

24. BREAKTHROUGH

My main interest at the moment, apart from my continuing pre-occupation with the meaning and pattern of history, was biology. I had read Darwin's *Origin of Species* and was powerfully affected. The effect came, not from the book's conclusions which I already accepted in a general way, but from the tremendous force and weight of the exposition, the method. The slow remorseless way in which all interpretations but the materialist are excluded, the masterly insistence on the simple and the concrete, had a decisive influence on my thinking. I then read all Darwin's other books, and followed up with many contemporary ones on biological themes. I was also reading D.H.L. for the first time with a strong sympathy. I still rejected much of his ideas and tendencies, but I had found out the quick of the man, all that he meant when he declared that our civilization 'has almost destroyed the natural flow of common sympathy between men and men, and men and women. And it is this that I want to restore into life.' I realized the deepest nature of his criticism of our cash nexus society, and what he had meant when he told me to stick to my hates, since they were the best and truest part of me; and I felt bitterly sorry that I had neglected my chances of meeting him when he was alive. I was also re-reading Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Dickens, and reading Proust for the first time—previously I had been put off by the kind of person who admired him. Also, after Darwin, I read Spinoza, and came through him to Bruno. (I wrote a long poem on Spinoza, which was printed in the *Irish Quarterly*.)

I had also begun writing a considerable amount for the *Freethinker*, with a few contributions to the *Literary Guide*. I should like to mention an article in the latter, dealing with an attack on Darwin by Belloc, since it brought out clearly the philosophic position I had now reached, synthesizing Freud, Jane Harrison, ancient Stoicism, Spinoza, Darwin,

Defending the latter from the charge of mechanism, I argued that one gained from his work the conviction that there was no teleological universe, no 'purpose-behind'. There was only the vital totality of

forces at any given moment, from which the future organically evolved. My argument implied that the living moment, the existential present, included freedom as well as determination, it was spontaneous as well as fated by the previous moment. Though I did not go any further, I should have claimed that the totality could not be seized by analytic thought—though such thought played a necessary part in one's comprehension of it. Intuition and analysis merged in the whole-man; and by one's existential wholeness one could know, even if one could not ever finally encompass by analysis, the living moment.

I was now at a half-way point between my Fanfrolico positions and those of Marxism. In *Dionysos* I had rejected all abstractions in the name of the ceaseless experience of existence.

Do we strive to make life approximate to an abstract idea? That is to hate all that breaks the abstract law, to hate all that is vitally alive and moves by the laws of its unique and dynamic identity. That is to hate life.

For life eternally outruns all statements that can be made of life, its complexities for ever go one step further than the ground covered by the widest of generalities. We must continually formulate our experience in image and thought; but once we conceive that the thought exists in itself and not as part of a continuous and deepening process, it becomes completely false. Once we try to substitute re-experience of the thought for the developing experience of the energies loosed by the thought, we are growing abstract.

I had now lost the bias to the irrational present in that passage; I accepted history and evolution as fully real, as the wider processes in terms of which any individual existence alone could develop; I saw that any biological, social or individual purpose must be inherent in the material situation and could not represent a transcendent or abstract intrusion of mind or spirit; I believed that the processes of knowledge, in so far as they proceeded from the whole-man, were knowledge of a real and material world. But I had not yet properly separated out the social from the biological, and as a result I still was confused as to the dialectical relation of the individual and society. My concept of a totality of given forces at any moment, with an inner dynamic of organic purpose, still had an element of *mystique* about it. This came, not from stressing the element of the unknown and unknowable, but from the lack of any guiding principles for the analytic attack. I was aware emotionally of the importance of love and work for individual and social development; I

felt their link with the brotherhood of struggle. But I was still far from any clear idea as to the precise effect of productive forces and relations in determining the general structure of history. Still, though Darwin had temporarily made me think of society in biological terms, he also prepared me for a materialist explanation of its movement and changes; and as a novelist I had already begun investigating and concretely defining relations which I could not yet formulate as a thinker.

I kept on writing poems, wholly for myself, in which the unslackening pang of loss was fused with my deepened sense of unity with nature. In some the pang spoke harshly:

*I have nothing left and nothing remains to be done.
In me is enacted the ancient sacrifice
and it means nothing. Nothing. That is my hope.
Put it aside now, put it aside at last,
let nakedness be gaunt with the thistle, and dumb.
Say nothing. Lean and turn with the thinning shadow.
Put it aside and wait till the Agony's past
here on the winter's slope. . . .*

But for the most part a sense of intolerable sweetness had the last word, which I tried to put into a poem on Van Gogh, my hero of this phase.

I was indeed intensely happy, with a daily sense of vast discovery and a crystalline conviction of harmony with nature. I lay naked in the sun outside my bedroom window where there was a sort of cavern guarded by flowers and bushes; and to listen through the night to the faint clear sounds of Mozart or Wagner from a house higher up the hill, gave me a purer sense of what music was, than any concerts or records I had ever heard. My gratitude was infinite. There were a few moments of friendliness with Elza, when we visited Kent's Cavern or watched the butterflies with long curved beaks which they inserted, hovering delicately, into the flowers on our terraces. But soon she grew hostile and retreated into herself. She was continually harassed by smells. First she insisted on having all her floors lined with cork-lino, then she said the smell drove her out of her senses, and so on. I had so much that I needed to read and think about, to write, that I did not want to disturb her and provoke her rages. For weeks I did not go out. Such groceries or vegetables as we needed could be delivered—a note being left out for the man from the delivery-van. I kept myself fit by sunbathing and exercises;

I had never felt better. But my happiness did not lie only in perfect health and satisfying work; it derived in the last resort from the secure feeling I had of a total renunciation, above all my sense of owning nothing and wanting nothing. During these years I was a better person than I had ever been before or have ever been since, because of my complete elimination of any property-sense from my being; and for this reason I was also deeply and stably happy.

