

# TWO POWYS DAYS

## APRIL 25TH & JUNE 20TH — SEE PAGE 2

### *Editorial*

Our interim meetings continue to be attractive occasions, thanks to Chris Thomas, John Hodgson and others. The Quaker houses favoured by John have a special historic London charm: in December at Bunhill Fields, now a medley of gravestones and skyscrapers, we discussed JCP's end-of-war essay in *Obstinate Cymric* – extracts from his diary in early 1940 contrast to this. Montacute in April is an enticing prospect, as are JCP's connections with Wordsworth (see pages 2–4). Neil Lee's personal view of Llewelyn is a brave venture. JCP's early essay on the Book of Genesis sparked comparison with the different angles of LIP and TFP. An unusual affinity between John Cowper and the Hungarian writer Szentkuthy comes from Nicholas Birns of New York (whom we will welcome at the Conference); a convoluted appraisal by Iain Sinclair is a reminder of the 1970s. Caroline Girle (later Powys)'s visit to Stonehenge in 1759 invites comparison with Glastonbury, chapter 3. Special thanks to Chris Thomas and Stephen Powys Marks for their contributions and help.

20th April: talk on JCP in Sherborne — see page 10

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## Corrections to Newsletter 83

### **'Llewelyn Powys — The Man Behind the Myth'**

On page 44 of *Newsletter* 83 (November 2014), it was incorrectly stated that '... Rosemary Dickens has made a very generous donation of £5000.00 towards the cost of production and future publication of *The Man Behind the Myth*.' The actual amount of the donation was in fact **£500.00** and the donation was made towards the cost of the **initial publication** of the book. Sincere apologies are extended to Neil Lee and Rosemary Dickens for any inconvenience caused by this error. **CT**

### ***Answering a Mobile on White Nose***

On page 42 of *Newsletter* 83 in the poem by Peter Foss, line 5 includes an erroneous transcription and should read: 'Here, **caking** my squelching boots in a badgers' set' Sincere apologies are extended to Peter Foss for the error. **CT**

**Peter Foss** adds: *the idea of 'caking' being that the mud came up on my boots in a globular mass. I suppose the badgers' set (or indeed 'sett') is a bit optimistically poetic (badgers' sets being in dry soil) and was more likely to have been in reality a rabbit hole, but that wouldn't sound so well consonantly than the phrase I have.*

## *Two Powys Days*

**Montacute, Saturday 25th April 2015**

### ***John Cowper Powys: Wood and Stone (1915)***

This year marks the centenary of ***Wood and Stone*** which was first published in America by G. Arnold Shaw in November 1915 and in the UK by Heinemann in February 1917. **Chris Thomas** will lead a discussion of *Wood and Stone* in its original location and setting. The venue for the meeting is *The King's Arms* located opposite St Catherine's church. The village of Nevilton, in *Wood and Stone*, with its twin hills, is of course recognisably Montacute. The invented names of local places in the novel such as Leo's Hill, Badger's Bottom, Root Thatch Lane and Dead Man's Lane, are clearly based on the real places JCP knew so well. JCP evokes with intense memory-recall the place of his childhood and youth, its fields, lanes and orchards: '*What enchantments were all around him*', says the author, '*What memories! What dumb voices.*' But he also knew its suffocating claustrophobia: '*English vicarages are dreadful places*', he says.

*Wood and Stone* was written during the summer of 1915 in Burpham. Apparently, according to JCP, it was his wife, Margaret, who suggested the title. She must have read the novel in manuscript and perhaps she was inspired by the passage about wood against stone, tears weeping into stone and men transformed into the elements. The book was very popular with its first readers although the reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic were divided about its qualities. Arnold Shaw, cranking up his publicity machine, ranked it alongside Dostoevsky. One of the first detractors of the

novel was Louis Wilkinson who lambasted it in *Blasphemy and Religion* (1916), and compared it unfavourably to TFP's *Soliloquy of a Hermit* which he considered a work of art. JCP himself seems to have been dissatisfied with the book, and looking back called it 'a silly novel'.

A useful place to start a discussion of *Wood and Stone* is JCP's lofty Preface, which introduces the grandiose theme of the struggle between power and love and tyranny and freedom, and includes references to Nietzsche, cosmic chaos, the 'imaginative mirror of art', the secret of the universe, a critique of the modern novel and a tribute to Thomas Hardy and his adherence to 'the old ample ironic way' which JCP clearly also wants to adopt. There is hardly any plot in *Wood and Stone*. JCP's intention seems to be to try and capture a sense of the panorama of life and the effect of the spirit of a particular place on the lives of his characters. *Wood and Stone* prefigures the great novels of his maturity: he demonstrates psychological insight into the inner world of his people; the characters have distinctive Powysian names such as Mr Wone, Mr Quincunx, Witch-Bessie, and Mrs Wotnot; the language and imagery have what we now recognise to be characteristic Powysian features; there is a powerful sense of umbrageous plenitude, of the 'indolent luxuriousness' and 'leafy exuberance' of nature. The novel is notable for its wealth of classical allusions (sometimes JCP hardly seems to have advanced beyond the poem 'To Montacute' in *Odes and Other Poems*, 1896), as well as for JCP's ability to evoke effects of light and colour, the changing seasons, and his ability to recreate the minute particulars of things such as 'oozy stalks', and 'moist adhesive tendrils'. We are made to experience the breathing of the earth itself as if everything is alive. Yet there is also a sense of the dark downward pull of the earth suggesting a sinister and unpleasant atmosphere. This kind of writing reaches its apogee in chapters IX, X, and XII. Because *Wood and Stone* stands at the beginning of JCP's career as a published novelist this makes it very well worth our study and attention. Our discussion will also consider *Wood and Stone* in the context of other contemporary novels.

For helpful **background reading** to *Wood and Stone* see articles by W. J. Keith in *Powys Notes*, Winter 1998, Paul Roberts in *The Powys Journal* IX (1999), Arjen Mulder, in *The Powys Journal* XIX (2009), Penny Smith in *The Powys Review* 11 (1982–83) and by Margaret Moran in *The Powys Review* 17 (1985).

**In the afternoon** members may wish to explore Montacute and visit places mentioned in the novel such as St Catherine's church and churchyard and the Priory Farm, take a tour of Montacute House, gardens and the parklands, or walk to Montacute Hill and the 'thyrsus' shaped tower or to Ham Hill Country Park (Leo's Hill) from where there are fine views of the surrounding countryside.

**Welcome and coffee** is at 10.30. Discussion starts at 11.00. Lunch can be taken at the venue at 13.00.

If you are travelling to the venue by **public transport** there is a limited bus service from Yeovil bus station (take route No. 81 towards South Petherton which stops in The Borough. The journey time is approximately 15 minutes).

**Dorchester , Saturday 20th June 2015**

***Powys and Wordsworth***

At the Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, **Paul Cheshire** will present a talk entitled 'John Cowper Powys and Wordsworth's "cerebral mystical passion for young women"', taking as his theme the passage in *Autobiography* about JCP's perception of Wordsworth's 'abnormally sensual sensitiveness to the elements'. In his talk Paul Cheshire will explore the relationship between JCP and Wordsworth. Paul says that to call Wordsworth 'my great master' is a sure sign of JCP's feeling of indebtedness to him. However, the 'cerebral mystical passion' he attributes to Wordsworth is a prominent feature in his own fiction and in his self-styling as a nympholept. This is not simply a projection on JCP's part: if one re-reads Wordsworth's Lucy poems while under the influence of JCP's sensibility, those poems resonate as if he has provided a key to their secret life. Wordsworth 'Imagining himself a girl' may push beyond the demonstrable, but this provocative Powysian reading also beckons to be explored.

The other 'mystical passion' these two writers share is their sense of a near-erotic pagan numinosity of the dead who lie beneath the earth. Wordsworth's Lucy would have particular interest to JCP, who held so many dialogues with inhabitants of graves real and imaginary in his novels and in his life. Thomas Hardy's Egdon Heath – where King Lear was stripped of all his vanities – is a fit Dorchester setting for these meditations, as Hardy too has much to say about death and sacrifice on the heath.

Until recently **Paul Cheshire** served as a Trustee of the Friends of Coleridge. He has written a number of articles on Coleridge and his contemporaries, including a chapter on Coleridge's notebooks for the *Oxford Handbook of S. T. Coleridge*. He has also written on the influence of seventeenth-century hermetic philosophy on Milton. He is currently researching the life and thought of Coleridge's little-known friend, William Gilbert, astrologer and author of an eccentric theosophical poem, *The Hurricane*, which shows the hermetic tradition surviving into the romantic era. He has created a website dedicated to William Gilbert: < [www.williamgilbert.com](http://www.williamgilbert.com) >

The meeting will commence at 10.30 for 11.00 start. Coffee and refreshments will be available. The talk will be followed by Q&A and discussion. Lunch will be from 13.00 to 14.00 at a nearby restaurant. In the afternoon we plan to visit a local place with Powysian connections.

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*Both events are free although a charge will be made for lunch which is optional.*

*We welcome contributions towards the costs of coffee and refreshments.*

*Everyone is welcome to attend including non-members.*

*If you wish to attend either of these meetings please notify the Hon. Secretary,  
Chris Thomas, either by e-mail or by post (see inside front cover).*

## Committee Nominations

Nominations are invited for **Honorary Officers** and **Members** of the Powys Society Committee to take effect from August 2015.

All paid-up members, including honorary members, are entitled to submit nominations for the Committee. Nominations must include the name of the **Proposer** and a **Seconder** and should be submitted in writing, or by e-mail, accompanied by a statement confirming the **Nominee's agreement**.

Nominations should be sent to the Hon. Secretary  
by **e-mail** < chris.d.thomas@hotmail.co.uk >  
or **by post** to Flat D , 87 Ledbury Road, London W11 2AG.

Nominations must be received by **Monday 1st June 2015**.  
Current **Honorary Officers** of the Powys Society are:

<i>Chairman</i>	Timothy Hyman
<i>Vice-Chairman</i>	David Goodway
<i>Secretary</i>	Chris Thomas
<i>Treasurer</i>	Anna Rosic (Pawelko)

Nominations are sought for the four positions of Honorary Officers from August 2015.

Current **members** of the Committee are: **Michael Kowalewski** (*Collection Liaison Officer*), **Shelagh Powys Hancox**, **John Dunn**, and **John Hodgson** who have two years to run of their three-year term of office; **Louise de Bruin** (*Publications Manager*) who has one year to run of her three-year term; and **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter Editor*), and **Jeff Kwintner**, who will complete their three-year term of office in August 2015.

Nominations are sought for **two positions** on the Committee from August 2015.

**Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary**

## *The Powys Society Conference, 2015*

*The Hand Hotel, Llangollen*

Friday 21st to Sunday 23rd August

### **'Signs & Wonders'**

The road that leads from Ruabon to Llangollen passes through the deep green valley of the river Dee amidst tall hedgerows, verdant pastures, and flowering meadows. You know you are approaching Llangollen, when, after a sharp bend in the road, the ruins of Castell Dinas Brân, standing on top of a steep sided hill, rise up immediately in front of you, a black silhouette etched against a faint blue sky, *'its foundations ... sunk in that mysterious underworld of beyond reality'*, says JCP at the beginning of *Owen*

*Glendower*. This is a perfect Powysian place. Here the silent signs of history meet the wonders of myth and legend, where the stones themselves seem to exhale the spirit of the past: The views from Dinas Brân are impressive and extensive – you can see the flat Cheshire plain, Valle Crucis, Eglwyseg rocks and the little town far below. When he climbed up to Dinas Brân with Phyllis, Marian and his dog, the Old, on 28th August 1935, JCP observed a double rainbow. A photograph, in *The Dorset Year*, shows JCP leaning against a medieval wall. He has been distracted and looks away from the camera. Perhaps he was thinking of writing *Owen Glendower* and sinking, in his imagination, into, what Thomas Mann called, ‘*the world’s abysmal past*’. Our venue is, once again, the Hand Hotel, as familiar to us, by now, as an old friend, and situated, appropriately, in the shadow of Dinas Brân, close to the fast running waters of the river Dee as it rushes beneath the arches of Bishop Trevor’s bridge in the centre of the town. The title of the Conference refers to a quotation from TFP, which has biblical connotations: ‘*We must show them signs and wonders*’, says Mr. Weston. Our speakers promise to reveal Powysian signs and wonders.

**In my talk** I propose to uncover some of the signs that point to hidden meanings, references and allusions that lie just below the surface of *Wolf Solent*, including some surprising hidden references to the American art collector E. P. ‘Ned’ Warren, with whom JCP was acquainted during the 1890s whilst he was living at Court House; **John Gray** makes a very welcome return to the Conference and will explore approaches to religion in the writings of JCP, TFP and Llewelyn. We are delighted to welcome **Nic Birns** to the Conference for the first time. Nic is the official representative of the Powys Society in North America. His talk will lead us into JCP’s radical vision of the past in *Owen Glendower* as well as the ‘*marvels and wonders*’ of *Porius*; **Robert Caserio** also makes a welcome return to the Conference, from the USA, and will discuss TFP’s writings, especially *Unclay*, in the context of the signs of the times, alongside literary trends, themes and subjects which he shared with other English writers and novelists of the 1930s. We are also very pleased to welcome **Kathy Roscoe** to the Conference. She is planning to publish, later this year, an e-book of selections from JCP’s philosophical books. She will present a talk on JCP’s life philosophy and lead a discussion with members. During our free afternoon members will have the opportunity to explore the sites around Llangollen and Corwen which have Powysian associations. For Saturday night we are planning an evening of readings from books by the Powyses, selected and presented by members, followed by an open discussion.

**Chris Thomas**

## DRAFT PROGRAMME

### Friday 21st August

- 16.00 Arrival
- 17.30 Reception
- 18.30 Dinner
- 20.00 **Chris Thomas:** 'Buried Treasure: JCP's sources and the creation of *Wolf Solent*'

### Saturday 22nd August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 **John Gray:** 'Three Powyses on religion: John Cowper, Llewelyn and Theodore on belief and non-belief'
- 10.30 Coffee
- 11.15 **Nic Birns:** 'Powys's Radical Medievalism: *Porius* and *Owen Glendower*'
- 13.00 Lunch
- Afternoon free – optional visit to Corwen and guided walk to places associated with *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*.
- 19.00 Dinner
- 20.30 An evening of readings by members of favourite passages from works of the Powys family followed by open discussion with participants.  
**Details to be confirmed.**

### Sunday 23rd August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 **Robert Caserio:** 'Unclay's Version of Pastoral: T. F. Powys's Place in Regional-Political Writing in 1930s Britain'
- 11.00 **AGM**
- 12.00 **Kathy Roscoe:** 'Wisdom for the 21st Century: the Life-Philosophy of John Cowper Powys'  
Followed by discussion with members on JCP's philosophical books
- 13.00 Lunch
- 15.00 Departure

## AGM 2015

This gives notice that the **Annual General Meeting** of The Powys Society will be held at 11.00am on Sunday 23rd August at the Hand Hotel, Bridge Street, Llangollen, LL20 8PL.

