

Editorial

The Vale of Llangollen is deservedly celebrated as containing, in proportion to its extent, a greater variety of interesting objects, and a more beautiful and striking combination of the milder and nobler features of pleasing and majestic scenery, than probably any other in the principality.

These words written in 1833* and arguably still true, should encourage us on our second return visit. JCP, a little more than a century later,† lists the familiar features in view from his *beautifully designed* new house above Corwen, a few miles away: the *wide pastoral meadows*, the *summit of a pre-historic hill-city of unknown antiquity, whose fallen walls make a massive stone-coronet*, the thousand-year-old pillar in Corwen churchyard, *carved in a manner I have learnt from the writings of Massingham to link up ... with the sacred pillars connected with the cult of the Earth-mother in Crete*; and (*within an easy afternoon's bus-ride*) the *yet more ancient pillar ... to King Eliseg* below the ruins of Dinas Brân, *jagged and desolate*, and close to the ruins of Valle Crucis Abbey, burial-place of the bard Iolo Goch and of the love-lorn princess Myfanwy—and never—not even at Glastonbury—*have I felt the spirit of what Spengler would call the Spring-time of our Faustian Culture as powerfully as in this holy ground. The thirteenth-century Cistercian chapter house remains entirely intact, and it would be easily possible to make use of this scholastic sanctuary in the mountains not only for Thibetan contemplation but for the writing of books.* JCP began *Owen Glendower* in the chapter house in April



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1937, and completed it in Mynydd y Gaer, the ‘stone coronet’, in December 1939.

In the other direction lie Bala lake, Llanderfel of the totemic wooden horse, and (a favourite walk) Llangar church by the meeting of the waters, where from a seat *by two enormous yew trees, you can hear the deep-throated murmur of the great river as it sweeps round a sharp bend ...* And behind the house is the sombre mass of the Berwyn Mountains, *lifting its huge heather-covered bastions, ridge upon ridge, where in the purplish darkness, after sunset, mounted in a hunched shoulder of this huge globe ... you get the sensation ... of being the last survivor of your race on this swart promontory, while beneath you the “black earth”, as Homer somewhere calls it, sails on her path, dark and scarred and enduring, under the godless vault of superincumbent space.*

After this grandiloquent literary scene-setting, the varied (though wide-ranging) human concerns of the *Newsletter* may seem as if viewed through a telescope. The Chairman’s kind remarks about Editor are appreciated, though a receptive e-mail might be a more accurate source than an Uncanny Ear. Thanks to all who have contributed.

KK

* By Samuel Lewis in *A Topographical Dictionary of Wales*, quoted by David Crystal in his entertaining philological ramble, ‘in search of English’, *By Hook or By Crook* (HarperCollins, 2007).

† In ‘Wales and America’, in *Obstinate Cymric, Essays 1935–47* (Carmarthen: Druid Press, 1947).

Chairman’s Report *August 2006–August 2007*

The Society held its August 2006 Conference at Chichester University, and this year concentrated on John Cowper Powys’s much-read but critically neglected philosophical writings. Henning Ahrens spoke on *In Defence of Sensuality*, and John Gray spoke on all three brothers under the title ‘Three Powys Philosophies’. Elaine Mencher spoke on her work of editing T. F. Powys for the Brynmill Press, and Barrie Mencher on Saturday evening introduced a reading of *The Sin-Eater* by T. F. Powys and Stephen Tomlin. Bill Keith was unfortunately prevented by illness from attending the conference, and his paper on John Cowper Powys’s *Autobiography* was read by Timothy Hyman. Special thanks at this conference went to Kieran McCann, for organising a Saturday afternoon walk over the Sussex Downs above Burpham, with appropriate readings from John Cowper Powys performed *in situ*. The Conference organisers, Louise de Bruin and Peter Foss, as ever worked tirelessly to ensure the weekend went smoothly, and established a warm and welcoming atmosphere. In 2007, we will return for our annual conference to the Hand Hotel in Llangollen. Several members of the Society have worked hard seeking suitable conference venues in Wessex, close to the Powys ‘sites’, but so far without success. A questionnaire was

circulated among members, who expressed the opinion that a slight increase in the conference cost would be acceptable. The Committee has borne this in mind, but remains committed to keeping the conference affordable.

The Society has held three interim meetings during the year. On 25th November, we met in the Friends' Meeting House at Hampstead for a discussion on *Wolf Solent*, led by Rob Timlin, Timothy Hyman, and John Hodgson. On 5th May, the Society reaffirmed its Wessex connections with a 'Powys Day' at the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester. Twenty members attended. Richard Burleigh spoke on the many writers with Dorset connections, apart from Thomas Hardy and the Powyses, and after lunch Chris Thomas spoke on John Cowper Powys's *Atlantis*. We ended the day with a walk round the ramparts of Maiden Castle.

On Powys Day, many interested members used the opportunity to view the Society's collection housed in the Dorset County Museum, and Morine Krissdóttir kindly displayed items of special interest to visitors. Our thanks also go to Judy Lindsay, the Museum's director, for the free use of a room in the museum for the day. Morine Krissdóttir has also started work to make the catalogue of the Society's collection available on the Society's website, and we hope that this project will be completed in due course. She has been assisted in her work on the collection by Mel Crowther and Jasmine Metcalfe, volunteers at the Museum, whom I would like to thank on behalf of the Society for the generous commitment of their time. The collection can be consulted at any time, with advance warning to the Museum.

The Society met again on 16th June 2007 at Little Gidding near Huntingdon, inspired and organised by Sonia Lewis. Sixteen members were present as our President Glen Cavaliero led a discussion on John Cowper Powys's *Maiden Castle*. This was also an opportunity for the society to express to Glen the society's warm congratulations on his eightieth birthday.

Also in the course of the year, members of the Society entertained a gathering of Old Shirburnians in the Powell Theatre of Sherborne School, reviving the dramatised reading *The Unreturning Morning* about the schooldays of the Powys brothers, which Peter Foss devised for the 2004 Conference. Chris Wilkinson, Peter Lazare, Peter Foss, Pat Roberts, and Richard Perceval Graves took part, and Richard Graves also delivered a spirited lecture introducing the Powys family.

The Society published Volume xvi of *The Powys Journal* this year, and Volume xvii will be available at by the time of the AGM in Llangollen in August 2007. This will be the seventh and last issue edited by Larry Mitchell, and our particular thanks go to him for sustaining the high quality of the *Journal*. As our President Glen Cavaliero remarked to me, 'Rarely has any group of writers been so well served over the years by criticism of such a high standard, written and published without any support from the academic establishment'. Richard Maxwell, senior lecturer in comparative literature at Yale University and one-time editor of *Powys Notes*, will take over the editorship of the *Journal* this year, and it is particularly gratifying to be placing the *Journal* in such experienced and capable hands, and maintaining the North Ameri-

can connection. Charles Lock, the *Journal's* long-standing Contributing Editor, has undertaken to be Reviews Editor.

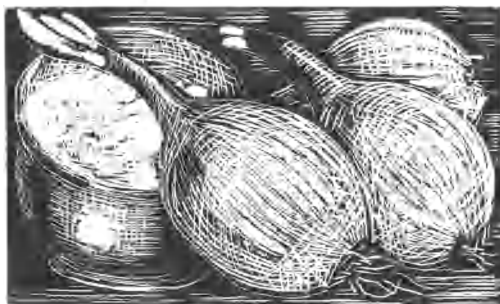
Kate Kavanagh edited three rich and stimulating *Newsletters*. Kate has an uncanny ear for catching Powys news in the wind, and our thanks go to her for her tireless enthusiasm. Our thanks also go to Stephen Powys Marks for his dedication and industry in his desktop publishing work, and to Richard Perceval Graves for his capable management of the Society's website to a high professional standard.

Your Committee met three times this year, in London in October 2006, at Anna Pawelko's home in Cardiff in February 2007, and again in London in June 2007. David Goodway stands down as a committee member at this AGM after six years' service. During this time he has edited John Cowper Powys's *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant and other essays* for the Society, and has reasserted John Cowper's left-libertarian credentials in his fine book, *Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow*. David Gervais has felt obliged to resign as vice-chairman for health reasons, but we hope he will remain a committee member and the Society will still be able to rely on his inspiring breadth of knowledge of European literature.

We were sorry to have to record the deaths during this year of our members Tony Halsall, Francis Berry, Eve Batten, and recently, Stephanie Gifford. Stephanie generously left a legacy of £500 to the Society, with her collection of Powys and other books. Tony's widow Chris kindly donated her husband's collection of Powys books to the Society, and these have been sold to members. Kathleen Feather, who with Francis Feather donated the valuable Feather Collection (now housed in Dorchester) to The Powys Society, has also died.

I would like to thank personally Peter Lazare, our Secretary, and Treasurer Michael French, for their dedication and combination of efficiency and enthusiasm, and all the members of the Committee, for helping to make being Chairman an enjoyable experience. I hope everybody in the Society finds that their membership deepens their experience of reading the Powyses.

John Hodgson



*Wood-engraving by Gertrude Powys for
Rats in the Sacristy.*

AGM 2007

The Annual General Meeting of The Powys Society will be held at the Hand Hotel, Llangollen, at 11:00 am on Sunday 29th August 2007.

AGENDA

- 1 Minutes of the 2006 AGM—published in the November 2006 *Newsletter*.
- 2 Matters arising.
- 3 Report of the Hon. Secretary.
- 4 Report of the Hon. Treasurer and Audited Accounts, as published in the July 2007 *Newsletter*.
- 5 Appointment of the Hon. Auditor, Stephen Allen.
- 6 Report for 2006–7 by the Chairman, as published in the July 2007 *Newsletter*.
- 7 To note the election of Officers and members of the Committee for 2007–8
- 8 Date and location of the 2008 Conference.
- 9 Any other business.

Committee Nominations 2007–8

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

	<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Seconder</i>
<i>Chairman</i>	John Hodgson	Peter Foss	Louise de Bruin
<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	Tim Hyman	Michael French	Kate Kavanagh
<i>Hon. Treasurer</i>	Michael French	Anna Pawelko	Peter Foss
<i>Hon. Secretary</i>	Peter Lazare	Stephen Powys Marks	Anna Pawelko

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

<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Seconder</i>
David Gervais	Tim Hyman	Kate Kavanagh
John Dunn	John Hodgson	David Gervais

If approved, the Committee from August 2007 will therefore consist of:

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

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

The Powys Society Annual Conference 2007
The Hand Hotel, Llangollen, Friday 17th August to Sunday 19th August

‘REAL REALITY’

Programme

Friday 17th

- 4.00 Arrivals
5.30 Informal Reception in Dinas Brân Suite; welcome by Chairman
6.30 Dinner
8.00 **Peter Foss: ‘This Reckless Enterprise – The Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys’**

Saturday 18th

- 8.00 Breakfast in Dinas Brân Suite
9.30 **Harald Fawcner: ‘The Indifference of Nature – Realness in A Glastonbury Romance’**
followed by Coffee
11.15 **Arjen Mulder: ‘Becoming John Cowper Powys’**
12.45 Lunch
Afternoon free, for informal arrangements between members for trips
(for example to Corwen or Llangar or Dinas Brân) if required and
weather permitting (members can have tea in their own rooms)
6.00 **Charles Lock: ‘John Cowper Powys and Roy Fisher’**
7.15 Dinner
8.30 **Poetry reading by Roy Fisher and Penelope Shuttle**

Sunday 19th

- 8.00 Breakfast
9.30 **Florence-Catherine Marie-Laverrou: “‘Encroaching Fields’ in Weymouth Sands’**
followed by Coffee
11.00 **AGM**, followed by discussion of John Cowper Powys’s poem ‘The Ridge’
(printed in *Newsletter* 50, November 2003)
1.0 Lunch
3.0 End of Conference and departure in afternoon

Hon. Treasurer's Report for 2006

The accounts for 2006 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 and advice on behalf of the Society. I am pleased to be able to report that, if it is the wish of the Annual General Meeting, Mr Allen is willing to continue as auditor for another year.

The paid-up membership for 2006 was 261. Looking at the figures over the last seven years, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusion about trends in membership

<i>year</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<i>paid-up membership</i>	315	292	287	279	288	276	261

but I hope members will agree that it is very desirable for the Society to increase its membership and that they will do all within their power to encourage those interested in the work of members of the Powys family to join the Society.

After taking into account the tax refund under the Gift Aid Scheme of £851 (£924 in 2005), our total subscription income in 2006 was £6,064 or 9.2% of our total income of £8,761. (In 2005 the percentage was 76.6%; however, this year's income is significantly increased from the sale, through the *Newsletter*, of books donated by the executors of Gerald Pollinger and Anthony Halsall.)

As in previous years, the largest part of our expenditure was on our two regular publications, *The Powys Journal* and three issues of the Society's *Newsletter*. In 2006, the net cost of producing the *Journal* and *Newsletters*, including distribution, was £3,789, virtually the same as in 2005 (£3,752). Regrettably, the 2006 Conference made a significant loss of £1,145 (2005: surplus of £167). In 2006 the Society brought out three new small publications (*JCP on Thomas Hardy*, *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*, and a third edition of *Powys Checklist*); these sold well, but as one would expect with special publications they did not cover the whole of the cost of printing and distribution (£1,391) in the year of issue, with an acceptable shortfall of £447. The remaining volumes were taken into stock and as a result, after taking into account movements in the value of publication stock, the accounts show an excess of income over expenditure of £3,106 (2005: £3,656) and an increase in the Society's net worth on 31st December 2006 to £13,752 (2005: £10,646).

