

Late Conference Bookings

There are a few places still available at the Chichester conference. Late bookers should contact the Hon. Secretary, Peter Lazare, by 30th July at the latest.

Editorial

Another patchwork. More on **Chichester** (and see the last *Newsletter*), and the **Conference**; 'The Sin-Eater' and the Burpham Walk—also another walk round JCP's earlier Sussex home, near Lewes, with associated subjects. A new Prize, and a Powys celebration at Sherborne School; reports on our two recent meetings at Ely and Hampstead, and on John Williams's professorial inauguration at Greenwich.

In various letters, 'ordinary life' figures more than usual—but often the unedited can give a good idea of a writer's background and everyday existence, and state of mind.

Theodore and young Stephen Tomlin clearly had a companionable friendship, with rewards to TF of introductions to publishers, and to Tomlin (who ended sadly, age 35) of 'eighteen months of happiness'.

Young-married JCP, a new householder, writes to his father and brother in practical mode, about mortgages and pianos. A new American archive, a review of

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Sylvia Townsend Warner's Dorset stories, and finally a surreal visit by Iain Sinclair to Blaenau and the Real Wraith of JCP.

This is your present editor's fifteenth newsletter, which continues thanks to contributions from members and help from many sides. For all of which once again thanks, and please continue to offer !

Chairman's Report for 2005–2006

Richard Perceval Graves stepped down as Chairman at the Annual General Meeting held at the 2005 Conference held on 19–21 August in Llangollen. Richard joined the Society thirty years ago, at the time when he was writing his fine biographical book entitled *The Brothers Powys*, and has been unfailing in his commitment to the Powyses ever since then. He initially agreed to take over the chairmanship for three years, but in the end stayed for four, and during his time as Chairman the Society has found a new stability and strength. He has attracted outstanding and distinguished speakers to our conferences. The Society owes him a great debt of gratitude. He is still working for us as manager of the Society's website, maintaining the Powyses' virtual presence in cyberspace.

The 2005 conference in Llangollen was held in the welcoming atmosphere of the Hand Hotel. Our conference organisers Louise de Bruin and Peter Foss again did sterling work in ensuring that practical arrangements ran smoothly. Our speakers included Charles Lock, Richard Maxwell, Barbara Ozieblo, and Ian Robinson. Chris Wilkinson devised a Saturday evening entertainment, 'Player Kings', based on the letters of Oliver Wilkinson and his mother Frances Wilkinson (née Gregg). This was the second conference to be held at Llangollen, which is near John Cowper Powys's home at Corwen and many of the sites pictured in his *Owen Glendower*. Participants indicated their willingness to return at a future date, but after the 2006 Conference at Chichester, it is hoped to return to a conference venue in the West Country. Finding a venue that is both comfortable and affordable is difficult, and specific suggestions are welcome.

The Society held two meetings in 2006. On the inspiration of Sonia Lewis, a dozen of us gathered in an upper room of The Old Fire Engine House at Ely for a discussion of the 'May Day' chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance*, led by Glen Cavaliero. On 17th June, Peter Foss talked to the Society at the Friends' Meeting House in Hampstead on 'Poetry and Truth, Glimpses from Llewelyn's Diaries'. This was the first London meeting of the Society for many years, and proved a great success. We hope to resume the tradition of meetings in Hampstead on a regular basis, although not at the expense of West Country meetings. There was no meeting in Dorchester this year, but we hope there will be an occasion for one next spring, when it is proposed to hold a 'Powys Day' with more than one speaker and a discussion session.

The Society published Volume xv of its *Journal* during the year, ably edited by Larry Mitchell, who keeps in close contact with the life of the Society despite living in distant Texas, and is regularly present at our conferences. Our thanks go to him, and to Kate Kavanagh, who has produced three lively and absorbing newsletters. The Society also issued three publications this year: John Cowper Powys's *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant and other essays*, edited by David Goodway; *John Cowper Powys on Thomas Hardy*, a selection edited by Kate Kavanagh, with an introduction by our President Glen Cavaliero; and a new, third edition of Alan Howe's *Powys Checklist and Readers' Guide*, revised and extended by Stephen Powys Marks. Our thanks go to all the editors for their painstaking work, and also to Stephen Powys Marks for his devoted desktop publishing work, which has given all the Society's publications a professional and attractive appearance. Members who are interested in research and in editing should remember that the Society would like to support and encourage their work, and the committee would be happy to consider and approve new publishing projects.

Your Chairman and Secretary visited the Dorset County Museum where the Society's collection of books and papers is housed, and met with Judy Lindsay, the museum's Curator, and Dr Morine Krissdóttir. Your Chairman and *Newsletter* Editor later paid a two-day visit to the collection. Researchers are encouraged to make use of this collection, which has been extensively catalogued and maintained for the purposes of study. Give notice to the museum in advance—the procedure is described on the Society's website.

The Committee met in London in October 2005 and February 2006. Members of the Committee also met for a useful discussion at Richard Graves' home in Bristol in June 2006, but without a quorum that would enable formal decisions to be taken. During this year, Lorna Burns and Michael Skaife d'Ingerthorpe stood down as committee members, and our thanks go to them for their service to the society.

We were sorry to record the death in December 2005 of Richard Handscombe, a long-standing friend of the Society and donor of the Handscombe Powys Collection at the University of Toronto. Shortly before his death in December 2005, Richard made a generous donation of £1,000, and it is proposed to use this to institute the Richard Handscombe Essay Prize on a subject related to the Powyses, to be awarded by the Society.

We also thank Tim Bates of Pollinger for his gift to the Society of about 100 books by and about John Cowper Powys. These will be sold in aid of the Society.

Thanks to an increased subscription and lower journal production costs, the Society's finances remain sound. We have a solid foundation for activities we may wish to undertake in the future.

I would like to thank personally all those who have contributed to the life of the Society in the last year, and hope that membership of the Society has brought pleasure to all.

John Hodgson

AGM 2006

The Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society will be held in the Cloisters Chamber of Bishop Otter College, College Lane, Chichester at 11:00 am on Sunday 27 August 2006.

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of the 2005 AGM—published in the November 2005 *Newsletter*.
- 2 Matters arising.
- 3 Report of the Hon. Secretary.
- 4 Report of the Hon. Treasurer and Audited Accounts, as published in the July 2006 *Newsletter*.
- 5 Appointment of the Hon. Auditor, Stephen Allen.
- 6 Report for 2005–6 by the Chairman, as published in the July 2006 *Newsletter*.
- 7 To note the election of Officers and members of the Committee for 2006–7
- 8 Date and location of the 2007 Conference.
- 9 Any other business.

Committee Nominations 2006–7

As no other nominations have been received, the present **Honorary Officers** will serve for a further year. They are:

<i>Chairman</i>	John Hodgson
<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	David Gervais
<i>Hon. Treasurer</i>	Michael French
<i>Hon. Secretary</i>	Peter Lazare

The following **Committee Members** have been nominated by Society members and have agreed to stand:

<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Seconder</i>
Peter Foss	Kate Kavanagh	Louise de Bruin
Anna Pawelko	John Hodgson	Peter Lazare

If approved, the Committee from August 2006 will therefore consist of:

Peter Foss (joint conference manager), **David Goodway**, **Timothy Hyman**, **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter* editor), **Jeff Kwintner**, **Anna Pawelko**, and **John Powys**.

Minutes of Committee meetings can be inspected on request to the Hon. Secretary.

Honorary Treasurer's Report for 2005

The accounts for 2005 are set out on the following two pages: they have been approved by the Society's Honorary Auditor, Mr Stephen Allen, and once again the Society is most grateful to him for his work for the Society. I am pleased to be able to report that, if this is the wish of the Annual General Meeting, Mr Allen is willing to continue as auditor for another year.

The revised subscription rates came into force on 1st January 2005, and I am very grateful to all those who completed new Standing Orders in respect of the new subscription rates. The Committee were heartened by the fact that, despite the increase in the subscription, virtually all members continued their membership and the paid-up membership in 2005 of 276 showed only a very small decrease from that in 2004 (288). After taking into account the tax refund under the Gift Aid Scheme of £924 (£580 in 2004), our total subscription income in 2005 was £6,453 or 76.6% of our total income of £8,422. (In 2004 our total income was very similar, £8,271, but this included significant income from the sale of *Wessex Memories* and the surplus from the Sherborne Conference; income from subscriptions accounted for only 55% of the total.) In moving towards predictable membership subscription income forming a larger fraction of the Society's income, the Committee feels that the Society's finances are now on a sounder basis, and this will permit the Committee to underwrite new initiatives designed to support the Society's objective of 'the promotion ... of the writings, thought and contribution to the arts of the Powys family ...'.

As in previous years, the largest part of our expenditure was on our two regular publications, *The Powys Journal* and the three issues of the Society's *Newsletter*. In 2005, the net cost of producing the *Journal* and *Newsletters*, including distribution, was £3,752 (2004: £4,228). The reduction in 2005 resulted primarily from a change of printer of the *Journal*, a change which the Committee believes has been achieved without any loss in quality or appearance.

Before taking into account the movement in publication stocks, the Society ended the year with an excess of income over expenditure of £3,847 (2004: £2,942), but it should be noted that the 2005 figure included the generous gift of £1,000 from Richard Handscombe just prior to his untimely death; the Committee has earmarked this money for the institution of an essay competition (*see page XX*). Using the revised depreciation methodology introduced in 2004, the value of the Society's publication stocks in 2005 decreased by £191 to £1,031 (in 2004 by £1,921 to £1,222). Overall, therefore, taking into account movements in the value of the publication stock, the accounts show an excess of income over expenditure of £3,656 (2004: £1,021) and an increase in the Society's net worth on 31st December 2005 to £10,646 (2004: £6,990).

I regret that it will not be possible for me to attend this year's AGM at Chichester, but I will be pleased to answer (by phone, e-mail or letter) any member's query on this report either before or after the AGM.

Michael J. French

THE POWYS SOCIETY

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2005

INCOME ¹	£	£	£ 2004
<i>Subscriptions</i>			
In arrears (2 members)	34		
Brought forward from 2004 (22 members)	420		
For 2005 (254 members)	5,075		
Honorary members (14)	—		
Tax refund under Gift Aid	<u>924</u>	6,453	4,687
<i>Donations</i>			
Conference book sales	170		
Other ²	<u>1,105</u>	1,275	302
<i>Publication Sales</i>			
<i>Wessex Memories</i>	110		
Stock publications	<u>403</u>	513	1,383
<i>Conference</i>			
Registration fees	5,301		
less costs	<u>(5,134)</u>	167	1,889
<i>Other</i>			
Bank interest		<u>14</u>	<u>10</u>
TOTAL		<u>8,422</u>	<u>8,271</u>

EXPENDITURE ¹			
<i>Powys Journal xv</i>			
Cost of printing	1,376		2,189
Cost of distribution	<u>369</u>	1,745	<u>341</u> 2,530
<i>Powys Newsletters</i>			
Printing costs, Nos 54, 55, 56	1,522		1,210
Cost of distribution	<u>485</u>	2,007	<u>488</u> 1,698
<i>T. F. Powys book/ day</i>		116	30
<i>Administrative</i>			
Web-site maintenance	82		70
<i>Expenses</i>			
Alliance of Literary Societies	15		15
Advert in <i>TLS</i> , December 2004	—		157
Expenses in relation to subscription increase	—		157
Officers' expenses	202		368
Travel to Committee meetings	<u>408</u>	707	<u>334</u> 1,101
TOTAL		<u>4,575</u>	<u>5,359</u>

EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE	<u>3,847</u>	<u>2,942</u>
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DECREASE IN VALUE OF PUBLICATION STOCKS ³	(191)	(1,921)
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EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE		
(taking stock movements into account)	<u>3,656</u>	<u>1,021</u>

THE POWYS SOCIETY

STATEMENT OF FUNDS AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2005

GENERAL FUND ⁴	£	£	2004
Funds at 1 January 2005		4,990	3,969
Excess of income over expenditure		3,656	1,021
Transfer to Wilson Knight Benefactors Fund		(5,000)	=
Funds at 31 December 2005		<u>3,646</u>	<u>4,990</u>

Represented by:

Stock of <i>Powys Journal</i> and books ³		1,031	1,222
Cash at Bank 31 December 2005 ⁵	2,836		
Less subscriptions received in advance ⁶	(221)	<u>2,615</u>	<u>3,768</u>
		<u>3,646</u>	<u>4,990</u>

THE WILSON KNIGHT BENEFACTORS FUND ⁷

Funds at 1 January 2005		2,000	2,000
Transfer from General Fund		5,000	—
Funds at 31 December 2005		<u>7,000</u>	<u>2,000</u>

Represented by

Cash at bank		<u>7,000</u>	<u>2,000</u>
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NOTES

- 1 Cash turnover in 2005: total receipts, £13,697; total payments, £10,067. After adjustments, relating to the cost of new publications stocked, existing publications sold, writing down of stock and subscriptions received in advance, the excess of income over expenditure was £3,636 (2004: £1,021).
- 2 Includes a gift of £1,000 from the late Richard Handscombe.
- 3 The value of stock at 1 January 2005 was £1,222. During the year this was increased by the taking of new publications into stock (£228: 70 copies of *The Powy Journal* xv for 2005 @ £3.25 per copy) and decreased by the sale of existing stock and straight-line depreciation of existing stock to zero after five years (£419). This gives a total decrease during 2005 of £191 and a stock value at 31 December 2005 of £1,031.
- 4 **Society's net worth at 31 December 2005, £10,646 (General Fund £3,646; Wilson Knight Benefactors Fund £7,000)** (at 31 December 2004, net worth was £6,990).
- 5 Community Account £223, Savings Account £9,613, less WKB Fund £7,000 = £2,836.
- 6 Subscriptions received in advance: from 2004 accounts: £17 [1 subscription for 2006]; from 2005 accounts: £204 [£127, six subscriptions for 2006; £40, two subscriptions for 2007; £18, one subscription for 2008; £19, one subscription for 2009].
- 7 All interest has been retained in the General Fund.

