

Editorial

The character on our cover, smiling and a little bemused, could well portray a listener to the thrilling tale of Homer's *Iliad* – the little terracotta head dates from the 7th century BC, more or less contemporary (probably) with Homer. JCP, as is well known, began each of his latter days with a verse from Homer (Loeb edition with crib) and one from his Welsh Bible. *Homer and the Aether* (published 1959) must have been a labour of love. It is a children's book for grown-ups, both child-like and wise, appropriate for one skilled in the Art of Growing Old. We hope to present readings from the book as an entertainment at the conference, and by way of preamble print extracts from JCP's own introduction, with some reviews of the book.

Other features this time also centre on JCP: his friendship with the actress Dorothy Cheston, partner of Arnold Bennett; and another glance into Powys family history from Stephen Marks, this time of his great-grandfather the Revd Annesley, father of ARP's first wife, grandfather of Stephen's mother Isobel. Notes by Chris Thomas pick up trails of encounters with or surrounding John Cowper, and of early days of the Powys Society; and Powysian sharing flourishes in the hands of Dawn Collins (Facebook) and Tim Blanchard (a proposed 'crowdfunding' Unbound project). The life of Richard Burleigh (1931-2017) is celebrated. And greetings and thanks from us all to our long-serving President Glen who is entering undiminished his tenth decade.

KK

At this year's conference we are planning to offer members, on our free Saturday afternoon, a special visit by coach to JCP's last home in Snowdonia in the slate mining town of Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Writing all day, lying propped up on his couch, in the tiny upper room at 1 Waterloo, JCP could look out of the window, entranced by the view of the Moelwyn mountains and distant ridge of Cader Idris, whilst he conjured his last cosmic fantasies sending his characters deep into outer space. Members are encouraged to reserve seats on the coach in advance of attending the conference (see p.7 for details).

CT

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Richard Graves

A Tribute to our President on the occasion of his 90th birthday, June 2017

Most of the time, being President of a Literary Society is relatively straightforward. Executive responsibilities lie elsewhere, and one's role may be largely ceremonial, though Glen contributed far more than ceremony, as others will testify. However, times are not always easy. Almost every Literary Society has an occasional bout of difficulties, often brought about by clash of personalities. A mark of Glen Cavaliero's greatness as a President is that when some years ago the Powys Society was faced by a raging storm of such difficulties (who else still shudders as I do when they recall a certain Conference at Kingston Maurward?) his combination of acute intelligence, genial good humour and diplomatic good sense proved equal to the task, and he successfully steered the Society to the calmer waters in which we remain. As one would expect, my own debt to him during my period of Chairmanship was considerable. Thank you, Glen, with love and respect, and may we all live to celebrate your 100th in ten years' time!

Richard Graves served as Chairman from 2001 to 2005. Glen Cavaliero became Chairman in 1972 and has been President for 32 years since 1985, succeeding Angus Wilson (1969-1981) and G. Wilson Knight (1981-1985). He celebrated his 90th birthday on 7 June. A review by John Hodgson of Glen's poems is in NL 90.

New Members

We are delighted to be able to welcome three new members (in Blandford, Dorset; Whitley Bay, Tyne & Wear; and in Tucson, Arizona in USA) who have joined the Society since the last announcement published in *Newsletter* 90, March 2017. This brings our current total membership of the Society to **245**, allowing for other members who have either resigned or not renewed their membership. Full details of trends and other membership data will be provided at the AGM at this year's conference in Llangollen on Sunday 20th August at 11.00am. (CT)

Renewed Copyright Agreement

Members of the Powys Society committee held a meeting, on 30th March, with the Agent for the copyright owner of the JCP estate, Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson. The copyright owner is John Powys, grandson of TFP and the son of Frances Powys. By mutual agreement the three parties have signed an arrangement granting the Powys Society the right to continue to publish, without fee or written permission, published or unpublished material owned by the copyright holder of the JCP estate. The arrangement will come into effect on 1 September 2019, on expiry of the current similar agreement, (which was announced in *Newsletter* No 26, November 1995, p.9) and will last until 31 August 2044. The committee extends their grateful appreciation to John Powys for making this generous arrangement possible.

Chairman's Report 2016-17

The binding elements in this Society – the annual Conference, the three *Newsletters*, the *Powys Journal* – have always only been part of the story; and in the past year several long-term issues have come to fruition. For example, our agreement with JSTOR has now been signed and the *Powys Journal* will be included in their Modern Literature Collection, becoming available to subscription libraries and possibly providing the society with some regular income. At a recent meeting between committee members and Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson, our waiver of copyright on our Powys publications (generously permitted by John Powys) was renewed for a further twenty-five years. The massive group task of transcribing John Cowper Powys's 1940 Diary is now complete and we are considering how best to present it; we are grateful to these volunteers, as we are to so many other helpers who keep the society fertile. Dawn Collins has set up a Facebook page, complimentary to Frank Kibblewhite's more formal Powys Society website (our main recruiting agent). Kevin Taylor's expertise is currently being directed to the possibility of digitising some of the major fiction. Michael Kowalewski has continued to deepen our relation with Exeter University; several members have been present at a Symposium there on the Powys Society collection and the literary archives of other west-country writers in June. Our membership continues to hover around the 250 mark. We are grateful to those of you who made a donation in response to our plea for help; we anticipate the income shortfall may continue.

Meanwhile, in Hampstead in December 2016 Patrick Quigley explored the relation of T.F. Powys and Liam O'Flaherty; the following April saw several of us – including our President Glen Cavaliero, who has celebrated his ninetieth on 7 June – enjoyably tracing together at Ely the character of Merlin in *Porius*. We are planning a December 2nd Hampstead meeting, centred on *The Religion of a Sceptic*. Arrangements for our Llangollen conference in August are almost complete, thanks to the efficiency of our long-standing team, Louise de Bruin and Anna Rosic; some of us are intending to visit Blaenau Ffestiniog. Among our speakers will be Grevel Lindop, author of the recent biography of Charles Williams, with a life-long interest in JCP, and David Stimpson speaking about John Cowper in America; Patrick Quigley will revisit Llewelyn's 1928 journey to Palestine and David Goodway will examine the life and career of Gerald Brenan, intersecting with Llewelyn and the Powys world. Our publications team – Kate Kavanagh with Chris Thomas on the *Newsletters*, and Charles Lock with Louise de Bruin on the *Journal*, have once again worked superbly to deliver on time. I am personally grateful especially to our Secretary, Chris Thomas, whose encyclopaedic knowledge and genial scholarship have continued to guide our progress.

Timothy Hyman

Treasurer's Report

The annual audit of the Powys Society's accounts for 2016 was completed and approved by the Chartered Accountants, Hills and Burgess, 20 Bridge Street, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 1AL. The balances in the three accounts at the end of December were as follows: Everyday Account: £654.21, Community Account: £1,984.42, Business Saver: £ 12,183.27. A surplus of £432.44 was achieved. There were no major outlays during the year 2016. Printing costs, however, for *Newsletters* Numbers 87, 88 and 89 have increased as also the postage. Book purchases increased. Cheques payable to the Society should be forwarded directly to the Treasurer, Mrs Robin Hickey, Hamlyn Cottage, Lynch Road, France Lynch, Stroud, Gloucestershire, GL6 8LT.

STATEMENT OF INCOME AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31ST DECEMBER, 2016

Income:

Subscriptions	5382.45	
Bank Interest	14.10	
Book sales	1588.43	
Conference	7083.00	
Gift Aid	428.47	
Donations	<u>282.00</u>	14778.45

Expenditure:

Printing	4043.59	
Alliance of Literary Societies	15.00	
Offers and committee expenses	2812.62	
Conference expenses	7068.82	
Conference refund	90.00	
Accountants	120.00	
Website management	95.98	
Unidentified cheque	<u>100.00</u>	14346.01

Excess of income over expenditure

432.44

Opening bank balances:

Community Account	230.43	
Everyday Saver	382.44	
Business Saver	<u>13776.59</u>	14389.46

Closing bank balances:

Community Account	1984.42	
Everyday Saver	654.21	
Business Saver	<u>12183.27</u>	14821.90

Increase in bank balances

432.44

Robin Hickey, Hon Treasurer

Committee Nominations 2017-18

The following Honorary Officers have been nominated and have agreed to stand:

	<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Second</i>
Chairman	Timothy Hyman	Chris Wilkinson	Peter Lazare
Vice-Chairman	David Goodway	John Hodgson	Anna Rosic
Treasurer	Robin Hickey	Jacqueline Peltier	Chris Thomas
Secretary	Chris Thomas	Peter Lazare	Anna Rosic

For the committee the following have been nominated and have agreed to stand:

<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Second</i>
John Hodgson	Kate Kavanagh	Jacqueline Peltier
Michael Kowalewski	Chris Thomas	Kate Kavanagh

The committee also wishes to *co-opt* **Anna Rosic** as committee member for another one-year term of office.

If these nominations are approved by members at the AGM, the committee, from August 2017, will consist of those above as well as **Dawn Collins** and **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter* editor) who have one year left to run of their three year term of office, and **Louise de Bruin** (*Publications Manager*) who has two years to run of her term. **Jacqueline Peltier** serves as an honorary committee member. **Charles Lock** (editor, *Powys Journal*) serves as *ex-officio* member. **There is one vacancy for a member to serve on the committee for a three year period.**

Chris Thomas, Hon Secretary

AGM 2017

The Annual General Meeting of the Powys Society will be held at the Hand Hotel, Bridge Street, Llangollen, LL20 8PL, at 11.00 am, on Sunday 20 August 2017. All paid-up members of the Powys Society are welcome to attend and participate in the AGM whether or not they are attending the 2017 conference.

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of AGM 2016 as published in *Newsletter* 89 November 2016, & matters arising
- 2 Nomination of Honorary Officers and Members of the Powys Society Committee for the year 2017-2018
- 3 Hon. Treasurer's Report and presentation of annual accounts for year ended 31 December 2016
- 4 Collection Liaison Manager's Report
- 5 Hon. Secretary's Report
- 6 Powys Society, Facebook, and social media
- 7 Chairman's Report as published in *Newsletter* 91, July 2017
- 8 Date and venue of conference 2018
- 9 AOB

Chris Thomas, Hon Secretary

The Powys Society Conference, 2017

The Hand Hotel, Bridge Street, Llangollen

Friday 18th to Sunday 20th August

‘Where the spirit breathes’

Programme

Friday 18th August

- 16.00 Arrival
- 17.30 Reception
- 18.30 Dinner
- 20.00 David Goodway: ‘Gerald Brenan: Bloomsbury, Gamel Woolsey and Spain’

Saturday 19st August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 David Stimpson: ‘John Cowper Powys in America – a Personal View’
- 10.45 Coffee
- 11.15 Grevel Lindop: ‘Saving Mid-Century Britain: Arthurian Themes in the Work of John Cowper Powys and Charles Williams’
- 13.00 Lunch
- Afternoon free optional organised visit to Blaenau Ffestiniog by coach
- [See page opposite]
- 19.00 Dinner
- 20.30 A dramatised reading of passages from JCP’s late work *Homer and the Aether*

Sunday 20th August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 Patrick Quigley: ‘The Making of a Pagan – Llewelyn Powys and Palestine’
- 10.45 Coffee
- 11.00 AGM
- 12.00 David Jones: memories of JCP and Phyllis Playter at Corwen
- 13.00 Lunch
- 15.00 Departure

For details of speakers and presentations please see Newsletter 90 (March 2017), pp. 5-9.

Visiting Blaenau Ffestiniog at the 2017 Conference

The committee has organised a visit at this year's conference to Blaenau Ffestiniog by a private hire coach. We will make a stop at the last home of John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter at 1 Waterloo, Bethania, situated on the outskirts of the town close to the waterfall and old woollen mill where JCP used to sit and rest beside a low stone wall. JCP acquired this house for £165.00 in 1954 (a present from Gerard and Mary Casey) and moved there at the beginning of May 1955. The house was recently advertised for sale (see *Newsletter* 90, March 2017, p.11) although it is also currently still available for holiday letting and is listed on various websites.

The coach will depart Llangollen at **approximately 2 pm on Saturday 19 August**. The return journey to Llangollen will **depart Blaenau Ffestiniog at approximately 5 pm**. If parking space can be arranged on the way we also hope to see the replica of the inscribed stone which provided the inspiration for JCP's novel *Porius* (the original stone is in the National Museum of Wales), and which was the source of the epigram JCP placed at the head of the novel (included in the Macdonald edition of 1951 but not in the Overlook Duckworth complete edition of 2007): '*Porius Hic In Tumulo Jacet Homo Christianus Fuit*' (not *Planus*, instead of *Christianus*, as some scholars have proposed and which JCP vehemently rejected). The stone is located in the middle of a field called 'bedd Porius' near Trawsfynydd, close to Blaenau Ffestiniog.

If you would like to join the coach trip to Blaenau Ffestiniog could you please **notify the Hon. Secretary as soon as possible**, by e-mail, letter or phone (contact details are on the inside front cover of the Newsletter) so we can reserve a place for you. **Places are limited to 26 seats on the coach**.

