II. FANFROLICO PRESS

1

We arrived early 1926. While Kirtley was making his arrangements, I got in touch with P.R. Stephensen, whom I had known in Brisbane and who was now a Rhodes scholar at Oxford. A keen socialist, he had joined the Communist Party but about this time had to resign, to escape being sent down for propaganda among Indian students; he remained however effectively a member all the while I knew him. In the summer we went to the Ile de Bréhat, off Paimpol Britanny, where I stayed on to complete a translation of the Satyricon, then rejoined Kirtley in London. Our agreement was that he would now pay me a small weekly sum for the work I was doing for the firm – though, to keep me going during the summer and autumn, I had asked Norman for another £50, which he sent. The Press was called the Fanfrolico (the Motteux-and-Urquhart version of Rabelais' Fanfreluche); Norman had used the name for a fantasy-world in which he set a number of contes drolatiques, a sort of Abbey of Thelema. It seemed a suitable and mystifying name for us to use as our Australian battle-standard. Kirtley published a second version of our Lysistrata, printed by the Chiswick Press but in the same format as our handprinted book. Then he began on a Petronius, with my translation and the hundred-odd drawings that Norman had made in 1909; but he decided that he couldn't bear England any longer and offered me the press. I at once accepted. I had no capital whatever and very little credit; for Kirtley, to ensure he wouldn't be pursued for my debts, told our trade-connections what the situation was. About this time P.R.S was leaving Oxford and didn't want an ordinary job; he offered me his services as manager. We agreed that each of us would take £5 a week.

I was now living with Elza de Locre, a strange, lost, and beautiful person, in the late twenties, who had recently left her husband, a son of Gordon Craig. She wove all sorts of romances round herself and her origin, but I later found she was the illegitimate daughter of a doctor and the daughter of a Coombe-Martin market gardener. She dressed in trailing pre-Raphaelite clothes to oppose the prevailing costume of short skirts and waists. At her insistence I grew a Tolstoyan beard. She had had a very hard life, often selling herself, and

not long before we met she had been doing in a rather professional way to keep herself and her young daughter.

At the time I first met her she was living with an Australian singer; and it was only very gradually, as severe strains developed between us, that I found out the facts of her life. For these first years I saw her only as strange, beautiful and lost, a sort of waif from my poetry, capable of a fine lyricism of emotion, but continually dragged down by dark spirits. Under my encouragement she began writing verses, which expressed just what I felt about her and which strengthened my conviction of her as a venus-incarnation of poetry (a Botticelli Venus) drifting on her shell of spring-meditation, with wild hair, across an unapprehended earth. The first piece she wrote was a quatrain:

> This is my loneliness, and here
> amid the frightened voices hid,
> I see the earth, as in a maze
> jeweled lamps hung from my mind.

I had no intention of leaving Janet, but I succumbed to Elza with her frail charm, her pitiful and yet proud appeal.

P.R.S. and I managed to carry on with the Press, continually getting books out just in time to ward off creditors. Among the works of mine that we did were translations from Greek and Latin: Lysistrata and Ekklesiazousai (Women in the Parliament) in similar format, the Satyricon, Propertius, Theocritos, Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, Catullus, Herondas, Ausonius; there were also Marino Faliero, Helen Comes of Age (three plays), Hereward, the Passionate Neatherd (lyrics); in prose Dionysos and William Blake: Creative Will and the Prophetic Image (two editions, the second with an extra chapter on the Prophetic Books). We also did a full collection of McCrae's poems and Slessor's Earth-Visitors; complete editions of Beddoes and Cyril Tourneur; a number of reprints that I edited, Sir John Harrington's Metamorphosis of Aiax (through which I came to know Peter Warlock), John Eliot's Parlement of Pratlers, the letters of the first Earl of Chesterfield, a series of Bedlamaite poems of the 17th century, Loving Mad Tom; also Norman's Hyperborea and Madam Life's Lovers (in which he set out to show how his gods interfered in the lives of their chosen ones, and to

deal with problem of creative advance and breakdown); Nietzsche's Antichrist, translated by P.R.S.; poems by Skeleton, William Morris, Byron, Herrick. In 1928-9 we published six issues of a periodical the London Aphrodite (the title a defiant joke aimed at the pontifical London Mercury), which we announced at the outset was to last only a year. We had felt the need of a larger audience that we could reach with limited editions. The London Aphrodite was ignored by the literary world, but sold out; there was such a demand that at the end we reprinted it and sold bound volumes. (The only book of the press not done in a limited number, my Blake, promptly sold out two editions.) Among the contributors were Norman Douglas, Huxley, Robert Nichols, T.F. and Llewelyn Powys, Karel Capek, W.J. Turner, Edgell Rickword, Rhys Davies. (I also edited Blake's Poetical Sketches for my old friend Eric Partridge, who had started his Scholartis Press; he also published a book of Elza's poem with drawings by myself.)

My relations with P.R.S. had begun to wear thin, and I handed over to him the book of D.H. Lawrence's paintings which had been offered to us, so that he could start his own press, the Mandrake. But now the Wall-Street crisis was catching up with us all and the basis for the many fine presses of the 1920's broke down. The Fanfrolico was next to the Nonesuch in the scale of its productions and the sales it made; the others were far behind. In general it may be claimed that the fine presses had done much to raise permanently the standards of English book-production.

With the departure of P.R.S. I soon decided to hand the sales over to a wholesaler and to return to hand-printing. I installed a press in the basement of a West Hampstead house and did much of the setting and machining, aided by a pressman whom I employed. Throughout the years I had done a large number of translations as well as editing and research; all the proof-reading as well as minor jobs in the office such as tying up parcels at a publication-date. After the *Satyricon* all the books were designed by me; sometimes I drew out each page. We were the first to use Polyphilus or Koch Kursiv (in a book), and, in handsetting, Walbaum, in England. Among the books I set and helped to print were Herondas, Morris's Guenevere, a second book of Elza's poems, Festival Preludes by Gordon Bottomley, Chesterfield's Letters,

and Morgan in Jamaica. This last book was by my brother Philip, who had now come over from Australia, with a poem by myself and reproductions of pirate-paintings by Ray: the only book in which we three collaborated. I was setting a selection of Davenant's poems I had made, when the Press ended; we also had set part of a version of Thus Spake Zarathustra by Brian Penton. I had commissioned a new version of Balzac's Contes Drolatiques from Phil, and Douglas Garman was working on Machiavelli's plays. I had in mind as future publications many out-of-the-way 17th century works as well as editions of the works of Wyatt, Skelton, Donne, Rochester, Plato; and I had some ideas about new ways of doing Blake. Alan Odle, Lionel Ellis, and Bawden had made illustrations for me. We were thus broadening out.

I had become friendly with Warlock, Norman Douglas, Liam O' Flaherty, Edgell Rickword, Robert Graves, and to a lesser extent with Huxley; and I had much contact with D.H.L. near his end. In October 1928 I had gone to spend a fortnight with Norman Douglas in Florence, where I missed meeting D.H.L., who had moved to South France, but saw several of his paintings left with Orioli. I urged the holding of an exhibition, and I think that my suggestions had much to do with Lawrence's decision, though he had already, I found later, discussed the matter with the Warrens. In any event he did much of the arrangements through me, asked me to check the way the pictures were hung and so on, to read the proofs of his essay and make sure he was correct about Henry VIII and syphilis. He also offered me the publication rights; but I did not take these up. I handed them over to P.R.S., who had called on him in France, partly to give him a good financial start, and partly because I did not much want Lawrence connected with the Press. I felt sure for one thing that if the Fanfrolico combined with D.H.L. we would be prosecuted. He was in the throes of a fierce conflict with the wretched Home Secretary, Joynson-Hicks, and we had had many threatening letters and warnings for having dared to publish (in those respectable days) such works as Lysistrata and the Satyricon. Norman's drawings were always liable to bring police-action upon us. (Partridge had an edition of a novel seized merely because the work bugger was printed.) We had ourselves plunged into the war against Joynson-Hicks with a verse-satire (mainly by

P.R.S., in part by myself) on a miserable critic of the times, James Douglas, who wielded much power and had declared he'd rather a daughter of his took prussic acid than read the mildly-Lesbian novel Well of Loneliness. (The satire was entitled Sink of Solitude, the imprint an improvised Hermes Press.) Also in the London Aphrodite P.R.S. had made a hefty attack on Squire's moralistic venoms, especially with reference to notices he had given Wycherley and Lascelles Abercrombie's Phoenix. However it was not just fear of prosecution that deterred me from doing D.H.L.'s paintings; I still felt a considerable amount of distaste for his form of sex mysticism, though I recognized the great power of much of his writing. For Norman, Aristophanes, or Petronius I should have been ready to go to the stake.