Michael J. French, Hon. Treasurer

AUDITOR'S REPORT TO MEMBERS OF THE POWYS SOCIETY

I have audited the financial statements in accordance with approved auditing standards. In my opinion, the financial statements give a true and fair view of the Charity's affairs at 31 December 2005 and of the surplus for the year then ended and comply with the Companies Act 1985.

J. S. Allen (Chartered Accountant), 25th June 2006

Conference Programme

Friday 25th August

- 4.00 Arrival
- 5.30 Reception
- 8.00 **Henning Ahrens: *John Cowper Powys's Philosophy Revisited***

Saturday 26th August

- 9.30 **John Gray: *'Three Powys Philosophies'***
- 11.15 **Elaine Mencher: *'Editing T. F. Powys'***
Afternoon: **visit to Burpham** and surroundings with guided walk
and readings, led by **Kieran McCann** (optional)
- 8.00 A reading of ***The Sin-Eater*** by **T. F. Powys and Stephen Tomlin**,
produced by **Barrie Mencher**

Sunday 27th August

- 9.30 **W. J. Keith: *'Coming to Terms with John Cowper Powys's Autobiography'***
- 11.00 **AGM**, followed by a panel discussion, '*Autobiography, Memory and Myth*'
- 3.00 Departure

The Richard Handscombe Essay Prize

The Powys Society announces a prize for the best critical essay to be submitted on a subject related to the Powyses. The object of the prize is to encourage new ways of understanding and promoting the brothers' works.

Essays should be no more than 10,000 words long and previously unpublished. They should be submitted in both hard copy and disk format, and entrants should enclose a short biography and a cheque for £5.00 made out to The Powys Society.

The winner of the prize will receive £200 and their essay will be published in the forthcoming number of *The Powys Journal*. The judges reserve the right not to award the prize if no entry of sufficient merit is submitted. The deadline for submissions is **1 April 2007**.

For further details please contact John Hodgson, the Chairman of The Powys Society, at: xhoni@yahoo.com

Old Shirburnians celebrate the Powys Brothers

Our member Sam Smart is the organiser of a biennial literary gathering of Old Shirburnians at Sherborne School on **Friday 17th November 2006**.

This year's event is devoted to the Powys brothers, and includes two symposia and a dinner. Our past chairman **Richard Perceval Graves** will be speaking on the Powyses, and it is hoped to revive *The Unreturning Morning*, the entertainment devised by Peter Foss performed at the 2004 Conference held at Sherborne.

Members of The Powys Society are cordially invited to attend the day's events. For further details, contact The Powys Society's secretary, Peter Lazare.

Burpham Walk

Kieran McCann, webmaster of the attractive and informative site 'John Cowper Powys in Sussex', has devised a walk through and around Burpham for the Conference's Saturday afternoon. The walk covers several of JCP's favourite haunts and is about 5½ miles. The walk is straightforward, on firm ground or over a couple of grassy fields though with a couple of ups and downs. Detours can be taken in the event of wet weather. Walking boots are not essential but stout footwear of some sort would be advisable; sticks and so on are entirely optional but would be authentically JCP.



If this walk is too long, further options are also available. It is hoped that we will be able to have tea in the pleasant tea rooms overlooking the river at Amberley.

We will punctuate the walk with *in-situ* readings from John Cowper's Powys's writing. Participants are encouraged to bring their favourite quotations.

(See also p. 30 for a walk around JCP's previous Sussex home, Court House near Lewes.)



A Meeting at Ely

It may have seemed perverse to hold a discussion of *A Glastonbury Romance*'s 'May Day' chapter on the 1st of April; but things worked out perfectly. Ten of us foregathered at the Old Fire Engine House, a restaurant and art gallery on the cathedral green, where we were made to feel at home and could share views in the most charming and comfortable room imaginable.

The chapter was looked at closely, and yielded up a great deal for comment and reflection. One was able to appreciate Powys's artistry as he allows incident to flow into incident, each one illuminating the others—the charming kitchen scene with Tossie and Sally in Miss Crow's house; the tea-party bringing together five other characters and filling out the happenings in Glastonbury—a scene rich in comedy; and then the contrasted love scenes between Rachel and Ned, Sam and Nell, the one full of the happiness and storms of young love, the other of grief, and all held together by Powys's evocation of the landscape. Nor was that landscape so different from our surroundings—the Isle of Avalon above the Somerset marshland, the Isle of Ely above the fens.

It was a pleasure too to be joined by Phyllis Playter's goddaughter, Phyl Lewry, whose photograph as a little girl standing with John Cowper outside 1 Waterloo adorned the July 2005 *Newsletter*. Warm thanks go to Sonia Lewis, whose idea the happy occasion was and whose organisation made it possible.

Glen Cavaliero

‘May Day’

This central chapter, as Glen reminded us, brought together several groups of characters with reminders of several more. It is largely in dialogue, with interspersions or close-ups, as if a chorus, from the natural world: the bowl of bluebells in Miss Crow’s kitchen accompanying the Below Stairs views of Sally and Tossie, the vases of primroses in the tea-time drawing room where the yeoman poet Ned Atheling crosses swords with Philip Crow (in tweeds and immaculate socks); the ancient log on Chalice Hill which Ned tries in vain to lift and impress Rachel, the hay-shed and evening star that accompany Nell and Sam in their sad last tryst. It is funny and sad, inconclusive and un-‘privileging’ as the whole book is.

Among other things, discussion touched on JCP’s cinematic technique in *Glastonbury*, and his mastery of details—the cowslip in the pocket; also the influence of Phyllis Playter on JCP—for the first time he had a resident critic, leading to much reshaping

Why ‘May-Day’? In this chapter, people are *nice*: even Philip is subdued, admiring his socks. Pain is turned positive (as with Sam & Nell). At one point the image of *moss* takes over, in a literary mulch of quotations—the composted memories of readers—moss, many plants in one—a multiverse. Sam is pursued by Christ as by the Hound of Heaven, but the conclusion, with Nell and the evening star, is moving; softened by ‘sort of’, ‘half ...’ JCP shifts his perspectives and readers have to supply their own reflection of life.

KK



The Ely group (from left to right): John Hodgson, Chris Gostick, Kate Kavanagh, Glen Cavaliero, Bruce Madge, Cicely Hill, Sonia Lewis, Peter Lazare, Phyl Lewry. (Tony Atmore had to leave earlier.)

Hampstead Meeting

17th June 2006

Fourteen people met at the Quaker Meeting House in Hampstead's steep Heath Street—as John Hodgson reminded us, it was the first Powys meeting in London for some years, and since even longer in this pleasant house. There were apologies from several members, including our President Glen Cavaliero and our prospective Conference speaker John Gray—who had compensated by choosing *Wolf Solent* as his Summer reading in the *Guardian* books section. Suitably for the season, John read from Llewelyn's description of a hot summer in *Skin for Skin* (Chapter 7, 'August').

Peter Foss then spoke on *Poetry and Truth: glimpses from Llewelyn's diaries*.

Most of the diaries are still unpublished, though gradually appearing. 1903 ('A Sherborne Schoolboy') came out last year in Cecil Woolf's 'Powys Heritage' series; 1908 ('A Reluctant Teacher') is due to appear by August; and 1909 ('The Immemorial Year') is in preparation. 1909–12 make a long book, 'The Diaries of a Consumptive'; 1914 and 1919 are fragmentary. Llewelyn's part of *Confessions of Two Brothers* (1916, written in Africa) contains sections from the diaries, later mined for his autobiographical *Skin for Skin* and his African essays. The diaries were quoted widely but selectively by Louis Wilkinson in *Welsh Ambassadors* (1936) and Malcolm Elwin in his *Life of Llewelyn Powys* (1946). Excerpts from 1911 (when he stayed with Theodore) were in *NL* 55 (July 2005).

As one who has studied them closely, PJF finds it increasingly difficult to consider the diaries from a distance. In his view they contain all of Llewelyn.

Poetry for Llewelyn—poetic *faith* (see his essay of that title) is, as for Goethe in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* ('poetry and truth'), what governs the life of the narrator, hence poetic truth is embedded in and through the person of the writer. JCP's *Autobiography* employs this method, as does Llewelyn's *Skin for Skin*. *Love and Death* goes further, taking poetic truth beyond biographical facts, transforming memory. Poetic truth replaces traditional religion as a transfiguration of life, through awareness and wonder, redeeming the negative in things.

PJF went on to consider the influence of Pater's *Marius the Epicurean* as the culmination of late nineteenth-century reactions (Arnold, Emerson) against rites and fixed beliefs, into a sacramentalising of time, life and the world. Llewelyn in *Now That the Gods Are Dead* employs Christian terminology for this 'pagan' worship of life itself.

Llewelyn quarried his diaries for his formal work but their freshness and clarity is not surpassed. Their sense of wonder, of experience transfigured, compares with that in poems such as Yeats's 'blessing and was blessed'—or George Fraser's vision of London in 'Epistle to a Young Poet' (*Conditions*, 1969).

Interesting comparisons of style were given between the diaries and essays describing the same event—the diaries often more vividly. Examples of these came

from the different accounts of his near-fatal crossing of the Furka Pass from Arosa to Davos in Switzerland. Quotations and symbolism enter all Llewelyn's work. He denied the necessity for the supernatural, but the heightened awareness of his 'poetic faith' led his brother John to call him an 'epicurean mystic'—a title chosen by PJF for his original thesis on Llewelyn, later published as *A Study of Llewelyn Powys* (Edwin Mellen Press, 1991).

Discussion following the talk dealt among other things with the modern favouring of sketches and immediate notes, often over polished versions. What did most artists do with their trial runs? A diary (edited or unedited) can be a different art form as well as raw material; but the finished work (like *Skin for Skin*) is still a more substantial work of art.

Then, the question of privacy: Powys diaries (of which Louise de Bruin gave several examples) were not 'private', often passed round the family or (like JCP's) directed at a future reader. All diaries assert the writer's identity; Llewelyn's, written when under possible sentence of death from consumption, were his *testament*.

Are diaries or letters the closest we can get to a writer? Both can be self-conscious, diaries too are 'addressed' to someone, even if to the writers themselves, asserting their 'iconicness'—their selfhood as seen by themselves—their 'life illusion'.

KK

Peter Foss will repeat this talk at the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, on October 17th 2006 (see 'News and Notes').

A Powys Book in My Life

A Singular Voice

This account (slightly shortened) by David Solomon of his many years' devotion to Llewelyn Powys was printed in the Spring 2004 edition of the Newsletter of the Highgate Literary & Scientific Institution.

I was a student in my early twenties when, by chance, I discovered a copy of *Love and Death* by Llewelyn Powys in my local public library. I was drawn to the title, and its subtitle—*An Imaginary Autobiography*. The book's impassioned and poetic prose entranced my young mind.

In this book Powys, in the role of a dying narrator, casts his mind back to youthful memories of an idyllic summer in the village of Montacute in Somerset where he grew up. He makes those rich and lyrical memories the backdrop for his love for a girl living nearby who later abandons him. The love affair was imaginary or, more accurately, he imagines a love affair that occurred much later in his life as if it had

taken place in Montacute, many years before, during that Arcadian summer of his youth.

Llewelyn was born in 1884. Although he lived and travelled in many parts of the world, Llewelyn remained a countryman in spirit, and the intensity of his delight in the richness of life came primarily from the English countryside. After Cambridge he tried his hand at school-mastering and lecturing in America. He was not a success at either. When he was twenty-five he was found to be suffering from consumption, in those days a deadly disease. That changed everything, as the poet and critic Kenneth Hopkins pointed out. The enforced idleness to which he was subjected in attempting to contain the disease 'enabled him to think, and in these years he began to form the philosophy which sustained him for the rest of his life, the expression of which gave significance to his books'. And Powys's simple, unpretentious philosophy, a philosophy of ancient lineage stemming from Epicurus, was a revelation to me.

