quotes a passage from JCP's *The Art of Happiness,* 1935, p.253: *For as John Cowper Powys says: Deep within us is a secret fount, from whose channel, by a resolute habit of the will, we can clear away the litter that obstructs the water of life*.

The essay by MacDiarmid in which he refers to JCP who he calls a great writer is entitled *Towards a Celtic Front,* 1953 (*Selected Essays*, edited by Duncan Glen, 1972).

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Ray Cox

Two Oak Trees

An investigation into JCP and the 'Oaks of Avalon' at Glastonbury.

Part 2

(*Part 1 of Ray's article was published in* Newsletter 101*, November 2020. Numbers in brackets in the text refer to the relevant page numbers in* A Glastonbury Romance*, as mentioned in the heading paragraph for Part 1 of the article.*)

JCP's possible walking routes to the two oak trees:

Route 1: This runs clockwise and is a long-winded route to the oaks. From Bove Town *(170)* at the top of High Street, the lane to Bushey Combe *(129)* is passed on the right and the first junction is Wick Hollow with the Old Wells Road *(170)* and Edmund Hill *(170/811)* going left. Although these names were mentioned in *AGR,* Old Wells Road is not a likely route if the destination is the two oaks, being a long and circuitous way round. But there is one name along this route which JCP uses, Brindam and Brindham Farm *(116/130)* in the description of the Dekkers' route to Splotts Moor *(112)* and Whitelake River *(108)*. From Brindham a footpath can be taken, right, turning towards

Higher Wick Farm. Here, the left path is taken and crosses over stiles, through two fields, across a footbridge over a stream, through the middle of another field and then a narrow path between hedges directly to the beginning of the lane, facing south, with the oaks shortly after on the left. JCP would not have been directed from the town along this rather wayward route as a way to the oaks.

Route 2: The right fork at the top of Bove Town, Wick Hollow, passes Bulwarks Lane *(216)* and eventually arrives at Maidencroft Lane *(167).* From here the route goes left to Higher Wick Farm and then turns right. This now joins the way from Route 1. It should be noted that Routes 1 and 2 are the only routes he could have used in order to view the oaks in the direction he describes. In other words, he would have arrived at the oaks 'at the end of the lane' on its northern end in order to note that the second oak was 'a stone's throw further on'. Again, this route is circuitous, though not as long, while being a very pleasant one, but unlikely to have been in JCP's plan, either if being directed or visiting the oaks if he had already known of them.

An alternative for all the routes except Route 1 would have been to start in Chilkwell Street *(211)* and walk up Dod Lane, directly opposite the entrance to Abbey House *(37)*, and then proceed on the path between Chalice Hill *(121)* and Bushey Combe, eventually arriving at Maidencroft Lane for Routes 2, 3 or 4.

Route 3: This route is the most direct. It crosses over Maidencroft Lane and proceeds directly to Paradise Lane. This leads downhill, becoming a path through an attractive landscape of fields and distant vistas to arrive at the lane in question at a stile. Directly across is the lane down to Wick Farm. Turning left (north) into the lane the oak trees are seen closely on the right side of the lane.

Route 4: At Maidencroft Lane the right turn leads to a T junction, with the Tor *(110)* looming ahead. Going left to the top of the road brings one to a sharp bend to the right, but the direction is straight on, past the brow of Stonedown and past the field on the right which gives access to the Tor. Continuing down Stonedown, the left turn (north) is taken at the cross paths, and this is the lane to the oaks.

A consideration of whether JCP used the clockwise routes (1 and 2) or the anticlockwise routes (3 and 4) may be thought of as gilding the lily somewhat, merely if the phrase 'a stone's throw further on' is considered. Regardless of his route he could have simply stood for a while at the end of the lane and contemplated the aspect of the trees in the landscape.

With any of these routes JCP, after visiting the oaks, could have walked back up Stonedown and straight on down to Wellhouse Lane and the main road, turning right into Chilkwell Street. The entrance to the Chalice Well is a short distance on the right, and further down on the left is the Rifleman's Arms (St. Michael's Inn

(211/251-2)) and then the junction with Bere Lane *(211)* and the Abbey Barn *(211).* With only a few days at Glastonbury he would not have had much time to enjoy other substantial walks in addition to seeing the main sites of the town. Perhaps, however, he had stayed in Glastonbury previously.

