III. DOWN TO THE EARTH OF HISTORY

1

What was I to do? I could have discussed things with Edgell and others, and have found some sort of old job in publishing or the like, hung on somehow on the edge of journalism; but that would have been to fail my Oath. I had somehow to find a way of life that would carry me on from the basis that the Press had given me. There could be no return ever now to my Sydney damn-all existence, where a woman was helping me with money; I had to stand on my own feet, carry along the helpless and semi-paranoiac Elza, and yet gain my living by a system that somehow built on the positive aspects of the Press and my verse-dramas.

At first there seemed a way-out without too much change from Fanfrolico days. B., a director of the wholesalers who had handled our books, left the firm to start off as a publisher. He approached me with a suggestion that I should continue printing my own sort of books, with his imprint. The offer seemed too good to be true. I had handed practically everything over the liquidators. B. now paid me some small sums while Elza and I found an old forge near Dunmow, with a cottage next door. With his agreement we put in a concrete floor in the forge, and he promised to buy me a press. But he paid us only one visit, then died. He was a heavy drinker.

We were left without any resources, in the countryside, cut off from London and its possibilities. I tried to finish off a divinatory Life of John Donne that I had been working on for B., which in large part was a depiction of the sexual conflicts I had undergone, interpreted through Donne, plus some investigations of little-known 17thcentury thinkers such as the Rosicrucian Fludd, whom I had read during my researches in the British Museum. Donne's surrender to theology in his desperate quest for a livelihood, borne down by his ailing wife and their brood of children, was the sort of thing I was determined not to repeat in my own life; I had to develop, in direct forms of experience, the elements of union, understanding, joy defined in the love-poems and their conflicts. I had to release those conflicts from metaphysics, not cloud them finally over with otherworldly goals. The book was thus far too

confused in method, neither an objective Life nor a confessed fantasia on themes from Donne, and could not hope for publication; but it helped me to see where I was going.

Then I had another idea. I still held some drawings done by Norman for Lascelles Abercrombie's Phoenix. (L.A. had at first agreed to let us reprint his play, then, after a discussion with Secker, lost his nerve. The drawings belonged to Norman, so I had not handed them in.) I shuffled them up, then set about devising a sort of light picaresque fantasy-narrative, set in Homeric days, to link them in ways that would quite mask the connection with L.A.'s play. I made the heroine Cressida and called the tale Cressida's First Lover. I felt that my prose had no chance of publication, but that the drawings might attract a publisher. To my surprise the Bodley Head at once accepted the tale, but didn't want the drawings.

Perhaps this light-hearted story might have led to something of the same kind, more historically serious. But the Chancery suit I had begun for the regaining of Elza's daughter was going badly; Elza was scared of our penniless situation, but even more scared of giving me freedom of action; she violently resumed her attacks on me. (From this period our sexual relations ended, though I continued looking after her till 1941.) The breakdown of the Press had hit me harder than I understood, finally undermining my faith in Norman's universe. The idea of failure could be accepted in private; the whole thing seen as a merely temporary retreat. But in the cold eye of a legal process, however conducted with gentlemanly decorum, I felt held up to the world as a defaulter, one who had let down those who trusted him. I felt the blow, but did not real how deep it had gone. I now began trying to psychoanalyse myself, a risky process, but something I could not evade. (I had read enough clinical reports to know fairly well how the examination went, but could not estimate the tangles liable to result when one was both inquisitor and victim. Elza's ruthless eyes served as the external force ensuring that I did not easily give up.)

I realised that the Oedipus Complex, which previously I would have declared quite irrelevant to myself, had powerfully held me in its strangulating sphinx-grip. I experienced afresh my close relation of desire-revulsion to my mother as the head (father) of the abandoned family, and of angry antagonism to my father who had left us open to the threat of

the world; experienced these emotions with the sharp searchlight of Freudian awareness torturing them out of their lairs, so that they might be recognised at last for what they were, and might give up their ghost in the light's harsh purifications – or at least lose their old hidden compulsive power. I saw that behind the intensity of my discipleship to Norman had lain my antagonism driving me on into ever-fuller commitment; anything less would have left crevices for the other side of the truth to intrude on my consciousness. I had gained a sense of superiority, of dominating our situation, by the increased precision and lore I had been able to bring to bear on his concepts, relating them to Plato, Proklos, Blake and philosophy in general, introducing him to Freud and Einstein, clarifying the idea of the creative image, and so on. To others I might seem an enslaved disciple; to myself I appeared the leader in fields to some extent cleared by Norman. Further, I had the success of the Press to compare with his rather dismal attempt on London in 1909-10. (For in my eyes we had succeeded, however ignored or belittled by the establishment and what were for us its tame pseudo-rebels, Lewis and Eliot; we succeeded because we kept going, did the work we wanted, and found as large an audience for the Aphrodite as we tried to find.) The failure of the Press was then a sad blow at my sustaining image of myself as the über-Norman; and one sees why I never even considered a return to Australia when it happened. Apart from the problem of Elza, which I could have escaped by such a return, I could not admit a setback which punctured my über- role and thus weakened the basis on which I had accepted Norman and repressed my antagonisms.

Under the ruthless psychoanalytic pressure the whole set of rationalisations on which I had built our alliance broke down. I was brought back to the tensions of 1918, but in a vastly enlarged situation, in which the strength of the repressed emotions was all the greater because of the force with which they had been driven down and distorted. About this time I heard that he was threatening to cut down my mother's allowance. I wrote him a fierce letter of remonstrance and denunciation. He has not left, I think, any record of his response. He had a remarkable talent for hiding such things away, pretending they had never happened; but it must have been a bitter moment. In supporting Elza against the world (the Craigs and my own former friends) I had rediscovered my duty to my mother; rediscovered all that I owed to her

longsuffering kindness and forbearance, all that I had blithely ignored or forgotten in my haste to join Norman.

My surrender to Elza was intensified, my need to champion her, my need to prove that I could overcome the monstrous egoism which now seemed to have governed Norman in all his actions. And I found the shattering problems of psychoanalysing oneself. Either such a process is ineffective, dwindling away feebly with a few minor understandings of one's past motivations, or else it gains a terrible momentum. What ensured that I would take the second course was the presence of Elza at my side with her remorseless eyes, waiting for the moment when I would be able to spring up as a new man, washed clean from sin, with my inner mechanisms all changed overnight. In normal process the analyst is there to take the transferences of the patient and to bring about the moment of recognition, when the latter is thrown back into himself and resolves what has been all his life an unresolved conflict. With no analyst there to bring about the result, one finds oneself spiralling downwards into an endless void of fear, of trauma. I ended by lying on my bed for a fortnight or longer in a fast, taking no more than a little milk, and carried away in a series of obscure visions. I knew them all the while to be a sort of hallucination, but saw them increasingly outside myself: images superimposed on the walls and the furniture, mingling with them, obliterating them. Mostly the forms were small, sometimes very small, as of scurrying hosts across huge deserts, suddenly lost in the crevasse of some cosmic disaster. At times there were pure geometries, abstract forms in precarious movement round some threatened centre, moving in on themselves in an endless contraction or swelling on the edge of a copper-red explosion. In between the visions I felt myself going down deeper and deeper in time through my childhood, my babyhood, to the enigmatic moment of birth. How far the early experiences I believed that I resurrected in dark, blurred and emotionally powerful form were genuine, I had no means of checking. I felt indeed that I reached the birth-trauma, and afterwards, staggering to a mirror, found indeed the faint traces of very old scars on my face and head where I had conceived myself to be torn. (It might be argued that I had noted the faint scars without registering them in my mind, and that I now used them to verify my "memories." The memories, I may add,

were not visually clear, but were somehow projections of my whole body, unfocused and begetting strong perturbations of emotion and sensation, yet somehow compelling the interpretation which I gave to them.)

My final experience on the bed was a vision, not a dark memory. In a stark bronze light I saw a lionheaded goddess of an Egyptian type, sharply cut out, yet alive. I leaped out of bed and began feebly to eat.

Partly under Elza's pressure, but also out of my anxiety to make a clean break, I burned all my manuscripts and letters. Elza said I was hiding behind my beard, so I shaved it off. Now she began to tell the truth about herself. A firm of Braintree solicitors was working for us on the Chancery action; they must have much sympathy for our plight, since they never sent me in a bill; but they did ask for £50 to settle on Robinetta, the girl, in a trustfund. I managed to get the Limited Editions Club of New York to commission a translation of the Golden Ass for £100; and we sold a slight novel to an export-firm I knew, who had decided to dabble in publishing. Saturday Night at the Black Bull was set in a country-pub, the whole thing happening in one night. I wrote it down, but Elza, who knew country-pubs well, provided some of the dialogue and the songs. The work was more a documentary than a novel. From now on Elza gave up writing verse, though she later made some attempts at plays, basing herself mainly on some road-shows in which she had, years back, played minor parts. One of these plays had an incest-theme, a father falling in love with his unknown daughter.