What was that philosophy? Because of his illness, his grasp on life was slender. He came to value his own experience of life with an especial passion. It was the wonder he found in it, appreciated through the senses, which determined the basis of his philosophy. In an essay called 'The Poetic Faith' he wrote:

The conditions of a man's happiness are circumscribed by the senses only ... The senses, the senses, the senses—hold to the senses. They alone will not betray us. The careless prodigal impressions they transmit present the nearest approach to an absolute reality that we shall ever know. And it is through the senses that we become initiated into the deepest secret of all—the secret that recognizes a poetic vision of life as the highest guerdon of each passionate intellectual spirit.

Philip Larkin said of Llewelyn 'no writer has been more constantly aware of the fact of death, of extinction'. But Larkin emphasised that Llewelyn's sense of death being near at hand was the very core of his love of life. He quotes Llewelyn's own words:

Consider the glow, the glory of being alive, the incredible chance of it! How heart-piercing, how shocking, how supremely beautiful is this unexplained, wavering moment that troubles all that is, from the Milky Way to a common stinging nettle!

But for Llewelyn, this love of life coupled with his sense of mortality led him to a rejection of organised religion, a rejection that he held as passionately as his love for life. He expresses this in his extended essay, 'Impassioned Clay':

Let us once again repeat the actual truth of the case, that hopeless, dangerous truth which the human race is everywhere and at all times, so reluctant to acknowledge. All religions, all metaphysical systems, all cogging theories of life that claim for human polity any foundation outside the ramparts of the visible world, are the veriest counterfeits. They are the sea-frit, the flying foam blown hither and thither over the face of the salt, unplumbed ocean.

Are Llewelyn's writings, then, only for the non-believer? It is his singular voice—in his style—in which he expresses his wonder at every observed detail of the world around him that can draw the reader, regardless of his convictions. Powys himself

recounted how Montaigne had fixed to the ceiling of his room the words 'The For and the Against are both possible'.

Llewelyn's illness required him to pass lengthy periods of rest and treatment in Switzerland. He lived in Africa for some five years and spent a further five years in America, mainly in New York. In 1931 he settled with his American wife, Alyse Gregory, on a remote headland on the Dorset Coast, although he continued to travel—to the West Indies, Palestine, France and Italy. It was from this time that his wonder at every observed detail bore fruit, in the rich and diverse series of essays which ultimately must be his monument. He used the essay form to express his philosophy, to discuss thinkers and writers from the past who had influenced him and, above all, to describe his personal responses to the natural scene, whether in Africa, America or Somerset and Dorset. His collections of essays, taken together, provide a graphic and intimate account of the progress of his life, his inner thoughts, his travels and his own highly personal response to all that he saw.

There are graceful and elegant paragraphs in all of his essays. The opening sentences of an essay called 'A Pond', contained in the collection called *Earth Memories*, is an example.

A mile from my cottage there is a small pond. It lies in the centre of a triangular lawn where two valleys meet. Except for the old shepherd, nobody knows of it. Though it has the beautiful shape of a dew pond it is not one. It is only a common pond supplied by the surface water of the wide downland gorges, and yet it has always seemed to me to be enchanted. I have often thought, as I have passed it, that one day, under special dispensation, I should receive from this small, green stoup of lustral water, a whisper as to the secret of life ...

Whether treating passionately of grand themes or evoking the simple natural features around him, all that Llewelyn wrote is marked by a style that springs from his own essential nature. His own words express this:

A perfect style is the perfect expression of a man's secret identity. It makes arrogant claims. It demands that the ordinary everyday world should give attention to the wandering goat-cry of a supreme egoism as sensitive as it is tough.

In her introduction to *Love and Death* his widow, Alyse Gregory, said of Llewelyn:

... of no one could it be better said that 'the style is the man'. He can write of life only as he sees it, and he sees it as a countryman susceptible to each manifestation of the rude earth, as a man of letters apt at literary enchantments, and as a natural poet.

Llewelyn Powys died a few weeks after the outbreak of the Second World War at the age of fifty-five, in Switzerland, where he had returned yet again in the hope of maintaining his grasp on life. Ten days before his death he wrote a postcard to a friend, which ended:

I believe with you that the present desolations will pass and you and your children will live in a better age with simplicity and gaiety. Dust is soft and secret, and silent. I am not so well, but I have had a happy life for half a century in sunshine.

David Solomon

Tony Halsall

(1950–May 2006)

Tony Halsall, a member of The Powys Society who has died recently, was a teacher, lecturer and college principal who came to an interest in JCP in the mid-1970s, while doing a thesis on the poet and artist David Jones. His wife Chris notes: ‘Tony ... found shared interests with John Cowper Powys of philosophy, religion and literature. He was taken by Powys’s often complex use of language, powerful characters and intense relationships. Tony revelled in challenging literature that other people find “difficult”. When he died he was working as a manager of the International Baccalaureate Organisation, whose mission statement he said could have been his own: “to develop inquiring, caring, knowledgeable young people who through intellectual understanding can make the world a better and more peaceful place”’.

(With thanks to Chris Halsall, who has kindly donated Powys books belonging to Tony Halsall to the Society.)

News & Notes

The **two meetings** in Ely and London (Hampstead) took place as planned (see pages 10, 12). A dozen-plus people came to each. They are rewarding occasions which we hope will persist and perhaps grow. Another meeting in London is planned for **25th November**.

★

The **Conference** is on course for **Chichester** (see pp.4–6 of the last *Newsletter*). For once, the novels take a back place to considerations of JCP’s ‘non-fiction’—if indeed these can be separated. On other pages you will find: some background to the reading of TFP’s play ‘**The Sin-Eater**’; a map of the **Burpham Walk** planned for Saturday afternoon; and an account of a similar walk around Court House, JCP’s previous Sussex home, near Lewes.

★

Members might be interested to know that **Mervyn Peake** (1911–68, poet, artist, author of *Gormenghast*) is buried at Burpham.

★

Also at Bishop Otter Campus that weekend will be a meeting of the **United Nations (UK, Southern Counties) Society**, on the theme of **Climate Change**. Some possible overlaps here?

★

August 13th (Sunday) is **Llewelyn’s Birthday**, and a gathering of his admirers is once more planned, for lunch at East Chaldon with a walk to the memorial stone on the cliff. Neil Lee-Atkin is hoping to film the event.

★

The Dragon Trail, ‘a journey through art and archaeology in Wessex’ (paintings and drawings, interpretation and a Trail), created by **Rosemary Dickens**, opens on **7th October** at the **Salisbury** (‘outstanding’—Bill Bryson) **Museum**.

★

A **concert** (including Elgar’s Cello Concerto) by the Rochford Ensemble conducted by PS member **Jeffery Babb** will take place at St Mary’s Church, **Hay-on-Wye** on Saturday **7th October 2006**. **Jeffery Babb** (18, Church Terrace, St Mary’s Road, Hay-on-Wye HR3 5EE) directed the Anglo-German / European Youth Music Weeks for many years. His interest in T. F. Powys’s writing on *Job* (see *NL* 57) is in connection with Vaughan Williams’s music

★

Peter Foss will repeat his talk given at Hampstead, **‘Poetry and Truth: Glimpses from Llewelyn Powys’s Diaries’**, as part of this autumn’s season of Tuesday Literary Lectures at the **Dorset County Museum, Dorchester**, on **Tuesday 17th October** at 5.30 pm (tea and biscuits 5.15pm).

★

The Powys Brothers will be celebrated at **Sherborne School** on **17th November** – (see page 9).

★

Peter Foss’s ***Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys*** will appear featured in the new **British Library catalogue**—it is hoped in the autumn. *Diary of a Reluctant Teacher*, the next instalment (1908) of Llewelyn’s diaries, is about to be published, with 1909 in preparation. A new collection of **LIP’s essays** has been agreed, to follow *Wessex Memories*.

★

Still no news from Overlook Press or Duckworth of Morine’s JCP Biography—and *Autobiography* is said to be postponed again, till September—*We Shall See*.

★

Frank Kibblewhite’s **Sundial Press** reprints of Alyse Gregory and Katie Powys were unfortunately delayed by Frank’s illness, but are going ahead.

★

The new titles from **Cecil Woolf** (JCP–*Emma Goldman* and JCP–*Dorothy Richardson* letters) and from the Powys Heritage series (Llewelyn’s 1908 *Diary of a Reluctant Teacher*) are still expected.

★

A feature by **Morine Krissdóttir** on **John Cowper Powys in Wales** is in the Wales and Borders magazine *Country Quest* for June 2006 (pp.20–21).

★

‘The Grand Heretics of Modern Fiction: Laura Riding, John Cowper Powys and the Subjective Correlative’ is the title of an essay by **Jerome McGann** of the University of Virginia that appeared in *Modernism/Modernity* (pp.309–23) on 13th February 2006 (access via Google). McGann also has an essay in his recent book *The Scholar’s Art* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2006) called **‘Impossible Fiction, or the Importance of Being John Cowper Powys’**. Jerome McGann was the author of

the T.L.S. piece (Dec. 1 1995) entitled 'Marvels and Wonders: Powys, *Porius*, and the attempt to revive Romance in the age of Modernism'.

★

Timothy Hyman's exhibition in June of paintings and drawings, 'London Mappings and Panoramas' gives an entirely personal and transforming view of places and people, undoubtedly comparable to JCP's.

★

Jeremy Hooker's *The Cut of the Light: Poems 1965–2005* is published by Enitharmon; this is in effect a *Collected Poems*.

★

Penelope Shuttle's new book of poems *Redgrove's Wife* (Bloodaxe) is in part a lament for and a celebration of the poet Peter Redgrove (a Powys admirer whose introduction to an unpublished collection of TFP stories was in *NL* 47).

★

Dorset Stories by **Sylvia Townsend Warner** (Blackdog) is reviewed on page 44.

★

An article on **Kenneth Hopkins**, Poet and Publisher, by Thorsten Sjölin appeared in the Autumn 2005 issue of *The Private Library*, the quarterly journal of the Private Libraries Association (pp.99–110). It contains a detailed review of Hopkins's work from the point of view of a book-collector, with a select checklist of his many publications and broadsheets.

★

Our conference speaker **John Gray** did JCP proud in *The Guardian*:

John Cowper Powys's *Wolf Solent* (Penguin Modern Classics) is one of the great 20th-century novels, and despite having read it many times I'll read it again. Powys renders the flow of human consciousness with a subtlety some have compared with Proust; but this is Proust out of doors in a magically transformed English landscape.

(*John Gray's other choices are Chris Petit's* *The Passenger*, 'a metaphysical thriller', and *Will Self's* *The Book of Dave*, 'a visionary fable ... also extremely funny'. From *The Guardian*, *Saturday 17th June 2006*, *Review section*, p.5: 'Summer Books: writers and critics choose the best titles to take on holiday'.)

★

Three manuscript pages from the end of *Glastonbury* with associated material have been acquired by the National Library of Wales, where we hope soon to get a sight of them. The catalogue entry was:

JOHN UPDIKE RARE BOOKS 7 St Bernards Row, Edinburgh

THREE MANUSCRIPT PAGES, WITH ALS

201. POWYS, John Cowper. Three foolscap manuscript pages from Powys' great novel *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932). Each page has a minimum of 35 lines of ms text on rectos only, with numerous corrections, additions and cancellations, the author's hand being clear and entirely legible. With the ms are a covering TLs from rare book dealer George Sims to a Mr. Baston, dated 28 January 1957. in which he presents "these extra (final) pp. of the *Glastonbury Romance*...they are valuable". In addition

there is a 4pp ms letter from Powys to Baston, dated “Blaenau Ffestiniog, Merionethshire, July 27 1955”, in which he explains how the complete manuscript of the novel had been left with his American publishers Simon and Schuster for publication in 1932. Eight years (or so) later the ms was sent back to Powys in England, but unfortunately parts were missing. In an accompanying letter from Baston to Simon & Schuster the collector (who possessed at the time “as much of the manuscript of *A Glastonbury Romance* as is known to survive”) suggests that the missing parts were “lost at sea” during the war-time crossing. With a final TLs from S&S to Baston, dated “September 1955”, which is torn with loss. The ms leaves and the letters have been folded, but are in otherwise very nice condition. **£650**

A rare chance to acquire three representative ms pages of J. C. Powys' greatest novel.

★

An engraving of a **portrait of TFP** by Frederick Carter (c.1934, a proof for an edition of 75) was recently for sale (for £200) at The London Original Print Fair (from Elizabeth Harvey Lee, 1 West Cottages, North Aston, Oxford OX25 5QB, tel. 01869 347164).

★

Letters and books inscribed by JCP that belonged to **Bill Lander** were to be auctioned at Sotheby's on 13th July. Bill Lander (1900–88) an ex-miner with strong literary interests, was a long-term member of the Society. He visited Corwen in the 1950s; JCP admired his ‘true Derbyshire personality’.

