

Editorial

Newsletter 88 appears somewhat differently to the usual, as Stephen Marks, long-term manager of the publishing side, was unable to do the formatting this time. Louise de Bruin, the Society's publications manager, and Jerry Bird, who does the formatting for the *Journal*, have nobly stepped into the breach. (There was a suggestion to postpone 88 until after the conference, but the status quo party prevailed).

The 1911 diary of Llewelyn Powys — *Recalled to Life: A Consumptive's Diary, 1911*, edited by Peter J. Foss — is available for advance sales and at the Conference. See p. 8.

Maiden Castle, subject of our meeting at Ely in April, is like all the JCP novels, a world we visit with many questions. Gertrude Powys's woodcut of a small-town travelling circus illustrates it well. (See p. 18),

Other contributions include a postcard sent by a service member of Northwold Rectory, publications in Tunisia and Paris, and personal routes to discovery of TFP and JCP and their worlds. KK envisages a dusky time-space map in which points of Powys light appear as the books illuminate different minds, past and present.

Co-editor Chris Thomas has the lion's share in this NL and we hope to continue co-operating in future. KK has now overseen 44 numbers, building on the good work of previous editors, Paul Roberts and John Batten, in the first 44. Let's look forward to another 44, and ongoing ...

KK

Chris adds: Kate has invited me to act as Joint Editor beginning with this issue. I am delighted to be able to participate more formally in the production of the *Newsletter* on a regular basis. We are all indebted to Kate for her dedication and editorial standards, which I hope to be able to maintain. Filling the role of Joint Editor is an exciting project and I am looking forward to working with Kate and with all our contributors. I am constantly

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amazed at how much material by the Powyses still remains unpublished or has been overlooked. It was a great pleasure for instance to be reminded of the work of Frederick Davies and his Letter to Colin Wilson, which appears in this issue after an absence of over 50 years. I am also delighted to welcome our new member, Kevin Taylor, to these pages: his note on Norfolk began the discovery of a chain of Powys coincidences. My visit to the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies proved very interesting and I hope we will publish other reports. The ALS offers us useful opportunities to help raise awareness of the Society and its activities.

CT

December Meeting

On Saturday 3 December at the Friends Meeting House, 120 Heath Street, Hampstead, NW3 1DR (300 yards from Hampstead underground station on the Northern line). **2pm for 2.30 start.** Everyone is welcome. **The event is free** although a small contribution towards the cost of refreshments would be appreciated.

Pat Quigley will present a talk on the relationship between **T.F. Powys**, the Irish writer **Liam O’Flaherty**, (1896-1984), and the group of writers associated with **Charles Lahr** (TFP’s favourite bookseller) and **David Garnett**.

Liam O’Flaherty was a novelist and short story writer, with strong socialist beliefs, who in 1923, at the beginning of his writing career, escaped from the authorities in Ireland, travelled to England, toured Dorset and visited TFP at East Chaldon where, according to Judith Stinton, in *Chaldon Herring: Writers in a Dorset Landscape* (1988/2004), he camped ‘*in a tent in a damp spot at the back of the old vicarage*’. Here he began to write his most famous novel *The Informer*, published in 1925, which was later made into a successful film, directed by John Ford, in 1935, with a screenplay by Dudley Nichols. O’Flaherty was a keen admirer of TFP’s books and in 1925 he published a review, in *The Irish Statesman*, of *Mr. Tasker’s Gods*, in which he called TFP ‘*a genius*’, and praised the novel very highly. While staying at East Chaldon, Liam O’Flaherty had many discussions with Theodore. In a letter he wrote: ‘*I have seen Powys and he looks awfully nice.*’ TFP also favourably mentioned Liam O’Flaherty in a letter to David Garnett (now in the Powys Society Collection). In 1923 Gertrude Powys painted a portrait of O’Flaherty.

Pat Quigley, who is a member of the Powys Society, has previously given talks to audiences in Ireland about JCP. He is a retired public servant and the author of *The Polish Irishman* (2012) and *Sisters Against the Empire* (2016) on the Marcievitz connection and the 1916 Rising.

If you wish to attend this event please **notify Secretary** by e-mail, post or telephone (see inside front cover of Newsletter for contact details).

Chris Thomas

Chairman’s Report 2015-6

The Society has had another active year. In the aftermath of our transfer of The Powys Collection to Exeter, we have been able to maintain a continuing connection with Dorset County Museum; we hold our summer meeting there, and the permanent display of Powys-connected material in the Writer’s Gallery remains an important link. David Goodway, our Vice Chairman, made a generous outlay of time and energy in sorting out the previously-uncatalogued Society’s papers that were still in Dorchester — making interesting discoveries of original material (including John Cowper Powys letters), while working recently at Exeter. We are especially grateful to Julia Matthews who helped transfer those surprisingly bulky files into the care of Christine Fauch at the University Library. We’re hoping an Exeter conference might take place in 2018.

Our London discussion on a dark December day, focusing on *The Pleasures of Literature* (once again based in the historic meeting house at Bunhill Fields and led by John Hodgson), was enjoyable and lively. At Ely in April, Sonia Lewis led quite a large group in talking through the ‘Scummy Pond’ chapter of *Maiden Castle*; our Cambridge-based president, Glen Cavaliero, made several outstanding contributions, as did a new member, Kevin Taylor. All in all, a very worthwhile occasion (even if we never could quite agree as to the mode of love-making Thuella and Dud were engaged in ...)

The Powys Press is publishing another book: *Recalled to Life — Llewelyn Powys: A Consumptive’s Diary, 1911* (superbly edited by Peter Foss, it will be available at this year’s Street Conference). As always, we are grateful to Charles Lock and Louise de Bruin for bringing out the *Powys Journal*; and to Kate Kavanagh for her brilliant editing of our *Newsletter* — the more remarkable for her bravely continuing her role despite the sudden death of PJ Kavanagh; a loss many of us will feel personally.

From earlier conferences, I have fond memories of Joan Stevens, a passionate admirer of Dorothy Richardson’s *Pilgrimage*; others will recall Diana Crossman — both were active members who strengthened our fledgling society, and have been missed in recent years. But despite those mortalities, new members continue to join, especially in America, and our numbers remain quite stable at 261. Our outgoing Treasurer, Anna Rosic, has rightly been worried that our expenditure has continued to exceed our income. Since we don’t want to increase our basic subscription, can I appeal informally to any generous member interested in making some additional donation, to please contact our Secretary, Chris Thomas. Meanwhile, we’re grateful to Anna for her stint in our finances — and for her continuing collaboration with Louise de Bruin,

as our very-experienced conference organisers. We receive enormous help in all matters of word-processing and printing from Stephen Powys Marks, communicating from Bath; as well as from Max Peltier in remotest Brittany. They have both worked magnificently over many years, and the Society owes them a massive debt of thanks. We are also grateful to Frank Kibblewhite, our webmaster, for keeping the website refreshed and up to date with useful information. The website is essential in helping to attract new members. Some members are still transcribing John Cowper Powys's Diary for 1940, with plans for other years.

Timothy Hyman



*AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies at Haworth, May 2016, attended by
Chris Thomas (see page 23)*

Treasurer's Report

The Powys Society accounts for 2015 are set out below: they have been approved by the Society's Honorary Auditor, Jane Roberts of Hills and Burgess Accountants, Leighton Buzzard, and I am most grateful for her work and advice on behalf of the Society. The paid-up membership for 2015 was 258, which is 4 more than in 2014.

Anna Rosic

THE POWYS SOCIETY			
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE			
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 ST DECEMBER 2015			
INCOME		£	£
Subscriptions		5540.13	5540.13
Donations Conference Book Sales		527.35	527.35
Legacy from the Estate of Graham Carey		500.00	500.00
Publication Sales		680.38	
Less cost of Printing & Expenses		<u>1001.72</u>	-321.34
Conference	Registration fees	8621.43	
	Less Payment to Hand Hotel	8835.00	
	Less Refund	30.00	
	Less Expenses	317.30	
	Less Deposit 2016 Conference	<u>200.00</u>	-760.87
Bank Interest and Goodwill		70.52	<u>70.52</u>
			<u>5555.79</u>
EXPENDITURE			
Powys Journal XXV	Cost of Printing	2654.38	2654.38
Powys Newsletters 84-86	Printing	2084.06	
	Postage	543.82	2627.88
Alliance of Literary Societies		15.00	15.00
Expenses	Officers Expenses	1277.95	
	Committee Expenses	<u>473.90</u>	1751.85
Website Management		95.98	95.98
Miscellaneous		27.40	27.40
Payment to Hills and Burgess, Accountants		120.00	<u>120.00</u>
TOTAL EXPENDITURE			7292.49
EXCESS OF EXPENDITURE OVER INCOME			<u>1736.70</u>
TOTAL INCOME			15939.81
TOTAL EXPENDITURE			17676.51
STATEMENT OF FUNDS AT 31ST DECEMBER 2015			
Cash at bank 31st December 2015			
Community Account £230.43, Everyday Saver £382.44, Business Saver £13,776.59			
Value of publications held in stock: £5,500			

Anna Rosic, Hon Treasurer

AGM 2016

The Annual General Meeting of the Powys Society will be held at the **Wessex Hotel, 15 High Street, Street, near Glastonbury, BA16 OEF, at 11.00am, on Sunday 14 August 2016**. All paid up members of the Powys Society are welcome to attend and participate in the AGM whether or not they are attending the conference.

Agenda

1. Minutes of AGM 2015 as published in *Newsletter* 86 November 2015, and matters arising
2. Nomination of Honorary Officers and Members of the Powys Society Committee for the year 2016-2017
3. Hon. Treasurer's Report and presentation of annual accounts for year ended 31 December 2015
4. Collection Liaison Manager's Report
5. Hon. Secretary's Report
6. Chairman's Report as published in *Newsletter* 88, July 2016
7. Date and venue of conference 2017
8. AOB

Committee Nominations 2016-2017

Honorary Officers: The following have been nominated and have agreed

	<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Seconder</i>
Chairman	Timothy Hyman	John Hodgson	Peter Lazare
Vice-Chairman	David Goodway	Chris Thomas	Tony Head
Treasurer	Robin Hickey	Louise de Bruin	Jacqueline Peltier
Secretary	Chris Thomas	Chris Wilkinson	Anna Rosic

Committee: The following have been nominated and have agreed to stand

<i>Nomination</i>	<i>Proposer</i>	<i>Seconder</i>
Louise de Bruin	Anna Rosic	Shelagh Powys-Hancox

The committee also wishes to *co-opt* **Anna Rosic** as committee member.

If these nominations are approved by members at the AGM, the committee, from August 2016, will consist of those above as well as: **Michael Kowalewski** (Collection Liaison Officer), **Shelagh Powys-Hancox** and **John Hodgson**, who all have one year left to run of their three year term of office. **Dawn Collins** and **Kate Kavanagh** (*Newsletter* editor) have two years left to run of their three year term of office. **Jacqueline Peltier** serves as an honorary committee member. **Charles Lock** (editor, *Powys Journal*) serves as *ex-officio* member.

Chris Thomas, Hon Secretary

The Powys Society Conference, 2016

The Wessex Hotel, High Street, Street, near Glastonbury
Friday 12th August to Sunday 14th August

'Strange Matters'

Programme

Friday 12th August

- 16.00 Arrival
- 17.30 Reception
- 18.30 Dinner
- 20.00 Paul Cheshire: 'John Cowper Powys and the "psychic sensuous margin of life"'

Saturday 13th August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 Peter Foss: 'Recalled to Life', an illustrated talk, with slides, about the events described in Llewelyn Powys's diary for 1911
- 10.30 Coffee or tea
- 11.15 Lindsay Clarke: 'Beyond the literary. JCP's *Porius* and the romance of the Polytheistic Imagination'
- 13.00 Lunch
- Afternoon free
- 19.00 Dinner
- 20.30 A special screening of Hilda's Book, a dramatised documentary film written and produced by Frank Wintle.

Sunday 14th August

- 08.00 Breakfast
- 09.30 Angelika Reichmann: 'Two Historians, Two Christies, Two Urquharts: Kingsley Amis and JCP'
- 10.45 Coffee or tea
- 11.00 AGM
- 12.00 Open discussion with members on a proposal to develop Powys talking-books
- 13.00 Lunch
- 15.00 Departure

For details of speakers and presentations please see Newsletter 87, pages 6-11

Correction

We wish to correct the misprint on page 4 of Newsletter 87, March 2016.

Elaine Mencher sent a note to the **Editor** to say that 'F.R. Leavis could not have written about Father Adam, the 1st edition of which was the 1990 one. Leavis died in 1978.'