However, I was strongly affected by one of D.H.L.'s letters, as also by one from Freud, whom I had asked to write an introduction to our Zarathustra. D.H.L. wrote something like: "Give up writing all this muck about love. Leave it to the Sashy Sitwells. You're right in what you hate. Stick to that and you'll get somewhere. Stop the love slush. Stick to your hate. That's what's real and good and creative in you." (I soon after lost the letter.) Freud, who had read the copy of Dionysos I sent him, mildly rebuked me by suggesting that I should get in touch with Lou Salome and discuss directly her relations with Nietzsche. I had forgotten that she became a disciple of his; her episode with Nietzsche had seemed far back in history. I reread what I had written about her, and I was struck by its cocksure sweeping tone. I felt a revulsion from the way that Norman and I had scattered judgments right and left, often on extremely imperfect considerations, concerned only with making persons and things fit with effective symbolism into our preconceived structures.

2

But D.H.L.'s diatribe and Freud's rebuke would not have had the effect of unsettling me if I had not already moved far from our Sydney positions. In carrying the Fanfrolico aesthetic into distant and enemy territory, I had steadily begun to change my perspectives, even if still clung to our central aesthetic idea. Almost at once London began to make me feel the disturbing pressure of class-differentiations as I had never felt them in Australia. There were even still many beggars hanging about or selling matches; and the effect of grime and decay in the

streets, the buildings themselves, could not but depress and antagonise an Australian. I arrived shortly before the General Strike of 1926; and though I understood practically nothing of what lay behind it, I felt a vast uprush of sympathy as I saw it coming along. The night before it began I went roaming restlessly about in the pubs of Fleet Street, listening to the talkers. Finally, worked on by the beer and the whole atmosphere of excitement, I butted into a group of printers with a speech appealing to them to stand fast and defy the State. My remarks must have been fervid and anarchistic; for one of the group shouted that I was an agent provocateur, and I had to make a hasty getaway on a convenient bus. I wrote an essay on the possibilities of radical change in such a situation, which revealed the hollowness of Wellsian Utopias by bringing about a concrete confrontation of the inhuman and the human elements in our society. However naively I stated it, I think I was putting my finger on the heart of the matter. I sent it to the Manchester Guardian (which had published an essay of mine, Travel Narrows the Mind) and the Statesman, and of course had it rejected.

Then when P.R.S joined me, I had his communist presence in the firm. Not that he talked much politics to me; for he considered that poets were spoilt by becoming too political. Yet he introduced me to Mayakovsky as well as Essenin and Blok. He knew Russian fairly well, and did much to produce the first English version of Lenin's Imperialism; I knew a little Russian, and with his aid I tried to do several poems by Mayakovsky, without satisfying myself. However I felt I did better with Essenin and Blok, and I printed versions of them both in the London Aphrodite. The mood of rebellion kept on coming back to me at a certain stage of beer. One afternoon, with Warlock, I harangued a group of locals on a Kentish green, pretending that they were peasants assembling to hear John Ball. Another day, with P.R.S. at Oxford, I gave another speech to some young workers on the need to overthrow their ghastly upper-class of gentlemen, while at the same time respecting true culture. A thesis that clearly left the chap I singled out in particular for my message in a state of extreme confusion. Often, when I had enough beer aboard of me, I informed P.R.S. that next day I was going to join his party; but he always laughed at me and made no effort to encourage me in the morning. Another communist I came to know and like was Charles Ashleigh, who delighted me with

his I.W.W songs; and for a time I meditated broadsheets for them, together with Cockney ballads sung by a girl who had been working in Arcos. Finally I became very friendly with a young and talented poet, Philip Owens, who was at that time a communist. In the London Aphrodite P.R.S. wrote what was meant to be a tribute, though in Marxist terms, to Bakunin:

> … Stalin seeks to stabilise the new regime. To such a climax of realism even the most heroically-carried-through revolution must come. Here is no work for heroes, flaming at the head of phalanges. Exit the Bakunin-principle, exit Trotsky. Enter Stalin, upstage, sits at desk quietly, works… It is the true greatness of the greatest revolutionary of them all, Lenin, that he could adapt himself, with overwhelming commonsense, to changes on a changing revolutionary situation…
>
> [But] Communism, on its own fundamental hypothesis, cannot stand still, but must develop. Develop to what? To practical Anarchism, no less; and it is then that Bakunin will have the last laugh.

In the same essay he may be said to have founded Marxist literary criticism in England by applying Lenin's Left-Wing Communism to D.H.L., noting his characteristic petty-bourgeois confusions and vacillations, his playing at revolution.

In 1929, in my essay in the last number of the London Aphrodite, I declared:

> Nationalism exists now only as reactionary principle. With the arrival of the proletarian revolution the human horizon has been so far extended that we are forced back insistently in individuality as the sole universal principle (i.e. in the sphere of experience of course, not of cheating). The political variation between Henry For and Nikolai Lenin is not the most important one – the chasm in the intellect between the two does not need stressing; no one is likely to mistake Ford for even a human being. The true conflict, which however must express itself in the struggle for the control of the instrument of production and distribution, narrows itself down to the question: Which party will centralise its organisation on the needs of the individual, his right to experience…
>
> The bolsheviki are in my opinion a genuine expression of the roman constructiveness. In any case the Russian revolution displays a huge and happy uprush of the human spirit; and this brimming worldtide of new energy is to be seen even in the reactionary military dictatorships among the latins and the commercial dictatorship of the United States. England, bogged in the product of its own cunning and so now its own dupe, remains outside this hurry of energy, whether of the constructive Russian kind or the sporadic American. It is among this international expansion that the poet must find his vindication of Force.

P.R.S. might well have extended his analysis of petty-bourgeois confusions to this essay. I might still defend the first paragraph as meaning that socialism alone can release true

individuality in a world of acute alienations. But in the second paragraph we see a blurred linking of all and any State-forms which jettison the illusions of Liberal Capitalism. Fascism made much of its appeal to intellectuals by denouncing the lies and hypocrisies of that stage of capitalism, but the imposition of naked force by monopoly-forces was the opposite of the genuine overthrow of the class-state.

Still, with all its confusions, my formulation can be taken as the first one made in the English intellectual field since William-Morris days of the decisive importance of total acceptance of the working-class revolution by the writer and artist. Such a formulation has nothing in common with the eclectic and superior attitudes of men like Shaw and Wells; it foreshadowed the movements of the 1930s and already went further that most of the antifascist intellectuals of those later days.

However I was still far from understanding my own words and all that they implied. Let us glance back over my Fanfrolico writings.

3

In general I had carried on our notion of the primacy of the creative image. Despite the changes that began in me with my arrival in England I printed Dionysos without altering its repudiations of any social partisanships. But the little book I wrote on Blake in 1926 (published 1927) concentrated almost entirely on the question of the imagination. The only other point in it that could be linked with Dionysos was a mild chiding of Blake for an obsessive use of Jesus as a symbol. But this objection was moral rather than social in its colouration; both P.R.S. and I felt one of the finest things about the Soviet Union was the anti-religious tone of its culture; hence our agreement in publishing the Antichrist with some of Norman's antichristian drawings such as the Crucified Venus. In his Bakunin essay P.R.S wrote:

> … the British Communist Party for years put the soft pedal on anti-god propaganda, as "tactics" to avoid estranging the Clydeside Roman Catholic. And this is the reduction ad absurdum of tactics because the war against religion can never be relaxed by a revolutionary party; not even after the revolution and certainly not before. The exposure of religion is almost the essence of the ideological attack upon capitalism; just as its propagation, by the

> journalism of deans, community hymn-wailing at football matches, wireless broadcasting of church services, and newspaper stunting of piffling "prayer book" controversies, is essential to the buttressing of capitalism.