★

The Spring 2006 number of **la lettre powysienne** (fully bilingual) is mainly devoted to *Weymouth Sands*, with some excellent photographs. There is a letter from JCP to Lucy, essays among others on Peg Grimstone, vivisection, hovels and gypsy caravans, and a page presenting ‘that same sentence about waves ...’ as translated in six different languages.

★

The Swedish JCP Society's *Newsletter* 8 (2005—also bilingual) has a forward by its new President, Olaf Björner, an essay on JCP as ‘master of nuances and variations’, and an interview ‘October with Täckmark’ by Gunnar Lundin, whose drawings of Täckmark, still lively in his tenth decade, are on the covers.

THANKS to all contributors KK



Richard Handscombe

*To follow the articles by **W.J. Keith** and Richard Handscombe in NL 57 (pp.9–14), **Robin Wood** in Canada sends this extract from an obituary (and see also page 8 on the prize essay, and Larry Mitchell below):*

Richard J. Handscombe, a professor at York's Glendon College for three decades, died on Dec. 24 after several years of poor health. Prof. Handscombe was 70.

As a professor at Glendon College, he shared with students and colleagues his fascination with the English language and how it works in everyday life and in texts ranging from metaphysical poetry to Winnie-the-Pooh. His other great passion, a life-long interest in birds, took him around the world. More recently, he had been content to raise his binoculars in his own backyards, here in Toronto and in Montserrat, West Indies.

Prof. Handscombe was an applied linguist who had been co-writer for two television series for teaching English as a Second Language and had published in stylistics, the use of media and language pedagogy. He had most recently worked on *Anglosea*, a video-based series to teach English to the deck officers of the world's merchant navies. He also taught children's literature in addition to other courses at York University.

*Robin Wood also reports that Richard Handscombe's son Matthew, an antiquarian book dealer, is donating his father's **James Hanley collection** to the Thomas Fisher Library in Toronto. **Matthew Handscombe** writes: 'My Dad was a big fan of James Hanley's books and for the last decade I've been working on improving the collection he began in the 70s. It's a huge bunch of books now and about as good as it's likely to get, so it's going off to the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto where it will join his Powys collection.'*

A new Powys archive in Texas

from Larry Mitchell:

The **Cushing Library** here at Texas A&M University has bought a **substantial Powys manuscript archive** from Matthew Handscombe, son of the late Richard Handscombe of Toronto. I met Richard some years ago in Toronto (about 1988) just before he gave his Powys book collection to the University of Toronto. He evidently held back the manuscripts. I negotiated the purchase of this collection in conjunction with Steve Smith, the Director of Cushing Library, and I wrote the grant that raised 50% of the money.

The provenance of the collection is pretty clear—Richard H. must have bought all or most of the collection from David Holmes, a dealer in Philadelphia. I know that because I looked at some of the mss there around 1988 and David Holmes had

purchased them from Margaret Eaton. In the collection itself, there is one letter to Peter Eaton from JCP (1959) and about a dozen to Margaret E. from Phyllis Playter (1962–64).

From my perspective, the collection was particularly desirable because it includes 29 autograph manuscripts of **TFP stories** (some fragmentary and/or drafts), 283 pages in all—a typescript, and a **dramatization of 'Job'**. There are 7 letters from JCP and 7 postcards. The most important item of **Llewelyn's** may be the manuscript of *Glory of Life* (62 pp) in one of the note-books LIP typically used, heavily revised and corrected, with major differences from the published version. The provenance is also clear—it came from Lloyd Emerson Siberell (his bookplate) and before that from Christopher Sandford of The Golden Cockerel Press (his signature). Also of interest is Siberell's fairly comprehensive archive for *A Baker's Dozen*, including the 106 page typescript with LIP's hand corrections and five of the original Noheimer illustrations.

When Cushing gets my Powys Collection, we will have a well-balanced collection of books and manuscripts—not anything on the scale of the HRHRC collection of course, but complementary to it.

Cushing Library is the Special Collections Library of Texas A&M University in College Station. The HRHRC (Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center) is in Austin and is a unit of the University of Texas. Since Harry Ransom began using oil money in the fifties to buy up literary manuscript collections, the HRHRC more or less inhaled everything that was available for many years—most recently Norman Mailer's papers. The Cushing, by comparison, is a johnny-come-lately—it has, for example, a superb science fiction collection, a great Kipling collection, a good Arnold collection etc. Since I came in 1989 we have acquired fine collections of Cervantes, A. E. Coppard, John Donne, and Whitman, in response to special faculty interests (Coppard was my interest!). Recently we have acquired impressive collections of eighteenth-century French Literature, a Colonial Mexican collection, and one centred on London. I am working to build the Powys and Garnett family collections and the History of Boxing Collection.

Who is Stein ?

It is a mystery: who is the designer of dust jackets whose only name I have seen is 'Stein'. I started the chase when I was preparing scans of the dust jackets of *Atlantis* (1954) and *Homer and the Aether* (1959) by JCP to illustrate an article in the forthcoming issue of *The Powys Journal*. On these two books published by Macdonald the jacket simply has the name in small capital letters, STEIN. Also designed by 'Stein' were the jackets for other Macdonald new or

(continued on page 45)

John Williams on Theodore
an Inaugural Professorial Lecture at the University of Greenwich

John Williams delivered his inaugural lecture as Professor of Literary Studies at the University of Greenwich on 26th April 2006, and took as his theme 'Death and Redemption in Late Romantic Fiction: The Neglected Writings of Theodore Francis Powys'. Dr Jane Longmore, head of the School of Humanities, commented that it was 'a typical act of intellectual daring' of John to use his inaugural lecture to introduce a writer unfamiliar to most of the audience. There were mutterings from the back rows that some had read John Cowper, but not TFP. John's lecture provided an introduction to Theodore's imaginative world, but also suggested avenues of thought to readers to already familiar with his work.

John describes how Theodore uses an apparently narrow canvas continually subjected to ever more severe restrictions, in trying 'to pare away external appendages and ornamentation in order to arrive at a naked, essential truth'. He began his discussion of Theodore by looking at the philosophical meditations of *Soliloquies of a Hermit*, which preceded the embodiment of his vision in fiction. Yet *Soliloquies* itself is hardly an early work, and is also the result of many years' gestation. It shows us the depth of Theodore's reading, often shyly, modestly concealed. The great mystical classics are there: Wordsworth, Blake, Meister Eckhart, and Boehme, and of course the Bible, but so are the iconoclasts Schopenhauer, and 'that German'—Nietzsche. Theodore came to Nietzsche early and drank deep—his copy of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in the Society's collection at the Dorset County Museum, is dated '25th December 1898'—as if Christmas were not celebrated that year. It is striking that the years of Theodore's most intense preoccupation with Nietzsche, when he sported a suitably bushy moustache, were also the time of his biblical study, when he wrote 'interpretations' of all the books of the Old and New Testaments, except two.

Theodore's mysticism is not a vision of mythic grandeur, but is gnomic, paradoxical, somewhat in the style of the Zen *koans*, and tending increasingly to silence. Central to the talk were Powys's innocent 'child-men' whose simplicity and innocence are linked to the profundity of mystic vision—Mr. Solly and Parson Tucker of 'Innocent Birds' and Mr Hayhoe of 'The Only Penitent'. In contrast, the social relations of the fallen world, with its 'mealy-mouthed gentility, hypocrisy, selfishness, and obsessive materialism' are obliquely flagged by every mention of Jane Austen.

John's talk also included a meditation on the symbolism of hills, which bound the horizons of Theodore's novels and stories as definitively as the downland that encircles his village of East Chaldon. 'I will lift up my eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help', sings the psalmist, and John reminded us of the ascent of the Hill Difficulty by Bunyan's Christian, the hills as places of refuge in Denham's 'Cooper's Hill' and Dyer's 'Grongar's Hill', and Wordsworth's ascent of Snowdon in the final book of 'The Prelude' (which John Cowper's Myrddin Wyllt re-enacts in the final chapter of *Porius*). The hills which bound the Theodorian universe also seem

emblematic rather than sublime, and although Theodore is as obsessively concerned with the details of the natural world as his brothers, his concentration on 'a diminutive worm, a blade of grass, a crumb, a flea' is symbolic, not animistic. Indeed the Theodorian world-view often appears achingly bereft of *numen*, or indwelling genius.

Theodore might well have been touched to find himself so 'glorified' in this lecture in the splendid surroundings of Wren's Royal Naval College. In *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, there is only one class of sinner who, under Mr Weston's divine dispensation, will still be 'consumed out of the earth'—that is, literary critics. Perhaps John Williams might be exempt. We wish John a long and happy tenure of his chair. His lecture has been printed by the University of Greenwich as an attractive booklet, and can be obtained from John at: J.R.Williams@gre.ac.uk

John Hodgson

'The Sin-Eater'

a play by T. F. Powys with Stephen Tomlin (c.1921)

The following notes by Elaine Mencher are reproduced with permission from Selected Early Works of T. F. Powys, edited by Elaine Mencher (Brynmill Press; Introduction, cxxiii-cxv). Insertions in square brackets are supplied by KK.

Although not an early work as such, *The Sin-Eater* is an example of yet another genre which Powys tried; a drama written in collaboration with Stephen Tomlin [1901–1937], a sculptor who discovered Powys in East Chaldon in 1921 and was most impressed by both the writer and his work, which he showed to S[ylvia]T[ownsend]W[arner]. The interest and encouragement of Stephen Tomlin and STW, combined with the help of David Garnett, resulted in C[hatto] & W[indus] becoming Powys's principal publisher.

According to Claire Harman [EM footnote: *Sylvia Townsend Warner, a Biography*, p.90] STW wrote a "morbid one act piece" in 1922 called *The Sin-Eater*, inspired by what Stephen Tomlin had told her about the practice of sin-eating. The "previous winter" Tomlin and Powys had written their own version, "to while away the long evenings at Chaldon." Claire Harman's brief and relatively urbane-sounding dialogue-quotation from STW's play is very different in tone from Powys's dialogue, nor could STW's willing sin-eater Abel's character be further removed from that of Holy Tom:

Hester: Tell me, is it hard to take away sins?

Abel: I can hardly say, ma'am. I've done it for so long, I hardly think about it now.

Hester: Do you suffer with all the sins you take on you?

Abel: No ma'am. I'm a very healthy man.

STW herself wrote [EM footnote: *Theodore Powys and Some Friends at East Chaldon, 1922–1927, p. 23*]:

During the winter [i.e. 1921–22] Theo and Tommy had collaborated in a one-act play. The subject was sin-eating, a Welsh custom Tommy had been told of by a Welsh artist called Cedric Morris. When anyone dies their sins are mystically set out upon a plate in the form of cold scraps, potato parings and locks of hair, strewn with salt. The sin-eater is then summoned to dispose of this mess, and when the plate has been cleared the dead man's sins are taken away in the stomach of the sin-eater. Tommy's share in this cheerful piece had been the dramatic mechanism, Theo supplying the dialogue and shades of night. It was not till it was finished that the authors made the discovery that their title had already been used by Fiona Macleod.

—namely for a tale of gothic horror, glimpsed through the Celtic Twilight, which stands first in *The Sin-Eater and Other Tales* by Fiona Macleod (pseudonym of William Sharp, 1855–1905), published in 1895 in Edinburgh and Chicago.

Not much needs to be added to STW's account. Sin-eating was a mediæval custom practised in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The sin-eater, usually a poor person, was employed to take upon himself the sins of the corpse. He was given a coin, such as a groat or a sixpence, and would ceremoniously eat—according to the locality—bread and salt, or bread, salt and water, or bread and beer, or bread and milk—near the corpse, whilst publicly vowing to thus take into himself and carry away with him the sins of the dead person. Sometimes the food was handed to the sin-eater over the body of the deceased; sometimes it was placed in a saucer on the chest of the corpse.

There is one Ams of the play in the B[issell] C[ollection] in Stephen Tomlin's hand, 68pp + a title page, a 1p plan and a 1p stage-setting diagram. On the title page Powys has written: *THE SIN-EATER / a play / by / Theodore Francis Powys / & / Stephen Tomlin*. Red ink is used for the stage settings and directions, and black for the speeches. A few pages are torn out at the end of the Nb. An accompanying handwritten letter dated 12 August 1963, from L. Powys [EM footnote: *Laurence Powys was [Theodore's son] Francis Powys's pseudonym*] to Bissell is included:

Dear Mr Bissell,

Very many thanks for your letter and for the cheque. I do hope you will like the contents of the parcel. It is a great pity that the play does not show each author's work or perhaps is not in my father's handwriting. But it is quite authentic — I remember so well their collaborating over this and my mother remembers as well. My father tried his hand at plays much earlier on and the mss of these may be still about somewhere.

There is also a Tms of the play in the Sterling Library, London University, with a title-page on which Stephen Tornlin has written "*THE SIN-EATER*" / *A Play*, below which is typed "By Theodore Francis Powys and / Stephen Tomlin" and, bottom right, "Chaldon Herring / Dorchester / Dorset," and, bottom left, "8100 words". The Tms is virtually identical to the Ams but does not include a stage-plan.