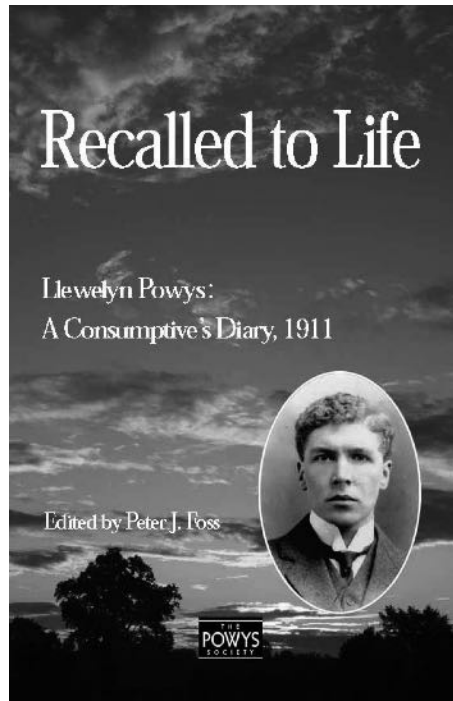
The article in the *Powys Review*, Nos. 29 & 30, about *Father Adam* was indeed by L.R. Leavis (Robin Leavis) who was the son of F.R. Leavis and, at the time of the article, was a lecturer in English at the Catholic University, in Nijmegen, the Netherlands. Robin Leavis studied English at Clare College, Cambridge, and is the author of articles on writers such as V.S. Naipaul, H.G. Wells, D.H. Lawrence, Conrad, Hardy, and Thomas Mann as well as a long running series of articles on Current Literature. He has also written two books, *The Plain Man's Guide to Current Literature* (1987) and *Creative Values and Contemporary Literature* (1989).

Elaine also explains that the 'modern edition' [of *Father Adam*] mentioned in NL.87, was published by The Brynmill Press. Elaine says that 'In 2002 Brynmill published a second edition (paperback), with an account of the story's genesis by Elaine Mencher, incorporating two "new" short stories and previously unpublished extracts from the novels which preceded the final novella.'

***Recalled to Life* Llewelyn Powys: *A Consumptive's Diary, 1911* edited by Peter J.Foss**

Recalled to Life will be available at the conference at the special price of £9.00. Thereafter the price will be £10.00 to UK members and £15.00 if sent to addresses outside the UK. Members in the UK who cannot attend the conference can still obtain the book at the special price by sending an order and cheque, **before 30 August**, for £9.00 to Hon. Secretary (see address in the inside front cover). Overseas members, who will not be attending the conference, can obtain a copy of *Recalled to Life* at the special price of £13.00 by sending an order and cheque to Hon Secretary **before 30 August**.

CT



Obituaries

Ken Hester (1934-2015)

Elizabeth Davey writes

Ken Hester joined the Powys Society in the 1980s. It was through the Society that he became acquainted with **Frederick Davies***, whom he subsequently visited regularly, until Frederick's death in 1990.

Ken did not attend many events but I do remember him talking about meeting **Naomi Mitchison**** at one of the conferences – she had come down from Scotland where she lived not far from my parents. They seem to have chatted about places they

both knew, as well as the Dragon School***, to which my mother had gone some years after Naomi.

Ken was an unlikely member of the Powys Society. Born in south-east London, he had already begun to attend the local Council School in Forest Hill, when the order for evacuation came in late August, 1939. Not quite five, he and his two older brothers were evacuated to Redhill in Surrey. Initially the brothers were kept together, but their first hostess died and they were sent their separate ways, Ken to a children's home, a harsh experience that coloured the rest of his life.

The war disrupted his education — he gained no formal qualifications but nothing held him back. When still very young he developed a love of literature and classical music which sustained him all his life. His great passions were Beethoven and Schubert, in particular

Beethoven's string quartets and Schubert's Lieder. He must have possessed almost every recording of *Winterreise* that existed. Others of his interests included walking and the natural environment – he became a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society and could also name every wild-flower and tree he encountered.

Always good with his hands, he was a skilled joiner, and when no more able to go on his long walks (he developed a muscle wasting disease) he turned his attention to making bird tables and nesting boxes for charity.

Eventually totally confined to his wheelchair, he never lost his enthusiasm for



living. When we looked for a passage from JCP to read at his funeral, we felt the following extract from *The Meaning of Culture* (1929) epitomised Ken's life.

'Every day that we allow ourselves to take things for granted, every day that we allow some little physical infirmity or worldly worry to come between us and our obstinate, indignant, defiant exultation; we are weakening our genius for life.'

Ken never took anything for granted but always had a real 'genius for life'.

Notes (by Chris Thomas)

Elizabeth Davey has very kindly donated to the Powys Society books from Ken Hester's personal Powys collection which are now offered for sale to members at the conference book sale.

***Frederick Davies** (1916-1990) was a schoolteacher, bookseller and translator. He was Fellow Commoner of Churchill College, Cambridge and the author of three novels, *The Lucifer Stone* (1965), *Death of a Hitman* (1982), and *Snow in Venice* (1983). He translated plays by Goldoni, Feydeau, Labiche, Sardou and Narjac for Penguin as well as books by Anatole France (*The Gods Will Have Blood*) and Alphonse Daudet (*Letters from My Windmill*). He became very closely acquainted with Phyllis Playter and JCP in the last years of JCP's life, speaking to him the day before he died. Frederick Davies wrote two wonderful articles about JCP, *Recollections of John Cowper Powys and Phyllis Playter*, published in the *Powys Review*, No 19, 1986 and No.20, 1987. He edited JCP's 1930 diary (Greyhound Books, 1987), and wrote an article *John Cowper Powys and King Lear* (*Essays on JCP*, edited by Belinda Humfrey, 1972). Frederick Davies also published a *Letter to Colin Wilson*, in the *Aylesford Review* in 1964 in response to Wilson's article about JCP in the same periodical in the previous issue (See the letter from Frederick Davies to Colin Wilson reprinted elsewhere in this Newsletter). The **National Library of Wales** has a large collection of letters sent to Frederick Davies by members of the Powys family as well as letters from JCP's French translator, Maria Canavaggia and others.



****Naomi Mitchison** (1897-1999), prolific Scottish historical novelist, science fiction writer, poet, travel writer, farmer, and feminist activist. Naomi Mitchison was a friend of Llewelyn Powys who she visited at the coastguard cottages on the Dorset Downs. She corresponded with Llewelyn and sent him a copy of her book, *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (1925). Her novel, *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931) shares an interest in mythological themes that JCP was also exploring at the same time.

*****The Dragon School** was founded in 1877 for the sons of Oxford dons but later became co-educational. The school was originally located in the St. Giles area of Oxford but it is now located by the river Cherwell in north Oxford. Other famous previous pupils of the school have included Naomi's brother, the evolutionary biologist, J.B.S. Haldane, the composer Sir Lennox Berkeley, the WWII pilot Leonard Cheshire and the writer Humphrey Carpenter.

*

Diana Crossman, a long-term member of the Society, died on 30th March.

Her special interest in the Powyses was Montacute in the old days: she described her pleasure in reading Littleton's 1937 autobiography *The Joy Of It*, about Montacute in the 1880s, the vicarage, its garden, the village and its surroundings, since 'My father was born in Stoke-sub-Hamdon in 1884 and this was the scenery he would have known and loved.' When moving house in Crewkerne, a few years ago, Diana kindly donated a number of Powys books to the Society.

*

Robert Nye, poet and prolific novelist and editor, died in Ireland on 2nd July.

As a fifteen-year old (b.1939) he wrote a fan letter to JCP and became one of the many young people whom John Cowper encouraged and befriended (JCP even paid for Nye's first marriage license, aged 19). RN described this eight-year friendship by letter in 'Prospero — for me' which was reprinted in *Newsletter 46* (July 2002), along with his poem 'In Memoriam JCP' (...O Prospero, no elegy for you. / You have been sent to Naples, that is all, / And this bare island is the barer for it). Another poem, his delightful 'Runes', about childhood magic rituals, is in NL61, page 38. A long critical 'Note on J.C. Powys and his critics', 'Tatterdemalion Taliessin', was in *London Magazine*, March 1973.

Many of Nye's novels are imagined reconstructions of fictional and real characters: Falstaff, Shakespeare, Mrs Shakespeare, Byron, Gilles de Rais, Faust — some drawn from the 'Matter of Britain', overlapping with *Porius*. They tend to be flamboyant and somewhat pornographic, but widely admired. *Merlin* (1978) is 'equally convincing as romance or poetry or drug-induced hallucination'. *Taliessin* is one of his many books for children.

Charles Lock
Geoffrey Hill and John Cowper Powys
A tribute to Geoffrey Hill 1932-2016

At the Powys Society Conference in 1986, held that year in Bath, I gave a lecture on *Maiden Castle* under the title 'To Ravage and Redeem'. Those words come from a poem by Geoffrey Hill, 'Genesis', written when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, first published in 1953, and collected in *For the Unfallen* in 1959. Portentous but not sententious, Hill's words already bore a weight to be gauged in the vocal cords:

By blood we live, the hot, the cold,
To ravage and redeem the world:
There is no bloodless myth will hold.

These lines expressed for me then a sense of the indelibly human and the inevitably violent, matched by what could be felt as the latent cruelty in *Maiden Castle* and John Cowper's other novels. Yet what had brought them together in my paper was, analogy aside, a separately intense devotion to each writer.

In *King Log*, published in 1968, 'Funeral Music' is a sequence concerned with the Wars of the Roses of eight sonnets, each drenched in gore and 'the human mire'. A further sequence appeared in his next book, *Tenebrae*, of 1978, and among the thirteen sonnets in 'AN APOLOGY FOR THE REVIVAL OF CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE IN ENGLAND' is one entitled 'The Laurel Axe':

Autumn resumes the land, ruffles the woods
with smoky wings, entangles them. Trees shine
out from their leaves, rocks mildew to moss-green:
the avenues are spread with brittle floods.

Platonic England, house of solitudes,
rests in its laurels and its injured stone,
replete with complex fortunes that are gone,
beset by dynasties of moods and clouds.

It stands, as though at ease with its own world,
the mannerly extortions, languid praise,
all that devotion long since bought and sold,

the rooms of cedar and soft-thudding baize,
tremulous boudoirs where the crystals kissed
in cabinets of amethyst and frost.

A luminously intricate sonnet, that crystallizes the better to condemn, that condenses as it disposes of its own lexical largesse. The violence here is politely concealed, in the way

by which wealth is afforded a languid and mannerly cover for the cruelty of the means by which it has been acquired. These sonnets will live in English, as English lives through them. Among his contemporaries there has been nothing to rival the complexities, implications and intensities of Hill's work; there has been very little in any age.

I had not in 1984, nor for decades afterwards, supposed that Hill had ever given a thought to John Cowper Powys. Already in the 1970s Hill was widely recognized in the terms that would be ratcheted to the headlines of this month's obituaries — 'England's greatest poet' and so forth — while John Cowper was then, as usual, as since, barely acknowledged. Hence my inability or unwillingness to see a connection between them; an educated blindness was at work.

In 2010 Hill published a meditation on Wales and the border country, along Offa's Dyke, that he had made famous twenty-five years earlier in *Mercian Hymns* (1971). It was precisely in terms of disparities in recognition that Hill invoked Powys, for the only time explicitly, in stanza 115 of *Oraclau / Oracles*:

What will you give me to recount my losses
Now that I have come so far a loser?
Here you riposte: even so, far
Better known than J.C. Powys is
Which is bloody shameful.

Let me edge off here, weeping, triumphal,
As full of poison as a bad clam-shell,
However grandly to proclaim John Cowper
Our buried giant of deep things improper.

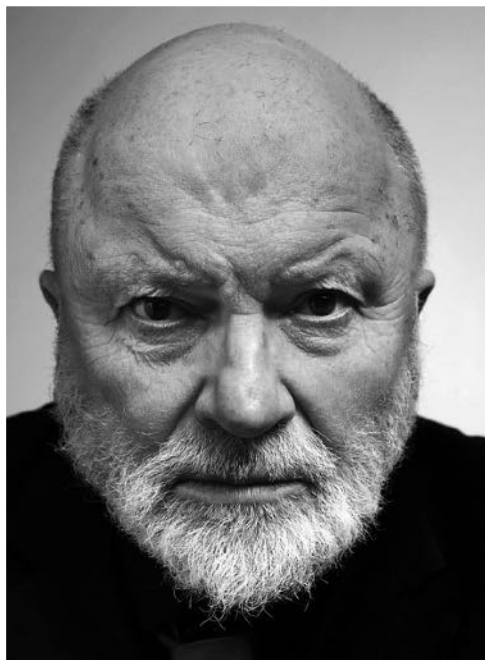
The one who made the riposte was Wilson Knight, addressing his younger colleague at the University of Leeds; Knight was there from 1946, as Professor of English from 1956 until his retirement in 1962, and Hill was lecturer in English at Leeds from 1954 to 1983. We may assume that Hill was bemoaning the lack of critical attention given to his first book, *For the Unfallen*. After explaining the context of this exchange, and the identity of the speaker, Hill affirmed, in a letter to me, that '*A Glastonbury Romance*, *Wolf Solent* and the *Autobiography* are among the very greatest things written in English during the Twentieth Century'.