A voluntary contribution of £10.00 per person would be very much appreciated to help support costs of hiring a private coach.

JCP mentions the final move to Blaenau Ffestiniog many times in his letters to friends and family calling 1 Waterloo '*a hermitage for two*', emphasising its remoteness and isolation, and describing the town as 'weird', 'El Greco like' and 'exactly without exaggeration like the Nephelocuccugygia or Cloud-Cuckoo town described in *The Birds* (by Aristophanes)'.

What Blaenau Ffestiniog meant to JCP can be ascertained from his description of the town in a letter to Louis Wilkinson, dated July 22 1955:

Yes, there are aspects of this town that are 'grim' but there are also small grassy valleys with streams of water running thro' them which to look up at the grim mountain precipices all round towering above you as you lie on some sun warmed rock listening to the water, & watching white sea gulls and hay fields and reedy marshes gives you the feeling you get from a poem like Keats's 'Mother of Hermes & still youthful Maia' ...

JCP is referring here to ‘Ode to Maia’, a fragment of verse composed by Keats while he was staying in Teignmouth in 1818. The last few lines of the fragment offer a suitable emblem for our visit to Blaenau Ffestiniog: ‘... my song should die away ... Rich in the simple worship of a day.’

CT

Obituary

Richard John Firman Burleigh (5th July 1931 – 23rd February 2017)

Neil Lee writes:

It is both an honour and a privilege to be invited to pay a tribute to a special friend and fellow bibliophile/antiquarian book-collector, fellow Dandelion and long-time Powys Society member Richard Burleigh, who sadly passed away on 23rd February at his home in Charmouth, Dorset, aged 85.

Richard was a dedicated Powysian, a devotee of all three major writing brothers and amassed a library at his home in Charmouth which was well stocked with their works, and which was fondly – and famously – known as *The Book-Wormery*.

Those who knew Richard well will think it typical of the man to remain dedicated to the end, and will not be surprised to learn from his daughter Julie that such was his passion for book collecting that even on their last evening together, though he had by then lost the power of speech, he spent time carefully combing the catalogues and writing down a list of prospective purchases. Richard was a true bibliophile!

It was this passion for book collecting, alongside a joint fascination for Arthurian legend and a shared interest in archaeology, which cemented our friendship and for more than twenty years we corresponded, exchanged books, and met annually each August to celebrate Llewelyn’s birthday at East Chaldon, where until recent years Richard was a ‘regular’ on the ‘Birthday Walks’.

The journey of Richard’s life took him from a boyhood in Norfolk, to Stevenage and then to Cambridge. Here he became a scientist at Fisons where he met his future wife, a horticulturalist; after they married they moved to Bridgwater where Richard took a position with BNF and the CEGB installing the Hinckley Point B Reactor. His developing interest in the physics of radioactivity and his passion for archaeology were then to be perfectly united in a position he held for over twenty years at the

Research Laboratory of the British Museum, where he became an expert in radio-carbon dating techniques. The family, by this time increased with the addition of three children, Peter, Claire and Julie, moved to Acton, which allowed Richard easy access to the bookshops of Chiswick. These were happy years, given the location of the British Museum, for as daughter Claire relates: ‘Bread and books formed a staple diet for dad, taking cheese and marmite sandwiches to the British Museum for twenty years, which he would eat with fellow sun-lovers in Russell Square during the lunch hour to get a few precious rays of the sun, before diving into one of the many Bloomsbury bookshops. ...’ Richard’s last position was a brief spell at the *Museum of Mankind* before he took early retirement and moved to Dorset, the final destination on his long and adventurous journey.

Canon David Baldwin led a Service of Celebration at a packed St John the Baptist Church at Broadwindsor on Saturday 11th March, which was attended by family members and friends alongside representatives of a number of literary societies including the William Barnes, Thomas Hardy and Powys Societies. Richard’s son Peter delivered a moving eulogy which captured the very essence and spirit of his father, and in closing said: ‘Richard had grown to adore Dorset – Hardy’s Wessex – and to celebrate in particular Barnes & Powys. These were always figures who challenged the received conventions of their time through observation of the world, through argument, through scientific method. But always there was a faith in something human that was ancient, that was in the world, in a place, in a ritual.’

In our case, the *faith* was a faith in friendship, in human goodness; the *place* was The Sailor’s Return at East Chaldon, and the *ritual* was the annual gathering to raise a glass in memory of Llewelyn Powys, a man we loved and admired. On August 13th this year, and on every August 13th we will continue to raise a glass to another such man, our much loved and sadly missed friend, Richard Burleigh.

Richard was laid to rest in the natural burial ground at Higher Ground Meadow, Corscombe, and forever now will be a part of the landscape that he loved.

Richard Burleigh, 1931-2017



Ely meeting, 29th April 2017

Ten of us gathered in the Fire Engine House, near Ely cathedral, to discuss the extraordinary character of Merlyn/Myrddin Wyllt in *Porius* with particular focus on Chapters III and XV. JCP said that he considered Chapter XV of *Porius* to be the best and most important part of the book. (It's the one with the children Neb and Gunta in Rhun's cave, and Myrddin's meeting with priest and druid)

Our past Chairman, **John Hodgson**, had been summoned to Kosovo so was unable to lead the discussion as planned. Our current one **Tim Hyman** took his place, opening by reading from Keats's unfinished poem 'The Fall of Hyperion' (1819), in which the deposed god Saturn, 'degraded, cold ... unseceptered, his realmless eyes closed ...', identified by JCP with Myrddin, lies hidden within the earth as Myrddin does. JCP's early book on Keats was written around 1908/1910 (it was published as *Powys on Keats* by Cecil Woolf in 1993), and he later published poems with the titles 'Saturn' and 'The Saturnian' in *Mandragora*, (1917). Myrddin/Saturn in *Porius* is a reinvention of Keats's sleeping god. Keats's poem is subtitled 'A Dream' which suggests descriptions of *Porius* as 'a dream novel'. **Sonia Lewis** said she sees the whole of *Porius* as a poem. **Chris Thomas** reminded us of Wilson Knight's pioneering study of the prose work of JCP called, *The Saturnian Quest*, (1964), in which Wilson Knight describes the theme of the 'Saturnian' and the revival of the Golden Age as the key to JCP's life's work. He prefaces the book with a quote from JCP's poem 'The Saturnian': 'Ah! I must follow it high and low ...' It's therefore no surprise that JCP said that he put a lot of himself in the character of Myrddin Wyllt.

Myrddin can't be neatly tidied: he is a human prophet, but he is also 'more than human'. He embodies different aspects of a god – he has the supernatural powers of a god – evoking Saturn, Rhun's Mithras, as well as the doctrines of Pelagius on free will and the Christian God. He combines images from classical mythology and Welsh legends; he is the opposite of mainstream Christianity yet also part of it as the Emperor's adviser. He stands for the Saturnian Golden Age – freedom from tyranny and oppression and the domination of ideas and beliefs (i.e. Christianity represented by the priest of Corwen). Myrddin's appearance as a savage herdsman comes from an old Romance (*Yvain* by Chrétien de Troyes), one of many stories absorbed by JCP along with episodes from the *Mabinogion*: all of these are discussed in *Celtic Myth*, a book by R.S. Loomis, which JCP read avidly. (Nicholas Tolstoy, in his book *The Quest for Merlin*, also gives a Scots version of the source of Myrddin the Wild as Lailoken, and examines Myrddin's prehistoric origins.)

Glen Cavaliero read a letter from a not very sympathetic colleague (and cousin) whom he had asked to read the book, objecting to the unlikely plot as many do (those 'trestles' that Myrddin said he had erected in the lake to protect the corpse of the

Druid's brother from cannibal giants – never heard of again). Glen also mentioned a long article by Jerome McGann published in the *TLS* in 1995, actually a review of the Colgate University Press edition of *Porius*, which discusses the novel as an attempt to revive the romance form in the age of modernism. McGann compares the novel to *Finnegans Wake*, to Proust and to Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans*.

We asked if Myrddin is a 'controller'? Or is he an Elemental? We examined his role as a magician. JCP paradoxically calls Myrddin a '*Christian magician*'. We discussed the description of the loss of Myrddin's life force when he becomes weak and dependent on Porius for support. We wondered if this might reflect JCP's own possible *petit-mal* epilepsy. Is Myrddin a Shaman? He projects visions of other dimensions and 'acres of time'; he appears in various disguises, he takes on the form of a shape shifter; he is a playactor, 'a crooked counsellor' and an archetypal trickster. But if he has shamanistic powers they would only work on believers.

Chapter 3 ('The Stranger') describes the appearance of Myrddin with his animals (one of the best scenes in the book) as seen from Porius's point of view. Myrddin is described as like 'a wild animal' and he has an affinity with animals and nature: he refers to 'my creatures' – the water rat that he senses softly crawling over his hand, and the stirring of nature in response to his appearance in a boat, are powerful images of this link with the animal world. He is Lord of the Animals like the figure on the Gundestrup cauldron surrounded by animals.

*April 29th 2017:
Glen Cavaliero, Dawn Collins and
Timothy Hyman at the cathedral*



JCP always undercuts mystery with realism, as Myrddin himself does talking with Neb. Neb has an insight into Myrddin's character calling him 'Great Master'. He says Myrddin was God before the Trinity. Myrddin is envisaged as Cronos/Saturn. He is the God of Time, 'the liberator of earth from heaven'. He identifies himself with the Mithraic figure of Aion – the lion-headed God entwined by a snake situated in the Cave of Mithras (perhaps JCP saw this image in *The Mysteries of Mithras* by Franz Cumont). Myrddin shifts his consciousness between past and future, and Porius comes to share this vision. Is the Golden Age, envisioned by Myrddin, a reflection of post-war optimism? JCP continually refers to the wider world beyond Britain, including the Byzantine Empire, and hints at contemporary reality. At the conclusion of his historical note to the background of the novel he says: 'As the old gods were departing then so the old gods are departing now'. He points to contemporary catastrophic world events and the need for a new Golden Age. Is he thinking of some form of anarchism? Each of us is free, to be who we are – even Mordred, negation and death in person. At the end of the book Porius, after a final confrontation with Mordred and an almost casual parting from the revived Myrddin Wyllt, sits on a cliff above the sea where Myrddin will disappear, wrapped and warm, content – as if an infant reborn to new life.

KK and CT

Exeter, 15th June

A half-dozen Powys Society members travelled in marvellous midsummer weather to the University Old Library in Exeter, to be welcomed along with PhD students and researchers by Christine Fauch, head of the Heritage Collection there. The archive was inaugurated 60 years ago, when the university received its charter in 1956; it has built up a special collection of writers associated with the South-West (Hughes, Clemo, Causley, Malcolm Elwin and William Golding among them).

The Powys collection, of more than 10,000 items, is a new addition transferred from its former home in Dorchester. It had, Christine testified, already been admirably listed (by its original curator Morine Krissdóttir) in accordance with the two substantial donations, by Feather and Bissell, which their terms of gift require to be kept separate. The list will in due course be transferred to fit in with other main catalogues and connections (a grant has been asked for this). Meanwhile researchers can use this inventory.

A tasty selection from the archive was laid out in the lecture room, chiefly of Powys-related books and letters; also ms pages including an alternative last page of *Porius*. Christine welcomed events like the present one, to stimulate fruitful exchanges and forge friendships in a context of world-class research.

Michael Kowalewski gave the first talk, dealing with FAQs. Why study the Powyses? Because of the deep personal engagement that these writers transmit to their readers. Why are the Powyses relatively neglected at university level? For the same reason perhaps: they resist classification; they call for personal rather than social engagement which some welcome but others may reject. (For George Steiner, John Cowper was one of the few writers to stand comparison with Dostoevsky.) Why study all three (or more) of the Powyses? There was a strong family solidarity between the whole tribe, and they sparked off each other, as letters in the collection at Exeter can show.

Michael described his own discovery of *Wolf Solent* in Jeff Kwintner's legendary Village Bookshop in Regent Street – attracted as many were by the cover and suggestive title, the name Wolf suggesting wildness (*Steppenwolf* by Hermann Hesse was a cult book of the time). Reading it, what impressed him was its focus on the hero's interior life, and its shifts simultaneously between the prosaic, nature, and inward feelings. He summarised the differences and similarities of the Powys brothers. All, as children of a vicarage, were steeped in the cadences of the Anglican Bible and Prayer Book, and incorporate them frequently. All three felt intensely for nature and lived mostly retired lives, but were fully aware of the currents of the day: Nietzsche, Freud, and Joyce figure in their mental landscapes. They were 'post-modern modernists', old-fashioned in style by choice. All dealt with the 'death of God' while treading a line between sacred and secular. They remain significant, and timeless.





Coffee time

The wide range of the Powys collection is well suited to research. It contains every publication including variant editions; manuscripts and typescripts, large numbers of letters, especially from John Cowper, and annotated Ex Libris which reveal much about their owners' interests.

