Editorial

I am pleased to be back editing the *Newsletter*. J.B.

Notices

It is sad to report that on 12 December last John Williams wrote to members of the Committee to announce his resignation as Chairman of the Society with immediate effect. Despite considerable efforts by all members of the Committee we have been unable to persuade John to change his mind. Consequently, at the meeting of the Committee on 20 January 2001 Griffin Beale was unanimously adopted as Acting Chairman of the Society.

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Because of unavoidable changes in the timing of Committee meetings this year it has not been possible to include information on the Slate of Nominations for 2001–2002, or on the Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Society in the body of the *Newsletter*. However, all the necessary information is included on a separate insert which accompanies this *Newsletter*.

Gerard Casey 1918–2000

Gerard Casey was no less remarkable than the family into which he married. His wife Mary was the only child of the youngest Powys sister, Lucy Amelia Penny, and their married life was spent between their farm in Kenya (Gerard had gone to

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ON OTHER PAGES

work for Will in 1938) and the Dorset village of Mappowder, the final home both of Theodore and of Lucy. After Mary's death in 1980, Gerard continued to live there, reading extensively in theology and philosophy, entertaining friends, and spending regular periods of meditation in the church, just as Theodore had done. It was always a delight to accompany him round the lanes, observing favourite trees or the flight of the swifts in the churchyard, and being brought to sudden unexpected halts as he stopped to develop some point arising from the conversation. I can hear his Welsh voice humorously saying in a kind of mellow growl, 'Now old John Cowper, Glen, he always used to say ...', and on more than one occasion repeating Theodore's conviction that with death would come 'obliteration'. He would declaim that word with enormous force, though whether in application to his own case or not I was never really sure.

Gerard frequently displayed amusement at the activities of worldly people, and was a formidable critic of urban sophistication. Although interested in contemporary social and political affairs, he was at heart a contemplative, steeped in the great schools of mysticism, yet with a grasp of theology that was firmly intellectual: the essays and letters published in *Night Horizons* (1997) indicate not only the depth of his thinking but also his concern as to how such thinking should be translated effectively into action. He was impatient of ideas he considered to be dangerous or wrong-headed, and he could be withering about the over-confident atheism of Llewelyn Powys and about what he regarded as the excessive preoccupation with sexuality to be found in Theodore's novels. His sudden outbursts of rage (largely the result of a prolonged and agonising attack of endemic encephalitis) could be terrifying; but he could be quietly humorous and gentle too. His sensitive care for Lucy in her old age gave ample evidence of this, as does his loving family memoir, 'Lucy, Katie, Will: a pattern of memories'.

He was a generous supporter of The Powys Society in its early years, and it was through him that we were able to publish Mary Casey's Journals. He himself was author of a powerful long poem 'South Wales Echo' (1973), dedicated to his admired David Jones but with a cadence and content much its author's own: the echoes are from his early years. He also published translations of the Greek poet George Seferis: his love for poetry and his understanding of it were that of a practitioner, and his mind had a poet's comprehensiveness with nothing rigid or monolithic about it. And accompanying that poet's sensibility there went a keen eye for beauty in the pictorial arts as well.

One only ever knows a person partially: each of Gerard's friends will have elicited a different aspect of him. I first met him in 1972, when he appeared among the trees of Lucy's garden. As much as his wife he had the capacity to come and go in silence, less to arrive than Bo suddenly materialise. They were both responsively attuned to their physical surroundings, as when Mary would bow her forehead to the earth on the ramparts of Eggardon or break off a conversation to stare down at the sea. Gerard I vividly remember climbing up beside the Cerne

Giant, discoursing on the beliefs connected with that extraordinary chalk figure,at once detached and yet in sympathetic correspondence with them. This native of South Wales and lover of Africa would seem at such times to be an integral part of the Dorset landscape, whose hills he delighted to enumerate, but whose human history he would not allow one to neglect. And if his formidable presence and occasional grim humour seemed at times to render him more Powysian than were the Powyses themselves, those who knew him as a friend admired and loved him for the courage, integrity and generous heart that were his alone. Each one of us is left richer for having known him.

Glen Cavaliero

Memorial Service, 17th March 2001

The event to commemorate the life of Gerard Casey was held on St Patrick's Day, at the church of St Peter and St Paul, Mappowder. Date and venue could not have been more appropriate. Gerard was Irish, although brought up in Maesteg during the Depression; and this was his village church. It was crowded when, a little late, I entered with my wife, to the sound of 'Tibetan Sacred Music: Invoking the Spirit of Kindness'. Then I remembered the silence of the church, when Gerard had shown me the pew in which his friend Theodore Powys used to sit. Gerard could share that silence, and he could voice – sometimes in the form of impromptu sermons – his belief in the Christian tradition, and his great respect for other religious traditions. As I said in my tribute, Gerard Casey was a man who was completely himself because he was more than himself – in the faith he kept 'with the dead and through the dead with God'.

Gerard's friend – we were all his friends here – the Revd Stephen Batty introduced the speakers. First, Gerard's brother, Patrick, who recalled that, while Gerard had 'very little in the way of small talk' he valued 'ordinary things' and 'ordinary people' very much. Patrick spoke, too, of Gerard's 'ability to touch the moment with poetry', and remembered his 'sonorous readings'. This was a moving tribute, which Patrick concluded with a poem he had written for his brother.

In my tribute, which followed, I recalled my first meeting with Gerard, at the John Cowper Powys Centenary Conference at Cambridge in 1972, when I had given Gerard a copy of my first pamphlet of poems, which contained a poem ('Song of the Ashes') purporting to be the song of JCP's ashes, scattered on Chesil Beach. As I probably wouldn't have done, had I known what Gerard would say to me the next day: 'Jeremy, I was deeply moved by 'Song of the Ashes'. I scattered the ashes.' I went on to say how much Gerard had helped me over the years – he always spoke to the core of a person, so that one left his company

inspired to be true to oneself and one's purpose.

Next, Frank Kibblewhite gave the first of his two readings. This was of T. F. Powys's 'Mr Pardy & the Waves'. Later he read Sylvia Townsend Warner's 'The Long Way Home'. Frank spoke, too, of the help Gerard had given him in his own life; it was what we were all there, in one way or another, to say.

The Revd Edward Davies recalled meeting Gerard and Mary in Kenya and their kindness to him. He brought before us the reality of Gerard's hard work as a farmer, especially in view of the severe illness which struck him down in his late thirties. Edward Davies also told a funny story, which started with Gerard picking up a handful of fresh rhinoceros dung and ended with some frightened people up a tree, hoping they were out of reach of what eventually manifested itself as a harmless cow.

Charles Lock, who spoke, as several of us had, about the serious things he had shared with Gerard, including study of Meister Eckhart, also told another funny story. The gist of this one was that Gerard was not only unaware of the movie *Bamby* but had never heard of Walt Disney, either. 'The only Walt I know is Walt Whitman.' (I was reminded by this of R. S. Thomas looking baffled in a public lecture and exclaiming: 'What is a DJ?' There is a poignancy in these two men having died close together: they were quite unlike in important respects, but shared so much in their religious seriousness, and in their *presence*, which gave such authority to their words.)

Earlier, Stephen Batty had read a poem by Emily Dickinson. This, 'Unable are the Loved to die', was printed on the programme, under Timothy Hyman's 1998 drawing of Gerard. This drawing and Timothy Hyman's paintings of Gerard are the most evocative visual memorials we shall have – far more than any photograph. Timothy later gave a reading from Gerard's essay 'The Shield of Achilles'. A young boy, Tom Danahar, had read from a story that invoked Gerard. We were reminded by this, too, of Gerard's great affection for children. I remembered him, when he was a strong, hale man, carrying my son Joe on his back into this very church.

Towards the end there had been a recording of a setting of the Magnificat by Noirin Ni Riain. And, before we left the church, to a recording of Mozart's 'Ave Verum Corpus', Louise allowed Gerard to have the last word. Then, once more, we heard that sonorous voice, in readings of Mary's 'Good Friday' and of poems from Gerard's 're-visions' of George Seferis. Much is owed to Louise who, with the assistance of Stephen Batty, organised this commemoration. It could not have been done better.

As we had entered the church to sacred music 'Invoking the Spirit of Kindness', so as we left it, and proceeded to the Village Hall for a good spread of cake and bread and cheese and cream teas, the keynote we took away was not so much that of Gerard's profound seriousness – though there is no question of that – but of his great kindness. If I were to recall now visits to Mappowder in which I

met Mary Casey and Lucy Penny, and the many visits in which Gerard spoke to me of other members of the Powys family, to whom he owed so much, it would be another story. Or rather, it would be another part of this one, for Gerard was a man who kept the family alive for us, and at the same time was completely himself, faithful to his tradition.

Jeremy Hooker

Subscriptions — please see page 9

Review of the Constitution

Accompanying this issue of the *Newsletter* as a separate insert you will find a short Discussion Paper on the Constitution. It has been clear for some time that the existing Society Constitution has a number of shortcomings which need to be remedied, and over the past few months the Committee has attempted to identify all those areas where the Constitution might be improved, together with some possible solutions. If accepted these can then form the basis for a revised Constitution, which will eventually need to be adopted by the Society. The discussion paper represents the deliberations of the Committee so far, and is published so that all members of the Society may be involved in the process. You are therefore asked to consider whether there are any other issues in addition to those identified in the Discussion Paper that also need to be addressed, as well as any views you may have about the best or most practical response to them. The Committee would welcome any comments or suggestions that you may have. Please send them to **Chris Gostick, Hon. Secretary, Old School House, George Green Road, George Green, Wexham, Bucks SL3 6BJ** as soon as possible, but in any case by **30 June 2001**. Many thanks for your help.

Spring in East Anglia

The last *Newsletter* carried a flyer about the proposed Society visit to East Anglia over the Spring Bank Holiday 4–7 May 2001. Sadly, so few members responded that the Committee has reluctantly decided not to proceed with the visit and the provisional booking has been cancelled. All those who indicated an interest in the visit have been informed separately, but anyone who did not return an information leaflet but who might still be interested in participating in a re-arranged visit at some future date should get in touch with the Hon. Secretary as soon as possible.

Autobiography *and* The Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers

John Cowper Powys's *Autobiography* (1934) was described by George Steiner as 'compounded of masks, compounded of silences, compounded of extremely subtle obliquities', but there are, of course, passages of genuine and fascinating revelation. Adrian Leigh has reminded me of one such passage concerning W. E. Aytoun's *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*, illustrated by Joseph Noel Paton R.S.A. and Waller H. Paton, published by William Blackwood and Sons, Edinburgh, 1863, a copy of which he has generously donated to The Powys Collection. Because it is made clear in the following extract from *Autobiography*, that the illustrations had a seminal influence on the young John Cowper, three have been reproduced for the interest of readers.

John Cowper remembered their father reading 'The Island of the Scots' to him and Littleton in the drawing room at Shirley, gathered round the mahogany table under the lamp, with the great green curtains with red embroidered tassles covering the window, out of the illustrated quarto they had of Aytoun's *Lays of the Scottish Cavaliers*:

> Whether he read any of the much more thrilling poems in the volume I cannot say, such as "Dundee" and "Flodden," but the important point—at least to me—is that I received my first impression of the enchantment of literature in connection with exiles, and with exiles whose own cause seemed irretrievably lost.
>
> It was however the illustrations in Aytoun's book that influenced me most. Take it all in all, no book—no, not any!—has had an effect on me equal to this one. Aytoun's verses did a lot, but the illustrator of this grand edition did much more, to turn me once and for all into an obstinate, incurable romanticist. Nor did the influence of this book stop there. It was not towards any merely *vague* romantic world that it set my heart groping and fumbling. Aytoun's *Scottish Cavaliers* stirred up, deep down in the central pit of my stomach where the umbilical cord must have been, that peculiar Celtic emotion—Matthew Arnold describes it beautifully, nor is it important whether he describes it correctly—which like the spirit of Wales itself, is always returning, like water seeking its level, to its own proud, evasive, ingrown, interior being.
>
> My father's eyes used to burn with a fire that was at once secretive and blazing, like the fire in the eyes of a long discrowned king, when he told us how we were descended from the ancient Welsh Princes of Powysland. From an old Welsh family long ago established in the town of Ludlow in Shropshire in what were formerly called the Welsh "Marches" we undoubtedly did—Princes or no Princes—as the genealogies put it, "deduce our lineage"; and I am inclined to think that there has seldom been a mortal soul—certainly no modern one—more obstinately Cymric than

my own. I am quite prepared to admit that the Cymric tribes were not the aboriginals of Wales. But whatever they were, even though they made use of legends and traditions belonging to the conquered, who in *their* turn probably made use of the yet earlier legends of the men who carried out of Wales the "foreign" stones wherewith to build Stonehenge, they seem to have been, to use Jung's phrase, the most "introverted" of all races. Possibly the men before them in that remote mountainous principality were "introverts" too! Probably the oldest wisdom in Wales was that wisest and most ancient of all human wisdom; namely that it is within the power of the will and the imagination to destroy and recreate the world. Yes, it was perhaps more the illustrations of this particular edition that stirred up this old Welsh temper in me than the verses themselves; and yet I soon came to know one of these verses, "The Burial of Dundee" so literally by heart that the emotion it contains, mingling with what I inherited from my father of secret, furtive, reticent pride, and mingling with the general "aura" of these romantic illustrations, has affected deeper than I could possibly make you believe, the actual feelings I have when I catch sight of certain rocks and stones and trees and rivers and wooded hills.' (*Autobiography*, 25–6, from chapter on Shirley)

The Burial March of Dundee *(stanzas iv and v)*

And the evening star was shining
  On Schechallion's distant head,
When we wiped our bloody broadswords ,
  And returned to count the dead.

