

Editorial

To those of us who came on the Powys scene in the early 1970s with Jeff Kwintner's Village Press, Ron(ald) Hall is a familiar name. Ron (1929-1985) left two heartfelt tributes to JCP's effect on his life, one the introduction to JCP's letters to Henry Miller in the 1975 Village edition, and another to the unpublished letters from JCP to his young self, some of which are in this *Newsletter*.

The chief publishing event of the Powys year has been *Recalled to Life*, the fifth and most substantial of Llewelyn Powys's diaries edited by Peter Foss, whose conference talk filled in the background to 1911. Arjen Mulder also takes a personal view of Llewelyn in Switzerland. The customary LIP Birthday Walk took place at East Chaldon (this year simultaneously with the conference). JCP as so often dominated the talks, but Michael Kowalewski discusses a Tunisian study of Theodore Powys, who is also recalled by Julia Mathews in her childhood memories of Mappowder. Chris Thomas tracks interesting leads and connections, from Jung at Chalice Well to Van Gogh's boots, and charts the wealth of revealing inscriptions on the flyleaves of Powys books.

KK

It was a great pleasure to meet some of our newest members at this year's conference, and very pleasing and interesting to read their accounts of the conference they attended for the first time.

The eloquent reviews, by Michael Kowalewski and Arjen Mulder, of new books by Zouheir Jamoussi and Peter Foss, provide tantalising fresh perspectives and deep insights into the work of T.F. Powys and Llewelyn Powys.

Jung, whose ideas surfaced in two of the talks at this year's conference, appears here, glimpsed surprisingly on a holiday in Glastonbury in 1939, visiting places well-known to JCP, and using the experience to develop his psychological theories about the connection between man and nature, individuation and a New Age.

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I hope members will come forward with more examples of inscriptions and dedications found in books by the Powyses, like the ones reproduced in this *Newsletter*. These inscriptions provide valuable clues to the interests, friendships, character and personality of the authors behind the books and their recipients.

CT



*From top left to bottom right:
Shelagh Powys Hancox with
Phoebe Clarke
Paul Cheshire
Richard Graves with
Marcella Henderson-Peal
Group by Pomparles Bridge*



The Conference 2016

This was our third time at Street, in the friendly Wessex Hotel, with Glastonbury and the Tor nearby, Montacute and other Powys places within easy reach. Over 45 people attended, several for the first time. The date was earlier than usual, coinciding with the traditional Llewelyn Birthday Walk at East Chaldon, on 13th August: intrepid members managed to do both.

On Saturday one group walked from Street over the Bridge Perilous (dodging traffic) and up Wirral/ Wearyall Hill (its magic thorn tree now a beribboned stump), pausing for evocative *Glastonbury* readings by Richard Graves (John Crow at the bridge, seeing the dead cat and Excalibur – chapter 13, ‘King Arthur’s sword’) and John Hodgson on the hill with the huge view of green Somerset behind him (Mad Bet and the two old men out by moonlight – chapter 14, ‘Maundy Thursday’).

Kevin Taylor not only *ran* up the Tor at dawn but *flew off* it (Philip Crow-wise) in a paramotor, taking an unusual photograph – see cover.

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On the first evening **Paul Cheshire** (of the Coleridge Society, introduced by Chris Thomas) on ‘JCP and the psychic-sensuous margins of life’, analysed the blending, or superimposing, of mind and body in our perceptions of the non-human world, and theirs of us – a world-view essential to JCP who saw consciousness and ‘soul’ in all things. In the opening chapter of *A Glastonbury Romance*, the Sun displays hostility, the Earth rivalry, towards the humans in its view; at other times sun or moon or evening star may be favourable, water and earth welcoming, or conniving. The underworld of Wookey Hole interacts with both Geard and Philip Crow. Sam and Nell, and Mary Crow, are favoured by the moon. The visionary Grail, the very real iron bar: both exert their power on minds and actions. The ‘Watchers’ take a scientific interest.

In discussion there were objections to the notorious opening chapter, and equally strong defences. ‘Claptrap’? A pagan challenge? God without using the word? Does JCP repeat this anywhere – writing from the controlling sun’s (or ‘Watchers’) point of view? Also discussed were the effects of the various cuts to the Wookey Hole chapter; JCP’s hopes for the Nobel Prize; the theme of Mothers; the ‘Cybele’ ending as a return to omniscient higher powers. And ‘How can the author *know*?’ Answer: the author is Creator, he *is* all things. ‘Know’ doesn’t apply.

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Next day, **Lindsay Clarke** (novelist, introduced by Tim Hyman) gave us ‘Beyond the Literary: JCP’s *Porius* and the Romance of the Polytheistic Imagination’.

Porius rests in the tradition of Arthurian retellings, its theme always of a

(somehow) wounded person redeemed by (some kind of) ritual. It is a Romance like *Glastonbury*, following the medieval romances (LC's special subject) with their metaphysical themes of quests, otherworld encounters, initiation, progress of the soul: the opposite of modern novels based on egos, irony and realism.

Like many of us, LC was drawn to JCP through Henry Miller, feeling comforting affinities with this dream-driven novelist – a 'charlatan of the imagination' as he described himself. He is more committed to life than literature, hence his uninhibited style. A propagandist for a magical view of life, he challenges conventional assumptions, entering unexplored areas of imagined human experience. The release of Merlin, the transformation of the owl, the mating with the giantess, are magical initiatory acts.

As in psychology, 'soul stories' help to find oneself through different states of consciousness. Many gods (as with Hindus), preside in a multiversal perspective, flexible and tolerant, stretching the imagination. The key to *Porius*, Merlin/Myrddin Wyllt, is a titanic divinity, ancient accomplice of time, voice of the earth and the secret roots of life, deeper than consciousness. In modern terms, he is eco-psychology.

*

Peter Foss – on Llewelyn's birthday (1884) – brought interesting illustrations of the events covered in Llewelyn Powys's 1911 Diary, *Recalled to Life*, edited by him and just published by the Powys Society.

Llewelyn was not 'a Diarist', and only kept one for certain years, after 1912 only occasionally; but he mined these extensively for his autobiographical books, principally *Skin for Skin*.

1911 is the fifth diary edited by PF (*Sherborne Schoolboy*, 1903, *Reluctant Teacher* 1908, *Immemorial Year* 1909, *Conqueror Worm* 1910): he hopes to do them all, but 1911 is especially interesting. Peter's essential 1991 *Study of Llewelyn Powys* goes into more detail.

1911 begins in Switzerland at the sanatorium where Llewelyn had been since 1909; he was critically ill in 1910 and still convalescent when he came home in April 1911. The early diary contains many quotations, when he was confined to bed and spent most of the time reading; he also copied-in poems and interesting letters (such as JCP's account of his time in Liverpool with Tom Jones and his girls), with photographs (several of his little niece Isobel). PF showed previously unknown photographs, one rescued from the Harry Ransom Center in the USA, where much of the Llewelyn material is, showing LIP on a sanatorium balcony with his beloved 'Biddy' Morrison. Another is of him lying on a sofa in the garden of his brother Will's farm near Montacute.

Many family and friends appear, discussing life and religion in the Vicarage garden, and as Llewelyn grew stronger going for long walks in that exceptionally warm

spring and summer. The special charm of Montacute was (is) its varied landscape, flat farmland plateau next to scooped combes and woods. Llewelyn had keys to the garden of Montacute House, from which Montacute hill appears like a mini-Tor; he also visited Tintinhull House with its planned garden, home of his friend Reilly with whom he later stayed uncomfortably in Jersey.

PF has counted 35 pubs that Llewelyn probably frequented (see *NL* 52, p.27). He finds Llewelyn research an ongoing joy, and ended the talk with a picture of himself quaffing scrumpy in Langport.

(Diary entries for October to December 1911, when Llewelyn visited Theodore, are in *NL* 55, July 2005. A review of *Recalled to Life* by Arjen Mulder is on p.28).

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On Saturday evening **Frank Wintle** introduced his 1986 film *Hilda's Book*, based on *The Mystic Leeway* by Frances Gregg, Hilda Doolittle's memoir *End to Torment* and poems by Ezra Pound to HD (in his pre-modern style). Frank became fascinated by this mysterious triangle of lovers, wanting to know what happened. He had heard about the book of Pound's poems found in the wreckage of Frances's bombed house in Devonport, and put a notice in the local paper asking for information on Frances. This was spotted by chance by her grandson Christopher Wilkinson, and one of the joys of the film was seeing Oliver Wilkinson talking about his mother Frances. The film includes acted scenes of Pound's wartime Fascist broadcasts, and of an encounter in a bar with one of the guards who witnessed Pound's imprisonment (he escaped execution by being classed as mad). The 'witch-like charm' of Frances was mentioned, and there was a reconstruction of one of the makeshift tents in which she and her family (including Oliver) were often reduced to living.

JCP's letters to Frances were published in two volumes (1994-6), and some of us may remember the moving dramatised reading of the letters, with Oliver as JCP.

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Finally, **Angelika Reichmann** gave what promised to be an intriguingly far-fetched thesis on the links between JCP and Kingsley Amis, in a comparison of *Wolf Solent* (1929) with *Lucky Jim* (1954).

AR gave a spirited account of echoes of *Wolf* in Amis's book, based on coincidences of names of characters (Urquhart, Christine) and the respective heroes' critical attitudes, both taking literary work with a person they didn't respect, both with a choice of two women, attractive vs 'interesting', and a powerful man as *deus ex machina* concluding the plot. She entertainingly described her academic researches into the two writers, all inconclusive since neither left any trace of having heard of the other.* Nevertheless, Amis was close to Philip Larkin, a professed admirer of TFP and possibly of John Cowper, and other contemporaries like Iris Murdoch

*But see *News and Notes*, p.24

were known JCP enthusiasts. Amis, a famously perverse man, could well have come across one of the reprints of *Wolf Solent* and never mentioned it – or perhaps in what he called ‘areas inaccessible to introspection’, have subconsciously incorporated the memory. In another Amis book, *I Like It Here*, the ‘phoney’ author the hero has to investigate is not entirely unlike JCP.

Both authors relate modernism to effeminacy. But Amis, reverting to Fielding in the 18th century, is anti-modernism as ‘culture’, as a form of pretension; Jim is presented as hyper-masculine. JCP’s models were 19th century, chiefly romantic as in Walter Scott; definitely not ‘Bloomsbury’, and never ironic. Wolf calls himself ‘a comic King Lear’ – too ego-focussed perhaps, to worry about the style of other people.

KK

DVDs of Conference Talks, Street, August 2016

**£8 for the set, from Raymond Cox, 4 Lulworth Close, Halesowen, B63 2UJ
Please make cheques to R.E. Cox (not The Powys Society)**

DISC ONE:

**Paul Cheshire: ‘JCP and the “psychic sensuous margin of life”
(introduced by Chris Thomas) ... 49m**

**Peter Foss: ‘Recalled to Life’, an illustrated talk about the events
described in Llewelyn Powys’s diary for 1911
(introduced by Louise de Bruin) ... 60m**

**Group walk to Pomparles Bridge and Wearyall Hill
with readings from *A Glastonbury Romance***

by Richard Graves and John Hodgson (*not complete*) ... 15m

DISC TWO:

**Angelika Reichmann: ‘Two Historians, Two Christies, Two Urquharts:
Kingsley Amis and JCP’**

(introduced by Charles Lock) ... 64m

**Lindsay Clarke: ‘Beyond the Literary: JCP’s *Porius* and the Romance of
the Polytheistic Imagination**

(introduced by Timothy Hyman) ... 61m

The Powys Society Annual General Meeting

Wessex Hotel, High Street, Street, nr Glastonbury

August 14th, 2016

Present: Timothy Hyman (*Chairman*), David Goodway (*Vice-Chairman*), Chris Thomas (*Secretary*), Anna Rosic (*Outgoing Treasurer*), Robin Hickey (*Incoming Treasurer*), Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter editor*), Louise de Bruin (*Conference organiser and publications manager*), Charles Lock (*ex-officio, editor Powys Journal*), John Hodgson, Shelagh Powys Hancox, Dawn Collins, Jacqueline Peltier – and some 30 members of the Powys Society

Apologies: Michael Kowalewski (*Collection Liaison Officer*)

Chairman welcomed members to the AGM and read a passage from *A Glastonbury Romance* (Nell and Sam parting).

Minutes of 2015 AGM

The minutes of the 2015 AGM, as published in *Newsletter 86* November 2015 were approved.

Nomination of Honorary Officers and Members of the Powys Society Committee for 2016-2017

Nominations to the Powys Society committee as published in *Newsletter 88* July 2016 were approved. The Hon. Officers and members of the committee, from August 2016, will therefore be the following:

Officers: Timothy Hyman (*Chairman*), David Goodway (*Vice-Chairman*), Chris Thomas (*Secretary*), Robin Hickey (*Treasurer*).

Committee members: Louise de Bruin (*Conference Organiser and Publications Manager*), who has been elected for a new three year term of office; Michael Kowalewski (*Collection Liaison Officer*); Shelagh Powys Hancox and John Hodgson, who have one year left to run of their three year term of office; and Dawn Collins and Kate Kavanagh (*Newsletter editor*) who have two years left to run of their three year term of office. Jacqueline Peltier (*official representative of the Powys Society in France*) serves as honorary committee member, Charles Lock (*Editor, Powys Journal*) serves as *ex-officio* member and Anna Rosic (*ex-Treasurer*) serves as co-opted member.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman referred members to his annual report as published in *Newsletter 88*, July 2016, p. 3, and appealed for more volunteers to come forward and offer their skills and expertise to help with Society activities especially with production of publications.

Treasurer's Report and Annual Accounts

The Treasurer referred members to the presentation of accounts for the year ending 31 December 2015 as published in *Newsletter* 88, July 2016, p. 5.

The Treasurer reported current bank balances according to the latest statements before activity in August as:

Community account: £1,009.25

Everyday Saver account: £1,487.00

Business Premium account: £13,780.33

The Chairman thanked Anna for her dedicated role as Treasurer and recognised the hard work involved keeping a close watching brief on the finances of the Society. The Treasurer said she was concerned about increase of expenditure over income but this was partly explained by necessary investment in recent large projects such as transfer of the Collection from the Dorset County Museum to Exeter and escalating postage costs.

The Chairman asked for advice from members regarding use of available funds and queried whether it was more appropriate to commit funds to projects or try and conserve income. **Paul Cheshire** expressed the view it is necessary to ensure some reserve funds but we should continue to make the best possible use of existing spare funds. **John Hodgson** said that reserves should also be used to support scholarships for appropriate students who could be offered free conference places and funds also made available to pay for new speakers who ask for an appearance fee. The Chairman said the committee welcomed ideas from members to help generate new income and use of funds.

Collection Liaison Officer's Report

Michael Kowalewski (reported in absentia) that during the course of the year he had not received any requests for access to the Collection or the Collection inventory.

Hon Secretary said that he had received a positive report from Christine Faunch, Head of Heritage Collections at Exeter University, that researchers who had visited the Collection at the beginning of 2016 expressed their thanks to the archivists for their professional help and efficient handling of requests to see original documents and said that the Collection was '*in good hands*'. The Secretary said that the committee is considering proposals to work with Exeter University English Department on potential to raise wider awareness of the Powys Collection and develop a sponsorship scheme to stimulate increased use of the Collection by students and staff as well as hosting events, meetings and lectures.

