Jack Clemo 1916-55: The Rise and Fall of the ‘Clay Phoenix’

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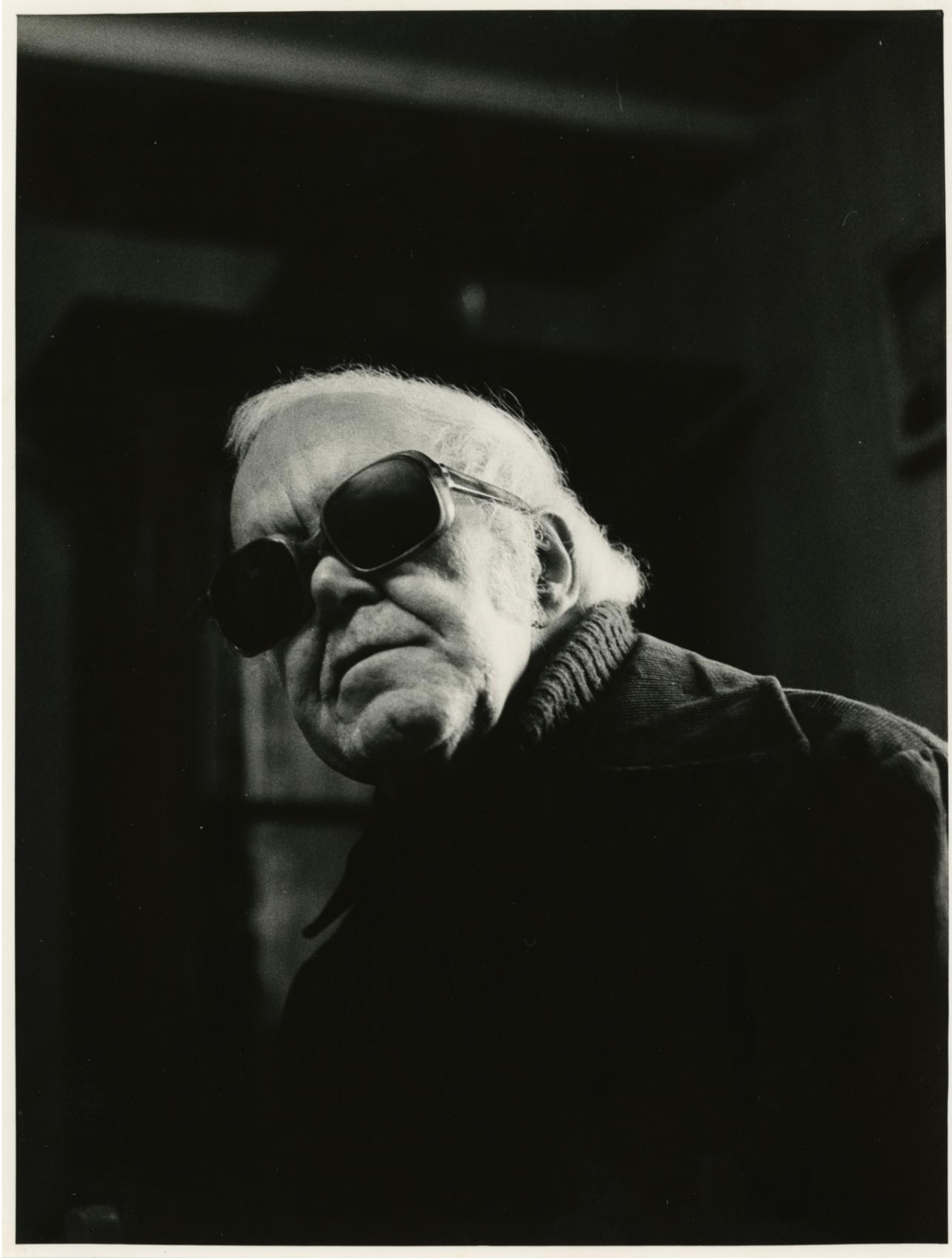
Abstract

Jack Clemo was a poet, novelist, autobiographer, short story writer and Christian witness, whose life spanned much of the twentieth century (1916-1994). He composed some of the most extraordinary landscape poetry of the twentieth century, much of it set in his native China Clay mining region around St Austell in Cornwall, where he lived for the majority of his life. Clemo's upbringing was one of privation and poverty and he was famously deaf and blind for much of his adult life.

In spite of Clemo's popularity as a poet, there has been very little written about him, and his confessional self-interpretation in his autobiographical works has remained unchallenged. This thesis looks at Clemo's life and writing until the mid-1950s, holding the vast, newly available and (to date) unstudied archive of manuscripts up against the published material and exploring the contrary narratives of progressive disease and literary development and success. When Clemo wrote his own biography, he interpreted the events of his life as though they were a part of a predestined pattern established by God, plotting a course that gave his life special meaning. But as well as moulding events into a particular narrative, Clemo omitted some key features of his biography, including the cause of his disabilities. This thesis, a detailed study of Jack Clemo's life and writing, returns to the original source material to reconsider this self-interpretation and justification, and to establish some of the details Clemo and his family sought to censor.



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For permission to use the images, as well as the University of Exeter's Special Collections Library, I am grateful to Ricky Knight, the Cornish Studies Library, the China Clay History Society, Ander Gunn and Paul Broadhurst. I have been unable to trace the photographer John Chard, who is believed to have taken photo 42. I have also been unable to discover any estate for the Dorset writer and friend of Clemo's, Monica Hutchings. It is likely that Hutchings took photographs 25, 26 and 27.

Two people who helped in different ways have sadly died over the three years taken to complete *Clay Phoenix*: Paul Newman and Brenda Angilley. Paul was a writer who helped with initial thoughts and ideas while I was putting together proposals. He produced many works relevant to this subject, including *The Man Who Unleashed The Birds*, reviewing Frank Baker and the artistic circle surrounding him in mid-twentieth-century Cornwall. Brenda Angilley died the same year, 2014. Brenda appeared on the documentary film *Roots of my Story*, having known Clemo as a girl. She also appears throughout Clemo's writing and was a significant influence on *Confession of a Rebel* and *The Clay Verge*, two of Clemo's most remarkable works.

Notes and Abbreviations

The most useful resource has been Exeter's Special Collections. However, reference numbers for individual files are long and cumbersome and I found that they disrupted the text too much, so I have abbreviated them and added a key. For example, the Special Collections reference for correspondence regarding *A Different Drummer* would normally read 'EUL MS 68/PERS/1/1/8'. In my system, it is simply 'P9', the 'P' showing that it comes from the collection described as 'Personal Papers'. Similarly, the 'Literary Papers' of Jack Clemo begin with an 'L', the Charles Causley papers begin with a 'C', the A. L. Rowse papers with an 'R', and the E. W. Martin papers with an 'M'. The key appears in the back. References to the Wheal Martyn archive are relatively few and tend to be shorter, so they have been kept as they appear in the archive record.

Clemo's handwriting is difficult to read, so much so that it has been used by the Special Collections Library to illustrate the problems that can face someone working with archive materials. Over the three years of reading Clemo's handwriting, I have come to decipher the great majority of it, but occasionally a word has eluded me. When I have been unable to interpret a word completely, I have marked it with question marks in square brackets: [??]. When I believe I have deciphered a word, but am not completely certain, I have put the word in square brackets with question marks either side of it: [?example?].

It will be noticed that in quotations I use ellipses both within and without square brackets, either . . . or […]. This is to differentiate the ellipses used by Clemo from those used by me. The ellipses without squared brackets are Clemo's own, while the ellipses within squared brackets are mine.

At the beginning of chapters, I have often used Biblical quotations. They are all favourite quotations of Clemo's from his diaries of the period, usually written out in full at the front and sometimes considered mottos for the coming year. Although when he died Clemo owned a number of different Bibles, including the Moffatt translation, an interlinear version, and Richard Francis Weymouth's translation into modern speech, in his books and in his manuscripts he always quoted from the King James Version, as I do throughout this thesis.

Lastly, Clemo's mother's writing has a good deal of regional character, which has been better preserved by not marking irregularities with [*sic*] notes.

The following abbreviations of Clemo's works are used throughout:

WG: *Wilding Graft*

CoaR: *Confession of a Rebel*, 1949 edition

CoaR II: *Confession of a Rebel*, 1975 edition

CV: *The Clay Verge*

IG: *The Invading Gospel*

MoC: *The Map of Clay*

CoC: *Cactus on Carmel*

ET: *The Echoing Tip*

BA: *Broad Autumn*

MoaR: *The Marriage of a Rebel*

DD: *A Different Drummer*

BH: *The Bouncing Hills*

SB: *The Shadowed Bed*

BP: *Banner Poems*

AtM: *Approach to Murano*

CA: *The Cured Arno*

CK: *The Clay Kiln*

IPT: *I Proved Thee at the Waters*

CG: *Cornish Guardian*

Introduction

When Jack Clemo died, in 1994, he left all manuscripts to his widow, Ruth. Ruth outlived her husband by more than a decade, and she spent much of that time working through his poems, letters and diaries, annotating, tearing out and Tippexing over sections she believed would harm his and her own reputation. Sometimes, Ruth rewrote events to create a more magical and mythical narrative, perhaps most notably altering the story of how she and Jack met (Thompson, 'Chalk Heart'). But in the final years her mental health deteriorated and her work on the archives became inconsistent. She set aside one or two items about which she was undecided, intending to return to them later, and forgot about them. In 2013, while working through Ruth's personal papers in the University of Exeter's Special Collections Library, I came across one of these items. It was a remarkable document: an unpublished poem dating from 1962, handwritten by Clemo on a page of diary paper and torn out by Ruth, who intended to hide or destroy it.

'Montana Shade'

If I could kneel at that grave –
In Butte, I suppose, but I shall never know –
Where you lie, once harlot and slave,
Mother of all my sorrow –
Would the western sky yield a narcotic,
Or burn me bare to the debt,
Almost too poignant to be spoken,
Where our life-currents met?

The Rockies, cattle-range and copper seam,
The Indian encampments – these would be less exotic
Than the bond between us: fused in a bad dream
Before I was born. You gave me the shameful token.

Your practised hand did the routine work,

Pressed the thorns and spear
Into the blind hereditary stream
Which foamed on through the murk
Till a cry from Cornwall made the target clear.
The small boy was stabbed in the dark;
The youth cringed at the world's disdain,
Grovelling alone on the clay-bed
In spectral silence, fighting to keep sane.
I owe to you all the leprous scars,
Peeled back to slime which spat at the cross:
Fumes from the sunken furnace;
Ice on the prison bars,
As I staggered from loss to loss,
Crying all night because you had made me one
Whom other women would shun.

The world asks questions I do not ask;
Saints fumble with the seals;
And if I meet you at the golden gate
All heaven will be looking on
To learn what an innocent victim feels,
Caught in the mesh of fate.

I would forestall eternity
And let men overhear
While still on earth, what I have whispered
So often through my tears,
And would whisper again if I knelt where you lie.
I have reached out to you
With the caress of Christ in my soul these thirty years:
Never a condemning thought;
Nor in the end would I undo
All the agony you brought.
I would not insult you with mere forgiveness:
I penetrate the unseen,
Find something so massive, something so playful,
Mere forgiveness would fall between.

You need not even be shy,
Montana Magdalene,
Much less ashamed if we come face to face:
We are just fellow sinners,
Liberated by His grace. (P195)

For the 1967 collection *Cactus on Carmel*, Clemo would edit the poem comprehensively and retitle it 'Bunyan's Daughter', transforming it into a monologue from the perspective of John Bunyan's blind daughter, Mary. But in

its original form, 'Montana Shade' was autobiographical. The 'Montana Magdalene' who gave him his 'leprous scars' was the prostitute from whom Clemo's father, Reggie, had contracted syphilis while seeking his fortune in the wake of the American gold rush. Reggie had brought the disease back to Cornwall in 1912 and to his fiancée Eveline. Through Eveline, the disease was passed to their children, one of whom died during infancy 'with pus coming out of her ears and eyes' (Willcox). The other child survived into adulthood, albeit with some devastating symptoms. He would become the deaf-blind poet and novelist Jack Clemo.

Syphilis, I will show, defined Clemo's life, writing and theological perspective, as well as his physical appearance. This single most important fact of his biography is not mentioned in any of the published works, nor in any scholarly study of Clemo. Only in the archives can it be found. There are almost three hundred files held in the University of Exeter's Special Collections Library, deposited or bequeathed by the Clemos between 1980 and 2007. The most recent deposit was offered following the death of Ruth Clemo and included the diaries central to this study. In the current Clemo collection there are six decades of diaries, a large photograph collection, audio-visual recordings, drafts, manuscripts and typescripts of all Clemo's books, a substantial collection of correspondence, numerous personal artefacts, financial and professional documents, essays, artwork and scrapbooks, as well as Clemo's personal library of more than four hundred volumes, many of them heavily annotated or containing further correspondence. There are yet more relevant documents within the Charles Causley, A. L. Rowse and E. W. Martin collections, also held at the University of Exeter's Special Collections Library, as well as at Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum and in the microfilm archive of the *Cornish*

Guardian, accessible at Bodmin Library. Besides these paper records, numerous people recall the Clemos; some lived in the clay country villages or attended the chapels, while others encountered Jack in the literary world. My interviews with them cover a broad period, stretching from the 1930s until Clemo's death. Before the present study, no one had worked through this material, yet the story that emerges from it is at odds with the published narrative, and with Clemo's own self-fashionings in his autobiographies.

Throughout his life, Clemo observed dates, numbers, literary biographies, wildlife, and even the weather, in search of patterns that might shed light on his destiny. These patterns, he believed, were established by God and should be considered revelatory and mystical, and he used them to structure his autobiographies, informing his faith and expectations of the world. What the archives offer – the diaries in particular – is the raw material or data; the events as they happened, prior to their selective arrangement into these patterns.

The correspondence held in the archives, as well as in private collections, has a heightened importance for a writer whose disabilities precluded him from conversation. There are no anecdotes of sparkling badinage at social gatherings, no Johnsonian witticisms or one-liners, no illuminating pronouncements. There is almost no dialogue at all. This might seem a disadvantage at first, but Clemo's inability to engage conversationally led to an abundance of correspondence. Had A. L. Rowse been admitted to the Clemo cottage, we might not know what interests they shared, but as he was kept out, the two men conversed through correspondence. Both retained their letters, so the interaction can be read in full at the Special Collections Library in Exeter.

In spite of all the freely available material, this thesis is the first to examine the Clemo archive, holding it up against his autobiographies and poetry to show

a new narrative, dominated by congenital syphilis. Previous studies of Clemo, such as Stephen John Lane's PhD thesis, *Cartographer of Grace*, have often relied heavily on the material Jack and Ruth were willing to share, and as a result they offer very little new information. Victor Perry's bibliography is of more use, compiled by Perry for a librarianship qualification. Perry listed Clemo's major publications, and a few of the earlier dialect tales and magazine pieces. However, the bibliography of works by Clemo presented in my thesis is the most complete to date, listing approximately eight times the number of works by or about Clemo. (Perry's bibliography does include reviews of Clemo's books in newspapers, which were passed on to him by the Clemos, and which I have not included here.) Notable among more recent scholars, Gemma Goodman at the University of Warwick has worked on Clemo's novels, while Emma Mason has written and taught on the religious experience with regard to Clemo's writing and personal theology. At Principia College, Illinois, Heather Martin has written and spoken on the poetry from a Christian perspective, while at Falmouth Kym Martindale is currently working on a monograph of Frances Bellerby and Clemo. The sole full-length study to have exploited the archive is Heather Martin's, which used just a handful of files from the three hundred now available.