Mary Butts, who had published a novel on Alexander the Great, *The Macedonian*, wrote to me. She was working on another about Cleopatra, and sent me the MS when she completed it. I ran through it for factual errors and found about fifty. She thanked me and said she'd incorporate my corrections, but a while later she wrote to say that she was feeling very depressed and ill, having fallen down a cliff. She had lost my list of errors and asked if I could remember what I had written. I compiled a fresh list as best I could, and sent it to her. I did not hear from her again. (She died in March 1937, a few weeks before her Gabriel.)

After my trilogy I felt winded for a short while. Then I wrote *Despoiling Venus*: the story of Caelius Rufus, done in the first person. I had wanted to compose something which would define his strong, lost, embittered personality. This novel was a pendant to the trilogy, making the direct link with Catullus and Clodia. Next I decided to go further back in time and used the Egyptian record of an envoy who went to Lebanon after timber near the end of the 2nd millenium B.C. Egypt at that time was on the downgrade, and Wenamen's difficulties and mis-haps amusingly brought out this situation. I followed the record closely, though introducing a Greek, a tough rough character, to represent the up-and-coming culture, which seems very crude next to the highly sophisticated though tired culture of Egypt. Through Phil I had got in touch with an Australian working at Saggara under Emery. I sent him the MS, which both he and Emery read. Neither of them could find any mistakes or slips in fact or in tone, though Emery queried one botanical detail. I had soaked myself in ancient Egyptian art, literature, and religion before I began the work.

I also wrote a boys' book, a tale set at the time of Spartacus, *Runaway*, for the O.U.P., and a long short-story, *Storm at Sea*, for the Golden Cockerel Press, which was illustrated with woodcuts by John Farleigh. Further, I found that the daily papers had started competing with short stories. I wrote large numbers of these, all of which were printed. The

best I collected in a book *Come Home at Last*. One longer story about the heroic end of Cleomenes in Alexandria was published in the *London Mercury* (now not Squire's). I was working about fourteen hours a day. Having no interruptions, I was able to stick to any job day after day without a break, using pen or typewriter ten to twelve hours at a time. My simple meals took little time to prepare.

A letter arrived from Jeanne, saying that Phil had accused her of being unfaithful, and asking me to convince him of her innocence. I was moved by the letter, and besides I was ready to champion any woman in the name of the united family. So I wrote to Phil in her defence. He replied, with testy correctness, that I was butting into a matter about which I knew nothing, that Jeanne had been playing hell with him, and that he was going off to the West Indies. He had obtained a librarian's job at Government House, Jamaica, through the offices, I think, of Compton Mackenzie. The work was easy and the Indies were congenial, but he could not bear the way the Whites treated the West Indians, with whom he hobnobbed on friendly terms.

The English, I gathered, sat on the stage or somewhere near it during shows, while the locals were kept to the pit, where Phil sat among them. He soon found himself choked out of his job and decided to return to England. For some time he had been doing much work, or, to be more precise, earning a lot of money by wasting time, in connection with films. He had been artistic director for Korda's film on Henry VIII, on the strength of the novel, *Here Comes the King*, which had been very successful; and after that he became friendly with Wallace Beary and the Fairbanks. At the time I had written to him sarcastically suggesting that he choose definitely between films and books; and indeed my advice was good. But he could not resist the easy money and the excitement of pottering about in the film-world, going on trips to Spain or somewhere else to get local colour for never-made films. And this just at the time when he should have been concentrating on his novels if he were to develop them with full effect.

Once again Elza suddenly decided that she must move. We found a house at the back of Preston further west along the bay. This was a fine house with a large garden and many fruit-trees. Elza was always friendly during moves, perhaps because then she had something to interest her. I was aware that her total lack of any form of activity stood heavily in the way of her recovery, and in our friendly periods I did my best to develop the least show of attention on her part into some more enduring

line of thought or action. I had to be careful, as the slightest effect of pushing her aroused instant antagonism. But though she momentarily took up this or that subject, she was incapable of any sustained action on her own. I never knew how she spent her time in her long withdrawn phases.

I had myself now reached a point where I needed to deepen and extend my understandings of history and individual existence. I had found that I could enter effectively into the latter only if I was at the same time exploring in some new way the relations of individual and social movement, historical change. The timeless element only came alive when I was deeply involved in the colours and patterns of a particular time. In the hopes of extending my method I wrote a slight contemporary novel *Shadow and Flame*. The main character was a gentler sort of Elza, the person she had seemed at our first meetings. She has married a young bookish chap who knows nothing of her past, and they are holidaying at Portreath; as strain develops, he is drowned in the shingly undertow and she is thrown back on her old ways. But now she manages to escape the spiritual undertow which has always brought her down; she finds, with an artist's aid, what I may call her Lawrencian body; she achieves calm, relaxation from the rigours of fear, acceptance of herself in the tenderness of undemanding touch—unpossessive contact with another. The tale was thus once more an allegory of Elza standing on her own feet, with myself eliminated and with the solution using something of D.H.L.'s terms reinterpreted in terms of my own experience.

The book was promptly accepted by Chapman and Hall, the reader being L. A. G. Strong. (He did not know at the time I had written it, as it was signed Richard Preston, under which name it appeared.) I got an amusing letter from a reader, who described herself as highly musical and married to an unappreciative husband; she added that she would like to spend a week-end with a witty young writer, giving herself 'without reserve'. I replied that Richard was neither so witty nor so young, but out of curiosity asked for a photo. She answered at length, but without the photo; and though I did not write again, she went on pouring out her soul, even sending small presents. What had convinced her that I was the witty young writer she needed was a passage where the heroine walks along the clifftop from St Ives with her bladder near bursting, too shy to withdraw behind one of the scanty bushes.

