IV. MARXISM DISCOVERED

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Early in 1936 I noticed an advertisement for books by Marx, Engels, Lenin. It struck me that I ought to know something of those thinkers at first hand, and I wrote in for several works. The Communist Manifesto, Capital (in the available from which I took to represent the complete thing), Anti-Dühring, Imperialism, State and Revolution: these works in particular had an immediate effect upon me. Here, I felt, was what I had long been looking for. The thought-processes were akin to those I had been painfully working with, but at once clarifying many points that had been still mystifying or obscure. I also got some Russian textbooks on dialectical materialism; and soon there was to come the outpouring of Left Book Club choices and extras. I turned again to Hegel and Spinoza; I discovered Giordano Bruno and studied his work as thoroughly as I could.

Edgell, Garman, Alec Brown, and other friends of the past, I now found, were communists – or close to the party. From this moment I considered myself a party-member; but remoteness from party-branches and the continuing problems of Elza, which now and then grew acute and led to much wanderings in Devon and Cornwall, prevented me from taking a card. I suffered for this inconsistency, but could not see how to combine my two loyalties except in the way I was adopting. In the May 1936 issue of Left Review I signalised my arrival on the Left by the publication of a long poem Not English? which I shall discuss later and in which I eagerly sought to set out my new uprushing vision of our revolutionary history.

I published (in The Eye) which must have been the first English poem on the Spanish struggle; for it dealt with an episode in which the police went over to the people's side. Then came the revolt of the generals, abetted by Mussolini and Hitler. Like many others I found the resistance of the Spanish people to be engrossing and exalting. Perhaps because it happened so soon after I had arrived at definite views of the contemporary situation, views which the attack on the young Republic seemed so sharply to verify. The whole issue of democracy and freedom was posited in such epically simple, such stirring terms; my recent discovery of the

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nature of fascism and its war-threats, already disturbing and challenging enough, was charged with an enormously intensified emotion. As the war went on, the heroic obstinacy of the Spanish workers and peasants in standing up against an army backed by the fascist dictators had an element of pure pathos, which strengthened the feeling that here were the sheer human values matched against the inhuman powers and a mad war-machine. And one must add the shame that was felt at the policy of the French and British government in denying the Republic any aid in such a situation. For once an issue appeared to be incredibly simple, and indeed in many ways it was, even if there were more confusions and intrigues in the shadows than one knew. The troubles with P.O.U.M. and the anarchists were disconcerting; but in the perspective that had already been firmly established, they seemed only the sad and peripheral results of sectarian dogmas.

Another matter that was yet more disturbing, but which also seemed to be explicable in the same sort of terms, were the Moscow trials. With the passionate devotions awoken by the Spanish cause, and with the glowing picture which the Soviet Union was felt to make against the fascist darkness, one was predisposed to accept explanations if they could be made at all plausible. For those who did not live through this period I must stress again the vast and simple appeal of the Spanish struggle, which by confirming all that had been said on the Left of the fascist menace, held together a world-picture which might otherwise have been more skeptically tested and probed. I read the full verbatim records of the Moscow trials, together with the eye-witness accounts of trusted observers such as Pritt, and the whole thing seemed aboveboard and overwhelmingly reliable. It was only when I put the books aside and thought of Bukharin or Radek that I found I could not conceive how such revolutionaries had got themselves into the positions which the court revealed. But however the disquiet persisted, I had no means of going further into the questions; I did not trust any anti-soviet sources – and indeed even if Stalin's crimes hadn't existed, they would surely have been invented by the apologists of imperialism. That history could have provided such a ghastly joke as that of bringing true so many of the nightmare-visions brewed up by the professional anti-socialists was something I could not yet possibly credit. So I looked again at the voluminous trial-

records and decided that somehow power-lusts had brought Trotsky and the others down, not dreaming that the supreme power-lust was that of Stalin.

Perhaps it was to answer and to lull such disquiets that I wrote many essays on the nature of Fascism, mainly for myself – though one large section of these analyses was published in Fact by Raymond Postgate. I differed from most of those writing on this theme at the time in that I tried to understand what in Fascism could win over many intellectuals as well as large numbers of the petty-bourgeois and the working-class. What interested me was not simple the way in which Fascism was made to serve the interests of monopoly-capitalism; the exposition of that had been made and continued to be made by men more skilled in economic analysis than I was. So, accepting that point, I tried to understand the confused and perverted revolutionary element that played its part in begetting the Fascism of our world. (Some aspects of the analysis would still apply today; but the whole perspective has been changed by the defeat of Hitler and the advent of the U.S.A. as the supreme imperialist power.) In turning to the socio-psychological elements I had in mind P.R. Stephenson, whom I had known as a staunch if idiosyncratic communist, but who, I was learning, had begun developing his own fascist party in Australia, under the flag of nationalism, anti-semitism, and the like. I could see how his many personal frustrations had led him in this direction. To take a crude example, he had felt impelled to lay the blame for the failure of the Mandrake Press on his partner, Goldston, a Jewish bookseller, and thus he had drifted step by step into denouncing Jewish Capital. Hitler had had his moment of illumination when he heard Gottfried Feder differentiate the two kinds of capital: raffendes (usurious, griping, and destructive) and schaffendes (constructive, productive). With such fantasy-formulations, the petty-bourgeois, dodging about between the proletarian gulf and the monopolistic maw, builds up concepts of the enemy, of alien forces, and so on, which are linked in turn with the delusive concepts of national or social unity. Reacting against threatening forces in the present situation and perhaps seeing truly enough the hypocrisies of liberal capitalism, he seeks to reconstitute some past situation which has become idealised in his mind, and in fact helps on the movement to greater monopoly, greater regimentation. Again I used my

understanding of P.R.S. to realise how the impatient tactician, feeling sure that he has found the clue to the forms and symbols required by the entangled situation of conflict, is equally sure that he can hoodwink or dominate others, so that, while they think they are using him, he is in fact using them. Self-intoxication, such I had seen in P.R.S. and surmised in both Mussolini and Hitler, could thus enable a man to deceive himself almost endlessly; for the more he felt the possession of power, the more he was sure that his tactics had worked successfully out. As he was incorruptible, he must have succeeded in using the others according to plan. I tried to bring Trotsky also under this sort of analysis, with less success, but well enough to help in allaying the doubts I had felt about Bukharin and the others. I saw rightly enough that the desire for power, the attainment of power, could lead to all kinds of deformations in a man or a group; what was wrong was the application I was making of this notion – or rather my lack of knowledge of the facts which prevented me from making the application in other quarters where it needed to be made as much as in those to which I turned it.

I was also helped in simplifying certain aspects of the situation by the fact that in my remote lairs, where often I spoke to no one for many months apart from a few words with the tradesman on mere business-matters, I had no contact with the actual stuff of events. I read avidly everything relevant, but lacked the direct impacts which help to upset settled notions, give various shocks, compel reformulations closer to reality. However this situation no doubt preserved me; for in the intensely self-sacrificial state I found myself at this time, if I had been free, I should certainly have soon got to Spain and would not doubt have shared the fate of Fox, Caudwell, Cornford.

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I now wanted to come at grips with more recent history, above all to bring out the true basis of the revolutionary tradition in Britain, to show its full human and cultural range. But first I felt the need to depict Bruno. I had found him a thinker, a man, with whom I felt a specially deep sympathy. My struggles to grasp Marxism made me enter into the struggles of his thought which constituted a key-element in the historical process leading on into Marxism.

Despite the differences in the historical level I could thus symbolise in his passionate quest my own eager and anxious efforts to move from what I have called my concrete existentialism into the full categories of Marxism. The story of his last years, which was what I tackled in my Adam of a New World, also had its links with the self-sacrificial impulses, strong in me at this moment, which enabled me to pour into it my deepest emotions about the Spanish war. This point I brought out by the dedication "to the many writers who have given their lives during the last few years in the fight against fascist terrorism." And I pointed out that Gentile, minister of education under Mussolini, had defended the act of the Inquisition in burning Bruno.

I started the novel with Bruno's arrival in Venice with an unclear but strongly-felt hope of converting the Catholic Church to his philosophy. A return to origins; a sense of having reached a dead-end in the Protestant world and in disputations that never issue in the social and political effects he desires – the Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast. He knows the hopelessness of his aims, and yet can see no other way forward; in Venice he comes up against a further insoluble contradiction in his thinking – in the person of Mocenigo who believes he has magical powers which can be turned to immediate financial result. I thought, as I wrote, that I was dealing with the fate of betrayed communists and other anti-fascist resisters in the worlds of Hitler, Mussolini, Franco. But though in one sense the story reflected the struggle of all opponents of tyranny, there was a particular sense in which victim, Bruno, tortured and burned by the Catholic Church, symbolised the communists who were being destroyed by Stalin. At the time nothing could have been further from my mind than such a connection, but as I reread the book I see the analogy everywhere present. Bruno, hoping to convert the Catholic Church back to its primal bases, to its original aim of expelling the Triumphant Beast, is not an antifascist defying a tyranny which he considers at all points corrupted and anti-human; he feels a part of the Catholic Church, in which he was born, as he cannot feel himself a part of the Protestant Churches. He is thus in a state of fused sympathy and antipathy; what he confronts is his own conception in a corrupted state. Hence the peculiar mixture of assent and dissent in his response to his torturers. (I arrived at this sort of

ambivalent relationship because in my account of Bruno's sufferings I was throughout drawing on my experiences with Elza in her hostile and inquisitorial moods when a hopelessly entangled emotion of love-hate enclosed me. I shared her aims; but her impregnable fears made me into an enemy seeking to pervert those aims and destroy her.) I give here one short passage from the lengthy depiction of Bruno's breakdown under the inquisitorial tests, his ceaseless self-renewal out of the breakdowns:

> The officers of the Inquisition, the priests and confessors, who visited him, were all fused in one terrifying form. The Questioner. He grew so dazed sometimes that he could not answer at all, his brain burned with flickering fires of sick distraction over a heaving netherpit of fear. Yet all the while he was left alone, he longed with a dark anxiety for the next assault upon his mind; he thought out carefully what he meant to say, refining and clarifying each sentence till he felt it irrefutable, impossible to be misunderstood or falsified; and he fretted for the moment when he should try these formulations on the adversary, who was uniformly unaffected. Whether he merely shouted or stamped about the cell, or argued his thesis out impeccably and masterfully to a triumphant conclusion, he was met by that sheer conviction of his vice and wrongness.
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> The bodily reaction was painful. After one of the encounters, he was left parched, burning, consumed; so weak that he could scarcely raise his hand. At times he argued loudly, till he screamed and shook with fury. He even beat his fists and his head against the stone wall. Despite the passion that shook him, he could not physically attack the questioner. It was not because of insufficient rage and hatred, it was not from fear of what might be done to him. In those spasms of blind agony he could not possibly have thought of consequences. He was daunted as if a circle of spells had been drawn round his adversary and he was one of the damned spirits beatings against that magical resistance.
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> But at the same time he drew a strange sustenance from the arguments. He had nothing else whatever with which to fill his days and nights. He had given up plotting escape. There was no hope of getting out of the narrow cell saturated with the smell of his own excrements and the smell of the excrements of men tormented there for centuries before him. He had forgotten the world and the things that went on in it, laughter and people eating and working together and the sweetness of a woman sleeping nakedly with her man and the nervous raptures of friendly talk and discovery.
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> Nothing was left except the ordeal of inquisition, the arguments that could lead nowhere except to blank despair, the conflict of a weaponless man with foes armored from head to foot. Nothing that he could say had power to impress or reach the questioner. He knew it was hopeless. Yet he went on. It was himself that he must convince, and if he talked long enough he would unveil the hidden meaning of his pang, and then the whole world would be illuminated for him. Left alone, he revolved in his mind all the things he had said or had been said to him; only while listening to hated voice or replying with hate, did his mind actively function. Sometimes, when

clamoring or sullenly listening, he felt a tremendous sense of mastery, as if he had grasped at last the final point of knowledge that had evaded him throughout his life.

But there were times when all his faculties failed him, when alarmingly the blood ebbed from the bodies of all words and he longed only to get out of his captivity. At these times he was ready to subscribe to any dogma, agree to any fantastic formulation, promise any kind of reformation. But he always failed to carry out his resolutions of surrender. His offers of capitulation were received with benedictions and expressions of thankfulness. But more than a mere capitulation was required of him; and it was here that the questioner had dug for him the pit of absolute horror, from which his mind recoiled with impotent defiance.

He was not merely asked to agree with what was said to him. That was easy; that he would gladly do. He was expected also to construct the orthodoxy to which he now claimed to be turning, to explain what he declared his Catholic faith and how he understood it. That also he could do, though it was less easy. He stumbled, and disputes arose. But at the crucial moment of confusion and disagreement he taught himself the way of humility, to empty his hand, to flatten out the rising burst of aggression and self-affirmation, to answer. “I see. I understand. That was as I meant it. That is what I meant to say.”

And this achievement of humility became a positive thing, in which he gloried. It was something that Bruno the reckless and irrepressible disputant had never known before. At moments, in his weakened condition, a profound gratitude welled up out of his heart for the experience of anguish and repression that he was undergoing. His humility, his breaking-down in himself of the need to affirm his passionate sense of wrong and his knowledge of the truth, became the sole consolation of his lonely vigils; and though it turned continually into a mere deceitfulness, a mere concealment of his real thoughts, at other times it seemed to be in itself the greatest truth, to enclose a truth of realisation greater than anything in either the ideas that he suppressed or the ideas to which he falsely subscribed. Not that “falsely” expressed the way in which he approached the alien concepts forced on him. He sought to make those concepts his own by penetrating into the minds of his adversaries, by seeing the world as they saw it, by deliberately breaking down in himself his sense of the limitations of his adversaries, their bedazzlement by the partial knowledge of relationship enclosed in symbols from which he had liberated himself into a larger light. But this attempt always brought him back to the basic problem, of knowledge, its relation to the universe as a whole and to the changing individual; and in that problem he lost himself.

What destroyed him, what ended his attempts at humility, was the insistence of the questioner that he must confess. Always at that demand his mind went void, his body benumbed; the cold fingers of fear tightened. He fought to comply, to make a total confession, as was demanded. But all he could manage was to mix up a few trifling peccadilloes with some general admissions of having gone counter to the Church’s teachings.

That was insufficient. Holy Church demanded an entire surrender of will and intellect. He must renounce heresy by exposing his life wholly before the questioner, as proof of his regeneration. Otherwise

> his protestations could not be accepted, he could not expect to obtain absolution, to have his sinful past washed away by Christ's blood. He must give his whole self.
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> He could not understand his own response of terror to this demand. He tried so often to confess, but despite all his efforts he could never bring himself to discover what it was that he had to confess, what statement would satisfy the questioner. He was ready to confess to any sin, any heretical opinion. But the readiness was of little use. When he came to the direct enunciation of his sins and his repentance, he found that his clumsy efforts did not deceive the practiced confessors of the Inquisition. These men, whom he might despise in his theological and philosophical disputes with them, proved uncannily perfect in their power to detect a single false note in his confession. He was admonished against pride, against the lord of lies; and was left to repent.
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> "Tell me, tell me what I have to say."
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> "Look in your own heart. Look in the corruption of your heart, and speak."
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> Once he grew frantic and went into the most obscene description of the various women whom he had possessed. He tried to conjure up every detail of his intercourse with them, every image of their possessed bodies; and he even invented details that he thought would shock, would prove that he really was exposing his inner corruption. And while he spoke, he felt that he was taking revenge on the celibate priest who was tearing the heart out of him. But the priest showed no signs of being moved. Bruno ended panting, with the sensation of having been disemboweled. The priest said nothing. He rose and went out of the cell. As the key grated, Bruno knew that he had lost, that nothing could save him.
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> "What must I do, Father? I have nothing more to say. Do you want me to tell lies, to invent sins for myself?"
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> "You have not yet repented. These devices of pretended stupefaction do not deceive Holy Church."
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> It was true. He had not repented. He could not repent. He could not see that there was anything to repent, despite the heavy overlooking sense of remorse. He was weak with lack of nourishing food.
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> Nothing could save him; there was no means whereby he could join himself to this body from which he had severed himself. As well might he hope to be fed again with his mother's blood as when in the womb. The birth-shock had intervened. He had gone forth into a new life, the cord of contact was cut, and he could not put off the responsibility which had become his. He could not deny the new world already implicated in his flesh.

Having thus sought to express my own movement into the new life, I turned to the English Revolution. I wrote two books, a Life of Bunyan and a novel Sue Verney based on the Verney Papers. The Bunyan book was in a sense an effort to understand my own baptism into the novel. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress was seen as belonging to the popular tradition of medieval preaching and as making the transformation of mythology, originally born from the

deep crises of human life, back into that life. I sought also to show how the defeated revolution (that is, defeated in its full implications, its deepest hopes, which had been expressed by Levellers and Diggers) recoiled into sectarian religion, which in turn broke open and revealed the universal element uttered and silenced in the revolution – the indomitable human dream of a brotherly earth of freedom, of Paradise Regained. (Leavis attacked my book as a work of purely sociological analysis.)

In Sue Verney I tried to see the revolution from a very different angle, that of a single manorial family, of one young girl in that family. As the Verney fortunes decline, her world changes and narrows, and in the end, married to a lesser country-gentleman, she comes to see in the vile Cromwell the defender of property, of their property.

On these bases I turned to a large work, 1649, a Novel of a Year, with 109 sections making up some quarter of a million words, in which I gave a full panorama of the revolution in the crucial year when Charles lost his head and Cromwell had his showdown with the parties of the Left. To keep a coherent pattern I concentrated on three characters, Ralph (a Leveller of the middle course, who ends reconciled with the trading world), Will (a good yeoman, who expresses the course of the ordinary man in the world of work), and Roger (the deeper rebel, who responds painfully to the full meaning of events). Round these I gathered a hurlyburly of characters, many of them historical, such as Lilburne, Winstanley, and Overton, Walwyn, Thompson. Cromwell, the ultimate dominator, did not appear except in his impact on others and in an actual letter of his which ended the book and brought out how he used God to fill the gap between his ideals and his sense of the possible. I can here make only a few points about the book. I opened with an account of the king's execution, seeking to bring out its vast significance and impact with the remote tone of a ritual atmosphere (the severing of the head of feudalism), the whole thing seen from the outside as if made up of endless small trivial details and yet moving by a magical compulsion of fate. (For a total inability to see what I was getting at, read the essay on my work in Alick West's Mountain in the Sunlight.) The importance of this event, which for the moment seems a pure "act of the people," of forces above and beyond any of the groups or leaders, resides in its irretrievable

character, its sudden lifting of the whole situation on to a new level where the man who finds the right relation to it will master and direct its consequences. This point is brought out in the following discussion between Overton, Prince, Walwyn.

