I. FIRST STAGES

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I was born in October 1900, in Melbourne, Australia. That year Nietzsche died; Tolstoy, Zola, Cézanne, Meredith, were still alive. I began in a world with no motorcars blurting their poisonous fumes along the streets, no aeroplanes fouling the skies of my childhood. Capitalism was to all intents and purposes a part of the natural order; the circulation of money as ordained by Yahweh as the circulation of blood. The world in which I grew up, in Sydney, was one that I immediately recognise when I read Proust, different as his complex world was from the crude society of Lower Bay View Street, Lavender Bay. The essence feels the same, with the same smell, the same sort of eternal warmth. On to that situation was to come the crash of the 1914 war, muted by distance but echoing with the same madness as in Europe; then the Russian Revolution; the inflations and economic disasters of the 1920s; the depression and the antifascist struggle of the 1930s; Hitlerism and the second worldwar; the atomic bomb and Hiroshima; the confrontation of the capitalist and the soviet worlds in the Cold War; the advent of Communist China and the revelations of 1956; finally the war in Vietnam and the full horrors of consumer-societies.

I have always thought that an autobiography which starts with that kind of historical summary strikes a clumsy and unpromising note; but I cannot start in any other way. The story I have here to tell is that of the taking of these moments of drastic change inside myself, the struggle to remain (or to become) human in the face of their worsening threats. Many other persons might say the same thing. What I think makes it worth while for me to attempt the definition of my reactions is the fact of a constant and conscious resistance from at least the years of the first worldwar: an unslackening struggle, though one with many zigzags, to detach myself from my class-society in a <u>total resistance</u>. What gives an interest to the story is, I think, the effort to maintain this total resistance in a changing situation, to develop it in more adequate terms, and to find out what it meant and what it entailed. When I look back over the more than fifty years in question, I feel that I have made many mistakes and gone often by

ed. Anne Cranny-Francis (2017)

devious and confused side-tracks, and that there is yet much more to clarify and understand; but I feel also that, for good and for bad, I have tried steadfastly to hold to my central conviction. That is why I have called the work the Autobiography of an Idea.

My first sense of a cleavage from the world around me and all its governing notions was vaguely born in the years after my parents' marriage broke down. My father was the artist Norman Lindsay. After he left for a period in England in 1909, my mother knew her marriage had collapsed and left Sydney for Brisbane where her strong-minded eldest sister lived. For a year or two there I did not go to school. Previously I had been for a couple of years at a small school kept by two old spinsters, where I at least learned to read. Now on my own, I read many school and adventure tales, and roamed in the Botanical Gardens. Then my uncle insisted on putting me into a preparatory school, where in 1913 I won the scholarship it offered for the Grammar School. In 1914, the year when the war broke out, I discovered the existence of poetry, partly through my English class, which was doing Julius Caesar, partly through a copy of Palgrave's Golden Treasury turned up among my mother's books. About the same time I came to feel at home in Greek myth and legend largely through Kingsley's Heroes. The first poem I composed was one on Artemis, in which I tried to express the goddess glorifying in wild life, in wooded hills that were in fact those near Brisbane, in the area of One Tree Hill. I began to read verse omnivorously, getting to know the second-hand bookshops and using the Public Library near the bridge.

It must have been 1916 that, reading Keats' Ode to a Grecian Urn, I had a sudden overwhelming sense of poetry as a living body of experience, as an experience somehow greater in intensity and fullness than anything I had known or could imagine in everyday existence. The conclusion, "Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty," burst on me with the conviction of ultimate truth, creating new dimensions all round me, revealing an infinity of meanings where I had never been aware of any meaning at all. I would have been hard put to explain the emotion, which however I felt to be too clear to need any explanation. At core what I felt was that in poetry, through rhythm and image, life was lifted to a new level, in which the

harmonies and unions denied by the everyday world came true, were directly experienced, conjured up, given a force and enduring stability that set them up in a permanent antagonism to the broken and incomplete world from which they yet drew their energies. Truth and Beauty were one in the poetic moment, however much they might seem sundered in daily existence; and the only life worth living was that in which I sought all the while for the poetic moment, the resolution in which this unity was achieved. I recall the clocktick of that afternoon, the precise situation of light and shadow, in which the poem with its own voice, a voice from outside my consciousness, but making itself forever thereafter the heart of my purpose. The large dim room, with the flat tiger-skin not far away, only the head with its glassy eyes padded out; the coolness of the linoleum on which I lay stomach down; the harsh Queensland summer-light banked up on the other side of the curtained glass-doors that led into the broad verandah. The event was crucial, determining the direction of my whole future life.

It was at first only a gush of keen excitement, the intrusion of a strangely hypnotic and shattering emotion. But gradually I felt more and more its relationship to the world outside, where a huge war was being waged: a war that impacted on Brisbane only in newspaper-headings that I scarcely heeded, in the occasional movement of soldiers or guns down the streets, in the super-patriotic comments of my aunt Mary. She, the one strong-minded character in my mother's family, had no children of her own and was determined to make a success of me: an academic success, as I seemed to have some scholarly talent. Soon she became for me the representative and symbol of the oppressive world. I distrusted and then detested her respect for success and money, however shrewdly she disguised it in fine-sounding terms. She was inflated, somewhat unfairly, into the supreme exemplar of hypocrisy and corrupt temptation – though at the same time I recognised that she had a genuine affection for me, and though, at another level than that of poetry's stark judgment-light, I responded to this affection. Her respectabilities, which I now scorned, belonged to a world where the quest of success and money was only another face of the bestial greeds underlying the war.

Not that I arrived at these positions overnight. But they were gaining strength by 1917-8. I had gone much further in poetry, and while remaining true to Keats and Shakespeare, had been deeply stirred by Blake and Shelley. Here at last I found the formulations on which to rest my case against the world, the final vision of Prometheus Unbound, the accusations of Songs of Experience and the dialectics of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell. The latter I merged with the dialectics of Plato's Phaidros to bring about something like a full union of my aesthetic and my moral positions. The only prose-writer who gave me the feeling of delving into the problems that obsessed me was Dostoevsky. There was much callow naivety still mixed up with my idea of poetry's high goals of liberation. I was not subsisting solely on a diet of Keats, Blake, Shakespeare, Shelley; but I returned to those poets all the same for my vaguely but strongly gasped criteria of what truly constituted poetry. I was indeed at the same time getting something from almost any sort of minor poet who had his own slight personal note, turning from Lydgate to Rupert Brooke, Quarles to de la Mare, Skelton to Graves. I did not yet think of myself as a poet though I kept on scribbling sonnets, quatrains, narratives in Spenserian stanza or terza rima; I was simply absorbed in versifying and reading verses, struggling with rhythms that arose out of the world around me, but transcended it.

The notions of permanence and of ceaseless change fought an obscure fight in the thickets of my mind. I was haunted at times (as I closed my eyes) by a stony image of the world, of the buildings around me, especially the structures recalled from my childhood, in a sort of Babylonian twilight, assuming the proportions of great battlements erected securely against time; and of the whole face of things crumbling and tilting as I looked at it, revealing vortex within dusty vortex: the wind stirring the sun-lit hairs on the back of my hand as a remorseless acid that ate into my bowels, come from the back of outermost space. Only in poetry I felt the conflict reconciled and the courage to confront a divided world: a triumphant kinship with all who had ever sung or loved in the remotest gulfs of time, and with all who

would yet sing or love; and yet the irremediable pathos of the precarious isolation of the singer or lover, his face immediately blurred in the black wind.

So, till near the end of my teens, I cannot remember ever thinking about what my career was going to be. I lived in the moment of absorption by poetry, which dominated my studies. In a sense I was determining my future by refusing to consider it. At the end of three years at the Grammar School (1916) I won another scholarship for two years there; but under pressure from my ambitious aunt I entered for the University examinations at the end of the first year, sure that I'd make a fool of myself. I came third in Queensland and so had a university scholarship for three years, plus ten shillings a week. All this while my mother had been keeping herself, me, and my two younger brothers, Raymond and Phil, on a £5-a-week allowance. After I entered the university, my aunt kept on trying to make me plan for an academic career; but I did not respond. I resolutely did not consider what lay on the other side of my three years of further study at Latin and Greek. She wanted me to go on to Oxford. There was only one travelling scholarship a year; and at the end (1920-1) I made a wager in my mind. I'd enter, and if I won I'd go to Oxford, but with no intention of becoming a don; otherwise I'd go to Sydney, to be near my father who had got in touch with me in 1919. But the scholarship was given to Eric Partridge, since well-known for his lexicographical work; he was older than I, my professor (Michie) explained, and could not apply again, whereas I could apply the next year, when I would gain the grant. I was satisfied. I hadn't really wanted to go, and now I could tell myself that the coin I had spun had duly informed me my fate was poetry, not scholarship.

