

## The Powys Society of North America

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## **Powys Notes**

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New School University

Associate Editor  
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### **US and overseas:**

Nicholas Birns  
205 East Tenth St.  
New York, NY 10003

### **CANADA**

Michael Ballin  
Department of English  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5

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Founded in December 1983, the Powys Society of North America seeks to facilitate the study and appreciation of the literary works of the Powys family, especially those of John Cowper Powys (1872-1963), T.F. Powys (1875-1953), and Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939). The Society takes a special interest in the North American connections and experiences of the Powyses, and encourages the exploration of the involvement of the Powyses in American literary culture and of the extensive collections of Powys material in North American libraries.

My apologies to all faithful Powysians, and especially to our loyal library subscribers, for your patience in awaiting this issue. This is the last issue of *Powys Notes* I will be able to produce. Having taken over as general editor of *Antipodes: A North American Journal of Australian Literature*, and having my hands full with that fractious literary scene, my journal production skills, not exactly up to the level of *The Yellow Book* or, as Jacqueline Peltier would wish me to point out, *The Dial* by any means, are strained to the breaking point. In addition, I have many literary and academic interests whose necessary pursuit takes me away from Powys Society matters. I have not yet found anyone to take over as Secretary of the US Powys Society. Interested candidates are welcome to step forward. I also would like to explore the possibility of merging with the UK Powys Society; in this era of globalization and the Internet, I wonder if it is not excessive to have more than one English-speaking Powys Society, especially as the UK Society possesses an excellent journal whose design and content we really cannot hope to match. It would help if the UK Society accepted credit-card payments.

On other fronts, the Powys outlook seems positive. News of our successful 2001 conference is contained later in this newsletter. Jacqueline Peltier and the French Powys Society now publish *La lettre powysienne*, available for 5 euros from *Penn Maen*, 14 rue Pasteur, 22300 Lannion, France. And, during a summer 2001 visit to Australia, I met Kris Hemensley, a veteran poet and Powys enthusiast, who has an extensive collection of Powys books in his wonderful bookstore, *Collected Works*, a true literary sanctuary which I heartily recommend to anyone ever visiting Melbourne. Rob Stepney's edition of *Owen Glendower* (advertised elsewhere in this issue) is a very good sign, as its availability is a *sine qua non* for a full picture of John Cowper Powys as author. And, happiest news of all, Morine Krissdóttir is hard at work on a full interpretive biography of John Cowper Powys, to be published in 2003 by Overlook Press. There is none better suited than Morine for this task, and when it is completed I am confident that we will at last have the background, better to say the backdrop, on which to project these inscrutable conjurations in multi-decker novel form we have been wrestling with for so long.

In the meantime this issue is, I think, an excellent one. Barbara Ozieblo, whose Susan Glaspell biography received a superb review in *The New York Times*, examines Gamel Woolsey, one of the fascinating women in the Powys circle and a significant part of the twentieth-century literary scene. Brian Glavey uses Powys as a prism to give a fresh look at the seeming antinomy comprised by the conjunction of Modernist aesthetic doctrine and the premises of the novel form. Patrick Couch, writing from Stockholm, avenges the Swedish hockey team's humiliating Olympic performance by writing a brilliant essay that shows how Powys repudiates ontological givens yet--not reaffirms them, that would be for lesser writers--but re-originates them! Particularly interesting is the Appendix on Jean-Luc Marion, where the reader can see the typographic byplay of God, GOD, and God. Peter Foss's lively and personal reflection explores a landscape with which Llewelyn Powys interacted as only that master of interaction with landscape could.

It has been wonderful being in contact with all of you for the past four years--I have made many friends and had fun even standing in line at the post office mailing out envelopes. Please stay in touch with me, and, more challengingly, stay in touch with the "strange, weird, obscure" feelings felt by the mind-meld of Rhisiart and that "simple intelligence", the goosander, in *Owen Glendower*!

Nicholas Birns  
March 2002

# Love and Disappointment: Gamel Woolsey's unpublished novel *Patterns on the Sand*

Barbara Ozieblo  
University of Málaga, Spain

Gamel Woolsey (1899-1968) is best known for her account of the Spanish Civil War, *Death's Other Kingdom*, and for her poetry. The two novels she wrote have not received much attention in spite of their haunting prose and winsome protagonists; although in both *One Way of Love* (1930) and *Patterns on the Sand* (1947) Woolsey adopted the voice of omniscient narrator to record her protagonists' youthful desires, her prose, as much as her poetry, is unabashedly autobiographical in its expression of her private fears and yearnings. Woolsey wrote of herself, "I am a waif and stray. . . . I was meant to be lonely and poor" (Woolsey to Phyllis Playter, undated letter), and the protagonists of her two novels are spiritually alone, determined on an independent quest for individuality and love, both sexual and emotional.

Woolsey was born in Aiken, South Carolina, on 28 May 1899 and grew up in Charleston.<sup>1</sup> A youthful artistic vocation furnished a somewhat dubious -- although socially acceptable -- excuse to leave behind the refinements and restrictions Charleston imposed on a young woman's development, and allowed her to settle in New York's Greenwich Village. Above all, she was thus able to evade the responsibilities of family life; her father had died when she was still a child and her mother, a highly-strung woman, drank excessively and depended heavily on her younger daughter.<sup>2</sup> Woolsey did not become an actress as she had dreamed, but--although her voice has been silenced and forgotten--she put her artistic skills to good use as a writer and most of her work has now been published. Virago brought out her first novel, *One Way of Love*, posthumously, in 1987 and then reprinted her account of the first months of the Spanish Civil War, *Death's Other Kingdom* in 1988. Kenneth Hopkins, an admirer of Woolsey's work, collected her poetry, publishing various volumes (Warren House Press, England) in the 70s and 80s. But Hopkins died before he could publish *Patterns on the Sand* and the manuscript, together with his preparatory notes for a biography of Woolsey, is now in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, which also holds the papers of Gerald Brenan and Llewelyn Powys. These two British writers played an important part in Woolsey's life: she fell in love with Powys, who was already married to Alyse Gregory, editor of the (New York) *Dial*, and then, early in 1930, she followed him to England, vainly hoping to have his child. There, she eventually married Gerald Brenan, the Bloomsbury Hispanist, with whom she settled outside Málaga, Spain, just before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1936.

The unfinished manuscript of Gamel Woolsey's first novel, *One Way of Love*, which she showed Brenan when they met in July 1930 in the Dorset village of East Chaldon, aroused his conviction that this was the woman he should marry. (Brenan had, as he put it in his autobiography, *Personal Record: 1920-1972*, "contracted what Byron called 'madness of the heart'" (218) and had decided that only marriage could assuage his tormenting

desires; he also needed a wife to mother the child he had sired on a servant girl in Yegen, Spain). Woolsey had previously shown Brennan the manuscript of *Middle Earth*, a collection of poems that she had sent to Simon and Schuster; these, according to Brennan's biographer, "came too close to Gerald's precious ambition" as a poet (Gathorne-Hardy 254), thus causing him to dismiss them as romantic verses of the twenties, but the novel evoked the following exclamation from him: "to my surprise, to my delight I found myself in the presence of a creature endowed with the most exquisite sensibility and, what is more, with a mind sufficiently exact and cold to record it" (*Diaries*). Knowing that Woolsey was planning to return to New York and intent on marriage, he flourished his Bloomsbury connections as an aid to publication; Brennan's biographer catches the sexist spirit of the times when he comments: "The writer's key to a woman's heart (or bed) is not dancing but the promise to get her novel or poems published" (Gathorne-Hardy 255). The Bloomsbury novelist and critic, David Garnett, although not sharing Brennan's wild enthusiasm, admitted that: "the beautiful parts [of *One Way of Love*] reveal a very delightful, delicate character and a real writer. . . . I admire her writing and respect it. She is always good when she writes about going to bed, for she has a trustful unforced, natural quality. It is very good in these parts (Garnett to Brennan)." It was perhaps "these parts" that captivated Victor Gollancz, who accepted *One Way of Love* for his recently launched publishing company, already famous for the attractive yellow book jackets and the socialist leanings of its founder; but then, in 1932, suddenly fearing censure of the novel's sexual frankness, Gollancz withdrew the bound copies. It has generally been supposed that the prosecution for alleged obscenity of Radclyffe Hall's pioneering lesbian novel caused Gollancz to renege on his contract with Woolsey, but his daughter, Livia Gollancz, in a letter to Kenneth Hopkins, makes it quite clear that this was not so: "You are wrong in thinking that it was *The Well of Loneliness* that prompted my father to put the book [*One Way of Love*] aside. It was in fact libel action over the book that we published entitled *Children Be Happy* (a novel made from the German play that translated as 'Mädchen in Uniform') that caused the trouble." According to Livia Gollancz, her father did consider publication again a few years later, but decided it would be "too risky."

Gerald Brennan's further comments on *One Way of Love* apply just as well to *Patterns on the Sand*; he noted the "quality and precision [of Woolsey's writing], the often surprising beauty of the images and the penetration of many of her observations upon people and things" (*Diaries*). *One Way of Love* is a largely autobiographical account of Woolsey's first marriage, applying a Freudian discourse to the relationship of the two main characters, Mariana and Alan, in order to understand why and how that marriage had failed. The novel can be understood as an attempt to dissect her first marriage, to come to terms with her sexual desires and with what she recognized as her inadequacies as a wife. She confessed as much to Phyllis Playter, John Cowper Powys's companion and her closest confidante at this time, when she wrote, "I am almost at the end of [my novel], but I still have to make the beginning. I have tried all through it to say what I really think, as I would in poetry. It was hard to do. I mean, to express my secret inner convictions of life (undated letter). Disappointed by her failure to publish this first attempt at fiction, Woolsey apparently accepted the feminine role of wife and mother (to Brennan's daughter) and gave herself to the refurbishing of the splendid, run-down old house they had bought in Churriana, a village just outside Málaga in the south of Spain. The outbreak of the Spanish Civil War interrupted the otherwise peaceful summer of 1936 and bestirred her sympathies and her conscience sufficiently to risk another rejection and she wrote up her experiences and reactions in *Death's Other Kingdom* (1939)<sup>3</sup>. The praise her account or

memoir received, even though it was necessarily overshadowed by the beginning of World War II, gave Woolsey the necessary self-confidence to attempt another novel, *Patterns on the Sand*. To what extent this novel is based on immediate personal experience is difficult to establish; we know very little of Woolsey's adolescence in Charleston, and Gerald Brenan's conflicting statements on this novel only add to the confusion. In 1971, Brenan sent Malcolm Elwin, who was then editing Llewelyn Powys's letters to Gamel Woolsey, two chapters of his autobiography, which he did not intend to publish, and a passage entitled "Her literary work," where he gives the following comment on *Patterns on the Sand*: "a novel about her girlhood in Charleston. It was a book written in a mood of nostalgia, with herself as heroine. It was beautifully written, but all the characters were sweet and good for she could not depict bad people, and it had little incident. It came out of her daydream life and every publisher we sent it to refused it." When Kenneth Hopkins was gathering material to write a biography of Gamel Woolsey, Brenan wrote to him: Gamel's "novel about her visit to London [*One Way of Love*] was autobiographical whereas the later one about life in Charleston was not, though it describes the scene she grew up into." However confusing Brenan's comments may be, he does give the clue to interpreting *Patterns on the Sand*: it is a novel from her "daydream life" and as such, even though the plot and characters may not come from immediate personal experience, the tone of the novel captures the same yearning for the unknown as did *One Way of Love*, a yearning which in both novels finds expression in the search for sexual fulfillment. The poetical vision that had attracted Brenan in her first novel allowed Woolsey to create a heroine as lonely and as lost, both existentially and socially, as she felt herself to be and to bring to her exploration of Sara's predicament acute psychological insight of unconscious drives and fears.

The first draft of *Patterns on the Sand*, finished in 1944, pleased neither Woolsey nor Brenan, who, in a letter to Alyse Gregory, praised only the "many fine lyrical passages, such as Gamel can be trusted to write." However, after reading the final version in 1947, Brenan wrote that he now considered it "a most moving and beautiful book". But even with Bloomsbury connections, it was not easy to find a publisher in post-war Britain and Woolsey, always easily discouraged, packed the manuscript away with other unfinished or unpublished writing.