She decided she wanted to go home to Coombe Martin, where her mother was now married to a market-gardener. I sold everything I had, and we left for North Devon. Her mother was astounded and uncertainly grateful at finding her still alive and not at all like a village-girl; indeed she carried the thing off very well. We retreated to a large house at Blackmore Gate on the edge of Exmoor; I had learned that with a reference in Who's Who it was easy to get a lease, with the first payment coming at the end of the first quarter; and the larger the house the easier it was. We had only some window-curtains, bought on credit at Barnstaple, and packing-cases from the barns at the back. We stayed here for near three

months, during which I made a few pounds by copying out my Blake and selling the manuscript to Foyle's. Then we went back to London.

Now began three years of wanderings. We were driven on by lack of money, and our moves, partly dictated by Elza's restlessness, made the lack even worse. We went, through some advertisement, to Maldon and lived a few days in beach-huts, wandered by stages across land to Colchester; there we found a Cornish advertisement and went to Portreath. I lived in a small house in an hotel's gardens, then in ruinous tower, while Elza stayed in a cottage. Now and then we had to go to London on account of Chancery, till Edith Craig gained custody of the girl. There were several changes more in Cornwall, from the head of Falmouth Bay to Truro, then to Portloe (with bailiffs after us), then to a rope-walk in Porthleven. The only time I ever asked for a loan of money was at Portloe, when I wrote to Will Dyson (my uncle through his marriage to Ruby Lindsay) and he at once sent me £15. At moments Elza seemed getting better but such effects were illusory. Strangely, after Coombe Martin she began to lose her pre-Raphaelite elegance and to look more and more a peasant like her mother. During these years, while she clung to me as her one point of safety, despite the fear and even hatred she had for me, I too clung to her. After the event I was able to recognise that. While I was with her, there could be no question of any backsliding on my part, any slinking off to the easy way-out. I wanted to take the hard way, and with her as jailer-prisoner I could be sure that I'd do so.

At Maldon a misdirected letter had made me aware that Norman was visiting England. I suspected that the misdirection had been deliberate, a disguised way of letting me know of his arrival. I took no notice. I felt sure that he had come to see me. Later I learned that he had left Australia because of a particularly vicious campaign aimed against him. But I still think he also wanted to see me and find out at firsthand what had happened to make me turn so sharply in a new direction. Perhaps in ignoring him I wanted to hurt him. But more importantly I was afraid of meeting him. I knew that in my desperate situation, penniless and bowed under the insoluble problem of Elza, I would not have been able to stand up against his overwhelming charm, against the genuine love I bore for him. If I was not to admit abject defeat and decline

into some sort of compromise that would destroy me far more surely than any Elza-burden, I had to keep away from him and continue my lonely way.

2

During these years 1930-4 I struggled to write various works. I completed a vast treatise on my psychoanalytic experiences called Birth and Will, in which the main theme was the birth-trauma. It seemed to me that men for the most part were swayed by twisted destiny in which the ultimate factor was that trauma, and that Will (the driving of oneself along some road which was only imperfectly understood) was the expression of this primal experience, in which fear and resistance had dominated. I had rediscovered the truth of Blake's aphorism: There is no Good Will. To Will then I opposed the organic movement of the whole self, and I strove to find out how one could define such a movement, in which one's acts would not only spring from the pure self but would also bring about a pure relationship to others, a relationship entirely without force or pressure. In short, I was trying to analyze how to treat human beings as ends in themselves and nothing else. Easier was the question of dealing with the extent to which fear distorts the life-process, and how Freud's repetition-compulsion reflects the inability to grow beyond the early patterns of fear and resentment. The birth-passage leaves a perpetual memory of being blocked and maimed, instead of expressing a happy release into a higher condition of life. No doubt I overstressed the direct effects of the birth-trauma, but I still believe that the primal experience of movement out of the sheltering womb into the outer world of harsh light and stinging air, through rhythmic pangs, must leave important marks on the organism, though further events in babyhood and early childhood must play an important part in certain basic determinations of one's character, one's sensibility, one's tendencies in later life. I tried in my manuscript to discuss such modifications or exacerbations. But I cannot give any of my exact formulations in these matters; for I buried the pages in the barren soil of the cliffs at Portloe. I have come to feel that nobody wanted to read such a work, and I was sufficiently satisfied with what I felt it had taught me. It had summed up and ratified the phase of growth which had begun at Forge Cottage. At moments I felt that in my ascetic and withdrawn life I was indeed attaining the purity of impulse, the

wholeness, which had made my efforts worthwhile, and that I was at last worthy of reentering life. But if such feelings were illusory, I had at least learned something which decisively freed me from various unrealised compulsions and which made it possible for me to make a new start.

In my attack on Will as the effort to impose a purpose and to drive ahead with it, as opposed to the achievement of harmony inside oneself (which involved an harmonious relation with nature and one's fellows, above all with the beloved), I tried to analyze the blind emotional derivations from the sexual apparatus, which seemed to me to create the sense of sexual differences. Men, in a sort of penis-worship, idealised the notion of force, of driving in-and-through, of being on top, of power-concentration. Through a distorted conflation with the notion of anal blast-power, the image of the triumphant penis generated the arrow, the spear, and finally, in sheer evil, the gun and cannon. Thus war and its mechanisms directly reflected the mad notion of penis-power, of male energy canalised in the destructive weapon. Women, because of their virtue, their sexual system which did not depend on an attacking weapon and a mysterious coming-and-going power, were relegated to a passive role and seen as the vessel fated to receive the male outpouring of power, life. Only by getting rid of the fantasies based on the sort of distorted notions of penis and vagina or womb, I felt, could a sane relationship between the sexes be arrived-at. The key-thing was to supplant all the complex and hiddenly pervasive ideas of will-drive and power by ideas of harmony, union, equipoise, equality: the movement into harmony and unity would then beget its own liberated energies.

I also attempted to find some way of following on Cressida's First Lover. But the flippant charm which had easily earned that work a publisher was now quite beyond me. I tried my hand at a long satirical fantasy, The End of the Satyrs, which dealt with war between the Satyrs and the Centaurs. The intention was anti-war, and I worked out a long chain-series of actions and reactions, beginning with something trivial, which idiotically ended in disaster. The culmination was a world-end by the development of the mechanistic and the destructive aspects of science. But if that was serious enough, the chain-series of accidents lacked any basis except in human folly, so that the satire lacked any solid understanding of the social and

political nature of war. The Bodley Head, rightly enough, rejected it. I next made an abortive start with the historical novel: a tale of a group of persons who, dressing up in 17th-century clothes in a remote country-house, find themselves actually in the midst of the Cromwellian Revolution. Here was perhaps a good idea, but it failed because I did not integrally relate the tensions among the group to the new historical situation that enveloped them. The transformation remained one of the fancy-dress.

Finally, in our rope-walk haven at Porthleven, I attempted a modern novel, Flat-Dwellers, using the setting of a large block of flats in order to bring together a large number of very diverse characters. My main character Jenny was however too much a less broken version of Elza; and the persons in whom I tried to define the intellectual dilemmas of our day were too clearly defined in terms that recalled D.H.L. and Aldous Huxley. I wanted to say something that went beyond those terms, but I could not find out how to do it. Still, I proved to myself that I could handle a complicated group of people who at least partially interacted on one another; and I tried some experimental devices, mingling speech, action and inner thought (not stream-of-consciousness). Despite a murder, nothing came together in a significant way, except that Jenny-Elza ended up by standing on her own feet – a piece of wishful thinking that did not provide enough reason for the complicated picture.

During these years I sold three articles on the ancient novel to John O' London and did a little book, The Romans, commissioned for a series by Gerald Bullett after I submitted a specimen chapter (£50). I wrote a certain amount of verse for myself mainly around a character I invented, James Allague, who represented the lost intellectual. These created something of a waste-land desolation, which I excused because of its satiric slant. Here is a poem of 1933 showing my combination of this slant with psychoanalytic positions: Bourgeois Cradle-Song:

> Rock-a-bye baby, hush and bo peep,
> While you're asleep the world will sleep.
> Mother, because the weather is sultry,
> Is in the garden committing adultery.
>
> Since father finds life grow daily duller, he
> Seduces the housemaid out in the scullery.

Sleep, little baby, the world wears a muzzle
While you are doing your crossword-puzzle,

thinking it out and thinking it in,
learning to wear a deceitful grin,
learning to howl till the world becomes
a nipple obedient to your gums.