Meanwhile, the sense of rebellious difference nourished by Keats, Shelley, Blake, Dostoevsky, had made me look harder at the war that seemed to have become an endemic part of our society. I came on Sassoon's war-poems, and they had the effect of giving the direct point of application to my revolt. I saw the war as the betrayal of human brotherhood, as the touchstone for the truth and the lie in my world; and the war itself, which had been a dull boom beyond the horizon, became suddenly an integral part of everything I touched, smelt,

saw, heard. I met Murder on the way. The murder was everywhere, the gutters ran with blood. Every human relationship was perverse and corrupt if it did not hold at its core the revolt against the reigning inhumanity. And my attitudes were strengthened by my discovery of others who shared them in varying degrees, men who had decided in their own way that our society was evil and must be overthrown. I had come to know Witherby, director of the W.E.A, and through him I took classes in English Literature. The W.E.A was still then largely a working-class organization; almost all my students were ardent socialists and trade-unionists, and after a while I began to find a common language with them in dealing with poets and novelists of the last century. William Morris especially appeared in a new light. Witherby himself was a Christian Socialist, an eccentric character, who shocked Brisbane with a speech in which he declared that he believed in Lenin because he believed in Christ. Despite his liking for practical jokes that dismayed the respectable, he was a quiet serious man who never tried to force an opinion on anyone; he used to listen and try to draw me out, occasionally putting in a word when he felt I was too fanatical. Thus, once when I quoted Francis Thompson, "Plough thou the rock until it bear…", he merely shook his head and muttered, "Too terrible." Through him I came to know V. Gordon Childe, then secretary to a Labour politician and giving no sign of a desire to return to archaeology. He was pacifist and socialist, and also never set out his positions, contenting himself with caustic moments on contemporary and ancient history, often amiably crushing my too-simple interpretations, but stimulating me as well as making me feel how little I understood. With the mild Witherby and the sardonic Childe I often went up to a shack which Witherby had on Mount Tambourine, at that time completely devoid of tourists.

Further, through the W.E.A I met two I.W.W. or Wobblies, with one of whom, Jim Quinton, I became very friendly and who was always ready to pour out the socialist declarations of which Witherby and Childe were shy. "Get down to bedrock", was his refrain, as he struck his fist into the palm of his other hand. Because the I.W.W were mainly Americans, and Jim's friend certainly was of the States, I took Jim himself to be U.S.-born;

but I find that he came originally from Southwark. About 1913 he had been arrested in Sydney, and, before giving evidence, was told to take the oath. He insisted that his real name was Quin Tong, that he was Chinese, and could only be sworn in the Chinese manner. They had to produce a plate, which he smashed, muttering a lot of gibberish. He demanded postponement after postponement of the trial, which, with his agile argumentative powers, he was able to get. Then at the end he lodged a claim on the court for a pair of shoes, which had been worn out in his many journeys to and from the place. In Brisbane, he once had himself gagged and shackled to the railings of the Parliament House. When the police saw his condition, they asked who had done it to him, and he replied, "Your rotten constitution!" He had a taut springing energy in all his movements and I admired him enormously. I had been making defences at the university, in conversation and in the debates, of the Russian Revolution, and I arranged for Jim to come down and address a student-meeting.

Thus I had found that my revolt, however arrived-at as the result of communion with the voices of poetry, had its wider connotations; that I had comrades ready to act for the principles I professed as a lonely discipline; and that the poetic revolt was linked at a thousand points with the spheres of social and political thought and action. So I came to the point of conscious rejection of any role or career which bound me in with the bourgeois world, with the cash-nexus.

A young fellow, a few years my elder, happened to be with his mother when she called on my aunt. (Mary had given me a small room in which to keep my books and write in quiet.) The youth was going to work in the management side of the big wool- merchants, Dalgetty's, and in order to bring out his own importance and to patronise me, he praised the firm and offered to help in finding me a good job there when I left the university. He belonged to a rich family, which no doubt did have influence in the firm, and he took for granted that I'd jump at the chance. However his offer, together with my aunt's pressures, had the effect of crystallising my antagonism to the world of money. A few days later, crossing the river, I noticed the offices of the firm and felt the time had come for a declaration of independence. I

took an oath never to accept any job whatever which I did not feel to be vitally connected with poetry, with my own struggle to be a poet. The lines I scribbled on the back of an envelope are among the few that remain from those days:

> They have taken the beautiful woman and cropped off her young
> bright hair.
> They have broken the thews of Apollo with a dark and bitter snare.
> Their word is the fear in the darkness, they move with a smell of
> decay,
> and all that on earth is most lovely turns loathliest under their sway.
> And this is the world they have builded, the world where alone I
> roam,
> with a statue only friended, with only a song for home.
> And this is the world I am bidden to accept and build more secure,
> or starve. But an oath I have taken, and come what may come, I'll
> endure.

Oddly, the lines which echo Swinburne's denunciation of the pale Galilean draw part of their imagery from the episode of St. Francis cropping the hair of Clara, yet I had at the time a strong attraction towards asceticism, with St Francis as a hero. I was confusedly acclaiming and yet attacking asceticism, identifying the cash-nexus with the denying and distorting forces and yet asserting my refusal to partake in the fleshpots that were dangled before me as a temptation. In a way this conflict has always remained with me in that the defiant demand for the fullness of life has been linked with the need to refuse most of what is considered enjoyment because of its complicity with corruption, with the fetishisms of a consumer-society, with dereliction in the cause of human wholeness. But indeed such a conflict can only be resolved in a truly human society.

Then, not long after, my father wrote to me and sent me several of his etchings, also a copy of Thus Spake Zarathustra. I was deeply moved. Up to this point I had managed for the most part to shut him out of my thoughts, only now and then recalling his existence and feeling a distant antagonism to him and his world of art as lacking in spirit and significance as I understood those terms. Behind this attempt to ignore him there must have lain a deep hurt, a bruised sense of personal rejection. He had turned from my mother and her three sons, had thrown us aside and rejected us. A little earlier he had forced my mother to divorce him. As the eldest of three sons I had become in some sense the head of the family: a role I felt only in

a certain gap that had grown up between me and the younger boys, who shared games and jokes from which I stood apart; I felt responsible towards them, though ignorant as to any means by which I could help or direct them. Now I realise that, despite the gap, the strongest emotion I felt was a deep solidarity with them: a sort of patient conspiracy of the sons against the father, who was resented both for his failure to assert authority (accept responsibility) and for his presence as a remote symbol of authority in the vague but threatening world around us. He was both the ruthless power demanding the shearing of Clare's hair and the tempter setting out his wares of flesh in an art that I could not stomach. Behind that image of Clare was no doubt the head of my mother with her fine thinning hair; the castrating blade hidden in the flaunted fleshpots was the threat of the father to whom I retorted rejection for rejection. The depth of feeling which I had been putting into the idea of revolutionary brotherhood had its roots in the sense of a fate I shared with Ray and Phil. My refusal to think about a career had been linked with my refusal to think about my father.

It was not that I disliked my work. On the contrary. Apart from the time I spent in studying (mostly along lines of my own) I always enjoyed any physical work of a purposive kind. My uncle John was a man who liked using his hands; he would have been happier as a sailor than a doctor. I learned many crafts from him: how to make chairs or a boat, solder a galvanized iron roof, paint, and so on. I kept a tennis lawn in order and did much gardening for my aunt. I was happy to walk twenty or even thirty miles a day. I not only wrote verses; I made them up into carefully lettered little books, sometimes with little drawings. But I rejected the idea of working for money. Poetry had no place in the money-world, which by its nature it opposed and condemned. So, ironically, I was ready to earn money only through poetry or one of its derivations. My W.E.A. lectures had been such a derivation.

The basis of my rebellion was thus, despite what politics I had learned from Jim Quinton and my W.E.A. class, primarily emotional and moral. I felt the existing world to be evil. There might be good elements in it, enjoyable and transporting moments of experience, and so on. But these carried on despite the rulers of the world whom I knew by the name of

capitalists and imperialists from Quinton, and by the name of devils or fallen angels from Blake. The good elements could only be confirmed and developed by bringing out their aspect of opposition to those ruling powers. And this opposition was not a matter of random or blindly repetitive collisions and defiances; it had a comprehensive direction. There was Lenin, in whom life was resurrected beyond the cycles of evil and decay, Lenin who in some sense was Christ of the second coming and who brought about the redeemed earth, edenic and saturnalian, of which men had always dreamed, in myth and poetry, in ritual and utopia. Through Jane Harrison, Cornford, and others, I had discovered Greek myth on a new level – in all the immediacy of the rites of initiation and rebirth. Poetry was that initiation, seeking to bring about a coincidence of individual and social rebirth. Through Blake I had discovered that the Last Judgement was here and now, forever precipitated in individual experience, but also moving to the world-event of which 1917 was the prologue.