So it remains a matter of speculation how he came to mention the oaks in his book. After the references to the oaks at *127* there is a further reference at *162.* Then, interestingly, later in the novel there are two further references which are capitalized: 'Two Oaks', at *532* and *785.* This capitalization suggests an importance the oaks may have had for him, which could either reflect his recollection of their prominence and appearance in the landscape, or perhaps the result of the knowledge, whether gleaned before, during or after his visit, of the matter of these trees in the mythological ambience of Glastonbury.

Notes:

Johanna van Fessem led the walk to Whitelake River, also visiting the two oaks, during the 2018 Powys Society Conference – See Newsletter 95, November 2018.

An extensive article on the history and mythology of Gog and Magog can be found on Wikipedia.

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Ray Cox

Review*: Adam Stout: *The Glastonbury Thorn: Story of a Legend

(Green & Pleasant Publishing, 2020, 156 pages,
plus 16 pages of colour plates.ISBN-10: 1916268609)

This book outlines the history, legends and mythology of the Holy Thorn. There are some pages on JCP. Stout says that *A Glastonbury Romance* is one of three *extraordinary books* about Glastonbury published around the same time in the early 1930s, the other two being *A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple of the Stars* (Katharine Maltwood) and *Avalon of the Heart* (Dion Fortune). He suggests that JCP's treatment of the Thorn was more subtle than the other two, noting for example that Fortune's writing on the Thorn is more traditional, albeit with a twist, with the story of the alleged nunnery on Wearyall Hill where King Arthur was said to have stayed. JCP was *more ambitious, more profound and more unsettling*. Stout notes that JCP was much inspired by Arthurian scholar and folklorist Jessie Weston's treatment of the Arthurian *Terre Gastée* (Waste Land). Her book *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) was also a major influence on T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land.*

In *AGR* Owen Evans believes that Wearyall (Wirral) Hill *...was the actual site of the that* Terre Gastée *of the mediaeval romances, which became withered and blighted after the Dolorous Blow delivered by the unlucky Balin upon King Pelleas, the Guardian of the Grail*. (*AGR* page 319 in the Macdonald, Picador, and Overlook Press editions.) For Mad Bet it is the Tree of Life (402). Stout sees the Dolorous Blow as akin to the axe-chop that felled the Thorn (as it has more than once); for Powys it is an ambiguous tree, perhaps a descendent of the original, and which could also be interpreted as an ancient fertility rite. Stout also discusses Johnny Geard, *at the heart of the Romance,* JCP explaining how the miracle-working Geard's singular gospel was that an actual new Revelation had been made in Glastonbury. The importance of JCP for Stout is that JCPs idea of Glastonbury entered the global literary mainstream inasmuch as it was a visionary maelstrom of fact, fiction and mythology that anticipated the late-twentieth transformation of the town with uncanny accuracy. Stout's book thus serves to keep JCP alive in literary comment.

Dr Adam Stout is a writer and historian, and has been a Visiting Research Fellow at the Universities of Wales, Leicester, Exeter and Southampton. He has written and lectured widely on the idea of Glastonbury.

The Holy Thorn on Wearyall Hill before it was destroyed by vandals in 2010 (photo: Getty Images)

Robin Florence Hickey

William Cowper (1731–1800)

Most organists would have heard of the Olney hymns, published in 1779. Not many would realise that some of them were composed and written by William Cowper together with his friend, the Reverend John Newton. William is related to the Montacute family through his older cousin and friend, Johnny Johnson, 'Johnny of Norfolk' (1769-1833) whose grand-daughter, Mary Cowper Johnson (1849-1914), married the Reverend C.F. Powys in 1871 and was the mother of JCP and his siblings (see *Powys Family Connections in East Anglia* by Stephen Powys Marks, *The Powys Journal*, Vol. 13, 2003).

William's mother, Anne Donne, a descendent of the poet John Donne, was the daughter of Roger Donne of Ludham Hall. She married Dr John Cowper, a rector in Great Berkhamstead. He was nearly six years old when his mother died in childbirth. He was packed off to boarding school in Hertfordshire, where he was bullied and developed inflammation of the eye. His days at Westminster school, where he stayed until the age of 18, were much happier.

Jacqueline Peltier has given us an insight into the life of William Cowper in *la lettre powysienne*, numero 25, Spring 2013. As explained by her, William fell in love with a cousin,Theodora Cowper, but then was made to abandon her. In later life he became a friend of her sister, Lady Hesketh.

In Cambridge he befriended Reverend Morley Unwin and Mrs Mary Unwin. In 1767 Mr Unwin was thrown from his horse and died. With Mrs Unwin, a calm and cheerful companion who loved poetry and rural walks, he moved to Olney, the home of the Reverend John Newton, known to them because of their evangelical fervour. Over a period of twelve years, Newton involved William in his parish work and together they wrote the Olney hymns. There were 348 in all, 67 by William, the rest by Newton. A former captain of slave ships, Newton is famous for writing 'Amazing Grace'. Among Cowper's are:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform...