There has been only one lengthy publication on Clemo, written by the television presenter Sally Magnusson and entitled *Clemo: A Love Story*. It is a brief history of the role of Providence in Clemo's romance, but the book was so heavily controlled by the Clemos that Magnusson was prevented from adding anything new to the mythology that Clemo had established in his autobiographies. Magnusson received her information directly from Ruth, who put considerable effort into the project, filling several notebooks with

information, ideas, directives and characters to be included, as well as subjects for Magnusson to avoid (P195).

Within Cornwall, the research of John Hurst, Andrew Symons and Alan Kent has been especially notable, and the three of them worked together to produce a collection of what they called ‘Poems Newly Found’ in 2003, entitled *The Awakening*. This is a useful edition in many ways, collecting some of the poems from the original *The Clay Verge* manuscript submitted to Cecil Day Lewis, but it suffers from many errors, the most obvious of which is the four missing stanzas of ‘Clay Fairy’, where the editors have simply neglected to turn the page of the manuscript to find the rest of the poem. Another recent publication was *The Clay Kiln*, begun in the 1930s and published in 2000, a clumsy composite novel with a long history, which John Hurst traces in his excellent introduction.

Since Clemo’s death, his reputation has survived most emphatically within Cornwall and within Christian poetics. Over the past thirty years, interest in his work has been gradually reduced to these areas. But this is not where Clemo started. He began his career auspiciously, having been discovered and championed by Day Lewis, who edited and published Clemo’s first three volumes for Chatto & Windus, the novel *Wilding Graft* (1948), the autobiography *Confession of a Rebel* (1949), and a slim volume of poetry, *The Clay Verge* (1951). Then, through the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s, in the magazines and journals I have tracked down, Clemo’s work can be seen featuring alongside or headlining over household names such as Seamus Heaney, Anne Stevenson, Geoffrey Hill and John Updike. He was, for a time, a prominent feature of the literary landscape.

In spite of dwindling interest, Clemo’s work now seems more relevant than ever. An important poetic voice of the twentieth century, he was also a

corrective to the romanticising of Cornwall, from both outside and inside. A self-proclaimed rebel, he led his rebellion through the fields of ecoliterature, theology and even poetics. The poet Toby Martinez de las Rivas recently described the nature of Clemo's poetic rebellion:

> His wilful refusal to be roped into anything which might constitute poetic fashion led him in some very strange and difficult directions. Many poets who declare themselves as radical today are really using techniques (and underpinning these techniques philosophically) with literary ideas which are the height of fashion – deconstructionism, non-procedural grammar, syntactic confusion etc. But Clemo, like another great literary hero of mine, Barry MacSweeney, is recognisably different in his lone adherence to ideas which served more or less to isolate him. (Personal correspondence)

Within ecoliterature, too, Clemo can be grimly antagonistic, undermining not only the perceived 'paganism' of Romantics such as Wordsworth and Keats, but also the dualist ideologies of the contemporary 'New Nature Writing' genre, led by popular figures like Robert MacFarlane and Tim Dee. This sort of writing has often implied a kind of Golden Age pastoralism, either lamenting the loss of a connection to nature or suggesting that progress or wellbeing depend on establishing or re-establishing the relationship, returning to the wild. Timothy Morton influentially criticised the bases of this sort of writing in both *Ecology without Nature* and *The Ecological Thought*, arguing that 'thinking, including ecological thinking, has set up "Nature" as a reified thing in the distance, under

the sidewalk, on the other side where the grass is always greener, preferably in the mountains, in the wild' (*Ecological Thought* 3). In both books, Morton points out how problematic it is to ideologically separate ourselves from nature: 'Environmentalism worries that we are disconnected from the world. But what if one of the problems were *this idea itself*?' (*Ecology without Nature* 108). Nature is not something *over there*, separate and distinct from us, but we are integral parts of a much broader ecological picture. 'Existence is always coexistence', Morton wrote, and this is essentially his 'ecological thought' (*Ecological Thought* 4).

Clemo and Morton approach the subject of nature from very different perspectives, but with a shared premise: man and nature are not two separate things. For Morton, this is the 'ecological thought' in contradiction of the post-Romantic environmentalists who talk of our severance from nature and of how important it is for us to reconnect with nature. For Clemo, man is born tragically within nature, fallen and all too similar. Instead of encouraging their connection or the development of any connection, Clemo's poetry and post-Calvinistic approach demand that we sever the bond between man and the world and submit to God. This is where Clemo and Morton part ways. Morton's dark ecological framework for thinking beyond the nature-man duality is non-theistic. 'There is nothing underneath objects', Morton says in *Reality Magic* (42). In Clemo's cosmology there is plenty 'underneath' (or above, or apart from) things in the world. In fact, Clemo believes in lots of things that might not be 'objects' in the usual sense, or might be aside from objects; things such as spirits, hell, heaven, and God, perhaps angels and demons too. Clemo is a *post*-nature poet, a writer who assumes the connectedness of man with his environment and then pushes in the opposite direction. Clemo's was not the voice of rustic

bliss or romantic elegy. Indeed, in his best-known poems Clemo assaults natural beauty, delighting in the industrial destruction of the fallen world, and using the boundary as a metaphor for God's assault on his own body and senses. In 'The Excavator' (1946), one of Clemo's strongest early clayscape poems, the excavator-poet talks about the 'delicate aesthetes', the nature poets:

> I cannot speak their language; I am one
> Who feels the doggerel of Heaven
> Purge earth of poetry; God's foolishness
> Laugh through the web man's ripening wisdom spun;
> The world's whole culture riven
> By moody excavations Love shall bless.
> All staining rhythms of Art and Nature break
> Within my mind, turn grey, grow truth
> Rigid and ominous as this engine's tooth.
> And so I am awake:
> No more a man who sees
> Colour in flowers or hears from birds a song,
> Or dares to worship where the throng
> Seek Beauty and its old idolatries.
> No altar soils my vision with a lax
> Adult appeal to sense,
> Or festering harmonies' magniloquence.
> My faith and symbol shall be stark.
> My hand upon these caterpillar-tracks
> Bogged in the mud and clay,
> I find it easier to pray:
> 'Keep far from me all loveliness, O God,
> And let me laud
> Thy meaner moods, so long unprized;
> The motions of that twisted, dark,
> Deliberate crucial Will
> I feel deep-grinding still
> Under the dripping clay with which I am baptized.'
>
> (*CV* 29-30)

Nature is one of the 'broken boundaries' mentioned in Clemo's first autobiography, and his own syphilitic body was his most natural symbol. As a kind of 'broken boundary', Clemo's writing again seems to find some concordance with Timothy Morton. Morton's central problem in *Ecology without*

Nature is the difficulty (or impossibility) of thinking fully outside of the ‘subject-object’ dichotomy:

> Whether we think of nature as an environment, or as other beings (animals, plants, and so on), it keeps collapsing either into subjectivity or into objectivity. It is very hard, perhaps impossible, to keep nature just where it appears – somewhere in between. (41)

Clemo’s body-at-war theme and imagery presses this same problem, transferring it into the realm of Christian thinking. How can this fallen nature be purged from one’s body? How does this spatial-temporal object interact with the divine? What sense can be made of such questions? In Clemo’s picture, people are in this uncomfortable medial space, with fallen nature on the one side leading one to damnation and the saving grace of God on the other. It is a theme that we will see many times throughout this thesis, explored in Clemo’s fiction, autobiography and in poetry.

In the* clayscape poems we find another way in which Clemo’s work is important. Clemo was born and raised in this clay-mining landscape and culture, and as a result in his writing we find a technical and functional mining language developed and used for industry by working men, being employed for a completely different and subversive purpose. Clemo is in the unique position of being born an insider, with an insider’s geography and insight, but with an alien set of values and ambitions. His is the only literary account of the clay country in the mid-twentieth century, of the industrial language, landscape, culture and dialect. Yet Clemo is not regionally containable, not *merely* of local

interest. He is connecting with the ageless and infinite, with God, sex and suffering, in an extraordinarily unguided and isolated fashion. He is an anomaly. As his good friend Derek Savage said, Jack is ‘a unicorn, phoenix and hippogriff’ (P3).

This biographical thesis explores the parallel trajectories of Clemo’s literary development and physical decline. Clemo was born into deep poverty, isolation and privation, yet he became one of the most distinctive and remarkable poets of the twentieth century. At the same time, his syphilitic inheritance transformed him from an apparently healthful child to a small, weak-hearted, deaf-blind man. These two narratives, of rise and fall, converge in the 1950s. Clemo becomes a popular novelist, autobiographer and poet at the same time as his final symptoms remove him from society.

Clemo used his writing to interpret his life, to confess it and to justify it. It was always a statement of faith, with promises of love and invocations of his triumphant destiny. The poet-narrator is constantly emerging from misery and suffering into fulfilment. This is the story of the novel *Wilding Graft*, the autobiography *Confession of a Rebel*, and the first few sequences of poetry. It goes to the heart of Clemo’s personal mythology. He tells us in *Confession of a Rebel* that we need to look at his private life to understand his writing, yet during his lifetime he and his wife only allowed access to certain documents and insisted on an amount of editorial control and a specific textual interpretation. Focusing on the literary ascent and physical decline, this thesis holds the previously unconsidered material up against the accepted mythology, revealing a number of tensions and omissions in Clemo’s public confessions, and giving full weight to the disease which was the greatest legacy of his father’s American adventures in the years before Jack was even born: syphilis.

I

Clay

> O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.
>
> (Isa. 64.8)

Cultural changes to Cornwall in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries moved more slowly inland. Industry dominates the landscape, with excavated moorlands, pits and dumps, office buildings, drys, trucks and rail tracks. Although only a few miles distant, this is a long way from the Arthurian coast or the Cornish Riviera, ‘the bland, beauty-haunted domain of Cornwall’s popular novelists’, as Clemo called it (*MoaR* 12). The roughly defined clay area remains in cold contrast to those coastal regions. It is not a tourist destination – not an easy space to sell the visitor – and the Eden Project squats uncomfortably on its fringes, hidden from the brutal gaze of the clays in its exhausted pit.

The shape of the land derives from an eighteenth-century desire to make fine porcelain. This porcelain is said to have been first brought from China to Europe by Marco Polo, but it was the East India Trading Companies in the seventeenth century which popularised it in Britain, turning it into a valuable import and its production into a potentially useful investment. There was a race to discover and patent the recipe, which the Devon-born Quaker and chemist William Cookworthy won. In 1745 he was shown materials from Virginia by an American, along with an example of the porcelain made from them (Selleck 53-5). The minerals required for the process were china clay (or kaolin), and china

stone, both types of decomposed feldspar found in granite. For the manufacture to be practical, Cookworthy needed a source of both minerals in Britain, and it was in the granite spine of the Cornubian batholith that runs across the southwest, protruding prominently at Dartmoor, Bodmin Moor, St Austell, in the far West of Cornwall and on the Isles of Scilly, that he found them. The first deposit discovered was of an inferior quality at Tregonning Hill near Helston, but on a later trip ‘in the neighbourhood of the parish of St Stephens, in Cornwall’, Cookworthy found ‘immense quantities of both’ (Barton 19).

Cookworthy’s partner, Richard Champion, took over the company from its founder, and was given the patent for Cookworthy’s hard porcelain. Champion tried to renew the patent, but was met with serious opposition by the Staffordshire potters, particularly by the influential and celebrated Josiah Wedgwood. Renewal of the patent was successful, but Champion was now being pressurised on one side by Wedgwood’s opposition and on the other by the amounts he was paying to the landowner Thomas Pitt and to the heirs of Cookworthy. Wedgwood and the Staffordshire potters moved in, looking to lease workable land, aware that Champion was financially vulnerable and that he would soon have to sell the patent. The collection of potters who took it on became known as the New Hall Company.

Through the nineteenth century the original large clayworks were sold off to new, smaller prospectors, many of them local. Farmland was leased, quarries were dug and drained, and small conical waste tips were raised on the edge of each concern so that dozens of white cones and pyramids blistered on the gutted belly of mid-Cornwall, dominating the skyline and landscape. The pyramids are redundant now and growing green with resilient wild plants, rhododendrons and buddleia. The spring, river and drainage water that was

once pumped out of the bottoms of the pits has been left to flood them, making deep lakes and pools, turquoise from the kaolin particles. Some of these, like Lansalson, near Ruddlemoor, with its rhododendron woodlands covering the peak and running down the slope to hang over pale blue waters and clay-bleached shore sands, look more like tropical oases than derelict industrial sites.

The principle of the mining has not really changed since the nineteenth century, although the technology has developed and the number of employees slumped. A warning horn sounds and the rock is blasted with explosives, exposing a new face in the pit. Powerful water cannons are fired at this pit face, washing away the kaolin particles and leaving only waste rock, which is removed and transported to the tip, or burrow. In the early days, the unwanted rock refuse was carted up on rails by horse, or by engines discarded by the tin and copper mines, and emptied at the top by a sky-tip worker. This was the job Clemo once told his head-teacher he would like to do when he grew up, ‘yearning for the sense of freedom, elevation and remoteness that must be felt up there on the ridge’ (*CoaR* 36).

Down below, the clay washed away by the water cannons is left to settle, then filtered, and the slurry carried away to dry. In the earlier days the drying was done naturally, by barrowing the clay into pans and simply left, though this took many months. As demand increased, this process came to be considered cumbersome and inefficient and the dry kilns were developed. These were long stone buildings with porous floors. Over them, wet clay would be poured and raked flat. At one end of the building was a fire, and at the opposite end was a chimney stack. These were connected by a flue that ran under the porous floor, so that the room was heated and hot air drawn under the levelled clay. Instead

of the drying taking much of the year, this process reduced the time to a couple of days. When Clemo's father worked the clay, before Jack was born, he laboured in one of these hot, oppressive, steam-filled drys.

Clay-mining changed inland Cornwall, and the need to transport the kaolin and other minerals led to coastal developments, such as the quays of Pentewan and Par. Charles Rashleigh began developing a harbour at West Polmear in the late eighteenth century, for clay and copper exportation. The population rose from just nine people to nine hundred in less than a decade, and West Polmear changed its name to Charlestown, now a popular tourist destination. Similarly, Christopher Hawkins in the early nineteenth century developed Pentewan, and Joseph Treffry completely altered Par, which was still exporting enormous amounts of clay at the beginning of the twenty-first century. At Par there remains a large industrial plant, much of it abandoned, although some of the buildings are working drys, receiving clay slurry through pipelines, then transporting it to Fowey Harbour along private roads.

The clay country is unique in Cornwall, with 'a culture and community of its own' (Payton, *Cornwall* 239). The communities here do not change as quickly as the coastal towns, and you find the same family names in the phonebook as you do in the graveyards. Through the twentieth century many traditions have died out, but Tea Treats and feast days, brass bands and male voice choirs could hardly be called things of the past, and the story is still told of the time Treviscoe Male Voice Choir brought home first prize from the International Eisteddfod at Llangollen in 1956.[1]

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[1] In *Confession of a Rebel*, Clemo would write that the annual Tea Treat was 'a bustling, noisy affair that was torture to me, all the more incomprehensible because it was inflicted in the name of religion' (51). For a brief collection of clay country traditions, see Davey.

A definitive tradition diminishing in the clays is Methodism. This was the foundation of Clemo's Christianity, both Wesleyan and Bible Christian. The impressive, thick-set chapel at Trethosa, where the Clemos worshipped and where Jack Clemo's mother Eveline taught the Sunday School, was built by the Bible Christians in 1876, Methodists having previously met in a makeshift chapel at Trethosa Farm (Rev. Williams 3). The Bible Christian movement was a splinter Methodist group founded by William Bryant, who was born a few miles to the north-east of the clay country, at Gunwen, near Luxulyan. The Bible Christians placed firmer emphasis on the Bible as the source of all statements about faith, but did not really deviate from Wesleyan Methodism. Even Bryant did not defect from Wesleyanism, but was expelled from the Church, seemingly for his maverick egoism and 'inability to work with others' (Shaw 89). His own Church was a great success in Devon and Cornwall, entering the few areas hardly touched by the tireless Wesley.