All members of The Powys Society are welcome to attend and participate in the AGM whether or not they are attending the Conference.

**Chris Thomas, Hon. Secretary**

## The Speakers

**Chris Thomas** is Hon. Secretary of The Powys Society. He is a graduate of the University of Auckland, New Zealand, where he studied English literature and the history of art, and was a senior scholar. He also studied at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. He has had a varied career in business, bookselling and the Civil Service and is now a full-time private researcher. He has published articles, features and notes for The Powys Society website, *la lettre powysienne* and The Powys Society Newsletter (he was guest editor of NL 83, November 2014) and has contributed to *The Powys Journal*. He is also a regular contributor to *The Dorset Yearbook*.

In his talk Chris will examine some of the sources that inspired JCP during the writing of *Wolf Solent*. Reference will be made in the talk to JCP's friends, the Californian poet George Sterling, and the biographer and poet Edgar Lee Masters from whom JCP obtained some of the source material for *Wolf Solent*. Reference will also be made to JCP's use of other sources such as theosophy, esoteric Buddhism, Celtic folklore, Nietzsche, and the theme of transfiguration and transformation. A key part of the talk will focus on JCP's familiarity with the visual arts, his many allusions in *Wolf Solent* to painters and paintings and a consideration of the influence on JCP of his acquaintance with the wealthy American collector of art and antiquities, E. P. 'Ned' Warren, memories of whom may be briefly discerned in *Wolf Solent*. Previously unpublished documentary evidence will be presented which provides first hand testimony, by JCP himself, of his meetings with Warren and the Lewes House 'brotherhood' in the 1890s.

**John Gray** is well known as a broadcaster, commentator and writer on literary, philosophical and political topics as well as the history of ideas. He has held teaching posts at the University of Essex, Oxford University, Harvard and Yale Universities, and is Emeritus Professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics. John Gray is the author of numerous books including *Straw Dogs* (2003) (see John Hodgson's review in the Society's Newsletter 57, March 2006), *Black Mass* (2007), *False Dawn* (2009), *The Immortalisation Committee* (2011), and *The Silence of Animals* (2013), which includes a chapter devoted to Llewelyn Powys. His most recent book is *The Soul of the Marionette: a short inquiry into human freedom* (available from Penguin in March 2015) which contains a short section on TFP focusing mainly on *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*. John Gray is a keen advocate of the writings of the Powyses. He presented a talk, 'Three Powys Philosophies', at our Conference at the University of Chichester in 2006 (see Newsletter 59, November 2006); he reviewed *Petrushka and the Dancer*, in *The Powys Journal* 5 (1995); he has also written articles on *Wolf Solent* for *The Guardian* (17 February 1995), a profile of TFP for *The New Statesman* (3rd December 2001), a brief survey of the Powyses for *Slightly Foxed* magazine (Spring 2012), and delivered a talk on the Powyses to an appreciative audience at the Oxford Literary Festival in March 2012. In December 2014 he selected the new edition of *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* as his book of the year for *The Guardian*.



John Gray's talk will examine the different approaches to religion exemplified in the work of JCP, TFP and Llewelyn Powys.

**Nic Birns** is Associate Teaching Professor at Eugene Lang College at the New School for Liberal Arts in New York. He was editor of *Powys Notes*, the Journal and Newsletter of the Powys Society of North America (from 1998 to 2002). He is the author of *Understanding Anthony Powell* (University of South Carolina Press, 2004) and the co-editor of *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900* (Camden House, 2007), which was named a CHOICE Outstanding Academic Book of the year for 2008). His book *Theory After Theory: An Intellectual History of Literary Theory From 1950 to the Early 21st Century* appeared from Broadview in 2010, and his monograph *Barbarian Memory: The Legacy of Early Medieval History in Early Modern Literature* came out with Palgrave Macmillan in 2013. He is the editor of *Antipodes: A Global Journal of Australian/NZ Literature*. He is working on two books about Australian literature.

Nic's talk will examine the different historical settings that separate *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*. The novels are at either end of a 'long medieval' period. *Porius* offers a deep archaism, an other world of dark energy and religious, fictive and sexual pluralisms, while *Owen Glendower* looks forward to the modernizing process of the Renaissance and has as one of its chief dilemmas whether Owen himself stands aside or athwart them. Whereas other modern historical novelists used the medieval period to either critique the modern or make the modern feel good about itself, Powys's radical medievalism sees the past as other, but also as an inventory of the present. And for Powys the past is present: not only was he living in Wales when he wrote these books, but the world is immured in a cataclysm of turmoil that makes these earlier 'dark' ages look light by comparison. Powys takes the traditional role of the medieval in historical fiction from Walter Scott onward, to provide an authorizing lineage in the past, and both accelerates and annihilates it.

**Robert Caserio** is Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University. His areas of specialist interest include nineteenth-century British literature, modernist studies, contemporary literature and theory and cultural studies. He is the author of over sixty articles about English and American literature in various books and periodicals. He has written two books and is co-editor of *The Cambridge History of the English Novel* (2012), editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the Twentieth-Century English Novel* (2009) and associate editor of literary entries of *Twentieth-Century Britain: An Encyclopedia* (1995). Robert Caserio is a member of the Advisory Board of *The Powys Journal*. He presented a talk to The Powys Society Conference in Llangollen in 2013 on 'Powys among the Autobiographers, 1900–1940', which was published in *The Powys Journal* xxiv (2014).

Robert's talk will explore the relation of TFP's *Unclay* and its disturbing content to the question of political and social responsibility in the 1930s. To explore the question more fully, and to bring TFP's lesser-known work into relation with its literary-

historical context the lecture will open a dialogue between *Unclay* and other works of fiction and non-fiction that are generically and politically relevant to reading it (by way of contrast as well as likeness). Although this discussion will look back to the 1920s (especially to Mary Webb), examples of works of fiction from the 1930s will also be referenced including works by authors such as Forrest Reid (*Uncle Stephen* [1931]), Walter de la Mare (*Ding Dong Bell*, re-issued in 1936), *Left Review* writing (Valentine Ackland's rural sketches from 1934–35), Charles Williams (*War in Heaven*), Stella Gibbons, Flora Thompson, and – for the clear contrasts with progressively motivated literary realism – Winifred Holtby's *South Riding* (1936) and Lettice Cooper's *National Provincial* (1938). The examples of non-fiction will include reference to Orwell and Priestley. A leading aim of the talk will be to bring TFP's work into dialogue with the contemporary critical views of William Empson and his proletarian sympathies, as well as to continue critical engagement with Glen Cavaliero's *The Rural Tradition in the English Novel*, Jed Esty's *A Shrinking Island*, and Alexandra Harris's *Romantic Moderns*.

**Kathy Roscoe** is a Social Sciences graduate and has been a nurse, Deputy Manager of a Citizens Advice Bureau and latterly, a learning mentor to disabled undergraduate students. She is embarking on a career as a writer and undertook a nature-writing course last year. She has had essays published in walking and outdoor magazines. The years working directly with people have given her a profound and privileged insight into the human condition. These and her own personal experiences convinced her that there has to be more to life than the mundane routine of modern society. It was while seeking answers that she stumbled upon the life-philosophy of John Cowper Powys and his message and practical philosophy resonated deeply with her. She has compiled an anthology of JCP's life-philosophy and is seeking a publisher. At present, she is writing a summary of his philosophy and its relevance today.

CT

## *The Art of Happiness*

**Charles Beauclerk** (author of *Shakespeare's Lost Kingdom*, etc.) will give an illustrated talk about **John Cowper Powys** on **Monday 20th April 2015 at 7 pm**, at the Digby Memorial Church Hall, **Sherborne, Dorset**. He will be concentrating on Powys as philosopher, with particular reference to '*The Art of Happiness*, a work rich in wisdom and humour'.

*Tickets £5 are available from the Parish Office, Sherborne Abbey;  
proceeds will go to the Friends of St Basil, Toller Fratrum, Dorset.*

[Please note that this event is not organised by The Powys Society.]

## London meeting — December 6th 2014

### The post-War Cauldron

The meeting-place itself was fascinating – the Quaker house next to Bunhill Fields burial ground (London EC), where between 17th and 19th centuries many famous names were laid to rest – Blake, Defoe, Bunyan among them – a quiet place shaded by plane trees, home of pigeons and squirrels, now weirdly surrounded by huge, gleaming, oddly-shaped office blocks and a rushing ring-road.

A small but enthusiastic group discussed JCP's essay in *Obstinate Cymric*, 'The Cauldron of Rebirth'.

The essay starts with an actual rusting cauldron found by John Cowper in a field, which he links with the magic wisdom-endowing Cauldron of Ceridwen in Welsh mythology.

Written in Corwen towards the end of WW2 (from internal evidence, after the Russian advance and before the atom bomb) it concerns the future of the world, at least the West and especially Wales, at this turning-point both historical and astrological, with the change from the era of Pisces to Aquarius.

Tim Hyman and John Hodgson as always emanated knowledgeable wisdom, and among subjects raised were JCP's social optimism (it was 'his Beveridge Report' – JH); his Jungian world-view (multiple 'gods' related but separate); his Spenglerian view of the cycles in history (Classic to Dark Ages to autocratic control to individual democracy); the intersecting of life and death in wartime (this also a theme of *Mortal Strife*); the complex patterns of science and poetry, darkness and illumination, the transition from rule of class authority to a 'new age' community of individual conscience and common sense.

It is a quirky essay (one of the reasons JH chose it) with digressions into the dichotomy between Greek, 'greatest of all human tongues' (power of imagination) and Latin (physical power, control, order) – Greek associated with Russia via the Orthodox church (then briefly tolerated by Stalin); Greek also inspiring the 16th century "top-down" Renaissance that failed (assimilated or expurgated by the ruling powers). Significant JCP words – 'magnetic', 'psychic' – convey his belief in the influence of thought. He was not a rational modernist, with undue faith in the welfare state, nor an over-optimistic anarchist, nor an entire subscriber to occult systems or the imagined worlds of science fiction. He absorbed all these things, synthesised them but not into a System (*pace* Blake's 'I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's').

He foresaw a 'change of heart' – and (all at the meeting agreed) social life *has* become kinder, more open to differences. JCP's faith was in 'practical, colourless, neutral, self-effacing, efficient public servants ... like the friendly, competent and humorous crew of a serviceable vessel' – replacing crafty, ambitious, individualistic, spell-binding labour-leaders. We may think this was too optimistic, but still admire the ideal and hope that it still exists. The new man emerging from the cauldron may be 'totally un-distinguished', and yet, following the spirit rather than the letter, possess 'the essential nature of humanity'.

As for Wales, despite changes (the decline of chapels) it still goes its own way in its own language, detached from the England of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, refusing confrontation ('retiring to the hills'), smiling enigmatically – its influence (especially on America, in JCP's view) 'as diffused as it has been secret'.

**Kate Kavanagh**

## The Conqueror Worm

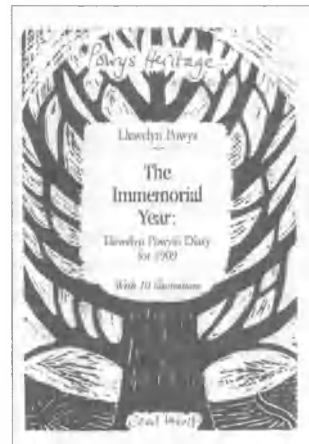
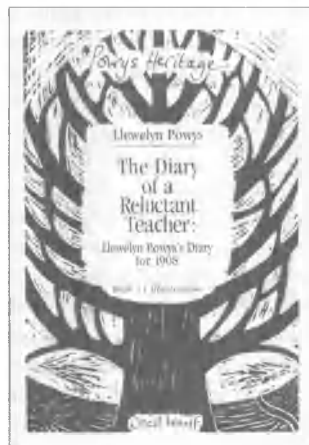
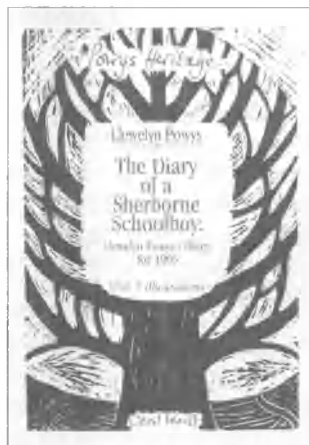
The latest of Peter Foss's editions of Llewelyn Powys's early diaries is now with us, with its fine cover reproduced on the back, with the blurb on the book's back shewn below. This one for 1910 follows on from his work on the Diaries of 1903, 1908 and 1909, published in Cecil Woolf's *Powys Heritage* series in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

### **The Conqueror Worm can now be obtained**

from the Hon. Secretary, Chris Thomas, price £10.00 (UK)  
or £14.00 (outside UK), p&p included. (179 pp.)

Edgar Allan Poe's poem 'The Conqueror Worm' was printed in *Newsletter* 79.

At the age of 25, the writer Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939), favourite younger brother of the novelist John Cowper Powys, contracted pulmonary tuberculosis, the killer disease of the age. Sent to a sanatorium at Clavadel near Davos Platz, Switzerland, he began in 1910 to keep a diary, over 48,000 words long, which charted not only the insidious progress of the illness and the treatments then in vogue, but also the cultural life of the high altitude 'cure', cut off from the world amidst a strange medley of characters reminiscent of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. In periods between blood spitting, Powys read widely and intensively, formulating his life-affirmative philosophy which was to permeate all he later wrote, from his vivid account of consumption in *Skin for Skin* (1925) to his 'imaginary autobiography', *Love and Death* (1939). This experience was augmented by the 'dangerous liaisons' he formed with young women, giving to the diary narrative an erotic frisson which reflects something of the nature of the illness itself. Powys received numerous letters whilst at Clavadel, from family and friends, many here quoted at length, making the diary an important untapped source of Powys material. The result is a kaleidoscope of impressions and anecdotes, bizarre encounters and philosophical speculations, which was considered at the time a work of literary art in its own right. Like Katherine Mansfield's journal from the same period, Llewelyn Powys's 1910 diary is a major record from inside the consumptive experience and adds significantly to our understanding of the ordeal of this deadly and durable disease in the first half of the twentieth century.