Lunch and chat were followed by interesting talks from researchers. **Luke Thompson** (his biographer) spoke on the remarkable life of **Jack Clemo** (see his essay in *Powys Journal*, Vol. XXIV), progressively blind and deaf but able to produce much-admired poems and prose springing from his hidden Calvinist world of the Cornish clay pits. Clemo revered Theodore Powys and finally visited him in Mappowder with their mutual friend Monica Hutchings. (Louise de Bruin met him there and remembered tracing letters on his hand.) Clemo dedicated poems to TFP and wrote essays on their meeting. He saw Theodore as a substitute father and had his mind's eye on Susie (Theodora, aged 15) as a possible bride (an unlikely choice: luckily he found an ideal one soon after). He deeply admired the poets Robert and Elizabeth Browning for their perfect marriage, and eventually went to Italy to trace their steps.

Chris Campbell, describing himself as a Weymouth boy, found that his own experience chimed with the description in *Weymouth Sands* of a seedy town with dodgy goings-on beneath the surface. He sees the action and the characters in the book as permeated with the single industry of Portland stone, bedrock of the text (comparing it to a novel on the all-pervading monoculture of cocoa in north Brazil), and the main theme as conflict between capitalism in such 'commodity frontiers'

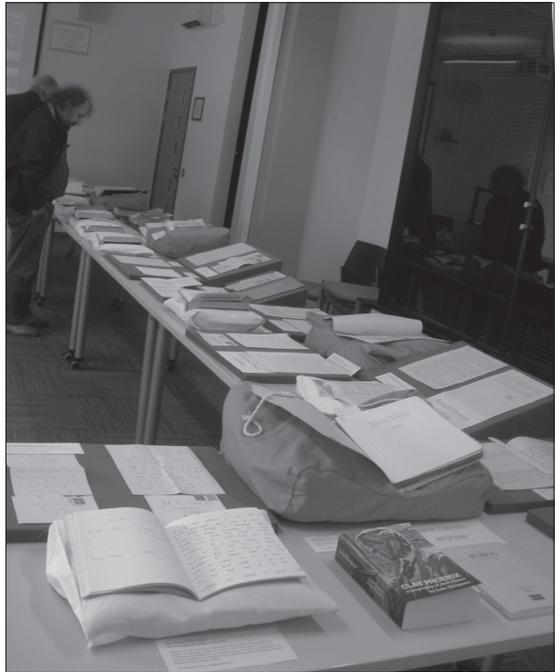
(Cattistock) and independent operators like Skald, ‘an oolite man’. To end with we were shown the final scene from the 1963 dystopian Joseph Losey film ‘The Damned’, shot in Weymouth, with holiday-makers paddling while offscene radio-active children scream for help.

This was followed by **Teresa Sanders** who is embarking on a study of **Sylvia Townsend Warner** (1893-1978) and her subversive views on education and pedagogy. She grew up in Harrow school where her father was a housemaster, but regretted the limited nature of her ‘girl’s’ education. She was a neighbour and became a close friend of Theodore in East Chaldon (parts of her proposed biography of him may be familiar to readers of Powys publications; she particularly admired Theodore’s wife Violet). A communist and WEA lecturer, she and Valentine Ackland were essential parts of the hub of left-wing intellectuals in the Dorset village.

Chris Thomas concluded the day by reading from *A Glastonbury Romance*, Chapter 17, ‘May Day’, a passage set in Miss Crow’s garden with its description of primroses and moss and their psychic powers – illustrating many of the points made during the day about JCP’s style, observations of nature, spirits of place, and what has been called JCP’s ‘re-enchantment of the everyday’.

KK

*A tasty selection from
the archive*



News and Notes

from Chris Thomas

The Powys Society has entered into a formal Agreement with the digital platform, JSTOR, to include a complete set of the *Powys Journal* in a new Modern Literature Collection. JSTOR provides access, to over 13,000 subscriber institutions, enabling readers to download articles from thousands of journals in a digital format. This means that within the next two years members will be able to access all back copies of the *Powys Journal* from a subscription library which will also provide the Society with a welcome additional revenue stream. Current copies of the *Powys Journal* can already be accessed via Literature Online in libraries that subscribe to ProQuest.

from Nicholas Birns

The New York Times, 24 February 2017, included a feature about the current favourite reading of the French actress Isabelle Huppert. She refers to JCP's *Autobiography* and says she is interested in *Autobiography* because of JCP's mention of Venice.

Time magazine, 10 April 2015, included reference to a review, in the issue for 11 May 1925, of TFP's *Mr. Tasker's Gods*, (first published in the USA by Alfred Knopf and in UK by Chatto & Windus, in 1925), with full details of the author's background, several columns of text, and analysis of the significance of the book. The review appeared ahead of a brief one-paragraph mention of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

from Tim Blanchard

Adam Curtis, maverick BBC documentary film-maker, winner of four BAFTAs and creator of *Just Another Day*, and *The Power of Nightmares*, is a JCP fan. His favourite book is *A Glastonbury Romance*.

from John Hodgson

I have discovered a very interesting discussion of *Wolf Solent* by the poet and critic, John Holloway, in his book *The Slumber of Apollo – reflections on recent art, literature, language and the individual consciousness*, (Cambridge University Press, 1983). John Holloway, (1920-1999), was Professor of Modern English at Cambridge University, 1972-1982. Holloway describes Wolf's final resignation to a cup of tea as 'that last infirmity of the English mind'.

from Dawn Collins

John and Amanda Powys have been digitising many of the items in their Powys

family collections. Some of these items have never been published but if you have a subscription to the family history website *Ancestry* you can view images of their collection.

from Geoffrey Winch

To mark Geoffrey Winch's 25th successive year of being published by the poetry small presses in the UK, USA and elsewhere, Original Plus have produced a retrospective pamphlet *West Abutment Mirror Images*. Available direct from Original Plus at: <http://thesamsmith.webs.com/originalpluschapbooks.htm> or other online booksellers. Alternatively, signed copies can be obtained from Geoffrey Winch, Dolphin Cottage, 65 Downview Road, Felpham, West Sussex, PO22 8JA. A cheque for £4.50 is sufficient to cover the cost inc. p&p (UK). Overseas orders: please email geoffreywinch@gmail.com in the first instance.

Patrick Quigley's latest book, *Sisters Against the Empire* (Liffey Press, 2016) follows his acclaimed biography of Casimir Markievicz 'the Polish Irishman' (2013) with the story of Casimir's Anglo-Irish wife Constance Markievicz, condemned to death after the Dublin Easter Rising in 1916. Her sentence was commuted to solitary confinement in England, where her devoted sister Eva Gore-Booth was her lifeline to sanity. PQ has had access to the drawings and writings made by Constance in prison, and analyses with sympathy the political and human effects of this piece of history. PQ's long article on Theodora Gay Scutt ('Susie' Powys), 'The Perfect Child', is in the bilingual *la lettre powysienne* no.29 (Spring 2015). He is a regular visitor to Theodora in her care home in Boyle, county Roscommon.

from Richard Simonds (USA)

I'm going through the J.C. Powys opus in order, writing reviews as I go and posting them on the web site for **Goodreads**. I also (in preparation for this project) went through the entire list of 100 books in JC Powys's list of Greatest Books published in 1916, which was quite worthwhile in terms of understanding his work (*Ducdame*, for example, mentions *The Oxford Book of English Prose* and *The Bride of Lammermoor*). Reviews of those books, some referencing Powys's comments, are also posted.

Powys claims to be primarily influenced by Dostoevsky and Rabelais, which he is (I also think his Poe influence is under-appreciated), but a couple of the books on the list, although he hardly mentions them outside of the 100, also seemed to me to be a major influence: Hauptmann's *The Fool in Christ* and Strindberg's *The Confession of a Fool*. The Hauptmann book seems to be an inspiration for *A Glastonbury Romance* in particular and the Strindberg book reflects some of the relationships between men

and women in his novels. I am wondering if anyone has ‘caught’ this or written about it before. While these books are at times disturbing and ‘flawed’, they were amazing to read, and reminded me quite a bit of Powys’s own. Also a special shout out to Vincent O’Sullivan’s *The Good Girl*, which Powys places in his list and I particularly enjoyed, even read it twice. Powys was a great novelist but also a great appreciator of literature, and the choices for his list are inspiring.

(See Richard’s review of *Ducdame* at: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1975268187>, and other reviews by Richard of JCP’s books, elsewhere at **Goodreads**. Apart from JCP’s well-known books of literary criticism there are other resources for the study of his literary influences and interests, such as the ‘blurbs’ he provided for publishers which were compiled by Robin Patterson and included in *Newsletter* 21, April 1994. JCP also gave a series of lectures on ‘modern books’ in America in 1922. CT)

from Kate Kavanagh

Extracts from P.J. Kavanagh’s diary, 2009 [aged 78]

2nd April: Venture to ‘new’ Highwayman [his favorite pub], nervously ... Fire smoking. I tell how to fix it. After a few years of cosiness feel just another Old Man who buys a pint. Return home, lowered in spirits, and read *Weymouth Sands*.

9th April: *Weymouth Sands* – surely the most cerebrally erotic book ever written? Everything – even inanimate objects – seems to spark off some ‘electrical’ discharge ... Last night a dream of travelling in an open car snatching books from people who walk on the pavement, reading. I read the page their book is open at: thereby I read a snatch of Dornford Yates, Proust, and ‘Nights in a Turkish bagnio’ (*Sweets of Sin, Ulysses?*) Surely the result of reading *Weymouth*. JCP all these three writers ...

13th April: Finish *Weymouth Sands*, an astounding book. Enjoy it? That seems hardly the word. JCP’s insistence on the transcendental – never mentioned – or at least as ‘multiplicity’ – to my taste. And the various versions of himself; but is Sylvanus Cobbold *mad*, or not? The matter is left open. I long to *edit* it; not to change it, or remove anything, but to *reduce* everything, in length. It could be done, in my view, with no loss.

10th May: ... Lunch at the edge of Weymouth, almost on Chesil beach, in pub surely in *Weymouth Sands* used for Jobber Skald’s first night with his love – before he confesses that next day he will kill ‘Dog’ [Cattistock] ... Drive disappointingly built-up length of Portland Bill.

DAWN COLLINS
Introduction to Facebook

Dawn Collins, a member of the Powys Society committee, has recently established a new page for the Society on Facebook. Members who have registered their e-mail addresses have already received a message about this, but for the benefit of everyone we include here Dawn's introduction to Facebook, in which she highlights the advantage to the Society of participating in modern social media which can help increase awareness of the achievements of the Powys family and stimulate new membership, as well as enabling readers and members to interact regularly and discuss their literary interests in a secure on-line environment. As part of this project Dawn has also set up a Powys Reader's Group on Facebook. Details of how to get involved in this initiative are included in her note. (CT)

Although there has been a Powys Society Facebook page for some time it has not been regularly visited by members. I have taken over the management of our Facebook page and hope to help it become a focus for the exchange of ideas, news and events – in fact all things connected with the Powys Society and members of the Powys family.

The Powys Society webpage is, of course, a wonderfully rich resource with its collection of in-depth information, news about forthcoming events, links, reviews, articles, photographs and on-line publications. It is invaluable as both an academic and general resource, run by the knowledgeable Frank Kibblewhite at Sundial Press, www.sundialpress.co.uk, publishers of many excellent Powys works. The Powys Society Facebook page is not intended to replace the website. You can visit the Society's Facebook page at: <http://www.facebook.com/thepowyssociety>.

However, to view the Powys Society Facebook page in the most effective way you must be registered with Facebook and have your own page. This requires only a rudimentary and minimal amount of information. In the privacy settings of the Facebook page it is possible not to reveal anything that you do not wish to be made public.

Facebook operates in a completely different, more ephemeral, and informal way than a website. You can't post and share your thoughts, ideas, comments or photos on a web page but you can post them on a Facebook page.

Facebook pages can display comments, information about events, as well as photographs and videos and is an attractive place for communication between those

with similar interests. We will shortly be adding links to other related literary sites and pages such as the Powys Society web page, the Sundial Press, the Alliance of Literary Societies, and many others. We welcome all suggestions from members for other links that they would like to see.

I would like to encourage you to use the Powys Society Facebook page as a place to find the most recent information about the Society as well as a place where you can regularly communicate directly with other members and anyone interested in the Powys family.

I hope, like me, you are enthusiastic about the potential of Facebook to help you engage with other members and share your impressions of books by or about the Powyses. Please send me your photographs, images of paintings, drawings, poems, notes, articles or quotes from the works that you particularly want to share or comment on.

It would be lovely to see your photos and thoughts about what you are reading now. I am enjoying reading JCP's *Autobiography* and will be posting images inspired by it. So please join me and send your contributions for everyone to see on the Powys Society Facebook page.

The response to the new Powys Society Facebook page has been very encouraging – around 75 people are following regular posts from members and other readers.

I have also now established an on-line reading group which enables participants to share their reading experiences, submit new posts, and comment on the views of others. We started a discussion of *Porius* at the beginning of June. All are welcome to join the reading group including non-members of the Society. If you wish to participate in the reading group you should submit a request through the Powys Society's Facebook page.