Wesley himself did visit the area once, in 1757. He mentions preaching there in his journal:

> At two I preached in St Stephen's (in-Branwell), near a lone house on the side of a barren mountain; but neither the house nor the court could contain the people; so we went into a meadow, where all might kneel (which they generally do in Cornwall), as well as stand and hear. And they did hear, and sing, and pray. (qtd. in Pearce 131)

In 1907 the Bible Christian group joined two other Methodist factions to form the United Methodist Church, which in turn merged with another two larger

Methodist groups in 1932, the Primitive and the Wesleyan Methodist Churches, forming the Methodist Church of Great Britain. This is the reason why maps from the 1930s show chapels previously labelled as ‘Bible Christian’ which are now labelled as ‘Methodist’. It did not mark an ideological or spiritual development, but a practical alliance.

The new and living activism of Methodism and the Bible Christian movement was central to Clemo’s faith. It was a taste he never outgrew, a present vitalism, immediate and urgent, with preachers fierce and earnest. The God of the clay-pits did not care for Latin and ritual, but for faith and living souls.

Methodism, of course, is known as a working-class faith, largely because of the missions made by Wesley and his followers, who did not value the souls of the wealthy over those of the poor. It appeared a more inclusive and down-to-earth sect. Not only did it show greater equality among the classes, but the Bible Christians enlisted equal numbers of men and women as preachers in the early days (as well as a disproportionate quantity of wrestlers). They were a group known for their enthusiastic preachers and an emphasis on conversion, with a tone or ‘mood’ of vitality which Clemo drew on throughout his work, and which later attracted him to the American hot gospel movement of the 1950s, when Billy Graham was speaking of a ‘Gospel which advances with the urban stridency of banners and trumpets, neon signs and advertising campaigns’ (*IG* 85-6).

Almost everyone went to chapel on a Sunday, most of them twice, and some of them three times if they were helping or attending the Sunday school as Jack’s mother Eveline Clemo did. Men and women, adults and children, captains and labourers, farmers and clay-workers all attended. It was the social focus of the week for many. There were a few pubs in the area, of course – the

Grenville Arms in Nanpean, the Queen's Head and King's Arms at St Stephen – but a large proportion of the congregation supported the temperance movements, and the accounts book for Trethosa Chapel shows that it hosted temperance meetings.

Other than Sunday services, villagers met labouring at the clayworks or in the fields, at band practice or at choir on Thursdays. It would have been both men and women going to work in the pits in the early days, the women doing lighter work like scrubbing sand from the sun-dried blocks of clay, but this changed with the new drys, and in the early twentieth century women would have been more likely to meet at the shop or on the daily visits to one another's homes.

It was at choir that Jack Clemo's parents met, the fifteen-year-old Eveline Polmounter and the eighteen-year-old Reginald Clemo. Eveline was born and raised on Goonvean Farm, in a devout household. Her father John had been a clay labourer and farm worker, like her older brothers, and illiterate. Her mother, Elizabeth Jane Bullen, known as Jane, was from a family of 'some local distinction' (*CoaR* 7), being better educated and from a tin mining background. The tinners were considered harder working and tougher than the clay miners, enduring greater risks and worse conditions. Jane lost her father Joseph at Dowgas mine, the tin and copper works between St Stephen and Sticker, which meant that her brother, George, had to go to work in the same mine to support the family. On the 1861 census, when George was fourteen, he appears to have been the main earner in the household. By the 1871 census his mother is no longer there, having gone into service as a cook at St Erme, and George is head of the household, with two of his younger sisters, Jane and Sarah, working with him at the mine and living in the family home at Resugga Lane End.

George Bullen, Clemo's great uncle, is the most distinguished of this family in Clemo's eyes, having been raised in such grim circumstances but becoming a respected Methodist minister. Bullen went to Yorkshire to study at Joseph Lawrence's East Keswick training college, where impoverished young men desiring to perform missionary work could be trained. As a result, Bullen is found in the late nineteenth century in a remote community on the east coast of Newfoundland, called Wesleyville, where in 1884 he became the first minister of the Methodist circuit. Before long, Bullen was pushing farther up the coast with his family to the even more remote Twillingate and then Notre Dame Bay. In 1889, he moved to Michigan, serving at Shepardsville, Potterville, Hastings, Carson City and Reed City, until settling at Muskegon Heights on Lake Michigan with his wife Selina, where he died in 1917. In *Confession of a Rebel* Jack used George Bullen to represent the polar opposite of the Clemos, specifically his father, who, he writes, had gone to America 'to entangle himself in the grosser roots of materialism' (7).

George's sister, Elizabeth Jane, married John Polmounter in 1871. They managed twelve children together, though only six survived – a high infant mortality rate, even then. Of the survivors, the eldest, Frederick, went to America in a ship full of Cornishmen and women when he was eighteen and settled in Pennsylvania; Alfred married Anna and stayed in the area; Lucy married Richard Grigg, who inherited Penrose Veor Farm in St Dennis, close to Annie who married Wilfred Greenslade; Bertha was born prematurely and did not develop well, but was looked after until her death in 1949 by Eveline, the last child and Jack's mother, who was born on 9 January 1894.

Clemo describes the uncertainty of farm life around the clayworks, where buildings could be quickly knocked down as the quarry deepened, and the rest

of the land was suffocated with waste sand as the burrows spilled over. He does not offer a vision of rustic simplicity: 'The carts rattling about under puffing stacks were filled as often with coal and clay as with farm produce, manure or fodder. Nature's role was reduced to a minor one, and her hold was precarious' (*CoaR* 5). The industrial destruction of the family farm when Clemo was a child is mentioned in the poem 'Goonvean Claywork Farm' (*MoC* 60-62), addressed to his mother. Here, the tearing down of the building is a preparation of the landscape of their faith:

> Near the white gashed cliff where the orchard
> Held its brave menaced fruit
> You crouched and were tortured
> By the clang on the thrusting rails,
> Watching the iron lines encroach,
> Hearing the clash of the buffers
> That signalled my fate's approach,
> The grimy burdens rumbling through the clay. (*MoC* 60-61)

When Reggie and Eveline were born, the chapel at Trethosa was not even twenty years old. It was there that Eveline felt her personal call to God. She was already a Christian and a Methodist, of course, but experienced the evangelical 'rebirth' – one's personal commitment to Christ, beyond church or chapel affiliations, more often called a 'conversion'. She writes in her pamphlet *I Proved Thee at the Waters*: 'At the early age of twelve, in an evangelistic service at our Bethel Chapel, I dedicated my life to Jesus Christ, and this experience gave me a mystical love for devotional reading' (4). Note the use of the word 'mystical' here. This is a different mysticism from the High Church experience we are familiar with. Eveline's mysticism, like Jack's, was more subtle and quotidian, an everyday observation of God's personal influence in her life and of His special relationship and covenant with her. Eveline was a devout child in a loving household, with respected parents and a missioning

Uncle George. Some of these traits Clemo believed he inherited, and the importance of bloodlines and hereditary characteristics becomes a key feature of Clemo's sense of identity and place in the world as he nurtured his compulsion for patterns. In *Confession,* he quotes a Michigan obituary praising Bullen for his 'Celtic temperament' and theological mind, his 'exquisite sensitiveness', 'shyness' and his 'strong and subtle intellect':

> Some of these qualities I inherited, with a similar endowment from the Hocking family, and had not the Clemos been such a rough lot I should probably have become a clever man of the conventional sort, perhaps a writer of genial stories like the Hockings'; I might even have entered the ministry. (*CoaR* 8)

The Hockings were popular novelists of their day, and they were distantly related to the Clemos. There were three Hockings who wrote, two brothers and a sister, though Clemo refers only to the brothers Joseph and Silas. Clemo's inheritance from them is mentioned both in *Confession* and in his short essay 'The Hocking Brothers', published in Denys Val Baker's *Cornish Review*. In the autobiography, it is 'the romantic narrative talent I had derived from the Hockings' (*CoaR* 102), and in the *Cornish Review*, their kinship proposes 'the probable derivation of my talent' ('Hocking' 53).

Clemo claims in *Confession* that he did not read much by the Hockings, and in the diaries he records having read just one book, Silas's autobiography *My Book of Memory*, which was damned 'shallow, disconnected stuff', a 'mere string of anecdotes and stories about the famous people he met' (P74). He called them 'fashionable' and 'naïve' superficial writers ('Hocking' 54) and was

so passionately critical of them in an early draft of *Confession of a Rebel* that Cecil Day Lewis had to tone it down for fear of libel (P7). So Clemo is not arguing that he received his talent from reading their work, but that something was passed on as though through the blood.

The Hockings were first cousins twice removed. Put another way, Jack's father's mother's mother's father was also Silas, Joseph and Salome Hocking's father's father. They shared 3.125% DNA. Yet the blood of those cousins, carrying their narrative talent, was somehow passed through to Clemo, presumably from the common ancestors, Thomas Hocking and Mary Parkin. The logical fallacy of Clemo's belief here is an important one, because the 'blood' claim is an irrational pattern-seeking behaviour or apophenia that will be seen throughout his life, in his relationships with women and with other writers, and in his interpretation of the world and God.

The reason for Clemo's concern for bloodlines and inheritance is the most important narrative detail of his life story, and relates to his father Reggie and to Clemo's disabilities. That detail is syphilis. Eveline would live with and care for Jack until her death, when he was sixty-one. She made a promise to him not to die before she saw him married; a promise she kept against the odds. Her devotion was assiduous and dogged. Reggie's significance was equally but very differently vital, and although he died when Jack was an infant, the inheritance he passed to his son is the most immediately recognisable feature of Clemo's life.

Reggie was born on 5 November 1890 at High Street, a mile south of Foxhole, but the family settled on Trethosa Downs, bordering the Polmounter farm at Goonvean. Clemo described their cottage on the Downs as

> one of a block of three squalid dwellings almost encircled by the towering white rubble from Trethosa clay-pit. Outside the garden wall was a railway siding flanked by a long line of drying-kilns with their grim stone pillars, wooden awnings and corrugated-iron roofs. The air was foul with clay-dust and the grime of coal trucks coming in from Cardiff. (*MoaR* 94-95)

Reggie was one of eight children, all of whom survived: Anne, Ellen, Lucy, Hettie, John, Fanny, Reggie and Horatio. Horatio alone is presented generously by Clemo, 'the single wholesome exception in a family of raw pagans' (*MoaR* 95). He was an excellent singer who taught Jack music in the 1920s. Of the other siblings, 'few of them turned out well'. One 'became a nymphomaniac in her teens and was removed to Bodmin asylum', while another 'drifted to London and had a son by a German lover' (*CoaR II* 2). Their mother, Esther (née Trudgian), was 'a tall, vigorous old woman, scornful of men, cynical in her view of marriage' with a 'sharp, almost witchlike face' (*CoaR* 39-40). She was a 'shrivelled, rasping old grandmother' (*MoaR* 95), on whom Clemo would base the brothel madam Sal in *Wilding Graft* (P193). Similarly, her husband John Clemo was 'a drunken lout from the Mitchell area', a cruel, abusive man, ferocious with his wife and children:

> I had heard a little of those nights when John Clemo, returning from St Stephen's pub in drunken fury, would drive his wife and children outdoors and on to the sand-dump, where they often remained till morning. (*CoaR* 1-2)

John, Clemo's grandfather, is the template for Zachary Kruse, the father of the hero Joel in *The Clay Kiln*. Joel, then, is a fusion of Clemo's father and himself, and is said to have

> hidden from his father, waiting with childish, impotent rage as he watched Zachary stagger past, shouting, peering into the empty wagons, pushing open the unlocked doors of the cuddies […]. Sometimes Joel had been caught and thrown upon the sand and beaten or had been forced to stay for hours, late into the night cowering upon a ledge along the side of the chasm. (14)

There is a sense that Jack comes to terms with his family history quite late in life, and his treatment of the Clemos is one way of gauging this. In the 1949 *Confession*, for example, he dismissed his name on the first page: 'The name Clemo […] is, I believe, rarely found outside the Duchy, though I am not curious enough about etymology to know anything of its derivations. I have never bothered to trace the family further back than my grandfather' (*CoaR* 1). He adds that since he has turned away from his 'natural fate' in favour of his 'Divine predestination', any 'atavistic tendencies' would have been chipped off. This allows Clemo the belief that only the inherited tendencies that are of benefit to God and to Clemo's divine destiny remained in him. In other words, it is the good blood of both families that flowed through Jack. In *The Marriage of a Rebel* thirty years later, Clemo observed the paradox in this sentiment and went back further in his history to find out more about his blood:

> The Cornish Clemos are descendants of a French family called Clement who escaped from France to Cornwall soon after the massacre of St Bartholomew's Day in 1572. The young male Clements married Cornish girls […]. The French are supposed to be clear, logical thinkers and they are supposed to understand sex. The Celts are alleged to be primitive, full of wild mystical intuitions, so that they become melancholy dreamers when their more ferocious tendencies are not being provoked. I possess the characteristics of both groups. (94)

Clemo is better at ease talking about the past in *Marriage*. The storm and stress of his hope and despair have been soothed by belief in a promise kept and by his resignation to this 'inheritance'.

It may be seen in this passage that Clemo had a tendency to simplify and polarise people and facts. He did this with his parents from an early age. On the one hand there are the dark and sordid Clemos, and on the other the devout and loving Polmounters. Exaggerating qualities in this way might be a useful trait for a novelist, a recognition and development of clear tensions, but it is also a simplification of the world, a tidying-up of messy issues, and should be considered an aspect of Clemo's apophenic impulse. The tendency to perceive events in terms of polarities is inherent in the devil-versus-Christ construct and in good-versus-evil, and it is also in the Nature-Divinity polarity of the early clay poems and in the novel *The Shadowed Bed*.

In his prenatal autobiography, Clemo is seeing a pattern which makes not only spiritual but scientific claims. Attributing specific talents and inclinations to distant cousins or a vaguely assumed Gallic ancestry, he is expressing the

belief that concepts and behaviours pass in an almost fully schematised way from one member of the family to another. The example of the two families, the Clemos and the Polmounters, of which Jack is the composite, is a good one. Clemo is hard on his father's side, impressing on the reader that his own nature embodies a primal conflict between their bad pagan depravity and the good simple Christianity of the Polmounters. This he saw as the conflict of his character, the blend of deviant and Christian blood warring in his veins. Clemo is a battlefield.

The importance of blood and heredity has at least three central sources. First is the Bible, in which God visits 'the iniquity of the fathers upon the children' (Exodus 34:7) and will not allow a 'bastard', 'Ammonite or Moabite', 'into the congregation of the Lord; even to their tenth generation' (Deut. 23:2-3). It is also implicit in dozens of references to 'sons' throughout the Bible, and most obviously in punishment of original sin. Secondly, Methodist hymns use the word 'blood' prominently (*Methodist Hymn-Book*). Clemo grew up with these and played them at home (along with the hymns of Ira Sankey, preferred by a preacher central to Clemo's theology, Charles Spurgeon) on their little pump organ, so their wild and thunderous tone was intimately known by Clemo and his family, and in later years when deaf and blind he would still sing those old tunes to himself in his head. Thirdly, Clemo's personal condition – his syphilitic inheritance – led him to analyse its cause, which he will have seen perfectly paralleled in the Exodus quotation of the 'iniquity of the fathers'. Clemo alludes to the inheritance in his poetry, often pointing towards America, though never explicitly stating his meaning:

> I heard the rock blasted the day I was born,
> But the ignition, the rocking fervours that flayed
> My Cornish harvest – for these

> You must search the bleared West, its forensic night:
> Prairies and headstocks, reeling streets.

