

Editorial

John Batten's *Newsletters*, and Paul Roberts's before him, would be hard acts for anyone to follow. This editor can't pretend to their scholarship or experience in the field, but will hope to keep up the traditional balance of news, personal views, sidelights, reviews, and unpublished material by the Powyses. All suggestions will be welcome.

Re-reading 25 years-worth of past *Newsletters* – not to speak of eleven *Journals* and 30-odd *Reviews* – leaves you enlightened, entertained and very much admiring the work of the many contributors. What a wealth of interesting talents this Society has had to draw on, and how extremely sad if any of those should be lost. The hope for the *Newsletter* is that any who can will feel able to contribute again.

This number is something of a patchwork, small-scale perhaps but colourful. With thanks to all who have sent material,

Kate Kavanagh

We all hope that everyone in the Society will share news and views with the *Newsletter*. All Committee members will be consulted for the section on Committee business, and on any matters of general concern.

The Committee

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*Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society
held at Dorset County Museum
at 5 p.m. Saturday 18th August 2001*

Present The Officers and 16 members of the Society.

1 Apologies These were received from Glen Cavaliero, Janet Fouli, Sonia Lewis, Bruce Madge, Eileen Mable, and Michael Scaife d'Ingerthorpe. Parts of letters from the President Glen Cavaliero, and from Eileen Mable were read out.

2 Minutes of the AGM of 20th August 2000 These were referred to as already published in the *Newsletter* for November 2000. The minutes were duly signed.

3 Matters arising from the Minutes There were none.

4 Hon. Secretary's Report Chris Gostick the Honorary Secretary reported that since the last AGM the Committee had met on five occasions, four of them (thanks to the good offices of Bruce Madge) at the British Library. As he ranged over the details of what had been discussed at those meetings, it was clear that the year had begun badly, with many difficult issues remaining unresolved, and with the new Chairman John Williams resigning after less than three months in office. Later in the Society's year, both a planned visit to East Anglia and the annual Conference had been cancelled, and the majority of the Committee had decided that they did not wish to stand for a further term of office.

In the meantime, Griffin Beale had stepped into the breach as Acting Chairman, and it was under his leadership that the Society had resolved some outstanding difficulties, debated many issues of importance, and reached an historic agreement with the Dorset County Museum for the safe-keeping of the Powys Society Collection. It was clear from Chris Gostick's remarks that this agreement owed much to the tireless work of the Hon Curator of the Powys Society Collection, Morine Krissdottir.

Other highlights of the year had included a unanimous resolution that John and Eve Batten should become Honorary Life Members of the Society in recognition of their outstanding contribution over many years in forwarding the aims and objectives of the Society. It was thanks to John that some two dozen members of the Society had met at *The Sailor's Return* at East Chaldon on 13th August to drink a toast to Llewelyn Powys on his birthday.

Chris Gostick concluded by indicating his sadness that this would be his last report as Secretary, by thanking the retiring Officers and Committee for their warm friendship and consistent support over the years, and by wishing the Society well for the future.

5 Hon. Treasurer's Report Stephen Powys Marks referred to the publication of the accounts in the July 2001 *Newsletter*. He made a short statement addressing the account, correcting a small mistake and explaining the loss on the 2000 conference. He pointed out that the difference between breaking even and making a loss is dependent upon only 2 or 3 extra people attending. He pointed out a significant fact that the net sale of society publications amounted to around £12,500 since the

publishing programme began. His accounts were approved and signed.

6 Chairman's Report Griffin Beale, as Acting Chairman, referred to the publication of his report in th July 2001 *Newsletter*.

7 Election of New Officers Griffin Beale read out a list of the newly-elected officers and members of the committee, who take up their positions after the AGM.

These are as follows:

<i>Chairman</i>	Richard Perceval Graves
<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	David Goodway
<i>Hon. Treasurer</i>	Stephen Powys Marks
<i>Hon. Secretary</i>	Peter Foss.
<i>Committee</i>	
David Gervais	Jeff Kwintner
Timothy Hyman	Sonia Lewis
Kate Kavanagh	John Powys.

8 Appointment of Auditor Stephen Powys Marks commended the work of the society's auditor Stephen Allen, and said that he had agreed to continue. This was warmly approved.

9 2002 Conference The provisional booking for Kingston Maurward on 17th-21st August was noted, and this needed to be confirmed or otherwise by the new committee.

10 Any other business There were no questions.

11 The outgoing Acting Chairman then offered his best wishes to the new committee and officers, and invited Richard Graves to say a few words to the meeting after the formal agenda was closed. There being no other business, the meeting closed at 5.45 pm.

RPG, PJF

From the New Chairman

Dear fellow-member of The Powys Society, on taking office at the AGM on 18th August 2001 I said to those present, as I say to you now:

My friends – for I dare call anyone my friend who is the spiritual friend of John Cowper or Theodore or Llewelyn or Katie Powys – I thank the Society for the burden of office that has been temporarily entrusted to my care.

I like that word 'temporarily' – for the acceptance of any kind of office is curiously at variance with the best Powysian ideals.

Remember Owen Glendower saying to himself:



... the way of life of the first people was far wiser, far freer ... there were no princes, no rulers then, but only the men of the land, living at peace together and worshipping peaceful gods ... What is Prince? A word! And what does that word mean? Blood and ashes!

Those leaving office may therefore, as good Powysians, be happier than we who take our turn. We thank them for their years of hard work and dedication to the Society – the enthusiastic and hard-working Chris Gostick, the indomitable Morine Krissdóttir, the tireless John Batten, the shrewd and wise Griffin Beale.

I am grateful for a card from a former Chairman, who sends this message:

Dear Richard,

I could not let the occasion pass without sending you a note to wish both yourself and all of the officers and committee members of The Powys Society all best wishes for the future.

Although I am no longer able to take an active part in the work of the Society, I remain a loyal member and look forward to the developments and new projects which I am sure you all have in mind.

Good luck to you all and every success in the future

Paul Roberts

I myself make only one pledge – not just to preside over meetings and to adopt resolutions, important though those things may be – but within the Society to be your friend and counsellor; and in the wider world to be your representative and your champion.

I shall wear the burden of office proudly – but also as lightly as I can. For the burden of office, like the burden of humanity must not, in JCP's words, be allowed to press all joy, all originality, all waywardness, all interest, all imagination out of our lives.

It is not for long, at best or worst, that we know what it is to be conscious of being living children of the human race upon this strange planet.

The days pass quickly, and the seasons and the years. From the graves of the darlings of our souls there comes a voice and a cry. A voice bidding us sink into our own true selves before we too are numbered with the dead; a cry bidding us sacrifice everything before we sacrifice the prerogative of our inmost identity, the right to feel and think and dream as persons born into a high inheritance, the inheritance of the mind that has a right to question all things and to hold fast what pleases it in defiance of opinion and probability and argument.

For it is only when we suspend our judgments and leave arguing and criticising, that the quiet gods of the moonlit shores of the world murmur their secrets in our ears.

I thank you.

Richard Perceval Graves

Committee Meetings

The new Committee has met twice, on 8th September and 20th October, at Timothy Hyman's house in London. Our new chairman, Richard Perceval Graves, pursues his custom of starting with a refreshing reading, on the first occasion from *Soliloquies of a Hermit*. He especially thanked Stephen Powys Marks for providing necessary and valuable continuity by remaining as Treasurer and as technical publishing expert. He also read letters from and to Morine Krissdóttir, welcoming her agreement to stay on the advisory board of *The Powys Journal*.

It was agreed that the revision of the Constitution should be discussed at a special meeting in the new year. Kate Kavanagh was appointed *Newsletter* editor, provisionally for a year, with her stipulation that the Committee as a whole should advise on any letters to do with Society business. Richard was empowered to update the Website and relocate it through his own company to an economical (£50 p.a.) hosting service with its own Domain Name, with Joe Boulter continuing as manager. We discussed the suitability of Millfield for the 2002 conference rather than Kingston Maurward, one strong argument being expense; Llangollen still as an option for 2003; also the possibility of finding someone willing to act as conference organiser. We discussed the Collection at Dorchester, banking arrangements, and possible future publications.

On 20th October (RPG reading from *Damnable Opinions*) the choice of Millfield was confirmed. Peter Foss and Kate Kavanagh described visits to the Collection with a view to reporting on this and the Museum's plans for expansion (in the next *Newsletter*, we hope). No immediate plans were made for publications by the Society; meanwhile Jeff Kwintner urged us to support the existing 'commercial' publishers of the Powyses in the first instance. It is hoped to make a video record of the next and future conferences. It was agreed to compile a list of Powys and Powys-related works currently in print, to appear regularly in the *Newsletter*; and to study methods of bringing the Collection more fully up-to-date. Stephen Powys Marks drew attention to some special offers of publications, as listed on the enclosed leaflet.

KK

Honorary Life Memberships

At the meeting of the committee on 8th September 2001 it was unanimously agreed to confer Honorary Life Memberships of the Society upon **Belinda Humfrey** and **Gerald Pollinger** for their outstanding contribution over many years to promoting the name and works of the Powys brothers, John Cowper Powys in particular. Belinda Humfrey, it will be well known to many members,

has edited *The Powys Review* over twenty years, a periodical which contains much important original material in addition to a wide range of scholarly articles. In the case of Gerald Pollinger, the committee is aware that this is something of a re-confirmation of an honour that has been in place unofficially since the time of Prof. Wilson Knight. We are all very grateful for the work he and his firm have done for the publication of Powys material since, indeed, the 1930s.

PJF

The Powys Society Conference 2002

The Powys Society Conference for 2002 will be held from Friday 16th August to Sunday 18th August 2002 at Millfield, a Public School which stands in delightfully wooded grounds on the edge of Street in Somerset. From the cricket field there is a fine view towards Glastonbury Tor, and we intend that on the Saturday afternoon there will be an expedition to Glastonbury and an event on the Tor itself.

The Conference, marking as it does the thirtieth anniversary of the first Powys Society Conference in 1972, will concentrate as that one did upon John Cowper Powys and especially his masterpiece *A Glastonbury Romance* (first published 70 years ago in 1932). Theodore and Llewelyn will not be neglected. We are extremely fortunate that both Margaret Drabble and Colin Wilson have agreed to take part.

The inclusive cost will be a modest £95; and we are hoping for a big turnout at what we intend should be a lively, happy, stimulating and thoroughly Powysian weekend. More details will appear in our next *Newsletter*. In the meantime, please add the dates to your 2002 diary, and to give an idea of expected numbers, let us know as soon as possible if you are intending to come.

RPG

Conference Organiser

As Chairman of your Society I want everyone to feel that it is possible to contribute to the smooth running of the Society without its being a huge personal burden. With the full support of the other members of your Committee I am therefore hoping to separate out what has hitherto been just one of numerous responsibilities shared principally between Chairman and Secretary – that of planning and organising our annual conference.

The conference for 2002 is already being planned and arranged in the traditional manner; but I would like a volunteer prepared to take over this role, principally as an observer this year, but assuming responsibility for the 2003

conference as soon as possible. You would not be committing yourself to anything beyond the 2003 Conference.

What would this involve in practice?

- A. Finding possible venues in areas with some central relevance to the Society's interests, and researching costs.
- B. Reporting to the Committee with details of general costs etcetera.
- C. Visiting the venue preferred by the Committee to check on details and to make the personal acquaintance of the venue provider
- D. Liaising with the Chairman – whose principal role in the future will be to find speakers – over a proposed programme
- E. Liaising with the *Newsletter* editor to provide advance details of the Conference and in due course a booking form.
- F. Processing booking forms, which would mean keeping a detailed record of those who will be attending and passing cheques to the Treasurer for banking.
- G. Liaising with the venue provider, the Chairman and the Secretary to ensure the smooth running of the Conference.