One morning he rushed into the office to announce joyfully that Lunacharsky had banned the production of an opera with strong religious colourations; we thought it excellent that Christianity, after having ruthlessly banned, suppressed, and crushed so many expressions for a millennium and a half, should itself get some suppressions. This was a very sectarian viewpoint, but it brings out how, by concentrating the polemical side of Dionysos against religion, I had built a bridge over to certain aspects of P.R.S.'s communism. But I still had read nothing of Marx and had no idea of his theories beyond the fact that he condemned capitalism. I did however now read a copy of the 18th Brumaire which P.R.S. had, and gained a respect for his capacity to write contemporary history. In due time this reading was to have a further effect.

Blake, then, dealt almost wholly with the doctrine of the Imagination, which could be brought very close to what had been set out in Dionysos. I opened with an account of the transformative powers of the poetic mind, using the poem in a letter to Butts which describes the thistle turning into an Old Man:

> Every image is a star, and obeys a law of gravitation by which it welds together the atomic material of its substance, emotional and aesthetic, around its central point of radiating fire, which is at once both an emotional and an aesthetic accretion and something transcending either: a unity which comes from the psyche of the individual creator, the sole home of unity. Every poem refills the furnaces of the sun. Operating from a higher condition of space where such chemical transmutations of elements are possible, if one were handed a bundle of beading energies such as the Homeric Epics, one could construct an earth in five minutes, whatever five minutes are in eternity – a problem on which geologists do not seem to be able to agree.
>
> But though a work of art can ultimately be explained only in terms of itself, yet we may explore much of the activity that produced it.

More stress is laid on direct experience than in Dionysos.

> He annihilates equally the attitudes of Neo-Platonism, Christianity, or Materialism, by merely saying: All the body is soul, though not all the soul is body.

> The image is Resurrection. Out of the body, this ruined and shabby bit of spirit, we must build up the jewelled gardens of eternity. The body, therefore, instead of being depreciated, has a new and tremendous value set upon it. It is no longer a kind of anchor of dirt to which the bobbing soul is tethered. It is the soul itself as projected into three dimensional space; and freedom can only be found by forging into the consciousness images that transcend, while including, all the properties of that condition of space. For any higher development must include this life, as two dimensional space is included in three dimensional; it cannot airily proceed on some new and abstract structure of life.

But experience itself involved a conflict between two opposites, and must proceed, not by destroying one of them but by resolving the conflict in a higher unity.

> Pity is the hurt of love; and therefore if love is to be whole it must rise above pity. Here is another trap of agony, of division, for the spirit. It must be continually rifted by pity, yet it must never succumb to it. It must banish pity by summoning its sense of joy in life to vanquish and include the sorrowing image, and so to transfigure it from a source of dissolution into a dynamic affirmation. On the one side lies insensitivity, which certainly saves one from a sense of things pitiful, but at the same time dries up the springs of delight. On the other side is the flabby submission to life's misery, or any surrender that irrevocably tinges the soul with darkness or smothers the laughters of desire.

The concern with pity in Dionysos and Blake had behind it my compunctions about my mother, whom I had in effect deserted in the return to the father and who been falling into a state of despair after her divorce – partly because she felt that she had lost any real relationship with her sons, especially with me, the eldest. Now to her figure lurking unconsoled in the back of my mind there was added that of the fallen angel in Elza: her poem Childhood:

> Between the branches
> I look down on a garden
> so full of human faces
> and angels flamed with wings
> lying in waiting here,
>
> It was so very long ago
> that Earth first claimed me for his bride
> and trampled out each blossom
> and dashed my soul against the winds
> to float with thin hands
> through the seething trees.
> And always I would lose my way
> and stumble over rotting minds,
> tree-roots in the darkness, thorns everywhere,

> and mangroves thrusting their fingers
> into my wounds; and then
> a small fire like a moonstone
> grew up in the distance
> into opening wings of light
> where my heart throbbed, and I said:
> If that light's throb stops, I am dead.
>
> I leaped the garden wall
> and there were four great angels
> with candles in their hands.

Her diction had been somewhat affected by mine, but the character of the poems was all her own and it deeply moved me.

> Blake uses two contrasted symbols to express these two conditions that beset the soul. He calls them Spectre and Emanation. The first is all that tends to harden, to parch, to lose vital contact with life and set up an intellectual or moral abstraction in place of the living image. The other is all that tends to loosen, to weaken the bonds of individuality, to dissolve it in the common glucose mass of life. Cruelty and Pity are examples of these severed and self-destructive halves of the soul; and both are excluded, or rather included harmoniously, by the proud joy of the self-contained spirit which pities out of its power and exults in uncontaminated power for all its pity. That is at once both cruel and pitying, and neither. The two angles of emotion are equally lost and held in the synthesis of self-responsible individuality, which looks both outwards and inwards, and has a sustaining knowledge of joy that gives it equipoise though the world's chaos of pain is beating on its doors from one side, and personal despair pacing up and down the other.
>
> Blake has moments when he seems to think the greatest peril is to be found in the spectre, moments when the guileful sobs of the emanation seems the call of death's siren. He changes as the emotional revolt within himself, threatening to upset the harmonic state of his soul, threatens to tear up the roots of life itself.

The issue of existential choice, of realizing at every moment of consciousness the total pressure of the universe and of objectifying it in an action, an image, is more stressed than ever.

> Urizen did not cloud and petrify on the deep at any given time; he did so when Blake's body was formed in his mother's womb, when mine was. Los made no mythically past effort to retrieve that universe of congealing horror; he made that effort in every poem that has been written, in every attempt to arrive at self-knowledge, in every effort that has in any way built into the consciousness of man. But though from one side he represents the accumulative effort of all self-expression, as Urizen represents the while general condition of cleft eternity, they have reality only when they appear in the individual spirit. Blake desires ever to give cosmic dimensions to the tiniest cry of emotion, to see in every bubble of

> delight the newly hewn sun expanding in the void, and to found heaven and hell between supper and bedtime. Nothing is too vast or too small to express the soul's careless clarities.
>
> Every man's life is the 6,000 years which it takes to create, complete and destroy an earth… every spire of ecstasy in time is that period, when the tail and mouth of the serpent eternity meet. … The Trumpets of the Last Judgment shatter earth to fragments every time an individual expression is defined; for every new image begins life anew. Mount Sinai is located in my soul, and that disastrous voice peals forth every time I submit to an abstract condition, and I am the Moses who receives the swaddling evil of the Law. I hang nailed on the cross of my mutilated self. I am crucified afresh every day. Every day the angels rebel in heaven and fall with giddy terror into the depths of my mind.
>
> It is small wonder that few men can live at such an intense pressure of feeling. Life and Death, Life and Death, nothing but Life and Death**;** And Life is not something external, the political or social system; but a city of flame, which, though the first quiver of the imminent cataclysm already shakes the ground, has a stability disdaining stones and brick as the merest dust of the wind. It is feverishly aspiring, sullenly dying. And there is no peace: life is eternally in danger. If I fail, the sun goes blind in the socketing sky. Who dare live with this hourly consciousness of life, of destiny with its fingers twined in the hair? Who hears forever in the air Nietzsche's shot: "Eternity is at stake"?

The central nature of contradiction is stressed, and is seen to come to a head in the question of Time. Time for us is both mechanistic clockwork time, which lacking all quality, can go backwards as easily as forwards, and a concrete oneway-movement. Similarly Space can be analysed into its infinitely small components (as the physicists of the particles have been doing) or it can be grasped as a significant aspect or element of a oneway evolutionary or developmental process. We live and move in timespace; but it is as time that we realise the universe as moving, changing, breaking up, concentrating on new levels of organisation. I had been seeking to define this nature of time-space in my imagery, as we have seen, through lyric dissolutions and reintegration, through the tragic dilemma of Marino, who, giving himself up wholly to hate, finds that time is his one real enemy. In Blake I still stated these contradictions in an idealist form:

> There is a ridiculous dilemma, a baffling and terrible banality, at the core of life. To it we shall respond with a tormented rebellion, if we are cowards; with a gay contempt, if we are not. It is the paradox of Time. If we are on earth, to achieve eternity we can do so only by a passionate and complete experience of earth; therefore, we submit to a very painful adventure in order to prove that there was no need for it. If life is immortal, we had identity before birth and allow

> ourselves to be involved in a lengthy and ponderous proof that we know the things we know. As I can never become another than myself, every poem I can write is shut already in my head, and yet I will go through endless difficulties to pretend to myself I am creating something when I am merely extracting it by a process of dentistry. If we seek to regain the blissful unity of the soul, its perfect harmony, we can only do so by riveting its identity with self-knowledge, and so making it for ever a thing apart, precipitating conflict by its very existence… And so on.
>
> There is this paradox at the heart of all thought. But though we cannot transcend its antinomies in our consciousness, we do so in every act of creation. For if the nihilism of the intellect were real for the whole of our spirit, it would act as sterilising factor and all the spontaneity of life die out in us. But by travailing in the ruthless ecstasy of creation we give a concrete denial of the abstract dilemma. The dichotomy of the intellect Blake calls Doubt: <u>If the Sun and Moon should doubt, They'd immediately go out</u>. Consequently, as we only perceive the antimony with our consciousness and we make the act of creation with our whole being, we can only conclude that our consciousness is a very imperfect instrument and that if we were able to view the question from some higher concentration of our forces, we would find that its contradiction were reconciled.