There we found him gashed and gory,
  Stretched upon the cumbered plain,
As he told us where to seek him,
  In the thickest of the slain.
And a smile was on his visage,
  For within his dying ear
Pealed the joyful note of triumph,
  And the clansmen's clamorous cheer.
So, amidst the battle's thunder,
  Shot and steel, and scorching flame,
In the glory of his manhood
  Passed the spirit of the Graeme.

Open wide the vaults of Atholl,
  Where the bones of heroes rest—
Open wide the hallowed portals
  To receive another guest!
Last of Scots, and last of freemen—
  Last of all that dauntless race,
Who would rather die unsullied
  Than outlive the land's disgrace!
O thou lion-hearted warrior!
  Reck not of the after time:
Honour may be deemed dishonour,
  Loyalty be called a crime.
Sleep in peace with kindred ashes
  Of the noble and the true,
Hands that never failed their country,
  Hearts that never baseness knew.
Sleep!—and till the latest trumpet
  Wakes the dead from earth and sea,
Scotland shall not boast a braver
  Chieftain than our own Dundee!

[*see back cover*]

The following extracts from John Cowper's diaries (for which I am indebted to Morine Krissdóttir) are further testimony to the influence Aytoun had upon him. It is interesting to note that he was reunited with the family copy in the same year as he had written *Autobiography*.

Friday 20th November 1931 ... A lovely long foolscap letter from Old Littleton & shall I tell ye what else? News from Mr. Rosenburg that he has actually found for me a copy of the One Book I wanted most of All. The illustrated version

of Aytoun's "Scottish Cavaliers" & it is being now sent. It is on its way now! What events! But to think of my having that book; with those pictures that have influenced my imagination more than any other Book.—O what a disappointment it is not the Illustrated Edition at all and it is not those Pictures I so long for! Well—well –well—well, I tapped and went on earth without shoes for no Reason at all.

Thursday 25 October 1934 Last night there came by Post from 'Mrs Powys' with a charming letter nothing less than the original Quarto Volume with those Illustrations that so stirred my imagination at Shirley when my Father read the 'Isle of the Scots' the first poem that affected me. But the illustrations of this book were one of the greatest Influences of my life & last night it arrived & the T.T. opened it after our tea & after I had my enema! Aytoun's Scottish Cavaliers.

Sunday 6th February, 1938 ... The T.T. came to bed very, very, late. I heard the End of the World Clock strike Three when she came. But we were late both of us because of the Owen B.B.C. which was constructed well but lacked the personal emotion of Aytoun's "Scotch Cavaliers" which is my favourite of all National Celtic poetry.

Wednesday 4th December, 1940 Reporter Ingersoll tells the story of "Mr. Hart" the shy & retiring air-man who came down seven times. This story and this character is the sort of thing to set up against my intellectual Pacifist Churchill-hating acquaintances. How can Mr. H. of Bath & Mr. N. of Manchester hate Churchill So? They must want Hitler to win. They do want Hitler to win in their Hearts. Now the question is Why? 'Tis like Hitler's hatred of the Jews ... Yesterday night at Seven-Thirty p.m. as I was showing the T.T. certain Illustrations of swords & bucklers & Helmets & graves on lonely moors & ruined Castles above swollen rivers & crescent Moons above lost battles and broadswords brandished in Victory—This old Illustrated Edition of Aytoun's Scottish Cavaliers that I read or my Father read to me from Infancy to Six years old & and this book with its pictures has Influenced my Deepest Life more than any other Book. Why cannot I even understand my pacifist critics of the war & of Churchill such as J. Norbury & John H. of Bath ??? Because of this book of Aytoun's Lays with these pictures!

J.B.

Subscriptions, Standing Orders, Gift Aid

The annual subscription is due on January 1st each year, as follows: UK, £13.50: overseas, £16; student, £6. Many of you will receive an envelope personally addressed. **Please open it now and read my letter to you. SPM**

Reviews

The Cuckoo in the Powys Nest: A Memoir, by Theodora Gay Scutt

Brynmill Press, 2000. ISBN 0 90783962 2. £20.00

This disturbing and revelatory book immediately presents the reader with several conundrums.

The first one is: who is the Cuckoo of the title? The cuckoo in folk legend has many contradictory attributes. It is both the messenger of spring and the messenger of darkness. It is an omen of good fortune but it is said that the Devil can assume the form of the cuckoo. The bird is ascribed oracular ability and yet its repetitive cry has become the symbol of obsession and insanity – the clock that always tweets at the wrong time. It is also the symbol of the adulterer as well as the one sinned against – the cuckold. For most of us it is simply the large bird that lays its egg in a smaller bird's nest.

So who is the Cuckoo? Theodora Scutt? Or possibly Theodore Powys? Or is it Count Potocki? The author refers only glancingly to the cuckoo once again in this book (and that is to herself as 'the rotten little cuckoo that he had decided to bring up') thus deepening the puzzle. Possibly the answer lies in the unpublished typescript 'Portrait of T. F. Powys by his adopted daughter Theodora Gay Powys'.

> [Daddy] often talked about cuckolding and all that. ... One day I asked him, "Daddy why doesn't Joan like the Cuckoo? It's such a nice bird, and it tells us that summer's here." "Well my dear it's because the cuckoo has been made the symbol of an unfaithful marriage." He quoted very often: "Cuckoo, cuckoo, O word of fear,/ unpleasing to a married ear!"

This of course raises more questions than it answers, but more of that later.

The second puzzle this book confronts us with is: what or who is it about? The writer of the blurb on the back of the book obviously faced the same problem: 'Surely this is the most authentic record we are likely ever to have of T. F. Powys, from the early 1930s till his death in 1953, seen through the eyes of "Susie" (Theodora Gay) his adopted daughter. ... But, more than all, she has produced a remarkable autobiography.' The first sentence may be intended to entice T. F. Powys fans; the last sentence is more accurate. Beyond doubt she gives us glimpses into TF's personality that are illuminating – the insights come slanting in and often hit the reader sideways. But it is 'Susie' who takes over this book, scouring the reader with her story.

Much of the basic material in the Cuckoo has appeared before – in the typescript mentioned above, written in 1965, and in two long accounts which were published in *The Powys Review* in 1981–82 (vols 9,10). This is, so to speak, the latest version of events that occurred some fifty to seventy years ago. Comparing the three texts has been an enlightening experience for the reviewer for it raises

fundamental questions about the role of the biographer, the art of autobiography, and of the slipperiness and mystery of the remembering mind.

Mrs Scutt herself is well aware of the fallibility of recollection and the telescoping of time:

> Most things I can remember if I search for them, but it's a bit like walking by moonlight in a light mist, nothing is clear and nothing seems real, except on the few occasions when the mist rolls aside and for a few yards around everything is crystal clear and alive. (1)

'Alas for memory': her vagueness about dates is appropriately Powysian. Early in the book she relates two events – the first takes place one Christmas and the other 'perhaps it is in this [same] winter ...'. They actually occurred 2 years apart – and it has been disconcerting to this reviewer to have access to information that the writer apparently still does not have. But what matters data when she can write this magical passage?

> I was in Daddy's study; the curtains, floor length heavy curtains, red I think, were drawn, for it was quite dark outside. The candles were lit, the fire was burning brightly and the room was very warm; it was Christmas Eve. ... I rather think I was alone in the room. Then there came sounds of footsteps, laughter and voices. They entered the room, all my adoptive

Susie with Theodore at Beth Car.

> Uncles, long dark cloaks and coats swinging, stamping their feet, shaking hands and embracing Daddy, filling the room with their talking and laughing and a great wave of strength and confidence and pride. My adoptive mother scuttered among them like an angry hen, dwarfed by their height and power. (8)

And what does it matter that I know that it would have had to be the Christmas of 1935 and that all the uncles could not have possibly been there that year? It is Theodora who can come up with the wonderfully evocative description of the memory of a crawling child: 'I remember it at dog-height.'

Although she brings in the uncles, the aunts, the friends and the hangers-on, the story is really about 'Susie the perfect child' and her adoptive parents, T. F. and Violet Powys. Susan was born in August, 1932. At the time of her adoption (when she was given the name of Theodora Gay) Theodore was 57 and Violet 46. The aging couple were still grieving the gruesome death the year before of their eldest and most beloved son, Dicky, and the tissue of events surrounding Susie's birth had no doubt left them bruised and angry. It was not an auspicious beginning, and it did not get better with time. For the first years of the baby's existence, Violet was often very ill with pre-menopausal haemorrhaging and pernicious anaemia. TF had his incapacitating stroke when the child was only 5½. The war came when she was but 7, with its attendant austerity and stress. TF died when she was 21. Although omitted from this book, but told in her *Potocki: A Dorset Worthy*, events in her life got even more extraordinary after his death. It is against this background that Theodora tells her story.

The task of looking after baby Susie fell largely to Theodore. Not unexpectedly, she bonded closely with her 'Daddy' but her feelings toward Violet were more ambivalent. In passage after passage she describes her adoptive mother's 'headlong rages', her extreme generosity, her 'shiftlessness', her 'completely undisciplined' personality, her hospitality, her jealous possessiveness, her loathing of the Powys brothers and sisters and most of Theodore's friends, her affectionate nature, her suspiciousness, her 'black hatred', her 'deep and genuine love for all animals'. She could, says Susan, have been an excellent nurse or small animal vet 'could she have been made to use her brains.' (152–3).

Theodora admits that her adoptive mother 'was so loving and so vehement that for all my childhood years I did love her dearly' (152) but she concludes that 'Violet didn't much care for me after I'd passed puberty'. (236) The feeling seems to have been mutual:

> She made my life miserable in a hundred small spiteful, invisible ways. ... I was certainly fond of her, but it was the sort of affection that one accords to a servant of long standing, and she knew it. (265)

Theodora's love for, and understanding of, Theodore Powys is on a different scale. She says he had 'a rare, keen wit', 'a sense of honour and justice', a quiet humour, a wonderful gentleness even if it was achieved by 'grim self control'. He

was 'a marvellous story teller' and had a capacity for warm friendship which he reserved for the few. Not to put too fine a point on it, the child adored her 'Daddy'. But Theodora is now 68, and part of the strength of this book lies in her ability to look at this man in a more balanced light.

She thinks that he would have been 'the most wonderful companion for a growing, active child' – 'if only he hadn't had that stroke'. She is sure that it was his stroke that left him unable to defend her against the emotional storms, the Violet storms that battered Susie. If he hadn't had his stroke she has 'no doubt that he would have reasoned that he must deal with his adoptive daughter exactly as he had with the sons of his body'. However, she concludes sadly, '"If" is a word that is only likeable in the future tense. In the past tense it is less than pleasant.' (2)

Many of the episodes she relates about this complicated man she attempts to put in the best possible light. For example, his refusal to let the lonely child have a dog she realizes was selfish of him but concludes he did it to protect her from the pain she would experience when the dog died. She remembers her bitter disappointment when Betty Muntz, the sculptress, promised to take her on her horse for a picnic at Ringstead Bay but never did. As a result she 'went off' Betty, thus losing another possible friend and mentor. It is only years later that she found out that it was Daddy who had stopped it: 'Poor little creature, it was too much for you'.