All your expenses including travel, postage and telephone calls would be paid for by the Society and the provision of a small additional honorarium – say £100 – is currently under discussion.

The job should be a lot of fun – though like all organisational tasks it will undoubtedly have its hair-raising moments! We are already thinking of North Wales with its JCP connections as a possible venue for 2003, so it might particularly suit you if you already love that dramatically beautiful part of the world.

You would be most welcome to join the Committee almost immediately as a co-opted member – possible since we are not a full Committee at present; but it would be equally possible (if you preferred it) for you to do the work as a normal member of the Society without taking on any other responsibilities.

For ease of communication it would be essential for you to have your own e-mail address – and I would be most grateful if volunteers would e-mail me at powys@richardgraves.org as soon as possible.

RPG

Opportunity Knocks: Grand Sale of Publications

The Society has a large stock of past publications, and would like to reduce it. So we are offering a selection at real bargain prices: some you can buy two for the price of one; *Journals* are offered any three for the price of two, *Newsletters* at giveaway prices. So look at your shelves, and fill gaps: use the enclosed form.

The Powys Society Website

Wherever the Powys Website is to be found in the future, you will always be able to reach it easily because we have acquired a permanent domain name as follows:

www.powys-society.org

We apologise for the fact that the site was out-of-date for so many months earlier this year. We have gradually been getting it up-to-date, and in due course we are going to remodel the site in an effort to make it more lively.

At present any suggestions for the site should be sent in the first place to:

powys@richardgraves.org

RPG

Next Summer We will Need a New Treasurer
Please see page 44.

Llewelyn's Birthday Meeting: 13th August 2001

Many Happy Returns

The day began in a tent – a flapping, breezy, summer extension to *The Sailor's Return* in East Chaldon, where 25 society members gathered to drink Llewelyn's health on his birthday.

This annual meeting on 13th August has become associated not only with Llewelyn but also with John and Eve Batten, who discovered the clause in Llewelyn's will requesting that a toast should be drunk.

Members complied readily with this request, after which Morine Krissdóttir paid tribute to the Battens' work for the Society: 'Their endless energy, warmth and expertise in making the shyest member welcome, was soon bringing in many new members and changing the whole climate of the Society. We had some wonderful times, even if they were an incredible amount of work, especially during conference time.' Morine also thanked the retiring Secretary, Chris Gostick, for his work, and congratulated him on his success in bring the Society 'through a stressful time to its present state of equilibrium'.

Members – many of them encouragingly young – then made their way up the track past Llewelyn's home at Chydyok to the cliff top and his stone. There Chris Gostick read the entry for 29th September 1947 (published in *The Cry of a Gull*, Out of the Ark Press, 1973). This was the day when she, with Llewelyn's sisters Katie and Gertrude, had placed her husband's ashes in their final resting-place.

Gertrude, Katie and I have just got back from putting Llewelyn's ashes in the place dug by Mr Treviss, three feet deep in chalk. We climbed the stile and got over the barbed wire fence and walked through Tumbledown and

along the cliff path, Gertrude carrying a spade, Katie a fork and I a shovel. The sky was overcast with dense clouds forming a curtain, the horizon as if a silver pencil had traced a thin line all round the edge, the sea sometimes deep blue, sometimes blue-grey. Gertrude carved an ankh with a penknife on the wooden box that held a zinc box with the ashes, then she got in the grave and placed it on the floor. Katie had brought a sunflower to place on it and Gertrude boy's-love, and I ground-ivy which I associate with our walks together, and a yarrow, my wedding flower. We filled it in again and came back along the cliff picking up sticks for our fire.

And now I am once more in my familiar room I cannot disassociate Llewelyn's ashes from his death and our ride to the crematorium. The ashes of his mortal body are in that little box, but he is forever gone. On Tuesday the men will bring the stone from Portland.

As usual, a posy of flowers associated with Llewelyn had been brought by John Batten and was laid upon the stone. Members then made their way back – by longer or shorter routes – to *The Sailor's Return*. And, again as usual, they were generously given a farewell gift of honey by Gerald Redman. Despite the uncertain weather, this was a most enjoyable event.

Judith Stinton

Everyone must join in wishing many happy returns of this by now traditional occasion, and of the Battens who with Chris Gostick and others have organised the walks with readings at Powys sites enjoyed by many members over the years.

KK

Judith Stinton is the author of Chaldon Herring: The Powys Circle in a Dorset Village (Boydell Press, 1988). She works at the Dorset County Museum, part-time in charge of the Powys Collection.

News from Elsewhere, News of Boooks

From America Nicholas Birns describes the Powys Conference that took place last May in New York.

The 'Powys and the Canon' conference held at the **Marriott World Trade Center**, New York, on 11th May 2001, concentrated on this question, 'Will John Cowper Powys ever be part of the canon?' Books are reissued, articles are written – but will he ever be read as the other 'modern masters' are read?

The conference was small (about ten people) but extraordinarily stimulating: as one attendee noted, it was perhaps the smallest possible gathering of people

that could still comprise a satisfactory 'conference'. The intimate atmosphere provided for easy conversation, so the talks mentioned below should not be imagined as staid lectures but as expositions, interchanges, conversations.

After a sumptuous continental breakfast, we were started off by **Kate Nash** of the University of Virginia, whose talk, "'Pure Romance" and Eroticism in *A Glastonbury Romance*', not only shed light on the generic and emotional dynamics of Powys's novel but, like so many of the papers, could serve as a springboard for reconsiderations of the novel form itself, and the canonicity of that form – questions which the anomalous nature of Powys's work solicits.

That astonishing polymath, **Peter Christensen** of Cardinal Stritch University, then spoke on 'Frustrated Narration in *The Brazen Head*'; here, one of the less canonical works in Powys's still-uncanonical canon was given new and enlightening scrutiny. **Patrick Couch** of University of Stockholm spoke on 'Love's Labour Lost: John Cowper Powys's Phenomenology of Agape'. Couch's dense and rich paper raised the question of whether pursuing Powys's canonical status was a kind of category error, as Powys wrote for himself, not for a general literary audience, and his work is more concerned with questions of 'first philosophy' in both the Platonic and Christian senses than with more social arenas.

The poet and actress **Carol Ann Brammer** then gave a reading of passages from *Wolf Solent*; hearing Powys's language spoken by a skilled performer leavened the academic atmosphere considerably and also brought us into more direct contact with Powys's aural rhythms. This was followed by a playing of an audiotope of reminiscences of **Albert Krick**, Powys's neighbour in Columbia County in the late 1920s; the tape was made in 1980; Krick, who took ill a few years later, has by now died, but his widow is still alive, a nonagenarian. (This information was provided to me by PSNA member **Eddie Jenkins**, who, though he could not come to the conference, was of invaluable assistance in helping me organize it.)

An Italian buffet lunch with antipasto, meat, and pasta dishes, and dessert, was served graciously by the hospitable Marriott staff (of whom, the sensitive reader discerns, more later). After lunch, **Larry Millman**, author of a fine article on Powys in a 2000 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, spoke on 'A Writer's View of John Cowper Powys'. Millman, a Powys fan since the late 1960s, spoke wittily and engagingly about his meetings with Phyllis Playter and others who had known Powys, and the effect Powys has had on his own vision as well as the often-neglected practicalities of the literary marketplace. Millman's talk was followed by the keynote speaker, **Robert Caserio** of Temple University, whose topic was 'Sex and Politics in *A Glastonbury Romance*'. Caserio, very valuably, showed how celebrations of Powys's pluralism and inclusivity towards the marginal should not be conducted in an overly euphoric vein, as Powys's works survey social and psychological disjunctures whose full comprehension demands an acknowledg-

ment of the sometimes insuperable differences between them. **Richard Maxwell** of Valparaiso University responded to Caserio's talk. Maxwell, who is working on an ambitious and intriguing book on the historical novel in which Powys's work plays a key role, raised again the question of Powys's relation to the genres of the historical novel and the novel itself.

Our final talk, given by **Brian Glavey**, University of Virginia, also considered how Powys's works address the idea of 'character' in the novel. 'Novel Personalities: Epistemology and the Aesthetic of Personality in *A Glastonbury Romance*' also addressed the relationship of Powys to what might be termed 'anti-subjective modernism' ('spatial form', anti-progressivism, and so on). Glavey, Nash, and Couch are all graduate students, which gives us great hope for the future of Powys studies. A concluding roundtable, including **Constance Harsh** of Colgate University and **J. Lawrence Mitchell** of Texas A&M University, ranged freely over Powys's reputation, how much of his work would ever or should ever be in print, and what he had to offer the contemporary reader.

The conference left all Powysian gathered there with a sense of satisfaction, if not quite the euphoria spoken of by Powys in the memorable passage from the last chapter of *Wolf Solent*:

What he longed to do was to plunge his own hands into this Saturnian gold, and to pour it out [...] All ... all ... all would reveal some unspeakable beauty, if only some Saturnian gold were sprinkled upon them!

'Ripeness is All'

The following morning, some of us met outside the Marriott and walked up the West Side of Manhattan to Greenwich Village, where we toured the five residences of John Cowper Powys in Greenwich Village. Patchin Place still looks largely as it did in Powys's day, though far more upper-class in tone; the ailanthus tree he spoke of in *Autobiography* is still there. His other major residence, 12 West 12th St, is now a Presbyterian parish hall, but I still feel a Powysian aura when I walk by there nearly every day to go to teach at my university.

The fellowship and good feeling of the conference, of course, now necessitates a tragic coda. The Marriott World Trade Center – a splendid, sumptuous, hypermodern if not postmodern edifice, replete with several restaurants and numerous facilities, soaring over twenty stories – was reduced to rubble some short months later on September 11th. All of the hotel's employees were evacuated safely – including those who had so graciously helped us with organizing the conference. Mirroring, though, the contours of the larger tragedy and the valour of the New York police and fire departments, two managers who had gone back in the hotel to make sure everybody else has gotten out are now among the mourned. Powys would have cried on hearing of the September 11th tragedy, all the more because it had shown the gleaming towers of modern

architecture as vulnerable and frangible, not all-conquering or holding the power to render everything smaller than them to oblivion. No one who wrote the powerful passage at the end of *A Glastonbury Romance* could fail to grasp the depth of the destructive malice of the terrorists who committed this vile deed, nor the sheer unpredictability of human circumstance at which this disaster once again compels us to wonder.

No man has seen Our Lady of the Turrets as She moves over the land, from twilight to twilight; but these "topless towers" of hers are the birth-cries of occult gestation raised up in defiance of Matter, in defiance of Fate, and in defiance of cruel knowledge and despairing wisdom.

Men may deride them, deny them, tear them down. They may drive their engines through the ruins of Glastonbury and their airplanes over the Stones of Stonehenge.

Still in the strength of the Unknown Dimension the secret of these places is carried forward to the unborn, their oracles to our children's children.

Now the World Trade Center is itself more ruined than Glastonbury ever was, or will be.

Nicholas Birns

Nicholas Birns is Secretary of the Powys Society of North America.

From Sweden *Lars Gustaf Andersson writes with news from the new Swedish JCP Society:*

We have around 50 members, most of them live in Stockholm (but some, like myself, in southern Sweden, in Lund). The nucleus of our society is of course our 'founding father' Sven-Erik Täckmark, who in spite of old age continues to read and write. Last winter he and Gunnar Lundin finished their translation of *A Philosophy of Solitude*, and we are now hoping to publish that.

Our *Newsletter* No 3 is now ready for printing. It will contain a long essay on *Autobiography* by Professor Ingemar Algulin (former professor of comparative literature in Stockholm, and one of the first to write about JCP in Sweden. We also have public lectures. I hope that some of the Swedish PhD candidates working on JCP-related dissertations will write for us, although we do not want the Swedish JCP Society to be an academic or scholarly organization. It will always be open for every reader and lover of JCP.