The way in which I was already drawing away from Norman is to be seen in my resuming the attempt I had begun before I became his disciple, of trying to understand, not merely denounce, the modernist developments in art and poetry. I wrote:

> It is curious that such movements as those of French painting during the last century, which consist largely of specialisations in certain aspects of the creative function rather than in an effort to achieve a synthesis of all its energies, should follow so shortly after Blake's demonstration of the mind's division. Cézanne, for instance, takes that part of the mind which has a constructive sense of volume, of colour-planes, and by hanging like a limpet (to the exclusion of almost every other part of the creative vision) produces an art highly specialised and effective in its area. Van Gogh does the same by unbarring certain pulsing undulations of rhythm; the Futurists and Cubists, in different ways, focused their attention on certain architectonic elements: patterns of abstract movement and patterns of chipped-up tone; and so on.

A very imperfect analysis, but at least the start of an attempt to look at the works for what was really there, not to smudge them out with excessive generalisation. The main idea, that of a steady movement from a <u>total realisation</u> (in fact Cézanne's aim) to abstracted aspects of fragmentations of that realisation, was, I still think, fundamentally correct.

In the last chapter, "The Colour-Image and the Future," I tried to analyse what seemed to me the full, aesthetic working-out of Blake's positions: in effect what I had been seeking to do in poetry.

> Take this line by Sir Thomas Wyatt: Like bended moon that leans her lusty side. That has the authentic concentration of fused sense, an image where form serves rather to hold the colour than colour to vivify the form. In Blake's idiom, pure form is a condition of the spectre, pure colour of the emanation; only when the two meet in an image of concrete emotion is the dualism transcended. If Wyatt had written: The moon hung over me like a bending, we should not get the colour-image. It is the unexpected conjunction of bended and moon which gives the divided sensation, half the pale rim of the moon, half the suave line of a naked girl. We are not quite sure which is uppermost in our mind: the stony light of the moon softening into a girl's side or the flesh's curve trembling back to the moon's hardness. This sudden mingling of two images produces a molten state of the senses as opposed to the less dynamic co-ordination in the form-image.
>
> It is but a short step from melting two visual images together to fusing impressions of different senses, and so the potentialities of the colour image become infinitely enticing. Blake prepared the hypothesis of this form of mental activity, though he did not venture there much himself. His method was not to create the matrix of the image in which the senses poured their essences. All the matrices in his mind were cracked, and the senses that should have mingled and run together into clear shapes of beauty, dripped out, falling away in coils of gesticulating smoke. But he shows us the effort of the self to achieve the new synthesis; and it is only in the cloudy and suffused outline of his forms as they seek to join with each other that we see much actual expression of aesthetic correspondences. For the definition of the spiritual state however see a poem such as The Mental Traveller.
>
> It is perhaps worth mentioning here that the womb of all these broken efforts is the first two books of Paradise Lost, the one place where an exposure of the true basis of Milton's mind intrudes. The cavern of racked darkness is Milton.

I was trying to show Blake as composing the hypothesis from which symboliste poetry developed. Keats made a big step with line like: "Delicious symphonies, like airy flowers, Budded and swell'd, and, full-blown, shed full showers of light, soft unseen leaves of sounds divine." Beddoes strongly built on such bases with line like "… live in the gyre of its kiss-coloured leaves." Thus the mind conquers the vastness of space, partly by filling it with a dynamic image, partly by merging the close with the far, flower with star. As a sort of parody I fabricated the line: the feathery bricks blossoming on the furred sea. To make this aesthetically effective in our response:

> We should have to merge the pictures of the feather-ends of foam with that of the broken squares and rounds of the sea paved flatly with melting foam, note the similarity of a white rose glittering and the tossing heads of tasselled foam, and register a sensation of the soft mush of foam where it piles up in a racing edge of ermine; these images of plume and glassy cube and curling petal and richly churning fur must be disentangled and then related back to the tumbling water; further the relation of the various image to the whole roll and turn of a wave must be seen; and the sense of these relations must be so strong that all sense of discord must be overcome. The fact that a brick is actually unlike a feather must be slurred over by a mind that moves so rapidly in the time sequence of the image (the slither of racing foam followed by the torn and stretching lace-pattern) that the contradiction of giving a stone plumage is overlooked: nothing is felt except the image of foam alternating from feather to brick visually and yet remaining foam all the time. Moreover all this must take place so quickly that the pictorial mixture must not unduly distract but submerge itself almost at once in the emotional development.
>
> Perhaps the time will come when our mental equipment is adequate to such a strain; but it has not come yet. We shall be obliged to lay the foundations a little more patiently awhile, before we can soar to these twinkling turrets of sensory complexity. Anyhow, as usual, one of Blake's spectres is waiting for us. Ungoverned colour-effects, merely as such, are as abstract as one of Wordworth's Ecclesiastical Sonnets. We must bind our stone together with the mortar of humanity, of the travailing blood, or we shall build no Parthenon. We shall instead build some ornately baroque dolls' houses out of the overstressed nerves, and no more. To assert that all one wants are spangled dolls' houses is to pretend to make a virtue out of one's failure.

I set out my ideas in the prefaces of some of the books, and in articles in a few periodicals; but the fullest statement of their later phase appeared in the London Aphrodite. In the manifesto of the first number I declared,

> It is certain that J.C. Squire and T.S. Eliot, Wyndham Lewis and Dean Inge, Humbert Wolfe and Robert Graves, E.E. Cummings and Alfred Noyes, Maritain and James Douglas, Roger Fry and William Orpen, would, if compelled by physical force to read our magazine, heartily (or at least irritatedly) dislike it. If we take any of these names in vain, we shall apologise in due course to the protesting owner and cheerfully pay the libel costs. However, while awaiting such regeneration, we declare war against all academicians. Whether modernistically disguised or smugly official – against all prophets from the gutters of resentment whether the noise proceeds from the mere press or exasperated theories of intellectualising impotence – against all sentimentalists who degrade the emotional theme by trivially pretty modes – against all debauchees of the distracted nerves of ascetics of the intellect who abstract the fluid geometries from their true action.

(It will be seen that Graves and I had now differed: something to do with Laura Riding.) In my essay on "The Modern Consciousness," I strove to develop the more serious attitude to contemporary culture and that I had begun in Blake. There were still too many oversimplified summaries of complex aspects of culture, the luck (or unlucky) hit-or-miss, but with more attention to facts. "Philosophy marched from abstraction to abstraction, the only conclusion of which could be Hume's pertinent use of logic to sever all the knots of divine law, with the Scotch Common-sense Philosophers tying them up again with penny bits of strings. Kant, a great destroyer with a disguise of infinitely tortuous terminology, destroyed metaphysics by carrying to a logical precision far ahead of any predecessor the proofs for the existence of God and then calmly annihilating them. Frightened at this vast god-slaughter, he resuscitated the deity with a salve of moral proof; but even then found himself floundering back into danger in The Critique of Judgment (which consequently nobody reads) and gave up the task. However his work remained, its stimulus, behind the deadening veils of style, vitally destructive. Hegel carried on his work, supplanting for the first time since the Hellenes the abstract universal with the human complex: his dialectic bored down into the human process as significance. His limitations do not matter here. Enough that he saw human activity as reality. On to this scene arrived Nietzsche."