In Roger, combining his struggle with an Elza-like character and his quest for the ultimate human truth in the events hurtling in on from all sides, I developed further what I will call the hell-harrowing theme. In such a pattern I gathered all that I had learned of initiation-ritual, of mystery-systems, of death-rebirth myth, together with what I had grasped of the structure of Greek and Shakespearean tragedy, plus the revelations of psychoanalytic technique. (It was in that technique, not in Freud's often confused and one-sided theorising, that I found the valuable contribution of psychoanalysis.) But in the last resort what gave life to all such matters for me was my own experience. I had undergone three experiences which were of key-significance for my development: the embrace of revolution in 1918-9, the conversion to Norman's thesis of the creative image, and own return to earth under the pressure of my 1930 failure and Elza's terrors. When I had found in myself the capacity for deep-going changes – changes which did not alter this or that aspect of my attitudes and positions, but which struck at the heart of my being and compelled a total reorganisation of every idea and emotion – how could I doubt that all men were capable of such changes, of response to the full seismic warnings and crashes of their epoch? Not that all men then set about a total reorganisation of idea and emotion; too many clung to their previous systems of stability, with various modifications, small or large; but everyone, I held, was given the chance to recognise the full truth of their world and their place in it. At some time in their lives they were brought up against the naked reality: humanity in its pure essence, Christ, freedom and brotherhood separated out from all thingifying distortions. Their character, their nature as human beings, depended in the last resort in the way they responded to his vision, this impact, this demand; the way in which they freed themselves from things, from the dehumanising pressures of fear and power-lust, or in which they re-accommodated themselves to those pressures.

The character who fully responded could not do so in a merely intellectual way; his whole life must be changed. With his changed sense of what constitutes true social or human unity he must find all his relationships in a state of flux and moving into new patterns, new perspectives. It seemed to me that in the last resort this moment of total change was the only thing worthwhile as a theme of art. That was a harsh and limited judgment on doubt, but I still believe it touched the final truth, without which all the other truths were trivial or were cheats. The great moment was both one of Hell-harrowing (the individual experience of descent and ascent), and one of a Last Judgment (a total revision of values in which not only the individual but the whole of society and its positions were called in question, radically reconsidered, and brought together in a new unifying concept). Understood in its full scope, the belief that nothing else mattered in life or art was not so drastic as it might seem – or rather it had much more subtle and comprehensive application than the crude terms of its statement might seem to imply. Jane Austen, for example, by her clear-eyed grasp of just what moved the persons in her very limited section of society, her realisation of the part played by money in all its complications, could be described as having her own clear searchlight powered from the batteries of a Last Judgment, however little she drove her vision to any revolutionary conclusions. The difference between her work and that of someone enclosed and duped by the values of the same sort of characters brings out this point.

But for me what mattered was the direct experience of the moment of hell-harrowing and total judgment; for, apart from the fact that this theme alone was adequate to compass my own personal experience, it alone could at all truly reflect and compass the conflicts, problems, and resolutions of the capitalist world in its last phases of vast destructive capacities. I hoped that by dealing with the past periods of great social convulsion and change, which we had some hope of seeing with a fair amount of fullness and clarity, I could in turn clarify the vast entangled and seething situation all around us. The contradictions of capitalism and the need of socialism might be formulated in a number of political-economic analyses; the vast issues of human and cultural change that a transition to socialism implied remained to be explored and understood. Though at this time I did not quite realise how vast

they were or how poorly equipped was Marxist theory for dealing with them, my whole bias was towards dealing with the deeper questions and problems raised by the change from self-divided societies to a society of classless brotherhood. Hence, paradoxically, my turning to the past. I felt that one could only begin to grasp the magnitude of the present issues of upheaval and change by understanding how the struggle for freedom had worked out in the frustrated past, how at each phase there had been a resurgence of hopes and desires for a just and fraternal earth, which the existent forms of social change had been incapable of truly releasing and expressing, and which had been driven back into despair and compromise, or had found fantasy-escapes in various forms of religion and art. The problem was not merely to understand the past which had formed us, but to grasp in the patterns and idioms of struggle a criterion of what constituted a human society as opposed to a class-one; to assess the resistances, the ways in which distortions arose; to recognise the distorting or dehumanising pressures in the disguises they would take in the present and the future, the rationalizations that would endlessly come up to hide and defend the points of arrest, the forms of social organizations which would claim to represent the new freedom in order to betray them. Only by seeing all history as struggle for freedom as well as a limitation and betrayal of freedom could one hope to grasp in fullness the human essence in all its implications as well as understand the strength and resources of the forces of betrayal. Communist society, I felt more and more, must be one in which all the aspirations and energies expressed by religion in the past could be freed from their irrationalities and concretely realised. Marxism was the summation of religion as well as of art and science – or it was a confined and ultimately twisted Marxism.

The personal aspects of hell-harrowing were concentrated in the experiences of Roger; but surrounding and embracing those experiences and the experiences of everyone else was the cycle of the year seen as a death-rebirth of the earth with all the overtones of myth and ritual that came out clearly in the ancient world. Now those overtones had been partly diverted into the Christian creed and into the political concepts of a society of natural kind, one freed from the Norman and other distorting yokes, but they also had their direct

relevance to the question of man's consciousness of his place in nature, in the universe. The whole pattern of the Year had its complex link with the rise and fall of the political struggle, the hopes and fears of the embedded individuals; the men struggling to work out a new social structure were part of the larger whole, seeking to find new relationships to nature. As George Fox wrote, "I believed and saw it in the new birth. Then, some time after that, the Lord commanded me to go abroad into the world, which was like a briary thorny wilderness; and when I came, in the Lord's mighty power, with the word of life, into the world, the world swelled and made a noise like the great raging waves of the sea. Priests and professors, magistrates, and people were all like a sea…"

That was one of inset passages in the book. Every now and then I put in a section with a quotation from the period. This was not done with a documentary aim, even if some of the passages provided useful historical information. They were used to broaden the narrative as part of the general method of moving from accounts of actions, historically significant, to small scattered vignettes of everyday life. But further they were used as touchstones for the deeper truth of my narrative. I was not using a style in any way a pastiche of the period's styles. My method has always been to avoid anachronisms, but otherwise to get the tone of the period by the way of men's thinking and feeling, their characteristic imagery, and to some extent by the way which the rhythm of speech is heard. Thus the style should be such that it can meet the test of an actual quotation from the period without being felt as different in texture, in spiritual and social dimension.

I followed 1649 up with Lost Birthright, set in the Wilkite upheavals of the 1760s. A loose connection was made by continuing to use in my leading characters descendants of those in 1649. Something of the same system was used, but with less breadth and intensity; the psychological texture was thickened; and the mass-impact was expresses by the intrusion of passages simply defined by "we" instead of "they". I thus tried from a number of angles to express the new stage of struggle by various changes in tension and colouration.

I made some tentative efforts at contemporary novels. I started one on the theme of the English Gentleman, using Elza's husband for the main character and setting out to

develop his relationships, and that of his two brothers, to the middleclass dominating mother. But when I had to go beyond the material which Elza's stories had provided, I felt rather at a loss, with the interest drying up. I also drafted a novel about myself in my Sydney days, but I could not effectively link my socialist turn, which had occurred in England, with the Australian environment. I tried a more objective theme, the fight against the Conscription Bill in the 1914 war, with a Brisbane setting: which meant trying to push my memories of Quinton and other working-class fighters back a few years, to a situation of which I had hardly been aware at the time. However, when I tried a much less ambitious theme, a young couple on a holiday at Portreath during which the man is drowned, I was more successful. The woman was an amiable sort of Elza, and I was hopefully trying out the possibilities of survival for Elza if I died (faded out). Here I was using in part a D.H.L. idiom. I had reread him in 1934-5, and found there was much more in him than I am allowed for. While I still felt he got his ideas of life out of focus by laying far too much burden on sex – an accusation that with a change of terms could as well have been made against our Fanfrolico ethic – I realised that on the positive side there was much more than a rare capacity of evoking time and place; he understood a great deal of the nature of alienation and the cash-nexus. In my slight novel, Shadow and Flame, I used the theme of touch as an expression of pure tenderness, of trust, between two persons; the hard casing of fear and inhibiting frigidity which has cut the girl off is broken by the acceptance of touch, and she wanders off, capable, we feel, of at last meeting life unclipped. As I was publishing a couple of historical novels a year, I used a pseudonym for this book, Richard Preston.

I used the name again for a larger novel with a broad theme, End of Cornwall. The End referred both to the geographical part of Cornwall I treated, the western toe, and to the theme of the breakdown of old peasant Cornwall with its many medieval survivals. At Portreath particularly I had had a chance to watch the final stage in the dissolution of old ways of life: the last primitively-run mines on the moors, the fishermen cursing the steam-trawlers and betraying the cooperatives they started in a vain effort to reconstitute old systems of sharing, the farmers scratching the barren soil and cursing. I was interested in the spectacle

of a system with many ancient communal elements at its last gasp – with the first flickers of movement in a direction adequate to our world: in the young lovers who break away from the narrow village-cruelties and non-conformist hypocrisies, in the few miners turning to trade-unionism. The first organisation of miners in the T. and G.W. occurred, as I prophesied, shortly after. I tried to show the slow and difficult transformation of old forms of union into new and fuller ones – the open point of break expressed by Amos' speech to Gwennap Pit with its ghost of Wesley preaching. The inner cleavages of the dying old-society are symbolised by the tale of the retired sailor, with his daydreaming wife, who kills his best friend; he is condemned to be hanged for motives he did not feel, and on evidence which is in fact irrelevant, while all the genuine evidence is missed; he thus dies in a rage, consumed by a sense of injustice and yearning to call up his dead friend to vindicate him against the calumnies. This side of the tale expressed a group which thinks itself held together by links which were in fact quite imaginary, while the real links were those of hate and merged frustrations.