How fathers put on to children their own past hurts – the reader will remember the stories of TF being dragged by his father on great walks beyond his strength. And in TF's case, his own fear of pain and of life itself. 'But all his life I think Daddy feared pain beyond all else, pain for himself or for others. He could not bear to see ... a horse or a dog beaten; but he would never interfere.'

'I remember that he always avoided any sort of involvement': her assessment of her father's personality is more equivocal than in her earlier pieces about him and her pure stream-of-consciousness style is admirably suited to this see-saw exploration of her father's personality. She relates the story of their finding a sheep on its back when they were walking on the Down at Chaldon. He had told the small child that this meant possible death to the animal, but he refused to upright it.

> Now a very little kid doesn't fully understand about life and death; but his practice being so far from his preaching (as we say) puzzled me so much that I've spent a lifetime trying to work it out. (16)

She thinks it is possible that 'he may have reasoned that the sheep might die more comfortably on its back than later on in terror under the butcher's knife' but concludes that the episode 'came into the same category as his later refusal to let me pull up a new slate to let out the starving starlings.'

She admits that she has 'wondered and puzzled' over much of what he meant and did. He told her she 'can't expect happiness in this life'. 'His form of

disapproval was ... to say gently, and rather sadly, that he was so glad that I enjoyed myself.' (203)

> Obviously to him the experience of happiness came seldom or never – or he expected too much of it; for he was happy when he was with Louis or Aunt Gertrude; when he was watching Devereaux, ploughing with his great grey team, or any other beautiful sight. Was he so dreadfully sad, between whiles, that he forgot those moments, or was he merely trying to save me from the disappointment and disillusion of expecting too much? I hope that was all. Yet I still wonder what he meant; the contentment of Mark Only, ploughing with his horses on the hill? Of the lizard on the sunny wall? Or of a strong, passionate, easily despondent nature, its every hope dashed until there is nothing but a weary content – the content of an old crippled dog, waiting in comfort for his master Death. All the vanquished hopes and passions curdled into a grim quiet bitterness that "made pretty stories" ... .Perhaps it's as well that I don't know. The answer may be in his books, but I cannot read the cipher ... . (240–41)

Don't expect any lit. crit. in this book. She does not think much of Coombs' book and states categorically that 'Daddy's books are not much compared to Daddy.' She says in the 1965 typescript: 'I did not like his writings [when she was a teenager] and still don't. There was too great a contrast between his books and himself – there was this violence in his books, and he was so gentle, so controlled, and violence gave him such pain – even the violence of words. One couldn't reconcile the books with the man at all.' (Tp,109) She was 33 when she wrote that passage, and 35 years later she still cannot see the connection. 'Neither then, nor now after many year's reflection, can I see the close link that there must have been between him and the books he wrote, with their recurrent theme of lust and violence and cruelty at their lowest worst . ... Perhaps it was that if one has a horror of a thing, and with pen and ink expresses that horror, it partly leaves one. I can't be sure.' (239)

Theodora puts her finger on a matter of importance for any TF scholar – or indeed, for anyone attempting to understand the relationship between the personality of a writer and his writings. There is no reason why she should try to so understand, but not to see a link (articularly in the case of the Powyses) is to deny the implications of what she has herself related in this book.

She tries to come to terms with her love for her adoptive father and her near-contempt for her adoptive mother and speculates a good deal on their marriage. Chapter Six is a particularly gruelling story of marital incompatibility, of grief, of illness, and its consequences. Obviously she feels she could give more to Theodore, and appreciate him better, than Violet, and yet she sees with a kind of bafflement how deeply they loved each other. Theodora had her 21st birthday when he went into hospital, in the advanced stages of bowel cancer. She writes 'I only visited him in hospital once; he only really wanted to see Violet.' (289)

If not one Powys were mentioned in the entire book, this would still be a fine if painful story of a lonely child 'constantly reminded of one's placelessness'. She describes her babyhood in the typescript: 'It was Daddy who used to walk up and down with me in his arms because I could not sleep – not Violet – he said I never cried the way babies usually cry, I just wailed. I lay wailing there like a little thing that wasn't wanted.'

She was a sickly child, falling from one illness to another, and Violet's possessiveness and TF's timidity kept her isolated and alone. In an apparent class-reversal, Violet would not allow her to play with the village children, and TF did not like her to play with those of her own class 'for fear it would make her discontented'. She was not allowed a pet, and never sent regularly to school. She went very briefly to Maiden Castle School after his stroke, and later in Mappowder, went, disastrously, for slightly longer to the village school: 'perhaps somewhere in Daddy's mind was the thought that as he had married a village girl, a village school couldn't be too bad.' It was a cruel decision for a child 'brought up in solitude and over-refinement'. The inevitable happened – she became very ill 'my fear and fury and misery turned inwards and ate me up'. (60) Thereafter TF taught her – one or two hours every morning except Sundays and Tuesdays. 5 to 10 hours a week: I assume quality, not quantity was the key-note, but hardly enough for a bright, enquiring mind. Without companions and without routine 'I would crawl out of bed about 9.30 ... not knowing what I could or should do with my day, and often wondering why I had a day at all.' (72)

A kind of epiphany came one day. She was nine, and had been using a 'fairly heavy hazel stick' as a pretend horse and one day Violet threw it out in a fit of anger, whereupon Susie 'whopped her heavily over the back' with it. 'I rather think I wasn't sorry. I wandered away into Big Quarterclose where some of the Fishers' horses were grazing, and I walked out to Mr Fisher's favourite, a big old spavined chestnut hunter gelding, by name Sam; and I talked it over with him, and he agreed to be my friend ... . And then I went home, because 'Mummy' didn't matter now I had Sam.' (168–9)

Shortly after this 'a thing happened ... that I have never understood; and I don't think I ever forgave my adoptive parents for it.' She was given an old pony on loan. It became ill with colic and died. She thinks that Violet tried to find some help but Theodore refused to have a vet. 'If it proved nothing else, it proved he wasn't willing to spend money or energy to save a fellow being from suffering.' (170)

Her deep anger and frustration comes out in passages like this, only to be followed by an apparent retraction, or contradiction. 70 pages later she is again writing: 'Daddy would walk miles about, sooner than go where he knew a man to be who was "friendly to cruelty".' (239)

She refers often to TF's dislike of giving pain. 'He very much disliked saying anything unkind to anyone; he'd rather keep quiet.' This sentence is followed

immediately in the next paragraph but in parenthesis, as if slipped in: '(Unfortunately he did criticise me, rather a lot. As far as I could understand, I wasn't much good at anything ...)' (228)

This constant undercutting of her sincere admiration of, even reverence for, TF is a startling and rather puzzling aspect of this entire book. At one point she says: 'One never knew how much Daddy really understood, and how much he refused to understand.' (251) This could, one feels, at times also apply to Theodora.

Horses were to be the saving of the young girl and some of the most lyrical passages in the book are descriptions of these companions of her loneliness. Her deep understanding of horses has helped her to understand herself, and makes a mockery of my previous statement.

> An only child brought up not only alone but with only quiet walking exercise, like a colt brought up in a yard, will never gain perfect balance. (12)

It is a comment like this that make this book so intriguing – in one sentence everything is said – about loneliness, about restriction and constriction, about the neediness of all young things, about the requirements for 'perfect balance' and her awareness that she was not allowed to achieve it.

Theodora did not find out who her real mother and father were until she was grown-up, and even the fact that she was adopted was kept from her for a long time. However it is obvious there were constant reminders that she did not belong.

> A happy child is a well-fed, well occupied and genuinely loved one, properly disciplined and with company of its own kind ... . This one certainly wasn't. I had nothing to do, no discipline worth a damn, and alas! in the background, all my life, sometimes with reason and sometimes without, there was a recurring theme of "Shall we keep her? Have we done the right thing? Is she too much for you, Violet my dear?" (24)

She never understood why she was never sent to an appropriate school and wondered 'how much value I had in my adoptive parent's budget'. (60) In the tumultuous teen-age years, Violet would shout that she had 'bad blood' and had been 'dragged out of the gutter'. (263)

But it was Daddy, reassuring Violet, who put into blunt words why she had been adopted: '"Why that was why we – why we adopted Susie, so that she should look after you after I am gone."' (222)

Theodora is not a whiner. Nor does she excuse her own behaviour. She says she was 'a horrible example of a child with little or no company of its own generation (and if I wasn't an anti-social introspective vicious-tempered little morbidity, it isn't day yet)'. (195)

It is her tart tongue that often relieves what could otherwise be unmitigated gloom. One of the most amusing episodes she calls 'The Night of Mum's Nose

Bleed'. Violet's nose bled often and copiously – apparently the cause was high blood pressure. One night, after bleeding for three hours, she woke Susie, who slept with her. Susie tried to stop it with a door-key down her back, cold flannels and finally just gave her a bowl to drip in! By this time there was blood all over everything and Violet felt very faint from the loss of blood. She went into Theodore's darkened bedroom and asked if he could help. He told her to turn on the light switch and when she did

> At the sight of the ghastly bloodstained apparition that was his wife, instead of "doing anything" ... Daddy completely lost his head; he dived down between the sheets and called out, "Oh, don't die, Violet! Don't die!" At the time I was much disgusted, although as I grew older I learned that to panic in an emergency is a strongly masculine trait, not at all special to the Powyses. (280)

Mrs Scutt is to be applauded for writing *Cuckoo in the Powys Nest* and Brynmill Press congratulated for publishing it. However much the reader may question her interpretation of events and of people, it has that most rare and wonderful thing – the authentic author's voice. The earlier, 1965 version of events is much more detailed and virulent. That is understandable – it was written in the middle of a heated court case instituted by Theodora's biological father, Count Potocki, against Violet in 1963. (This was not settled until 1970.) Theodora has stated in a letter to PR 16 that she did not write this, but there is too much similarity in the events and even in its phrasing for it not to have been, at the very least, dictated by her. Some of the suggestions, such as that Violet cuckolded Theodore, are undoubtedly born out of the extreme malice of Potocki (who in 1968 wrote the execrable *Dog's Eggs: A Study in Powysology* – which I am sure Theodora had no part in). However, it remains something of a puzzle that she chose this particular title, *A Cuckoo in the Powys Nest*, without explanation.

It is understandable that Theodora would want to publish a second, more politically correct, version of her memories of her adoptive father and her childhood. Many of the episodes related in the 1965 typescript reappeared in the two articles published in *The Powys Review* 1981–82, but the style of these, highly edited and sanitized, is not hers. The *Cuckoo* text reads as if she has finally found her own voice, spontaneous and assured, filtered neither through Potocki nor the editor of PR. Her style is indefinable but unmistakable. Only someone personally taught by T. F. Powys could write in this unconventional but strangely moving way. Theodora may have been TF's 'adoptive' daughter, but he taught her well. She is the true inheritor of the Powys way with words.

She says at one point in the book, 'I shall probably not be believed and may even be accused of lying; I've said my say; I've done my best.' She has indeed, and more honour to her.

Morine Krissdóttir

Discovering Derbyshire's White Peak, by Tom Bates, ALD Design and Print, Sheffield, S11 8ZF. £6.95. ISBN 0114 267 9402

I am fortunate enough to live in a largely unspoilt village in a beautiful part of the West Country and nowadays seldom feel the urge to enjoy the beauty of my native land which lies north of Watford. If anything is going to drag me out of Montacute it could be this book by Tom Bates, better known to members of the Society as Neil D. Lee.

Its format is dictated by the fact that this is a compilation of articles which Neil has written for a local magazine. Each village in this picturesque area, much frequented by walkers, cyclists and long-distance hikers, receives the Bates treatment: a character sketch, salient points about its history and local worthies supported by excellent photographs of its most interesting features. Of course, I instantly turned to Shirley – the only village in the area with which I am familiar. We are told that John Cowper Powys is its most famous son. There is that telling quotation from *Autobiography* comparing it with the furthest Hebrides and photographs of both his birth place and his father's church. Thumbing through the 185 pages I realised that this is a region of great beauty and diversity which I ought to see while I can still do it like a Powys, on foot.

One of the striking things about Neil's photographs, apart from their quality, is that only in very few cases does the parked car – the blight of Montacute and villages generally – intrude.

I liked the inclusion of some of the author's poems and found it touching, but perfectly correct, that Tom Bates should thank Neil Lee for permission to include his 'White peak Worship' among them. If you think you know Derbyshire, or you wish to explore it, you will enjoy this book.

J.B.