Nietzsche was seen as synthesising all philosophy from Plato to Hegel. Then we jumped into the contemporary situation with Wyndham Lewis. He "is very vague as to primary causes or definitions, but any thinker in whom he can discover the stigmata of Time-process is proclaimed part of a Camorra to undermine stability and cast it into the sea of hungry sensation. Seeing a decade of fluctuous fools, he decides wisdom must lie in a stony mechanism of intellect. Nietzsche is glimpsed only as a frenzied megaphone in the distance, a Hunnish outlaw announcing Force. Bergson seems the Moses whose wand tapped the stone and set the cascades of Time frothing around modernity's flippant ankles…" After discussing the varied thinkers whom Lewis lumped together, I turned to Bergson, who "attempted to create a vision of the creative surge of life, and, missing the subtle antithetical values behind the most dithyrambic of Nietzsche's utterances, he fell himself into the surge. Seeking to add

Spirit to Darwinism, he largely did nothing but give a pseudo-poetical version of Evolution excitedly disappearing down its own vortices of rhythm. Since the antithesis of energy is only abstractly perceived, the rhythm of Time (a fine conception if finely handled) becomes as abstract a process as any mathematical computation. For there is an irrational abstraction as well as rational one. Similarly his effort to define free will (though again made in the right direction) ends in only a flushed inversion of Determinism. Beginning with the effort to show the act of Spirit, he ends by showing act as a hectic mechanization of Spirit."

Then I turned to the two whom I took as positive thinkers: Freud and Einstein. "Nietzsche proclaimed that the individual is, in essence, all desire; and Freud has demonstrated this negatively, by showing what happens if he fails the immanent desire of self. Finally, in Beyond the Pleasure-Principle, Freud reaffirms the terrifying third essay of the Genealogy of Morals, showing that all man's life is a curve towards death: two forces alone defying the curve – one, blind: sex; the other: consciousness." My interpretation of Einstein was yet wilder. I saw him as ending the old certainties of measurement; the fixed point must be sought in new dimensions, in new wholes of comprehension. "For the judgment of the self to have validity it must at one and the same time arrest the flux by a unified conception and yet keep contact with all its relations."

Then came poetry. Milton was seen as the creator of false rhythm and diction, which for long arrested poetic development. "Michelangelo at the heart of the Renaissance had tried to distort its rhythm with a Gothic dispersal of energy in torment. Milton did the same now to English poetry." To overcome this setback the poet had to regain the Renascence (Shakespearean) consciousness with a further synthesis, which "was Music". Here comes a discussion of the Colour-Image. A similar situation on painting had its conflicts resolved by Turner. "He used light as an explosive, mixing it with his landscapes to blast them to pieces, hoping to catch their significance at the moment just as the explosion irradiates the forms." Thus, he bequeathed difficult problems, which various painters from Delacroix to Cézanne, Van Gogh, the Futurists and Cubists, have sought to overcome. There were many achievements but an over-all breakdown of the integrative faculty.

> The masterly union of tone and rhythm in, say, Ruben's Munich Bacchanal is not force to them because, having read about force in scientific books, they can only conceive it as graphs or diagrams, angles hitting one another. They do not see that the Bacchanal conquers time by catching energy up into a completed rhythm, so that our response to the work does not show us a group of static figures, but sends Silenus staggering into our own experience – the completion of Rubens' experience in rhythm makes us also feel our whole life (now become drunkenness) moving into the experience of the picture and returning revitalised back into our own self-delighting.
>
> No, to Marinetti, a picture consisting of one ear, an eyebrow, a matchbox, the façade the man looked at five minutes ago, and a beer bottle label, joined together with spirals, would be a far truer synthesis of Dionysos.
>
> Rubens, then, integrated in Beauty the spiritual significance of energy: the modern seeks to disintegrate its physical constituents. Having now a static mode of volume and a static mode of flux and force, we advance to Cubism, which applies the method of the latter (cutting-up of forms) to the flat definition of the first. This done, all that is left is Blague.

Rodin however was praised, though, "trying to synthesise Michelangelo and Praxiteles, he only succeeded in bringing and irritation into the heart of his love." Then came Music. Beethoven's symphonies "bear one across the whole experience of an earth, at every point relating the individual experience to the generic symbol." In the sonatas and quartets are expressed "the personal reactions from the necessity defined by those symbols of desire and joy – the suffering, the weariness, the reveries, the bitterness, the self-contempt and self-renewal … anger always resolved on the note of unconquerable delight, which is robbed of any smug shallowness by the omnipresent anguish of skepticism, a self mockery never permitted to become sterilising." (In Sydney I had written a poem of some 500 lines on the sharp minor Quarter, Opus 131, in which I attempted to bring what I thus considered the meaning, plus changes in rhythm, imagery and emotion to define the musical changes.)

> The form is so compact that no critical pin can penetrate the decision of its tonal values; but its chief characteristic is the resilient energy of the *melos* which, though constructed of very simple units, gives the effect of infinite length and diversity, stepping from horizon to horizon, utterly free of space. Also the physical genesis and recoil of the image is always perfectly understood: human gesture and intonation are the basis of this *melos*, the Dionysian dance its mode.
>
> Wagner is diametrically opposite in form. He builds always by mass; drowning the earth with infinitely subtle and rich colour, he takes up the beautiful soaked masses and builds titanically out of them, draping them from star to star, but always returning to the

> clear contours of the hero or the heroine of kisses about whose nakedness he wraps this rich cloak. And this delicate huge modulation always proceeds from the human necessities of the theme: gesture and intonation rule here also.
>
> Wagner adds an immense quantity of realistic properties, such being of little value to Beethoven's maenad purposes, but essential to the elucidation of Wagner's colour-masses, to save them from becoming abstract polyphony.

Then I tried to show that the same breakdown as in painting had occurred: the exploitation of some particular aspects at the expense of a total realisation. I overvalued Scriabin as a parody of Wagner with "a deep sadistic compulsion" in his music; and saw Schönberg with his twelve-tone scale as the decisive turn into disintegration. (With Beutler in Sydney I had worked out the concept of melodic form as based on the rise and fall of the voice plus rhythms ultimately derived from dance, with harmony and counterpoint introducing colour-elements, the union or conflict of other voices. We did not mean that the composer thought in terms of voices, but that in the last resort, if his work were emotionally true, a human intonation, a human dance-rhythm, underlay his form. I still believe this to be correct, though the thesis needs to be carefully formulated to avoid narrow interpretations.)

I then turned to contemporary poetry. The Georgians carried on the failure of English 19th-century poetry. The thinned-out, abstractly Dionysian form of Francis Thompson and Housman's "human cry, very limited in emotion, but technically purified," failed to provide an effective basis for their work, despite felicities in de la Mare and W.H. Davies. The first genuine new start came with the Sitwells, aware of French development, but definitely English. Some forward steps had been taken by Sacheverell Sitwell, W.J. Turner, and Roy Campbell, while the older men, Gordon Bottomley and Yeats, has made important contributions. Yeats "has long since outdistanced his early Celtic twilight. From Ezra pound he learned economy of statement and has developed a sinewy but melodious form of lyric. Moreover, in his best plays, he has invented a feminine but delicately profound use of symbolism continuously relating itself back to human experience." Bottomley had learned from Morris's Defence of Guenevere to build dramas, which evading larger tangled themes, yet suggested a passionate intensification "and a force of gesture hidden under clenched

surfaces." However a nihilistic intellectualism had come in with T.S. Eliot. "One man of at least far bulkier stature buttresses this dull synthesis of despair: James Joyce – though an occasional vividly precise phrase redeems him from the dullness of the pure Intellectualists." He was anti-Rabelais, using the excreta of experience for disgust, not for delight. (A little later in an essay for the second volume of Scrutinies I saw him with more sympathy as a creator of the very palpabilities of daily life, but at root expressing the final vast expansion of the naturalist novel on the edge of extinction, using imposed symbolism to hold together the disintegrating material and then using the disintegration of the word itself as a method, the associative principle divorced from purpose and calling up ghosts of myth to give a semblance of structure to unconscious meanderings below the level of individual character.)

D.H.L. I saw as the opposed twin of Eliot and Lewis. "He wants the loss of identity, not its hellenised godhead. He wants to ooze back into the mud, masochistically surrendering to the brutal embrace of death, not to shape Praxitelean statues from his poised delight." His literary ancestry was Whitman's narcissism and Russian masochism (cf. Dostoevsky and Bunin); but to the latter Lawrence adds a thick obstruction of perverted poetic imagery – the result of absorbing the Western musical energies – the image of beauty flowing down into cavernous loins." Conrad however initiated new possibilities of dramatic conflict, "not the Shakespearean wrecking of self on an insufficiency or blindness of the will, but the tragic division of self (hinted at by Ibsen, etc.) – the effort to arrive at consciousness of oneself, to attain an intellectual awareness of one's impulses."