## News and Notes

### Our Cover

**Janice Gregory** writes that her cousin, Shelley Byington, and her family is delighted to have us use the painting. 'All of us are pleased to share this beautiful artwork with you. It has been well cared for and loved by our Mother for many years.' She gives the artist's name, Chester Hayes, and the date and place – 1900 in Paris. 'So, Alyse was 16 years old and was probably studying opera at the time.'

I'm hopeful to find out more and will let you know if I find out anything interesting.

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from **Charles Lock**: Checking on a bibliographical reference to a piece by **Colin Style**, 'On Hardy's Sacred Ground: John Cowper Powys's *Weymouth Sands*' in *Powys Review* 17 (1985), I discovered this detailed account of a most interesting life — he was a poet, editor and wide-ranging writer, closely involved with Zimbabwe. He was particularly devoted to the Zimbabwean poet **N. H. Brettell** (1908-91), and did much to draw attention to that truly neglected figure.

< <http://www.ru.ac.za/alumni/news/deceased2014/colinthomaselliottstyle/> >

I do not recall meeting him but some members may have done so. He died only this past September.

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### NLW Powys archive – update

from **Bethan Ifan** (18th December 2014): This is just to let you know that the John Cowper Powys/ Phyllis Playter archive is not yet live online. As you may (or may not) know, Geraint recently underwent further surgery and is currently recuperating and working part-time from home. He has not therefore been able to cast his eye over the archive and give it its final touches as he had hoped before this year was out. However, he will be returning to work fairly early in 2015 so I'm sure I will have some progress to report by then.

Feb 9th, from **Bethan**: I have very good news about Geraint – he is back at work and walking without crutches! He's working mornings only at the moment but will I'm sure work his way back to normal hours before too long.

The external fire damage to the roof of the Library appears to have been finally completed but the huge undertaking of repairing damaged manuscripts is still ongoing and fire-damaged offices are still out of bounds.

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Samuel Hawley of the **Conquistador Press**, Kingston, Ontario, Canada, informs us that a new edition of Llewelyn Powys's *Skin for Skin* has been released and is available from Amazon.

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from **Marcella Henderson-Peal**: I have discovered two more (living) philosophers, one French Canadian and one French (professor emeritus); I should interview the

latter, Gilbert Romeyer-Dherbey, soon in Bordeaux. He tells me he talked about JCP in a radio program on France Culture in 2003. A poem on JCP by another academic, Frédéric-Jacques Temple, friend of Henry Miller, will appear in *la lettre powysienne*.

Marcella is compiling an interesting list of writings on JCP in French. We hope in due course to publish these.

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from **Tony Head**: In the article on the letters of JCP to Jean Wahl (*The Powys Journal* xxiv, 2014) edited by Marcella Henderson-Peal and Charles Lock, a photograph of JCP's letter of July 26th, 1954 is shown next to the transcription of it. About mid-way through the letter there is one word which in the transcription is described as '[illegible]', but this word is clearly 'Latin'. So the sentence reads (with added punctuation to clarify the sense): 'I am now studying, as far as I can manage all its Latin, a little book on Roger Bacon by Theodore Crowley ...' etc. It's strange how you can stare at a word for hours and be unable to 'see' it, even with the help of a context, and then return to it again after a goodly gap and bingo!

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**Timothy Hyman, RA (our Chairman)** writes on Goya in the current RA magazine. His new book *A Year with Maggie's* (aka *The Maggie's Year*), of drawings from his arts residency at Cancer Caring Centres, is on sale with a 'selling show' at the RA from 29th April.

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from **Michael Caines**: John Goodby refers in passing to the Powyses in *The Poetry of Dylan Thomas: Under the Spelling Wall* (Liverpool University Press, 2013), where he notes that the brothers were favourites of both Dylan Thomas and Bert Trick, his socialist friend who exerted a significant influence on him. Goodby also notes that Thomas's reading of **T. F. Powys** made its mark on *Under Milk Wood*. The Welsh poet offered a 'thumbnail-sketched' parody of TFP in a broadcast called 'How To Begin a Story', in which 'Minnie Wurzel wants only the vicar; the vicar, the Reverend Nut, wants only the ghost of William Cowper to come into his brown study and read him "The Task"; the Sexton wants worms', and so on. *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* is not mentioned, but there is something reminiscent of that novel in Goodby's account of how Thomas learned to give 'coherence in the absence of plot' in his famous comic conspectus of life in that imaginary Welsh town Llareggub (read backwards – could it be twinned with Folly Down?)

*Two more notes*: In May Faber reissued a book first published in a limited edition last year by Quive-Smith Editions: *Holloway* by Robert Macfarlane, Stanley Donwood and Dan Richards. Inspired by the landscape of South Dorset and the work of the environmentalist Roger Deakin, it explores the Chideock Valley and other places of interest to Powysians.

Also, the London bookseller Collinge & Clark has recently taken delivery of a collection of rare pamphlets, including typed copies of poetry collections and lecture texts, by Kenneth Hopkins. See the website for details and update (he was thinking of

selling the lot to a research library).

< [www.collingeandclark.co.uk](http://www.collingeandclark.co.uk) >

★ ★ ★ ★

**Mado Spiegler**, who lives in **Philmont** not far from JCP's Phudd, wonders if he ever mentioned (or knew about) the powerful waterfall (350 vertical feet) in Philmont, at the end of the reservoir behind the former train station. The Ackawamick stream (< [www.collingeandclark.co.uk/](http://www.collingeandclark.co.uk/) > spelled Ogawamuck in Powys's time, the river fed by Powys's 'creek') had been dammed up in 1845 to feed a weaving plant. In Powys's time, the area of the High Fall was known as Factory Hill. Powys could easily have followed the stream(s) from Harlemville to the top of the waterfall; alternately he could have walked through the woods, down to the pool at the bottom of the falls. But if he was aware of the waterfall, it was hardly the idyllic place it has become, being then surrounded by small factories.

★ ★ ★ ★

*from Jacqueline Peltier*: Our mutual friend, **Conrad Vispo**, has sent the result of years of work, *The Nature of the Place*, a very impressive book, well illustrated, on **Columbia County**, a whole treatise of Ecology applied to a small but meaningful corner of New York State.

Conrad asked me to share it with you, as his dedication indicates: 'For the Powysians! It has been a pleasure to meet you (at least by email, if only Kate in person). It has been nice to find that the Valley's link to Powys is still alive. Thank you for having facilitated my inquiries! C.'

★ ★ ★ ★

*la lettre powysienne* 28 (autumn 2014) contained articles on *Morwyn* (M. Ballin); on JCP and the Breton philosopher Jules Lequier (G. Le Brech); and P. J. Kavanagh's adventures in Powysland (Columbia County) in the 1970s. No 29, due to appear, deals with JCP and Theodore, Peter Foss and Llewelyn's 1910 Diary, Theodora Scutt, Oscar Wilde and Dylan Thomas.

★ ★ ★ ★

**Anthony Green**, composer and musician (see *Newsletter* 83), gave a piano recital on Saturday 28th February at the Schott Music Room in London. The programme included music by Haydn, Beethoven, and Charles Ives as well as a performance of the second part of Anthony's own composition *A John Cowper Powys Symphony* transcribed for piano. The symphony consists of three parts – 'Maiden Castle', 'Glastonbury Variants' and 'Epilogue – After the Flood'. The first movement with its spare minimal sound gives a good impression of the bleak elemental landscape of Maiden Castle. In the second movement Anthony depicted some of the characters of *A Glastonbury Romance* in a series of short musical vignettes. The third movement builds to a tremendous crescendo before dying away softly at the end. The music was full of colour and texture and Anthony used the whole range of the keyboard to great effect in the resonant acoustic of the small performance space. Anthony is a confident and accomplished concert pianist and also gave a breathtaking perform-

ance of Beethoven's Waldstein sonata. The concert concluded with excited cries of 'Bravo' from the small appreciative audience. CT

\* \* \* \*

It's worth keeping an eye on 'Facebook' for **Powys sidelights**: e.g. (2nd March) 'How *Glastonbury* saved my life' by 'Matt', or JCP by 'PhilosophersCabin' ...

*The Dabbler*, 'a culture blog for connoisseurs of everything', includes a note, posted by Jonathan Law, on 27th January 2014, entitled 'The Madness of John Cowper Powys or Strange Doings at Phudd Bottom'. The note reproduces the well-known photo of JCP and Phyllis sitting outside Phudd Bottom with the Old and describes JCP's everyday life at Phudd Bottom. Jonathan Law is a writer, author of reference books and a contributor to *Slightly Foxed* magazine.

\* \* \* \*

'*Rooting Around the Ridgeway*', an *Artsreach* project exploring literature inspired by and written about the South Dorset Ridgeway, on 13th January locked horns with *Maiden Castle*. They bravely try to analyse but took a fairly dim view, only 4 of the group managing to finish it: verdict not a 'Good Read', and as a view of 'Mai-Dun' contrasting unfavorably with Hardy's story (1885) 'A Tryst at an Ancient Earthwork' (about unearthing Roman remains in a violent storm at midnight).

\* \* \* \*

**Geoffrey Winch** has a new poetry collection, *Alchemy of Vision* (Indigo Dreams Publishing, obtainable (signed) from the author, Dolphin Cottage, 65 Downview Road, Felpham, PO22 8JA). Here's one:

*To a Plain Glass Vase*

relief at not having to interpret  
meaningful decoration, not having to  
rotate you to study your other side  
but your clarity deceives the eye

though I see through you  
you still retain the power  
to distort my world  
change my view

you hold my flowers patiently  
remind me of their need for water —  
I pay no attention and they die

you are filled with more sunshine  
than I could possibly be  
yet shatter as easily



Neil Lee

Llewelyn Powys: The Man Behind the Myth

New Age Poetry Press (limited edition), 2014. 147pp

Neil Lee, a front-running champion and disciple of Llewelyn Powys, has produced a helpful and readable introduction and guide to his subject's (not now to say his Master's) life and ideas. On its cover is the famous 1933 photograph of Llewelyn as the Ancient of Days, with pilgrim staff and holding the Ankh, symbol of life.

The book is also a compendium or anthology of extracts, not only from LIP himself but from the many books about him and those connected with him – including Peter Foss's definitive in-depth 1991 *Study* (whose first section is titled 'The Man and the Myth'). There won't be much that is new to the inner circle of Powys enthusiasts, but this does not detract from the effectiveness of reading these various voices – wife Alyse, oldest friend Louis Wilkinson, lover Gamel Woolsey, rival Gerald Brenan, brother John, critics admiring or hostile – interspersed with quotations from the man himself.

As we know, all of the three Powys writer-brothers were preachers, in their fashion, but none so openly as Llewelyn, and for the young Neil Lee, training to be a Unitarian minister, this became literally so. Llewelyn's Gospel, denying need for supernatural laws, renouncing the conventional "thou shalt not" morality of the church of his fathers in favour of adoration of the created world – and this argued in powerful prose at once grandiloquent, witty, and above all convincing – was incorporated by Neil in his own sermons from the pulpit, to some acclaim. (A later question concerned Llewelyn's continued use of the word 'God' in colloquial phrases, only sometimes ironically, which might seem to contradict himself. Was he in fact a Deist, not a rational atheist? In fact Nature and 'God' seem more or less interchangeable to him, as they were for the young Wordsworth.)

Llewelyn's example in private life, however, was not so easy. Neil begins and ends his book with his own personal Llewelyn experiences, and when his life took a similar pattern to Llewelyn's, in being torn between devotion to two women, he felt that Llewelyn in a sense took him over.

The Alyse-Llewelyn-Gamel triangle inevitably looms large in the book, and this seems to define, for Neil, the Man-Myth opposition, with the man in his private life not practising what he preached. How come that Llewelyn's message, to the young and to the world, was to enjoy human sexual attraction as leaves bud on the tree, happily and freely as birds, and yet Aphrodite got her claws into him until his dying day, causing much unhappiness to himself and to his wife (another victim of the heart)? Did he never allow for this possibility – let alone for such likely complications as children, jealousy, or unrequited love? The gods may no longer rule, but we still need to negotiate with them.

Llewelyn's 'myth' was his role as 'heroic sage' as seen by his early biographers, and the 'persona' he created for himself in his writing. For Neil Lee the 'myth' (perhaps

better called 'mythology' since 'myth' is often taken to mean untrue) was his philosophy, his godless but creative view of life as awareness, enjoyed through the senses. Like Kenneth Hopkins, Neil Lee maintains that Llewelyn's ultimate appeal lies in that philosophy; but he is still uncomfortable with Llewelyn's apparent failure in real life – as a man – of 'empathy': that is, entering the feelings of those different from yourself. ('Compassion' Llewelyn did recommend, and often showed.)

This reader suggests that Llewelyn sensed, as others did, a certain magic in himself, which could excuse the incompetencies in everyday life that he was able to use as comic material in his American essays – seeing himself as a sort of *Candide*, a target for sophisticated rogues, unable to operate an elevator (though unlike his brother John, he probably could tie his own shoelaces) – and perhaps this excuse extended to insensitivity with others.

But he saw life as *poetry*. The tears, the anguish at parting from Gamel, would surely have been part of Life, no more to be suppressed than the delights of love-making, or the joy of having found a soul-mate. Self-centredness, intensity of experience, *was* (surely) his philosophy, and if it entailed suffering, his own or others', so be it. He was fighting his corner. Who, in a godless world, would have rebuked him? Freud (as immature)? Jesus (for unkindness)? Nature (for not accepting reality)? the poet Blake (for trying fatally to 'bind to himself a joy')? Epicurus (for not being more measured)? His friends (for being unmanly, or embarrassing)? Or his later devotees, for being human and fallible as themselves. But if those 'pleading, feverish' letters to Gamel had been universalised as poems, would they have seemed so inappropriate? For Llewelyn, poetry and 'religion' are always closely allied, and his shared imaginings and dream-life with Gamel, even though not god-requiring, do seem a kind of ritual transforming of the real world to a paradise.

Neil Lee, analysing a life always on the brink of death, acknowledges (perhaps excuses) Llewelyn's refusal (or inability) to learn 'that sometimes greater happiness can be achieved by denial of pleasure than by indulging oneself' (TMATM p.45) But 'there was never anyone more involved with the Now of life ...' *Glory of Life and Impassioned Clay*, 'his creed', shine undiminished.

'My style is all I have to offer', Llewelyn wrote to his sister Katie, about difficulties with *The Cradle of God*, his retelling of the Bible: '... I feel I have a very clear point of view to express if only I gather it together without too much bawdiness and profanity.' Llewelyn Powys excites very different reactions, and for some (and with that book in particular) his teasing penchant for irreverence goes unacceptably far, or (worse) trivialises the serious. (It can be held, however (as a poet said), that God has a sense of humour, and likes it in others.)