The Secretary encouraged members to visit the Collection at its new location in Exeter, to contact the Collection Liaison Officer for information about the new inventory or to contact Christine Faunch to arrange a visit (contact details can be found on the Collection page of the Society's website).

The Secretary explained that the **Collection catalogue** is currently stored on a CD and the contents will eventually be integrated into Exeter's on-line Heritage Collections catalogue. Members asked if the inventory could also be made accessible on the Society's website to enable users to browse the contents prior to selecting materials to study. The Secretary said he would make a request to Michael Kowalewski to liaise with the webmaster, Frank Kibblewhite, on this matter and report to members in the *Newsletter*. Secretary also said that if necessary, funding could be provided to help transfer and upload the CD as a pdf to the website.

Charles Lock requested that the website should also be updated with more copies of Newsletter made available on-line. The Secretary said he would liaise with the webmaster about posting Newsletter regularly on-line.

The Vice-Chairman, **David Goodway**, provided an update concerning the remaining business papers of the Society that had been left at Dorset County Museum following the removal of the Collection. David said that all these papers had now been relocated to Exeter and thanked Julia Mathews for transporting all the boxes containing documents. During the move, David said, some extraneous, non-Society documents, had been uncovered consisting of several boxes of documents relating to the William Barnes Collection and past member Bernard Jones. David explained that it appeared someone at the Dorset County Museum had been examining material relating to the Barnes Collection and separated documents with reference to the Powyses which had then been deposited with the Powys Society business papers. David said this included some important correspondence connected to G. Wilson Knight and he considered that this would be worth maintaining at Exeter. This material is now being assessed by archivists at Exeter University who are in communication with Dorset County Museum about the retention of the papers at Exeter.

Secretary's Report

Membership: Secretary reported that there are currently **263** members of the Society.

Secretary provided an analysis of annual membership statistics: total new members joined, since last August was 17; 11 new members joined during the period January to August 2016, 2 of these joined in USA, the rest are UK members. Two members were reinstated in 2015; and one member was reinstated in 2016. The total number of members removed from the membership database during the period August 2015 to August 2016 was 10 – of these 5 members were deceased and 5 members resigned. Secretary said that 14 members had not responded to reminder letters and they are still unpaid for the current year 2016. Secretary explained that according to the rules of the Constitution individuals will be removed from the membership if unpaid by September. This will therefore leave total membership of **249**. The Secretary encouraged members, who do not pay their subscriptions by Standing Order or Direct

Debit, to renew their membership as soon as possible at the beginning of each year which will help to cut administrative costs and save time and effort pursuing unpaid membership at a later date.

Donations: the Secretary referred members to the generous gift of correspondence between Mrs Hetty Reid in Cape Town and JCP, in the 1950s, reported in *Newsletter* 88, p. 32. The gift was kindly made possible by Mary Carson in South Africa. The correspondence will be deposited in the Collection at Exeter.

A new book about TFP: the Secretary provided details of a new book just published by Cambridge Scholars: *Theodore Powys's Gods and Demons* by **Zouheir Jamoussi**. The author studied English Literature and History at the universities of Tunis (Tunisia), Wisconsin (Madison, USA), and the University of Paris III: Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris, France) where he completed his thesis in the 1970s on TFP. The present book is an updated version of the thesis. Mr Jamoussi's teaching from 1971 to 2002 at the University of Tunis mainly focused on 18th century English literature and history. Mr Jamoussi is also the author of *La Liberté dans l'oeuvre de Defoe: entre la réalité et la fiction* (2001), *The Snare in the Constitution: Defoe and Swift on Liberty* (2009) and *Primogeniture and Entail in England, a survey of their history and representation in literature* (2011). The committee has approved an approach to Mr Jamoussi to invite him to give a talk on TFP at the 2017 conference.

Typescript of six chapters removed from *Wolf Solent*: Secretary said that he had received a request from a non-member that the Society should publish these missing chapters. Secretary explained that the committee had resolved not to go ahead with this request as the typescript, which is located at the National Library of Wales, can be examined personally by individual readers, on request to the library (the holograph manuscript is at Syracuse University in USA); also that the chapters were the subject of an article, 'The Disfigurement of Gerda', by Ben Jones, in *The Powys Review* no.2, Winter 1977. This article includes long quotations from the holograph manuscript material at Syracuse. It is likely that the typescript at the National Library of Wales was produced by Sally Powys as this was amongst the manuscript material originally owned by Francis Powys and which was subsequently passed to NLW with the assistance of Morine Krissdóttir.

Copyright contract with the owner of the JCP estate: The Secretary said that the committee has approved renewal of the contract, for a further 25 years, that allows the Powys Society free use, without prior permission or fee, to publish, unpublished and previously published material that falls within ownership of the copyright holder (John Powys, grandson of TFP). The present contract expires in August 2019. The Secretary said he is liaising with the Agent for the Copyright holder, Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson, about this matter.

Thanks and acknowledgements

The Chairman extended special thanks to **Stephen Powys Marks** and **Kate Kavanagh** for production of *Newsletters*. The Chairman also thanked everyone else involved with the production of the *Newsletter*, including contributors, as well as **Louise de Bruin** and **Jerry Bird** for stepping in to assist with *Newsletter 88*. The Chairman thanked Louise and **Charles Lock** for their time and dedicated effort producing the *Powys Journal* to such high editorial standards. Members applauded the work of **Shelagh Powys Hancox** and her assistants for running a highly successful book sale which this year raised over £800.00.

Date and Venue of 2017 conference

The date of the 2017 conference will be **18-20 August 2017**, at the **Hand Hotel** in **Llangollen**. A draft programme and more information will appear in the March 2017 *Newsletter*. **Louise de Bruin** said that she is currently liaising with Exeter University about the possibility of holding the 2018 conference at their premises but this will depend on costs.

AOB

Stephen Powys Marks asked if ownership of the Collection could be transferred to Exeter University. The Chairman explained that this was not possible according to the terms of the original Agreement with the Trustees of the Dorset County Museum. The Vice-Chairman also said that the ownership of all the business papers of the Society, not included in the move of all the other items in the Collection (including the Bissell and Feather gifts), has now been transferred to Exeter University where they can be consulted.

Richard Graves reminded members that the copyright of his biography *The Brothers Powys* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) has been gifted to the Society and proposed that this might be reprinted. **Belinda Humfrey** also noted that *Recollections of the Powys Brothers*, (Peter Owen, 1980), which she edited is now hard to obtain and could also be reprinted.

Marcella Henderson-Peal said that she and other Powys colleagues in France organise meetings and a dinner in Paris usually twice a year and invited members to participate. Marcella proposed that these meetings could also include an organised visit to places in Paris associated with JCP.

An announcement was made that JCP's house (1, Waterloo) at Pen Y Bryn, in Blaenau Ffestiniog, was recently on the market and advertised for sale at a price of £94,950. There is a full description of the house, with '*stunning mountain views*', and a slide show on the agent's website.

Chris Thomas, Hon Secretary

Meeting in London

on Saturday 3 December 2016

at The Friends Meeting House, 120 Heath Street, Hampstead

2pm for 2.30 start

Pat Quigley will give a talk on ‘Liam O’Flaherty and TFP’

followed by open discussion

See Newsletter 88, July 2016, for more details

The event is free — All are welcome

Kevin Taylor *My First Conference*

There are two rituals I like to observe when I go to Glastonbury. The first is to run over the Tor and I managed this at first light on Saturday 13 August, exchanging greetings with the New Agers in their sleeping bags on the summit. This set me up nicely for my first Powys Conference: a magical setting for some deeper engagement with one of my favourite texts.

It didn’t disappoint. Paul Cheshire’s stimulating reflections on *AGR* prompted an interesting discussion of the infamous first page (‘the Becher’s Brook of English literature’), which someone characterised as the equivalent of the opening chord of a Beethoven symphony: complex, resonant, declarative.

On the second day Peter Foss presented fascinating previously unseen photographic records of Llewelyn’s young adult years, leaving me wanting to know more about him (the focus of my reading to date being almost exclusively JCP). Lindsay Clarke then gave a writerly perspective on the polytheistic imagination in *Porius* which rang very true and opened some profound themes for discussion around humanity’s relationship with the natural world and planet. In the evening Frank Wintle’s film about Pound, H.D. and Frances Gregg was a period documentary framed by his reflections on its making and his subsequent thoughts about the relationship between the two women. Finally, and my personal favourite, Angelika Reichmann turned her comparative reading of two works with some improbable but undeniable similarities, *Wolf Solent* and *Lucky Jim*, into a very thought-provoking exercise in intertextual criticism, finding in the Angry Young Amis’s comic novel a reaction against the very different stylistic approach and world-view of JCP’s form of modernism.

The standard of all four presentations was extremely high, and I was overwhelmed by the amount of knowledge of the Powyses and inspirational insights from those present at the conference. My joy at the Glastonbury location was further enhanced by a walk in the sunshine over Pomparles Bridge and Wearyall Hill, with dramatic *in situ* readings from *AGR* by Richard Graves and John Hodgson.

My criticisms as well as compliments were invited, and if I had any of the former they would relate to my feeling, especially at the AGM, that this was a Society of longstanding acquaintances talking to themselves – which is fine and understandable given the quality of the conversation! But if the Society is to carry on fulfilling that part of its mission which is ‘to promote a wider general readership [and] an expanded universe around the Powyses’, it might need in the future to think more about outreach to a younger generation and to new modes of representing and disseminating this great literary legacy.

When the conference was over, still thrilling from it, I observed my second Glastonbury ritual: a flight over the Tor. As I spiralled down in my paramotor from 1,000 feet and swooped past the parapet of St Michael’s Tower I felt that my perspectives had been dislocated in some very energising ways over the previous three days. I can hardly wait for next year’s event.

Robin Hickey *My Conference*

It all began when my niece, Marcella Henderson-Peal, asked me to accompany her to a Powys conference held in Llangollen in 2007. Meeting so many talented writers, poets and students of the Powys family, I was totally overwhelmed yet continued to attend every conference since, as I became engrossed in JCP’s Wessex novels, beginning with *Weymouth Sands*. As a geologist who enjoys walks along narrow country lanes and across grassy fields, finding Jurassic rocks and fossils and identifying limestone flora, I rapidly identified with JCP’s descriptions of the country side. I learned a lot from my late husband who was a well known conservationist, horticulturist, botanist and botanical illustrator.

This year’s conference, so well organised in the Wessex Hotel in Street, was as thrilling as ever with different interpretations and insights, much research having been done by the speakers. Our Saturday walk was complemented by thought-provoking readings from *A Glastonbury Romance* as we relaxed in a field within sight of Pomparles Bridge. When we reached the top of Wirral Hill I would happily have stayed longer listening to the reading which returned us to JCP’s world.

On Saturday evening, Frank Wintle’s film entitled ‘Hilda’s Book’ was both intriguing and touching, especially when Oliver Wilkinson spoke so calmly about his fated mother, Frances Gregg. Frances had insisted that her own mother always lived with them: both were killed, with Oliver’s sister, in a bombing raid on Plymouth. It has taken me all these years to become more familiar with the wider Powys family and their friends.

Over the past nine years I have got to know most of the members who attend each year and have been delighted to hear about their reading tastes and experiences, mostly over dinner when we have time to relax. Perhaps, as I look forward to the next conference, it's time I got to grips with *Porius*, having been soaked on many a geological scramble in North Wales.

Marcel Bradbury *My First Conference*

When I first started to read the Powys brothers some years ago I was astonished that writers of such evident power were all but unknown. Joining a society that promoted their work was an obvious step to help further their work but until this year when I retired I have not been able to attend the annual conference.

As a first-time attendee and an amateur enthusiast (I spent my working life as a lawyer) I will, no doubt, not have been alone in a worry that I would be out of my depth. Looking over the title of the papers to be given I imagined myself sharing the puzzlement of Littleton Powys when he read some criticism of his brothers works: 'That is rather beyond me, but I can see it is meant to be high praise!'

I need not have been concerned. It was a very enjoyable weekend and I shall certainly attend again. All the talks were absorbing and instructive and the Saturday afternoon walk to Glastonbury (with appropriate readings en route) was a delightful way of getting to know members better.

I originally came to the brothers via Philip Larkin's well known advice; 'Start with Llewelyn ... start with *Skin for Skin*', so I was particularly delighted with Peter Foss's illustrated talk on that unequalled and magical heatwave summer of 1911. I think a walking tour, armed with Peter's excellent new book, of all the pubs mentioned in *Skin for Skin* now beckons.

But of course the talks are only half the story, meeting fellow enthusiasts is reason enough to attend; everyone I met was welcoming and keen to help. What a pleasure to be able to launch into a discussion about a JCP novel without the other party backing away with a nervous look in their eye!

Would I have wanted anything to be different? I don't think so. There is, I suppose, a potential danger in an established Society that the search for 'new angles' will mean examination of the work will gravitate to the margins at the expense of the core. It was clear from the questions and discussions following each talk given at Street that there was a huge amount of expertise in the room to say nothing of family members with personal experiences to share. I wonder if some personal overviews of specific works or introductory history to the background to

these remarkable works would be attractive to more recent members at forthcoming conferences?

All in all an excellent and extremely well run weekend. Meeting the daughter of one of my other favourite writers, Robertson Davies, sent me on my return back to his ‘high praise’ of JCP (‘He was as great a master as Joyce – in my view greater’) in his splendid collection of essays and lectures *The Merry Heart* and it was with just such merry hearts that I am sure everyone, particularly those of us with piles of books under our arms, left the conference.

Rampaul Chamba *My conference 2016*

‘Give me a place to stand, and I shall move the earth’ is a remark attributed to Archimedes of Syracuse (c. 287 BC - c. 212 BC), Ancient Greek mathematician and philosopher. Whenever I read John Cowper Powys, his writing evokes this aphorism because Powys is so adept at grinding tectonic plates together with his suffusive and effervescent word wizardry interspersed with the most labyrinthine, exquisite, and beautiful prose. It seems, for Powys, words were a fulcrum or conduit to move the earth.

I must have leveraged some psychic incantation of my own earlier this year when I decided to book my first Powys conference. It proved to be a most enjoyable experience. I was pleased to find that the programme schedule was so much more contained and informal than large academic conferences. Friday evening started with an easy ramble into the conference through food and conversation. Following dessert, Paul Cheshire’s talk provided a healthy serving of ‘psychic sensuousness’ in J.C. Powys’s work. Saturday’s morning programme was full with a talk from Peter Foss about the background to Llewelyn Powys’s 1911 diary.

Given my interest in psychoanalysis, I found Lindsay Clarke’s talk particularly engaging. Clarke shared his thoughts about *Porius*, Powys’s epic imagination, multiversal perspectives on physics, time and space, the influence of Thomas Mann, archetypal psychology, and more. The warm weather provided another stimulus to join fellow members on a walk to the bridge (unfortunately, over stagnant water) which was the location of John Crow’s vision of King Arthur’s Excalibur – and the bloated cat. Richard Graves, walking-stick as prop at hand, not unlike John Crow himself, gave a reading of that scene from *A Glastonbury Romance*. Deliberately standing right next to Richard so the sound of his words wouldn’t blow away in the light wind, I was thoroughly entertained by this open-air rendition. I would like to think that Powys’s spirit was hovering somewhere in our midst, chuckling

at our reverence for his words. With the pleasant company of others, I thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the walk, up hill, but not as far as the Tor. On Sunday morning, Angelika Reichmann examined connections between *Wolf Solent* and Kingsley Amis's *Lucky Jim*, as well as Iris Murdoch, Philip Larkin, and others. The AGM and project to develop Powys talking-books provided an interesting insight on some of the inner workings, hopes, and challenges of keeping the Powys Society moving forward.