If you don't have access to the Powys Society Facebook page you can send your contributions to my email address at: thepowysocietyfb@btinternet.com

If you are planning to attend this year's conference and would like to know more about the Facebook page, we will be holding an informal 'tech clinic' where you can see how to post comments and upload images and documents to the Powys Society Facebook page and Reading Powyses group.

TIM BLANCHARD

Powysland: How to Defy the Modern World

I've often thought that for all the quality of the existing work and scholarship on JCP, there was a missing link when it came to material that would draw in new generations of readers: the explorers of literature who have worked their way through the classics and 20th century novels, but haven't been able to face JCP, scared off by the bulk of his novels and his cultish reputation. Where's the way in for them?

Unbound is a new kind of publisher, reviving 18th century subscription publishing, but using a digital platform to raise awareness and rally support. Kate Mosse, Jonathan Bate, Tibor Fischer and Monty Python's Terry Jones have worked with Unbound. Paul Kingsnorth's *The Wake* was an Unbound book long listed for the Man Booker Prize. The principle behind the approach is that it allows books to be published that mainstream publishers wouldn't touch, because they don't have guaranteed financial returns.

Unbound is interested in working with me on publishing an accessible book on JCP – *Powysland: How to Defy the Modern World*. The book is now completed and the appeal for interested subscribers – a crowdfunding campaign run online through specific pages at www.unbound.co.uk – begins this month (July 2017).

Under this model, interested readers pledge to make a book happen. Once the target is reached (and Unbound estimate I'd need between 300-400 supporters) the subscribers receive an early copy of the hardback book with their name included to acknowledge their support for the project. With enough support, books are distributed via the same network used by Penguin/Random House. (If the target isn't reached then subscribers are refunded their money.)

As part of the crowdfunding approach, Unbound recommends offering supporters a range of different pledge levels. One suggestion is for a Powys Membership level which would include receiving a year's membership of the Society alongside a hardback copy of the book. This would be at no cost to the Society – the full £22.00 fee would be paid for each pledge at this level – would publicise the existence of the Society, and have the potential to encourage new people to trial membership. (Another planned pledge level, by the way, allows people to include their own favourite JCP passage or piece of wisdom in a mini-chapter of the book.)

I think this kind of book would be important, if only in a small way, in getting JCP to new and different audiences of readers – and I'd be grateful if you'd consider supporting the campaign to make the book happen as part of the Society's mission to promote awareness; and also by sharing news of Powysland among your circles of reader friends and family.

There'll be regular updates on the Unbound project page – but if you have any questions, or would like to see example chapters to get more of an idea of the particular approach I've taken, then please contact me via tim.blanchard@btopenworld.com / 07584 170881.

CHRIS THOMAS
The Beginning of the Powys Society

Fifty years ago, in a notice published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, in August 1967, embryonic proposals were first announced for the establishment of a Powys Society. Our current Vice Chairman and founding Deputy Chairman of the Powys Society, David Goodway, however recalls that: 'The Society was not established in 1967. That was when Barbara Spencer launched (from Salford) the series of meetings in London. She was much opposed to the formation of a society, which a group of us proceeded to organise against her wishes in summer 1969. I remember the date full well since I was about to leave London for Leeds.'

Far away from these events, I was still at school, and living near a beautiful sandy beach, framed by cliffs and pohutekawa trees, on the North Shore, overlooking the extinct volcanic island of Rangitoto, in Auckland, New Zealand. I had recently discovered the novels of John Cowper Powys and had already read *A Glastonbury Romance* at least twice. JCP's writing amazed me and I longed to visit all the places in Dorset and Somerset he describes. I longed to go to England, and talk to other people who knew all about JCP's life and work. That didn't happen until much later, after I left university in 1973. I didn't know that in the meantime plans were already emerging for the formation of a Powys Society. If I had been aware of this I would surely have immediately joined fellow enthusiasts in England.

On 24 August 1967 *The Times Literary Supplement* published a two line notice. Amidst the other personal notices, advertisements, appointments, employment opportunities, news of lectures and meetings, and requests from book collectors, readers might have spotted this:

'Literary – ANY PERSON interested POWYS Society write Box H.1888,
The Times, EC4'

This was the beginning of the idea of a Powys Society. But nothing more was heard about these proposals in the pages of the *TLS* until 16 October 1969 when Barbara

Spencer, the founding Secretary of the Society, published a letter to the editor, headed 'John Cowper Powys', inviting anyone interested in the Powys Society to get in touch with her:

Sir, – In 1972 will occur the hundredth anniversary of the birth of John Cowper Powys, who is regarded by some as one of the greatest novelists of this century. A society has been formed by those who have recognised his genius, and Mr Angus Wilson is the President. I shall be glad to hear from any readers who are interested in this society.

BARBARA SPENCER,
14c Limefield Road, Salford, M7 0LZ

JCP's name was not absent from the *TLS* in the intervening years between 1967 and 1969 for in the issue dated 1 August 1968 the *TLS* carried news, in its Commentary column, of the deposit of James Watson's collection of Powys items at Churchill College in Cambridge and in the issue for 12 September 1968 Alfred Andersch discussed the German edition of *Wolf Solent* (Zolnay, 1930), which, the author declared 'still circulates among German intellectuals as a secret recommendation.'

We should date the commencement of the Powys Society to 1969 when it was formally constituted, the first committee was formed, the first meetings and talks were organised and our first President, Angus Wilson, was appointed. Newsletters did not appear until the 1970s and one of the earliest published in 1973 includes vital information, not available elsewhere, about those very early years of the Society. Some of these Newsletters, with details of the talks presented at the first Powys Society meetings, have been preserved and scanned. We plan to post them on the Society's website.

Do you have memories of the earliest days of the activities of the Powys Society in the 1960s and 1970s? Please send your reminiscences to the editors. We would like to hear from you.

CHRIS THOMAS

Brief Encounters

The literary connections mentioned in this note are intended to follow in the spirit of links described by Rachel Cohen in her fascinating book A Chance Meeting, Intertwined Lives of American Writers and Artists, 1854-1967, Cape, 2004 and by Javier Marias in his book Written Lives, Canongate, 2006 Penguin Classics, 2016. Although neither of these books include any reference to members of the Powys family they do mention many of the literary idols and inspirations of the Powyses. Rachel Cohen, for instance, discusses Henry James, Whitman, William James and Hart Crane and Marias discusses Joyce, Henry James, Thomas Mann, Wilde, Laurence Sterne and Emily Brontë.

In his memoirs [1] the poet, editor and advertising copywriter, James Rorty [2], describes a chance encounter with JCP:

In New York I ran into John Cowper Powys, whose Oxford gowned histrionism I had had frequent occasions to admire during his annual barnstorming tours of the Pacific Coast. "What you are going back?" exclaimed Powys, his craggy Silurian countenance suddenly becoming a mask of horror, "Ah Rorty, don't go back to that terrible country! I speak as a prophet, Rorty. Don't go back!" But with the word of that strange unique man of genius ringing in my ears I did go back. I had even then a suspicion that Powys was right. But California had done much to restore my health. I loved the country ... Why did it have to be terrible? Powys was a charlatan I told myself – he has indeed mocked himself with that charge and I could well forget his Sybilline howl.

The source of JCP's negative feelings can be easily traced for in the Spring or Summer of 1923 he left California, never to return, deeply disappointed and frustrated by the failure of his agent, Jessica Colbert, to arrange the production of his play, *Paddock Calls*, and her inability to find him more lucrative lecturing engagements. Rorty on the other hand found employment on his return to California where he helped edit, with fellow poets, George Sterling and Genevieve Taggard, an anthology of Californian poetry, *Continent's End* (Book Club of California, 1925).

In a letter to his mother, dated 10 June 1923, the American modernist poet, **Hart Crane** (1899-1932), mentions his acquaintance with JCP and Alyse Gregory:

I am getting quite a reputation with my "Faustus and Helen" poem. Although it is only now being printed in Florence, those critics and writers who have seen it are acclaiming me with real gusto ... **John Cowper Powys**, whose *Suspended Judgements and Visions and Revisions* you have read, is very enthusiastic ... Waldo Frank, **Alyse Gregory** and others used some influence in getting me my job with J. Walter Thompson ... [3]

This is very interesting. The letter is evidence that JCP must often have read many of the contemporary modernist and international literary magazines such as *Broom*, *Secession*, *Others*, *The Measure*, and *Seven Arts*. Hart Crane's groundbreaking and influential long poem, in three parts, *For the Marriage of Faustus and Helen*, with its jazz rhythms, expression of a modern consciousness and echoes of *The Waste Land*, was not published in book form until 1926, in his first collection, *White Buildings*, but part two, *The Springs of Guilty Song* had appeared in *Broom*, in January 1922 and JCP must have read the poem there [4]. The poem also appeared later in *Secession*, No 6, September 1923 (the issue printed in Florence that Hart Crane mentions in his letter), and *Secession*, No 7, Winter 1924 which JCP is also likely to have read. The letter also provides a brief glimpse of **Alyse Gregory** and her acquaintance with many of the writers associated with *The Dial* as well as other literary magazines, including Waldo Frank, editor of *Seven Arts*, and a contributor to *Broom*, as well as the critic, writer and literary theorist, Kenneth Burke, who was one of the directors of *Secession*, and a colleague of Alyse at *The Dial*. [5]

The great modern American novelist, **Saul Bellow**, (1915-2005), Pulitzer prize winner for literature, and author of *The Adventures of Augie March* (1953), *Henderson the Rain King* (1959), *Herzog* (1964), and *Humboldt's Gift* (1975), seems to have known JCP's work quite well. In an essay called, 'My Paris', first published in the *New York Times Magazine*, 13 March 1983, he said:

I thought I understood why I had come to Paris. Writers like Sherwood Anderson, and, oddly enough, John Cowper Powys, had made clear to me what was lacking in American life. "American men are tragic without knowing why they are tragic", Powys wrote in his Autobiography. "They are tragic by reason of the desolate thinness and forlorn narrowness of their sensual mystical contacts. Mysticism and sensuality are the things that most of all redeem life." Powys mind you, was an admirer of American democracy. I would have had no use for him otherwise ... I knew what Powys meant by his imaginative redemption from desolate thinness and forlorn narrowness experienced by Americans, whether or not they were conscious of it. At least I thought I did.

In 1953, the poet William Kean Seymour (1887-1975) visited JCP in Corwen, with his wife, the novelist Rosalind Wade (1909-1989), and presented him with an inscribed copy of his *Collected Poems* (1946): 'with affectionate memories of a sunlit afternoon at Corwen'. Seymour, who is now largely forgotten, also edited *The Miscellany of Poetry* in 1919, an anthology of Georgian poets, which included poems by JCP's cousin Rose Macaulay and his friend E.H. Visiak. JCP's copy of Seymour's *Collected Poems* can be consulted in the Powys Society Collection at Exeter. Seymour's visit was recorded by JCP in a letter to Ron Hall in which he

described him as ‘friendly, good natured, without a touch of pride, vanity or conceit’. Seymour’s wife, Rosalind Wade, was later editor of the great liberal periodical, *The Contemporary Review*, between 1970-1989; a role previously occupied by JCP’s contemporary at Cambridge, the historian and liberal MP G.P. Gooch (1873-1968), who was editor between 1911 and 1960 and is mentioned in *Autobiography*.

At our conference in Llangollen, in 2015, John Gray recommended a novel by the acclaimed Spanish writer, and translator, **Javier Marias**, called, *Dark Back of Time* (Chatto & Windus, 2003; Penguin, 2013). In the same conversation our past Chairman, John Hodgson, also recommended another earlier novel by Marias called *All Souls* (Harvill, 1992; Penguin, 2012). Both novels by Marias deal with the academic and literary world of Oxford in the 1980s and its second-hand bookshops (all now sadly physically disappeared), strange chance encounters, and an obsessive quest for apparently forgotten writers. These recommendations sounded interesting and led me to explore some intriguing connections with JCP. The novels by Marias, I concluded, read like a combination of Borges (*The Library of Babel*), Alberto Manguel (*The Library at Night*) and A.J.A. Symons (*The Quest for Corvo*). However, their primary interest for the Society is not only the brief mention of ‘the three Powys brothers’ but also the author’s quest for people who were personally associated with JCP such as the sculptor Oloff de Wet (1912-1975) and the poet, anthologist, bibliophile, Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and literary editor, John Gawsworth (1912-1970). Gawsworth corresponded with JCP in 1949 and 1951, (JCP’s letters to Gawsworth can be consulted in the Powys Society collection in Exeter), and provided de Wet with an introduction to JCP (see Oloff de Wet’s memoir: *A Visit to John Cowper Powys*, reprinted in *Newsletter* 54, April 2005). It is, however, a pity that Marias did not also include, in his novels, any mention of Oloff de Wet’s close friend, the poet, and journalist, Hugo Manning (1913-1977). In the 1970s, whilst living in London, Hugo Manning was very closely associated with Jeff Kwintner’s Village bookshop where he was responsible for proof-reading and editing most of Jeff’s publications. In fact he was a major influence on the running of Jeff’s publishing interests. Jeff used to call Manning his ‘poet in residence’. Hugo Manning was also a great admirer of Henry Miller, with whom he corresponded, as well as an admirer of JCP’s books, which must have endeared him to Jeff. There is a photograph of Hugo Manning, Oloff de Wet, and the Society’s past Secretary, Derrick Stephens, standing outside de Wet’s studio in Kensington, in *Newsletter* 54, April 2005, on p.30.