Llewelyn's delight in picturesque obsolete language is an annoyance to some, amusement to others. Simply, some cannot read him at all and for others he is always, very, readable. The latter can sympathise with most of his 'luluizing' exaggerations for the sake of the story. We nod off, sometimes, when he gets into the anti-Christian pulpit, or harps on battles that have been won. We overlook his stories of cruelty in

the world (in case we had thought it was all good). We rejoice in the perfect words he finds to describe its people, its landscape and plants and – especially – animals.

It is an endless interest to trace likeness and differences in the three Powys Brothers. Both Llewelyn and John Cowper wanted to persuade people to *be happy* – Llewelyn through awareness of the senses, JCP through reading. (TFP, more indirectly, by confronting evil and good?). We are lucky to have them all. The legendary ‘Lulu’, guileless and sunny (also very well-read and thoughtful), could be the craftiest of the lot.

**Kate Kavanagh**

Neil Lee’s book can be obtained directly from the author (see *Newsletter* 83, p.44), and may be reprinted. Neil, and his Dandelion Club (Friends of LIP) is a regular supporter of the Llewelyn Birthday meeting and walk from East Chaldon on 13th August.



*Bookplate of Alyse Gregory, trimmed and full versions.*

## *The Book of Genesis*

*The Powys children were accustomed to Bible classes and the lessons read in their father's Anglican church, so would have been familiar, as were most English people of their time, with the Authorised Version of the Bible. Up to the twentieth century, but no longer, according to JCP in 'The Bible' in Pleasures of Literature, where he has hopes for the then new Bible Designed to be Read as Literature (1936, edited by Ernest Sutherland Bates – printed as if a novel or poetry, with helpful introductions and the less interesting parts left out) to encourage secular enjoyment of it as a masterpiece in its own right. This earlier essay, written for a 'libertarian' journal, is an anticipation.*

*The Freeman was edited by A. J. Nock from 1920 to 1924 – contributors included Mann, Russell, Sandburg among other famous names. The title was later revived for other different journals.*

*It's interesting to compare the three Powys 'takes' on Genesis – JCP seeing it romantically, as if Homer or Hardy; Llewelyn (in The Cradle of God, 1929) as a teasing mixture of iconoclasm, realism, anthropology and mythology; Theodore (in An Interpretation of Genesis, 1907) as a complex metaphysical message.*

*W. J. Keith's Ultimate Things: Christianity, Myth and the Powyses (The Powys Society, 2013) discusses their different approaches.*

**KK**

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### John Cowper Powys : The Book of Genesis The Freeman, July 11th 1923

The most beautiful book of the Bible is the first; and the particular kind of beauty which *Genesis* contains, the purest essence of poetic story-telling, is found at its noblest in a very few chapters. These are not the stories narrating the Fall of Man or the history of the Flood but the much more simple and human chapters which deal with those unequivocal people of the primitive desert, each one as clear cut and distinct as a picture by Rembrandt — Abraham, Isaac, Sarah, Hagar, Rebecca and Rachel.

When one reads again these deeply cut and gracious vignettes — brief epic poems of nomadic life — one experiences that same delicious shock of aesthetic joy as when after a long absence one returns to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These Hebrew 'epics in little' are different enough from the great Greek poems. They are in prose and they are very brief. But the fundamental secret of the epic style is there; and the revelation is borne in upon one again that it is in this 'epic' handling of life, rather than in anything lyric or dramatic, that one finds the essence of the profoundest poetry, and that this deepest essence of poetry is not subjective or impressionistic but objective and selective; something that attains the ideal by becoming representative of certain

universal and eternal aspects of man's life upon earth; something that concerns itself first and last with the mere "recurrent story" of men and women, of fathers and sons, of marriage, of eating and drinking, of concubinage, of flocks and herds, of birth, of old age, of the nostalgia for one's own country, and of the burying of one's own dead in one's own land.

All these selected aspects of man's life, under grandly simplified conditions, are caught up and thrown into relief, with the clear-cut distinctness of great rock-shadows upon burning desert-sand; thrown into relief and heightened under clear, pure, imaginative light-waves, that are at once shamelessly revealing and tremulous with a lovely, liberating romance. Just the significant details of common human life; nothing more than that — details arrested from the flowing of the great stream and recognized for what they are: the story, the events of the story, for better and for worse, of the days of the years of man's life upon the earth!

Few Homeric characters are more distinct and idiosyncratic than this figure of Abraham as he emerges upon the scene travelling, travelling, travelling, with his vast flocks and herds and camels and horses and mules and asses! There is the same curiously personal relation, not obsequious at all on Abraham's part, between him and the good God of his fathers, as existed between that other, Grecian wanderer and his goddess of wisdom. This inner understanding with his God gives to Abraham, just as it gave to Ulysses, a certain unconquerable confidence in his star which calms, sustains and comforts him to the last.

Longing for children and angry with the delays of his divine protector, Abraham takes to himself Hagar the Egyptian, one of his wife's slaves. Then ensues a tragicomic little episode. The slave, carrying now within her her master's child — and can one not see the sophisticated malice on that narrow Egyptian face! — mocked the ageing, childless queen of that heroic caravanserai, mocked her as only Egyptians can mock!

Fleeing in her pregnancy from the fury of the outraged sister-wife, it needed the most tender efforts of the agitated God of the tribe to bring her back and patch up some sort of reconciliation. He achieves this by promising that even now, old as she is, Sarah shall bear a son. At this announcement a strange wild laughter rings through that troubled tent. But the event takes place in its appointed time, and Isaac is born.

In her happiness and in her weakness the voice of Sarah now is pathetically changed: "And Sarah said, 'God hath made me to laugh, so that all who hear shall laugh with me.' And she said, 'Who would have said unto Abraham that Sarah should have given children suck? For I have born him a son in his old age.'"

The personality of Isaac never seems to have the vitality or tenacity of his father Abraham or his son Jacob. In many respects Isaac is the most tender and appealing of the three great figures. He never appears quite equal to the terrific tradition he has to carry forward. There is always something retiring and pensive and even a little helpless about him. With her own Ishmael at her side, beautiful and dangerous as a young panther, the jealous Egyptian peers out at this carefully nurtured old man's

child, whose face seems already careworn with a destiny too heavy for his strength; and the young panther beside her must needs fling his own bitter taunt at that solemn cradle. Therefore it came to pass that for the second time the bondwoman was cast forth; but "the thing was grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son."

Years went by, and Abraham still moved with his flocks and herds across the land. At last at Hebron in the land of Canaan among the children of Heth the aged Sarah died. "And Abraham stood up from before his dead and spake unto the children of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you; give me a possession of a burying place with you that I may bury my dead out of my sight." Noble and gracious, with that ancient courtesy of the desert, was the answer he received from the owner of the place he chose. "Nay, my lord, hear me. The field give I thee, and the cave that is therein, I give thee. In the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee. Bury thy dead."

At last the time drew near for Abraham himself to die: but as yet Isaac his son, a young man fond of roaming by himself in the fields at eventide, had no mate. The tent of Sarah remained empty and the young man mourned always for his mother. It was then that Abraham called to himself his faithful servant, "the eldest servant of his house," and made him put his hand under his thigh and swear that he would fetch, from his own far-off city in the country of Mesopotamia, a bride for the son of his old age.

The servant takes his master's camels, together with rich golden ornaments for the maid, and sets out upon his journey over the desert. He reaches Nahor at sunset, and then ensues that unique scene which like the meeting of Ulysses and Nausicaa, has fascinated the imagination of three thousand years. The young Rebekah has no moment of hesitation in obeying this miraculous call.

What girl

Now reads in her bosom as clear

As Rebekah read when she sate

At eve by the palm-shaded well ? \* [*can anyone identify this?*]

Mounted on one of Abraham's camels the maid is carried away to her unknown suitor, "a damsel very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her." The book tells how the gentle, pastoral Isaac made his way slowly across country to meet this strange young girl. "And Isaac went out to meditate in the fields at eventide and he lifted up his eyes and saw and behold the camels were coming. And Rebekah lifted up her eyes and when she saw Isaac she lighted off the camel. . . . And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent and took Rebekah; and she became his wife; and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

To these two were born at one birth the great red-haired hunter Esau and "the plain man Jacob." For some mysterious reason the meditative Isaac preferred his hunter-son; but the beautiful Rebekah preferred Jacob. It was she who put into Jacob's tenacious and acquisitive head the idea of stealing his father's blessing. It was she who cooked the savoury mess that was not the authentic venison "such as he

loved." It was she who put the skins of the kids of the goats upon Jacob's hands and upon the smooth of his neck.

The story reads like one of those concentrated tragic incidents in Mr. Hardy's Wessex ; for loud and great was the pitiful outcry that filled the tent from the deep heart of the elder of these Hebrew Gemini when he knelt before the old man and found his blessing stolen; loud and exceeding bitter was his cry: "Bless me, even me also, O my father!"

The successful one in this unscrupulous deception remains in what follows the most obstinate and idiosyncratic of all the three great patriarchs. Not for nothing did the Lord his God change his name to Israel; for in this "plain man who lived in tents" there burned the fiery flame of the very heart of all the Jewish race, their piety, their heroism, their cunning, their indomitable purpose. Jacob's character reveals itself bit by bit as the story proceeds, until the least wrinkle upon his lean, secretive, passionate face limns itself before us. How fiercely he snatches, how patiently he pursues, how obstinately he holds, this tenacious and crafty son of Isaac! the lover of "savoury meats" and "eventide meditations."

He also went to the city of Nahor in the country of Mesopotamia, to find himself a mate from his father's people. It was on his journey thither that as he lay one night with stones for his pillow he saw the vision of "Jacob's ladder," a ladder ascending up from that stony desert, even to where the great Arabian-named stars looked down upon the dark sands! What thoughts must have passed through that calculating, passionate, one-track brain, under its white turban, to turn the stones of such a solitude into a great staircase of angels! And then his meeting with Rachel by *her* well, Rachel his cousin, the daughter of Rebekah's brother, that crafty Syrian! As with some of those deep and narrow countrymen of Mr. Hardy, Jacob's amorous propensities were as intense and unswerving as his avarice for paternal and divine benedictions and his greed for flocks of woolly sheep! "And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother" — the girl and the sheep together! — "that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flocks of Laban his mother's brother."

There, under the exacting and tricky Laban, he served his seven years as sheepman. For this, fooled by the Syrian, he received the elder daughter Leah in place of the one upon whom he had set his heart. "Leah was tender-eyed but Rachel was beautiful and well-favoured; and Jacob loved Rachel." For seven more years therefore, he served the man for Rachel. At last with both women and all the children he had had by Leah, and with Joseph his one child by Rachel, and with an enormous percentage of the flocks — the Lord helping him in that matter — he set out to return to the land of Canaan. His one fixed idea now was to propitiate his formidable brother Esau; and this — by the aid of his flocks — he succeeded in doing. What a re-encounter between those two! With what a sublimely deprecatory gesture and low bowing of that sly old shepherd's head does he indicate to the bewildered warlike

sheik how the Lord has blessed him! "And Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell upon his neck and kissed him and they wept. And he lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children whom God has graciously given thy servant."

But one prefers to take leave of Jacob in one of those strange, desperate moments when his sublime egoism was struggling for something less tangible than women or children or sheep. "And Jacob was left alone: and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day ... and he said, Let me go for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob ... and he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob but Israel, for as a prince hast thou power with God and with man and hast prevailed ... and he blessed him there."

With the passing of Jacob, the grander, simpler elements of poetic beauty disappear from the biblical narrative. Some of the prophets are inspiring and terrific, some of the kings are tragic and appealing; but never again returns, no, not to the last page of Holy Writ, that rare pastoral romance, that unequalled human dignity, such as lies like the desert-scented presence of some infinite Arabian dawn, coming up over rocks and tents and palm-trees and well-waters, upon the sunburnt foreheads and veiled faces of those men and women of the old time, whose descendants have been as the sands of the sea for multitude.

**John Cowper Powys**

*Llewelyn's Genesis*  
[*The Cradle of God*, pp 9-10]

... Did they feel no misgivings other than craven fear when the voice of Esau broke from the shadowed interior 'with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father'? It is over, cancelled, forgotten in the outer darkness of oblivion. The bones of the duped father lie close to the bones of the designing son, the hands that blessed and the head that received the blessing, equal now, equal for all time, shut away from the brightness of the sunshine as it falls on olive-ward and vineyard.

If Jacob may be described as the most unscrupulous of the three fathers, he was also, without doubt, the most interesting. His story presents us with a lively illustration of how success may be won in this world, when subtlety is added to an unswerving concentration of purpose. The man was a veritable jackdaw for knavery. None knew better how to pull wool over the eyes of others. He had a leaping ambition. He was scarce out of the womb before he was observed by the midwife to catch hold of the foot of his twin brother, as though harbouring already in his embryonic skull, before the bone of it even had properly grown over, a plan for laying Esau by the heels, which, indeed, as the years passed, he did to a good



purpose. To a pretty tune he fooled him over the matter of "that same red pottage," and we have already seen how he overreached him with regard to their father's blessing.

It was during his journey to his relations in Mesopotamia that it first became clear that he had inherited the wild anthropomorphism of his grandfather. Not only was he a practical opportunist, but his head, apparently, was rioting with the belief that the creator of the universe, the inventor of the camel, of the palm tree, and of the pismires, had selected him, and him alone, for the bestowal of especial favours. It was a madness that redeems him. What momentous monomania was this, that could cause a quick-change mountebank, fleeing from justice, to dream, as he laid his head on the stones of the bare hillside, that he saw a ladder whose top reached to heaven? Then it was that the man became cognizant of a great destiny. To his mind there was nothing incongruous in the audacity of his vision. That such an escalator concurred with the secret yearning of his soul we can hardly doubt. 'This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' In the early morning, still under the influence of his unchecked monolatry, he got up and raised the stone that he had used for a pillow, setting it on end and pouring olive oil upon it as a kind of consecration. He then continued on his way, knowing full well in his heart that the covenant God had made with his grandfather had once more been confirmed.

Like many another man of fierce purpose Jacob was capable of deep affection in his family life. The love he bore for Rachel and for Joseph and for Benjamin was genuine and profound. There still hangs over his first meeting with Rachel a romantic grace. Anyone acquainted with the customs of the East can well envisage the scene, the dusky-featured, long-robed men, the three flocks of fat-tailed sheep lying about on the dry ground scattered over with sheep's excrement, the sidestones of the trough shining from the grease of the ragged fleeces, the bright sunshine, and the young stranger, his mind freed at last of all dangerous thoughts, drawing the maiden to his arms to kiss her, the destined mother of millions!