Howl, little baby, you poor little beast,
you've had your swill and enough is a feast,
when you are older and learned to feed
on women and food that your blood doesn't need,

your carcass with toxic wastes will go rotten,
your earlier hatreds will be forgotten,
but still beneath an attractive smile
you'll hide your cruelty and your guile.

Hush-a-bye baby, the world doesn't know
you're tied by a cord to the things below.
You're tied to your Mother, eating or sitting,
And your Father too, whatever he's committing.

You're out in the pantry, taking a snack,
your eyes at the door and you see through the crack.
You're out in the garden parting the shade,
you're sleeping inside the nursery-maid.

Hush-a-bye baby, hush and bo-peep,
while you are sleeping the world will sleep.
Mother has dwindled into a flower,
Father's a shadowy pantry-power.

Yet day will return with a thunderclap,
you'll be dismembered on Mother's lap,
Father will reassume his face,
And you will scream for the world's disgrace.

But you'll fear again in a little while
and reassemble your cruel smile,
the labyrinth of forgetfulness
where the terrible Minotaur makes his mess.

I also started a Life of M.Caelius Rufus, the orator who supplanted Catullus in the loves of Lesbia-Clodia. In my Catullus printed at West Hampstead I had added a long account of Catullus and Clodia, and had been moved by the fierce despairing letter that Caelius wrote to Cicero as he went off from Rome to start the hopeless revolt in the south that led to his death. In him, as in Catullus, I felt a kindred soul.

But I was diverted from the work just as I finished it by a note from my brother Phil, who pointed out that I'd never sell a straight bit of history on the Caesarian period, especially if it dealt with a minor character, but that I might do well with a novel. I pondered his advice and came on the idea of a novel about Catilina. (I had kept on studying as well as I could, drawing on local libraries for books and finding that of Truro most helpful.) About the same time, Colin Still, a reader who had much prestige in the publishing world and who knew Phil, had Flat-Dwellers sent to him by some firm (I forgot which). He wrote to me saying that he was much impressed, but thought it too experimental to get into print. When I finished my novel on Catilina, Rome for Sale, I notified him and he told me to send it to Nicholson and Watson, who, on his advice, at once accepted it. Still wrote a preface, which I did not see till it was in print. In it he compared the Roman radicals like Catilina with the Fascisti. Strange as it may sound, I knew nothing whatever of what was happening in Germany, except that in an odd copy of John O'London I had seen and glanced through the Nazi programme, which seemed quite radical. I had no way of comparing it with the facts, as I had read no newspapers over the harried years, not being interested and the hoarding each precious penny. Beyond the necessary conversations in shops, I had spoken almost with no one except Elza. In my occasional talks with Cornish farmers, fishers, or miners, international politics was hardly a theme.

In Rome For Sale I at last came down securely to earth, though I still had much to learn, much to understand even of the method I had hammered out. My struggle to grasp what had really happened in my own development had made me apply the same lines of thought to Catullus. That poet did not appear in Rome For Sale or the two following works, but the trilogy was in effect an effort to understand him by objectifying his world with all its inner strains and its direct issues of conflict. Though we have only a fairly small number of his lyrics (plus a few longer works in which he operates as doctus poeta, a literary or learned poet), and only one anecdote about him (in Suetonius), his personal poems are so strongly based in a direct and passionate recoil from everyday life that we can build up his world and his passage through it with remarkable fullness – and this is true however we interpret the

vexed question of artifice and personal revelation in his themes. As the first lyric poet after Sappho who thus drew directly on his experience, with a tragic note, I felt a deep sympathy for him. And so the attempt to enter fully into his world was both a repetition of the journey into myself and an escape from it. It helped me to objectify my own sufferings and trials; and the more effectively and widely-based I could make the objectification, the more I reaffirmed the newly-gained balance in myself.

Here lay the dynamic of the work, the need that drove me to explore the historical process and seek the laws that governed it. Anything less would serve only to pin me down still to the cycle of self-destruction from which I was struggling to escape: the cycle which had engulfed Catullus. There was no escape by averting my eyes on to petty issues; I had gone so far on the subjective side that my sole alternative was to grasp process, human and natural, as completely as I could, with every faculty I possessed. And that meant to give their full rights to all particular existences while seeking the systems, laws, or principles that drew them together and related the individual and the universal movements. What I had absorbed about the distorting effects of abstraction made me shrink from putting too much weight on general laws; at the same time I knew that the stress on individual development in isolation led to all sorts of impasses and inversions of reality. To the extent that I recreated the situation in its inner and outer fullness, to that extent I released myself from a curse.

Many forms of my previous thinking, which had had dialectical elements, now reasserted themselves, stripped of their idealist one-sidedness. Thus the scattering of sense and emotion in the explosive image and their re-gathering in a new concentration – according to the associative principle as it appeared in the world of Freud and modern Physics – reappeared as the complex expansion of individuality in history, in the actual world of people, and in the interconnections which brought the most diverse variations under shared laws of dialectical development. The notion of a purposive structure in life, defined by the creative image, passed into that of a purposive structure in the individual and society, which was to be found in all men, however much some might be more active, more responsive to the changing systems of which they were all a part. This is not to say that the value of art faded out and a vague

concept of social activity replaced my ideas about the creative image. Art still had its active role, but was not the exclusive source of values. I was not yet clear as to the role of productive activity and the relation of art to its process, but I was beginning to glimpse some sort of close link, a dynamic union, between the two levels.

There was also emerging, still embryonic, the notion that from one angle history was an attempt to recover on new levels of division the unity and brotherhood of tribal society: an attempt continually defeated yet ready to assert itself at all periods of crisis. That was one reason why I punctuated the narrative of Rome For Sale with the days of ritual celebration, when fertility-imagery, imagery of rebirth, reasserted the unity of the producing groups despite the power-groups which exploited them in order to impose a different sort of unity. Again I had not yet clarified this notion, but it had arrived and was to keep growing in my mind.

Thus the historical novel, as I tackled it, appeared as an effort to objectify poetry, to define the full situation and the testing-points of the poet. Poetry then ceased to be an exalted and isolated faculty, but appeared as a specific instance of human creativity, which, properly understood, illuminated the whole of its society, the fate and the hopes of every member of that society. I passed over into Catullus, who passed over into the totality of his world in which a deep revolutionary crisis was maturing. In this sense poetry became one with revolution: an identification that I was to struggle to understand and clarify for the rest of my years. For it is still with me, far from being completely understood, and I cannot conceive my existence without it.

My problem then was to set out the full pattern of political conflict, on the open stage of history, with all the intrigues behind the overt actions and declarations, the unconscious as well as the conscious assumptions, the multiple links with the needs and pressures of the life of the people. To show Catilina's growth from the position of a debt-pressed noble to that of rebellious sympathy with all fettered life, and to make the pattern of this personal development one with the expanding picture of his society and its nature. Thus from a limited egoism the hero becomes a man who realises himself in and through the life of the people, not by some facile political identification, sentimental or guileful, but through an experience which takes

him to the heart of the matter. This experience of a descent into commonlife in all its oppressions and sufferings is ultimately one with the patterns of ritual death-rebirth in the national religion. The movement out into the fuller life and the return to the isolated self, which is slowly modified in the process, is one of small deaths and rebirths; its climax comes in open revolutionary struggle if the hero's death comes about as the logical and passionate seal of his evolving unity with the people. I was still strongly affected by Nietzsche's aphorism: to die at the right time and sacrifice a great heart in battle. Certainly in an insoluble situation the true artistic resolution might well be such a death; but death was not the necessary culmination. The hero might emerge from the final confrontation with deepened self-awareness and understanding of the goal, able to carry the struggle on at a new level. Where he died, the exaltation of the tragic moment meant that one would be left with the conviction that, despite the personal failure, the revolutionary impulse, inherent in the need of men for a brotherly world, has returned into the depths, into the whole life of the people; and in this sense he is reincarnated.

The method meant an attempt to see how the central conflict worked out at all levels, political, legal, social, religious, cultural, personal – each owning a certain autonomy, especially with regard to its forms of expression. And to bring all these aspects together in a dynamic whole, which was both the hidden core of conflict and the spirit of the poet struggling to understand himself and his society. For material: the ancient historians, the poet, the art and archaeology of the period, Cicero's speeches and letters, the rites and traditions. Nothing whatever of known fact to be changed in the least degree. Amid so much tendentious evidence, any document that gave one the immediate feeling of event, a character, was of supreme importance. Thus, I felt the quick of Catilina in the letter about Orestilla that Sallust preserves: his sense of honour, his warmth of love. His conflict is between a deepening lack of illusion and a deepening faith in the struggle he has taken upon him; between the firm security of his love and the need to turn from it as the only way of regaining it on a level where he has built a world that does not mock and threatens it. The journey is to the point where his love and his bond with the oppressed become one.

