

VII. CONTRADICTION AND UNBALANCE

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The foreseen disaster of Fore Publications had come about; the union with the Pilot Press was not attempted. The managerial board had agreed on the union. Then Emile called a meeting of all those connected with the working of periodicals, and to my surprise Randall Swingler spoke against the link with the Pilot Press. As he had founded the press, together with his brother Stephen, his decision had to be accepted. Seven was an earlier victim to the new commercial competition; Our Time soon followed. (Perhaps Randall had chafed, as well he might, at my taking too much on myself in the negotiations to change the basis of Fore; Emile may have reminded him that it would be wise to keep his personal control of the firm for the future eventualities. But he was often unpredictable. Thus, once Rust, editor of the Daily Worker, sensibly asked several of us writers to an informal discussion at his place, to thresh out why so many of us were discontented with the cultural policy of the paper. We were somewhat shy at first, then began to get seriously down to analysing our objections to sectarian aspects. But Randall burst in at that moment with the cartoonist Gabriel and delivered a long harangue on how much more intelligent was Gabriel and his D.W. colleagues, how much better equipped as communists, than us mere writers; and the discussion failed to get under way again. Gabriel and Randall both left the party in 1956.) Meanwhile Krishna Menon had asked me to find and carry on a press, the Meridian, for left books; he was eloquent, as always, but not very definite about his resources. It turned out indeed that his experience of carrying on the Indian League for many gruelling years by sheer will-drive and the capacity through his own devotion to gather willing workers for his purposes had convinced him that a publishing firm could be conducted on the same heroic and cashless basis. To my surprise we succeeded with our first book, The Discovery of India, by Nehru, which was handbound by some bewildered section of the co-op, I think, in Birmingham, who succumbed to Krishna's sharp moral pressures. But that success was due to the fact that the British had just let Nehru out of jail and he was coming out as the key-figure for the new India. I won't tell the strange tale of Meridian here, except to add that Krishna for a while took

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over Our Time; Randall produced some three issues before the new version of the periodical broke down. I also managed to publish a couple of booklets of poetry, one of them by Randall, and the first and only volume of a miscellany Anvil. A series that I had worked out for Fore Publications, New Developments, was taken over by Nicholson of the Bodley Head. I did the executive editing, and each volume was written after long discussion: Basil Dean wrote on Films, Calder Marshall on the Book, Ann on the Theatre, and so on.

I had come to know John Davenport, large, erudite, very talented, and somehow unable to do anything much with his talents. He was in charge of a European news-emission of the B.B.C., and liked to detail proudly how he diddled the controllers. He used always to make the news bulletin a few minutes too long; it was passed as holding all the necessary reactionary items; then at the last moment he would “discover” that something had to be cut and would remove the most vicious items. He and I decided that we must start a magazine which would print the best of what I have called the resistance-literature – not necessarily work connected with the war, but expressing the values on the resistance-movement as defined by Aragon, Eluard, Vittorini and the like (I had met the Vittorini in Paris, tired but keenly responsive.) We took the title Arena and prepared the first issue, but Randall, sympathising [with] the project, offered to let us use the Fore imprint and such system of distribution as it still held together. For the first issue Edith gave us ‘Street Acrobat’, and there [were] poems by MacDiarmid, Malcolm Lowry, Jean Cassou (several of his prison sonnets which I translated). Of essays there was an important statement by Tzara, ‘Dialectics of Poetry’, ‘Shakespeare’s Imagery and Rhythm’ by Pasternak, critiques of Camus and Ben Traven; an essay of mine on Catullus and one of Alick West on Shaw; stories by Tikhonov and Endre Illes (Hungarian); a version of Eluard verse-and-prose ‘From the Horizon of One Man to the Horizon of All’. No notice whatever of the issue, or of the following six, except that the Daily Worker made a strong attack on the Editorial Note (written by myself, and accepted by John and Randall):

Arena is a literary magazine interested in values. This statement may not seem to differentiate it from other literary magazines; everything depends on the definition of Values. If one is a problematically-

existent dog chasing its docked tail, in a search for the Value of Value and the Meaning of Meaning, there is certainly nothing that need upset anyone. Not much, except perhaps dizziness, will result. The intellectual gap with which one begins will continue intervening at all moments when there is any danger of nearing the wholeness within which value becomes valuable and meaning meaningful. But our use of the term means human value and does not abstract value from activity, from the total human process and its formative or developmental modes.

In plain terms, this means that Arena neither seeks to label our culture as “decadent” nor to acclaim it as securely progressive. We believe that the culture of our world is rent by intense conflicts, and for that very reason is full of the most violent potentialities for good and evil, for integration and disintegration. We believe in particular that countries like France and England, which have well back in their past undergone successful bourgeois revolutions, have passed during the last hundred odd years through phases of culture which are of the utmost importance for the future. (The one flat period in, the visual arts, for instance, that can be simply labelled decadent or moribund in any final sense is that of 19th century academicism and naturalism, in which the tradition of the Renaissance is seen petering out, with the folk-roots cut away. But at once a series of counter-movements, often sectional and limited, begins struggling to find the lines of renewal, the necessary breakings-down and the points of new organic integration.)

Much of that was meant as a polemic against the Soviet attitudes which took Victorian academicism as the high-point of realism and tried to write off the dissident movements as petty-bourgeois. Next came the formulations which the D.W. denounced:

The work in which Arena is interested is the sorting-out of these confused and often vital trends of resistance – the clarification of the valuably formative from the false and the merely fashionable (a feeble conformity trying to exploit what was for the moment a genuine adventure). This work includes a give-and-take between Marxism in its critical aspects and the free play of the creative elements in our culture; it aims at separating-out and strengthening all that genuinely reveals the artist’s prophetic function, his capacity to reach ahead into various aspects of the integration that his world lacks but needs for its advance. And that means also showing how this function worked out in the past.

Christopher Caudwell posed with fine precision the issue at stake. The critical problem is to realise what “is the lie at the heart of contemporary culture, the lie which is killing it, and deeper still is found the truth which is the complement of the lie, the truth which will transform and revitalise culture.”