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And now there had come the letter from my father, the summons. Together with the etchings, the vision caught in actualising net, and Zarathustra, the testament. How was I to respond? To close my ears to the call or to translate it into the terms that alone held significance for me – and in so doing, transpose those terms to meet the new situation? Certain notes of the call were richly in key with my own deepest thoughts and emotions; others jarred harshly against those thoughts and emotions. The conflict with me was violent but short-lived. I was intoxicated by the voice: This is My son in whom I am well pleased. Only by the intensity of my return to the Father can I gauge the important though hidden part he had played in my previous systems. It seemed as if I had built up my poetic universe in the rivalry with his pictorial one, in antagonism, and that, at his first word of approval, the elements of difference had to be minimised and the elements of similarity brought happily forward.

Soon Norman also sent me the proofs of his book Creative Effort, which I read with fascination, with a revulsion near terror and an ecstatic acceptance. The world he here set out was roughly the world of Nietzsche given the cosmic dimensions of Plato. He saw the

individuals with creative powers in thought or in the arts as the demiurges of the universe. In a neoplatonic pattern he saw them descending into the vortex of hungry matter, assuming bodies to work and suffer on earth for the purpose of arresting the downward flow of matter. By creating the dynamic image in art, music, poetry they gave form and stability to a dimension of chaos, of hyle, inert matter. They halted the downward curve and turned it upwards again, back into realms of light and qualitatively finer matter. In these higher realms what was on the earth the sphere of art-imagery has become the basis of existence, which is in turn developed into yet finer substance, into subtler form and pattern, more powerful rhythms of liberated life-energy. The drama of earth was the story of the creative mind's struggle with matter, with everyday experience, with all the dark and brutish elements of the earth-creatures who lack the principle of form.

Drawing on Blake, Plato, Plotinos, I put a more specifically neoplatonist structure into these ideas that Norman had – though, after our discussions, he tended to take over many of my colourations. By concentrating on the concept of art-activity as the supreme concretising activity of the human mind I was able to move over from Blake the down-to-earth revolutionary to Blake the visionary, dispersing his spirit-shapes all over the universe and using aphorisms of his such as that which declares eternity will come to pass by a refinement of sensuous enjoyment. And to draw on such notions as that of Keats about the earth as a vale of soul-making. As I wrote later in Dionysos:

> The image is not a phantom substitute for actuality. Actuality is phantomed by the passionate reality of the image since causation now is free, self-determined and plastic. This is the knowledge of every creator. It is expressed by Keats when he says: What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth whether it existed before or not. It is expressed by Blake when he speaks of Imagination, the real and Eternal World of which the Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow.
>
> One must note that the aesthetic projection of a higher reality has no relation with the automatically existent and abstract higher reality of ontology.

To enter this kind of universe I had only to stress the side of my thinking which had seen poetry as the force creating a concrete universe of joy and harmony, which the earth-systems

denied and sought to destroy or pervert. To stress this side so strongly that the link of the poetic struggle with the revolutionary struggle to bring about a just, brotherly, harmonious, and happy earth began to loosen and fade out, to seem irrelevant or even a parody of the aesthetic transformations.

Norman in his book was fiercely hostile to all ideas of social progress; he carried the worst aspects in Nietzsche to their local conclusions, ignoring the other aspects which could be given a different interpretation. In my desire to find myself in accord with him, I could take over the idealisation of the creative process; but I found it harder to break up the set of interconnections of this process with history, with the dream of earth as paradise regained, which I had been working out and seeking to define in terms of a single revolutionary process. However, the aesthetic aspects had been the firstborn for me, and had been strengthened by my long absorption in the poets; the social and political aspects had come later and had never been grasped with any sort of theoretical clarity. It seemed that they had belonged to the phase of my antagonism to Norman and that they could not sustain themselves in the warmth of our coming-together.

Norman had in fact identified stability (the product of the concrete art-image) with authoritarian governmental forms that maintained the status quo. I did not want to recognise this fact, for my recognition of it would have introduced a heavy discord into the heart of our new-found compact: the unity of father and son, which supplanted the oath of the sons in brotherhood against authority (the father). My response to his magnetic and voluble personality ensured my surrender in this matter. From my new angle I found his art entrancing. When I had stood sullenly outside its doors, I had felt only a narcissistic egoism which dwelt narrowly in the lower dimensions of life because it feared the responsibility of dreams and of actions faced in their full reach and meaning. Now that I had entered in, I saw a glorying acceptance of life, an effort to construct spirit out of a continuous refinement of sensuous enjoyment. (Neither judgment was true by itself; perhaps, brought together, they would express the specific quality of the work and its limitations.) For the next few years the

world of imagery which I inhabited was largely based in his art. I was also strongly affected by the poems of Hugh McCrae which had themselves been much affected by Norman.

Norman himself had not always held to the positions he now set out. In his youth he had indeed been sympathetic to any anti-establishment views, even socialist ones, though he was never anything at all like a socialist. He had a wholly materialist outlook and in his art wanted to express an uncompromising joy in life, looking on the one hand to the Abbey of Thelema in Rabelais and on the other hand to the bacchanals of Rubens; he delighted in strength and idiosyncrasy of character. Before 1918, his art was firmly rooted in the earth, in the varied scene of men, with a pastoral note looking back to Theocritos. But now the pastoral vision of a Dionysiac utopia had been wrenched away from the earth and made into an emblem of the spiritworld. The direct cause of this volte-face lay in the worldwar, which [hit] him hard and made it impossible for him to carry on with his carefree attitudes. To preserve his faith in the utopia he had to transfer it off the earth. He told me once that when a complacent visitor was talking of the war, he burst out in fury, telling him that it was going on in that very room, that blood was streaming all around them. The sharpest blow was the death of his young brother Reg, a handsome chap full of the springfires of life. At the moment of his death, their mother at Creswick had an abrupt conviction of some sort of message from him. About this time Low the cartoonist visited Springwood, for some reason taking a ouija-board. Norman was interested and constructed his own board: the alphabet in squares hung on the wall. Two persons took up a stick, their hands holding it alternately, and the stick came to life, jigged about, and ended by pointing to letters that made up sentences. Norman considered that Rose (his second wife) was the medium achieving spirit-contact with Shakespeare, Beethoven, Apollo, and the others, and carried on conversations by means of the stick. I was present at only one of these séances; I think Norman wanted to find out if his “spirits” would accept me. They did, but I didn’t get much out of them. I asked Apollo leading-questions to find if he would set the origins of the Greek hexameter in the Mycenaean world (where, in these days long before the decipherment of Linear B, I suspected it lay); but I got evasive answers. Still, I

lulled my doubts. I had accepted Norman's neoplatonic scheme of descent-ascent, so that there was nothing illogical in the communications. All the same I continued to feel a certain distaste for the whole thing, and was pleased to be invited to no more séances.

My acceptance of the creed of Creative Effort had been facilitated by my love of Plato. Before all this, I had accepted his cosmology as a sort of allegory, just as I accepted Shelley's universe of angelic potences, or Blake's conversations with spirits. I had been deeply stirred by the Menon as a picture of the mind's awakening, by the Ion as a description of inspiration, by the Phaidros as an account of the quest for beauty; the reality which the dialogues treated was for me the sphere of poetic insight and delight. Ignoring the metaphysics of the Forms, I read Plato for the psychology of creativeness and saw the poet or artist, not God, as the creator of ideal patterns. This approach made the transition to Norman's world-picture easier. I merely restored the otherworldliness to the Forms, while keeping their vital link with poet and artists. And thus, I was not only able to accept Norman's ideas but to give them a far greater philosophical rigour than he was capable of.

I had gained the degree of B.A. with first class honours in Latin and Greek; but after the wager I had made with Apollo worked out as blocking me from an Oxford-scholarship, I happily prepared to move to Sydney with a few pounds in my pocket and the address of an anthroposophist German sculptor, whom I had met on a visit to Brisbane. Not long after Ray sold all my books, left in Brisbane, and joined me in an attic. We lived a hand-to-mouth way for some months. Then I fell in love with Janet Beaton and we married, despite my insistence that no external ceremony constituted a bound for me. She had £5 a week from her parents, and I earned odd sums by writing, mainly things for the Sydney Bulletin, tales, essays, topical verse under various pseudonyms such as Panurge. From my viewpoint it just happened to be lucky that Janet had a regular allowance; we would have come together just the same if she had had nothing. Norman could attribute the solution to guidance by Apollo or some thrifty goddess. In fact the passive element introduced by his concept of the artist as one accepting

the pulls of life with responsibility only to his art made it rather likely that something of the kind would happen. But it was not a genuine solution.

From 1921 to the end of 1925 we sought to found an Australia Renascence with such publications as Poetry in Australia and Vision. As usual, there was a contradiction in our aims. We had a supra-national notion of culture. From the Greeks, through the Renascence, on into the great works of the 19th century we saw a single lineage of mind or spirit. Norman's chosen spirits were expressing the vital human essence, regardless of local conditions. But we were in fact strongly patriotic, seeing Europe as culturally exhausted, going down into a swamp of primitivism, a desert of abstraction. We were announcing the end of the pioneering phase in Australian art and letters, and the need to draw in elements from the full sweep of world-culture, but our perspective made us do so in wildly exaggerated terms. Still, the announcement, and the work that accompanied it, did have a lasting effect, partly through the stimulus given to the poets Kenneth Slessor and Robert Fitzgerald.