Under the heading 'Themes and References', no. 11 (Introduction, xxxi) Elaine Mencher also discusses 'Holy (or Poor) Tom', the name in King Lear for an outcast zany, that 'permeates the whole of the [TF] Powys oeuvre.' The Bissell Collection (BC) is now part of The Powys Collection, housed in the Dorset County Museum. STW's play is in the STW collection, also in the DCM. It concerns two "sinners", a woman who has killed her husband and the man who has betrayed her by poisoning her life. **KK**

The theme of the **Sin-Eater** crops up in folklore and fiction—e.g. in Mary Webb's best-seller *Precious Bane* (1924), and in JCP's Owen Glendower (pp.739, 762, the 'Till the French Sail' chapter).

From JCP's *Diary, 1935-6*:

15 Nov 1935: Oh that I might be a Wagner of Wales—what wonderful Wagnerian operas with a mythical & mystical Background of Mythology could be composed here—I see Welsh Siegrids & Parsivals and Brunhildas on every side & with Bran the Blessed & Gwynn ap Nudd in the offing—what romantic operas could be composed. This Book of Miss Raine's "Hearts of Wales" the T.T. says would make a perfect Opera—"The Sin-eater" & the "Horn of Emlyn" etc., etc., etc.

19 Dec, 1936: Adrian Bury read about the sin-eater in Mary Webb's *Precious Bane* & I read the Glendower scene in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. The T.T. & I both were completely exhausted after "this long and exciting Symposium".

Theo and Master Tom

Stephen Tomlin (1901-37), a young sculptor with 'Bloomsbury' connections, came to East Chaldon in 1921, discovered and made friends with TFP and alerted his friends to TF's work, among them Sylvia Townsend Warner and David Garnett. The play 'The Sin-Eater' was the product of 'Tommy' and Theodore's long evenings together in Beth Car. Tomlin had earlier asked STW to send them a play of hers—she doesn't mention if it was her own version of the 'sin-eater' tradition.

The following letters give an idea of their friendship.

TFP to JCP (in America)

East Chaldon, Dorchester
October 14th, 1922

My dear

I am so glad that you are better and safely recovered. Influenza is the very hell of an illness. But I believe now you will be free of it for at least a year—because the dead germs feed the living—that's the case I think. I feel sorry for Mr. Brown [Maurice

Browne] being under the rule of fat face. But thats how things go in the world. Master Tomlin says the good people who start little theatres fill him with gloom. We quote your words of a night sometimes.

Mrs. Windringham is away for the week end thank goodness. Tom Tomlin has hired a studio in London. But he hasn't gone there yet. For gods sake don't you trouble to send us any presents—cursed old mean Hell dog that I am—why should I steal from you? I did enjoy having your letter.

A new labour weekly paper—the New Leader has taken three or four of my short stories of 1,500 words—do you understand words—1,500 words. Constance Garnett's son you know her by name gave the Editor my name. And he seems kind but I musn't hope for too much ... I want to get Mr. Tasker typed again after I have revised it. Tomlin thinks this would be worthwhile. I have got Amos Lear back. But Mad Tom says I am only just beginning to get my right medium. Medium means stone I believe ...

Violet sends you a great deal of love. I hope you don't walk too far to tire yourself. You sound a little lonely in the place you live at. I liked your putting those honest people on the Chesil beach. Lord Lord how I wish you were here.

Yours ever

Theodore

Stephen Tomlin to Theodore F. Powys Esq., Beth Car, Chaldon Herring, nr
Dorchester. Postmark 24 JAN 23

1, Milton House, Fernshaw Rd, S.W.5
Wednesday

My dear Theo,

I hardly have the courage to write to you at all now; for I feel so ashamed of myself for neglecting you all so. But please don't imagine you have been out of my mind, for you haven't at all. And I am always thinking, and often talking of you. I have still a hideous memory of the last evening I saw you both, when I felt so miserable, and had so much to say, and yet sat quite inarticulate, or talked about the weather. If you only knew what a disconsolate ginger-beer bottle I was then—so longing to burst, but so inevitably corked!

Theo, my dear, I cannot express what I felt & always shall feel about Beth Car & its inhabitants. I seriously do not suppose I shall ever again be so continuously happy, or tap such a deep well of contentment, as in my Chaldon sojourn; & a very great part of that happiness came from you.

Perhaps after such a long proud silence, this effusion will seem rather unconvincing, but I think you will know how much I mean it.

I have been having a fairly hideous time & even now do not feel much at ease, or resigned to my London life. I hope the British workman when he gets to Parliament will prove more intelligent about politics than he does about his own job! In my house, none of the doors will shut, or the windows open. I have felt like the only

orphan in a draughty orphanage. It is very difficult to settle down; & one's friends are like gad flies. I have been very busy, & have done a portrait of Helen & am doing a head in stone of David. We talk of you a lot together; he is very hopeful about the books. And we have got you quite a large following already who are waiting excitedly for your work to come out.

When are you going to send me your latest? I need not tell you how much I want to see it.

My portrait of you fell irrevocably to pieces on the way up, alas!

The other day Dobson & I met a man called Beckhoffer (however he spells it) who had met Lulu in America, & knew of Jack. Bertie has called, which was very kind, but I was out. I am going to see him soon. At Elsa Lanchester's Cabaret the other night who should I meet but the O'Neils (Dr & Mrs) & Louis Wilkinson! I was so pleased to see Burney again, & very interested to meet the Archangel!—whom I quite liked in spite of my forebodings! I'm going to see them soon I hope.

There's so much I want to tell you, but you know how difficult I find this pen & ink business. O Theo, dear! if only I could gather you & Violet up in a sheet like S. Peter's dinner & drop you here in the Fulham Road & bring you in to tea.—what a talk we should have, & how happy I should be!

Did you see that Mr Ewart's nephew was shot in Mexico? How is Mrs A.? I had a very nice letter from her a little while ago. Will you give her my love & tell her I really will write shortly?

Do write me, Theo, again. I do so enjoy hearing from you. And I want to know all the latest scandal; & above all I want to hear about your work. About that, I feel I should write to you like Abraham Cowley:

But Love that moulds one man apart of two,

Makes me forget and injure you.

I took you for myself sure when I thought

That you in any thing were to be taught.

Correct my Error with thy Pen;

And if any ask me then,

What thing right WIT, and height of GENIUS is,

I'll only show your Lines, and say, — " 'Tis this!"

Goodbye, dear Theo. I am in debt to you for 18 months of happiness, and you may write it down a bad debt, for I shall never be able to repay you!

Much love

Tom

Ts copy and Tomlin's letter are from the Society's Collection. The Powys Review 5 and 7 (1979, 1980) are largely devoted to TFP at Chaldon, with long extracts from STW's writing about Theodore. Judith Stinton's Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset Landscape (2004) includes the photograph of Stephen Tomlin (credited to Oliver Garnett), reproduced on our back cover. With thanks to Judith for this and to Morine Krissdóttir for help and contributions.

Arnold Bennett on the Powyses

Ed. must apologise for NL 57 omitting due thanks to John Shapcott, Chairman of the Arnold Bennett Society, for providing the excerpt from Bennett's Evening Standard Years reprinted in the last Newsletter (no. 57, page 43). John Shapcott contributed his views of the last Conference in NL 56 (November 2005), pp. 16–18.

Glen Cavaliero adds a note to Arnold Bennett's view of JCP:

I recently came across the review of *In Defence of Sensuality* in the *Evening Standard* of 30th October 1930, by Arnold Bennett, one of the major literary pundits of the day. He calls the title 'wildly misleading' and suggests 'An Attack on Sensuality' instead. But he liked the book, finding it 'really interesting ... provocative, challenging'. Bennett is shrewd. 'Mr Powys advocates egotism. He is against utter devotion to "humanity" as an end. (And surely it is true that nearly all "lovers of humanity" are very hard on individuals!)' This suggests comparisons with *Straw Dogs* by our forthcoming lecturer, John Gray [reviewed in NL 57, p. 19]. Bennett considers Powys's book 'a disturbing message to the age.' Those words could apply no less today.

Theodore Powys also gets a mention in a review by Bennett of a book that I could kick myself at having missed while researching for my study on *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel: Gay Agony* by 'A. Manhood, author of *Nightseed*'. 'Those who enjoy the novels and stories of T. F. Powys will probably enjoy *Gay Agony* more.' There is double back-hander if ever there was one. No wonder Bennett goes on to remark that 'I await the next phase of Mr Manhood's talent with anxiety'.

Louis Marlow (Louis Wilkinson) fares somewhat better at Bennett's hands. He reviews *Mr Amberthwaite*, *Two Made Their Bed* and *The Lion Took Fright* (what excellent titles!) quite favourably, adding in one instance that 'Mr Marlow has not yet reached general recognition. He will reach it'. (But when?)

(Arnold Bennett: *The Evening Standard Years*, ed. Andrew Mylett, was published by Chatto & Windus in 1974.)

JCP first visited Bennett (in Sussex, walking from Burpham) in June 1926 (see NL 45, p. 18). The PSNA Powys Newsletter 5 (1978) has an article by the late R. L. Blackmore on JCP's visit to Arnold Bennett and Dorothy Cheston at 75 Cadogan Gardens, London, on 19th June, 1929, as recalled by their daughter, with photographs.

Bennett was clearly aware of the theory that any publicity is better than no publicity, and was a practised master of the columnist's art of weaving unlikely subjects together.

The unlikely-sounding author H. A. Manhood appears in connection with Theodore, in Louis Wilkinson's Welsh Ambassadors (pp. 161–2):

H. A. Manhood, the kinship of whose writings with Theodore's many have noted, wrote to me in March, 1925, before his own literary career had begun, giving his impression of Theodore, from 'a first reading of him ...' as

a starkly masculine writer. I picture him as a taciturn Welshman ... his work might reasonably be likened to a particularly prickly chestnut, bristling, repulsive to the casual, but vastly stimulating to the sympathetic ... humour with its clothes off—unexpected, disturbing. But I do not think his conception of life is as malignant as some would have us think ... His books should be printed on heavy, yellow handmade paper, in a dwarfed but substantial type—beautifully uncouth—wide margined pages, with heavily blacked woodcut capitals ...

These impressions, in every important particular, are antipodal to those given by the writings of John.

Theodore replied to Louis, 'I am very glad that you met Mr Manhood and that you liked him. I am proud of his praise. And your answer to his question about how I lived couldn't have been more proper.' (p.191)

Heritage Coast gates

To the *Bournemouth Echo*

Dear Sir,

What a shame that the good-quality wooden stiles and dog-gates along the coastal track between Lulworth and the White Nothe have been replaced by ugly galvanised gates. This is all in the name of some sort of 'access' requirement, as if one cannot negotiate a traditional stile on a country footpath!

The Countryside Agency, Dorset County Council and the Weld Estate have apparently collaborated to fund this ill-conceived project, so unnecessary and inappropriate to the World Heritage Coastline.

The present gate-eyesores simply diminish the quality and character of that landscape, which is surely not what we want.

Yours faithfully

Peter Foss

PJF also wrote to the Blackmore Vale Magazine about the error in its article (31st March 2006) by Edward Griffiths on a 'Pub Walk' to Chaldon Herring:

The 'Powys Brothers' Memorial Stone Sculptures', both described and illustrated, have nothing in fact to do with the Powys Brothers. They were commissioned for the Nature Conservancy Council, as part of a project for sculpture in landscape. The 'stone' which your guide missed was the Memorial to Llewelyn Powys, whose ashes were buried near the top obelisk above the warren. There is an inscription from Isaiah on that stone.

A walk from Cooksbridge to Court House

by Christopher Thomas

In 1896 John Cowper Powys gave up his lodging above Mr Pollard's grocery shop in Southwick, on the outskirts of Brighton, and moved into Court House, an old farmstead, situated at the foot of the South Downs close to the historic town of Lewes.

The author of *Odes and Other Poems* was now 'a man of substance', aspiration and ambition. He had not however changed his essential philosophy. Indeed it might be argued that the move to Court House heightened his idealism and strengthened his core sensualist belief:

I lived then just as I have ever since in the particular philosophy and particular sensations which occupied me at the moment.¹

Court House offered JCP plenty of opportunities for long solitary walks on top of the Downs or on quiet tree-lined country lanes in pursuit of 'strange mysterious ecstasies' and raptures. Opposite the house there were woods, meadows, fast flowing streams, and fields dotted with cornflowers and red poppies. In the early morning JCP might even have been able to hear the stone curlew or corn bunting which today are rarely seen in these parts.



For an emerging writer, poised on the threshold of a literary career, with an ecstatic apprehension of man and nature and an intense feeling for the spirit of place this was an ideal location to start a new home.

In fact you can't visit this part of Sussex, scene of JCP's early experiments in Dithyrambic Analysis, locus of his sylphic quests, and 'cerebral vices', without thinking of him 'carrying half the milder aberrations mentioned in Kraft-Ebbing',² deeply absorbed in his complex inner world, declaiming Swinburne, and poring over books, until late into the night. Undoubtedly this is a place that can still evoke powerful Powysian associations.