A few examples. After the defeat at the elections Catilina is deeply depressed and tries to lose himself, wandering about the city and drinking in low taverns; at last he returns home.

> Orestilla was sitting pale-cheeked in the front room; she recognd his step outside the door and hastened to meet him in the porch. “I was so afraid,” she said, and threw herself into his arms. “Where have you been?”
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> Catilina shook his head; he could not speak; he saw the stain of dried tears in her cheek.
>
> “Poor one,” she murmured. “Did Manlius find you? He was nearly mad with worry that something had happened to you.”
>
> Catilina tautened. He must not weep. The world was so good. He was surrounded with such loyalties, and he had run away because his vanity had been hurt. He felt the bond between him and the world tighten infinitely. This was faith, this knowledge of love. They all loved him, and he had nearly failed their trust.
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> At the same moment he knew how weary he felt. With a weak gesture of the hand he moved on to the bedroom, followed by Orestilla, who was deeply disturbed by his silence.
>
> Then, as she approached with tenderly questioning face, his weariness dropped off and he felt only desire for her. He could not wait. He took her in his arms and fell with her to the floor. As if he was falling from great height, he felt her body, the earth, rushing upwards to receive him, to take him into oblivion.

When the break comes and he rides from Rome, at Arretium he calls on a friend, who he finds newly-married to a strong-limbed country-girl.

> These two were happy. Catilina thought of Orestilla and then cruelly drove the image out of his mind. But as he lay talking with Flamma of the state of Etruria, he felt that unbridgeable distance stretched between him and the wedded pair. He was bringing fire and steel, no matter what the motive, upon the earth; and these two were peaceably increasing the earth’s wealth. They owned an elysium from which he by his very virtues was excluded, and what greater injustice can there be than that a man should be damned for his virtues? Yet for what was he fighting but that this wedded pair should inherit the earth, they and all their happy other-selves? One seed must die in the earth, splitting suddenly with the unrealisable spark of growth, that the ears of corn may wave in the breeze of sunlight. He was the seed broken in the darkness.
>
> As he lay in bed later, his mind still reflected the picture of Flamma and his wife standing with arms about one another, looking out amorously on a future of harvest-days. Yet he did not want to go back the long road to the moment when he and Orestilla had stood in the marriage-awareness with a world of choice before them. Then he could have chosen the farmlife; but he had not chosen it; therefore he had not wanted it. He did not want it now. His hand felt out in the darkness for the sword which he had placed on a chair at the bedside. His palm closed round the hilt, and he rejoiced in the darkness.

And here is a passage describing the night before the last battle.

They had their banquet; and resting on the rough couches covered with skins and coarse wool, Catilina felt his confidence returning. He had four good men about him and two legions camped in the fields outside. What more could he want? On the morrow they would fight. They were near the mountains and could not retreat much further north without losing all order. “Sing us your songs,” he told Manlius, and Manlius sang in a strong peasant voice the songs which he had learned in taverns and army-tents. Once again the spirit of Etruscan earth was coming to Catilina, despite the loss of Caesar, despite the death of his son, despite the triumph of Cicero with words. The winter pall had draped the ruins of old palaces and of later farmhouses with equal bareness and charity. Desolation became part of the earth, and man’s desolate efforts lost their pathos. All that Catilina had planned was reduced to this wind-swept tent on the bleak hillside; this was the earth that he had inherited; but why should he complain. It was earth, and therefore he had no complaint. There was a richer culture in the strong peasant voice of Manlius singing these old songs than in the prettily modulated voice of any poet of the salons. Deeper back it went, closer to the comfort and endurance that was all life could give.

Endure and take what warmth you can gain. That was all wisdom. First learn to endure. The voice of Manlius came out of the winter earth, pledge of the returning sap of spring. Men walked the earth, and the spirit within did not wither with the change of seasons. It could endure more than a tree. The weakest man was stranger than an oak.

“Do you remember when Sulla took Praeneste?”

“I remember…”

“The slaves in the crowded workhouse-cell. The man hung up by the wrist because he tried to stab the foreman.”

“That ship launched at Puteoli.”

“I’ve never made a long sea-voyage. Let’s find a ship and sail out through the Pillars of Hercules, westwards.”

The voices were happy, reliving the past, charming the future with confidence. Life was worth living. Learn to endure, and all is easy. Then the warmth of comfort is known at its true worth. No luxuries are needed by the man who possesses his hearth and the bosom of his wife. But such knowledge comes only from endurance. The voices faded away across the pleasant warmth of wine into the padding[1] silence of the rain.

As he lay in the darkness near the end of the night hours, he was awakened by a shrill yelping cry. He started up, for the noise sounded from under his own brows. Then he heard it again. It was the cry of some mountain eagle. He had heard before the cry of hunting birds, but had never asked himself their meaning. Now to his flocking pulses the cry sounded shrill with terror, not with menace. Was the creature of prey then driven by a sheer unreasoning terror? It must be so; otherwise, why did it declare thus to the world its hungerpang, its ruthless determination to kill and to feed on the blood of other life?

The eagle was alone. Its life was a crag. It knew the loneliness of sheer light, and it feared its own existence of stark appetite. It cried

[1] Typo in typescript: ‘ladding’.

> in its despair, asking its prey to forgive and to understand. It warned in its terror, it cried out its cruelty, asking the earth the riddle of its birth. Why am I made to kill and to be lonely? Pity me, you creatures that I kill. I kill only out of my need, and thus depends the loneliness that creates my terror. Fear and pity cried in the voice of the eagle and all other creatures of prey.
>
> The awakened man trembled as he lay on his camp pallet, praying that the eagle would not again rend the air with that beseeching cry.

Out of his opposing moods and understandings he comes to his final decision, his death. "His death would be only another altar of piety in the unchanging temple. But his mood of violent joy did not dull his sense of generalship. It towered above him, an eagle, while he directed the operations…"

> Petreius sought out the body of Catilina and stood looking down at his defeated foe. The man was not quite breathless, but, as he lay unconsciousness, he still showed on his face the set expression of fierce determination which had made him so well known at Rome during the last few years. After all, what were politics between soldiers? The man was a brave fighter. Petreius had seen so many dead men.
>
> But Catilina's blood was draining into the earth that Catilina had loved, the earth that the feet of the priests of Mars would soon be reawaking to life. Catilina was dead, but his blood was living in the earth.

Round him, as he moved towards that end, there have been the many other actors: Cicero the arch-opportunist with fine words for every occasion; Caesar the radical who abides his time, waiting for the moment of most intense and extended conflict, ready to gauge what can be done by his concrete sense of the tension of forces at any given moment; Marcus Antonius the young hero intent still on a fullness of immediate enjoyment… (Here it was that I recalled Marx's 18th Brumaire and found that his picture of political workings had indelibly imprinted me.) What in my existential ethic was death as a final moment of choice achieving a maximum of selfconsciousness in a concentrated burst had now become the moment when the individual life reached its highest fulfillment in a union of struggle with the people. I did not fully grasp all that this implied, but I had taken the decisive step. I had found a form and content integrally related to my past poetry, which sought to move on a higher level, freed from the illusions and compulsions that had brought me to the breakdown, the total rejection of the past in 1930, a death that I had been struggling ever since to turn into a rebirth.

In 1934 we went back to London. Rome for Sale had been taken. Elza was bewildered and impressed. She felt the event proved that she herself must and could do something similar. She decided to try living on her own and I found her a round in South Devon; I myself went to a cottage on a hilltop near Speen in Buckinghamshire. The place had previously been inhabited by a journalist connected with the rationalist movement, who committed suicide there; he had left a large library of anthropological works on his shelves. Nothing could have suited me more at this moment, when I wanted to deepen my grasp of the nature of fertility-ritual, of the passage-rites of initiation, of tribal society itself. I went up many times to London to read and copy out Medieval Latin poems at the British Museum. Still had got the publishing firm to commission two anthologies of Latin translations: I am a Roman (prose and verse illustrating the Roman way of life) and Medieval Latin Poets (still, I think, the largest body of such works in translation by a single author in English). I did not let any of my old friends know that I was about.

Then as I expected and was dreading, Elza fell ill. I went down to her place in Devon and brought her back to my cottage, where I nursed her for some weeks till she was better. Then she went off to Brixham. But almost at once she wrote that she was ill again. I joined her, and we stayed together till 1941, all the while on the same basis of distance, living in the same house but hardly even speaking except at rare moments when she became friendly for a while. Throughout these years I did all my own cooking, washing, mending of clothes, and so on. (I never had the spare money to buy any new clothes, till about 1940, when I bought a new pair of trousers.) When we stayed any length of time in the same place, I grew vegetables.