There is another connection between Javier Marias and JCP, for Marias, in his early career, made numerous translations into Spanish of the major works of Sir Thomas Browne, whom (as did his brothers) JCP greatly admired for his ‘sumptuous and aromatic pages’ (*One Hundred Best Books*), ‘great rolling lines’ (*letter to Llewelyn*),

‘majestic passages’, and ‘sonorous sentences’ (*Wolf Solent*).

It has been suggested by Gareth J. Wood that the baroque prose style and imaginative vocabulary of Marias’s novels have been influenced and enriched by his reading of Sir Thomas Browne, and by other English writers also admired by JCP, such as Laurence Sterne and R.L. Stevenson.

NOTES

- [1] *Where Life is Better – An Unsentimental American Journey*, Reynal and Hitchcock, 1936.
- [2] James Rorty (1890-1973) was the father of the philosopher, Richard Rorty, in California, whilst editing *Continent’s Ending*, he met the poet Robinson Jeffers at his home in Carmel who also provided the title poem for Rorty’s anthology, Rorty was deeply impressed by Jeffers’s work. He enthusiastically reviewed Jeffers’s third volume of verse, *Tamar and Other Poems* (Peter Boyle, 1924) in the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1925, which kick started Jeffers’s reputation as a great modern American poet. JCP also read Jeffers’s poems but was appalled by his descriptions of violence and cruelty (‘He’s a bloodthirsty bugger’, he wrote in his diary in 1934 after reading *Give Your Heart to the Hawks*, 1933) although he must also have sensed an affinity with Jeffers’s sense of the spirit of place. Jeffers and his wife Una were great admirers of JCP’s novels. Katie also read Jeffers’s work and sent him a copy of *Driftwood* which he greatly admired – ‘the poems are beautiful things’ he said to her in a letter. George Sterling was, of course, a great friend of both JCP and Llewelyn, and persuaded another of their mutual friends, Charles Erskine Scott Wood, to visit Jeffers in Carmel, which he did in 1926. Wood’s wife, Sara Bard Field, discusses her memories of Jeffers, Sterling, JCP and Llewelyn in her *Poet and Suffragist*, oral history interviews, 1959-1963.
- [3] *The letters of Hart Crane, 1916-1932*, edited, by Brom Weber, University of California Press, 1965. I have not been able to trace the source of JCP’s enthusiasm for Crane’s poem but it is likely to have been a letter (now lost) or perhaps a verbal communication.
- [4] *Broom* (founded by Alfred Kreyborg and Harold Loeb), was published between November 1921 and January 1924. *Secession* (edited by Gorham Munson, Mathew Josephson and Kenneth Burke) was published between 1922 and 1924. The literary critic, editor and chronicler of the 1920s, Gorham Munson, knew JCP and visited him in New York. Both magazines specialised in publishing contributions by writers of the European *avant-garde*, such as Blaise Cendrars, Paul Eluard, Pirandello, and Philippe Soupault, and other modern European writers such as Robert Musil and Thomas Mann as well as modern artists like Picasso, Léger, Klee, Epstein and Modigliani. The magazines also included work by contemporary American writers such as Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, and Amy Lowell, giving JCP an unrivalled perspective on contemporary art and literature. A complete run of both periodicals can be found on the websites of The Blue Mountain Project and Jacket2.
- [5] For Alyse’s relations with Kenneth Burke at *The Dial* and interrelationship between Kenneth Burke, Gorham Munson, Hart Crane and Waldo Frank see: *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village* by Jack Selzer, University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

Dorothy Cheston and John Cowper Powys

In pain and despondency, a few weeks before his major stomach operation in New York at the end of September 1917, John Cowper wrote to Llewelyn: ‘Harry Lyon is here – settled in the same house with Dorothy Cheston, next door to Dorothy Russell ... [1] A chance reading of Reginald Pound’s biography of Arnold Bennett revealed that Dorothy Cheston became in all but name Bennett’s second wife, from soon after they met in 1922 until he died in 1931. ‘Her strong and vivid personality, her mental athleticism, her good looks and dash giving him a companionship which ... never ceased to interest and surprise him. [2]

Margaret Drabble’s biography of Bennett, twenty-two years later, adds to the picture. Dorothy was:

a young English actress, extremely attractive with the short blond hair of the 1920s, delicate, very English in her appearance ... she had been on the stage for some years and was capable of playing a wide variety of roles, though one imagines from her appearance that she was more of an ingénue than a femme fatale ... she had had a good academic education at Queen’s College, Harley Street, a school which Katherine Mansfield had also attended ... she was a high principled, sincere girl, independent, enthusiastic about her career, valuing her integrity ... [3]

In Rome, in 1926, Bennett wrote to Frank Swinnerton: ‘Dorothy’has a passion for archaeology. On Saturday last she climbed from the roof to the cupola of St. Peters ... ’ [4]

Announcing the imminent birth of their daughter, Virginia, to his sister Mrs Kennerly on 14 July 1925 Bennett told her:

Dorothy is the daughter of Chester Cheston, the architect (dead) and sister of Cheston, the painter. Her mother is a rich woman of 70, who lives in hotels, when I speak of my age her reply is that her father was just over my age when she was born. She is as tall as I am and a hefty wench ... [5]

In 1926, staying in Burpham, John Cowper writes to Frances Gregg: ‘Dorothy Cheston is still in England playing the lead boy in the Elizabethan play *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. She was the colleague of Mrs Patrick Campbell and Viola Tree.’ [6]

That Dorothy and John Cowper were better acquainted than his few mentions of her would indicate is revealed in her long biographical introduction to Bennett’s letters which she edited. She writes:

I remembered arguments with John Cowper Powys (who in the years I had known him in America, used to lecture upon literature and literary figures), concerning

Arnold Bennett's importance, and his place, in comparison with the other notable or great figures of literature. I had been in disagreement with John Powys, feeling that he did less than justice to Arnold Bennett by reason of the purely personal aesthetic prejudices which threw his own admiration always on the side of the great pessimists. Arnold Bennett was an optimist, and he was successful. Did this render him, to us outside the ring of successful and famous persons, necessarily less penetrating or profound? When one thought of Dostoevsky one was inclined to agree with John Powys that optimism as a creed too greatly hampered the range of man's soul. But Arnold Bennett's optimism was not a creed. It was a purely personal viewpoint. And was he an optimist? And was he so successful-minded?

'Where', she wondered when she met him,

is that successful worldly wise optimist? I could glean its presence only from his waistcoat buttons. And immediately, also, I thought of Jack Powys because regarding literary figures he was my chief arbiter or referendum. 'Jack would like him and Jack was wrong about him.' I thought some point about Arnold Bennett had been missed by those of us who had been following imaginary conclusions regarding his supposed preoccupation with material data and detail ... I could myself recall, now I come to think of it, a day, when lunching with Jack Powys in 12th Street, he waved a telegram, just received from 'Bennett and Wells' in ardent support of the protest which was being made in America by certain literary people, and, which I believe, Jack was heading, against the action of the Anti-Vice League in suppressing Dreiser's book *The Genius*. [7]

That Dorothy was very keen to bring Powys and Bennett together appears from Bennett's letter to her on 13 August 1924, from his yacht:

Look here, sweet infant, what is the theory of this suggested visit to Powys? Have you thought it out? Do I take you or do you take me? And if either the former or the latter upon what ostensible ground do I take you or you take me or vice versa? Had you not better think this over further? I can't think of any grounds why you should take me to see Powys at his place and still less why I should take you. [8]

It appears from this that John Cowper was not at the gathering at Dorothy's house when Bennett met Theodore Powys in London seeing his son off to Africa. Bennett writes to Frank Swinnerton on 21 September 1923:



Dorothy Cheston

I met Theodore Powys at Dorothy Cheston's the other afternoon. Believe me, a damned strange fellow. On the strength of his unbalanced interestingness I bought *Black Bryony* and I began to read it today. It promises. I also bought the other Powys's *Ebony and Ivory* and thought nought of it. I hope you'll meet John Cowper Powys, as I want a second opinion of him. Dorothy, who knows him and his sister passing well, speaks very highly of him. I know another brother, an architect, who is not interesting, but just nice and decent, like me. [9]

There seems to be no record of a meeting between John Cowper and Bennett before 7 June 1926, when Bennett and Dorothy were staying in a rented house near Amberley which belonged to the painter Fred Stratton. Bennett worked on his novel and read Dreiser and Balzac. So, John Cowper being well versed in these writers, he and Bennett would have had much to talk about when John visited Bennett and Dorothy on 11 June 1926. Four days later JCP wrote to Llewelyn:

Did I tell you that I had a most pleasant time with Arnold Bennett who placed a whole bottle of whiskey at my side and let me take as much as I liked scolding me as to the danger of drink but not hindering me? He says that you are an accomplished writer. Aldous Huxley, Somerset Maugham, Mr Wells, Eden Phillpotts, and all are constantly visiting him, in addition to Dorothy's younger friends. I was so struck by his patience and massive goodness. His impediment of speech gives a touching weight to all he says. [10]

Bennett was equally impressed, finding John, 'an untidy fellow of very great charm, with a very fine literary taste but a very sentimental man in many ways who was rather in favour of the general strike'.

NOTES

- [1] John Cowper Powys, *Letters to Llewelyn*, Village Press, 1972. Vol.1, p.233
- [2] Reginald Pound, *Arnold Bennett*, Heinemann 1952, p.304
- [3] Margaret Drabble, *Arnold Bennett*, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1974, pp.273, 275
- [4] Pound, as above, p.304
- [5] *Ibid.*, p.313
- [6] *Letters of John Cowper Powys to Frances Gregg*, Vol.1, Cecil Woolf, 1994, pp.116, 214
- [7] D.C. Bennett in *Arnold Bennett, A Portrait Done at Home*, Cape, 1934, pp. 14, 16
- [8] *Ibid.*, p.234
- [9] Bennett in Pound, as above, p.306
- [10] John Cowper to Llewelyn, as above, 1975, Vol.2, pp. 45, 46, 47

Dorothy Cheston, 1891-1977

Dorothy Cheston's ability as a stage actress seems to have divided her critics. Frances Partridge thought she was 'a bad actress' [1], Shaw was informed that Dorothy 'could not act' [2], and Sir John Gielgud, who knew Arnold Bennett and Dorothy quite well, remembered 'an ambitious and eager young actress' [3]. In fact the reviews of her performances, in a variety of different roles, on Broadway between 1917 and 1920, and elsewhere in America in the 1930s and in England in the 1920s, were usually quite good: 'a new beauty' (*Harrisburg Telegraph*); 'scored a triumph, lively and pleasant, the success of the evening' (*The Times*); 'intense and beautifully absurd, alluring' (*New York Sun*); 'a great actress', and 'effective' (*Washington Herald*). Thanks to the support she received from Arnold Bennett, Dorothy Cheston remained constantly in work on the London stage during the 1920s [4].

Bennett, who met Dorothy in March 1922, when she was appearing in a leading role in his play *Body and Soul* at the Liverpool Playhouse, was immediately impressed. He thought he'd found his ideal woman. After his separation, in 1921, from his first wife Marguerite, Bennett and Dorothy developed an intimate relationship although they never married [5]. But the image that emerges of Dorothy in Frank Swinnerton's memoir of Bennett [6] is less than flattering – Swinnerton portrays a difficult, selfish, and demanding person, which is at variance with the character represented in Bennett's journals and by the version of her presented in Margaret Drabble's biography of Bennett. JCP would probably not have recognised Swinnerton's critical portrayal of Dorothy.

One of the most striking features of Dorothy's physical appearance, which helped her to succeed on stage, and which many people, including JCP, commented on, was her blonde hair: 'the prettiest blonde on Broadway' (*Washington Herald*), 'a dazzling blonde' (Frank Swinnerton), 'her crinkly blond hair' (*Harrisburg Telegraph*), and her 'yellow curls' (Dreiser). It is very likely that JCP's reference, in *Autobiography*, to a dinner engagement at the Brevoort Hotel in New York with 'the goldenest of golden heads' [7] is a reference to Dorothy. Susan Rands, in her article in this issue of the *Newsletter*, has made a good case for establishing a close relationship between JCP and Dorothy Cheston. But there is also other, strong evidence, for this relationship. For instance in her memoir of Bennett [8], Dorothy

Cheston openly calls JCP ‘my friend John Powys’; she knew many of the people in JCP’s circle of artists, writers and actors in New York between 1915 and 1920. Dreiser for example refers to her in his diaries [9] and especially to her attending a rehearsal of one of his plays with Marian Powys and having dinner with JCP. She knew Maurice Browne. It is likely that JCP recommended Dorothy to Browne who cast her in the chorus of Corinthian women in his production of *Medea* at the Garrick theatre in New York in March and April 1920 [10]. In 1934 JCP wrote in his diary: ‘the T.T. scolded me for not having asked Dorothy to visit us’, clearly indicating he was still in communication with her [11].