These positions had led me continually into the role of oddman-out. Thus, at a conference called by Emile on the theme of combating bourgeois trends in culture, in resisting the Zhdanov-type positions which were set out, I made a defense of Sartre as a man with many

ambiguous points of view but with a strong core of creative insights which we should have been welcoming. For which I was much trounced. (During the war-years I had encountered Marx's Economic and Philosophic MSS and from that moment those early works continued to play an ever-greater part in my broodings: especially the pages dealing with Estrangement and Alienation, or those concerned with man's relation to nature in production and art-creation.)

The Soviet Writers asked Sean O'Casey, Bernard Shaw and myself to the Pushkin Celebrations of midsummer 1949; but I alone went (with Ann). So far the only English writer who had visited postwar Russia was Priestley. (On his return he told Monty and myself over a glass of beer, "They're wonderful people, almost as good as North-Countrymen.") Flights to Russia were still in a primitive stage. We flew to Prague, stayed the night with the Eislers and had a long chat with the cheerful young poet Neumann (who in 1970 committed suicide in anguish over what had happened to the party), then flew on next day with Jan Drda and Novomeski the Slovak poet. The festival began at Moscow, went on to Lemibrad and Tsarkoe Selo, then to Pskov, and finally reached the poet's birth place. I give here only the account of the concluding meeting, scribbled in part at the time, written out a few days later:

Buses, cars, carts of all sorts. The groups with wreaths assemble and we move down into the hollow between the two heights. Drda and Novomeski have a wreath from the Czech writers; we others are gathered behind the wreath from the Soviet writers. We plod down the slope of fine red-yellow dust and ferocious heat, infested by photographers ... then slowly up the monastery steps to the graveyard, till we are packed round the Tomb, an unimpressive thing with a brief sort of monolith on it. The dusty heat bears down on us as the speeches continue and the wreaths accumulate by the grave. Young people have come up behind us and press in to watch the ceremony. The comely intent girls beside me have lipstick on their mouths; and against the church wall stands the Leningrad poet (Olga Bergolts) with her broad warm face and bright blond hair, serious as a child.

Speeches end. Several direct descendants of Pushkin are photographed against the tomb; one of them is a lad with hair and facial structure quite like the poet's. We go down the other side of the monastery hill, out into the powdery dust and more entanglements of vehicles, cars and rustic contraptions with ancient yokes. Many of the carts are decorated with birch boughs. So, on this day of festival, both Pushkin and the Trinity receive a birch-homage of greenery, of new birth.

We find our own bus among the thin shadows of the pines. Some distance on we strike a large car-park before the gates of the estate, crammed with cars and lorries. The militia-man doesn't want

to let the bus in, but gives way before our credentials. We lurch down endless avenues of pine. Improvised restaurants are at work in the glades, with flowers on the light tables. Icecream stalls keep turning up from the forest-depths. People are streaming in from everywhere, up and down the main track, in and out of the forest, fathers with babies in their arms and lovers with the light of wildflowers in their eyes. A man is selling hazelnuts by the glassful. Plump girls dispense sweets and fruit drinks, and someone is singing in the secret trees.

Our car stops, something has gone wrong with it, so we hurry out to sprawl in the pine-coolness. Vera (a Russian girl) throws herself on the earth like a parched man on a spring of water in the desert; and Neruda lies back with half-closed eyes, seeing everything there is to see and a lot more. Damdon and Gergel (Mongolian and Hungarian writers) compare the Mongolian and Hungarian languages for roots in common. Overhead the sky is darker blue between the pines.

“Let us stay here,” says one of the Russian girls, “for ever.”

We drive on down the narrow track of pines for miles and come out at last into the huge clearing where a gay fair is in full clamour, with merry-go-rounds and swings, and stalls and sideshows. The colours of the scene as clean and bright as a folk-painting. We get out and go the way of the strollers.

Children are splashing in the lake. Under the leaves and among the tree-roots are the large boisterous families or the lovers in a ring of silence, with green lightdrifts across their brown faces. We go down and over the little bridge and the chuckling water, up to the house which has been opened a few minutes ago as a Museum. Scarcely larger than the house revolving on the Pskov stage (in a play on Pushkin), a small wooden summer residence with the nurse’s room apart on one side. A charming garden at the rear and the ground sloping green to the lake in front.

Back to the clearing. Clouds are muttering darkly in the west. A few raindrops spit on our faces, but the meeting starts on time in the open without the least concern for weather-signs. We go up on to the large platform against the trees, and Tikhonov takes the chair. A crowd of thousands has already gathered, with more and more coming up all the while. On the other side of the clearing the bright blue swings and merry-go-round stand richly among the varying greens of the grass and the trees, with echoes of laughter and song – the right background noises for our meeting in praise of the poet. Standing against a rope barrier, in front line of the crowd, is a line of old peasant women in red cloaks; and beside them are men and women in Baltic costumes on benches.

Speeches begin. Tikhonov, Siao, Drda, Peter Blackman (who was in Russia as Paul Robeson’s secretary), various Soviet writers, a local Comsomol girl with nutbrown face. The clouds darken and come towering up our way, and the drops thicken. Then, with a rustling rush, the rain is pelting. But no one cares or moves. The audience goes on sitting or standing with the same glint of attention. The old women in red smile as though they know all that is being said, but are glad to hear it; they don’t even shake their heads to drive away the gnats of rain. Maisky, sitting in front of me, keeps feeling in his pockets for something to spread out on his knees: handkerchief, letters, odd bits of paper. But he, too, is smiling.

Thunder is suddenly near, and lightnings flicker at us out of the moving sky. But nobody stirs until the last word is said by the last speaker. Then, with rain slopping down our necks, we climb under the tall pines.

“Pushkin Rain,” says Tikhonov; and then, at a specially loud thunderclap, “Salute to Pushkin!”

The lean young poet Dudin shakes his fist at the roaring sky.

Two types of response, both equally valid.