Mark Boseley has produced Walking in the Creative Life of John Cowper Powys, a thesis (from Sweden) rich in quotation from the Diaries.

From France The first number of *La Lettre Powysienne* edited by Jaqueline Peltier, with an inaugural letter from Sven-Erik Täckmark, contains an unpublished letter from JCP to Sven-Erik; short articles (in French, some with English

translations) by Elmar Schenkel (on JCP in Germany); Catherine Lieutenant (*Rabelais*); Michel Jestin (from the rocks of Brittany); Robert Carrington (Sylvanus Cobbold); Gunnar Lundin (*A Philosophy of Solitude*); Isabelle Schmitt (from Burgundy, author of a thesis on *Wood and Stone*); a list of Powys titles available in French; and useful Internet information. Recent news of French publications includes *Dostoevski* (Editions Bartillat 2001), with a 'long and passionate' introduction by Marc-Edouard Nabe; and theses in progress from the universities of Paris and of Saint Etienne.

A review of *Esprit-Frères*, a selection of JCP's letters in translation published in France by Editions Jose Corti, will appear in the next *Newsletter*.

Also from France, stories by JCP and TFP will be published by the Institut Méditerranéen pour la Culture with Librairie Elisabeth Brunet.

In **Croatia** *Psychoanalysis and Morality* (JCP 1923) will be published (in translation?) by Jesenki and Turk.

The **German** mail order publisher Zweitausendeins is bringing out translations of five of JCP's philosophies: *The Meaning of Culture* (already issued), *In Defense of Sensuality*, *In Spite Of* (due October 2001), *The Art of Growing Old* and *The Art of Happiness* (December 2001). They are also reissuing *Weymouth Sands* in the edition first published by Hanser Verlag in 1999.

★

A translation of Llewelyn Powys into German, from 'Diary of a Consumptive', is in *Davoser Revue* LXXV No 2 (June 2000), 23–7; as is 'Llewelyn Powys in Clavadel' by Peter J. Foss (17–22, in English, illustrated). Two more articles by Peter Foss based on 'Diary of a Consumptive', in English and French (illustrated), are in *Ecrivains découvreurs de montagne*, cahier 3: 'Littérature de Sanatorium' (2000). Peter Foss's article about Llewelyn in Arosa, 'Tackling the Furka', is due out in the American *Powys Notes* this winter.

A new collection of **Llewelyn Powys essays**, *Wessex Memories* – the first new collection since 1947 – is to be published by Sansom & Co. in the new year. The *Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys* is now complete and under offer of publication. It is a book of similar size to Dante Thomas's bibliography of JCP, and lists much previously unknown material. Peter Foss has also written the memoir of Llewelyn Powys for *The New Dictionary of National Biography* (scheduled for 2004) – the first time that Llewelyn Powys will have appeared in the DNB.

★

Brynmill Press continue their plans for new collections from TFP, with a second volume of stories in the offing and two volumes of Selected Early Works on the agenda.

★

From the Aether ...

Joe Boulter our Website manager writes:

The Powyses on the Internet

There is a large amount of interesting material on the Powyses and their work available on the Internet, both formal and informal, and not just things to read, but discussion groups to join, virtual tours to take, and audio to listen to.

Here is a list of the Powys Internet resources we know about:

www.powys-society.org – this is the new address for the official website of the Powys Society. You can reach all the other sites listed here from this site.

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/Powys – this is the website for an e-mail forum designed to promote online discussion of the Powyses and their work. By going to the site, you can join the forum, after which you will be able to send e-mails to and receive e-mails from all the other members.

www.powys-lannion.net/index.htm – this is Jacqueline Peltier's Powys website. Here, you can find lots of excellent things to read (one example: a list of the Powys's works which are in print in France), see (a virtual visit to Weymouth Sands), and hear (a piece about John Cowper Powys on the Today programme).

www.home.iae.nl/users/tklijn/Index.htm – this is the address of Thieu Klijn's website about the Powys family. Thieu originally conceived and designed the Society's website.

www.alumni.caltech.edu/~peltier/Powys/PowysRev/PowysRev.htm – this is the website of the journal *The Powys Review*.

www.members.aol.com/nicbirns/powys.html – this is the website of the journal *Powys Notes* of the PSNA.

We are keen to hear about any other websites with Powys-related themes which we can link to from the official website. Please send suggestions to – **joe.boulter@ait.co.uk** – or if you don't have e-mail, to the Editor of the *Newsletter*.

★

Lars Gustaf Andersson's (Swedish John Cowper Powys Society) e-mail address is: **Lars_Gustaf.Andersson@litt.lu.se**

★

Tony Head suggests members could ensure JCP some cost-free publicity by nominating *Owen Glendower* (or *Porius* ?) for '100 Best Historical Novels' on the Historical Novel Society's website: **www.historicalnovelsociety.com**

Click on 'Top 100 Novels' and fill in the form – it will only take five minutes and to judge from the list a dozen or so should ensure JCP a place in the book.

With thanks to all contributors,

KK

Sidelights (1): What's in a Name?

Within a week of his son's birth, John Cowper Powys wrote to his brother Theodore,

A lively and lusty boy born at the end of Saturday afternoon now makes the house resound with his crying. He is to be called Littleton Alfred after dear Littleton and Margaret's father; also Alfred de Kantzow who is to be his other godfather—that is to say if he can be induced to enter a church ... I have asked L.C. [their brother Littleton Charles] to the christening and if you can come over and sit with me in the churchyard while the service goes on perhaps it will keep away evil spirits ...¹

I had wrongly taken John Cowper's letter to Llewelyn written from Keswick on 7th October 1902² to indicate that John himself was not present at the christening, but he must have been there for in *Autobiography* he thus describes Mr de Kantzow:

It was a pretty sight to see this aged Lucretius clasping in his shaky fingers the wrong side uppermost, a neat version of the Book of Common Prayer as he stood at our Burpham font; and it was a charming poem you may be sure, in the old fashioned courtly style, that he composed to celebrate that day ...³

Littleton and Theodore seem to have been there too, and Margaret's brother-in-law, Edmund Pearce, who performed the ceremony jointly with the local vicar, Harry Lyon's friend Mr Saleeby.

John Cowper's delightful and very vivid description of Alfred de Kantzow in *Autobiography*⁴ needs no addition, but it is nevertheless interesting to find corroboration of de Kantzow's existence in the autobiography of E. V. Lucas. Lucas, much later, was the author of the biography of Charles Lamb, the book which John, Margaret and their son read when they were together for the last time in the summer of 1929. In the 1890s, during John Cowper's Southwick days, Lucas was an assistant in one of the Brighton bookshops of the kind John Cowper used to visit. Lucas describes the first prose-writer he knew and continues:

My first poet was less authentic—merely one of those oddities which every good-sized town can boast—a local newspaper bard. The imposing name of mine was Alfred de Keyser, and he was a wild-looking, grey-haired man, usually muttering to himself, with a long, lean, neck, flowing clothes and an eager, impulsive manner of walking and thrusting forward a strange and rather distraught face. In fact, superficially, everything a poet should be. Not only did he write verse, but he advertised the fact by combining the duties of author, publisher and bookseller, himself offering for sale the leaflets on which his effusions were printed. I remember a line from a poem on the Brighton pier which I thought splendid: "Brilliant night moths and butterflies of day".⁵

Although the name is spelt differently, time and place and the similar characteristics make it virtually certain that Lucas and John Cowper are talking about the same person. The differences in the descriptions, particularly the fact that John Cowper took time and trouble over the friendship whereas Lucas did not, are also significant.

The christening of Littleton Alfred was not the end of John Cowper's friendship with his son's namesake. In a letter to Littleton two years later he tells him, 'Alfred de Kantzow is coming here for a fortnight'; moreover, 'Herbert (Margaret's younger brother) has just left, Bertie was here last week and Harry probably comes next.'⁶ As a young married couple the Powyses did not lack visitors. Margaret's relationship with Herbert was probably close, for he died at Burpham, presumably in her house, in 1939.

Littleton Alfred's other namesake, his grandfather Alfred Lyon, was very different from any of his descendents. A successful East India Company tea merchant from Lancashire, he retired to Islington on Dartmoor; he bought Middlecott and several other properties and as much land as he could, expecting to find mineral wealth. After producing four daughters, his first wife Deborah Capel died in 1865. Within a week Alfred was visiting the parents of his children's governess, Fanny Beresford, and within a year he had married her. When she died after producing ten children he promptly married her sister. He left a diary, now in the possession of the owners of Middlecott, which might repay further study. He died four years before his grandson and namesake was born. Littleton Alfred appears to have had little in common with his grandfather except a fondness for Middlecott, (a very nice house beautifully situated), and the fact that when he trained for the Catholic priesthood he went to the college at Wigan, his grandfather's birthplace.

Susan Rands

NOTES

- 1 Quoted in *Essays on John Cowper Powys*, ed. Belinda Humfrey (Univ. of Wales Press, 1972), 317.
- 2 *Letters to His Brother Llewelyn*, ed. Malcolm Elwin (Village Press, 1975), 17.
- 3 John Cowper Powys, *Autobiography* (Picador edition, 1982), 329.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 232-7.
- 5 E. V. Lucas, *Reading, Writing, and Remembering*, 1932.
- 6 John Cowper Powys, letter to Littleton Charles Powys in the Powys Collection, Dorset County Museum. 1904, otherwise undated.

Susan Rands's latest publication on the Powyses is John Cowper Powys, the Lyons and W. E. Lutyens (Cecil Woolf, Powys Heritage series, 2000), a fascinating piece of research on JCP's wife and early friendships.

JCP: Letter to Gertrude (1907)

[Postmark: ArundeI, 29 March 1907]

My dearest Gertrude

I don't want to get inveigled into any more correspondence so for heaven's sake don't give me away as having written to you with my own hand so large an epistle as some old apostle says but I am in such excellent spirits that I can't help wanting to make a sound of humming & singing in someone's ears — and my amanuensis Mistress Lilian is out driving the Pony and Margaret is in the Nursery. She has occupied the Nursery Littleton being transferred to the Cottage at the end of the garden where I hear him greeting the dawn — the cocks begin at 4.30 — the birds at 5 and Littleton at 6.30.

Hurrah I have been out! I have seen the sun and walked on the lawn and basked there quietly sitting opposite three blue and three red hyacinths for two hours and a half today. So much for figures and numbers: they sound nothing but mean much: I drink very little now and live greatly on all sorts of Jellies. I have had a lot of butter since it came this morning. When I am thirsty I rinse out my mouth with lemonade as I am not even allowed to drink more than a wine glass of water.

This regime is entirely after my own view of the situation and follows the system of Montacute. I get great ease from it and the relief is wonderful and my spirits rise in proportion. Slight thirst is nothing in comparison — in fact it is a cause of pleasure — for washing your mouth with lemonade when you are thirsty is delicious.

I have never enjoyed flowers so much or the singing of blackbirds and the cool and yet warm balmy air that comes in thro' the window is heavenly.

I hope I don't BORE you with all this but I am in so good spirits that I get pleasure nodding a trifle of nothing across the country to my eldest sister.

As a matter of fact I am extremely cheerful and look forward to my OPERATION (dreadful syllables!) with positive alacrity. I neither pine desperately to get it over — for I am very peaceful as I am at this moment — nor do I wish to put it off for the sooner it is over the sooner I shall be able to go walks again. So I am content anyway. And you must believe me when I tell you quite seriously that I am not under the least alarm about it. The chances are a hundred to two (I believe) in my favour and if you have to die — we must all die some time or other and when you are once dead it is the same as if you had lived to be ninety — what better death could you have than in the escalade and storming-break of the great fortress of health? But don't be alarmed my dear I shan't die. I saw old Mr Goodyer watching my window from the entrance to the Churchyard yesterday. He loves funerals you know and watches them from a wheel-barrow placed upon a dustheap. He had an oblique and wicked eye upon our home as though he already saw the procession and snuffed the baked meats in the kitchen. I said to

myself "Not so shortly friend as thou imaginest — I am above — I move about — a jolly candidate for 1908".