As in 2005, the satisfactory outcome for the year is aided by significant gifts to the Society and it seemed appropriate to transfer £3,000 from the General Fund to the Wilson Knight Benefactors' Fund to reserve these funds for specific projects. **The Committee would welcome suggestions from members for developments or initiatives they would like to see the Society undertake with these funds.**

Michael French

THE POWYS SOCIETY

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2006

INCOME ¹		£	£	£ 2005
<i>Subscriptions</i>	In arrears (2 members)	63		
	Brought forward from 2005 (7 members)	144		
	For 2006 (254 members)	5,006		
	Honorary members (13)	—		
	Tax refund under Gift Aid	<u>851</u>	6,064	6,453
<i>Donations</i>	Conference book sales	78		
	Book sales <i>via Newsletter</i> ²	1,323		
	Other	<u>116</u>	1,517	1,275
<i>Publication Sales</i>	Stock publications		933	513
<i>Other</i>	Bank interest		<u>247</u>	<u>14</u>
TOTAL			<u>8,761</u>	<u>8,255</u>

EXPENDITURE ¹				
<i>Powys Journal xvi</i>	Cost of printing	1,488		1,376
	Cost of distribution	<u>284</u>	1,772	<u>369</u> 1,745
<i>Powys Newsletters</i>	Printing costs, Nos 57, 58, 59	1,476		1,522
	Cost of distribution	<u>541</u>	2,017	<u>485</u> 2,007
<i>2006 Publications</i>	Cost of printing and flyer	1,306		
	Cost of distribution	85		
	<i>less</i> proceeds of sale	(944)	447	
<i>Conference</i>	Payment to Chichester University	6,762		
	Other expenses	569		
	<i>less</i> registration fees	(6,186)	1,145	(167)
<i>Day schools</i>	LIP day, London, 17th June 2006		73	116
<i>Administrative Expenses</i>	Web-site maintenance	82		
	Alliance of Literary Societies	15		
	Officers' expenses	174		
	Travel to Committee meetings	<u>267</u>	538	<u>707</u>
	TOTAL		<u>5,992</u>	<u>4,408</u>

EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE **2,769** 3,847

DECREASE IN VALUE OF PUBLICATION STOCKS ⁴ **337** (191)

EXCESS OF INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE
(taking stock movements into account) **3,106** 3,656

THE POWYS SOCIETY

STATEMENT OF FUNDS AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2006

GENERAL FUND ⁵	£	£	2005
Funds at 1 January 2006		3,646	4,990
Excess of income over expenditure		3,106	3,656
Transfer to Wilson Knight Benefactors Fund		(3,000)	(5,000)
Funds at 31 December 2006		<u>3,752</u>	<u>3,646</u>
<i>Represented by:</i>			
Stock of <i>Powys Journal</i> and books ⁴		1,368	1,031
Cash at Bank 31 Decembert 2006 ⁶	2,641		
Less subscriptions received in advance ⁷	(257)	<u>2,384</u>	<u>2,615</u>
		<u>3,752</u>	<u>3,646</u>
THE WILSON KNIGHT BENEFACTORS FUND ⁸			
Funds at 1 January 2006		7,000	2,000
Transfer from General Fund		3,000	5,000
Funds at 31 December 2006		<u>10,000</u>	<u>7,000</u>
<i>Represented by</i>			
Cash at bank		<u>10,000</u>	<u>7,000</u>

NOTES

- Cash turnover in 2006: total receipts, £16,829; total payments, £14,023. 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 £3,106. (2005: £3,656)
- Donated by the executors of Gerald Pollinger and Anthony Halsall.
- JCP on Hardy* (400 copies), *The Art of Forgetting* (200 copies), *Powys Checklist* 3rd ed. (200 copies).
- The value of stock at 1 January 2006 was £1,031. During the year this was increased by £799 through the taking of new publications into stock (70 copies of *The Powys Journal* xvi for 2006 @ £3.25 per copy: £228; 167 copies of *JCP on Hardy* at £1.25 per copy: £209; 79 copies of *The Art of Forgetting* at £2.65 per copy: £209; and 93 copies of *Powys Checklist* at £1.65 per copy: £153) and decreased by £462 through the sale of existing stock and straight-line depreciation of existing stock to zero after five years (£419). This gives a total increase during 2006 of £337 and a stock value at 31 December 2006 of £1,368.
- Society's net worth at 31 December 2006 was £13,752 (General Fund £3,752; Wilson Knight Benefactors Fund £10,000)** (at 31 December 2005, net worth was £10,646).
- Community Account £235, Savings Account £715, Base rate tracker account £11,691, less WKB Fund £10,000 = £2,641.
- Subscriptions received in advance: from 2005 accounts; £77 [£40 2 subscriptions for 2007; £18 one subscription for 2008; £19 one subscription for 2009]; From 2006 accounts £180 [£143 seven subscriptions for 2007, £18 one subscription for 2008, £19 one subscription for 2009].
- 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 2006 and of the surplus for the year then ended and comply with the Companies Act 1985.

J. S. Allen (Chartered Accountant), 27th April 2007

Kathleen Feather

Kathleen Feather, wife of Francis Feather, died in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe on the 1st of May 2007 after a short illness. The Powys Society remembers with great fondness the conferences where she and Francis conducted the exciting book sales that were more like auctions. But it is for their immense generosity in giving to the Society their unique Powys collection, now housed in the Dorset County Museum, that we should be most grateful. (MK)

Kathleen Feather was, of course, the 'Girl in the Green Hat' of Francis Feather's loving tribute to their long and happy life together (see *NL* 42). (KK)

Stephanie Gifford

Stephanie Gifford, who joined The Powys Society in the 1970s, has died in Bournemouth, bequeathing £500 and a large number of books to the Society, very gratefully received. (PL)

News and Notes

Morine Krissdóttir is to talk on her new book on John Cowper Powys (title *Descents of Memory*) at the Dorset County Museum in October—see enclosed leaflet for details. The new edition of *Porius* edited by MK with Judith Bond is also due to appear from Overlook/ Duckworth by then.

★ ★ ★ ★

Another **Powys Society meeting** in the Friends' Meeting House, Hampstead, is planned for Saturday 24th November, at which it is hoped Morine will also speak. Further details on this in the next (November) newsletter.

★ ★ ★ ★

Duckworth Press in London currently lists *Glastonbury*, *Owen Glendower*, *Maiden Castle*, and *Porius*: Overlook Press in America also lists *Weymouth Sands*. *Autobiography*, previously announced, seems sadly to have vanished from their programmes. Let's hope the wheels turn again.

★ ★ ★ ★

Neil Lee (aka Rev. Neil Lee-Atkin, aka Tom Bates), a dedicated LIP admirer (see page 19, and *NL* 59, p.23) has started **The Dandelion Club**, a Derbyshire-based association for **Friends of Llewelyn Powys**, many of whom will also be members of The Powys Society (and all fully supportive of the Society, he adds).

★ ★ ★ ★

Selected Early Works of T. F. Powys is highly recommended in *The Year's Work in English Studies* (vol. 85, covering 2004, p. 1180, published for The English Association by Oxford Journals, OUP.) 'These excellently produced volumes ... Powys is a

neglected genius, and students of English literature owe an enormous debt to Elaine Mencher and to Brymill Press for this scrupulously detailed edition.'

★ ★ ★ ★

David Goodway reports finding presentation volumes with interesting inscriptions in **Blackwell of Oxford's Antiquarian Dept.** Blackwell's Rare Books catalogue lists about 20 first editions by JC, LL, and TF Powys. Inscriptions from JCP are to Gilbert Turner (*Letters to Louis, Owen Glendower, Rabelais*), others to Turner from Lloyd Emerson Siberell, JCP's first (1934) bibliographer; one from TF (*Innocent Birds*) to 'John Arrow'. Gilbert Turner was the librarian (at Chelsea and at Richmond, Surrey) who helped JCP with books and typing, especially with *Rabelais* and *The Brazen Head* (which is dedicated to him).

★ ★ ★ ★

'Lines from the Margins', an article by Tony Glynn on **Elizabeth Myers**, appeared in *The Tablet* on 26th May 2007. 'Her books gave insight into a world of people little written about [in the late 1930s–40s]: of children in danger of being crushed by the odds, as she herself once was, and the marginalised.' Tony Glynn has donated material on the life of Elizabeth Myers to Manchester Central Library, where there has previously been little information about her. 'Manchester gave her a raw deal in early life and it at least owes her the debt of recording her better in their archives. (They do, however, have her books for reference).'

★ ★ ★ ★

Herbert Williams's latest poetry collection, *Wrestling in Mud: New and Selected Poems*, containing work written over five decades (Cinnamon Press, £7.99) was launched at the Hay Festival. More from www.cinnamonpress.com or www.herbert-williams.co.uk for these lively and accessible thoughts on life, Wales, and life in Wales, always with a personal twist. Herbert Williams wrote the short biography of JCP in the Seren 'Borderlines' series (1997) and the script for the TV drama-documentary 'The Great Powys' (HTV Wales, 1994). There are reviews of his work in *Journals* VIII, IX, and X.

★ ★ ★ ★

A feature in **Pride of Britain Hotels magazine** 'Around Britain—Going by the Book', by Westrow Cooper (p.16), starts with a paragraph on the Dorset coast path, TFP and the Chaldon circle, with quotations from Llewelyn ('handsome, charming and endowed with tremendous zest for life') and pictures of TF and JCP (in boat, on cover of *NL* 58). They share the space with *Lorna Doone*, Dr Johnson, *Tristram Shandy*, *Dracula* and Ian Fleming.

★ ★ ★ ★

Chris Thomas, following his talk on JCP's *Atlantis* at Dorchester in May, is to contribute to the Autumn programme of the 'Atlantis' bookshop (www.theatlantisbookshop.com). The founder of this bookshop—in Museum Street opposite the British Museum, a traditional area for bookshops specialising in magic and the occult) – edited *The Occult Observer*, to which JCP contributed 'The Unconscious' in 1949 (see *NL* 45, p.12). Ralph Shirley, the Powys cousin (1865–

1946), edited the earlier (unconnected) *Occult Review*.

* * * *

Does anyone know in which book(s) JCP used the phrase ‘*Zurich- (or Swiss-) Missionaries*’ (i.e., Jung’s followers – he feared they’d invade Britain)? (Query from Jacqueline Peltier)

Not, I think, in ‘The Unconscious’ mentioned above, despite it being one of his more truculent diatribes against the evils of (Freudian) ‘science’. KK

* * * *

We are still hoping that three publications from Cecil Woolf will be ready in time for the Conference: the long awaited letters from JCP to Emma Goldman (ed. David Goodway), and JCP to Dorothy Richardson (ed. Janet Foul), also a new Powys Heritage booklet from Peter Foss, ‘The Immemorial Year: Llewelyn’s Diary for 1909’.

Powys Day in Dorchester *Saturday 5th May 2007*

A happy day on Powys ‘home ground’. Twenty-plus members met on a fine morning at the Dorset County Museum, for refreshments in its windowless but cheerful ‘schoolroom’. The Collection Room was opened, with Morine Krissdóttir and her part-time assistants Mel and Jasmine in attendance. Those interested and fit climbed the many stairs (the recently installed lift only reaches the second floor, with alternative access to the top-floor collections only by fire escape) to the small but light and pleasant picture-lined room, with its Inner Sanctum filled with the Feather and Bissell collections, and other well-cared-for Powys treasures.

Richard Burleigh – member of no less than 10 literary societies, newsletter editor of the William Barnes Society which is also based in the DCM – then gave an overview of some lesser-known treasures by Dorset writers, from the point of view of a ‘compulsive book-collector’. Dorset is a rich county in this respect, even without Hardy or the Powyses. A selection, for a taste – all works that could have interested the Powyses in different ways – starting from the seventeenth century with Thomas Fuller (*History of the Worthies of England*) who like many writers of the 17th to 19th centuries, was a rural clergyman. The monumental *Monumenta Britannica* of John Aubrey (better known for his gossipy *Brief Lives*) was finally published in Dorset in the 1980s. Coleridge and the Wordsworths, who first met in Dorset, admired the pre-Romantic poem ‘Lewesdown Hill’ (about an ecstatic May-morning walk) by William Crowe. Lady Charlotte Guest who lived in Dorset, was the translator of the *Mabinogion* (inspiring Tennyson as well as JCP). Alfred Russel Wallace, whose evolutionist theories ran parallel with Darwin’s, has his grave (at Broadstone) marked with a fossil tree. The smuggling adventure *Moonfleet* (1898, by John Meade Faulkner) is set on Chesil Beach. William Barnes, famous for his poems in Dorset

dialect, studies in philology and much else, survived to be observed and described by the Powyses. Two former pupils of Barnes, notable in their fields, were the Edwardian royal surgeon, Sir Frederick Treves (*Highways and Byways of Dorset*, 1906) and the Revd Octavius Pickard-Cambridge, rector of Bloxworth and naturalist, author of *The Spiders of Dorset* (1881) ... Clusters of writers at Lyme Regis (Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, Palgrave of the *Golden Treasury*, John Fowles) – the Chaldon Herring circle (Townsend Warner, Garnett) – T. E. Lawrence (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*) – Kenneth Allsop (of broadcasting fame) – H. J. Massingham (champion of country crafts) – Monica Hutchings (friend of Littleton and TFP) – Patrick Wright's *The Village That Died For England* (Tyneham, on military territory in the Purbeck Hills) – *Some Dorset Country Houses* by David Cecil (author of *The Stricken Deer*, a life of William Cowper) – Stevenson's *The Wreckers* set in Stalbridge ... with others too numerous to mention. Dorset, with its varied scenery – from paradise to drama – the Queen of counties – and its comparative (though not excessive) remoteness from big cities, does seem to have, and to have had, a special appeal for writers of all kinds, with their attendant book-devotees.



One of the groups starting a walk at Maiden Castle (John Hodgson, John Dunn, Kate Kavanagh, Chris Thomas, Louise de Bruin, Peter Lazare (Julia Matthews)).

After lunch (at the congenial restaurant-café Bojangles), **Chris Thomas** gave a close and enthusiastic account of JCP's late work *Atlantis* (1954) – a book, he said, quite new in his life, but like all Powys books, unique. He finds it approachable, bright, lively – unlike the earlier novels in that only the main figures are outstanding, with minor characters not all worked out, or left in the air – but with creative power still strong and some scenes (such as the monsters in underwater Atlantis) powerful as any in *Glastonbury*. Among aspects of the book that impress him are its links with the poem 'The Ridge', written probably at about the same time, in 1952, with its themes of death and defiance and questioning. *Atlantis* has a stronger grip on Self, solving the poem's struggles in visionary ways ('landscape upon landscape' in the speech from the Ruler) and transformations (Zeus's dissolving into thin air), and with – at the last minute – the discovery of a new world and its new (Red Indian, Hiawathan)

mythology. *Atlantis* marks JCP's transition from mythologized history to pure fantasy. We are reminded that Wonder is the beginning of philosophy. Powys draws on Hesiod's account of the gods as much as on Homer's. But he is not rationalising the old tales (as Mary Renault and Robert Graves do); he is a storyteller, a mythologist himself. At the same time *Atlantis*, visual as Powys always is, sparkles with its southern Mediterranean landscape and sensual atmosphere, reminding Chris of landscape in Pasolini's films, and dreamy romantic-period Germans' passion for Greece. JCP's veneration for Pallas Athene is well known, though in this book the Olympians are off-stage. The supernatural beings who do appear have Powysian elements, but the hero (*Odysseus* was originally the title) is not like Powys. The descriptions of the ever-present sea recall *Weymouth Sands*. Atlantis itself is not a



*Maiden Castle – a labyrinth
(Anna Pawelko).*

place, but a mental space. Powys uses myth to reconcile beauty and ugliness, and to extend consciousness into the non-human. An artist can step into a priestly role.

Discussion followed (Keats – Goethe – Pater – Anarchism ...) and several groups then made their way to Maiden Castle, where they contrived to circle that giant green labyrinth invisible to each other, though all enjoying the low evening light and (see *Hiawatha*) Keewaydin's cool wind. **KK**

Little Gidding, 16th June 2007

Nearly twenty members found their way to this tiny place in remotest Huntingdonshire to consider the vicissitudes and essences of John Cowper's *Maiden Castle*: 'There are other places which also are world's end ... but this is the nearest ... now and in England.' The discussion of this controversial and sometimes unloved novel – controversial in its writing, its publication, its readability, and in its themes and meanings – was lively and wide-ranging. Glen introduced the two sessions and most ably conducted the excitable participants. The occasion demonstrated yet again how blessed we are to have such a distinguished President who takes much time and more thought to leading us through the Powysian mazes and amazes.