To Simplify Life
Reflections after translating A Philosophy of Solitude *into Swedish*

John Cowper Powys's philosophy uses sensual reality to absorb the connections between Nature's animate and inanimate worlds that bring forgetfulness and renewal and, ultimately, contact with the spiritual for everyone in his 'multiverse'. This process takes place during his walks, in his solitariness, in hotel-rooms during his American lecture tours (he is said to have given more than 10,000 performances there) or, in his old age, in front of his Welsh fire, practising *wu-wei* (non-action) while logs of wood slowly burn. We Powys brothers, he says, have always felt at home with everything Chinese, and a kind of 'girlish' empathy for Chuang-tse, follower of Lao-tse, lasted to the end of his life.

In solitude, friends transformed into spiritual images, eidolas and historical personages all assume a concrete life that is recreated in the imagination of the novelist. The wind, scents, the sight of the seawaves through a window form a backdrop to the human experience wherein an individual can find his place. Powys keeps to what is essential, recharging the batteries of the downhearted and disorientated, providing release from suffocating frustration; it is about a loneliness that opens and unites, even for the outcast, not least for him.

While the West directs its attention to the physical world – transforming it into what now seems to be a monstrous idol – and the East aims at the spiritual, Powys wants to unite both of them. The Self is united with and is merged in the Non-Self, and is at the same time preserved with its will intact as hard stone or crystal. This union, occurring during his walks, is often an act of love. By achieving forgetfulness of one's own problems these acts also strengthen the ego, which through the contacts with other selves – plants, animals, human beings – gets in touch with its own self, resulting in a double injection of elementary life-zest and a power to endure. It is a question of freedom, and freedom cannot be achieved in a crowd when it comes to handling one's life.

Goethe speaks of an attitude where the onlooker goes to the bottom of the thing and himself. Out of this, individual art and science is born wherein Nature's methods are adapted to a humanised form. 'The style is based on the individual' and is decisive in a work of art. Goethe calls this habit of thought *Gegenständliches Denken* (objective thinking). The similarities with Powys are easily seen.

But also for the wanderer, the past flows from the sensual reality. Powys is observant regarding things and environment in an introverted way. The wind – the air, his necessary element – does not only bring messages from faraway places, it also arouses archetypical moods, such as have been experienced by lonely people for thousands of years, and unite us with them; and hence it is only a short step to a union with historical persons, the point of departure for the novelist's medium-like role. Even if the solitude in Powys's *A Philosophy of Solitude* is *gegenständlich* (object-directed), it leads us to such encounters.

Powys's *philosophy in progress* is to be found everywhere in his works, in the earlier ones as well as the stronger and more integrated ones from the end of the 1920s onwards; all of his production is a tangible testimony of the possibility of his basic view: the individual has an indestructible core but finds himself spiritually in a continual evolutionary interplay with others.

A Philosophy of Solitude (1933) is the concise expression for the 'elementarism' that was already outlined in *In Defence of Sensuality* (1931). Here the inorganic, the Non-Being, prefigures a simple, reduced way of living. By being in touch with the Inanimate, we learn elementary endurance and joy. But we also catch up with ourselves and can find a truer society. The ecstasies of solitude and the conjuring up of eidola is a human affair. Chapter Six of *A Philosophy of Solitude*, The Self and Its Loves, is a good introduction to this idea.

In other works – *The Meaning of Culture* (1929), *Dostoievsky* (1946) among others – Powys advocates the importance of culture; mainly literature and art. *A Philosophy of Solitude* is more influenced by Rousseau and Taoism; it deals with habits of thought and ways of living.

This 'philosophy' is practised by a man who liked to see life as a play and who considered himself an actor and a preacher. In *Autobiography* there is a passage about Emperor Augustus on his death-bed when he says: 'Have I not played my role well?' To look upon oneself as an actor gives rise to distance and change even though the driving force for an individual still emanates from his life-illusion. Even if the number of characters (who can be seen as Powys's roles) in his novels grew considerably over time; this essay can also be seen as a collection of hints on how to play one's role well.

In T. D. Suzukis' and Eric Fromm's *Zenbuddhism and Psychoanalysis*, a duality is expressed which is actualised in *A Philosophy of Solitude* by means of its criticism of psychoanalysis. According to 'elementarism' it is possible to be conscious and to change oneself; we can even all be magicians. Psychoanalysis deconstructs man, resulting in loss of feelings of ego and will. Thus Powys's unconscious is something other than Freud's sub-conscious; it lies beyond the latter, it is this 'emptiness' that brings harmony and power. This emptiness is the life-power itself because it does not contain anything special. In China it is called Tao, in Japanese Zenbuddhism sunyata. The Non-Being is greater than the Being. 'Tao is empty but its effects are inexhaustible' (Lao-tse). It is the emptiness at the hub that makes the wheel go round. In the positive, active West this type of negation is uncommon with exceptions like Meister Eckhardts' 'God is that which has no images.' Powys called himself a Taoist. By throwing one's spirit into an object or scenery or by concentrating on a windowsill or some 'fetish' like the cigar-boxes of the black cleaners in a railway toilet in New York, one comes into contact with emptiness and renewal. During his American lecture-tours, when Powys arrived exhausted at the lecture hall just a few minutes before the performance with the audience full of expectations, he concentrated on some negligible, non-associative object, until his spirit sank as an empty bucket into fresh water – whence it came, he did not know! In an essay, Powys's Japanese translator and enthusiastic introducer Ichiro Hara has pointed out the similarities of this with a form of Zenbuddhism.

The unconscious also has a connection with the half-conscious state of mind that we share with animals and plants, 'vegetative' living. Man is, as for Goethe, separated from Nature, but has links with it that also belong to a 'non-human' region of spirituality. In *A Philosophy of Solitude* this phenomenon is sometimes calld 'another dimension'. In the Welsh historical novels *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius* (1951) it assumes the name of 'Annwn', the mythical Kingdom of Death, with which Glendower is in contact. Properly speaking it has, like the Tao, no name, for as soon as we name it, it falls into our imagination and does not

become the wordless, creative life-spring. St Paul says that we need not pray with words, the Holy Spirit prays for us. It is sometimes likened to the air, and the air was, thus, Powys's element. From the wind in Somerset he was given messages connecting time and space; it also brought stillness when it blew the rain against the window and the drops in the twilight slowly streamed down the pane.

And yet, John Cowper Powys was not a Taoist. He was rather a follower of Homer. In his personal way, he pleaded for a humanistic western cultural inheritance, his 'canon' being as well constructed and tailored as the one of Harold Bloom's. Powys had, like Goethe, an ability to see similarities and complementary traits between the cultures, in whatever contexts they appeared and whoever expressed them. But he kept to his own – his 'elementarism' stood him in good stead – and it leaves a typical Powysian snail-track through his philosophical essays and his novels which does not fade away.

Gunnar Lundin

The Llewelyn Lecture

I am sure a number of members who read with interest, as I did, the Thomas Hardy lecture of 1908 in *Newsletter* 39 must have had the distinct impression that they were reading a piece not by Llewelyn but by John.

It seems to me undeniably the case that there was no possibility of Llewelyn being able to write such a sophisticated and rhetorically effective essay in 1908. Llewelyn's style, even when mature, was quite different, but in 1908, two years after he had failed the Cambridge tripos (in effect, being unable to write a cogent essay) – and bearing in mind the evidence of his letters and diary of that time – it was not recognisably developed.

The diary he kept in Philadelphia in 1909 is brief and halting – and sometimes illiterate – and when his sense of the art of writing, and his vocation as a writer, began to burgeon in 1910–12 (when he used his diary to experiment with forms and modes), his style is distinguished by flashes of short, intense, sometimes surreal, phraseology, often repeated like a refrain, but nothing is ever sustained. John Cowper Powys, on the other hand, was supremely a writer of the sustained peroration, carried over thematically from paragraph to paragraph, making use at the same time of rich figurative language and rhetorical devices such as we see in this Hardy lecture.

This doesn't mean that the Hardy lecture is not in Llewelyn's handwriting, with the corrections, changes and emendations also in his handwriting. But the text itself is John's, dictated no doubt in a dithyrambic fashion on one of those many days they spent together at Burpham or Montacute in the autumn and winter of 1908, preparatory to Llewelyn's ill-advised lecture tour of the US in 1909. We have some evidence as to the fiasco of that lecture tour. Louis Wilkinson

in *Welsh Ambassadors* (1936), pp.108–9, describes the embarrassment he experienced listening to Llewelyn trying to deliver a lecture: 'He stammered, paused, stammered again; one after another of his sentences crumbled and fell to pieces, and then, for many moments together, he would be, it seemed, struck dumb.' And then Louis goes on to say 'he had notes; indeed ... he had the whole lecture written out, but he was trying not use the manuscript, and when he did in desperation fall back on it, it completely bewildered him.'

The lecture Louis Wilkinson was referring to was one on Walter Scott delivered in New York on 8 January 1909. Llewelyn describes the occasion thus in his diary: 'Deliriously with parched mouth and woolly hood [I] swayed to and fro' before an amused audience.' 'He had better take the first boat back to England', someone apparently shouted. The lecture had obviously been written out – as was the Hardy – and undoubtedly prepared to John's dictation in 1908. Llewelyn had no capability to pen a lecture on Scott, a writer he was not interested in and had only read in part, just as he could neither write an essay nor write a lecture on the likes of Mrs Humphrey Ward. And yet he did! His lecture on Mrs Humphrey Ward delivered on 1 February 1909 at Newburgh N.Y., is described also in the diary: 'In the evening I lectured on Mrs. Humphrey Ward. I have never read any of her books. However the audience seemed satisfied and begged me to come again next year.' In fact Llewelyn was appalled by Mrs Ward's work when he dipped into one of her novels for preparation, and the lecture he was advised to read on this occasion was in fact composed by John, as Louis Wilkinson records: 'John coached Llewelyn, and now and again ... dictated parts of a lecture. One such dictation [was] of a lecture on Mrs. Humphrey Ward.' (109)

Llewelyn's diary of 1909 testifies to the disasters of these lectures. The best face he puts on them is that they were 'not a success, but at the same time not a failure'. But often the assessment is otherwise : 'A dreadful failure. Everyone left.' (lecture on Hawthorne, 29 Jan. 1909), 'a great failure' (lecture on Cowper, 16 Feb. 1909), 'rather a failure' (lecture on Shelley 16 March 1909). The perceived quality of Llewelyn's literary judgement was summed up in certain endorsements he was bold enough to cite. On a Meredith novel, his view was that 'it was a fine book, a very fine book'; on Hawthorne his opinion was that 'Hawthorne loved Salem, Salem loved him not'.

This is not to belittle Llewelyn as a writer, for he was determined to study the craft and he studied it well. In the late 20s and 30s he was cited in several anthologies and creative writing manuals as a master of the essayist's art. This is merely to put the record straight about this particular text, and furnish a caveat that what appears in the handwriting of one of the Powys brothers is not necessarily therefore his work. Llewelyn's diary shows a number of instances where other members of the family have provided comments and entries, sometimes in the first person as though they were the author of the diary. The relationship between John and Llewelyn was so close and interwoven that they

each utilised the other's ideas, opinions, preferences, copying and reproducing. Llewelyn at this time regularly acted as John's amanuensis, copying to dictation or writing notes from speech, or scribing his work, and a little later, as we know, John was happy for Llewelyn to advise, edit and alter his own rough texts. As always with the Powyses nothing is simple.

Peter Foss

Editorial Note *Readers will recollect my reference (Editorial Note,* Newsletter *39) to the coaching which took place before the lecture tour and my suggestion that extensive editing of Llewelyn's draft had taken place under his brother's supervision. The text transcribed by Neil Lee was a photocopy, but the original has now turned up. While I would not question Peter Foss's general thesis, there are aspects of the lecture which suggest that Llewelyn was not merely a passive recipient as in the case of the Humphrey Ward text - see* Newsletter *38 p. 19, and evidence of that is to be found in the many deletions and amendments in the text. Furthermore, how unlike John Cowper (p.11) to write, of Hardy: 'like an owl in the impenetrable shades of Pitt Wood in the heart of his beloved Wessex', but how typical of Llewelyn to drag in a reference to Montacute. And how like him (p.14) to reel off the names of taverns where real peasants were still to be encountered. I think it likely that some readers will have discerned other indications of some real input from Llewelyn.*

Montacute Reminiscence
by Louis Marlow (Louis Wilkinson) *

Montacute in Somerset gave me my first sight of the West Country; and I can never forget my first surprise at those varied differences between Somerset aspects and those of my native East Anglia. The softness, yet heaviness of the air, the ascents and descents, to me so unwarrantably steep, of the roads and fields, the deep richness of the soil, the landscape-breaking hills, the abundance of trees, all these West Country tokens combined to dazzle and puzzle my youthful eyes. I felt that I was in another country. I was a stranger in a strange land, moved now to enthusiastic response, and now to critical discontent, or even resentment. For I did not like it when the evening sun disappeared untimely behind a hill; I missed the gradual and completed decline of the suns of Suffolk. I missed, too, the dry Suffolk soil which never caked my shoes as the soil of the Wessex lanes did, nor caused me such effort in walking; and I thought it rained a great deal too much and too often; also I resented having to walk and bicycle so much up-hill. I remember wondering whether this unfamiliar exercise would bring me some

* *This article appeared in the first number of* West Country Magazine, *summer 1946.*

compensation in manly increase of the girth of the calves of my legs; for I had been told by a traveller just returned from Burgundy that the women of the hilly district of Volnay possessed sturdier calves than the women of the neighbouring flat surfaced Pommard, and I reflected that what would perhaps produce an unattractive effect in a girl's appearance might well result favourably in a young man's.