*Patterns on the Sand* opens in 1914 and climaxes three years later when the war in Europe is "at its height" and "coming our way fast" (203) in Charleston, South Carolina, the aristocratic city of Woolsey's youth, where she had been cushioned by a large family of high social standing on her mother's side. Sara, the protagonist, is the daughter of grocers and, since nice social distinctions are still not quite a thing of the past, it is only thanks to her friend Elisabeth's determined patronage that she can participate in the flurry of excursions, dances and balls that make up the existence of a young girl waiting for the right man to carry her off, the sort of life that Woolsey had fled from. Sara's brother Paul, on the other hand, "on a quite separate masculine footing, had always been intimate . . . with the . . . young men of good family in the city," his "passport" to such intimacy being his privileged sex and his athletic prowess (5). This iniquitous difference between the two sexes is subtly but persistently denounced throughout the novel in the depiction of the lives of the young men and women, brothers and sisters whose expectations differ markedly because of their sex. The men "generally met away from home at some place where young men gathered or went hunting on the islands in their small yacht" (15) or they were "away" on business, appearing in law cases, clinching deals or simply visiting "some woman." Their sisters' lives were circumscribed by the home and by appropriate activities,

such as organizing "an entertainment to be given at the Opera House in aid of some charity" (57), deciding what gown to wear to a dance or, alternatively, just sitting on a sofa, stroking a cat, waiting for the men to return. At no point does Woolsey openly speak out against this order of things; she is, after all, intent on merely capturing the mores of the times. Yet by juxtaposing the ways of life open to men and women she is clearly pointing out the existent inequality, while Sara's unchanneled, ignorant longings focus our attention on the fate of women. Although Woolsey herself was just too young to actively participate in the struggle for the vote, her bohemian years in Greenwich Village, while not making a radical feminist of her, did raise her awareness of the woman question. Alyse Gregory, who would become her closest friend, had been active in the movement and Woolsey would surely have read her novel, *She Shall Have Music* (1926), where a young woman struggles, as Gregory herself did, to escape the restrictions imposed on women's expectations.

Sara's circle centers on Elisabeth, her suitors, and her brothers, William and Rush; but halfway through the novel Elisabeth dies of tuberculosis and Sara's social life becomes more limited. She had been afflicted with an adolescent infatuation for Rush, but suspects that "Elisabeth's friendship [had] made her tabu-- safe from him" (190). Once bereft of Elisabeth's protection, Sara, her "mind lost in vague dreaming desire", the embodiment of the captive princess of folklore (1), has no defenses against the willful Rush. Although the young people are inevitably chaperoned on their longer outings to picnic spots like Folly or Sullivan's Island, their longstanding friendship justifies all the freedom of movement they can possibly require and the automobile, as yet a not very dependable means of transportation, offers excitement and independence while placing added power in the hands of the men. Social conventions, then, do not stand in the way of Rush's conquest of Sara; however, Woolsey is careful not to antagonize her readers. In *One Way of Love* she had described the love-making in considerable detail, so risking censorship in 1932 and, wiser for that lesson, in *Patterns on the Sand* she leaves the caresses of the two young people almost entirely to our imagination when, in a scene reminiscent of Walt Whitman and of Kate Chopin, "The garden was silent. On the shore the tide was going out and the sea was falling slowly and softly" (162).

Although we gather that these silent meetings are repeated and that Sara is very much in love, we are never sure of Rush's intentions. He is Elisabeth and William's half-brother, his father having been one of the "bad Ashmores" of Charleston, and much is insinuated throughout the novel as to the habitual behavior of that branch of the family. Sara is also aware of the social difference; her family, the Warrens "had come from no one knew what or where and Sara's father and grandfather had been moderately prosperous grocers" (5). Nonetheless, she lives in her dream world and counts the days till Rush will again be in Charleston. After one of these encounters in early summer of 1917, Rush, leaving Sara in her garden, crosses through an adjacent empty lot and is shot dead by an unknown marauder. Suspicion hovers over Sara's brother Paul, but nothing can be pinned on him, and the case is closed as yet another example of random violence. The shock of the murder provokes a nervous breakdown in Sara after which she falls ill with pneumonia; by late autumn she is recovering on Sullivan's Island accompanied by her mother. Here, William visits her, and declares his love; he wants to marry her and raise his brother's child. The reader is thus jolted into an awareness of Sara's real predicament, that of the unwed mother in the convention-bound Charleston of the early decades of the twentieth century. In the natural order of things, this was of course a possible consequence of the coming and going of the tides--but although Sara had worried about how "the world

outside" would regard her (188) and "indeed . . . behave to her when she appeared in it again" (189)--her condition had been successfully kept from the reader, and presumably from society.

*Patterns on the Sand* will inevitably be compared to DuBose Heyward's earlier *Mamba's Daughters* (1929), which Woolsey, who was extremely well read, must surely have known. Although both novels recreate Charleston society at the turn of the century, Heyward's novel focuses firmly on the social and racial tensions of the period while Woolsey, writing from the perspective of geographical and temporal distance, creates a pointillist canvas of dream surfaces which serve to heighten the impression of Sara's unfulfilled, vague desires. Uncritical, naïve memories of the Civil War, of gentlemen farmers, plantation songs and "darkie" stories create the enchanted myth of the past and of childhood innocence which shapes this tightly structured novel as it moves toward tragedy and the strangely startling--but satisfying--resolution. Toward the end of her life Woolsey would write to Phyllis Playter that the past was "both my castle and my prison" (postmarked 9 Jan 1963) and it is the past that dominates in *Patterns on the Sand*, creating an aura of an oneiric, thus unattainable world, which then colors Sara's longings, impeding positive action. The young woman can only wait passively for her life to change, and so accepts her status quo as a woman and a trespasser of the beau monde, as well as the racial stereotypes on which she was brought up. Although Sara is intuitively aware of the dissatisfaction, social injustice and evil, which surround her and is intensely conscious of death and the passing of time, she can only long for undefined love and sexual desire.

Woolsey's first novel, *One Way of Love*, has been compared to Willa Cather's *My Mortal Enemy* (Gathorne-Hardy 254n) but such a comparison does not do justice to Woolsey's prose in either novel, and *Patterns on the Sand* is much more concentrated than her earlier attempt at fiction. Although both writers lament the passing of an age, where Cather is realistic and down-to-earth, Woolsey creates a poetic world, a "Middle Earth" (as she entitled her first collection of poetry) where "the days go by/ silently and steadily;/ It is not heaven, it is not hell,/ But for the living does as well" (*Collected Poems*, 12). These lines from the poem "Middle Earth" capture the atmosphere of *Patterns on the Sand*: the young women sitting idly in the heat, waiting for the men to finish their business and take them to balls, dances and on picnics to the islands. There is nothing else for them to do, except gossip and listen, again and again, to the stories told by maiden aunts and faithful "darkie" servants. Woolsey imbues the tedious, languorous life of society women before the War with the sensitivity of poetry, the nostalgia of the past, the longing for an awakening to a life that would be real and exciting but which too, would pass away, even if it were attainable. This carpe diem mood which pervades the novel serves to mute Woolsey's criticism of women's education and position in society although, in spite of the final socially correct and optimistic note which William's love for Sara introduces, we are denied a happy ending because we recognize that the author knows that Sara's longings for a fuller life will not be satisfied through marriage.

Nostalgia for the past is not offset in Woolsey's writing by even an ambivalent acceptance of a new order, as it definitely is in Willa Cather's or Edith Wharton's novels. Sara is mired in the past, her imagination bound by plantations, however run-down and unproductive, and by reminiscences of gallant young men in gray. Although Woolsey herself escaped the stifling atmosphere of Charleston society when she escaped to New York, Sara is not allowed to even toy with the idea of following her example; the young girl's life is enclosed in the first image taken from children's tales which is used to describe her--the trapped princess awaiting her lover. The novel is saved from sentimental triteness

by its poetical language and vision, which appeal to our senses. The predicament of early twentieth century women is not explored, developed or solved in any way; it is merely stated, and precisely because it is presented as the only accepted way of living, this novel brings home to us today just how difficult it must have been for a young woman to get away and forge a life of her own.

On the other hand, the earlier *One Way of Love*, by giving Mariana a life outside Charleston, is a more optimistic novel. Here, the young woman has already escaped the binding traditions of her past, and is free to make what she will of her life. Her sexual awakening, however, is not accompanied by an awakening to her worth as a creative individual and her desires remain vague and undefined, thus making the novel somewhat unsatisfactory from a late twentieth-century feminist point of view. Woolsey was not, in any of her writing, arguing for equality between men and women or for equal opportunities, as Alyse Gregory had done in her novels; she was intent on expressing the fears and dilemmas of a stifled young womanhood and based her protagonists on her own experience. Thus both novels are valuable as accounts of how we struggle to come to terms with our lives and should find a wider readership even now, over half a century after they were written.

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## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was given at the SASA conference in Atlanta, in February 2001. I am grateful to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of the University of Yale and to the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin for Visiting Fellowships which allowed me to consult their holdings on Gamel Woolsey, and Alyse Gregory.

The inscription on Gamel Woolsey's tombstone in the British Cemetery in Malaga, where she is buried, gives the date of her birth as May 1899; however, when she married Rex Hunter on 25 April 1923 she declared herself to be 25. (A copy of the marriage certificate is in the Kenneth Hopkins Collection at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.) Woolsey never obtained a divorce from Hunter, who returned to New Zealand in 1949, where he died in 1960.

2. Gamel Woolsey wrote at length about her relationship with her mother to Phyllis Playter; xeroxes of these letters are in the Kenneth Hopkins Collection at the HRHRC at the University of Texas, Austin.

3. *Death's Other Kingdom* was published in the United States under the title *Malaga Burning* in 1998, with an introduction by Zalin Grant (Paris, Reston: Pythia Press).

# Novel Personalities: Epistemology and the Aesthetic of Personality in *A Glastonbury Romance*

Brian Glavey  
University of Virginia

As for Dave Spear, he was free that night to read his Atlantis book til the candle in Dickery Cantle's third back bedroom burnt to the socket. But he read only three pages. It is hard to be impersonal in a cosmos that runs to personality. (870)

Over the past decade, the scholarly enthusiasm over postmodernity has shifted such that critics have returned to the scene of modernism in order to rethink its boundaries, which have begun to appear much more complicated than they did ten years ago. That this same period has witnessed stirrings of a revival of interest in that most neglected of modern authors, John Cowper Powys, offers some hope that Powys might one day find a more secure position in the history of the twentieth-century literature. Although much admirable work has been done to sketch out Powys's relations to the various artistic movements of his day, the task of situating Powys in relation to his contemporaries is still an immensely troubling one. Indeed, for as long as his books have been in (and out) of print, critics who have seen them as worth the trouble have had to struggle with Powys's self-celebrated eccentricity. To put it as cynically as possible, Powys managed to make every career mistake an early-twentieth-century British writer could possibly make. While Joyce fled to forge the conscience of his race in Paris and Zurich, and Americans like Pound and Eliot escaped to the London vortex, Powys set sail in the wrong direction, writing many of his most important works in small American towns with names like Phudd Bottom. In general, Powys resisted the aesthetic urbanization of modernism and remained aggressively provincial. He treated science with an amused disregard, found psychoanalysis preposterous, and, despite his admiration for William James, rejected the idea of the stream of consciousness. But perhaps one of his biggest mistakes from this perspective would be his disregard for the doctrine of impersonality with which so many of his contemporaries were struggling. Although the degree which these other artists achieved such ideals is highly questionable, the insistence that the artist should be kept out of the art and that the critic's attention should never stray from the poem to the poet was to become one of modernism's most commonly invoked dogmas. Therefore, it has been especially damning evidence that discussions of Powys's work seldom even attempt to uphold this distinction. Separating Powys from his work seems implausible. Powys wrote his novels and poetry with little interest in the modernist passion for masks, personae, quotation, or irony. Rather than pare his fingernails somewhere behind his work, Powys prefers to remain visible everywhere in his text, surrounding himself with his characters and splashing in the mud puddles of his creation. For those who disapprove, Powys's vocal omnipresence becomes evidence of a lack of restraint and further proof of his amateurish lack of formal sophistication. Indeed, even the most devoted Powysians often feel the need to apologize for such authorial intrusions, as if the author were a lovable but slightly embarrassing relative who inevitably opens his mouth at just the wrong moments.