If, as many readers have felt, the predominant theme of *MC* is death, what is striking is how JCP illumines this gloomy subject with his masterful insights into human and earth life: 'The communication of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language of the living.' Much of the book is a vast tramp, which begins and ends

in the Dorchester cemetery, and in-between around the town and countryside and up and down Maiden Castle. Dud's character, as depicted by JCP, was put through the wringer in a number of spirited exchanges: was he a John Cowper self-portrait, seeing himself in Phyllis's eyes, does Dud possess hidden depths of feeling and understanding, is this a self-parody? Glen emphasised the unexpected change from the Dud-viewpoint to that of Wizzie in the last third of the book, which is seen as a major shift of emphasis and of a renewal of readers' engagement. After lunch, we turned to the numerous deletions from the manuscript enforced by JCP's publisher in 1936, and Glen demonstrated how disastrous many of these were to the tone and character of the book. Among such were passages that dealt with some of the protagonists' heartfelt beliefs, the memorability of nature, especially for Dud and Wizzie, and sexual issues. Discussion of sexualities brought female characters – Nancy, Thuella and Wizzie – to the fore. Indeed, Wizzie's becomes the voice of JCP by journey's end: she finally captures the castle. We hadn't enough time to get to grips

with Enoch/Urien, who seems to me to be one of those towering, elemental creations of JCP, very much a foretaste of things to come in the Welsh romances. *Maiden Castle* might not be many peoples' favourite, but it is the cross-roads book for JCP, full of his idiosyncratic insights into sensuality, sexuality and boredom, and of exciting moments of high comic drama.

After tea, Glen cut a great iced cake (baked by our multitalented Chairman), to mark his 80th birthday. Thanks to the staff at Farrar House for their hospitality and for providing us with a wholesome lunch, and especially to Sonia Lewis for spotting the potential of Little Gidding and making the arrangements for a most enjoyable and successful meeting .

Tony Atmore



From our President, Glen Cavaliero

I would like to thank the many members of the Society who sent me their good wishes on the occasion of my recent 80th birthday, either on individual cards or on the array of signatures in a folder whose cover carried a beautiful photograph of Glastonbury Tor. I was so touched and heartened by this evidence of shared enthusiasm and friendship, for The Powys Society has now been a source of companionship and delight to me over what is now half a lifetime. I am so grateful to everybody concerned, for you have made what was in any case a good day for me something extra special, 'your wone selves'.

Reviews

The Justice of the Night, poems by Glen Cavaliero

Tartarus Press (Coverley House, Carlton-in-Coverdale, Leyburn, N. Yorks DL8 4AY), 2007

88 pp., £12.99, ISBN 978-1-905784-01-1

In the high-spirited and optimistic opening poem of Glen Cavaliero's welcome new collection, *The Justice of the Night*, the poet offers us not imagery of the night but radiance, God seen as very like the sun.

*God has a great round face
like the sun, a dial like the sun,
a sun-dial.*

*His grin is the daylight.
He tosses the earth in his arms
on a taut line*

'The First Lesson', inspired perhaps by the seven-year-old Rebecca who is its dedicatee, encourages us to 'endure the round/of grief and glamour', by figuring God in benevolent style, with solar attributes. This god plays with the earth as if it's a ball,

his sport, his delight, his toy,

and human beings, says this poet, must

*... enjoy the game
if you can, breathless,
bruised; endure the round
of grief and glamour...*

Grief and glamour are the dominant moods of the collection, the dual feelings of despair and of energetic hope with which the poet confronts the world. He suffers, but keeps faith with and experiences much rejoicing, like any good Powysian.

In such connection we might also expect, and indeed do find, a finely-judged and atmospheric sense of place, evocations of landscapes with which the individual who 'notices such things' must come into relation, even though there is inevitable struggle.

*Space falls away, compliant, you're exposed,
and the sky's hood contracts and darkens,
drawn tight by some immense and unseen hand,
and the reeds' shuddering seems a warning,
and you start to walk, anywhere, no matter
in what direction so long as you keep moving,
but aware in a corner of the mind's eye
of that stooping thing that pads towards you,
that no dike bars, that knows its way
and you, its destination.*

In the above quotation from 'Points of Recognition', this sense of challenge from

the uninhabited landscape, where the individual is alone with, if you like, his destiny, is fully realised. We realize as we read this poem why the word *panic* comes from being in the realm of Pan, in the wild of outside the walls of city, town or village – ‘an old thicket choked with long dead branches’, where ‘the trees exert a queer pressure, and the cornfield’s further off than you remember.’ But such disquiet comes indoors also, as we learn in the masterly second section.

*But above all be aware
of being alone in your house on a summer evening
endless as only summer evenings are
when the soaked shroud of leaves weighs on the wall,
and it’s too warm for a fire, too cold
for concentration, not dark
enough as yet for light,
and you know that stillness and action are alike impossible.*

This long and complex poem is a triumph of utterance, catching exactly and conveying in controlled but vivid language the disquiet to be felt in solitude, the whip of isolation, within a landscape that is not as friendly or tame as it seemed at first, or in a house that no longer gives psychological shelter. The poem builds up to the final striking clarity of the last line –

*When it finds you
it will not feel like a friend.*

This is a superb conjuring-up of the sense we have at challenging times of the unexpected dangers lying in wait for us and against which there is no defence. An unflinching poem, where the *it*, the figure of death that haunts the poem, makes a powerful contrast with the boisterousness of the bright-faced God in the opening poem. Grief and glamour indeed.

These tanists, these opposites, recur throughout the volume. The final poem, ‘Dedication’, addresses the panic theme again, in a love poem that draws adroitly both on the resource of writing, ‘a *private alphabet of unappeased desire*’ to address the you who ‘yet again, become my dictionary’, set in a summer landscape where ‘*the panic season calls once more*’.

This coherently arranged collection is made up of four sections which create a strong sense of equilibrium, and it follows-through these themes of loneliness, landscape, celebration, human love and, not least of all, stoic humour.

‘The Wise Woman of Amounderness’ is a moving portrait of a wise woman ‘*shrinking in the wail of gulls*’, deeply disillusioned with her life of faith and contemplation, believing ‘*Everything lost, lost*’. But she comes to accept she can only continue to praise the world and the creator-god who has disappointed her –

*Three tiny scallop shells
came to my hand as I floundered over shingle,
renegade, on pilgrimage
to the engulfing sands:*

*I cherish them, scrolls of a creation
inhumanly complete, a superfluity
to me as I to them, and so I praise their maker
since nothing's left to me but praise
until the tide, indifferently obedient,
sounds my name.*

Name, identity, disillusion, faith in the face of the uncaring universe, an illogical but necessary cherishing – this is a beautiful describing of the difficulties of any soul, and a fine job description, in a way, of any poet.

Glen Cavaliero's vision also takes in the city. In 'London Fires', the city is presented with all its bloody fiery history at the margins, but concludes in the present moment (and this poet has a wonderful gift for last lines), as

*a blondie ghost in flickering pink
confers belated grace. Below
the jar and rumble of the fleeting traffic
and its unseen load, the bones of London kindling
crumble, uninsured.*

Regret, that halfway house between Grief and Glamour, is a constant presence in the poems, whose calm is deceptive, like the bones of London under the pavements.

In the attentively-detailed poem 3 from the sequence 'Mater Dei', 'The End of the Beginning', the poet considers a garden in a cold springtime where

*... the poet's drooping mulberry prepares
for a fourth centenary, propped on crutches*

and wonders if the legend of John Milton planting the tree is true. From this he considers whether a secluded garden like this could be like that in which

*... Mary heard the summons and assented,
compliant with tradition's iconography --
an ordinary room, familiar, humble,
for no red carpet's called for by an angel
who'll hover in a crowded city bus-stop
on a November morning at a sad farewell
for ever, in the fog --*

*that grieving face
still haunts me, outward bound
to God knows where. Yet I was once
the object of an unsolicited embrace there...*

The heartfelt image of an angel at a crowded city bus-stop exemplifies this poet's ability to take traditional images and make them new, contemporary. He also takes us to places such as this (from 'On the March' I. The Begwns) —

*young Kilvert comes into his angel-satyr country
with its blackberry girls in lonely dingles, curlews*

*voicing waters, whitewashed chapels and the parson
in a hermit's cell, dementedly at prayer.*

and this (from 2. The Skreen) –

*There is a well here, close to the terrace walk.
Down it goes, deep and hallowed as the trees are high.*

*while in a square deific poets gather
to discern appearances of some inscrutable illumination.*

I love the wit of those two lines.

This book has been written from ‘an estate of the soul’. It is a powerful collection, rooted in love of and experience of language, and it possesses an individual and sophisticated vision.

I must also add that it is beautifully produced by Tartarus Press.

Penelope Shuttle

A Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys, by Peter J. Foss

The British Library & Oak Knoll Press 2007, £40, UK ISBN 978-0-7123-4935-2

The long-awaited labour-of-love, a complete *Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys* by Peter J. Foss was finally published in the UK in May by the British Library in association with Oak Knoll Press (of New Castle, Delaware), and is now available at the price of £40.* This book, which is a veritable tour-de-force of thoroughly researched information, represents excellent value and will be readily acknowledged by students (and Masters!) of English literature as a very welcome addition to the canon of reference works on great twentieth-century British authors.

Peter Foss surely deserves acknowledgement as the world's leading expert on the life and work of Llewelyn Powys; following sixteen years later in the footsteps of his seminal work, *A Study of Llewelyn Powys: His Literary Achievement and Personal Philosophy* (1991), which was written as a doctoral thesis, this latest invaluable offering confirms the author's status and completes a task first requested by Llewelyn himself in 1935. A task which Alyse Gregory described as a ‘reckless enterprise ... complicated, elusive, exciting, frustrating and challenging ... requiring the cunning of the sleuth, the patience of the fisherman and the pugnacity of a Mr. Kruschew’. ‡

If this be the case, then thankfully Peter Foss must possess all these attributes in abundance, for the 300 pages of this epic *Bibliography* are packed full of the kind of valuable and useful information which only someone with an affinity with his subject—and a dedicated and life-long passion for knowledge of his subject matter, could produce.

For those of us who constantly seek out and eagerly devour every scrap or morsel of information about Llewelyn Powys, his life, work and philosophy, Peter Foss has set before us a gargantuan meal of epicurean indulgence, for this book is far more

than just a simple bibliography! The bibliographical information and cross-references constitute the main course of the feast, but the subsidiary information makes for an excellent hors-d'oeuvre and sweet, with all the trimmings, coffee, brandy and cigars!

The *Bibliography* is arranged basically in two parts. Part One provides a complete description and collation of the early editions of Llewelyn's books, 'including foreign translations, but the descriptions are only confined to first editions or special early editions.' In the Introduction, the author points out that, 'I have included as much information as I could gather on the bibliographical and compositional history of the books ... together with lists of reviews and quotations from contemporary sources'. 'The arrangement of the descriptions is apparent on examination', as the author himself writes:

I first provide title-page, pagination and book size, then describe the binding and dust-jacket. There is then a collation of pages and a list of contents. The next section gives date of issue, print-run and publication price, followed by further description of the circumstances of composition and publication. I am particularly interested also in providing a picture of the development of Llewelyn Powys's reputation based upon the reception accorded to his published books. I therefore cite a selection of reviews, and quote from those that present the most intelligent or informative opinion.

Part Two is devoted to a chronological list of Llewelyn's miscellaneous contributions both to books and periodicals, and is divided into four sections. The largest of these, 'Contributions to Periodicals and Newspapers' contains over 400 items. In Part Two the arrangement is simple, explains the author: 'I give first the place of publication with volume, number, date, and page reference. This is followed by any further reprintings in magazines or anthologies, and a description thereof ...'

And there is so much more. Part Two also includes a section on Llewelyn's reviews and notices, of which there were many that were anonymous, and as Peter Foss points out, 'I have included full details of those that can currently be found, but I have no doubt that there are others'. He also states, 'This Bibliography does not pretend to be a hundred per cent complete (what bibliography is?); although, as well as being the first definitive Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys, I believe it will be found to include the overwhelming majority of his published writings'. Understated—as the triumph of this book is also understated.

The author deserves the congratulations and gratitude of us all for researching, compiling and writing a quite unique book—for *The Bibliography of Llewelyn Powys* is a masterpiece of the bibliographer's art that he alone could write.

Neil Lee

* Quoting the price via Amazon, Neil Lee points out that Peter Foss's *Study of LLP*, originally similarly priced from Mellen Press, is now priced at at least £80, so there is every reason to expect the *Bibliography* to follow a similar course.

‡ See PJF's Introduction. Alyse was writing in June 1964 to Margaret Eaton, who about 1962 had started collating a bibliography of Llewelyn. (Mrs Eaton gave the unfinished work to Peter Foss in 1988—and it formed the

basis of his research into the project). In 1935 a Bibliography of the writings of Llewelyn Powys was first attempted by Lloyd Emerson Siberell, at Llewelyn's request (for an Appendix to Louis Wilkinson's forthcoming Welsh Ambassadors).

The Blackthorn Winter, by Philippa Powys

with an introduction by **Glen Cavaliero**

Sherborne: The Sundial Press, 2007, hardback, £19.50, ISBN 978-0-9551523-2-0

‘A Wholly Separate Thing’

If the first pages of *The Blackthorn Winter* seem unremarkable enough, the Introduction will have given a foretaste of how unusual and original a book it is. Not a difficult story to read, it is an easy story to misread.

Like her brother, John Cowper, Philippa Powys has a great sense of drama. Her plot is dramatically simple, her dialogue spare, and the visual beauty of *The Blackthorn Winter* has a cinematic quality. How interesting to imagine its author making a film! Her profound sensitivity to the nature (the ‘life’) of creatures and things would have been recognized by John Cowper as his ‘elementalism’. Associated with it and very present in her book is his ‘Homeric sense’ – a certain way of looking at things, happenings and rituals and a certain way of recording them.

Nancy Mead is a passionate, restless young woman who works on a Dorset farm and is set to marry Walter, the worthy son of the village blacksmith. Instead she elopes with a young gypsy. It is a story of enthrallment and betrayal. Nancy, in her early twenties, fits the pattern of romantic heroines in her wilfulness and changes of mood, but Philippa Powys characteristically avoids cliché and makes her heroine pretty, fair-haired and rounded – a wood pigeon to her creator’s ‘sea-eagle’.¹

On the day the gypsies arrive Nancy sets off to explore their caravan quarters, ‘dauntless’ and ‘caring for no-one’. Struck by the young gypsy’s beauty she feels ‘strangely taken aback’. She is dismayed not only to have been struck by his beauty but to find that she is physically moved by it.

Her heart trembled within her, as the leaves of an aspen when the breath of wind is first upon it. The sensation was new; Walter had never stirred it ... She dared not observe closer ...

He glances at her and she ‘leaps’ to help him attach the newly-shod horse to the cart. Their fingers meet and he asks her, ‘Can I see thee tonight?’ His hand covers hers and, again, she is dangerously moved.

The two meet later in the lane and, when Mike crosses toward Nancy, her apprehension amounts to terror. Her misgivings are real but fleeting; we are left in no doubt as to which way her promptings will lead her. When he asks her what she is afraid of, her answers are a quaint and touching mixture of school-playground challenge and flirtation. There is no reason to suppose that his ‘But I loves thee’s pretty face’ is not perfectly genuine but, though a beautiful young man, he is not at all a pleasant one and, with her countrywoman’s knowledge, Philippa Powys has this

feral wooer linger around the farmyard for three days without food in the hope of a meeting with Nancy. He is rewarded with food and Nancy's company in the hay loft. Soon after that she joins the gypsies.