However my uncertainties as to what next to do were settled by Warburg, then in Routledge's, asking me to write a biography of Mark Antony. I was thus plunged afresh into the Caesarian world. And shortly afterwards I found what I needed for a fresh stimulus. I saw an advertisement for works by Marx, Engels, Lenin, and decided I ought to look at them. My knowledge so far had been almost all derived from P.R.S.'s writings in the *Aphrodite*, his copy of Marx's *18th Brumaire* which I had read and which had in fact merged with Beasley's book in providing much of the political outlook in *Rome for Sale*, together with a few scattered remarks in conversation. I had a woefully inadequate idea of Marx's positions: which had not prevented me in the past from laying down the law about them. Now, however, I obtained and read the main works of Marx and Engels in English, with *State and Revolution* and some other writings of Lenin. From almost the first moment I felt that at long last I had come home; I had found the missing links in my dialectical system. I had brought that system from its idealist basis in Plato-Blake-Nietzsche down to earth and had at moments intuited something of the nature of productive activity; but only now did I see that activity in the fullness of its nature. The conflict of liberty and brotherhood which I had tried to discuss in *Last Days with Cleopatra* was now seen as securely resolved by the return of the means of production to the producers.

My ripeness for Marxism was shown by the fact that in a few weeks I had read and absorbed all the main works by Marx and Engels, with a sprinkling of Lenin's theses. Needless to say, I had not understood them as fully as I thought I had, nor were the answers to all the problems so unanswerably present as I thought they were. All the same, I had really reached bedrock; and though in the twenty-five years since January 1936 I have found the problem of developing Marxism adequately to be incomparably more difficult than I had imagined, I have never wavered in my conviction that Marxism does lay the basis for a world of unity (of equality, brotherhood, justice) and for a unitary consciousness in which the old contradictions and limitations of thought and feeling are overcome. What I have had to learn, often very painfully, is the depth of those contradictions and limitations, and the complexity of the struggle that has to be waged in order to overcome them—a struggle which is simultaneously social, political, intellectual (scientific and artistic), and which is going to take a long time.

I thus inevitably oversimplified things in my delighted discovery of

Marxism. Where I have differed perhaps from the many other intellectuals of the period, who in their own ways then came to Marxism, has been that when I bumped in due time up against the brick walls, I blamed myself for the oversimplifications, not Marxism. From the outset I took seriously the proposition that the dialectical method must expand and deepen to admit every new truth, every new exploration of reality; I did not believe that the way forward lay in trimming the truths and editing the explorations so that they did not jar against the already-built system. In consequence my progress as a Marxist has led to many conflicts with my comrades, in some of which, though not all, I have been wrong.

But that experience lay ahead. For the moment I was enjoying all the excitement of the secrets of heaven and earth laid bare. I subscribed to the *Daily Worker* and plunged into immediate politics as zealously as I had once avoided them. It was with much satisfaction I realized that Edgell, Garman, Alec Brown and others had reached the same conclusions as myself, though by less devious byroads; and that in *Left Review* there was a rallying-point of the movement. With a shock I grasped something of what the rise of Fascism in the Thirties had meant: the breaking-out, through the thin crust, of the evil forces I had often talked about in the Twenties as sure to reassert themselves. I got hold of any books I could about the Soviet Union, and in particular searched eagerly for translations of Soviet novels or plays. I soon had read a couple of score or more, most impressed by Sholohov, Gladkov (*Cement*), and Leonov (*Skutaresky*, done by Alec Brown). With enormous love and gratitude I looked towards the new world into which my aloneness had suddenly turned: the Soviet Union and the Communist Parties.

I wanted to join the C.P. at once, but was deterred by the unsolved problem of Elza. There was no branch close by, but I could have found one at Exeter or somewhere nearer. I had learned that the only thing with any strong effect on Elza was an accomplished fact. If I had joined up and then told her, she might have accepted my action and have made some effort to go out into the world again. Probably things would not have worked out that way; but they might have. I should have tried. My failure to act at this moment haunts me as the one real error of those years.

But in positing the issue so simply I know that I do not do justice to the complexity of each changing moment at the time. After more than

five years' daily crushing of my own self-will, I did not find it easy to assert myself, even when now I had discovered an authority in the world which I could respect. When I had diverted my immature revolutionary emotions in 1919 into the championship of Norman's ideas of art, I had found life infinitely exciting; in effect I had accepted him as authority. My unstable and conflicting emotions of admiration and anger towards him and his work were supplanted by a single-hearted allegiance, and there was a powerful identity between the actual father and the father-image of authority, built up in my spirit out of complex family and social elements. The authority I now accepted was set flatly against all the existent forms of authority that I knew in the social scene. In my Fanfrolico years in London I began to break up the N.L.-image and ended by losing any faith in it; I turned instead to Elza as the martyred mother (in whom I slowly recognized an identity with all the suffering and downtrodden elements of life). Elza then, in her suffering self and in her remorseless need to keep insisting on moral purification, became my sole image of authority. However, as I dramatized my experience and situation in my work, I gradually got an objective basis, which had ended by splitting the authority-image in Elza. Now I saw her pitiful self on one side and the claims of the suffering and downtrodden on the other side. The Soviet Union and the C.P.s of the world became the new form of authority to which I could yield a pure allegiance, for they were pledged to the ending of the class-system and all the sufferings and contradictions that that system implied—all that Marx had gathered under the term which I still did not know, Alienation.