That Powys has been uncritically viewed through this disparaging lens is most unfortunate, and to immediately conclude, as many readers seem willing to do, that the dangerously Romantic personal quality of Powys's novels translates into a lack of formal sophistication is to unfairly assume that all formal sophistication is modernist formal sophistication. In reality, such interpretations offer only one of many possible definitions of form: to be formal in this modernist/New Critical sense means to privilege space over time, to stress order and organic wholeness, and, ultimately, to maintain strong boundaries separating the work of art from its author, its reader, and its context. Part of Powys's achievement is his unflinching resistance to this particular sort of formalism and the ideas about the nature of art and reality which accompany it, reminding us that there are actually many different intelligent, self-conscious responses to modernity that do not fit into the High Modernist paradigm. Charles Lock offers the best explanation of the sophistication of Powys's novelistic form, highlighting how the polyphonic lack of narrative hierarchy and absence of any strong monological principle of coherence mark *A Glastonbury Romance* as a prime example of many of the best qualities of the novel as a radically democratic form. In many ways Powys's multiplicitous novel anticipates a sort of postmodernism, privileging temporal over spatial form, contesting the validity of objectivity and totalizing narratives, and emphasizing the process of creation rather than the artifact.

On a more superficial level, though, to read Powys as sloppy or naïve is to assume that he was somehow oblivious to modernist innovation. This is simply not the case. Powys was a fantastic admirer of Proust and Joyce, and is claimed to have memorized *The Waste Land* in its entirety. Despite his relative isolation on the wrong side of the ocean, he was not by any means unaware of the doctrine of impersonality adopted by so many of his contemporaries in Britain. But part of Powys's peculiarity—at least within the context of an aggressively dogmatic modernism—is his ability to admire vastly different artists without necessarily adopting them as models. The sort of impersonality gestured at by Flaubert or Joyce or Eliot or Pound, simply didn't make sense for Powys who, like D.H. Lawrence, clung to the belief that art was necessarily about the vital expression of personality. Nonetheless, Powys did have his own ideas about the desirability of the impersonal and its relation to art. Like Eliot, he knew what it meant to desire an escape from personality. "All my life," he writes in the *Obstinate Cymric* (1947), "I have run away from certain things—chief among them from myself" (145). And like Eliot, Powys sees art as offering the possibility of achieving this sort of impersonality, which he defines as "an escape, bringing with it a feeling of large, cool, quiet, and unruffled space" (*Complex* 46).

I imagine that few readers have ever read *The Waste Land* in order to escape into cool, wide-open spaces and, to be sure, Powys and Eliot are talking about two very different things. Eliot seeks after the impersonal through an almost religious denial of the self in reverence to some "more valuable" authority outside of the self, whether it be tradition, the mind of Europe or, later, Christianity. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot's metaphors for this process are scientific: the way to escape personality is by embracing order, method, and a positivistic reality beyond the self. There could be no idea more ludicrous to Powys than that art should aspire to the condition of science. Even if such a self-sacrifice were desirable—and it most certainly was not—it was nonetheless impossible. For Powys, the self simply has no access to this sort of objective world, and he was extremely skeptical about any possibility for the extinction of personality, even after death. Whereas Eliot proposed a strong opposition between expressing personality and escaping it,

Powys contends that either is impossible without the other. In a chapter on the nature of art in *The Complex Vision* (1920) he explains:

Let art be as bizarre, as weird, as strange, as rare, as fantastic as you please, if it be true art it must spring from the aboriginal duality in the human soul and thus must remain indestructibly personal. But since the two elements of personality wrestle in every artist's soul, the more personal a work of art the more comprehensive is its impersonality. (189)

Besides deflating modernism's other prime imperative, to "make it new," Powys argues that the only way to achieve the impersonal is by embracing personality, which is one thing we all have in common. He continues:

he controversy as to the superior claims of an art that is just "art," with an appeal entirely limited to texture and colour and line and pure sound, and an art that is imagistic, symbolic, representative, religious, philosophical or prophetic, is rendered irrelevant and meaningless when we perceive that all art, whether it be a thing of pure line and colour or a thing of passionate human content, must inevitably spring from the depths of some particular personal vision and must inevitably attain, by stressing this personal element to the limit, that universal impersonality which is implied in the fact that every living soul is composed of the same elements. (189-90)

This sort of impersonality is therefore formal and has nothing specifically to do with the content of the work of art. Although it is not difficult to see where Powys's personal taste might rest in this matter, if we are to take him at his word then it would appear that a painting by Mondrian would have just as much claim to the personal (and thus impersonal) quality he is discussing as a novel by Dickens—so long as it expresses the artist's personal vision. In the case of Eliot, for instance, that personal vision might be of a world in which the poet must hide behind personae, allusions, and ancient Greek—but what, after all, could be more distinctly Eliotic than that? As Maud Ellman notes, "subjectivity is never more indelible than in its passion for its own extinction" (198).

Powys was very much aware of this paradoxical nature of subjectivity, and the indelibility of personality is, in many ways, the keystone to all of his thinking. "The secret of the universe, as by slow degrees it reveals itself to us," he writes, "turns out to be personality" (*Complex* 194). Powys explains in *The Complex Vision* that every citizen of creation—whether animal, vegetable, or mineral—exists in its own envelope of subjectivity through which "the objective mystery" of the world around it is constantly being half-created and half-discovered. The result is a "multiverse" in which the personal, subjective universes of an infinite number of monads intersect and interact. Ultimately, each self is fundamentally alone, although for Powys this solipsism represents the salvation rather than the suffocation of the self, since it allows the individual remarkable—though not unlimited—power to change his world merely by changing his mind.

A very strong analogy can be made between this creative interaction of the self and the world and the act of reading. And since this sort of world-reading involves not only discovery, but creation as well, the self is not only always a type of reader, but also a writer. In fact, reading and writing become extremely difficult to untangle in the Cowperverse, an observation which makes particular sense in light of Powys's repeated claims that he wrote his novels first and foremost to give himself the pleasure of reading them.

Powys believes that everyone is an artist. Art's importance is that it provides a sort

of laboratory or training ground for the powers of creative discovery by which—whether we realize it or not—each of us constructs our own lives. “The real purpose of life,” he argues, “is simply and solely the arrangement of thought” (*Defence* 129). The best one can hope for is to become increasingly conscious of this process of creative discovery itself, and art is especially useful in this regard. Powys explains, “There is only one purpose of all conscious life, and that is to grow calmly, steadily, quietly more conscious!” (*Defence* 127) We have no real access to anything completely unaffected by our own personality, and, therefore, for art to defy its personal quality is to deny this essential characteristic of our existence. And since living in the world is always a creative act, Powys rejects not only the idea that the work of art should be segregated from its creator, but also the notion that art and life should be similarly estranged. The narrator of *Glastonbury* offers an interesting summary of Powys’s position:

**The composers of fiction aim at an aesthetic verisimilitude which seldom corresponds to the much more eccentric and chaotic dispositions of Nature. Only rarely are such writers so torn and rent by the Demons within them that they can add their own touch to the wave-crests of real actuality as these foam up, bring wreckage and sea-tangle and living and dead ocean monsters and bloody spume and bottom silt into the rainbow spray! (666)**

For all of his admiration and commitment to the nineteenth century novel, Powys does not put any particular stock in mimesis as an aesthetic goal. An artist who sets out to imitate life or nature is in danger of missing the point, since the only way to really imitate these things is not to copy but to create. Powys shifts the emphasis away from the artwork as a finished product to the process by which it is created; the work of art is not a well-wrought urn, but a surge of sea-water and slime: a very different definition from that proclaimed by many modernists, who would likely see Powys’s “wreckage and sea-tangle” as precisely the protean mess with which the artist must wrestle in order to come up with the lapidary work of art. Such artistic practices tend to value art as a compensatory realm where artificial order is created and imposed upon an otherwise directionless and chaotic universe. For Powys, on the other hand, the most an artist can hope for is to add her own chaos to the cacophony.

This modernist insistence on the extinction of the artist’s personality and the division between art and life are implicitly linked to Eliot’s repeated choice of scientific metaphors. In rejecting Eliot’s aesthetic of impersonality and formulating his own, Powys was also rebuffing modernity’s positivism and offering his own alternative epistemology. In the same *Glastonbury* monologue, the narrator reminds us of Powys’s pronouncement that the secret of the universe is personality:

**There is no ultimate mystery! Such a phrase is meaningless, because the reality of Being is forever changing under the primal and arbitrary will of the First Cause. The mystery of mysteries is Personality, a living Person; and there is that in Personality which is indetermined, unaccountable, changing at every second! (665)**

*Glastonbury* is a personality, the wind is a personality, each dog and wood-louse has a personality all its own. But Powys is saying more than that the universe is teeming with personalities—though he is of course saying this. The mystery of mysteries is not that everything is a personality; the mystery of mysteries is a personality. In a certain sense, Powys suggests that truth itself is a personality. This proposition replaces the

dominant positivism of modernism with a radically different conception of what it means to know. Knowledge in a scientistic worldview is predicated on the mastery of facts, on being able to predict, demystify, and control a reality about which we can all form a consensus. In Powys's world consensus is impossible and knowledge has nothing to do with objectivity or mastery. Instead it involves a sort of non-instrumental familiarity which treats all phenomena as ends-in-themselves. The model for all knowledge in the scientistic scheme might be the memorization of a physics textbook. Powys completely discards this model and replaces it with one more closely related to getting to know a friend or relative. He places science in league with other more or less useful myths, so that even the brute physical world can only be known in this personal way.

Implicit in this idea, especially if we remember Powys's solipsism, is the notion that the "indetermined" and the "unaccountable" will prevent us from ever completely "knowing" any other personality. As well as we might think we know someone—or even ourselves for that matter—there is always the possibility that he or she will surprise us. Thus, we can strive to get to know the world better, to become more familiar with it, but in the end it will always be capable of surprising us. This epistemology of personality accounts for much of Powys's particular distaste towards psychoanalysis. Powys attempts to dethrone science in the name of personality; Freud attempts to dissect personality in the name of science. Powys characteristically objects to the speciousness of most systems of thought, rejecting attempts to explain the world in terms of causal sequences and pathologies, sophisticated sophistries that obfuscate the mysterious nature of the world. We can offer explanations of events in terms of motives, desires, and instincts, but should never have any pretensions about dissolving any primordial mysteries. Powys's theory of personality translates into a sort of universal but optimistic skepticism. He writes, "I think it is sufficiently clear that to a lonely consciousness suspended in a self-created circle of deliberately chosen objects of contemplation, there will be no conceivable occasion for 'pursuing truth'" (147).

Despite the reaction many readers have to *A Glastonbury Romance* as being a book which simply asks us to believe too much, there is a strong sense in which belief and doubt are largely beside the point for Powys. In fact, Powys asks his readers to perform a willing suspension of disbelief and belief, recommending that the best reaction we can have even to our own existence is "a skepticism that possesses something of the heroic isolation of Christ himself, who announced that he himself was the truth" (Defence 147). It is this skepticism which explains what Powys means by the escape into the impersonal. In his *In Defence of Sensuality* (1930), Powys extends his philosophy of the complex vision by arguing that the chief end of man is to take pleasure in his solitary contemplation of the world which he creates around him. This can only be done by an act of will, a sort of daydream phenomenological reduction which brackets off questions of knowledge and belief in order to lose oneself in the contemplation of the world as pure phenomena. "One ought constantly to make a definite introspective effort to detach one's ego from its human envelope and contemplate the envelope with humorous detachment" (220).

This epistemology can help us get to know *Glastonbury's* eccentric narrator a little better. Because every person has direct access only to the world he or she creates, the objectively omniscient narrator simply doesn't make sense for Powys. Even the First Cause, which we might want to call God, is a fallible person—and not a particularly trustworthy one at that—biased by its own jealousies and desires. Although *Glastonbury* is peopled with invisible observers, their birds-eye-view doesn't offer them any more privilege than it does the birds; rather, it is the fish which provide the novel with its

narrative strategy. Charles Lock suggests that Powys would have us think of the town, and the book, as a sort of aquarium, noting:

The voice and the consciousness of the narrator are always "immersed," close to and on the same plane as the voices and consciousness of the participating characters. As a "medium" the novelist is as ubiquitous as water, and as unreliable, protean, deceptive, ambiguous, and zany. All the narrator's absurd and sometimes even tedious theories about the First Cause, the influence of the sun and moon, the destiny of souls after death, the voices of trees, and much more, must be taken as the utterances of a character, of one who has no ambition to "look down" on things or to speak with "authority." (*Polyphonic* 274)

The narrator, then, remains at sea-level. Powys chooses this sort of eccentric narration rather than presenting his story filtered through the consciousness of one character because such novels tend to give the sort of completely detached, impossibly objective perspective which he denies to his narrator over to the reader. Such a narrative, Lock emphasizes, tends to express a "partial view" of reality which implicitly supports the notion of an outside, objective world which the reader can catch sidelong glimpses of and about which most people can form a consensus. This view of the world is anathema to Powys's, and because he does not believe in sharp distinctions between art and life, his narrative strategy is to place the reader in a relation to the novel that is analogous to what he holds to be every person's relation to the world around them. The novel becomes a world which the reader must half-create and half-discover and which must ultimately remain a puzzling and utterly unique personality.