By 2012, the date of this letter, Geoffrey Hill had been knighted for services to poetry; for poets, the world's recognition seldom reflects more brightly. Yet in the fifty years since Wilson Knight had offered that chastening (or consoling) comparison, the reputation of John Cowper had altered hardly at all. And Hill continues in the letter: 'and the way in which he remains an obliterated name threatens to destroy the last faint hope one has, that, in the end, excellence comes to be widely recognized,

and honoured.’ That the words of *Oraclau* might do their part to advance JCP’s reputation, Hill allowed stanza 115 to be printed at the front of Vol. XXII of the *Powys Journal*.

In closing his letter Hill made his own riposte to one who had confessed surprise at finding Hill an admirer of Powys: ‘PS. My poem “The Laurel Axe” in *Tenebrae* (1978) is of course also Powys-inspired.’ How could I not have heard in that poem any of the echoes it holds of the opening pages of *Autobiography*? I had even missed this clue from ‘In Piam Memoriam’ (1958): ‘The scummed pond twitches.’

‘Contract’ or a variant thereof is a word much favoured by Hill, hardly at all by Powys. Yet it is the contract, not only of society or even of the nation, that holds all together, in spite of the blood necessarily spilt and shed. ‘Contractual ghosts of pity’ is a phrase from ‘Funeral Music’. John Cowper offers no analogous phrase, but the extreme variety of persons and views that can be brought and held together in his novels, in his fictional Glastonbury or Dorchester or Edeyrnion, relies on some sort of contract: we might call it the contract of myth. Myths of blood and violence may disclose a contract in the Grail, to whom each character is in one way or another contracted. This is the mythic, at once horrific and holding, that is evident in ‘Funeral Music’ and *Mercian Hymns* as it is in John Cowper’s novels. To invoke such a contract, to posit such a Grail, to make any gesture towards harmony, while denying the extremes of violence or pleading for a bloodless myth, is the way of sentimentality. Never do we suppose that either Powys or Hill has chosen an easy way, or the way that gives ease. Their harmonies are difficult of access and, even when reached, can be rough to the touch, to the ear: they seem as though contracted to the places that hurt. Admirers of John Cowper will find themselves indebted to Geoffrey Hill — and not only for the devious magnificence of this phrasing and praising



Geoffrey Hill

to proclaim John Cowper

Our buried giant of deep things improper.

Maiden Castle at Ely meeting 23rd April 2016

Another excellent meeting organised by Sonia Lewis. We were about a dozen, including Glen Cavaliero and a newly-attending member, Kevin Taylor from Cambridge University Press.

Sonia introduced us to ‘The Scummy Pond’, her chosen chapter from this sometimes baffling book.

— Why this chapter? It comes in a convenient position in the novel, it contains almost all the characters, and crucial elements, and most of all it has the best title.

It begins by Dud changing his favourite month from September to May – due to the Dorchester effect. In the Friary bedroom he is awake and preparing for his morning walk, stumbles into a quarrel with Wizzie but it tells us that the main problem of the day is the pending dinner party at the Antelope. He sets off on his walk, encounters Claudius in the coal yard — the Airplane here is counterbalanced by the two ducks. He offers to help by intervening between Jenny and Claudius — another mistake.

Now the essence: the ‘interior substance of things’ ‘the emanation of things’.

We turn to this *winnowed reality* — for Dud this means ‘fusing himself with the whole weight of essential elements’. The cuckoo flowers [almost all cut in the first published version] become the ‘talisman that lifted the sluice gates of these intimations’. These are symbolic flowers; and at that moment Mr Droit the ‘drowner’ with his spade and his enigmatic smile passes by. These are keys to the inner life of Dud, and he goes on to question ‘what was it I felt, a glimpse of a reality just beyond *our* reality?’

He then slips into criticism of Thuella and contemplates how he will deal with her. He arrives back at his rooms, prepares breakfast and writes, feeling that he becomes the Medium for what he puts down.

Remembering his letters, after opening Thuella’s he has to rush off to meet her at Scummy Pond.

Everything is turned on its head — she comes *up* the lane not down, she is not wearing anything that he expected — looks rather lovely in a faded suit and frayed belt and with an oversized hat — to put it simply, he is floored! After explaining that she wants him to intervene on behalf of Urien with Mr Cumber, he realises that ‘he is to be rewarded as men have been rewarded by women from time immemorial’.

There is a delay as Dud has to go back to the gate to get Thuella’s hat (a woman’s ploy?) and encounters the three men and their wretched dog, who delay him. However, he and Thuella do enjoy together ‘such linked sweetness’ in a kind of cerebral erotic way. It seems such an ambivalent passage, I think it is only the Ash tree that really understands what went on!

Returning to Friary Lane, Dud attempts to speak to Jenny on the Claudius topic and encounters her anger ... Wizzie looks particularly lovely but is concerned about *her* hat ... And now the Antelope dinner. Cumber with his 'concentrated civility' becomes a springboard for Dud's thoughts, and through him we are given a snapshot of those present who form 'those ripples on life's surface'. Dud intervenes again, this time on behalf of Urien, only to find that Urien has managed quite well without his help. He [Dud] doesn't like seeing Wizzie and Thuella getting on so well together: 'he did not want to lose his sense of guilt in regard to them'. He leaves abruptly and meets Urien outside, who suggests they walk to Maiden Castle.

Dud cannot leave alone the question of Urien's name. 'Enoch's a good biblical name, Urien's like the name of a person in a book – it doesn't sound authentic.' This is followed by the bombshell. 'It was your mother's favourite name. We meant it to be your name ...'

In discussion, the oddness of *MC* was generally felt, with differing ideas of what actually is going on at the Scummy pond ... How important are the differences between the two versions – omissions of more longwinded or fanciful passages, in the publishers' view — eg of the cuckoo flowers (aka Lady's Smock). Or do these give more clues to character of Dud?



Discussing Maiden Castle at Ely.



Which characters are most or less convincing? Why no further mention of Nance's young son in the graveyard? Presumably this was Urien's son too.

A selection of views from books follow.

On Maiden Castle

Glen Cavaliero: *John Cowper Powys, Novelist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973)

Expressive of a powerful and devious, but genial, personality, [the novels'] atmosphere is unique in its blending of extravagance and self-mockery, intensity and comprehensive sensuousness. Underlying them all is a prevailing scepticism that never degenerates into bitterness or gloom. ... a serious attempt to come to terms with both the inner and outer aspects of experience ... Powys's central concern might be summed up as the truth of fiction. ... a place in which to explore the abiding nature of the child within the adult ... [Foreword – p.viii] ... He is not only the champion of the solitary man in an age in which gregariousness has become a moral, not to say commercial, virtue, but also the compassionate analyst of the immature [p.3] ... a convinced animist ... a contemplative merging of the self with the exterior world, the elemental world which the mind shapes and seeks to control. [p.5]

on Maiden Castle:

Perhaps the most Powysian of all the novels ... [Dorchester] the scene of, and the means to, a man's awakening to reality. [p.93]

... [Dud ends] left alone, confirmed though chastened in his life-illusion [p.96]

... a novel which explores the whole nature of nervous tension ... [the Wessex novels] are psychological myths ... [p.101]

... *Maiden Castle* is more like an abstract of life. This is not to say that it is not life-like; but its truth is the truth of poetry rather than of prose. [p.102]

G. Wilson Knight: *The Saturnian Quest* (Methuen, 1964)

In *Uryen* we have Powys's attempt to personify a wisdom or wise-being which is death as well as life; animal and the inanimate as well as man; a, or the, creative principle, wronged by four thousand years of misguided progress. *Maiden Castle*, except for Wizzie — and the child Lovie — must be read for its philosophy. It is a hinge and a precursor. Though his conflict with the sun denotes a limitation, we can nevertheless say that in *Uryen* much of Powys's future speculation lies curled as in a womb. In terms of this extraordinary and half-repellent personality Powys is forcing a passage towards his Golden Age. [p.5]

Malcolm Elwin: Introduction to Picador/ Pan edition (1979)

Maiden Castle derives as a corollary from *The Art of Happiness*, with which it comprises in some sense a complement to the *Autobiography*. Wizzie Ravelston, Jenny Dearth and her sister Thuella, and Nancy Quirm are all women with different backgrounds of

past suffering which have moulded their characters, and the story reflects the conflict of their characters upon each other and upon their menfolk. The power of feminine influence is further shown in No-man's being still affected by the personalities of his mother and his wife long after their deaths. *Maiden Castle* is indeed the story of men and women whose characters have been made or marred by the loss of their first loves and first faiths, of their struggle to readjust themselves, and of the devastation created by the struggle. Above all, it is a study of the destructive powers of feminine emotions.

Most recently, **H.W. Fawcner**'s new study, *John Cowper Powys and the Elements* (The Powys Press, 2015) sheds much helpful light on *Maiden Castle* in terms of the language actually used by the narrator through his characters (chiefly of course Dud), to convey openly or unconsciously their states of mind and life-strategies and connections with wider, elemental, influences. He concludes (after a discussion of the role of the Lesser Celandine):

'By highlighting the elements in this study, I have sought to throw light on *Maiden Castle* as a work of literary art that — in the very habit of giving priority to sensations — is in fact constantly presenting the more mature view that life is a mystery lived not in the inner spheres of imagination and sensations but in those vaster fields that, due to their enormity, can never become "objects of experience" and therefore never system-units in any supposed systemization of experience The project of superintending sensations by ordering them into a happiness-system is built to self-destruct. What remains when the system is gone never becomes known to Solent or No-man. Yet this is a failure one can live with. For what interest (what mystery?) would creation hold for one who had somehow managed to construct a smoothly-running life-system; or for one who, having accepted a system's breakdown, knew exactly how to start building the next one?'

KK



Woodcut by Gertrude Powys, originally in LLP's *Earth Memories* (1934).
Could this be Wizzie and her beloved horse?

Powys Day, Dorset County Museum, Dorchester

16th July 2016

About 10 of us were present for a discussion of Theodore's Theology in the library of the DCM. The discussion was led by Michael Kowalewski. Michael introduced the topics, which were discussed by all participants, concentrating on three works — *An Interpretation of Genesis*, *Father Adam*, and *Fables*.

MK began by stressing the sheer originality of Theodore's worldview. This vision was set in the context of his time, where Gnosticism and alternatives to orthodoxy were being explored. The biblical tone of *Interpretation* obviously was influenced by the Bible, but also Nietzsche who was an influence on all the brothers and a son of a vicar as well. All the three writing brothers had reacted strongly to the father's brand of orthodox Christianity, seeking new ways out of it, but also within it.

Theodore's *An Interpretation of Genesis* was first published in 1907 (re-released in 1929) and responds to the challenge of the critical modernist movements of the time by rewriting Genesis as a dialogue between a Seeker and The Lawgiver of Israel, who is ambiguously, God, Moses, and Theodore himself as the writer. God is referred to as the Truth, rather than God, and from him precede two archetypal figures, the Father and the Mother, around which Theodore weaves his rewriting. This device enables Theodore to meditate on the relation of Heaven and Earth, natural existence and spiritual freedom.

Theodore's extended treatment of the theme of the younger brother inheriting the father's blessing over the elder might well point to a struggle with John Cowper, his elder brother. This reappears in the *Fables*, in the story of John Pardy who returns home after 30 years in America and then drowns himself while talking to the waves.

If *An Interpretation of Genesis* sets the theological orientation at the beginning of Theodore's career, *Father Adam* continues it in the form of fiction. The switch from Truth and high seriousness to fiction, comedy and irony is marked strongly from the first sentence. The themes of God, lust, love, the Law are continued in a new key.

One of the things noted about his brother by JCP was the intensity of his vision of evil, which frequently takes the form of an aged and wealthy lecher corrupting an innocent girl, not even out of lust but an existential and primordial cruelty beyond free will or judgment. A sort of fault in creation itself.

The notion that the Jehovah of the Bible and the Father of Jesus had resurfaced in the early 20th century, and whether he was influenced or simply paralleled this idea it was an idea Theodore was willing to pursue in many works, including in 'The Only Penitent' where Mr Jar, a form of God, confesses to the murder of his son. Indeed, Theodore is much taken with the possibility that almost anything, including in one

story a hat, can become God. In one fable, 'Mr. Pim and the Holy Crumb', a piece of communion bread takes on that role and is eaten by a mouse for its pains.