Having been a member of the Society for a few years, it was about time I attended a conference. It proved to be a delightful introduction to the Society's collective will to enjoy and ponder a great writer. I was received warmly by many people. Good food, fine weather, lots of books, and comfortable accommodation, added to a thoughtful and pleasant weekend. Thank you to all the Committee Members for your dedication to keep Powys's legacy and imagination alive.



Richard Graves & Rampaul Chamba



John Hodgson

Chris Thomas
Jung's Glastonbury Romance

All the way through the talks presented by Paul Cheshire and Lindsay Clarke at this year's conference I had a strong sense of the presence of Jung and his ideas about unconscious creative processes, human potentiality and man's relationship to nature. Paul's discussion of JCP's psychic sensuous sensibility, his awareness of the consciousness of elemental things and their interaction with human consciousness, suggested Jung's concept of an original '*participation mystique*' (an idea derived, as Lindsay later pointed out, from the anthropologist, Levy-Bruhl), the magical bond between man and his environment and the invisible magnetic links between human beings. Lindsay referenced Jung's guiding concept of individuation, the initiating drama of the quest motif, man's inner world, the role of the four psychic functions – thought – feeling – intuition – sensation, the possibility of the development of a new kind of consciousness, and reflected on the appearance of eco-psychology and the insights of post-Jungian archetypal psychology, which he said all have a relevance for the consideration of JCP's polytheistic imagination, especially in *Porius*. As Kate mentions in her review of the conference talks, JCP's awareness of consciousness and soul in everything is the foundation for his magical view of life. One member of the audience afterwards applauded Lindsay's insights – '*it was awesome – because everything you said is true!*'

Reflecting on these talks I was reminded of G. Wilson Knight's observation, in his essay, *Poetry and Magic*, that, in his writing, JCP transmitted '*a mystique of the inanimate*' which Wilson Knight supposed could be symbolised by the Christian doctrine of the 'real presence' and which he compared to Jung's discussion of the alchemical notion of the spiritual element dormant in stone or metal. Such a view, I thought, seems to be present in the references JCP makes in *Autobiography* to '*the inner being*' of things which he says he always felt '*were part of my soul*' as well as his other references to sharing '*the sub-thoughts or over-thoughts that the old earth herself has.*' This makes JCP's declaration in the Preface to *A Glastonbury Romance* especially meaningful: '*I have been all my days so much of a "medium" for so many swarms of invisible things*'.

JCP's description in *A Glastonbury Romance*, of '*the vast, dreamy life-stirrings of the soul of the earth*', and what Lindsay called JCP's sense of '*the animate multiverse*' seemed to me to have a direct parallel in Jung's awareness of the spirits in matter and the vitalising effect of man's participation in nature. As I wandered around Glastonbury on the last day of the conference with a member of our committee I became increasingly

aware of Sam Dekker's Jungian sensation of 'a strange and singular reciprocity between his soul and every little fragment of masonry, of stony ground, of mossy ground, of woodwork, of trodden mud ... or of mildewed palings.' This is reminiscent of Jung's description in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, of his life in the Tower he built for himself at Bollingen: 'At times I feel as if I am spread out over the landscape and inside things and am myself living in every tree, in the plashing of the waves ...'

We visited Chalice Gardens which felt like stepping into a sea of green. At the Lion's Head fountain in the garden I refilled my bottle with fresh water. We went to the Vesica pool and looked into the shadowy depths of Chalice Well. We sat in the shade in the Meadow beneath Chalice Hill; the orchards looked mysterious, 'deep-grassed, grey-green', says JCP in *A Glastonbury Romance*; a small child ran up and down the garden paths like some sort of elfin being or diminutive Kore. The air was hot and still. Everything was silent in 'Summerland', 'deep-meadow'd, happy, fair' (Tennyson). It felt like an archetypal scene beyond time and space. Then I remembered something important. 'Of course', I said to myself, 'Jung was actually here as well – I mean he had really visited this place with his wife Emma!' The visit took place in the fatal year of 1939.¹

Jung received an invitation, early in 1939, from his friend and English translator, Helton Godwin Baynes,² to take a holiday in England and visit Glastonbury during the Easter period – a visit which, he thought, might also help Jung's wife Emma with the book she was in the process of writing about the Grail.³ Jung himself was also deeply interested in the symbolism and psychological meaning of the Grail romances. He noted in his autobiography: 'I discovered that in many places in England the myth of the Grail was still a living thing ...' JCP's response to the possibility of a 'living Grail' was, of course, on the other hand, sceptical. In *A Glastonbury Romance* he refers to: 'dangerous enervating myths that had taken the heart out of man's courage and self reliance upon the earth.'

In his letter to Jung, H.G. Baynes mentions, people and places very familiar to JCP:⁴

I would like to take you and Emma to Glastonbury and Camelot and that country. How about a weekend in Glastonbury? The vicar there is a strange being ...⁵ He has been caught by the Grail and the Joseph of Arimathea tradition. He actually had the sarcophagus of Joseph in the church, a beautiful thing and he has an immense amount of lore and scholarship about it which would interest you. The Chalice Well where the Grail was supposed to be hidden is still flowing ... I am pretty sure you would be tremendously interested. So will you come?

Jung and Emma willingly accepted the invitation and greatly enjoyed the adventure. In 1940 Emma Jung wrote to Peter Baynes and told him that their holiday weekend in Glastonbury was 'something quite marvellous'.⁶ Later Jung also sent a letter, dated

12 August 1940, to Peter Baynes in which he reflected on the significance of the new year: ‘1940 is the year when we approach the meridian of the first star in Aquarius. It is the premonitory earthquake of the New Age.’⁷ Could it be that Jung’s romance with Glastonbury was not just a holiday or fact finding trip for his wife Emma but provided the stimulus for future work on the psychological aspects of alchemy, religious symbolism and mythology,⁸ as well as giving him additional insights into ideas about self discovery, transformation and spiritual renewal and rebirth which would later become features of the New Age in the 1960s?

Notes

- 1 Jung may also have visited Glastonbury in 1920 whilst he was in Cornwall leading a seminar on the interpretation of dreams.
- 2 H.G. Baynes, (1882-1943), known to his friends as ‘Peter’ Baynes had been acquainted with Jung since the 1920s when he was appointed his assistant in Zurich. He published a Jungian study of schizophrenia in 1940 called *The Mythology of the Soul, a research into the Unconscious from schizophrenic drawings and dreams*.
- 3 Emma Jung’s book was completed by Jung’s close collaborator, Marie-Louise von Franz in 1955, and published as *The Grail Legend* in German in 1960 and translated into English in 1971. Glastonbury is mentioned several times in the study.
- 4 Letter quoted in *Jung’s Apprentice – a biography of Helton G. Baynes* by Diana Baynes Jansen, (2003).
- 5 Lionel Smithett Lewis (1867-1953), Vicar of Glastonbury, 1922-1950, author of *St. Joseph of Arimathea in Glastonbury: the Apostolic Church in Britain*, 1922 and *Glastonbury; Mother of Saints*, 1925. For details of L.S. Lewis see Bill Keith’s *A Reader’s Companion to A Glastonbury Romance* (2004) and his *A Glastonbury Romance Revisited* (Powys Press, 2010). In his book on St. Joseph of Arimathea Lewis refers to Joseph’s supposed coffin in the church of St. John the Baptist in Glastonbury which, he says, ‘bears the initials of J.A. on it with a caduceus between them’. JCP refers to the sarcophagus and the initials in Chapter 5 of *A Glastonbury Romance* – see Bill Keith’s publications for more details. We don’t need to imagine what Jung must have thought of the symbol of the caduceus as he would have been very familiar with this image of individuation, healing and synthesis of opposites from his researches into alchemical symbolism and mythology. In *The Grail Legend* Emma Jung quotes from the 1937 edition of Lewis’s book about Joseph of Arimathea.
- 6 Jung’s visit to Glastonbury is also referred to by Catrine Clay in her biography of Emma Jung, *Labyrinths* (William Collins, 2016); she says that Anne Baynes recalled that the holiday with Jung in Glastonbury in 1939 ‘was an extremely happy time for all of us’.
- 7 Jung’s prophecy of a coming ‘New Age’ could be said to have been first realised by the publication of *Le Matin des Magiciens* by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier (Gallimard, 1960) and taken up by the magazine *Gandalf’s Garden*, the archetypal magazine of the New Age underground press in the 1960s, edited by Muz Murray. He produced six issues of the magazine between 1968 and 1972. *Gandalf’s Garden* included several articles about Glastonbury. The significance of Glastonbury for the New Age counter culture was explored by John Michell in his influential book *The View Over Atlantis* (Sago Press, 1969).
- 8 In 1939, after visiting Glastonbury, Jung published a psychological commentary on the Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation, and an introduction to Dr Suzuki’s study of Zen Buddhism. He also gave a lecture on the theme of Rebirth at the 7th Eranos conference in Ascona (in which he discussed the idea of *participation mystique*) and began a seminar on Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. In 1940 he continued his research into alchemical texts and published *The Integration of the Personality*.

Chris Gostick

The Llewelyn Birthday Walk 2016

Saturday 13 August dawned another bright sunny day, and by midday the *Sailor's Return* at East Chaldon was thronged with a characteristically heterogeneous group of Llewelyn Powys enthusiasts from the Dandelion Fellowship, enjoying pints of beer and lunch in the sunshine, and admiring the plaque to John Batten, the founder of the Llewelyn Walk, that had been unveiled on the pub wall last year to mark the 20th anniversary meeting. Once again we had a great welcome from Tom Brachi, landlord of the *Sailor's Return*, and his staff, and there was the usual great mix of people, from the very young to those of us now of more advanced years, all catching up with everything that had been happening over the past year. Once again we were pleased to welcome back many regular faces, in particular Janice Gregory – Alyse Gregory's great niece – together with her cousin, Jean Grant, both from the USA, who had made the trip over from the Powys Society Conference in Street for the day, together with Byron & Eirlys Ashton. It was also good to see Pam Gillingham again, another old friend from the early days, as well as Jed Redman – although we were sad that long-standing members Honour & Rob Timlin were unable to be with us this year.



This time we were also joined by BBC Producer James Edwards and a cameraman from BBC South, who were doing a short feature on the literary heritage of East Chaldon, assisted by another old friend of the Walk, Judith Stinton. They had already spent a day filming in the village, and now followed the walk all the way to the stone and back, interviewing a number of us in the process. It is anticipated that the completed film will be broadcast on BBC South towards the end of October – something to look out for if you are within the area.

As has now become customary I eventually called everyone to order around 1pm and proposed the short toast to absent friends and to Llewelyn's memory, on this 132nd anniversary of his birth in Dorchester in 1884. Shortly afterwards the walk got under way, with the TV crew in attendance, and we assembled again at Chydyok, where Neil Lee read a section of 'Armistice Day 1934', a most appropriate piece from *Somerset & Dorset Essays*. It was particularly good that both Neil & Ann were able to join us again this year – together with another *five* members of their family, which must be something of a record! – as both have had a great struggle with ill-health over the past 12 months and it was remarkable that both were able to get to the stone and back once again.

In the end at least 22 people made it to the stone along with the film crew, where Jean Grant placed the usual small bouquet of Alyse's wedding flowers, picked by Rosemary Dickens, on the stone, and I then read the short piece from *The Cry of a Gull* for 28 September 1947, when Alyse, Gertrude and Katie buried Llewelyn's ashes after they had been returned from Switzerland. The weather had turned gradually cloudy as we climbed up the downs to Chydyok, but once at the stone itself the sun came out again, with the usual spectacular views of Portland to the west, and the coast out beyond Lulworth to the east, that Llewelyn had known so well. We all paused there for some time after the usual group picture at the stone, before reluctantly heading down past Chydyok again to the stiff climb up Chalky Knapp and back to the village, for a final round of tea at the *Sailor's Return* before people gradually began to drift away and the shadows began to lengthen at the end of another memorable Llewelyn Birthday Walk.

We shall be meeting again at Chaldon around noon on 13 August 2017, when as always all will be welcome to join us on this now regular occasion.

***Llewelyn Powys: The Man Behind the Myth, and Dandelions, Ground-Ivy & Yarrow* are now available at the reduced price of £3 each or £5 for both, postage included in the price. Contact Neil Lee, 1 Church Hill, Spridlington, Market Rasen, Lincs. LN8 2DX. (Cheques payable to Rev. N.D. Atkin)**

News and Notes

Michael Kowalewski has recently been informed by a non-member, Brian Sexton, in Coventry, that he has just acquired a small collection of **original material** relating to John Cowper Powys which he plans to sell at a later date. Mr Sexton says that he obtained this material from the estate of a book collector and keen JCP reader, **Harry Morley**, who lived in Northern Ireland and Birmingham, and who corresponded with JCP in the late 1940s and 1950s. We do not yet have any other information about Mr Morley's background, his interests or his connection with JCP. Mr Sexton has kindly sent copies of the material he owns. More details, including transcriptions of the letters from JCP to Mr Morley, will appear in the March 2017 Newsletter.

Copies of the JCP's books owned by Mr Morley are heavily marked with Mr Morley's own annotations, including this on the front page of *Autobiography*:

My 'Desert Island' book

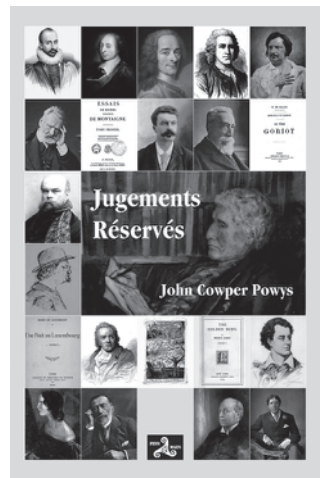
The story of a brave man who helps to give me courage, whose rich prose I enjoy, and with whose individualistic, honest and imaginative philosophy I am in sympathy.

Harry G. Morley

The Book that Out-Montaignes Montaigne

*

Jugements Réservés, Jacqueline Peltier's French translation of JCP's *Suspended Judgments*, is the first French translation of an important JCP book since *Dostoievski* and came out exactly a hundred years after *Suspended Judgments* was first published (1916). JP's notes have special interest as two-thirds of the authors JCP discusses are French. As always with JCP, individual writers provide jumping-off points for general discussions – on the deficiencies of sterile academics and trendy 'modernists' (Byron) – the importance of music in poetry (Verlaine) – the limits of coarseness and tenderness, savage humour and cynicism, inventiveness and realism. As he explains in his foreword and afterword, what interests JCP is



how they deal with life, and can enlarge our own lives. JCP's style and personal preferences are well conveyed in the introduction by Marcella Henderson-Peal – and to this limited reader anyway, he seems to lose little in translation.

Anyone interested in obtaining the book, please contact Jacqueline (j.peltier@powys-lannion.net). The price is £14.50 or 17 euros, plus postage.