What most impressed me during this first visit to the West Country was the sense of a new and richer beauty in the visible world, beauty that rejoiced in full and fertile life of a kind only occasionally and somewhat remotely hinted at in the East Anglian world I had known since my birth. In comparison with the luxuriousness, the rich bloom of Somerset, Suffolk seemed austere and bleak; and, East Anglian native though I was, I could not resist the disloyal intimation that this Wessex countryside was in a deeper harmony with my own nature. At any rate, it was giving me something that East Anglia had not given and could not give me; it had the enchantment of a new, surprising mistress, the allure of an unguessed-at strangeness, the excitement of that, and the balm.

I was, through this initiating time, the guest of Llewelyn Powys at his father's vicarage, a vicarage populous with the brothers and sisters of that large, phenomenal family. The feelings aroused in me by this family were remarkably similar to those aroused by the features of the West Country landscape. I tried to describe, in a book I wrote some time ago about the Powyses, the effect of the impact of this family as a whole; the effect of contact with the corporate entity, 'the Powys', which has always impressed itself strongly upon me whenever I have been with more than two or three of them together. But each, none the less, delivers his or her own separate impact; there is the effect of the distinct and intact instrument as well as that of the orchestra; or one might say, less metaphorically, of the individual no less than of the racial life.

It was to me, as a youth, a very strange effect indeed. I had never known anything like it. Llewelyn Powys I already knew well; but, subjected to the Montacute 'genius loci' and 'genius familias', he was, in a subtle and baffling way, different. Even when I was alone with him, he was, although almost the same person as my Cambridge undergraduate friend, not quite the same. He was less Llewelyn and more Powys. John Cowper, too, was already known to me, but here, in this place, in this house, he was differently known. I wish Theodore Powys (T.F.) had been there as well, but I was never with him at Montacute. I do not think, though I may be wrong, that even the sealing stamp of that family impress would have more than slightly modified him.

The solidarity of that Powys life gave me the same sense of being an alien as did the substances of the unfamiliar, fertile, provocative landscape, the lineaments of the roads and pathways, the village houses and cottages and church, all built of their yellow, foreign Ham Hill stone. Strangeness and provocation and excitement abounded both within and without the Vicarage gates; fertility, beauty, a

new life, a life of new abundance, new power, new and magical charm.

'Fertility' is the word that is strongest to recall memories of that Montacute visit and of the many others that were, fortunately for me, to follow it. How different, in their fertility, from any others that I had then known, were those companionships and those talks in the Vicarage 'schoolroom', on the terrace of the Vicarage garden, along the roads that led towards Tintinhull, towards Yeovil, towards Martock, and in those country taverns where we rested and drank beer richer and more potent than any which, alas!, exists to-day. We talked about all sorts of things, chiefly about literature, religion, politics and girls. Such discussion and debate were not, of course, new to me. At Oxford and at Cambridge, even at Radley, and with two or three of my early Suffolk friends, there had been talk on these matters, and some of it was good talk, not infertile. But, conversing at Montacute, I felt a new liberation, a natural liberation, that had a natural sureness and force. It was all very different from the undergraduate talk in college rooms, because it was more real, more really free, and less clever. At Cambridge, in my time at least, although no subject and no approach to any subject were in themselves taboo, there survived the taboos imposed by intellectual and social snobbishness, by academic limitations and the care for 'good form'. A stronger individual force is needed to defeat these sterilising trends than is usually to be found in most clever undergraduates, however 'emancipated' they may be.

'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole law' *Fay ce que voudras.* Montacute Vicarage was an early twentieth century Abbey of Thelema. Do what thou wilt, but the complete discovery, or indeed any discovery of your true will, the will in true harmony with yourself, is obstructed hardly more by the usual conventions than by the conventions of those who believe themselves to be freed from vulgar bonds.

Mr. and Mrs. Powys, the father and mother, took no part in these discussions and disputes, but I know now that their presence in our background bore upon us. The old man's formidable integrity, the deeply driving sense he gave of being in truth 'unspotted from the world', immune from anything that could weaken his own realities or blur the edges of his own truth – this and all his qualities, confirmed in him by his years, confirmed us too with a power no less valid because we (or at least certainly I, the alien) were unconscious of it. What I say about him may sound fantastic, but I believe it is true. His invulnerable will, his fidelity to that, confirmed us.

I could not even imperfectly realise Charles Francis Powys until my later Montacute visits. Though I felt awe of him, I was deceived by his surface appearance of a benevolent, whiskered, white-tied Evangelical clergyman. He was benevolent, he had a mildness not only in his looks, and his son Llewelyn metaphorically described him, not without justice, as 'a graminivorous animal'. Seeing him for the first time among his sons and daughters, few observers can have found it easy to reconcile him with such a progeny. 'Yet who would have

thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?' And such blood? But he had blood enough, force enough. When it came to some hint of what was in him besides that evident goodness and mildness, I came also to see his presence in the house, though it was generally invisible – for we rarely saw him except at family prayers and at meal times – was a determining force. It was he that had made them, these sons and daughters; from him they had issued, and from him they issued still. Unknowing, he himself was in all those hours of our companionship and discourse, and so was his wife, the mother, that *anima naturaliter Christiana*, believing, tragic, romantic, poetic, of an extreme nervous sensibility, so unlike the father in every one of her natural qualities, except that she too had her own integrity and unworldliness, as unassailable as his. Her children derived no less from her than from their father.

All this was more than forty years ago; but the years have brought no real change. The West Country is the same: Llewelyn Powys, though he has died, is himself and will continue as himself in his writings. So will John Cowper and Theodore, and those others in the family who have inscribed themselves in their work, in their art. Through Llewelyn and John Cowper, not only their two separate selves, but the whole Powys 'corpus' will survive; for they have given the record which only they could give of their father and mother, of their brothers and sisters, of that memorable family life and family character which will thus continue to be communicated long after every Powys now living is dead. As I look back to those distant but near-by Montacute hours, my first impulse is to embrace them in gratitude, not only as a life-long enrichment, but as a pledge of immortality.

Member's News and Notes

New Web Site The official Powys Society Web Site has now moved to its new permanent address:

www.powys-society.telinco.co.uk

Special thanks go to Joe Boulter who has worked hard to redesign the site, and who will now continue to keep it up-to-date, and to Thieu Klijn who created the original site. Anyone visiting the old site will now be re-directed to the new site, so internet users please up-date your bookmarks.

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Biography of John Cowper Powys Dr Morine Krissdóttir has been asked to write the official biography of John Cowper Powys and has now signed a contract with the American publishers, The Overlook Press, for world rights. Peter Mayer, the director of Overlook, is a John Cowper enthusiast and together with Morine and the new agent, Christopher Sinclair Stevenson, has devised a programme of

publication over the next several years which should see the reappearance of all the major novels. The biography is due for publication in 2003.

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Help in finding books In the November *Newsletter* John Williams referred to the difficulty of finding Powys books. Gerald Redman, a member with a particular interest in Llewelyn has been locating hard-to-find books on the internet and, as a service to the Society, is willing to undertake that for any member who needs help. If you are interested, whether or not it is Powys you are after, talk to Gerald on 01278 784134

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Powys Society of North America announces its 2001 Conference: 11–12 May, New York, 'Powys and the Canon' The Keynote speaker will be Robert Caserio, whose recent book on modern British fiction has recognised the crucial position of John Cowper Powys in any future negotiation of a twentieth-century canon. Other papers have been invited across the whole range of Powys interest and there will be visits to Powys places in Greenwich Village. Members interested are invited to contact Nicholas Birns at nicbirns@aol.com , or Nicholas Birns , Faculty Services Office, New School University, 66 West Twelfth Street, New York, NY 10011.

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The Swedish John Cowper Powys Society has just produced its first Newsletter. The major article in its 18 pages is a contribution about JCP from Sven Erik Täckmark. (*received courtesy of Joan Stevens*)

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The key to a Powys fan Joan has also drawn my attention to an interview by Allison Pearson in the *Daily Telegraph*, March 3rd, in which Chris Woodhead, the former Chief Inspector of Schools spoke of his enthusiasm for John Cowper Powys and *Wolf Solent* in particular. The interviewer was told: 'If you want to understand me, read that book.'

A Dream Returns

Almost six hundred years after the enigmatic Owain Glyndwr made a mysterious disappearance from recorded history, enthusiasts are still looking for his bones. I cannot promise resurrection of the body of Glyndwr. But I can promise (barring unforeseen circumstances) that John Cowper Powys's *Owen Glendower*, which has long been out of print, will this year be restored to the world of available works.

How do I come to feel so strongly for the novel that I want to republish it?

I could blame my Dad. That would be a little unfair, since a comet and a trip to India were also involved. But, more than twenty years ago, when I picked up the Picador edition of the novel from a Heathrow bookstall, my choice was guided by the memory of family visit to Glyndwr's Parliament House in Machynlleth. It had been Dad's idea. Decades later, it meant that the name 'Glendower' was familiar, and attractive.

Beginning the novel, I was immediately entranced by its sensuousness, by the complex psychology of its characters, by the vividness with which it conveyed the blood and guts of battle, by the erotic charge of Rhisiart's dealings with the women of the book – but, above all, by the complete conviction with which it evoked another time.

On the plane to India, I was sitting next to a sociable Sikh man who would have been happy to tell me about his country, but I was immersed in fifteenth-century Wales. I got into the meat of the book during Christmas spent at a mission hospital near Varanasi, which was an odd conjunction of cultures. By New Year in Nepal I had finished.

I remember urging the outcome to be other than it was – just as I had tried to deny history when reading accounts of the Spanish Civil War. I desperately wanted Owen's dream of independence to be achieved.

Owen Glendower had been a powerful read, but I put it aside. Back home, my travel-stained Picador copy stayed on the shelf – except when I lent it to a friend doing a six months' stint as a geologist with the British Antarctic Survey – until I moved to Wales in late 1996.

We were staying for eight months in a cottage with a view of Snowdon over the waters of Llyn Padarn. Winter evenings, I sat by the fire, and the book I chose to re-read, along with George Borrows' *Wild Wales*, was Glendower.

Incredibly, when I looked out of the window I could see a comet in the northern skies, much as the men of Gwynedd had done when its appearance seemed to prove Glyndwr's supernatural powers. It was that coincidence, as much as anything, that prompted me to write an article in the *Observer* newspaper about the Glyndwr Society's search for the old prince's bones.

I also wrote a travel-page piece ('In Glyndwr's Footsteps') for the *Independent*. It was when I wanted to recommend Powys's novel as a travelling companion that I became aware *Owen Glendower* had been long out of print. I tried to persuade established publishers that re-issuing the novel would be a worthwhile project, and a timely one given the 600th anniversary of Glyndwr's rebellion. Faced with their lack of interest, and perhaps perversely, I decided to go ahead on my own.

Transferring the four hundred thousand words of *Glendower* – 1.9 million characters of text – into a computer has been a substantial undertaking. The browned and battered pages of the Picador edition were a challenge to the scanner. Powys's extensive use of italics and exclamation marks has confused the 'optical character recognition' programme. And Welsh names and phrases have

bamboozled the English spellchecker. But the bulk of the work is done.

I am now proof-reading the text and hope to have the book out by mid-summer. The 1970s Picador paperback was a re-run of the original Simon and Schuster edition of 1940. The new *Glendower* will be redesigned in a larger format. More importantly, it will have a specially commissioned introduction by Dr Morine Krissdóttir, who is currently writing the official biography of John Cowper Powys. This will place the creation of the work in the context of his life and events occurring at the time of writing. It will also trace the influence of the inspirational landscape – Glyndwr's native Wales – in which he wrote the book.