“Good weather for mushroom picking,” says Tikhonov, and laughs. “I thought the lightning was going to strike the microphone. Still, it was a great moment, and everything was correctly timed.” The emotion of a completed rite with great significance for life, of suddenly merged hopes and aspirations, brims up out of his eyes; and he takes my hand and shakes it in a pledge of the thunder-moment. And a great burst of thunder comes, tightening our hands.

At that moment a man was killed, though we didn’t know it. Over towards the house the lightning struck a tree, which fell across the man.

We decided to run for the cars, and dash out into the open, but we don’t know where our cars have parked, and splash through the mud before we find them. The women rig up a partition at the back of the car, and change what they can of their soaked clothes. The little bus-girl, now that there is something to do, forgets all about her finery and runs joyously about in the rain till she is wet to the skin and her fiery hair clings in tiny ringlets to her cheeks and the locket flops on her high small bosom.

Blond Natasha runs off in an overcoat twice her size to fetch Gergel, who has warily stayed in the house; and then Gergel turns up and somebody has to fetch Natasha. And when we try to start, we find that the bus is bogged. We have to get out and push. But at last we move, though we have spots of trouble on the hills. As we go, we see some people wandering home, but others still arriving. About fifty thousand attended the festival while we were there – and Mikhailovskoye, remember, is out in the wilds.

We have missed the folkdances, the people miming and masquerading as Pushkin characters, the merriment in the darkening glades, the songs in the night of the pines and along the glimmering edge of water, the dances on the wet earth. But we know that the folk are going to carry on with their festival throughout the night.

It’s good to know that, though we intellectuals are now bumping on our way back to the towns. Around us are rain-washed sky and refreshed fields. Soft, long lights stretch over the broad earth of evening under the mauve masses of clouds. The fresh green of young crops polished by water, with glowing streaks of yellow and russet; all dominated by the immense transparent distances.

We stop for a moment, and among the bushes the virulent mosquitoes attack us. Yet lads are walking across the fields with bare torsos.

The sky turns a slaty-silver. Children stand in swings with poles instead of ropes. Gossiping groups gather at the village corners. I recall an incident that I saw as we were leaving the clearing at Mikhailovskoye. Some lads were coming up from the stream. They met a couple of girls who ignored their backchat. One of the lads, a lean sinewy chap with clearcut face, caught hold of one of the girls and swung her back in a proper kiss. At that moment the ambulance,

summoned for the dead man of the lightning-struck tree, went past and closed the embracing couple from my view. Then I saw the girl slip out of the lad's arms and run on after her friend, lightly, without a backward look.

I give the transcript of what I felt at the very moment; for otherwise I could not summon up with any confidence the extreme exaltation that I felt throughout almost those weeks. After the festival proper, at Stalingrad, at Kiev and the country around, again at Moscow and Leningrad. No doubt I was looking through spectacles that oversimplified, and I had no notion of the cruelties also being perpetrated behind the facade. And yet, now the facade has been torn down, I still feel that the core of my response was to something real, to the soviet people as they truly were: something that I knew already in the best soviet verse and prose, in the living pattern of history, but which assumed an enormous force in the direct contact. I felt that here, despite many crudities, backwardnesses, and authoritarian survivals, was indeed a people in the process of transformation. I still believe that to be true, though I know at least a little more fully how painfully complex has been that process.

Thinking over these points, I recall another passage in my record. I had drunk a little too much at a meal at the Union of Writers.

Then I remember what Leonov said, and go to him in his corner, as we have a long and immensely significant discussion. I recall its emotion with perfect distinctness, but none of its words. Anyhow, we tackle the basic issues of the artistic conscience in our world, and I prove to him that he has made certain essential contributions to the clarification of those issues; and at last he is convinced. Our last words only I can dredge up from my mind.

“No, you did all that, Leonov. It's a fact.”

“Lindsay, you have the soul of a child.”

Perhaps, in paying me that Russian compliment, he was telling me that I took too much on trust. What I didn't know or guess is brought out by another episode. Gergel wanted us to go on for a tour of Hungary, and he took us to see the Hungarian ambassador, a charming man who said he was an historian pushed into diplomatic work, and that he hoped to escape back into his studies. He was particularly interested in English history, and asked me many questions about books and sources. But Ann and I said that we could not spare any more time away from England, and that we must for the moment forgo Hungary. Later, reading Horvath-

Polazzi's book, I learned that just about this time he was being put under an inquisition by the Hungarian secret-police, who wanted to get information against three great traitors in England: Bernal, Gallacher and Jack Lindsay. Bernal was suspect for his work in the Peace Movement, Gallacher because his son had had a commission in the British Army, and J.L. presumably because of his villainous questioning of Marxist dogmas. How the accounts of our arguments at the Salisbury Pub and elsewhere had reached the secret police in Budapest is an interesting matter; no doubt someone in the London Embassy had gathered informations¹ and sent them home. But from whom did he get his stories? In any event we see the contradictions of the situation. There was I, the English guest at the Pushkin Celebrations, whom Gergel and the Moscow ambassador were urging to visit Hungary at the government's expense, and who was at the same moment being noted down by the secret-police as a traitor whom the Heroic British Working-Class would soon call to account.

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Back in England I was indeed soon to be called to account: this time for the publication of Marxism and Contemporary Science. Maurice Cornforth was one of my strongest attackers. Finally I was called on to explain myself before the Cultural Committee. It was one of the worst moments of my life. I listened with the utmost concentration to the various explanations of how badly I had strayed from the Marxist Truth; I desperately wanted to hear an argument against me with which I could agree. But almost all that was said seemed to me to be stupid or irrelevant. Alick West, who a few months back had written to me that while he disagreed with me on various points he was ready to support anywhere my right to raise the questions I had raised, now made an unadulterated attack, using some topical news-items to link me and General Montgomery as exponents of imperialism. How he managed this bit of dialectical acrobatics, I cannot recall. Emile as usual was cool and detached; but Douglas Garman (who had retired from his job as party-functionary through stomach ulcers) attended the meeting, and, though not a member of the Cultural Committee, vehemently

¹ As per typescript; may be a typo or intentional.

demanded that I should be thrown out. (He died a short while back, strongly Maoist in his views.) I asked for time to consider what had been said, and Emile gladly assented. The only person who spoke on my behalf was Behan, of the building workers, but, as he hadn't read the book, he could only give me a general support. Johnny Campbell, then editor of the D.W., attended the meeting but did not speak; he, like Garman, was not a member of the Committee. When I left, he went out with me, and walked at my side till I caught a bus; he showed a warm and comradely sympathy – though as he too hadn't read the book, he could only do this by the very friendly tone of his remarks.