In this unpublished poem of 1961, entitled ‘Inheritance’, Clemo is writing about where his real roots – ‘The clues to a life so torn’ – might be discovered:

> Cornwall cannot speak alone
> For this poet she calls her son.
> Manhattan has marked me too. Anaconda
> Farther back. (P91)

A. L. Rowse, a contemporary of Clemo’s from the same region, writes in his autobiography: ‘There was no money for anybody of the working class to travel […] unless it were abroad to America, from which it was expected that you came home “made”’ (Rowse 9-10). Eveline Clemo also writes of the expectation that her fiancé, Reggie, would come home a wealthier man, explaining that ‘we decided [Reggie] should go to America for a few years, as wages were much higher in the States than in the clay industry, then he would return home and our youthful dreams would become a reality’ (*IPT* 6). Reggie was embarking on his *wanderjahr*, heading for the Wild West of wealthy gold, silver and copper mines, for adventure and fortune.

There is a slightly surprising element to Reggie’s decision to leave at the beginning of 1909. Eveline Clemo wrote that she fell in love with Reggie ‘at the early age of fifteen’ (*IPT* 5). She would have turned fifteen in January 1909. So, at most, they could only have been in love for a few weeks before ‘we’ decided that Reggie should disappear alone for a number of years. It is not the usual behaviour of newly besotted lovers. Clemo states it differently, and somewhat more plausibly, in *Confession of a Rebel*, implying that Reggie wanted to escape the squalor of home for the promise of glamour and adventure in America.

On 17 March 1909, Reggie left Southampton aboard The White Star's *Adriatic*, landing in New York just over a week later. From New York, or so he writes in the ship's register, he intended to go on to Michigan (New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957). It was quite common for miners working at Michigan to move west to Montana, where the lively immigrant communities were gathering in Butte, and by 1910 Reggie can be found living with his older brother John and his sister Fanny at 413 West Boardman Street. Fanny had travelled out to join them on 9 October 1909, aboard the St Louis, and on the passenger list she wrote that she was heading straight for Butte. John Clemo, who had already been in America for five years, was working at Mountain View Mine, known as 'Saffron Bun' for the number of Cornish working it, and Reggie was probably working alongside him.

Boardman Street was a colourful area of Centerville, which itself was an immigrant community of mostly Cornish and Irish miners. Indeed, the whole of Butte developed around the mines, originally gold and silver before the growing demand for electricity increased the need and the price of copper. Centerville was close enough to the copper mines for the miners to walk to work, with Mountain View out to the South. But the Clemo household was also just ten minutes' walk from an enormous bustling red light district covering many blocks and targeting the swollen population of miners, mostly single men a long way from home. A few years before Reggie arrived, the brothels sprawled over the streets of Mercury, Park, Main and Arizona. By 1909 the area was being 'cleaned up' and the wooden shack 'cribs' made way for new brick buildings. Trade hardly suffered, and the business behind the sturdy brick walls remained the same. Of particular note was 'Venus Alley', the red-paved shadowy lane between Mercury and Galena. As well as this, along East Mercury, with several

doors opening onto Venus Alley, was a brothel now renowned as 'America's longest running house of ill repute', the Dumas, active from 1890 until 1982 (Dumas).

'He was an extrovert,' Eveline wrote of her husband, 'loving the world and the gaiety of life' (*IPT* 6). Jack put it differently: 'He went to America and was there betrayed by the quality of his ideals' (*CoaR* 3). In Sally Magnusson's book the story becomes even more explicit: 'he seems to have found it hard to resist the frontier spirit, where the work was hard but the drinks and the girls were easy' (Magnusson 14).

Reggie returned to Cornwall in 1911, but did not stay long and left Southampton for New York a second time on 27 July aboard the *Majestic*.[2] By now, Reggie and Eveline were engaged, Reggie having sent an engagement ring 'just after her sixteenth birthday', in 1910 (Magnusson 14). The ring has survived, a showy gold piece with six rose-cut rubies flanking a row of five small pearls, and appears to have been resized at some stage. Reggie also sent photographs of himself, about which Jack wrote:

> In the many studio portraits of himself which he gave my mother, his clothes are fashionable, the shirt-cuffs, bow tie and hat being arranged with the meticulous care of a young dandy who wants to be admired or flattered. This trait of swagger was probably a reaction against the squalid slovenliness of his home. (*CoaR* 3)

He returned home late in 1912 to bury his father. He reignited his relationship with young Eveline very quickly and she became pregnant around February

[2] There is a photograph of him aboard the Majestic (P147), though it is mistakenly dated 1909.

1913 so that their marriage had to be rushed.[3] Neither Jack nor Eveline tells this full story, but each gives a different half of it. In *Confession*, Clemo writes: 'On July 5th, 1913, the pair were married at St Austell. Within a year their first child was born' (*CoaR* 14). In Eveline's book, we learn that 'on the 26th November, our first child was born – a little girl – she lived only five weeks. This was the first cloud to darken my life' (*IPT* 6). By stating that Eveline and Reggie were married in July, but only remarking that the girl was born 'within a year' of their marriage, Clemo is obfuscating the fact that she was conceived out of wedlock. Similarly, Eveline Clemo only tells that she was married in 1913, without giving the wedding date, though stating that the child arrived in November. Pre-marital sex was clearly disapproved of by both Jack and Eveline.

Reggie and Eveline had only been together for a few weeks of romance in 1909 and for two months at the beginning of 1913 before she was pregnant and they had to hurry their marriage. They hardly knew one another at all. By the time of their wedding day, Reggie had started back at Trethosa clayworks. In fact, he returned just in time to take part in the infamous strikes of 1913. Demands were being made for better pay, a working day shortened to eight hours, with longer lunch breaks and wages every fortnight instead of monthly. The strikes led to violence, with strikers attacking both the police and their neighbours. The house of a shift boss was dynamited at Nanpean, and a local policeman was shot. A brutal force was brought down from Bristol and Glamorgan constabularies, which had experience of striking miners, although by this time the loss of wages had caused many to sell their belongings and

[3] A relative of Eveline's, Maria Willcox, told me that most marriages came about this way, though it was a surprise to her that it had happened to Eveline. Mrs Clemo was such a religiously moral woman that this fact is considered most unlikely and a great deviance from how she came to be considered in the community.

others to doubt the purpose of their action. In October the same year the workers returned to the pits and Reggie, briefly, to the dry.

The couple were living at the time with Eveline's parents, John and Jane Polmounter, at Goonvean Farm. The farm was a religious household, where Eveline says she 'first saw the reality of Christian love and principles put into everyday living' (*IPT* 4). Her mother had always been deeply religious, and her father was now a preacher, speaking at the local chapels, although he had not been a Christian when they married. Stephen Lane plausibly suggests that it was a part of Eveline's hopes of marrying Reggie that she would be able to convert him from his lack of faith in the same way that her mother had converted John Polmounter (Lane 11). Clemo writes that 'within a few months of her marriage John was kneeling beside her' in prayer: 'He had been broken down by the sight of Jane kneeling twice a day at his bedside, calling on God to have mercy on him' (*CoaR* 9). This would not work for Eveline, and her kind idealism caused her to suffer. Speaking much later with her son, when Jack had told her how 'wonderful is the blood of the two' parents in him for their combination of sensuality and spirituality, Eveline replied with stoic reflection: 'Then – if that was necessary – I didn't make a mistake in marrying your father' (P71).

When John Polmounter was ill and unable to rise, his son-in-law Reggie helped at the farm. How often this happened is difficult to say, though it cannot have been frequent since Reggie did not remain there a year. Surprisingly, even though Eveline's parents worried about her marrying Reggie, he and Polmounter appear to have got along. It was John's encouragement of Reggie to stick up for himself against the farm's volatile resident eccentric, Richard Best, nicknamed 'Master', that caused one of very few fond moments shown by

Jack in his imagining of his father. When Reggie moved in, Best was in his mid-seventies, ‘a semi-lunatic […] with no taste for women’ (*CoaR* 11). He had been born on the farm, and when Polmounter inherited it, Best refused to leave so was kept on as a farmhand. He is described as a ‘grotesque’ figure, filthy and malicious, although occasionally helpful. Best did not like Reggie even before he was living at the farm, and Clemo tells that on those mornings when Reggie helped out, Best would sabotage him:

> At first Reginald let him have his way, but John told him he ‘mus’n give in to Maaster’ […]. Thereafter Reginald stood firm; and the picture of those two – the old, half-crazed man and the young dare-devil – bickering childishly over the sacks of grain amid the morning shadows of Goonvean barn, has a touch of fantastic comedy about it. (*CoaR* 12)

Jack also recounts a story from the same period, when his father agreed to shoot an old farm dog, leading it out to the field with a gun. ‘He returned to the house, looking shame-faced, the dog trotting at his heels’ (*CoaR* 17). This inability to ‘kill a dog in cold blood’ is evidence of ‘a weak, vacillating character’ to Clemo, who adds that in spite of his unwillingness to kill an animal, ‘he could have killed his best friend in hot blood.’

All of this was happening in the wake of the tragedy of their daughter’s death, but instead of having time to mourn and adjust, Eveline’s history of suffering was just beginning. Seven months after her child died – a year into their marriage – war started, and Reggie had no intention of joining it. To avoid conscription he found work at the Royal Arsenal munitions factory in Woolwich

and left his new wife behind at the farm with her parents. ‘This was not an easy parting’, writes Eveline Clemo, ‘coming so quickly after the loss of our baby.’ Reggie only rarely came home.

There is a remarkable silence about Reggie’s time in London, although he was there longer than he was with his wife. The Royal Arsenal records were not kept and neither Eveline nor Jack writes about it. He was there for at least a year, probably two. Eveline tells the story as though he remained in London until ‘the end of 1916’ (*IPT* 8), though Jack says that after only ‘a year at Woolwich Arsenal’ he was ‘transferred to Devonport Dockyard’, where ‘he led an exemplary moral life’ (*CoaR* 18). The arsenal’s records have not survived, but on other occasions when the accounts of mother and son conflict, it is usually Eveline who proves more reliable.

At any rate, on one of her husband’s infrequent visits in June 1915, Eveline got pregnant a second time. Her hardships were now gathering pace, and a few months into her pregnancy, her father died. The farm changed hands and the rest of the family were forced to move. Richard Best remained, but the pregnant Eveline and her absent husband Reggie, her disabled sister Bertha, and their elderly mother Jane, moved from Goonvean Farm to a two-bedroomed clayworkers cottage on Goonamarris Slip, at a corner known as Vinegar Point, owned by Goonvean and Rostowrack China Clay Company. The cottage, with its identical attached neighbour, stood alone on the slip in the shadow of the clay dumps:

> When I looked out of the back bedroom window I could see nothing beyond our garden hedge but the grim smoke-belching stacks around Goonvean pit-head and the mountainous heaps of

> white rubble thrown up from Bloomdale, Goonvean and Trethosa pits. When I looked out of the front bedroom window I could see nothing but the fields of Goonamarris farm slanting steeply down to a coppice, the more wild and rugged gorge of Tregargus carrying the stream between thicker belts of woodland to the south-west, and southward the green dome of Foxhole Beacon topping a broad flank of heath. (*MoaR* 21)

A white gate opened onto the road, and a granite path led up to the solid wooden front door. Inside, the cottage was dark, each of the four rooms having a single window. Downstairs and overlooking fields was the front room, which would hold a settee, a pump organ on which Eveline would give lessons, and later a small writing bureau by the window. There was a fireplace for heating, and beneath the stairs was the spense, a close space used for washing, and later used as a dark room for developing Eveline's photographs. Beyond this was the kitchen with an old Cornish cloam oven, which, said Eveline in a 1976 interview, gave pasties 'a different flavour from what we have on our electric cookers' (*Pause for Thought*). To avoid wasting milk, she made clotted cream, which was added to most meals (Brown). The staircase was darker still, leading up to the two bedrooms, one to the front and one to the back, where husband, wife, sister, mother and the soon-due child would all sleep.

Outside, looming over the cottage, was the Bloomdale sand burrow, 'a long curving dump which frequently, in rainy weather, spilled over into the lane outside our garden' (*MoaR* 22). The spilling sand was a constant reminder that nothing in this landscape was permanent, and it is an image to which Clemo returned in his dialect tales and again in the 1951 short story, 'The Clay Dump'.

In time, Goonvean Farm would be devoured by the works, the lanes would close, the burrows would swell, the pits would be expanded or flooded, and the cottage too would disappear.

Yet this was the sole time that Eveline would move house. The rest of her life's sufferings were all enacted within those four unyielding granite walls. And this was Jack's birthplace, the place where he wrote all his novels, stories, dialect tales, his autobiographies, theological works and most of his poetry, and where he spent his first sixty-eight years, in the tight hard rooms, playing in the garden, wandering on the dumps and clay paths, alone except for his dog and his Bible.

II

‘put forth thine hand’

> Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord.
>
> (Isa. 54.1)

‘It was a fitting birthplace for me,’ Jack wrote, ‘being dwarfed under Bloomdale clay-dump, solitary, grim-looking, with no drainage, no water or electricity supply, and no back door’ (*CoaR* 15). In her own, more ceremonious, account of Jack’s birth, written in the mid-1970s, Eveline Clemo announces his arrival with a heightened phrasing that lends a prophetic tone: ‘On March 11th, 1916, our second child was born, a little boy who was to become the Cornish writer and poet, Jack Clemo’ (*IPT* 7). The phrasing was partly because she was Jack’s mother and loved him, but also there is the hyperbole of one who has little or no experience outside of her own local industrial landscape and culture. Both reasons are important. The latter is a trait which mother and son share; it is everywhere in Jack’s diaries and evident in the melodrama of his earliest novelistic attempts. But the former, being Eveline’s commitment to her child, and her faith in him, is considerably more impressive in the circumstances. Already she has lost a baby, a parent and a home in fairly swift succession. She has gained a husband who shows little desire to be with her, and she has effectively become the head of a household comprising her ageing mother and

disabled sister, while she herself nurses her newborn boy. Yet, still, this was only the beginning of the suffering that would lead her to the brink of despair.

After the horror of her daughter's death from congenital syphilis there was anxiety for the boy christened Reginald John Clemo, and terrific relief when he appeared healthy. In the 1980 BBC dramatization of Clemo's life, *A Different Drummer*, Reggie is depicted as being present at Jack's birth, rushing in to inspect the child. In *Confession*, Jack adds to the scene: 'My father is said to have been satisfied with me' (17). The family were close to finding an unhappy kind of stability, though within months even this was threatened.