This strategy is especially evident in the narrator's treatment of Johnny Geard. As the novel progresses two unusual things happen: the identity of the narrator as someone actually writing the story we read becomes more pronounced, and the character of Mr. Geard becomes more obscured. Indeed, the novel's conclusion is largely concerned with questioning our ability to understand him at all. As Geard is preparing to drown himself, the narrator claims:

**Mr. Geard's character will never be understood—or the monstrous inhumanity of his departure from the visible world condoned—until it is realised that the unruffled amiability and the unfailing indulgence of his attitude to those near and dear to him concealed a hidden detachment from them that had always been an unbridged gulf. (1106)**

On the one hand, the narrator is only explaining Powys's particular brand of solipsism: the self is ultimately alone and must meet its own needs before turning in sympathy to the outside world. But, if Powys's philosophy is being invoked to pardon Geard, then why is the gap "unbridged"—which suggests that it could somehow be otherwise—and not "unbridgeable"? Furthermore, the secret distance which Geard has maintained from his loved ones could just as easily be read as further evidence for his inhumanity than as proof against it. Tellingly, the sentence itself is torn in half by its own "unbridged gap." The clause which interrupts the sentence emphasizes the first half, "Mr. Geard's character will never be understood," while keeping it forever separated from its more consoling conclusion.

The real question, though, is why the narrator should even raise the possibility that Geard might be misunderstood in the first place. This is a rather unusual equivocation for a narrator who has, for over a thousand pages, told the reader about spirits, ghosts and holy

grails, not to mention sadism and sexual dalliance of cosmic proportions—all with little worry about whether the reader will understand or believe. Suddenly, however, the word “character” reminds us that we are reading a fiction, and the narrator’s authority can no longer be relied upon so confidently. This question becomes only more vexed once Geard has finally passed on, when our previously all-knowing narrator curiously admits that whether Geard’s soul “will outlast the life of this planet, and of all other such bubbles of material substance that the torrent of Life throws up, is unknown to the writer of this book. (1118) The well-being of other deceased doesn’t offer the narrator such trouble, so why should Geard’s? Apparently, it is not only his family that stands on the other side of that unbridged gap. Again and again, this mystery seems to coincide with moments in which the narrator calls attention to his or her own position as a writer and the novel’s status as a work of fiction.

Although the narrator’s ignorance comes as something of a surprise at the end of the novel, the narrator has by that point already begun digging this mysterious gap around Geard’s “character.” Consider this passage from Geard’s last sermon:

**“Scientists,” explained Mr. Geard, only he used homelier and less abstract language, “are continually finding new cosmic vibrations, totally unknown or only suspected before; and why should not a new element belonging to the Unknown Dimension in which our present dream-life floats, be discovered by psychic, in place of physiological experiment? (1073)**

From the perspective of Powys’s philosophy, Geard is delivering an extremely important message, and yet the narrator insists on intervening and distancing the reader from the text with this odd act of quotation/paraphrase. How are we to interpret the fact that the we are not presented with Geard’s own words? If those words would be too homely for the reader, then why not simply paraphrase without the direct quotation? The passage is made more obscure as the narrator continues to speak for Geard:

**The human soul”—so Mr. Geard in his sublime ignorance of modern phraseology hesitated not to declare, “possesses levels of power and possibilities of experience that have hitherto been tapped only at rare epochs in the world’s history.” (1073 my emphasis)**

In light of the fact that the narrator has been acting as a translator in this passage, how are we to understand what it means that Geard “hesitated not to declare” these words? Did he pause before not saying these things, or did he say them immediately, without hesitation? If these quoted sentences were not actually spoken by Geard, then are we to distrust all of the dialogue presented in the novel up to this point? Has the narrator been ventriloquizing throughout? Would it really matter? Where is all of this language coming from?

Similar questions are raised by the narrator’s curious intertextual gesture toward the “female psychologist” a few pages later:

**Not long after Mr. Geard’s death, not long after the sifting out of all these dramatic events, one of the cleverest women psychologists of our time brought forward an interpretation of the man’s mood on this fatal day that deserves to be recorded. [...] The amazing—but surely not impossible explanation—offered by this penetrating woman is that a violent psychic radiation from all the minds of the twenty-seven people, including children, who were actually drowned during those twelve ghastly hours riddled Mr.**

Geard's hyper-sensitised and super-porous sympathy with what might be called a drowning-spasm, and produced in him a craving for death by drowning that really amounted to a kind of drowning-hypnosis. This brilliant writer points out further, that his growing preoccupation with the Grail Fount on Chalice Hill was itself a hydrophiliastic obsession. While many pathological subjects, this writer maintains, seek a pre-natal peace in death, what Mr. Geard in his planetary consciousness desired was a return to that remote and primal element of Water, which was literally the great maternal womb of all organic earth-life. It was this woman's far-fetched pamphlet that with its use of pathological technical terms had such a large share in turning the attention of intellectual people away from the religious aspect of the problem. (1104-5)

If this is supposed to be a critique of the sort of erudite sophistry the narrator critiques elsewhere in the book, one has to wonder why Powys doesn't choose a more convincing representative for an opponent. This would be the perfect point for the narrator to strike a blow against psychoanalysis, but instead he or she seems to dream up a pointedly absurd version of psychology which doesn't really quite seem guilty of his or her criticisms. In fact, the interpretation offered by the psychologist appears completely plausible within the logic of the book, and could just as easily have been espoused by the narrator, or even Powys himself. Does this language belong, like Geard's final sermon, completely to the narrator? Once again, these mysteries coincide with the insistence that this explanation "deserves to be recorded," and the appearance of other self-consciously literary phrases like "stupendous story," "brilliant writer." Furthermore, the narrator draws attention both to the fact that Geard's story must be interpreted and that we can never be too certain about the interpretations we come up with.

Thus, the book concludes with two contradictory suggestions. On the one hand, it assures us that Geard is a person whom we can understand if we trust the narrator. On the other hand, there is a strong suggestion that it doesn't even make sense to try and understand Geard, since he is only a fictional character and exists only in so far as he is read about. The book maintains an investment in the omniscience of its narrator, while simultaneously reminding us that the "dramatic events" it contains are open to endless interpretation. By the end, we are forced to rethink our entire relationship to the book: perhaps we had thought that the narrator had been giving us full access to Glastonbury, or at least to parts of it. Perhaps we had been led to believe that we were active participants and spectators within all of the book's events. But by drawing attention to its own status as a fiction and confusing the narrator's role in the whole affair, *Glastonbury* forces us to face the possibility that we might have been duped all along by an absurdly untrustworthy narrator.

The sophistication of Powys's narrative rests in the fact that, despite *Glastonbury's* metafictional streak, he never lets the reader completely off the hook by "baring the device." Powys may call attention to the book-ness of the book, but he does so in such a fashion that the reader is not allowed thereby to draw such reassuring distinctions between the text and the world. Powys deftly uses just enough of the characteristics of conventional realism to allow us to think we know where we stand in relation to the text, but constantly troubles this relation by reminding us that we are reading a work of fiction. The result is to keep the reader from ever getting too comfortable about how much can be believed, about what should be taken seriously, what is a joke, what is real and what illusion. But this, of course, is exactly how Powys conceives the position of the self in the world. The only way to make it through *Glastonbury* without having a readerly-nervous breakdown is to bracket

such concerns and simply enjoy the pageant from a position of absorbed detachment. One must give up the hope of mastering the text or of knowing the world it describes, because in a certain sense, *A Glastonbury Romance* is as much an eccentric personality as its author.

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# Love's Labour Lost John Cowper Powys's Phenomenology of Agape

Patrick Couch  
University of Stockholm

## Introduction

That John Cowper Powys and the Canon have come to be regarded as somewhat of each other's Nemeses in Powys criticism is a well established fact. That Powys by his exclusion from what is generally considered the Canon (here, I do take the liberty of regarding the phenomenon of Canonicity as a simple one, defining it simply as that which is read, taught, and republished by those currently in power in Academia) has given him the status of rebel by his followers and as an awkward and uncomfortable literary persona by those that bother to acknowledge his literary existence at all, not dismissing him as ridiculous and unfit to even address or not even knowing of him, is equally established.

The reason for this here deliberately oversimplified situation is, however, less agreed upon by all parties involved. There are numerous accounts of why Powys has come to inhabit the peculiar literary status that most agree upon that he indeed inhabits. It is not my intention to enumerate these. Neither is it my intention to justify any one in particular of them. Instead, I will take a phenomenological view of Powys's predicament and try to point to an interest marking Powys's writing that is radically incompatible with the fundamental pillars of canonicity.

This essay will be deliberately imbalanced. I will satisfy myself with the following phenomenological view of the foundation of the phenomenon of canonicity. I understand canonicity as that which singles out what is in power. That which is in power is marked by canonicity. Power, however understood, requires an object which it has the power over. Power is thus necessarily involved in a relationship with that which it is not. The same is true of canonicity. Canonicity is but a relativity in which the relations are those of subduer and subdued.

In comparison, I will argue in this essay that Powys's main interest as a writer is in a phenomenon that knows no relativity. Knowing no relativity, this phenomenon cannot be known by the Canon since the Canon, ultimately, only knows canonicity, that is relativity, that is that which can be put into relationships. If this is true, Powys's peculiar literary status is a necessary ingredient in his authorship. Furthermore, if this is indeed true, Powys can only be regarded as the antithesis of the Canon in so far as he is radically not of the Canon. This does not mean that he is that which the Canon is not. It means that Powys is that which the Canon cannot know.

It is my opinion that what Powys knows, and what he dedicates all his great writing (read most Powysian, that which is most peculiar and idiosyncratic) to, and what the Canon does not know is Agape. Not only does he know Agape, in

his writing he unfolds a phenomenology of Agape where Agape is that which makes life as feeling possible. Please note, this essay in itself is not strictly phenomenological. Rather, it is meta-phenomenological in that it speaks in a traditional non-phenomenological way about what is phenomenological. Less pompously put, I merely wish to call attention to the centrality of agape in John Cowper Powys's writing.

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Very few critics have called attention to the important role of agape for an appreciation of the writings of John Cowper Powys<sup>1</sup>. I wish to end this neglect. I will look at the surprisingly small amount of criticism dealing with John Cowper Powys's interest in St. Paul's notion of agape. I will then survey Powys's appropriation of Pauline agape in his non-fictional writing. To conclude with a brief consideration of these notions and their implications for Powys's non-status in the Canon.

According to H. P. Collins, one of few critics to actually address Powys's consideration of St. Paul, the one explicit essay Powys wrote on St. Paul "though included in *The Pleasures of Literature* could only be omitted from his 'philosophical' writings and put among his aesthetic adventurings by an act of violence" (*Old* 130). Collins feels that in this essay Powys "surpasses all his other argumentative writings," and emphasises "how far more compelling John Cowper's sensationism can be when developed through religious enquiry than when developed empirically in the essay-books" (*Old* 130, 132).

Collins points out that it is rather surprising that Powys, who "abhorred 'the cruel, evil-minded Puritan'" should reveal such a deep affinity with St. Paul in the essay, when one bears in mind that St. Paul is usually considered "the oracle of many Puritans" (*Old* 131). However, this paradox is resolved when one recognises that the St. Paul in question is the St. Paul of Powys's own perspective (*Old* 131). Collins further points out that although Powys is "a Pauline Christian," he "wears his Paulism with a difference," and that "St. Paul the Puritan has no existence for John Cowper" (*Old* 131).

Finally, Collins calls attention to one decisive aspect of St. Paul's psychological insights, an aspect Powys fully embraces, and, in his fictional writing, radicalizes. Collins emphasises that not only does St. Paul "struggle to change the actual nature of God; he succeeds in supplanting the objective Christ of the Gospels by the subjective ideal in the human mind, the 'Christ in our souls'" (*Old* 131). This shift from objectivity to subjectivity is appropriated by Powys, and it is as vital as it is radical in Powys's great fiction, especially in his *A Glastonbury Romance*.