Theodore took up a unique position between atheism and belief constantly alluding to theological themes yet never giving away what he himself believed. This is apparent in *Fables*, many of which are a dialogue between what we would regard as dumb beings, such as seaweed and clock, a hassock and a missal, a worm and a hen, a skull and a gravestone. These very non-platonic dialogues are experiments in opposed theologies and usually end in the pathetic death of one of the interlocutors.

One constant in Theodore's theology is the belief in the finality of death which is the only release from a world of suffering and leads to no afterlife. What we experience here of God and the mystical is all we can have.

Michael concluded by saying he found that metaphysical fear was the key to Theodore's writing. A fear that can lead to Love, almost as if affliction proved rather than disproved the deity. In his latter years of silence Theodore may well have purified his fear and found some kind of mystical communion. He remains an enigma.

MK

Notes and News

From Charles Lock

On Radio 4's *Pick of the Week* (this evening, Sunday 19 June) I heard that the **Brazen Head bookshop**, in Brooklyn, so hidden that one virtually has to make an appointment, is named after a novel by John Cowper Powys, and was so named by its proprietor Michael Seidenberg. This information was first broadcast on the Radio 3 programme *The Essay*.

From Chris Thomas

The extract heard on *Pick of the Week* was taken from a series called *The Shopping News* in which journalist Joanna Robertson talked about her experience of shopping in different cities around the world such as Rome, Paris, Berlin and Tirana. The programme devoted to New York, broadcast on Tuesday 14 June, dealt with shopping for books in New York, where the presenter was accompanied by the American writer and critic, Susan Sontag, and included a discussion of the Brazen Head bookshop. Articles about the bookshop and its owner, who runs the shop from his private New York apartment, appeared in the *Guardian* in 2015, in the *New Yorker* in 2008, which specifically mentioned JCP, and also the online *Huffington Post* in 2011. For more details please visit the Brazen Head bookshop website at www.brazenheadbooks.com

From Jacqueline Peltier

Zouheir Jamoussi at Tunis University, author of several books on mainly 18th century English literature and history, has updated and revised his 1971 doctoral thesis called *Theodore Powys's Gods and Demons*. The book will be published by Cambridge Scholars later this year.

A dissertation by **John T. Connor** for the University of Pennsylvania, 2010, called *Mid Century romance: modernist after-lives of the historical novel*, includes a discussion of JCP's history novels and is catalogued on the internet at <http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/185/>

Jacqueline's French translation of *Suspended Judgements* by JCP, *Jugements réservés*, with notes by Jacqueline and an introduction by Marcella Henderson-Peal will be available at this year's conference (CT).

From Chris Thomas

Paul Weston has recently published *Glastonbury Psychogeography* (Avalon Aeon Publications, 2016) in which he discusses *A Glastonbury Romance*. Paul has also added to his website the film of his talk about 'A Glastonbury Romance, A Personal Approach to A Glastonbury Romance', which he delivered at our conference, 'Grail Visions', in Street in 2010.

A bibliography of Iain Sinclair's works, compiled by Jeff Johnson in the USA, will include references to articles about JCP written by Sinclair and published in past issues of the Powys Society Newsletter.

Colin Blundell, poet, publisher, instructor in life-coaching and time management courses, and friend of Patricia Dawson, has published a blog in which he discusses JCP, *The Meaning of Culture* and ideas about the 'life illusion' at: <https://colinblundell.wordpress.com/2016/03/31/a-secret-mythology-r10/>

The **National Library of Wales** has acquired from a private dealer the collection of letters from JCP to Dinah White, the nurse who cared for JCP's son after his motorcycle accident. The letters had previously been offered for sale at a public auction in Salisbury in 2012.

NLW has also now included in their on-line catalogue of manuscript material the typescript of the deleted 6 chapters from *Wolf Solent* which were analysed in an article, 'The Disfigurement of Gerda', by Ben Jones, in the *Powys Review*, No2, Winter 1977. The holograph manuscript of the deleted chapters is located at Syracuse University.

In **Haunted by Books**, (Tartarus Press, 2016) by **Mark Valentine**, member of the Powys Society, editor of **Wormwood** magazine and champion of forgotten authors and books, I found several references to TFP including a reference to an interview with F.R. Leavis, conducted by the American poet, critic, and novelist, **Frederic Prokosch** (1906 -1989), in which Leavis included TFP in a list of writers who he said he still considered worth reading (although, he added, he included TFP ‘*grudgingly*’). I asked Mark to elaborate on this and he said in an e-mail that this reference can be found in a book called *In the Fifties* (1995), pages 33-4, by the historical novelist, anthologist, editor, and author of memoirs of literary life in London, **Peter Vanisttart** (1920-2008). Mark quoted the reference about TFP in full: ‘*At Cambridge, he [Prokosch] had called upon the formidable F.R. and Q.D. Leavis ... Of novelists, Joyce, Lawrence and Forster were, that afternoon, accepted, also two more. “How do we feel about Virginia, dear?” “We have accepted Virginia Woolf.” Queenie had, too, accepted T.F. Powys, though with an air of self-reproach. “He is of his own effects repetitive, but he has integrity and that is what matters.” Prokosch demanded the sixth. Leavis peered at him. “Is there a sixth? Who knows? Quite possible. Do we accept a sixth, Queenie? We have considered L.H. Myers, dear. To be sure”*’ Mark says that he recommends Peter Vanisttart’s book in general, as an excellent portrayal of the 1950s, as well as his other memoirs, *Paths to the White Horse* and *Survival Tactics*. The reference made by Leavis to L.H. Myers (whose father was F.W.H. Myers, founder, in 1882, of the Society for Psychical Research) is especially interesting as we know from the evidence of JCP’s diary in 1935 that Phyllis in particular was a very keen reader of L.H. Myers’s novel *The Root and the Flower* (1935; collected in the linked novels *The Near and the Far*, 1940) and we may therefore wonder if this might have had an influence on the writing of *Porius*. Compare, for instance, the first sentences of *The Root and the Flower* and *Porius*. *The Root and the Flower*, begins: ‘*Little Prince Jali stepped on to the balcony and looked down upon the plain in awe.*’ *Porius* begins: ‘*Porius stood upon the low square tower above the southern gate of Mynnyd-y-Gaer and looked down on the wide stretching valley below ...*’

From Louise de Bruin

In the *Giant Dongle*, the free magazine from the West Dorset branch of CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale) No. 26, summer 2016, **Jerry Bird** devotes in his article ‘Dorchester’s Lost Pubs, part 2’ a few paragraphs to JCP and quotes a passage from *Maiden Castle* about Dud No-man’s visit to the Antelope Hotel.

Alliance of Literary Societies

Chris Thomas reports:

I attended the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies on 21-22 May, in Haworth, which this year was hosted by the Brontë Society. The ALS has over 100 members and there were about 30 organisations present at the AGM including representatives of the Virginia Woolf, Arnold Bennett, Charlotte Yonge, Jane Austen, Hardy, Orwell, Charles Lamb, and Samuel Johnson societies. The event, which was well organised, was slightly let down by the absence of a delegate list. However I managed to work out who was who. The event was a very good opportunity to meet the members of other literary societies, discuss issues of mutual interest, share problems and solutions and find out more about other writers, some of whom were well known to me and others not known to me at all, such as Leo Walmsley. All the delegates seemed to share the same enthusiasm and passion for their favourite writers and a keen willingness to explore ways to help promote our various societies. This was also an opportunity to get reacquainted with Brontë country (I visited nearby Ponden Hall — the most likely real inspiration for *Wuthering Heights*) and see more of north Yorkshire.

Our hosts, the Brontë Society, were very welcoming and allowed delegates a free visit to the Brontë parsonage where we were treated to a special view of their many artefacts associated with the Brontës. The Brontë Society is richly endowed with original letters, portraits, manuscripts, first edition books and other objects, such as a beautiful portrait of Anne Brontë by Charlotte, a carnelian necklace worn by Anne, which we were shown in a spirit of almost religious awe and respect. The curators called these things ‘treasures’. But security and insurance must be a headache I thought. We walked through the parsonage and saw a fine display charting the life and times of the Brontës.

Local historian and Brontë expert, **Juliet Barker** gave a talk on ‘Re-Writing Writer’s Lives — Mrs Gaskell and the Life of Charlotte Brontë’ which raised lots of questions about the role of a literary biography, truthfulness and the invented representations of a life — Mrs Gaskell is of course well known for virtually creating the Brontë myth. I could not prevent myself from thinking of the way JCP has been represented, or misrepresented, by his critics and his biographers. We also listened to a very entertaining talk by **Ian Dewhirst**, ‘The Druggist and the Relieving Officer, and other Writers in Haworth’ who attempted to dispel the Brontë myth of a lonely, remote and isolated community — why are the moors

always depicted as ‘bleak’ he said. He showed that the Brontës weren’t unique, surrounded as they were by other poets and where they had access in Haworth, Keighley and Leeds to circulating libraries, lectures and other cultural activities.

At the **AGM** delegates were informed of the newly appointed ALS President, Clare Harman, who is well known to the Powys Society as the biographer of Sylvia Townsend Warner. Delegates were also invited to submit digital images of their authors and provide other information that can be uploaded to the **ALS Facebook** page to help extend publicity and promotion at no extra cost. Plans were discussed for an extension of the ALS website, a new blog and more opportunities to promote communication between societies and sharing news and information. You can expect to see the Powyses on Facebook very soon.

The ALS publishes an electronic annual journal. Contributions are invited from all members of any affiliated ALS organisation on a preselected general theme. This year’s theme was literary scandals. **Ray Crozier** has an article in this year’s journal called ‘John Cowper Powys and the Ulysses Trial’. Other items in the Journal include articles about Arnold Bennett and George Orwell. If members would like to read a copy of the Journal, I will send a pdf attached to an *e-mail* on receipt of requests. Please see inside front cover of the Newsletter for contact details of Hon. Secretary. If you wish to receive a paper copy of the Journal please contact ALS direct and send a cheque, made payable to the ALS, for **£2.00**, to cover p&p, to 59 Bryony Road, Birmingham, B29 4BY. The theme of next year’s Journal will be ‘Lost, Found or Faked’. If you would like to submit an article about the Powyses on this theme, or receive more information, please contact Linda Curry at the ALS at: ljc1049@gmail.com or write to the address above.

This was a delightful, friendly and productive weekend and I hope the Powys Society will continue to maintain our association with the ALS and maintain good relations with its affiliated members in future years.

The AGM next year, will take place in Edinburgh. All members of the Powys Society are welcome to attend. Please visit the ALS website for more details at: www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk

Kevin Taylor

“This is Norfolk”: coming to Powys through a landscape

Membership of The Powys Society arrived as a Christmas present eighteen months ago. I was re-reading *A Glastonbury Romance* for the third time, alongside the *Autobiography*, and was beginning to mutter about John Cowper Powys in my sleep. My wife felt I ought to get out more, meet some like-minded obsessives. On 23rd April 2016 I attended my first event, a discussion in Ely of the ‘Scummy Pond’ chapter from *Maiden Castle*, and was pleased to find a welcoming and amiable group who had a lot of interesting information and insights into Powys.

He draws you in. About twelve years ago someone handed me a copy of *A Glastonbury Romance* and I realised after the first two chapters (‘The Will’ and ‘The River’) that this was something extraordinary. I knew nothing about the Powyses beyond *Mr. Weston’s Good Wine* which I’d encountered years before and recognised as a classic; this was different again, equally odd and even more powerful.

Those two chapters are woven into a landscape I know and love. The setting is Northwold Rectory and its environs, where the Crow family — including cousins John and Mary — gather for Canon Crow’s funeral and the reading of his will. The densely written, deeply evocative scenes which play out depend for their force on the particular contours of that landscape, described by Powys with loving attention and meticulous accuracy. They accommodate a drama of passion both cerebral and sensual, of erotic reminiscence and anticipation attended by “*beds of golden marigolds*”, “*pale, delicate-tinged cuckoo flowers*”, “*shoals of glittering dace*” and the kingfisher’s “*living javelin of blue fire*”. And as Mary and John row their boat westward, each bend in the river opens a new mythological dimension, presided over by the “*Primordial Power*” to which the John offers his secret prayer.

“This is Norfolk”, he said to himself, and in that intense, indrawn silence some old atavistic affiliation with fen-ditches and fen-water and fen-peat tugged at his soul and pulled it earthward.

At the conclusion the cousins pledge to meet again in Glastonbury, where Powys is preparing for them — with the same loving naturalism shot through with mythological significance and acute psychological observation — a profoundly contrasting landscape.