I have felt so much better that I have composed a sonnet and sent it to the Western Gazette on behalf of that poor Rayner.* I was amazed to hear my dearest mother utter words of commendation of that dreadful Mr Whitly on the grounds of his being industrious religious and having made rules of thrift. I hate people who get as rich as that: no really good person — by which I mean of course no imaginative and sympathetic person ever gets very rich. To get very rich you are bound to ruin or injure someone and all the hospitals and free libraries in the world can't make up for it. However poor wretch he is dead and we ought — mother and Shakespeare both say — not to beat the bones of the buried — but this poor lad! I feel so sorry for him. But I believe that Mr. Gladstone who is not a very strict or very firm gentleman will be so impressed by the public agitation that he will not hang him —

Poor Margaret! She has been really quite ill. For a moment the Doctor was afraid it might turn out to be typhoid fever but she is nearly well now and will I think be out tomorrow and about on Sunday. It was lucky this excellent Lilian came. She is a splendid nurse.

Give Lulu my greatest love and of course to Father and dearest Mother. Lulu will forgive my writing to you after all his unequalled letters but the very fact that if I wrote to him I should feel tempted to write about the Milky Way and Whether there is such a thing or not as Transmigration of Souls — and I should feel ashamed to scribble nothing but the veriest idlest garrulous hysterical kind of happy absurd nonsense to such an accomplished master in what is the most pleasure giving of all the arts and yet Cox body! as Bernie would say I lie grossly — I would talk any drivel to my old friend Lulu and be sure of a welcome. Only he loves me to write to you.

Now remember! Don't betray to any one or let any one else at Montacute betray to any one that I have written to you so large a letter with my own hand. Don't casually say in all your letters 'I have just had a long scrawl from Jack'. But of course you may show it to everyone you like in the house not even excepting Mr Rogers who perhaps will regard it (or do I flatter myself too highly) as almost as wonderful as the last letter of Jack Sheffard to Madge Spitfire before he paid the last penalty in the presence of half London.*

I should be seriously disappointed if my execution for so I think it is really worthy to be called should by any untoward accident not occur now. But I think D'Olier has written to Horsley to set things on train and Hutchinson has said his last word and formally handed me over — The Muse of Medicine (a picture might be painted) relinquishing its patient to the Muse of Surgery the former holding bottles pill boxes etc etc and the latter armed with a thousand knives —

Well the progress of Science has done more for the poor human race than nearly everything else. It has relieved us as Lucretius prophesied it would of

terrifying superstitions. It has abolished Inquisition's Burning at the Stake, Puritan Tyrannies, witchcraft etc etc and it has invented chloroform and Ether and Morphia and Cockayne and Liqueur Brandy O most heavenly gifts to mortal men since Prometheus stole fire from heaven! and now it has turned the knife that most horrible of instruments into a key to palaces of joy.

How much to be preferred is the surgeon's knife to the executioner's axe!

In old days for writing this sonnet about Rayner I should be going to be disembowelled instead of which my stomach is going to be renewed and as it were reborn and my bowel bound to it in love and amity! It is extraordinary how peaceful and at ease I feel. I look forward with satisfaction and tho' I look backward with regret for my innumerable past errors and evil doings it is a pleasure to think how differently I am going to act when I am well again!

"When the Devil was Sick — I know that sick-bed repentances are held of light worth — well I don't mind — I laugh myself — I also quote proverbs — but it will be seen — it will be seen — it will be seen —

Would you like to hear some of these wonderful changes that are going to occur in your elder brother John Cowper? I put them in the form of Memoranda — a sort of dialogue in Theodorian style between body & soul. I had such a kind and charming letter from Theodore today. Tell Lulu it couldn't have been kinder. I shall ever value it —

1. Observe as long as circumstances possibly allow it you must be cheerful and your will to look on the best side of things (except where reality is concerned or pity for others). Rally in yourself always that is to say the powers of your Spirit —

2. Be boldly and unashamedly always yourself and do not conceal your opinion on any subjects anymore. It is better that people should receive shocks now and then than that hypocrisy should any further be endured — do not say what will please anymore but what you really think. (Ho Ha! laughs my Body at this remark of the worthy Soul — "what will your friends who are poets painters etc say to you now?")

3. Be really moral from no more sentimental reasons but lest by any means by your evil doing the misery of the world is increased — "Wait till you are well and safe out of this danger my dear — we shall see then what comes of all these fine vows!" so grins and mutters this incorrigible old cynic of an unregenerate Body. But I let him have his word and go quietly on —

4. Don't argue with people (especially religious people) so as to gain victories over them or because they annoy you — "What little Johnny going to tease us no more!" Shut up vile Body — So ends this moral dialogue of sick-bed Jack and his Soul: it remains to be seen what happens when Jack is well.

Tell Mother the Doctor says that the calves'-foot jelly you buy is made of

nothing but old horses' hoofs and leather with a little Citric Acid. Mrs Collyer has been making me some calves'-foot jelly flavoured with lemon which I have enjoyed particularly as the lemon quenches my thirst.

Please tell Father that I look forward very much to seeing him for 2 nights or more on the 4th that is to say on Thursday — if I do not clear off to London before. It is very kind of him to come as the journey is such an annoying one. However if he gets here by three he will have time for a long walk over the Downs after tea and he will have all Friday to explore the country.

I guess by that time I ought to be able to go short walks. But if not I daresay Margaret could drive us all three in Mr West's cart and we might if the weather was beautiful have an extremely pleasant day out and go and visit Findon or Slindon our two show villages one East and one West along the downs: a merry excursion like that with Father would give me something to look forward to: however we shall see — of course I may be whirled off before then. I daresay D'Olier will have heard from Horsley today — on the other hand he may be away on a holiday.

Another perfect morning! I shall be out in the garden earlier today: about half past eleven I daresay. I long to be sitting on my lawn again observing the blue and carmin [*sic*] hyacinths. Certainly one result of all my virtuous and devil-was-sick resolutions is that I enjoy flowers with an exquisite pleasure which I cannot describe to you — more than I have ever before. It is a funny thing that you should be rewarded for good resolutions before you have had any trial of any single one of them but such is the friendliness of the law. Certainly it seems as though all the exquisite sensations which I have not had for years and years — blotted out I suppose by the [?] & the devil — have returned all in a moment and I throw my horns and tail into the air and dance uncouth dances like any mad kid. Well good bye for the present my dear — we have lovely Peach Blossom. Your loving Jack

★

JCP wrote this letter in pencil recycling the last page on which he had first jotted down the beginnings of two poems. The first one is called "Rayner's Father" and starts, 'Two Fathers had you Rayner/ One who bade his son ...', the second is titled "Ode to the Night", and begins. 'O deep transparent cool and glowy night/ Full of blue caves and green recesses, full of lapsed sorrows and assuaged wounds/ of quietness and healing and calm thought./ Of legends old, old tunes, forgotten dreams/ that drift like white clouds over the flying moon!/ And fall like cool rain round the roots of flowers!/ And float like wet spray round the edge of cliffs!'

LdeB

* In 1907, JCP (aged 35) was in a weakened state enduring operations for stomach ulcers.

* 'poor Rayner': a much-discussed murder case of the time. George Rayner (20) shot

his suppose father 'Mr Whiteley' in 'a moment of impulsive insanity'. He was reprieved by Gladstone, then Home Secretary, and act of 'imbecile weakness' thought to threaten moral order, even to lead to the abolition of the death penalty. (With thanks to Wilf Dectner of the Somerset Studies Library, who kindly looked through the Western Gazette at the request of Susan Rands.)

* Jack Sheffard: notorious for his prison escapes, chronicled in the Newgate Calendar and in a novel by Harrison Ainsworth.

* Who was Mr Rogers?

With thanks to Louise de Bruin. This letter was among Lucy Penny's papers.

KK

Sidelights (2): Hollywood English

Burton Rascoe, a literary journalist, editor/ contributor to The Smart Set, a rival to The Dial, writes in The Bookman (LIV No 3, November 1921, an issue on 'The Motion Pictures: An Industry, Not an Art'). The restrained outrage of the visiting Powyses perhaps echoes Hollywood's portrayals of Englishness. This gossipy piece on Hollywood parties (Charlie Chaplin and Lola Fisher doing an imitation of Grand Opera 'which can never be duplicated ...') continues:

Chicago is remarkably silent this month ... however, Harold Waldo, as usual, sends an anecdote from the [i.e. West] coast ... This one concerns the fortunes of John Cowper Powys, the constant lecturer and sometime author, and his brother Llewellyn [*sic*] ... Robert Nathan, the author of "Autumn", is of the opinion that no one with the name Llewellyn could possibly have hair that isn't curly. Well, it seems that —


Lem Parton, newspaper man of San Francisco, took the Powys brothers out in a Ford coupe that he hadn't learned how to drive excessively well. Every time they approached another car, the Powys team exclaimed in chorus, "My word! My word!" In short, Parton's driving made them nervous and they made him nervous and he made them nervous back again. It was a really frightful time. But Parton delivered these two inveterate Elizabethans safely at their hostel; and it suddenly smote him where he keeps his pride that he hadn't made such a bad mess of it after all — had killed no old ladies and broken no children's legs nor ruined any stately traffic cops — so he held out a tentative suggestion of another ride. In the country, he opined, out on the open road, where traffic was less dense, trees green, and air sparkling fresh, motoring was really a delight. "Oh yes, indeed!" responded one of the Powys brothers, "yes, yes — one could even leave the bally machine beside the road and enjoy a walk!" There is a legend down by the Bay to the effect that when John C. and his brother first came to San Francisco, they got off the train miles before it reached town and walked in!

Louis dont go to England. Killed German shell dont go dont go. A sea battle will decide death to the English.

France will go at east India. A century will pass before England will rise again. Germany will draw Spain into the war too. Rome will make peace in era ~~doom had had time for Germany~~ day of Kaiser's death. Kaiser will die suddenly day of victory Cook will poison him 11th of February 1918. Till Pope evokes aid of France as allies will be driven out of Europe. England will be invaded. Russians will save her from annihilation, through ~~unaided~~ services undaunted. Germany will go from England in the year 1918

(when enter?)

Draws near now.

America will be neutral all through. Germany will devour  Will soon strive to take Salonica. Decivilization of the world ^{earth} draws near. End of all damnation.

(Who are you?)

December 26th killed. Frenchman. Bullet in the east Bulgarian. An officer Captain Gerard Q.B. ^{Chades} died at ten this evening.

Marion Towse - At the board -
Theodore Seaver - at the board.

J.C. Poupé

Frances Grogg W. W. Benson

Wm. W. Benson.

Julia Hawthorn Glegg Irish Markham
Harry Kemp (His mark X)

Table-Talk

This somewhat surreal document (*reproduced opposite at 70%*), which I found among Oliver Wilkinson's papers, brings together in one room many of John Cowper Powys's 'small circle' in New York during the First World War. An historian friend of mine, Thomas Otte, in a series of inspired and highly persuasive arguments based 'on the prosaic assumption that table-turning has more to do with the people sitting at the table than with any spirits possibly hovering above it', has narrowed the date of this meeting to 'between late December 1915 and, perhaps, January or February 1916'. This seems to be confirmed from various Powys and Wilkinson letters written at this time.