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For John Cowper Powys, the agape delineated by St. Paul is not so much an abstract, theoretical concept as a "completely new emotional discovery" (*Pleasures* 216). This implies, of course, that Powys neither considers agape a creation of St. Paul himself, or of Christianity, for that matter. Rather, the contribution of St. Paul and Christianity was that it discovered, in the sense that it increased and emphasised the awareness of "a divinely-natural, heathen virtue, older than the Chinese Tao" (*Obstinate* 141) already in effect before the event of Christ. Not only does Powys consider agape a discovery made by St. Paul, he also argues that it is "a terrific psychological experiment, absolutely authentic, horribly sincere" (*Spite* 185), constituting a "desperate spiritual 'leap in the dark'" (*Spite* 185) inevitably made by St. Paul after the event of Christ. According to

Powys, once this discovery has been made, it is impossible to unmake, and all attempts to "regard anything else as the heart of the matter except this mysterious agape," (*Pleasures* 247) Powys considers "an outrage to St. Paul's grand discovery" (*Pleasures* 247). It is my contention that Powys, continuously throughout his writing, regards precisely agape as the heart of the matter.

Powys is very careful to point out that although he refers to St. Paul's understanding of agape as philosophy, the philosophy in question "is a thing of tone, temper, mood, and spirit, not a system of negative rules and regulations" (*Pleasures* 191). With this comes a necessity to distinguish between St. Paul's "spiritual psychology" (*Pleasures* 210) of this new discovery, and "what one might call his official creed" (*Pleasures* 210). Failure to do so results, at best, in a miscomprehension of agape and, at worst, in the recession from it. Powys sees the reason for the neglect of agape in the world as the fault of Puritanism. "It is the puritans who have ruined the influence of" St. Paul (*Pleasures* 191). Because Puritanism "has always been a reversion to St. Paul's avenging God, and a recession from his 'mind of Christ'" (*Pleasures* 184) thereby deliberately moving away from agape, Powys feels that it has become quite distanced from the radical discovery made by St. Paul. In the eyes of Powys, Puritanism knows nothing "of the magical power of agape over the cosmos" (*Pleasures* 191). Ultimately, "St. Paul's philosophy in its immense inward liberation is the extreme opposite to anything puritanical" (*Pleasures* 191).

Although Powys feels confident that when St. Paul "talks of his mysterious agape we do know exactly what he is talking about, for he has defined it to the last ingredient" (*Pleasures* 232) he continues, throughout his writings, to address the question "what did St. Paul really mean by his mysterious 'charity'?" (*Mortal* 200). However, one thing Powys never questions, and that is, whatever its real meaning, agape is at "the very centre of St. Paul's life" (*Pleasures* 184).

Powys regards the translation of agape as 'charity' to be preferable to the more modern translation of it as 'love,' stating "[w]ise was the instinct in our divines when they translated this great Pauline agapé not as 'love' but 'charity'" (*Obstinate* 141). Powys does "not share the warm super-amorous glow which the mere sound of the syllable 'love' calls up in many breasts" (*Pleasures* 232-3). He "deeply regret[s] the Revised Version's use of this word in place of the Authorized Version's 'charity'" (*Pleasures* 232-3). Powys argues that the substitution of 'charity' for 'love' is caused by sentimentality. "[O]ur love-loving modern Christians find charity a chilly word . . . so back we come to the old sex-sodden sex-sentimental love, only it must be the love of Jesus or the love of the church or the love of the saints or the love of Humanity!" (*Obstinate* 141). Powys regards this substitution as utterly devastating. "[W]hen we hear the Revised Version translate that clue-word of the Secret of Jesus—the word agape—as 'love' in place of the familiar 'charity' we get an uncomfortable shock. Nor does 'love' mean the same thing. Technically it may. Actually it does not!" (*Pleasures* 27) The most unfortunate aspect of this "sentimental substitution" (*Pleasures* 232-3) is that it "completely destroys the creative magical quality that St. Paul gives to agape" (*Pleasures* 232-3). It is this "quality that makes it so perceptibly different from its metaphysical use in St. John" (*Pleasures* 232-3).

Powys forcefully distinguishes between St. Paul's understanding of agape and St. John's. The reason Powys gives for this is fourfold. (1) The agape of St. John is exclusive, whereas the agape of St. Paul is inclusive. The "restricted 'lovingness'" (*Pleasures* 174) between "the Father and the Son and the blessed elect" (*Pleasures* 174), Powys regards as a "much too small and too hermetically-sealed a salvation for this tragic world" (*Pleasures*

174). Powys regards the "exclusive love" of St. John to be "unhealthy and morbidly-enclosed" (*Pleasures* 175). The basis for this unhealthiness contaminating St. John's agape is the distinction between the elect and the lost, whereby the lost are excluded from agape. (2) In contradistinction from the agape of St. Paul, the agape of St. John is metaphysical. Powys continuously emphasises the metaphysical nature of St. John's agape. It is criticised for being a "metaphysical love-circle with the elect inside and the lost outside" (*Pleasures* 177), and the whole gospel of St. John is accused of being "a hot-house of metaphysical love" (*Pleasures* 179) in which even the Trinity is metaphysical (*Pleasures* 181). In opposition to what Powys regards a "Johannine Love-Circle floating on the black waters of the Abyss" (*Pleasures* 179), stands St. Paul. According to Powys, "St. Paul is not content to use the word in the mystical metaphysical sense in which it is used—and to many of us so movingly and seductively—in St. John's Gospel" (*Pleasures* 216). (3) St. John is mystical whereas St. Paul is sensitive to the mysterious. For Powys, being mystical instead of sensitive to the-mysterious is a fault. Powys regards the Fourth Gospel to be "a mystical metaphysic, large and cool and detached, a divine iridescent bubble of magian 'love,' that floats serene above the pain and the tumult" (*Pleasures* 183-4). In opposition to St. John's agape, Pauline agape contains not "a grain, or drop, or faintest tincture of the 'mystical love' advocated with such seductive and dangerous eloquence by the saints and by others who are far from sanctity" (*Spice* 185). (4) Both the mystical and the metaphysical aspect of St. John's Gospel point to the abstract nature of this Gospel. Contrary to the abstract "neo-platonic Fourth Gospel" (*Pleasures* 183) in which agape is not only metaphysical and mystical but "remote" (*Pleasures* 233), the agape of St. Paul is concrete. Given this fourfold reason for distinguishing between St. Paul's agape and St. John's, it is decisive to keep in mind that, unless otherwise stated, the agape referred to throughout this essay is "Pauline 'Agapé'" (*Meaning* 271).

It is vital to bear in mind the radical character of the inclusiveness pertaining to agape. Powys argues that it is necessary "to admit that the magical power in St. Paul's agape extends a good deal beyond our ordinary ideas of 'benevolence and righteousness'" (*Pleasures* 233). The agape of St. Paul extends far beyond "all ideal talk about the Brotherhood of Man" (*Pleasures* 210) including, as it does, "the cosmic brotherhood of beast and birds and fishes and angels and demons" (*Pleasures* 210). Consequently, the word agape "was adopted by St. Paul from his Greek authors and then applied, as we all know, to every aspect of actual human life" (*Pleasures* 216). Although Powys, at times, seems to be arguing that a certain selectiveness pertains to agape in which "a concentration upon the 'lovely' aspects of our experience rather than upon the base, the frivolous, the malicious" (*Pleasures* 192) is to be preferred, Powys emphasises that agape is primarily "an 'enduring of all things' in an ecstasy of joy" (*Pleasures* 227).

Although agape is an ecstasy of joy, it is not necessarily something immediately perceptible. Powys's notion of agape "is not puffed up" (*Meaning* 290), that is to say, it is secretive rather than exhibitionistic. Powys holds that "St. Paul's religion is nothing if not a secret of abysmal exultation" (*Pleasures* 225). Put differently, "St. Paul's religion is a religion of secret ecstasy" (*Pleasures* 225). The lack of exhibitionistic features pertaining to agape points to a radical ordinariness. Where St. John's agape is metaphysical and mystical, Pauline agape is an "undistinguished, unambitious, colourless, neutral, objective, practical agape" (*Obstinate* 107). It is the "agape of the soul of the ordinary unprivileged man and the ordinary unprivileged woman that seeketh not her own" (*Obstinate* 107). Pauline agape is "so concrete, so realistic, so saturated with the dew of life, that it makes the gnostic declaration of St. John that 'God is Love' seem an extremely

remote and metaphysical echo" (*Pleasures* 219). Furthermore, "the concrete reality, the electric and quivering reality" (*Pleasures* 211) of agape is so intense that all metaphysics is a step away from it. In the final analysis, what sets Pauline agape apart from all other delineations of it, is that it is a "living agape" (*Pleasures* 233).

That agape is living instead of metaphysical means that it is not distanced from "the ultimate feeling of being alive" (*Defence* 21). Accordingly, agape is responsible for the "primitive feeling of happiness, such as fleas and worms and sparrows and rabbits and minnows and gudgeon, as well as gods and angels and saints, experience" (*Defence* 40). Thus, what Powys sometimes prefers to refer to as 'the ichthysaurus-sensation,' which "is nothing less than this simple primeval happiness in the immediate experience of being alive" (*Defence* 41), is nothing other than agape. Powys views Christ's teachings as nothing but the advocacy of agape understood in this way. "[T]he whole tone of His teaching suggests that the secret we all crave lies in an extremely simple and totally unsophisticated feeling for life as it can be felt in itself as it carries us along" (*Defence* 40). Consequently, Powys feels that the "mysterious emotion called 'agapè' in the Gospels . . . is nothing less than just this very sort of psychic-physical happiness" (*Defence* 40). However, Powys notes one limitation to the agape expounded generally in the Gospels. In the Gospels, agape "is turned toward human beings" (*Defence* 40), whereas the agape Powys himself delineates after having appropriated it from St. Paul, is primarily turned "toward Nature" (*Defence* 40).

It is my contention that this "extremely simple and totally unsophisticated feeling for life as it can be felt in itself as it carries us along" (*Defence* 40) so characteristic of Powys's fiction, deserves no other name than agape. Having established the vital importance of this name for this feeling, I, further, wish to claim that agape is, in the final analysis, Powys's one, sustained, interest throughout his writing. This is no more true than in *A Glastonbury Romance*, where life itself—"the feeling for life as it can be felt in itself"—is clearly the one ultimate protagonist.

## Conclusion

Although the claim that agape permeates all Powys's writing is left unsubstantiated in this essay, simply because this writing (especially the novels) remains unaddressed, I hope to have shown two things. (1) Powys is in a radical way interested in agape, defining it in his own idiosyncratic way. (2) This interest disqualifies him from the Canon simply because the Canon, blind to that which it cannot address for lack of relativity, has no inherent possibility to position itself in relation to Powys.

This by no means inhibits the Canon from addressing Powys anyway. However, it inhibits the Canon from addressing that in Powys's writing that makes truly Powysian. Indeed, this very essay itself does not touch upon that phenomenon Powys dedicates his own writing to. Instead, it struggles to the best of its ability to speak for Powys, addressing the Canon in a way the Canon can apprehend with a plea Powys's writing can only make in silence and in invisibility, yet with absolute clarity to those that in the experience of reading Powys come to doubt the validity of a Canon that does not love.

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**Additional Notes** (Not necessarily part of the essay, but part of the reasoning relating to agape and phenomenology)

### **Michel Henry and Meister Eckhart**

The most interesting and beneficial consideration of agape and its implications for subjectivity for the present endeavour is to be found in Michel Henry's appropriation of the thought of Meister Eckhart. Henry's explication of Eckhart's thought offers a level of sophistication seemingly lacking in Powys's non-fictional writing, yet implicit in his fiction. It is my belief that the radical inquiry into agape and subjectivity in Powys's fiction is more easily accounted for if Henry's appropriation of Eckhartian thought is considered. There are two reasons for this. (1) Powys, in his non-fiction is unable to express and formulate the radical presuppositions on which agape and subjectivity, as they are investigated in *A Glastonbury Romance*, rest upon. However, in Eckhart, the claim Powys makes that agape is the "extremely simple and totally unsophisticated feeling for life as it can be felt in itself," is substantiated. (2) Agape and subjectivity, as they are delineated in *A Glastonbury Romance*, are so radically perceived that it is not enough to suspend and switch off established presuppositions about them. It is my belief that not only must prevailing presuppositions about agape and subjectivity be switched off, the possibility of an alternative approach to them must be shown. Only if a fundamentally different alternative to established views of subjectivity is shown to be a possibility, can a suspension of both attitudes effectively be executed.

In his German writings, Eckhart makes the following claims: (1) "God loves nothing but Himself and what is like Himself, in so far as He finds it in me and me in Him" (Walshe 2:1); (2) "He loves us only in so far as he finds us in Him" (Walshe 2:1); and (3) "God has only one love: with the same love with which the Father loves His only-begotten Son, He loves me" (Walshe 2:2); (4) "whatever He loves is one love" (Walshe 3:87). Henry comments upon these claims in the following manner, "in loving the soul, God loves himself and this in such a way that there is in reality but one love, one single operation, and the love whereby God loves the soul is ultimately nothing other than the love whereby the soul loves God, nothing other than the love whereby God loves himself" (*Essence* 314). Consequently, Eckhart and Henry following in his footsteps, does not distinguish between the soul and God. This means that subjectivity in Eckhart is of a radical character. One is justified in claiming that the subjectivity in question is of an absolute character, thus deserving the name absolute subjectivity.