All writers of place (Thomas Hardy and Iain Sinclair are two of my other favourites) work with the *genius loci*, that underpinning of organic/inorganic presence with a psychic or spiritual intelligence which is both an innate characteristic of the location and also a feature of man’s dynamic interaction with it. In Powys as in Hardy this

intelligence is encountered and activated through layerings of engagement with a particular place, both actual and through memory and imagination.

For the present-day reader of *A Glastonbury Romance* with some knowledge of JCP's life, Northwold Rectory and the two rivers behind it exist on at least four different planes where time and place conjoin. The first is the 1880s and his boyhood visits to this rural idyll, his grandfather William Cowper Johnson's parish living, far from the dark oppressions of Sherborne School. The second is the week in 1929 which JCP (now 56) and Littleton spent lodging in the Rectory, reviving old memories and reliving childhood adventures in the garden and along the 'big river'. The third is the imaginative reconstruction in the novel itself. And the fourth is the actual place we may visit and revisit today: any encounter of the fourth kind resonating with vibrations from the other three.

I live near Northwold, and spent time sitting on the banks of the Wissey, still with its "*long shining river-weeds*" and "*dark places in the swirling water*". I took in the majestic sweep of the Rectory facade, reflecting on what JCP had done with, and to, this place. On the internet searching for old photos I turned up a postcard written on 20th June 1910, seemingly by a maid or housekeeper then living in the Rectory, probably to her sister in Norwich. It was a sweet, inconsequential communication with a perhaps plangent undertone but it raised for me another plane of meaning: the building as it must have been midway between JCP's boyhood visits and his 1929 return, occupied by different people with a whole other set of preoccupations, unsuspecting of their part in the space-time continuum that would give rise to one of the greatest literary accomplishments in English.

By coincidence (a fascinating word), the date I acquired this postcard was early-June 2010. Interested to see inside the Rectory, especially the drawing-room where the will was read, a plan occurred to me. On 20th June, exactly 100 years after it was posted from there, I made my way up the long drive and rang the doorbell, postcard in hand, to present as a gift to whomever answered. They would either be delighted at this gesture and welcome me with open arms; or call the police. Since I was also wearing my running kit, I felt the latter more likely.

It proved the former. The present owner of the house read the postcard, acknowledged the poignancy of the centenary day, and spoke warmly and expressively of her love of the place. She invited me back to have a look around the following weekend, which I did; and although the building has been reconstructed and the interior doesn't bear much resemblance to how it was in the 1880s, or 1910, or 1929, it wasn't difficult to imagine myself in the presence of the young JCP, or of the Edwardian maid who wrote the postcard (now in pride of place on the mantelpiece), or of John and Littleton in '29.

But the spirit which presided predominantly was that of the novel. The tensions in that scene when the will is read were as vivid to me as the ghosts of Canon Crow and his "*long-dead wife*" are in the book; and the encounter triggered my awareness of yet another plane, a sixth: that of the writer in 1930-31 at Phudd Bottom, NY, 5,000 miles from Northwold but actively present there in his keenly engaged imagination, mediating those other planes and layers to bear out with extraordinary power the truth of Wordsworth's notion of "*emotion recollected in tranquillity*".



A Tale of a Postcard

Kevin Taylor is a recent new member of the Powys Society. In this note he describes how he became obsessed with *A Glastonbury Romance*. Kevin also describes his visit to Northwold, prompted by the chance discovery, on the internet, of an old contemporary postcard of Northwold rectory.

The postcard, posted in Northwold, and sent to a certain Emma Lloyd at 67 St Georges Street, Norwich, is dated 20 June 1910. This gave Kevin the idea of visiting Northwold exactly 100 years later, on 20 June 2010. In an e-mail to me Kevin speculated that the sender of the card, Mabel, was probably a domestic servant, who was employed at the rectory, and was writing to her sister in Norwich. It occurred to me that theoretically in fact it should be entirely possible to trace

Mabel and identify her. Kevin's speculation turned out to be absolutely right. I looked at the 1911 census and found the recipient of the postcard, Emma Lloyd, still located at 67 St Georges Street in Norwich. She was a domestic servant in a single household employed by an elderly lady, Dinah Godfrey. The census provided details of Emma's age, 25, and her place of birth, Woodton, in Norfolk. By checking the census for 1901 and 1891 I was able to locate her family which included her sister, Mabel Lloyd, the sender of the postcard, born in the year 1890. I then went back to the 1911 census and searched for the name of Mabel Lloyd in Norfolk. I quickly found her employed as a domestic servant for Edward Cyril Newcome (1855-1917), landowner, at Feltwell Hall, (a large three story building), in the village of Feltwell, which is only a few miles north west of Brandon and very close to Northwold. Although Mabel was clearly living at the Rectory in Northwold in June 1910 it is quite probable that since 1910 was also the year in which Claude Thornton, the successor of William Cowper Johnson as rector of Norfolk, was replaced by Nicholas Parker Gepp, this would have involved a sudden change of household during which Mabel found alternative employment at nearby Feltwell Hall. Another coincidence emerged from this association for Edward Cyril Newcome's father, Edward Clough Newome (1809-1871) was a famous ornithologist and expert falconer who was well known to the 4th Baron Lilford, Thomas Powys, who JCP called, 'the Bird Man', in a letter to Louis Wilkinson in 1956. Edward's family had been Lords of the Manor of Feltwell for over 200 years. (For more details of Edward Cyril Newcome, see Walford's County Families of the UK, 1871). Feltwell Hall has since been demolished and replaced by modern housing development.

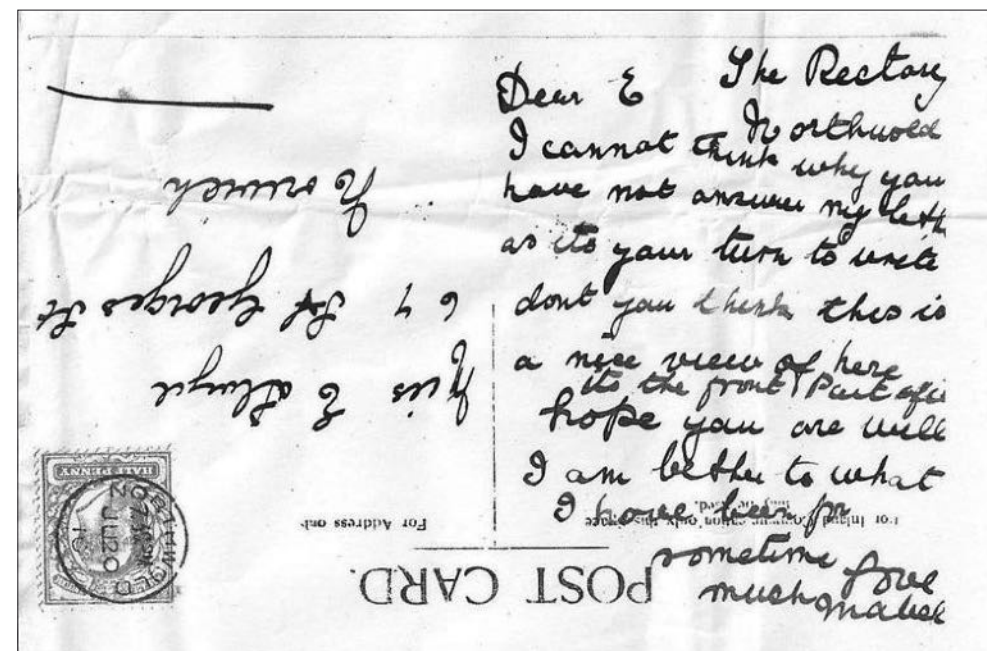
What Kevin also did not know is that the date of 20 June 1910 is significant in another way. According to Stephen Powys Marks in his article, Powys Family Connections in East Anglia (*The Powys Journal*, Vol.III, 2003), 20 June 1910 was also the date that the Cowper Johnson and Powys clan met for a family gathering at 9 The Close, Norwich where JCP's aunts, Catherine (Kate), Theodora (Dora) and Henrietta (Etta), were living. So at just the same time that Mabel's postcard from Northwold was arriving at St Georges Street, the Cowper Johnsons were gathering for a family photograph in the garden of No 9 The Close (the photos are beautifully reproduced in Stephen's article).

We may well wonder whether Emma's employer, Dinah Godfrey, might possibly have been acquainted with JCP's aunts as St Georges Street is situated quite near to the Cathedral Close. How strange that a chance discovery of a slight piece of

ephemera on the internet should lead to this intriguing chain of Powys connections.

Members of the Powys Society visited Northwold in April 2014. See Newsletters No.81, March 2014, and No.82, July 2014 for photographs and report of the visit.

CT



Transcription of postcard message

Postmark: 20 Ju '10

Address: Miss E Lloyd, 67 St Georges St, Norwich

Message:

The Rectory

Northwold

Dear E

I cannot think why you haven't answered my letter as its your turn to write.

Don't you think this is a nice view of here. It's the front part.

Hope you are well.

I am better to what I have been for some time.

Much love. Mabel.

The Soliloquies and Fables of a Hermit

Mike Smith is a keen collector of limited editions, inscribed or presentation copies, unlimited signed copies and first editions of the Powyses. He also owns original letters from Francis Powys, Harry Coombes and David Holbrook mostly about TFP which he received in the 1970s during the writing of his dissertation 'The Soliloquies and Fables of a Hermit'. Mike is now offering many of these items for sale. If you would like to find out what he has available please contact him direct at: Mikesmith.rww@hotmail.co.uk

Here Mike describes his involvement with TFP's writing which began when he studied his books at school and continued at Warwick University with his dissertation 'The Soliloquies and Fables of a Hermit'.

CT

Mike Smith *A dissertation revisited*

In the summer of 1972, I loaded a small tent onto the back of my frail Honda 50 and rode from Coventry to Dorset in the hopes of finding material for my dissertation of Theodore Francis Powys.

I had studied Powys for English A. Level, and became enchanted with his unique writing style, his idiosyncratic values and the simple backdrop of timeless Dorset. However, I might never have become so attached to Powys had it not been for an absent minded elderly friend. I had borrowed *Kindness in a Corner* from the Head of English, who was taking us through *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*.

A teaching colleague of my mother discovered what I was reading, and being something of a Silas Dottery himself, asked if he could borrow it. I pointed out the delicacy of the situation but foolishly relented. Naturally he lost the book, and left me in an exceptionally embarrassing position. Before owning up, I searched every antiquarian bookshop in Warwickshire and got hooked on bookshops and Powys in the process. As an almost penniless student I spent precious pennies on Powys books wherever I went.

My trip to Dorset consequently saw more than just my tent loaded precariously on my back, for the return journey.

However my trip saw me acquire more than books, because the good folk of Chaldon Herring and Mappowder treated a hopelessly ill-prepared and under-funded

student with great affection and kindness. The landlord of the Sailor's Return (very obviously the Angel Inn from *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*), Leslie Burbage, virtually fed me for free, enjoying the daily update on my progress over a chat and a pint. The sculptress Elizabeth Muntz and her friend Mr. Bonamy shared their anecdotes of the Powys family and their status in the village. And best of all I gained, by sheer luck, insight into how the incident of the frizzled cat in *Mr. Weston's Good Wine* came about.

Dusty Miller, then in his 80s, told me how one night two village lads, who regarded Theodore as fair game for pranks, climbed up on his roof and dropped a live cat down the chimney, which then landed in the open fire, flaring up and frizzling all its fur. Theodore was waiting for them as they climbed down, but instead of frogmarching them to their parents, invited them in for a glass of wine. Dusty explained that this was typical of the eccentric things Powys would do, but I explained to him how the incident had ended up in Powys's most famous novel, suggesting that these two lads had probably provided the very example of casual cruelty he had been seeking at that very moment.

I tracked down Lucy Penny, the youngest of the Powys siblings, and we got on so well that I looked her up on all my successive visits to Dorset. I gained lots of biographical background from her, but it was difficult, because like so many gifted and gracious people, she was far more interested in her young visitor and his story. She pointed me to the Mappowder graveyard, and the church where I found an old exercise book with a moving tribute to Theodore from Littleton. In it he wrote: 'Mr Weston's Good Wine, Fables and Kindness in a Corner filled me with admiration at the originality of thought, the understanding of human nature and the dry humour of my hermit brother. One of the chief charms of his writing is its simplicity, you will never find a long sentence or a long word; it is his natural writing, absolutely free from affectation and studied artistry.'

It took me a whole dissertation, yet Littleton had nailed it in two sentences. He had also singled out three of my four favourites, *Unclay* being the other. These were the four books I chose to concentrate on in my dissertation, and it was my section on *Unclay* which both Lucy and Francis Powys most enjoyed.