KK

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Two new books by **Jeremy Hooker** have been published by Shearsman Books: poems, *Ancestral Lines*, and another of his prose 'diaries': *Diary of a Stroke*. Both are evocations of his own life, his childhood and family and the landscape of Hampshire where he grew up, woven into an illumined landscape of the mind.

*

From Jacqueline Peltier

Three blogs about JCP and Llewelyn at: <http://firstknownwhenlost.blogspot.co.uk/2010/08/john-cowper-powys-in-hotel-writing-room.html> which includes a discussion of JCP's poem 'In a Hotel Writing-Room' first published in *Wolf's Bane* in 1916; and chosen by Philip Larkin for his *Oxford Book of 20th-Century English Verse* (1973).

<http://reviewsbyjohnvernon.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/struggle-for-life-by-llewelyn-powys.html> – a review of Llewelyn's *A Struggle for Life: Selected Essays of an Epicurean*, edited by Tony Head, published by One World Classics, and: <http://reviewsbyjohnvernon.blogspot.co.uk/2011/01/glastonbury-romance-by-john-cowper.html> where there is a discussion of *A Glastonbury Romance*.

*

From Michael Kowalewski

All of Gertrude Powys's paintings which have been donated to the Dorset County Museum by the Powys Society, and which were previously available on the BBC Your Paintings website, can now be viewed on-line at www.artuk.org ArtUK is the successor to Your Paintings – a joint initiative between the Public Catalogue Foundation (now known as Art UK), 3,000 museums, many other art collections, as well as the BBC.

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From Bethan Ifan

The collection of JCP's manuscripts and papers at the National Library of Wales, purchased or donated, during the period 1969-1997 and 2006, has now been fully catalogued. The catalogue of the collection can be accessed on-line at: <https://archives.library.wales/index.php/john-cowper-powys-papers-2>. This section

comprises 139 volumes of manuscripts, and papers, of JCP, dated c[1893]-1988, some published posthumously, including letters, both written to JCP and to his companion Phyllis Playter, as well as drafts of works, published and unpublished, diaries, lectures and essays. The correspondence includes 800 letters, dated 1921-1932, from JCP to Phyllis Playter; some 640 letters and cards, dated 1925 and 1935-1955, from Littleton Charles Powys, to JCP; some 450 letters, dated 1942-1962, from JCP and other members of his family to Gilbert Turner, and some 350 letters, dated 1945-1969, from Gilbert Turner to JCP and Phyllis Playter as well as over 200 letters, dated 1924-1967, from Alyse Gregory to Phyllis Playter. For more information about this collection see: <https://archives.library.wales/index.php/john-cowper-powys-and-phyllis-playter-manuscripts>. The second group of JCP and Phyllis Playter manuscript material can be accessed at: <https://archives.library.wales/index.php/john=cowper-powys-and-phyllis-playter-papers>

This group comprises 4 large boxes and 58 small boxes of papers including correspondence, literary papers and material relating to the estate and JCP's family, together with correspondence, and literary and personal papers of JCP's companion Phyllis Playter.

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So JCP DID know about *Lucky Jim*!

From *Letters to Ron Hall* (unpublished), Monday 19 September 1955:

... I should have to have you listen to me to explain this — as this new *rough spoken chap* to whose writing neither P. nor I cotton at all, this fellow called Kingsley Amis or some such, who *unkindly refused to listen* to an old lecturer jawing on and on! I'd like to see what Salvation Yeo in *Westward Ho* of C. Kingsley would make of him and how he'd deal with a fellow who when an old gent talks to him too long and too carefully thinks of forcing him down the W.C. and pulling up the Plug.

*

Boots — Heidegger, van Gogh, and JCP

From Chris Thomas

Earlier this year I eagerly read Sarah Bakewell's *At the Existentialist Café: Freedom, Being, and Apricot Cocktails* (Chatto & Windus, 2016), and, following up Marcella Henderson-Peal's investigations into JCP and existentialism, I looked for any mention of his contact with Jean Wahl and other French existentialists. But my search was in vain. However when I read Sarah Bakewell's description of Heidegger's famous analysis of one of Van Gogh's paintings of a pair of worn peasant's shoes I immediately thought of a connection with JCP. Heidegger's analysis of the shoes in Van Gogh's painting is similar to JCP's description of his father's boots at the

beginning of *Autobiography*. Both writers closely associate the mud and earth covered soles and uppers of the boots and shoes with the character and personality of their owners. Here is Heidegger writing about Van Gogh's painting in *The Origin of the Work of Art* (a lecture delivered in 1935 reprinted in *Holzwege* (Forest Paths or Forest Tracks) in 1950 and recently translated as *Off the Beaten Track*):

... the toil of the worker's tread stares forth. In the crudely solid heaviness of the shoes accumulates the tenacity of the slow trudge through the far stretching ... furrows of the field swept by a raw wind ... Under the shoes slides the loneliness of the field path ... The shoes vibrate with the silent call of the earth ...

Here is JCP, in the first chapter of *Autobiography*, describing the personal significance to him of his father's boots:

The greatness of my father as a personality was first manifested to me ... as the possessor of boots with enormously thick soles ... when I think of my father's boot-soles ... I am conscious of some wonderful secret of happiness ... Is it some subconscious awareness of all the Derbyshire mud and Derbyshire moss and grass and rubble that those thick soles had trod upon? No! ... The fact that they were boot soles and their *raison d'être* the pressure of the earth under the legs of a man of my father's volcanic intensity of earth-feeling, is doubtless a significant symbol.

All this serves to remind us that JCP was, in his own particular way, also a phenomenologist.

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From Dawn Collins

Artist Tony Kerins, has produced a series of sketches for a proposed film of *Weymouth Sands*: <http://tonykerins.com/portfolio/weymouth-sands-jc-powys/>

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From Jeff Bursey

Centring the Margins: Essays and Reviews (Zero Books, 2016) by Jeff Bursey includes a review of the correspondence between JCP and Dorothy Richardson (Cecil Woolf, 2008) which was first published in the *Powys Journal* Vol. XX, 2010. Jeff is a Canadian novelist, short story writer and literary critic. He has published two novels, *Verbatim* and *Mirrors on which dust has fallen*.

REVIEWS

Michael Kowalewski

Zouheir Jamoussi: **Theodore Powys's Gods and Demons**
Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, 2016, £47.99

Dorset is a dark county. It depresses and inspires in equal measure, its enclosing hills a defence against the modern world and a site for visitations from the other world, good or evil, gods and demons. Theodore Powys is the most Dorsetian of writers. He senses the silence and strangeness of a place he hardly left in his adult life. From luminous Tunis which inspired artists and composers with light and colour, Zouheir Jamoussi shows real appreciation of TFP's dark landscape and more importantly, mindscape. It is amazing to think *Theodore Powys's Gods and Demons* began life as a Ph.D thesis way back in 1971, so well has the author spliced in the latest research on Powys. His distance in both time and place gives him a unique but comprehensive perspective on the author.

That said, he singles out the things that all of us converts to Theodore notice – the theological and biblical obsession; the tension of prophetic and artistic modes, as with Blake; the passage from realism to allegory, the all-pervading Fear that is the dominant motif. To these he adds his own unique insights – into animal and 'thing' symbolism, the influence of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*, the influence on William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. The latter is particularly timely as Exeter University, which keeps our Powys Society Collection, has recently acquired the Golding archive, so some incitement is on offer to search out these links more closely.

Jamoussi is sensitive to all the nuances of Powys's style. He is particularly good on the half light that is the preferred luminosity of TFP, and on the role of sight and vision, both physical and spiritual. Every insight and statement of Jamoussi is backed by copious and well-chosen quotations from the full gamut of TFP's work, which justifies amply all his observations. This makes his work an excellent introduction to all of TFP's writings, providing excellent summaries and evaluations of each work.

He is perhaps somewhat harsh on Theodore's apparent indecision over Death and God – has any writer actually solved these dilemmas? Theodore's thoughts may not be conclusive but they are utterly original and unique precisely because he refuses a final conclusion on God or Death. Jamoussi notes the paradox of a rejection of modernism and yet of being very modern in his rejection. Nietzsche and Freud mean almost as much as the Bible and Bunyan and although he rejects the modern, the ancient writers also rejected their own modern world and sought a reclusive cell away from the world. Theodore has the soul of a mediaeval anchorite. Did he ever read, possibly in his father's library, John Climacus or *Ancrene Wisse*? If not, the

overlap of vision is remarkable. Jamoussi fully draws out this aspect of Theodore.

That Powys is obsessed with the Bible – at a time when it was losing its grip on writers – is clear. His first work is after all *An Interpretation of Genesis*. But the Bible of Powys is far more Old Testament than Christ and the good news. Indeed while God appears in Powys in much the way he does in the Bible, as if walking through Eden or talking to Moses, Jesus hardly makes a showing. This is crucial in setting the mood and cadence of Theodore's God. It is Jehovah of wrath not Jesus of mercy who dominates the landscape and appears as Tinker Jar or Mr Weston.

The need to affirm and yet escape the influence of Powys *père*, the patriarchal country vicar, is central to all the brothers but perhaps most for Theodore who never escaped to University and who physically resembles the father most. As a student of Freud, Theodore would have known the need to symbolically slay the father and renounce his guilt-ridden Christianity, but also to inherit the priest's mantle he dons in *Soliloquies of a Hermit*. Thus he adopts art as his vocation in both denial and continuity of his father's calling.

Jamoussi pays particular attention to two undoubted features of Powys's vision – Fear and Cruelty. He charts closely the scenes in Theodore's works where cruelty is involved and links them to Powys's deeply ambiguous view of sexuality, which usually consists either of the rape of the innocent or the seduction of the pure. Sex is sadomasochistic for Powys, according to Jamoussi, which no reader could dispute, although I would give more emphasis to the evil lecher despoiling a maid than the wanton girls seducing foolish young men. Jamoussi makes much of TFP's misogyny, but less of his hatred of male cruelty. Either way, Jamoussi is absolutely right on the mediaeval emphasis on sexual wickedness.

The Fear theme is everywhere and seems to be a cosmic angst (one thinks of Kierkegaard and Heidegger) preceding any concrete object of fear, which is usually God or Death. It is fear of death that awakens consciousness and thus gives impetus to contemplate the infinite consciousness of God. But death is also the supreme gift or blessing – even for God himself, weary of his own moods.

So Jamoussi finds Theodore's essence in a quite mediaeval or early Christian view of contemplation as the goal of existence, and action and the business of the world, as terrible, indeed demonic – hence the title – interruptions of that Contemplation. But where Theodore is not just some reactionary anti-modern is in his very modern doubt about God's existence and his reconstitution of God as an artist, an artist who loves even the evil he creates and who can also grow tired of his own work and long for death. That is the reason why it is still worth reading and contemplating Theodore, the gift of God.

Jamoussi is well aware of other writers on TFP, but of all those I have read, he

perhaps is closest to the essence of Theodore, and had reached that view long before most recent research and publication. It does seem that Powys studies generally are becoming more generous to Theodore now as his vision seems increasingly appropriate in a darkening world. Who, looking at recent events, would doubt the power of Theodore's 'darkness visible' of half-light or not appreciate Jamoussi's guidance on his path?

Arjen Mulder

Llewelyn Powys: **Recalled to Life, A Consumptive's Diary, 1911**

Edited by Peter J. Foss

The Powys Society, Mappowder, 2016, £10

Recalled to Life makes for delightful reading. It is the first book Llewelyn Powys wrote that can be appreciated for its literary value. The earlier diaries, like *The Immemorial Year* for 1909, and *The Conqueror Worm* for 1910, are mostly interesting for those who want to study how a writership comes about. In 1911 this is achieved.

In 1909 the main problem is how the young Powys son Llewelyn, born in 1884 and done with his studies in Cambridge, will make a living for the rest of his life. He gets an offer to work as an editor in a publishing house in London, but lingers over his answer and finally says no for no good reason. The two eldest brothers interfere. John Cowper wants him to become a lecturer in the U.S.A., the career that he himself is pursuing successfully. He even writes most of Llewelyn's lectures for him, but they were of no effect owing to Llewelyn mumbling and not knowing what to answer in the Q&A after his readings.

Littleton wants him to become a school teacher, like himself, head of Sherborne Prep School. But again, Llewelyn performs what he is supposed to do but doesn't seem to be quite there. He is mostly bored and the pupils do not motivate him into becoming a better teacher. In this context the event of the first blood spitting that signals his tuberculosis comes as a solution for a situation Llewelyn is not able to cope with. He has clearly invited the illness by visiting a young friend who is dying of the open, highly contagious form of TB. It feels like an attempt to defy death, and Llewelyn loses the game. But he wins back his life.

As a patient Llewelyn doesn't have to worry about work or his place in society at large. He enjoys social life in the closed hierarchical community of the expensive English sanatorium in Clavadel, near Davos Platz where he will be treated for one and a half years, from New Year's Eve 1910 to May 1911. Clavadel's is an international group of artistic ladies, dramatic young girls, intellectual middle-

aged men and some very tragic young ones, each with the token of the Conqueror Worm (TB).

The setting is the Swiss Alps, a grand-scale landscape in both snow and summer glory. Not to die is Llewelyn's chief mission, and the other patients provide his educational material. They become metaphors of ways to deal with matters of life and death: the Jocular Whisperer, the Madonna, the Tetrarch, the Hamadryad, the Tragic Whisperer, Mrs Coffin, the Archangel, Lady St Vincent, the little Newcastle girl. Llewelyn allows each of them a beautiful vignette. Dr Szende, Wilbraham and poor Miss Sawyer: Llewelyn gives us in a few sentences what took Thomas Mann 600 pages in *The Magic Mountain*.

The continual presence of death at Clavadel in the valley of Davos, with the sublime dead stone Alps towering around them, makes Llewelyn understand what his deepest drive and value is. Life. The life force. Intensity of observation, and of experience. His main activities are sleeping, reading, walking and flirting with the girls. He loves every minute of it. But again Llewelyn can't resist the temptation to defy death. He falls in love with and kisses and cuddles a lovely fresh girl who's dying of open TB: Lizzie, a portrait not to be forgotten.

The first half of the 1910 diary is drenched in happiness. Essential writing. This is how we want our author to be, fully authentic, not yet tainted with an Oxbridgean artificiality that make some of his later books tough reading. But, ill-advised by JCP again, in June 1910 he starts writing his first fictional story. He inserts it into his diary. And funnily enough, as soon as he feels obliged (by JCP) to write 'real' literature he loses all the freshness of his diary writing. His tone of voice, his style, becomes flat, vague, boring. And Llewelyn knows that he is failing John Cowper yet again.

And again TB brings the solution. Llewelyn spits blood, nearly dies; he needs to recuperate for half a year. The empty pages in his 1910 diary he later filled in with quotations from his reading (lots of Shaw, D'Annunzio, de Maupassant, and Pater's *Marius the Epicurean*). And he copied many letters he received from family and friends in England. When John Cowper read Llewelyn's 1910 diary he complained: 'It contains too many quotations and not enough ideas and sensations of your own. I want your philosophy.' That first sentence I fully subscribe to, but the philosophy part he'd better had kept out of the equation. Llewelyn tests his homegrown 'neo-pagan' philosophy in conversations with the intelligentsia in Clavadel and in his diary entries. They never get to the literary level that his personal writing always easily realises.

