



## Editorial

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FRONTISPIECE. Caption: John Cowper Powys c. 1929. Sketch by Garland Smith

## Editorial

It is a rare treat to see a portrait of John Cowper Powys for the first time; here as frontispiece is a drawing of JCP by Garland Smith (1880-1968), a woman of whom little is known; she was admitted to study (for free) at the Cooper Union in New York and on 5 March 1930, according to John Cowper's diary, she hoped to rent the apartment in Patchin Place to be vacated when he and Phyllis Playter moved to Phudd Bottom. The diary further records that Garland visited Phudd Bottom on 16-17 May 1931. The portrait shows JCP at the time of publication of *Wolf Solent* and seems to have escaped notice since its first appearance in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* on 30 June 1929. We are most grateful to Adrienne Cacitti, a freelance writer and Powysian from Capitola, California, for sharing her discovery and assembling the biographical information.

A portrait from ninety years ago is published here as we mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Powys Society. Between the intention and the declaration, between the declaration and the act, time passes, things happen, and it can be difficult to identify a single moment of origin or foundation. Though signs of activity are evident from 1967, the Powys Society has chosen this year to celebrate the first fifty years of its mandate as a charity to promote and encourage the appreciation of the writings of the Powyses. Though associated through their works chiefly with the West Country, through many generations the family had strong links to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. John Cowper and his brothers Littleton and Llewelyn attended Corpus, as had their father and his father; on the maternal side many of the clergymen in Mary Cowper Johnson's family had been at Corpus, and it was at Corpus that Charles Francis Powys met his future brother-in-law. In the next generation, John Cowper's son Littleton Alfred would be the last of the family to graduate from the college, in 1923. It was therefore most fitting that on 30 March 2019 some fifty members of the Powys Society gathered at Corpus, whose Archivist, Lucy Hughes, presented an unusual display of Powysiana—including an underwhelming record of borrowings by assorted Powyses from the College Library.

## IMAGE JCP'S ROOMS AT CORPUS

Corpus is situated just over the road from St. Catharine's, the College of the Society's President, Glen Cavaliero. The place of the Society's celebrations was thus not only fitting for the Powyses but of practical advantage for our president, the Society's third in these fifty years, following Angus Wilson and G.R. Wilson Knight. Glen Cavaliero succeeded to the office in 1985 and through an exceptionally long and dedicated presidency he has played no small part in the continuity of the Powys Society and the sustaining of its values and purposes. A number of speakers paid tribute to the President's contributions, in learning as in guidance and tact. The proceedings took place in the Old Dining Hall, under the vigilant eye of the Revd. Dr. Edmund Courtenay Pearce (1870-1935), Master of Corpus from 1914 to 1927 and John Cowper's brother-in-law: each was married to a sister of Thomas Henry Lyon. As an ecclesiastical architect T.H. Lyon would supply the outline of that afternoon's tour of Powysian Cambridge, under the guidance of Kevin Taylor; after admiring Lyon's work in the chapel of Sidney Sussex and in the church of Little St Mary's a short

walk brought us to the 'umbrageous purlieus' behind the Fitzwilliam Museum where the moss on an ancient wall had transported John Cowper to the seventh heaven, as recounted in a passage of *Autobiography* that our Chairman Timothy Hyman there read, movingly.

Immediately outside the gates of Corpus stands an ancient pillar-box dating from the reign of Queen Victoria, and it may be assumed with confidence that John Cowper's letters were posted here, many of them to find their way to Montacute, and that through its opening a lean and bony hand must often and anxiously have probed. In the background of this image of a pillar-box is St Catharine's College.