As well as writing my top-of-the-voice manifestos, which mingled Nietzsche, Plato, and N.L in strange ways, I went on writing lyrics, narrative poems, and, in particular, verse-plays in which the general system was Elizabethan, but the psychology Nietzschean-Freudian, and the idiom a mixture of colloquialisms and the richest combination of the colour-image that I could devise. By the term "colour-image" I meant much more than imagery in which colour played a part; I meant a dynamic sensuousness in which the image strongly cohered, then iridescently broke up, hung on the edge of dissolution, then regathered its forces into another dynamic concentration of sense-thought-emotion. The key-aspect running through the images in congregation or explosion was light; and thus the massing of an image was taken as mobilisation of bodily and spiritual energies into a new unity, while the explosion and its overcoming expressed the innermost pattern of the cosmogonic secret. The image conquered space, while its accompanying rhythm, indissolubly united with it, expressed the conquest of time. The absorption of the music of Beethoven and Wagner played an important part in this

new-creation of the image, and my verse, directly and indirectly, attempted to find the verbal equivalent of the musical imagery of those musicians.

With all the devotion of the best-beloved disciple I sought to live out my life on the principles of Creative Effort. Just as I refused any ordinary work and took the course that seemed directed by signs from my poetry or its surrogates, so I did my best not to organise my life in any way outside the disciplines of work. Those disciplines had to be strictly accepted and adhered-to, without any question or complaint, but they had to emerge from the work-processes themselves. Other experiences had to be taken as they came. They provided the living material of one's art. They included the most direct and simple of enjoyments: those found in sunlight and moonlight, in calm and storm, in the wild surf or the dry shadows of the barren hillside. They involved both ease and extreme stress, all of which was to be accepted with an equal mixture of sheer surrender and stoical apatheia. They involved also the simple pleasures of everyday existence, the tankard of beer with friends, the embrace of the girl who gave herself without bargaining or equivocation. One had to submit to the pull and drive of life, take it wholly inside oneself, yet be unsubdued, the master of one's fate. For one's fate was determined in the last resort, in all that truly mattered, by the necessities of art.

Perhaps I may be forgiven for citing here some passages from the letters of Hugh McCrae, written at this time, but published only a few months ago, near fifty years after the event. They conjure up the excitement of those days, and our hopes. They give a flattering picture of me; but it is not that which makes me cite them. The element to which Hugh was responding was not myself in isolation, it was the element of magical discipleship which I embodied as the beloved son doing his Father's business. (For the same reason I seemed a stupid and blinkered fool, quite lacking in any sense of humour or proportion, to many others.) Hugh is writing to Norman:

> What an astounding young man you have begotten in Jack Lindsay!
> I see the figure of a new era flying over the earth… One half-god, with so much un-modern honesty and fierce-hearted courage, can do miracles in the world. Beauty sleeps out of sheer

> boredom… but she will waken to the kiss of the giant-slayer, and it may even happen in our own life-time.
>
> …. I gradually returned to the world… the first human I met was Jack, at Bulletin office.
>
> Jack's talk is wonderful, and I think I put up a record silence during his two days visit at Blaxland. It is people like yourself and Jack who make me wonder where I came from, and how I ever grew into being a writer…
>
> Jack's verse leaps straight between the legs.
>
> His body is a place for his spirit to take pleasure in… His flesh sings, pours wine, and draws melody from the world's harp for the enjoyment of a ghost as big as the Devil!
>
> I love him for what he can do, but despair of ever being near him. (1922)

Though he didn't know it, I had used the theme of the Sleeping Beauty in a lyric meant to express our Renascence:

> I shut my eyes and kissed. The dark place tingled
> with a thin twitter of strings
> tuning the silence of edged with glamour,
> a harp's twinged mutterings.
>
> I kissed. The quiet was brayed with sound,
> life clanked with buckled stride
> and faint with twitching past the centuries
> women's voices cried.
>
> The hoarded silences crashed in ears;
> but were her breath returned,
> her lips, in that cold body alone alive,
> on my lips burned.

The sensuous image was coming to life, we believed, in the night of abstraction, the death of man. Here is another lyric, expressing the same idea of return to origins, of revival out of death, of the source of art in oceanic depths (here seen as Atlantis):

> Tempted with dark roofs of water
> and columns of shifting light
> pale your statuary
> sleep through the emerald night
> lanterned only by nereid eyes
> that in the dim-paned sea
> shine unearthly bright.
>
> Tell to the depths your secret.
> An harp of the air
> will answer that mystery,
> a bird will dare
> to echo one tone of its sweetness aloud,
> a shell of the sea

mutter your lair.

Still in earth, bird and tree
your liturgy sings.
O drowned beauty,
giant in the spirit your message rings
and the song obeys
a voice that raises from under memory's tide
the organic swell of praise.

John Kirtley, who worked in a Sydney stock-exchange firm, and who had a passion for fine books, played his part in this phase. He handprinted my first book of verse, Fauns and Ladies, and then Slessor's Thief of the Moon. I began to help him setting and printing. When I mentioned that I had been translating the Lysistrata, he suggested that we should attempt an ambitious production. Norman saw Apollo's hand in the project and offered to do illustrations. We worked hard and turned out a very handsome book. Kirtley sent some copies to London, where they earned high praise. So he decided to drop his job and set up a fine press in London. He asked me to go with him. Considering that the venture had come up out of my poetry, I agreed. Constables had expressed readiness to publish some small verse-plays of mine if I wrote a few more in the same vein; and that seemed a further sign that I should try my luck in England. I however had no thought of leaving our struggle to launch a Renascence, and meant to stay away only a year or so: to carry the standard of the concrete Australian Image into enemy country and then return to base. Norman saw the proposal in the same way as I did. He paid for a new suit and gave me £50. Kirtley and I sailed off.

3

I have sketched out our world-outlook, but I should like to go more fully into some of its aspects, using the book Dionysos: Nietzsche contra Nietzsche which I wrote in 1925 and published with slight revisions in London a couple of years later. As I reread it, I find much that makes me blush and blench. Norman's influence appears in the notion that capitalism and socialism are identical since both are primarily concerned with economic values, and that "man" is a wholly destructive force. Part of these attitudes derived from the lack of differentiation between the controlling forces of capitalism driving into the worldwar and the

masses who were controlled and driven. I had felt something of this revulsion during the war, but my discovery of socialism had temporarily released me from it. However, my political grasp was too insecure to stand up against Norman's formulations, which it seemed necessary to accept if I was to continue my faith in the poetic image. At the same time I took over Norman's idealisation of the Romans, who were seen as seeking to externalise the Greek sense of order in political and social terms. The political illusion, said Nietzsche, "has for its aim the well-being of the transitory individual. Hence socialism, its fruit."

The same sort of confusion gathered round our idea of acceptance. From one angle indeed the artist accepts the world and everything in it as the expression of energy, of process, as actually existing; he accepts reality in its many sided complexity. But he also accepts what is, in order to change it. In the full dialectical viewpoint this involves both the development of art and the changing of the social situation; the movement towards a fuller aesthetic is bound up with the movement towards a more human society. But in our positions the whole emphasis had been laid on the aesthetic movement; the social movement was irrelevant. Since experience was reduced to a purely sensuous level, from the simplest enjoyments to the ecstasies of sexual union, the best thing that society could do was to stay as it was, carrying on its blind repetitions, and getting as little as possible in the way of the delighting artist. Any effort to actualise justice could only upset the balance and result in worse cruelties and oppressions.

> Life is valueless and disgusting if its only purpose is to bleach uncontrollable ravin into kindliness and lack of cruelty. Life is a vicious circle if it moves merely from animality to God, from that which is purely bestial to that which is morally pure, from one formlessness into another through a brief period of tormented individuality.
>
> For in the tiger and the saint we see the completion of a cycle. That which began in a world of formless substance, a little irritated clot of automatic reactions, returns to a world of formless substance. The only difference is that a tiger will bite; while the saint (if the torture-chamber of morality and religion has done its work effectively) will not.
>
> All that has happened is that a little clot of irritation had had the automatic cogwheels of its identity dispersed. The process that formed, in evolution, the saint's personality painfully, after aeons, out of the little clot of cohering energy which was the tiger, has no

> more significance than the action of the wind spiralling briefly through dust.
>
> That is all that has happened. The aeon that has passed was only that twirl of the dust.
>
> The tiger has been made harmless, returned to the thinness of God. A praiseworthy but pointless performance, and one which we cannot accept as constituting an intention in life.
>
> However, I have no quarrel with the extreme ends of the process, if they keep their proper places. The tiger in the jungle, the saint in the bosom of God, both these are out of my path. It is in the intermediary stages that the yet unhaloed tiger is dangerous to life; for the humanizing (that is, tormenting) process has only operated sufficiently to make him more ferocious, and to have suppressed his original simple functions as yet not obliterated with the sweet nirvanic opiate of pity.
>
> The half-tiger half-saint then turns on life with the ravin of the tiger, and all the power for harm which the consciousness gained by rubbing shoulders with the cycles of life has given him. Instead of Buddha we get Savonarola.
>
> I do not attack these conditions. I leave it to the opacity of the moralist to believe that a spiritual condition is alterable from without. Man will always have to go through this process of damnation and salvation. But he will never know why he does so.