Her new companions are not, like gypsies in most of the stories and paintings of the time, particularly decorative or wholesome. Nancy has to share sleeping quarters with Mike's old grandmother: '... the limited space of her present abode was stifling hot, and was pervaded by a clinging and unwholesome smell which met her at every indrawing of her breath'. Writing of a woman in love, Philippa Powys is no sentimentalist. One or two of the women treat Nancy kindly, but she is lonely, and in the days that follow, though she comes to enjoy life in the open, times are hard. Mike is volatile and unfaithful; others among the male gypsies are worse. Walter comes to fetch her back but, under Mike's spell, she remains. A child is born and various troubles in the camp force Mike and Nancy to leave. Nancy is ill after walking long in the rain and later, abandoned by Mike, she arrives near the village she left, just after her baby has died in her arms. She meets her faithful Walter again but, consistent with her truthfulness to life, Philippa Powys leaves the story with a doubtful ending.

The name 'blackthorn winter' is given to that time of year, usually at the end of March, when the sloe is in bloom and Spring is halted by a second brief very cold spell. It arrives symbolically for Nancy after a day when she wakes to the feel of pure air and the sound of lark song above the cliffs and rejoices in her life. Drenching rain and cold bring an end to her short-lived contentment.

Louis Wilkinson writes of the 'stammer' in Philippa Powys's writing. 'Unless its stammer can be cured, her work will never be generally received; but it has already been received by more than a few as a thing of value, a wholly separate thing.'²

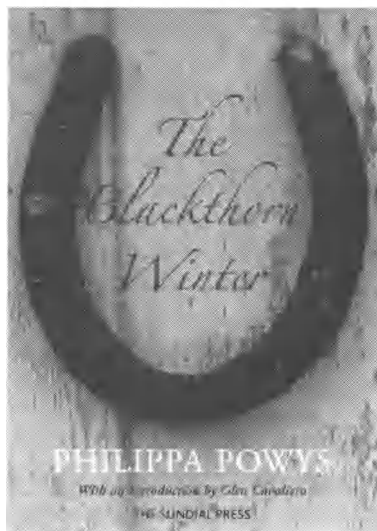
Not surprisingly, she is most free of her 'stammer' when she is writing of the country, which she does in fine and loving detail, always correctly: she knows how clouds are likely to look at a certain time of day in a particular place and season; that blackberry leaves go purple in autumn. She writes not out of a world of her imagination, but from the world she sees, knows and describes with imagination and startling exactness, calling actual places to readers' minds and senses – heathland with bilberries, wasteland with ragwort; the sound of cartwheels, the feel of the shaking cart; the touch of a gate hasp under the hand, of turf underfoot. Her actuality is magical.

Nancy is not only at home in the outdoor world and the elements, she is part of nature. Governed largely by her instincts and seeming, at times, hardly an agent – any more than a rainbow or a waterfall could be said to be an agent. She courts disaster. Her folly is utter and her creator describes it all with a degree of honesty still not yet entirely usual in the fiction of the time. More rare even, is Powys's refusal to idealize or defend. Nancy is not placed in a predicament which might seem to pardon her waywardness. The company of her good man Walter is unsatisfying, but her escape is not presented as a bid for some idealized freedom. She goes with the gypsy because she wants the gypsy.

Whether in company or on her own, Nancy is always alone. All the events are focused on her and the story is told consecutively. Secondary characters are sketchy or absent. We know nothing of her parents. But for the difficulty of language and dialect, the book could well have been written in the first person. The author identifies closely with the heroine, freeing the story from an omnipotent narrator's voice. Alone with grief, hunger, bad weather and downright cruelty, Nancy is totally without self-pity and she is not meant to invite pity.

Words beloved of former writers – ‘wronged’, ‘betrayed’, ‘seduced’, ‘ruined’ – apply to Nancy. She is, wittingly though unwarily, seduced; wronged by ill treatment and abandonment. Not ‘ruined’ – she is what would now be called ‘a survivor’. More significantly, she is, like all her fictional predecessors, a victim; not the victim of villains, nor a plaything of the gods or of God, but, in the tradition of great tragedy, the victim of her own folly.

There are terrible events and terrible images in *The Blackthorn Winter* and it is hard not to believe that more of them than we might like to think must have been known, in some way, at close hand, to Philippa Powys – who never writes about what she doesn't know. The story of Nancy Mead is told proudly, directly, classically, and the teller offers no verdicts.



Cicely Hill

¹ ‘Sea-Eagle’: John Cowper Powys’s nickname for Philippa (Katie).

² *Welsh Ambassadors* (1936; London: Bertram Rota, 1971), 20.

The Blackthorn Winter was first published by Constable in 1930.

From JCP’s Diary, 1930

Sunday 29th June ... the T.T. had no dinner. She felt tired and distrait. She read Balzac ... I read aloud to her several chapters of Philippa’s book. Philippa is her favourite writer of all the Powys family. She says it is noble, simple and Homeric. Arthur appeared on Gladys’s horse ...

Sunday 13th July ... Finished Katie’s powerful and poetical story—and meditated what formidable egoism in it prevented me from feeling like crying. Wrote about Mr Will Zoyland of Hartlake in my book ...

[The Diary of John Cowper Powys, 1930, edited by Frederick Davies (Greymitre Books, 1987)]

Visiting Sven Erik

The following is a message written on 21 April 2007 by Charles Lock to Jacqueline Peltier. Sven Erik Täckmark now lives at Katarinagården, Tideliussgatan 9, 11869 Stockholm, Sweden. Though no messages to him are likely to be acknowledged, one can be sure that they will be appreciated. [JP]

Returning from Uppsala to Stockholm on Thursday (19 April) in the late afternoon I had a few hours to spare before taking the night train to Copenhagen. I set off from the station across 'Gamla stan' and climbed up to Södermalm and then, quite misguidedly as it turned out, eastwards into a very attractive area of the city not previously known to me, climbing 170 steps up a cliff-side, with a view in reward. And I looked for Tideliussgatan, and asked, but received advice rather generous and friendly than accurate. A downpour solved my problem by compelling me to take a taxi: I was left at the very end of a street, the building numbered Tideliussgatan 7, but where one might expect 5 and 3 and I was only an abyss: a cliff drops away, and a stepped path takes one (but only on foot) down, and back to the city centre. In fact the place is very close to where Sven Erik lived for many years, on Åsögatan.

The doors, though of glass, showed nobody within, and the various bells were pushed without success. The main entrance was at no. 9 (so it said on 7) and I repeated there the routine of knocking and ringing. Then I went around to the back to try the door one floor below street-level at front: signs of recent activity, but no response to my noises. I could hardly give up the quest, so I returned to no. 9 and pushed each bell in sequence, round and round, until a voice answered, and the door was remotely opened. But on which floor had the voice answered me from? Each floor had its own locked door, and on the fourth floor I finally found a staff-member to open it. He neither knew the name of the resident I was looking for, nor could he find a list with the names of all residents. We wandered about, until we passed the door with the right name on it. And the name of the nurse, who first had to be found and informed before I could enter.

Eventually, within, Sven Erik, asleep and looking very, very frail. Waking up, slowly, he showed no signs of recognition: so I called out (as if addressing the postcard on the wall beside the bed) 'John Cowper?! John Cowper?!' After a minute of perplexed and spluttering sounds: 'You're NOT John Cowper: are you a friend of his?' lucidity returned and we passed forty minutes in intense and coherent talk: though his body is extremely frail he is as he put it 'cerebrally in good shape'. And his reading is as demanding as is indicated by the interview (conducted some months ago now) in the Swedish Powys Society Newsletter: on his bedside table were *Moby Dick* (in a recent Penguin), Thomas Mann's *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull* (Confessions of Felix Krull) and the German translation of JCP's *Autobiography*, which appeared in (I think) 1998. 'I wanted to see how well the translation had been done', and Sven Erik praised the work of the translator. And he hopes to be still alive

when his own translation is at last published: 'Survive, survive, that is the greatest commandment.' And we spoke of JCP's admiration for Melville and the pleasures of reading and rereading *Moby Dick*.

I gave him your greetings, and he spoke most warmly of you and wondered whether he still received *la lettre powysienne*. I assured him that Jacqueline would always send him a copy; a few minutes later, in that clumsiness that comes upon one when one tries to be helpful in a too-well-regulated space, I caused a pile of papers to fall to the floor, among them the spring 2007 issue of *la lettre*, with all the recent mail. He had been reading the Powys Society *Newsletter*, and was keen to hear about the Society and the next meeting.

The room he now occupies is spacious, with a fine view over a garden and down the slope, with its own bathroom inside, rather like a hotel-room but three or four times the size of those I normally stay in. Extremely clean, and it must be said that Sven Erik has probably never looked so tidy, so well cared for: and we've known each other for at least thirty years. Dominating the room is the puppet of JCP that he had had made in Stockholm (probably in the 1960s?) at a cost (this he remembered) of a thousand crowns. He is keen that this puppet should go to the Powys Society, though I refused to take it with me: 'No,' I said, 'he is up here (on the top of the bookcase) watching over you.' 'Yes, we look at each other, he takes care of me, and I take care of him.' There were just a few books, classics in English, German and Swedish, maybe fifty in all, and very few photos or possessions: the puppet was prominent. But afterwards, he insisted, the puppet is to go to the Society.

'Ninety-thirty-eight' he proclaimed, naming the year in which he had visited John Cowper in Cae Coed, Corwen: almost seventy years ago. Sven Erik turns 91 on April 29, and would therefore match JCP's own age; but no, I pedantically countered: JCP died at 90, in June 1963, having been born in October 1872, so Sven Erik had already outlasted JCP by some months: much satisfaction was expressed at this disclosure.

And so, bearing greetings for Jacqueline, and for the Powys Society in the person of Glen Cavaliero, I left, though only after the two of us had trawled the corridors looking for the nurse without whom I could leave neither the floor nor the building. With so much security *The Inmates* did come to mind, but only as a title: a much more fitting phrase would be the art of growing old, the sheer art of being ninety, and still fighting against decay in all its forms and manifestations: the discipline of setting forth at ninety on another reading of that whale of a book ...

Charles Lock

Reflection and surrender

Eunice Theaker describes her enduring admiration for the poems of John Cowper Powys. Two letters from JCP from 1955, answering hers about his books of poetry, are on the Powys Society website.

I came across a book by Louis Wilkinson over fifty years ago in which he mentioned Mr Cowper Powys the poet. Not being able to trace the poems I enquired of Macdonald his Publisher, who sent me his address. Mr Powys's enthusiastic reply took me no further, and it was not until ten years later that the poems were published and I obtained a copy. The following is what I might have written to him to round off our correspondence. Not having a literary reputation to lose I can safely say that I love the poems. I have not mentioned the love poems here but I have noted that he did not include in his philosophy 'In Spite Of a Broken Heart'.

Dear Mr. Powys

Alas! why did the Muse of Poesy

Touch me with fleeting fingers and pass by ...

At last your poems are in my possession and this letter is to tell you how I responded to them. The volume was published and edited ten years after our correspondence and during that time I had become acquainted with some of your prose. When I finally opened the pages I had in mind the vigour and optimism of your philosophical essays and the deep seriousness of your novels, and I was surprised and fascinated to discover a contemplative and wistful poet.

Critics have pointed out from time to time that your poems bear the hand of others, but the same applies to many poets finding a voice near the end of the Romantic period and the beginning of modern free verse. How interesting your conversations with Ezra Pound would have been; how many poets wasted their voluptuous talents by being influenced by Pound, just as composers turned away from melody.

I have read the volume many times and the poems are indisputably yours. Your editor Kenneth Hopkins said 'that there were doubtless a number of poems which the reader will be content to read but once' and it is at this stage that the critic and scholar might abandon them, but I recalled the eagerness in your letters to convince me that you were a poet, and how much, when you were young, you wished to be remembered as a poet, and I kept faith with that over the years.

Working, as I did, for engineers in Electronic Research and Development, with all its necessary precision, how pleasurable it was to take a book at random from my shelves, perhaps yours, to meander in Montacute with buttercup dust on my shoes.

What lives we lead—dear God, what lives!

What a palimpsest of double days

The Master of our journey gives!

Forever round our casual ways

*Strange omens peer, strange portents wink;
And we stand darkly on the brink
Of more than mortal mysteries.*

[from 'The Willow Seeds' in *Mandragora*, 1917 (Hopkins, 146)]

You once said 'poetry in itself never betrays us, but the poets who write it do'. Poets betray their secrets in their work and to those who seek to fully understand you I would say, do not ignore the poems. My interest in your philosophical essays was heightened by the many references you make to poetry. The muse never leaves you and in every argument a poet lurks.

*See, it is past, my life.
There is no more to do, no more to say—
Yet I had hoped to have writ something that
Should live when I was dead—something that should
Become a fellow-minister with winds,
Vapours and floods, valleys and rooted hills
And all the potent agents of the morn
And solemn night, in the great temple courts
Of everlasting beauty —*

[from 'The Dying Poet' in *Poems*, 1899 (Hopkins, 53)]

This poem is beautifully realised and lingers in the mind. It belies the assuredness and defiance in your philosophical essays. Is it you—is it someone else? No matter, the reader stumbles not on one jarring word or inharmonious line. This poem is not for the lofty critics looking for bathos, plagiarism and influences, it is for the reader like myself who becomes immediately engaged with its expressiveness, reflection and surrender.

'Lucifer' was published at last and never have I read a poem so thrilling, compelling and dramatic in its imagery. You hoped this poem would be the one to last. So it must. What a wordsmith you are, how daring. What a triumph is this work.

*On this dark promontory against the sky
Satan stood forth. No words could tell the grace
Of his proud form, the pride of his bowed head,
As the large desolation of that place
Folded its wings about him.*

[from *Lucifer* (1905; 1st publ. 1956), part six (Hopkins, 216)]

I hope to read all your poems one day.

Yours sincerely,

Eunice Theaker

Soldier on leave: A boyish boy

John Dunn writes: These photographs [on this page and the front cover] were found in an envelope addressed to John Bunting from JCP inside a copy of *Mortal Strife* (Jonathan Cape, 1942). The book has a dedication from JCP to Bunting dated Corwen, 1942. This includes a long Goethe quotation from a work that has obvious affinities to JCP's personal philosophy. It is probably no accident that JCP chose to quote the great German romantic, clearly regarding him as a thinker well apart from the aberration that was the Nazi régime. On the back of one of the photographs is written 'John Cowper Powys with John Bunting on hills behind his house at Corwen, N. Wales, late 1939 or early 1940', which would suggest that JCP had met Bunting just before he started work on *Mortal Strife*.

I am tempted to think that John Bunting might be the 'Soldier on Leave', who JCP had in mind when writing chapter six of *Mortal Strife*. The young man in the photographs with JCP epitomises for me the good-humoured 'common man' about



*John Bunting, ? Paulette, and
JCP, 1940.*

whom JCP wrote in the chapter. Here is a man who has preserved his individuality in an era of which JCP wrote 'we have begun to de-personalize the personal in each other'. JCP added that, for such as this soldier, 'it is the consciousness of being already outside the whole stellar immensity that gives an ordinary man in a war like this something to rest upon. He is not enduring *alone*. His inmost identity is already in another Dimension and in touch with Forces outside this stellar system; and though things have happened and will happen again around him here that to the end of his days he will regard as unbearable, he has not only learnt the trick of forgetting these, he has also fallen into the habit of feeling that the 'I am I' in him is only bound to this particular level of life by pain and pleasure and fear and custom.' (*Mortal Strife* (Jonathan Cape, 1942), 92-3.)