### T. F. Powys: *An Interpretation of Genesis* (1907)

[pages 61-67 in 1929 edition; 'Zetetes' is 'The Seeker']

#### THE LAWGIVER OF ISRAEL

... In the day of Abraham the feeling of separation was at its height, and thus Abraham sent for a wife for his son from his own nation.

#### ZETETES

The maid that desireth to be a mother, she is the true wife for a man, and if he ask her to come to him she will come, though it be to the uttermost part of the earth.

If a man say unto her, 'Wilt thou go with me?' she will say, 'I will go.'

Fair to look upon is the true woman, with a beauty not of darkness but of light.

## THE LAWGIVER OF ISRAEL

We come from Abraham to Isaac even before Abraham's end came, for we follow the story of the Truth in man, and we come to words of deep meaning for man.

The poet telleth the story in words that all may read, but I tell it only to those that are old enough to understand, and within this thought that I now unfold unto you lieth the secret of the life of man. Rebekah signifieth the woman, the mother of man. And the woman knew that from her womb should come two children.

'And the one people shall be stronger than the other people ; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.' Man had begun to read the will of the Truth in him.

In the time of Adam Cain ruled his brother Abel, but now the elder shall serve the younger. 'And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel ; and his name was called Jacob.' The first child is strong and mighty ; from the strength and cunning of the beast he came, and he neareth his end.

The second child is weak, for he is a babe and beginneth to live. The father Isaac loved the first child because he was the fullest grown, and the highest type of animal upon the earth; the strength and wisdom of all animal life is perfected in him, he is the end and fullest utterance of that life. The mother loveth the younger child, because he is a nursling in her bosom, and verily the mother doth well to will life for this child, for in this child is the true seed. The red pottage that Jacob sold to Esau is the life of the body, and the red blood is the portion of Esau, but the birthright belongeth unto the younger child.

## ZETETES

What of this birthright ?

## THE LAWGIVER OF ISRAEL

The birthright is the Truth in man that the elder son despised, it is the true seed promised to Abraham.

The first separation or out-growing was from beast to man, and the second is from man to the Truth. The beast hath an end, and man hath an end, but Truth hath eternal life. In every man the elder and the younger child dwelleth, and man loveth the elder, but the woman in man loveth the younger. The red pottage, the flesh and the blood, is the portion of the elder ; to the younger child the birthright of the Father belongeth. The elder son is the flesh and blood, the body and desire of man ; man knoweth him, but the younger son man doth not know. Already the elder son beginneth to serve the younger, and the time will come when the elder son shall leave the younger and depart from him.

## ZETETES

Thy words are hard to read and few shall understand them, for the elder son is still

strong in man, and man loveth him even as Isaac loved Esau.

#### THE LAWGIVER OF ISRAEL

The darkness that was in Abraham passed into Isaac his son ; the darkness Abraham had not quenched, for he knew not how to bring light to it. [...] Come in unto thine own soul, O man, so that Truth may be born from thee; from thyself bring forth the son that hath life, and from the man let the younger son be born.

‘And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great.’ The poet that wrote this story had the elder son strong in him. And indeed who would have read his writings had he not given the elder child place ?

It is well that we should follow the life of the elder son here in this book, so that we may learn how the elder son cometh to an end. Toward the close of the book of man the elder son shall serve the younger, and man shall know that in the younger the Truth is.

But now the younger son is but a babe and the joy of man is with the elder.

#### ZETETES

Rebekah is the Mother and Isaac is man. And man called his elder son to him and said, ‘ Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death; let me rejoice once more in my old age, that my soul may bless thee before I die.’ The Mother called the second son, for she knew that in that son was the true seed, and she bade her younger son take the blessing from the elder.

#### THE LAWGIVER OF ISRAEL

Even because man will not know, and will not see the Truth that is blessed, so he bringeth deception upon himself.

The child that existeth only in thought must needs wear the flesh and blood, yea and the rough skin of the elder brother, or ever man will bless him. And the younger child said unto the Mother, ‘ Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man.’

The younger child is invisible to man, man is blind and cannot see, man is old, and the death of man is upon him. Man desired to bless the elder child, but he needs must bless the younger. [...] Within the life of the elder is the younger child to whom all these blessings belong, but not as the human father intendeth belong these blessings unto the child; that which is valuable to man hath no value to the son of man, for the son of man valueth the Truth alone. Thus man blessed the child that he knew not and believed that he blessed the elder that he knew.

#### ZETETES

The sympathy of man is with the elder child, and to the first-born the poet would draw man’s love. The poet knew that man loved the elder and despised the younger, and within the poet the elder child was the stronger.

## THE LAWGIVER OF ISRAEL

When the younger child is grown the elder shall serve him, and shall desire to do him service. The elder child shall keep only to himself that which is his dominion upon the earth; the fulness of the life in the body, that is the dominion of the elder son, and to the elder son it is said, 'That thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck.' By his own death shall the elder son break the yoke of his brother. When the body shall end, the body shall be released from itself, yea, and from the soul that hath dominion over it.

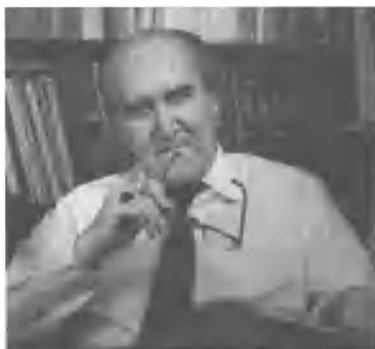
The day will come when the elder son shall will his own destruction. That day is not yet, for the Truth is but young in man, and man knoweth not that the second child is the true son of man. The woman knew, and the woman layeth down her life for man; she knoweth that a child shall be born of her that shall live, and the desire of the mother is to this child, and she maketh the father to bless whom he would not bless.

## ZETETES

According to the story Jacob is sent to take a wife from his own people.

'And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran,' and because the sun was set Jacob laid down to rest, and put the stones of that place under his head for a pillow, and Jacob dreamed a dream. In his dream he saw a ladder set up toward heaven, 'And, behold, the Truth stood above it.' Before this night Jacob had not taken his fathers' god to be his god. But this night, in the midst of the lonely place, thought was with him, and he knew that a change had come over him. As the smoke of a hollow mountain showeth that the earth is filled with fire, so Jacob's dream showeth that thought was within him. ...

*See W. J. Keith's Ultimate Things (pp 90-93). NB: Theodore and Violet's two sons were born in 1906 and 1909.*



*Miklós Szentkuthy*

# Powys, Szentkuthy, and Quivering Pigeons

Nicholas Birns

*Extracts from 'Pigeon-Quivering Test Idols: John Cowper Powys & Miklós Szentkuthy', in Hyperion, On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VIII, No. 1 (spring 2014), pages 71–89.*

Scholars of the British novelist and essayist John Cowper Powys (1872–1963) have always debated whether or not he was a modernist; whether his emphasis on unusual states of consciousness and breaking taboos put him into the league of Gide, Joyce, Lawrence, or Woolf, or whether his hefty, multiplot novels remained in Victorian formal confines albeit with very changed perspective and subject matter.

John Cowper Powys did not fully develop as a writer until he was in his fifties and in the United States, where he spent many years living, traveling, and lecturing. In the 1920s, he began a remarkable series of novels that are among the most convulsive and mighty to come out of the twentieth century – *Wolf Solent* (1929), *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), *Weymouth Sands* (1933). He also wrote much else, including literary criticism and massive books such as *The Complex Vision* (1920), *In Defence of Sensuality* and *The Art of Happiness* (1935), all of which hovered in a space between metaphysics and self-improvement. Powys's output is so prodigious, and the space allotted for him in canonical modernism so small, that his reputation is still being assessed. And in an era that prized international recognition, Powys was not widely known outside the English-speaking world. There was however one reader who found Powys, in a country far different from England in tongue and topography, Miklós Szentkuthy (1908–1988), who was over thirty years younger than Powys, had a similarly ambitious, multifaceted, and inevitably misunderstood career.

Szentkuthy first came to fame in the mid-1930s with *Prae*, his answer to Joycean modernism, and an aphoristic philosophical book, *Towards The One And Only Metaphor*. He then began the *St. Orpheus Breviary*, his life's work, a metahistorical roman *fleuve*. Communist oppression, though, meant that this work had to be interrupted, as Szentkuthy (who was deeply learned about music, and had a musical dimension to his writing possessed by few of his more world-renowned literary contemporaries) turned largely to novels and biographical 'fantasias' about composers. It was only in the 1970s that he returned to his *magnum opus*, which he managed barely to finish before he died.

Szentkuthy, rigorous and lyrical where Powys was often multifarious and sensate, living under successive state oppressors while Powys enjoyed the ambiguities of freedom, was nonetheless one of Powys's truest readers. In scrutinizing this act of reading, we can see how author and reader can make a connection not only in the time of their own living but through the alternate 'times' of history and the imagination; that it is not just a connection between isolated geniuses but between the skeins of implications that gifted writers gather around them.

★

It is Powys's novel *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932) that is strategically mentioned in Szentkuthy's *oeuvre*. Szentkuthy read the book in the early spring of 1934 and heavily underlined and marked his copy. Although Szentkuthy mentions Powys several times throughout *Towards the One & Only Metaphor*, the key Powys reference occurs very early on in 'Black Renaissance', the second 'historical' book of the *St. Orpheus Breviary*. Szentkuthy begins the book by describing the life of St. Dunstan, the principal spiritual leader and power-broker of tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England. Dunstan received a religious upbringing in Glastonbury, by Celtic Benedictine monks who had fled from Ireland, and what is decisive (for both Dunstan and Powys) is the fusion of old Irish pagan myths, old Judaic and early Christian legends, and the kaleidoscopic pantheon of the early or imperial Romans.

In that Christianity there was more paganism than people might imagine, but there was also more Christianity (nonetheless) than people imagine. On the left there stand Stonehenge's gigantic prehistoric altar or temple stones – stormy bones and dissection of the sky, as Constable portrayed them in 1836 – and on the right, Roman temples with Greek orders in which Christians have already said mass.

Szentkuthy's Dunstan is very much a Powysian Dunstan. Szentkuthy concedes that Dunstan was a conventionally, though brilliantly, pious Christian – perhaps revealed to Szentkuthy through the Dunstan of Andrew Lang's *Book of Saints and Heroes*, read frequently by the young in the early twentieth century – diluted by his enemies with pagan and occult tendencies. The Dunstan presented in 'Black Renaissance' is more like Walter Pater's Denys D'Auxerre from *Imaginary Portraits* than anybody who actually existed in the tenth-century English church. Szentkuthy's portrait is one of mediality – Dunstan is a Christian with pagan aspects.

One can see Szentkuthy standing between two extremes of modernist attitudes towards religion: the reaffirmation of Christian tradition made by T. S. Eliot, and the utter rejection of it by D. H. Lawrence. Powys might have offered to the Hungarian writer an example of how to dwell innovatively between these opposites.

Though Powys, like Lawrence, was a vitalist, a channeler of bodily energies, and an erotic visionary, he was, though not a Christian, not exactly not a Christian either. The son of a country parson, he retained respect for the religion even if he did not practice it, preferring the ecstatic if eccentric and minute visions often experienced in his fiction. Whereas Lawrence, in the phrase of the critic Gladys Lebolt, positioned himself as "the true redeemer" – the false one being Christ – Powys left possibilities for redemption clouded, in the ether. In *The Complex Vision* (1920) Powys, typically, endorses a spiritual, affective redemption in which Christianity is present but placed at one remove, quoting Blake's: "*And throughout all eternity, I forgive you: you forgive me ...*"

★

As with Powys, Szentkuthy was not totally at home in canonical Modernism, or at least the bromides about time and consciousness that clustered around writers such

as Proust and Woolf. 'Time as a disease' indicates the lack of a solution in the physical world for human deficiencies. Yet the recognition of disease is not an end in and of itself, it is also a kind of inverse foundation for belief; once the worldly category of time is thought of as a disease, then and only then can a spiritual alternative be posited.

The physical, though, for these two writers, is not just inert, Cartesian: it is vividly, passionately sexual. This is a surprise since the overt writerly sexualities of the two men might seem closer to the pallid and eviscerated Eliot than the robust and licentious Lawrence; they are not titillating or aphrodisiac, proffer no gospel of erotic liberation. Both, though, are intensely sexual, and see Eros as a way both to manifest interest in phenomena outside them and to offset the morbid and domineering tendencies that they see in themselves, and that, in a sense, they have to have to be writers. Thus it is important that Szentkuthy, in Powys's 1937 novel *Morwyn*, wrote "*exactly Me*" in the margin of the passage beginning

I decided that what the human race meant by love was totally unknown to me. I decided that I possessed the gift, or the curse if you like, of pity, to an abnormal degree; but of pity, you must remember ... for physical rather than for mental suffering ...

This sensibility – of a distant, potentially manipulative intellectuality that is seismically dissatisfied with its limitations, so much wishes to be empathetic and loving that it perhaps in a weird way ends up being so, is shared by the two writers.

Both cultivate a dandyism, as a mode for enjoyment of life or vice versa, halfway between Wilde and Lawrence, or, alternately, one can see Powys as a Huysmans gone west, aired out, leavened by the mountains and values of the Celtic fringe, and Szentkuthy as a Huysmans gone east, crossing the old Holy Roman realm, and being exposed to the lacerating winds of the Hungarian plain. In particular, the sexuality in both men, though different in its articulation – Powys much more sensory, Szentkuthy more intellectual – is analogous. It is poised between the heterosexual and the homosexual. It certainly more hetero than homo in expression – Powys was not a "homosexual" in any literal way, and Szentkuthy was decidedly heterosexual, although in an idiosyncratic fashion, both more spirited and more analytical than the norm – but it is heterosexuality informed by the transgressiveness, the brio, the scorned extravagance of the queer. Unlike the always purportedly hyper-macho Lawrence, Powys and Szentkuthy admit this in their prose, and the tension of the overtly unsayable is replaced by a luxuriance of the still-not-quite articulable.

★

What Szentkuthy saw in *A Glastonbury Romance* is perhaps a 'black medievalism,' a sense of the resonance of the Middle Ages in the presence that was not nostalgic or religious, melodramatic or fantastic, but was interested in stubborn, illicit continuities of eccentricity.