I had thoroughly taken over Freud's notion of the civilising process as one of repression; but I opposed to that process the integrative activity of the artist who creates consciousness by the dynamic image and who does not need to be repressed into moral behaviour. He does not need to be educated out of cruelty. Taking over Zarathrustra's dictum, "Write with blood and you will learn that blood is spirit," I argued:

> The blood is the touchstone of virtue, Dionysos the god. Ενοι, this thought rises to my head and lifts the scalp tightly as if, Dionysos, your mænads bound it with vine-wreaths.
>
> All emotions such as pity, sympathy, humility (considered in themselves): all that seeks quiescence and the slowing of the pulse: all that sets its goal in passivity or abstract virtue: becomes harmful to life.
>
> This does not mean that I do not feel pity, or that I would not do my best to alleviate pain where I find it. I have felt pity excessively; but I hate it, I hate it because I perceive behind it, Zarathustra, a deep sense of shame at having come into contact with so exhausted and maimed a condition of life, shame at the existence of an earth, at my complicity in its preposterous and horrible existence.
>
> I have walked blindly about, sick in the belly for hours, because I saw a dog run over in the street.
>
> But though I unavoidably feel pity, I do not frame my morality, out of my response to it. I discard it as soon as I can, in my healthy moments it is utterly alien, a loathsome necessity of the spectacle of an earth. When I call upon beauty in my own mind, or to the best of my ability summon it, pity is but a slight emblem in a larger disdain

> and anger. It exists only in the decay of the body; submitting to it, I open my pores to the graveyard worms, I decay. Beyond it remains the nexus of all the constructive emotions, the mass of sensation to which I am seeking to give a new reality and value by stamping it in a new image.
>
> Those who insist on giving pity an ethical value (and I do not deny their right, or rather their need, to do so) must be moved by one of the following reasons:
>
> Either they are still savage enough to need to keep impressing on themselves a picture of suffering and of inhumanity which stimulates their flagging sense at being cruel.
>
> Or they like to brood over pity, over misery, over ugliness, over all that is twisted, morbid, dying – the primitive's effort to stimulate himself back into the action of life in order that he may damn himself again, and so obtain the material for a slow-re-humanisation, and so on, and so on, for ever and ever, eternally recurring…
>
> In this idiom it will be found that the word Love is substituted for the fact Hate, Justice for Revenge, since you can only love God or an abstract principle by setting them overly or unconsciously against life's tumult. You are not, as we are, plunged into the stream in order to weave beauty's pattern out of its acclaimed energies, the broken lights that crest the waters. You wish to bottle, to tamper with, to redirect, to nurture those energies into moral channels where they must either stagnate or be poisoned, or roaringly overflow back to their primitive levels.

There is here, as in all the formulations, the identification of Man with Bourgeois Man, whose moral contradictions cannot be resolved in their own terms. The revolutionary impulse to change all that in its totality is therefore driven into the limited channels of the aesthetic transformation. Behind the thesis lies Blake's verses: Pity would be no more, If we did not make anybody poor[1]. But the judgement is perverted by lifting the moral issue clean out of the social sphere. Further the morality, the life-cycle, of (bourgeois) man is identified with the mechanistic science of the bourgeois epoch, which has ruled since Galileo. The only form of qualitative change which is recognised is that of the creative act, which achieves a new and resolving unity. Thus the creative act is opposed absolutely to the morality, science, life-cycle, of (bourgeois) man. The strong element of truth is quite spoiled by the limitation of the concept of Man.

[1] In the Blake poem, 'The Human Abstract' (*Songs of Innocence and Experience*) quoted by Lindsay, the lines are: 'Pity would be no more/ If we did not make somebody Poor'.

The creative act thus becomes the sole reality outside the repetitive process, and all the creative moments exist in the same time-space, outside mechanistic time. The end-product, if it involves a qualitative leap forwards or upwards, appears as the cause of the process producing it, not vice versa.

> … the Hellene (erroneously supposed to have no sense of development, because he rejected it as a social symbol), had this profundity laboriously translated into an external symbol (Hegel with his effort to see the idea incarnate in history: Darwin seeking for the seminal source of an evolving species) to be retranslated by Nietzsche with a new width and precision into the spiritual experience of the individual…
>
> The physics of Eternal Recurrence reappear, scientifically based, in Einstein. Nietzsche' implied analysis of the subconscious motive, particularly in relation to fear and repressed desire, finds its medical verification in Freud. His definition of the image's action, his realisation of the æsthetic nature of the universe, have produced Croce and Gentile.

These latter comments show an all-to-hasty wish to find allies. Like others who have not properly understood Einstein, I took his use of the term "dimension" to imply a full physical existence, so that I induced Norman to link Einsteinian space-time with our notion of the superior time-space of the image; the work of Croce and Gentile I was overvaluing, and indeed what I responded to in it was the Hegelian element. (Eternal Recurrence here, by the way, does not mean the repetitive and mechanistic process, but its exact opposite, the Dionysiac moment of the advent of the creative but its exact opposite, the time-space shared by all such advents.)

What gives a perverse force to the book is its passionate consistency in seeing individual self-consciousness, organised by the creative image, as the sole truly active force, the only one capable of a qualitative leap in development. History appears as the dramatisation of this self-consciousness, revealing (apart from the blind repetitions) the structure of its lyric and its tragedy.

> The primitive came bloodily to the sacking of civilization; he put his foot on the arm, sinking belly of Venus, and chipped the beautiful stone with his sword-edge and his kisses. He stood up with a snarl of greedy triumph over the consciousness he defiled; and he looked into the mirror in which Venus had been doing up her hair. He screamed with terror, and fell grovelling before the image of his

> own brutality, now separated from himself and threatening him. The mirror glinting in the beautiful hand shattered at this alien image that sank into it; the reflection tore the silver sheet of sunlight to shreds. The arm bearing aloft the twisted image of ugliness and hate branched out into a withered tree. The moaning savage lifted up his eyes upon the effigy of his own cruelty. The pain he had inflicted returning upon himself, the nemesis of hate. He bowed and prayed before the Cross…
>
> Jesus is the least important fact in Christianity; what concerns us is the sudden vast contact of the primitive with the currents of self-knowledge; and it is pleasant to consider that if he murdered consciousness it, as certainly, murdered him.
>
> What could it give him but terror and loathing of self? Listen. This darkness is wealed with cries of agony. Touch it, and the blood spurts from the raw wounds of thought. Up with the whip and enfeeble this frantic beast. The Renascence is waiting till these horrible expedients of man to become human have succeeded in draining at least most turbulent pulses of his savagery. Then it will be safe for mind to reassume its continuity.
>
> > I was then a skeleton
> > hanging from a chain,
> > picked clean by sunlight
> > and the beaked rain.
> > Slowly I dropped: slowly
> > knuckle and bone
> > crackled, grated in the wind, and
> > were ditchward blown.
> > Rib after rib I counted
> > falling out of me
> > till only the skull was left
> > rattling precariously –
> > then that too fell
> > dull through the air,
> > and there was nothing
> > but Me there.
>
> Praxiteles, Titian: Homer, Aristophanes, Rabelais, Shakespeare: there is no break there. Was there ever such an episode as Christianity? No…
>
> The straightforward drama of man, the clear revelation of all his emotional recoils, drawn sharply with fire and bronze against a bright pyrical picture of his everyday actions by Homer, reappears with a new profundity and power in Shakespeare. Terror rustles in a more jagged darkness; beauty burns more defiantly upon the sun. We have only to put Cleopatra against Helen, Macbeth against Achilles, Hamlet against Odysseus, to see the new heights and crevasses created in man.