I went back to our house in St. John's Wood, where I was alone that night. Money had grown tighter, and though I was inclined to hang on, Ann insisted on our moving to a cheap cottage on the edge of Penshurst. We still kept one room in the London house, which a psychoanalyst, a party-member, was renting from us. (Shortly afterwards he committed suicide.) I lay sleepless all that night in the long room. I could not imagine living except as Communist, whatever differences I might have with other Marxists, and my experiences in the Soviet Union had powerfully reinforced my feeling of the need for international solidarity. Even if I were thrown out, I should continue always (I told myself) to be a party-member; I would never allow any passing angers or disagreements to dominate, I would always see the party, caught up in all the limitations or distortions of the moment, as one with the international revolutionary movement in which it was the vanguard force and which would in its own due time outgrow all the limitations and distortions. But I could not separate my loyalty to that movement from my need to tell the truth as I saw it. What then if the conflict between the positions of the movement and my convictions of the truth became intolerable? At all costs I wanted to avoid such a clash, and yet I could not avoid it by tampering with my truths. Yet how far could I insist that my book was the vessel of truth and that my critics were deluded or dogmatically narrow? Who was I to make such an arrogant claim? How could I be sure that I was not sticking to errors out of intellectual pride or mere ineptitude? What would be the point of pressing my positions so uncompromisingly that I would certainly be expelled – only to decide afterwards that I had callously and hastily rushed into formulations which

turned out to be hollow or confused? What was it that I had written? What was the essential point of my dissidence? Had I obscured that point by unnecessary and indefensible polemics? And so on, and so on. Worst of all, as at the meeting, I found my mind failing to hold on to what was the key-point at issue.

I at last decided that there was confusion in the book in the concept of unity, and that this confusion was in turn linked with my political positions in the years 1945-7: my overvaluation of the spontaneous popular bases behind the Labour victory. I decided that I would offer a self-criticism along these lines, but would make no further concessions to my attackers – though I was ready to debate any particular passage to test the accuracy and completeness of its formulations. Thus I set my admission out for Emile to insert in the

Communist Monthly:

... a failure to distinguish correctly between unity as a necessary omnipresent condition of the dialectical interpenetration and struggle of opposites, and unity as a resolution of the struggle. This failure inevitably means a falling away from Marxist materialism and a reliance on an idealist abstraction of unity... I see that at the very point where I wanted to be concrete, to define the actual process of art and science and the ways in which they derive from life, lay hold of life, and in their development transform men – in the actual historical conditions of social struggle and movement – at this very point I fell into abstraction ... I should not like the statement that I advocate non-partisanship for the artist to go unchallenged. (On looking up my remarks in the book I find them much less clear than I thought, and therefore not free from the distortion I have sketched.) My viewpoint is that the artist expresses in so far as he is good artist, the whole life of his world; but since he will be dealing with that life dialectically, he apprehends the struggle that makes up the total process. He does not set out the struggle abstractly or impartially; rather, in so far as he truly grasps it, he expresses the movement towards the resolution of the struggle, and is thus partisan of the future. This viewpoint implies further that any artist truly grasping the whole process of his time and its inner struggle must also grasp the unity in the past (clan-society) and the unity in the future (socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat) to which history is moving. In the past this awareness takes various points dictated by the level of general development. Ever since 1917 it must involve a positive and partisan attitude to the Soviet Union, and increasingly so with every year: for the whole meaning of history is now out in the open.

I still agree with that last sentence; but I see that the fact of the whole meaning of history being out in the open must involve also a ceaseless criticism of the Soviet Union (or any other

socialist society) for any ways in which it falls below its high destiny as well as an acclamation of that destiny.

Emile was essentially a kind-hearted and unassuming man, ready to carry out his duty ruthlessly if he had no other choice, but always preferring forbearance and compromise where he could feel it justified. Though there were others who would have liked to make me an example to all dissidents by contumelious expulsion, Emile now considered the matter closed, and he kept it closed. Throughout my dealings with him, then or afterwards, I always liked and respected him, even when I sharply disagreed. (It is perhaps relevant to note that at about the same time as I had my troubles, Lukacs was being attacked in Hungary, by Rudas and Horvath, and found it expedient to make a limited self-criticism.)

What then of the book? Did it deserve my own strictures? Reading it again after a long time, I find it hard to summarise. Certainly it is very unequal, seeking as it does to cover not only dialectics in general but the applications to biology, physics, anthropology, art-criticism, psychology (mainly Freud, Gestalt, and Existentialism), history, and ethics. It would indeed have been an epochal work if it had grappled successfully with his wide field, exposing all the mechanistic structures and showing how a unitary dialectical method should be developed. I certainly stressed throughout the unitary nature of all process: meaning that one had to grasp the unity before one could isolate the inner conflicts or contradictions. Here is one of the passages that led to the attacks on me:

One brief example will serve to show how essential Marxist method has beaten against the Hegelian dualism. In the system of Hegelian logic one begins with oppositions; and to apply that system simply in a form of materialist inversion one would have to assert that class-society exists as two opposed classes which come together in opposition, till out of the quantities of their combination there leaps the totally new thing, the totally new society. In fact society is a unity out of which there painfully and slowly emerge new polarities, which at long last crystallise into class-conflicts and discords. The class-forms develop inside society; they do not come together to form society.