The omens for a new edition are good. Second-hand booksellers keep on telling me that John Cowper Powys is in demand. In a recent issue of *Publishing News*, Michael Fishwick, a director of non-fiction at Harpers, was asked to name the out-of-print book he'd most like to see back on the shelves. *Owen Glendower* was his choice. He described it as 'a dream of a book'. For him and others, The Dream Returns ...

Rob Stepney

[*I can be contacted at 2 Walcot Farm Cottages, Charlbury, OX7 3HJ; e-mail: walcot2@freenetname.co.uk*]

The Sherborne Prize Poem 1939 –1949

Although the Powyses were a close-knit family I am not aware of any other example of their collaboration, one with another, to compare with Littleton and John Cowper's remarkable joint-adjudication of the Sherborne Prize Poem. Remarkable both for its duration and the professional dedication with which it was carried out. The correspondence between the two brothers could undoubtedly shed more light on this subject. Apart from an unpublished diary entry, provided by Morine Krissdóttir, all the material quoted here is in the Powys Society Collection, several of the items being a recent gift from Mr Timothy Rogers. Ed.

Extracts from an article written by Littleton for The Shirburnian *1950, with a footnote by John Cowper Powys.*

It was in the early summer of 1938 that one day I was asked by the Headmaster to help in deciding which of the three competitors' poems was the one to deserve the prize. The subject was 'Glastonbury Tor'; and I had no uncertainty in declaring S. J. H. Durnford the winner. ... I wrote my report on the poems. The Headmaster accepted my recommendations, and then asked me to take upon my shoulders the responsibility of setting the subject and judging the Prize Poems in the future. I was delighted and said I would do it but on one condition ... that I should have the help of my brother John Cowper Powys whose whole life has been devoted to Literature. This was granted with pleasure, and for a decade we two brothers

acted as the Beirniadiaid (to use the language of the Welsh Eisteddfod), the adjudicators.

I should have liked our mother to have known this. Her father, William Cowper Johnson, had won the Prize Essay here in 1833, and I can remember her excitement when she came to the Commemoration in 1891 to hear her son John recite the Prize Poem and to receive the prize for the English Essay too. To know that her two eldest sons had been given this appointment would have rejoiced her heart.

As judges John and I made a good combination; for I was more conservative and more of a formalist than he; he was more liberal minded and quicker to see merit in poems of a more modern type. And we had the help of my wife Elizabeth Myers as long as she was alive; and Redwood Anderson, himself a supreme poet, was always ready to give his counsel ...

[*There follows a résumé of the competitors and their poems.*]

In 1947 and the next two years we did not set a subject, but left it to the competitors to decide for themselves about what they intended to write. I think that was a change for the better for it is always possible to set a subject which will please one competitor and not the others. The experiment was successful. There were more competitors and some good poems. ...

And so the decade of judging the poetry of Sherborne was completed. For us it had been an interesting and enjoyable task; and if the actual standard of poetry was much the same there was an increase in the number of boys competing which was all to the good. ... The poems had usually been written in one or other of our country's traditional metres of which good knowledge had been shown, and in their poems had occurred many phrases and thoughts of true poetry which gave us a feeling of confidence that the poetic vision would be with these poets as they made their way through life.

Littleton C. Powys

I would indeed like to add a word to my brother's excellent summary of our combined attempts to weigh, analyse and assess in their literary and imaginative order of value, the Sherborne Prize Poems for the ten years from 1939 to 1949.

As my brother suggests and I entirely agree with him, the remarkable thing that must arrest the attention of any devotee of poetry is the manner in which all the way through these ten years the compass-needle of these Sherborne poets' practice, full of historic and psychological interest, even at worst, swings backwards and forwards between the old formal tradition of rhymes and metres, and the mysteriously attractive new style of poetry, where other, as yet only dimly realised, sequences, harmonies, and laws and secrets of rhythmical utterance have, for many pioneers of poetic experiment, to a large extent superseded the old poetic rules. I think it reflects great and special credit on the methods of teaching English Poetry in the School employed by those concerned that this extremely important crisis in our poetic history, as a race, has been so clearly laid bare to the

Sherborne boys throughout these chaotic years, and left to be regarded, as it essentially is, as an extremely subtle and so far only very darkly discerned point of departure, provocative of angry divisions of opinion, involving other arts than the art of poetry, and although leading itself to lively and furious disputations, for that very reason deepening our mental and emotional response to the whole problem. Let me add though, that of course in these things a critic's personal taste governs his feelings, that for me the two outstanding poems, I will not say poets, for there who can predict? (and all these poets change so quickly that the problem transcends prediction as well as adjudication) of these ten years are Raper's 'The River Parrett' and Angwin's 'First Evening'.

J.C.P. Nov. 1950

The Poet Raper Visits Littleton Powys (Summer 1942)

In July I met Mr. Littleton Powys for the first time, and I describe the meeting fully, since it was for me, an historic occasion. He had expressed a wish to see me and have a talk about my poem 'The River', and accordingly I went to his cottage on a fine Sunday morning. I found Priestlands without difficulty and his house also, since he had told me that 'the name is written upon a little wicket gate'.

I stood on his door step for approximately fifteen minutes, ringing the door bell at intervals of two minutes, and listening to the sound of tea cups , spoons and conversation issuing from the room. I was far too scared to go in and knock at the inside door, but merely stood, hot, and fingering my hat and tie until it should please him to hear my ring.

At last, to my infinite relief, the door was opened and he came out; he was a tall, large man, with thick, white hair, and a kindly red face. Extending an enormous hand he shook mine with warmth and said 'Ah, so you've crawled up to see me in my house', with the voice of one who means every word of what he says, and has underscored half of them for emphasis. 'Have you had tea?' he continued. 'No Sir.' 'We have', said Mr. Powys, and taking me by the shoulder, conducted me into his sitting room, where his sister, a frail, rather intent-looking lady, was sitting. 'This', announced Mr. Powys, 'is our poet, Raper. Raper, this is my sister.' She shook hands with me and said, 'I was so thrilled by your poem, as children we knew the country so well.'

We cleared away the tea things together, so that then we can have a long full talk about your poem', said Mr. Powys. Eventually all was ready, and he and I repaired to the sitting room, and sat on the sofa for the 'long, full, talk'.

It is certainly not my intention to describe in full the remarks that he made about me, for all that was far too complimentary to make repetition of interest to any third party: but his manner, his fullness of spirit and his obvious sincerity merit a more accurate description than I can give. So much I learned however. That he liked my poem because its theme was the love of England, and the timelessness of all beauty. All this was emphasised by a series of paralysing

thumps on my right knee and a most terrific delight in everything that he said and heard. Did I realise that the metre was that of 'In Memoriam'? No, I did not. Well that was simply marvellous and he really must make a note of it. 'Oh, you blessed, blessed boy' (all this was to the accompaniment of thumps). I really was wonderfully lucky to have this gift - this marvellous gift of loving nature. He really would have to tell his friend Redwood Anderson all about it.

There was nothing antiquated about him, except the whiteness of his hair, which fell in thick manes on either side of his head. His bright eyes were on me continuously, smiling with assent to everything that I said. The notes of 'my old brother Jonathan; that's his photograph on the mantlepiece' figured very largely. The notes were in the form of an enormously long letter, written in little bunches of words from the top left to the bottom exclamations and side lines in Greek, Welsh, country dialect and Powysian panegyrics. The whole was written in a half legible scrawl with large portions written vertically, or added above by means of arrows. Much of what he said I could not absorb, owing to my total astonishment that anyone could like my poem so much. I really was amazed, and although I never bored my friends with long accounts of what he read, when I eventually returned to the house, I was far from believing what Brother Jonathan said. Littleton seemed to fondle each line of his brother's letter and retailed it to me with a smile in which awe and mysterious delight were mingled.

Courtesy of Timothy Rogers

Two Letters from Littleton Summoning Another Poet

June 22 1944

My Dear Rogers,

I congratulate you on your excellent poem which in my brother's opinion was the best. I am looking forward to showing you his comments on it and also those of Redwood Anderson who probably knows more about English poetry than anyone else in the country. I also want to tell you my own thoughts about it.

Now when can you come and see me? I am free any evening at 6.30 next week except Monday and Saturday.

I am yours sincerely

Littleton C. Powys

July 18 1944

My Dear Rogers,

Raper tells me that Saturday next is the best day for our symposium. So will you come at 4pm. on that day and come prepared to read your poem as well as you can to the other two competitors. Then after tea we read poems of from 30 to 50 lines in length to each other – our favourite poems, so please be ready to do that. We should have a pleasant time.

Yrs. Ever

Littleton C. Powys

John Cowper Powys's Adjudication of 'Home' by Timothy Rogers

In a diary entry for 22 May 1942 , John Cowper writes: 'Have spent 3 days on my long letter to old Littleton about adjudication 'Dyfarmad' of the Sherborne Prize Poem.' He is referring to an assessment of the poems of two years earlier. His comments on the poem written in 1944, which follow, run to fifteen pages and have been considerably shortened for publication.

This poem is planned out most beautifully and effectively with Prelude – Narration – Conclusion. Both the prelude and conclusion prove this poet's sincerity and honesty by his power of revealing, facing and analysing, his own disillusionments and pessimistic moods, and dark and sombre misgivings. This is the true sign. This is one aspect of the one thing needful in poetry i.e. to be true to – no! not to 'The Truth' in any objective sense – but to the poet's own impression of 'the truth'. In other words – poetry is the art of knowing yourself a perfect example of which is Wordsworth's 'Intimations' – in some ways a very sad poem.

It is right and proper for a poet to catch out of the air the psychic vibrations of the spirit of the time; and T.R. does this in the sadder & more sardonic notes of his Prelude and Conclusion. But as the poet has a right to be obscurely sad and sardonic – As a reader I also have the right to confess that though I catch the general drift of the 'Stone poplars' and the 'broad-hemmed highway' compared with the 'petty paths' – (I do not quite like the petty paths of youth – somehow they do not seem exactly 'petty' when you are young – and are older people's worries less 'petty'?) ...

It is when T.R. comes to his descriptions that I follow him & fall in with his mood and am completely carried away by the vivid & most realistic vignettes he conjures up – full of direct impact and the fresh living shock of his own impressions of certain scenes. ... Tho' I have to accept T.R.'s honest word for his own memories – Mine of my childhood are much more like what he says is a 'brochure for a tour' and what misses the 'pith point & core'. For I do not at all agree, my childhood was impressed, and in Weymouth too, by things much more like T.R.'s brochure than this 'other' world of enchanted castles and dreamy lakes. I got those when I was read to. ... My 'dreaming lake' was quite spoilt by what I threw into it!

But all this only shows what a real advance T.R. has made for now I quarrel with his memories as against mine, his vision as against mine as one grown up writer to another. I was far happier as a boy than as a child, far happier as a young man than a boy, far happier as an old man than as a young man!! But it proves T.R. to be a real poet that he has roused all these feelings and memories. May he do so with others both old and young!

Well, There it is! I do not find that my adjudication (to use our Welsh Eisteddfod word) quite coincides with that of my brother; but there it is. And as it ought to be, so it has to be, so it must be between devoted lovers of poetry. To my

thinking the first prize ought to go to Rogers. I regard his poem as far more poetical far more original and far more beautiful than either Raper's or Ardlagh's, and it appears to me to be entirely free from the inexplicable conventionality that falls upon that rare poet, Raper, not long after his incomparable opening. I consider Raper's lines at the beginning to be the best in all these poems; but 'ailinon! ailinon!' Some fatal madragora spell, some lotus-induced trance falls upon him as the poem proceeds. And Ardlagh's 'little things' strike my mind as quite as conventional, quite as much of a trick, quite as forced as the oft-repeated poetic conventions of Raper and entirely without that sweet, drowsy, seductive and easily-drifting sheuserian melody, of which Raper always possesses the secret.

But let us consider what are the three first things desirable in poetry: and I think they are all equally important, just as Rogers' 'inseparable trinity' of 'life and truth and love' are important to him (though personally my 'trinity' of ultimates would be different from his in this wider matter) in human existence. But in poetry – our present concern, though it is a bit hard to isolate it from the rest! – I cannot help feeling that Originality – Music – (including of course the most daring discords subsumed in the subtler harmonies) and Beauty (and this last, this Beauty must, I feel sure, be widened to include the most surprising & startling things, looked at from certain angles & foci & in certain perspectives.