There then are the main lines of this effort to work out a chart among what seemed the main modern tendencies. There was still too much of the impatient readiness to define a man's whole work in terms of an anecdote about him (Courbet) or of some isolated point (Proust) without proper thought or research. But taken as a whole, the essay made sense in comparison with excessively generalised dicta of Dionysos: a genuine effort to come grips with the modern situation as a whole, seeing both the new potentialities and the distorting tendencies of fragmentation and abstraction, which I was not yet able to link with bourgeois alienation.

I put the conflicts and tensions of this phase in three plays, Ragnhild, Bussy d'Amboise, and Hereward. The first registered the shock of meeting Elza and taking her inside my system; the second the fuller working-out of the entailed tragic conflict, with the image of desire-death embodied in one woman; the third, the same sort of tensions in a hero torn between two women. The tale of Ragnhild (written July-August 1926) was my own invention. Ragnhild, an Irish princess, has been carried off by a Norse chief, Frithiof, as his wife; she chafes against his power, and works on his brother Asmund and on a young scald Viglund. Frithiof surprises her with Viglund and she kills him in a semi-trance, then lets Asmund put the blame on Viglund, who is killed. (Frithiof was based on the singer with whom Elza had been living; Asmund on another Australian, whom I had known at the university and who, after surveying in the Sudan, had been having an affair with Elza.)

Since my thinking was, and has continued to be, inseparable[1] from my dramatisation of conflict in poem, play, novel, I shall cite two passages from Ragnhild to show the orientation now taken by the key-images of love and death. Marino had seen Justice as a symbol lodged beyond the world of men, however it agitated that world. Now it entered into the experience of love, expressed in the demand that everyday life be one with the dreams of harmony.

> Ragnhild. There was a woman that the breasted lilies
> suckled, and justice of moonlight crushed from apples
> to rot the soul with a slow stain of dreams.
> Why? That is all I want to know; and then
> disdainfully to die. Justice I ask.
> Tell me why stars are silver bells of silence.
> Tell me why stars bring promises to me
> of dawns as beautiful with a single purpose
> as the straight lunge of a trumpet's roar.
> Why have I felt the day's worn ragged light
> prophesy days that spread in twinkling harmony
> about the staunchless beauty of the sun?
> as I have felt my body, once or twice,
> blown out, then lit again, growing again,
> unrolling in clear fumes of rounding flesh
> beautiful with the curved purpose of the spirit
> about the central kiss.

[1] Typo in typescript: 'inseperable'.

And tell me why
I must expiate in days of drizzling pain
this knowledge that there is a fist of power
closed in the dull glove of the lifted sun,
and that there is a moon more lovely than the moon
like milk inside that old gourd of silver.
Tell me, or I shall leave a curse behind
to sear the lilies that breathe out the moons
like puffballs going out on the stars' hedges.
I'll put the stars through sieves of the dark mind
and rub the rays of beauty burring them
quite away. I'll kill the songs of love
that stir with the whisper of mysterious flowers
in every tingling silence. I ask Justice
because the sunbeams chafe against my breasts
and I can find no friend on all the earth.

Viglund. Why do you come to me?

Ragn. Because you sing
words from the spirits whose caressing fingers
smoothed out red clay to tremble into petals,
and carved the trees out of the stately air
with bits of mud and weed. Because you sing
words from the spirits that thought the curves of my body
and set it wandering in a loveless place.

Vigl. And they have told me also that those who find
always a shrunken sadness at their side
instead of the toppling laughters they invoked,
are no true lovers. It is themselves they see
so small beside the tall desire they fear.
They make a pigmy of the gigantic sun
that brawls with beauty through the sky's taverns,
because they cannot take the happy hands
and dance on the starting timbers of the world
that's trodden for ever by the four gay winds.

Ragn. Whose hands do the gods offer me?

Vigl. That's for you
to learn; and when you have made sure of it,
clasp tightly.

Ragn. You spoke of the gay dancing-floor
that is the creaking earth. You are the first
who ever told me there was such a place.

Vigl. Yet joy was always there.

Ragn. And must I have
only the tattered winds for my companions?
You tell me to take the hand, my lover's, bravely…
Shall I take it
and stand as high as the sun?

Vigl. It is your duty.

Ragn. You are in the right. I have been dying in a house,
that should be climbing the adventurous hills,
soaked to the brown skin with the valley-mist
and my skirt up round my waist to hold the apples
we stole below. And that is where I would be.
You tell me that I go the cowardly way
to rail upon the bland and prosperous moon,

because I am poor in kisses and a sad heart.
Can this be true if I cry out to Freya:
I take the first windfall of chancy joy.
though it means in a week's time I'll be sleeping with
my feet in bogwater or laying my queenly head down
not dresst a week now, that has been dresst each day
all of my life, now lying amid shabby leaves,
dogswort and darnel, that was used to have
pillows re-sewn with rose-petals every night
when the whim took me. Beside a tinker's fire
scenting the dawn with sharp and dewy hunger,
to take the happy hand you bid me take
and hang out dreams on sunlight as the maids
hang out the linen on the bushes to dry;
and wear them next my skin.

And here is a passage on death after Frithiof has been killed and Ragnhild is driven back into her demonic self. Kiolvor is an old woman devoted to Frithiof, who fears and hates Ragnhild.

Kiolvor. Whom did I hear calling? You, always you.
You give me no peace.
I hear you going about in the darkness
with the terrible indrawn hiss, the deepening silence
that is sound before the sound of a shriek.
Ragn. That is as it should be.
Kiol. The seethe of fear
cleaving the darkness
Ragn. I am the edge of the sword,
truly you said that; and I am happy to be
the destroying beauty, and the fissure of lightning
splitting up the cloudy rock of the night-sky,
and the terrific storm that stamps flat
the crops of three countries so that next year
the poor perish with famine in the streets,
only that one small trickle of its deluge
may nourish a lonely violet under a stone –
but that's enough. Why should the poor not die?
Kiol. They told me someone is dead. Who is dead?
Ragn. Have these two men died? I do not know.
Bodies going puffily hard, jellied with cold,
bleeding here and there –
that is not death. I am another sword,
bringing a death too hard for them to die.
Kiol. Tell me who is dead.
Ragn. That is not death.
Or I would be walking over a cliff
or letting a poison scald me out of pain.
But that is not death. It is nothing at all.
Kiol. I have something to say. It came to me
last night in my bed as I looked out
at the beach's hulk of fading stone.
A voice said to me,
wearily it said:
The stones and the rocks and the boulders on the hill

are men, and men are stones
growing like trees out of the wintry earth,
black huddled things
cracking the sky to bits between splayed fingers.
And the wind comes and smudges out the stony faces
and the rain pits them with another face
on and on for ever and for ever.
How patient all these men are, standing there
until they are ground down by the rub of darkness.

Ragn. You old woman, that is true, but not death either.
I talk of a death that tosses the whirled sun
into something less that the spinning glint
cored in a dewdrop.

Kiol. I see the wintry sky
flawed with the dark branches of the trees.

Ragn. Does not earth die when two mouths merge together
in a burning cave of beauty? That is death,
that only, and the death that I would die...
love potioned with warm death.

Kiol. Death is here.
I smell it. Ah, some spirit claps his new hands
to try them out. Who is speaking?

Ragn. Frithiof.

Kiol. O... O...
What is you say?
How can I kill her? I am so very old...

Ragn. There on the bed you'll find him if you wish
to speak to the face you knew.

Kiol. He stands beside you.
He is not on the bed. He is at your side.
His face is smooth and drawn like a sheepskin,
hardly a face at all,[2] drawn back so tight
from the thin mouth which is looking at you.

Ragn. Stop this.

Kiol. I will not. He has eyes of ice
thawing down his cheeks. He has no eyes.
They have dripped out, but with his mouth he hates you.

Ragn. (beating her). Stop. Stop.

Kiol. Leave me alone, Ragnhild.
I saw the oars laid out on the sand,
stiff serpents of the sea copper-collared
all white and slimy gold in the sunlight,
biding their time, as I too bide my time.
It was not waves I heard bump on the shuddering wood,
it was stones rolled upon them; foam splintered
with arrow-heads, and the wind rough with gold
where the Valkyrs swoop, hooves of the clattering light
clanged on helmets – the girls have long hair
that blows in the men's faces and they can't see
and are killed.
No eye can view the horses but they gleam in the water
and you can tell them passing by the flashes of the foam.
Ha, the shieldgirl slings him up.