Lewes is only one hour's travelling time from London by train and as I'd just finished reading the Sussex chapters in the *Autobiography* I thought this would be a good time to revisit some of the places he mentions. I decided however to begin my journey at the place which caused JCP so many disagreeable feelings.

Most trains usually rush past the little station of Cooksbridge. Passengers hardly give it a second glance. But in the last years of the nineteenth century this was the



station JCP regularly used to get to and from his lecturing engagements in Eastbourne. Although irritated at first by its plebeian-sounding name JCP must have quickly got to know the station and the surrounding countryside almost as well as the Montacute of his childhood. How many times did he, like one of his own self-creations, alight from a railway carriage carrying his travelling bag full of heavy reference books and gripping his hazel stick or oak cudgel, and start to walk the short distance to the farmhouse that stood in for a castle; his thoughts, like those of John Crow, revolving round 'the vast dreamy life-stirrings of the soul of the earth.'³

Some trains, although not many, still stop at 'the station with the frying-pan name.' Today it makes a good starting point for an easy walk that follows mostly traffic-free lanes, goes through Warningore Wood, skirts Court House and goes up onto Mt Harry before descending into Lewes, where there are good pubs and restaurants as well as a fine collection of second-hand and antiquarian bookshops so you can browse for hard-to-find Powys titles. There are parking facilities at Cooksbridge as well which means that, instead of going into Lewes, you could return using the waymarked field paths.

But stay a little bit longer and you might also explore the world of another literary clan, for Berwick, Charleston, Monks House and Rodmell (where JCP also considered living) are all located nearby.

A distant neighbour of JCP in Lewes at this time was the wealthy art collector Edward Perry Warren. However nobody has recorded whether they were acquainted. It seems unlikely. After all what could a fastidious connoisseur of fine art have in common with an unworldly young teacher and author of a slim volume of unremarkable verses? Yet Ned Warren was living in Lewes throughout JCP's Court House period.. If they had encountered each other they could have shared an enthusiasm for

the classical past and JCP might have added another crony to his gallery of extraordinary pals. Ned Warren in fact owned a large collection of paintings and classical objects, including a beautiful Roman silver drinking vessel, which is now in the British Museum (the Warren Cup). Perhaps one of these objects might have turned up in a JCP poem just as did the Hermes of Praxiteles. (*see below for more light on this – Ed.*)

I stood on the platform of Cooksbridge and stared at the commanding shape and prominent outline of the Downs and felt invigorated. I couldn't help thinking of Wolf Solent for whom landscape also had a profoundly subjective and life enhancing meaning:

... it came over him with a mounting confidence that this wonderful country must surely deepen, intensify, enrich his furtive inner life, rather than threaten or destroy it.⁴

Spring had arrived late but already there was a feeling of rejuvenation in the air, a sense of fresh green leaves and sudden bursts of colour. A soft salt-laden breeze transported the smell of wood smoke, marjoram and wild thyme from distant fields. The experience of Wolf Solent came to mind again:

... the sweet airs of an unusually relaxed March morning visited his nostrils carrying fragrances of young green shoots, of wet muddy ditches, of hazel copses full of damp moss and of primroses on warm grassy hedge banks.⁵

Life neatly imitating art, I reflected.

Immediately outside the station I entered a narrow, winding and undulating lane. The verges and hedgerows were filled with scented wildflowers, bluebells, viper's bugloss, yellow dandelion and buttery cowslips. Small brown 'skippers' kept flying up as I walked silently past. Though it was now midday few cars had passed and I was left alone to concentrate on my musings. Inevitably I recalled JCP's instructions



Court House, Mt Harry and The Weald

to Littleton to get behind him as they walked on the road to Court House: 'Let us Think!' he shouted.⁶

I turned left into Allington Lane which passes the edge of Warningore Wood. JCP says that he used to walk here every day but the path that goes through the middle of the wood is hard to discern now. Broken ivy-clad tree stumps, fallen branches and a luxuriant growth of ferns, lichen, fungi and nettles cover the woodland floor.

Court House stands back from the road partly hidden by outbuildings, dense shrubbery and trees much as it did in JCP's day. A bridle path goes round the back of the farmhouse to National Trust property at Blackcap. On the way up to Mt Harry I passed mixed scrub and tall trees which grow thickly on the north-facing slopes of the Downs. Crows circled noisily overhead. Halfway up the bridle path I paused and turned to look back towards Court House. Just then dark rain-bearing clouds obscured the sun, casting the slopes into shadow. Perhaps it was a synchronous sign of the darkness in JCP's own mind tormented by his inner demons and 'a thousand frantic and misery-causing manias'.⁷ I scrambled up the last few yards of the path slipping on the loosened flintstones. It was a relief to get to the top and feel the warm presence of the sun again.

From Mt Harry there are spectacular panoramic views of the weald and all the little downland villages which JCP says he used to visit on his rambles. To the south amidst the steep-sided bostals grow yellow vetch, anemones, orchids, woody glades, dogwood, alder and birch. The fritilleries that had settled on the white blackthorn blossom bordering the chalk-lined paths flew in all directions as I approached. Come here in the Summer and you might also see the much rarer Chalkhill Blue butterfly.

Resting on the soft springy turf I reached inside my pack and took out my copy of JCP's second volume of verses. How these old fashioned 'imitative' poems came alive



Court House from the fields behind.

again in this outdoor setting amidst the sound of soaring skylarks and the euphony of bumblebees. Perhaps, I thought, some of these poems owed their origin to one of those secret mystical moments that JCP cultivated with such ardent passion, or in some other physical experience up here in this expansive landscape. Certainly JCP must have reflected on his poetic vocation and bardic role:

Lo! he traffics with the sun,
He hath dealings with the winds,
With the sea hath business done,
In the stars a kinship finds.⁸

In some of the poems I also noted there was more than a hint of JCP's mythological attitude to reality, his paganism, romanticism and nature mysticism:

To grow with the slow-growing trees, to flit
With things of one day's life about the stems
Of hidden flowers, to ride upon the waves
And mingle with the universal air,
This is the true religion, this indeed
True worship of the gods.⁹

Small wonder Malcolm Elwin dedicated his book about early English romanticism to JCP, 'one of the great romantics of his generation'.¹⁰

As I returned the book of poems to my pack I caught again the smell of wood smoke now pungent and resinous in the somnolent afternoon air. A sudden gust of wind surprised me and disturbed the foliage affording a brief glimpse of the buildings below. The weald seemed to exude a preternatural glow, the sparkling light shimmering over the fields and dissolving into a haze on the distant horizon where it was just possible to make out the faint outline of the North Downs. Strange, I thought, to



Court House from the road (?1960s).

stand here on the fringes of the London commuter belt yet still feel surrounded by the eidola of JCP's 'shaping spirit of imagination'.¹¹

Stranger still, now my walk was done, to gaze into a translucent sky and sense what he had sensed:

The astronomical world is not all there is. We are in touch with other dimensions, other levels of life.¹²

Photographs by Christopher Thomas and Stephen Powys Marks

References

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| 1 John Cowper Powys, <i>Autobiography</i> (London, 1934), 203. | 2 <i>ibid.</i> , 251. |
| 3 <i>A Glastonbury Romance</i> (London, 1966), 22 | |
| 4 <i>Wolf Solent</i> (London, 1961), 27. | 5 <i>ibid.</i> , 1 |
| 6 <i>Autobiography</i> , 249. | 7 <i>ibid.</i> , 221 |
| 8 'The Poet', <i>Poems</i> (Village Press, 1975), 100. | 9 'Religion', <i>ibid.</i> , 51. |
| 10 Malcolm Elwin, <i>The First Romantics</i> (London, 1947). | |
| 11 Coleridge, <i>Dejection: An Ode</i> . | 12 <i>Autobiography</i> , 652. |

Lewes House

from **John Cowper Powys, the Lyons and W. E. Lutyens, by Susan Rands** (2000), pp. 12–13 ('Progress of a Marriage'), *Powys Heritage series, Cecil Woolf Publishers, 1 Mornington Place, London NW1 7RP.*

In spite of the detail in *Autobiography* of his peregrinations John makes no mention of one place which, if other sources are to be believed, he visited frequently and often with Lyon [*T. H. Lyon, JCP's brother-in-law*]. This is Lewes House, at this time of great interest. In 1890 it had been bought by **Edward Perry Warren**, a fabulously rich, eccentric Bostonian, classical scholar and expert in antiquities. It was a large, square house built of locally fired Sussex brick situated half-way up the steep little hill in the town. Warren lived there with a small group of friends, 'each with his own horse, study and dogs. No woman ever entered the house ...'²³

'You are to imagine,' wrote Henry Rowan Walker in his draft biography of Matt Prichard, one of these friends:

five males in white duck suits sitting along a wonderful Elizabethan table ... glittering with exquisite porcelain and silver which it was their whim to have completely changed every fortnight. And had we some of their archaeological skill we would reassemble the fragments of their Hellenic discourse (interwoven as were the wise philosophies of the nineteenth century with the finest Palerian [Falernian ?] vintage). There are some indeed who could reassemble them more realistically than we as they were sometimes themselves sitting at that table bringing those attic evenings to birth; J. C. Powys, poet of that most remarkable family, John Fothergill, landlord and aesthete, Will Rothenstein ... would sometimes disturb the classic serenity of spirit by

bringing with him that French sculptor Rodin who instead of looking at the amphorae from Chalcis would look at the window and comment on the claim to beauty of that labourer outside.²⁴

It is extraordinary that Powys nowhere mentions his visits to Lewes House; perhaps he thought it a den of iniquity he would not have his wife know about. According to this unpublished biography [of *Prichard*], Powys speaks of Lewes House as

‘a kind of classic monastic retreat, whose evenings I remember as full of perpetual discussion of music. Of them all Matt and (John) Fisher were the most approachable and Prichard far the most stimulating figure, though they were an exceptional and to a youthful mind a puzzling crew. When I dined there as I often did, Warren, (John) Marshall and Fisher discussing their plans of campaign would always say it was Prichard who supplied their ‘blood and iron’ line of action.’

Powys found Prichard ‘a most exciting baffling personality at once passionately impulsive, candid and reserved. And he was always very kind to younger men—never sarcastic or ironical at their expense.’ [...]

Warren has also been called ‘probably the greatest living expert on Greek gems’—another aspect of his expertise that would have interested Powys.²⁷ The more one considers all that there was for Powys at Lewes House, the more remarkable it is that he never mentions it. In *Autobiography* he calls his Court House days ‘the most reprehensible and irresponsible epoch of my life’, and this must be how he felt about the joyous carousals at Lewes House, so much to his taste and so against his upbringing, where the objects of pagan antiquity were so thick about him. The impulse for his ill-fated course of lectures in the spring of 1900 on ‘The Roman Emperors: the Caesars’, which did not meet the approval of his masters, probably came from Lewes House.²⁸

Notes

23 John Fothergill, *My Three Inns* (London, Chatto & Windus 1951), 232.

24 Harry Rowan Walker, unpublished biography of Matthew Prichard. Kindly supplied by David Sox. [...]

27 The accolade was paid to Warren by the classicist and Oxford professor G. B. Grundy (1861–1961), another visitor to Lewes House, in his autobiography *Fifty-Five Years at Oxford* (London: Methuen, 1945). Warren was certainly a remarkable man, and his collection formed the basis of both the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Metropolitan Museum of New York. He was not only rich but in his lifetime very generous, and he left his fortune to many a deserving cause in the art world. He made news again only last year [1999] when the British Museum paid £1.8 million, its most expensive purchase of a single item, for ‘The Warren Cup’, a Roman silver cup with reliefs of homosexual scenes which once belonged to Warren [it is now—2006—on display, with a booklet devoted to it]. It is difficult, however, to assess the full degree of Powys’s friendship with Warren or his involvement with Lewes House. Neither Fothergill, nor Grundy, nor Rothenstein in his recollections *Men and Memories 1872–1900* (London: Faber, 1931) makes any mention of Powys.

28 Powys was obliged to drop this course after doubts were raised about his technical competence in the subject. For Powys’s early lecturing career, see ‘John Cowper Powys as University Extension Lecturer, 1898–1909’ by Stuart Marriott and Janet Coles, in *The Powys Journal* IV, 1994.

Early Days—JCP the householder

(i)

A Wedding Present

JCP and Margaret Lyon were married in April 1896 at Ilsington, Devon. See the wedding photograph in The Powys Review 16 (1985), p.20. Mrs Curme was the housekeeper at Court House.

[postmark 1895] [Court House?]

My most unequalled of Fathers, Margaret and I have often wondered together if it would be in the least likely that anyone would give us a Piano, and we generally came to the conclusion No!

This really is a most wonderful surprise; I am writing to tell her today—She will be wild with delight.

It was the one thing needful to make our house an Earthly Paradise (may we far and wide distribute the fruits thereof!)