The war caught up with Reggie and he was called into the Navy. Jack says this was in early 1917, though Eveline dates it as late 1916 and is correct, the military records showing that Reggie was engaged at Plymouth on the training base HMS Vivid II from 1 December. The records also describe Reggie as 5'6", of sallow complexion with brown eyes and black hair, of very good character but only satisfactory ability (P189). Eveline did not want Reggie to leave for war and prayed for it to end before he was deployed. Meanwhile, Reggie's 'daredevil spirit' was expressing itself in a way that suggested he too was now eager to be at home, in 'one of the few incidents in my father's life that make me feel proud of him':

> At week-ends the dockyard workers were allowed to visit friends and relatives who lived within ten miles of the port; longer journeys were strictly forbidden. The ten-mile limit enabled my father to cross the Tamar and proceed as far as St Germans, where it was supposed he stayed. But, unknown to the dockyard officials, he always borrowed a bicycle there and rode thirty miles westwards

> through Cornwall to Goonamarris. He would arrive home on the Saturday night and return the next day to report, quite truly, that he had been to St Germans! (*CoaR* 18-19)

In this account, Clemo believes that his father had been transferred from the Woolwich munitions factory to work at Devonport Dockyard and it was from this job that he cycled back to Goonamarris. Eveline's version of Reggie's weekend visits has him cycling from the naval barracks as a serving recruit in training, rather than a dockyard worker:

> At the end of 1916, my husband was called from the munition factory to serve in the Navy and he remained at the Royal Naval Barracks at Devonport until October 1917, often daring enough to break the rules of the Barracks not to travel over ten miles unless permission was given. (*IPT* 8)

On 30 October 1917, Reggie was called to action, to serve on HMS Tornado, one of the new R class destroyers built for the Great War. Reggie would be one of many second class stokers, the lowest rank, who would be shovelling coal in the three boilers below. On a winter night not quite two months later, on 22 December, HMS Tornado was on escort duty with a group of other destroyers in the thick fog of the North Sea. They were near the Maas lightship at the mouth of the river running through Rotterdam when flotilla leader HMS Valkyrie hit a mine. The Valkyrie survived, but a few hours later another destroyer, HMS Torrent, was also hit. HMS Surprise went to help the sinking Torrent, but was also struck. With Torrent and Surprise going down quickly, Tornado tried to get

clear, but it, too, was hit. Two hundred and fifty two men were killed, and in the bowels of the ship Reggie had no hope. He would have either drowned or been boiled alive.[4]

The ship sank in the dark early morning of the 23rd and the telegram arrived at Goonamarris on the 27th, two days after Christmas. Again, Eveline proves herself the more reliable narrator, as Jack mistakes the whole event. By his account, Reggie was at sea in the summer, rather than late October; his ship was torpedoed rather than mined; and the telegram arrived on Christmas Day rather than two days after. Maybe Jack remembered the stories he had been told in an exaggerated way, or perhaps these were the additions of the novelist, making the account more exciting.

Reggie's tale is not told with sadness in *Confession*, and Clemo offers a jocular addendum:

> Some years later a brother of [Reggie's], a spiritualist, attended a séance in America at which, he declared, my father's spirit materialized […]. According to this spiritualist account Reginald was not drowned but had his limbs blown off by the explosion and died instantly. I do not give much credence to the statement, because my uncle was not the kind of man to whom spirits are likely to tell the truth. (CoaR 19)

A funeral card from Reggie's service has survived in their family papers, reading 'In loving Memory of Reginald, The Dearly-beloved Husband of Eveline Clemo

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[4] In the original handwritten manuscript of Charles Causley's introduction to Clemo's volume of poetry *The Map of Clay*, Causley included a detail about the sinking of the Tornado: '"They were torpedoed bringing back butter or margarine," Mrs Clemo told me' (C2).

and dear Father of Reginald John Clemo, Who lost his life on H.M.S. Tornado, Dec 23rd, 1917, Aged 27 years' (P189). The irony of these platitudes would have been well known by the villagers who turned out for the funeral, but always Eveline remained loyal to him and regretful of their tragic history, arranging for her gravestone to read:

In Loving Memory

of

Eveline Clemo

Who died at Goonamarris

4 June 1977 Aged 83

And her Beloved Husband Reginald Clemo

Who died at sea

23 Dec 1917 Aged 27

Heavenly Love Abiding

In 1918, Eveline had to learn to cope without even the rough security of a bad marriage. Jack reported that after suffering the 'first shock and prostration' of mourning, his mother 'yielded everything' to Christ, surrendering herself to 'His purpose', whatever it might be. She gave up

> her hope of remarriage, with all the pleasures and social contacts that make life bearable to the average woman. She renounced every human narcotic, choosing to suffer an unmitigated spiritual stress so that its creative power might have free access to my personality. (*CoaR* 20)

There is some ambiguity in these words. The phrase is written as though there is only one aim in this renunciation, but Clemo gives two. The first is ‘co-operating’ with Christ’s purpose, but the second is for the ‘creative power’ to have access to Jack’s ‘personality’. The assumption is that God’s sole purpose for Eveline is to raise Clemo.

Perhaps the death of Eveline’s own mother in 1919, as Eveline was yet recovering from the death of her husband, was also a divine facilitation of her servitude. Jane Polmounter was bedridden and ‘suffering from complete loss of memory’ (*CoaR* 23). By the time of her death Eveline was exhausted and overwhelmed. Jack writes that she was ordered to stay in Newquay for recuperation, but ‘within a month’ had witnessed the wrecking of a ship off the Newquay coast. She watched as the lifeboats were launched to rescue it. The sinking ship (possibly the French trawler *Philomene*, which prompted the traditional lifeboat’s final launch, in 1920) vividly recalled her husband’s death, and her misery deepened. Jack and Eveline removed themselves inland again to their little cottage.

At this time, Jack is said to have been ‘a winsome, intelligent and brilliant child’ (*IPT* 8), precocious, able to recite the Lord’s Prayer and nursery rhymes by the age of eighteen months. ‘You’ll never rear him, Mrs Clemo – he’s too good for this world!’ one neighbour told her (*IPT* 7). Others said ‘’E’ll suffer for it’ and ‘’E’s too forward ’e is – no ’ealthy sign, Mrs Clema’ (*CoaR* 22). So eager was Jack to learn, we are told, that he would collect up the greasy scraps of paper thrown out of passing clay trucks, wrapping the workers’ pasties, to find more reading material. Photographs of the infant Jack are few, but those that exist are of a healthy, solid child. There is one in which he appears to have

been photographed with both his father and mother, Reggie in naval uniform and Jack in a white suit. On second glance, however, the infant is too old for Reggie to still be alive, and for some reason the father's hand is transparent. It has been spliced, a fantasy photo imagining what the family might have looked like had Reggie survived the war (P151).

A 1920 photograph shows Jack and his mother in a studio shot, Jack standing on the chair beside her, one arm around her shoulder. He looks perplexed and distant. She is wearing black. It was not the fashion to smile in photographs and exposures were longer, so Eveline's expression is relaxed. Her eyes have fallen gently sad, but her mouth has a curve in the corners as though readying to smile (P147). Soon after this photograph was taken, when they were settling back into the cottage, a new threat emerged. Jack was still four, with a few days before his fifth birthday, when he felt a pain in his eyes. Lamplight or sunlight became unbearable, and Eveline noticed as they sat down to breakfast that a film had formed over his right eye. She took him to the doctor at St Dennis, who said it was iritis and referred them to Truro. Jack was 'prescribed tonic for him to take and drops for his eyes' (*IPT* 9). He had to avoid the light and be kept in a darkened room. If he needed to go out then his eyes must be bandaged. Jack was not completely blind from the iritis, but his vision was severely impaired. Figures were vague and the landscape distorted with white shadow. It was the treatment that blinded him completely, with the bandages and darkened rooms. 'Only this drastic treatment could save me from permanent blindness', he wrote in the early 1940s.

Jack recalls the first trip to hospital, the bus from St Stephen and the smell of the building, then the waiting room with all the other children with eye

problems, ‘some blindfolded, some wearing dark glasses, others celluloid shades: all tense and unnatural’ (*CoaR* 24-25).

This was a devastating period of development for a child to be sick and locked away in the dark. He would never be the same again, and his mother knew it. She saw in the clouding of his eye the same disease that took her daughter, and she fell into a suicidal despair:

> I have never forgotten the stress I went through at this time. It seemed as if all my hopes had been dashed to the ground. I felt I could not face life with a blind child and with no husband to help to carry the burden. My human weakness gave way under the strain. One day, in an agony of spirit, I went to my bedroom and, taking my Bible in my hand, I knelt by my bedside praying to God for light in the darkness. (*IPT* 9)

The world was breaking her, devouring her home and family. With this pain, guilt and fear, this feeling of abject defeat, Eveline reached for her Bible, and it fell open at Isaiah 54:

> Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.
>
> For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.

> For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.
>
> For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. […]
>
> O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.
>
> And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.
>
> And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.

The aptness of the wording – the shame, the abandonment, the children – struck her immediately. This was God talking to her. It was God making a promise, a personal covenant – a bargain even – faith in which was the marrow of the Clemos' hope and remained with them throughout their lives. Always, Eveline would recall this promise, though it was condensed in her memory. When asked in a 1971 television interview to recite the passage from memory, the quotation was muddled together, a mixture of word-perfect accuracy and rearrangement, suggestive of the points most salient to Eveline's condition:

> Fear not, I have called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved, a wife of youth when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forgotten thee, but with great mercies will I gather

> thee. Thy maker is thine husband. Thy children shall be taught of the Lord. (*Peninsula: Focus*)

She has lost her husband, but now God is her husband. ‘For a small moment’ only, she is being forsaken. She is currently suffering from God’s abandonment, but her children will be rewarded in the end. Everything will be all right, God will look after her. The pain will pass, the glory of God return to them, ‘And all thy children shall be taught of the Lord; and great shall be the peace of thy children.’

Eveline’s ‘shame’ was syphilis, which passed from Reggie to Eveline, and from Eveline to her son? When Reggie returned from America in 1912, he did not bring back his fortune. There was no money, no wealth, nothing saved or invested for the future, nothing to give his wife and family except the syphilis he picked up in the brothels of Butte. Congenital syphilis killed their daughter, and now it threatened their son with blindness. Syphilis is intimated in both published and unpublished poems, autobiographies and even in the novels, knowledge of which adds greater texture and tension to Clemo’s sense of inheritance, invasion, the repeated metaphor of leprosy, and of degradation, as well as his fascination with America. His father’s activities in Montana defined him in a profound and inestimable way.

The symptoms shown by both the dead baby and then Jack were classic of congenital syphilis. The girl’s were of ‘early’ congenital syphilis. In Sir William Osler’s *The Principles and Practise of Medicine* many of the variant symptoms expected of a congenital syphilitic are described: ‘The child may be born healthy-looking or with well-marked evidences of the disease. In the majority of instances, the former is the case and within the first month or two the signs of

the disease appear.' Symptoms usually develop from the fourth week, when 'a nasal catarrh occurs, syphilitic rhinitis, which impedes respiration […]. The discharge may be sero-purulent or bloody' (Osler 273). This is strikingly similar to the way in which Maria Willcox described the death. Jack's symptoms, on the other hand, began when he was almost five, which is then known as 'late' stage syphilis. In Morrison and Pollacksay's *Glaucoma: Science and Practise*, problems commonly begin at the age of five. They begin their section on syphilis: 'congenital syphilis can produce anterior uveitis with occasional glaucoma', continuing:

> In congenital syphilis, characteristic interstitial keratitis occurs in about 15% of cases and generally appears between age 5 to 16. Beginning often with unilateral lacrimation, photophobia and pain, the condition usually progresses to bilateral pain, corneal edema, and infiltrates, frequent anterior uveitis, and deep corneal vascularization (salmon patches). The inflammation may last weeks to months. (285)

Interstitial keratitis is an inflammation in the cornea, the main cause of which is syphilis. Put plainly, the symptoms are weeping, painful eyes and sensitivity to light. The bouts of inflammation could last for months initially, but if untreated or misdiagnosed and mistreated, blindness may occur. When the symptoms persist, corneal swelling or swelling of the iris, such as iritis, which is a kind of anterior uveitis, might be expected. Osler continues the story, predicting when the next wave of symptoms will occur:

> Particularly apt to appear about puberty, is the interstitial keratitis, which usually begins as a slight steaminess of the corneae, which present a ground glass appearance. It affects both eyes, though one is attacked before the other. It may persist for months and usually clear completely, though may leave opacities, which prevent clear vision. Iritis and choroiditis may occur. (Osler 275)

At around the age of five, eye troubles may begin, then again around the time of mature dentition or puberty. Worse, ‘Sensorineural deafness, which is often progressive, may appear at any age’ (Caserta), along with legion other symptoms. Jack might develop a saddle nose as the bony parts of it collapse, or notched teeth and pronounced brow and lower jaw, as well as headaches, joint pains and insomnia. The disease would quarry into his face and senses, leaving a landscape of painful white wherever he looked.

Syphilis is never directly referred to in Clemo’s work, and even the later diaries have been edited so that the word is either blacked out with a marker pen or torn out and destroyed, although it is alluded to powerfully throughout.

Eveline’s shame, then, is both religious and humane. ‘Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves’, wrote the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 6.9). In the Old Testament the rule was that if a man ‘entice a maid that is not betrothed, and lie with her, he shall surely endow her to be his wife’ (Exo. 22.16). There was a similar expectation in the villages: when a woman became pregnant the couple were to marry. But the cost of fornication was not only to bind Eveline to a man unsuited; it also bound her to

the shame of knowing that her son's sickness and her daughter's death were given from her own body.

To a secular reader, regardless of their views on marriage, it is difficult to blame Eveline for the infection. It was Reggie's careless whoring that led to his contraction of syphilis, and he passed it on to Eveline. It is not known whether Reggie was aware of the infection, or at what stage a correct diagnosis of either Reggie or Eveline might have been made. At the time of their daughter's death it would have been possible for the couple to have been tested for the 'Wassermann reaction', and to have been treated with Salvarsan, a new arsenic-based drug administered by a laborious course of injections. Neither test nor treatment was reliable, and there is no proof that Reggie or Eveline undertook either. Moreover, Eveline's family had a history of infant mortality, and the couple may have believed that the girl's death was consistent with this. It seems unlikely that Eveline would have risked a second child had she believed herself syphilitic, although her despair and apparent sense of shame when Jack's eye trouble began suggest that by this point she knew of the infection. The most consistent guess would seem to be that a diagnosis was made following the death of her firstborn, and that she and Reggie were then tested and treated. Eveline would have believed that all was well and that her son was healthy. Jack's iritis destroyed this hope, and threatened the only good thing she had left.

The eye trouble lasted nine months, with daily treatments given up at St Dennis surgery that meant Eveline had to wheel her son almost two and a half miles to the village in his old pram.

> Before the blindness came I was a plump, jolly, pink-faced little fellow, very lively, chattering and laughing all day long. Those few months of isolation, with the mental nightmare of inarticulate terrors and panics […] had changed me into a thin, pasty-faced brat, dull-eyed, silent and morbid. (*CoaR* 28)

This is how Jack entered school at six years old, sickly and remote. Initially, he went to Foxhole school, though his attendance lasted only one day. Clemo writes that the headmaster thought he was a dunce and refused to accept him. He would have to attend the school at Trethosa, half a mile due west of the cottage, a 'rather stupid decision', Clemo thought. Trethosa School was a little nearer than Foxhole as the crow flies, but the problem was that between the cottage and the school were the clayworks of Goonvean, which the child would have to walk through by an exposed track:

> The journey to Trethosa School […] led us usually, through Goonvean clay works, around the edge of the enormous unfenced pit, in which blasting was frequently in operation. An alternative course led around the southern end of Trethosa sand-dump, along the gravelly ridges where a false step might send one hurtling into a disused quarry full of slimy green water. (*Cornish Guardian* 19 Nov. 1936)

Predictably, Jack was not suited for school, and *Confession* was intended in part to be a condemnation of contemporaneous schooling, a condemnation also found in his letters to the *Cornish Guardian* through the 1930s. Modern

schooling did not accommodate exceptional children, Clemo thought, but only normal people: the ‘sympathetic nurture of my abilities was impossible in any Council school’ (*CoaR* 30). There appears to have been a tension at school, of which Jack would have characteristically been at the frontier. Education was increasingly secular, with faith expected but liberal, and this was not in harmony with Jack’s upbringing, where faith was primary and primitive.