[2] Typo: full stop [.] rather than comma in typescript.

Ragn. Who is to die?
Kiol. I shall not tell you. Keep her back, Frithiof.

And then at the end Ragnhild herself reaches the valkyr-exaltation, but her ecstatic acceptance of death is from the side of hatred and has as its earthly reflection only fear and craft.

Ragn. Go to your deaths. I bid you go to your deaths.
Out, old ocean-dragons, hurdlers of sea,
birds nesting in fire-edges of the foam.
out, you riders of death, and you sea-horses
charging the hedgy waves. Draw out and drive
among the skerries and the sea-teeth waiting
to get a bite at your under-timbers. Out,
out, old quester nosing in cold gulfs,
sandpiper on desolate dunes of wind.
And crane that leans by some dim pool for hours
to snap the prize up and its scales of moonlight
rangers in heron creeks
winding on sudden noises and much gold,
secret raiders battering in the night's doors
studded with star-nails, to take gods by the throat
and drink the stone-vats of heaven dry of mead,
I love you, and I cry here for your deaths.

O all you gods that love me because I am
prouder, more unbending in my pain
than you in contemptuous joy, grant me this—
send all these long boats and all these confident men
a sea-death or a sword-death by the month's end.
Send the lightning-worm venoming at them,
let thunder clashing halves of the sky together
break the frozen clouds up into hail
and the sea arch the manes of its battle-waves
and send them all against each trapped ship;
or give them some happy and hopeless death
in a tall defile or a burning house- -
or let it march foursquare and with tangled spears
closing in to trample them utterly out
So that when the enemy have passed over
there's only a rose tinge sodden in the soil
and a little scraps of swords, to show they were.
Kill these men for me, because I love the,.
(She drags up Kiolvor)
Get up, voice of fear and the ancient wrong
walking in darkness, quaver your farewell,
for all these men are sailing to their death.
I say they are. I say it. They shall die,
Frithiof is dead, and Viglund, and dead too
for ever while I draw the sun's breath,
this body which I inhabit but do not own,
since my kisses only dwell in one small tower
halfbuilt into the sky, and they never wassail
in the warm full rooms of flesh. Always some ghost
usurps my mouth and takes the kiss before

I can get down from that small tower of clouds.
Never again. All that is ended now.
Nothing is left but a cold craftiness
and silence ebbing out of a wound in the side.
Get up, old woman, listen, listen to me.
Kiol. What... what is it?
Ragn. I killed Frithiof,
Kiolvor, I killed Frithiof. Laugh with me,

In Bussy I drew a reckless character who without realising half of what he is doing, falls in love with Francoise de Monsoreau, wife of the King's Head-Huntsman, and finally killed her chamber. The point of the drama lay in the way in which the casual act of adultery snares him emotionally, so that, instead of dodging away safety, he carries on into the inevitable ambush. Here then I sought to express my full acceptance of Elza, my struggle to transform her world of fear and broken love. Only one passage, at the height of Bussy's discovery of the course that he must choose, whatever it entails:

Franc. Never again
Bussy. When all the shifting earth
rises in terror at you, and the light
is nothing but twisting snakes among the leaves,
then it is mine to calm the roar of space
and show you sunlight not as fierce sea
lashing the world into tormented life,
but as the props of beauty up whose sides
the whole world's effort to grow string and single
painfully climbs.
Franc. Never again, my love.
You are that tallness, like a tree of light
up which I have sought all of my life to climb,
but like torn ivy bruised upon the wind
I never found its strength.
Bussy. Till now...
Franc. Till now!
But having now this knowledge I am strong.
Once I feared to die to die because I had
nothing to live for and so could find no meaning
in the slack thought of death, and yet I cried
often to death, often. But now, although
one part of me wants life as never it did,
another part cries Die, cries Die, because
death is a garland and a noise of birds
and a proud sob of love, and more, and more –
and yet I shall not die.
Bussy. For love is here.
And stars have only being when we see
the beauty of a dwindling fire of dew
and know the joy exhaling both in fumes
of silver; for our breaths mix, and our breath

it is that melts the dewdrops and the stras
into one width of light, wherein we stand
and do not need to die.

Franc. Ah, hold me closer.
I am so afraid that you will vanish.
I try to look at you, but I cannot see you.
I see only a dewy wraith, a thought
hiding between two wings of steady flame,
faceless, and like an angel, and most dear...
and I feel that one cry of the suffering world
will blot you out.

Bussy. It shall not. I am proud.
And all the numbing pain of the burst world
shall not unknit one quiver of a kiss
but toss unnoticed past. If we can stand
entire in love, and lonely, against the world,
then it can never be more than the ocean
clashing a mile off, which becomes a part
of the mild boom of bees and the wood pigeons.
And we shall say: the sea is over there,
we must go walking that way before long
and see the gulls flying with bended feet
and pick some shells up. That will be its use.

5

But before I consider the third play, I must say more of the ethic of those days. First, the Press had enabled me to throw off the element of passivity shown by my being ready to live in part of Janet's money. I was not being fully true to my oath when I accepted at secondhand, money that had been earned by methods I would not tolerate for myself. (Her allowance was given to her by her father, a kindly old Scotchman, who I am sure drew his fair-sized wealth from stocks and shares.) But now, as if by a stratagem of Apollo, I was living, though a young poet with no name in the world, on the proceeds of my poetry and its surrogates. Further, by making use of my crafts as printer and book-designer, together with all the multiple activities surrounding the Press, I was losing any sense of being a mere writer capable only of scrabbling with a pen in an attic. I had the first inchoate feeling that the poet should be able to do anything that came along, whether his hands or his mind were concerned. Clearly, any individual can only tackle a certain amount of crafts or intellectual disciplines in one lifetime; but he should master enough to show that if he were put to it, he could master the others as well.

I have already mentioned that in reaction against moralistic straight jackets of all kinds we felt that the artist or poet should take his cue from life in all its hurly-burly, should accept the pull of life and what it brought him. Such an attitude could be interpreted with varying degrees of passivity. At one end the poet could feel it is his duty to mop up every glass of beer near his elbow and to succumb to every little slut who rubbed against him; at the other end he could decide that the pull of life he was ready to recognise was that which bore the stamp of some sort of relevance to his poetic needs. On the whole it was the second line of interpretation that ruled with me. Janet and Elza had seemed each to reveal a face of my poetry: Janet with her generous easy-going nature, her intellectual balance and wit, had seemed to come smiling out of my lyrics, as Elza with her desperate and obscure inner tensions seemed my tragic heroine in all her lineaments. (She treasured a fullsize colour reproduction of the head of Botticelli's Venus, and was remarkably like the goddess.) But now I encountered a third and different incarnation of my favourite images, Betty May, who, among many other things, was an excellent model for Epstein. She was my wilful Helen in bold guttersnipe version, mistress of a thousand beds and yet proudly herself as if all those beds had only been an unimportant prelude to the one complete and shattering love that she was offering with both hands, with both breasts, and with all the frank urgency of her broad handsome barbaric face. My affair with her lasted only a few weeks, and we parted good friends. She told me that she was thinking of going to live with Edgell, and I gave her my blessing.

Oddly, the effect of the affair, working on me together with all the many factors drawing me away from my Australian positions, was to make me confront afresh my sexual ethic. I decided that I wanted to build my life on Elza, on her alone. I was coming to the point defined in Bussy some time after I had written that work. My semi-break with P.R.S. had helped. I was feeling a certain revulsion from the ingrained Australian attitudes about the differences of the sexes. The segregation expressed by the exclusion of women from pub-bars, the extreme stress on matiness, on the compact of the males (in work and in beer) as something on a higher level that any relationship possible with woman, I had accepted the

segregation-system and given it Norman's particular stress: that men did all the creative work while women supplied the material of the image and bore babies. The male gestation of the image was paired off with the female gestation of the child; the male got the woman with child, the woman got the male pregnant with image. (Hence one of the sources of the notion of a passive acceptance of the pull of life; women were the active agents in sex despite the myth of male aggressiveness.) Unclearly I was turning against these pre-suppositions, partly because I reluctantly and uneasily had to champion Elza against my male friends, especially P.R.S., who disliked her. I was resisting the attitude that the call of the male friends in the comradeship of beer was something more important that any demand a woman could make. I tried to devise a compromise:

> The crest of drunkenness is that pale face
> foaming to momentary moons along huge waterflanks
> of the hypothetical and true Embrace
> which sucks us into Song
> yet gives us wheezy ribs of caking loam
> for all our thanks—
> it is your face to which my swirled heats foam.
>
> How is it then this fury can disturb
> the suspended candour of your domestic eyes?
> For, tell me please –
> if truly this vain babel I could curb,
> would you not then despise
> my weakness bent to you: yet you're distresst
> because these Seas
> carry me on, your face their stormy crest.