#### IMAGE OF PILLAR-BOX

Though Corpus was most welcoming, Cambridge seemed quite unstirred by Powysian devotions. How differently they continue to order such matters in France. On 31 May, in the programme broadcast on 'france culture', 'Les Chemins de la philosophie', Denis Grozdanovitch could be heard pronouncing John Cowper Powys one of the great philosophers and *Autobiography* and *Wolf Solent* among the most important books of the twentieth century. Given such acclaim it is hardly a surprise that interest in Powys continues to grow in France; in 2014 *Proteus and the Magician*—the correspondence between JCP and Henry Miller, edited by Jacqueline Peltier—was launched at Shakespeare & Co, and another Powysian gathering took place in Paris in June 2019. More material will surely emerge from the French archives but this year's *Journal* crosses the Rhein and traces John Cowper along the course of the Elbe, from Dresden, where he lectured in the years before the First World War, to Hamburg whose Academy awarded him its Bronze Medal in 1956. The occasion of its presentation coincided with one of Glen Cavaliero's visits to John Cowper and Phyllis Playter in Blaenau ffestiniog. The various documents assembled here by Chris Thomas should provide numerous insights and ways of ingress for the study of John Cowper's reception in the German-speaking world, and for understanding the importance of Germany and its literature for his own formation. An article by Finn Harder brings out the nature and significance of John Cowper's influence on Hans Henny Jahnn who was the chief instigator in the awarding of the Bronze Medal.

JCP and Germany aside, the five articles in this issue are all devoted to John Cowper, which prompts the Editor to make a plea for material concerned with the others, notably though not only Theodore Francis and Llewelyn. Anthony O'Hear offers a lucid account of *Wolf Solent* through a philosophical lens, while the Editor tackles (yet again) the problem of what it is that happens when we read *A Glastonbury Romance*. After forty years of wonder and perplexity he is much encouraged by the fact that there are younger scholars in Britain engaging with Powys: here Felix Taylor explores the evidence of John Cowper's involvement in the anti-vivisectionist movement while Taliesin Gore looks at the philosophical claims of 'panpsychism' in the light of John Cowper's writings. It need not surprise us that John Cowper should have come under suspicion from the security services in the US, even in those innocent days, but Robin Wood has obtained access to the files of the FBI and tells an exemplary tale of futile surveillance.

Of Powysian interest the most important publication in the past year has been Chris Gostick's edition of the correspondence between JCP and James Hanley; Patrick Quigley's review of *Powys*

*and Lord Jim* brings out the importance to John Cowper of Hanley's support while providing a strong argument for recuperating Hanley. The amply annotated volume is rich in details of everyday life while chronicling the composition of *Owen Glendower* and *Porius*, and of Hanley's works, with much exchange of literary views and opinions.

Other books reviewed include a re-issue of *Unclay* from New Directions, a new novel by Lindsay Clarke, and a biography of Emanuel Haldeman-Julius, publisher of the Little Blue Books, for whom Phyllis Playter worked as a proof-reader and among whose myriad titles are a number by John Cowper and Llewelyn.

Just two weeks before the celebration at Corpus the Editor had been in England for the burial on 13 March of one of John Cowper's peers, the American writer James Purdy, whose ashes had been for a number of years in his custody: the responsibilities of an editor (see *PJ* XXVIII) seem to know few limits, at least not on this side of the grave. Ten years after Purdy's death permission had been granted for the interring of his ashes precisely according to his wishes, next to the grave of Dame Edith Sitwell, in the village of Weedon Lois near Northampton. The distinctive Victor Gollancz design of Purdy's first publication in Britain, *63: Dream Palace* (1957), gives prominence not to Dame Edith but to two other English admirers:

#### IMAGE OF DUSTCOVER

Gerald Brenan's links with the Powys family were explored by David Goodway in *PJ* XXVIII, though it seems that John Cowper and Gerald Brenan would have arrived independently at their assessments of Purdy, which extend from the cover onto the flap of the jacket. As populists continue to test the resilience of the veneer that holds us in civility, John Cowper's words resonate afresh: 'James Purdy is the best kind of original genius of our day. His insight into the diabolical cruelties and horrors that lurk all the time under our conventional skin is as startling as his insight into the angelic tenderness and protectiveness that also exist in the same hiding-place. Few there be that recognize either of these things: but Purdy reveals them.'