Vulgar Marxism, or distorted Marxism, in fact does state the social situation on these terms. But Marx, as we saw in Chapter 1, par. iii, never lost sight of the fact that conflict and division occur within a unity. Lenin continually stresses the point. He insists that society is a unity inside which continual differentiation and contradiction develop, and that through history we see the same

“immanent emergence of differences – the internal objective logic of evolution and the struggle of the differences of polarity.” (One reason why Hegel begins with a dualism is because he thinks of class-division as eternal.)

A correct criticism of the book would be, I think, that I do not enough work out this question of the unitary nature of process, and the ways in which polarities, conflicts, contradictions, unbalances, emerge inside the unity. From what I have discussed of my earlier development it will be clear that the unitary conception was deep-rooted in my whole approach to life; but a new stimulus had been given by my reading Whyte’s books and my discussing things with him. I had been deeply impressed by his notion of formative energy or process, and by his analysis of the fundamental part played by symmetry and asymmetry in the working-out of process: all movement in the universe, at all levels, seen as the reassertion of symmetry in an asymmetrical situation. I did not see then, and I still do not see, any incompatibility between such formulations and the Marxist system of logic taken over from Hegel. Rather, they could help us to grasp just now how polarities appear in a given situation, in the physical world or the social alike. The conflict appears as the asymmetries grow and threaten to break a system down; the formative principle is seen at work in the struggle to arrive at a resolving unity, a reassertion of symmetry. However, it was not enough to assume that Whyte’s ideas and Marxism ultimately coincided; I should have brought the problem fully out into the open and then show how I proposed to deal with it.

Before my book was published I had a discussion with Bernal, who accused Whyte of idealism. I agreed that there were many idealist assumptions in The Next Development of Man, but that did not tie the label for eternity on the idea of formative process with its symmetry-asymmetry conflicts. I claimed that this idea was perfectly capable of a materialistic development in the Marxist sense. Bernal is a man whom in many ways I greatly admire, but I have been able to come humanly within effective speaking-distance of him. Our argument went round in circles without either of us being able to register any impact from the other’s words; it ended leaving me with the conviction that no effort had been made to get inside

Whyte's system, so that I felt all the more zealous in setting out its claims. But, I repeat, I don't think I did this in the best possible way in my book.

Perhaps I can gain something of an objective focus on the book by citing some translated sections of the long review by Bogdan Suchodolski in the Polish Mysl Wsprolczesna of September 1951. Suchodolski set out fairly my unitary thesis:

The characteristic of Marxist dialectics, according to Lindsay, consists in the fact that it views contradictions as contradictions occurring within a certain unity. It is a monistic dialectic, and not a dual one. Lindsay believes that the concepts of unity and completeness are a much more fundamental characteristic of Marxist dialectics than the elements of struggle and contradiction, which flow only from the unity of the defined developmental processes.

Here Lindsay sees the fundamental divergence between the dialectic of Marx and Hegel. Hegel created a system of dual dialectics based on fundamental contradiction between subject and object, idea and being, spirit and matter. As the basis of Hegelian philosophy was the concept of the ego as opposed to the external world. It is true that Hegel wanted to overcome the immobility of pantheism and the superficial mosaiclike diversity of mechanical theories, but the system he created, which was meant to link unity and change, evinced at its very inception a dualistic split typical of idealistic philosophy. Hence the Hegelian conviction that contradiction goes deeper into life than unity, that it characterises the substance of things and their changes much better and more deeply than unity does. Marx's philosophy on the other hand grew up, according to Lindsay, on completely opposed premises. Already in the Forties of the last century Marx formulated his fundamental idea of the basic unity of the world, of a man and nature, spirit and matter. Within this unity Marx perceived a constant historical progress of human activities, transforming environments and man himself, a process in which man opposes nature while at the same time remaining within its kingdom, a process of social advances and social contradictions which are overcome and generated in the course of the same advance.

Lindsay considers that Marx's dialectics are understood in a very superficial and mechanistic manner if one takes them to be simply an adaptation of Hegelian dialectics, in which the place occupied by the concept of spirit has been taken by the concept of matter. In reality Marx replaced Hegel's dualistic dialectics by a monistic system of dialectics: a unitary dialectics, as Lindsay proposes to call it. Marx understood that "life is an integrated process, within which occur differentiations and conflicts, both the cause and result of development." Marx proved that "human life is a single process which includes the unity of mankind with the larger whole of nature and expresses itself internally in the differentiations, discords, and harmonies of social existence. The external aspect of man in nature is one with the internal aspect of man in society."

Marx overcame the traditional dualistic method of seeing man and nature. He showed that man belongs to nature, although, at the same time, he plays an active part towards it. But the active part of

this relationship is not at all, contrary to many previous arguments, a proof of man's separateness in the face of nature. "Since man and nature form a whole," Lindsay writes, "nature is part of man's activities in the same way as human activities form part of nature." The originality and greatness of Marx's philosophical conceptions consist in the fact that he overcame the element of passivity and contemplation in the traditional pantheistic conceptions, as well as in the fact that he overcame the dualistic element in the traditional conceptions of man's active role in nature. In this historical process in which man, forming part of nature, is at the same time an active element in its transformation, as well as in the transformation of himself: in this unbroken unitary process are contained all the contradictions and struggles, and their supervening solutions. Thus is human society formed and developed; thus is forged the higher link between man and nature; thus is man created.

Suchodolski also set out fairly my argument against the vulgarisers and the mechanisers:

Lindsay attaches special importance to the correct formulation of the problem of human society, and stresses the fact that this problem has generally offered most opportunities for the rebirth of a masked form of dualism. The vulgar exponents of Marxism have many times presented the problem as if all social life were only a mechanical super-structure erected on the top of elementary economic processes, as if consciousness was only an addition to basic biological processes or social activities. Treating the problem in this manner, they sank to the positions of vulgar economics and sociology, vulgar materialism and behaviourism. Thus they facilitated the launching of attacks by the opponents of Marxism...