Looking back I find it impossible to make out how we survived in the years 1930-4, with the various small amount of money earned during that period. For most of it I lived on oats and spinach, with a few potatoes and the like. After Rome for Sale I had at least £5 a week, as I arranged for that sum to be paid by the publishers instead of any lump-sums in lieu of royalties – £4/10/- after the cheque passed through the agents. Rent was usually about 30/-, and so there was £3 left, which I divided equally between Elza and myself. With my thirty

shillings I had to buy all food, stationery, stamps, and (very rarely) a book or two. As things went on a few extra sums came in; but they were usually swallowed up by our moves. Once we had nothing for some days but blackberries from the hedges and a couple of raw turnips.

Never has my health been better. The pressure of difficulties at times made me think how pleasant a nervous breakdown would be, but nothing of the sort showed up even remotely. I had decided that all illnesses were the result of a failure of organic purpose and that I must therefore deny myself such luxuries. It seemed to work, and has carried on fairly well to the present (when I am over seventy). But to refuse to be ill one has to face up to the nature of the experiences that have shaped one, so as to be able to thwart the repetition-compulsions which constitute the fate of most people. In the same way I decided that all medicines and drugs must be rejected, since they could only upset and pervert the organic movement which was also the freedom and fulfilment of the personality. I have never had a headache in my life or taken an aspirin; in recent years I have used herbal and homoeopathic preparations when it seemed they would help to fill in deficiencies or negate toxins in our polluted food-supplies. But that is all. I do not consider such things to be drugs in the sense that the chemical concoctions of the mechanistic systems of medicine are drugs. Also, at the time of which I am writing, the 1930s, I worked out my own system of rhythmic deep breathing, a series of accumulative relaxations, out of the ideas I propounded in Birth and Will, and only later realised that what I had devised was in effect a system of yoga.

If one is going to refuse to be ill, one has also to decide to work out a healthy system of food and adhere to it. The necessary first step is to give up eating corpses and to achieve one's symbiosis with the earth entirely through plants. Early in our wanderings, at Blackmore Gate while struggling with Birth and Will, I came to this realisation. The event that dramatised the question of choice was the gift of a couple of rabbits by a farmer from lower down the valley. We had extremely little food at the time, but he could not have known that. Probably he wanted to make a neighborly gesture. I looked at the dead animals, which would have had to be skinned and disemboweled before cooking; I looked at them a long time. And suddenly I realised the nature of one's dependence on dead flesh as a diet. The delusion that most people

suffer from, that they need a meat-diet and will weaken without it, derives from their incomplete separation-out from their parents; they still feel the emotional need to live on their flesh and blood, and the slaughtered animal is the substitute. The conviction that such things taste well is born from the emotional need, not vice versa; for when one recognises the basis of the need, the corpse-taste becomes repellent. Further, all the worst sides of the birth-trauma are nourished by the dependence on dead animals as food. (All meat is in a process of decay and has varying amounts of excrement in it.) If one needs meat, one needs also a vast mechanism of animal-rearing, with the murder-centres called slaughter-houses; and, no matter how one tries to banish the fact from one's consciousness, one is demanding that other animals die daily in order that one may live. One's symbiosis with the earth is therefore in terms of unceasing violence and murder; and one knows, deep in one's being, that one lives only by a system of blood-victims.

I saw then that I could not hope to be anything like a true human being except on a vegetarian basis; I could not hope by any other means to throw off the mechanisms of force and parasitism which I was desperately seeking to eliminate. In one sense the choice was a moral one: a refusal to accept a way of life based on making endless victims out of other forms of animal life, my kin. But the term moral needs a wide extension to cover the whole area of the choice involved. In that choice was involved the question of a way of life in all its aspects, of one's relation to nature and other forms of life. To treat people as ends and not as means seemed impossible to me while one was parasitising on other animals. I use the term parasitising because it is not as though there was any necessity to make corpses an essential part of one's diet; my own experience is that one can live incomparably more happily and healthily on plants. The persons, then, who choose to live on corpses do so solely out of an emotional bias; and they make that choice only because they feel an emotional need to live on other forms of kindred-life, even though it worsens their health. They deliberately refuse the way of direct and harmonious symbiosis with the earth, with nature as a whole, which is expressed by subsisting on plants, the halfway house between inorganic and animal life. Thus, one's whole attitude both to nature in general and other human beings in particular cannot but

be strongly modified by one's attitude to food, the substance which preserves one's life, enables one to grow, and establishes one's direct connection with the world of nature in the most intimate way possible. To achieve freedom and harmony both inside and outside oneself one must end the aggressive and parasitising attitudes expressed by eating one's fellow animals. This freedom and harmony can only be fully achieved and stabilised in a world of brotherhood that rejects corpse-eating as well as exploitation; but that fact does not relieve one from the attempt, here and now, to actualise the desired relationships as much as is in one's power – just as the remoteness of a fully communist society does not relieve one of the need to share in any struggle, however limited in its immediate range, which leads in that direction. A communist society which is not vegetarian seems to me a hopeless contradiction. (Incidentally, there is the advantage that food-production for a vegetarian society does not need anything like the vast spaces required for the breeding and rearing of cattle; it provides the economic rationale for a world-society of plenty.)

Further aspects of this issue gradually came up in my mind. The more I looked at the history of religion the more I saw how central the part played by matters of diet. The primacy of food is obvious in all totemic conceptions. When we come to settled society, the domestication of animals brings about the rituals of sacrifice, to overcome the deep sense of guilt created by killing a creature which has become a living member of the familia. Hence the way in which so many temples of the ancient world were in fact mere slaughter-houses, with the role of removing bloodguilt from the person who wanted an animal to be killed and also wanted to eat it. The gods shared in the meal and sanctified it. Saviour-gods kept strongly the character of the sacrificed animal, Dionysos the Bull, Christ the Lamb; or the animal sacrifice, swollen to the dimensions of an act of cosmic creation and regeneration, stood at the heart of the mystery-creed, as with Mithraism. As societies grew more complex and self-divided, there was a tendency to identify the victim-god with the oppressed classes – as we see in very powerful form in early Christianity. The blood-guilt of slaughtering animals becomes one with the guilt of exploitation; the sacrificed Christ becomes one with the poor out of whose broken bodies is (in emotion) made the daily bread.

Here I have space only to set out a few generalisations on this matter, but I believe the thesis can be sustained at length and in detail. I did much work in the following years on the problem, though I have published little. The whole basis of such thinking is so repugnant to a world of corpse-eaters that I felt it would be futile to publish my findings, which could only seem wild and fantastic exaggerations. However, of recent years, among young people, there have emerged certain lines of thought sympathetic to such positions as these of mine; and in any event I cannot set out here my struggles to grasp what was implied by an organic wholeness in living, unless I also outline my ideas on corpse-eating. (It will be seen that my positions imply a very close link between cannibalism proper and any form of corpse-eating; the notions of magical power gained by eating corpses instead of plants is at root the same in both cases. Which is not to say that one can reduce corpse-eating in general to cannibalism proper. The growth of horror at the latter practice was a step in the right direction, but only a step.)

What I have called the way of organic purpose or movement, as contrasted with the repetition-compulsions induced by the contracting or obstructive aspects of the birth-trauma, thus involved a new relation to nature: one of union in place of one of dominance and aggression. In a sense all creative attitudes to nature have reflected such a relationship, even if outside the creative act, the poet, artist, or scientist reverted to notions of mastering nature rather ones of mating with her. The problem was to make the concept of harmonious union a part of the whole texture of everyday consciousness as well as being the sporadic accompaniment of the creative act. An individual's world of sense expresses his total relationship with nature, though that world cannot be separated from his mental and emotional activities. Still, however indivisible in the last resort is the unity of the self, of mind and body, we can use such a term as the world of sense to define that aspect of experience in which the individual is most directly in connection with his environment of natural process: in which indeed his being and that environment become dynamically one, even if the process of union is also simultaneously one of separation-out. The emotional and intellectual awareness of union transforms the sensory world, which in turn reacts back on thought and feeling. In those

years, especially when we were living in some fairly isolated spot, I felt what had been the heightened moment of poetic recognition as a normal aspect of everyday life. Further, I felt that once could not grasp in anything like its living fullness the social process or the growth of an individual without taking into consideration at every point the over-all relationships to nature which were involved. I found it hard to work out in detail how the complex links worked out, and I still find it so, but I could not see how any sense could be made of life and its development processes without the attempt to grasp the whole made up by society and nature in their union and opposition. Later this concept constituted one of my main points of difference as a Marxist from my fellows in that discipline. But everything I have learned convinces me more and more of the rightness of my point. For the moment however I was sufficiently taken up with my readings in biology, anthropology, and history, and my efforts to grasp the concept of unitary movement.