It is significant that amongst JCP’s fellow passengers, on board the steam ship *Philadelphia*, when he returned to New York from his summer break in England (finishing *Wood and Stone*), in September 1915, was Dorothy Cheston [12]. This is either just a convenient coincidence or it suggests perhaps that JCP may have known Dorothy in England before they met in New York. Perhaps she had attended one of JCP’s lectures and afterwards sought his acquaintance. Perhaps they had discussed the opportunities of an acting career in America. They both travelled first class on the *Philadelphia* and it seems inconceivable that they did not meet and talk during the voyage.

But perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the relationship between JCP and Dorothy Cheston lies in a scandal, associated with a close family member, that fell like a dark shadow over Dorothy’s past and which could quite possibly have been the subject for a conversation between Dorothy and JCP either on board the *Philadelphia* or later in New York. Dorothy’s uncle, Charles Cheston (1843-1906), was a highly respected solicitor who was employed by William Tyssen-Amherst (1835-1909), 1st Baron Amherst of Hackney, MP and JP, to look after his estates in Norfolk and east London. Tyssen Amherst, who was immensely rich, inherited Didlington Hall [13], near Northwold, from his father, and set about renovating the house during the 1880s (he employed Norman Shaw) and expanding his huge library and collection of rare books, manuscripts, antiquities, and Egyptian artefacts. This occurred at the same time as JCP and Littleton used to visit Northwold on their holidays. The young Powyses must have known about the wealthy baron and his collection of books and objects at Didlington. Unfortunately Charles Cheston had a secret gambling habit and to foster his obsessive speculations on the stock exchange he was driven to embezzle hundreds of thousands of pounds from his employer. When Charles Cheston’s criminal behaviour was threatened with public exposure he committed suicide [14]. Amherst lost his fortune, was forced to sell his prize possessions and

himself died shortly after a case of breach of trust was brought against him by his own family. Dorothy was fifteen years old when these events took place but she must have been acquainted with this story of a family tragedy [15]. JCP would not have failed to be impressed by the strange coincidence linking Dorothy with the place where he was so happy in his boyhood, fishing in the Wissey, and walking in the fields between Northwold and Didlington.

Dorothy Cheston's obituary was published in *The Times* on 25th February 1977.

References and Notes

- [1] Partridge, *Love in Bloomsbury*, (1981)
- [2] *Shaw and Other Playwrights*, (1993)
- [3] Gielgud: *A Life in Letters*, (2004)
- [4] Details of Dorothy's performances can be found in *The London Stage, A Calendar of Productions, Performances and Personnel, 1920-1929*, (2014).
- [5] In September 1925, when Dorothy was pregnant with her daughter Virginia, and had started to live permanently with Arnold Bennett, she changed her name, by deed poll, to Dorothy Cheston Bennett. Confusingly, JCP also knew another Dorothy Bennett, married to his old friend Oatley Bennett in Chicago, a cousin of Littleton's wife Mabel.
- [6] *Arnold Bennett: A Last Word*, (1978). The novelist Frank Swinnerton, (1884-1982), who had known Arnold Bennett since 1909, was also very familiar with JCP's books in his role as an editor and reader at Chatto & Windus. He refused publication of all of JCP's work between 1915 and 1925. See the article by Andrew Nash in the *Powys Journal*, Vol. XIII, 2003, 'Frank Swinnerton on John Cowper Powys'.
- [7] *Autobiography*, Macdonald, (1967), p.598
- [8] *Arnold Bennett: A Portrait Done At Home*, (1938)
- [9] *American Diaries, 1902-1926*, (1983)
- [10] Reviewed in the *New York Times*, 23/3/1920
- [11] JCP diary, 18/1/1934
- [12] The Philadelphia departed from Liverpool 11th September 1915 and arrived in New York 20th September. See New York passenger lists, online database, at ancestry.com
- [13] Didlington Hall was demolished in the 1950s. See <landedfamilies.blogspot.co.uk> and <amhersts-of-didlington.com>
- [14] *Farrington Advertiser*, 25th August 1906
- [15] Dorothy's father, Chester Cheston, must have observed the tragedy unfold with great anxiety for he was also close to Tyssen-Amherst. Chester Cheston was an architect, land surveyor and estate agent for William Tyssen-Amherst. He designed the huge Victorian Gothic church of St Marks in Dalston, and associated vicarage, on land provided by the Tyssen-Amherst estate. There is no evidence that he carried out any other architectural work.

from

JCP's introduction to Homer and the Aether (1959)

... If a youthful mind, whether a masculine or feminine one, were to ask me *point-blank* the question I am presently going to ask you all – and how much more expressive and full of meaning those two words “point-blank” are than this vaporously-vague grandiloquent expression full of vaunting pomposity that many of us are tempted these days to use, namely “*by and large*”; and what actually does “*by and large*” mean? I always see it accompanied by that particular gesture in a speaker that implies “I am too grand an orator to descend to silly details” – the question “In what respect does Homer’s *Iliad* surpass Dante and Shakespeare and Milton and Goethe?” I would answer at once: It is not nearly as imaginative as Dante. It is not nearly as dramatic as Shakespeare. It is not nearly as eloquent as Milton. It is not nearly as philosophical as *Faust*. And yet it is a greater poem than the *Inferno* or *King Lear* or *Paradise Lost* or *Faust*! Why is this? In what way can it possibly surpass these masterpieces?

I will tell you at once. By being more realistic and more natural. In other words, it is more like what has happened, is happening, and will happen to us all, from the very beginning, in our history in this world until the end of human life upon this earth. Of course we use different weapons against each other and against the various sub-human living creatures who surround us than they used in the *Iliad*. So they did in the earliest cave-men times, twenty thousand years ago. So they will do in future times when many of us will have successfully invaded our planetary neighbours in space. But I tell you, my dear young questioner, it isn’t the instrument we use in our quarrels with one another that counts. Some of us may simply use our tongues. Others among us may simply use our silences. Others may – O! there is no end to our weapons against each other! There may even come a day when by means of repeated concentrated thought applied for a certain length of time we shall be able so strongly and intensely to wish Mr. So-and-So or Mrs. So-and-So dead that the particular person *will* die and not a soul will be able to accuse the killer.

No, we must get out of our heads that because the Homeric people use swords and spears and arrows against each other that the whole of the *Iliad* is just an old-fashioned fairy-tale like *Jack the Giant Killer* or *Cinderella*. It is much more than that! It has the varieties of character, the mysterious intricacies of character, the inexplicable vagaries of character, the confounding leaps and plunges of character that we get in Hardy and Dostoievsky and Dickens and Víctor Hugo and Thomas Mann; and it has also got the romantic surprises of Sir Walter Scott, as when we find the beautiful Briseïs tearing her hair on the ground by the dead body of Patroclus.

No, let me repeat once again, what has made Homer for three thousand years the greatest poet in the world is his *naturalness*. We love each other as in Homer. We hate each other as in Homer. We are perpetually being interfered with as in Homer by chance and fate and necessity, by invisible influences for good and by invisible influences for evil, and we see the unconquerable power that Homer calls *keer* leading our parents, leading our uncles and

aunts, leading our grandparents to a particular death; and there do exist among us those who even feel this implacable destiny propelling themselves to a definite end, actually indicated as inescapable when some particular date in the calendar is reached or when some particular event has occurred. Thus Achilles assures his horse Xanthus, who is dragging his chariot, and who turns his head to remind him that if he kills Hector his own end will shortly follow, that he needs no reminding of this *keer*; for he knows it well, but “all the same for that” – *alla kai empees*, as Homer puts it – he intends to drive on to the end.

What is so particularly natural about the *Iliad* and what is such a daily inspiration to me in my ordinary life is the place he gives to women. First of all are the beautiful mistresses of the houses and halls of Homer’s warriors, such as Argive Helen, carried off from Menelaus by Paris, *alias* Alexander; such as Hector’s mother, Hecabe, and his wife, Andromache, and his half-sister, the beautiful prophetess Cassandra, whom Agamemnon takes captive and conveys to his home. Then there are the women who are taken captive by the conquerors who have slain their parents, husbands and sons. These women are treated at first as if they are slaves. In fact we are told in one place that their value is equal to the value of four oxen. But when once they enter the dwelling of their conqueror and take up their abode there, they very quickly dominate the whole house.

There are many scenes in the *Iliad* where we touch the reality of our life as it is today when it is transformed for us by our own private thoughts; as for example when we struggle with certain forces of nature. Consider, for instance, the passage in Book XXI, line 308, where the River Scamander calls upon his brother, the River Simoïs, to help him in his battle with Achilles. Here we have a perfect example of that element in life where the sub-human wrestles with the human and they both are compelled in some strange way to appeal to the super-human to decide their strife. Here the burden of our oldest ballads seems anticipated by Homer, and all those ancient market-town quips and proverbs and all those immemorial fairy-tales and roadside legends reaching us from forests long ago cut down, and from moorlands long ago built over, find their parallel. There is something about the rhythm of the Homeric hexameter that is more able to catch and absorb into its current, as it rolls along, these familiar human situations that are always recurring, than any other form of poetic rhythm except the simplest of our best-known old ballads.

Many of the most appealing passages in the *Iliad* consist of prayers; and it is impossible sometimes not to associate these prayers, such as “O Sun that beholdest all things and hearest all things, O Rivers, O Earth, O all ye lost ones of our race, who, weary of life, rest forever in peace below it all”, with the calm, majestic resignation of so many of the Collects in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England “as by Law established”.

My own favourite book in the whole of the *Iliad* is Book XXI, wherein the gods and goddesses fight among themselves, some taking the side of the Greeks and some the side of the Trojans; and nothing is more perfectly characteristic of Homer as a poet than the

fact that the chief of all the immortals, the great Zeus himself, Heavenly Father of both gods and men, regards this fighting among the gods with humorous amusement. I implore all those among Homer's readers who may be following me, as I have been following my imaginary thought-reader, the immortal Aether, to ask themselves whether they can imagine the author of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and *Othello* and *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, however shrewdly he may hint that the Power above us all laughs at lovers' quarrels, going so far as to suggest that the behaviour of angels and devils, as they contend for the victory in our hearts, is to that great Power a matter for hilarious amusement. Does the Deity in Dante's *Divine Comedy* even for a moment look down upon it all as if it were a comedy in our sense of the word? Can we imagine for a moment Milton's "Heavenly Muse", who "with mighty wings outspread, dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss and mad'st it pregnant", chuckling with ribald amusement at the silly quarrels going on in both Heaven and Earth?

I am tempted to go so far as to say that we Britishers have appreciated Homer more than any other race in the world; and I think a person has only to read a little of Chaucer and Spenser to see why. The truth is we are the most un-philosophical race in the world. We are also, second only to the Saxons and Bavarians of Germany, the fondest of fairy tales in the world. We are certainly the fondest of old ballads and old popular sayings for their own sake. We are the most obstinate in hanging on to old local traditions for their own sake; and finally we are the least cultivated, the least concerned with what is called intellectuality, of all the races in the world. Then again we have appreciated the Jews, and done justice to the Jews, beyond all other western peoples; and if, compared with the Germans, our lack of metaphysical and psychological power is deplorable, and compared with the French, our lack of civilised receptivity and subtle appreciation of the nuances of human life is almost comical, no Europeans have given themselves up with a more impassioned and, I might say, a more childlike abandonment to delight in simple beauty for its own sake than English travellers have done when visiting Italy or Greece.

All these qualities, both positive and negative, when joined together, tend to strengthen my conviction, quite apart from the number of famous translations of the *Iliad* that have been made in this country, both in prose and verse, that there is something about our attitude to Homer that comes nearer to the attitude of the immortal Aether, to whom I have presumed to give a human consciousness, than that of any other nation. This is no theory; for again and again in watching my friends talking together, and watching men's attitude to their wives and children, and watching the attitude of their wives and children to them – especially when the ladies, as is now often the case, have to play the part of a Homeric housekeeper and handmaid, as well as that of the beautiful Cassandra, who speaks out so freely, and of the unequalled Helen who may so easily be beguiled – I have been swept away by a fascinating wave of excitement in observing how this stupendous poem, that may easily have been recited by some reciter with my own mania for it three thousand years ago, still embodies the life of men, women and children as it is lived upon this earth. And the exciting thing is

that Homer treats his Divine Beings in exactly the same way that he treats us ourselves, his Human Beings. Over and over again, we find ourselves awed and hushed in the presence of his Divine Beings and aware of a natural feeling that their ancient altars must be respected and their legendary ritual upheld; but at the same time there is absolutely nothing of that peculiar atmosphere of unctuous solemnity and oily gloom that some of us find so hard not to associate with our Christian Sunday.