John Cowper had met Theodore Dreiser over a year earlier. Writing to Llewelyn in October 1914, he is characteristically enthusiastic:

Well! I told you how I've taken a flat with May [Marian Powys, also present here] ... 82 W 12th Street, New York City ... O we have discovered a Master my dear! Did you read *Sister Carrie* or *Jenny Gerhardt* or *The Titan* by Theodore Dreiser? Well, this excellent fellow has been discovered by us and has become extraordinarily friendly. He lives in West 10th Street quite close, with a girl who is either his wife or his tart, I know not which. He has the most charming disposition and in appearance resembles Goldsmith or Dr Johnson without their wig. He is nobly and generously ugly, a massive rugged seamed and scarr'd Balzacian type. He talks humorously and dogmatically with quaint American exclamations and a sort of genial aplomb ... I wish I could convey to you the charm of this admirable man and the Rabelaisian largeness of his good-nature. He is really of a sweet and lovely disposition but knows well how to strike out when he encounters dreadful people. May maintains he is like our Will — and there may be something in that ..."

He goes on to describe Dreiser's partner:

His wife or tart I knew formerly in Chicago. It was by meeting her by chance near Jefferson Prison that I got on the track of 'Theodore'. In fact she led me round to their room in 'Greenwich Village', as they call that little quarter, when I was out in the morning buying bread and cream. Since then they have dropped in several times and we have gone to them ... May and I don't take much stock of 'Aileen' ... But Theodore we are perfectly in love with ...'

'Aileen' is Elaine Hyman (who later took the stage name Kirah Markham — another signatory here) who had lived with Dreiser in his studio apartment since 1913. Dreiser and Powys had met her — separately — at the Chicago Little Theatre (founded in 1912 by Maurice Browne, a university friend of Louis Wilkinson), where she was playing Andromache in the first American production of

Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. She had studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, and supplemented her acting income by painting murals and working as an illustrator. There are complimentary portraits of her as Stephanie Platow in Dreiser's *The Titan* and as Sidonie Platow in *The Book of Sidonie*. Powys seems to have modified his first impressions of her, for in a letter to Llewelyn written on 8th November 1914, he writes,

Dreiser and his Elaine just gone. They are certainly lovely people. She looked beautiful tonight in a green blouse — it made her jet black hair look like a mermaid's or like Scylla's in *Endymion*.

But then he adds:

But God in Heaven! These girls are nothing, after our Frances!²

— Frances Gregg, the wife of Louis Wilkinson — both present here.

Louis and Frances had only returned to America in July 1915, and were staying temporarily at 241, West 11th Street. Frances's description of her first meeting with Dreiser bears out John Cowper's portrait of this 'ugly-faced Balzacian':

Dreiser was old when I first met him, forty or fifty, huge, bulbous, with a crooked, flabby face, and one eyelid that drooped. He was a great, a noble, a gargantuan squire of dames ...³

Dreiser and Markham often held weekly open house for artists and intellectuals, and there is a fascinating account of one of these evenings in a letter from the young Kenneth Burke to Malcolm Cowley on 6th November 1915, containing descriptions of both Kirah Markham and Frances Gregg:

But to get back to the evening at Dreiser's — I did obtain an offhand invitation to come again. From a very charming friend of his [Markham] I received a cordial invitation to come again. Needless to say, I was brimming over with gratitude for her. She is perfectly able to set one at his ease ... One of the astounding paintings Dreiser has on his walls is of her. When I saw it I forthwith described her to Mrs. Wilkinson as a cash girl who had read Nietzsche. You can imagine how embarrassed and repentant I was when she made things so comfy for me. She is tall, and judging from the way her clothes hang on her, her body must be exquisite. She is exactly the type of woman Dreiser bestows upon his favored villains.

Mrs. Wilkinson [Gregg] defies my Cicero. I could not have had a more suitable woman made to order. She is a small, neurotic woman, and as she stood by the coal fire, and spoke in an affectedly low voice, and let her cigarette go out so prettily, I was horribly infatuated. Great God, Malcolm! Henceforth deliver me from the non-intellectual woman! Our strongest bulwark has been smashed. Beauty and brains are not anomalies. Henceforth I cannot cite my ugly mouth any more as a proof of my genius ...

I thought I was going to meet Powys last night, but I didn't.⁴

Burke's picture of Dreiser himself is of a nervous and difficult host, confirmed by other accounts of him at this time.

Richard Graves has drawn attention to the guarded relationship between Marian Powys and Kirah Markham.⁵ John Cowper refers to this in letters to Llewelyn at the end of 1914:

Little May is sitting on the bed making a new gown for herself for a Dreiser party, 'come Sunday'. She does try to entangle that great and good man, I can tell you. But he has had his day, the sly old dog, and is resting on his laurels or on the long body of the pure Elaine ... (8.11.14)⁶

Little May amuses me more and more. She does go it - my God! - with Theodore Dreiser. I wonder if he'll make his Jew-girl jealous.⁷ The statuesque Elaine has that capacity one can see ... (18.11.14)⁸

The odd man out is Harry Kemp. As far as I know, his name never occurs in accounts by Powys or Wilkinson. Known as the 'Byron of the Village', 'The Tramp Poet' and later as 'The Poet of the Dunes', Kemp - 'six foot tall and barrel-chested'⁹ - became a celebrated Village character. He lived just a block away from Dreiser, who knew Kemp's wife (the actress Mary Pyne) better than Kemp himself. There is a portrait of Pyne as 'Esther Norn' in Dreiser's *A Gallery of Women*, in which Kemp also appears as 'Douane'. Later this year, Kemp, Pyne and Markham all worked for the Provincetown Players in the Wharf Theatre at Cape Cod and in the Playwright's Theatre just south of Washington Square in New York. In later years, as President of the Provincetown Pilgrims Association, Kemp organized many hare-brained publicity stunts to publicize Provincetown as the first landing place of the Mayflower.

Quite where this table-turning took place, and just how much credence was attached to the spirit's message is hard to say. Both Gregg and Dreiser probably owned ouija boards at this time.¹⁰ John Cowper, writing to Frances's mother in 1912, as he, Marian, Louis and Frances were crossing the Atlantic after the Wilkinsons' marriage, describes a session with Frances 'at the table' in an alcove behind red curtains:

A spirit from the drowned Titanic was there, called 'Laroche'. He said, 'Frightful Disaster, assumed name, foreign affairs, my love, madness, madness ...' Then we called the Catholic and asked him who he was most in sympathy with. He said 'Frances' and then she got tired and removed her hands and he went away. I was all the while praying that you would not appear, because she would have lost her self-control if you had ...¹¹

And there is an amusing self-deprecating account by Frances of a table-turning session with W. B. Yeats later that same year:

I posed as a 'psychic' in those days, and very soon a ouija board was brought out and Yeats and I sat down to it. My young husband sat nearby, against the velvet background, tall, beautiful, silent, faintly like a copper-headed ancient Aztec Indian. On two separate occasions he said

'ha', one of several infantile grunts with which he was wont to punctuate existence ...

The ouija board pranced under my fingers, and I began to cheat. I have always cheated with ouija boards, or tipping tables, or in telling fortunes. Invariably, as the makers of religions in all times, I have used a cloak of superstition from within which to say whatever was wise and good, or kind, or unkind and malicious but true and even, at my most feeble and despicable, to sway the fates in my favour, giving myself a timely boost in the interest, or the favour of my victim. I put this dilemma to Mr Yeats, for I knew it to be equally true of my fellows. These faked predictions, warnings, judgements had, on occasions, an uncanny way of proving very exact.

'How do you know,' Mr Yeats replied, 'that you are cheating? Why should you endow yourself with these powers of cryptic utterance? It is impossible to say who, or what is striving to speak through you. Let us go on. Your husband need not stay if he is bored. You can stay all night if you like. Yes, do stay all night.'

'Ha,' said my husband, and shortly afterwards we left ...¹²

As for Dreiser, there is a tempting item, ordered but not yet delivered, in his collected papers at the University of Pennsylvania, titled 'Ouija board notes'. I am waiting impatiently to see if any of those present here are mentioned elsewhere.

It is not surprising that both Powys, who had two brothers in combat (Bertie on the Western front and Will in Kenya) and Dreiser, son of a German immigrant, held strong, and often opposing, views about the war. It is a measure of their friendship and respect for each other that they did not allow this to sever the relationship.

Louis did not return to England till after the war was over. But in the next war he was nearly killed by a German shell, that rendered his London flat uninhabitable – in his absence. However, as readers of the Newsletter will know, Frances, her mother and her daughter were all killed by a single German shell, in 1941.

Chris Wilkinson

NOTES

1 *The Letters of John Cowper Powys to His Brother Llewelyn*, Volume I, 1902–1925, ed. Malcolm Elwin (London: Village Press, 1975).

2 *Ibid.*

3 *The Mystic Leeway*, by Frances Gregg, ed. Ben Jones (Carleton University Press, 1995).

4 *The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley, 1915–1981*, ed. Paul Jay (University of California Press, 1990). Kenneth Burke (1897–1995), was studying at Harvard at this time. He was music critic for *The Dial* in the 20s, but also did editing and translating work for them. He is now best known as a theorist of literary forms. He was introduced to Louis in New York in 1915 by his old school-friend, Malcolm Cowley, who was then meeting Louis regularly in New York. Writing to Burke in November 1915,

Cowley says: 'As you rushed impressively through your list of boozes and your boastful confessions about enthusing over things so insignificant, I thought with a certain melancholy humor of my Tuesday evenings with Wilkinson, when at times I become so excited over a topic of literature that I gulp down in one breath two mouthfuls of Bass Ale and Stout half and half, chew viciously at a Butter Thin Biscuit, and almost succeed in eating one of those uncooked pickled fish (I forget what they are called) which he tells me are the sign of the true European epicure.' Cowley was editor of the *New Republic* from 1929 to 1943.

5 *The Brothers Powys*, by Richard Perceval Graves (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).

6 John Cowper Powys, *op. cit.*

7 The words 'tart' and 'Jew-girl' may grate harshly on our enlightened politically-correct ears, but we need to remember both the times and the context here. There is a locker-room feeling to some of John's remarks to Llewelyn about this time, some coarse banter from one brother to another in private. The language used here is either a throw-back to the slang used at school, or it may be a conscious attempt by John to rid himself of the euphemisms and the repressions of the not-so-silent moral majority, against whom John and his entire circle were rebelling. Both names have acquired a resonance they never had in the middle of the previous century when 'Jew-boy', for instance, simply meant 'A (young) Jewish male' according to Partridge, and 'tart' was a term used 'endearingly of chaste and unchaste alike'. True, by the beginning of the next century 'tart' was used for 'fast or immoral women' but I see in my 1946 *Odhams Dictionary* the meaning given is 'a young girl with sex appeal'. It does add though: 'esp. one of easy virtue'. I think 'tart' in the context of John's remarks means 'mistress'. I think 'Jew-girl' means 'a young Jewish girl', with no pejorative implications. The fact that Elaine Hyman had adopted the stage name 'Kirah Markham' suggests that she was proud of her Jewishness; and certainly John always identified with the Jews in his lecture audiences. He even claimed to have Jewish blood himself. Writing to Louis Wilkinson in 1953, John says categorically, "Jews are my favourite race".

8 John Cowper Powys, *op. cit.*

9 *Live at the Village Vanguard*, by Max Gordon (Mary S. Van Deusen, 2001).

10 Ouija boards at this time were usually rectangular, about 18 by 20 inches. On them were inscribed the letters of the alphabet, numbers from nought to nine, and the words 'Yes', 'No' (to start and stop the conversation and to provide a shorthand answer to questions) and 'Good evening' and 'Good night' (for courtesy) – one word in each corner. A little table, 3 or 4 inches high, with four legs and a pointer, was used to spell out words. The instructions for one of the first of these oracular talking tables described the process that should follow: 'Place the board upon the knees of two persons, lady and gentleman preferred, with the small table upon the board. Place the fingers lightly but firmly, without pressure, upon the table so as to allow it to move easily and freely. In from one to five minutes the table will commence to move, at first slowly, then faster, and will then be able to talk or answer questions, which it will do rapidly by touching the printed words or the letters necessary to form words and sentences with the foreleg or pointer.'