JCP, as quoted by Llewelyn: ‘There is no excuse for ennui and boredom in this life. You should never allow yourself to look upon existence in a commonplace way. You must turn your mind away from what is mean and petty and sordid so that large luminous thoughts may roll in upon it like amber-coloured waves.’ Large luminous thoughts? Amber-coloured waves? How wrong can one get when advising one’s loved ones? What Llewelyn produces are nagging wavelets of anti-christian rhetoric. JCP is a fatal force in Llewelyn’s life story. He organises and directs the developments he thinks Llewelyn will have to pass through in order to become a real writer, a one of a kind. Yet at the same time JCP himself writes a book, on Keats, which Llewelyn finds tainted with ‘ill-considered, badly-phrased, insignificant personal prejudices’.

The 1911 diary is wisely published under the title *Recalled to Life*, with its double meaning of Llewelyn recuperating in Clavadel and of returning to Montacute. Peter Foss has done an amazing job yet again with both his introduction and notes. They make for a moving subtext about a scholar who fell for the charms of this singular British author, Llewelyn Powys, and spent his entire scholarly life researching every crumb of writing Llewelyn left behind in various archives around the world, going even so far as to try and reconstruct the many walks Llewelyn mentions in his diary. ‘Walked’ is the word most often used.

In Clavadel Llewelyn blossoms open and becomes a global writer, as I called it in a talk at the Powys Society Conference in Street, August 2012. His perspective is European, broad-minded; he writes in an international style, cool and precise. After the miserable split with Lizzie and her deadly lungs he enters into a new love affair, with clever Biddie. Their love is both tragic and endearing, as the TB doesn’t allow them to kiss anymore. Just being near, no touching.

In April 1911 John Cowper picks up his favourite brother in Clavadel, and on the first day of May Llewelyn awakens in the family house in Montacute, Somerset, with their very Christian mother and father and their two elder sisters. Life is well organised for our TB patient. Llewelyn installs himself, and starts walking again, first short roundabouts through the village. After a few weeks he climbs Ham Hill and goes for extensive walks through the countryside, orienting on churches and graveyards, for at least six hours every day.

The diary writing is dense, detailed, notebook-like; the text is full of names of villages, hillsides, woods and streams and people along the way. Llewelyn is rediscovering, recalling the Somerset landscape of his happy youth, but with eyes that have seen Death. The Conqueror Worm is conquered with every step he takes, with every memory stored.

Reading the 1911 diary it slowly dawned on me what Llewelyn is doing when for weeks on end he follows every trail over the hills and valleys – he is creating a

legendary landscape, investing it with stories of fair maidens in white dresses and noble horsemen, lusty farmers, moving preachers, love affairs and heroic deeds: characters and names not to be forgotten in the local community. In his essay-writing up until the very end (1939) he will be returning to this legendary world of Wessex full of earth memories.

A turning point follows. In November 1911 Llewelyn is invited to come and stay with his brother Theodore and his sad wife Violet in their little house in East Chaldon at the south coast of Dorset. A very different setting indeed. The metamorphosis of Llewelyn's writing in just a few days is momentous. Llewelyn leaves the magical world of JCP, and moves into the religious sphere of the deeply depressed T.F. Powys, who is writing his first novel just then. Their sister Katie joins them.

An intimacy comes about that only the sons and daughters of the Powys clan can achieve without lapsing into incest. It creates a energising atmosphere for all of them. It liberates Llewelyn's vision of John Cowperian archetypes, into a Theodorean awareness of the here-and-now and never-again – life as a continuous defying of death. He explores and creates a new legendary region, the rolling landscape of downs and cliffs, which he will recreate into the Middle Earth legends of his love affair with Gamel Woolsey in the early 1930s.

Julia Mathews

Childhood Memories of T.F. Powys in Mappowder

They walked up the dusty lane that was the main street of the village: singly, in pairs or small groups. Dark, silent, sad figures talking in hushed tones acknowledging one another; the little wicket gates clicked behind them as they joined this sombre pilgrimage. We knew them all: Mrs Lucy Penny, Mr Powys's sister, in the group with our parents. She so often welcomed me into her sweet cottage.

My sister and I had an excellent vantage point. We watched from an upstairs window in our cottage conveniently positioned in the middle of the village on raised ground. We had a literal bird's eye view of the Lodge and the tall tower of the Norman church. We watched the familiar figures disappear from view but we knew the path they would be taking beside the wall of the church turning left and under the rounded arch of the porch. Would Dr Jackson be standing there by the huge oak door that was so hard to open? Would anyone sit in Mr Powys's pew?

Cars, an unfamiliar sight, were parking haphazardly not only by the milk churn stand at Styles Farm, but also outside the Village Hall, even in the gateway of the field opposite the Lodge. Unfamiliar figures dressed smartly in suits got out of them.

‘I think that lady is dressed as a man’ whispered my sister. We did not know of course who Sylvia Townsend Warner or Valentine Ackland were.

And then the road was empty.

So the funeral of Mr Powys took place just as we knew it would since the afternoon on the 27th of November. It was our mother’s birthday and she was opening presents; we sat down for tea with cake and biscuits. The bell rang and my mother ran to answer it expecting another card from a kind village person, but instead my mother gave a sharp cry and came back in with tears in her eyes. Her hand went to her mouth, then she composed herself and said ‘Mr Powys has died.’ My father put his arms round her and said in a strange, hoarse, voice ‘Well, he had not been well for a long time.’ We all cried and it was not until later that evening that we put the uneaten birthday cake into the cool darkness of the larder.

In my bedroom, now looking at the empty village, I remembered the tall silver-haired figure whose whole presence would fill the doorway of the Lodge as he cried ‘Out cats!’, sending Violet’s cats scattering into the road.

‘Well, you had better come in,’ he would say to me. ‘And have you seen the fairies today?’ I knew that if I shook my head he would take me by the hand and we would walk into field and look for fairy rings or signs of where ‘they’ had been. Mr Powys knew exactly where to find evidence of this as he walked in the dusk of evening along the road to Plush.

He knew about the wind and how it could talk to the leaves:

The first autumn winds that blew had only to whisper to the chestnut leaves that they must now expect to be loosened from their mother, and to take leave of her, and to fall to the earth, where they would rest harmlessly, though a little surprised at first, until their final dissolution came. The oak leaves had entirely different natures from the leaves of the chestnut. Their ideas were deeper and darker, for they had learned many a mournful mystery from the Druids, and had no belief in the happiness of life here, nor in the happiness of the life hereafter.

(‘The Withered Leaf and the Green’, *Fables*)

We saw him in his long dark coat in wintertime, walking with his stick. Sometimes he would engage my mother in long discussions and my sister and I would become bored and restless. They talked about what we could see on that evening, how it

was different from last night or a week ago. Of birds and trees, cold and rain, foxes and owls in the churchyard.

... There is no better time to hear a tale told than the middle of a still winter's night, and no better place than the little field where the dead are laid. The folk in the village are then snug in bed, and only the nightjar, the owl and the fox are abroad. A winter's night is better for a church yard conversation than a summer's one.

(‘The Candle and the Slow worm’, *Fables*)

They would mention the name Wordsworth – I learnt a poem of his that Mr Powys read me, so I listened harder; and Keats, yes, that was a name I had heard too. On other evenings he would just say ‘Good evening’ and walk past. We would be disappointed and my mother would say, ‘Mr Powys is distracted and is thinking hard about things.’ ‘For a book?’ I would ask. ‘No, not now,’ she replied. ‘He doesn’t write books now.’

On the shelf by the fire in the sitting room there were books that Mr Powys had written. They were dark blue and the name T.F. Powys was in gold lettering on the spine. He was always called Mr Powys in Mappowder except by Violet, his wife, who called him Theodore. My mother would often smile or frown as she sat by the fire reading the books. ‘I don’t really understand what he’s getting at in those books,’ my father would mutter. My mother would look up exasperated but just say: ‘Well, you usually read military memoirs and non-fiction.’ That was true of course. He was an ex-army officer.

He had stopped our Riley on top of Bulbarrow on the day we had moved to Mappowder. We had looked at the Dorset Gap across the Valley that spread for miles, and he had said ‘Well, we are in bow and arrow country now.’ I knew that meant it was wild, remote and exciting.

It was magical in the valleys we roamed as children. The little silver streams, tributaries of the River Lydden, that we could jump across from their flowery banks and from where we came home with cold wet shoes but warm memories of a happy afternoon. The wooded hills only reached after a long walk through hay meadows, but worth the effort because then we could climb the trees and have an even better view. Freedom to absorb all that nature had to offer, and surrounded by enchantment.

How lucky that through the pages of TFP’s books and his personifications of nature, I can be transported back into that childhood time.

Chris Thomas

Inscriptions and Dedications

Books inscribed by their authors and presented to family members, friends, colleagues, and admiring readers, can help to tell us a lot about the writer's interests, ideas, reading, and, if dated, can also provide vital biographical information. Many of the *ex-libris* books in the Powys Society Collection in Exeter are, of course, inscribed to JCP, and there are many that are also inscribed by JCP and were originally presented to Llewelyn; some are inscribed by JCP to himself like the marvellous copy of Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* which is inscribed simply, 1895, *The Year of Love*, the year that he proposed to Margaret.

Some of the best examples of JCP's generous and beautiful inscriptions, filling virtually a whole page, can be found in books presented to his friend Elsa Vaudry, illustrated in the *Powys Review*, Number Three, Summer 1978. In *Newsletter* No. 83, November 2015, Stephen Powys Marks reproduced a wonderful full page inscription by JCP to Elizabeth Harvey in a copy of the 1949 reprint of *The Art of Happiness* which he owns. Jacqueline Peltier, in her edition of the Henry Miller/ JCP letters (*Proteus and the Magician*, Powys Press, 2014) has included a beautiful inscription by JCP inside a copy of Llewelyn's *A Pagan's Pilgrimage*, which he presented to Henry Miller. There must be many more similar examples in other private collections, and archives.

Recently I was contacted by a member of the Society, Nick Fenney, who sent me copies of inscriptions he had found in some of his purchases of JCP's books which all appear to be very rare. He has a copy of JCP's *Poems* (William Rider & Son, 1899) which is inscribed simply 'Marjorie from J. C. Powys'. This is no doubt contemporary with the publication of the book and must be a presentation copy of Powys's *Poems* to Marjorie Cicely Phelps (1877-1957), later Marjorie Ingilby, the daughter of the Squire of Montacute, William Robert Phelps (1846-1919) and his first wife Cicely Fane (1852-1877). In *Autobiography* JCP describes the productions of Shakespeare plays he used to put on at Montacute in the holidays and in which the Phelps children, including Marjorie, were willing participants. Susan Rands has written a detailed article about Marjorie and the Phelps and Powys families in *Powys Journal*, XXI, 2011. JCP later met Marjorie again in 1934 in Dorset (see JCP's diary entry, 17th June 1934, about their meeting, in *The Dorset Year*). Nick also owns what he describes as 'a rather wrecked, heavily foxed and water stained' 1st edition of *Visions and Revisions* (G. Arnold Shaw, 1915) inscribed to 'Tickner Edwardes from his neighbour and colleague J.C. Powys, April 29th 1915. With a drink of mead to his son's success in the Army and victory to his arms.' Edward Tickner Edwardes (1865-1944), the naturalist, beekeeper, writer on country life and later vicar of Burpham, was a close friend to JCP when he moved to Burpham in 1902, and he is memorably described in *Autobiography*. The son of Tickner Edwardes was killed in action in WWI; there is a monument to him in the local church. The articles Tickner Edwardes published in the *Idler*

magazine in the early 1900s, under the heading, *The Idler in Arcady*, about the natural world of Burpham, are illustrated with Edwardes's own photographs and therefore provide an invaluable contemporary visual record of the landscape and buildings that JCP describes in *Autobiography*. Books inscribed by JCP to Tickner Edwardes are rare but Nick in fact owns another first edition copy of *Poems* with an inscription to: 'ET and KL Edwardes from J.C. Powys, Good Friday 1902.' KL is a reference to the wife of Tickner Edwardes, Kathleen Louise (1871-1958).

At this year's conference booksale one lucky member made a serendipitous purchase, a gift from Stephen Powys Marks, of an old copy of Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in Cassell's National Library series, edited by Henry Morley, and first published in this edition in 1889. The significance of the book is that it had once belonged to JCP, and, according to the faint bookseller's mark inside, he acquired it from a local bookseller, printer and stationer, D.B. Friend & Co, at 56 Church Road in Hove, probably in the 1890s. Its chief glory is the inscription on the inside front cover, in JCP's unmistakable hand, written boldly in striking purple ink and filling a whole page: '*By the eternal God we will make of this England such a glorious and enlightened Utopia or die in the attempt!*' Could this provide evidence for JCP working out, at an early date, a blueprint for his radical ideas of a 'Republic of the Future'?

A few years ago one of our members in the Netherlands informed me that he 'was fortunate enough to have bought a beautiful edition of Wolf Solent (*Simon and Schuster, New York, 1930 [reprint]*): one of a small number of author's copies bound in blue morocco. It has an inscription to Littleton and Elizabeth Myers, dated October 1942.' The inscription in fact is a quotation from Rabelais, Chapter VIII, and is followed by another short quotation in Greek which fills the entire page.

When Michael Kowalewski opened a book, *The Age of the Gods* by Christopher Dawson, (Sheed and Ward, 1933), which he had borrowed from Somerset Libraries, he was surprised to find a familiar name inscribed on the inside front cover – **Littleton A. Powys** (who was of course JCP's son). The inscription is followed by 'St. Stephen's House, Oxford', the well known High Church Anglican theological college where Littleton was a student in 1926 and later appointed Vice-Principal in 1931. This is followed by 'R. Bostock, Esq, Sparsholt Manor, near Winchester, on the occasion of his marriage, September, 1934 (21st).' It seems Bostock presented the book to Littleton whilst Littleton was still at St Stephen's House in the mid-1930s. But it is unclear what Bostock's relationship with Littleton was although they may have been acquainted through Harry Lyon in the 1920s (Robert Bostock was an architectural designer) and both may have shared similar Anglo-Catholic views. The inscription is an interesting insight into Littleton Alfred's reading. *The Age of the Gods* is a study of ancient pre-Christian religious cults.

Dawson was also an important Catholic apologist. In his diary for 1929 JCP gives a good impression of Littleton's enlarged Catholic sympathies especially in his description

of Littleton's performance of his 'offices', reading from a Roman breviary; his vestments, said JCP, reminded him of *old Byzantine pictures*. In 1940 when Littleton resigned his commission in France as an army chaplain, JCP quickly realised that his son's '*secret reason*' for this action was his decision to convert to Roman Catholicism. In 1959 JCP wrote to his friend Nicholas Ross saying that Littleton was '*the ONLY Roman Catholic priest I've ever known.*'

Another member has sent me a copy of a really fascinating inscription by JCP which has some biographical relevance and which he seems to have written rapidly inside his copy of the *Oxford Book of Ballads* (edited by Arthur Quiller Couch, 1910). The inscription is clearly a poem composed by JCP himself and seems to reflect events in his life at the Little Theatre in Chicago in 1913 when he was trying to write plays for Maurice Browne. The poem is prefaced with a reference to one of Pascal's notes on the theatre: '*the least of theatres is an escape from the infinite*', and reads:

*My Play is sans Shield or knife
To wrestle with the Sphinx –
Death in my heart I dance with Life –
And loathe and love the Minx –*

*The moon my mistress, with my Love
I madly ebb and flow;
Sky meteors mock at me Above;
Sea urchins leer below –*

*Protagonist, Antagonist,
(Hark! Little Sunken Bell!)
Poor furious child I beat my fist
Against the walls of Hell;*

*I play: the 'Néant' is my Stage;
That Background does not stir.
Soften my madness,
Soothe away my rage
O Little Theatre!*

This might be a poetical commentary on JCP's personal relationships at the Little Theatre in Chicago, and the situation he relates, in a letter to Frances Gregg dated 27 November 1913: '*That demon Maurice has turned down my play as it was and makes me revise and revise – and I know he won't take it ...*'

The editors of the Newsletter would like to hear from you. Tell us more about your books with unusual and interesting inscriptions by the Powyses.