The child was weak, sickly, under-developed and not especially bright, in spite of his precocious infancy. He was not fit to play sports and physical games with the other children, nor clever enough to stand out in class. His body was at odds, his faith at odds, and for the boy to survive he would have to make a virtue of being at odds. It is remembered as village talk the way in which Jack stood alone in the playground, away from other children, leaning against a wall. He did not join in the play and he did not have friends, so when he walked home he usually went alone across the moor, marsh and quarry. In *Confession*, Clemo writes that in nearby Goonamarris village there were only three other children, all of them girls. And the teachers encouraged his alienation: ‘The headmaster nicknamed me “Jean” because of my supposed effeminacy – a nickname that stuck to me throughout my later schooldays’ (*CoaR* 42). He was in all possible ways a misfit, a fact which paradoxically both crippled and fortified his character, leading him to become more remote, but to see in that remoteness a glory, a pattern, a will, a strength, a confirmation of extraordinariness. In his youth we find the beginnings of the apophenia that becomes more imposing later. In looking to survive overwhelming weaknesses, young Jack instinctively sought to reinterpret them as strengths, resorting more and more to Biblical bases and the design of the ultimate authority. This revaluation of his idiosyncrasies emerges both subtly and crudely. The subtlety

appears more frequently, especially in the tensions between Clemo's personal experience of God's approval and intentions for him, with his Biblical, dogmatic faith. More crudely, we see it in Clemo's rejection of cleanliness when he was sixteen, in response to his mother 'revealing the squalid story of the Clemos and my father's tragic disharmonies' (*CoaR* 90). An 'anti-social bias had been a part of my nature since childhood […]. If I was told that any particular habit was beneath my dignity I would be all the more inclined to practise it.' He broadened his accent and began using dialect words picked up from books:

> Often for days on end I wouldn't wash my face or comb my hair; I refused to bother about shaving […]. I seldom laced my shoes until the afternoon, never troubled to fit my neck with a collar and tie and when my mother fitted these on so that I might be 'presentable' to pay some visit, I would keep them on until the end of the week, wearing them in bed, too lazy to remove them before sleeping. […] I knew now that I had sprung from a family that had produced more than its share of moral degenerates, and only when my habits and appearance conformed to this degradation did I feel at ease, self-contained, not divided. (*CoaR* 92)

This seems to be the same instinct that drove the apparent candour of Clemo's autobiography and caused him to write it as a 'confession'. It is the desire to create a context for his shame, to be punished and absolved, as well as the desire to be bracketed with other confessors. At the same time, this is a clear and typically teenage attempt to understand oneself, although Clemo had too many atypical circumstances to mature normally.

Jack’s profound unordinariness and sickliness led him to avoid school when he could, and he notes that the school only tolerated his common absence from the ‘belief that I could not survive into adolescence’ (*CoaR* 29). This is quite a statement, and bears on the discussion of the disease that ravaged Clemo’s body and prised him from the world. The school apparently knew of his condition, which meant the whole village knew.

Clemo hated school, hated the institutional prescriptive aspect of it, and condemned the nascent decadence and frivolity of his peers. The only part he enjoyed was the brief service in the morning, with its hymns, prayers and Bible study. He found it impossible to keep up with the other children in class, a fact worsened by his absences, and although he enjoyed reading he claims to have had no academic talent at all. In truth, the school does not sound very much to blame for Clemo’s failures, excepting the headmaster’s nicknaming, and *Confession* sneers a little too eagerly at the ‘system’ even when it is supporting him. For example, ‘Miss Sarah’ helped Clemo to win several prizes for his writing, yet he claims: ‘my only clear memory of the period is of Miss Sarah’s habit of snapping out at me during times of quiet study: “Don’t frown so, Clemo!”’ (*CoaR* 30).

His only talent was for writing, his mother proudly recalled:

> I remember the infant teacher telling me how impressed she was with the first composition he wrote and how she took it to the Headmaster, who read it to the upper class saying, ‘I should think you’d be ashamed to write another composition after hearing this one written by a boy of six.’ (*IPT* 12)

Later, Eveline mentioned that this story had been 'about a mouse' (*Pause for Thought*).

In the archives at Wheal Martyn there are two books Jack won at school for his writing: Hall Caine's *The Christian* and Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. (Caine's melodramas would be an important, if detrimental, influence on Clemo's early novel drafts.) Some of these prizes were sponsored by outside groups, such as the book Jack won for an essay on dogs, funded by the National Canine Defence League.

Aside from these few moments, school was a miserable and hostile place where Jack's otherness was exaggerated. He was an only child, rather indulged and sheltered by his mother, without any male role model, and with the legion adversaries of his syphilis and personal tragedy. 'I was apart, left to live my own life; not of their world', he wrote (*CoaR* 29). The full experience was summed up in a short paragraph in an even more distantly retrospective feature for *Cornish Magazine*:

> My formal education consisted of spasmodic attendance at Trethosa Council School between the ages of six and thirteen. The only things I liked at school were the girls and the Bible. I was fascinated by the sentimental feminine appeal, and I loved the scripture lessons, but the prosaic items of the curriculum bored me and I refused to respond to any of my teachers. Even before adolescence I seemed to be one of those who can come alive only under the stimulus of religion and sex. (M. Williams 115)

Both Jack and Eveline recalled the headmaster Mr W. S. Pellymounter with some fondness, and two notable stories are recalled. The first is when Pellymounter asked Jack what he wanted to be when he grew up. 'I replied frankly and unhesitatingly that I meant to be a sky-tip worker' (*CoaR* 36). The second story is from a 'Parents' Day' at the school, in what would be Jack's last year. It is detailed with pride by both Eveline and Jack, as a moment when the headmaster was saying something positive about the boy: 'Mrs. Clemo, your son is a born philosopher', Pellymounter told her, to which Clemo commentated: 'I suppose that in some sense he was right' (*CoaR* 37).

It has to be acknowledged that Clemo had an agenda when he recorded this in *Confession of a Rebel*. The agenda is the least appealing aspect in all of his work and is essentially self-serving. He derogates the school system as he derogates the villagers, other writers who have not helped him enough, old girlfriends and family members. He is showing how much better and more exciting he is than other people; how much more talented and nearer to God. He made attempts to give the work an evangelical purpose, too, but the overall effect is not very satisfying. In the short chapter on school, it is not only schooling itself that is sneered at, but individuals. There is even some contempt in that phrase, 'I suppose that in some sense he was right.' And there is more than a little arrogance in his disbelief when it was suggested that he ought to do some homework, as though 'Homework, with special attention to arithmetic, would help the mind that was to make a synthesis of Calvinist dogma and sex mysticism!' (*CoaR* 32). Disappointingly, at the root of this is simply the revolt of an indulged only child. His criticism of the syllabus was equally solipsistic: 'My taste and temperament were never consulted'.

Covering the 1920s and Jack's period of schooling, the only sustained account we have comes from *Confession*, so we rely unsatisfactorily on this occasionally biased and unpredictable narrative for the majority of his first fourteen years, and to a lesser extent his first twenty years. Having said this, there are many surviving photographs to consider. Jack's mother was ever ready with her camera on family visits, special occasions and trips to the seaside. The importance of the photographic evidence is easily demonstrated by a photograph of Jack's father. Both in *Confession* and in magazine articles Clemo wrote about his father being a cowboy working on a ranch in Montana, which he apparently did while still at the Butte mines, and how 'I still like to think of my father as a cowboy rather than a clay-worker' ('Jack Clemo States His Case' 8). He says that they own a photograph of Reggie with a revolver working on a ranch. This photograph has survived in an early album, and is labelled 'Reg on a ranch near Butte: 1911 (with revolver).' But the photo is not what Clemo claims; it is a studio shot, a fake, and the 'ranch' is a prop, a backboard painted to resemble a log cabin with 'Ranch No 1' written on. The gun, too, is a prop, the finishing touch to the elaborate cowboy outfits both Reggie and his friend are posing in, with woolly chaps and lassos (P147).

There are several school photos in the albums, the earliest being from 1922, in which all the children are looking soberly at the camera, except, that is, for Jack, who is looking off somewhere to the left of the photographer and grinning mischievously. There are others of him in later years, including a group photo from Miss Sarah's class, but mostly the pictures are taken on daytrips to the beach, at Porthpean, Portholland, Sennen Cove, Porth, St Ives or Land's End, or near the cottage with his Pomeranian dog Gyp, in all of which Jack contrarily appears as a flourishing outdoorsy type of boy, with a carefree slouch

accentuated by posing with his hands buried deep in his pockets, wearing a flat cap and baggy slacks. Physically Jack is skinny, though not exceptionally so, and no more so than several other children in the school. When he is not wearing a cap, his dark hair is parted roughly to the side. It is quickly apparent that in all these photographs there is little evidence of friends. There is one boy who appears unlabelled in the pictures, and the pair seem close, photographed on the beach or reclining together, either a relative or otherwise the boy mentioned in *Confession,* named Brian, who was 'one of my fellow-actors in the negro sketch' they performed (45). Of the few other children living nearby at this time, Jack recalls kissing a village girl 'behind gorse bushes on the Slip'. Apparently these children all moved away by the time Jack was seven.

The photos do not give the impression of a 'pasty-faced brat', as Clemo described himself, and the only feature at all suggestive of his condition is his walleye. Jack's right eye – the one that Eveline had observed covered with a white film – is turned outwards and slightly up, which does not appear to have been the case before the first bout of eye trouble. In most of them Eveline is present, either in the picture itself or behind the camera. She and her son, now as ever, are inseparable. Indeed, June 1942 was 'the first time in my life that I've been separated from her' (P72), and this due to a serious illness, when Eveline was admitted to Devonport Hospital for an operation. Jack was twenty-six at the time.

An equally pervasive presence throughout these years is Aunt Bertha, though she is scarcely mentioned in the books. For some years, when evacuee and foster-children were brought to the cottage, the three adults – Jack, Eveline and Bertha – shared the large front bedroom. Bertha was Eveline's older sister, born in 1891, and she had moved with Eveline and their mother into the

cottage, where she lived the rest of her life. Yet Jack mentions his dog more frequently and with more tenderness than he speaks of her. From the autobiographies it might be imagined that Bertha was almost always absent from the cottage. She was a ghost in the household, an insubstantial figure, unobserved, discounted, except in the photographic record. Here Bertha is shown to be present at all the events she was omitted from in *Confession*, on holidays and daytrips, picnics and walks, with Eveline and Jack and myriad cousins. She had a great shock of wisping black and grey hair that grew up and outwards in curls, adding five or six inches to her height. She was extraordinarily small, at around four feet, so these few added inches were exaggerated. In the photos she is shown to have had a broad neck, heavy, square face and thick round glasses. Her figure varied considerably, though most often she appears to have beens stout, with her shoulders rounded forwards. She was born prematurely, according to Clemo,

> because a workman was killed at Goonvean clay-pit at the end of August 1891. Another labourer had come banging on the door of Goonvean farmhouse and panted out the ghastly news. My grandmother, Jane Polmounter, who was expecting a child in the late autumn, was so upset that she was soon in premature labour. (*MoaR* 39-40)

She was a tiny baby, and as an adult 'used to tell people with evident pride: "When I wiz born they could put me in a milk-joog"' (*MoaR* 40). Grace Gribble of St Stephen recalls Bertha, Eveline and Jack visiting the house, and Bertha enjoying joking about an aircraft during the war that 'flew so low it nearly

touched my head!' She would also collect money for charities. This is remembered by many villagers, as well as in the Trethosa Chapel 'Statement of Accounts' for the Sunday School. (Several books of accounts and minutes of meetings were held at Trethosa Chapel, where I viewed them 15 July 2013, but since its closure their presence is unknown. The current information came from a book marked 'Statement of Accounts Trethosa Bible Christian Sunday School Jan 1905 – Dec 1998.') Year after year, Bertha's collection and donation to the Sunday School is entered. There appears to have been competitiveness between Bertha and a 'Miss Harris', another collector who performed marginally better than Bertha by around sixpence every year after the First World War. In 1925, Bertha reached a low. On top of the frustrating annual loss to Miss Harris, this year Mrs Keast joined the list and thrashed them both by a whopping £4. Determined never to suffer this ignominy again, the following two years suggest a fresh resolve, and for 1926 and 1927 Bertha is on record as the chief charity collector at the Chapel. Reading through year after year of these records, it is hard not to share in her triumph.

Bertha was not a healthy individual, either. As well as her stunted size and short-sightedness, she was also diabetic, had learning disabilities and heart troubles. Yet Clemo shows little sympathy. In *Confession* she is ignored, in the diaries she is mocked, and in *Marriage* she is pitied. Her death was written about churlishly, and Clemo did not attend the funeral, preferring to sit with the foster-girls Frances and Violet at a neighbour's house. Even the death itself was uninteresting to him. In the 1949 diary Clemo marks it: 'Bertha is really ill, obviously dying – and no word from E.' (P79). The illness is a matter of immediate inescapable fact, but the problem of his prospective girlfriend 'E.' (Eileen Funston) not replying to his letter was the real concern. And he was

correct: Bertha *was* dying. She died the following morning, but again Clemo does not show any emotion aside from irritation that the house was full of other people, ‘shadowy figures’, as he puts it (P79). When Eveline had married, Bertha had attended; when her first daughter was born, she was at the farm; when their father John Polmounter had died, Bertha was there; at the birth of Jack, she was present; at the death of Reggie they were all at the cottage; when the mother, Jane, died, Bertha was again there. But she is not mentioned, her feelings are unrecorded, her concerns are not Jack’s.

Eveline’s appearance in the photograph albums, on the other hand, is appropriate to her presence in Clemo’s life and writing. She appears on every page of the diaries, at length in the autobiographies, and later, when Jack was blind and deaf, Eveline was the filter through which the world was forced to pass, communicating with her son by spelling out words in capital letters on the palm of his hand with her index finger. She describes herself as ‘introvert, sensitive, meditative, mystical and somewhat solitary’ (*IPT* 6). Clemo describes her as ‘superior in character and taste to her three sisters’ and theologically ‘not without talent’ (*CoaR* 6). Physically, he describes her as ‘dark, tight-lipped, with her sad, probing black eyes’ (*CoaR* 26). In *The Marriage of a Rebel* this description of her eyes is repeated: ‘her large black eyes probed’ through ‘horn-rimmed spectacles’ (*MoaR* 11). Clemo cannot talk of his mother’s eyes without noting their penetrative black gaze. The quality of her eyes is remarkable in the photographs too, where they appear harder or sadder than her mouth. Clemo’s description continues: ‘Her sallow face, which had never been softened by cosmetics, was deeply lined with suffering, and the big nose and determined jaw suggested that strength of character had developed in her at the expense of superficial charm. But there was no bitterness in her expression’ (*MoaR* 11).

This description matches all accounts of her, as a strong but kindly authority, dour but not cruel. ‘You wouldn’t throw your last snowball at her, put it that way’, Preston Gribble told me. Other villagers, such as Jennifer Pursall in the documentary *Roots of my Story*, called her ‘a formidable woman’. The foster-children, who arrived at the cottage in 1948, remember her kindness above all else, to the extent that they disliked the work of the artist Lionel Miskin, who painted several portraits of Eveline and Jack. The paintings show Eveline strong, determined, unyielding and grim, aspects of her character that ensured her own and her son’s survival, but did not especially reflect the loving mother Violet and Frances recalled. There is little in the paintings to suggest the gentleness and humour shown in the photographic record, where, even as an older woman, she has a girlish grin.

‘Never did she try to scold me into goodness’, wrote Clemo, ‘nor did she confuse me with talk about the Christian ethic. She lived that ethic as no one else I had known ever lived it […]. Her purity and unselfishness impressed me as they impressed others in their daily contacts with her’ (*CoaR* 52). Alan Sanders, born at Stepaside, remembers Eveline well from his childhood, and described her as ‘a woman who would give anything’, an example of which was shown in her treatment of the Solomon family. The Clemos themselves were a poor household. Bertha was disabled, Eveline widowed, and Jack a syphilitic schoolchild. Yet, when a family appeared in even worse trouble than they were, she gave what she had to help. The Solomons were thrown out of their Foxhole home after having failed to pay rent. They had wandered over, now homeless, to Goonvean, where the father built a stone hut with a corrugated iron roof for them. The Clemos were the nearest household and when Eveline heard of their trouble she began to give them food, cook their meals and give the children

cocoa in the morning. She did this until the council intervened, sending the family to the workhouse in St Austell, now a car park below the College’s Sedgemoor campus.