William enjoyed cultivating the garden and looking after his many pets. However, in 1773, when he suffered a period of insanity, Mary Unwin took great care of him, encouraging him to write in order to keep him from becoming depressed, His output of poetry was prolific at this time. His daily routine was quiet; walking in the countryside, tending to his garden and his pets. The Olney hymns were published in 1779.

When Newton accepted the living of a large parish at St Mary Woolnorth in London in 1786 they moved to Weston Underwood into a house on the Throckmorton estate which was furnished by Lady Hesketh. It was a productive period in William's life. Among other writings he was translating into blank verse Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* which were revised three times. His versions of these epic poems were published in 1791. Here he befriended Hayley, a well known author at the time.

In 1791 they moved to Dunham Lodge, near Swaffham. When he met Lady Austin, she challenged him to write a poem in blank verse which he gladly undertook, the subject being 'The Sofa'. However, it was the amusing ballad *John Gilpin* that caught the attention of the public and brought him recognition as a poet of standing. When Mrs Unwin's health took a turn for the worse they moved backwards and forwards between Dunham Lodge and Mundesley, but she died on 17th December, 1796.

A friend of the Johnson family, Margaret Perowne, looked after him while Johnny Johnson, then a curate at East Dereham, Norfolk, spent time with him, reading to him every morning. They moved into the house in Market Street, East Dereham, where William spent his last few years working on his translations. William died here in 1800, aged 68. The house was demolished and has been replaced by the Memorial Congregational Church.

Portrait of Cowper from a painting by Romney in the National Portrait Gallery

Not only did he write a huge number of poems, but his many letters to Lady Hesketh, Hayley, Lady Austin and John Johnson have been published. Copies can be found in the Dereham and Norwich libraries together with booklets containing his poems which were copied out by Mary Barham Johnson (a relative of the Donne uncles) relating to his garden, the countryside and his pets. She was a member of the Powys Society (see *Newsletter* 29, November 1996, p.26, and her article "The Powys Mother" in *The Powys Review* No.8, 1980/1981).

Of particular interest to Powysians are the memorials in Market Street in Dereham. In front of the Congregational church there are a new memorial plaque, the original plaque and a large granite memorial stone erected by The Very Reverend Stanley, Dean of Westminster (a window in St George's Chapel in Westminster Abbey (1876) places Cowper in front of the spire of Olney church.)

Nearby, in St Nicholas' church, Dereham, an

impressive stained-glass window (1905) in the chapel of St Thomas of Canterbury, where William is buried, depicts him wearing his poet's morning cap together with his dog and pet hares. A small plaque in the floor of the church displays the name of Mary Unwin while a street has been named after her. Cowper Street takes drivers past the station and out of town while a sculpture of his head adorns the porch of a more modern house. It is also possible to enjoy a walk to Ludham Hall, now run as a B & B holiday home. Walking from Ludham Bridge along Johnsons Street, turn right and follow a tarmacked lane which leads to Ludham Hall, a red brick building, the red bricks having been added to the original ashlar and flint exterior in the 18th century.

Jacqueline describes Cowper's life as 'hell on earth'. Although William suffered numerous bouts of melancholy and his poetry seems quite morbid, his lovable, likeable, self-effacing and friendly nature is forthcoming in his letters, many to Lady Hesketh and John Johnson who continuously supported him.

Geoffrey Winch

Gift of Isis

'That unequalled Isadora has gone to California . . .
She danced for me alone . . .
I enclose to you the red rose as she went.'

(John Cowper Powys to his brother Llewelyn, 18th November 1917)

red roses she'd sent him
to fill his modest room
            for stirring her soul with
            insights and revelations:
now she fills it
                        with her whole persona
as she prepares to dance for him
                                    her *Marseillaise*
(the dance she'd danced
            for all young men
                        spurring them to rise,
                                                to strive
for all to which they aspired)

            bare-armed
                        bare-shouldered
                                    and barefooted
                                                she spins
                                                            leaps
as if carried on the wings
                        of the Arc's volunteer
            descends
perfectly balanced and seamlessly spins
                        and springs again
                                    with outstretched arms
and again –
            her fluid lines
                        and flawless limbs

unhindered
by the flowing
of her scarlet veil
then as vapour
she dissolves
leaving him
with his youthfulness restored
fashioned as a single red rose

Geoffrey Winch