The poets to whom I was most turning now were Yeats and Donne. I was drawn by the latter's conflict between the Centrique Part in all women and the beloved Centre of all living. This was precisely my own conflict at the moment, and I was moving from a stress on the first aspect to one on the second, all aspects of my struggle leading to Elza.

> Look in my eyes and love me, and in turn
> with clockwork spontaneity I'll burn.
> It's easy while the Mirror is our Sky
> where images in mute deception die,
> and nothings snaps
> our prompt embraces but the dinnerbell –
> our coroneted Hearts can set no traps
> to break this spell.
>
> Yet you are weeping, and I bluster here..

Where is the mirror that should shut out fear?
Who broke it? why? By poetry renewed,
unflaccid kisses still can dare the nude –
Yes, there's the guile:
our Mirror is the glazed mercurial Skies
changing each day to make us versatile...
Look in my eyes.

I was changing from the narcissism inherent in Norman's outlook; the mirror of self-regarding was broken. Venus admiring or sleeking herself was no longer the key-image. Love must be able to stand up against the full strains and challenges of life. This meant the complete acceptance of Elza as she was, and the need to discover myself outside the categories of Norman's thought, which were now seen as complacent barriers against the truth of relationships.

So this is love; if so, what shall we do?
Now fobbed off with eternity we stand,
myself a pulse within the imaged You,
for ever putting out a farewell hand...
can I withdraw
without submitting to a barren law?

So be it: let me be your heart, and so,,
rocked on your blood for ever, put away
Two Mes, they say, upon your eyeballs show,
Two Yous on mine... and thus my eyes display
myself inside
those Yous; so on, until I'm terrified.

For you and I must endlessly contract
within the other, and that other still
fall narrowing down oneself; a visual fact
now made reality by amorous will.
Then come, perplex,
open our eyes and see what happens next.

All my problems burst on me fullblast at the same moment. It seemed impossible to carry on the Press with the worsening economic crisis. I decided to liquidate, though in the end we were able to meet practically all our debts: I had sold a lot of stock at £1,000 before the worst loomed up. And through the malice of the wife of the Australian poet Rupert Atkinson, Elza found out about Betty May. She was also suffering because Edith Craig had taken her daughter and refused to give her up. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that I had now for some time definitely given up the cult of the Centrique Part for that of the one

beloved as Centre; but I had no means of convincing Elza that this was so. Certainly the way in which the breakdown of the Press had shaken me contributed to my inability to carry conviction. Since early 1926 I had based myself wholly on the Press as the system which had enabled me to earn a living and publish my poems together with works proclaiming our aesthetic; and now that the system was collapsing. What was I to do? The paranoia which had been showing up in Elza for some time was given a strong stimulus. She made increasing demands on me; her fears of all my friends made her scheme to isolate me from them. Partly because of my confused state, my weakening nerve, and partly through my determination to make amends and help her to overcome her fears, I succumbed. And the more I surrendered, the more exacting she became. Instead of alleviating her fears by my acceptance of her demands, I seemed to make them worse; and yet I could not now reverse the process. I was caught in a deteriorating mechanism. True, I could in a moment have ended the situation by standing up strongly against her; but obviously that would have meant at attempt on her part to kill me or to kill herself, or she would have dashed out into the streets with nowhere to go, no resources, no hope. I was not afraid of her trying to kill me, but I was very afraid of her suicide. (She had tried to kill herself at least twice before I met her.) And I could not face the thought of her lost and homeless, in utter misery, in London where she had suffered so much before. So I gave in, sustained by the vague hope that my devotion would somehow get through to her and bring her happiness – bring us both the basis of a new harmonious life together.

Before all these troubles had burst upon me, I had written Hereward, which forecast the confrontation of the two loves: Torfrida (Elza) and Alftruda (Betty), with the destruction of myself, Hereward, as the conclusion. In the last scene, Alftruda, who has betrayed Hereward to the Normans, hands him a sword and he dies fighting

> Hereward. Have you one word to say before I go?
> Alftruda. Hereward, I love you.
> Hereward. Thanks for saying it,
> although I knew it closer that a word,
> the best word strong and tender in the world.
> You were the greater love, dear, after all –
> the part I love the best, my self of courage

mocking the world with glee – Torfrida moved
upon my other side, my dreaming self,
feeding upon my blood. Death makes me true
to both my loves –
The world's not large enough to hold us three
but death is wider.

Partly under Yeats's influence I had flattened my verse, dropping much of the colloquial and broken rhythms; and simplified the imagery, to give more force to direct emotional statement. At the same time I changed my constructional method, seeking a more cinematic movement, sometimes with very short scenes and staccato effects, alternations of a dreaming voice in darkness and sudden bursts of action. The scenes were mostly separated by lyrics spoken in darkness to music. The play opened with:

It is the falling of night –
Beneath the boughs of the night
I listen for a footstep too:

leading on into a scene of Alftruda and a Norman. Here are a few more of the lyrics:

Does she dream, that the faces change?
does she know face from face?
She has gazed herself blind in a mirror.
She is beautiful. Let her embrace
passion comes back to a mind,
and despair out of ecstasy's error.
I am glad. Let her stay blind.

I make a mock of the wind,
I have no fear of the waves;
but the human voices shake me.
so little I understand.
Danger he wished to find,
and more than a woman's face –
if out of despair you should wake me,
I too would take sword in hand.

I am afraid of the world –
not of the chattering masks
with a void behind the eyes,
not of the cruel fingers
knotting my nerves with pain,
not of the murderous angers,
the bloodcries coming again –
I am afraid of one thing:
your love and my pitying sighs.

The turn in dramatic method was linked with a desire at last to see my plays staged. As I felt the need for wider activities, partly through the London Aphrodite, I had begun to explore the

possibilities of opening a theatre for poetic and experimental drama, and Douglas Garman had agreed to come in as manager. Bottomley was enthusiastic, and in the one meeting I had with Yeats he showed a guarded interest. He would certainly have let us use his plays; and without a doubt I would have started the theatre, with or without success, if it had not been for my disaster with Elza. Under new circumstances I had to give up any idea that involved my being away from her for protracted periods.

Elza's book, I See the Earth, was chosen as one of the 50 Best Books of the Year through my drawings in it. I now made my first tentative trial of music, sketching simple rhythmic effects I wanted to be played, probably on drum and flute, for Hereward lyrics. I showed my ideas to a young Australian musician, John Gough, who enthusiastically made quite complex settings in his style based on Delius. I was sorry that I had not stuck to my own vaguely ominous effects, and did not attempt any more music till about 1945. For me, the important thing was that I had widened my area of expression: shown that if put to it I could draw or compose. A step nearer to the complete man.

Two short Norse plays, written in the Hereward-style and published in the London Aphrodite, growing critique of our Australian positions. Love told of a scald who meets priestess of Freya who goes round collecting offerings with a statue of Freya in a wagon; he makes love to the girl and is confronted by Freya who has entered into the statue; they fight and he wounds the goddess; then, seeing some countryfolk, he puts the shattered statue together and chants the goddess' praises while the priestess carries on with her work. The theme was thus the defiance of the gods, the use of them (the images of desire, harmony purpose in) for the human goals, the assertion of love against Norman's puppet-master of destiny. The second play, Hate, told of the burial of a Norse hero, at which his best friend, worked on by the ritual and the cants, declares that he too will be walled up. About a century later the tomb is being opened and a violent clash of weapons is heard in the darkness. The man who had sacrificed himself as the perfect expression of friendship tells how the dead man attacked him as soon as there was total darkness, and they had fought on all those years. Just as light broke in again, he, the survivor, had struck his friend-enemy down. In horror the

intruders kill him as well. The theme was thus the element of hatred underlying the purely male compact, the bond of war or aggression. The man is fighting his own unrealized evil. Both these works foreshadowed my break with Norman, but the happy ending of Love was not to be.