Through these years, as many others, Eveline was supporting the family on her War Widow’s pension and sometimes helping out at other homes. To make the coal stretch further, Eveline and Jack would take their zinc bath and buckets to collect discarded cinders, known as ‘cherks’, from the claywork engine houses, or Jack would be sent up the Slip with a wheelbarrow gathering ‘smutties’ left from gorse swaling, a chore that found its way into a 1936 dialect tale, ‘Charlie, the Smutties, an’ the Baaby’. A memory from one of these moments impressed itself especially on Clemo:

> I would sometimes climb fifty feet up to reach the newest layers, crouching ankle deep in the black ash, glancing down at mother as she waited beside the bath among the shadowy bushes, the stacks of Goonvean growing dim across the fields behind her, the clay-pit remote and melancholy. The beauty of the scene was an enrichment that prevented me from ever feeling humiliated or degraded while thus grubbing amid the dirt. (*CoaR* 48)

They grew their own cabbages and potatoes, went blackberrying in the autumn, and collected milk from Goonamarris Farm. There was no shop in Goonamarris itself, but there was a Co-op up at Nanpean that delivered to the cottage. In 1926 and 1927, Jack was allowed to ride on the horse-drawn Co-op van, because the driver, Harry Phillips, was courting one of Eveline’s nieces, Elizabeth Viney Grigg, daughter of Lucy. ‘Some of my happiest recollections of

childhood are of those long rides with Harry in the creaking van, around St Stephen, Coombe and Trelyon, past the uranium mine at Terras', Clemo wrote (*CoaR* 62). Either Eveline or Jack would collect the milk, which again is a quotidian event that held great significance for Clemo later, as it became a common theme in his early novel drafts, and those trips with Harry facilitated a youthful romance.

There were some glittering gems radiating from the choking kaolin dust and cold granite, however few, and however clouded. Eveline Clemo's commitment to her son put in place a faith-based framework for subsuming the adversary that pursued them. The syphilis was still in its infancy, the poison of Eveline's disgrace, waiting for the catalysts of mature dentition and puberty. These came at the end of 1928, and the world changed again for Jack as his eyes swelled and the pain recommenced. New Year 1929 began blind, but the Clemos devised a way of easing at least some of the discomfort:

> After some discussion an alternative method was found, freeing my eyes from bandages while ensuring that no light reached them. We had an old square board which was pushed out above the stairway when mother papered the inner walls of the landing. This was placed in the recess about ten feet above the bottom of the stairs and became my perch from nine o'clock in the morning until bedtime […]. Beside me on the board was a small cup of boracic lotion and the wad of cotton wool with which I occasionally bathed my eyes to ease their smarting. When I looked over the edge of the board I could see a faint blur of light on the stairs below. But I seldom glanced down. (*CoaR* 59)

He now entered an important transformational phase. The syphilis had reignited and Clemo would not return to school. He did not want to and he was not able to, having performed so poorly in his exams. In most families it would be expected that the boy would find work, but Jack was not at all inclined to it, and in *Confession* he searches for reasons why he could not even take a ‘soft job at Treviscoe Co-operative’. His eyesight wasn’t very good, and anyway the walk would be hazardous in the winter, passing the clay-pit and tanks. Besides,‘I knew that I should find such work uncongenial’. It was ‘effeminate’, he said, and he did not like the idea of staying in all day (68). In *Marriage* he continues to give excuses: ‘I could not face the daily proximity of rough, insensitive labourers who read nothing but newspapers and talked about nothing but sport and the “bloody Government”’ (*MoaR* 12).

Jack was a lost and spoiled only child, with a mother who indulged him with an urgency that came from the belief he might not survive childhood. He had no father and no peers whatever to share or contrast the progression into adolescence. He had already sufficient reason to consider himself exceptional, and there was no one to refute this. The awakening of his sexuality, for instance, was met without any guidance, and without any friend experiencing the same, or male relative to empathise or explain what was happening. What, may it be supposed, did his strict Bible Christian mother and Aunt Bertha have to tell Jack about his nascent sexuality?

Jack’s sexuality was totemically inspired during this spell of pubescent blindness, by a girl called Evelyn. The occasion of their meeting was the marriage of Harry, the Co-op driver, to Viney Grigg, on 27 April. Jack went with his mother to Penrose Veor, the Grigg family farm in St Dennis, where Viney

was getting ready. When the party left for the chapel, Jack stayed behind, ‘and those who remained at the farm were too busy preparing for the reception to take much notice of me. All except one – Harry’s sister Evelyn’ (*CoaR* 62). She was a little more than a year younger than Clemo, but considerably more mature. Clemo describes the interest she seemed to take in him, stroking his hair and arms, and leading him around. The simple interest excited an obsessive, fantastical desire for her that lasted throughout the 1930s. In *Confession*, Clemo writes that he adored her for six years only, but even in the 1937-38 diaries he is questioning whether Evelyn has really made the right choice by getting married to someone else, or whether she has been deceived away from God’s will that she and Jack were meant to marry.

By 1930, Jack had left school, stopped attending chapel, and started attending to girls. He refers to this as his pantheistic, or pagan phase, though these are not very precise terms. There was no profound shift from a belief in a God identifiable as the world or identical with the world to one transcendent, and the processes and expectations of God (for example, in prayer and appeal) remained the same. Moments of exhilaration and sexual excitement were still considered Providential. Clemo later acknowledged in print what he more frequently suggested in his private diary, when describing his spiritual development of the period in *The Invading Gospel*:

> I did not doubt Christianity – I merely disliked it; or rather, I disliked its façade, while being conscious that behind the façade was some tremendous secret which I could not get at but which was the only thing that could satisfy me. (18)

What did change were Clemo's focus and the language of belief. He began to understand more, to read and study a diverse literature that showed conflicting perspectives and differing tastes. If there was a vague sense of worldly rapture in some of Clemo's early expressions of faith, this was not 'pantheistic' or 'pagan' in any recognisable form, and his beliefs did not alter as radically as has been suggested. Rather, we see in this sense of having emerged from a dark past into a newly enlightened present or brightening future, a trend that may be perceived throughout Clemo's life and work. He is the constantly regenerating 'clay phoenix', ever-optimistic, ever-hopeful, and ever-apophenic. The tidy compartmentalization of his past is a part of the retrospective imposition of patterns on his life, and a way of separating painful events of the past from his present. But it also had the effect of simplifying mythopoeically his life, creating an illusion that greater changes were constantly occurring. A good example of the effect of this myth-making might be found in the way that Andrew Symons wrote on Clemo's early poem 'Midnight of the Flesh' (Symons 'Mystical-Erotic' 80). Informed by Clemo's claims to paganism and pantheism, Symons considered this poem to be a part of the 'pagan' period of the early 1930s, and analysed it as such. Yet it was no such thing. The poem 'Midnight of the Flesh' appeared in 1945, the same year as much of Clemo's most famous poetry, including 'Christ in the Clay-Pit', 'A Calvinist in Love' and 'Prisoner of God'. It was, however, based on an earlier work, 'Midnight Longing', which differs enormously from 'Midnight of the Flesh'. When Clemo returned to the poem in the 1940s, it was changed 'almost completely', as he said, to be compatible with his new faith (P75), and was submitted with all of the other poems that would appear in *The Clay Verge*. The misinformation of the myth (mythinformation?) has misled the critic.

Clemo is most certainly a Christian in the early 1930s, with a basically fundamentalist Methodist leaning and a God who acts dynamically. He loathes entertainment, dancing, sport, film and drinking. In *Confession*, he tries to describe what he called his ‘pantheism’:

> It was not that I felt any Shelleyan or Wordsworthian rapture in Nature – that was still beyond my temperamental range; but I could not recognise the chapel God in the Power that had restored my sight. God had become to me more cloudy, diffused, a vague Spirit of the universe, mystical and, of course, non-moral. (*CoaR* 65)

The self-accusation does not tally with any unpublished contemporaneous document, but seems to have been developed in considerable hindsight. His favourite reading at the time was the popular fiery sermonising of Talmage and Spurgeon (P75), and he was reading the Bible on his daily walks. There is little *practical* difference between this ‘pantheistic’ ‘Spirit’ and Clemo’s later faith. The Spirit answered prayers and acted on or within the world (rather than being the same as the world), and it led him towards good and away from harm.

We have a fair idea of what Clemo was thinking at this time because of another development that sprung from his 1929 blindness and his defection from school. There still hung over Jack the question of what he was to do with his life. How was he to survive? How was he to help his mother and pay his way? She had encouraged him to get an office job at the works and in the mid-1930s she sent him up to Goonvean to see how he would get on there, though he did not take the hint and in his diary wrote:

> In the evening I went to Goonvean claywork to see some fellow my mother saw yesterday, who'd asked her to send me down, as he wanted to see me. Spent a pleasant half-hour there in the rude cuddy by the mica – a fire burning – a very bare place. Talked with the old clay-worker about my writing, about the cinema, about Mussolini – all sorts of subjects, quite homely and natural it was. (P68)

Jack had thoroughly rationalized his unwillingness to work, and partly perhaps as a further defence against his sense of inferiority and distaste or fear of others, Clemo came on a decision that allowed him to stay at home with his mother in the house and not have to engage with other people except on his own terms: 'What about if I was to write stories like – like they 'Ockings?' (CoaR 69).

III

'Twilight Where God Dwells'

> And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.
>
> Gen. 28.15

Eveline would have preferred her son 'to stand in our pulpits and preach, not to write novels' (*Pause for Thought*), but in the 1930s Jack entered a new period of his life and began an outpouring of experimentation in form, style, religion and ideas. His literary ambitions ensured that the period is well documented. The diaries begin in 1934, and Clemo also begins writing provocative letters, poetry and opinion pieces for the *Cornish Guardian* on an almost weekly basis. There are letters, short stories, dialect tales, early poems and drafts of novels, all documenting Clemo's self-propulsion into the world, with his new ambition and sexual awareness both awoken by the pubescent bout of blindness. Clemo's sense of abnormality was nurtured by his isolation. His awareness of his body and sexuality did not come healthily from peers or parents, but mostly from D. H. Lawrence novels, outdated books on sexual biology, and the public's response to his histrionic pronouncements in the local paper.

There is, then, at the beginning of the 1930s, a further leap into the atypical. His life was already anomalous. He was a contrary syphilitic drop-out living on the edge of a clay-pit with his mother and aunt, physically enfeebled and ill-

equipped to cope with his special burden. To evade despair he had to reinterpret his situation. The natural choices for a young man finding his way might be to shun others, to shun normality, to embrace his individuality. At this critical stage of his development, we see Jack doing all of these things, wedging himself deeper and more irrevocably into the role of misfit and rebel. His development would now depend largely on himself, his own direction, imagination and reactionary individualism. He did not know what other boys were going through, or which of his urges were natural, peculiar or divine. It is no wonder that he became fixated with experience and with his own biography, when he was working on understanding all this so completely in the dark. And it seems inevitable that many of his life experiments and attempts to drag himself towards maturity were blundering and dismal disappointments, none more so than his earliest attempts at love-making and understanding sex.

These attempts began in the 1930s with two special romantic infatuations. The first was with Evelyn Phillips, beginning in 1929, and the second was with Barbara Rowse, a child at the time. Clemo's affections were by no means exclusive to one or the other, although his spiritual ideal was. So, in the same year that he would describe his ideology for 'But one Book, one God, one girl', meaning Evelyn, he would also write: 'B. is all I want, because in her I find what I sought in Evelyn, what I've prayed for for years' (P69). 'B.' was Jack's abbreviation for Barbara, which would later be changed to 'Ba', when the 'Browning Pattern' was observed. This was a pattern of similarities Clemo perceived between his own romantic life and that of Robert Browning. 'Ba' was the affectionate abbreviation Robert Browning used for Elizabeth Barrett in their correspondence. There were still other love interests, which erupted excitably, though they tended to be briefer and less space is given to them in the diaries

and autobiographies. One of these others was a girl called Violet from Foxhole. In the 1934 diary Violet, or 'V.', as he refers to her, is a possible alternative to Evelyn, and Jack is here considering which one of the girls is destined to be his wife:

> Is she at Foxhole – V? or at St Austell – my Evelyn that used to be? Or perhaps – I don't hope – she is in the ways of sin and prostitution, crying out for me to understand her suffering and her hunger. I DO – I DO! I would go now if I knew where she was; I would fall with her that we might rise together from a common level. (P68)

The desperation and drama are important to the understanding of Jack's early development. The romance is largely fantastic, nourished in a dark corner of the cottage where he worked and brooded at a cramped bureau. There is no outlet or social suppuration of this bulging emotional pustule. It swells fanatically and awkwardly. Clemo's sensitive, creative and active brain was confined in the cottage as in a crucible, and all the violence of adolescence and maturation were intensified. No wonder the melodramas of Hall Caine and Marie Corelli were favoured; they were of the same idiom. Indeed, it may be noted that there is a similarity of language, register and structure between Clemo's earlier writing and Hall Caine's prose.

The obsessive theme of finding a wife, also in the above diary entry, will be the most frequently recurring theme of Clemo's biography. The only extraordinary aspect of the quotation is that it does not refer to God's role in the procurement of a lover, as the entries usually did. Otherwise, it is quite typical.

For example, there is the impression given that it does not really matter whom Jack marries; it could be Evelyn, could be Violet, or could be some prostitute he has not met. That final sentence is clearly hyperbolic. Jack did not look for a partner among those ‘in the ways of sin and prostitution’, but the sense that he would marry anyone interested in him is consistent with coming years. So this early diary entry shows Clemo looking for marriage-as-such, rather than concerned with individuals, but also it shows him as a fantasist. The dramatic fantasy of his relationships is not apparent from the autobiographies, but it is a key feature of his romantic development.

Both Evelyn and Barbara complained about the way they were portrayed in Clemo’s work. Evelyn was upset with *Confession*, and Barbara was upset much later with the 1980 television film *A Different Drummer*. Barbara had not read *Confession*, in spite of being given a copy by Jack, but she had seen the film, and she was so upset by it that her husband telephoned the Clemos to complain on her behalf. Nothing more is known about the complaint, but it was sufficient that Jack felt the urge to reply, and he composed a letter to Barbara and her husband with uncharacteristic typographic errors, stating that he could not see what all the fuss was about and using Evelyn’s earlier complaint as an example: ‘Evelyn and her husband were somewhat annoyed at first, thet soon got iver ut and Evelyn continued to be friendly with my mother’ (P48). Aside from the typos, there is an unconventional morality being suggested; it does not matter whether Barbara got upset or was misrepresented, because she would get over it eventually, just as Evelyn had. It is a dangerous and self-serving moral system.

Barbara and her husband were complaining, not only for the indiscretion, but for factual inaccuracies. Such complaints were becoming familiar to Clemo

by that time. Eileen Funston, mentioned in both autobiographies, and Mary Wiseman, to whom Clemo was engaged, both disputed the nature of their relationships as portrayed by Clemo (P55). Brenda Angilley (née Snell) also disputed any sense of romance (interview), and June Trethewey has given her own excellent account of their brief connection, which again differs from the published version (correspondence).