Henry points out that since Eckhart considers the essence of subjectivity (the soul) to be the very essence of God, "Eckhart's whole problematic where man and the problems of his relationships and ultimately union with God seems to be the theme, is actually reduced to the determination of God, to the determination of the essence and of its internal structure" (*Essence* 314). Consequently, the non-distinction between subjectivity (soul)

and the absolute (God) in agape is foregrounded as the pre-eminent theme of Eckhartian thought. In withholding the distinction between subjectivity and the absolute, Eckhart removes subjectivity from that which is relative, i.e. not absolute. Following Christian tradition, Eckhart names the relative world arguing, according to Henry, that the conflation of subjectivity and the absolute occurring in agape "becomes reality only in a man who renounces the world" (Essence 312). A peculiar inversion results from this. No longer is the world the immediate here of Heideggerian *Dasein* and *In-der-Welt-Sein*, and God the transcendent Other of traditional reason. Instead, God, the absolute, becomes the immanent subjective and world the removed transcendent. It is vital to acknowledge this inversion occurring in Eckhart in order to grasp how agape brings about the conflation of subjectivity and the absolute.

The understanding of world as transcendent carries with it several implications for the understanding of agape as the renouncement of the world. Because of the transcendent nature of the world, its renouncement in agape brings about (1) "the exclusion of otherness" and of the horizon (Essence 315); (2) the ejection of all images; (Essence 315). (3) "the rejection of exteriority" (Essence 315); (4) "the retreat from everything which is not the essence" (Essence 314); (5) the exclusion of all attributes and forms (Essence 316); (6) "the rejection of all that separates itself from the essence and is posited outside it" (Essence 316). In the final analysis, the renouncement of the world brings about "the rejection of all creation" (Essence 316). In Eckhart, creation is of decisive importance because it embodies everything the absolute is not. It is not incorrect to reduce the Eckhartian problematic to a duality between creation and the absolute. Put differently, ultimately, Eckhart distinguishes between that which is created and that which is uncreated. According to Henry, Eckhart understands creation primarily as "the ontological process upon which all distinction and all difference rest," as an "activity explicitly recognized as such, as 'activity', as 'operation' or as 'mediation'" (Essence 319). This means that in so far as the absolute, and with it absolute subjectivity, is uncreated, no distinction, difference, or mediation is known to it. The final implication of the renouncement of the world—agape—is thus that it necessitates the need "to reject the ontological process whereby in general a being phenomenizes itself as an 'image', it is to reject that which in monism presents itself as the presupposition for all possible manifestation and is designated by it under the general title of 'mediation'" (Essence 320). The renouncement of the world is thus understood in Henry's appropriation of Eckhart as the rejection of mediation. Ultimately, agape is understood as *âne mittel* (modern German *ohne Mittel*), im-mediately, without mediation (Walshe 1:62).

This understanding of agape accounts for the conflation of subjectivity (soul) and the absolute (God)—it comes about as the removal of mediation. According to Henry "[t]hat which harbours no difference, no opposition, and consequently nothing 'other', nothing foreign in itself or in its nature, is precisely what constitutes unity" (Essence 318). The unity in question is no other than that of subjectivity and the absolute. Accordingly, "[b]ecause unity constitutes the very nature of God, the nature of the absolute, there is no opposition or difference interior to the latter understood as unity" (Essence 318). Absolute subjectivity is thus understood *âne mittel*—without mediation. In absolute subjectivity, understood as essence, "there is nothing 'other,' nothing foreign, because in it there is no opposition, no difference" (Essence 318). Therefore, one is entitled to say that, in a radical way, "the essence, whose content is constituted by its own reality, encloses nothing else," (Essence 315) and that "the absolute 'remains in itself', and allows itself to be understood without equivocation as immanence" (Essence 324).

With agape apprehended as consubstantial with the removal of difference (mediation), an alternative to the mode of manifestation in need of difference for its execution is found by Eckhart in revelation. In distinction from manifestation—now understood solely as a mode of appearance requiring difference for its accomplishment—the event of revelation comes about precisely as the end of difference. Instead of difference, revelation reveals unity in the Eckhartian sense. In revelation the unity between subjectivity and the absolute is acknowledged and the transition from world to immanence effectuated. In the event of revelation, "man wherein it is accomplished" is revealed to lack difference, opposition and distinction (*Essence* 318). That revelation is interpreted as an acknowledgement means that it is understood as an experience. More precisely, it is understood as an "experience of the absolute" (*Essence* 318) experienced by absolute subjectivity itself. Therefore, it deserves to be called "the auto-revelation of the absolute" (*Essence* 329). Because the experience of the absolute is an "adequate experience of its reality in unity" it leaves outside "all transcendent determinations" (*Essence* 328). This implies "that revelation in its effective, phenomenological accomplishment is the work of the absolute" (*Essence* 333). Consequently, "such an arising of revelation in the effectiveness of its original phenomenality is the act of remaining in itself of the absolute; such an act is the original arising of revelation" (*Essence* 333).

The autistic nature of revelation ensures that the experience constitutive of revelation remains absolute. Consequently, the reality of the experience experienced by absolute subjectivity in revelation is that "of its own reality as absolute reality" (*Essence* 436). In other words, it is the experience of the absolute. Henry points out that this is not anything remote or abstract since "the essence does not reside outside us but in our own life, and this because it is the very essence of this life which is ours" (*Essence* 429), and that revelation is nothing other than "the internal structure of life" (*Essence* 334).

In summary, the aim of the preceding consideration has not been to problematise Eckhart's thought, or Henry's appropriation of it. Rather, the aim has been to introduce an alternative approach to subjectivity and agape. The Eckhartian problematic is of decisive interest to a study of subjectivity in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* for two reasons. (1) In Eckhart, subjectivity is delineated as absolute through the revelation of agape. In other words, the unity Eckhart finds in agape between the absolute and subjectivity necessitates a reconsideration of the very notion of subjectivity. It calls for a consideration of subjectivity as absolute subjectivity, made transcendental through a process of purification whereby transcendence is excluded. In comparison, subjectivity in *A Glastonbury Romance* seems to be exposed to a reduction in which the world—understood as transcendence—is excluded. (2) In Eckhart, subjectivity—absolute subjectivity—requires a radical understanding of agape as *âne mitel* as its condition of possibility. If subjectivity in *A Glastonbury Romance* is revealed, through a phenomenological investigation, to actually be exposed to a reduction, what are the implications for agape?

My intention is by no means to reduce subjectivity in *A Glastonbury Romance* to that of the Eckhartian problematic. It is merely my hope that the preceding consideration of Henry's appropriation of Eckhartian thought serves to introduce the possibility of a subjectivity of a radical kind. Furthermore, by introducing certain notions used in the current presentation, primarily, absolute subjectivity, *âne mitel*, world, absolute reality, I hope to provide the ensuing investigation of *A Glastonbury Romance* with notions that ease its procedure. However, it must be emphasised that the preceding Eckhartian presentation will be suspended during the actual phenomenological investigation of *A*

### *Glastonbury Romance.*

In summary, this work is a phenomenological study of subjectivity in *A Glastonbury Romance*. I consider the most radical name for Powysian subjectivity in Powys's non-fictional works is agape. It is my intention to show that the notion the name agape expresses—what Powys calls "the feeling for life as it can be felt in itself," and what Cavaliero calls "the apprehension of life as it is in itself,"—is the most radical phenomenon in *A Glastonbury Romance*. As such, it is the one phenomenon most deserving of close critical examination. Because of its radical character, a study of subjectivity understood as agape requires an equally radical character. It is my belief that phenomenology offers itself precisely as such a form of investigation. Only a methodological approach sensitive to "the feeling for life as it can be felt in itself," and turning to "the apprehension of life as it is in itself" is capable to investigate subjectivity as agape in *A Glastonbury Romance* in a rigorous and radical manner.

### Jean-Luc Marion

A phenomenological investigation of agape, in any context, must acknowledge the efforts of Jean-Luc Marion. In many ways, Marion's endeavour points in the opposite direction to Eckhart's. Excusing the simplifications any generalisation entails, one could say that Eckhart's enterprise points to agape, in that it expresses *âne mitel*, as immanence. In contradistinction, Marion labours in the direction of transcendence. By conducting a brief consideration of Marion's efforts I hope to substantiate this generalisation and to show the prominent place agape has come to inhabit in modern phenomenology so as to partly justify my choice of method and theory for the ensuing investigation of agape in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance*.

Marion's investigation of agape attempts to be a "deconstruction' within the framework of a phenomenology that is pushed to its utmost possibilities" (*God* xxii). The guiding principle for Marion's labours is the question: "does God have to be?" (*God* 44). In order to enable an investigation which implicitly intends to argue that God does not have to be, Marion crosses out God in favor of GOD. "The cross does not indicate that GOD would have to disappear as a concept, or intervene only in the capacity of a hypothesis in the process of validation" (*God* 46). Rather, Marion crosses out God in order to give himself a certain leeway that will enable him to "think God outside of metaphysics," (*God* 37) an endeavour co-extensive with the attempt to disengage the apprehension of God "from the conditions posed by onto-theo-logy" (*God* 37). This means primarily that Marion attempts to break with Heidegger. According to Marion, the question of God "never suffered as radical a reduction to the first question of Being as in the phenomenological enterprise of Heidegger" (*God* 69). Consequently, Marion attempts "[t]o think GOD, therefore, outside of ontological difference, outside the question of Being," (*God* 46-7) and furthermore "to free him from metaphysics, hence from the Being of beings" (*God* 60).

Marion's enterprise can be expressed as an attempt "to envisage a properly Christian name for the GOD who is revealed in Jesus Christ—a name anterior to the Being of beings (according to metaphysics), hence also to every thought of Being as such" (*God* 82). Since Being is no longer valid as a sign for God, Marion asks "What name, what concept, and what sign nevertheless yet remain feasible?" (*God* 47). Throughout his attempt to show that God does not have to be, Marion endeavours to show that the answer to this question is agape. (*God* 47). The reason being that "this term, which Heidegger (like, moreover, all of metaphysics, although in a different way) maintains in a derived

and secondary state, still remains, paradoxically, unthought enough" (God 47) to free GOD from metaphysics as onto-theo-logy. Marion's thesis is most concisely formulated in the following manner. "Only love does not have to be. And GOD loves without being" (God 138). In order to show that agape is the proper name for a GOD without Being Marion raises questions such as "can agape transgress Being?;" (God 82) "Can it manifest itself without passing through Being?;" (God 83) can it "mark its distance from Being?" (God 82). The task he sets himself is thus to show "concretely how the God who gives himself as agape thus marks his divergence from Being, hence first from the interplay of beings as such" (God 82-3).

Marion singles out two fundamental traits pertaining to agape. Both are constitutive of givenness. (1) "[W]hat is peculiar to love is that it gives itself" (God 47). Marion understands this giving itself as independent, arguing that "to give itself, the gift does not require that an interlocutor receive it, or that an abode accommodate it, or that a condition assures it or confirms it" (God 47). Consequently, "[l]ove loves without condition, simply because it loves; [GOD] thus loves without limit or restriction. No refusal rebuffs or limits that which, in order to give itself, does not await the least welcome or require the least consideration" (God 47). This radical independence and indifference is fundative of agape. (2) Agape "postulates its own giving, giving where the giver strictly coincides with the gift, without any restriction, reservation, or mastery" (God 48). As a result, "love gives itself only in abandoning itself, ceaselessly transgressing the limits of its own gift, so as to be transplanted outside of itself" (God 48). Consequently, agape is marked by "the transference of love outside itself" (God 48). Put differently, "[i]t belongs to the essence of love . . . to submerge, like a ground swell the wall of a jetty, every demarcation, representational or existential, of its flux" (God 48). In other words, agape "can even be defined as the movement of a giving that, to advance without condition, imposes on itself a self-critique without end or reserve" (God 48). This means that "[t]he transcendence of love signifies first that it transcends itself" (God 48). Marion's apprehension of agape is clearly marked by the necessity of agape to require transplantation, transgression, transcendence and flux.