This was the moment then when I should have been able to break from Elza in the sense of standing up against her, obeying my need to express the new allegiance openly and *then* seeing what I could do to help her.

All that sounds simple. But in fact I was caught in a set of contradictions that were not at all easy to resolve. My new position, which brought to a head the striving of many years, involved as its essence the need to achieve a unity of theory and practice. As long as Elza could contain the authority-image I had expressed that unity by my submission to her; now I could express it only by joining the C.P. Deep in myself I felt sure that I would drive her to suicide if I did. How could I express my solidarity with the oppressed and exploited of the world by stepping over Elza's dead body to give them a cheer? The more I felt sure that I would kill her or drive her out of what remained of her wits by the step

it was necessary for me to take, the less I could take that step. I felt more cornered than ever. The whole mechanism of fear and self-pity which had put me at the mercy of Elza took control once more.

Clearly throughout my post-1930 relations with Elza I was revealing the masochism of which Heseltine had scornfully accused me. Without that masochistic strain I could not have carried out the steady sacrifice of my self-will; I must have gained a certain satisfaction from being Elza's victim. And yet I do not feel that the whole thing can be reduced to such simple terms. There was indeed the weak side to which they apply; but the need for moral self-renewal which expressed itself through my weakness seems to me the dynamic of the process, the ultimate touchstone. I renounced my freedom in order to gain a place in the universe; and though for long it seemed that I had lost any basis for reaching human solidarity, in fact the drive throughout was the need to reach it. Step by step I moved towards a fuller sense of what constituted humanity; and that progress was the proof, the only possible proof that my submissions were not as irrationally masochistic as they might well appear. I had come through to the point which has been well defined thus:

... submission is not the only way of avoiding aloneness and anxiety. The other way, the only one which is productive and does not end in an insoluble conflict, is that of *spontaneous relationship to man and nature*, a relationship that connects the individual with the world without eliminating his individuality. This kind of relationship—the foremost expressions of which are love and productive work—are rooted in the integration and strength of the total personality and are therefore subject to the very limits that exist for the growth of the self. (E. Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*)

In the sense that this passage gives to the words, I had used submission to break through into a spontaneous relationship to man and nature, realizing that the key-expressions of this relationship were love and productive work; and I had struggled to define this attitude in my writing. Through Marx I saw that history was more than a cyclic conflict between freedom and brotherhood, individual self-expression and social unity, and that the logical step after the creation of an industrial proletariat was the socialist ownership of the means of production and distribution. But this new idea was not merely the addition of a cornerstone to an edifice in process of construction, it involved a radical reorganization of my whole dialectic. I had been tending in this direction

ever since I wrote *The Modern Consciousness* in 1928; but the moment of arrival was none the less shattering.

After my fast at Forge Cottage I had had a long period when I struggled against the reduction of society, history, people, to a set of psychological projections and traumatic compulsions. Now I had to struggle against the reduction to economic forces and relationships. Once again personality seemed unreal, a rationalization imposed on an unrealized complex of compulsions. I decided to write a novel on the last days of Bruno, his return to Venice which led to his being handed over to the Inquisition. He had known the danger he was putting himself into; in a sense he had sought destruction. But more deeply, he had tired of his rootless wandering life, his intellectual activity without a basis in any apparent group or people; he wanted to find again his place in the Catholic body, with a desperate hope that by the sheer force of truth he could convert that body or at least find in it a minimal basis for the propagation of his ideas—so that out of the resulting conflict a union of his lonely truths and of Catholic solidarity might result. (In historical fact, some 250 years were to be needed before the line of thought Bruno-Spinoza-Kant-Hegel-Marx could find its catholic body with which to unite, and then this body turned out to be the international proletariat. Bruno was trying to short-circuit history by turning to the one world-body of his epoch; he was also perhaps showing a nostalgia for his own childhood and an intuitional revolt against the new individualism which he was helping to found and which was to play its part in making capitalism possible.) There could only be a tragic end to his quest; and in his possessed distracted days in Venice I strove to show the hopeless contradictions that drove him on. In his agony before the inquisition I was drawing on my own memory of the demoralizing dilemma of facing with rational arguments a force which is simply asking a total submission—a submission which one may want to give but which one cannot fabricate. As I had put it in one of my Elza-poems:

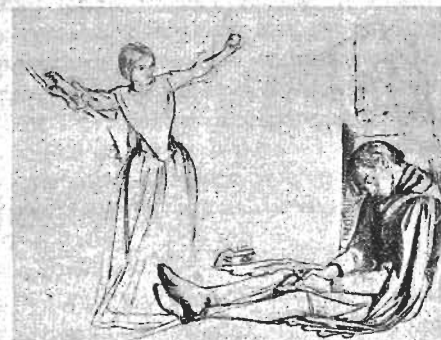
*The walls of the world have fallen, yet I'm enclosed.
No man, imprisoned in a foul jail,
may know this suffering; for while he rots,
he writhes with renewed worms of rancour and plots
to escape, and when his efforts fail
he still can blame and hate
the men who thrust him there.*

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+ GUENEVERE +
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TWO POEMS BY WILLIAM MORRIS
THE DEFENCE OF GUENEVERE
AND KING ARTHUR'S TOMB

with eight decorations by
DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI

and a foreword by
GORDON BOTTOMLEY



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*For me all such evasions come too late.
I cannot even claim the right
to be sad because I am lonely.
I am ravaged by the ceaseless Face of light.*

*I cannot blame, because I know
that I am alone in the world, mated only
with the untouched Accuser. Nothing avails
to repay where what is demanded is not part
of self or the world, not coins or the heart's idols,
but the whole of a life. This is the clutch
in ancient days called Christ, the insatiable voice
of pain insisting upon absolute choice.
In vain I cry: You ask too much, too much.
It is not mine to give.*

But I was also thinking of the victims of Fascism being tortured as I wrote. And though I did not know it, I was exploring also the pangs of a Communist brought up cruelly against the dogmatisms developed in his own creed as part of such aberrations as occurred under the later Stalin. I was dealing with the conflict of freedom and unity which carries on into socialism, however much it is being steadily resolved by the forward movement of the socialist society towards communism.