Lucy arranged for me to meet Francis at Buckland Newton, and once again I was treated to wonderful hospitality, even though Francis was far from well, recovering slowly from a stroke. We talked about *Unclay*, and he was really pleased that I believed it to be exceptional, if not as polished as *Mr. Weston's Good Wine*, and he particularly agreed with my thoughts that *Unclay* was a sort of supplement to *Mr.*

Weston's Good Wine, developing established Powysian themes to a new dimension. It was after this conversation that he made me promise to send him a copy of my dissertation after it was finished.

Both Francis and Lucy duly received their own special copies (as did Landlord Burbage, though I'm not so sure it was received with quite the same level of literary interest). The University of Warwick have lost their copy, and my own linen bound version was lost in a house move. Fortunately I still have the marked copy replete with examiner's red ink.

As a retired Headmaster I know my limitations as a writer. Still it is quite illuminating to see both the insights and the limitations of the young me, writing with evident enthusiasm, and (I still think) sharing some part of a wavelength with a man who died two years after I was born.

Gift of correspondence between John Cowper Powys and Mrs Hetty Reid

The Powys Society has received a very generous donation of a collection of original letters from JCP to a correspondent, Mrs Hetty Reid, who worked as a librarian in Cape Town, written in the 1950s in response to Mrs Reid's enthusiastic reaction to JCP's *Autobiography*. The correspondence covers the period from 9 February 1954 to 26 April 1961.

The collection consists of 28 holograph letters sent to Mrs Reid in South Africa from John Cowper Powys in Corwen and Blaenau Ffestiniog, all signed and dated by JCP, including some original envelopes, and 1 letter, dated 12th October 1955, from Phyllis Playter to Mrs Reid.

The letters are all in excellent condition and preserved in plastic sleeves. The letters are either written on blue aerogramme paper or white notepaper. Some of the letters have been transcribed by the benefactor: five of these have been typed and 13 transcriptions have been handwritten.

This collection has been kindly donated to the Society by Mary Carson who inherited the letters from her cousin, Audrey Kilgour, a friend of Mrs Hetty Reid, the original owner, who asked her to look after them and dispose of them as she thought appropriate. Audrey Kilgour originally proposed publishing the letters when she became the owner in the 1990s and sought advice from the Society but

she did not pursue the project and retained the letters. When Mary Carson inherited the collection she wondered what would be the best thing to do to conserve the integrity of the collection as a whole and when she saw our website decided the letters would find a very good home with the Society and would be looked after in a professional way.

Although the letters do not add anything new to JCP's biography they do give us a very good picture of JCP in his old age, demonstrate the kindness he extended towards his correspondents, and give insights into his ideas and thinking at the end of his life.

The correspondence begins politely in 1954: '*My dear Lady*' but progresses to a more familiar form of address: '*My dear Friend*' and '*My dear old Friend*' in 1957. JCP tells Mrs Reid about himself: '*I have only two virtues – industry and gratitude*', as well as about his health, old age and his loss of memory, his belief in a self cure, his diet, his fear of heights, his family, his writing projects – he was working on *The Brazen Head*, called at this time, *The Two Barons*, and *Homer and the Aether* called then *Homer and the Aegis*, and *All or Nothing*; he discusses his writing style, which he admits is '*long winded*' and says writing essays is much easier than writing novels. He refers to his self image as a medium inspired by the spirits of other writers. He discusses his favourite books and writers (Milton, Anatole France, Coleridge, Thomas Browne, Hazlitt, Charles Lamb, Rabelais, Don Quixote, Goethe's Faust). He explains he is a born letter writer but fears he may soon have to give up writing letters although he always wants to go on receiving them. The letters contain references to the work of Elizabeth Myers, the prose style of Arnold, Pater, Newman, and Conrad. He gives an insight into the help he and Phyllis received from neighbours in Corwen – especially the two boys David and Roger Jones.

The collection of Mrs Reid's letters will now be deposited in the Powys Collection at the University of Exeter where they may be consulted by readers on request to the archivist.

Chris Thomas

Frederick Davies
A Letter to Colin Wilson

This letter was first published in the Aylesford Review, Summer/Autumn issue, 1964. It was written in response to Colin Wilson's article, 'The Swamp and the Desert: Notes on Powys and Hemingway' published in the Aylesford Review, Spring 1964. Wilson's article was reprinted in his collection of essays, Eagle and Earwig (1965). But Frederick Davies's reply has never been reprinted. In the article Wilson discusses JCP's tremendous creative force, his fertile imagination, the contradictions in his character and his writing, he refers to what he calls his old fashioned sentimentality as well as his morbidity, his modernity, his understanding of erotic forces, his vitality, his sensuality, his method and style of writing and the reasons that prevented him from being a really great writer. Davies found much to argue with as well as agree with in Wilson's article. Since old copies of the Aylesford Review (which was published between 1955-1968, edited by Father Brocard Sewell) are hard to obtain and the letter by Frederick Davies has never been reprinted it seems a good opportunity here to reproduce his text in full. His comments are still relevant today.

CT

Dear Colin Wilson

This is simply to relieve the schizophrenic tension your *Notes* have engendered in me! There is so much I am in whole hearted agreement with you about JCP – but there is also much which has completely infuriated me. But I expect by now you are accustomed to such reactions? Apart from George Steiner's *The Death of Tragedy*, *The Outsider* and *The Strength to Dream* (Davies is referring to two of Wilson's books) have been the most provocatively stimulating books on comparative literature since Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism*.

Of course you are absolutely right when you say 'Powys ... can never see more than a chapter ahead.' In fact he never even saw that far ahead. He told me many times — partly to encourage me in my own writing — that he never knew what he was going to write next until he had his pen in his hand. He was an 'inspired' writer just as he had been an 'inspired' lecturer. As a lecturer he held audiences of thousands under a magnetic spell — with no notes in his hand — with eyes closed — with his long arms and uncanny fingers vibrating with his terrific personal magnetism. As a lecturer he believed words came to him from outside himself. As a novelist it was exactly the same. He believed most firmly

that the creative will power of his imagination tapped cosmic sources. Here, though I must make the proviso, in his later historical novels he did a remarkably meticulous amount of research before letting loose the powers of his imagination — and letting loose could only be obtained by the physical feel of the pen in his hand.

But he was not only an 'inspired' writer he was a 'compulsive' writer. He wrote because he had to. He wrote, like Byron, to escape from himself. In a sense he spent his whole life running away from himself. He did this by telling himself tales. Each day he would take up his pen and part of him would continue telling to himself the tale where he had left it the day before. And here I think is where you and many critics have completely misunderstood why he turned his back on the twentieth century. The Powys of 1938 was not an embittered man. He had certainly good reasons to be — but not the reasons you give. The damages awarded against him in the libel action over *A Glastonbury Romance* (hence *Weymouth Sands* becoming *Jobber Skald*). But even that is not in my opinion, the real reason why Powys turned to historical novels. The real reason lies in the nature of his imagination.

A very famous woman novelist (not one of the three you 'classify' him with [Wilson had referred to Rose Macaulay, Rosamond Lehman, and Phyllis Bottome] said to him shortly after he returned to England that she was deeply curious as to the kind of novel he would write once he found himself back home again, because *Wolf Solent*, *A Glastonbury Romance* and *Weymouth Sands* had all been written in America, thousands of miles away from the scenes of his youth which they depict and portray. The important point is that this lady novelist knew that JCP had several times tried to begin a novel in America about America — with an American setting and with American characters. But none of them had ever got beyond a few chapters. This lady novelist had discerned that Powys's imagination needed the romantic nostalgia of distance — distance in space or time. *Maiden Castle*, written in lodgings above a greengrocers shop in Dorchester is ample proof that she was right. And *Owen Glendower* is ample proof that Powys consciously or unconsciously realised it himself. Powys could only tell himself tales in order to escape from the present: from himself in America back into the scenes of his boyhood and later from himself in England (and Wales) back into the scenes of the present in the past.

There is so much else in your *Notes* I should like to discuss but I must not take up more of your time. Perhaps some day we may meet and talk. I hope so. I am afraid I disagree very strongly with the apparently generally accepted view of Powys as a basically Protean writer. Once the man is really known then his work appears more and more to constitute a consistent and rational whole. In other words I believe one

could ‘produce a thesis on the recurrence of Powys’s basic themes and symbols’ even though as you say ‘none are intended’.

With kindest regards and best wishes

Yours sincerely

Frederick Davies

PS. Now of course I feel I’ve given only half of the picture. Powys wanted to escape from himself. But that means nothing unless some attempt is made to explain why. And that would need at least Wilson Knight’s 30.0000 words! Very, very briefly: Powys wanted to escape from himself because paradoxically he was the most courageous of men, morally and physically — and gifted with (or handicapped by?) an enormous, almost masochistic strength of will power. He detested all the appurtenances of modern western materialism, and had the courage to throw them back in its face.

With regard to his writings — if any other person, even a Dostoevsky or Tolstoy, sat down each day and simply wrote what came into his mind, the result, to say the least, would be far from impressive. But Powys happened to be a genius and critics will be disagreeing over him a hundred years hence as they are still today disagreeing over Stendhal. Powys like Stendhal knew he was a great novelist and that he was very much in advance of his time. Unlike Stendhal, however, he did not foretell the exact date at which his work would become popular!

REVIEW

Jeremy Hooker: Scattered Light

Enitharmon Press, 2015, 120pp, £9.99 ISBN: 978-1-910392-08-9)

Scattered Light is a thoroughly engaging collection. In terms of lineation, word spacing, indentation; and in his use of white space and stanza weighting, Jeremy Hooker is consistent thus ensuring his poems might be read in a way that can be most rewarding.

Brother Worm constitutes the first of five sections. It contains just a single poem of the same title. The other sections are *Unfinished Portraits*; *Scattered Light*; *God’s Houses*, and *Island View*, with generous scatterings of ‘light’ throughout.

‘Father, painting’ opens *Unfinished Portraits* — a poem in which the poet recalls watching his father attempting to improve one of his landscape paintings by adding more colour, but actually spoiling it because of failing eyesight — nevertheless *It is his work to do with as he pleases* ... Hooker concedes. Landscapes crop up also as a means

of building portraits of others, including artists such as Ray Klimek (‘For Ray Klimek: Photographer’) who *Out of the dust brings to light / tyre tracks, footprints, cloud, / landscapes in flux* ... — then he captures ... *a wheelbarrow / beside a drainage channel, / dull red, but an ember against dust-grey slopes*. I welcomed what I took to be William Carlos Williams’s red wheelbarrow making an unforeseen appearance here.

Gerard Casey is the subject of ‘An Unfinished Portrait’ ... *with the presence / of the family around you. // Will and Gertrude in their paintings ... Theodore and John Cowper in their books. // Mary and Lucy everywhere* ... Gerard comes over as a strong but quiet man ... *suddenly, stunning the room / with a sermon* ... and also as the thoughtful man *walking on Chesil Beach / scattering ashes* ...

Among the poems of the *Scattered Light* section are brief encounters with the natural world. In ‘Butterfly Extravaganza’ we read that when *the day begins / to turn, spinning / scattering light / red pearl brimstone green* ... it is all ... *a blur, illegible*. And poems here often have as much to do with wind and rain as light – e.g. witness the effects of ‘Barleyfield Wind’ as *Ripple, / current, eddies, / whirlpool, a pattern created / and in one movement unmade* ... There are also shifts of emphases which lead to unexpected encounters – this for instance is where we find the poet’s unique interpretation of the Orpheus myth:

*The truth is,
after the bold descent,
the song calling,
echoing,
he was absorbed
into the ground.*

*Eurydice,
tendrils twined
around him,
climbed up
the ladder of his bones.*

(‘Orpheus’)

In *God’s Houses* Powysians will discover (if they didn’t already know) that Jeremy Hooker has sat where Theodore sat in St Peter and St Paul, Mappowder — *A place where a man / might hide himself from the world* and where *His tomb is a stone book, / the last enigmatic page / given over to grass*. For me, however, the most moving of the *God’s Houses* poems is ‘Holy Rood, Southampton’ destroyed by enemy bombing

during the blitz in November 1940 — *As the smoke clears, / Holy Rood is open, / windowless, a wreck* as were the dwellings that surrounded it — a place where a poet will wish to pause to reflect on the fallibility of the human race.

Staying on England's south coast — the main focus of the *Island View* section — we see *West Wight and the Needles / haloed in light, / another world*. ('Island View'). Along 'Saltgrass Lane' Hooker recalls being met *with a smack of light, / colour and salt-lashed air ...* and now where *For an old man / who walks with difficulty / memory is to return / without a stumble*. Then to 'Hurst Castle', *A symbol of power, / once our playground, / empty as a cockleshell*. There is no doubt that the poet still regards these landscapes as his home territory.