During this period I matured my ethic of personal stoicism: to accept, to endure, not to complain but to be unsubdued. Never to retort a wrong. Not to admit that one could be wronged. It followed that I also felt I had no rights. How could I claim any rights from a society that I repudiated? In practice this meant that I was ready to fight for the rights of others, since such a fight, however limited in its applications, could be seen and felt as part of the struggle to change society in its totality. But once the assertion of rights became personal for me, I had no interest in it. I considered it would be wrong for me in any circumstances to call in the aid of the police or to ask the State to support me. During our periods of extreme poverty in the 1930s I probably had no basis on which to appeal for public aid; but the very thought of such a thing never crossed my mind. I would not have accepted such help even if it were easily at hand. (I have always thought the one ludicrous event in the life of Marx was his attempt to get his character vindicated from a libel in the Prussian courts; all he earned was correctly a further insult.)

4

I have mentioned the two translation-anthologies I made. I also wrote four more novels before I encountered Marxism in early 1936. First, I completed my Roman trilogy. Caesar is Dead opened with the day of Caesar's murder, which was described solely through its effects on a large number of people in Rome. The main theme was the mounting revolutionary movement aimed at avenging Caesar and based on the peasants in the armies, and the way in which M. Antonius emerged as its natural leader – with the first stage of the antagonism between him and Octavian. Rome for Sale had used a method of generally short scenes or episodes, sometimes in a connected series, sometimes in contrasted emotions or settings. (See for example the passage cited above where Catilina feels the warmth of comradeship, then the anguish of eagle-loneliness.) Now I juxtaposed scenes and characters of as varied a kind as I could manage, to show the outmoving effects of Caesar's death, then swung them together in a rising surge of action to bring out the cohering and converging forces of revolution.

The third novel was Last Days with Cleopatra, in which again the method was different. Here we deal with the breakdown of Antonius, which was also the breakdown of the dream-side of the revolution, that aiming at complete brotherhood and enjoyment of the earth. But the spectacle is seen through the eyes of two young lovers, the daughter of a Museum professor and a slave-page of Antonius. Their coming-together in the face of many difficulties, and their final flight down the Nile, when the girl bears a child alone with her lover, expressed the emergence of new possibilities of love and union on the ground cleared by the revolution, despite all the setbacks and limitations. But the preface showed how unclear I still was in my generalisations about history.

> I began the closer scrutiny of this period when working on the poems of Catullus; and being led to consider the general political background at a time when I was essaying novel-form, I felt certain narrative themes demand my attention. First, the revolutionary movement and the part played by Catilina; secondly, the religious impulse which resulted in Caesar-worship; thirdly, the balance of forces which out of the conflict produced the Roman Empire and (consequently) modern Europe. I felt the general drama of the period, its tangle of forces, its spiritual mass, long before any themes emerged; for I always, to use the pictorial analogy, work from mass towards outline, from character-impact towards structure or plot.

I used a vague term like "Roman Race" to express the national and popular tradition, with its roots in tribal survivals; and I saw in history that clash of the two impulses of brotherhood and of individual rights or claims, which have never been able to achieve an harmonious interrelation. "Thus, when 'liberty' develops into commercialism, there is necessarily generated a need for 'justice,' which calls out for the totalitarian state; and so on." We see here that I was still carrying on something of the petty-bourgeois confusions I discussed with regard to my formulations in the London Aphrodite. By linking liberty with economic liberalism I was indeed coming close to one of the confusions or ambiguities which lay behind Fascist theory and on which both Hitler and Mussolini traded. However, my sympathies were now so strongly linked with Catilina as the type of revolutionary leader that I was certain to overcome those confusions when I began to look closer at contemporary history. I now knew a little more than I did when I wrote Rome for Sale; but my attention we still directed towards the ancient past, and it was not till 1936 that I turned more than a cursory glance at the world about me. Here I went on:

> The devotion of "brotherhood" came to a head in Catilina, and left an irresistible revolutionary force at the disposal of Caesar, upon whom the loosened emotions and needs torrentially poured. Such a loosening must be short-lived by its very nature, and the man who attracts to himself the pouring must be a powerful individual who can dictate the terms on which the revulsion, the inevitable contraction and reconstruction, is to proceed.
>
> Caesar became the "race-hero", dictated his terms to the future, and then was torn to pieces by the storm of forces.
>
> It is here then that intrudes the specifically religious emotion which needs a "divine king dying" to satisfy its terrors and to give life significance. And it is here that we see the relation between Christianity and the Caesar-cult; for the murder and deification of Caesar quickened and gave an immediacy of appeal to the passion-dramas of the Mysteries, turning the race-brotherhood emotion (which is simple in Catilina) into a recoil of individualism and the need of a Saviour historical in existence but more closely related to the problems of the suffering individual than the defied Caesar could ever be.

I pointed to the positive side of ancient religion: "which sought to give ritualistic expression to the great crises of life, birth and puberty, marriage and death; it thus still included, to a great extent, drama; it sought to be a mirror of experience, to reflect things, in Spinoza's phrase, sub specie aeternitatis: that is, in the fullness of their organic changes." So I interpreted Last Days

in the following terms, still using that irritating term race to express the element of concrete unity in the producing group with their strong sense of tribal brotherhood:

> The figure of unleashed energy, Antonius, after carrying all before him in glorious power, suddenly finds himself lost, for all his resistances have been dissipated. He fails, because he no longer has a fulcrum with which to shift the earth that he has apparently mastered; and his antagonist, embodying the revulsion, effortlessly triumphs.
>
> That is why, I see, I have built this novel on the young lovers. They are the individuals struggling to real their small lives as the universe, and they are as important as any protagonists of the history, which, after all, exists only in order to give them a foothold. In them life is beginning anew. Absorbed in their personal affairs, they are the counter-balance to Catilina absorbed in the outgoing brotherhood-call; yet the race is getting at them through Isis and the child.
>
> But, I must repeat, this is all analysis after the event… I didn't write to prove anything…

The terms are confused and imprecise, but I was getting at some real problems. (I had no idea of the way that the term "race" was coming up in Hitlerian ideology, or what it was to lead to.)

The novel ends:

> But as he scrambled up the slight slope, he saw that she was safe within the rock-chamber. She had raised herself a little and leaned against the wall, the baby in her arms under her bared breasts. A dim glow suffused her, haloing her pale-gold head, softening her weary limbs in an attitude of perfect repose. He thought of Isis and the Divine Babe who had been born on the night of his marriage with Daphne. Daphne was greater than Isis, for she was Isis and yet mortal. Pity swelled and burst in Victor, leaving only love and courage and pride. Here was his wife and his son, here was the meaning of things hidden and manifest. The unutterable Mysterion. The thought of the last years rushed upon him and he tried to find a way of grasping the changes that had occurred within him, for he had changed while yet nothing seemed changed; but the thought was too large, too exacting, and only fragments of it blundered through his mind.
>
> Daphne opened her weary eyes, and they burned at once with deep violet fires of welcome.
>
> "Everything is all right," he said breathlessly. "Everything."
>
> "You are here," she murmured.
>
> He held out the figs, laughing. "Beautiful figs to eat."
>
> She shook her head and parted her lips for a kiss; and he kissed her, and then broke up a fig and fed her.
>
> Beauty and terror of the world. Images flared and faded within his blood. Isis and the Holy Child, Daphne with her bared breasts suckling the world. He understood it all and yet it escaped him. The acts of religion were a veil behind which the reality stirred; they sought to mirror the changes of the blood, the pang and release of growth, the timeless darkness of memory, the mouth of light, hunger

> and eating and the food changing into blood, the life of the blood driven into consciousness, desiring, returning into itself, growing, finding new meanings. It was only this, there was nothing else. Why then did the priests make it difficult: or was the difficulty only in the darkness of the blood that clouded the moon-mouth, the releasing light: and in the fear of the past, the insatiable dead that cluttered up the past, claiming their offering, their share in everything?
>
> He had no word for these thoughts, which came to him in quick jerking emotions, like the moon racing through a wild cloud-rack, like fishes slithering in the underwaters; moons of beauty, glistering spawn of thought, in the wild depths.
>
> In the body, in the changes of the blood. One in everything, touching and not touching, tired or active, in the bodies reverend without shame. He knew it all, in her arms he knew it all, or standing alone.
>
> And he loved the child, his shared child, his son.
>
> Outside the interpreter was loudly superintending the unpacking. The mule brayed. Victor went outside and took up the rugs. "Bring in the food," he said.
>
> Then with cautious gentleness he raised Daphne, while he slipped the rugs under her and wrapped her up, and he touched the child caressingly and smiled at her. And the answering smile in her eyes made him feel that his heart was broken, that he was the happiest man in all the world. And he was afraid of no one.

Without noting it, I was echoing, on the different level, the end of Caesar is Dead, where the young Octavian is sick, reacting against the violence and murders of the proscriptions, which have stirred his own cruel elements. He calls for his sister.