From JCP's Diary

Saturday 25th November 1939 Private John Bunting spends the weekend as our guest with Mrs. Peake. He came up last night & will come to tea. He is a dark boy ... John Bunting will walk D.V. D.V. and talk with me today a boyish boy. John Bunting is a dark sweet mischievous boy, an engaging boy!

Sunday 26th November 1939 The Phantom comes for an hour. John Bunting comes for 3 hours & tea with us & the Ladies. Private John Bunting hovers in our offing! We do greatly admire his sloe-berry dark eyes & mischief so sweet & so cynical!

4 Dec. 1939 There has just arrived from our darling little kid—aged ten—or 20—John Michael Bunting, Signalman—his Father’s book; his Daddy’s works—the works of Daniel George—& Jesus Christ but they are top-notch ... He is a neglected genius—his son is a Kid sent to school—a brave Kid; who refuses to Blub.

18 Feb. 1940 John Bunting and Veronica Scragg came for five hours. They were both nice. He is very good-looking & a good deal of a nice egoist. She is very competent and a character. A competent character.

26 Feb. 1940 A letter from John Bunting of a bold childish egoistic[—]sturdy, tho’ a bit stunted & small in stature, by reason of, I say, having to face this East Wind continuously of his Dad’s sardonic cleverness! ...

After seeking advice from JCP and Phyllis on which of his two girlfriends to marry, Bunting’s next visit, presumably the occasion of the photographs was with Paulette, the favoured one.

21 April. 1940 Well! our dear Ten years old John in armour—i.e. with his helmet & huge uniform-coat came with his half French Girl PAULETTE who to the mind of “the Man” and to the Mind of the T.T. is a Treasure! A perfect little girl. Belle et Bonne, Sage et Gentille. I took them up Mountain & Paulette did enjoy it so. Aye but she is good and wise as well as beautiful. Her profile is enchanting ... her blush rare - the T.T. can express it better than I. The T.T. & “the Man” always agree over Girls. We are both eccentric and very exacting but this little being suits us to a T ... I am glad they are at Glan Dwr for Mrs. Bailey is one for reticence over her guests.

23 Nov. 1940 John Bunting’s Marriage to Paulette.

[Bunting seems to have served in India during the war. They corresponded and JCP prayed for him as well as his other boy correspondents who were in battle – MK]

17 October. 1944: Gertrude & I go to the Prayer Rock which I tap for Tolchard, Bunting & Bax & Gertrude taps for Peter ...

From Letters to Louis Wilkinson

Nov 6th 1942 John Bunting hopes one day you will meet his father [Daniel George] I too would greatly like to hear your impressions of that gentleman whom I know only very indirectly (117).

25th Jan 1948 ... I have heard Rumours of you ... At the Board of Daniel George & his son John Bunting & his French daughter-in-law Paulette ... (242)

Daniel George Bunting (1890–1967), father of John, fought in WWI, was manager of an engineering firm in London, and from 1940 a reader for the publisher Jonathan Cape. He published under the pseudonym Daniel George, his works including: Tomorrow will be different (1932), A peck of troubles (1936), Alphabetical order: a gallimaufry (1949), and Lonely pleasures (1954). A collection of letters to Bunting père from Lady Cynthia Asquith are in the Lilly Library at Bloomington, Indiana.

With thanks to John Dunn and to Morine Krissdóttir for providing diary entries and internet information. KK

JCP's *Wales revisited*

Obstinate Cymric is a rewarding book, consisting as it does of a collection of shorter essays, JCP at his most publicly accessible, counterbalanced with the free-rolling Leviathan of 'My Philosophy As Influenced By Living in Wales'. All were written in (or just before) the 1940s, at the centre of his life in Corwen, in the shadow of the war. One of the streams running through the book are his attitudes to the role of Russia – heroic yet threatening, coloured by his studies of Berdyaev and Dostoevsky – and to the Labour revolution in Britain after the 1945 election: in both, with hope and optimism to the fore (and let us remember JCP's insistence on the nobility and value of 'wishful thinking', and his conviction that imagination has equal value with 'real' reality).

JCP 'mythologises' 'Wales', of course. Roland Mathias's long essay in *The Powys Review* 17 unpicks the sometimes contradictory threads in this, between the 'princely'/'Celtic' and 'evasive'/'aboriginal' – all these in quotation marks. 'Welsh Aborigines', the first essay, is the most teasingly provocative in its interpretation of the diverse Welsh 'races' – not least in its self-elected 'We' and its 'JCP-ising' of the 'Real Welsh' – pre-Celtic, non-Aryan, of Berber origin, and Multiverse believers to a man – proudest and humblest of people in the world – *deep, detached, evasive, introverted... helped out by the double-dyed irony of the New Testament ... once more one ancient, communistic, matriarchal gwerin whose 'support' is the magical music of Jesus as it used to be the Cauldron of Ceridwen!* It is a lively polemic, perhaps recalling his more scandalous platform performances: in 1943 defying a new Dark Age.

This essay was published in the periodical *Wales*, as were 'Wales and America' (1944) and the more substantial 'Pair Dadeni, or the Cauldron of Rebirth' (1946, also reprinted as a separate pamphlet) – this last, shadowed by news of Hiroshima and the Holocaust, with its message of hope as the spirals of history mark their minimal evolutionary advance towards the new Aquarian age. Between the explorations of Welsh themes in the book is an excellent essay on *Finnegan's Wake* – all the more valuable considering JCP's antipathy to *Ulysses*. Other themes range from personal experience near at hand – deploring the 'Sir' automatically accorded a tweed-wearing stranger – noting local respect for 'culture' and enjoyment of bus outings to the cinema in the lives of 'ordinary people' – to Homeric echoes in a farmer's elusive smile of acceptance under provocation, the '*Leave it to Chance!*' – *How alien a mood, under the impact of a wrong, does this seem to the righteous indignation that I feel in my English blood, or to the long-cherished wrath that I note in my Irish contemporaries! ... So may I learn to retort to the injurious if only I live long enough for this mountain-rain to elementalize away my human malice.'*

JCP writing circles, spirals and repeats – as Jeff Kwintner, most sensitive interpreter of these later books, points out – always with differences, always adding new elements. Familiar themes recur – humility and kindness, 'negative power' growing from below, opposed to 'love' imposed from above, natural 'magic', the power of the

'I', power from the reservoir of the void, inter-dependence of all separate things, the play-instinct, 'heathen goodness', the 'Square Deific', '*It All Depends*'... With these and many more, mingled and swept into what Yeats might call their *gyre*, 'My Philosophy' is perhaps the most no-holds-barred and unmasked of all JCP's published voices (as earlier, privately, were his letters to Llewelyn, and probably those to Phyllis). Among his writings of the 1940s, with *Dostoevsky* and *Rabelais* as anchors, and the worlds of *Porius* and *The Inmates* in the offing, 'My Philosophy' heads on to *In Spite Of*, that culminating example of Blake's 'I must create a System, or be enslaved by another man's'.

Kate Kavanagh

The wealth of interest in past Reviews and Journals (and Newsletters) is very seldom outdated and can't be over-praised. In NL 49 (July 2003), p.23, we listed the 'Corwen books' (1935–55) with a selection of comments on them. On JCP and Wales:

Obstinate Cymric (essays 1935–47) was published by Druid Press, Carmarthen, in 1947. In **The Powys Review 3** (1978) Belinda Humfrey's Editorial is on JCP as 'Anglo-Welsh', referring to essays in *OC* and to Matthew Arnold's *Study of Celtic Literature*. **Review 4** (1978/9) has Ned Thomas on *Obstinate Cymric* (writing as a Welsh nationalist on 'uneven spatial development', but not unsympathetically). In **Review 7** contains Ichiro Hara on *JCP and Zen* and Cicely Hill on *JCP and the Chuang-Tze Legacy*: both referring to the essay 'My Philosophy Up-to-date As Influenced by Living in Wales'. In **Review 17** Roland Mathias's *JCP and 'Wales'* (largely on *Maiden Castle*) is a revision of his earlier *The Sacrificial Prince, a study of Owen Glendower*, in Belinda Humfrey's *Essays on John Cowper Powys* (1972).

Will & Ariel Durant

An appreciation by Jacqueline Peltier of JCP's friends and benefactors in New York.

Among the many influential people John Cowper Powys met in the United States, one in particular should be remembered for the part he played in John Cowper's life: Will Durant. He is mentioned three times in *Autobiography*, and his name keeps coming back in several letters to Llewelyn, but I am not sure John Cowper has really succeeded in giving Will Durant a fair tribute.

One could gather the – wrong – impression that 'the little Frenchman', as Powys repeatedly calls him, was a dear amusing figure, although his role as a generous man and provider of lectures was also pointed out.¹ In fact Will Durant, and Ariel his wife, were eminent personalities. At their death they left a legacy of philosophical and historical works, especially *The Story of Philosophy* (1926, an immediate best-seller), and *The Story of Civilization* (1935–75), an 11-volume historical series, which can still be profitably read today. They devoted their combined energies to raising the level of education of the general public, and they led a blameless and graceful life together, which ended with honours. They also doted on John Cowper, for whom they had

both love and admiration. What follows is mostly taken from the memoirs they wrote together, and it is to be hoped this short presentation will be an encouragement to read *A Dual Autobiography*² for it is an admirable and inspiring book.

William James Durant was born on 5th November 1885, to French-Canadian parents of humble origin. He showed intellectual gifts early, and earned a scholarship to study in a Jesuit institution, aiming at embracing the priesthood. However he soon discovered in himself traits that did not comply with priesthood: an unquenchable thirst for books, the assiduous use of onanistic practices and lust for exposed 'calves' (as he wrote), shown in burlesque theatre shows. After toying with the extravagant idea of reconciling the Church with socialism, in order to create a powerful force for economic and political reform, he finally opted for the tasks of a lay teacher. In 1912 the Francisco Ferrer Association (supervised by Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman) offered him a job as 'Principal' at their libertarian school in New York. There he was to meet his future wife, Chaya Appel Kaufman, or Ariel as he was to name her.

Chaya belonged to a family of extremely poor Jews from Ukraine who had emigrated in 1901. She had an undisciplined and tough childhood in the poorer districts of New York and sometimes she would help her parents sell newspapers at the entrance to Grand Central Station. In spite of poverty and hard toil her mother, who was well-read and endowed with a strong personality, mustered enough energy to attend the meetings of radical groups in the evenings and keep abreast of events in



JCP with Ariel & Will Durant and Max Schuster (right) at Phudd Bottom, 25th September 1932. (Courtesy Will Durant Foundation)

the literary world, such as Tolstoi's death, Walt Whitman's poetry or Freud's theories. As Powys noted:

Although despised, or only very condescendingly patronized by the Gentile intelligentsia of New York, I found profoundly appreciative audiences among the Jews and the Communists.³

The Kaufmans came to live at 64 East 107th Street, near the Ferrer headquarters⁴ which included a school, a social centre, an art class and a lecture hall. Chaya at fourteen discovered its many attractions; a natural anarchist herself, she was enthralled by a school which was so well suited to her taste, offering a libertarian education. She was to see many interesting people come to give talks. In September 1912 a new teacher arrived and she first made fun of that 'timid, awkward, shy' young man of 'five feet and a half inches'. But she soon fell in love with him, and her love was reciprocated. With a keen instinct for her capabilities, Will wrote to his young fiancée:

I love you, dear, for what you are and for what you are going to be,—my wild, sweet, radiantly healthy, divinely terrible, Walt Whitman girl!

They married in 1913 and started their life together in dire poverty, there being a serious economic depression at the time. The young teacher of philosophy had left the Ferrer Center and struggled to make a living, but he soon found his real calling when he became a lecturer travelling in many different states, and lecturing in many places. Will made his debut at Labor Temple at the end of 1913 with a talk on Spinoza. Until 1927 he lectured there to audiences varying from four hundred to seven hundred. He worked very hard, in order that his lectures should be clear and accessible to men and women who were eager to learn but had never had any chance of getting an education. He was also studying at Columbia University for a PhD and graduated in 1917.

The end of the war was the beginning of a hectic time in New York, especially among writers and artists in Greenwich Village. Later Ariel remembered:

Greenwich Village was not merely a consortium of rebels. Yes, there were socialists and anarchists there; but more typical—in those apartments, tearooms, clubs, restaurants, saloons, lecture halls, and little theaters, all crowded within a space six blocks square—was the spirit of moral, political, sartorial, and verbal freedom, seasoned and lightened with sin and gaiety, with love of literature and sensitivity to art.⁵

The people they met were for instance Max Eastman, who launched the newspaper *The Masses*, the music critic Carl Van Vechten, the Provincetown Players who brought new technique to acting, Margaret Sanger the advocate of birth control, Clarence Darrow the lawyer, Edna St Vincent Millay, Edwin Arlington Robinson, and many others whose names have become familiar to us. Among these people, one shone particularly. As Will Durant remembered:

Quite different from any of us, and yet soon dear to us, was John Cowper Powys. He was one of the many gifts that Ariel brought me. One afternoon, passing by Percy Stickney Grant's Church of the Ascension, she noted a number of people entering the building at an hour unlikely for religious services. She followed them to a small

auditorium where, she was told, they would soon hear a lecture on Shelley. Presently a tall, bent, angular Briton entered, wearing the robe and cap of a Cambridge scholar; long legs and dangling, waving arms; a head of massive curly hair; a face of strong features and flashing eyes. He fumbled for words (Ariel reported), but he found them, yoked them, and made them form a picture so vivid and colorful that she was enthralled. Emerging, she ran to Labor Temple to tell me that she had just 'seen Shelley plain' through a man descended from Donne and Cowper and combining their piety with the rebelliousness of Shelley and the sensitivity of Keats.⁶

Will Durant met him, took to him and immediately hired him to teach at Labor Temple, whose destinies Will had taken in hand. As JCP tells Llewelyn in his letters, the two men would sometimes debate with each other with keen amusement. From then on, the Durants and John Cowper often met, and their friendship deepened. Ariel had for a while to abandon her hectic life in the Village, for she gave birth to a little girl, Ethel, in 1919. John Cowper was asked to be her godfather.

Will Durant led a busy life, but he also entertained some future plans concerning a history of civilization. As luck would have it, Ariel during her Greenwich Village era had met a young man by the name of Emanuel Julius who loved books, was ambitious and poor. He left New York, went West and married Marcet Haldeman, a girl apparently with some income. He added her name to his, and started a publishing firm, which as Ariel writes, 'almost educated the United States with fragile but handy "Little Blue Books" at five cents a copy.' Haldeman-Julius came back to New York, and went to listen to Will Durant lecturing on Plato. He later wrote asking that the lecture on Plato be made into a little book for his collection. Will replied that he was far too busy. To make his plea more effective Haldeman-Julius replied by attaching a cheque for \$150 as prepayment. That is how *Plato* was finally published as Little Blue Book no 159. It was followed, in the same collection, by ten other booklets from 1923 to 1925, and it was to be for the Durants the beginning of prosperity; for two young publishers, Dick Simon and Max Schuster, took an interest in his lectures and were to publish them in 1926 as *The Story of Philosophy*. It was immediately a huge success, heading best-sellers lists.

