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John Cowper Powys letters to Harlan Cozad McIntosh

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Gwybodaeth grynodeb | Summary information

Lleoliad Repository:	Llyfrgell Genedlaethol Cymru = The National Library of Wales
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ID:	NLW MS 23913D
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Hanes gweinyddol / Braslun bywgraffyddol | Administrative history | Biographical sketch

Nodyn | Note

John Cowper Powys (1872-1963), was a prolific novelist, poet, and literary critic. He wrote one of the most remarkable autobiographies in the English language; he was the author of several works of popular philosophy; and throughout his long life he was an obsessive letter writer and diarist. Although never fully accepted as part of the 'canon' of English novelists, he is widely regarded as one of the great novelists of the 20th century, and his admirers include many eminent writers and critics. He was born in Shirley, Derbyshire, on 8 October 1872. In 1879 the family moved to Dorchester, Dorset, eventually settling, in 1885, in Montacute, Somerset. Powys therefore spent most of his childhood within the borders of the ancient kingdom of 'Wessex'. Its landscape – which was also the setting for Thomas Hardy's novels

– came to dominate his imagination. He was the eldest of eleven children in a family notable for its strong-willed and individualistic characters. Two of his brothers, Theodore Francis Powys (1875-1953) and Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939), also became distinguished writers, while his sister Marian Powys (1882-1972) settled in New York, becoming a leading lace designer and a world authority on the history of lace making. Their father Charles Francis Powys (1843-1923) was a clergyman who took great pride in his Welsh ancestry, while their mother Mary Cowper Powys (1849-1914) was descended from the English poets John Donne and William Cowper. John Cowper was educated at Westbury House preparatory school, Sherborne, and Sherborne School (1883–1891), and subsequently at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In 1896 he published his first volume of verse, *Odes and Other Poems*, and in the same year he married Margaret Alice Lyon (1874-1947). They had one son, Littleton Alfred Powys (1902-1954), but the marriage was a failure and Powys and his wife eventually separated. After leaving Cambridge Powys had found work as a teacher at various girls' schools before becoming an extension lecturer affiliated to Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Between 1909 and 1930, he earned his living as an itinerant lecturer in the USA, where he won fame as an inspired and charismatic orator. His first novel, *Wood and Stone*, was published in New York in 1915, and his first full length work of popular philosophy, *The Complex Vision*, appeared in 1920. During a visit to Missouri, in 1921, he met Phyllis Playter (1894-1982) who became his life companion, his muse, and a powerful influence upon his literary career. While in the USA Powys also made the acquaintance of several eminent American literary figures, including the poet, Edgar Lee Masters, and the writers, Theodore Dreiser and Henry Miller. He reached his maturity as a novelist with the publication, in 1929, of his fifth novel, *Wolf Solent*. Its success led him give up lecturing and devote his life to writing. In 1930 he and Playter went to live in Phudd Bottom, upper New York state. There followed two other novels of immense scope and psychological subtlety: *A Glastonbury Romance* (1932), and *Weymouth Sands* (1934). In the same year he published his very frank and revealing *Autobiography*. Although written in America, these books are full of sensuous descriptions of the 'Wessex' landscapes of his youth. Like Powys himself, many of the protagonists of his novels are introspective characters who develop a personal 'mythology' as a means of coming to terms with the world. In 1935, while in his sixties, Powys fulfilled a long cherished ideal by moving to live in Wales. For twenty years, he and Phyllis Playter made their home in Corwen, Meirionnydd, where Powys immersed himself in the language, history and mythology of the country. He also made the acquaintance of several eminent Welsh academics and writers, including Iorwerth Peate, the founder of the Welsh Folk Museum, and Gwyn Jones, Viking scholar and translator of the *Mabiniogion*. Powys's two late masterpieces, *Owen Glendower* (1940) and *Porius* (1951), belong to this period. In 1955 he and Playter moved to a quarryman's cottage at Blaenau Ffestiniog. John Cowper Powys died at the Memorial Hospital, Blaenau Ffestiniog, on 17 June 1963.

Natur a chynnwys | Scope and content

Eleven letters, 1938-1940, from John Cowper Powys to the writer Harlan Cozad McIntosh (1908-1940), containing detailed comments on a draft of the recipient's novel, *This Finer Shadow* (New York, 1941) (ff. 8-34 verso); and twelve letters, 1938-1942, from the same to McIntosh's wife, Jane Hardy, a New York literary agent (ff. 3, 35-58 verso). Also included are a manuscript copy of Powys's foreword to the novel, and carbon copies of three letters from Jane Hardy: two, 1938, to Powys (ff. 1, 5), and one, 1966, to Powys's literary agent, Gerald Pollinger (f. 59).

The letters contain references to Edwin Muir (f. 8 verso), James Hanley (ff. 10 recto-verso, 12 verso, 13-14 verso, 15 recto-verso, 47, 48 verso, 57) and John Redwood Anderson (f. 58 verso), and to the death of Llewelyn Powys (ff. 33 verso-34).

Nodiadau | Notes

Nodiadau teitl | Title notes

Ffynhonnell | Immediate source of acquisition

Sotheby's; London; Purchased at auction, lot 184; 10 July 2003; 0200311863.

Trefniant | Arrangement

Arranged chronologically at NLW.

Cyfyngiadau ar fynediad | Restrictions on access

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Amodau rheoli defnydd | Conditions governing use

Usual copyright laws apply. Information regarding the ownership of John Cowper Powys copyright can be found at <http://tyler.hrc.utexas.edu/> (viewed February 2016).

Nodiadau eraill | Other notes

- **Statws cyhoeddiad | Publication status:** Published
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Pwyntiau mynediad | Access points

- Powys, John Cowper, 1872-1963 -- Correspondence (pwnc) | (subject)
- McIntosh, Harlan Cozad, 1908- -- Correspondence (pwnc) | (subject)
- Hardy, Jane (Literary agent) -- Correspondence (pwnc) | (subject)
- Muir, Edwin, 1887-1959. (pwnc) | (subject)
- Hanley, James, 1897-1985 (pwnc) | (subject)
- Powys, Llewelyn, 1884-1939 -- Death and burial (pwnc) | (subject)
- Anderson, John Redwood, 1883-1964 (pwnc) | (subject)