Szentkuthy – born with the German name Pfisterer – and Powys – an Englishman

bearing a Welsh surname who always felt an affinity with Welsh legend and moved to Wales in his old age – both operated slightly outside of essentialist national identity. The very word Wales – which is a Germanic name, meaning, “foreigner”, the Welsh word for Wales is “Cymru” – comes from the same root that gave us “Wallachia” (a region of Romania near to Hungary) and the “Olasz” in “Olaszország”, the Hungarian word for Italy). In one of the Powys books that Szentkuthy most heavily underlined, *Obstinate Cymric*, next to “Wales is the natural cross-road between Past and Future ...”, Szentkuthy wrote “P”.

The German-Hungarian-Mitteleuropäisch-Italophile Szentkuthy was familiar with the overlay of adjacent nationalities as signifiers of overlapping modes of consciousness fundamentally different, and so was Powys, Anglo-Welsh-American that he was. The two writers were both immersed in what I have termed, in my 2013 monograph of that name, “barbarian memory”, a sense of the interruption of European history by waves of barbarian invaders that is nonetheless not atavistic or racist, and insists on continuity. Powys and Szentkuthy each, in their own way, add to this an undercurrent of often occult religiosity. This expressed itself very differently: Powys was above all a ‘nature-writer’, participating in a characteristically English tradition of minute observation of particular experienced landscapes, whereas Szentkuthy was drawn to art, architecture, and opera, what Powys would call “life-illusions”.

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Szentkuthy wrote under censorship, and under fear of state silencing and repression; Powys was far freer to express himself, yet there was another kind of censorship in his case: of neglect, of misunderstanding, of seldom reaching beyond a circle of dedicated readers. Both writers avoided the fads and conveniences of the times. Powys (unlike fellow elementalists like Yeats and Lawrence) never came close to fascism, and Szentkuthy lived under both fascism and Communism but never came near either of them.

In an era when writers were often lauded for their contact – even if it was aversive contact – with extreme ideologies, these two writers abstained from that inverse glamour. Equally, although they were both fundamentally modernists in technique, they abstained from the default avant-gardism that by the mid-twentieth century had become too easy a stance, while also refusing to act as if modernism had never happened at all.

Both writers admire Joyce, but refuse to take him as gospel; they see an element of factitiousness in his work. In one sense they were asking for more genuine innovation in art than Joyce was giving them; in another, they were protesting against the affirmation of disruptive, unconventional techniques for their own sake. This is, again, a common viewpoint in the twenty-first century, but it is easy to have such a viewpoint now. It was not in the twentieth century, and Powys and Szentkuthy were then, as so often, against the grain.



It is interesting that Szentkuthy, a historicist and medievalist au fond, refers to *A Glastonbury Romance* and not to Powys's later medieval historical novels, *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius* (1949), both of which are actually set in the past, in the manner of Szentkuthy's treatment of Dunstan. It is, though, in a sense, advantageous that the 1930s novels and not *Owen* or *Porius* were the nodal Powys works for Szentkuthy, as Powys is not really a historical novelist. He uses history as a vehicle for consciousness, as another channel, another dimension, to make sure we are not trapped in a monolinear present. He is not out to vindicate or to immerse himself in history as such, and Szentkuthy, despite his inherently far greater interest in and knowledge of history, followed him in this perceptual respect.

Szentkuthy and Powys, in a sense, deliberately chose unpopularity because they refused to have anything to do with the kinds of power – political, stylistic, encyclopedic, and erotic – that were common coin in the literary worlds of the twentieth century. Both writers, though, were unafraid of ideas, of exposition, of a discursivity that a modernist century so conscious of the image often seemed to forsake. It could indeed be that Powys's nonfiction – essayistic, speculative books such as *A Complex Vision* – that seem more premonitory of the *Breviary* than Powys's novels in general, which are filled, Victorian-style, with multiplot trajectories, and vividly sketched, quirky, interlocking characters in fully realized physical environments. Szentkuthy is far likelier to take famous people from history and animate them, have them wander among the detritus of time and beauty, and muse metaphysically, phantoms in a layered, temporal diorama: his fiction is far less peopled, far more abstract.

Hungary was converted to Christianity around the year 1000, and Szentkuthy in the *Breviary* is perennially conscious of Hungary as bursting into the middle of Europe, into the middle of history, from inchoate and Asian origins, placed between the Byzantine and the Western, the pagan and the Christian, the ancient and the modern. Dunstan is thus, in his tenth-century condition, a crypto-Hungarian.

But Dunstan is something more personal; he is a crypto-Szentkuthy. Szentkuthy was born in 1908; Dunstan, from all sources available to us, almost exactly 1000 years earlier, in 909. Dunstan served as a mirror, an analogue, through which Szentkuthy could depict himself. This interest in both self-revelation and self-occultation, of parading and hiding, is also there in the Powys brothers who wrote autographically yet were men of fierce secrets, who wrote in voices unmistakably their own but were always oriented to the vistas they witnessed and created. Szentkuthy and the Powyses aired out the self without being egotistical. They let the world know they were there not to impress or be aggressive but to share rare experiences they thought, they trusted, would be of value to others.

**Nicholas Birns**

*The complete essay can be read online, via Hyperion.*

## Iain Sinclair and JCP

*This essay by Iain Sinclair is an extract from the new edition of his book, Suicide Bridge, a sequence of poems and prose essays containing material written between 1973 and 1978, on the theme of the relationship between myth and place, based on Blake's 'Jerusalem'. It occurs in Book Two, 'Westering'. Suicide Bridge (subtitled 'A Book of the Furies, A Myth of the South and East') was first published by Sinclair's Albion Village Press in 1979, reissued, with Lud Heat, by Granta in 2002, and reissued again in a completely new edition by Skylight Press in 2013. The edition of Suicide Bridge, published by Skylight Press, incorporates fragments, photos, and articles left out of the first 1979 edition including this essay on JCP.*

*The essay was probably written around the same time as another quirky and visceral piece by Sinclair on JCP, 'Earth Ankh Autumn', concerning his visit to Blaenau Ffestiniog, in October 1973, which was commissioned by Jeff Kwintner. (See The Powys Society Newsletter 58 (July 2006): they can helpfully be read together.) Sinclair has frequently described his first meeting with Jeff, which occurred in the early 1970s, but the best and most detailed account can be found in a book-length interview with Sinclair, conducted by Kevin Jackson, called 'The Verbals', published by Worple Press in 2002. In the interview Sinclair describes how one day returning home he found Jeff already inside his house, waiting for him, and looking at his books. Jeff had come in search of the author of Kodak Mantra Diaries (1971), in which Sinclair describes Allen Ginsberg's visit to London in 1967.*

*This book was a significant influence on Jeff: Sinclair's Albion Village Press became the inspiration for Jeff's Village Press. 'Are you interested in John Cowper Powys', asked Jeff. 'Well yes, reasonably' replied the startled Sinclair. 'You must be on the payroll', said Jeff, 'Turn up tomorrow to our office in King's Road and consider yourself on the firm.' Sinclair was immediately introduced to Jeff's team: 'dowsers, ley line freaks, jugglers, acupuncturists, nutters and visionaries of every kind ... who were going to reinvent the culture ...'*

*Later Jeff loaned Sinclair a red Ferrari and provided him with instructions to visit Wales. Other projects with Jeff included taking photographs of the ancient sacred sites of England which were exhibited in Jeff's Village Bookshop in Regent Street, where he also proudly displayed the bust of JCP made by Oloff de Wet. Jackson's book has some wonderful contemporary images of Jeff's assembled team including an amazing photograph of Jeff himself, looking very animated, and inspiring his staff in the bookshop with his belief in the possibility of a new counter culture. Sinclair's essays on JCP are the direct result of Jeff's vision of what Sinclair calls his 'New Age set-up'. This extract from Suicide Bridge is reproduced here with the kind permission of Skylight Press.*

**Chris Thomas**

*Iain Sinclair : John Cowper Powys, Victim of the West*

*'Aspirin, wild violets & iron'*

The Wessex of Powys is not the Wessex of Hardy, and it does not operate within the same temporal ocean. Hardy's tales are fossil vertebrae printed on the shell of Powys, stone skeletons within his meat; firmer, barer, not so vast, rushing, weird, and jokey. The hook of Hardy is austere, his hunger harpoons the pleasure principle. Powys does not possess and he does not punish.

Is it even the same ground? The secret forces that move between their chosen sites are recognised by both men. Hardy's puppets are struck down by them, stopped: too thin to stand against. Powys knew the serpent beneath the earth, that the force of earth-magnetism was always active: Cerne Abbas, Chesil Beach, Stonehenge. What was it? It related to moments of ecstasy and half-conscious ceremonial re-enactments. But there is a clownish, wordy, novel-scribbling, man-of-letters quality that will not be shaken off. Pieces of self are evenly distributed among male and female characters, deformed, made whole, beast and rock. Powys is speaking of the power of projection. Will *vs* Time.

He had located though he did not spell it out, the track of the Ancestral Beast, journeying and questing. The Run of the Hare, the Wolf Loop, the Leap of Salmon Father, now quantified as 'Lines of Force', 'Ley Lines', significant alignments. It is this chart, burnt in deep bone, that he goes over, moving through the rhythms of the time swell, activating, affirming, agitating in excited prose and, finally, so I believe, decaying, holding back, stopping short.

For Powys, as an initiate, it was a long process of becoming – of being made, of making himself – ready. Solitary journeys, bleak cottages, exile, performance. Grasping the wand or stick, undergoing surgery, exquisite pain. Knife, fear. Repressed, sadistic urges. Visions of animals in cages. Against the cult of vivisection. A prophet made gaunt with travel, with essays and theatres and sermons given against diminishing quanta of time, while the tongue thickened to block his mouth and teeth fell on the desk. He was polished and refined by privation. The word-cellar floods under him. He did not know who. He did not know *what*. And that is true initiation. The Solitary Giant looking tall on his mountain.

And then, when it seems to be too late, a rush, a frenzy, an amazed and amazing production of enormous texts, heretical bibles, linked sequences, channellings of place: *Maiden Castle*, *Weymouth Sands*, *A Glastonbury Romance*, *Atlantis*. Voices of time, reversed vortices, medieval groans and clanks. Poems of wood and stone, songs of earthworm. The tenderly eroticised consciousness of pondweed. So many elements competing for his love. And now it is against gravity, retreating into Wales, deeper, higher, against the Chinese mountains, glacial lakes and slate slopes of Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Things happen. When this process is begun it is a literal alchemy meaning that the author repeats, he goes over, he sits in solitude. He works it, beats out the shape; huddled in a winter coat. Goatman. Changeling. Parson's son. Serving what purpose,

which gods? The sheer bulk, the volume of it, his task.

He is transformed, bathed in thin light. He appears as a sage, a visionary. He leaks light on demand. They speak of him, the clods, as a saint, a holy man stitched from humours. He spends his late days walking behind the house, along the ridges of the hill, backtracking. He does not write directly about where he is – but where he was. He goes back through the curtains, a sequence of misty dissolves. He is often a pace or two behind himself (those brilliant projections). He is dragged along as summoned events begin to manifest. The details of biography, the small revenges, are not important. But it is this Miltonic contest, the wrestling of angels (ideal and punished selves) that releases a disembodied reality and makes it fly: *conflict*.

It builds, it springs, it thirsts towards violent and active relief. The skull-crunching blow on Glastonbury Tor stalled forever by some failure of nerve: the arcing fountain of blood pumping into the sky with each beat of the heart. *It does not happen*, is battened down, denied. Motors of revenging bodily impulses vibrate and then become still. They calcify. Salty lusts are cupped and swallowed with muddy water.

There is so much left undone that the hot texts spill on far beyond personal death. There had to be doppelgängers long before the obituary date is confirmed in the bibliographies, as when for example Powys appeared before Dreiser (when he was somewhere else entirely). Or the buried sage, now one of those figures available in tin roofed shelters to spiritualist séances: clots of quivering ill-defined matter spewing through the gauzy veils. Smoke in Indian travesty smelling of sulphur. The ghost writer raps on tables like a demented woodpecker.

This is not the cosmic frontier trail of the high ones, Blake, Milton, Shakespeare – whose works he devours, though they are too tidal and deep for any single lifetime. The process continues for aeons after death. Blake revises Milton, Keats absorbs Shakespeare. Powys is not of this company. Nobody is capable of allowing himself or herself to be possessed and therefore remade by the totality of this cycle of gigantic prose fabulations. They complete themselves.

When he was gone worshippers paid their respects, the various Wilsons and Wilson Knights. Like Quakers in whitewashed chapels in their gloves and coats. Waiting for the flare of posthumous enlightenment. He is reissued, remembered, cultified. Presented for a season among the bronzed fittings and dressed windows of Regent Street in London's West End. The pools of red-gold carp. And those English places continue to speak through him. 'He enjoyed', so it is said, 'the process of temptation itself and more than he could possibly have enjoyed any fruition of desire.' Amen. Indeed. Just so.

*Iain Sinclair presented a talk on JCP at The Powys Society Conference at Millfield School in 2002: 'Powys, Place and the White Lines on Hackney Marshes' (See The Powys Journal XIII, 2003).*

*An article by Paul Roberts, 'Jeff Kwintner and the Village Bookshop', can be found at <http://fashiontribefootnotes.blogspot.co.uk/>*

CT

*Patrick Quigley: Reigniting Spiritual Energies*  
*Iain Sinclair's Psycho-Geography*

*Blake's London: The Topographic Sublime* (London: Swedenborg Archive No 1, £5.95);  
*Swimming to Heaven: The Lost Rivers of London* (London: Swedenborg Archive No 2.  
£5.95); *Our Unknown Everywhere: Arthur Machen as Presence* (Ceredigion: Three  
Imposters, £10.00)

If John Cowper Powys ever contemplated writing a novel set in London the protagonist would be something like Iain Sinclair. He takes long walks to places avoided by the majority of citizens, studies the city with the intensity of a psychic detective as he invokes dead or obscure writers, mapping hidden connections between the present and the past. He enriches our view of the ordinary through the richness of his prose and the range of his reading. Sinclair, like John Cowper, is a devourer of literature – he was for many years a dealer in second-hand books and appears to have read everything. He is an intense speaker whose digressions remind one of Powys as he circles his topic, peeling away layers of meanings to entertain and enlighten the audience. Sinclair is a Welsh immigrant who explores layers of London history beneath the walls and surfaces of contemporary development. He loves remnants of the past – a disused doorway, a feature from a demolished building, an underground river beneath concrete and tarmac.

Sinclair's books are densely packed with stories, allusions, topographical descriptions and autobiographical anecdotes that cross the porous border between fact and fiction. He has featured as a character in Michael Moorcock's graphic novel, *Multiverse*, and in Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* where he appears as a time-travelling commuter who makes sudden appearances in London throughout the ages.