4/21/50

Marjorie
from J. C. Powys

First edition
author's presentation inscription

Tickner Elwardes
from his nephew & colleague
J. C. Powys.

April 29th 1915

with a drink of mead to
his sons, soldiers in the
Army and victory to his
arms.

The Heart of Theatres is an
escape from the Infinite
Fascal.

My Play it is sans shield or
knife

To wrestle with the Sphinx -
Death in my heart I dance
with Life -

And love and love the
Mince -

The Moon my mistress, with
my love

I madly ebb and flow;
Sky - Meteors mock at me
above;

Sea - Machines leer below -
Protagonist, Antagonist,
(Hush! Little Sunken Bell!)

Poor furious child I beat my fist
Against the walls of hell:

I play: "Le Néant" is my Stage,
That Background does not
stir -

Softens my madness,
TO soothe my rage

O Little Theatre!

TO WHOM ALL LOVERS OF THE BALLAD

OWE MOST IN THESE TIMES

FRANCIS JAMES CHILD

FREDERICK JAMES FURNIVALL

AND

JOHN WESLEY HALES

For
Littleton & Elizabeth
From

John Cowher Powys
Oct 1943

" - telz que
dict Platon, in Symposio,
avoir esté l'humaine
nature à son commencement
mystic, et autour estoit
escript en lettres Ioniques:

ΑΡΑΤΗ or ΖΗΤΕΙ
ΤΑ ΕΑΥΤΗΣ "

Rabelais' Gargantua
chapter VIII

J. Cowher Powys

By the eternal
God we will
make of this
England such
a glorious and
enlightened
Utopia or die
in the attempt!

UTOPIA

A Note from Henry Miller

See back cover: transcript

Dear John Cowper Powys – Forgot to tell you in my letter that you will find some chapters from “Black Spring” in “The Cosmological Eye”, some fragments from “The Rosy Crucifixion” in “Sunday after the War” and some excerpts from other books in the various volumes I mailed you recently. I sent you “The Colossus of Maroussi” separately. Graham Ackroyd of Sticklepath (England) will probably write you about some of the other titles. Dylan Thomas, the Welsh poet, was here recently. Through him I got a fresh whiff of Wales. Cordial greetings! Henry Miller

[notes by JCP]

Think of Dylan Thomas visiting Henry Miller (!)

This is a long loan For Harry M! as this H.M. is like himself a real Treasure of a novelty after the obscure dodderings of most celebrated men! This Henry Miller seems to be like Dreiser of German ancestors on both sides but born in Brooklyn New York & like Goethe he had a tailor for his grandad

Ron Hall and JCP



Ron Hall, 1955

Ron/Ronald Hall provided descriptions on the covers of later Village Press books, and introductions. The most considerable of these, infectious in its enthusiasm, is to the 1975 Village Press edition of letters from JCP to Henry Miller, those two ‘friends’ of the 1950s who inspired Ron’s young life and that of his friend Philip Callow. Ron’s precarious existence was anchored in letters, and JCP’s life-lines to him over ten years (1951-1960) were prepared for printing by the Village Press but never published. Other JCP letters to young fans, of friendship and encouragement (e.g. to Nicholas Ross), did appear; those to William Gillespie are unpublished, those to Robert Nye documented but disappeared. The letters to Ron are typical and have special charm, showing JCP’s endless kindness and encouragement, and interest in authors (like Claude Houghton) enjoyed on both sides.

Ron’s introduction to these letters starts with his earlier (1952) account of a day spent with JCP and Phyllis at Corwen; this was printed as ‘The Old Man With The Praise’ in Roye McCoye’s Elegreba, and later in Powys Review no 9 (1981-2). Jim Morgan’s letter after Ron’s death appeared in Review no 17 (1985) with an elegy for Ron by Philip Callow.

KK

Introduction to Powys/Hall correspondence

[1952]

We stood before a blazing fire in the small hotel at which he’d invited us to stay. I looked out of the window and the hot tea burned my tongue. I saw Owen Glendower swinging in the wind and rain outside the opposite hotel. After some minutes the proprietress told us the way and we set off. On the outskirts of the market town we made our way in drizzle up what was like the stony bed of a swift stream.

‘Must be somewhere here,’ I said as we stood uncertainly. A door before us opened and a very fragile-looking woman called, ‘Are you Ron Hall?’. The next thing either of us recalled later was passing into the house, into the kitchen, and being overwhelmed. Now as I try to relive that moment I find I cannot. It was too vivid, filled with such intensification of life that I must ever fail to evoke it with words. He came towards us shouting, ‘Hello – hello my dear old friend Ron! And Hello! Mary. Oh this is so good! Shake hands Ron my old friend – shake hands!’ He pressed our hands to his lips quickly in blessing and friendship.

It was as though I had seen a vision – of a man enraptured with life. We had expected to find an almost bedridden, enfeebled old man, full of his struggles with the ‘devil’s acids’. We found a man ALIVE.

I shall never find the sight of him, as he came through that door hand outstretched, dimmed by time: an old-young face striking in its features yet arresting beyond these with the rapture it started up in one. His head and face were illumined with what I have thought of ever since as an endless motion of rooted ecstasy.

‘Shake hands again Ron my old friend, shake hands again!’ He plied us with questions as to how we’d travelled. I suddenly felt marvellously at ease, in the most real of worlds. Everything in the room delighted me, entranced me. I didn’t have many moments to look around though. There was so much to say. The pale morning light of an overcast wet day came in through the ‘council-house’ window.

As he hugged his old knees and clapped his hands together I saw what I had long known. John Cowper Powys was Praise and Exaltation. He sat on his ‘boy-scout’ camp bed with ink spattered all down one side, and I saw as it were a living river of books, affirmation, ‘arts’ pouring before me through the room. And I felt an uprising of my own identity such as I’d never known before. Everything was an affirmation in this man’s presence.

Phyllis was already getting us a snack in the kitchen. As John let go his cries of delight and rocked to and fro or expanded warmly on one thing after another his face burned something deeper into me than memory; it burned so far in that when we came away I could not call it up. How I had dreamed of such a human power in life! Mary sat in the wicker chair. I looked at her too. She had opened to the day and there was joy in her face. Phyllis called, ‘Is that the boy with the newspapers?’ John told us then how this boy and others would come in the mornings to see him swallow a raw egg.

‘They stand there and watch me crack the shell – then they watch it going down my throat like this.’ He threw his head back and pretended to swallow the egg. In a flash the intricate subtleties of his heathen, religious, elemental philosophy of life was transformed into the pleasure he got from his performance before the kids.

When Phyllis sat down with her sewing he declared roundly, ‘Writers, artists – we all want praise you know! That’s what we all want: praise!’ ‘John,’ I said, I heard a reviewer refer to your Rabelais book once as “not a study at all, but a panegyric”.’ ‘Panegyric, that’s it!’ he cried, and smacked his hands together.

I do not attempt here any appreciation of the multiform yet integrated aspects of John Cowper Powys’s creation – this down-to-bed-rock Iberian Cave-man Idoliser, fetish-worshipper and enemy of all white idealism. All I want to make clear is that with him one feels the great human

bond of *sharing the miracle* to a tremendous degree. Past, present and future are one immediate living breath.

Homer was living round the corner of Cae Coed with the rest of the Merioneth Greeks. Rabelais, if given a call, would be round in a trice for a good glass of Pantagruelian juice, brewed in the Cauldron of Ceridwen. Dostoevsky and his substantial vapours were moving ever in from the mountains, over the grey Welsh horizon. In the simple little room with its few bookshelves and John's father on the wall draining his cup to get the unstirred sugar. With the loaf of bread from which 'Prester John' tore pieces and the bottle of milk he gulped at now and then, all the things that are disintegrated by our tormented age were given wholeness again, miraculously.

I reached out and touched the great club in the corner next to me. It was John's companion on his two-hour morning walk up the mountainside. It is as unique as its companion. No human hand could grip around the head – it was like a small boulder there. To grasp it lower down must have been to grasp a forest! And its name is a secret to the world at large!

'It's the sense of *smell* I want to know to the full now. I want to smell everything! Oh I do so much enjoy this sense. Yes, I want to smell everything! I want to smell the arse of God.' It was intoxicating to witness his zest. We were talking of one book after another. Strings of asides came from him, and not 'literary' ones either. He was up and down off his couch, showing us things; a book of mythological and legendary figures which he'd been asked to write a preface for but could not for lack of time; a letter from Dostoevsky's daughter – a prize possession this.

The morning rushed on without time. I pulled from the bookcase two books by Henry Miller and read the inscription on the fly-leaf of one of them: 'In remembrance of thirty years ago, the book I should like to be remembered by.' It was *The Colossus of Maroussi*. We spoke of Henry, our mutual friend. After a while John said, 'I can't understand why he thinks so much of Rimbaud.' I tried to say why I thought this was and I ended up reading Miller's last paragraph of his *The Columbus of Youth*. When I reached the end of the glowing, visionary words I looked up and saw he was bursting to pronounce something.

'It's always the same' – he drew himself up with a fine noble gesture – 'whenever I hear of that splendid golden visionary future I want to cry out . . .' – and here he delivered such a cadence of Latin finality that I felt the Boulder of the Cave had been rolled into place for ever.

'But how do you reconcile that with your "other dimensions", that "crack in matter"?' 'That's what I've said before, Ron,' Phyllis put in. John laughed. 'Oh I don't *reconcile* it at all, I say I'm like a swarm of gnats – kill me in these' – he whacked his hand down on the bread-board – 'and I'm in those that got away.'

We all laughed. Phyllis bade John not to talk so much or he'd tire himself out. Obediently he lay back and drank some milk. 'Yes, I mustn't talk so much. You talk Ron, you talk.'

Talk! I couldn't say a word. Back he came again, to my rescue, after his long rest! He got me talking about the numerous and varied jobs I had had: the carpet cleaning, crematorium, garage, office, tractor work, and the umpteen books I'd devoured furtively at the same time. 'Why, you ought to write about all those jobs and people, Ron,' Phyllis was saying in her soft Kansas voice.

'Ah yes, and your *best* writing is that *rich, eloquent prose* such as Henry Miller does so well.' I can hear him saying it now – 'rich, eloquent prose' – the most delicious, stimulating

dish in his cosmological stew-pot! Talk veered to my chances of publication. I'll be a genius in no time, I thought. And that was just it. I suspected that everyone who came to this room and talked with them were brought to realise themselves as unique human beings, with genius hidden in their finger-print.

We were supposed to be back at the hotel for lunch. I knew, however, that we would not be leaving until we said farewell. I hardly dared ask the time in case there were no clocks. One of the ways they knew the time of day often was by the knocking on the door of their 'regular' tramp. We were listening to how he called for his bit of provender – '... just a little tea and sugar and bread we put by for him. The old chap is such a lover of pictures of foreign places. He sits on the seat between these two houses, looking at the Catholic magazine we give him, for *hours*, completely absorbed in the pictures of Rome and Italy. You should see, Ron and Mary, how his face lights up when I hand it to him! And how miserable he is when he hasn't got it!' A life-long sympathy with tramps, hoboos, down-and-outs, 'nobodies', was self-evident.

An urgent need to pass water made me ask for the toilet. I had to keep making this trip all the time I was in the house, although I'd drunk very little. Symbolic, I told myself!

While Mary and I ate at a small table, Phyllis told us that *Porius* had to be cut by five hundred pages for publication, and that *A Glastonbury Romance* was cut by a third.

There were a host of things swirling in the air about our heads. Some of them were the things we talked about: Lawrence, the pristine quality of his descriptive power – my own physiog – John's manias ('Why do I have such a horrible shivering loathing for my own body, except for my hands and knees?') – Goya ('Look at this one here, Satan Devouring His Sons. Oh, he's a great one is Goya!') – Dreiser, his friendship with him – obscenity and pornography.

Yet it was not so much *what* we spoke about that afternoon and morning but *how* we spoke, freeing into the air the voice of the heart, the blooded spirit, the great past, the legend that man creates and that he is. Good it was indeed to hear John's brother Llewelyn spoken of so casually as if still alive. *For who and what was dead?* Llewelyn's death-mask upstairs was alive, the row of Greek plays were breathing, the Durer watercolour on the stairs was still wet.

Living on the bare necessities they could afford these two people were overbrimming with riches. Were they apart from 'the modern world'? There was no 'modern world', only the world that endureth. The difference of many years between us did not concern anyone. Life itself spanned everything, a bridge into the Present. Once, standing by his camp-bed couch, I said, 'I was thinking the other day, John, that the more you write the farther you get from writing.' He applauded delightedly. 'That's it, that's very good! I should like that on my tombstone!'

Mary talked with Phyllis in the kitchen. The fluorescent light over the couch and writing-board was switched on. The 'old borgne,' as he called himself (for the life of me I could not detect which eye it was that was useless!), listened intently to my relating a parable of Michael Prishvin's. It told how he would walk in the Russian forest surrounded by trees laden down with snow so that their crests touched the ground. As he walked along he swung his stick at them 'and with swift, deft blows I liberated a great many trees.' 'I know just that, I've done just that – on the mountain, yes!'

When we were gathered together again, America became our subject. Like a fool, forgetting Phyllis's Kansas, I spoke of America as a kind of disintegrative force breaking down finally

a decayed society. ‘But, Ron, that’s all abstraction,’ she said quietly, passionately. ‘Open up, Ron, open up!’ I had to remind myself quickly of Whitman, Melville, Miller, Jeffers, Patchen.

Phyllis suggested John show us the ‘museum’ as they called it. He led us upstairs into a small icy room where I couldn’t stop my teeth chattering. Many books – twenty books of twenty years’ diary entries; a painting by someone called Meisener that reminded me of Breughel. ‘These are the greatest of them all,’ he declared, sweeping his hand along a row of Greek classics.

Down again in the hall I saw a number of extraordinary sticks. John picked one up and stood before me with it held out. ‘I call this the Tortured Stick,’ he said, ‘see how it’s twisted. It was a cruel thing to do. You look after it, and see! it’s got an *eye*!’ Sure enough, there in the handle was its eye. Wire had been wound round it when it was a thin thing and it had grown into a strong spiral. I swore to look after it. Now I, too, had a magic stick! Now I’d begin to sound the bed-rock of reality with it!

It was quite dark outside, and time to go. We seemed to have traversed a lifetime of friendships together, the four of us. Phyllis was going to see us down the road. John’s tall, bowed figure dwarfed us both. I fancied he was feeling tired. Tired! The past six hours of intense animation would have tired an ox – a young one, not an octogenarian. I was exhausted – and charged to the brim.