One event leading to another, it was through Will's insistence that Simon & Schuster agreed to read *Wolf Solent*. When finally the publication date was set, a celebration was organised on 18th May 1929 by the Durants at the Gipsy Tavern in Greenwich Village. Some twenty Powys admirers were invited to dinner, and there were informal speeches. Will Durant wrote enthusiastic reviews for the newspapers and hailed the book as a unique contribution to English literature. Five impressions of *Wolf Solent* were issued by Simon and Schuster in 1929.

After John Cowper and Phyllis left New York for Phudd Bottom in 1930, John wrote to the Durants inviting them to come over:

Listen! Couldn't Michael and that new car bring you and Ariel over here before you go back to your Long Island home? If you could get here by one o'clock we would take you all to a mid-day dinner at a neighboring farm house ...

And they effectively came to see JCP and Phyllis towards the end of September 1932. Ariel comments:

We went, taking Max Schuster with us, and I have treasured a photograph that Phyllis took of four of us lolling on the lawn.⁶

In 1931 *Adventures in Genius*, a series of substantial articles and essays on Flaubert, Anatole France, Spengler and Keyserling and others, was published. Will wrote one on Powys (which Ariel found slightly dithyrambic), in which his friend was celebrated thus:

... the eyes startled and piercing, hunted and hunting, tossed and pulled about with things vividly seen, haunted with mystery and frightened with understanding ... the Oriental mosaic and music of a philosophy as profound as Spinoza's and as kindly as Christ's.⁷

John Cowper replied:⁸

... those Jesuits, or their God, squeezed a drop of the real saint into you, for all your rogueries. I do feel grateful to all you've done for me in enabling me to live like this in peace and quiet by my pen and avoid going on the Road. You were the "fons et origo" of my initial escape from the Tread Mill—and I tell you I don't forget it!

Time passed. In 1934 John Cowper and Phyllis left for England. The Durants continued leading a busy life, working at their books, and going for long trips: Russia, Greece and Italy, the Middle East. The war put a stop to that. But afterwards they resumed their travels, and decided to pay a visit to Phyllis and John at Corwen. On 12th January 1948 John wrote:

How Phyllis and I will look forward to those Days, July, 1948. Think of your taking rooms at the Owen Glendower!! But listen you won't have to drive out from there to Cae Coed ... for it's only a quarter of a mile ... to the field 'Cae' in the wood 'Coed'.

The Durants arrived in July. Will:

John was at that time writing a book on Rabelais; this most spiritual and stoic of our friends relished a robust humor, and he had written a volume *In Defence of Sensuality*. But he did not fool us; he was sensitive rather than sensual. Burdened with pain, fevered with the ecstatic search and fashioning of words, he had little time for sensual indulgence—the enjoyment of sense pleasure beyond rational measure and social control ... Like Plato, he was an *anima naturaliter Christiana*. There was more purity in his unsanctioned union with Phyllis than in any but a few marriages in Christendom. I have seldom met a mind that so enriched and illuminated ours. We came away deepened, exalted, and warmed.⁹

As for Powys, after their visit, he wrote to Ethel, 'his ward', as he called her:

... It was simply splendid seeing your dear parents again after some fifteen years! Your dad was just the same gentle, contemplative ironical with a touch of Anatole France in his humorous toleration of the insanities of the human race and a touch of Renan in his wise interpretation of the Middle Ages on which he is engaged. ... It was a pleasure as rarely comes to a returned wanderer to have them sitting side by side in this room—incarnations of all the best I'd enjoyed in thirty years of colportage!¹⁰

A Dual Autobiography ends with Will's repeated avowal of his love for the companion of a lifetime:

Today, October 31, 1970, is the fifty-seventh anniversary of our marriage. On November 5 I shall be eighty-five ... Ariel is still in full vigor and spirit ... My greatest blessing now is her continued presence ... When she sits down to work or talk with me she is a bubbling fount of inspiration and insight.¹¹

Jacqueline Peltier

NOTES

- 1 J. C. Powys: 'Durant, in the manner of Ferney, had fed me when I was penniless. [He] is the wisest of the few Frenchmen I have loved.' *Autobiography*, 613.
- 2 Will and Ariel Durant, *A Dual Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977).
- 3 J. C. Powys, *Autobiography*, 450.
- 4 Francisco Ferrer was a Spanish philosophical anarchist who repudiated violence. In 1901 he opened in Barcelona the first Modern School, independent of Catholic doctrine or power. Wrongly accused of participating in a plot against the sovereigns, he was shot in 1909. The Francisco Ferrer Association was founded by a medley of freethinkers in 1910 in New York, as a protest against Ferrer's execution.
- 5 *A Dual Autobiography*, 81.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 92.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 163.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 160.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 5 June 1931, 163.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 271-2.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 401.

Durants in the Diaries

The Durants appear quite often at this period, in JCP's Diaries and in the letters to Llewelyn. Some extracts (KK):

1929

Sunday, September 1 [*in Patchin Place*] Started with the T.T. for Schuster's at Glenhead Long Island but the T.T. returned only getting as far as Mineola. Mr S met my train. Mr Simon came to lunch. Gave Mrs S the model of Abbotsbury Chapel & a bag of Lavender—Walked in the woods with Mr S Mr Proctor and Mr Levinson. Had tea on Mrs Levinson's terrace. Returned to the Schuster home where Mr S senior talked about birds and showed me an edition of the Talmud with the sayings of many Rabbis in it—very characteristic. Saw a hornet's nest. Will Durant came over, also Mrs Durant the latter looking ghastly white & overworked from her place in the Square. My little ward [*their daughter*] looked very well & gave me a nice welcome. Mr Simon played the Moonlight Sonata very nicely. He looked fragile and wistful.

November 25 [*Patchin Place*] ... Mr Schuster came to tea with us bringing William Durant and Puck [*JCP's nickname for Mrs Durant—no doubt he saw her world-circling role as more Puck than Ariel*] who soon left after arranging for us to dine at that place in Washington Square on Saturday. Puck mocked P. crying out 'O the little Secretary! O the little Secretary!' Mr

Schuster was massive, formidable, majestic and courtly. He was very nice & very considerate, & gave us most careful advice about Keedick ...

[ed. *Anthony Head, Cecil Woolf, 1998*]

1930

Thursday 29th May [in *New York, visiting from Phudd*] ... Had lunch with Simon and Schuster actually in in the Inner Sanctum itself with Durant and Puck and Ethel [*their daughter*] who had just landed from going round the world. They were shocked by the starvation and under-nourishment in India and China. Durant is all for Dominion status at once. He looked such a darling, so weary, so little, so like a fairy-dwarf and so extremely honest and intelligent. Tomorrow Schuster sails for the Savoy Hotel ...

[ed. *Frederick Davies, Greymitre Books, 1987*]

1932 [at *Phudd Bottom*]

Sunday 25th September Up at 7.30 down at 7.45. Put on my clean workman's trowsers in honour of our visitors but I tucked the ends of them under my socks after my fashion & having put coal on the stove for it is a very Cold day though with bright sun & shut the door I took Black since it was Sunday & all still under rails to the Druid Oak by the Chatham Road thence across the big field by Pimpernel rails & home by Gate. I called the T.T. & took up her hot water & aye ! but she did scold Petrushka by reason of the trowsers inside the socks & I did promise to manage differently over this & so I will for she spoke of seeing me in the station at Chatham thus begirt as to my ankles ...

And now we await the arrival at two o'clock of Durant & Mr. Schuster & we are to take them up to lunch at Mrs. Steitz. ... Durant and Puck & Schuster arrived and the T.T. walked all the way to the Steitz to find out if they were ready. They were! So after eating sweet apples in the orchard & taking photos with the White Horses we all went up there, Durant driving his great family coach. They provided a luxurious meal & then the old lady and Hattie sat and listened, Durant & Puck talked of coming through Mukden [?] & Manchuria and then they described their reaction against Russia owing to the spies of the "Ogpu" who followed them about & the poverty & misery that they saw different from what we read. Puck was especially indignant & Durant doubtful of the success of Communism—They spoke with great freedom before the old lady. Mr. Schuster—thank the Lord !—had read, & was pleased with, my *Philosophy of Solitude*, published in Jan. 1933]. He quoted the Dedication to the T.T.'s Father. They drove us back and then drove away. Fiercely then and most eloquently did the T.T. defend Russia saying that the liberty to talk was not so important but a bourgeois luxury. Took Black to Eagle Tree. The Mountains lovely. Returned in the dark. Less Discomfort.

Monday 26th September ... After breakfast—she had on that warm blue Middy dress—the T.T. spoke of Durant & of how he is immune to money influence for his own self but subject to it in some subtle academic way that leads him so queerly to defend Hoover & this is a warning. The accounts Durant & Puck bring back of Russia are perfectly awful; the treatment of mothers with children & the ruthless inhumanity of their driving and enslaving the people, for the good of the third or the fourth generation ! Durant's words & Puck's indignation seem just here & sad—even if he does defend Hoover. Dreiser too says its not right to drive one generation for other generations. But the T.T. is deeply hit by the way women are enslaved - making them work & taking them away from their children. This account about making women with children work has turned the T.T. against Russia & she did support it so before. [Unpublished – thanks to Jeff Kewintner for making this available]

Runes

'That boy is mad' my uncle said.
He'd followed me to school
And noted all the things I did
Which proved I was a fool.

I'd walk seven strides, then run seven more,
Then skip, and turn about
To kick the lamp-post with my boot,
And give the wind a clout.

I'd stop outside the rabbi's house
To pull up both my socks,
Then whirl seven times, and widdershins,
Around the pillar-box.

There was a wall I had to touch,
A drain I liked to poke
With a green stick plucked from the hedge;
A tree-trunk that I'd stroke,

And sundry paving-stones I leapt
While others I would stand
Enraptured upon, my eyes tight shut,
My satchel in my hand.

At last, then, when I reached the school
Whose portals opened wide
I had to turn my back on it
Before I passed inside.

All this and more my uncle saw
And came and told my Dad.
'The boy's a fool,' he said. 'It's cruel,
But probably he's mad.

I promised I would try to mend
My manners and my ways.
They watched to see what I would do
And so for several days

I practised only in my head
My little occult flights,
Waiting until, their interest dead,
I could resume my rites.

But I had learned a lesson:
To keep my antics small
So no one guessed their import
Or noticed me at all.

I learned to hide my meanings
And not betray the fact
That my whole life consisted of
A single magic act.

So was I mad, as uncle said,
Or just compulsion's fool?
Neither, for no neurotic god
Compelled me to his rule.

Nor was it really madness, but
A way to not go mad,
Some runes to make the world to rhyme
With things inside my head.

It was the muse of poetry
Who held me in her spell
And made me measure all my steps
And dance for her as well.

Before I ever wrote a line
I was her small liege-man
Playing the fool on the way to school
Is where my verse began.

Robert Nye

This poem first appeared in The London Magazine, October/ November 2006, edited by Sebastian Barker. Robert Nye's account of his eight-year friendship with JCP – by letter – with a poem, is in NL 46, July 2002.

John Cowper Powys and John Buchan: Some Surprising Similarities

Susan Rands traces some similar early influences with very different results in the lives of JCP and his near-contemporary John Buchan (Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor-General of Canada, historical biographer and writer of thrillers with 'clubland heroes') – with a side track to another contemporary, Aleister Crowley.

Born respectively in 1872 and 1875, Powys and Buchan were both the elder sons of clergymen. Both had many siblings, ready participants in the games they invented and audience for their stories. Based on the Bible and the Classics, their schooling was formal and very rigorous compared with today's. After Sherborne Powys went up to Corpus Christi, Cambridge, just before his nineteenth birthday. Born in Perth, Buchan attended Hutcheson's Grammar School and at seventeen went to Glasgow University. Just after his twentieth birthday he went on to Brasenose College, Oxford.

Buchan was particularly pleased to go to Brasenose because it was where Walter



*John Buchan,
by Frank Slater
(National Portrait
Gallery).*

Pater, whom he already much admired, had been a tutor, lecturing mainly on Plato. Buchan felt that he himself, like the Platonists, 'combined a passion for the unseen and the eternal with a delight in the seen and the temporal'.¹ Pater's chief friend, F. W. Bussell, was Buchan's tutor, whom he 'delighted in surprising, for from Nietzsche whom I had just discovered I would quote extracts in my essays which were a little startling to a clerk in holy orders'.² Powys, on the other hand, claims that it was not until after he left Cambridge that he 'had so much as heard of Walter Pater, that Pyrrhonian monk of God whom those mathematical Cantabs took good care to hide away from me ...'³ which, if true, shows that Cambridge then was less liberal-minded than Oxford, as it arguably still is. Though both Powys and Buchan so much admired Pater when they were young, it was as late as 1915 that Powys published an essay on him, and drew on Pater's Sebastian van Storck (from *Imaginary Portraits*, 1887) for his own character Balthazar Stork in *Rodmoor*. Later, both seem to have largely outgrown Pater's

influence and Buchan seems to dislike such aesthetic and bookish culture and makes it a characteristic of some of his villains.

An earlier and much stronger influence on both writers was Sir Walter Scott. Powys tells us that Scott's works 'of which I must have read all except *Count Robert of Paris* were in those days and remain now by far the most powerful literary influence of

my life'.⁴ Buchan went further: he wrote a full biography of Scott interspersed with skilful literary appreciations of the ballads and novels. Of *Waverley* he says 'the characters are mostly survivals, grotesques, eccentrics, persons with some inherited or induced strain of extravagance'⁵ – which describes most of John Cowper's characters and many of Buchan's too. Buchan speaks of Scott's 'romance which is a revolt against the despotism of fact'.⁶ this is also descriptive of Powys, and of Buchan, to the extent that their novels push the bounds of probability to their furthest possible limit. Again, Buchan says of Scott that 'with generous profusion he piles excitement upon excitement, weaving, like his favourite Ariosto, many different narratives into one pattern, and managing it with such skill that there are no gaps in the web'.⁷ This is equally true of Powys and Buchan: of Powys particularly in his historical novels, *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*, and of Buchan particularly in his contemporary ones. Buchan's eight historical novels have a smaller cast, each set in a different time and place, depicted with a wealth of convincing historical and topographical detail; they are undeservedly much less well known than what he called his 'shockers'.

Matthew Arnold was another early influence. To both Powys and Buchan solitary walking in uninhabited places seems to have been a physical and spiritual necessity,



*John Cowper Powys,
by Augustus John
(Cardiff Art Gallery).*

which may be related to the fact that both suffered from stomach ulcers for which they had serious operations. They were temperamentally disposed to appreciate the figure of the Scholar Gipsy. Powys wrote two essays on Arnold, one relatively early published in *Visions and Revisions* (1915),⁸ and another later and lengthier in *The Pleasures of Literature*, in which he calls 'The Scholar Gipsy' Arnold's 'loveliest poem'.⁹ Buchan's appreciation of Arnold appears much earlier, for he calls his first volume of essays, published in 1896 during his first year at Oxford, *The Scholar Gipsies*.¹⁰ These are delightful essays, full of love for the valley of the Tweed and the moors around it where in his boyhood he roamed in the company of shepherds and keepers, fishermen and poachers and tramps, or alone. Buchan speaks of the scholar gipsy who wanders to 'the open country, to the green woodland where the air is free

and the Great Mother as gracious as the muses'. One essay, 'Gentlemen of Leisure', calls to mind John Cowper's 'The Perfect Gentleman', in which Powys tells us that the essential soil for producing the perfect gentleman is leisure.¹¹ Buchan describes two perfect gentlemen: a country parson and a tramp. In another essay from *The Scholar Gipsies*, 'The Individualist', the protagonist's mind 'was occupied with many problems, among them that hard one of adjustment of a man to his neighbours, and the place of ambition in the scale of virtues': precisely the problems that beset John Cowper in his Sussex days when under the influence of the Lyons and surrounded by close neighbours. Buchan's narrator keeps company with a tramp who goes about

contentedly doing small thoughtful kindnesses to the people of the isolated homesteads along his route.