> She came quickly, and held his head with her cool hand. Dimly he was aware of her gentle presence, her swollen body showing the child that she was bearing to Marcellus. That sight made him feel a faint touch of jealousy and yet a great comfort; he would not have things otherwise. Then the nausea swept over him. Ah, he would retch out his very life. But he wouldn't die, he mustn't die.
>
> "I'll be all right in a moment," he gasped.
>
> She kissed him softly on the brow, over his burning eyes.
>
> There was love in the world. Peace, and a home and a woman's hands. Work and food and a sleep untroubled by strange gods. Octavianus drifted into a doze. He had no fear. He was the Son of Caesar.

Antonius is unafraid at this wild height of things; the breakdown and the resistance of Octavian mark him out as the leader who will achieve the final balance on which the world, at this stage of things, can stably proceed; Son of the deified Caesar, he assumes the position of power which is later reflected in the dream of the runaway slave that he is mated with Isis and father of the divine child, soon to become Christ. In this sort of way, especially with the

crisscrossing political and religious strands, a complex pattern of revolutionary development, operating at all levels, was worked out. But as I said in my foreword, I did not devise the complexity from outside, but in a struggle to give individual faces to what at first was only a set of tensions, conflicts, unifying and discordant masses inside a stormy perspective.

After these large-scale canvases I tried my hand at smaller themes, in which my method light be worked out in suaver and more closely-knit textures. Despoiling Venus dealt with the relations of M. Caelius and Clodia (with her shrine of Venus Spoliatrix), their frustrations, and the decline of Caelius into angers and resentments that limit and waste his fine rebellious energies. Wanderings of Wenamen went far back, to late in the second millennium B.C., when Egypt was a weakened imperial power, and Wenamen, on his embassy to the Lebanon for timber, confronts not only local princes slipping out of Egyptian controls, but also a Mykenean Greek, the crude barbarian with whom lies the future. The theme was therefore the confrontation of cultures, with the moral that the one with more elements of tribal brotherhood intact in it had a vitality and a power of growth that the higher civilation has lost, however rough and backward the new forces may seem at a glance. (The basis was the text we have of Wenamen's report; my MS, sent to an Australian at Amarna with whom Phil had put me in contact, was read by Emery, who could find no errors.) I also got together a collection of twenty-four short stories, Come Home at Last, set in the Greek and Roman worlds, and united to some extent by the theme of homelessness, the quest for an enduring home or bond[2] in societies based more and more on slavery. As in the novels personal, social, and religious aspects were brought together; Death of Spartan King dealt with the vain effort of Cleomenes with a mere dozen followers to proclaim freedom in Alexandreia in 219 B.C. and to rouse the cowed citizens – here the devoted deaths were told in terms that gave them a ritual colouration and made Cleomenes one of the precursors of Jesus with his twelve. The dedication to Eric Partridge was still somewhat confused in idiom, but declared that out of the

[2] Lindsay's handwritten correction is difficult to decipher; could also be 'land' though comparison with other handwritten corrections suggests 'bond' is more likely.

standardising (I meant unifying) trends of our world would emerge an enriched variety of culture. “Indeed the proof of this is already to be found in the tremendous cultural blossoming in the U.S.S.R. To real the direction in which freedom lies one has only to compare this harvest with the few stunted weeds produced during the same period under Fascism.” I saw the movement of history as one towards world-unity “though at the cost of vast pain and perplexity.” In fact I still knew very little of the Soviet Union or Fascism, but my remarks at least showed I was beginning the attempt to revalue the contemporary world in terms of what I had learned from the ancient.

I also wrote for the Cockerel Press a long short-story Storm at Sea, in which Carian pirates with a Mithraic creed take a storm-racked ship and their captain’s rape of the heroine involves a sort of parody of the bull-sacrifice; the breakdown of the girl’s lover expressed the moral emptiness of the Roman world before such challenges.

5

On considering what I have so far written, I feel that, despite certain disclaimers here and there, I perhaps give the effect of a sturdy struggle upwards along predetermined lines. The more I think of what really happened, the more I feel the crucial role of my weakness, my fear. When in 1918-9 I came to the point of rejecting war and money, I did so out of certain moral ideas based in poetry, but I also was moved powerfully by fear of war and money. I might even say that I feared to give way the least bit to the world of the cash-nexus because I knew that if I did it would swallow me up. That no doubt is as much a halftruth as the position that I took my stand simply on high moral values; but it must not be omitted from the picture. Fear indeed seems to me to be an essential component of any understanding or decision that goes deep. How could one possibly take a decision to stand outside the whole mechanism on which human beings appeared to depend, if it weren’t that one felt a deadly fear of the mechanism? And one would be quite insensitive if one did not feel as deadly a fear at the decision to stand outside – which might easily, if adhered to, bring one death and disaster? In a sense then what goes on in such a situation is battle of two fears. In my case the fear of being swallowed up by the cash-nexus was stronger than the fear of starvation. A moral conviction emerges and

triumphs; but what has happened has not been simply an act of defiance as the result of an already-formed noble conviction: very far from it.

It seems to me that a man who looks straight ahead, who announces that he is resolved to go on to a point in the distance along the line of his vision, and who then proceeds to go there, has in fact gone nowhere at all. For the point he marked off ahead was only the point where he stood. Real forward-movement is a complex business, involving changes and modifications all the while, so that the goal one has set, however firmly, becomes something quite different by the time one gets there. One has changed and the goal has changed. To say that is not to deny the value of the goal or the existence of continuity as well as change in the person struggling ahead; but the relation of change and continuity in the process will be dialectically complex and will involve unpredictable as well as constant elements. Strength in the form of a too definite determination of goals, a too rigid notion of tactics, and a too impervious movement forwards, can produce a heavy deformation of human nature, in which what was good in the first impulses becomes tyrannical and insensitive.

Hence the importance of the role of fear, of weakness, as well as that of desire, of courage and strength. Fear is needed as well as desire to clarify the situation in its fullness, and to light up the way out of the threatening or distorting pressures. Without weakness the mind and the senses are closed up against all that does not express and expedite the dominant idea, so that the idea itself becomes perverted. The problem is to fear without being swayed by the thing one fears; to be weak without losing one's way. Then one's strength has a chance of turning into a valid strength, enabling one to go the way of one's deepest desire with a maximum of human sympathy and understanding of what is at stake. (Herein lay, I think, the truth we oversimplified in saying that the poet must submit to the pull of life, not impose an abstractly moral judgment on his impulses and emotions.)

When I took the course of accepting Elza's dictations, I was in extreme fear, fear of the world and its cash-nexus, fear of her and the effects on myself if I drove her to suicide. In a sense, by accepting the terms she laid on me, I made her responsible for what happened. If things went hopelessly wrong, she would have been the one under whose flag it had all

happened. I was evading my fear of the world by putting it on to her. And yet, so entangled are the moral and emotional forces of such a situation, I was also pushing myself into a situation where my worst fears might easily have come true. I was ready to endure anything rather than commit a further evil deed – force things along the line of my "will." For in the new values being born inside me, what at the time had been the working-out of the concept of the poet-vitally-at-the-mercy-of-his-impulses now appeared as the forcing of my will, the importance of the abstractly-devised system which I was ruthlessly carrying out, on to the suffering Elza. I had to discard my "strength", to become once more weak and vulnerable; this entailed a drastic rejection of all ideas of male dominance, however disguised as poetic dedication.

Yet, the whole point of this book is the attempt to show the continuity of an idea (also an emotion): that I must resist the cash-nexus and be true to the values of poetry as I conceived them. How is that continuity prevailed[3] if, as I am now saying, fear and weakness were as much present as desire and strength (the constant service of the idea)?

I do not think there is any contradiction of the main thesis in the admission of the role of fear and weakness (vulnerability). All one is claiming is that the process was one of real life and not the fanatical and mutilating imposition of an idea on to life with all its endless variety of demands and satisfactions. The complex of fear and desire, itself drawing force from family-experiences that went far back beyond 1918-9, had created in me a pattern of withdrawal and of reliance on poetry as a saving power; and I tended to repeat this at every fresh crisis. Impacts from outside then did much to determine the emotional and intellectual content built up to meet the strains and stresses of the withdrawal – the meetings with Witherby and Quinton; the letter from my father; the encounter with Elza; the breakdown of the Press and the "betrayal" of Elza. The pattern of withdrawal (fear) thus took on new orientations, expansions, adaptations, to make possible my survival in a situation that might easily have led to breakdown. What I can claim is that in each case I managed to escape the breakdown, and to this extent my weakness took on positive aspects. To the extent that that

[3] Typescript: 'prevailed' is a handwritten correction over the typed word 'present', which is crossed out by hand.

happened, the act and idea of total rejection or resistance ceased to be simply an expression of fear and begot its own characteristic activities of justification, defence, and attack. I could then throw off fear as the champion of the idea. And that, I see, was why I have had no interest or capacity to assert my rights in the face of the world, but have been ready wholeheartedly to take up the assertion of the rights of others. The first case seemed (and seems) merely a personal matter liable to bring the world crushingly down upon me; the second case offered me the shield of the idea.