3

The line of thought in this period has been already indicated; but I need to deal with some of my efforts to formulate it yet more directly. While working on Bruno I had decided to make a largescale study of his thought, but I felt defeated by Renascence mathematics. However a section of my study was published as The Anatomy of Spirit (1937), with chapters on the Idea of Justice and its forms of growth, the Idea of Unity, Relationship, Irrationality, Memory, Trauma, Substitution Fantasies, Spirit. The method was an uneasy combination of Freud and Marx, with oversimplified definitions. After dealing with embryonic forms of religion (of a personal deity) in totemic groups, I declared, "Religion arises with civilisation; that is with settled agriculture. At last there seems a hope of security from food-anxieties. But class-society, the pre-requisite of all advance" at this level, "denies any emotion of security by its creation of the competitive individual. Therefore the vague cosmic unity implied by magic develops into the abstraction of social unity and gathers round the vague form of the original clan-father… So class-society alternately, and simultaneously, stimulates the hope of security

and the despair of it, the idea of a universal family-bond and the idea of each-for-himself." Thus a complex development goes on, of fusing and conflicting forms and ideas of both unity and division, linked ultimately with the systems of productive union and money-or-power division. Money is abstracted into a positive force controlling men and causing all their discords, into a fetish which masks the "murderous deal in human flesh and blood." Men look back on the lost tribal bond, with its brotherly values, and idealise it as a lost paradise. But each time they reimagine and revalue it in terms of the potentialities-for-union brought about by the productive advance which has been made necessarily at the cost of increasing division. Herein lies the paradox of all history. The idea of unity is stirred always by a process that denies it. At each great social crisis, with the emergence of revolutionary demands, there is a mixture of practical aims (which will strengthen and stabilise the class with the key to the next phase of economic advance) and of visionary hopes for the earthly paradise (which are felt by the mass workers in craft or agriculture). The revolt thus sets itself aims that are beyond the possibilities of the situation, and in its final phase recoils to the limit of practicality, the forms and positions which the key-class needs for its advance. But as the area of responsibility widens, the more the paradisac dream comes down to earth. Finally in our own day, with a world-market and rapidly expanding technology, the dream can be actualised as socialism – or rather it can find its first solid basis in socialist forms on the way to the communism which fully restores freedom and brotherhood.

This was the picture I set out, with attempts to explain further how religion or abstraction developed all sorts of obstructions to the free exercise of the dream; the birth-trauma in its social reflection was linked with the classes who clung to their power-privileges and blocked the way forward to full freedom; the sense of the divided self, which went back to the churinga of tribal society, kept on gaining increased strength and fighting against the enhanced spiritual unity which was linked with the work-sphere in all its positive aspects. Thus the conflict of unity-and-division in the social sphere had its reflection in the conflict of unity-and division inside men; the clotted fetishisms of money-power were linked with the abstractions of arrested or hypostasised thought, with the idealisations of a false unity, a unity

based on exploitation. The external-soul or soul-object of early tribal days developed by complex steps into both the money-fetish and the spirit conceived as cut off from the body, existing in a higher reality. And so on.

Thus, despite many oversimplifications, I was raising important questions and was far more unorthodox as a Marxist than I realised. I thus refused to accept the formula of development as occurring solely through inner contradictions or conflicts:

> Society develops out of its inner contradictions. But we can at no point separate that development from the world of nature in which it takes place. The collision from outside is an essential part of the growth of division inside. Environmental changes merge with the inner forms of instability in the tribe. We cannot conceive of inner contradictions developing on their own without a dialectical relation to the environment of the group. Some marine organisms have lived for aeons almost unchanged.
>
> That is why I say that for a group at the primitive stage of the Australians a strong environmental change is needed before the tribe will meet a situation where it must develop or die.

> Then society reaches a more complex class-stage, the inner conflict of the classes becomes the dynamic of social change; yet even so, the impact from without remains of essential importance. The class-struggle is not waged in an abstract space labelled society. Each group develops by reason of class-struggles; but each group is at the same time in conflict with other groups, and all this struggle goes on as part of the dialectical struggle against nature.
>
> Under communism, the human whole, conscious of the dialectics of process, is matched against nature as a whole, and the question of impact reaches a new level.

I was taking over, as I was to do for some time, the idea of struggle <u>against</u> nature, of men's goal as the <u>mastery</u> of nature. Certainly those phrases echo well enough the attitudes that have dominance in class-societies, where they are linked with the power-ethic that permeates the ruling-class or the sections aiming to become such a class. But such an idiom, reflecting violence, power-lust, war, sadism, rape, expresses what is wrong in the societies that use it. It carries the notions of war and class-oppression into men's relations with nature, who is seen as an enemy to be attacked, sacked, looted and despoiled. (More of this later.) But apart from this unhappy turn of phrase, I was in my formulations echoing the early Marx (whose manuscripts had only just been published) with his notion that men move forward by humanising nature and naturalising society – that is by a dynamic interpenetration of nature

and society. How, if that was so, could development occur solely by an internal social process? The interpenetration of men and nature took place in the productive sphere, where men transformed nature but were at the same time vitally linked with her and were transforming themselves as well. On these lines we can understand Marx's aphorism: Man produces according to the laws of beauty. For in the productive sphere as in that of art man is merging in a living way with nature, discovering her formative forces and systems and reapplying them on new levels. Thus here, and in other points which will come up, in my line of thinking I was arriving at ideas that are to be found in the 1844 Manuscripts – ideas which largely dropped out of Marxism and which I think no one else was exploring at this time. Herein lay one of the prime reasons for my later conflicts with orthodox or official Marxists.

In reviews in Left Review I set out the way in which I saw the key-issue in the art of our days its power to catch the moral dilemma in terms of the death-rebirth structure of myth and to embody this structure with full realistic comprehension.

> What was called in the old scheme of drama Recognition has thus found a new significance. Drama is born again with the vehemence that it had for the Elizabethans. We can best gauge the new quality if we look at Recognition in its original form and its present form. In Greek art two outstanding examples are: the return of Odysseus to his home, and in Daphnis and Chloe, the home-coming of the lost one and the discovery of the lost parents. (These basic ideas find their lowest expression in the romances of lost heirs, etc.) Under these ideas lay the sense of getting back to contact with the fullness of life, of entering into a larger life, a more conscious relationship. Now Recognition appears as the point where the shell of the old life cracks and the new self is born, breaking into new spaces of activity and achieving fullness of social contact. This is the pattern which all serious art today reveals, however varying the material and the incidental forms. At root there is the same pattern in the novels of Socialist Realism; they deal with the theme of the individual dying at one level into the collective to gain a deeper individuality on a higher level. (December 1936)

I wrote some long essays for the Freethinker, and drafted a book for the Left Book Club on Freedom, in which I sought to show that, while there were continuing elements in the idea throughout history, there were also specific issues that came up out of each society, determined by its fundamental social relations. The very idea of Freedom had been born out of the existence of the Slave; and so on. In a socialist society the issues of freedom presented

themselves in terms different from those born out of bourgeois society. Though there was a fair measure of truth, I think, in what I said, I did not realise how such arguments could be perverted to excuse the denial of necessary freedoms under socialism, and I did not make sufficient distinction between a socialist and a communist society. So I am glad now that the book did not appear.

However Gollanez published my Short History of Culture, cut from a very large work and weakened. This book developed certain aspects of the Anatomy of Spirit, stressing the tribal origins of art and poetry, and concentrating on the ways in which the primary bases carried on in popular forms which have provided over the centuries, at least till the advent of industrialism, a perpetual source of renewal. I sought to show, for instance, the important part played by the concept of the circle and the line, which had emerged from the dance. The dance further involved a gyring impulse organic in origin, which found all sorts of ritual expressions. The circle was a concept of movement and led to technological forms such as the cartwheel and the potters-wheel; it begot the rounded architectural forms which proliferated in the Bronze Age; it further begot all sorts of concepts and structures felt to be world-centres, which from simple ritual mounds led in due time to the sky-mount of pyramid and ziggurat, even of Gothic Cathedral.

The early tribal groups developed "images and ideas of symmetry based on the equal balance of two opposing forces or forms." The sense of group-unity was projected on to nature; and the sense of two balancing forms (man and nature) inside the over-all unity led to the dual organisations of primitive groups, with all sorts of connected dual-concepts or forms, ranging from the dual culture-heroes to the dual systems in dances and games. Rhythmic tensions and expressions underlay all human activity, from the outset.

> Rhythm in human activity is movement functionally seeking the utmost economy of effort in the maximal attainment of some aim, so that energy may be preserved and released for further effort. The consciousness of this disciplined and purposive movement becomes the sense of grace and beauty, and gives the feeling of enhanced life both to exponent and observer. Rhythm is thus not something added to activity. It is the essence of movement itself. For man it is the body in its fullest flowering of activity, and is thus I inherent in the

> body's structure; and out of the harmoniously adapted movements of the body are mental patterns evolved.
>
> For the movements do not take place in a void. Rhythm derives from the tension of organism and environment, and for man the basic environment is always social, always finding its crucial point in productive activity. Out of the tension between the personal body-and-mind and the complexity of social relationships with their dynamic in the productive sphere, is both the heightened consciousness which flows into art and science.
>
> The formations of mind occur by the same laws as the formations of matter. Only, because they take place on a new and unique level, there are new factors, new kinds of cause, in their precipitation… Consider the subtle way in which matter responds rhythmically to the tensions of environment: the proliferating chains and rings of carbon atoms which underlie organic matter, the inexhaustible kaleidoscope of snow crystals ...
>
> Man, in devising art-forms, is working on the same system as Nature used in compacting rhythmical patterns out of the tension between organism and environment. Many of the forms which man has laboriously hammered out of his mind as art-structures can be found already defined in the hidden world of the radiolarians or the organic designs revealed by the microscope in vegetable matter. Gothic art, for example, is rich in vegetable forms which were invisible to man in the days when Gothic art was devised…
>
> He does not passively work out a pattern on a shell-float that is part if his body. He projects form-concepts mentally and in structures outside himself. There are entirely new factors of mobility and freedom. But both radiolarian and man obey the law that rhythm is the expression of a tension between organism and environment.
>
> The realising rhythm of the dance thus leads on to more than art. It leads also on to science…

The dance as the supreme artform is a form of surplus-energy closely linked with the productive sphere and its activities.