History is seen as gaining its sole meaning through intensification of the individual self-consciousness. Lyric art utters the direct acclaiming response to life; tragedy confronts joy with its antithesis, the free creative act with the blind repetitive cycles. Tragedy thus accepts

and includes the break, the failure, of self-consciousness, but then proceeds to leap beyond the gap into a new unity, a new level of concentrated energy. It expresses the accepted or willed death of the creative individual – the death he dies many times before the final collapse of his organism when he inherits the time-space he has created. The lyric, with its culmination and urge in the love-embrace, in orgasm, is included in tragedy, where the orgasm becomes death

> He sets aside once and for all the Aristotelian definition of tragedy as the purging of the soul by terror and pity, a moral catharsis, an opening of the bowels of compassion. Rather it is the creation of a moral crisis, not the purging of terror and pity, but an intensification of all things pitiable and all things terrible by an upward sweep of emotion coordinated into a rhythmic culmination which becomes Ecstasy. And this culmination is not a release of emotions troubling the mind, but a sudden accumulate rivetting of power: a release of energy indeed, but even more a dangerous conservation of energy: an orgasm and a statue…
>
> Love and death are two basic conditions of life, and therefore the work which makes a lyrical fusion of them will be profoundest. Tragedy alone can assemble the necessary range of imageries, of human emotions and gestures, all eddying remorselessly to the cataracts of death, of the ecstasy which makes death a symbol of life, birth, and self-completion – of love.
>
> Therefore death as much as coition is a symbol invested with infinite emotional significance. Dionysos, the god of growth, of all flowering, is inevitably the god of vital disintegration, since the plasm of life is germinated from the smashed splinters of Apollo's eternity. Dionysos is then supremely the point where organism changes – the unseizable point in Time where evolution occurs. That is, where an act of will reconstructs the organisation of any unit substance, where the foetus becomes human, where the amoeba coordinates itself into something more than an amoeba, where the seed germinates, where a new plasmic rhythmic breaks the crust of consciousness.
>
> This new birth which is also a death is the expanding core of Dionysos. The eternal repetition of the seasons turning like a globe round the static earth is the wave of Dionysos circling, like the vibrations of light, through a dark recurrence: this circle of earthly life, this will which forces inertia to submit to the pangs and delights of birth, becomes in the spirit the eternal rings of a deepening immorality.

(The earth is called static because its movement seen as due to wholly mechanistic forces.)

This passage owes much to Jane Harrison as well as to Nietzsche; for a moment it trembles on the edge of a materialist dialectic, then reverts to existential idealism. Will is used in the sense which I attributed to Nietzsche in his phrase "the will to power": the innermost urge in a

person to a greater abundance of life, to a new unity of vital being. All qualitative change, whether in man or nature, is seen as involving this drive, this leap.

A few more key-aspects of the book may be here underlined. First, the insistence on the concrete. “To me the problems of metaphysics are as sensual as any thought of naked lovers, since behind everything, the image of lovers naked, the immanence of God, I feel the movement of a universe of inertia shrugged obscurely into form, patches of flesh wearing, through the opaque veils of silence, the spiritual vortex of light working on the clay of darkness.” Next, the insistence on the lived-through, the living-through; on thought-thinking not on thought-thought. This philosophy is the opposite of all those which have sought definitive systems. “Its purpose is also disruptive where it is most constructive; it balances life on a fine, delicate, and violent edge of creative exaltation. It seeks safety by giving itself up to the most dangerous conflicts. It deliberately submits to all evil, to all disastrous forces, in order to use them, to bind them suddenly into the ascending rhythm of passion which is joy.” The book opens with the statement: “The purpose of thought is not to solve the riddle of the universe, but to create it. Once it lapses from the giddiness of the search in order to construct reality out of its findings, it tends to become static.” The function of philosophy is “not to systematise thought, but to create philosophers.” The book ends with a poem which seeks to be true to Nietzsche’s aphorism: You will find me best when you reject me.

> This is the End, and so this Book is dead.
> Am I sorry to see it fall
> into inertia? It means nothing now.
> I read it and I say:
> What Voice is this speaking from the Dead?
> so far away,
> so humourlessly the plangent mockeries call –
> Truth, here is Truth: a stone…

And so on. The creative act is real while it lasts. It can be lived through afresh by the enjoyment of the poem, picture, statue, music, it has produced. But for the creator, once it is over, its significance lies in the activity to which it leads and which, to be fully valid, must transcend it. The existentialist basis appears throughout in the idea that every moment is a moment of a choice involving heaven and hell, integration and disintegration. There can be no

pause from the pressure of the need to grasp the moment in its wholeness and to make the choice between form and chaos. Since the moment can be analysed infinitely, without any final conclusion as to its nature being reached, the only way to grasp its wholeness is in the aesthetic act. The moral choice thus always involves an act, towards disintegration or towards wholeness; and this is the only real choice confronting men. All other choices are illusory, as are all expressions of will that are not impulse from the heart of the formative process.

4

I should now like to turn briefly to the ways in which I tried to express these ideas in my poetry. I thought that apart from Norman nobody ever read them except Gordon Bottomley, who, in his generous way, responded to my discovery that I've stolen a line of his by saying that he was happy to play Marlowe to my Shakespeare. However in the manual on Australian Literature, 1940, I read with surprised pleasure the following analysis, I think by Frederick Macartney:

> In them he reveals the self-creative tendencies of individuals in action and shows woman as a dominant energy in love. His Nietzschean philosophy of life characterises these plays. The individual, who is himself and not another, is his own authority for what he does; correction is not to be externally imposed but springs from within. He is his own critic. He has cast out fear. Each acts within the limits he can energise. Through poetry, then, may be unfolded the creative expression of the individual as absolute authority. And drama is a fitting means for the manifestation of the poet's creed in action.
>
> In Lindsay's verse-forms imagery and symbolism are highly complicated. He has been so accustomed to turning the abstract into the concrete that it is not easy for him to realise adequately the difficulties his readers have to overcome to follow his meaning or to get any meaning at all. An object in the world of his imagination takes on the form of what is organically alive and makes new association out of all ordinary settings. Sensations cease to be abstractions and become living things capable of movements beyond the limits of the rational; they can take on new shapes and work in smoothly with their opposites in a way that leaves the intellect staggering. It happens at times that the imagery becomes so complicated that the thought is, as it were, lost in a maze and cannot get through. But generally the meaning comes forth somewhere through an apt or direct expression.
>
> Despite his egoism, which springs from his philosophical outlook, Lindsay's poetic drama cannot be lightly passed over. They do not achieve all that he aimed at, and they are not likely to win extended favours. But they are among the good things he has

> accomplished. Some of his scenes shimmer with poetry. The symbolism is ofttimes rich and delicate, and the imagery graceful and light. But there is an undue tendency to overdo it, and the general effect is an unevenness of handling…

A writer, who is at all serious, seldom meets criticism, hostile or friendly, which gets right inside his method and sees what he was trying to do; hence my gratitude for this analysis. I should like to cite some passages which show how I attempted to find the poetic equivalent for the thought of Dionysos. First, here is the lyrical side: the scene where, in Helen Comes of Age, Helen, sleepless, draws the curtain of her room and finds Paris outside. He comes in. She is standing naked, with her two girl attendants embraced on a couch at the other end of the room.

> Paris. Helen, I could not sleep… Helen… Helen… Helen…
> Say something.
> Tell me even to go and I will go…
> Helen… You fountain lighted in the mind,
> of spouting marble blown towards the moon:
> beautiful statue wandering in the mind
> between the hands of thought that cannot touch you:
> you stone of fire graven in the poor heart,
> and put out never. Mine. (He kisses her.)
> Helen. Now go.
> Paris. I cannot.
> Helen. Aye, I know that well,
> or I would not have bade you go, be sure.

On this follows an exchange of love-utterances which attempts to get into rhythm and imagery the same sort of effect as the shelving semitones of Isolde's Liebestod, a flow of variation on the theme of kiss-flower-moon. The embrace-in-the-mind is thus the rhythmic embrace of the bodies.

> Paris. (embracing her). Mine, all the dimpled moonlight in your body
> fruited with kisses.
> Helen. Mine the fruit of kisses
> loading the sun's broad branches and your mouth.
> O make yourself the lighter by one kiss
> and I merrier.
> Paris. Flown kisses are
> fire's gossamer and hang as light upon
> your nipples as the sun's dust on a rose.
> Helen. I am tinged with your kiss as colour fumes
> from petals kindled by the flinty sun.