Like Powys, Buchan is very aware of past happenings in now deserted places, and one of the best essays in this early collection describes 'A Drove Road': 'the charms of old associations are there, a thousand memories of the past, clearer and more tangible than those which attend other relics of age, in as much as the past in this instance borders so nearly with the present.' Buchan sets immense store by a knowledge of the past: 'To be the slave of yesterday', he continues, 'is to be the lord of to-day and the master of tomorrow' – which describes, it seems to me, Powys's Prince Porius.

No less than Powys, Buchan admired Rabelais, and published an appreciation of him in 1908,¹² well before Powys's in 1915 and 1938. Unlike Powys, Buchan was satisfied with Urquhart's translation and thought author and translator so alike as to be well matched. Powys, on the other hand, thought Urquhart too powerful a character in his own right to be satisfactory as a translator, and published his own translations with his long essay of 1948.¹³ Buchan thus describes Rabelais: 'the most versatile and chameleon-like of great men, who like the philosophers constantly provides his own refutation. He is allegorist, romantic, moralist, physician and buffoon by turns, and if from the whole we can piece together a consistent figure of a man it is only from the whole and not from any selections';¹⁴ and later:

In the second place, Rabelais is a lover and a student of human nature. In his day he had known every rank of society. He had Villon's knowledge of the taverns and the back streets of life, without Villon's heartlessness. The preacher in him made him raise his figures all a power too high; they are types, but colossal types, and yet they have the reality which only a direct and subtle observation can give. Pantagruel, the wise King, and Panurge the vagrant whom 'he loved all the days of his life'; Epistemon, Friar John of the Funnels—it is a gallery of very human giants, who have every fault but cowardice and meanness, and every virtue but austerity. Such are those who eat of the herb Pantagruelion (a lost plant, we fear), 'which is sown at the first coming of the Swallows, and is to be plucked out of the ground when the Grass-hoppers begin to be a little hoarse.' No finer companionship has ever been imagined than that of the Abbey of Theleme, where all were

"Lively, jovial, handsom, brisk,
Gay, witty, frolick, chearful, merry, frisk,
Spruce, jocund, courteous, furtherers of trades,
And in a word, all worthy gentile blades."

But if he is the humanist he is also the moralist. And his ethics are not a single dogma, but a whole rich philosophy of life. His high spirits rarely lack tenderness; like Bacon's sage, he "has the face of one who pities humanity."¹⁵

This brings to mind the travesty of Rabelais's Abbey of Thelema enacted by another late Victorian contemporary, Aleister Crowley (b.1875), in the farmhouse he bought at Cephalu in Sicily in 1920. Crowley was a friend of Louis Wilkinson, the

close friend of the Powys family. In 1916–17 he was in New York and there tried to involve Louis's wife Frances in his practices. In June 1917 John Cowper wrote to his brother Llewelyn: 'that thrice damned devil Aleister Crowley tried to throw his infernal spells over Frances nearly scaring her to death. It was with the greatest difficulty Louis could be persuaded to forgo the perverted snobbishness of hobnobbing with so notorious a worshipper of devils ...'.¹⁶ It is evident from John Cowper's letters to Louis that Wilkinson often mentions Crowley, with whom he remained friends to the end of Crowley's life, but Powys takes little notice of this in his replies. JCP's *Rodmoor* was published in October 1917, and the character of Brand Renshaw surely derives from Crowley.

There is no evidence that Buchan ever met Crowley, but he must have heard of him and many of his villains have Crowley's characteristics, notably Shelley Arabin in *The Dancing Floor*.¹⁷ Like Crowley Arabin purchases a deserted house on a Greek island and there practices pagan rites of an hypnotic and indecent nature, keeping people imprisoned under his spell, precisely as Crowley did. (Crowley was christened Edward Alexander but changed his name to Aleister, probably, according to Ronald

Decker in the DNB, because of his admiration for Shelley's poem 'Alastor'¹⁸ – a probability which Buchan uses in naming his villain.)



Aleister Crowley,
by Augustus John (from
Fitzrovia by Michael
Bakewell

Crowley like Buchan was a keen mountaineer, and several of Buchan's novels end with a final contest between the hero and villain in difficult mountainous conditions. Crowley in his prime was very good looking and had the sort of interests that intrigued well-off idle people between the wars, so he was widely accepted, as is another of Buchan's villains, the demonic hypnotiser Dominick Medina in *The Three Hostages*.¹⁹ Prior to his Sicilian escapade Crowley took a house on the shores of Loch Ness, calling himself the Lord of Boleskine: Buchan with his Scottish roots would surely have heard of him there. Crowley's first wife was Rose Kelly, the sister of Gerald, later President of the Royal Academy; she divorced him but not unscathed. Crowley's powers are vividly described in Somerset Maugham's novel *The Magician*.²⁰ Although Maugham exaggerates his unpleasant person and activities Crowley recognized himself in Oliver Haddo, and one wonders if he saw himself also in Buchan's more discreet but no less damning portraits.

As is now well-known, Powys was sued for libel by a Somerset notable who, not without reason, recognized himself as a character in *A Glastonbury Romance*. Powys could not have known of him, nor of some of the events depicted in the novel that actually happened; but Powys and Buchan both had the capacity to describe recognisably places they had never seen. 'Early in 1914', Buchan tells us, 'I wrote *Salute to Adventurers*, the fruit of my enthusiasm for American history. In that book I

described places in Virginia I had never seen, and was amazed when I visited them later to find how accurate had been my guesses'.²¹ In spite of this great imaginative capacity, or perhaps in some way to anchor it, both writers often begin a novel at the place where they actually are at the time of writing: for instance, Powys like Dud Norman in *Maiden Castle* is living at 38, High East Street, Dorchester, and Buchan is enjoying his country home at Elstead like the protagonist of *The Three Hostages*. For both another favourite beginning is a journey.

Both were inspired by the ballad 'Thomas the Rhymer'. For Powys it provided the prefatory verse ('*O they rade on, and farther on ...*') and the imagery for *Rodmoor*; for Buchan it was the theme of a short story of the same title in which a shepherd, who is a regular churchgoer, through the good offices of a curlew hears the Rhymer, who shows him the ways of the universe and the history of his ancestors and lures him to wider horizons. The shepherd tells the minister of his experiences and that he plans to 'go south'; the minister protests that there are 'no faithful ministrations there', but the shepherd doesn't care and goes anyway. 'Let none', the story ends, 'pray to hear the full music of the Rhymer, for it will make him who hears it a footsore traveller in the ways of the world and a masterless man till death.'²²

Although they shared so many influences and interests the lives of Powys and Buchan, and the worlds of their novels, could hardly have been more different. As Buchan remarks, with more accuracy than originality, 'the novel is the world as seen through the temperament of the novelist and his success depends upon the depth of his insight and the richness of his temperament, the twin powers of perception and interpretation'.²³ ('Success', however, depends on our terms of reference.)

It appears from a letter dated 8 February 1956 from John Cowper to Louis Wilkinson that he once met Buchan, though he has trouble remembering his name: 'I had to pay a visit to Downing Street to get some credentials to go about this country lecturing on the War! And it was then I met a well-known writer ... Who was then a General on the Staff of our Commander in Chief—I forget his name too! ... But now the name Buchan comes back to me—John Buchan? And yet I'm not quite sure even now!'²⁴ This would have been during JCP's brief visit to England in the summer of 1918, before he decided to return to America. Buchan was at that time Director of Intelligence at the Ministry of Information.

REFERENCES

- 1 John Buchan, *Memory Hold the Door* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), 39.
- 2 Ibid., 49.
- 3 J. C. Powys, *Autobiography* (1934; Picador edition, 1982), 181.
- 4 Ibid., 66.
- 5 John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* (London: Cassell, 1932), 133.
- 6 Ibid., 198.
- 7 Ibid., 199.
- 8 J.C.Powys, *Visions and Revisions* (1915), Village Press edition p.1.
- 9 J. C. Powys, *The Pleasures of Literature* (London: Cassell, 1938), 396 ff.
- 10 John Buchan, *The Scholar Gipsies* (London: John Lane, 1896).
- 11 J. C. Powys, *The Art of Forgetting the Unpleasant*, ed. Goodway (Bath: Powys Society, 2006), 43ff.

- 12 John Buchan, 'Rabelais' in *Some Eighteenth Century [sic] Byways*, Blackwood 1908.
- 13 J. C. Powys, *Rabelais* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, May 1948).
- 14 John Buchan, 'Rabelais', as above, 309
- 15 Ibid., 226. In one of Buchan's latest novels, *the House of the Four Winds* (1935), the hero says to his friends, 'Remember the inscription on the Abbey of Thelema, "Fais ce que voudrais, for the desires of decent men will always be governed by honour" '!
- 16 J. C. Powys, *Letters to his Brother Llewelyn*, Vol.1 (London: Village Press, 1975), 225-6.
- 17 John Buchan, *The Dancing Floor* (London: Nelson, 1926). One of the many surprising places that Crowley visited and wrought his own kind of havoc was Rempstone Hall in Dorset. See *The Calcrafts of Rempstone Hall* by Richard Ryder (The Dovecote Press, 2005).
- 18 Ronald Decker, *DNB* (Oxford, 2004).
- 19 John Buchan, *The Three Hostages* (London: Nelson, 1924).
- 20 Somerset Maugham, *The Magician*, 1908. Maugham's preface asserts this.
- 21 John Buchan, *Memory Hold the Door*. As above, 194.
- 22 John Buchan, 'The Moon Endureth' (1921), 294, 307.
- 23 John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott*. As above, 336.
- 24 J. C. Powys, *Letters to Louis Wilkinson*, London: Village Press ed.1974), 348.

Encounters with an Exercise Book



A postscript to 'Likes and Dislikes' in Newsletter 60 (p.32), from George Sims's memoirs. The Powys Journal 11 (1992) contains George Sims's essay on Alyse Gregory, with a longer version of the lines quoted here. Jacqueline Peltier's study of Alyse Gregory, A Woman At Her Window (1999), is in the Powys Heritage series published by Cecil Woolf. (photo by Beryl Sims)

I had first met John Cowper Powys in the winter of 1957/8 when I was engaged in selling his manuscripts. He then lived in Corwen, and as there was a good deal of snow in that part of North Wales I made the trip by train, much enjoying the final part of the journey on a branch line through the valley from Llangollen. Indeed, when I left the station on that dark winter evening and began to climb the snow-covered, steeply ascending streets, hearing school-children call out in musical Welsh voices, Corwen had a slightly unreal, magical air for me.

That night and the next I slept in an ancient inn, the Owain Glyndwyr, a little troubled by the noises of mice in the roof, but I had very enjoyable meals with J.C.P. and his charming woman friend/companion, Phyllis Playter. The Powys manuscripts were lodged in a loft with a rickety access ladder and inadequate flooring, so there were moments of farce as Miss Playter and I searched for them. She was an American with a good sense of humour and a delightful laugh, seeing the funny side of our situation as we perched precariously to reach into unlit corners. Much laughter in the loft helped to change a business relationship into a friendly one, and the 'Dear Mr Sims' in letters before I went to Corwen became 'Dear George'. Because of this

friendly attitude I had no hesitation about sending the exercise book to No 7 Cae Coed, Corwen, just after my trip to Pigotts [*home of Eric Gill's family in Bucks*], and the contributions by J. C. Powys and Phyllis Player in the book are both dated May 7th, 1958. J.C.P. did not write out lists but sent back inimitable, long paragraphs with a good deal of underlining ... His page headed 'Like' forms a brief essay and deserves to be quoted in full ... [see NL 60]

Two pages in the book which my wife and I find particularly evocative are those in the hand of Alyse Gregory (the widow of Llewelyn Powys); to read them brings back countless memories of one of the most sensitive and delightful human beings we have met. Mark Holloway painted a picture of Alyse in a poem:

*She sat upright in an upright garden armchair
In a patch of shade, voluminously dressed
From black boots up to a high-collared neck
In black, with white slightly flared cuffs
And an abbreviated white ruff—
Victorian, Jacobean, or of any age between.
Her head was small, handsomely shaped, held
With an authority almost but not quite assured;
It suggested classic coolness, untroubled ease
Of judgement, intellectual poise; so why
Did she seem to shrink in her chair with doubt
As if in diffidence her head denied? True,
Her face had been long drawn upon by pain
Perplexity and grief, or so one guessed;
Also, she seemed to like to dwell in doubt:
Dubito ergo sum might have been written
Triumphantly in those tender alive lines ...*

My wife and I first visited Alyse in 1953 when I negotiated the sale of some of Llewelyn Powys's manuscripts to the University of California Library. She lived in a remote cottage at a place called Chaldon Herring on the whale-backed Dorset downs, which could only be reached on foot or in a jeep, more than a mile from the nearest track. It is no exaggeration to say we were both captivated by her charm. She had enjoyed a varied and successful career as a worker for charities and the suffragette movement in New York, co-editor with Marianne Moore of *The Dial*, novelist and essayist, and yet diffidence and a reluctance to put herself forward were marked characteristics. The only request she refused me was when I asked her permission to submit for publication a brilliant essay she had written about one of her sisters-in-law, Philippa Powys. On September 4th, 1958, Alyse filled two pages in the book with lists containing phrases that we remember well ...

COUNTRY HOUSING

By A. R. POWYS

In the last year of his life, A. R. Powys contributed 16 articles to *The Farmers Weekly* magazine. Amongst the papers I have inherited are cuttings of almost all the articles, except for two which are preserved in complete issues which enables one to see the context of the series. The first article was missing, but I obtained a photocopy from the British Library's newspaper collection at Colindale. Also in my papers are three letters to or from *The Farmers Weekly*, the manuscripts or typescripts returned by the Editor, and galley proofs of two unpublished pieces.

The articles were published between April 18th and October 11th 1935. The two complete numbers were those of June 21st (vol. II, no 25) and October 11th (vol. III, no 15), from which one can deduce that there were half-yearly volumes, which ties up with the statement in the *FW* website that it has been going since 1934; the journal had a page size of 13⁷/₈ by 10¹/₄ inches, and these two issues have 52 text pages. ARP's articles, going under the general heading of 'Country Housing', were printed in the last pages entitled 'The Home Section', which contained quite a variety of matters which might interest country people, but were not strictly farming issues.

The total published word-count is some 18,000, with another 1,650 in the galleys. Most of the articles were illustrated, so that a few of them occupied the whole editorial matter on a page. 'Country Housing' was obviously regarded as a worthwhile topic for the farming community; from the text it is clear that this is the target, not the owners of grand houses.

The earlier articles were devoted to the historical background to the houses we have today; the later titles show how they then tackled issues likely to be faced by farmers dealing with their own buildings, which then would be largely traditional in character, or occasionally by a farmer in his role as a churchwarden.

At top of this page: heading and author as printed at top of the first article, the heading in Gill Sans Shadow Line.