I developed this kind of idea at much length, carrying right on to the present. There were many flaws in the presentation. In my haste I linked many things which required detailed analysis for their connections to be brought out and established. Also I rashly assumed that with the aid of Marxist dialectics the crisis in science could be directly overcome; I did not grasp the grip of mechanistic ideas in the post-Galilean world, through oversimplifying the role of science in meeting human demands and building socialism. (More of this later.) In dealing with the Recognition-motive in the modern novel I stressed the importance of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. With Tolstoy

> as with Dostoevsky, the theme of Renewal is basic in his work, reaching its culmination in Resurrection. Exactly as Dostoevsky in the last paragraph of Crime and Punishment, he in the last paragraph

> of this book confesses that he can trace the pattern of the individual to the borders of the new world of union but no further. He took the Fool as hero, either by means of a kind of self-portrait like Pierre or of the direst folk-fool… Wagner is yet another creator who turned finally in his tangled recoil from the moneyworld and his problems at Bayreuth, to the Pure Fool, Parsifal, as the only solution in a society that seemed far from actualising the lessons of active love in the Ring… Tolstoy and Dostoevsky thus raised in its most empathic form the question of conversion, of renewal, of social change; but from their pre-capitalist approach they were driven back on an individualist core which was in fact the very source of the things they loathed. Hence their dilemma; hence Tolstoy's mysticism of non-resistance and Dostoevsky's agond sense of underlying perversity. What Dickens did schematically in his redemption of men from the disemboweling money world, they did with full psychological depth. Behind their work lay the full revolutionary impact.

(That phrase "pre-capitalist approach" would need some careful analysis and modification.) Add Zola with Germinal: "My subject was the action and reciprocal reaction of the individual and the mass, one upon the other," and we have the basis for the novel of Socialist Realism. (I am still ready to use this term for art under socialism as long as it is freed from the many crippling limitations which Soviet critics have often piled on it. From the outset, as here, I used it simply to express the art which sought, by any means whatever, to define and express the movement of people into the widened consciousness of socialist relations; I therefore took it, and still take it, to include all expressions which truly deal with the obstructions and perversions developed inside any socialist society.) Germinal, I said, had been the bridge from Balzac on one side, and Tolstoy on the other, to the new world. Gorky took the final step. "Beginning as the depicter of the squalors of low-life, the rebellion of the lost and the forgotten – often with a buffoon-note – he learned through participation in the class-struggle to find the resolving artform." In Mother the quest of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky came at last down to earth. "The structure of Recognition came its full curve from Greek Tragedy to its goal."

As an example of the Soviet writer who realised this direction and culmination I took Leonid Leonov, dealing with his Skutarevsky (which had been finely translated by Alec Brown). This novel has as theme the movement of a scientist of a generally progressive viewpoint, who feels that science is a sort of abstract truth removed from human struggles,

and who is gradually drawn step by step into a full revolutionary consciousness; he finds his union with the people at a moment that seems bitterly a total failure in his work. “The novel is subtly convincing because we are throughout made to feel Skutarevsky in continual interaction with his environment; the changes in his consciousness do not come schematically but as the result of an organic give-and-take between his life and work and the social forces about him. When the final ‘conversion’ comes, we believe in it because it has been creatively conditioned by the accretion of the minutiae of change. In this typical Soviet novel we see the mass-structure of renewal brought into full aesthetic consciousness.”

It was not quite so typical, as I then thought, in its solution of the problem of concretely depicting the growth of socialist consciousness; but I believe I was right enough in holding that soviet culture had shown the decisive way forward. Despite a very zigzag movement on account of official interventions and distortions, it has never at any phase quite lost the essential clues; it could not have issued in Solzhenitsyn without a long series of works that truly grappled with soviet problems and what was happening among the people. This side of soviet cultures, often closely entangled with the weak or schematic side that has been officially fostered at many points, has persisted, both in prose and verse, and taken by a large, makes soviet literature since 1917 of incomparably greater importance, depth, and breadth, than the literature of the class-societies during the same period. (More on this later.)

If I am to sum up simply the pattern of my thought over these years, I should do so as follows. The personal experience of death-rebirth in the crisis at Forge Cottage, aided by psychoanalysis, led on a grasp of the bases of art in initiation-ritual. What I had sketchily worked out in a general way through thinkers like Jane Harrison assumed a full immediacy, a comprehensive reality. The structure of art and initiation-ritual was in turn revealed *in* historical development. What I had realised in my own body was re-realised in terms of the anthropological, poetic, and historical evidences. The primary realisation of the nature of change, dynamic and organic, provided (as it has continued to provide) the touchstone, the criterion, the guiding illumination, by which all the other evidences could alone be given their

full inner meaning. Hence my struggle in novels (or direct history) to unite immediacy of apprehension and objective dialectical pattern.

Turning up a carbon-copy of a summary of an essay roughed out about this time (with Labour Monthly or Fact in mind), I am able to reconstruct my attitudes without any anachronisms. I had arrived at a concept of the Popular Front, which later was to underlie my view of the Antifascist Movement in the last years of the War, with its Cultural Upsurge – a movement in Britain which I hoped to see linked with the political after-effects of the Resistance Movements on the Continent to provide a truly popular basis for the advance of socialism.

> Is the P.F. an accidental and opportunist bit of strategy? Quote Carlo Roselli for the effect on non-Marxist with deep sense of human rights. Come to stay despite an opportunist analysis of it by communist bureaucrats. Quote Lenin on need to take over whole human heritage. But how is this to be done? All that is valid in art and science — exactly what meant: not academic knowledge if it, but re-living through, re-creation. Hence come to problem of dogmatic Marxism against creative. Dogma or science. Quote Stalin in defence of creative Marxism. Various errors in Marx and Engels. Why had Marxism seemed desiccatory, dogmatic to such a large extent? Answer: Has been on the defensive, almost purely critical. Necessarily first analyses economic.
>
> Only in temporary lull Engels was able to make extensions, but on the lines of showing how scientific facts etc. can be correlated with generalisations about dialectics. Passive analysis. Not yet a conscious application of dialects to the actuality of science, or art. During this period (imperialist corruption) first need to preserve pure doctrine. Lenin. This need persisted through Russian revolution and up to the success of first 5 years plan. Limited however by imperialist [end page 127 followed by 127a] pressures. Nevertheless basic change. Inevitably bound up with changes going on in rest of world. Fascism makes increasingly large areas, chiefly prolet. or intelligentsia, aware of nature of capitalism. Hence people's front. Arising as political strategy, in fact an inevitable movement in the development of Marxism, representing change from Marxism on defensive to Marxism expanding, really starting off on work which Engels first sketched out (largely from passive angle, having no basis in social reality at his moment). Reality now in soviet masses, however crudely and imperfectly.
>
> Since dialectics is merely effort to become conscious of reality of movement, can't be discarded, but must change with every new step into such consciousness. Just as Darwin might conceivably be rejected as far as almost every detail in Descent of Species, yet he would remain the creative founder biology and evolution would be unshaken.

I continued along these lines, seeking to find in the movement from below, in the consolidation of the masses in a new way, more spontaneous and organically developing the theory and practice of socialism, the basis for the liberation of Marxism on a new level. The core of this viewpoint has always stayed with me, determining my political position and the lines along which I have struggled to extend Marxism. I pointed out that term Dictatorship of the Proletariat was in a sense a shock-term meant to bring out the ultimately rigid and tyrannous nature of the class-State, and aimed at ending the mystification of State-power; and that it had the wrong colouration in an era that had seen the emergence of open class-dictatorships, seeking to pair off socialism with fascism. I ended with this statement about socialist realism:

> Question: Can prolet. art and lit. be creative? Answer: only as an heroic form. Reason: All the structures of human consciousness and art have been derived from labour-processes developed in terms of agricultural year (tragedy, comedy, the poetic forms etc.). With industrialism, contact with earth is lost. No rhythm of construction (often expressed sentimentally as loss of contact with earth, crudely but truly).
>
> Prolet. art is creative only in so far as it uses the old forms of consciousness born from identification of productive man with seasonal change. This works out in directly revolutionary art. Heroic death etc.
>
> Prolet. art is transition, as prolet. society is. Transitional to classless world-society when the loss of contract with earth will be ended and a new kind of rhythm will arrive. Meanwhile masses divorced from old rhythms cannot be fully creative. Hence the way that Russian art or lit. disappoints except in so far as it takes directly heroic theme or appears as embryonic transformation of folk-material.

There is much oversimplification, but the formulations seem to me to be struggling to get to the heart of the matter. I had my many illusions and confusions; but in some ways my distance from the scene of action gave me a useful perspective and saved me from being too easily taken in by the day-to-day rationalisations in the political scene. Thus I was saved from the concept of the C.P. as alone holding the clues, as justified in imposing its point of view on the masses. I saw the party as giving leadership only in so far as it was fully and concretely based on the movement from below. This seemed to me, and still seems, the true Leninist position. Often lipservice is paid to it by persons who use it to disguise the diametrically

opposite procedure: the imposition of a viewpoint arrived-at from a bureaucratic or dogmatic level, with a false narrowing-down of the problems, upon the masses who are expected to "understand" and apply, popularise or extend, the expanded system. (I did not yet grasp at all clearly how these issues were linked with the ways in which "democratic centralism" is applied within the party.)