Now let us apply these rough-and-ready tests to each of the poems; and I will begin with Rogers.

Take Rogers' opening verses. For myself I find the lilt of these verses peculiarly original and charming; and not only so. For I find the melody of them to be that rare kind of melody wherein the things alluded to - I purposely avoid the expression 'described' for I like Rogers' method much better than description – dissolve naturally and inevitably into the melody, into the words alluding to them. Each of these words is peculiarly porous to the melody used and as when a light wind passes and makes quiver some extremely light object – a drop of water, a feather, a dandelion seed, so these words are for a passing second caught floating on this scarce perceptible air as it sighs on to the next drop of water, or seed, or weft of vapours. 'And thoughts like clouds go slipping by' How excellent his use of the word 'slipping'. 'One by one in wisps of white' Here the mere look of the words 'wisps & white' in this line produce the feeling we all know so well of giving ourselves up to airy phenomina, so much lighter than any organic creature of breath and blood. And then we come to the line I regard as a pure inspiration – a line of real poetic genius – a line I would be prepared to put side by side with one of those indescribable & unsurpassable single lines of Wordsworth such as : 'Will no one tell me what she sings?' I mean the line: 'I try to touch them as they pass.' Now if I know anything of poetry I know that this is the real thing!

In the next verse may I be allowed to – tho' it isn't quite fair to Rogers - to note, that the line as typed 'And watch the drowsy bees' has been altered in the poet's

own hand to 'I watched the drowsy bees' which of course makes all the difference. I suspect that Rogers has had trouble with this verse. Even yet I have an instinct he isn't quite content with it for I think the change from 'and' to 'I' was followed by a doubt whether the bee line shouldn't be left out altogether! And for myself I think the verse would be better and more in keeping if those curst bees were left out! It's an original melody he's after – and O! he come so near, so tantalisingly near to getting an enchanting effect! – but those b—y (busy I mean) bees spoil it with their murmurs! And with the hapless rhyme with breeze.

And how true to what we always are seeing and so few poets note are: 'The fields green, yellow, brown Squared upon the folding hills' and then I like the walls and chimneys 'lost upon this tapestry'. ... Then this perfectly enchanting verse – 'I think of all the secret ways By God mersham and Olantigh When love went dancing down the days' – and how excellent – how perfectly in keeping - is the repetition of 'clouds like thoughts' & the 'wisps of white'. ...

O how good this is as poetry! The particular way our poet leads us from Dorset to – is it Kent? I am as unsure over counties as I am whether Virgil comes after Theocritus! If ever a poet was sincere down to the bottom of his feelings this poet is sincere. You can see it in the very blunders stumbles and tumbles he gets into; as he hurries and scampers and rushes like Wordsworth's hare in the Leech-gatherer, or what he persistently calls by that ridiculous & ponderous & absurd title 'Resolution and Independence' . ...

But O how good is this question – 'Is it the whisper of the breeze?' This is the secret of this inspired poem! For – and who knows it if not I? – and who knows it if not my brother? And who knows it if not half the boys who've set out for generations down the Digby Road to the Railway Station? – for this poem 'Home' conveys in its curiously original metre with that strange effect of the long long long delayed rhymes the effect, not of sobbing exactly, but rather the feeling of tears at the back of the eyeballs. And could anything be more proper to the burden of: 'If I forget thee O Jerusalem may my right hand' etc. than this sudden question: 'What is it that calls me now? Is it the distant creeping train?' ...

Consider – (I feel like a Barrister with a Brief for this Poet at the Bar!) the theme 'Home' – Now what after all is the most romantic and poetical essence of this subject Home? What beyond all niceness and cosiness and comfort and sweet love and quaint memories and delicious 'little things' & touching vignettes of our parents' lives – is the real innermost reality of what 'Home' means to all men and all women of all ages and all boys and all girls and all children and all babies! 'The longing to get back'! – Ask any soldier any sailor any traveller any colonist any pioneer any school boy or school girl – and ask those black embodiments of the human heart the African Negroes of America whose ancestors were slaves. 'Home' to them is more than 'a place', and yet it is a place! It is, so to say more than Africa – more than America – more than Kent with the Medway or the meadows etc. It is the longing or the 'hiraeth' for what American Darkies call

'some place else' Very well! – if once you – (i.e. the judge and the jury in this Case of the Poets allow that this deep nostalgia of the human soul – from the souls of Popes to those of black babies and from the souls of Prime Ministers to those of yellow waifs and strays is the crux of the magic of the word home. What would a poet naturally think of at once when this syllable 'Home is uttered but a Railway Train? And yet only Rogers of all the three has touched this deepest string, a string far beyond all the 'little things' (so tender and loving) yes, and beyond our childish bed and this or that memory of the family – a string almost impersonal – beyond all families (as all real poetry is) because it is at once particular and universal.

Readers will be surprised, perhaps disappointed, to learn that despite all JCP's enthusiasm Timothy Rogers' poem 'Home' did not win the prize.

Letters to the Editor

A letter from Jacqueline Peltier

Simply because of my admiration for the work of John Cowper Powys and my resulting interest in his intellectual and literary environment, I joined The Powys Society in 1983 and have now been an ordinary member for almost 18 years. I have contributed what I could to the recognition of JCP's literary status, and continue to do so.

Having personally no taste for administration and organisation, and doubtless no particular ability, I have never had any desire to become a Committee Member or an Officer of the Society. I recognise of course that the Society needs people with the appropriate skills, and am indeed grateful to all those who have come forward over the years for contributing their time and energy.

A renowned clinician in the field of hematology once wrote 'The ideal hospital is a hospital without patients', and went on to explain tongue in cheek that patients are always responsible for the problems which arise, and that indeed hospitals could be run far more efficiently with no budget overruns or sudden crises if there were no patients! He called this the 'administrative temptation'.

I say this to remind the Officers and the Committee that likewise the Society only exists because there are ordinary members. When they put themselves forward, they themselves voluntarily proposed and accepted that we, that we, the ordinary members would place them in the positions they hold, not for their personal satisfaction, but as our servants, public servants, to organise and administer the Society with the overriding aim of promoting 'public education and public recognition of the writings, thought and contribution to the arts of the Powys family, particularly of John Cowper, Theodore and Llewelyn, and also

including the other members of the family and their close associates'.

My experience of relations with the Committee and Officers over the past year or so leaves me with the impression that at times they have been in danger of forgetting this, and of forgetting that ordinary members are also human beings as are patients in a hospital, and have a right to due respect and consideration even from the Officers of the Society, their servants, and even if at times they unwittingly appear to complicate the administration and organisation of the Society.

The 'Resolution' in newsletter 41 was published one week after the Committee had been formally advised that it was based upon at least two false assertions. This shows a complete lack of respect and consideration for me. Furthermore, I do not think that ordinary members have given the Committee any latitude to publish false statements in our Newsletter when attempting to slap down an ordinary member.

For the record, as pointed out 24 November to the Committee: nothing I wrote in my correspondence with John Batten contested his right to refuse any publication, nor criticised him for any such refusal. My circular cannot therefore be construed as casting any slur on John for those reasons, as claimed in the 'Resolution'. I challenged the Committee 12 December to substantiate their grave accusation against me, and am still waiting.

Back in October, I proposed reconciliation to the Committee, they responded with their flawed 'Resolution'. This response is the last time I will refer to the whole affair if the Committee does the same. I have no more time to waste if my position is still not understood.

Jacqueline Peltier

Nothing further to this letter will be published. Ed.

News of Francis and Kathleen Feather

Greetings from Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

More particularly from No. 4, 5th St. West, Suburbs – the home of Kathleen and Francis Feather, where the permanent guest, the bronze head of JCP, looks down on all the comings and goings in the lounge. They miss the Conferences very much but now Francis is approaching 93 and Kathleen 89 it is becoming more and more difficult for them to be active in any of the organisations they belonged to.

Despite the turmoil in the agricultural sector and very serious economic crisis the country faces, both closely watched by Francis who has a small circle of friends who share his interest in social credit which he still considers the answer to the country's problems, Francis and Kathleen lead a quiet life. They still keep to English times, rising at 8.30 or so and are to be found breakfasting at 9.30 by which time most people have already done a day's work. Then it is time to relax on the stoep (verandah) of their Colonial style home, built, as it happened, the same

year as their home in Westcliff, where life does not start until the crossword in the daily (two minute wonder) newspaper has been completed. They are fortunate that Ever, who came with the house, is there to do the daily chores.

Their house is situated in very neat grounds, cared for by the oldest son of my house chap who has been with me since I started the migration of the family 30 years ago. It is also very conveniently situated, half way to town for me. They lost their labrador last year which is rather disastrous as it was immediately after that that the house was entered, in day time, by persons unknown who took their prized canteen of cutlery, a wedding present from Francis' Mother 64 years ago! a microwave and various other domestic appliances. This instance unsettled them considerably particularly as the Police, who have a post not 200 metres away, were alerted and were coming in 15 minutes but to date have not arrived! They realised how law and order was being affected and it was then that they wanted to consider re-locating, to Dorchester! It would be ideal for them to have another dog but it would be difficult for them at their ages to train one to their ways. The SPCA has a great many at this particular time as so many people are leaving the country. My son and his new wife will be off too in March to make their fortune in England! We cannot complain as we did the same in reverse for virtually the same reasons.

Last year (2000), Francis had a pretty painful time. He had wanted to see the sea again so, in March, I took them by air to Cape Town and then we went to flats in Hermanus overlooking the sea. The first day there Francis decided to see the view from the back of the flats and was dazzled by the brightness and unaware of 2 steps so he had to be taken to hospital and the verdict was several ribs broken! Naturally that spoilt the benefit he could have gained from the pure air and wonderful scenery. He did not let this stand in his way too much. We had to hire a wheelchair which made life easier as both he and Kathleen needed such an aid.

Having recovered from that, Kathleen now uses a wheelchair for support around the house and sits in it when the need arises, unfortunately, one day in August, this was in such a position that Francis tripped over it and broke his leg! He was immediately hospitalised and his hip replaced. He remained in hospital, often hallucinating, but was returned home after about 10 days and with the assistance of Nurse-Aides day and night for a few weeks and a physio who came to the house at regular intervals he returned to his feet and now zooms around the house with his walking frame. He is still not going out very much but when he does he manages with an elbow crutch. He is concerned that he has tunnel vision after cataract operations and his hearing-aid is anything but satisfactory but he manages to muddle along. He is quite convinced he will live to 100 and this is quite probable.

I went to the market today and have not seen so much waste before which, I think, is a clear indication that people just cannot afford vegetables any more and cannot afford bus fares to get to the market. Bread has gone up to $20 a loaf, still

pretty cheap in your terms. A chap bought a tiny piece of meat yesterday for $55 and said he had 4 children at home to feed! We have just come across a sort of colony of 20 old people, mostly blind, who are living in a little stone built farmhouse where the water has been cut off and they have no electricity. The two ladies who are stronger than the others have to walk to the river for water. They had had no food for 2 weeks when we took them some basics. They are generously given $60 each per month when social welfare has any money available, meanwhile the so-called war vets were awarded an increase from $2,000 per month to $5,000 per month for disrupting elections, farm work and killing farmers etc. etc. What a world we live in.

Many mornings find Kathleen at her computer writing to her many contacts, mostly family, all over the world and Francis will be dealing with his financial matters or correspondence and this takes their full attention. He complains that these things take him far longer than they should! Also financial matters are becoming very difficult to cope with as Banks are charging commissions for dealing with foreign moneys and some shops want to charge extra for the use of the Visa card and also limit the amount of a transaction even from one account to another! The prices of everything rise by the day, the folks are fortunate to have their funds UK based as they benefit whenever our currency goes down. One can get up to $110 for GBP1 and we used to be on a par.

In December Francis had trouble with teeth, the few remaining ones, and found himself without teeth at Christmas which was very distressing for him but we managed to get things sorted out for him so that he felt comfortable at my son's wedding in January. Kathleen is not driving very much these days and the highlight of the week is when either my Sister-in-law or I take her for the Pensioners' day shopping at our nearest shopping centre. Francis we have to take more often to the Bank, a special branch where a few customers get personal attention and they make a great fuss of him.

The family feels that the house is getting too big for them now and costs of maintenance and rates, water etc. are all rising with alarming regularity but it is a matter of housing those books! Despite a large number having gone to Dorchester the collection remains large with the odd catalogue, magazine, and particularly Folio volume arriving the reduction of that library remains a problem. Despite an emphasis on books and reading in the country, there is little or no appreciation of books such as that collection and its value here is nil!