Marion locates agape understood as givenness earlier than ontology, claiming "to discover in the gift an instance anterior to Being/being that distorts the ontological difference" (God, 102 ). It is not my intention to give a detailed account of Marion's intricate argument, it suffices to say that this argument results in the founding of the statement "The gift delivers Being/being" (God 101) on the statement "Charity delivers Being/being" (God 102). Agape and gift are apprehended as consubstantial.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Marion, in his investigation of a GOD without Being apprehended as agape, turns to the problematic of givenness. He does so by first making clear that (1) "[t]he gift is conceived as giving, and not first starting from any giver whatsoever; the giving in its turn is understood as the destinal sending;" (God 103) and (2) "the gift occurs only in distance" (God 107). Second, he does so by removing himself from Heidegger. In distinction from Heidegger's delineation of the Fourfold and Ereignis, Marion argues that "[b]etween the gift given and the giver giving, giving does not open the (quadri-) dimension of appropriation, but preserves distance" (God 104). For Marion, distance becomes the one indispensable phenomenon for the manifestation of agape. Marion understands distance as "the gap that separates definitely only as much it unifies, since what distance gives consists in the gap itself" (God 104). As a result Marion distinctly breaks with Heidegger who understands unity as *âne mittel*, without mediation. Marion's understanding of the unity distance brings, emphasises distance as necessary for unity. Marion continues to

argue that "[t]he giving traverses distance by not ceasing to send the given back to a giver, who, the first, dispenses the given as such—a sending destined to a sending back" (God 104). Therefore, "[d]istance lays out the intimate gap between the giver and the gift, so that the self-withdrawal of the giver may be read on the gift, in the very fact that it refers back absolutely to the giver" (God 104). Furthermore, "[d]istance opens the intangible gap wherein circulate the two terms that accomplish giving in inverse directions. The giver is read on the gift, to the extent that the gift repeats the initial sending by the giving of the final sending back. The gift gives the giver to be seen, in repeating the giving backward" (God 104). In this way Marion comes to delineate givenness as a playful economy of circulation. "Sending which sends itself back, sending back which sends—it is a ceaseless play of giving, where the terms are united all the more in that they are never confused" (God 104). Marion concludes that "distance, in which they are exchanged, also constitutes that which they exchange. Distance can be exchanged only in being traversed" (God 104). Ultimately, "[d]istance implies an irreducible gap, specifically, disappropriation. By definition, it totally separates the terms that, precisely for this reason, can play through their sending and return" (God 105).

Since Marion conflates GOD and giving—"GOD gives" (God 105)—and therefore also agape and giving—"agape . . . is not—but gives (itself)" (God 106)—what holds for giving also holds for agape. Consequently, agape, apprehended as giving and gift, is reduced to a playful economy of circulation enabled through the mediation of distance. This leads Marion to conclude that "[a]t the heart of agape, following its flux as one follows a current that is too violent to go back up, too profound for one to know its source or valley, everything flows along the giving, and, by the wake traced in the water, but without grasping anything of it, everything indicates the direction and meaning of distance" (God 106). The centrality of distance in Marion's problematic results from the Catholic ideology in which he operates. Commenting upon Hegel's view that the great superiority of Lutheranism over Catholicism lies in an "eucharistic consciousness without real mediation," (God 169) Marion argues that "[o]nly distance, in maintaining a distinct separation of terms (of persons), renders communion possible, and immediately mediates the relation" (God 169). The ideological nature of Marion's endeavour is explicitly acknowledged. "One must certainly recognize that Catholicism attempts to preserve this gap . . . indeed we attempt nothing other, here, under the name of 'distance.'" (God 229)

Marion's explication of agape is of considerable importance for an investigation of agape in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* primarily because it offers itself as a way away from metaphysics and onto-theo-logy. Marion's problematic makes it difficult for considerations of agape to uncritically insert agape into preconceived notions subscribing to established metaphysics. Only by an act of ignorance can agape still be circulated within a metaphysical framework. Consequently, when investigating agape in *A Glastonbury Romance* I cannot afford to disregard Marion's efforts. Furthermore, I will need to position my own investigation of agape in relation to Marion's, and ask to what extent Marion's claims are valid for my own labours.

Through a brief survey of the current phenomenological debate about agape and its phenomenological status, I hope to have shown that agape is an appropriate topic for a phenomenological study. I also hope to have delineated what is at stake in such a debate. Agape comes to inhabit a vital place within current phenomenology in that it foregrounds the question of transcendence and immanence. Henry's recourse to Eckhart is to a large extent triggered by his attempt to rethink immanence. In distinction, Marion's recourse to deconstruction is very much an attempt to rethink transcendence. In a definite sense, this

debate is vital for the question of subjectivity. If one agrees with Marion that agape is a playful economy of circulation, flux and giving, it is impossible to think a subjectivity not affected by this transcendence. On the other hand, if one sides with Henry and Eckhart, subjectivity must necessarily be thought of as immanence, acknowledging no play, no flux and no transcendence.

Consequently, the present investigation of agape and subjectivity in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* finds itself in the line of fire of current phenomenological debate. It must in one way or the other acknowledge this debate. Although this debate will be suspended during the actual analysis of *A Glastonbury Romance*, it must be acknowledged that what is at stake is the very foundation upon which subjectivity is grounded. Does subjectivity (life) find itself in constant flux, or is it in its own peculiar way removed from it? Is subjectivity (life) reducible to an economy of exchange, or is it unknown to such an exchange? Can subjectivity (life) be invisible and untouched by flux, remaining absolute, yet still removed from all metaphysics, all onto-theo-logy? The present investigation of subjectivity and agape in John Cowper Powys's *A Glastonbury Romance* hopes to show how Powys's novel shapes itself as an inquiry into these areas, and how it idiosyncratically delineates its own apprehension of life (subjectivity, agape).

### 1 Corinthians and 1 John

The text central to an understanding of St. Paul's advocacy of agape is 1 Corinthians, whereas St. John's views on agape is, primarily, put forth in 1 John. The most concise and decisive statement on agape in 1 Corinthians is the following famous passage.

**And now I will show you the most excellent way.**

**If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not agape, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but have not agape, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not agape, I gain nothing. Agape is patient, agape is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Agape does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Agape never fails. . . . And now these three remain: faith, hope and agape. But greatest of these is agape. (1 Cor. 13)**

St. John's statements on agape in 1 John is somewhat more scattered. Three of the most decisive ones are the following:

**Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world . . . comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)**

**Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world among us that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so**

loved us, we also ought to love one another. No-one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:7-12)

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgement, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:16-19)

These excerpts from 1 Corinthians and 1 John constitute the core of Powys's textual basis on which he founds his discussion.



# Tackling the Furka

by Peter Foss

In 1912 Llewelyn Powys spent two months in Arosa, in the Swiss Engadine – arriving on 10 January 1912 and leaving, in somewhat unexpected circumstances, on 29 February. The ‘unexpected circumstances’ were the events surrounding a serious haemorrhage he suffered as a result of walking across the mountain pass called the Maienfelder Furka between Arosa and Frauenkirch near Davos Platz. The relapse he suffered kept him secretly holed up in the Frauenkirch Inn for nearly a week, and then in the sanatorium at Clavadel for another fortnight before his return to England on 19 March. In Autumn 2000 I had the idea to go back to the area of my visit of the previous year (see ‘Sleuthing in Davos’, *Powys Society Newsletter* 39, April 2000) to tackle the identical walk myself – obviously in more propitious conditions, since Llewelyn had to contend with the exigencies of winter weather and snow drifts, whilst Autumn in Switzerland is usually free of snow.

Arosa is a world apart from Davos – one book called it, in 1912, a place ‘where the world ends’. It is, to begin with, higher – 1800 metres (6000 feet); it is more a spread-out village than a town, and survives more immediately on its winter sports – and it is far more dramatically placed among the mountains, with the rock-faced wall of the mountain-range rising immediately from its valley floor (the valley of the Schanfigg). I stared out day and night at this wall of rock from the hotel window – the three peaks called Furggahorn, Amselflue and Schiesshorn on its eastern side, above which the sun rose dramatically every morning at breakfast. The Amselflue peak between the other two is the mountain which, on its further side, seen from Clavadel, presented to the inmates of the sanatorium the profile of ‘Queen Victoria in bed’. This I could see clearly, and with the faint line of the mountain track passing below it.

I had set myself a number of objectives in visiting Arosa. I wanted to try to identify locations and people mentioned by Llewelyn in his diary, and to try to find out where exactly he stayed when he was there. One of the places is easily identifiable because it still exists – the Hof Maran, a now-popular sports-hotel lying on a mountain plateau a mile above Arosa. From the outside it had all the appearance of a large old chalet, and would, one thought, have been very much as Llewelyn had known it. But no. When I investigated further, the inn had been rebuilt in the early 1900s and in the 1920s, so that finding an image of the Hof Maran as it had been in 1912 was no easy task. Luckily, I did manage to get hold of one – a fine photograph of exactly that date, with figures of guests and hikers on the varandah. The braces of the men in the photo showed how down-market the Maran was at that time, when now it is a 4-star hotel, the interior of which is rather like the Tardis – one walked into spacious conference rooms with plush armchairs and a grand piano in the lounge.

When he first arrived in Arosa, Llewelyn booked into the ‘smart hotel’ he describes (but does not name) in ‘A Struggle for Life’ (1926); but because it was ~~too~~ smart (dinner

jackets were *de rigueur*), and because of the class of people he encountered, after two weeks he went looking for a country inn in the mountains – and that was the Hof Maran. Until now the 'smart hotel' has gone unidentified, but when I came across in a most unexpected place – a cupboard in the Heimatmuseum – books of yearly visitor lists from the period, I was not only able to pin down Llewelyn's fellow guests, but also to identify the hotel. It was indeed The Grand, built in 1903 in the valley below Arosa, and it was here that Llewelyn met the two young blades who accompanied him to the Hof Maran – W.J. Rowland and Godfrey Hebert – and also the German woman who was to become the love of Llewelyn's Arosa period, Margaret Berger.

The most interesting part of the resort is undoubtedly the oldest part – Inner Arosa, especially the old church perched like a white marmot on its spur of rock above the chalets. This was the Bergkirchli or 'mountain chapel', where Llewelyn went with Margaret Berger on 11 February to scabble around in the snow uncovering the grave of one of her friends who had no doubt died (unofficially) of TB (unofficially because consumption was unrecognised as being present in the resort in 1912; hotels tended to advertise 'no consumptives'). The Bergkirchli is unusual among Swiss churches because it survives intact, with a structure of 1492 and a largely 18th century interior. Inside, it has the most wonderful small baroque organ displaying panels of King David and St Cecilia, though in Llewelyn's time it was virtually disused.

Towards the end of his stay in Arosa, Llewelyn began, as was his wont, to get into entanglements, and I believe it was partly for this reason that he decided to climb the Furka on the day he did. He had been looking out daily on the snow-covered range that separated the valley from Davos. At first he didn't recognise where he was (for Arosa lies in a different valley system and is a 30-mile train journey from Davos). In a flash he realised that he was barely 10 miles, over the mountains, from Clavadel. Planning to walk over when the weather permitted, to see his old friends of the year before, he made his first attempt on 23 February, but the conditions drove him back. On Thursday 29 February he started again, partly I suspect to avoid a compromising assignation with a woman called Olga de Poire, a Slavic adventuress, who had been making incessant overtures towards him at Maran. She had certainly requested him to meet her in her room the night before he left, and had sent *billet doux* to him both before and after the 29th. Llewelyn was repulsed, caught as always between the desire for sexual gratification and caution as to whether this was really what his life should be. He chose to escape, tackling instead the Furka, as he describes in *Skin for Skin*, and in 'The Walk over Furka Pass', *Powys Journal* IV, 1994.