How interesting it is that the peculiar shiver of terrified awe which our great religious prophets and teachers and preachers and saints have, by degrees, ever since the year one of our calendar, forced us to associate with the word God, doesn't enter for a moment into Homer's conception of Zeus, any more than it does into Vergil's conception of Jupiter or Jove. How satisfactory it is to be able to worship Zeus or his daughter Pallas Athene or his sister-wife Hera, without having to think of a God that we have been taught for nearly two thousand years to associate with the "bowing and scraping" of a Hush-a-bye Heaven and the infernal cruelties of a diabolical Spanish Inquisition Hell, not to speak of the Predestination doctrines of Knox and Calvin and the fiery stakes of Bloody Mary.

Every lover of Homer will I think agree that the most significant and characteristic thing about his gathering, accumulating, enlarging, thickening, expanding, deepening story of human life – of human life as it has been in every age from the beginning and as it will be to the very end – is his emphasis upon the family. He does not, as so many poets since his time have done, talk a great deal about tribes and groups and clans and sects and varieties of idealistic associations, whether pacific or belligerent. What Homer does is to confine himself to the immediate family of the warrior in question. In the speeches they make to each other, in the appeals they make to the people, every single one of them will invariably refer to the father by whom he was begotten; and Homer himself is concerned with this paternal link to such an intense degree that if the two names can possibly be united into one single name he will unite them.

But now let us pause to consider the Homeric attitude to sex love. I think everyone will agree with me that in the passionate love of Achilles for Patroclus there is not a trace of homosexuality. Their love is like the love that existed in historic cases all down the ages between man and man while both men can at the same time have their women. Indeed it is an interesting and remarkable thing that it is impossible to avoid noticing in Homer the complete absence of the least suggestion of homosexuality or of Lesbianism. Considering the emphasis laid upon these erotic eccentricities in this modern age of ours what are we to make of their complete absence in Homer? I would even be inclined to go a little further and to emphasise the absence from the *Iliad* of any mention of those two sexual aberrations connected with cruelty, namely, what we have come to call Sadism and Masochism. There are several familiar historic cases of tyrants obviously addicted to sadism, and several prehistoric myths and legends whose cruelties can easily be connected with these two sexual aberrations. But there is not, as far as I can discern, a trace of either of them in the *Iliad*. Is the reason for this the fact that in the *Iliad* we are dealing with a desperate war, a

war that so exhausts everyone's energy that there is no energy left over to indulge in erotic sensations except the most natural and ordinary ones? Or is the reason simply that the lovers of and composers of poetry all the way down human history are so absorbed in the normal current of human life that they instinctively tend to avoid abnormalities, whether erotic or otherwise?

There are those who instinctively prefer the neat Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides to Homer. Why, I ask you, do they? The answer is simple. Because they are full of intellectual Ideas and Theories and Interpretations of Life, full of creative Visions and moral Principles as to how human existence upon earth could be improved. Matthew Arnold, one of my own favourite poets, tells us that Sophocles "sees life steadily and sees it whole". O what a pure delight it is to return to Homer after "seeing life whole"! Why, I ask you, *is* it such a relief and such a comfort? Because Homer has the reality of our natural feeling about life, and Sophocles has an intellectual vision of things that may turn out to be, as my brother A.R.P. said of some wild theory of mine or of Llewelyn's, no reality at all, *in fact a lie*. Sophocles may see life as "steadily" and as "wholesale" as he likes, but real life, as all men and women and children soon discover from personal experience, is the extreme opposite of anything you can see "steadily" or as "a whole". It is a wild, chaotic series of exhausting contradictions. When is Shakespeare at his greatest? When his characters are philosophizing? Not a bit of it! All the supreme scenes in Shakespeare are when his people are transported by ecstasies of love and hate.

But none of the passionate defiances and challenges of Shakespeare's stage, nor any of the pandemoniacal eloquence of Milton's angels and archangels, nor the most contorted twists of Browning's tipsy piety with its belching outbursts of county-council optimism, really expresses, as we all know well, the actual experience of life which we poor mortals from childhood to manhood and womanhood have fled from or endured, have fought against or submitted to, ever since we were born. But Homer does express precisely this. We may be put off by the Greek words or annoyed by the conventional or slangy translations. But now and again, as we go struggling on, there come glimpses and murmurs, as I have sought to make my immortal Aether show, of a natural and wonderful reality that the sweeping tide of these tremendous hexameters has caught up from the simplest human lives. Let us therefore listen to it rolling on with all its multifarious cross-currents, as it has done from the beginning, if there was a beginning, and will do until the end, if there will be an end, suffering and enjoying at the same time what "*is all*", as Keats said, "*we know on earth and all we need to know.*"

G. Wilson Knight
Enigmatic Deity

This review of Homer and the Aether was first published in the Times Literary Supplement, 1 May 1959, and was reproduced in Wilson Knight's book Neglected Powers: Essays on Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Literature (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971). JCP wrote to Wilson Knight on 5 May 1959 and thanked him for sending him 'copies of your wonderful Review of my Homer and the Aether in T.L.S. and also the Twentieth Century one. I like to think of there being one too in the Yorkshire Post, similar to these.' Wilson Knight published reviews of Homer & the Aether in the periodical the Twentieth Century (May 1959) and in the Yorkshire Post (2 April 1959). According to Derek Langridge, in his John Cowper Powys: A Record of his Achievement (1966), there were reviews of Homer and the Aether by others in the Cork Examiner (5 March 1959), the Observer (8 March 1959), by Stevie Smith, and the Sunday Times (8 March 1959) by John Raymond – see both these below. On 10 March 1959 JCP wrote to Clifford Tolchard (Village Press, 1975): 'Yes I admire Stevie Smith very very very very much & I'm thrilled she should be as friendly to me and I wonder if John Raymond is anyway related to Raymond Mortimer. I am thankful my dear old friend that you think my Homer will be a success for I have great faith in your psychic power of prediction.' The review by Stevie Smith of Atlantis is in NL 49.

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Homer and the Aether is an unusual study. Superficially it might seem simple, but appearances are deceptive. The greater part of it is an enjoyable paraphrase of the Iliad, abbreviated for the purpose and accompanied by a commentary on the warring of Greeks and Trojans from a modern viewpoint, what we might call a series of 'personal impressions', mainly interesting for the pleasure of having the well-known story transposed with new highlights and emphases into the form of a Powys narrative. That alone would justify it; but there is more to be said.

We have first an introduction to the nature of the Homeric art, followed by a chapter 'the Aether Speaks' introducing us to a deity who claims to have acted as Homer's inspirational assistant, and then our main narrative, interspersed with comments by the Aether, whose function appears to be complex, variously seeing into Homer's mind, interjecting into it particular thoughts and insights, or just discussing in general terms the mental processes of the people and the implications of the action. The interpretative value of this original and engaging method will be assessed differently by different readers, but far more important is the nature of the attempt; and perhaps

even more important still, the choice by Powys, at this crowning period of his literary life, of ‘the divine Aether’ (191-2) for this particular office.

Powys admires Homer for two main reasons: for his peculiarly vivid realisation of inanimate objects, whereby they become more significant than our normal apprehension supposes; and for his honest facing of existence in its unsystematic and haphazard quality, well symbolised by the unruly actions of his Olympian deities disputing with one another and confusedly taking part in the human action dominated, it is true, by Zeus, but presented with slight sense of reverence and much of humour. Now both these are primary trends in Powys’s own philosophy: his feeling for the indwelling spirit of the inanimate is as strong as, and more widely ranging than, Wordsworth’s; and he is a consistent repudiator of the concept ‘universe’, preferring the word ‘multiverse’ to leave room for chance, for the unconditioned and unknowable. To all tidy theological systems he responds with the same kind of provisional and half humorous acceptance as Homer gave to his Olympians.

And yet, as has been pointed out in these columns, in a previous review (*Cosmic Correspondences*, a review of *Up and Out*, *TLS*, 11 October, 1957), no living writer, and perhaps no former seer in our literature, is more saturated with a sense of occult powers active within the living universe; and this sense is closely involved with his life long use of great writers as a guide to living and, among these, Homer has always been his first choice. The Homeric inspiration may therefore be closely equated with Powys’s most fundamental beliefs. His new book not only repeats but dramatises his philosophy; and since dramatisation involves personification, we find the repudiator of monistic systems inevitably drawn into acceptance of a deity corresponding to his central trust and impregnated with a far higher degree of poetic belief than the mythical Olympians: the divine Aether, ‘the Immortal One beyond all gods and men’ (28). The Aether functions rather like the lady Eternity within the supposedly godless *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (III, 16), or Lilith at the end of Shaw’s *Back to Methuselah* as a central and supernal, though not necessarily all-powerful or omniscient principle.

The Greek αἰθήρ is defined by Liddell and Scott as ‘either, the upper, purer, air, as opposed to the lower air or atmosphere’; it signifies ‘the clear sky, heaven as the abode of the gods’. It corresponds accordingly less to theology than to some abode or basis of the divine; it is more ultimate than theology. Ether is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as originally signifying ‘a form of fire or of air’ which came to be regarded as a fifth element. Physics until recently postulated the ‘ether’ as a continuum within which to lace its findings, and without some such postulate these findings are scarcely definable in any but algebraic terms. Modern Spiritualism has its ‘astral’ or ‘etheric’ body, or dimension, corresponding to the ‘spiritual body’ of St. Paul (1 Corinthians, XV.44-6). ‘Ether’ is a key concept in what might be called the

astral adventures of Byron's *Cain* (II, i. 29, 99; II, ii. 185). Our poetic tradition abounds in such uses. George Darley has a 'bird of Paradise' living 'on aether' (Thomas a Becket, IV. V). That unjustly neglected poet-prophet John Davidson placed his trust in the 'ether' as the basis of all things. And now Powys, our supreme exponent of the twentieth century poetic consciousness at its finest point of what might be called, by paradox, 'visionary scepticism', chooses 'the everlasting Aether' (248) to function as the personified agent of human inspiration. The Aether contrasts itself, or herself, with both the Greek οὐρανός the upper sky, and earth's lower atmosphere αἴθρ which in comparison, seems 'a sort of mist, or fog' (168). It is not all-inclusive, but to man it is the necessary prerequisite for the enlargement of consciousness. Somewhere, we may suppose, within the area covered by this multi-radial, and undying concept lies the spring which might throw the various and mutually exclusive specialities of modern learning into new harmony.

The Aether's authoritative pronouncement in the second chapter tells us how, while allowing Homer his intellectually gathered knowledge and his traditional poetic technique, it adds to these an insight into the thoughts of men and gods otherwise unattainable, together with an insight into the consciousness enjoyed by inanimate objects. Here Powys advances beyond his previous statements. Such objects, says the Aether, enjoy a semi-consciousness drawn from the human beings who have known them. In this there is an undeniable truth, as the modern practice of 'psychometry' proves and as has been half-recognised throughout the ages, a good classical example being Cassandra's reading of past events from the palace at Argos in Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, and similar examples are described in the present narrative (172, 178). Powys's Aether is the 'ether' of physics with 'the power of passing through every form and shape which matter, consciously or unconsciously, has taken'. But it is also the 'shining Aether', conceived as a power of 'gleaming and penetrating light' which induces in the poet a 'special kind of ecstatic trance' through a use of air and water transfigured by its own suffusing radiance (23-5). It exists at the point where physics and poetry together dissolve into clairvoyance.

And here we come up against the problem of Powys's recent scepticism – though his earlier pronouncements were less definitive – regarding human survival: 'O and how lucky you terrestrial creatures are', says the Aether, 'that when the end comes you can lie down and go to sleep and never wake up again' (29). But as Powys's rejection of monistic systems is countered by his artistic use of this central deity, so his rejection of human immortality is not allowed the last word. This is only another instance of that literary phenomenon whereby his own genius impels an author to state artistically what he, as a person, might deny. So we next hear, in an exquisite concluding passage, that those who are 'afraid of annihilation' are given

sweet dreams of ‘some blest Elyian Field’ where there are reunions – like those in Shakespeare’s last plays – and forgetfulness of anguish. That is the Aether’s final word, in its content so beautifully placed and phrased that it holds an authenticity and a finality beyond the contained logic. It is as though, in invoking the divine Aether, a conception drawn very obviously from his own inspirational experience, Powys has himself come more powerfully than ever under its counsel; and it is perhaps this enigmatic deity, rather than Powys, who speaks.

It is fascinating to watch so fine a creative intelligence at work on the problems posed variously by his own scepticism and his own inspiration.

Stevie Smith *Powys and Homer*

The popular poet and novelist, Stevie Smith (1902-1971), was a great admirer of the work of John Cowper Powys. Other than this review of Homer and the Aether in the Observer 8 March 1959, she reviewed three other books by JCP: The Inmates (World Review, August 1952, see NL49); Atlantis (Observer, 31 October 1954), in which she called JCP an ‘erudite old genius’ and a ‘master of all the worlds of consciousness’; and The Brazen Head (Observer, 23 December 1956). She called The Brazen Head ‘beautifully, deeply weird, and also happy’. She once referred to JCP in an interview as ‘a wonderful old man’. She composed a four line poem about JCP, ‘Homage to John Cowper Powys’, and mentions him in her novel The Holiday (1949). JCP returned the compliment praising her work in his letters to her and said to his friends Hal and Violet Trovillion: ‘she’s our favourite of all our modern lady poets by far.’ Wilson Knight cited her praise in his evidence to the Swedish Academy in his nomination of JCP for the Nobel prize for literature. Stevie Smith also reviewed books by Llewelyn Powys, (Love and Death and A Baker’s Dozen), and based a poem, ‘I Remember’, on Littleton Powys and Elizabeth Myers on their wedding night. More details about Stevie Smith and JCP can be found in an article by Jack Barbera, in the Powys Review, No.15, 1984/1985.