I should think it would be a very good idea to buy one at once with Mr Baldon's help as otherwise the best may be taken; but I will write and ask what Margaret thinks—How delightful to hear her play it at Xmas—I should be very glad to help in the Entertainment and still more glad to be at home again by Dec.ber 30—Yes we must come home on the 29th—

Love to dearest Mother

Lucy shall hear from me—

[sideways] Mrs Curme is more cheerful now the photographs have come

I enclose 1s for Peppard—Tobacco if he likes—

I value your photograph very much indeed, long may you look so soldier like and British—

They have however “razed out” too much “the written troubles of the brain”—

(ii)

1902

Burpham, Arundel. Feb 7th

My dear Father

I have been thinking a great deal about you during the last few days—I heard however nothing about Aunt Philippa [*his father's older half-sister*] until Wednesday evening when I left Leeds for London. Margaret had forwarded a letter to me from Ralph [*Shirley (1865–1946), Aunt Philippa's son*] which I read in the train—I have now read mother's letter to her and yours this morning to me—Dear Father, I have always known that the loss of Aunt Philippa would be a very serious thing to you, breaking a last link, as it were, with the Past; and I now feel sad to think how your mind must recur to the events of this week of trouble and the previous suspense which led to it.—the death of such who are advanced in years among those we love may bring with it more natural consolations than the death of such as are still young but in another

way the separation means even more, for much of our life is composed of old associations and familiar usages, and such a loss as this to you, cannot, I know, be replaced. I am afraid you have had a melancholy birthday. May you be spared to us to know many happier ones free from these frightful ills that flesh is heir to. I was very pleased and honoured by Ralph telling me that Aunt Philippa spoke of me with affectionate regard at the end of her life—this £100 is another evidence of her unfailing kindness to me and I am very gratified for having had so affectionate and dear a godmother.

I am glad Margaret is coming to you—I hope it will be convenient. She has been very weak and out of sorts for some time, as a result of a sort of blood-poisoning from Vaccination. She has been in bed for several days and I have had a Doctor from Bognor to see her—I shall be very grateful to you if you will take her in for a week—it will do her good—

I am your affec son

J.C.P

[*Littleton Alfred was born on 30th August 1902*]

(iii)

Burpham

Bankside Cottage, Burpham, Arundel, Sussex

Feb 9th 1902

Dearest Littleton,

I need not tell you how interesting to me your account of yourself, your difficulties, overcomings, and subsequent happiness has been—It was dear and thoughtful of you, Littleton mine, to write me so long a letter; you know how much I think about you and with what an unfailing interest I follow your career—I cannot but be particularly interested in the hint you gave of being able to marry subsequently and settle down in Llandovery—(But I expect you are smiling at my rapid imagination!) Perhaps after all you would be happier in a larger school with older boys to influence than at the Prep—However for a while your course lies clear and plain before you—

I shall look forward keenly to hearing more about your proceedings—and how you get on in your different branches of activity—It would please me much to see you established in Wales with an effective influence over our dear compatriots—The change must however be great and need all your faculties—I like your description of the Welsh boys very much—I have read of a Hyperborean Apollo but never of one in Ultima Thule—Well, dearest brother, old Companion of many days, go on and prosper—May the spirit of our ancestors—of Rodri Mawr and Howel the Good inspire you in ruling the descendants of their subjects!

Now with regard to my affairs—Aunt Philippa has left me £100 which is very kind of her—Ralph is staying here till Monday and I hope will go away the better for the change—He sends his love to you and wishes he could have more opportunities of meeting you. I am afraid Father feels that his only sister's death has broken a last link

with old days in a way that nothing else could do—I cannot help thinking of our youthful visits to the youthful Thames [*see Autobiography, p. 181*]—Do you remember our bedroom with the picture of John the Baptist? And the fire-light upon the books, and how much we enjoyed the (to us) unusual late dinner, with a glass of claret each, underneath the melancholy but gentle face of Sir Robert Shirley in his Cavalier costume? Poor Aunt Philippa!—

But to return to my affairs—I have arranged with Cartwright to keep this house for three months (from the sixteenth of January) at the rate of a pound a week and $\frac{4}{6}$ for the gardener. At the end of that time he will tell us whether he is willing to sell the place and I shall be able to tell him whether I can buy it—Between ourselves, I think if he is willing I shall buy it—Mr Saleebey (the Priest of Priests) who has a very high opinion of the letting properties of this house and considers it a good investment has expressed himself willing to lend me the sum of money necessary to buy it, when the time comes, on a mortgage with no other security than the house itself. I have told Cartwright that I could not afford to give him more than £500 for the house and £50 for the furniture (which according to the stipulation must be taken too) and so when the time comes he will either have to take that offer or sell to someone else—

Now that I have £100 on hand I should be able to spend it in making the Attic into a decent study with a higher roof than the rest of the rooms—Margaret is so very happy here playing on the organ etc and so friendly with the genial folk of the place



Littleton Alfred and Margaret

and so delighted with the house and garden and I myself am so pleased with the scenery and with the river and its nearest [*sic*] to the sea that I feel considering that common opinion (including that of dispassionate individuals like Ralph) regard it as a safe investment it would be a pity to wander into the Desert again seeking for an abiding place.

Cartwright would not let the house. It is a choice between selling it and keeping it—and if he decides at Easter to sell it he will sell it to someone or other—if not to us—Ralph is very pleased with the place and walks round the little garden in the sun under the shade of the fruit-wall with the utmost satisfaction—I do not think really that it would be easy to find a house better suited in itself and its surroundings to Mag—and after all it is the girl who has to live in the house—I am in the Winter away so much, I should feel happier about her in the midst of such kind friends and under the care of so genial a Priest—it is good for her health to have some cheerful intercourse when I leave her alone—But you must not think I am not pleased with the place myself because as you know this particular kind of scenery is very delightful to me with its access to the wide Downs, River and Sea—

Now dearest laddie, I have told you everything—so you must after a little while write to me again about your adventures. I am always thinking of you and feeling proud of you and of the useful and not un-famous life you are leading—to be more useful and much more famous in the future!

yrs with love

J.C.P.

(iv)

Bankside Cottage, Burpham, Arundel

April 1st [1902]

My dear Father

Thank you for your kind letter. I have agreed to buy the cottage for £500 and the furniture it contains for £50. The larger part of the latter we shall probably dispose of to the Lewes man who brings over our own from Court House—£250 of the sum required I can supply myself and the other £300 our friend Mr Saleebey will lend me as a mortgage on the Cottage—Our furniture has already been removed from Court House which is now let to some Brighton people—On the 15th or 16th we shall have the workmen in to whitewash and repaper and put in a fire-place in one of the bedrooms; also to make the windows open wider—While this is going on and while, when the house is ready, we are getting in our furniture, Mr Saleebey will kindly take us in and one of our maids, while the other has a holiday.

Give my best love to dear Mother. It was very delightful seeing her—We had quite a merry time at the White Hart

Your affec son

J.C.Powys

(v)
1909

from Burpham garden

JCP to TFP (*incomplete typescript copy*)

[1909]

What lovely hot weather this is. Lulu has gone for 5 days to stay with Ralph in Brighton. This garden is like a vase of precious odours—phloxes reminding me of Northwold pouring out their scent—Scent reminds you of old days as much as anything and I think of the little river and the raspberries and Grandfather drinking all the cream and looking out of the window. And Aunt Dora grubbing out roots under the bushes of the round bed near the Lime tree, and the peculiar smell of treacle and dough and ginger beer mixed together and the Magnolia white blooms and the rose garden with late finches nests in it and the little pond full of toads and cool large water lily leaves. And then do you recall the odd raft we made in the water and how Grandmother thought every day was Sunday and the smell of lemon verbena in the porch and the substantial broad bottomed look of John [?]'ster's mother in her pew—and Winnie Joy looking sweetly at Littleton—ah! those memories those memories!

Will you please tell me what the full name of the ugly cod—I mean his christian name because Lodge's Peerage has sent me a notice to fill up for their 1910 edition and I think it will tickle your fancy as it does mine that the ugly cod should be in the Peerage—Violet won't mind being described as the daughter of Jacobs esq of East Chaldon will she?—Of course we'll put the little boys in properly—I want it quite clear that it is the ugly cod otherwise the handsome cod might swear it was himself when he opens this Bible of the British Empire in the parlour of the Phoenix Hotel. By the way did you notice in the paper that the only little heir of Lilford aged 13 has been killed in an operation in London—his father made them have a coroner's inquest?

Do you know Theodore I am so much better I think I ought to resume lecturing—I think I shall let Oxford go but stick to America for both autumn and winter doing of course much less work; you see I have never tried only lecturing say 4 times a week; I suppose I ought to try moderate work before I chuck it completely—eh? what do you think on the matter?

Love to all

yr J.

When am I going to hear from you your defence of your Doctrines?

Letters from the Society's Powys Collection, Dorset County Museum.

'A Burpham Miscellany' by Stephen Carroll, with photographs, is in The Powys Review 24 (1989).

Revisiting After My Fashion

Twenty-five years since first reading *After My Fashion* (in 1980 when it appeared) the story-line—like all the early stories—still seems fairly ludicrous, though oddly rather less so than at first reading. The book now seems firmly set in its post-WWI period—unlike most other JCP novels, where the non-specific period signals can be disturbing. In *AMF* the social framework has become part of the scenery, and presents less of a barrier. In its English chapters, the formal engagements and sudden marriages of propriety, the respected Gentry and their faithful retainers, take their natural place beside the profusion of downland flowers and birdsong and the ‘peaceful hay-scented streets’ of Selhurst/ Chichester; the hatpins and glimpses of stocking and ‘Mr’s and ubiquitous teashops.

The New York chapters, meanwhile—9 out of the 22—possibly quite dashing at the time (in 1920 when the book should have been published), would not have seemed very dated in 1960. Susan Rands suggests (in her booklet on JCP’s Sussex years) that the reason for the book’s non-appearance could have been that its situations were too close to ‘home’; but it is also conceivable that it may have seemed (to Americans) quite daringly ‘modern’. The whole book is, of course, illuminated by what we now know of JCP’s experiences up to this time: his half-hearted marriage and ‘respectable’ household; his passion for Frances, perforce non-possessive, and flirtations with other female admirers; his closeness to his free-living sister Marian; his unconventional American friends and Greenwich Village life.

The portrayal of the main character and focus of the book, Richard Storm, as a man of talents without conviction, and appetites with no heart, impulsive but unable to be unselfconscious, comes across as believable, but barely likeable; arguably rather less likeable than the more obviously eccentric and neurotic Adrian Sorio in *Rodmoor* before him, and Rook Ashover in *Ducdame* after him. There is obviously a good deal of JCP in Richard Storm—the JCP of *Confessions of Two Brothers*—and the New York chapters make us look at him more realistically than in not-quite-real 1900s south England. This is perhaps the reason for a reader’s unease. Having, in this craggy character, excised (or over-analysed) most ordinary gentler feelings, such as JCP himself was obviously capable of—for his mother and siblings for a start—the fictional character seems unbalanced. With hindsight, we miss the compensating affection and commitment which as we know came to the surface of JCP’s real life shortly afterwards (on meeting Phyllis), and which shines through the diaries (even with allowance made for the play-acting in these, and for their exaggeration of the ‘feminine’ in him). Later JCP-like characters—Wolf, Dud (John Crow never comes alive to this reader)—are in some way more believable; possibly because they are more odd, or more complex, and there is enough oddness in the worlds they move in not to make us question them in ‘real’ terms.

Nelly, the girl-bride in the book, is touching but less convincing. The generation-wide gap in age between her and Richard is, as usual in Powys stories, played down,

though here it is at least mentioned. She seems to have one foot—perhaps both feet—in Victorian convention and yet to have a mind of her own. She is partly straightforward and plain-speaking, partly a conventional social ‘game-player’. Perhaps she is uncomfortably derived in part from Margaret Powys and in part from an imagining of what her namesake the favourite Powys sister might have been if she had lived. However, she could be typical of post-war English girls of her kind (the book has a strong English vs. American theme); and her final retreat into the protective conventions of the awful Mrs Shotover is perhaps understandable in one about to give birth. Most of the other characters seem quite convincingly alive—Canyot the one-armed painter, a sympathetic dependable figure; Elise, theatrical femme-fatale but authentically inspired, Catharine the Bohemian girl, even the new-Russian idealist and the unorthodox butterfly-fancying Vicar. Mrs Shotover is a caricature County Lady, and probably the closest to real life of them all.

The whole book is visual and detailed as always with JCP, both of the undisturbed Sussex scenery, almost too heavily heavenly, and the hellish iron and steel and grandeur of commercial, youth-driven New York. There are some memorable set pieces: the paradisal cathedral-close garden, the lichen-covered village church roof, the painter and the dumb child; Nelly’s ‘happy valley’ picnic (lettuce sandwiches and a bottle of wine—picnics seem one of the few times Powys people *don’t* drink tea). In the New World we have Elise’s overwhelming dance, and her egomaniacs’ dialogue with the Russian below the Atlantic City boardwalk; the crowds in Washington Square, New York’s *rive gauche*; palatial Penn Station (as it was); the new (art deco?) Stuyvesant theatre.