Paris. How shall I gather you against one touch?
Helen. Throw out a wider net of kisses still
to draw down all my spirit to one spot
of seething roses bowered in my sense.
Paris. It is done. I have dragged moonlight for your soul
with a flowermesh of thought, and sweeping come
home to your mouth.
Helen. My mouth has never strayed,
it is stained with kisses and the running juice
of some pulped laughter.
Paris. I am tethered here;
the kisses struggle in their gaol of flowers,
winged with moonlight.
Helen. Let them out,
Paris. Not yet.
Helen. Not yet, O dredge the moonlight for its flowers
to crush upon my breasts,
Paris. and give new life
to petals fading into bruised fire
of gossamer:
Helen. to breathe upon the sun,
Paris. And raise the beauty wraithed in ancient dew,
Helen. And flowers ghosted in a lover's sigh
Paris. What would you have?
Helen: Fling open moonlight wider,
Paris. Soon O soon,
Helen. Is there a flower puffed
soft on the light's frailly-woven wind
that has now wafted beauty into my sense?
Paris. Light is a drift of flowers
Helen. and looped kisses
blossoms beleaguering the towery moon.
Paris. O I have fenced all beauty in one kiss.
Helen. And belled the moonlight in one brimming petal
Paris. To pour into your palm
Helen. Ah Paris
Paris. Closer still the ring of stealing flowers
hems in the moon:
Helen. a garrison of flowers
to take the turrets of the moon
Paris. O hear
the pealing buds
Helen. the prisoned kisses
Paris. caught
in moonlight fluted through a flower's mouth
Helen. Our allies O the cauldron of red roses
Paris. And music where the moon's mad corybants
Helen. Leap through my soul.
Paris. The moon's warm citadel
hoists its last kiss, surrendering:
Helen. let moonlight go
flapping like a sail, cut the rope of twined kisses
and
Paris. let the moon go floating

Helen. O moon of gossamer
gone:
Paris. and kisses ebb across the mind
Helen. And the eyes open on the spreading moon
that coasts no dangerous reef of sunken flowers:
to torn curtain of kisses,
Paris. your beauty unveiled
by kisses corybants of music's wine
tapped in our pulses:
Helen. It is over now,
My lover beating silence to a cup
for an astonishing music poured from vats
of the old moon. O gobletted silence, gone.
Paris. To come again whenever you should tilt
the moon within your mind, to overflow
this fluting magic phialed for your mouth…

And so on through longer passages to the moment of flight:

Helen. On to the boat then, hawsered to the rocking moon.
Goodbye, Menelaos, I'm going to Troy.
Paris. We are going to beauty battlemented in the dawn
and lonely watchtowers of posed love that look
down upon the crushed earth marketting below
from the war rack of fancies heavening our world.
They shall gaze up at the clouds and see bright mysteries:
lovers falling through dwarfed kisses gone in careering smoke:
they are lost in the maze of that kiss now for ever and ever;
pavilions breaking up into wildsea races;
tritons blowing on conches of curly sunlight
and giants blasted by the momentary gods.
The clouds shall be our fancies and we will make and break them
till there are no more kisses upon earth.
We are going to a cloudy Troy in the mind
reared by invisible music built of stone
from the secret quarries of love. Helen, we go to Troy…

And here as a contrast is a passage from Marino Faliero, based on the same story as that used by Byron in his play. But I made the wife unfaithful and Marino an emblem of the pang of shame and outrage discussed in Dionysos, a bitterness of isolation turned in on itself. He is waiting for the signal that will usher in the massacre of the nobles. The lyrical image, as set out in Helen, sought to make a harmonious eternal-moment of time-space by the endless circling, breaking apart, and inweaving of imagery in its complex associations; the tragic image, striving to bridge the gap in consciousness, is deeply aware of the conflict in time-space, the concrete unity is split by the clockbeat of mechanistic time: death as rebirth fights

with death as annihilation. Marino is fretting, soothed by Bertuccio, who is his betrayer and his chief ally.

… Bert. We can do nothing more.
Mar. Then why talk of it.
Bert. I have not said a word
Mar. Then let us leave it. O, are there are no ways
of bribing Time that tinkles in the mind
with tedious jestering, a chatter of bells
over the dull boom of great drums of fear
spread taut in the blood: the ominous bird
that from the unexplored thickets of the soul
drags a thudding threat across every silence,
like touching unknown faces in empty darkness –
Time, that obstinate huckster of stale wares,
How can we buy him off from the mind's doors?
Bert. You will not, after breasting all these days
with such an even courage, now unstring
that bow of courage…
Mar. What is this? I, fearful!
I have too deeply quaffed with goodman death
a crony cup. Here, feel this hand.
It is not firm as yours?
Bert. Firmer.
Mar. My mind's as firm.
Only I do not like waiting. I was not made for it.
Yet what's a little longer, a little longer:
a few hours pawing hotly at the mind,
when all my life has waited for the dawn
that is enwombed yonder? My blood's on tiptoe.
My mind is terraced with dark listeners.
They listen from dark terraces of silence.
They look at me, at the small cry of light
that is my thought dwindling into pain
at the end of those looming silences.
Do not let silence talk to me. No.
Answer, answer!
Bert. What am I to answer?
Mar. Anything, you fool. Anything that may be spelt
in the loud marts of wisdom that is but
the veil rustling with terror, yet less terrible
than blackness gapped with quiet. Anything
rather than silence dripping on the flayed mind.
Here – there – where is it? The dark adversary
dodges the turn of thought and clicks his tongue
still behind the head, and every lull
is scratched with voices like a finger drawn
over screechy glass: fingers feeling for me
behind the wind of silence, nothingness
to which the silence tapers, tendrilled voices
trying to break through the glass of the wind.
No.
Tell me, Bertuccio –

let me see, let me see –
how do you think the Genoese will take
the news of the upsetting of the Government?
I suppose it will bring them barking at the heels
of our navies, with their currish ships snapping –
Of course the difficulty will be to keep
these rascal tools of mine in hand when they have slain.
The State's strength must not suffer.

Bert. Ten years now
the plague has crawled among us. So one morning,
though tired with butchering, will hardly sap
our forces to such weakness –-

Mar. At this moment
they are moving about the city, muttering,
taking out swords to look at them and think
what rust of death will eat them by next night,
humming the hours away, muffling with wine
shrilly-pealing time, as one sets a cover
over a bird to stop its singing, stop
the birds of shrieking time with a pall of wine.
Call in some wine, Bertuccio.
That will ease this pulse which in each minute
cages a score of colliding fears slung
to jolt between the heartbeats. That's the thing.
Too much can be thought of in a second.
Time should not be heard, it should not leaf
the air about us with a hiss of thought.

Bert. I shall order the wine.

I should like to pause there and cite another passage from Dionysos to bring out how closely the plays turn into action the philosophy.

> By Evil, I mean those who seek death, who, seeking death, interpenetrate with fangs of inertia every pore of Plato. I mean God.
>
> It is obvious that if Mind moved purely upward, it would escape all meshes and rush to a finality somewhere beyond all beyonds, a mad tobogganing into a vacuum…
>
> My effort towards consciousness is the concretion of Good; then how could an abstract principle of Evil balance a concrete condition of Good?
>
> Therefore Evil is concrete, not a vague principle of discord and pain, but discordant individuals, those whose pain desires to escape itself by the dissolution of the life which causes pain.
>
> Once I have desired consciousness, I create all Evil. My decision strikes bells through every plangent hell of inertia. I must die also, that life with all its pain may cease. I, who create pain, must be so riddled with death that I, too, will wish to end this intolerable nonsense of agony. It remains to be seen if I can surmount the conflict my desire precipitates…
>
> I say that all these attitudes (that is, those who take them) are evil, automata of death in a conflict I wage with myself. Behind them stand darker figures, those in whom hate has become a

> tormented recoil from life… a vital principle, surely, for it can no more achieve inertia than the discipline I profess…
>
> You who are my evil, whoever you be, a truce for a moment while I send my love across the abyss. You may seek inertia, but you have taken no coward's way to it. I have my renegade moments when the aesthetic of hate appeals to me more than the aesthetic of love: the attraction of Milton's Satan. There is dignity in complete hate because it is pure, it has no tincture of love, which in it is loathsome (as Milton's Adam and Eve are); whereas love, by willing the eternal recurrence of life, wills also the existence of hate: it is beautiful, but veined with darkness, it twines together all contradictions, and so its pride, though ultimately greater, cannot have the single and perfect charm of hate.

(It must be recalled that under the heading of hate I was listing all who had sought rigid systems or attempted to project a single God.) In Marino there now bursts in an agitated citizen with complaints about a ship of his captured by Cretan pirates. After much talking at cross-purposes Marino bursts out.

> Mar. My God, I have no patience. Let every ship,
> boarded by descending furies, be pushed under
> by the vast thumb of death, the ships that hide
> among the gullies of foam like insects hiding
> in the tattered fur of a great writhing beast,
> let them be shattered,
> as the sea, itching with their vermin-keels
> like that rolling beasts, mangy with foam,
> turns its gigantic limbs –- fool, fool,
> the moondrop welling from the tremulous sky
> shivers and the stars are loose in their sockets
> and you come and tell me you have lost a ducat.
> Merchant. No, my lord, when did I say a ducat:
> You there, confess I said nothing of a ducat.
> I have the bills here, also an assessment –-

He is thrust out, and Marino continues his anguished meditation on Time.