Sinclair is one of the leading exponents of Psycho-Geography in which writers and artists explore the psychic connections of place. Another writer in this vein, Will Self, filled two volumes with his perambulations, including a walk from Shepperton to the USA to commemorate his mentor, J. G. Ballard, also a major influence on Sinclair. There is nothing new in this – the Celts developed a story-telling tradition around the naming of places. James Joyce almost perfected the art in *Ulysses* where the streets of Dublin are delineated as carefully as the characters. A century ago the Powys family were deeply aware of the power residing in landscape. Powysians have a keen sense of the importance of walking, in the annual commemoration of Llewelyn in Dorset and in visits to places connected with the family.

The Swedenborg books and the Machen booklet are based on lectures given in London between 2007 and 2013. The subjects are diverse but similar in tone and treatment. William Blake recurs as a presiding genius of London, creating 'Jerusalem' in Stepney & the 'Isle of Leutha's Dogs'. At times the lectures seem to be about everything except Blake, but the writers quoted share similar mythic visions – Alan Ginsberg, George Barker, Aidan Andrew Dun and a host of others. A reference to the

poet, Charles Olson: 'You take what has been story and fold it back into legend' can be applied with ease to the Powys brothers.

In *Our Unknown Everywhere*, Arthur Machen as Presence, Sinclair has an account of meeting Jeff Kwintner in the 1970s. One evening Sinclair returned home to find: 'a man who'd bluffed his way through the door with an unlikely tale of how he wanted to talk to me, urgently, with a project to reignite the spiritual energies of London. He was sitting comfortably in my room, going through the books ... "Do you like John Cowper Powys?" I jumped back. I had a few Powys titles within reach, so this was good. He was convinced.' Kwintner hired Sinclair to work for his new venture, Village Press. 'Powys would be the titular spirit for a spanking new bronze-and-pale-wood flagship shop on Regent Street. With Japanese fishpond, Powys bust, portraits.' There is much to interest Powys Society members here, including an entertaining visit to the former Powys bookshop of Francis Powys in Hastings, now Albion Books and dealing in fantasy and New Age. 'The contents of the shop are so compacted, stuck together, that it feels like broaching a single fat book, made of all books.'

Arthur Machen is a different sort of presence; he has a reputation as a writer of supernatural fiction – *The Great God Pan*, *The White People* etc., and his tale 'The Bowmen' – the basis of the legend of the Angel of Mons. Sinclair uses the pages of Machen's memoir, *The London Adventure*, to evoke a literary outsider who remains, for this reader, a pale and ghostly one. \*

*Blake's London* and *Swimming to Heaven* are two matching hardbacks with decorated paper dust-jackets, beautiful to look at, pleasing to hold and read. Each lecture is supplemented with a section of questions and answers which amplify the texts. The books are sure to become collectors' items as will *Our Unknown Everywhere*, a beautifully-produced booklet with card covers, published by Three Imposters, a Welsh company dedicated to republishing Machen, in an edition of three hundred and fifty numbered copies.

Reading Sinclair is like a long train journey with a companion who tells story after story. The journey passes so quickly that you regret arriving at your destination and wish you could start over again. With these beautiful productions you can.

**Patrick Quigley**

\* See Newsletter 66 (March 2009) for obituaries of Janet Pollock, daughter of Arthur Machen. Patrick Quigley, author of a Life of Casimir Markievitz, is now working on the lives of the Gore-Booth sisters, Constance (Countess Markievitz) and Eva, Sisters against the Empire. He has discovered an unknown Irish link with JCP ...

## JCP in Wales

### Introduction by Chris Thomas

In 1940 JCP had been living in Wales for just over four years. By now he had merged his identity with his Welsh surroundings. He had intensified his study of the Welsh language, as well as Welsh literature, history and culture. He had acquired Welsh books, a Welsh New Testament, a Welsh dictionary and he read the Welsh newspapers – *Y Cymro*, *Brython*, *Y Fanner*, and *Seren*. In Wales JCP discovered that the winters were harsh and long. He was fascinated by the way frost and ice transformed the things he loved. He noticed *the way the ice has formed as thick as a young child's arm round the thinnest grass blades & the most frail reeds and rushes. Now how can this be?* (Diary, 1st Feb. 1940). He observed the changing seasons prompting thoughts of the past and mortality: *Dim mists, wet mists, vague mists over all the horizons and a feeling of green shoots, green buds growing & pink calices fluttering down from the new buds of leaves on the trees! BLACKTHORN is out—that danger-blossom that fatal-blossom that death-blossom that we brought into the house—& Nelly died!* (23rd April 1940). At the end of 1939 JCP looked back on a terrible year. Although he finished the manuscript of *Owen Glendower* on the top of Mynydd Y Gaer,<sup>1</sup> the war cast a long shadow over everything. He felt he was entering *bad, dark times*.<sup>2</sup> He suffered the loss of the Old and the death of Llewelyn. There were constant worries about money and the health of immediate members of his family; he felt anxiety about the future of his son. But despite difficulties he seemed determined to liberate his potential for private happiness: *... I must tell you, I have two ways of enduring & enjoying life—My Father's wh. is my feeling for the ice & stone & the pillows of pink moss & the grey lichens and my Mother's wh. is my pleasure in Standard Authors & their pregnant ritualist sayings.*<sup>3</sup>

There were other compensations during this period: visits to south Wales, Dorset and London; letters from family and friends, letters from Hillsdale, letters from old friends such as Louis Wilkinson, Dorothy Richardson, and Emma Goldman, as well as letters from new acquaintances such as Jean Wahl. Two new friends, mentioned in the diary extracts below, C. Benson Roberts ('Ben', 1896–1962), and Huw Menai ('Huw', 1887–1961), had a strong impact on JCP's life at this time. He called them 'two perfect Welshmen'.<sup>4</sup> Gerard Casey, himself from South Wales, persuaded Benson Roberts to invite JCP to present a lecture in Bridgend, on the *Mabinogion*. This lecture took place on 5th December 1938 (described by JCP in a letter to Louis Wilkinson dated 9th December 1938). The two men quickly formed a close friendship, exchanging regular correspondence: JCP addressing him as *O rare Ben Roberts* (after Ben Jonson). Benson Roberts visited JCP in Corwen in 1939 and JCP later visited Benson Roberts and his family in Bridgend.<sup>5</sup>

Benson Roberts introduced JCP to his friend, Huw Menai. This resulted in the invitation to JCP to deliver a second lecture in Bridgend, on Shakespeare, on 2nd April 1940.<sup>6</sup> Huw Menai was a poet, an ex-colliery worker, a socialist and political

activist who lived in the Rhondda.<sup>7</sup> JCP was impressed by Huw Menai's poetry and immediately bonded with him, saying extravagantly that he was *the greatest man save Dreiser and Hardy I have ever met*,<sup>8</sup> and calling him *an old Red of the Rhondda* who wrote *patriotic letters*.<sup>9</sup> It is fascinating to read how ardently JCP cleaved to these two men, how he so passionately embraced Huw Menai's role as a poet, taking over his poems and helping with their publication, just as he had for Alfred de Kantzow years before, and writing a generous introduction to his collection *The Simple Vision*, published in 1945.

Two other significant names are mentioned in the extracts below. Iorwerth C. Peate (1901–82), scholar, poet, author and anthropologist, was at the time JCP met him, in April 1940, Head of the Department of Folk Life at the National Museum of Wales, and from 1948 to 1971 Curator of the newly created Welsh Folk Museum.<sup>10</sup> Eliot Crawshay-Williams (1879–1962), Chairman of JCP's lecture on Shakespeare on 2nd April 1940, was a liberal MP, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lloyd George, worked for Winston Churchill, and was dedicated to Welsh affairs. He wrote novels, plays, film scripts, poetry and novels.<sup>11</sup> The autobiography he gave to JCP was *Simple Story – An Accidental Autobiography*, published in 1935.

JCP's diaries continue to reveal insights into JCP's ability to transcend difficult conditions, to *contemplate the cosmos* (21st February 1939) and *ravish the four elements* (14th June 1939). Many thanks to Robin Wood in Canada, Sylvie Vaudier in Paris, and Fabian Heus in the Netherlands for their help with further transcriptions of 1940.

**Chris Thomas**

#### Notes to Introduction

1 see Diary, 24 December 1939; letter to Nicholas Ross, Boxing Day 1939; and letter to Gerard Casey, 7 January 1940, *PJ*, Vol V, 1995.

2 Letter to C. Benson Roberts, 14 September 1939.

3 Diary 5 January 1940.

4 Letter to Nicholas Ross, 18 March 1940.

5 For more information about Benson Roberts, who was the first Chairman of the Powys Society, see Anna Pawelko's article in *la lettre powysienne* no 4, 2002.

6 Letter to Nicholas Ross, 6 April 1940.

7 See *Archives of Welsh Writers in English* at NLW web site and on-line *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*. See articles by Belinda Humfrey and 'Selected Letters from JCP to Huw Menai' in *The Powys Review* 27/28 (1992/1993).

8 Diary, 3 December, 1938.

9 Diary 26 May 1940.

10 See on-line *Welsh National Biography*.

11 See obituary, *The Times* 12 May 1962, and on-line ArchivesWales.

JCP's letters to Iorwerth C. Peate were published in *John Cowper Powys, Letters 1937–54* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1974). *Letters from John Cowper Powys to C. Benson Roberts* (including photos and Introduction) was published by Village Press in 1975.



## From JCP's diary

*Monday April 1st, 1940*

A Beautiful Showery Day

At Bridgend —

Up at 7—Fed Rooks—visited Old—bade him farewell for my journey & he said he did not mind—but that he thought he wd. spend the time asleep. Set out in rain with the T.T. Waited some while at station—wondered if Mrs Timothy wd come but no sign of her. Changed at Ruabon went together to Shrewsbury. Saw a beautiful baby like an Aryan Nordic Moses in a Basket with his hand stretched out & his eyes watching all. I couldn't make him smile. I looked [at] the little T.T.'s small oval face looking out of window & felt “funny” at leaving she. There was a Vision of an aristocratic maiden—so grand in the carriage—later soldiers sailors & airmen took her—and the T.T. talked to two simple girls in uniform going to be cooks in France. I left the T.T. at Shrewsbury & had a glass of milk and whisky—then on to Cardiff [,] saw Ludlow & Stokesay but missed the Llys at Caerleon upon Usk.

At Cardiff I was met by Mr T. C. Hart the Printer who came from Northamptonshire [*sic*] near a Lilford Domain & I hesitated whether let him think I was descended from a Lord or to explain that a Lord & “the Man” had a common ancestor—and in the end I thought the best counsel *boulg-kertorou* [Gr letters] was the latter—Mr Hart took me to tea in the Station & then took me to the Museum to visit the great Iorworth Peate who looked incredibly grand. And Mr Hart said he was destined to become the Boss of the Museum. I believe it well. He is a distinguished—



*C. Benson Roberts, JCP, Huw Menai, taken by Phyllis Playter at Corwen, Easter 1939.*

*(scanned from photo in Letters to C. Benson Roberts, Village Press, 1975)*

looking beggar! Then off again & was met at Bridgend by Huw & Ben—I had telegraphed my train at 3 but they only got it at 6.30 when I had been there some time. They met two trains. They all were so nice. Ben's friend from Haverford-West Mr Idris Jones, who (like "Petrushka the Man") is a gasterenterostomé—had been tho' an Annibynunw [?] – in a retreat at Cowely at Oxford, yes! at Hamilton's Cowley ... ..

Janey had got 2 beds in her Spareroom where the T.T. & I wld have been—and in these two beds Huw & "the Man" slept. Never since with Tom had I slept with a strange man so near! But Huw was like Tom. He smoked a cigarette the second he was awake. He slept 2 hours in the morning but he lay there like a cloud [?]

"Little John" the baby is an active boy going about but he is still a baby.

It was a nice room Huw & I slept in—each with a hot bottle—provided by "Jany" at [in] Pen-y-Bont ar Ogmore

*Tuesday, 2 April 1940*

### A Beautiful Day

I lecture on Shakespeare at Bridgend.

Huw & I sleep together but not together. We woke up late. I loved listening to steps on the pavement—and wheels on the road—steps & wheels ... I like this sensation. Then I went first into the Bathroom & shaved—"Little John!" I did call out—"Where are you Little John?" "Here I am!" replied this Entity who has been in the World for 2 or 3 years. Various other friends appeared. Ben & Janey's friends are very nice. There is Whyndan [*sic*] Jones a very nice person—all blobs & bosses like a very Benevolent Gnome—I like him particularly. His wife (20 years younger) is a Norwegian with a daughter Ingrid—Then there is – no! I've got them wrong—I forget the name of the Gnome—the one who is Wyndam Jones is a Free-mason & Rabelaisian humorist, full of quips & wanton jokes "jollyng along" every one, yes fooling & jollyng & jesting & ragging & teasing and spoofing and uttering Wise-cracks—ike an American. In fact they [ ] all like Americans these hospitable easy SouthWelshmen only less reserved & more Imagination & more Sensitized & much less proud & cold & Red-Indian at heart. Twas a "Civilized spectacle" to see how prettily old Huw's Wordsworthian Phyz did crumple up under the Rabelaisian attacks of Mr Jones.

Huw took me in the aft. for a heavenly walk by the River Ogmore which like the Bog Stream or worse at Sherborne is poisoned against fish & is of an ashy tint. But across it in a wood I saw Wood Anemones & on a Bank I saw Celandines the 1st I have seen this year—& in a child's hand I saw Wild primroses and there was the Gorsedd Circle all ready for the Eisteddfod which is not to happen, & there to my delight – what I have not seen since I was at school—A Rugby Football Goal! And then afterwards we watched the game with great wonder & interest.

The Lecture Hall was crowded—old Ben was radiant. In his wisdom he had got as Chairman Mr Croskshay [*sic*] Williams the famous Twice Divorced Parliamentarian; a nephew of Lady Charlotte Guest of the Mabinogion—a lovely man of 60 who

looked as if he were 40! He gave me his Autobiography. I lectured acting Macbeth Hamlet Lear for 2 Hours & pleased Ben more than Mabinogion last year. John Horstmann & Lucy were there at tea and at lecture with their car. They were as usual very nice.

Sat up quite late talking. I forgot “O reason not the need! our poorest beggars are in the basest things superfluous ... but for true need oh heavens give me that patience, Patience I need.”