From their inception, ouija boards have been advertised as both a 'portal to the spirit realm' and a toy. One of the first advertisements promised: 'Ouija knows all the answers ... Surpasses, in its unique results, mind reading, clairvoyance and second sight. It furnishes never failing amusement and recreation for the entire family.'

Two opposing theories were offered to explain the phenomenon. Spiritualists believed that the messages came from forces beyond our control. Others thought it was more like automatic writing, where the board opens a kind of shortcut from the conscious to the subconscious mind. (Information from the 'Museum of Talking Boards' at www.museumoftalkingboards.com)

11 *Jack and Frances, The Love Letters of John Cowper Powys to Frances Gregg*, Vol I, ed. Oliver Wilkinson (Cecil Woolf, 1994).

12 *The Mystic Leeway*.

Postscript Chris Wilkinson adds:

Dreiser's 'Ouija Board Notes' arrived from Pennsylvania just as the *Newsletter* was going to press. They contained notes of two other sessions, one of them with Theodore Dreiser and Frances Gregg 'operating' (dated January, 1916), and the other with Dreiser seemingly on his own. Neither of the spirit messages are as elusive as the one recorded here (their extreme fluency is, to say the least of it, suspicious), nor are the transactions signed. They are both typed. The record of the session starting 'Louis dont go to England' is in freehand and written by three different people: Frances, Kirah Markham and Louis. They show the initial difficulty of transcribing words letter by letter, where 'as eabattle' is later seen to be 'a seabattle' and 'asallies' becomes 'as allies'. There is also a certain amount of gobbledegook, a lot of it right at the start of the session, from which no useful meaning can be derived, and in these cases the typist (Frances, I suspect) has simply omitted it. What is reassuring is that it is clearly headed, 'This was received via a ouija board Dec 26 - 1915', confirming Thomas Otte's astute calculations about the date.

Theodore Dreiser to JCP

Dreiser's friendship with the Powyses endured. This letter (from the Bissell collection) was written shortly before Dreiser visited Corwen (when Marian and Peter were also there). With thanks to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania.

Int. Kisco May 24 - 38

Jack Dear:

After so long it's so good to hear from you, although, even if I don't hear you are never, truly, away from me. Like the air you are omnipresent and I draw on you for imagination and courage to take life as it runs. You do not say anything much of Phyllis, but she, too, is with me — like the art [?] arc] of life — impressive and comforting ... As for the lady you write me about — Darling Jack, I can't let myself in for any more pestering from any source. It's dreadful — the number of people who, without rhyme or reason, wish to keep in touch with everybody. And at a time when the multifarious forces of life rain on me a heavy rain. I may bring myself one of these days to write her a brief formal note — and I may not. But it is not because I do not realize that all of us need a little consideration and that our admirers, if they do not destroy us through direct contact, help us financially and socially to be. Organized society means that or nothing.

I wonder about your flock [?] and Phyllis; and her mother; and Llewellyn. (I

have his book, and it is lovely); and your brother Theodore. His novels are truly amazing. I never forget one. And one of these days I hope to possess a full set so that I may return to them for comfort. For as badly as I think of Life, at times, he thinks so much worse of it, that reading him makes me decide that I am less pessimistic than I am. So.

Just now I am at Int. Kisco. June 3 I expect to return to New York for source work there.

A letter addressed to me at Int. Kisco will always reach me. With love and admiration

T. D.

Masters, as you know is in touch with me. I receive poems and gay or dour letters, as the weather varies. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on."

J.C.P.: Two Poems

From the Bissell Collection, with others 'written at Hillsdale'.

Celandines

I thought of Celandines so darkly wet,
So yellow bright, and more than fields and ditches
Came back. What demon said I could forget?
It is with me as with a maid who stitches
Her bridal slip to sounds that flutter by
Thro' windows and thro' doorways, bearing her thought
Up the white road and into the far sky!
Something that's more than fields these flowers have brought.

The rains that filled the ditches, where are they now?
Where are the black birds that flew screaming over
The cattle-trodden elder-scented track?
Where is the grass-embedded ash-tree bough
That moss and fungus-cups were wont to cover?
Where? In my heart; by celandines brought back!

Celandines make frequent appearances in JCP's writings, notably in chapter 3 of Maiden Castle:

Glancing at the ditch on his left as he went along by Claudius's side, he [Dud] suddenly stopped with a sharp spasm of delight. There was the first celandine!

He stooped towards it. What he wanted to do was to throw his cap down on the wet ground so that he could kneel and thereby observe that dim little bud, among its glossy spatulate leaves, more closely! Even from where he stood hovering above it, its yellowness was visible through the pale green calyx; and the word 'aguish', as applied by the magical poet to the damp chill of water-ditches, rushed through his brain with a delicious pang.

Claudius's voice interrupted him. 'Aye? What is it? A celandine? There are always a lot of them along here — later, you know — much later. But come on, No-man ...

Maiden Castle (ed. Ian Hughes, Univ. of Wales, 1990, 117–18) continues the theme: Dud's organic 'minute particulars' vs. Claudius's cold iron wireless stations. (With thanks to PR for pointing this out.)

Would members like to contribute to an anthology of JCP's celandines for the spring number?

The Ledge

Her love is like a bird with bruised wing
Beating against the slippery precipices
And ponderous granite-slabs, piled to the skies,
Of his world-old and weary reasoning.

Where is the voice out of the air to bring
Word of the hidden mossy ledge that lies,
Among those thunder-blasted crevaces,
Green with fresh grass, beside a flowering spring?

There is no voice out of the wind. There is
Only the wind, wailing and journeying
Forever. But, those flutterings once stayed,
That ledge would, like a loadstone, from the abyss
Draw her to an eternal comforting,
All sorrows ended and all fears allayed.

Compare

Tuesday 4th August ... the non-human Coldness and detachment of that Stone, in whose ledge — like a wisp of lovely moss or grey Cimmerian lichen — lives the TT.

from The Diary of John Cowper Powys, 1931 (J. Kewntner, 1990) 191.

Sidelights (3): "They Artists ..."

A visit from Mr & Mrs Collins to JCP, April 1935

The artist couple Elisabeth and Cecil Collins visited John Cowper Powys in Dorchester, on the afternoon of Monday, 1st April 1935. Elisabeth Collins (1904–2000) outlived Cecil, and experienced a remarkable second flowering as a painter; in her nineties her work was at last purchased by the Tate Gallery. Timothy Hyman became a close friend; this is an extract from an interview he recorded late in 1999, only a few months before her death.

TH One of the first ways we met was talking about John Cowper Powys. Why did you and Cecil go on your pilgrimage to him?

EC Well, because I think he's a great master, for one thing – unrecognised, and I think everything about the Powys family is so peculiar, so unusual and wonderful ... Somehow or other we found ourselves at the bottom of the lane and we went in, you know, and there were shelves all round with books behind and bottles of milk in various stages from green to new – bottles all around. And John Cowper was in one of his Being-Very-Courteous moods; so whatever you said, he agreed profusely. This was very disconcerting. But Cecil just went on talking ... Far too much ... as usual ...

It may be amusing to compare the diary entries in *The Dorset Year* (216). Phyllis was unwell, and hid in the attic, while downstairs the ever-garrulous Cecil (then aged 27) overstayed. As John Cowper, still fuming the next day, recalls: 'They artists with their photos of Mr Cecil Collins' approaches to life, going one further on Picasso, took all my afternoon ...'

Timothy Hyman

Timothy Hyman is a painter and writer on art, long inspired by JCP.

T. F. Powys: A 'Cheriton' Essay

An early essay from the Bissell collection – 'unsophisticated first-person narrative' as characterised by J. Lawrence Mitchell in his essay on T. F. Powys in The Powys Journal x (2000) – or as John Williams says in the same Journal, the apprentice TFP (probably at about 30, the time of his engagement and marriage in 1905) assuming (too obviously) the voice of 'an elder'. This 'vignette' in the pastoral pre-WWI convention clearly relates to the 'Cheriton' essay in Journal x – the 'shamefully romanticised' description of an idealised village that as TFP matured as a writer, was to be overlaid by a 'bleak, unrelenting account of a loveless, depraved village community ...' (JW as above).

But you do feel genuine affection here (and it's good to feel that TFP could share in the innocence at all, even with half an eye). Perhaps we need this pastoral (pre-WWI) convention in the background to take in the multiple layers of farce and parable and caricature and Grand Guignol that are to overlay it; and need both pictures to appreciate the all-seeing view of Mr Weston. The trysting-place and the 'shadows of the evening' could serve as advertisements for Mr Weston's two wines?

KK

Wayside Gates

To a bypath wanderer and a hater of the dreary sadness of a long road, there is no sight that can be more pleasing than a wayside gate. The wooden bars, moss covered perhaps, tell homely tales of the fields that lie beyond, far acres over which only the feet of honest labourers ever tread. Every gate that he passes gives a sense of freedom to the wayfarer. He can turn in if the gate be one of that rustic fashion that inviteth one to enter. And how peaceful, mark the word, how divinely peaceful, are the thoughts of one who waiteth beside a gate in a country lane. The silence of the place lendeth wings to the imagination, and thoughts mount heavenwards. Doth not the companion in its wooden silence, for thanks be to God, the iron horror hath not so far penetrated into country places, consider all things, and Man most of all in the way of friendly forbearance? In nearly every country village there is a favorite gate that stands perhaps at the end of some modest lane. A place pleasantly situated under the boughs of an old elm, that is never forgotten by the young men and maidens who have once wandered there. To a girl, and however lowly she be, a world of romance is writ in that word, who is out at service perhaps and away from the village, and even the great Goethe stooped to write of them, has often happy thoughts of the old wayside gate, that come into her mind as she brushes at her mistress's shoes, or else shines the teapot. And the young men too, for I have my own village of Cheriton in my mind, and I know well the very gate of which I am writing, can never forget those friendly oaken posts and the deal bars between them.

In dust and heat, in far off Empire lands, whither the stress of circumstances or the bold spirit of adventure hath led them, how very often will a Cheriton boy's thoughts lead him back there. He will see again the well known summer lane and the fir trees, and see the naughty smile of little Winnie, who he knows well enough will wait for him when once she reaches the safe shadow of the elm.

How strangely we are drawn even in our dreams, like the homecoming swallow, to one little point in the huge circumference of the world.

There was good Farmer Jacob, whom I call to my mind, a yeoman of once moderate means, and always of a humble presence, who after church every Sunday morning, unless it rained exceeding hard, would walk as far as the elm tree gate and no farther. The honest Goodman would touch the gate, with a touch

loving as well as tender, as though the gate did aid him in his morning prayer. Tis sad to relate that evil times came upon this simple soul, so that he was forced at length to leave his farm and live in a hovel upon Cheriton Heath. But even though the shame of his worn coat prevented his Church going, he never forsook his old Sunday companion, the wayside gate. The more evilly Fate used him, the more he clung to the gate.

Fair, shine or shower, he would be found leaning over this one humble friend, whom he had loved in his well-being, and who could never turn against him in his sorrows.

Tis to be hoped that in Heaven, where farmer Jacob dwells now, he hath found a gate to love as much as he loved ours of the Cheriton Lane.

Previews

Rob Stepney's new edition of Owen Glendower, with a 14-page Introduction by Morine Krissdóttir, should by now have appeared. It is based on the Bodley Head/Picador edition (see Newsletter 42), reset in larger format to a mere 700 or so pages, with a map, some minor adjustments and corrections (see 'A Short Story', below); a stirring Victorian battle scene on the front cover and an ethereal JCP on the back. By way of previews, two enthusiasts accounts follow.