How to DEAL with the RABBIT PLAGUE 2nd
See page eleven

The FARMERS WEEKLY
THURSDAY, JUNE 21, 1935

67 WEANERS AVERAGED 42 LBS. EACH!

Silcock's
PIG BEARING MEAL
BETTER IN EVERY WEIGHT!

The Farmers Weekly, June 21st 1935.

There is little on aesthetics; in fact, in line with his own thinking expressed in the later chapters of *The English House* (1929), he was a strong believer in using modern materials in an honest manner.

There must have been some earlier contact, but the first letter in my papers is the commissioning letter of March 27th 1935 from the editor, Maxwell Raison, only three weeks before the first article appeared (see page ###). It is interesting to see how Raison enjoined ARP to provide 'practical advice' 'very simply expressed' for his hundred thousand readers who were 'real working farmers'. And you will see also how ARP explained himself in an introduction.

Raison asked for some idea of the length of the series, on the assumption that each article would be around 1,000 words. Unfortunately there is no indication of ARP's intentions; in the event, the published articles averaged 1,125 words, some being much more than this, plus of course illustrations. The question of later publication as a book and the copyright issue were raised by Raison, but left to be addressed later.

On August 14th, after the twelfth article, on paper with the impressed address 'Brympton d'Evercy, Yeovil', ARP wrote:

'I send you a long article on roof coverings wh. may be divided as you like [this became articles 13, 14 and 15]. Please let me know 2 weeks before you have used this & I will write some more.

I seem to be coming to the end of the subject, but can go on on allied matters easily for a while.

and asks what else he might write about, and then adds:

P.S. I could do a general article on the subject of planned farm buildings on the lines I spoke of, but to be particular on this subject is beyond my experience or reading at present. Doubtless in a journalistic way I could mug it up to add my thoughts to it & make some sort of presentable show.

ARP didn't get the chance to 'mug it up' (I wonder what the Editor thought of that), as he had not been at all well; it is clear that the series already in hand was not complete, with the two unpublished galleys not reaching any sort of end. In fact he was so ill that he collapsed early in March the next year, was taken to a nursing home, and died there on March 11th.

Most of the articles seem to have been printed virtually as submitted, apart from minor editorial corrections, but two of the scripts are heavily marked with passages to be omitted, in one case philosophical observations on poetry and on death, perhaps not the stuff for farmers! The galleys appear not to have been proof-read, but even the printed text contains one delightful howler which must have left the readers truly puzzled: 'It is often said that the nearer a building approaches the form of a cake the more economic it is, ...' (fifth article); a pencil note on my cutting tells us 'cake' should have been 'cube'! There may be other oddities which I have not spotted, but I did see that two of the articles were attributed to his elder brother, T. F. Powys.

ARP's published work, apart from the numerous articles in *The London Mercury* and elsewhere, comprises three books, *The English House* (1929), *Repair of Ancient*

Buildings (1929) which itself was the collected wisdom of the SPAB, and *The English Parish Church* (1930). It would be interesting to compare the ideas put together for *The Farmers Weekly* articles, pretty well off the top of his head, with his earlier published work to see if there are any developing trends, but this must wait.

Raison offered ARP a fee of two guineas an article, plus half a guinea for each picture used. This would have been a useful supplement to his modest salary as Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings; in 1935 this was £500 (see *Annual Report* for 1936), or some £10 a week.

The magazine then cost 2 old pence; now its price is £2, 240 times as much.

Stephen Powys Marks

A. R. Powys's Introduction to the series:

I have been asked (writes Mr. Powys, who is secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and an expert in the subject he discusses here) by the Editor of THE FARMERS WEEKLY to write a series of articles on country housing, and I think it fair to the readers of this paper to tell them something of myself so that they may be better able to judge the worth of what I have to say.

I am the son of a parson who had charge of a parish in South Somerset, and I spent all my early years in that district. Among my friends were farmers and men who worked for them. Later I became an architect, and chance and inclination led me to associate myself with a group of men and women who worked together to protect "worth-while" old buildings, great and small, from harm; either from a process of "make-believe" antiqueing or from neglect, or from that kind of treatment which shows a carelessness for the pleasing qualities they have.

In time I was appointed secretary to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and in that work have had unusual opportunity to learn from many people how best to treat old buildings, making them serviceable, and to do so with as small a change to their character as may be. At the same time, opportunity has come to me to take part in planning and building new cottages.

The FARMERS WEEKLY

A.R.Powys, Esq.,
The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings,
20, Buckingham Street,
W.C.2.

March 27th 1935

Dear Mr. Powys,

I have now read the manuscript that you submitted a day or two ago and I think that this, together with your accompanying suggestions, will answer our purpose very well. The introductory article can be used as it stands, but it is a bit long and I hope you won't mind one or two minor cuts being made.

Assuming that each article is approximately 1,000 words in length, can you give me a rough idea of how many articles will go to complete the series?

Another point in my mind is how you will treat the question of reconditioning and the improvement of the domestic amenities of the various types of houses. Do you propose to deal with this aspect of the matter as you describe the various types? It is a vital point with us because really the main purpose of the series of articles is to show how old houses can be adapted to suit modern conditions and to ease the burden of the housewife and to make her domestic life more efficient and more pleasant.

I hope I am making my meaning clear. We don't want to treat the matter merely from the historical point of view. Practical advice is what is wanted because our 100,000 readers are real working farmers and not merely occupants of pleasant country houses. Money is a tremendously important consideration with them.

Another point is the question of illustrations. Are you in a position to supply photographs & diagrams to illustrate the articles?

As to the question of fee, if you wish to retain the copyright of these contributions we should not feel inclined to pay more than two guineas for each article, plus a fee of half a guinea for each picture use. If you do decide to publish in book form at the conclusion of the series we might consider publishing the book on your behalf, but this is a matter that could be discussed later.

I am very anxious to get these articles going immediately, and I would like to use the first in our issue of April 5th.; but to do this I should have to be sure of receiving copy for the second article not later than Monday, April 1st.

I should be very much obliged if you could let me know immediately whether my suggestions are acceptable to you.

Yours sincerely,

Maxwell Raison

List of published articles, with titles as provided by the Editor

1	April 18th	<i>Country Housing—Beginning a New Series on the Structure and Adaptation of Rural Buildings</i>
2	April 26th	<i>The Simple Type of English House</i>
3	May 3rd	<i>A New Style Grows Up</i>
4	May 17th	<i>Our Own Building</i>
5	May 24th	<i>Modern Building</i>
6	May 31st	<i>Why Must the Old Cottages Go? ‡</i>
7	June 7th	<i>Changing Old Houses to New</i>
8	June 14th	<i>Further Steps in Reconditioning Country Housing</i>
9	June 21st	<i>Old Walls: Timber-framed or Mortar-built</i>
10	July 26th	<i>Repairing the Roof and Walls</i>
11	August 2nd	<i>The Safety of Old Timbers</i>
12	August 9th	<i>Old Roofs or New?</i>
13	Sept. 13th	<i>The Death-Watch Beetle</i>
14	Sept. 27th	<i>The Repair of Roofs</i>
15	Oct. 4th	<i>More about Roofs</i>
16	Oct. 11th	<i>Mending Modern Houses</i>

‡ This article is transcribed on the following pages. The subject of old cottages was a burning issue in the 1920s and 30s, as is evident from a booklet published by the SPAB in 1921 and a pamphlet of 1927 following a Conference held by the Royal Society of Arts (see page 52).

WHY MUST the OLD COTTAGES GO?

In the last article on housing I indicated the recent tendencies of life which should be respected in building new cottages.

Goodness in anything was found to be the sum of all desirable qualities, and among them were efficiency, common-sense economy, and beauty.

Simplicity or elaboration are related to the purpose of the building rather than to beauty. A palace or a cathedral would be mean without some elaboration, and a farmyard or a cottage would be absurd with much of it.

Though very briefly repeated here, the idea presented accords with the facts of life as we find them; it is in no way a theory about what might be or what should be. The statements are comparable to a scientist's report on the nature of a grain of wheat or of a handful of soils; they record facts.

Tradition Holds Us

In addition to qualities pertaining to a good new house there is another which is inevitably present when we consider old ones. Let us find what it is so that we may be able consciously to deal with old houses in the way that is best for mankind.

There are few men who do not feel the security of their childhood. The consciousness of this feeling is often not apparent through the time of active life; it is there, but it is hustled aside by the pressing needs of man in his vigour. As the force which impels us to activity wanes, the desire for this vanished security is found to have survived; and it may then take command of a man and send him to seek the home of his childhood. This is the first evidence that we are rooted in the past.

When we fought in the war, we did not much remember that by fighting we were defending our power to carry through the works we had begun—the improvement of land, the perfecting of a herd, or the strengthening of a flock. Chiefly, we thought of protecting our race and the way of life from foreign interference. In a word, we

Country Housing : VI by A. R. POWYS

wanted to carry the ways of our fathers into the future. This is again evidence that the past has real value for us.

Lately, my work took me to the top of a church tower, and with me was a farmer, the churchwarden. We looked over land that were his, sweet fair and in order. The hedges were trim and tight, the land clean and ripe.

I am sure that [the] proud pleasure he felt was derived more from the goodness of the view, and the knowledge that this goodness was upheld by him, than from any thought of the profits to be had from it.

Set in the fair goodness of England are old villages—churches, barns, shelter for beasts, homes for men, maybe single wayside cottages, small hamlets of houses built long ago. These, too, are a part of the scenes we willingly let linger in our minds.

Is it not then a true and a real fact of our lives that old buildings thus grouped together or standing separately have a value added to them by their long associations with men of our kind, probably of our kindred? They have a value which the best new house has not. This is the quality belonging to old houses which we sought to find.

Whether these houses shall go quickly or remain long is much a matter for those farmers who give their time to serve on local councils. In 1840 ninety per cent. of the houses in England are said to have been old houses. Today I am told less than ten per cent. are of that kind.

I would ask, then: if these old houses that make our villages and small country towns are in fact a real and not an imaginary pleasure to us, why should we let them be destroyed? Surely those that can be kept usefully and healthily in the service of man should be so kept, and if an

artificial, if not a real economic reason is causing their destruction, should we not take steps to see that their fate is no longer subject to such cause?

I assume, and I am sure I am right in assuming, that my readers share my opinion that *only those old houses should be destroyed which are bad and which cannot be made good at a cost which is no more and in many cases less than building anew*. But at present many houses which are being destroyed because the economy which controls our decisions in an artificial and not a real economy. It has been caused by Act of Parliament.

Facts of Law

The main facts are these: the Housing Act under which we hope to rid England of bad houses is so framed as to make it less costly for a locality to destroy an unfit house than to make it into a good one, and this though the actual pounds, shillings, and pence which it would cost to make it lastingly healthy are less than the money needed to build a new house. In other words, because the Government, out of taxes we

pay, does provide a subsidy for making a new house for every family dispossessed, and does not provide a subsidy for making an old house healthy, the local authority is encouraged to destroy the very buildings which we have agreed justly, properly and really do add to man's pleasure in his short life. Is not this foolishness?

The new housing Bill now before Parliament is better than this Act. It does provide local authority with a cumbersome way of reconditioning old houses; but because it is a way which will remain less financially attractive to that authority than is the new building of houses, it is likely that unnecessary destruction will continue.

The advice then which I would give to the councillors of local authority is to find out which of those houses listed in the course of his duty by the Medical Officer of Health as bad, are of a kind we would like to retain. Having done this, let them decide which among these buildings a sensible man can make comfortable and easy to keep clean and healthy. If it seems difficult by reason of the clauses in the Act to put them into order,

let the Council, before it resolves to demolish and rebuild, ask the Ministry of Health to tell them how they may fulfil their wish without adding any extra burden to local finance.

It will be time then, if no way of saving them can be found, to resolve their destruction; and at the same time it will be well to publish in the local paper the reasons why they could not do what they would.



Condemned Cottages at Ashbury in Berkshire.

[On the back of the original photograph in ARP's hand]

Condemned by Farringdon R.D.C. plan for reconditioning provided by S.P.A.B. (Soc for the protection of ancient buildings). The owner was unwilling to repair at his cost. Local authority refused grant under Housing (Rural Workers Act). They were finally condemned as houses. There's a chance they may be converted to a church Hall, but in that case the changes would be drastic.

Cottage Preservation

A. R. Powys as Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings was responsible, of course, for the preparation of its Annual Reports, which were issued in his name for more than twenty years up to his death in 1936. He was also responsible for putting together the Society's booklet on a practical demonstration of the feasibility of repairing abandoned or derelict cottages of which there were huge numbers throughout the country at the end of the First World War in 1918, from which he himself had only returned in November from his German prison camp.

This booklet, *An Old Cottage Saved*, had been preceded in 1919 by a pamphlet issued by the Society on the treatment of old cottages, when the its Committee had decided to find a derelict cottage to be repaired as an illustration of what could be done elsewhere. The cottages found were a pair at Drinkstone in Suffolk; they were chosen for several reasons: the excellence of their workmanship, the badness of their condition, and the very small cost of acquisition. The Committee was offered £600, a substantial sum, by Sir Philip Stott, who also accepted the risk of loss. The cost of the work on *two*

cottages came to a total of £722, compared with £950 *each* for comparable houses to suit the Government's requirements for this kind of property.

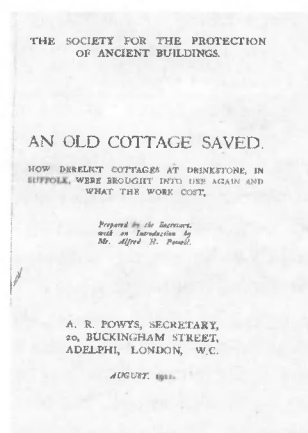
The cost of the booklet itself was defrayed by a special appeal to which the National Trust and *Country Life* contributed, both well aware of the cottage problem.

The SPAB was advised by William Weir, one of the band of 'wandering architects' under whom ARP himself had been resident architect or clerk of works at the outset of his career.

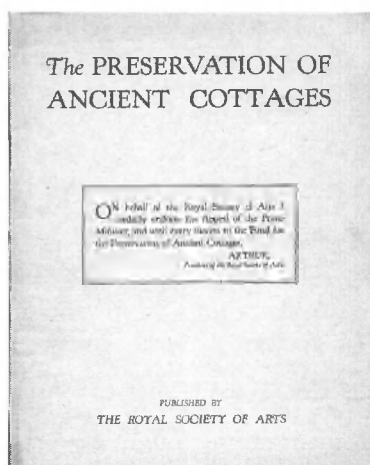
This repair work is referred to in the seventh *Farmers Weekly* article. The booklet itself must be the first item in any listing of ARP's books.

Another piece of evidence of the concern was a Conference held in 1927 by the Royal Society of Arts, who ran their own campaign, publishing *The Preservation of Ancient Cottages: An Appeal*, written by the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, who had been Chairman of the Conference. This pamphlet had a final Note by Thomas Hardy, who had started his own working life as an architect, and was a great supporter of the SPAB, giving manuscripts which were sold to help for the repair of the little church of Winterborne Thomson in Dorset.

SPM



*Title-page of SPAB booklet,
1921, 36pp. plus 21 pp.
illustrations, 7¼ by 4¾ ins.*



*Cover of RSA pamphlet, 1927, 24pp.
incl. 8 photographs, 8¼ by 4½ ins.*