I wondered at the outset about the relevance of the introductory poem, 'Brother Worm'. It is reputed that Charles Wesley, the great hymn writer, frequently referred to humans as worms; 'Ye worms of earth arise ...' so I wasn't sure that I was setting off on the right track when I discovered the poem concerned another Charles — Darwin in this case. It begins with his becoming profoundly aware of the earth's susceptibility to movement as happened in the Concepción earthquake — ... *the ground moving from under him / like the Beagle in a cross ripple ...* It then focuses on his awareness of an earthworm's awareness as *through its skin knows vibrations / of a mole's snout ...* This collection for me, therefore, is essentially about awareness: a reminder to allow oneself to be enlightened by those things, places, landscapes and people that are all around and to respond to them sensitively — after all, even worms, *Blind, deaf creatures, / how alive they are, / how sensitive ...* — so much here is to do with JCP's 'Art of Happiness'.

I first became aware of Jeremy Hooker early in the 1980s when his colleague at U.C. Aberystwyth, Laurel Brake (who was married to my oldest of friends), mentioned his name as a Powys dedicatee in a telephone conversation in which I told her that I had recently 'discovered' the Powys Brothers. But it wasn't until sometime later I realised Jeremy Hooker was also a poet of some note when coming across his occasional contributions to the Society's *Journal* and *Newsletter*. And then it was only a year or two ago I made up my mind that I really ought to catch up with a body of his work, so acquired a copy of *The Cut of the Light*. I derived great pleasure from reading that volume, and now I have also had the pleasure of reading his *Scattered Light*.

Geoffrey Winch's recent collection is *Alchemy of Vision* (Indigo Dreams Publishing, 2014). His most recent JCP-related poem 'Frugality' is published online in *Militant Thistles* (<http://militantthistles.moonfruit.com/>)

Geoffrey Winch

JERRY BIRD
John Cowper Powys's
A Glastonbury Romance

A Glastonbury Romance is a magnificent *tour-de-force* of a novel, derided and admired in equal measure by critics when it was first published. It concerns the lives, loves and obsessions of the inhabitants of a Glastonbury undergoing the pain of transition from a traditional rural way of life to a modern industrial-based economy. It also portrays the nascent 'New-Age scene' of twentieth-century Glastonbury between the wars. *Glastonbury* is a massive book of nigh on half a million words and provides a rich tapestry of plot and sub-plot with human strengths, weaknesses, obsessions and endeavours richly painted on a canvas woven from myriad strands of mythology, magic and folklore.

Nearly fifty characters are portrayed, each having a unique relationship to, and perspective on, the town of Glastonbury and its mythology, lore and legend. The action moves slowly, and the novel often feels somewhat formless, but reading it is an exhilarating experience, and the reader is left in awe at the author's magnificent vision in attempting such a deep analysis of the mythology of place in a novel.

A Glastonbury Romance is almost impossible to summarize — suffice to say, it revolves around the religious revivalist ambitions of the individualist, grail-seeking, charismatic preacher and mayor of Glastonbury 'Bloody' Johnny Geard and his circle who envisage the town as a kind of spiritual commune. Set against them is John Crow, intellectually, an agnostic who rails against his own mystical leanings, and his cousin Philip Crow, an ardent modernist and capitalist, whose aim is to promote the town as a centre for commerce and industry, and to sweep away the '*monkish mummeries*' of the grail legend. Philip wants to

conquer it, this effeminate, flower-garden of pretty-pretty superstitions and medieval abracadabra! He would plant factory upon factory in it, dynamo upon dynamo! He would have mines beneath it, railways across it, airlines above it! (230).

Red Robinson, a communist agitator, for whom the town's mystical heritage is oppressive anathema, forms an uneasy alliance with these two, and the scene is soon set for a psychic battle between the sacred and the secular, the commonplace and the extraordinary. In Powys's *Glastonbury*, the indigenous population is largely sceptical of both camps; when Philip Crow defeats Geard in an impromptu public debate between industry and spirituality, the crowd's reaction is described thus:

There was a feeling among them all as they went off as if they had stretched out their arms as if to receive a Golden Bough and had been rewarded for their pains with a handful of dust (342).

Powys, here, cleverly references both T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), and Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). Neither is capable of connecting with the innate feeling of the people of Glastonbury; their personal, albeit inexpressible, sense of their town's timeless psycho-religious significance has more depth and percipient realism than the musings of either a modernist American poet, or a Scottish antiquary/anthropologist.

The novel's great set piece is the pageant that Geard organises in an attempt, in his own highly idiosyncratic way, to outdo the passion play of Oberammergau on Albion's soil.

As is the case with many of Powys's spiritually-incontinent characters, Geard's carefully-drawn aesthetic is startlingly earth-bound:

He had never been an artistic man. He had never been a fastidious man. He had got pleasure from smelling at dung-hills, from making water in his wife's garden, from snuffing up the sweet sweat of those he loved. He had no cruelty, no ambition, no breeding, no refinement, no curiosity, no conceit. He believed that there was a borderland of the miraculous round everything that existed and that 'everything that lived was holy' (1171).

Powys's own complex philosophy, and his sense of the spiritual '*multiverse*', as he calls it, was explored in many of his philosophical works, of which the best known are *The Meaning of Culture* (1929) and *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930). These propound a vivid sense of Man's belonging to, and being a part of, nature, and the connection of the individual's psyche to something universal and creative in the life-force which, borrowing a phrase from Nietzsche he terms the '*First Cause*'. This connection, according to Powys can only be made through '*indulging our "sensual" rather than our intellectual side*'. The Gnostic First Cause, which Powys describes as '*divine-diabolical*' is the unpredictable, dualistic force in his cosmology, and in *Glastonbury*, the grail, which is effectively the soul of Glastonbury is a part of the First Cause itself:

The Grail could not actually be "killed", for the Thing is a morsel of the Absolute and a broken-off fragment of the First Cause. It could not of course be killed literally; not in the sense of being annihilated. But it could be struck at and outraged in a way that was a real injury ... After all, though there was an unknown "element" in the composition of this broken-off piece of its own substance, that the First Cause had flung down upon this spot, there was also something of the "thought-stuff" of this same ultimate Being in the personality of all its living creatures. Thus in the psychic war that was going on above the three hills of Glastonbury, the Absolute was, in a manner of speaking, pitted against the absolute (781).

This sounds very much like modern Pagan theology, in which the 'spark of the divine', which is to be found within all living beings, connects with certain sacred, and/or mystical, places where the Earth Goddess's influence is strongest — Glastonbury being one of the foremost examples.

In chapter three, John Crow, on his way from Norfolk to Glastonbury, is given a lift by the antiquary Owen Evans, who takes him on a guided tour of Stonehenge. This passage does nothing whatsoever to advance the storyline, but it does serve to reinforce the sacredness of place which is so central to the novel's ethos, and was probably inspired by Hardy's scene in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, which Powys so much admired. It also establishes a fundamental flaw in the character of John Crow; the religious sceptic is greatly impressed with the monument, declaring '*This is still alive. This is no dead Ruin like Glastonbury*', thus making a favourable comparison between pagan Stonehenge and the ruined Christian heritage of Glastonbury Abbey, and St Michael's church on the Tor (82). He embraces the hele stone, saying '*Stone of England, guard Mary Crow and make her happy*'. Much to the annoyance of the pagan-inclined, if otherwise outwardly conventional Evans, the agnostic John Crow appears to experience a religious ecstasy at Stonehenge. Powys's masterful use of irony is to the fore here; Evans's own religious ecstasy comes later when he nearly dies, tied to the cross, impersonating Christ at Geard's religious pageant.

Just as the sacredness of place is often described in terms of liminality — 'where the veil between the worlds is thin' — to Powys, prayers offered to the First Cause (as in Crow's supplication to Helios at Stonehenge) are most likely to be propitious at liminal times of the day:

The best time for any human being to pray to the First Cause if he wants his prayers to have a prosperous issue is one or other of the Two Twilights; either the twilight preceding the dawn or the twilight following the sunset. Human prayers that are offered up at noon are often intercepted by the Sun — for all creative powers are jealous of one another — and those that are offered up at midnight are liable to be waylaid by the Moon in her seasons or by the spirit of some thwarting planet. It is a natural fact that those Two Twilights are propitious to psychic intercourse with the First Cause while other hours are malignant and baleful (61).

The way in which the connection between the etheric First Cause and human individuals in the novel is manifest is most clearly illustrated in the case of Owen Evans, who is perhaps the most explicitly pagan of the characters in the novel:

He could feel the path to the horror, shivering with deadly phosphorescent sweetness. He could feel the path to the renunciation filling his nostrils with acrid dust, parching his naked feet, withering every human sensation till it was hollow as the shard of a dead beetle! The nature of his temptation was such that it had nothing to redeem it.

Such abominable wickedness came straight out of the evil in the heart of the First Cause, travelled through the interlunar spaces, and entered the particular nerve in the erotic organism of Mr. Evans which was predestined to respond to it (254).

Powys's knowledge of Glastonbury was exhaustive, and was for a large part based on personal experience. He visited the town while planning the novel in 1929, and amassed a library of books and maps covering its history and topography. He was also familiar with all of the principal Glastonbury grail romances in particular, and a large part of the Arthurian canon in general. He takes a few liberties for the sake of his storytelling, such as introducing a second storey into St Michael's tower on the Tor, and a Saxon archway at the Chalice Well, but it is recognisably Glastonbury between the wars, and not so dissimilar from the present-day town, both physically, and psychically, with a palpable tension between its spiritual and every-day preoccupations. Even the flood in the final scene was not unrealistic: a severe deluge damaged the town in 1925 and would still have been fresh in the minds of the townsfolk during his visit.

The association of the Grail with Glastonbury, as Powys well knew, was largely down to the legend of Joseph of Arimathea, which was first written down in the apocryphal *Book of Nicodemus*, around the fourth or fifth century. Powys boldly replaces Joseph with Merlin, thereby making his own contribution to the Glastonbury mythos. As in the Arthurian legends, in the novel, Merlin is a vital part of the story, and yet he is a largely invisible presence:

As all Merlin's disciples well know, there is a mysterious word used in the Grail Books about his final disappearance. This is the word 'Esplumeoir'. It is inevitable from the context to interpret this as some 'Great Good Place', some mystic Fourth Dimension, or Nirvanic apotheosis, into which the magician deliberately sank, or rose; thus committing a sort of inspired suicide, a mysterious dying in order to live more fully (169).

Dion Fortune (real name: Violet Mary Firth), Glastonbury resident and mystic, wrote disparagingly about *A Glastonbury Romance* in her book *Avalon of the Heart* (first published in 1934):

'Glastonbury Romance' ... has fluttered our local dove-cots to a painful extent. Do we behave like that at Glastonbury? I hadn't noticed it. I must have missed a lot. I am afraid that if people make the Glastonbury pilgrimage, expecting to find Glastonbury romance at the end of it, they will be disappointed. We do not quite come up to Mr Powis's [*sic*] specifications (Fortune 1995, 96).

Fortune, despite her condescension towards Powys (was the misspelling of his name deliberate, one wonders?) does seem to have been deeply influenced by him. W. J. Keith points out that *Avalon of the Heart*, published just a year or so after *A Glastonbury Romance* bears several striking resemblances to the latter. Both

books begin with an approach to Glastonbury *via* Stonehenge, and end with an apocalyptic flood. Moreover, she relies heavily on Powys's invented association of the Grail with Merlin, even referring to 'the wonderful holy well of St. Joseph, Merlin and the Graal'. She also makes much of the town's pagan versus Christian divide, and mentions '*watchers beside the Tor*', a reference that Powys also uses several times, 'watcher' in this sense being a kind of Gnostic spectator on the ethereal plane. Frederick Bligh-Bond in *Gates of Remembrance* (1918) records that one of his 'automatic writing scripts' (which ultimately got him fired by the Church of England from his job as architectural historian at Glastonbury Abbey) was signed '*We who are the Watchers*'.

As Geoffrey Ashe notes, Fortune and Bond were just two of the major players in Glastonbury's emergence as a 'New Age' centre between the wars, others being Katherine Maltwood, who discovered/invented the Glastonbury Zodiac, and Alice Buckton, whose drama group at times collaborated with Rutland Boughton, the composer whose 'Glastonbury Festival of Music and Mystic Drama' was staged intermittently from 1914 to 1926. Powys's frequent allusion to the Age of Aquarius in his philosophical works, and the occult nature of much of his fictional writing place him firmly within this camp. As Keith remarks:

JCP's Glastonbury looks not only backwards towards ancient legends, but forwards to new and challenging attitudes and beliefs. So far as I know, there is no evidence that JCP was acquainted with any of the proponents of New Age Glastonbury. He never mentions Maltwood or Fortune, but the allusions to Bond in *A Glastonbury Romance*, though never actually referring to him by name, imply more than a perfunctory awareness of his reputation, while the references to 'the Watchers' suggest that he might know more about Bond's Glastonbury circle than he is prepared to reveal (Keith 2010, 76).