4

Though I was cut off in my western lairs from participation in the many activities of Left intellectuals during these years, there was one point at which, despite my absence, I played a direct part in the agitations and tumults. This was through my mass-declamations. The form arrived by chance, or perhaps one should say, by the sudden coincidence of my own emotional needs and those of the situation. In a review of Alan Hutt's This Final Crisis the T.L.S. had remarked on the fact that he unfortunately did not know his people. I wrote an indignant verse-declamation and sent it to Left Review where it was published in May 1936 as a Mayday poem. Margaret Leona and others in Unity Theatre had been casting round for some way of devising a form that would combine verse, music, ballet-movements; and my poem seemed just what they wanted. They broke my lines up into speaking parts for single voices or for chorus, and linked them with symbolic movements. So the poem was staged as Who are the English? and issued as a pamphlet which sold in very large numbers. The performances were highly successful and the declamation was taken up by groups all over the country. In March 1937 Left Review published another long poem, written at Edgell's suggestion, On Guard for Spain, which had an even greater success. Its performances must have run into many hundreds, including two in Trafalgar Square; the typical meeting organised by the Left Book Club consisted of speeches by Gollancz, Harry Pollitt, and the Duchess of Atholl, with On Guard. Harry Pollitt once dropped me a line to say that he had never seen audiences so moved as they were by my declamation. I did many more. I did a declamation on China for a show at the Phoenix Theatre; at the request of the Left Book Club Theatre Section I did another, Support the Soviet Union, which they printed (November 1937) and which was also widely performed, especially at meetings celebrating the twentieth

anniversary of the revolution. Further I did many lesser ones, at the request of various strike-groups and the like.

Oddly then, I, who was the most cut off of all the Left intellectuals was the one who devised the most active form of writing, the only one that went into direct action. (On account of my remoteness I never saw a performance of any of the poems.) Naturally the poems were detested by all the liberals of the antifascist movement, who saw in such whole-hearted identification of oneself with a side (even one of which they approved) a betrayal of the writer's objectivity. In Fact, July 1937, Spender wrote:

> What Owen meant when he said that English poetry is not yet fit to speak of heroes becomes doubly clear if one considers the kind of poetry which endeavors to serve the purpose of heroic war propaganda.
>
> I rose from the bed of my wife's young body
> at the call of liberty.
> O feed with my blood our flag's red flame,
> Comrades, remember me.
>
> So sings jack Lindsay putting the sentiments into the mouth of a young militia lad in Barcelona.
>
> Writing such as this may be effective recruiting propaganda but it is supremely untruthful as poetry. These lines are not bad because there is no conceivable conditions in which one man might experience the sensations they record, but because the man's case is represented as typical, so that the lines have an air of generalisation. Such writing is simply a record of hysteria which the poet shares with the audience and himself and does not see at all from the outside.
>
> Such sentiments as Jack Lindsay expresses in these lines provoke the brutal comment: "If that's what you think dying at the barricades is like, why not try it:"

One may note that Owen was writing of an imperialist war in which any poet who took sides was indeed betraying poetry. And further that it is not just "a young militia lad" who speaks my quatrain; it is a dead man, who is appealing to be remembered by the living. (I wrote another poem on the basis of several names of Republican dead, trying to bring out the pathos of the unknown lives behind these labels.) The emotion I felt as I wrote my quatrain was not one that sought to inveigle others into a bloody death, but was one of anguish at the thought of wasted lives, for which the least we could do, was to resolve not to forget. It was the accusation against the fascists of having willfully brought about this destruction of young life, which was uppermost in my thought. Only by the oath-to-remember could the sacrifice be at

all vindicated. (In the same issue of Fact, John Allen wrote, "One of the biggest successes and most popular pieces of the Unity Theatre Club is their production of Jack Lindsay's On Guard for Spain, a poem whose language is far from easy and which lasts nearly half an hour.") But if I was the detested of the right wing in the movement (which was by far the larger wing among the writers), I was also a parish among much of the left wing as well. John Allen wrote to me about this time, in connections with some photos in the Daily Worker of the Trafalgar-Square performance, without any reference to me in the letterpress, that, when he called in at the office to protest, he learned that there was a rule tabooing my name in the paper. This position of rejection by both wings, by almost all shades of opinion, I have managed to maintain till this day.

I give here the opening of Who are the English? as example of the style of these poems, which found such a strong response among working-class audiences.

> Who are the english,
> according to the definition of the ruling-class?
> All you that went forth, lured by great-sounding names
> which glittered like bubbles of crystal in your eyes
> till they burst and you burst with them,[1] shot to shreds
> from one end of the shuddering earth to the other end,
> shot that the merchant's pockets might cling and bulge,
> shot that hoardings of imperial size
> might fill each blank space of the motor-roads
> with pink whore-faces beckoning the bankrupt to buy –
> you are the english,
> your ruling-class has said it,
> you are the english,
> keep then the recompense of sounding name, for you have nothing
> else.
>
> Or you, the ragged thief, fruit of the pressgang, gallowsbird[2]
> flogged to a scarlet-breasted musketeer.
> you, too, splintered your bones to build an Empire;
> and now those names are lost in the desolations of moons
> snow-drifting on the war-gnawed litter of history,
> the dump of bones, you starveling, accept your share
> with those whom the great-sounding names or greed
> drew with drumflams to death in distant places
> while Flanders mud flakes off the latest dump,
> you are the English,
> your ruling-class has said it.

[1] Typo in typescript: full stop [.].
[2] Typo in typescript: 'gallowsbord'.

And shuffle along you toilers on whose cowed faces
the heels of your betters have left bleeding badges
as proof of your allegiance. Shuffle along
all you thrifty cotters saved from brotherhood by Wesley,
all you farmhands sweated out of thought,
all you slum-denizens humbly paying pence
to keep a bishop in christian poverty,
all you shophands beaten over the brain
till you can only answer, O let's go to the pictures,
all you that lick the hand providing dope,
you readers of the national newspapers
absorbing fascism and astrology
with your list of winners and hire-payment systems,
you are the english,
your ruling-class has said it,
keep then the recompense of a sounding name, for you have nothing
else.

I call instead on those who are not the english
according to the definition of the ruling-class.
We'll step back six hundred years or seven
and call up the peasants hoarsely talking under the wind,
their cattle stolen by the king's purveyors,
their wives deceived by whining hedge-priests.
Peasants, leaving your wattled huts to haunt
the crooked dreams of Henry with your scythes,
unrolling a long scroll you couldn't read
though you knew the word it held, not England,
but Justice – come, you peasants with hoof-smashed faces,
speak from the rotting wounds of your mouths, we'll understand,
prompting you with our anger.

I talked with John Ball, I was out with Jack Cade,
I listened to Wicliffe, I was burnt as a Lollard.
Come with us, peasants, waking from fumes of charcoal,
into the wintry dawn, while all cattle stamp,
leap from your strawbed, leave the blowsy alewife,
someone has called and you have taken your fork
against the thundering cataphract of power…

And so on, up to the present. I produced a prose version of much the same tale, England my England, for Randall Swingler to start off Key Books, and it had a big circulation in the factories, selling some 80,000 copies. But before we pass on, I'd like to cite the opening of Salute the Soviet Union; for it expresses the profound gratitude I had felt for the Soviet Union in 1919 and had now regained. Though the terms are too naive for the post-1956 world, I still feel the core of this emotion, mixed with regret and anger that the Leninist bases were not maintained.

What will they say of us in years to come?

Though with tremendous powers they girdle earth,
though beauty gives a flower-edge of sweetness
to all their senses, though their unity
has meadowed the whole world with happiness,
they will look back upon the grinding hour
of conflict scraping at our flesh today,
and they will say of us:

"There is one thing which we can never know.
There is once exaltation never to be repeated.
To stand amid evil's darkest squalor, in a world
bristling with spikes of death. To hear the storm of madness
scream with a fury never heard before
in all the ages of pain. And then to see
the birth of brotherhood: the Soviet Star
leaping in the sky of man."

Yes, they will look back with curious envy
upon our sufferings. They will say of us:
"This generation was born from the decisive clash
when a man came face to face with his own self,
when fear and love came out of the tangled shadows.
Till then, struggling in the net of natural forces,
man found his fear of the unmastered world
gnarling his hands in greedy hate against his fellows;
and through the ages the blind conflict heaved.
But in the hour when mastery loomed near,
love and fear came out of the jungle-shadows
and spoke their challenge, standing face to face.
Are you for love and a world of harvest-songs:
Are you for fear and the gnarling hands of greed?
Ah the strange joy."

That is how they will look back upon our vanished faces,
listening for the bells of danger and delight
which peal within our blood this day.

There were great moments earlier,
moments when man struck through the distorting mirror
with hands bleeding from the splinters of time,
and saw in a lighting-jag of vision
this craggy moment where we stand,
this moment of choice clanging its bells about us.
All the broken hearts of the lost years
were mended when the Soviet Star
leaped indestructible from the forges of chaos.
Listen back down the lost years for those voices…

I quote these passages, as well as others in the earlier part of the book, because no paragraphs, no later efforts to recollect, can give quite the same direct impact from a period as the things then written. The later account may well put the whole thing in a clearer focus, may explain

what was confused or incomplete in the statement, but it cannot revive the past moment just as it was, in its sharp immediacy, with all its imperfections, but at the same time with its living force.