To abandon the unified view for even a moment must lead to mechanistic falsifications. The opposed elements then become independent, become things quite alien to one another, and their relationship is comprehended from a mechanistic viewpoint. Negation, which forms an essential part of dialectical reasoning, only correctly plays its dialectical part when it is a negation within a certain evolving whole. When it becomes an independent element, separated from the whole, it leads to scepticism which Marxists do not understand, and to an empty juggling with concepts. Lindsay quotes many formulations by Marx and Lenin, which warn us against the mechanistic abuse of negation: formulations in which we find a very clear statement of the principle that the uncovering of contradictions only leads us to knowledge when we realise the complexity of a process which in the course of its development reveals certain contradictions that are both the causes and the effects of the process.

Dialectical thinking that loses sight of the wholeness and unity of developing processes ceases, according to Lindsay, to be genuine dialectical thought. It leads to the rigid opposition of rigid and immobile concepts, to the looking-on contradictions as separate things totally alien to one another. ...

This conception has always been wrapt up in many misunderstandings, and many Marxists, even when declaring their stand on the position of monism, have not always behaved as if they did. The author – and this forms the most important part of his book – attempts to prove on the basis of examples taken from the fields of

art, ethics, biology, anthropology, psychology and history that all progressive materialistic thought uses monistic dialectics, which it is constantly striving to strengthen...

After proceeding on these lines at some length, he stresses:

The theoretical analysis of the monistic nature of Marxist dialectics as opposed to Hegelian dualism appears justified, while the manner in which the author has examined and uncovered the dualistic mistakes committed by some thinkers when operating the dialectical method are on the whole very penetrating. The method of stressing the completeness of processes only inside which historical contradictions occur, is necessary for the efficient struggle against the vulgar interpretation of Marxism and its mechanistic deformation.

He then however goes on to criticise some of the ways in which I sought to present the difference between lasting elements in Marx's and those historically conditioned by the problems he was tackling in his later political-economic works. He was right. I was guilty of the error, which I soon myself rejected, of opposing Marx's earlier and later works instead of seeing the essential unity, the way in which concepts like fetishism, division of labour, labour-power etc. carried on the central alienation-thesis of 1844. Though I tried to hedge my statements round against misunderstanding, as he notes, I did not myself fully understand what I was talking about; and he correctly points that out. He further argues that I did not clarify my comments about unity with sufficient detail; and again he is correct. He insists that I drift from a genuinely materialist basis at various points.

He does not preserve the borders between materialist and idealist theories. He is always strongly against those who go in for diagrammatic explanations, against those who exaggerate in formalist and abstract attitudes (Popper for instance), against those who oppose spirit to matter (as for instance Croce), but he always finds praise for those who are of immanent attitudes, who try to comprehend processes irrationally or intuitively. His attitude seems to be peculiar in that he values the kind of thinking that grasps reality as an unceasing unitary processes, but criticises the kind of thinking that understands reality as a composition of separate things. From this viewpoint he opposes the idealists not because they proclaim anti-materialist views, but because idealism is diagrammatically abstract, immobile, or is a form of camouflaged dualism which stands for the spirit's independence from matter. For the same reason he is ready to criticise a certain form of materialism by reproaching it with being a masked form of dualism, which attempts to maintain an opposition of spirit and matter in a way that is merely that of the idealists turned the other way round.

There was a certain element of truth in all that. I then found, and still find, much virtue in thinkers who seek intuitively to grasp living wholes which they cannot yet fully analyse or understand. But beyond all that Suchodolski was correct in pointing to certain confused and uncertain borderlines in the formulations, which came in part from imperfect knowledge of the disciplines treated, and in part from some methodological vagueness. His essay was the only effort made by any Marxist to get inside what I was saying; for the rest I only had denunciations.

But despite the blurred points I think (as Suchodolski generously agreed) that the book had its virtues as a first attempt to get rid of the manifold mechanistic positions absorbed by Marxism over the years, as a result of an insecure criticism of bourgeois science – science from Galileo to Quantum Mechanics. Oddly, the one section of which Emile approved was that on Biology, where I semi-praised Lysenko. The main part of this section however consisted of an effort to show the mechanistic or metaphysical nature of prevailing theories of morphogenesis, embryonic segregation, and genetics. The scientist on whom I mainly drew was the Negro Ernest Just with his analysis of the cell-surface. Lysenko was mentioned only for his general approach. “His work in theory is hard yet to evaluate. At worst he rushes in where mechanistic angels fear; at best he reorientates biology to new basic issues.” But instead of citing my points on biology from Marxism and Contemporary Science, I should prefer to use an essay I wrote (at the suggestion of Cedric Dover) for a Symposium on Organic Evolution, convened by the important Indian biologist Sunder Lal Hora for the National Institute of Sciences of India in 1953. Here I set out the same positions as in my books, and my essay was accepted and used together with papers by Hora, Needham, Bernal, J.B.S. Haldane, Medawar, Pantin, Manton and many other experts of world-status. After discussing the gaps that Darwin left in his theory of evolution, I summed up:

The scholastic position in the post-Darwinians was what made possible, and inevitable, the advent of Mendelian Genetics with the claim that its mechanisms filled the gap left by Darwin. In fact they widened the gap; for they obscured the need for a resolution of the real problems bequeathed by Darwin through more concrete and unified comprehensions of the nature of evolutionary process.

This is intended as a broad generalisation. Clearly there were various by-products, so to speak, of genetics that have been valuable; certain inquiries that have added to our store of knowledge, even if the genetical interpretation is suspect. But the total bias of the school was to turn biology into a metaphysical blind-alley, giving a pseudo-concretion and precision to the gene-nucleus, e.g. the idea of quantitative nuclear division used to explain an assumed type of embryonic growth.

Natural Selection remained a blind force mechanically sieving the blind torrent of random variations.