I am speaking here of the completed work; but nothing I have written caused me greater pangs and confusions. I had to write and re-write, I had to fight every inch of the way—as if I were reliving all my past years with Elza as well as sharing a cell with some anti-fascist fighter in Hitler's Germany; I had to rediscover in Bruno the complex origins of my Marxism and regain through my reconstruction of his personality, his thought, his desperation, a belief afresh in the individual as well as in the forces of history.

When the book appeared, nothing of what I had attempted was visible to my fellow anti-fascist intellectuals. This was the first shock, giving me a slight inkling that I had a somewhat romantic and oversimplified idea of what our anti-fascist unity was, and of the way in which Marxism acted as a liberating force.

I inevitably carried an existentialist stress into Marxism, but I did not, and do not, see that this was necessarily wrong. Existentialism in its modern form is a one-sided dialectic which seeks to correct certain



Jack Lindsay on the sea-front at Douglas,
1942



Jack Lindsay at Bournemouth, 1939

abstractions and distortions in the Hegelian system. It goes too far in its swing and achieves an aberration far greater than anything in Hegel; yet its protest remains of significance as an attempt to vindicate concrete experience and the whole-man. In so far as Marxism has carried over abstractions from Hegel, the existential protest has a certain validity, which however diminishes with each step of Marxism towards a fuller concrete grasp of life in all its aspects. That is, existentialism in its protest has an absolute value against Hegelianism, but not against Marxism. It keeps its value only insofar as Marxism holds mechanist, idealist, and over-rationalized elements—as Marxism will continue to do in some degree until the realization of world-communism and the total withering-away of the State.

Here is a crucial point in my outlook, and I feel that I must clarify it further in order to bring out as richly as possible the inner struggle of my advance into Marxism, a struggle which, at a different level, is still with me now. Kierkegaard put ethics in the forefront as the key to the release of the whole-man; Nietzsche stressed an aesthetic view of the world for the same reason. Both were reacting against the views of the rationalist 18th and 19th centuries which in effect identified Being and Thinking. I think, therefore I am. This abstract elevation of thought and reason is linked with the expansion of mechanist science, and reveals a key-aspect of the alienating process, which above all drives a wedge between reason and emotion, logic and imagination. Kierkegaard saw that the purely intellectual or rational (scientific) mode of life was insufficient, and he used all his sharp irony against the idea that an intellectual system could set things to rights by merely offering the rejected elements a place in its rational ordering. Nietzsche in the same vein attacked the notion of scientific objectivity, not in the name of relativism, but in that of the whole-man; scientific values must not be cut away from the values and purposes of the whole-man; he saw the science of his day as hopelessly compromised with the deadening forces of dehumanization.

I believed, and still believe, that such contentions were correct, however much I dissent from the ways they were worked out. Kierkegaard split his 'existentialist simultaneity' with an abstract concept of choice between belief and unbelief, between finite and infinite, and so on. Nietzsche lost his concept of the whole-man in a medley of biological and subjective fantasies, and never faced what he meant by Eternal Recurrence (a blind repetition or the acceptance of necessity which

becomes freedom). Jaspers was thus able to formalize the split at the heart of the existentialist notion of wholeness, a split which inverted the struggle against alienation into an acceptance of alienation as the precondition of choice. He divided Being into three forms: being-there (the world of scientific 'objectivity'), being-oneself (the transcending of being-there), and being-in-itself (the world of transcendence itself). The weaknesses and errors of the unsystematic dialectics of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are thus systematized, upheld, and brought within the general framework of philosophy. The vital intuitions of those thinkers are carefully undermined. Though in Jaspers' system the thinker is said to participate in all three realms of being and thus to approach the unity to which his reason aspires, in fact the interrelations are metaphysical and we are back at rationalist domination, against which existentialism made its protest. A gap has been driven between being-there (the given self, the given world) and being-oneself (the dynamic self of living experience, with all its potentialities and complex changes); the task of achieving a true dialectical unity has been evaded once more in the name of abstract choice. (The dilemma made manifest in Jaspers is in fact present in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche; but because they do not systematize, it is disguised under a brilliant handling of momentary aspects of experience, with their contradictions and their impulses towards resolution brought out.)

Something of the Jaspers' system had still clung to me in my defence of Darwin, though I was already rejecting the gap between being-there and being-oneself. At the same time I was also beginning to comprehend that scientific method and fact were not given, unalterable things. Now that comprehension became explicit and drew me forever away from the existentialist gap of passivity. I saw that it was necessary to distinguish between scientific methods and views as developed in a world of alienation and those that would develop in a classless society moving towards communism. The deadly gap between science and feeling, reason and imagination, which was the clearest mark of the alienating process, would have to be closed if the whole-man was to be more than a ghostly figment used as a merely logical link between the two spheres; and this implied a struggle to develop both science-reason and imagination-feeling along new lines so that they could fuse in a higher synthesis. Existentialism, I saw, used its genuine insights into alienation to obscure the real solutions, to return to the metaphysical sleight-of-hand it had set out by rejecting. The problem was to end the gap between being-

there and being-onself, not to rivet it by a scheme of transcendences which were in fact only a sanctification of the divisions of alienation. The gap must be closed by a steadily-deepening unity of thought and act, theory and practice—whereby both thought and act themselves would be changed.