Today I look out on brilliant bougainvillaeas and a few late jacaranda blooms, the sky is blue without a cloud, there is peace and quiet with the odd bird trilling and one wonders how things can be so bad in this country. We are just so lucky that our lives have not been personally touched by any of the many horrors being perpetrated by ignorant people. Francis is doing his best to make people think for themselves and analyse events but his efforts are a drop in the ocean.

Juliet Rickwood (Older daughter)

Mr. Weston and the Girl in the Green Hat
A Reminiscence from Francis Feather

I was born in Woodford, Essex in April 1908, but received my secondary education at Tonbridge School, Kent, which I entered in the summer of 1922. At about this time, I cannot remember when, the family moved to Old Bexley, Kent, making the journey from home to school so much easier. On leaving school in 1927 I was immediately articled in my father's firm of chartered accountants in Great Tower Street, London – remuneration 10 shillings per week and a £5 note at Christmas, rising from £30 to £60 per annum, plus the Christmas £5 note during the five years. That being the situation my father paid my railway fares and I travelled first-class with him. This enabled me to prepare for my professional examinations in comfort.

Trains from Bexley disgorged their passengers at London Bridge and either Cannon Street or Charing Cross, both being terminal stations. Cannon Street was the more accessible for Great Tower Street. During the rush hour arrivals and departures were continuous and the combined crowds enormous. Again, I don't remember when and I have never been able to keep a diary, but it must have been late in 1928 that I suddenly became aware of a green hat bobbing about in this vast crowd and was overpowered by the fantastic certainty that the wearer and I had been together before and that I had to effect a reunion.

During the period that followed, sometimes I saw the green hat and sometimes I didn't. Attempts to follow it were always unsuccessful and it was some weeks before I was able to set eyes on the wearer; and a considerable time before I discovered that she lived at Sidcup, right next to Old Bexley.

For five years I had had virtually no contact with girls other than daughters of my father's friends, and in any event I had quite early on, resolved not to have any associations or outside interests until my examinations were behind me and I had an established career. That was not an easy resolution to abide by, particularly since she obviously worked somewhere close to Great Tower Street as frequently if I left my office to post a letter she would be using the same pillar box. I did not attempt any approach until I had presented myself for my final exam – but I did check a particular finger on her left hand whenever opportunity allowed.

Lunchtime should have held possibilities, but were a complete failure. Later I learned that she took sandwiches to town with her every day. So after a hurried lunch by myself (price sixpence) since my main interest was anything to do with books – typography, binding, paper, content – I was off to a branch of Stonehams outside Fenchurch Street Station where the manager welcomed youthful browsers, so long as they treated the books well.

At this time Elkin Matthews and Marrots were publishing eighteen small volumes by eminent short-story writers of the time, printed by a Scottish printer in different named fonts. Each was limited to five hundred and thirty copies,

numbered and signed, publication beginning in 1928. The second was by a writer of whom I had never heard and in a font (imprint shadow) unknown to me, *The Dewpond* by T. F. Powys. I was so struck by the story and particularly by the style in which it was written that I ordered the entire set! Not only that, I asked the manager if he had anything else by this author. By chance *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* had been issued in November 1927 and he had a copy on his shelves. I think the price was 15*s*, but I strained my finances to the utmost so that it no longer remained there. I was bewitched by the clarity of the prose and the sheer originality of the allegorical content that I had to recommend it to all and sundry. That included a fellow browser who insisted that he was unable to buy a copy because he had just purchased a book by George Moore for 30*s*.

In my enthusiasm I said I would lend him my copy, what was his name and where did he work? The next day I duly brought 'Mr Weston' to town and in the lunch hour sought out his office, which was quite close; climbed the stairs, entered the appropriate office, knocked on the 'enquires' panel, which was duly opened by The Girl in the Green Hat !!

Quite demurely she showed me into the browser's office, where I handed him the volume and asked him to introduce me to the young lady who had shown me in. So began an association of over seventy years of sheer happiness with a sixty-fifth wedding anniversary due in June. Had I acted in the late twentieth century as I had in its twenties I might have found myself in prison for STALKING.

I have no doubt that the very volume, through which Theodore indirectly and unwittingly brought about an introduction which must have led to more long-lasting happiness than all the copies of all his books put together, is now part of the Feather Gift in the Dorset County Museum. Kathleen added the following footnote to the story in a recent letter: 'I have one regret and that is that although it was one of his greatest desires Francis never met T.F. personally. He was invited, courtesy of Charles Lahr, to spend a week-end with T.F. at the time when he was studying for his C.A. finals and about to sit his exams so he passed the invitation to a friend and the opportunity never came up again. That friend happened to be the one to whom he lent the copy of Mr. Weston.' Ed.

The Ways of Providence
by Llewelyn Powys

When I was a boy a sensation was caused in the neighbourhood of my home by a thunderbolt which happened to fall on the top of the church tower of the village of Norton-Sub-Hamdon. Norton church offers a fine example of one of those graceful Ham Hill stone towers in the perpendicular style that are typical of the villages in this part of Somerset. The tower was struck on the night of July 29,

1894. The thunderbolt made its hit in the centre of the little square of lead, so that fortunately the main body of the building was left unhurt, only the tower being damaged, blazing from top to bottom like a chimney stack, the outer shell, except for slight traces of an oven-colouring on some of its stones, remaining today as beautiful as ever. The inside of the tower was, however, completely gutted, and the awe-struck village people, awakened from sleep by this appalling visitation and gathering in the body of the church, were privileged to watch their beloved bells – signa-bell and sancta-bell, bells that for centuries had summoned them to daily prayers, to the merry-making on the September Feast Day of the Blessed Virgin, to bridal beds and to their clay-cold Somerset graves – come tumbling down from the belfry to the ground one after the other in huge, quicksilver-like masses of silent melted metal.

I can recall only one attempt being made to reconcile this magnificent manifestation of divine violence with the theological conceptions then current in the locality. Norton was suspected of inclining towards ritualistic practices, and it was rumoured that a Montacute dissenter who happened for some unexplained reason to be at the top of an apple tree at that late hour had observed this missile of God's wrath to hesitate over the tower of my father's church at Montacute and then the next moment to continue westward over Ham Hill in the direction of the more mischievous building. How many are the foolish human preconceptions that may be directly attributed to the anthropocentric reasoning natural to our race! As inevitably as we are born with navels, are we born into the world with an instinctive mistrust of every form of objective reasoning. Just as each individual all through his life calls Ego! Ego! Ego! like a gaping chick hungry for poultry-sop, so the reasoning of the whole race of Homo Sapiens has been falsified by this same self-centred skin-for-skin bias. Our round noddles resemble toys provided with a balance of lead to ensure that they always return to the same position. At all cost we must be at the centre of the mystery play. This is the universal axiom that must be granted to all human cogitating. And yet the very dunghill worms might with equal good sense present claims as audacious. This propagating tribe of blind serpents, though ordained to creep in so lowly a fashion on their bellies, in the passing of the centuries level mountains, raise valleys, obliterate the relics of old cities, and in fact alter the earth's face far more permanently than we with our peevish engines have been able to do. The conqueror worm was before us, and will be continuing his blameless method of life long after our own tale of fear and fury is utterly forgot. Without some such reference to introverted obsessions it would be difficult to explain how it comes about that the majority of people still believe in God's paternal interest in the world's affairs. There exist such numberless household reasons that go to show that, if there is such a being at all, he has neither care nor scruple for what is happening on the earth. And yet see how the clergy stoop over our corpses, looking like so many marabou storks, with grave heads nodding and white wings flapping, attempting as best they may to give our

accidental, inconsequential deaths some pattern of providence.

In reality we all, men women and children, fall without notice as apples in an autumn orchard. Theologians dodge this difficult question. As they slip their cassocks over their pinched ears before sacristy mirrors they invent fresh quibbles to explain the mystery of suffering and the mystery of evil. The truth is, suffering is a simple fact of existence, like water, grass and the sun and moon, and it is only when juxtaposed against absurd church fancies that the cry of mystery has to be raised at all. Ferocity and suffering are as coincident to life as wheat to bread. Where life is they are. Hate and love! Life is made up of these spirited ingredients, as a Twelfth Night pudding is made up of burning brandy and sultanas. God is as much present with a stoat eating out the eyes of a struggling buck-rabbit at the devil's end of winter burrow as he is with a springtime doe-rabbit rushing into the open to rescue her screaming young one, and pounding the marauder with her harmless hairy pads so shrewdly as to cause the weasel to drop its prey and move off, sore, sulky, and utterly astonished.

Of course there is no pity in the clouds. Every week, even in my village environment, I hear of villainies that utterly invalidate such a pretty hypothesis. If there exists a God, true it is that he should be 'the only penitent'.

And yet even so life is to be blessed, and not cursed. Joy holds empire over sorrow. We may lie groaning on our death-beds for weeks together, but let us not forget we have had our hours when the cowslips appeared tall and the sunlight danced on dairy-field-stickleback-streams before breakfast! Never were there created such insatiable spiritual apes as we are. Unless we are to believe that we are to live for ever and ever we are cast down. Human happiness depends upon our being able to rid our minds of the unreliable consolations of other-world religions, learning to concentrate our attention upon our practical opportunities. Little by little we must wean our interests from the popular values of an artificial civilisation and realise that the only capital a man can truly enjoy and make use of every day of his life belongs to his body – to his five senses.

How many opportunities of happy living have been sacrificed since man came to be diverted from simple natural ways. What dreary hours squandered in amassing wealth never to be used, in gratifying social ambitions in groups of people who do not possess birth, refinement, or understanding! When shall we begin to learn our elementary pot-hook lessons? They are there all day long on life's great slanting blackboard, and are not beyond the understanding of the most inattentive urchin pupil with his trouser pocket full of October chestnut 'conquerors'.

Lucretius, by far the most inspired of the Latin poets, has had so wide and deep an influence on the thought of the civilised world because of his genius for penetrating the fogs and mists of metaphysical sophistications with the clear eye of a stooping falcon. He was a man to demand a plain answer to a plain question, and his conclusions are as fresh and apposite to-day as ever:

'Herein if anyone is resolved to call the sea Neptune and the corn Ceres, and likes rather to misuse the title of Bacchus than to utter the true name of the vine juice, let us grant that he may proclaim that the world is the true Mother of the Gods, if only in very truth he forbear to stain his own mind with shameful religious awe.... And if you learn this surely and cling to it, Nature is seen, free at once, and quit of her proud rulers, doing all things of her own accord alone, without control of Gods.... Who can avail to rule the whole sum of the boundless, who to hold in his guiding hand the boundless reins of the deep, who to turn round all firmaments at once, and warm all fruitful lands with heavenly fires, or to be at all times present in all places, so as to make darkness with clouds, and shake the calm tracts of heaven with thunder, and then shoot thunderbolts, and often make havoc of his own temples, or moving away into deserts rage furiously there, plying the bolts, which often pass by the guilty and do to death the innocent and undeserving?'

From *The Literary Guide*, September 1936

New York Herald Tribune Books, Sunday June 3 1934
Correspondence

The permanent return of John Cowper Powys to his own country after something like a quarter of a century residence here, is news which many of your readers, like myself, must have received with a sharp sense of loss, mingled with good wishes for his own prospect of repatriation.

During that quarter century I suppose there have been few individuals, either foreign or native, who have left over the length and breadth of the land so vivid an impression of a personality. From San Diego to Boston and from Charleston to Seattle there is hardly a sizeable community which does not graphically recall the dramatic figure, often in a scholar's black robe, with the electric eyes, the shock of wiry hair, and the face like a highly civilised savage, which once or oftener stood on some local platform. And in an era when the lecturer, particularly the English visitor, has often been guilty of patronage, it is to be recorded with pleasure that John Cowper Powys never 'talked down' to an audience, whether in Lancaster Pa, Mount Vernon Iowa or New York city. Moreover, his listeners will testify to his particular capacity for electrifying even the most apparently familiar subjects. I have heard him speak memorably even upon Shakespeare.

For some years, doubtless happily as far as Mr. Powys is concerned, it has not been necessary for him to pursue the somewhat distressing paths of the lecturer. During this time his books have rightfully reached an enlarged audience and a change of residence is fortunately irrelevant in that department. But I have wanted here to speak for the countless individuals for whom Mr. Powys going up and down and to and fro in our land, his cultural good faith and generosity, in short, his presence here, has been cause for international gratitude.

Ferner Nuhn (Cedar Falls, Iowa)