I then turned to Just and showed how he was able to achieve a unitary notion of the cell and its environment. “Just shows with fine insight and power how these ideas,” of unitary process and of a vital fusion of opposing or conflicting elements within the unity of process, “work out in the construction of a methodology capable of simultaneously analysing a situation and grasping its total implications – of realising at one and the same time movement as well as structure, change as well as form, unbalance or dissymmetry as well as balance and symmetry. Such a methodology necessitates the ability to perceive the element of dissolution inherent in the order of a situation or organism, and the succeeding or resolving order inherent in the dissolution.” Then I dealt with Lysenko, accepting the accounts of transformation given by soviet scientists and by English experts like S.M. Manton. These seemed to show “phasic changes in the organism and the fusion of environment and organism in changes.” After that I discussed Hora’s work dealing with “structural changes through changes of function,” and especially his work on Convergent Evolution.²

I use this essay, because it shows that my ideas were capable of acceptance by serious scientists such as Hora. Dover sent me on a letter he received from H. Graham Cannon, Beyer Professor of Zoology in the University of Manchester. “I felt his praise was intensified by the fact that he does not know your work and that he picked out your paper from a large number

² Lindsay footnote: While it is now clear that Lysenko was a tyrannical character, who made all sorts of claims not tested by methods excluding alternative interpretations, the questions which he opened up are by no means closed. What was good in him was a sort of accumulated peasant folkwisdom which however he sought to apply dogmatically. The development of molecular biology has vastly refined Mendel-Morganism and given much useful information; but I do not see that it ultimately affects the criticism of mechanism in this field.

of others.” The professor wrote of the essays, “They are most stimulating, but please can you tell me who is Jack Lindsay? Is he now Lord Lindsay: I knew the first noble Lord extremely well and loved him very much. Certainly I find Lindsay’s essay most stimulating and valuable.”

3

I had returned to the historical novel, with Fires in Smithfield. I used the reign of Bloody Mary as the last time when England had been for a while under the control of a foreign power (Philip of Spain and Catholicism) and a resistance-movement had grown up. The analogy with U.S. occupation of our land with the complicity of the Labour government was slight enough; but in Poland at least I was told that the account of the harried protestant underground had revived many memories of wartime oppressions under the Nazis. That was what I was concerned with: the seminal growth of a new force – the London Underground of Mary’s reign was the ancestor of the puritan organisations of the Cromwellian Civil War. At the same time with the theme of the hidden Gold I wanted to show the distortion at the heart of the new forces. I tried the Dostoevskian trick of describing nothing of the actors’ reactions beyond what an intelligent observer might surmise, and found that tension was increased thereby. Also, at Penshurst I began on a Life of Dickens. At that time, it may be hard to realise today, Dickens was generally despised by intellectuals as the low comedian of a one-dimensional universe. Apart from Edmund Wilson’s essay, there was hardly anything of value on him. When my book appeared, Spender attacked it as sociological Marxism; Tommy Jackson attacked it in the Worker as Freudian debasement. (Later, when lecturers of Keele College produced Dickens and the Twentieth Century, with an essay by myself on Barnaby Rudge, they told me that the Life had been their Bible; but no notice was otherwise taken of it except by Edith Sitwell and Angus Wilson.) I had tried to develop a method of dialectically fusing the personal, the social, and the aesthetic aspects. (Dona Torr told me that when she read it she agreed with Jackson; but something kept nagging at the back of her mind; she got hold of the book again, read it, and found that she entirely accepted the method. I hoped this was an augury of the ultimate acceptance of the method by my fellow-Marxists.) I had done a little

B.B.C. work; a talk I was going to give on Witches I Have Known was forbidden at the last moment by the religious censors, but I managed to do a programme on the Greek Mime (Theokritos and Herondas). At Peshurst we had moved across the Medway into a forester's cottage amid oaks and beeches. It stood in a glade with easy access to the river for swimming, but the track to the main road and its buses was almost impassible in winter. Ann was secretary of the Tunbridge Wells Peace Council. She found she was suffering from cancer of the breast and was operated on. Before that happened, I had written a novel The Passionate Pastoral (set as a fantasy in our Ashour Woods); the period was the 1790s and the theme was in part the romantic concept of Nature (expressed by the naked girl in the forest); the collapse of the romantic dissident in the face of counter-revolutionary violence reflected both the 1938-9 situation and the effects of the Cold War. (It was welcomed in Poland as "at last a good piece of Marxist Pornography" and issued, finely illustrated, with the poems translated by Leopold Staff.)

Dakers had now gone definitely down; he managed to publish Dickens, but held up a long novel on the Kett Revolt of 1549, The Great Oak. I had come to know Greenwood who then ran the Bodley Head. He was interested in my work and took over my novels, Fires in Smithfield and Passionate Pastoral, promising to reissue those out of print. His assistant Norman Denny became a good friend. He argued that I should turn to direct historical work and commissioned a history of Byzantium. At this time, the height of the Cold War, I doubt if anyone would have published me but Greenwood, who was not particularly of the Left, but who refused to have this literary opinion settled for him by a reactionary situation. He also published Howard Fast and Aldridge for the same reason. (The Diplomat had been turned down by several publishers. One morning Greenwood showed me the large wad of manuscript and asked if I knew who Aldridge was.) In Eastern Europe I had been continually asked what novels best depicted postwar England and its struggles; but I could not find any to recommend with sincerity. So, I told Greenwood, I was going to try to fill the gap myself. Actually, I had been wrestling with the idea ever since Time to Live and The Subtle Knot – books that left me dissatisfied with their effort to use a symbol (the street-dinner, the morality play) to express

the postwar condition. I found, I thought, what I wanted in the idea that became Betrayed Spring, a novel in four intertwined themes and situations. A demobbed soldier comes home to Lancashire and has to decide whether to go back to the mines; another returns to Yorkshire where his father owns a textile mill; in London a young girl, a plasterer's daughter, is seeking to find her place in the world; on the Tyneside a trade-union official is concerned with holding down his job in difficult conditions. The period covered was September 1946 to March 1947, with its winter of prolonged harsh frost. That frost, holding up the spring, becomes the symbol of the Labour government's betrayal of the united spirit of the last war-years – both because of its bitter freezing of the English earth, and because of the government's failure to call on the workers to carry on, to take charge of the workshops, as in many places they would have liked to do. The moment was thus climax of the united spirit and its breakdown, its betrayal. The problem was to give the effect of energies mounting and frustrated, and to gain a unified picture (England at this moment) out of the very diversified scenes and social situations.