Where I differed from most of my fellow-Marxists, though it took me some time to grasp the meaning of this difference, was that I refused to assume that the taking-over of the given mechanism of Marxist dialectics automatically solved the problem of alienation and closed the gap. I saw it, indeed, as the first and necessary step towards the solution. But the insufficiencies of the existing scientific outlook and method remained even when science was set socialist tasks instead of capitalist ones. The social aims were bettered, but the actual modes of thought and being were still tethered to the insufficiencies and distortions of a discipline developed under the full blast of alienation.

At the same time, I realized, one could not hope to step overnight into a science from which all the old mechanisms and idealisms had been purged; those limitations went deep into the premises on which all scientific thinking had been built up, under the Greeks or in the epoch starting with the 16th century. In carrying on from those given bases, a fierce struggle was needed to work out new fundamental methods and ideas expressing the dialectical unity of process. Similarly, old methods of art could not express the new man developing under socialism.

There seemed, and seems, then, to me a deep conflict between the socialist struggle for the new man and the methods which a socialist society is compelled to take over in order to develop its science and its art. This conflict seems to me to have been recognized so far only in its superficial aspects. But I had faith, and still have, that the conflict will grow powerfully in due time, and that from it will emerge the single line of thought-feeling which will unify science and art in undreamed-of ways and finally dispose of the heresy that being and thinking are the same, without succumbing to existentialist dilemmas or irrationalities.

I should like to follow out these problems further in their general bearing; but here I must restrict my remarks to the struggle rending me in 1936. I felt the existentialist stress on the unceasing urgencies of choice to be essential, but I wanted to discard the abstract mechanism that made the moment of choice a repetition-compulsion going round in a vicious circle where one chose nothing, one merely vindicated the right or liberty to keep on choosing. That abstract mechanism is what

vitiates existentialism from Kierkegaard to Sartre (though the latter, as artist, continually breaks through it). Kierkegaard's system was the perfect consecration of the alienating process; for the person practising it went on as if nothing had happened and impacted on nothing outside himself; he had merely tied himself up in a knot of absolute anxiety. To choose abstractly is to choose nothing; it is to deify the *angst* of alienation as the only concrete aspect of experience. If, however, one straightens out the dogmatic kink in existentialism, one is left with a moral urgency and a sense of the immediate reality of living, which Marxism needs for the unfolding of its ethic and for a protection against all hardening of the arteries, all mechanist application of terms, methods, definitions, categories.

Through psycho-analysis, anthropology, and biology, I had broken down the divisions in my thinking between being-there, being-onself, and being-in-itself; but I lacked terms adequate to grasp the inner conflict of the unitary process I was intuiting. I still could not satisfactorily explain the nature of real choice, which involved not only oneself but also others, not only the existential moment but also history. I needed Marxism to move from existence to history without losing the concrete texture of the moment. My struggle since then, often leading me into confusions and mistakes, has been to hold true to the existential moment, in which the unexpurgated colour and richness of experience is alone preserved, without blurring the significance of the long-distance choice, the complete self-dedication to the work of achieving human unity through association with others in the field of history.

Thus Marxism released me from the spell of my relations with Elza; nothing else could have done so. For, though I might attempt, in works like *Birth and Will* or in the novels, to analyse my own motivation and to understand what moved Elza, I was not strictly concerned to assess my relations to her. Those relations came under the existentialist heading of a Nietzschean *amor fati*. I had made an absolute act of choice and was bound to it. In the last resort I was not interested in understanding it so that I could overcome it; I wanted to grasp it in order to give it more power, make it more fully an aspect of myself. True, each step I had made forwards had undermined our relations; but despite my temporary revolts or plans of escape I could not have broken the spell of the relationship without snapping the existentialist *huis clos* of which it was the expression. I had to make the full philosophical exploration and find the flaw in the existentialist position, find the dialectic which

emerged from the full comprehension of the flaw, before I could feel free.

Also, there was a powerful life-and-death pressure driving me on. To those who feel no need to unify their life and to make a consistent relation of theory and practice, the above arguments must seem nonsensical. Why be bound by such a desperate need to find a coincidence of theory and practice? why tie oneself to an intensely difficult mode of life merely because of a philosophical point? I can only answer that I have never been able to live, have never seen any reason to live, except in a unity of idea and action. And so I carried over into my post-1930 relations with Elza my Nietzschean concept of tragedy, my acceptance of *amor fati*. In *Bussy* and *Hereward* the hero (poet) when brought to the end-of-the-tether of his existentialist contradictions can only affirm himself by a triumphant and mocking death. When, in 1930, my bluff was called, I had to decide how far my Bussy-Hereward role held. Heseltine committed suicide. Such an end was not possible for me; but the time-space I had entered was a death. That was why I could not make an easy re-adaptation to the world, go to Phil, Edgell and the others, and find some way of jogging along as they did. I accepted Elza as a form of death, of total isolation. I felt that only by such an acceptance could I live out my death and find some way back to life that was not a cowardly retreat from all my premises. I had to live out that death of isolation and existentially find my rebirth. That is, I had to make each step forward as a fiercely-contested victory over the existentialist contradictions; I had to invoke those contradictions at their strongest and most effective, and only then find if I could overcome them. And I could believe that I had overcome them only to the extent that they were concretely resolved in immediate experience, in love, in work, and in my relation to nature. My love was the discovery of otherness as a dialectical part of myself; my work was the creation of images in which this dialectical conflict was resolved; my relation to nature was the joy in love and in work, which supplanted the tragic ecstasy and slowly evolved a new sensuous harmony in my momentary living. The problem was to achieve love, work and joy in a time space that was their ceaseless negation, the death-isolation incarnated in Elza. All the while, the existentialist conflict was deepening into the Marxist conflict, converting otherness into my own life and thus making a dynamic unity of being-there, being-myself, and being-in-itself.