I asked him if he wrote his books on the camp-bed. He showed us a sheaf of foolscap covered with huge script, crossings out, insertions, the words revolving, corkscrewing, rocketing and then massing in solid phalanxes, armies, hosts. I thought of *Porius* and *Wolf Solent* in this form.

I grasped my Tortured Stick, shot a glance at the giant’s club in the corner, at the bread and milk – the room, the living room. Outside it was pouring with rain. As we went off down the road he stood momentarily in the doorway, with his arm raised like one of Walt’s aged plainmen. ‘There’s the hill that’s in *Porius*,’ Phyllis shouted against the wind. As we neared the town she told us that John wrote letters most of the day and his books in the evening.

The night howled and swirled about us as we said goodbye to Phyllis. It was an uncommonly vivid parting in the blackness. We each felt we’d known her most of our lives. Next morning, in sunlight, we ran for the train and sat in the empty compartment looking back at the valley. The swollen river was in spate. What thanksgiving was in us! In truth we were changed from what we had been twenty-four hours ago. There was no assessing this thing that had been added unto us.

I see now in so-called ‘memory’ the whole valley under great clouds, riding in on wind and sun, mysterious as those winds that course through the life and books of John Cowper Powys, bringing the fruitful rain that is endlessly streaming down the sides of that ‘bed-rock’ of life itself – his waters of Life.

*

[1975]

I wrote that account of my first meeting with Powys shortly after it, twenty-three years ago. The essential uniqueness of that day still lives in me. As Cynthia Nolan put it, writing to me recently of her and her husband Sidney Nolan’s meetings with John Cowper, ‘When you were with him he put a spell on you.’ This magical surcharge of contemplative-dynamic spirit is as clearly manifest in his handwriting as it was in his voice.

Letters have always been of vital importance to me. Confessional, exhortatory, intimate with details of struggle, suffering, delight, communion: those of ‘Vincent’ from Arles and St. Rémy Asylum to his brother Theo; Dostoevsky’s to *his* brother from the Siberian camp; Lawrence from Taos; Checkhov after visiting the leper colonies; Blake rejoicing and castigating from Felpham. They gave me the *man*, in his diurnal flesh and spirit. It is a strange feeling, reading words meant for only one confidant, outside the area of literature, art, yet so often plunging us to the core of an artist’s vision.

Re-reading these pre-eminently happy letters from John Cowper Powys to me made some of the barriers and insulations I had set up about myself fall away; until I felt again in the centre of a numinous light. A disturbing, liberating experience. Even at times bewildering, as a reference, say, to ‘Joann the Stolen Body’ set me wondering what my then little daughter had said or done? While his dislike of the title of an early novel of mine caused me to ponder what the devil it was supposed to *mean*!

His comments on my jobs, habitations, friends, words to my wife on her paintings, to us both on our new-born or growing children, took me back through my twenties. Sentences, phrases that had been recurring isolated in my mind over two decades took substance of time and place.

The other day I came across the rough draft of the first letter I wrote to John Cowper. Its ardour, humour, its rhapsodic hero-worship hit me a strong backhander of truth – the submerged truth of my spirit’s power of intense response, unalloyed praise. I saw that I had written to this great and humble man with something of that over-brimming rapture for existence that filled his life and work. Early manhood carried me on a wavecrest of energy and fulfilment: I was twenty-two, three years happily married, with a chubby serene daughter of three; penniless between potato-picking, factory and menial jobs; writing in two rented rooms on a Cornish beach after leaving the Navy, Birmingham, gipsy caravan, houseboat, converted bus, behind. I felt connected to the currents of genius flowing to me from music, books, paintings – carried on a flood tide of life. Powys’ enormous capacity for profound delight drew a totality of response from me with each letter from him. At eighty he communicated a youthful verve and appetite for living that belied agedness and a lifetime’s suffering. He had moved as far from the sombre, brooding obsessions of the three novels of his forties as the painter Kokoshka did from his early portraits to the vast, high-tones canvases of *his* old age.

Ah! to get home from grease-nipple factory’s incarceration, or fourteen hours ploughing, and see his huge and minute handwriting! To catch his tone of concerned fraternity, the heightened ‘equality of all souls’ feeling! Fatigue, tedium fell from me. Best of all was when marginal insertions and inter-linings made the pages go on expanding as I turned them this way and that! Such a *physical* transmission of a man’s being.

Lately I have been privileged to receive from America and parts of England copies of and original letters by John Cowper Powys to relatives and friends. And I have seen listed some of the collections of his letters, including thousands to brothers and sisters, and hundreds to his ‘alter ego’ Huw Menai. The number he wrote ‘is infinite’, someone has assessed! Now that I can see these letters to me as one decade’s small strand in an intricately vast network, I marvel even more than when I received them at his unfailing and swift response.

Sometimes his bold little drawings spiked and whorled out of a letter. He drew his Cae Coed

room about him as he wrote, with himself propped up on his couch writing and drawing. Always his concern was to establish a strong human communion across space and time, gaily, earnestly. 'Magnanimous to the point of self-destruction,' Alyse Gregory wrote of him. Magnanimity, loyalty, praise, lucidity, joy, wonder, profundity, simplicity, compassion; a man too good to be true! To whose veracity of being I herewith testify, joining so many others. He was too *large* ('I am large. I contain multitudes' wrote Walt Whitman) a being for our social instruments of evaluation: commensurate to the 'whale' phenomena of his novels amidst the shoals of literary minnows.

I spread out before me now dozens of large photographs of John Cowper Powys, from his thirties to late eighties. I single out those belonging to the years of our friendship. What astonishing changes, contrasts, metamorphosis! His very facial bone-structure seems to differ dramatically from picture to picture. They remind me of how, before me, his bright, Jackdaw-eyed animation would in a flash become a weighted absorption; or how some real or imagined object beyond the room took him swooping away, away! Some of the last photographs have a greatly feminine radiation. Some a haunting humility. The ones of the earlier years convey something at times hieratic; the oracular mouth, the hands gesturing sublimities and the shapes of stones, sheep's backs, infants' skulls.

Great is my blessing to be able to speak with first hand 'extravagance' of a fellow man! I can walk on 'the wet sand and on the dry sand' of Weymouth beach, over Maiden Castle's ramparts and through Wolf Solent's Somerset lanes, gripping his bestowed Tortured Stick in my fist. I can take his books from my shelves, treasuring the thumb-print seal inside *A Glastonbury Romance*. 'Given this Pythagorean day, namely the Fourth of July, 1951 under or by my hand and seal to Ron Hall from John Cowper Powys. It's really the 3rd! but I make war against the Trinity on behalf of Walt Whitman's Square Deific.' I read the moving inscription to him by a close friend of Thomas Wolfe's in *Of Time And The River*, above John Cowper's words to me. I relish in memory the richest Christmas Cake we ever ate, sent from 'John and his Phyllis' when we were very hard up on the forward end of an old houseboat. Books came often from them when we lived remote from libraries. A snug cot-blanket for a new-born son; records and magazines — some passed on to me from Henry Miller. I boast in resurrected gratitude.

Through John Cowper's introduction I came close, in the last three years of 'the old Borgne's' life, to a fatally crippled young poet from Oldham, Roye McCoye. Roye died within a year of Powys. One memory I have of this courageous Lancastrian was visiting him in his Cheshire Home and finding him strapped in his wheelchair typing the final letters of a postcard to J.C.P. 'Done it!' he exclaimed thickly, smiling up through his new 'buggerly beard'. 'And it's only taken me five hours this time.' Twenty eight words on the card.

In the years that I corresponded with the French writer Jean Giono it was John Cowper who acted as translator-intermediary for me. That he was one of the supreme agents for connecting kindred spirits in a century where so much works to isolate them is evident from a sampling of his letters.

Facts, itineraries, dates, new writings, letters, references hitherto unknown to me have been added to the legend of this man during the past year. Vastly mysterious, hugely simple, the aura about his work and life seems to me to be rising up increasingly now, from a kind of

diffusely ‘underground’ region. His work has created a secret ‘neglected’ two-way psychic current. Something alchemical to the spirit. Imaginative-elemental response to him has to be at a level below and beyond the reductively sterile flux of two centuries of an anti-magical, mechanistic world-view.

Before this year is out the whole of his work will be in print together for the first time.

‘His art isolates the artist as the crime does the criminal,’ I read yesterday in a book by my friend Francis Stuart. An irrefutable truth, consuming, regenerative. No writer has given utterance to the eternal solitude of a human being more impressively than Powys. ‘Alone, alone, alone’ — the fundament on which he creates. So that, seemingly paradoxically, he is infinitely interfused with all creation! Out of his visionary awareness of this mystic duality he penned his pell-mell letters.

‘John the Spruce Fir.’ ‘Jack Straw.’ ‘John o’ Lanthorn.’ ‘Your old Dog.’ ‘Your old Doddipole.’ A man, solitary, comrade, ‘half-sham-hermit’, whose exultant, defiant spirit used that innermost isolation of the artist to spring spontaneous words, feelings, cries, out in envelopes into the world.

Ron Hall

‘father on the wall draining his cup ...’: A favourite painting by Gertrude Powys. Present whereabouts unknown. ‘its name is a secret ...’: JCP to his sister Katie, 27 November 1951 — ‘I lie on back under a rock or tree and hold up my Herculean Club called Expectation ...’ (in *Atlantis* JCP names the Club of Herakles ‘Expectation’ or ‘Dokeesis’). ‘his “alter ego” Huw Menai ...’: See *Powys Review* 27/28 and *Newsletter* 84. The original letters are in the Collection at Exeter, copies in the NLW.

KK

Some of JCP’s letters to Ron Hall

[1951]

7, Cae Coed,
CORWEN
Merionethshire,
N. Wales.

My dear Ron Hall, your letter is a marvel. I’ve not only never had one in the least like it but I’ve never *seen* one like it. I do thank you for it, Ron, from what’s left of my heart in my old age. I feel just as you do about Henry Miller. He was a boy in his teens a lot younger than you when we met in New York and let me tell you Ron and you will easily believe it that his sudden quite recent not a year ago it was re-appearance in my life, tho’ only in our letters to each other, has been the most exciting stimulus and the most proud delight of my old age. Yes! I feel towards him exactly as you do though I am half a century older than you; but I am still just the same sort of hero-worshipper of the kind of geniuses that have that sort of *cosmic spirit* that is so hard to define, as I was when I was your age. Your list of them, Ron, is almost identical with mine today! Only I know nothing of Hamsun (H. Miller was amazed at my ignorance of him when as a boy he asked me about him — and I am totally ignorant of him still! Also of ‘Giono’ mentioned here by you — also (I confess) of Picasso. But your others every one of them are my

heroes too and I rejoice that you name James Hanley who has been my friend for 15 years and he sends me literary papers and magazines every month. In fact it was because he lived near here that I first came here when 15 or 16 years ago I came back to Great Britain. Do please write again Ron and tell me where you were born and where your wife was born and what is her name and where your friend Phil Callow was born.

For myself I was born in this latitude (so the climate here exactly pleases me) in Derbyshire where the first years of life till seven were spent. They say 'Derbyshire born Derbyshire bred', you know, 'strong in the arm — and weak in the head!' I live here with two American ladies a mother and daughter, the elder well on in her eighties and very shaky — so that with my own nervous weaknesses and Mrs. Playter's great age and infirmities my Miss Phyllis Playter has as you can imagine a pretty hard time especially as she herself is anything but sturdy and strong. So we have to live like hermits and we have to refuse all visits from our friends — this is essential for my own nerves: for 5 years ago I *just didn't* die of starvation from these acids caused by nervous excitement and causing much deadly indigestion that I became a real *literal* Belsen-looking skeleton.

By the very post your wonderful letter came Henry Miller sent me from California the first number of a new magazine called *Survival* with an article of his on Rider Haggard and there *also came* — just note these coincidences Ron — the latest number of *Everybody's Illustrated Magazine* with an article on Rider Haggard by my friend and the biographer of my dead brother Llewelyn *Malcolm Elwin*.

Yes this letter of yours does indeed delight me. Do tell me from what quarter of the globe *you* come, and your *wife*, and your friend Phil Callow — I think all these things are curiously and strangely interesting — My Americans come from Kansas though Miss Playter went to school in Boston just as I was born in Derbyshire and went to school in Dorset! Well I must stop for I have only got one eye that sees and my good one gets tired and I have to earn my living still! But do write again — tho' I mustn't write quite so much next time Ron!

Yours most sincerely grateful

John C. Powys

1 February 1951.

My dear R.H.

O it was all *Henry!* He suddenly in the course of his *Vast Autobiography* (now *his Work in Progress*) as he recorded various experiences influences and impressions was aware of the impression of your ancient correspondent *on the Platform* and clothed in what over there was always called Mr. Powys's '*Oxford Gown*' tho' it was usually Miss's — I forget her name, a famous big girl-school Mistress's '*Graduation Gown*'. But I wore this gown and it was of heavy silk purely as an actor; yes as an Actor dresses up; and H.M.'s first letter to me — a Divine Bolt out of the Black-Blue — contained a most vivid account in his own best dramatic style of my performances on the Platform of the *Labour Temple* in 14th Street Manhattan if I haven't forgotten of it.

Will Durant was the Director then. You could get in for a ever small small *small* sum. Henry mentioned the exact number of cents — but within the easy pocket power of any kid from Brooklyn. He says he was with his great pal *Emil Schnelloch* (I have his picture here as a grown man and such a handsome distinguished man he sure has grown to be!) and he tells of my antics with that gown of — O yes! Miss *Spence* it was!! as I did my stunt which *has always been my first string* and that I *now* try frantically to catch the air of in my second

string which is writing! For the devil's acids don't let me play on platforms any more! Yes acting reciting extemporising dancing my mad dance of a mystical Fakir (and *Faker tool*) for I am a born Platform Performer!

Yes I am pathetically *unmusical*, but from the first time I heard him 25 or 30 years ago in New York Sibelius has been the *only* Musician I can properly follow and honestly enjoy.

Well! the best to Phil Callow and my true homage and duty to your wife Mary.

Yours, J. C. Powys

And Henry tells how my dead brother Llewelyn was with me and how cross he got at my long drawn out argument with these two German kids!

My dear Ron,

It's a good thing I've learnt the great secret and trick that the only cure for self-consciousness is *more* self-consciousness till you're so much so that you *couldn't* be more so — then and then alone and only then does self consciousness completely cease! Where does it go? Well! it *merges in all our sensations*. It becomes the telegraph wire through which the wind hums. It becomes the 'water in our mouth' when we think of anything nice!

I do like *very well* this poem on Sibelius, especially the beginning and the end. I am grateful for it and also for the wondrous description of that carpet cleaning and of this foaming and roaring tide and your Mary and Joann.

No Theodore has never been to Cornwall. He still lives in Dorset. Yes do lend me that Magazine with Henry Miller's article about Cendrars for I am always as completely puzzled when H.M. mentions him as when he talks of Hamsun of whom I have never read a line.

Theodore lives at a village called Mappowder near Sturminster Newton.

O I began writing as a little boy. My first writings were when I was 7 or 8, copycat tales like *Ivanhoe*, and I wrote a poem on a ghost and a demon at Corfe Castle, but at your age 21 wrote a rambling imitation of Rabelais about an old poet I knew at Brighton called Mr. de Kantzow. Then I wrote no more till I was *over 40*.