It is the American central section, unique in JCP’s fiction, that carries the book along, and gives it a reality different from the enclosed world of other early (and later) books by JCP. The two settings, Sussex and Manhattan, are perhaps too different to cohere, but reminders of the contrast and of England, with the dual influences on Richard, are worked into the American part, and do their best to convey the collision of worlds which in 1920 must have been at its most powerful. More conventional are studio-discussion themes of Art, Life, etc.; and there are a fair number of perhaps over-convenient deaths; but there is enough action and enough background to carry these contrivances along.

AMF was scorned by both Llewelyn and Frances, the two critics JCP paid most heed to, but it’s hard not to think he abandoned it too easily. We may feel that this book was a one-off for JCP; that he was more himself when more ‘gothic’, in the more self-enclosed settings of *Rodmoor* and *Ducdame*, that it doesn’t have the mythical dimension other books do; and that straying into other novelists’ territory was not what he was best at. But *AMF* is still a pleasure to read, and a book that stays in the mind.

Kate Kavanagh

The Powys Review 8 (1980–81) contains long reviews of *After My Fashion*, by Glen Cavaliero, *G. Wilson Knight* and other distinguished Powysians.

Review

Dorset Stories, by Sylvia Townsend Warner

Black Dog Books, 2006. ISBN 0-9549286-3-6. 258 pp. £15.99

Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote well and widely. There are seven novels, each one quite unlike the others, poetry, a fine biography of T. H. White and many short stories, collections of which are mostly out-of-print. She was also a diarist and letter-writer. The latest collection of letters, *The Element of Lavishness* (2001), between herself and William Maxwell, her editor at the *New Yorker* for which she wrote more than 150 short stories, is surely the best, for in Maxwell she had a correspondent who was her equal. They sparked one another off and the result is a joy to read. Now we have *Dorset Stories* with a useful introduction by Judith Stinton and illustrations by Reynolds Stone. The book comprises stories from earlier collections and a few from the *New Yorker* which have not before been reprinted.

‘Love Green’ is a scene-setting essay about Chaldon where Sylvia Townsend Warner had her first meeting with Theodore Powys and where she met her great love Valentine Ackland. The two women lived in Chaldon for a few years and then in 1937 moved to Maiden Newton, about 15 miles away, where they remained for the rest of their lives, for Sylvia more than 40 years.

A darkness in a few of the early stories, particularly ‘Early One Morning’, ‘Over The Hill’ and ‘A Village Death’, reflects the early influence of Theodore Powys before Sylvia Townsend Warner fully found her own voice. ‘A Bottle of Gum’ provides light relief and comes from a study of Theodore which Sylvia Townsend Warner was writing and only abandoned when she discovered how much Theodore disliked it. Small wonder: it is certainly an amusing tale but who would want their quirks and nervous anxieties, however lovingly depicted, exposed for the entertainment of strangers?

Almost all the stories in the book were written in the first half of the twentieth century and may well induce nostalgia in some older readers; but there are sharp reminders that not all the old days were good.

Sylvia Townsend Warner was an astute observer of character and situation who never used the authorial voice to make her point but revealed it through the speech, behaviour and names (of which she was a master) of her characters. Here is the chairman of the Ladies’ Committee dismissing unsuitable recipes for a fundraising cookery book. “‘How very interesting,’” answered Mrs. Beggerley Blatchford. “‘Quite in the traditional spirit of English cook lore! But I wonder if we ought to include these recipes in our book. You see, Mrs. Granby, we hope our little book will be used by our dear villagers themselves. Perhaps these recipes would be a little ambitious—not quite in keeping with their simple tastes—dear souls!’” (‘Folk Cookery’). Newcomers to the village (‘If These Delights’) decide to give ‘a proper party’ to liven the place up. Mr. Chilmaid, the village undertaker, with his catalogue of party tricks—‘a mine of unexpected surprises’—was not the assistance they had expected.

The War brought Sylvia Townsend Warner into closer contact with village life and this, together with her work in the office of the Dumbridge (Dorchester) Women's Voluntary Service, provided more story material. Fuel rationing, National Salvage Week, quiet blackmail over clothing coupons, evacuees (including the poltergeist-raising Evie, 'a tremendous blond girl')—all feature in *Dorset Stories*. So does Sylvia Townsend Warner's inimitable use of simile. Two Home Guards are about to instruct local women about fire-arms.

Before the hearth was an elderly Persian rug, and standing in the centre of the rug was a machine gun, mounted on its tripod and looking like a pet alligator.

('England, Home and Beauty')

The stories cover a wide range of human experience set within a small compass. They reward careful reading. The hasty reader, as I discovered, can easily miss the point.

I have a favourite story to which I have already returned several times. 'I Am Come into my Garden' is prose written by a poet. Mr. Thomas Filleul has a walled garden wherein grow an abundance of choice fruits. It evokes the garden of Solomon and many another garden down the literary centuries which have been places of safety and goodness, love and generosity. Mr. Filleul is moved by the spirit of his garden. Never named, both George Herbert and Oscar Wilde are present in this tale.

Dorset Stories is a book of delights, beautifully illustrated and well-printed on good paper. It is unfortunate that it lacked a competent proof-reader.

Eileen Mable

Dorset Stories can be ordered from Black Dog Books, 104 Trinity Street, Norwich,

NR2 2Bj.

(continued from page 21)

reprinted works of JCP, *Porius* (1951), *In Spite of* (1953), *A Glastonbury Romance* (1955), *The Brazen Head* (1956), *Up and Out* (1957), *All or Nothing* (1960), *Wolf Solent* (1961) and *Weymouth Sands* (1963), over a period of a dozen years. Many also state on the front inside flap simply 'JACKET DESIGN BY STEIN'.

Larry Mitchell put me on to the website of Classic Crime Fiction (of Goldeneye Rare Books, Grimsby) which lists 56 second-hand books from 8 publishers with dust jackets designed by Stein, 39 of these being for books published by Macdonald; this does not include the JCP dust jackets, but it does include half a dozen by Kenneth Hopkins, published by Macdonald. The list of these books spans the period 1945 to 1963, and includes Herbert Adams, Carter Dickson, and Georgette Heyer. This bookdealer does not know who Stein is.

I have come across another reference to a jacket design of 1954 by 'Stein' in Alan Powers' authoritative book *Front Cover: Great Book Jacket and Cover Design* (Mitchell Beazley, 2001). Alone of all the designers whose work is illustrated, this artist's anonymity is preserved by the single name in inverted commas.

'Stein' surely must be a pseudonym: who is this person, and why the concealment?

So I repeat my question:

Who is Stein?

Stephen Powys Marks

Iain Sinclair

EARTH ANKH AUTUMN

A visit to the home of John Cowper Powys at Blaenau Ffestiniog, October 27 1973

"Light is the urging." Late October. We drive down a golden tunnel. This autumn arch is alive with the pulse of vision. Coronal splendours. The breath of burnt leaves. It is a time when the past becomes accessible.

We stop the car high on the road above Ffestiniog. It is our instinct to pause here and not rush on down. Something in the quality of the light slows us. Motivation has become confused. We are here to visit the slate miner's cottage where John Cowper Powys lived for the closing period of his life, to pay a brief homage. But that is not all. That is only a part of it.

The low sun has not yet pulled the mantle of haze back from the mountains. It isn't easy to gauge distance. Two fir trees in this field: and Powys's insight, connecting Wales and Tibet, begins to make perfect, literal, sense.

There is the egoic surrender to landscape. Consciousness follows the eye arrow. A Chinese painting on silk. Perceiver and perceived are one. This is outside the western material tradition of ownership and grasp.

Powys cultivated this gift, the recognition of self in natural forms, to a higher peak than any other writer of his generation. He knew that these mountains are more than a geological accident. They cannot be explained in terms of upthrust and earth movement: the knife of ice. It is the biological kinship that interested him. That the hills contain the old gods, are moulded to the shape of their bones. And it was here, in the stereoscopic loops of this vision, that all the mythologies fused and became one, were taken into the swift bloodstream of Powys's prose. It was here that the equation worked out. Greece, China, Wales. Homer, the Tao, Taliesin. In this land which had once been called Powys the superimposed layers of legend found their final form.

It is worth remembering, and still largely unnoticed, it gives Powys his stature, that he took time as a single workable entity. He was a post-Einstein prophet. He could allow the ancient hill giants and space ghosts, as yet undiscovered, to converse in one narrative. You have to think of that other misunderstood English mystic, William Blake, and his Island in the Moon.

Powys also realised that the hills have generative powers, are our fathers, hold our children chained. These are dynamic metaphors, dangerous to play. A high level of

reverence is required. Powys walked among these mysteries, with his magical sticks, the stones in his pocket. Cézanne made similar use of Mount Sainte Victoire. “The sunless side of god’s face is the mountain”. This is not, recently, a western thought. But it is there in the ancestral matrix, in the Orphic Mysteries and the most ancient hymns. The holy mountains of legend. It is hidden in fear.

To reinvent the ceremonies of the tribe, that was the flash of genius that Powys seized. He was ahead of his time in finding a road back. Now it is commonplace. Powys took the risks, raised up the ghosts of Wessex, lifted the mists of the Arthurian borderlands, challenged the mountain. And he became more than a writer in doing it. He was a magician, shaman and charlatan. His marvellous instinct for the absurdity of his own postures saved him.

Placement upon the earth is so crucial and Powys got it right from the start: Weymouth, Dorset, the American years of exile, Wales, a homecoming, It was a formidable curve, touching the nodal points of energy, Maiden Castle, Glastonbury, Cerne Abbas. He was a geomancer, seeing always the correct balance in the relationship between man and plant and animal. Man was not superior and separate.

In the cloud of these thoughts we drove down into Blaenau. A strong place. A hill community caught in a vortex of held energies. The cottages are worked out of the home stone. It is a bowl, an amphitheatre. Put to industrial work and now living with the end of that era.

Powys’s cottage (at 1 Waterloo) shares this directness. It fronts the hills, is not oblique and hidden like the previous Corwen house. That was a different thing. Owen Glendower country, the Inn still carries his name, but it is gentle land, civilized and worked, not savage and open to “aboriginal energies”. Powys lived there in a suburban house on the fringes of the town, could walk easily up the damp path to the pine woods and the hills.

But now as we approach the slate cottage we come again on the notion of the Tao, the path.

There is a split, one fork curves behind the cottage and the other breaks onto the hillside. A waterfall tumbles between loose stones. The stream trickles down from Llyn y Manod, one of a chain of small mountain lakes laid along the same magnetic track.

Sitting here among the rock one admires again that life instinct. To withdraw to this place: solitary, intuitive, but alive to all the twitches of the human comedy. Blind in one eye, strong body metaphor. Something shared with the other great souls and seers of the century. Pound who ended in silence, Joyce driven by his cataracts down the tunnel of the ear. Wyndham Lewis totally locked in deafness. Powys divided, one eye on the interior, the other moving out among the mountain heights.

Pound was a Confucian and believed in strength at the centre, the virtue discov-

ered in men of power. He opposed the Tao. His line was tight. Powys unleashed his torrential energies in lectures, monologues, letters and novels. The form was against him, this delayed his "discovery". There is an archaic period-flavour to the surface of his prose. Powys knew it and used the fact in reverberating ironic spasms.

The big clues have still to be dug out of the animal fat of his works. He was spontaneous, careless, human. Not wanting to make godlike artefacts. He was an earth medium, transmitting the stories that can be heard in the stones. He sniffed the spoor of legend. It was his fate to live at a moment when the storyteller had lost his place at the centre of the circle. He ends in mountain exile.

We leave the hill. The camera is allowed to capture clues that lurk in the air. It twitches like a diviner's rod. Heat forces the finger. The shutter snaps.

As we pass the door of the cottage, a car drives up, a woman gets out. Somebody answers the knock. A face glimpsed in the shadows. Phyllis Playter. Great strength, darkness. We do not intrude further. Return to the car, drive away.

(This piece, set up in galley proof, was given to the Powys Society Collection in the Dorset County Museum by Jeff Kwintner. It is published here for the first time with the author's kind permission. JH)

To the Ash tree in front of my window

*Leafless thou art, a sullen wintry thing,
That with thy greenish trunk and drooping head
Standest forlorn and all uncomforted,
As if no change could ever respite bring
To thy deep mood of vacant melancholy;
And yet I know that as the days draw on,
Though bleak and sad their dull succession,
They move towards an end most bright and holy.
Soon through thy veins the sap of a new birth
Shall rise, a flood of quick triumphant joy,
And with new-blossom'd leaves thou shalt acclaim
The Earth's renewal—Great for me thy worth
O Ash tree! Thou hast made me to employ
My mind in putting my sad heart to shame.*

An early sonnet by John Cowper Powys
(from *The Powys Collection*)