At the crucial point, reached round the New Year of 1936, the new

balance triumphantly asserted itself as a definitely organized system, and I found it was Marxism: not simply the particular system labelled Marxism at that moment, but Marxism the vital stream of thought-feeling which in that system had reached the highest world-level then possible. Marxism as a vital stream broadening into the future and implying an ever greater unity of consciousness, unity of man and nature, unity of man and man. Not that I did not welcome and accept the system as it had evolved up to that moment. To do otherwise would have been to sever potentiality from existence, otherness from self—the primary existentialist errors. I had found the open gate into a united movement, which, however many errors, corruptions, distortions it might incidentally produce, held the only fully valid clue to past, present, and future alike, and the one compact that could not in its essence be corrupted. I was free, with all the new problems that freedom raised—the relations to other people as well as the effects on myself that the moment of choice now brought about.

But in this digression I have omitted the events which went on as I wrote *Adam of a New World* and which had such a profound effect on the anti-fascist groupings: the conflict in Spain that led to the Civil War. In a newspaper of February 17 I read that shock-troops in Spain had disobeyed their officers and joined the mob. I wrote a rough poem, *Warning of the End*, which I sent to *The Eye*, a sort of trade-journal issued by Lawrence and Wishart. It has at least the interest of being a prophecy of the civil war to come in July and the first of the vast number of poems to be written on the Spanish theme; for me it meant the first direct expression of a new stirring loyalty.

About the same time, reading the review of a book by Allen Hutt in the *T.L.S.*, which remarked that what he said was all very well, but he didn't know the English, I wrote a longish declamatory poem. *Who are the English?* I sent it to *Left Review*, where it was published and received with such acclamation that it was reprinted in large numbers as a pamphlet. Also, a group at the recently-formed Unity Theatre, who wanted to develop a form of dance-mime together with spoken verse, took it up and produced a stage-version of it which was very successful and provided the basis of an English form of mass-declamation with mime and movement. When the Spanish Civil War broke out, Edgell wrote and asked me to do a similar sort of poem on the theme of the war, and I produced *On Guard for Spain*, which was also developed into a mass-declamation.

On Guard was even more successful than *Who are the English?* and in the following years was continually done all over England by Unity Theatre or groups connected with the Left Book Club. It was performed in Trafalgar Square and at countless rallies; the typical meeting in support of the Spanish Republic consisted of speeches by Victor Gollancz, Harry Pollitt, and the Duchess of Atholl, with a performance of *On Guard*. Harry once felt impelled to write to me after such a meeting that he had never in all his life seen an audience so powerfully affected as by the declamation.

The Civil War had itself affected me as no other event in my whole life. Coming just at the moment when I had discovered my new allegiance, it represented the new life with the immediate threat and attack it aroused from all the forces of evil, of power and property. Till the final defeat of the Republicans in 1939 my own aspirations were indistinguishable from what I felt of the Spanish people. There were, of course, over-simplifications in all this, but at the same time a profound element of truth. There was a peculiarly tragic quality in the struggle, with the Spanish people doomed from the outset through the help given by Mussolini and Hitler and the betrayal by the 'democracies', and with the anarchist spontaneities and confusions of the people themselves. I suffered extremely from a bad conscience at not being in the International Brigade, and yet at the same time felt an intensely urgent need to get on with my writings, to attempt to absorb into my own painfully evolved dialectics, and to express, the full meaning of proletarian unity. Perhaps I did not force the issue with Elza because my deepest need lay in my writing, and I felt underneath that if I joined the C.P. I would be hurried along by participation in the many activities of the day, thrown off my balance just as I was anxiously trying to find it in the new complexity of ideas and impulses that had gripped me. To join the C.P. was for me tantamount to going into the International Brigade—though in fact after the deaths of Fox, Cornford, Caudwell, every barrier was put in the way of intellectuals sacrificing themselves.

Also, for a while Elza listened to my political ideas and was moved by them; I had hopes that I had at last found a way of awakening her from her deathly withdrawals. It seemed that with a little patience I should be able to carry her with me, and that I must not frighten her too much by stressing the activities stemming from the ideas. However, she began to feel that contact with people would be the logical consequence, and at once closed herself against what I said.

Despite the sado-masochistic character of our relationship, I had escaped by facing the real nature of my isolation; she could not escape, could not work, because she had long given herself up to a retreat from reality in which she had staked her all on me as a 'magical helper'. She had lost all her spontaneity and waited for a miraculous moment that would restore it, restore her power to work (above all to write poetry) and her power to love; and that moment she had identified with the moment when I regained 'sanity'. But in this system of hers I could never regain sanity, for the test did not lie in anything I became, anything I said or did; it lay solely in the miraculous return of her spontaneity, her effective connection with the life-process. And as the miracle did not and could not happen without the effort it was beyond her to make, she could never consider that I had become 'sane'. So she was returned to her need to dominate me and the situation; but whereas I had freed myself from dependency through my work, she had grown ever more dependent on me, though this dependency took the form of her sense of domination. She needed me ever more as the one person with whom she could feel safe, the sole person she had as a symbol of the world and also as a victim. In fact I had now long lost my original sense of guilt towards her; I merely felt that by an involved set of circumstances I had become responsible for her; I pitied her and could not face the suicide or breakdown which I felt sure would result from my leaving her. It may be argued that this pity and this fear of what she would do if left alone were a delusion; and indeed a strong masochistic tincture pervaded the emotions. But after all there was the practical problem which no amount of chiding myself for self-pity and masochism could whisk away. I kept on hoping that one of my books would make a lot of money; I should then be able to take steps to see that she was well looked after when I went. But though after *Rome for Sale* I always had at least £5 a week, I could not advance beyond that level. Such extras as I made were swallowed up by our moves and similar expenses. The result was that I had to keep on working all the while if we were to subsist; and the unrelenting economic pressure had a great deal to do with my accepting the situation, because I feared any long break that would disorder my earning system. In the first years, when anxiety was strong, I had longed for illness, for a breakdown on my own part, which would solve the situation by putting me in hospital and forcing Elza to stand on her own feet. But, partly through my sparse vegetarian diet, my health could not have been better and I never came even

remotely within reach of the coveted breakdown. Elza, on the other hand, was several times vaguely ill, though she always refused to see a doctor.