O no I had no difficulty in publishing because my lecture manager printed and published anything I wanted to print or publish. I wrote *Glastonbury* on my lecture trips all over America in hotels. He is dead now my Manager and friend G. Arnold Shaw. He was a *lovely person*.

I am fiercely Pro-Jewish. I always maintain I have *Jewish blood* myself.

My one eye tells me to stop and I obey.

Yours, J. C. Powys

O no! I don't *have* to lie all day on this boyscout couch but I do so because it helps those *gastric acids* — is it perhaps excess of Hydrochloric acid? I am awfully ignorant in the medical sciences. But I am damned cunning at curing myself like an old fox! I walk up the mountain (*not climbing*) to a narrow lane through a wood and between those ancient massive stone walls *balanced up without cement or mortar* such as you never find in some counties at all and then it's a narrow sheep path over the foot hills of the Berwyn Range that stretches South West to *Cader Idris* the second biggest mountain around here but in 2 minutes up our lane I can see on certain days about 50 miles South West or rather *due West* those two peaks of Snowdon where every year climbers get killed or half killed!

Phyllis and I were deeply impressed by that little photo of Mary. Phyllis understands her reluctance and shares it completely! In fact for the last 15 years, that is since we've been here, *nothing* will induce — I say *nothing* will induce her to be included in any photo or any photo

group or any snap shot — *nothing*. But we both I tell you are thrilled with this photo of Mary and think it is good wise and beautiful like Voltaire's Belle et Bonne.

We have been discussing the best we know how to discuss anything — that is looking at it from the male side and from the female side — this choice — as Homer says: 'this way and that' — your grand problem of whether to concentrate just now on painting or writing. And we have come to the conclusion that if we were your Uncle and Aunt we would advise . . . Writing! And not only so, we would actually dare to advise you to write in all your spare time . . . *your First Novel* and we would, strongly advise you to make it as *autobiographical as possible*

Now please remember this is as much Phyllis' advice as it is John's — and together we really are *no negligible advisers!* And our longing is to read — for every night for the last five or ten I forget years from 10.45 or eleven p.m. to midnight or a.m. (How odd it is that 12.30 should be a.m.!!) Phyllis reads aloud — *she* then on John's couch without? the electric light called EFFLORESCENCE which John has to have because of his one eye being less stoical than he could wish! For he is what in French is called a 'Borgne' that is to say a one-eyed man! and it is the happiest hour and a half or hour and three quarters not quite two of my day! — and she reads *one first novel after another* of all those we see reviewed in the Express or Telegraph or Observer or Sunday Times or any of the lot of weekly ones that our kind patron (he who had attracted us originally to this part of Wales) James Hanley sends so faithfully to us as a present every week — there is a true friend for you! And we get them (she does it all) from the Times Book Club in Wigmore Street London on the cheapest subscription — so we don't get the very new ones; only those that are about 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 months old, sometimes even 12 months old. And *no detective* ones at all except translations of that divine French writer, a Flemish Breton now a naturalised American in California — can you guess who?? See if Phil Callow or Mary can guess ere you turn the page! !

Monsieur Georges *Simenon* whom P. and I both worship and read every book of that are translated (and *she* reads the ones that *can't* be translated because they are so outrageous!!). Well! what was I . . . where was I? . . . (The Old Borgne looks back over his scribble!) O yes — see bottom of page 5! — our longing is to read your first novel at that hour. Now listen . . . we hold that it would have widespread appeal because without being Mary or R or C or having a little *Joann* your situation must *represent* and be a *reflection* of or symbol of a great many other people's similar or pretty similar situations. At the very very very very last words of *Faust* — it is the only German word I know — there comes the word 'gleichnis' always wretchedly translated but I am sure it really means 'obscurely symbolic of what we are all suffering or enjoying here in our normal earth life but which as represented here has an unutterable mystic significance in *another dimension!*

Now why not invent different names for yourself Mary Callow Joann people at the factory — be awfully cautious and careful against *libel* for I had to pay £200 pounds for libel in the Glastonbury Romance. But be very realistic in your descriptions of your actual *work* and remember that you can live by novels but you can't live by essays however eloquent! *Thus speaks your old John.*

20 February 1951.

My dear Ron,

I think these *drawings* of yours are extremely good. Why! like Miller I can see you'll be a bi-linguist and with two strings like your old friend John — but of course speaking and writing are closer together and go more naturally with each other than drawing with writing. I hope

these two exciting tides, for sailing rowing and even drifting on, won't toss and heave and tear and rend at your boat too disturbingly! What abominable unfairness it is that I should have had as the son of a Clergyman *all that time* on the side at college and in the holidays to try and write, and you coming back as you must very often teased and fretted and cross and tired and wanting a good meal and a good sleep more than either to practise writing or drawing!

However! lots of kids at those colleges are so obsessed with their games and their social life that they've no more thought of practising writing than if they were professional boxers or fashionable ladies!

But O listen my dear friend — don't 'ee let your growing mania for the 'country' or even for the 'cosmic' or for any leap in the dark de-racinate you from your childhood and boyhood in a City, for I swear to you my dear Ron that for a true city lover and a real *city born* there *are* invisible roots like those vast mysterious roots — roots like monolithic prehistoric *Forests of Stone*, all those Stonehenge-ancient Delphic-Dodonal fortress capitols of the demigods of hugest antiquity, such as Miller loves to think about — and don't 'ee Ron of my Miller's Mill-Wheel, don't 'ee don't 'ee deny the pigeon's hum and the cockney clown of London town and the cock crow of Coventry, for they are all, they are all in the heart of the city born child — I know it who can never know it! — imagined there lived there felt there, till they *are* there [. . .]

7 Cae Coed
Merionethshire
N. Wales
Great Britain
the Old Hemisphere
The Earth
Satellite of the Sun
Member of Galaxy Number 10000000000
of the 100000000000000551st
Dimension
of the 80000000000000000008th
World of the
Multiverse!
My dear Ron,

by heaven! if you haven't beaten your great uncle in the latest from our mutually admired James Hanley.

Phyllis ties up sometimes parcels of U.S.A. magazines for him and you should see the parcel he always *has* sent us for years! or I'd be ashamed almost that you *should* see it, considering how an unprincipled old monkey like your humble servant *does so little for him in return*; but he's *always like that*, you know. Yes, he's always like that . . . more O my dear Ron. so much more of a Bestower than a Receiver, of a Giver than a Taker. James is without doubt (with one solitary exception) the most absolutely *good man* I've ever met. He is of course a free thinker and what my Catholic friends and relatives call a *lapsed* Catholic but I don't put down his goodness to the Papal Church tho' I confess I haven't met any Church of England person or any Non Conformist person, *person* mind you not *parson*! for parsons in all lines of their little jobs have *too many temptations* even to compete in John's Ascot of Virtue — but I put it down to pure unadulterated CHANCE, yes the greatest of all goddesses 'Tyche' or absolute chance or 'Agathe Tyche' or *Good Luck*.

No my dear Ron, it's perfectly O.K. about keeping 'Skin for Skin' a bit longer. Yes, thanks awfully for asking, Phyllis and I are struggling on with many of the same difficulties as our neighbours and among the new houses that our Rural District Council of Edeyrnion [has built] within a good deal less than a stone's throw of one another and of us. And with so little O so little ground round them — barely enough for the children to play in! And why is this? Because while everybody else is Nationalized, *the land, origin*, as the old Single Taxers said, of everything, remains un-nationalized! However we are lucky *under that law* earlier I fancy — yes considerably — and going back to the beginning of the war or even to the 1st war — than our present government which makes it impossible for landlords to turn tenants who pay the rent out *or to raise their rent!* Our rent is very low: I forget its up and downs, twelve and six I think; only rates and taxes go up and down and get mixed up with it and I get mixed up over it! But 16 new council houses now being built so near but will have a rent well over a pound — so we *are* lucky and the Great Goddess Chance in whose worship Julius Caesar went up the Steps of the Capitol at Rome on his *knees* has been good to us!

yours as ever
John C.P.

21 and 22 April 1951.

My dear Ron,

Your 'The Man Who Flew With The Birds' has given me a *very great deal to think about*. Phyllis read it all aloud to me, very clearly and quite dramatically and effectively and we've discussed it. I think its general effect on me is like the effect of the poetry of Shelley — that is to say a confrontation of the *four elements*, speaking in the old fashioned popular sense of *air water, earth fire* by the conscious human soul as if it were completely independent of the human body and had the power to take to itself the smallest possible unit of matter, a tiny speck of gravel or sand or some minute bit or crystal or quartz or even an infinitesimal shaving of wood, and the power to make of this diminutive object a *substitute* for the old heavy body it has dispensed with and cast off; *and then* with this new centre of gravity and with this *new living thing* made of sand or wood or grass or gravel or a chip from a stone or even a fragment from the antennae of a moth or a butterfly into which the soul has entered and which is now *entirely composed* of those two opposites mind and matter since it has succeeded in this new act of creation, of deliberate creation of human creation of a creation that has *dispensed with* two things nowadays regarded as *inescapable* namely *the human body and God* yes! until now regarded as *indispensable* in creating a creature that is *all matter and mind* and is entirely free from what is called the *Organic*; so free that what we now have is a living and moving, rushing and heaving floating and gliding swimming and diving entity that is composed of a unit of *inorganic matter* that has now been taken possession absolute possession of by a pure spirit, or let me rather say by pure spirit. Thus we now grow aware of a certain thinning off, or of a certain *Shelleyan purgation of personality*, which is the thing about Shelley that has so bothered lots of critics, Matthew Arnold for example, who find him too insubstantial and too 'lost in a luminous void' — for just as the new centre of gravity or dot or atom or point of *expansive experience* or the tiny material speck which is what now has the nerves and the cells and the wires of *that which thinks*; just, I say, as this speck of crude matter has been stripped of the *organic* and of all that has been evolved to become life but on the contrary has been *created*

alive by an arbitrary ‘fiat’ (let it be so) of your own *human will* and caprice substituting itself for the rich evolutionary mossy licheny sappy-fishy-scaley-leafy-scummy-seaweed-moluscy creative energy of the Goethean life force — so this human, yes this *so* this too too too too human SOUL entering into or possessing this bit of match stick, this grain of sand which is all the body now allowed to you — is itself, yes! this Soul is also shorn of its rich historic prehistoric personality — nay! it is shorn of *all* personality, of *all* individuality of all John or Ron or Phil or Mary or Joann or Phyllis and becomes and is made of and is diluted into or enlarged into or metamorphosed into *Pure Spirit* — a great flowing flowing flowing of the Spirit of this particular Dimension!

So we have in this *Parable* of yours — for that is really what your story amounts to — yes it is a parable written in prose that has the refined airiness and fieryness waviness and planetariness of Shelley’s poetry and of your own struggle with life [...]

Sunday 10 June 1951.

My dear Ron,

I’m so interested and so is Phyllis that you’ve written to Claude Houghton. O sure! we know and value highly his books. Was that last one you read called *Birthmark* I wonder? We’ve never corresponded with him but we always read his books and we think he has a true craftsman’s hand and that his plots have that measured out with compasses effect that some of Hardy’s have. We especially liked one, maybe the last but one, whose heroine was called Myra and the plot consisted in Myra being torn between husband and lover, poor girl; but she was *very* well described. Then there was one still earlier where the hero went down from London to Hove to *visit a mad lady* and this visit remains — and it must be years since we read *that* book — so vividly hauntingly in our minds!

Think of his corresponding with Henry Miller all these years! While I had never known of H.M.’s existence, so remote from the *avant-garde* of art and letters has my life been!

I *am* so glad you’ve been reading *Love And Death*. Yes, he was wonderful on those old ballads and pounded and moulded them into his own prose as Elia used to do with you know whom!

We do so like those shells you painted inside. Phyllis has put them on the mantelpiece opposite me as I write on my couch. They are each side of a grey solid vase-casket between it and two of those glass things with — you know? — that rainbow-making prismatic tinkling glassy things suspended. Beside which on the right is Hera from Rome (a postcard) and on the left Athens from Athens also a postcard — and above a picture by my eldest sister Gertrude now over 70 of my father when about 80 holding to his mouth a cup of tea and tilting it so as to get the last sip of sugar at the bottom.

(*J.C.P. drawing of these objects and others later mentioned.*)

The third rounded shell is behind the Old Devil’s head so he can’t draw it.

Here is the Club Stick I always carry in my walks now. It has a very *keen* eye really but I can’t draw its eye.

In my youth my mother loved to paint pictures on the smooth stones of Chesil Beach but I’ve never seen any painted inside hollow shells! One of the longer ones was broken but Phyllis has mended it with paste or glue or gum or what in the USA they call by the odd name of ‘mucilage’ which sounds like I don’t know what to me! I love your discourse on *whorled* shells that hear the sea. It’s the first time in my life that anyone has referred to shells and the sea in a letter to me

or even used the word *whorled* or *whorl*. Even now (tho' I won't get the Concise Dick-John to look it up!) I do not know if you pronounce the *whorl* of a shell as you do the *whirl* of something going round at top speed — or when I whirl my club round my head!

P and I missed nothing on your letter. I think your hand is rather like H.M.'s. O what a good thing to have a clear hand like both of you have!

your old John

P.S, I always love it when you bring in a word about your wife, whose picture we admire so, and about little *Joann*.

My own favourite of all the races are Italians as my favourite of all countries is Italy. I would not like to be buried in Athens, but in spite of all its abominable cruelties I'd love to be buried in Rome!

*

2 May 1960. [next to last]

My dear Ron,

The effect of old age on me has of late been very marked and noticeable. I get mixed up and bewildered and confused about everything, people and faces and places and events of the last ten years, even the last twenty. We lived for twenty years in Corwen and now, on 2 May 1960 we have lived here 5 years. Phyllis is much wiser than I am. I depend on her judgements and decisions about people and things almost entirely.

Did I tell you — alas! I always forget now whether I've told this friend or that friend this or that — I remember long ago reading somewhere that the worst tendency of old age is to repeat, repeat repeat!

I have asked Phyllis what she thinks on this important point of nuclear war and if I understand her right this is what she thinks. Alas! Phyllis says that her view would take pages and pages to write down and so *this little gap* which I have left for her to fill in my letter will *have to go unfilled*. For myself I would certainly *leave it to Nature* to work out. My disposition is at once a childish one and a clownish one and is a teasing one. I know I am like any of those old clowns we are always reading about. By just being naturally myself, that is to say, being a mixture of an innocent child and a born Pantomime Clown my instinct would always be to leave the H. Bomb business and the annihilation of the Human Race business entirely to Fate and Destiny and Chance and Nature. I am singularly devoid of any emotion on this topic. My conscience is entirely directed to acting so as to make Phyllis as happy as I can and to doing any particular thing that any one of my three sisters asks me particularly to do.

I would not want for a moment, my dear friend, to convert you to my point of view. If you're keen on joining this Movement against the H. Bomb my instinct is to leave you to make your own choice and not interfere. But my choice is to leave these things entirely to Destiny and Nature.

I'm delighted to hear about Royce and his Joyce! That they are actually thinking of marrying! I say Hurrah! to that as you do! Do send me ere long a photo of *Tiny Tim*, I love to think of Mark Powys Hall shouting and roaring. But I don't like to think of yourself as 'exhausted'.

Think of it being actually Nine Years since you first wrote to me, to us. It doesn't seem possible!

All our love to you and Mary and the kids from us both here.

Always your old John C. Powys