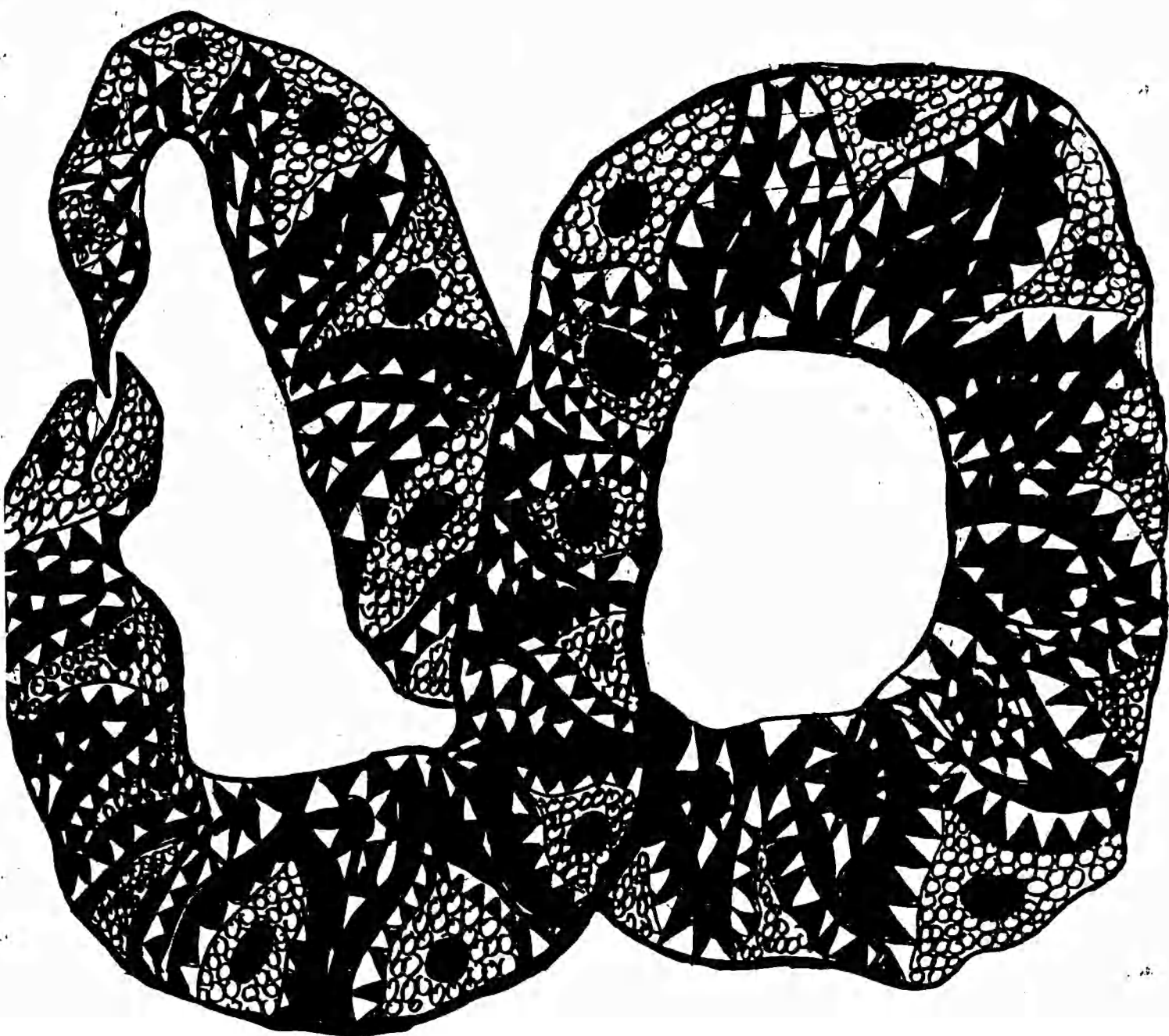
My own tackling of the Furka seemed an impossible challenge, even on a near-perfect day in the year 2000, without snow or fog or blinding sunshine. First one has to climb down through the woods below Arosa, a steep descent into the valley of the river Plessur, the 'valley of desolation', as Llewelyn called it in his diary. Then one crosses to the Welschtobel, the valley of the rocks where he and Margaret were often to be seen, she sketching, he skiing. Here the lonely sign 'to Frauenkirch', described by Llewelyn, is to be found. The ascent then is through dense forest at a vertical scale, climbing steps specially made or over the roots of trees – for perhaps – a mile to the tree-line, then upward more to a mountain pasture where the path around the dramatic Schiesshorn divides off. The path then follows a glacier of boulders up the col of the mountain to the pass, all the time along the crest of a kind of rock-strewn rampart like a Roman road, part of the ancient track across this part of the Alps.

When one arrives at the col under Amselflue, after a climb of two-and-a-half hours, the silence is eerie, with only the occasional avalanche of rocks breaking the stillness,

triggered by chamois or foxes invisible in the desolation. In Llewelyn's time, with no track visible and in winter, the scene must have been wild indeed. At the pass itself (2436 metres – 8000 feet) there is a small still pond and a Schutzhutte – about 50 yards to the left of the track – built of rough-hewn rocks and a mud floor, enough to shelter you from a blizzard. My day had started sunny and warm, and my chief fear was that by the time I reached the top in the full glare of the sun it would be too hot and my descent to the other side would be uncomfortable and sweaty, particularly because I was having to come back by bus and train to Arosa. However, on getting to the pass, the sun disappeared, cloud emerged and the temperature cooled – perfect conditions for walking in the high Alps.

Looking back towards Arosa the route seemed to be nothing but a rock-strewn, precipitous chasm. But the way forward was more congenial – descending into the valley of the Landwasser. Turning to the left, skirting the Furggahorn, one comes eventually to a point where Clavadel is visible. It is then that one sees the sanatorium – described vividly by Llewelyn in his diary: 'In one moment of time – abruptly with a jerk almost – I had interlinked two of my life scenes as I had so often dreamed of doing; Lisaly and Margaret had met...' The descent passed through Stafel Alp, a small community of chalets where Kirchner had made his home in the 1920s – wonderful old, dilapidated Swiss cottages impossibly positioned half-way up the mountain.

I arrived at Frauenkirch in time for the 3.10 bus to Davos and the train to Arosa for dinner at 7. The walk had taken five-and-a-half hours. Llewelyn in 1912 had loitered at the Frauenkirch Inn for tea before he made the further ascent – strenuous enough – up to Clavadel via the Sertig road. He had been welcomed by the doctors and patients who pressed him about his miraculous 'recovery' – 'all the time sensing the bubbling sensation in my chest'. He returned that evening to Frauenkirch and spent 'one of the worst nights of my life' – the night of his haemorrhage. Over the following few days, confined to Frauenkirch, it was only Lise Gujer who was allowed to know and to tend to him, such was the shame and embarrassment of his relapse. The Furka nearly proved Llewelyn's nemesis in 1912. For me it was a wonderful and memorable experience, and my own way of paying homage to Llewelyn in Arosa.



## Powys and the World Trade Center: A Tribute . .

(originally appeared in UK *Powys Newsletter*, fall 2001)

The "Powys and the Canon" conference held at the Marriott World Trade Center, New York, on May 11, 2001, concentrated on this question, "Will John Cowper Powys ever be part of the canon? Books are reissued, articles are written--but will he ever be read as the other 'modern masters' are read? The conference was small (about ten people) but extraordinarily stimulating, as one attendee noted, it was perhaps the smallest possible gathering of people that could still comprise a satisfactory 'conference.' The intimate atmosphere provided for easy conversation, so the talks mentioned below should not be imagined as staid lectures but as expositions, interchanges, conversations. After a sumptuous continental breakfast, we were started off by Kate Nash of the University of Virginia, whose talk, " 'Pure Romance' and Eroticism in *A Glastonbury Romance*", not only shed light on the generic and emotional dynamics of Powys' novel but, like so many of the papers, could serve as a springboard for reconsiderations of the novel form itself, and the canonicity of that form--questions which the anomalous nature of Powys's work solicits. That astonishing polymath, Peter Christensen of Cardinal Stritch University, then spoke on "Frustrated Narration in *The Brazen Head*"; here, one of the less canonical works in Powys's still-uncanonical canon was given new and enlightening scrutiny. Patrick Couch of University of Stockholm spoke on "Love's Labour Lost: John Cowper Powys's Phenomenology of Agape." Couch's dense and rich paper raised the question of whether pursuing Powys's canonical status was a kind of category error, as Powys wrote for himself, not for a general literary audience, and his work is more concerned with questions of 'first philosophy' in both the Platonic and Christian senses than with more social arenas. The poet and actress Carol Ann Brammer then gave a reading of passages from *Wolf Solent*; hearing Powys's language spoken by a skilled performer leavened the academic atmosphere considerably and also brought us into more direct contact with Powys's aural rhythms. This was followed by a playing of an audiotope of reminiscences of Albert Krick, Powys's neighbor in Columbia County in the late 1920's; the tape was made in 1980; Krick, who took ill a few years later, has by now died, but his widow is still alive, a nonagenarian. This information was provided to me by PSNA member Eddie Jenkins, who, though he could not come to the conference, was of invaluable assistance in helping me organize it. The tape was Italian buffet lunch with antipasto, meat, and pasta dishes, and dessert, served graciously by the hospitable Marriott staff (of whom, the sensitive reader discerns, more later). After lunch, keynote speaker Robert Caserio graciously yielded to Larry Millman, author of a fine article on Powys in a 2000 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, who spoke on "A Writer's View of John Cowper Powys." Millman, a Powys fan since the late 1960's, spoke wittily and engagingly about his meetings with Phyllis Playter and others who had known Powys, the effect Powys has had on his own vision as well as the often-neglected practicalities of the literary marketplace. Millman's talk was followed by the keynote speaker, Robert Caserio of Temple University, whose topic was "Sex and Politics in *A Glastonbury Romance*". Caserio, very valuably, showed how celebrations of Powys's

pluralism and inclusivity towards the marginal should not be conducted in an overly euphoric vein, as Powys's works survey social and psychological disjunctures whose full comprehension demands an acknowledgment of the sometimes insuperable differences between them. Richard Maxwell of Valparaiso University responded to Caserio's talk. Maxwell, who is working on an ambitious and intriguing book on the historical novel in which Powys's work plays a key role, raised again the question of Powys's relation to the genres of the historical novel and the novel itself. Our final talk, given by Brian Glavey, University of Virginia, also considered how Powys's works address the idea of "character" in the novel. "Novel Personalities: Epistemology and the Aesthetic of Personality in *A Glastonbury Romance*" also addressed the relationship of Powys to what might be termed "anti-subjective modernism" ('spatial form', anti-progressivism, and so on). Glavey, Nash, and Couch are all graduate students, which gives us great hope for the future of Powys studies. A concluding roundtable, including Constance Harsh of Colgate University and J. Lawrence Mitchell of Texas A& M University, ranged freely over Powys's reputation, how much of his work would ever or should ever be in print, and what he had to offer the contemporary reader.

The following morning, some of us met outside the Marriott and walked up the West Side of Manhattan to Greenwich Village, where we toured the five residences of John Cowper Powys in Greenwich Village. Patchin Place still looks largely as it did in Powys's day, though far more upper-class in tone; the ailanthus tree he spoke of in *Autobiography* is still there.

The fellowship and good feeling of the conference, of course, now necessitates a tragic coda. The Marriott World Trade Center--a splendid, sumptuous, hypermodern if not postmodern edifice, replete with several restaurants and numerous facilities, soaring over twenty stories--was reduced to rubble some short months later on September 11. All of the hotel's employees were evacuated safely--including those who had so graciously helped us with organizing the conference. Mirroring, though, the contours of the larger tragedy and the valor of the New York police and fire departments, two managers who had gone back in the hotel to make sure everybody else has gotten out are now among the mourned. Powys would have cried on hearing of the September 11 tragedy, all the more because it had shown the gleaming towers of modern architecture as vulnerable and frangible, not all-conquering or holding the power to render everything smaller than them to oblivion. No one who wrote the powerful passage at the end of *A Glastonbury Romance* could fail to grasp the depth of the destructive malice of the terrorists who committed this vile deed, nor the sheer unpredictability of human circumstance at which this disaster once again compels us to wonder:

**No man has seen Our Lady of the Turrets as She moves over the and, from twilight to twilight; but these "topless towers" of hers are the birth-cries of occult gestation raised up in defiance of Matter, in defiance of Fate, and in defiance of cruel knowledge and despairing wisdom.**

**Men may deride them, deny them, tear them down. They may drive their engines through the ruins of Glastonbury and their airplanes over the Stones of Stonehenge.**

**Still in the strength of the Unknown Dimension the secret of these places is carried forward to the unborn, their oracles to our children's children.**

Now the World Trade Center is itself more ruined than Glastonbury ever was, or will be.

**"What he longed to do was to plunge his own hands into this Saturnian gold, and to pour it out, over Mr. Urquhart, over Mattie, over Miss Gault, over Jason, over all the nameless little desolations--broken twigs, tortured branches, wounded reptiles, injured birds, slaughtered beasts--over a lonely stone on which no moss grew, in the heart of Lovelace Park, over a drowned worm, white and flaccid, dropped from the hook of Lobbie Torp into some Lunt pool, over the death-pillow of old Mr. Weevil, deprived now of his last conscious gluttony, over the lechery of the 'water-rat' himself, so pitiful in its tantalized frustration! All...all..all would reveal some unspeakable beauty, if only some Saturnian gold were sprinkled upon them!"**

**--From *Wolf Solent*, 'Ripeness is All'**