> Mar. Look at the stars,
> mouths streaming with light's water, a silver rheum
> that flows with time and is timeless.
> Earth, with its crop of seasons moving around
> a circle painted with the fire of flowers,
> blossoming snow, and all the bundles of fruit
> dropt by the sun in trees, revolving depths
> of equal life, and timeless, for they return.
> The flames of frost smoke to crimson briars
> and summer's ghosts dazzle the snow that clusters
> woollen fires on black boughs. Summer and winter
> shake out the same fritillaries of light
> upon the sense, timeless. Time, time
> where is it that it aches under my eyelids

and the stars pant it out? did you hear a noise?
Bert. It is early yet.
Mar. You have a man at hand to take the orders
for the bell to ring?
Bert. He is outside.
Shall I call him in?
Mar. No, no.
What is time in the mind, when on a tide
of some flooding season it sets one way,
not by the merging ritual of days
spinning eternities of gladed spring,
since surely spring returns, but engulfed
in a branching sameness? In the soul's great year
either to marching pipes we maenadise
and break through wintry curtains of the shook winds
with freshening stride, and the mind's endless season
brightens to alternate revelries of flowers,
or else fling to arctic death and all the stairs
of fear looking for the bottom of the world
to put its back against. There is no bottom.
What do we fear? Not death or any pain.
It is fear we fear.
Bert. Leave this incessant warding
of arrowy thoughts. I'll stand with any
amid dangers, or the darting expectance, as here,
as long as I'm left alone. If we're to fail,
well, let us fail.
Mar. Do you think I care
For our success or failure so much I'd bend
by the least whisper of a plea for either?
What is this plodding fear then? I do not know.
They can do nothing to me that I fear.
They are nothing to me, nothing. And yet
I would not have the death with which I have roped
this square, budge to admit one life escaping…

They call in the man and send him out again.

Mar. Is it time, Bertuccio?
Bert. Almost.
Mar. Yet the square
brims only with a furry quiet of shadows,
pelisses of the moon, drawn after her
like all the heeling seas.
The shadows tingle with a war of silences
and weedy tendrils clashing noiselessly
like hauberked ghosts metalled with no sound
and crossing swords blunted on soft quiet
and darkness padded with terror. Is it fixed
for the Admiral to know I have sent
word for the signal, so they may pretend to fight?
Bert. The Admiral by now must be breathing
that mass of gloom over to the right there.
When we pull the curtains, he will know it is sent.

Mar. All's finished now. My life is ended.
Let me sit down now.
There is nothing more to do. Nothing now.
You did not understand me when I said:
Their death does not matter, yet nothing else matters.
Was that a light there?
Bert. No.
Mar. No.
I feel as though all earth's phantasmata
were locked in rigid air and my body
grows very still, very still.
This is peace, I think. It is the first time
I have truly known peace.
My spirit with the pull of arched smoke
hangs above this steady cressetflame my body
and I seem somehow standing over myself
as you might stand over a dead man.
Bert. It is time to send him.
Mar. Send him then.
Bert. Here!
Gianotto (entering). Yes?
Bert. You are to go now. Take the ring, and see
there are no delays.
Gian. I know my duty. (Goes)
Mar. Call him back. Make sure there is no mistake.
Bert. Do not fear for him. I have used him before
in more difficult embassies than this.
(Pulls curtain)
Mar. It is afoot now. Nothing can stop it now.
Death is baying.
Listen and you can hear death coming nearer
like trinkets of music gaudy in the wind.
Did you see that curtain shear off the sliding moon
as a head falls before a dark sickle?
The skies are faceless. There is no face to see
into this cauldron steaming with slow death.
We are in a strange place, Bertuccio.
The stones of the Piazza are scorched
from hell's faggots burning darkness beneath.
They will feel hell, even through the leather of their shoes,
and murder pacing up and down. Draw back the curtains.
I must see if the moon is withered or agape
with mutilated fury. Draw them back. (Bertuccio obeys)
Ah, it is there, fading sunk within
the pale wind sprayed out from the dawn's sluices.
The dykes of darkness are down. The east lets out
a feeble glare of heat, the first dour taste
of blood on the day's mouth. Dawn is rubbing
darkness out gradually. Ah, to see
this blind pallor of rose
slasht to giant red lips drinking red.
Where is that bell?
The blood is beating molten chimes in my head,
I am deafened.

Though the whole sky should swing like one huge bell,
the moon hitting upon
its reeling sides like a silver clapper,
on this beaten brass of early light,
I should not hear it.

Bert. O for God's sake, stop.

Mar. Come to the balcony
and hear the sky toll death,
I, like the sun, standing
to quaff the vapors from the vassaled earth,
to burn their souls like dew with my hands.
Has it not shook the air,
a mellay of pitiless bells?
O false mists of light,
fear is the mirror you inshroud. I will not
look at myself within you. O, why
did we not do it last night? It would have been over by now.
Death shall flash soon.
Are there no bells yet? There they are.

Bert. No.

Mar. I heard them. I tell you I heard them.
I can hear them now.
There! There!
(Enter Seignior of the Night and men)

Seign. Marino Faliero, Duke of Venice,
I arrest you on a charge of conspiracy
against the State –

Mar. I did not hear them, Bertuccio?

Bert. There were none.

Mar. So…

Bert. Who has given you the right
to burst thus on your masters?

Seign. I have my orders,
and what is more, I have the men with me
who'll see those orders done. I come from the Forty.

I have felt it worth while to cite these passages from Dionysos and the plays, since they bring out more strongly the position I had reached than any generalised recapitulations could do. They bring out indeed, I feel, with a violent immediacy the actual thinking and feeling of those days. But having gone so far into a subjective existentialism, how was I ever to regain the fuller dialectical bases which I had been beginning to build in a tentative way before I received my father's letter? How was I to attempt once more to link the aesthetic and the social aspects?

The rest of the book is the story of that return-journey. But, by the nature of things, such a return could not be to the identical point of departure. Every experience alters one,

enlarges the field that one has to cover. After my devotion to the cause of Creative Effort and our Australian Renascence, I could not be the same person as I was in 1919. I could only get back to a materialist dialectic with a much wider scope, with a much fuller aim, than I could have dreamed of in my first simple salute to the Russian Revolution. The return-journey could only be a devious and a prolonged movement, coming out at an unguessed point in unexplored country. An aphorism of Nietzsche's which stayed with me was that declaring: What does not kill me, strengthens me. The more resistances I had to overcome in regaining a materialist dialectic, the stronger and fuller the dialectic would be in the end – as long as I could truly persist. Looking back, I see in my development a series of swings, of wild and brusque changes, and yet I am even more aware of the continuity. To keep on swinging about implies a lack of any coherent or guiding factor; but to plod along a single track suggests that even if one began with a useful truth, one has lost its living virtue. The excessive swings of my early years do indeed reveal a sharp instability; but even so, if such an unstable movement from side to side could be overcome, there was the possibility of a much enhanced richness of experience to synthesise. The question for the reader to decide is whether the swings destroyed the element of continuity or the struggle to understand myself and my world issued through them in a wider and fuller truth that it would otherwise have achieved.

One point in common in all my phases has been the need to live wholly in accord with the dominant idea. Not to treat ideas and beliefs as a sort of luxury-product, as something to be taken out at convenient moments, brushed up, and put on display, then stowed away again till the next convenient moment. I have always tried, to the limit of my ability and understanding, to incarnate the idea, without trimming or compromise, in every aspect of my living. It has always baffled me how anyone can profess Christianity and yet not sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor, then dedicate the rest of his life to poverty and the selfless service of the suffering and the oppressed.

It follows that any critique of one fundamental aspect of a culture or a society must involve the critique of all other such aspects. In the attack on mechanistic attitudes and in the

sketchy effort to set out a thesis of concrete time-space I had already begun a critique of post-Galileo science, but had not carried it far. However I intuited enough of what was entailed by the final developments of such a system, to see that in our world it must lead to violent destructive powers. In the last year in Sydney I had worked out with my friend Beutler, a musician for whom I had written some songs and the libretto of an opera, The Song of the Faun, the basis for a big opera on Atlantis, in which the theme was to be the open struggle of Good and Evil, with something of the imagery of Marino, but with the forces of Evil directly embodying the sort of science that was to lead to the atomic bomb. The theme was thus World-end by the full working-out of the possibilities of mechanistic science. We had only completed the opening passages before I left. But I may cite here one of Marino's speeches which sets the key of revulsion and hate:

Marino. O, I am halfmad
with seeking for that word in my mind
which can lash a storm of waters on this city
and kill me with fulfilled vengeance. That I ask.
Death for myself and death for all the world.
The whizz of death's sword through a moaning air
of dizzy slaughter would be time enough
to know that earth had shrivelled. Let it die.
Myself and you and you and everyone
that's carcassed for its maw. Let air grow ice
and choke each throat; and a stone of silence
freeze on struck man, and trees wrinkling with sunlight,
and all the fields blotchy with flowers, and fruits
like blistered rottenness blown on boughs, hot sores
of earth's rank blood spotting fiery green
and all the harlot seas leprous with foam.
But chiefly man.
For him the sweating sun bleeds and the gashed moon
ulcers night's flesh, but have no stratagem
to unfrost his face of lies, and beneath show
whimpering hate, his soul. Then what flat leer
of blind grey seashapes, and a night of bats,
scurrying glooms puffed from small white dead things
that the touch loathes, lice shook from the moon's hair
to bead in eyes, the widejawed gobbling fish
that lip the pallid glass of the eyes' cistern,
risen from depths of slime –-
Bert. This is intemperate,
all things have remedies.
Mar. But this has none.