As well as England my England, I compiled, at Edgell's request, another work that attempted to revive the revolutionary past with that sort of living forces by collecting the very words of the actors or eyewitnesses. A Handbook of Freedom (later issued as Spokesmen of Liberty) had to be cut and Edgell added some items for the later period. One point perhaps worth making about the declamations is that they clearly filled a need; for I had not thought of Who are the English? as a work for performance. The need was there, and I was the only poet who wanted to address the mass-audience beginning to emerge; so I filled the gap. Though others tried the form as a result of the performances, they had almost no effect. The stage of my development must have coincided with the stage reached by the advanced sections of the working-class and the middleclass intellectuals less dyed-in-the-grain than Spender and his type. My declamations this represented the English form of an art-genre which had sprung up to meet a mass-situation in Germany (the early Brecht) and in the U.S.A. of the New Deal (in such works as Ballad for Americans). My form however was not imitative, as I did not know of the German or American examples; it was the genuinely English variation of the genre, which could only appear effectively when there was a large number of people strongly sharing certain ideas which related to an urgent situation. Is one then preaching to the converted? I do not think that is a relevant point. One is playing one's part in compacting the unity of the mass-group, and the virtue of the work lies in the degree of validity in the emotions stirring that group and the force of the form which one achieves in the dynamic interplay between poet-spokesman and actively responding group. Was Shelley preaching to the converted when he wrote his couplets after Peterloo: "I met Murder on the way…"? Of course he was; but that point has nothing to do with the human validity of his statement or the emotional force of his form.

With the final defeat of the Spanish Republic in March 1938 the bottom seemed to drop out of the epoch. Though one had known things were going badly, it had seemed impossible that such naked courage, all the more striking because of the superior armament of the enemy, could ever be defeated. The event was felt as a defeat of humanity by a nightmare of monstrous creatures: an emotion that Picasso put into Guernika. Almost overnight the antifascist union of the intellectuals began to break down; it was no longer safe and fashionable to stay well out on the Left; soon the violent persecution of the communists in France was to show what persistence in a socialist and antifascist stand was likely to bring. The pact between Hitler and the Soviet Union completed the rout. But I for one felt that the intransigent attitudes of Britain and France had forced the Soviet Union, which had made genuine offers of alliance against Hitler, to take this step in self-defence; and when Stalin occupied the eastern section of Poland, it did not appear as a sharing of the booty but as the only act which at the moment could both save much of Poland from Hitler's clutches and extend the soviet frontiers so as to make a German attack more difficult. I felt stronger than ever in my support of the Soviet Union as the sole bastion of democracy. When, during a move, I drank coffee in a roadside café, I argued with a crowd of lorry-drivers in defence of the soviet measures against Finland as a necessary step to safeguard Leningrad from the strong line built in complicity with the Germans, I had everyone of them against me. Unmoved, I scribbled a sonnet that began, "Having felt for Spain, what further can I[3] feel?" and ended: "Across war's thickening storm the lifeboat breaks: Red Army march or budpulse on the bough?..."

Those attitudes now seem oversimplified, but I do not feel ashamed of them; they at least went more to the heart of the matter than the outcries of betrayal by the intellectuals in retreat. I fully agreed with the first stand of the British C.P. in supporting the declarations of war against Hitler by Chamberlain and considered the volte-face brought about by Palme Dutt

[3] Typescript: 'what further can be feel?'.

as hopelessly incorrect; and I did nothing to support the People's Convention against War. However imperialist-minded were the English and French leaders, the logic of the war, I felt, must bring about in time a genuinely popular basis against Hitler; I also felt sure that Hitler would in his own time attack the Soviet Union. I saw clearly enough that at the moment both England and France were not interested in fighting Hitler and wanted to switch the war against the Soviet Union, but I considered that they had been too deeply snared in the net of their own duplicity. The question in my eyes was only whether reaction would get far enough to arrest the staunch antifascists, including myself, or whether the contradictions of the war would force it into a genuinely antifascist direction before that happened.

To make my position clear I therefore tried to get Lawrence and Wishart to publish my declamations under the title Prophecies Come True. The book would then state both my primarily antifascist position and my support of the Soviet Union. To ensure that my point was understood I concluded the preface: "I wrote in a letter published in Reynolds in the early weeks of the war that we could count on the U.S.S.R. as an ally the moment that the war became a People's War, and not before." (True, I made too extreme a definition of the signature of such a war: the granting of liberation to India and the ending of the imperialist system!) I also stated, too simply but truly enough, "The collapse of France has put beyond question the contention that only the full and unfettered release of mass-energy can stand up against the Fascist attack." The terms of my remarks show that, while opposed to doctrinaire condemnation of the war as purely imperialist, I was thinking in politically sharp categories that bore little relation to realities; that the correct intuitions were translated into grandiose conceptions based on a belief that the peoples everywhere were vastly more ready for the radical changes than in fact they were. (This tendency, not all limited to myself, was close to the way that Trotsky thought with his strong sociologist bias and his consequent underestimation of the autonomy of political institutions. Such a bias looks for an immediate predominance of social forces; it also translates political institutions immediately into social forces – and is thus forever expecting rapid culminations where there is in fact no likelihood of them coming about.)

In my note I also made rather large claims for my Prophecies. I pointed out that there were many prophecies in the poems of events which had actually come true. “But I am also using the term Prophecy in its wider sense. Blake took the term to define the poems in which he sought to symbolise the basic emotional and spiritual conflicts generated by the French Revolution. The tradition that he was invoking was wider than he knew – stretching from the Lamentations of the seers of ancient Egypt (derived from the revolutionary period between the Old and Middle Kingdoms) and the utterances of the Hebrew prophets, to the Wanana of the Samoan poets or the chants of the South Bantu prophets who, with considerable political acumen, inspired and rallied the Amoxosa clans against the British in the early last century.” I was dignifying my poems too far, but what I said was not all amiss. While the last thing I wanted was to reduce poetry to agitprop and declamation, I felt that at one point in its broad realm of energies poetry should be able to take a directly active role without becoming banal and stereotyped. I felt that the other areas were weakened, not strengthened, by an autonomy which disdained the direct relations. I noted of the poems, “They have also been used as monologues, here and as far afield as New Zealand. One North-Country worker” (Norman Alford) “told me that he recited parts of them with success, together with poems by Burns, in country pubs.”

In 1941 I read, I think in the Labour Monthly, an account of the way in which the Soviet Union had now definitely put itself into a position where it could not possibly be drawn into the war. (It couldn’t have been in the Daily Worker, which had been suppressed.) I grinned, remembering my first disillusion with C.P. judgments in such matters. It had been during the war of Mussolini against the Ethiopians. The D.W. reporter in the field had explained how well the latter were doing, and I, a new recruit to the paper, had been duly impressed. Then a day or two later the Ethiopians collapsed. My premonition that the news of the Soviet Union’s immunity to war would be followed by some disastrous contradiction was soon proved true. The unannounced attack on the Soviet Union promptly followed. And that was the day I received my calling-up papers. Shortly afterwards, at my medical, I asked to be put into the infantry, feeling that would bring me quickest into active service. But because I

was near 41 years of age and had a degree, I was posted to Signals; the slogan said that the Signals Corps was the Brain of the Army.

6

But in the last couple of years I had done much work which I must briefly describe. I had returned to the theme of Catullus, at last directly dealing with him in Brief Light. And I wrote the third work of my English trilogy, Men of Forty-Eight. War had been declared and I felt that I might well have only a short while to live. I did my utmost to pack both my revolutionary fervour and my sense of tragic contradictions into the novel, especially in the character Boon, who goes through both the February and June uprisings in Paris, takes part in Chartist work, and dies in Munich. All the inner conflicts that had brought me to a revolutionary position, and all those which felt continuing despite my efforts to find a point of central balance in the idea and act of revolution: all the conflicts between the impulse of self-sacrifice and the intensified joy-in-life that was one of its results; the descent into the depths of oneself which was also the harrowing of the social hell; the desperate struggle to understand the personal compulsions which had driven me to my positions, so that I might maintain those positions without personal distortions – maintain them by a pure act of the whole self; the perpetual struggle between justice and pity, between the pitiless need to judge the world and the need to reject all limited judgments in a total acceptance; the Dostoevskian conflict between the desire for a pure goodness which affects life solely by its radiating wholeness, and the perverse wish to explore the unlocked gates of all that has been forbidden – the old sectarian paradox that all things are permitted to the saved; the tragic sense of time, in which the goal seems both just ahead and irretrievably behind…. all this and more I poured out in anxious days and nights. A testimony for whom? I hardly knew, but felt that I must make this statement before the war broke and I was probably silenced. Comrades, remember me.