She, on her part, would have liked to stop me working. She recognized to a certain extent that I was escaping from our interlocked situation through my work. After Portobello Road, she never read a line I wrote. She knew that if she did she could not stop herself dictating and tearing up; and she had enough sense to know that if she did that, she would destroy my earning power and bring about a state of collapse in which she could not maintain her control. So, to maintain that control, she had to permit the process which made it impracticable. Her one resource was to dream of the miraculous day when she, too, would become 'creative', able to earn her living. But this dream was liable to fall away, leaving her with melancholic depressions or a sadic outburst in which she wanted to smash my typewriter. I realized that ever since she left Combe Martin, she had been seeking the magical helper who would restore her birthright and release her energies, her spontaneity and her expansiveness; and that her history had throughout been a series of disappointments and disillusion. Robert, who had introduced her into the refined world of his mother, the world of Ellen Terry and of Nicholson, had seemed for a while to offer her a key into a magical realm: but the inner release did not come. I had done more than anyone else to convince her that the release was possible, by my headstrong fantasies of our Fanfrolico purpose and our great aims, and by enabling her to begin writing poems. Therefore my letting her down had come with a decisive blow of derangement; and the fact that she discovered my 'betrayal' at the time when the Press was breaking down and I was going through a very painful and prolonged process of inner change, was crucial for bringing out her sado-masochistic components in the form of an effort to take complete charge of me. The economic decline and insolvency of the Press lay at the core of our spiritual fall; for she was thus led to a belief that I was a fraud, not at all the strong and fated character she had taken me to be, whose guidance had to some extent released her. The more I lost faith in what I had been and honestly sought to rid myself of my flaws and illusions, the more I convinced her that I was a weakling. Her respect for the demonic force of my Fanfrolico days (begotten in me by N.L.'s ideas and my feeling of a dedicated purpose in serving them) completely died away; and it was this ending of her respect for my 'power' which led her to

feel the need of filling the vacuum with her own domination. To the extent that she had previously respected my demonic possession as the mark of her fated magical helper, she now feared and despised me. Her angers over Betty May had not been the key-thing at all; they had expressed her final conviction that I was a weakling and that she had discovered a means of dominating me. (I do not mean she thought consciously along those lines; I mean that that was how the situation worked on her.) In the same way, it was the economic collapse and the crisis of ideas which it precipitated that was the dynamic of my fall, not the guilty conscience over Betty in which I concentrated my dissatisfaction with my past self.

The plain proof of this analysis is to be found in the fact that the collision leading to the breakdown of our relations in 1930-1 occurred then, and not earlier, when I was still meeting Betty, or just after I had ended things with her. Elza was certainly feeling uneasy at that earlier period, as was shown by her sudden advent one morning to confront me and find out what was going on; yet she did not tackle me then, nor did I feel burdened by the sense of disaster and doom that made me 'confess'. Elza was still controlled by her respect for my strong sense of inner purpose. Long before she had heard the name Betty May she responded to the weakening purpose in myself to start petty tyrannies such as throwing out the Pentons. At the same time she made the vague effort to return to the persons she had known in her days of selling-herself—a further expression of the fact that she was beginning to feel she could not rely on me. But she found that she could not make a return to her old way of life, and that sharpened her sense of dependence on someone whom she no longer felt carried along by a magical aim.¹ She was impelled to begin direct attacks on me to find out just how weak I was, just how unlike her pristine image of me I had become. Her taking-up of the Betty-hints thrown out by Marie was the expression of this need to get inside me; and the cheat she felt was the discovery of the man-of-straw behind the Apollonian disguise. Therein lay my betrayal of her; the Betty-theme was the mere emblem of the deeper letting-down; her misery lay in feeling tied to someone

¹ In the first days at Forge Cottage, brooding over Donne's symbols of the Two Indies (gold and spice) and on Freud's idea of anal-eroticism, I said to Elza, 'Perhaps a man ought to give a woman money every time he lies with her.' The next moment I thought the idea a bad one (reducing all sex to the Baudelairean position of guilt); but Elza enthusiastically took it up and kept talking of it. Clearly it met her feeling of castration in the act that proved her woman.

who was now shown to be an imposter. She could not move forwards a poet or return to the one role, prostitution, where she could use her helplessness to get her own back on an outraging world. She felt the need to take whips and scorpions to my unreliable self; and thus it was, as I have said, that my vulnerable condition—ever more vulnerable the more I tried to change myself—provoked her distrust and hostility instead of making her feel that at last there was the basis of a stable and happy union between us.

Though I did not yet analyse things quite as bluntly as I have just done, I had steadily arrived at this position; and my discovery of Marxism, which was the natural completion of the process going on in me ever since 1928, brought me to the point of finally discarding the mechanism of guilt. But it did not, as I have said, solve the practical problem of what I was to do with Elza. I could not, now as before, accept a way-out which was an expression of my self-will and disregarded the consequences for her, however good a rationalization I could put up in its defence. My pity and my responsibility remained, however much their focus had changed.