*Wednesday 3rd April 1940*

Huw sleeps for 4 hours

I see the Rhondda

A beautiful day – showery

up late

Huw slept 3 hours – We set off early and visit Laleston where Mr Rees lives the curate in charge who is going to marry a school-mistress whose dad is a miner – He showed us his books—Huw thought he was Jewish. He certainly did treat his correspondence with Mr Shaw the Dramatist in a Jewish way. He has pictures of Persons of Celebrity like Mr Hugh Walpole. The church Tower of Laleton is very very beautiful.

Then Ben driving Huw & me in his car “Easter Hero” for he had saved up his Petrol for today set out to the Rhondda. I was staggered by the grandeur the Majesty the Sublimity of the Rhondda. O I would have been—so says the T.T. too!—proud to live there. It was not mean squalor at all. Something very different. Great mountains bleak and wild—no trees—pyramids sky-pointing pyramids on the crest of jagged hills & majesty & grandeur & bare rock and slag & blackened piles of coal rubbish. Here at the tops of Dante’s very Earthly Paradise with the sun sinking horizontal down Amos Hill

Ben & I were taken into Ann’s House—Ann the wife of Huw & their Eight living and two dead children—Ten children in all—& she had very beautiful eyes & an incredibly smooth soft lovely complexion—no rouge but only powder hair just only just tinged with grey, but looking really Brown still—& beautiful grey eyes—& a calm Madonna-like forehead. Then Betsy aged 16 sat on the arm of my armchair my arm round her flanks & her ringlets brushing my skull, & Peggy aged 21 sat on the other arm of my chair—my arm round her flanks—& on my knees or lap I should say for the two young women were really on my knees was Huw’s son Arfon an exquisite little boy of thirteen. Then in front was Huw’s daughter Olwen aged 22 who (for my pleasure, or my yet further pleasure) put on her white Satin Ball dress and pushed back her hair from her neck: her back was bare down to the waist. What a divine family! I have never known such people! I have never met such lovely girls such natural girls such friendly girls such girls with the purpose of giving delight.

Then we went to Ben’s sisters for supper—& had a wondrous evening.

Thursday, 4th April 1940

Travel back home. Meet the T.T. at Ruabon.

Up less late—up about Nine. Huw had slept better—He generously allowed me to shave first. We had a very happy breakfast. Ben came from going to shop with tales of the reaction to Lecture. O I forgot to say at lunch time yesterday we went in Easter Hero to visit Mr & Mrs Casey the parents of Gerard. It was a very very happy excursion. We saw Mr Casey. I like Mr Casey very very very much—and I said that brother Will had said he was unruffled & that Elizabeth had said he was a Monument of Common Sense.

Well at 12 I set out – met Mr Ayre a Puppet-Show-Man who gave me photos of his Puppets—very good, very good—Had to stand in Corridor as far as Cardiff—looking at that weird sub-ocean black-mud landscape full of mud & mist & castles & mystery & ready to vanish away; under an illusion a land of glamour and illusion. I saw wood anemones & Marsh Marigolds from the train-window. Then I changed at Cardiff & got into a Manchester Carriage. The corridor was full of soldiers – yes it was full. One soldier tried, tried to, tried to, tried hard, tried to tried to take off his burden with iron helmet and all but he couldn't get it off. There was a girl with a baby one of those girls that our un-shy-un-clever unambitious un-crafty un-climbing un-rascally un-vicious un-sleek un-cruel un-wicked Archbishop of Canterbury won't allow to be called unmarried wives. He wd like this un-lecherous—un-apish—old revered gentleman—he wd like—he wouldn't of course like—to see all “unmarried wives” whipt by the bloody hand of the Beadle that made Shakespeare say that he would—Shakespeare thinks that he would—but this is of course only Shakespeare's lecherous mind—he would, Shakespeare thinks—love to use them—hotly lusteth to use them – in the kind for which—Shakespeare is only talking of the Beadle—for which he whips them! I forgot my duty to the Archbishop and offered my seat to this unmarried whore whose face was childishlike chaste and good—which is odd—but she preferred to stay with her boys (2 of them) (yes 2 of them too!)—“2 boys Taffy” says the Dove—and a baby—and sometimes she sat on the soldier boy's luggage in the corridor.

At Ruabon I had to wait for two hours and I went I went yes I went along the well enclosed well walled well & high walled Park of Watkin Winn. How these Welsh landlords who betrayed Wales along with the Tudors do adore barricades. How different our landlords are!

ENEMA



*JCP's 1929 Diary, 2nd August, p.58*

**Reached Stonehenge**[by car with Littleton]. I prayed to the actual stones of *Stonehenge*. I said—“O Stonehenge help me to write such a book on Glastonbury as has never *been* writ of any place”. I drank rain water out of a hollow in the Stone of Sacrifice—I knelt on the edge of the altar-stone. I invoked Merlin and my Three Great Spirits of the Earth. I carried water in the palm of my hand for the handle of my stick.

## *Stonehenge in Caroline Powys's Time*

In 1759 Caroline Girle (later Powys) visited Stonehenge on the return leg of a 17-day round trip from her home in London, taking in Oxford, Blenheim, Worcester, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Bristol, Bath, Salisbury and Andover, travelling 359 miles in all.

During the current controversies over how to take modern-day traffic past Stonehenge, here is a chance to see what Caroline made of the great monument.

Below is an engraving of 1826, which may well show what Stonehenge was like in Caroline's time; on the next pages is part of her account of this tour (ff 19–22 in my transcript; see *The Powys Journal* xii, pp 103–125, for my full account of her Journals). Stonehenge starts at the bottom of my first page with an extensive extract from Stukeley's work, and then has her own considered observations, including slight remorse for getting the servants to break fragments off the stones, but then, she says, that is just what the antiquarian gentlemen from London had done. Before we reach Stonehenge we have her fascinating account of Bath, where, if her father had not died at an early age in 1761 as they were packing up to move, she would have been the resident of a house he was buying in The Circus, then still only part built.

**Stephen Powys Marks**



City itself I fancy wou'd not be greatly injur'd by having ye same character not that tis near so bad a place as report had taught me to expect; they there draw all thier goods on Sledges which they say is a great inconvenience tho I thought it seem much less so then ye way they convey them from place to place in the Metropolis; ye next morning [August 21st] we went in ye Hott Well, or St Vincents Rock, which indeed is a sweet Romantic place; this was ye fullest Season has been know[n] for years; ye Company meet here to drink ye waters at 8 & 12; then walk in ye Rooms which is a little way distant from ye Well; after dinner meet there for ye evening and on Tuesdays & Fridays are Baths this is a short description of ye employment of ye Bristol Season which was then at ye height and a prodigious deal of company there then indeed seem'd Assembled. Mr Fords family were so obliging to give us thier company to dinner and in ye evening we once more prosecuted [f.20] our Tour and got to Bath that night; this is a place of great Antiquity laying in a Valley surround'd with an Amphytheatrical veiw of Hills from which Hills spring ye waters so fam'd and which are of such advantage to this City a City in my opinion more worth seeing then any I was ever at the Grand Metropolis except'd, twice I have been there before but tis infinitely improv'd by the building ye Circus and a noble Street by which tis approach'd from ye Square they seem to fear the formers being ever finish'd its progress is so extreemly slow 9 Houses only are yet erect,d there is intend'd to be 3 times that number and ye openings between give a fine veiw of ye Country those that are Compleat'd give one an idea of ye elegance of ye whole they being in a magnificent taste in ye Doric Ionic & Corinthian Order; and indeed tis so fine a design twou'd be great pity if it fail'd in ye execution; there are many other fine Buildings in this City as the Parades &c but ye Bath Stone affords a fine opportunity to embellish and give an air of Grandure to ye whole we employ'd our morning as is usual at Bath, in going to ye [f.20v] Pump ye Abbey Church & ye Rooms tho' each were but little frequent'd there being but two or three families besides that of ye Dutchess of Marlboroughs; the heat of ye waters is very extraordinary and People attribute it to different causes but most to the passing thro' certain Sulpherous veins of ye Earth in taste tis not so agreeable as those at Bristol Thursday afternoon [August 23rd] we went to Mr Busbys at Walcot; we had pd in the morning a visit to Mr & Mrs Pierce, and early on Friday we quitt'd this agreeable Place and lay that night [August 24th] at ye Devizes, at this Town were then qua[r]ter'd our Berkshire Militia, which to ye honour of thier Officers & County we really thought came much nearer to a resemblance of ye Regulars then any we had yet seen; after having breakfast'd on Saturday [August 25th] we quited this Town, and in a few hours had ye pleasure of seeing that famous Monument of Antiquity on Salisbury Plain call'd Stone-Henge; but as I shou'd be able of myself to give but a very incoherent account of this noble work, eminent from ye remotest Ages, I shall here insert, a very short Abstract indeed as I took it down in Reading Dr Stukelys [f.21] Book Concerning it; his own words are as follows.

For technical reasons in this transcript letters which should be superscript are shewn underlined.

" Tis more then probable that twas a Temple of ye British  
 " Druids, and the Chief Cathedral (as it may be call'd) of all  
 " thier Temples in this Island, tis thought to be of an  
 " extraordinary Antiquity, perhaps 3000 years Old, erected not  
 " long after Cambyses invasion of Egypt. When ye Saxons &  
 " Danes came over they wonder'd at Stone-Henge then &  
 " were at as great a loss about ye founders & intent as we  
 " are now; Camden saw with excellent judgment twas neither  
 " Roman or English; Inigo Jones endeavour'd to prove it ye  
 " former, but whoever is acquaint'd with Roman Architecture  
 " must be of a different opinion; after passing a Circular Ditch  
 " by which tis enclos'd about 35 yards distant is ye work  
 " itself being 108 feet diameter; on entering & casting your eyes  
 " Around ye Yawning Ruins, you are struck with an extatic  
 " reverie; The Temple was compos'd of two Circles & two  
 " Ovals; ye whole number of Stones 146 The Great Oval  
 " consisting of uprights, ye inner with ye alter of 20  
 " ye Great Circle of 30 ye inner of 40 ye 5 imposts of ye  
 " Great Oval, 30 of ye Great Circle, 2 Stones standing  
 [f.21v] " on the bank of ye Area; 2 others lying down and one there  
 " seems to have been by ye Barrow nearest this place;  
 " The largest Stones beyond controversy were brought  
 " from those call'd Grey Weathers on Marlborough Downs; and  
 " by a peice brought to ye Royal Society and examined  
 " with a Microscope, tis found to be a composition of  
 " Crystals, red Green & White; The extravagant Grandure  
 " of the work has attract'd ye admiration of all Ages  
 " indeed a serious view of it puts ye mind into a kind  
 " of extacy, at ye struggle between art and Nature; and  
 " tis truly entertaining to consider ye judicious  
 " carelessness therein, for notwithstanding ye Monstrous  
 " Size; (ye Stones of ye Adytum being 30 feet high,)  
 " tis far from appearing heavy, and no one ever thought  
 " it too Great or too Little, too High, or too Low;  
 " The Trilithon at ye upper end was an extraordinary  
 " Beauty but ye noble impost is dislodg'd from its  
 " Airy Seat an fallen on the Altar, ye two uprights  
 " that support'd it, are above 30 feet long; one is  
 [f.22] " intire but leans upon one of the Stones of ye inward Oval

The three pages printed here are part of the 13 pages which make up my transcription in 2010 of "The Oxford, Blenheim &c Journal of Caroline Girle, 1759" (BL Add. Mss. 42164, one of 14 related MSS); this was before her marriage in 1762 to Philip Lybbe Powys of Hardwick near Reading. The tour took place in 13th–29th August 1759. These pages are part of a continuous text. This transcript is the Copyright of Stephen Powys Marks.

“ the other is broken in half laying on the Alter.

Such is the account Dr Stukely gives of Stone Henge the original is a Folio Volume mine only a few lines taken from different parts of his, to serve as a help to memory if Time shou'd obliterate y<sub>e</sub> Idea of those very striking Ruins from my mind; having spent some time in viewing this magnificent wonder, and endeavouring with some tools our Servants had to carry some peices of it with us, [(I which with great difficulty we at last accomplish'd) and have since had them polish'd but in Reading the above Author we were rather mortified as tis his sentiments, that tis an absurd anxiety for people to wish this Temple farther ruinated, but we however have the comfort to think y<sub>e</sub> very small bits we took cou'd not greatly endanger y<sub>e</sub> work; and that tho' our party were chiefly Female we had not more curiosity then y<sub>e</sub> learn'd Gentlemen of y<sub>e</sub> Royal Society who it seems [f.22v] with Dr Stukely had some brought for thier inspection thro' a Microscope; but to quit the subject of Stone-Henge after as I before said we had spent some time in walking round we once more enter'd y<sub>e</sub> attending Vehicle, highly entertain'd by y<sub>e</sub> sight of what in the same moment gave one sensations pleasingly Awful, by the number of Barrows on Salisbury Plain. People (says Dr Stukely) injudiciously conclude there have been great Battles fought there, and y<sub>e</sub> Slain buried in them but they are really no other than family Burying Places. from Stone Henge we went to what is generally esteem'd y<sub>e</sub> most worth a Strangers notice of any in that County, tis almost unnecessary to say I mean Wilton House; this Seat of y<sub>e</sub> Pembroke Family, has been thiers 200 years, but orriginally a Monastery. part of it was rebuilt in the reign of Harry VIII and part in that of Elizabeth; this charming tho' ancient Mansion is situat'd in a Garden of 60 Acres, which a River runs thro', a delightful Lawn lays before the House, which has y<sub>e</sub> view of y<sub>e</sub> Canal with a [f.23] a Grand Arcade at y<sub>e</sub> upper end, where the fall of water is very fine; on the contrary when you are at this building y<sub>e</sub> eye has still greater beauties to admire as y<sub>e</sub> Magnificent old Structure, a Palladian Bridge, Gothic Seats, Temples, and numberless Peices of y<sub>e</sub> watry Element, which ever is one of the most pleasing objects in a fine prospect; y<sub>e</sub> late Lord Pembroke, had thoughts it seems of erecting in his Gardens a Stone Henge in minature, as twas suppos'd to have been in its first Glory; this wou'd have greatly add'd to the curiosities at Wilton, for who that sees that Stupendious Piece of Antiquity in Ruins, wou'd not wish to behold it in its flourishing State but to quit the Gardens for the House, which is still worth more observation then the surrounding Grounds, tho' trees & Water so charmingly intermingled a verdure so delightful presented to the eye that y<sub>e</sub> following lines of Popes may I think with justness be applied to Wilton.

Unpolish'd Nature can-not boast a part,  
For Chance, too regular, too rude for Art.  
Here Order in Variety you See,  
Where all things differ yet where all agree,

[f.23v] the late Earl was as I've heard a Man of Great Genius, & a Master of Antiquity, by