The great set-piece at the centre of the novel is Geard's Glastonbury Pageant. Such pageants had actually been staged in or near the town in 1905 and 1906, and Powys, who had not yet left for America at that time, would surely have been aware of them. Geard's pageant is chronologically eccentric, starting with Arthurian scenes, a passion play in the centre, and ending with a prehistoric finale at Stonehenge (which, fate/Powys decreed, was never to be performed). The event brings together almost all of the characters in the book, with their complex interrelationships depicted in one impressive passage. The pageant is realistically portrayed, though not without a good deal of humour:

John's fury, directing itself blindly towards the Middlezoy King Arthur and towards the equally frightened pages who were to drag out the thrones, was now confronted by the soft protests of the prostrate Crummie, who, lying upon a lathe-and-plaster [*sic*] stretcher, roughly bulwarked to represent a barge, was attended by two lusty youths

from the Congregational Chapel who were to carry her in, at the critical moment of the coronation, and lay her before the king and queen. Across the body of Crummie, who was wrapped in a dark blanket over which her long fair hair fell in dishevelled allurement, a mitred bishop, Bob Carter, from the Godney grocery, who was clinging frantically to the crown of Britain, which an agitated page, Ted Sparks from the bakery at Meare, was trying to take away from him, burst into angry abuse at Lancelot du Lac. This melancholy Mirror of Courtesy was Billy Pratt of the St. John's Bell-Ringers, and Billy had infuriated Bob by insisting that it was his right to stand at the head of Crummie when the moment came for them all to emerge into public view, whereas Bishop Bob declared that Lancelot's place was near the queen. It was out of the midst of this noisy wrangle of Church and State over the beautiful corpse that the soft voice of the Lady of Shalott herself arose, enquiring of John what for mercy's sake was the matter, and why the performance didn't commence. "It's so stuffy in here," murmured the love-slain damsel (587).

The pageant ends abruptly when Owen Evans is taken ill while playing Christ on the cross and is rushed to hospital. Powys's narrator (one of the Watchers?) notes:

Not since the bloody king [Henry VIII] put the last Abbot of Glastonbury [Richard Whiting, executed 1539] to death had such physical pain been experienced by anyone upon the slopes of — Gwyn-ap-Nud's Hill. But it would be a mistake to say that the spirit of Mr. Evans yielded, or weakened, or regretted his undertaking. Right up to the end, till by straining his torso to the breaking-point he lost consciousness, he not only endured this anguish but he exulted in enduring it. His exultation kept mounting and mounting — extreme pain and ecstatic triumph embracing each other in dark mystic copulation (639).

It may have been this typically Powysian passage, conflating explicit sado-masochism with religious ecstasy, which so upset Dion Fortune's demure sensibilities. Her writing is almost completely sexless, and in *Avalon of the Heart*, as in her subsequent series of occult novels, the real action takes place almost entirely on the spiritual plane. In Fortune's novels, magic is always scientific, almost clinical, while Powys is more concerned with complex and unpredictable human reactions to spiritual and magical thoughts and phenomena, besides which *A Glastonbury Romance* is suffused with eroticism in many and varied forms. Fortune's magico-religious ecstasies are cerebral, Powys's are emotional, genital, or even, on occasions, excremental.

The grail itself appears in various guises to many characters in the book, often in vessel form, but sometimes not, and while the experience may be mystical, it can also be hum-drum. In Powys's text, the grail can be communion chalice or chamber pot; stone or sword; a sudden rainstorm or a pattern cast by a shaft of

sunlight. This reflects the wide variety of descriptions and associations of the grail in legend, and displays the author's extensive scholarship and knowledge of the subject.

Perhaps the most mystical of the characters' grail encounters is that of Mary Crow, though she appears not to understand the significance of her experience, and it is left to the 'Watchers' to confirm the reader's suspicions:

It was with a shock of real amazement, as something that seemed more blood-red than sunlight hit the left-hand column of the great broken arch, that the girl lifted her head now. She let her twisted dressing-gown fall loose about her shoulders and propped herself still higher in the bed, with the palms of her hands pressed against the mattress, for she became aware that the sight of this unnatural light — in reality it was a wine-coloured red, touched with a quite indescribable nuance of purple — was giving her a spasm of irrational happiness. She leaned forward, allowing her dislodged dressing-gown to slide down upon the pillows behind her and quite disregarding the fact that a cool sunrise wind was blowing against her flimsily clad figure. Her soul had come back with a violent spasm, like a rush of blood to her head, and her whole nature seemed to pour itself out towards the reddish light on that tall column. Her pulse of happiness was intense. What she experienced was like a quivering love-ecstasy that had no human object. She could actually feel the small round breasts under her night-gown shiver and distend. Her head instinctively fell back a little, while her chin was lifted up. Her lips parted, and a smile that was a smile of indescribable peace flickered over her face. She would have served at that moment as a model for some primitive Flemish artist painting a passionately concentrated vision of the rape of Danae.

Whatever it was that stirred her so, the effect of it soon passed; but Mary told no one, not even John, of the experience she had had on the dawn of the Baptist's day. The invisible Watchers however of human life in Glastonbury noted well this event. 'She has been allowed to see It,' they said to one another. 'Will she be the only one among these people?' (577).

John Crow, his reaction to Stonehenge notwithstanding, remains a sceptic, later referring to the grail mythology as nothing but 'lies, lies, lies', and he is actually horrified when he unwillingly experiences a vision of Arthur's sword — a phenomenon which Keith interprets as '*a warning against the deliberate suppression of any sense of wonder or expression of the unknown*'. Later, he is forced to acknowledge the supernatural healing of a cancer patient, Tittie Petherton, by Johnny Geard, who later also appears to have restored the life of a dead child.

Geard's own cathartic vision comes at the point of death in the apocalyptic flood that ends the novel. As he drowns, staring at the Tor, he sees '*that nameless Object, that fragment of the Absolute, about which all his days he had been murmuring*'.

At this point Powys emphasises the Tor's pagan, rather than its Christian, sanctity — suggesting perhaps that the Holy Grail holds more universally vital secrets than mere ecclesiastical mysteries. We see Geard's life-memories flash before him as his consciousness ebbs away, and he descends, Merlin-like into his own state of 'Esplumeoir', at peace *'about what should happen in the future to his new Religion'* (1171). Geard, Powys notes, meets his end *'in the exact space of water that covered the spot where the ancient Lake Villagers had their temple to the Neolithic goddess of fertility'*. In a sense, Geard here completes his own pageant, which was to have ended in a sequence revealing the pagan origins of the grail.

It is almost as if Mother Earth is impatient with the impasse between the pro- and anti-grail factions in this sacred place (and, by implication, Powys's unpredictable and mischievous First Cause). A final denouement (which is hinted at in the earlier descriptions of Geard's final, but aborted, act in his pageant), is pre-empted by the flood which cleanses the wasted land of its myriad, inadequate, projected human psyches, restoring sacred Avalon to its pristine, prelapsarian, fertile state. In the end, the creator/destroyer goddess, represented here as Cybele, prevails over pathetic human obsessions and preoccupations.

A Glastonbury Romance was a very successful novel in its day, and sold in vast numbers both here and in America, despite the author's unusual (and somewhat disconcerting) device of outlining his personal, highly unorthodox, spiritual cosmology in the first chapter, which has been referred to as 'the Beecher's Brook of English literature' (Beecher's Brook being a jump in the Grand National steeplechase which many riders and horses fail to negotiate at the first attempt!).

The innate paganism in much of Powys's writing is somewhat at odds with his cosmology as outlined here — the feminine and caring (albeit ultimately euthanistic) embrace of the earth-mother, who is mentioned several times in the text, is very different from the diabolic/divine First Cause. Many readers in the 1930s would have been startled by the prominence of pagan ideas and philosophy within its pages. The novel's second major release was by the publishers MacDonald, in 1955, by which time the modern Pagan revival was well underway, though still, to a large degree, underground (Gerald Gardner, the founder of Wicca, did not declare himself to be a witch on television until 1963, the year of Powys's death). By the time of its third major release in the 1970s, in a cheap paperback edition by Picador, with suitably mystical cover art, *Glastonbury* was already established as a major 'New Age' centre, and was now experiencing some of the pagan/Christian/secular conflicts which Powys's novel uses as a dramatic device — a case of life following art, perhaps, or maybe *A Glastonbury Romance* had a greater impact on the New Age and Pagan movements of the twentieth century than is generally recognised.

Powys's writing is certainly prescient. He writes of mysterious magnetic forces

present at megaliths — had he read Alfred Watkins's *The Old Straight Track* (1921), from which the idea of 'ley-lines' was first derived? — and compares (albeit subliminally) the architecture of Stonehenge and Glastonbury Abbey decades before John Michell and his ilk were shedding 'new light' on the subject, while his portrayal of an exciting, if gloriously eccentric, mystically-charged melange of Christian/pagan/anarchistic thought at the heart of this small Somerset town rings true to the experience of every visitor that has encountered the place in the last fifty years.

After *Glastonbury*, Powys's subsequent novels, *Weymouth Sands* and *Maiden Castle*, were more conventional, though only by comparison to the earlier novel's extraordinariness. His next major works were historical fiction, although calling *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius* (1951) historical novels is a bit like calling *Moby Dick* a fisherman's tale. *Porius* particularly is a masterpiece. At times it reads like an extended study of what Powys called *'the three incomprehensibles'*: sex, religion, and nature. At other times it reads like a magical mystery adventure. In one chapter an owl metamorphoses into a bird-maiden; in another the hero, Prince Porius, makes love with an aboriginal giantess while her father is busy plucking corpses from a battlefield with cannibalistic intent; in another the bard Taliessin (here, Powys's mouthpiece) chants verses such as *'The ending forever of the Guilt-sense and God-sense, The ending forever of the Sin-sense and Shame-sense'*. He continued to challenge his readership with unorthodox philosophical and polemical treatises, and outrageously fantastical writing almost until he died, at the age of ninety.

To mangle a now very hackneyed phrase, if John Cowper Powys had never existed, it would almost have been necessary for the modern Pagan revivalist movement to have invented him. His *Glastonbury* novel stands as both a milestone in English literature and an avatar of the 'New Age' movement, which all too few of its current proponents are aware of, though most will recognise his name from the late Colin Wilson's endorsement of both the man and his writing in his bestselling work *The Occult* (1971), which quotes G. Wilson Knight's comments about Powys's own feeling that he may himself have been a magician:

Those who have incurred his anger have so invariably suffered misfortune that he has, as it were, been *forced* into a life of almost neurotic benevolence ... Powys's early ambition to become a magician was no idle dream (Knight 1964, 62).

Unfortunately, Colin Wilson appears not to 'get' (in modern parlance) *Glastonbury*, as the following quote from the same book makes plain: *'A Glastonbury Romance is probably unique in being the only novel written from a "God's-eye" point of view'*. Actually this is far from the case — the author as narrator (or 'Watcher') nowhere

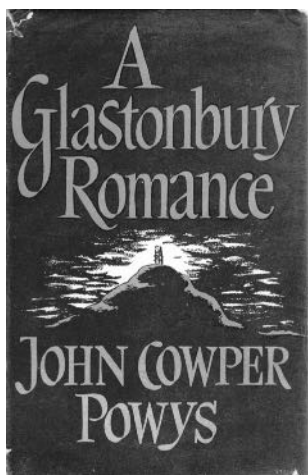
uses the term ‘God’ in his novel. Having read and re-read Powys’s masterpiece on several occasions, I am struck by the feeling that, while this is a deeply religious book, ‘God’, a single entity, is completely absent. And that is its point.

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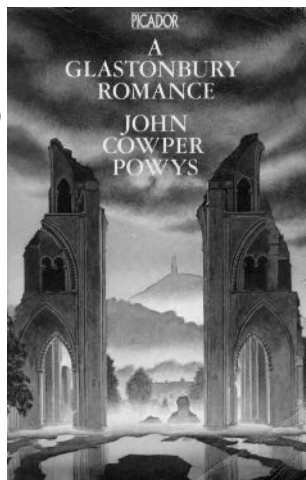
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Jerry Bird is the editor of *Merry Meet Magazine* (a journal of folklore and Pagan heritage). This a slightly shortened version of an article which appeared in Vol. 52, Spring 2014, and is part of an ongoing occasional series of articles which investigate modern literary novels that may have influenced the mid-twentieth-century Pagan revival. Other novels featured so far have been Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willowes*, and Lord Dunsany’s *The Blessing of Pan*.

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1955 Macdonald edition (left)



1977 Picador edition (right)