Again this formulation helps to explain why I had to take the line of submitting my will absolutely to Elza's as far as action was concerned. At the time of the crisis of 1930, to have gone off and found a job in the ordinary way would have wiped out my relation to the idea; I might have found security in the world's sense, but I would have felt utterly insecure; for I would no longer under have been under the flag, and behind the shield, of the idea. I could carry on in a system which, in the world's sense, was utterly insecure, and I could feel even a certain stability in it, because I was still accepting the idea as something greater than myself, something that I must serve. If I had been a strong man in any ordinary sense of that term, I should have felt I could dominate the idea, dominate the world; whereas my "strength" lay in my weakness, my complete inability to believe that I could dominate anything, my renewed wish to give up any pretences I ever had of dominating anything. (It was logical then that in 1929 Peter Warlock should have written to me denouncing me as a masochist, on the basis of some remarks in my preface to our Sappho; I survived, but he, determined to be a dominant male, committed suicide the following year.)

These remarks perhaps help to put in a truer perspective my 1919 Oath. Clearly that decision had its affinities with the rejections made by many young people in recent years, their attempts to renounce the cash-nexus, to find alternative ways of living. Where such attempts involve genuine attempts to found systems of communal living, I give them my sympathy – even if I think that such systems, however sustained for brief periods, cannot but end by being corroded and perverted by the surrounding corruptions. Where they are based on attempts to use charity, cadged money, or agencies of social assistance meant for the unemployed, the

sick, and the like, I see that my Sydney phase had some similarities with their attitudes, but I also see their protest as useless and confusing the issues. When the rejections are based on the positions of so-called play-power, there is again a superficial link with one aspect of our Australian viewpoints, but at root the differences are stronger than the likenesses. However we attacked moralistic abstractions and repressions, or proclaimed that everything that lives is holy, that abstinence strews sand all over the ruddy limbs, and so on, we wanted struggle at all points against the established systems. In rejecting the cash-nexus, I never rejected work; on the contrary from the outset I had William Morris's respect for all concrete labour, whether with the hands or the mind. I denounced machine-production as a way of fragmenting men, as a reflection of mechanistic philosophy and science; but I did not identify work with submission to the machine. Rather I saw the right sort of work as an essential aspect of the revolt against fragmentation, as lying at the core of the struggle to regain wholeness. I had no general plan as to how the mechanistic trends were to be reversed, but I felt the opposition of play and work to be the clearest expression of the very dichotomy that had to be overcome. Work should move over into play, and play into work, the divisions at times breaking down, but the nature of the two activities never in doubt, their difference as well as their union. (Play-power thus appears a sort of aristocratic ethic in anarchistic dissolution, as destructive of any true culture as the ethic of enslavement to mechanistic and fragmenting work, as one-sided.)

There remained then an unresolved contradiction in my Oath and its application. I could do my utmost to adhere to the Oath and yet not become parasitic, in so far as my poetry and its surrogates earned me a place in the world, extorted some money from that grudging enemy, and enabled me to struggle against the alienating system. But I could not preach this as a general way-out. I was thus clinging to a utopian conception in the midst of my effort to get rid of utopias and find a workable basis for the whole man. All I could say in palliation was that as long as I used my position to fight for the end of the society of alienation I was to that extent justifying my use of a private system of revolt in the name of a revolution that had to be based in the mass of producers if it were to be actualised – that is, in the mass of men and

women grievously and irretrievably entangled in the fragmenting process, accepting it as a necessary condition of their existence. Only these people could ultimately reverse the process, however they were conditioned by it in so many respects.

Still, perhaps I might general my position as follows. Everyone who grows aware of the nature of the cashnexus should resist it as far as he can. As a poet I could carry revolt further in some points than the man who had to take a job, say, in a factory; I could say that I would not take money only in so far as it came out of my doing the things I wanted most deeply to do. To this extent I was anticipating communist society when work becomes an expression of the deepest self and the division between work and play breaks down – work being even more enjoyable than play, and play itself integrally linked with the world of work. (Marx, I could point out, refused flatly to do any work other than that he felt to be his destiny, however much his family and he himself suffered; as a result he saw his son die.) But if everyone could not strive to live already in his work in terms of communist values, he could at least always apply the principle of being as little involved personally in the money-process as was possible. To own property for one's own use is permissible; but to own it in any other shape or form (in houses or land to be let, in investments or stocks and shares bringing-in any kind of interest) is to have a direct stake in the system and is therefore immoral. I have myself always felt that any form of unearned income must be rejected. I have never made a bet and would not accept money from such a source; if someone made a bet in my name and won, I should give the money away. I believe that one cannot be too rigid in one's refusal to be connected with money as a self-breeder, money unrelated to one's work. Yet the British working-class, to which one looks for a reversal of the profit-system, spends enough money yearly in gambling to transform the country educationally and culturally if it were sanely employed. And when about 1938 I wrote an article in Reynolds Weekly, in which I made reference to a worker's pride in his work, I received a score or so indignant letters from workers saying that they loathed their work and took no pride in it, but not one agreeing with me. One or two suggested that they would feel differently under socialism, but not one agreeing with me. One or two suggested that they would feel different under socialism, but not

because work would change its nature; they would then subordinate their boredom to the sentiment of working for the community.

The question of fear again comes up in the whole revulsion from money as a self-breeding, external, and dominating force. The image is one of the losses of identity, death-obliteration, and the intrusion of alien controlling powers. (Hence the popularity, in our world of money-power in its final expansions, of science-fiction with the motive of the alien intruder seeking to conquer the earth.) Such imagery has always roused my deepest fears, my deepest resistance. One effect was the aversion from all medical drugs. Round about 1947, when I found that smoking was getting a grip on me, I at once dropped it. (This was before the link with cancer was known.) I could at one time accept occasional drinking, because it involved a direct struggle between one's consciousness and the intrusive force striving to dominate; but if I had ever found that such drinking threatened to become a settled habit, I should have dropped it once. The drug-habits of so many young people today thus appear to me as the final submission to alienation and the domination of the cash-nexus. They are merely the extreme form of the practices central to a drug-society such as ours, where we see the grip of all sorts of chemical drugs, from antibiotics to tranquillisers. So the young drug-takers, so far from expressing a rebellious impulse, are revealing the tamest of all possible surrenders to our drug-society of alienation. The world of hallucinations is the most degrading parody of the true attainment of unity with the natural and organic processes through love, art and deep contemplation. It represents the most complete acceptance of bourgeois self-alienation, the most complete counter-revolutionary submission and passivity. An extreme fear of alien domination has always underlain my efforts to find a way of life that reflected as little as possible the cash-nexus and all its surrogates. Once again I find it hard to draw a line where the revulsion of fear shades off into the desire and quest for a way of life to which the fear does not apply.

The highest point of consciousness in this period (1930-5) lay in the inversion of my idealist existentialism into a concrete one. I was aware of the dialectical conflict of opposites, in the terms I had learned from Blake and Plato (and to a lesser degree from Hegel), but I had

not built up a definite philosophy of history out of those terms. I was concerned with preserving my sense of guiding organic purpose, while ridding it of idealist and teleological elements. Darwin and biology helped me. I arrive at the concept of the timeless moment of time, in which the totality of a situation was summed up. That totality included the past that had shaped it, and the future that was to issue from it. So the next stage emerged, not by chance or by a mechanistic fate, but out of the living totality of forces making up the concrete moment. The purposive movement was the expression of this totality, not of any sequence of cause and effect that could be mechanistically abstracted. The more one penetrated into the concrete totality, the nearer one could come to a formulation of this organic purpose. In the last resort one would need a comprehension as wide and full as the universe; but one could still make worthwhile and meaningful statement of the lesser wholes that constituted that universe – though one needed at the same time to be aware of the limitations resulting from a partial view, which could not take in the further relations of the whole that one was considering. Such an awareness saved one from dogmatizing on the understandings one achieved; it made one look always for the intrusion of new forces; it made one think of one's particular whole as always making up a system of complex symmetry and asymmetry with the other wholes surrounding it, and with the cosmic process itself. But as long as one kept these further considerations in mind, one could validly deal with a particular whole: the earth, human society and history, and so on, down to smaller concatenations of energy and movement, substance in its ceaseless change, transformation, development. Particular aspects of the unitary process could be grasped by a concrete penetration into their inner conflicts, seeking always for the timeless moment of total transformation, of a leap into new balances, contractions or expansions.