I was writing on a spit of sand south of Poole Harbour in the terrible winter of 1939-40, sprinkling crumbs for the birds among the trees on my long walk to the shops. When I finished the novel I worked on a lengthy work of history, Mirror of Antiquity, trying to

extend my knowledge and fill in some of the gaps of which I was only too aware in my Short History of Culture. This book, though commissioned, was a casualty of the war, as was a short book on Blake I wrote for the Critics Group of New York. Methuen held up Men of Forty-Eight till after the war, till 1948. I wrote four more novels before my call-up. Hannibal Takes a Hand deals with his efforts to build a democratic system in Carthage after his defeat, using communal structures which had been broken down by the aristocracy. He blamed the latter for his defeat and in part was taking revenge on them; they wrecked his plans by calling in the national enemy, the Romans. From one aspect then the book was an allegory of what was happening in France as I wrote. The French ruling-class could not seriously consider war against Hitler, being too obsessed with destroying the popular forces in their own country; and a section of them, via Petain, was to come to terms with Hitler. In the preface I pointed out that Flaubert had written Salammbô as an allegory of the Second Empire. In his Carthage "the only two forces are property-greed and lust-obsession –" I should have added power-madness. "The conflict is therefore one of a nightmare. The conception derives from Flaubert's agonised recoil from the Empire world of Napoleon III; and in order that he may deceive himself and gain the impetus for a grand canvas on which to depict his nightmare-recoil he turns to antiquity." Carthage was chosen for the setting because it lay in the area in which his bourgeoisie, after defeating democracy in 1848, had been rapidly expanding. So Carthage is "a symbol of the world of Napoleon III; the pictorial minutiae are merely bits of dream-strangeness that give him the courage to go on outlining the vast chaotic storm-design of a brutish struggle which horrified him and was meaningless. What creates the entirely lopsided and unreal nature of Flaubert's fantasia? The fact that he selects only one half of the ancient world and therefore recreates only one half of the ancient world. In his own world he could recognise only forces making for destruction; he saw the revolutionary movement of the masses only as an inverse aspect of the disintegrating and bestial imperialism that was dominant in the State. Hence his picture of an intolerably prolonged struggle which finds no end, only a truce of exhaustion and an alternation of cruelties. The greatness of his mind is shown by the way in which he recognises absolutely no hope if humanity is enclosed within

the values of the class-state. It is that element of no-compromise which cuts him apart from the mere aesthetic fiddler and sets him as far greater than his own theories…" My book was in a sense an anti-Salammbô. On the one hand it used the considerable archaeological work done in the area since Flaubert to attempt a realistic picture of the Carthaginians and their city; on the other hand it showed the persisting democratic elements among the commonfolk which provided quite different potentialities than Flaubert's account allowed-for in the culture. The mystery-elements of ancient religion appeared in Hannibal's sense of a god-presence which merged with his deep feeling of soldierly comradeship – the two elements of his character in turn creating his conviction of a communal purpose. And in Gersakkon driven by the need of redemption, who becomes the saviour-victim. "Here is there safety? I tell you that it lies in danger. Where is there security? I tell you that it lies in abandoning all things for the sake of the voice of unity. Where is there salvation? I tell you that it lies in the rejection if the sacrifice of blood." The revolutionary impulse, defeated in Hannibal, is deflected into the mystery-revolt, with its good-tidings for the poor and the disinherited. The peasant woman, who washes Gersakkon's corpse with water in which herbs had been boiled, says, "They cannot kill God. He will come again."

I added a footnote to the proofs, "The novel (including the preface) was finished and in the publisher's hands in early May 1940 – before the collapse of France. The remarks in the preface do not then represent 'wisdom after the event'." I next wrote The Stormy Violence (the title a phrase from a poem by Robert Crowley, written in mid-16th century on the poor driven by the landlords from the land so that they lack "the safeguard and defence against the stormy violence"). I wanted as character a man who had been as humiliated and as alienated from society as any man could well be, and chose a countryman in Elizabethan times whom the landlords as J.P.s had branded as a serf on the accusation of being an idle rogue; his girl has been torn from her parents by the J.P.s and sent from home to serve the gentry as a kitchen-maid. With a series of disasters that utterly shame him as man, he runs away and succeeds in reaching London where the infamous slums provide lairs for such as him. There seems no course for him but revengeful crime and a foul death, when he is taken

by a press-gang. The ship in which he has to work as sailor is captured by Spaniards. He is left aboard with the one man whom he feels a friend, and succeeds by a desperate plan in killing or locking up the prize-crew. His motive has been solely self-preservation and friendship; but as he is bringing the ship into Torbay, a pilot joins them. He discovers that through love of the ship he has won back his place among men, his place on the earth.

> Dick stood aside with a sour grin. Now he was going to lose the ship. He hated them all. Then, suddenly as he saw Hal come hobbling with the rather clumsy crutch that Casparo had knocked together for him, he felt the burden lifted from his spirit. They could take the ship, but what the ship had given him they could never take. There was no problem at all: that was the answer to his misery. Go on into the easy sunlight, take the offered handclasp, fight for the right as he saw it and felt it in the daily struggle, and be true to the purposive union of men at work, which he had learned to recognise and love in the ship. Test everything by what the ship had given him, and he wouldn't go wrong, he wouldn't ever be betrayed. He wouldn't ever betray anyone. Life was luminously simple. He returned Hal's smile fully and simply for the first time since the attack on the Spaniards.
>
> "Come and look at the prisoners in the fore-peak if you don't believe us," Hector was saying with tremulous dignity.
>
> "Get them out and make them help work the ship over the bar."
>
> "Be damned to you, said Dick. "Would you have Spanishers learning how to sneak in and raid our harbours?""
>
> He was surprised at his outburst; surprised that he could speak of "our harbors", he who had no land, no home. The pilot was humbly confessing his error. But the words hadn't meant to him what they meant to Dick; the men and women that he had wanted to protect from futile piratic raids weren't the Queen's subjects of the pilot's mind. They were the men and women who at least in some corner of their lives were implicated in the union which had made the lovely form of the ship, who gathered the corn and milked the cows, who worked the looms and the forges… England: that was his England, and he had earned it. Free, free at last, he thought.

In learning with the utmost bitterness and anguish what it is that makes a man, he has regained solidarity with other men – with the men who have been made by the same harsh process, even if they have not gone down into such depths of darkness as he has gone. But I was also saying that the phoney-war must come to its end, and that when its downward course had gone as far as it could go without complete human disaster, then at last the common-folk would grasp what was at stake. They would build a true anti-fascist union and the struggle would become a human struggle. Not that here or anywhere else I worked out a fable to enclose a political moral. I struggled with a theme which had fascinated me because of its

promised clues to human destiny, to the naked human essence in a situation of crisis; I struggled with it till I felt that I had found out why it fascinated me; the meaning emerged when a point of human bedrock was reached, coming out of the persistent tension of conflicts in the complex converging impacts of everyday life, the shifting mask of contradictions.

I now wrote a novel with less stress than the last three, but continuing the same theme. The setting was Italy in the days of Byron and Shelley, but the hero was a young English art-student at Rome, whose decision to break from academic methods coincides with an upsetting love-affair and an entanglement with the movement of the Carbonari. The underground movement was what constituted a link with the present; I wrote as the resistance-movements in occupied Europe were just beginning to get under way. The background was the corrupted and brutish condition of the Roman States and the Neapolitan kingdom; the Rome of 1816, a festa in the Umbrian highlands, Pompeii, the ballet and a gambling-house at Naples, a gun-running expedition at sea, the violence of the gangster-organisation of the Calderai. Part of the artist's inner conflict lies in the pulls of resistance-comradeship and his fascination by a young English girl of upperclass family, the crisscrossing of their fears and desires – all his moral problems inseparable from the changing attitude to nature revealed in his art-struggles. Finally I wrote the Barriers are Down, set about 450, at the time of the Hun invasions, peasant-revolts, and early Western monasticism. I wanted a perspective of total breakdown in a civilisation, with the foundations of a new world being obscurely laid in tribal solidarities, upheavals on the land that were ending the old systems of landlorship, and devotion to an ideal which rejected the world (of money and power) even though in the form of withdrawal. Somewhere deep down these positive aspects were knitting together. I sought to express the divergences and kinship in the various trends of resistance or rejection in the person of three friends who go various ways. (Gollancz did not publish the book till 1945.)

All this time too I was working at anthropology and put together for myself a large work on Beowulf and its complex elements. I wrote a Pattern of History, which tried to work out with more scholarly detail my thesis of tribal survivals or intrusions, at work on new

levels of development, as a key-force in history. This book I tried on Lawrence and Wishart; they had it read by Roy Pascal who couldn't stomach my thesis; there seemed no point in sending it elsewhere. I also wrote a book on the idea of change or transformation in the 18th century, how it operated in poetry, philosophy, the various branches of science. The approach here was concrete. I had noted that Gray's Elegy and Collins's Ode to Evening were highly typical poems of the mid-century, and asked if it was by chance they both dealt with Evening. By reading large number of other poems I made sure that the choice of theme and imagery was not accidental, but represented something deep in the period's sensibility. Analysis of scores of evening-poems showed the main ingredients: the idea of a total change in the Face of Nature, of a movement from the social to the personal, from the world of work to that of seclusion (contemplation or love-making), and so on. Thus the eve-image led to a series of other themes or image-clusters connected with the sense of deep contrasts or transformations; finally I was able to link the series with the crucial changes going on in the productive sphere, a new attitude to nature, the first stages of a true sense of historical change and of evolution, the first effective growth of chemical experiments under controlled conditions, and so on. I explored many of the sequences of imagery and came up against a fundamental point, the ambivalence of the relation to Newton: on the one hand the acceptance of his notion of a mechanistic world-order, on the other hand the revolt of the colour-sense and various ideas of fluids, energies, powers. James Thomson founded romanticism on the basis of this contradiction, and the sense of a Lost Earth arose from the expropriations of the peasants and the destruction of a "concrete universe" by the systems of Newton and Locke. Open revolt came with Smart's paean to Colour as an active force and Blake's rejection of Newton as an Urizen-type petrifier.

I sent the work Decay and Renewal to the C.U.P. and had it rejected. Some years later Waddington told me that he thought it highly original and interesting, and argued for its acceptance; but the Syndics considered it too unacademic. I was also doing work on Provençal poetry; Partridge published some of my translations. And I had established connection with International Literature issued in Moscow. I wrote several essays on the

English situation which appeared in the non-English edition; and I made the first versions in English of the Ukrainean poet Shevchenko. The correspondence began in an odd way. The magazine had made a stupid criticism of John Summerfield's novel Mayday, among other things being horrified at a reference to shitting. John wrote to me, saying that he didn't like to answer them himself; would I do so? So I rebuked them for their fear of normal physical functions. They took the rebuke in good spirit, and on this basis began my direct contact with the U.S.S.R.