To ensure that I would be true in detail and spirit to the various areas, geographical and industrial, which I covered, I decided to call on the documentary method, while subordinating verisimilitude of detail to the fundamental image required and to the development of character. I visited the scenes to be described and talked with people there, but I also discussed my problems with workers, sent them sections of the novel, got their critical comments, and so on. In this sense the work had a collective basis. B.L. Coombes, Jim Bowman, Ted Dickens, C.O. Cossey, and Reg Birch were particularly helpful; and E.V. Tempest helped me to see things from the viewpoint of a Bradford mill-owner. But at no point did I let any of the collaborators determine the least aspect of the artistic issue, the questions of character, and so on. I doubt if any other large-scale novel in England had been written in this way. Emile did his best to aid me in finding workers who would be useful. I was convinced that no publisher would even look at the book; but to my surprise Greenwood and Denny thought highly of it, and it appeared under the Bodley Head, going at once into two fair-sized impressions, but of course totally ignored by the intellectual world. In Eastern Europe however it was enthusiastically welcomed and translated, being reprinted in English as a

school textbook in the USSR. It was done into Chinese, and in 1968 a Mongolian poet told me I was the favorite English novelist in Mongolia – largely I think through Betrayed Spring.

I followed it up with Rising Tide, dealing with the seaman's strike of 1949, a strike with a high level of political consciousness. I used the same collective method as in Betrayed Spring and came to know a number of Dockers well. Ted Dickens did his utmost to help me to enter into the dockworld, with its strong intuned community-spirit like a Welsh mining-village of the old days. (The Rev. Stanley Evans said to me, "Wasn't there a white horse over in a corner of that waste-ground where your young couple set up home?" I thought a while. "Yes, you're right." He had worked in the dock-area, in West Ham, and recognised my setting.) Then came Moment of Choice, which like Rising Tide, used characters out of Betrayed Spring. In Moment I concentrated on the Bradford scene, with a background of the peace movement. In all three novels, parts of a series The British Way, I used a modified form of the Year-concept: partly to link man and nature, partly to bring out the idea of life as a cycle continually broken by the emergence of the new, the spiraling on to a new level, yet reasserting itself as both stability and change. The T.L.S. did not review any of the novels, then denounced them in a leading article, saying that the first section of Moment suggested the arrival of an Antony Powell of the industrial Midlands, but that the action then moved to the London May-day of 1950 with a scene of police-brutality and thus ceased to be work of art. I wrote a letter to the editor, remarking that it was odd to consider novels not worth a review, then to attack them in a leader; I added that though they might not like engaged art they evidently believed fully in la critique engagée.

I was working hard at Byzantine history. My first version of Byzantium into Europe must have run to some 350,000 words; then I cut it down to a still-large work. As the title showed, it was the first book – in any language as far as I can make out – that treated the Byzantine world as an integral part of European history. It seemed to me that the bias imparted by the Catholic tradition had set the history of Western Europe in a totally false perspective. Till the 12th century Byzantium was incomparably ahead of the west and thus could not but set the pace of development, however complex, obscure, and circuitous were many of the contacts

and influences. The problem was to clarify the stages whereby the ancient world broke down and moved into feudalism, with different effects in the areas with more or less carry-overs from the past; and how it was that the western towns finally generated a new sort of energy and organisation which provided the first bases of what became the industrial bourgeoisie. What was originally the Byzantine virtue, its strong inheritance from the ancient world, became in due time the brake on its progress. I thus tried to approach the subject without any of the pre-conceptions; born of the Catholic or the Orthodox traditions, which I felt had distorted all previous judgments. At the same time I tried to examine Byzantine culture, literary, musical, and artistic, with some understanding of its inner spirit: the rich mergings and breakings-apart of classical, popular, and further-eastern elements, the deep conviction of rebirth implicit in the Martyrion with its momentous consequences for architecture, bringing to its full conclusion the concept of the temple or church as a cosmic image – a complex of ideas and symbols that clustered round the dome in the east and ultimately begot the Gothic cathedral in the west.

In England the response by scholars was a refusal to consider my thesis except for a brief repudiation. (Christopher Hill and Naomi Mitchison welcomed the book, and Edith Sitwell told me many times she never travelled without it, but these were marginal responses. In the U.S.A. and elsewhere it had some serious attention.) In the *T.L.S.* the anonymous reviewer (a Cambridge historian) used the occasion to denounce me as an agent of the Russian Office – though in fact none of my main theses had any connection with Russian work in the Byzantine field; such as they were, they were all my own. The Cambridge historian objected specially to the stress laid on the class-struggle in the ancient world. “This naturally makes nonsense of Western scientific methods. And it raises the question, which will have seriously to be faced, sooner rather than later, by those concerned with academic appointments, whether in fairness to his pupils, any individual who adheres to the Communist doctrine can be allowed responsibility for the teaching of his history.” To make sure that this call for the banning of Marxists from universities was not missed, the T.L.S. followed the review with a two-column editorial under the heading “Freedom and Integrity,” which ended by labelling as

“confused liberalism” the views of anyone dissenting from the proposal to ban Marxists from teaching history. With a glib hypocrisy the statement remarked, “Men should not be persecuted for their opinions. But in so far as their opinions affect their competence, their employers are under the bounden duty to take them into account.” (In the same way publishers always claim that they do not reject a book for its political views; they turn it down because it isn’t well enough written or wouldn’t sell. The only exception I have encountered to this rule occurred in the still-innocent days of the 1930s when an editor of the O.U.P. who had published two of my adventure-books for boys, turned down one on the Eureka Stockade, published later by L. & W., on the grounds that he would never accept a book in which a British officer was shown behaving as one did in the story – an episode of a few lines.)

I cite the review and editorial from the T.L.S. to bring out the intellectual climate of those days: something that has no doubt been forgotten or never known by readers nowadays.