Re-reading Owen Glendower

I read Owen Glendower in 1982. It was my first JCP. Thanks to Picador I discovered this novel in an attempt to find out more about the legendary Glendower. Our youngest son is called Owen and both sides of our family have Welsh backgrounds. In the summer of 1982 we spent a memorable camping holiday at the foot of Dinas Bran.

From page one I was enchanted. My previous passions had recently included Patrick White and Lawrence Durrell and as soon as I began to read Owen Glendower I knew that JCP was going to be my new passion.

In January 2001 I decided to re-read *Owen Glendower*. I was aware that I didn't want to find it lacking – it was after all my first romance with JCP.

As I read I began to wonder, even worry as to what I had found so exciting. Had my feelings for things Welsh all those years ago overpowered my reasoning? Certainly this time I was not so enchanted and I began to be critical, even irritated. Every direction that the book took seemed to be a cul-de-sac, but as Master Young explained 'This wasn't in the least what he meant, but the worst of

it was, he wasn't absolutely clear himself ... but it had more to do with bards than with priests.'

I was now trying to take a more objective position but I was seduced, and bewitched at every turn 'Yes old conjurer, there's a soul watching you' (Owen looking in the mirror). I wondered what had caught me on first reading. Had I identified with specific characters, Tegolin, Alice? This time I felt most passion about old Griffin, Rhisiart's horse. I recalled an Elizabeth Frink drawing where man observes horse and horse observes man.



This book is full of monumental characters like Broch and Father Reinalt, sexy characters like Lowrie and Luned, and tender characters like Modry, Gwion Bach and Meredith. It is a book that loses itself, loses its way, but with the hope that by 'sinking inwards rather than by winning external victories ... it's life, it's life'.

The final chapter – Difancoll – shows how all these loose ends, these disaffected and disinherited people are to be the future and the past. ‘It’s the fact that they’re the visions of thousands of generations of men living in those hills ... a spirit that is more than just ourselves; and each one of them brings more than we know to what that spirit stores up.’

Owen Glendower finishes with ‘The Argument’: ‘all these things as having happened in their beauty and their pain that there might be a song for those who come after.’

So I ended my re-reading uplifted, knowing that I matter. The old conjurer had worked his tricks and my imagination has been freed: free to be myself and more than I am.

I rediscovered the truth that in writing *Owen Glendower* JCP had both respected and followed the passions of my life and he remains my new passion.

Sonia Lewis

Sonia Lewis is a potter, living near Ely, Cambridgeshire.

Redwood Anderson and *Owen Glendower*

Selections from a 33-page letter to JCP in the Bissell collection.

The Editor’s summaries of passages omitted are shown in smaller italic type, Editor’s cuts in the text in square brackets [...].

The copyright holder hasn’t been traced.

An Article in Dublin Magazine XVII No 2 (1942) draws on the letter.

See Newsletters 22 and 23 on Redwood Anderson.

19 Westbourne Avenue, Hull

Begun: 20th Dec. 1941.

Finished: 23rd Dec. 1941.

My dear old John,

On Friday, the 28th of November, at a little past midnight, I closed the cover on the last wonderful pages of that last wonderful chapter of the second volume of *Owen* — “Difancoll”. When I had finished the first volume, I then and there sat down — that same day — and wrote you long and easily. My impressions came so fast that it was sometimes hard to keep up with them. This time, I felt no such impulse; but rather a desire to take all I had read of *Owen* and to retire with it into myself, and there meditate upon it and try to recover from the strange shock the second volume had given me.

For to me this volume is a challenge: a challenge not to Thought, for Thought, being the child of Speech, can usually express itself in the fashion of its mother; but a challenge to those profounder and subtler states and motions of the spirit that for ever escape thought’s farthest-flung fowling-net. States and motions that

are like those memory-images which rise unbidden when we are not thinking of them, but stubbornly refuse recall or an attempt to command them [...]

I think the passages that impressed me most were, first, the description of the violation of the dead after the battle of Bryn Glas: it is indescribably horrible just because it does not describe; it stimulates every vile image and does not check that image by the imposition of another. You rely here, almost wholly, on your reader's power to invent, or evoke, the terrible and the bestial — one reader, at least, has not failed you! Then, secondly, those few paragraphs in which you describe the forests of Tywyn, beginning: "Strange and prehistoric were the legends..." down to "... the supreme enemy of the defeated race." It is remarkable how well, how authoritatively, you write whenever you write of the Great Mother; it is the same at the end of the *Glastonbury Romance* — the Towers of Cybele. Thirdly, I have noted many passages in the chapter of the Goosander [...]

All this is exquisite writing. But it is much more — it was at this point that my already-aroused suspicions knew they were justified: that "Owen Glendower" was something very different from the "Historical Novel" it so simply called itself — or rather, that the "History" it related was only accidentally connected with "Owen ap Glendourdy" (!) [...] the whole of the commerce between the Goosander and your Owen is thrilling, and provocative of many queer undercurrents of thought. And fourthly, and more generally, I was deeply moved by that last scene between Rhisiart and Tegolin in the prison. Its simple human strength and weakness gain so immensely by being placed immediately after (or rather, very shortly after) that crazy scene when King Henry comes in to talk to the prisoners. What with Mad Huw, the Dwarf and the Dog, it's an amazing background of the fantastic against which Master Brut's faith and courage (I forgive him everything!) stand out in such heroic contrast — like truth in a madhouse. And last, all the end of that last chapter.

[He admires JCP's final tying-up of the individual stories, and finds the characters' various ends all differently satisfying.]

This chapter is like a grand and solemn Finale, in which all the themes of the earlier part of the work are caught up, brought to their conclusion, and gently laid to rest — all but the human master-theme of the book, the love of Rhisiart and Tegolin — that goes on; that opens up in new and solemn beauty the same theme as at the beginning [...] As writing it is the latter part of this chapter which arrested me, and, most of all, the very end, where Meredith sets out alone for the Forest of Tywyn. Ay, and how right you were to make your raven of Llangar croak the older form of Nis gwn, instead of the more modern Ni wn i ddim!

[... a discussion follows of 'Difancoll' — 'from "difam" to vanish, and "colli" to lose, am I right?']

... mere philo-logical truffle-hunting! Far more I wish to tell you how deeply those last pages of the book moved me — especially from the last paragraph — "Aye! how many human feet ..." to the last word of all. It is a magnificent release

of his spirit after its long tension: a splendid “reconciliation” (“all passion spent”) after the tragic catastrophe on Mynydd-y-Gaer. When I had finished it, that Friday night, I sat for many long moments silent.

[He now discusses the characters and how JCP achieves their change and growth over the years covered by the story — more than in any of his other books. He excludes Owen himself (‘his development has nothing to do with time’), Broch (‘whose nature has, after long journeying, reached port’) and Meredith.]

It is the change in Rhisiart that is the outstanding example. His character is all the way through presented with a most keen insight, almost with love. Even his appalling acceptance of Tegolin’s sacrifice comes right and does not alienate one’s sympathy. And I wonder how many of us accept sacrifices quite as great, if different in kind, from our women and never even know it! And what a hell it becomes for us when, later, we do learn to appreciate those sacrifices — when it is too late to repay, too late to stop! Rhisiart’s gradual growing up, and, in some sense, drying up, till he is the legal man par excellence of the last chapter, is an altogether admirable piece of work. [...] Coming to the women, I was impressed by the discernment in your recognition of the fact that women change less than men in all that is essential. I don’t mean that they are less changeable or fickle — heaven forbid! — but that as fundamental characters they end much as they began. All your women show this [...]

And once again it is Tegolin on which my mind fastens. I think here is one of the loveliest characters in Literature, and one of the truest. How well I know that unshakeable resolve, that unclamorous devotion, less to a person than to one’s own relationship to that person! It is, I think, a quality very characteristic of a certain type of Celtic woman, whether Welsh or Irish. It is reasonable, yet goes far beyond all logic ... My friend, you have drawn the spiritual portrait of all our ideal women ... Blessed is he who has known one such.

[A long analysis follows of the technical structure of the book as epic/poetic superimposed upon tragic/dramatic, with Owen’s death like that of a tragic hero — ‘outer defeat and inner triumph, for “Prince of Annwn!” is a cry of triumph if ever there was one’ — in wave-patterns not always coinciding; and of JCP’s methods of solving the complex pattern, with comparisons to Victor Hugo, Browning and Dante — progress in Owen being most like the gradualness and leaps in Dante.]

Such, then, appears to me the double structure of the book; and as a matter of mere psychological nose-poking, I should dearly like to know how much of it was of deliberate forethought, and how much accident [...]

... In spite of its great length, I did not find one page — no, not one paragraph — dull. On the contrary, there is in every paragraph, almost in every line, a curious vibrancy, an excitement that carries one along as on some eager chase. It is difficult to say exactly in what this lies: it is in the very build of the sentences, the balance of the phrases. It is partly, also, in the fact that you make your reader contemporary with the events, and that without any rubbish of “Owen Glendower in Modern Dress”. I imagine that your own excitement infected your

style, and through your style, infects your reader. It did me, at any rate. It is a great feat and triumph in the sheer art of writing. [...]

[He attributes this to the sense of excitement JCP conveys, and to making the characters contemporary, while in close touch with old legends.]

... How I admire, and envy, your immensely wide knowledge of Wales and of the old Welsh literature and legend! You have made fine use of it all through "Owen" ... nor do I think it merely decorative ...

[He compares Owen's puzzling decision not to attack at Worcester, with Hannibal's similar retreat outside Rome — in both cases due to a virtue that works against their success — with Owen, he takes this to be fastidiousness, his disgust at the sack of the village.]

He next ('and I approach trembling') tries to analyse how it is that what would otherwise be technical faults in a novel — the repeated miraculous escapes, the 'troubling insistence on pain and cruelty', the oddness, even the 'streak of the non-sane' in so many characters, even the main ones, the unresolved duality in Owen between 'acting' and 'escaping'; 'wrenchings of the framework of probability' — come to be seen in the light of an inner significance that makes them seem 'absolutely right and justified'. He comes to see, not the book as the sum of its characters, but the characters as various manifestations of a Wordsworthian mystery, some controlling destiny like a fourth dimension ('the breath of the Abyss' — Annwn). Some are more aware of this than others: chiefly Owen and Broch, but above all Owen's son Meredith, whom Redwood sees as the heart of this mystery. He refers back to his earlier quotation from Wordsworth ('the features/ Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,/ Characters of the great Apocalypse'); and picks up the resonances with Dante.]

"Owen Glendower an Historical Novel?" Yes, but not the history of Owen Glendower and his ill-starred rebellion. The history of one moment of that Essence whose motions are the heavens, the earth, and the waters under the earth, and all that in them is. This is that "same face" of which all your persons are the "features" — that "great Apocalypse" of which all your events are the "characters". And what is that essence? With the reticence of knowledge and of supreme art, you do not attempt to answer. But in the mind of him who is at all of your spiritual Kith, in the soul of him who has so much as caught one waft from the Cauldron of Ceridwen, in the head of him in whose veins flows but one drop of the blood of the Old People, you awaken echo after echo of that unspoken Name.

The story has, of course, its unity as a story, its historical unity; but the fact that all its main events, and most of its main, and many of its subsidiary, characters are but "the workings of one mind" — that through them all, as day through the figures of a cathedral window, shines that Light which is as darkness, gives to the whole work another and profounder unity — what I have called the Mythological Unity (I prefer this term to Metaphysical or Philosophical). It is this fact that relates Owen to such poems as Dante's *Commedia* and Goethe's *Faust*. [...]