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Homer’s beautiful “Iliad” could hardly have a better interpreter than Mr John Cowper Powys, that blessed old prophet of the everyday magicalness of human life – its tools and utensils, its beloved animals and landscapes since the word began; and its capacity to be at the same time frivolous and noble. For in Homer above all other poets these values stand. The laughter of the “Iliad” goes on and the inanity of the bloody quarrelling in heaven and on earth, but when it comes to the tragedy of overwrought

human feelings, as for instance in the superb simplicity of Andromache's lament for Hector's death, there is no "falling off" in grief because a man is being comically huffy just round the corner, or a goddess takes care with her makeup, or a poor Greek soldier, nine years on the plains of Troy, drowns himself because his dog is mocked.

Mr Powys keeps close to the original poem and brings in a character called Aether, the divine thought-mover, to explain and simplify. Aether says that every man, woman and child has to "fight ... yell ... and crawl to be happy" and then he says "O how lucky you terrestrial creatures are that when the end comes you can lie down and go to sleep and never wake up again." After which the quarrelling comes on, the famous quarrelling, that begins with the insults hurled between Agamemnon and Achilles on account of the stolen girls and ends with Hector's funeral pyre and the uneasy truce before Troy is sacked at last.

Fifty days in the ninth year of the silliest war in the world is the scope of the "Iliad". Naturally one goes through Mr Powys's rendering looking for what is his and not Homer's. And finds? Well certainly the god Ares less of a buffoonish coward ... mainly maniacal really ... in the beautifully "invented" aspiration Mr Powys gives him – that the whole "beastly little" human race may have its blood flow completely out of it and so perish. And human ladies better at recognising concealed divinities than their husbands and sons are. And Pallas Athene as she prepares for battle "combining the technical skill of an expert armourer with the exquisite taste of an experienced old maid".

Then in Homer, when Aphrodite tells Helen to go to Prince Paris, and to bed with him at once, Helen says, "Why don't you go to bed with him yourself since you are so fond of him?" Mr Powys gives us this splendid exchange but explains that Aphrodite enjoys vicariously the lovemaking of lovers, though this, mercifully, they do not know.

The great battle scenes where the boys and girls from heaven fight with every unfair advantage alongside their pet mortals, lose nothing of their Homeric peculiarity of horror, courage, meanness and comicality but when Diomed wounds Aphrodite ("Hit her hard if you get the chance" Athene has whispered in his ear) more tenderness is shown to the stricken goddess. She runs back to heaven (as Homer tells us, too) and burying her face in her mother Dione's lap, asks why *Ανάγκη* must rule over all, yet never a word be got out of Father Zeus as to the nature of this dread goddess.

The theology in Homer is always good natured. Men are greater than the gods in that they have true feelings and fight under the odds of death. Yet the gods must be respected, however cursed and wounded by men, and allowed, somewhat contemptuously, to have the last word. Certainly the "Iliad" is no anti war poem and certainly it has in it no vestige of what now we should call Christian feeling. The

soldiers know “these struggles and groaning for Helen’s sake” are idiotic, yet fight they must and will; the mood in this late year of the Trojan War is like the British song in the 1914 war “we’re here because we’re here because we’re here.” And even Hector when he has said goodbye to Andromache and his little son, admits he really – “in a horrid way” – feels more at home fighting than being made up to by Helen or embraced by his wife. I am afraid those who claim otherwise ... that the “Iliad” is anti war and there are Christian elements in it, have a hard task.

Yet the tender feelings of Homer must not be forgotten, especially the tender feeling for women, which Mr Powys also has so strongly. One likes to bring together all one knows of these gay and tragic, high spirited and loving ladies. And though the generations lie between them, I like to think of Euripides’s Andromache and put her on top of Homer’s girl. I am thinking of what she says in “*The Trojan Women*”, the true, sad things Andromache says to her mother ... as to how, when she is a slave and her “master” takes her to bed with him, though during the daytime she may stand against him for Hector’s sake, yet when she is in his arms at night (she weeps as she says this) she may find she is not able not to grow fond of him and that here is the true weakness of women and it is here they are truly slaves. In Homer, too, she is thinking of the slavery that will follow defeat, but more especially of how the little child will fare, as if being fatherless were not enough ... when plucking at a man’s robes she will be told “Go away, no father of yours is feasting with us.”

These thoughts that are so deeply in the minds of Homer and of his latest companion, touch across the centuries, but they would mistake the poet’s mind who took them for an argument against war, or any argument at all. In Homer certainly there was no such thought and even Euripides – somewhat more of an arguer - makes his sad Trojan women say: “If this had not happened to us we should not be remembered.” Perhaps most of all we may bless great Homer today for having no argument but being quiet in himself.

John Raymond
Wizard of the Hills

John Raymond (1923-1977) was a literary critic and reviewer at the Sunday Times where he shared column space with other literary luminaries such as Cyril Connolly, Harold Hobson and George Steiner. His reviews were first published in the 1950s and his last reviews appeared in 1976. He specialised in reviews of books on history, literature, biography, memoirs, and travel. J.W. Lambert (1917-1985) who was literature and arts editor at the Sunday Times, 1960-1976, and assistant editor

1976-1981, knew Raymond well and wrote a tribute to him in which he described 'a man who commanded admiration and regret in almost equal measure, liberally salted with dismay and exasperation, but sweetened by an unalterable affection.' This review of Homer and the Aether appeared in the Sunday Times, 8 March 1959 and was his only review of a book by JCP. John Raymond was the son of the much loved film and theatrical character actor, Cyril Raymond, one of whose most famous appearances was to play alongside Celia Johnson in David Lean's film Brief Encounter (1945).

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At the age of 87 Mr John Cowper Powys still has the power to astonish. There he sits, an aged Merlin among the slate quarries of Merioneth spilling out the ichor and regaling us, in the phrase that he himself has used of Rabelais, with "the planetary reach of his prophesying". Two years ago it was Roger Bacon. Now he has tackled Homer.

This paraphrase and commentary on the Iliad is among the best things he has ever done. His version – charged with typically Powysian overtones, elaborations, and excursions – takes its place somewhere on the left of the orthodox translations: Pope splendidly himself with a difference; Lord Derby, stilted but effective; Professor Murray of Stanford, California, the Loeb translator on whom Mr Powys has based his own free rendering: and best of all perhaps, for the layman with only a rusted memory of Greek, E.V. Rieu.

In his introduction to the Penguin edition, Dr Rieu makes some good points. He lists the poem's minor incongruities – Odysseus's three dinners in the course of twenty four hours, the fact that Priam "who has had the Achaean chieftains knocking at his gates for nine years has to ask Helen who is who." As he points out, though the war itself lasted all that time, the action described in the Iliad's twenty four books actually covers only fifty days. He is also strong on the force of epithets in Homer – a force that arises, he thinks, not so much from verbal intoxication as from an impassioned kind of realism, a need to realise everything in nature or the world of men in its essence or totality. As he says:

Every manufactured object that he mentions is well and truly made. A ship is always fast, well benched and seaworthy; a spear is stout, long and sharp and it is its custom to throw a long shadow on the ground and also to be "windfed" even when resting in a warrior's hand; that is to say it looks back to the time when its shaft was part of an ash tree on the windswept mountainside, or else forward to the moment

when it is going to hurtle through the air.

Mr Powys has a keen sense of this particular trait in Homer. In a noble prologue – full of that state of euphoria with the visible world that we have come to associate with Whitman and Claudel – the immortal Aether, Homer’s guide and inspiration, declares the poet’s destiny:

It was not till he had almost tired himself out and very nearly blinded himself by his obstinate following of every sea side track and every mountain trail and every stretch of forest upland in his desire to absorb the entire background of the Trojan War, that I, the shining Aether, swept down upon Homer ... I shall not meddle with the metre he uses nor with the rhythmic music of the words ... I shall give him the power of reading the inmost responses of every form and shape that has ever been assumed by matter. I shall make him see that this does not only apply to birds and beasts and fish and reptiles and worms and insects, but also to the vegetable world of plants and trees and mosses and ferns and reeds and grasses and lichens ...

Sir Maurice Bowra, in his memorable *Tradition and Design in the Iliad*, has emphasised that whereas the *Odyssey* is largely a comedy of manners, its companion poem is a tragedy for recitation, a composite theme – in this case “the wrath of Achilles and its results” – comparable to the history of Herodotus or to *The Return of the Native*, “where the chief character is no man or woman but the vast tract of Egdon Heath.”

Mr Powys steers a creative course between the full high tragedy of the poem, with its sense of human futility, especially the futility of war, and the exhilaration, the sniff of battle, that filled the young Kinglake with such rapture and years later caused him and his friend Methley to seek out the Troad and its great plain.

Everyone has his own Homer and Mr Powys’s *Iliad*, as one would expect, is a powerfully individual one. His Achilles is a tiger, his Agamemnon a rampageous ox-facer bully with the heart of a boy, his Hector “the sweet war man”. To revisit Troy in his Homeric company is a rich imaginative experience.

STEPHEN POWYS MARKS

*John Cowper Powys casts his mind back
and remembers Annesley Powys*

The letter of John Cowper Powys to my mother Isobel in 1956 [back cover] is mainly about arrangements for travelling for a visit, with varied instructions for reaching Blaenau by train, but it starts off with a remarkable collection of reminiscences taking up much of the first page. It has the splendid variety of size, emphasis and sloping lines which we are familiar with as he enters his last years and approaches his death in 1963, but it is the reminiscences which I want to notice here.

First, the mention of the O'Neills, Belle and Bernie, who were among the closest friends of the Montacute Powyses. Bernie, born in 1865, was older than JCP. It is obvious now where Isobel got her one given name: at one time I thought she might have been named after a Hardwick cousin, Isabella Lybbe Powys with whom ARP was in touch at about this time, but now we have two Isobels as much better candidates: Bernie had a sister Isobel, and Belle O'Neill was herself an Isobel.

Then there was the burial of Isobel's mother Dorothy's ashes in the Cemetery at Meanwood which was Dorothy's father's parish, leading on to JCP's remembering how 'very very good' that father, Revd Annesley Powys (1850-1917, vicar from 1883) had been to him. He returns to the casket burial when he signs off in the top right corner, and is reminded of when he first saw 'the fairy-like charm of Dorothy' in 1902.

As for Annesley, in a letter of December 17th 1958 to Evelyn Powys JCP recalls her referring to Alfred de Kantzow: he was 'the first friend I made after I left home to earn my living. The second friend I made was your Dad Annesley who gave me the wisest advice I've ever had in my life – to go and lecture in America. There I made a good living for something like 35 years and there I met my Phyllis.' In the next letter of January 19th 1959: 'I must end up as I do to every one of your family with a word of grateful devotion to Annesley your Dad who gave me O such [good advice].

Even more worth noting is the remark of the Cloakroom official, 'you have very distinguished relatives in the City'; this is fine testimony of the reputation of Horace Annesley Powys's family, related as it was to Hardwick and Lilford Powyses. JCP's lecturing was taking place when Annesley Powys was still very much alive and his good works as a parson would have been well known.

The Revd Annesley Powys died on November 18th 1917. Two days later obituaries were printed in three local papers including *The Yorkshire Post*, followed by two letters in the same paper. From these we learn that he spent his whole clerical life in

Leeds, combined at first when he was Curate of Holy Trinity, Boars Lane, from 1875 with serving as an assistant master at Leeds Grammar School. In 1883 he succeeded his father-in-law, Canon Mapleton, as Vicar of Meanwood Church where he served till his death in 1917.

His many qualities are mentioned, but one aspect which would have resonated loudly with John Cowper Powys was Annesley's classical scholarship; he gained a first at Oxford (St John's College) in Classical Moderations, and a first in History Finals (JCP gained only a second, Littleton only a third). Mr Mozley, one of the letter writers, observed: 'his devotion to the Greek and Latin classics was remarkable. He was one of those who prove in their own person the natural attractiveness of Homer and Virgil and Horace, and of the great prose writers of ancient times', and from one of the obituaries, 'His recreations included the study of botany.'

No wonder that John Cowper had such a high regard for Annesley Powys.



The family of Revd Annesley Powys, taken at Meanwood on August 7th 1915. From left, top row; 'jock', i.e. Geoffrey, Sylvia, David, Marjorie, ARP; lower row: Evelyn, Mrs Jessie Powys, Isobel, Revd Annesley Powys, Dorothy. (from copy originally given to Evelyn by her mother, now SPM Collection)