I do not know how far I have succeeded in penetrating your mind and seizing your intention — or how far I have read my mind into what you have written. [...] For instance, Meredith's last broken cry "... but greater than your greatness..." can only mean one thing, and the croak of the raven of Llangar, Nis gwn, can only mean that same thing. And, after all, does it so much matter? For the final existence of any work of art is not that with which it leaves its creator, but that which it assumes in the experience of its recipient — and this that I have tried to describe is what your *Owen* is to me.

And that experience has been a most wonderful thing — one of the supreme experiences that literature has given me. [...]

Far and away is this the finest of your works — it is indeed one of the greatest novels of this or any age; one of those few novels which memory sets up as a landmark on our spiritual journeys [...]

But it is rather the effect of a great poem than of a great novel that *Owen* has on me: or, more accurately, I class the experience of reading it more with the experience of reading the *Divina Commedia*, the last third of the *Iliad*, and *Faust*, than with that of reading any novel I know; and I think this is due to just that mythological unity and profound mystical significance of which I have spoken and which I think is the great thing about *Owen* — for this is a unity and a significance more often found in poetry than in prose, a unity and a significance which is, for me, the final achievement of art.

This letter is very long, but you must take its very length as some measure of my enthusiastic admiration and profound esteem.

A Short Story of the Mabinogion

One impression I retain from my first contact with the Society — a conversation with Chris Gostick — is that people interested in John Cowper Powys regard coincidence with no real surprise. I may be in a minority, but I have not yet come to expect the unexpected; and I still find it difficult to believe that my effort to find someone to advise on the Welsh phrases used in *Owen Glendower* should have turned out as it did.

Even with a very limited knowledge of the language I was reasonably sure that the original typesetting of *Glendower* had not correctly rendered certain Welsh words. For example, 'dyffryn', meaning 'valley', was on occasion spelt with one 'f', and 'llyn' (lake) with one 'l'.

A dictionary would have settled those points, but I felt that only a Welsh speaker could help when it came to Powys's use of verse and quotations from the myths of the *Mabinogion*. At one stage, Rhisiart remembers his nurse's repeated

use of the saying 'A vo pen bit pont' (which Powys translates as 'He who is the head, he will be the bridge'). Was that quotation correctly copied from the *Mabinogion*? I wondered.

We happened to spend our two week family holiday this August in the village of Dolwyddelan, on the eastern edge of Snowdonia. I asked the couple who rented us the holiday cottage whether they knew of anyone who might help. After some thought, they suggested two names. One of them was Eigra Lewis Roberts, who writes novels and television drama in Welsh, and they pointed out her house on the lower slopes of Siabod.

On two attempts to find her in, I had no response. On the third visit, my knock was answered by Eigra's husband. Somewhat tentatively I explained that I was republishing *Owen Glendower*, a novel by John Cowper Powys, and needed advice on its Welsh content. Did he by any chance know of the book or the author?

'Know John Cowper?' said Llewelyn Roberts. 'He was our next door neighbour in Blaenau Ffestiniog.'

I was shown a letter John Cowper had written to Llewelyn's father when he was at the Chest Hospital in Machynlleth, with a terminal lung disease caused by a life spent working in the slate quarries. 'My dear old friend,' the letter began. It ended with the promise of an 'ever loyal neighbour': 'I shall praise this hospital to the end of my life if it really does send you back much, much, much better.'

I was then shown a photograph of John Cowper on the doorstep of Number 1 Waterloo, Blaenau.

'And there is something else,' said Llewelyn pulling a book from the shelves. 'It will be useful to check the Welsh against this.' He handed me a copy of the *Mabinogion*. It was not just any copy of the book. It was John Cowper's.

Rob Stepney

Rob Stepney, publisher of the new edition of Owen Glendower, writes on science and medicine. Owen Glendower can be obtained directly from him at 2 Walcot Farm Cottages, Charlbury, OX7 3HY (e-mail: walcot2@freenetname.co.uk).

Review

The Alchemy of Laughter: Comedy in English Fiction,
by Glen Cavaliero

(Macmillan, 2000), 249pp. & Index. ISBN 0 333 77048 x. £45.00.

As my review of this book was held over until the 2002 edition of *The Powys Journal*, it was felt that readers of the *Newsletter* (particularly those thinking of ordering a copy) might appreciate some prior notice of it here.

The Alchemy of Laughter is warmly recommended, not simply for its (relatively

brief) discussions of the work of John Cowper and Theodore but for what it has to say about comedy in general and English comic fiction in particular. Since the book argues that comedy is an essential and intrinsic part of any attempt to 'see life steadily and see it whole', it should have a wide appeal.

What marks Glen's book out from most others on the subject is the breadth and detail of its illustrations. It does not confine itself just to the likes of Fielding, Jane Austen, Dickens and so on, nor does it treat less well-known writers simply as their satellites. Every novelist discussed is studied as a writer in his or her own right and each of them plays a part in the book's overall argument. The accent is always on the various kinds of pleasure that fiction offers, rather than on theorising or on literary history. This approach encourages readers to attempt novels that are new to them and also stimulates them to go back to novels they may not have read in years. Time and again, the book manages, in a few pages, to bring to life less frequently read novelists like Peacock, Firkbank, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Henry Green, etc. It is refreshing to be invited to think of such writers as living parts of 'English Literature' and not just as special tastes.

The treatment of John Cowper Powys and T. F. Powys is particularly suggestive. In trying to define their different kinds of comic sense the book enlarges its notion of comedy in general. Theodore's irony is more disquieting than Fielding's (he addresses his readers 'as though they were children, while knowing them to be adults') whereas, in John Cowper, comedy expresses itself through a general 'comic undertow' in the writing rather than in overtly comic scenes ('what Hardy views as tragedy, [he] treats comedically'). Such insights are as fertile for our reading of other novelists as they are for the Powyses (e.g., one might find a 'comic undertow' in Scott too).

The Alchemy of Laughter is not, thankfully, a book with an axe to grind but it does have a large general proposition to float: that the comic vision is, by virtue of its resistance to settled and monolithic ideologies, a means of accepting and celebrating life. Unlike satire, it refuses to put things in pre-determined boxes. Appropriately, this idea is always pursued in an exploratory and not in a didactic way. Readers of John Cowper's *Rabelais* (which contains some of his finest criticism and also provides a refreshing corrective to T. S. Eliot's still influential, classicising view of French prose) will recognise that this idea is very much a Powysian one. The book therefore serves as an indirect reminder of how relevant John Cowper's thought about literature can be in more general contexts.

Finally, I should add that *The Alchemy of Laughter* is a rare example of critical scholarship that has a genuine style of its own and is readable for its own sake.

David Gervais

With thanks to the *Journal* editors.

David Gervais has edited the Cambridge Review and written widely on French and English literature. His next book is on Shakespeare and Racine.

Letter

From Theodora Scutt

An Author's Reply

It may be a bit silly to write a review of a review,¹ especially some time after the actual review was published; I do so now because Dr Krissdóttir has misunderstood my meaning.

It never occurred to me that the title I chose for my book could be misunderstood. The Cuckoo is a bird about whom I know two facts — 'Summer is i-comen in/ Llude sing Cucoo!/ Groweth mead, and bloweth reed/ And singeth the wude nu —/ Llude sing Cucoo!'. The other fact is that he, she, can't be bothered bringing up her, his, own kids. They are always laid in some other bird's nest and this other bird has the bother of hatching and rearing them. Which is what happened to me; hence the title. But why do I have to explain it? Doesn't everyone know?

When I wrote the articles for *The Powys Review*,² I could barely spare the time to do so and when they were published I didn't read them; at that time my days were very full indeed in a basic and worrying way, and therefore I cannot comment on the possibility of the articles having been 'sanitized'. MK has, however, hit the nail (crookedly) on the head in the case of 'A Portrait of T. F. Powys',³ which I certainly didn't write — I hadn't time! — but my biological father wrote down what I said about T.F., for which he had my leave. However, when I read the finished thing, in Provence, I nearly had a fit, as Potocki had not only taken down remarks that he knew were not for repeating, but he'd added one or two remarks of his own. I was very angry and normally would have used the paper for firefighting; and the reasons why I didn't could make another book — but won't.

Naturally 'Cuckoo' was published under my real name; but to the very best of my ability I wrote it as Susie Powys — as the child that I was. I don't think Dr Krissdóttir realises that. I suppose she's right about the kid's 'deep anger and frustration', but what she, the kid writing it, was trying to do was to record facts. About Daddy. There were parts of my childhood and youth in which he had no part, so I didn't trouble with them ... I couldn't read Daddy's books, because they showed so clearly the unhappiness of the man who wrote them, and I didn't want to think of him being so unhappy. One day I'll try again to read them.

I cannot live without a horse in my life. Home is not a home unless there's a horse in the background. But in fairness I must say, as to people who know me I wouldn't need to, that all farm stock, farm work in general, the countryside as it was then, and what I suppose I must call the 'supernatural', took a great part in helping me to gain my balance in a fairly unbalanced childhood.

If I said what I really think about the remark that I wanted to 'publish a second,

more politically correct version' of my recollections of Daddy, it would be entirely unprintable ... Political correctness, of any variety, can go to a very hot climate as far as I'm concerned; all I was doing (at any time) was trying to tell the truth without hurting the feelings of my real mother, who was well alive as I wrote and whom I liked very much. I'm glad at least that MK realised that I had nothing to do with *Dog's Eggs*. I think — I can't be sure — that Potocki wrote and printed it from Provence, after I'd left for England. I may be wrong; I certainly would have tried to stop him and certainly would have failed; and enough has happened between now and then to put more important things than Father's *faux pas* out of my mind.

However that may be — and it makes no difference now — Dr Krissdóttir has written an excellent review; and she seems to have enjoyed reading the book too. I'm glad of that.

1 The review was by Morine Krissdóttir of *A Cuckoo in the Powys Nest, A Memoir*, by Theodora Gay Scutt (Brynmill Press, 2000) in *Newsletter* 42, April 2001.

2 Theodora Scutt wrote in *The Powys Review* Nos 9 and 10, 1981–2.

3 The unpublished typescript written in 1965.

Dusk

A mastership of cloud
 Rain-ruff of the moon
 Nerve-centre of green
 Rigmarole of blue
 Colour red blown out to sea
 A bird 'with oceans for eyes'
 October out-clouding itself,
 growing wilder and wilder
 Innermost twilights
 of a million tiny worlds
 promoting his or her silvers
 A vehicle that serves
 as a dwelling when parked
 in the heart of dusk:

Penelope Shuttle

Penelope Shuttle (see Newsletter 31) lives in Falmouth, Cornwall.

(A puzzle for readers: identify the quotation from JCP)

For John Cowper Powys

Joy,

Cosmic

Prince

Rafael Squirru

Rafael Squirru is an Argentine poet and art critic, an enjoyer of JCP since the 1950s.

Notices

Which Powys books do you re-read? *Newsletters* over the years have run several series of personal views from members: 'Profiles', 'How I Discovered the Powyses', etc. We'd like to continue this, under the suggested title 'One Powys Book in My Life'. Discovering often follows similar patterns, while seeing how one favourite book lasts, or changes, for you over the years – how it bears re-reading – is different for everyone. Anyone who would like to contribute, please contact the Editor.

In the Spring number we also hope to start a series on Powys Publishers, and to include an article on the Collection and Dorset Museum.

Requests for books to buy or borrow can appear here.

We Need a New Treasurer

Stephen Powys Marks has been the Society's Hon. Treasurer for nearly 13 years, and does not wish to continue after the AGM next Summer.

The Treasurer keeps the financial records of the Society, including records of subscriptions paid, pays in money received and pays out cheques, sends out reminders for subscriptions, checks the bank statements, and claims back tax on subscriptions. It needs precision but need not take too much time.

If you would be interested or can think of someone you think the obvious candidate please get in touch with one of the officers, Peter Foss or Richard Perceval Graves. If you want to know more about what is involved do telephone Stephen Powys Marks (01761 435134).