It is not known what part of *Confession* Evelyn objected to, but the description of her father might not have pleased her:

> A pathetic figure slumped at the table, sometimes fumbling with a Braille manual […] warped by an uncongenial atmosphere both at home and in the Church. […] And the warping process was completed by something like a monomania on the subject of smoking. (*CoaR* 85)

(The character of Mr Phillips is amusingly represented in Norman Stone's 1980 film *A Different Drummer*, in which he is called 'Mr Thomas'.) Or perhaps Evelyn was annoyed for having been written about at all, when in her mind there had never been a relationship.

The story Clemo tells of the Evelyn romance begins with the wedding of Harry and Viney. After this Jack and Evelyn did not see one another for a year, though Jack writes that his eyesight began to return immediately afterwards, connecting this romantic experience with his healing, as well as to his decision to become a writer. The year of the wedding, Clemo submitted his first piece of work to *Netherton's Almanack*, an annual publication based in Truro, containing 'much that is interesting and instructive, three copyright Cornish Tales, and a

large amount of Local and General Information', as the cover informs us. The tale was entitled 'Benjy an' his Sweetheart' and would appear in the 1931 issue, published in December 1930 (WM 1996.199). Around the same time, Clemo had received a wave of encouraging acceptances, in the *Cornish Guardian*, the *Christian Herald*, *Tail-Wagger Magazine*, and to a lesser extent with a music firm in London. It was following these that he became a regular presence at the Phillips household. To begin with, Jack was visiting the Phillipses when Harry Phillips, Evelyn's brother, lost his job as the Co-op cart driver and found new employment driving a milk van for a farm near Grampound:

> Harry offered to give me rides in the car as he had done in the old Co-op wagon before his marriage, and from the summer of 1931 until the spring of 1932, I walked on several mornings a week to Foxhole to meet the milk van as it came out from St Austell. I rode to Nanpean and thence back around Rostowrack to Goonamarris. Harry usually stopped at his parents' home for a cup of tea, and I too would be invited indoors. Thus I was seeing Evelyn nearly every day. (*CoaR* 83)

It is for this connection to the farm and to the milk run that Evelyn 'usually appeared as a farmer's daughter' in Clemo's novel drafts during the period (P48). However, Jack's trips out with Harry were called to a halt when villagers complained that he might 'infect the milk' (*CoaR* 84). Jack's malaise made him more vulnerable to colds and flu, and his coughing upset the clients, so he was no longer allowed to travel with Harry in the van. If he wanted to see Evelyn, he

would have to walk to the farm deliberately, without the excuse of passing by with Harry.

By all accounts Evelyn did not encourage Jack. He only really talked to Mr Phillips, while Evelyn sat aside from them, listening to the gramophone or knitting. When he had written a new story he would take it to Nanpean and read it out to the family, sometimes having to wait for ‘some squabble’ to die down before continuing. Clemo writes how alien ‘these family matters’ were to him, and they distressed him as such: ‘they did not fit into my ideal world at all’ (*CoaR* 84).

In his infatuation with Evelyn we see more of the apophenic tendencies, though heightened by Jack’s youthful passions. Mr Phillips had been blinded in 1931, which Clemo saw as a meaningful parallel to his own recovered condition: ‘That Evelyn’s father […] should lose his sight just as I had recovered mine, was surely proof of a fated attachment between us’ (*CoaR* 83). It was also too much of a coincidence that his Pomeranian had been born at Evelyn’s own home and given to Jack by her brother Harry, and that it had arrived on Evelyn’s birthday. ‘Even the dog I regarded as a symbol, a pledge of destiny’, he wrote (*CoaR* 64). Jack desired Evelyn profoundly. Later, he would make two claims that seem counter-intuitive. The first was that he had not erotically desired Evelyn (Hemmings letters), and the second that ‘Neither then nor later was I “in love” with her’ (*CoaR* 83). He says that he was only ‘obsessed’ (*CoaR* 109). This statement that he was never ‘in love’ with her contradicts the diaries, and is the sort of claim that anyone looking back and re-evaluating their failed relationships might make. At the time, Jack was so besotted with Evelyn that he fantasized about their future together, planning children and choosing toys in Woolworth’s, like the couples he saw on his hospital trips to Plymouth (P68). He

slept with her photograph under his pillow, kissing it many times before placing it beneath a copy of the New Testament and going to sleep (P69). And when he was simultaneously besotted with the child Barbara, he had an hallucination:

> I was in bed thinking about B. last night when suddenly a cry seemed to ring through my brain: 'Jack!' and I said, 'What is it, Evelyn?' – 'You're being untrue to me!' came the answer. It was strange, like Rochester's experience in Jane Eyre; it seemed so real, […] I told myself it was only imagination. (P69)

Jack had read *Jane Eyre* just over a year previous to this event, and he observed a likeness with his own love of Evelyn: 'Read "Jane Eyre" – oh, what a book! It rent my soul about – that prayer of Rochester and the [?mysterious?] answer which presaged Jane's return . . . Like Evelyn and I' (P68). The reference is to chapters XXXV and XXXVII of *Jane Eyre*, when it is revealed that one night both Rochester and Jane were thinking passionately of one another and were able to hear their thoughts and to reply.

Jane Eyre made an impression on the young Clemo, and became a strong influence. There were a number of resonant points of interest. To begin with, there was the representation of 'fate […] or Providence' (Brontë 336), which is shown through the many improbable connections and 'coincidences' of the novel. There was also the tendency towards melodrama, and the differentiation between a divinely approved and divinely disapproved marriage, illustrated by Brontë's treatment of the proposals made by Rochester and by Rivers. Although the proposal of Rivers is made in God's name, it is not the 'will of Heaven' (Brontë 485). Rather, it has been determined by God that Jane and Rochester

should be spiritually connected, and it is Heaven's will that they should at last come together.

In 1942, when writing *Wilding Graft*, Clemo read *Jane Eyre* again, observing in his diary: 'the copious style helps to correct my tendency to sketchiness. How that Rochester can talk!' (P72). There is also a biographical parallel which Jack never acknowledged, as Rochester was blinded and 'a cripple' before his future wife at last came and vowed to look after him. This happened in Clemo's life, though thirty years later. Some time into their marriage, Rochester's sight began to improve, as Clemo would later pray and expect his own blindness to do. And Clemo adopted Rochester's terms of endearment, calling his lovers 'elf', 'pixie' or 'fairy', as Jack's most common term of endearment for Ruth was 'pixie', and he also wrote the poem 'Clay Fairy' for a girl named Iris in 1946 (L28, see Appendix I).

The other claim about Evelyn, that his love for her was not sexual, could be questioned. In a 1982 letter to the Irish poet and publisher Louis Hemmings, he writes:

> My feeling for Evelyn was virtually sexless. She was my ideal muse, mediating a divine mystery that inhibited the vulgar physical cravings of adolescence. And when this ethereal bubble was pricked it was replaced by Browning's vision:
> 'To live, and see her learn, and learn by her…
> Not by the grandeur, God – but the comfort, Christ.' (Hemmings, Correspondence)[5]

[5] The Browning quotations are from 'Giuseppe Caponacchi', in *The Ring and the Book*, lines 2085 and 2096-7.

Forty-five years earlier, in 1937, Jack had written about what went wrong with his attempt to woo Evelyn:

> I prayed and had faith, but I did nothing to make her love me, physically – the ‘works’ of a love-life. I’m so afraid of losing B. now I have reached the cause of past failure, that I feel some definite unforgettable physical bond must be forged between us before the world has a chance to [?come between?]. (P70)

The problem was, he thought, that their relationship had not been physical, and here he seems to suggest that he will not make that mistake with Barbara. The sexual implication is fairly obvious, and is well supported by the writing produced from this period, in the novels, poetry and letters to the paper. Sex was very much on Clemo’s mind when he was infatuated with Evelyn, and the fact that she was the object of his desires is clear from the poetry dedicated to her (L27), and from moments of Clemo’s idling recorded on the backs of old manuscript pages and notebooks, where he plays with her name, in verses and acrostics (WM 1992.33.5). In the *Cornish Guardian*, Jack’s experience of sex appears to be a possible mystical point of contact between a person or a soul and God, an idea which Clemo would develop. The majority of sources point to a conceptual grouping of Evelyn, God, sex and love. In Clemo’s treatment and revision of this early infatuation, we see again his attempt at distancing himself from the past and the way in which he tidies away events and ideas, often sanitizing them or placing them within a larger pattern. Certainly the ‘relationship’ was not physical, but it is not true that his feelings were sexless.

However, we will see that Jack's understandings of 'sex' and 'mysticism' are not always straightforward. 'Sex', in his early years, was misunderstood, and mysticism appears to evolve as a concept. Writing much later, in preparation for a BBC interview, he thinks about Evelyn and 'the romantic vision she'd brought me. I floated around in a mystical cloud and couldn't come down to earth even to court the girl' (P43). 'Mystical', in this instance, means something like 'magically obscure'. But Clemo uses 'mysticism' to mean many things, at times separating or hybridising historic usages, or embracing several evolving meanings at once.

By Christmas 1933 the relationship between Jack and the Phillipses was tense. Evelyn became fed up with Jack's attention and let him know: 'Evelyn was here – and a bloody devil she was […] giving me hell to end the year with' (P68). The words 'hell', 'devil' and 'bloody' used as profanities are unique to this period of Jack's teenage years and are very soon discontinued. For the mid-1930s, however, they are liberally committed to the diaries.

The break in their meetings came at the beginning of 1934, when Jack was recovering from another bout of eye trouble that had begun at the end of the previous year, and in March Evelyn's mother brought all Jack's belongings left at the farm back to the cottage, now that he was no longer welcome (P68). The tension had been building for some time, as he continued to pester Evelyn, and it is possible that the Phillipses were less tolerant or indulgent of Jack's attention to Evelyn after the syphilis re-emerged. They made it clear that Jack was no longer to try to see her and that he must leave her alone.

Jack did not take the hint. Instead of ceasing to bother her, he decided to follow her, and when he heard that she was due to be singing at Old Pound

Chapel, a little bethel between Nanpean and Karslake, he set off to surprise her. She did not respond well:

> When I next visited Nanpean Mr. Phillips informed me very gravely that Evelyn had complained about my presence at Old Pound, that she resented my following her about in this fashion […]. I was not surprised by the news; I had known for months that Evelyn was growing increasingly annoyed at the gossip that linked her name with mine. But I hung on and decided that I must see her alone and put the facts before her in the exulted manner of a Teufelsdrockh. (*CoaR* 108)[6]

He understood she was upset. He expected it and accepted it. He could appreciate that he should leave her alone now. But if he could only see her one more time…

The evening at Old Pound Chapel had a significance independent of Evelyn. Being in that out-of-the-way bethel, hearing the Sankey hymns with their direct and simple message, and seeing the honest faith of these 'old-fashioned' working people, ignited his love for 'primitive Christianity':

> Had I perhaps, all along, been searching for the secret of Nonconformist Puritanism, aware that it might contain a revelation sufficient for my life and destiny if only I could view it by a sudden oblique light, as no one had ever viewed it before? (*CoaR* 107)

[6] Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* was another book that had a great influence on Clemo, though it is rarely acknowledged. 'Teufelsdrockh' was the name of the fictional philosopher who was the subject of Carlyle's novel.

This reverie is interpreted as a minor victory for dogma over idealism within his temperament, and suggests a place for Clemo in the chapel tradition. That place, of course, would have to be unique and original, and we see in this episode the sense in which Clemo is deliberately an outsider, misfit or rebel. Instead of observing the similarity of his primitivism to that of the congregation, he assumes that his own is categorically different, 'as no one had ever viewed it before'. It may be argued that the key difference between his faith and the congregation's is simply the assertion of his individuality, the sense that faith must find room for his idiosyncrasies and idealism. In other words, this is a kind of idolatry only justified by a rule of exceptionalism, such as election or mysticism, where one has a link to God that others do not. This is not stated here, but soon becomes apparent as themes develop. It is a step beyond the personal conversion experience of Methodism and towards a more solipsistic view. The experience could not be simply personal, but had to be qualitatively different.

The 'relationship' with Evelyn was now over, but Jack's hopes were not. He had invested a good deal of thought and emotion into her, and he would not give up. For one thing, he had submitted his first collection of poetry to C.W. Daniel publishers, entitled 'Twilight Where God Dwells', dedicated to Evelyn. The collection sees the narrator writing to and about his love, a girl named 'Brenigan', who represents Evelyn. The publisher rejected it:

> There is ample evidence that you have had a big experience as a poet but it is not so clear that you have succeeded in transmuting

> it into poetry with the literary skill necessary for your work to be accepted as having outstanding merit. (L27)

They said they would reconsider publication if Clemo was able to raise ‘half the costs of manufacture’, which of course he was not. Only nine pages of this manuscript, from a likely twenty-five, definitely still exist (L27 and WM1992.67). The following, entitled ‘Midnight Longing’, is among them:

> To lie awake and to stretch tired, yearning arms
>   Where dim shapes flutter, white, in the dark room glide,
> Seeking a form among them, real, and expect some charm
>   Of shadow to make flesh, for a love unsatisfied.
>
> To whisper a name, soft, question the startled air,
>   And to answer, myself, as the voice so beloved would say,
> Loud, that the wind thro’ the night in its course might bear
>   Echo, and stir one love wrapped in dreams. Sweet play.
>
> To curse at the hours, slow-moving, at languid time
>   That speeds not the year when the body withheld shall lie
> And be loved and receive speech due to itself in its prime,
>   And the voce speak, echoing mine in our one soul’s cry. (L27)

Clemo returned to this poem more than ten years later, in 1945, retitling it ‘Midnight of the Flesh’. The difference is remarkable. The poem is rewritten to reflect the mature fusion of sex and theology, and while it is not the best of the poems of the period, it certainly shows the touch of maturity. The new version reads thus:

> To lie awake and stretch tired, yearning arms
>   Where you, girl-phantom of my prison, glide,
> And try and make love’s wanton, secret charms
>   Turn shade to flesh for seed unsatisfied.
>
> To call your name and woo the heedless air,
>   To speak, myself, what your ripe voice should say,
> And burrow to the craven help of prayer,
>   Imploring Him who sneers in this delay.

> Is He afraid earth-sparks would foul His lip
>   In that great hour when we together cling
> As I ascend the fountain steps to dip
>   My torch in waters whence the rainbows spring?
>
> Torch that now sears my vitals: Nature still
>   Glares with the greedy glint of lecherous fire.
> Your breasts are rounded into Calvary's hill,
>   And 'gainst the sky his Cross is on the pyre. (L28)

The reason for so few of the poems from 'Twilight' being left in these manuscripts is probably that many of them were used to compile the earliest version of *The Clay Verge*, which draft has around fifty poems, later whittled down to seventeen (L28).

Jack was also *religiously* invested in Evelyn. He had observed the auguries and concluded that they were destined to be together, to enter a relationship with God, his mother, himself and her (P68). He held the utmost conviction that it was God's intention for them to marry, a pattern repeated through all Clemo's romantic attachments. After the severance of their contact, this conviction wavered, and Clemo began to transfer his hopes onto Barbara. Still, through 1935 and 1936 Jack mourns the loss of Evelyn, adding an occasionally optimistic passage: 'God *can* convert a soul without the conscious will of that soul, making, compelling it to yield itself. So it was with me – so it shall be – *and is* – with Evelyn. Thank God! Oh, thank God!' (P68). In 1936 he still kept her photograph under his pillow, and Evelyn was referred to as 'My dear girl, my Evelyn' (P69). Later that year, Mrs Clemo bumped into her in St Austell and discovered that she had a boyfriend. She tried to break the news to Jack carefully, but he did not react well:

> Very much upset. It has come suddenly – last evening mother spoke of Evelyn, and it seems that while I have been indifferent,

> hearing no word of her, she has gone down the road to sin and death. My God! I do not know how to bear this. Her character gone, her name a by-word […]. I could give her up to another man, but to give her up to the devil, to eternal death – oh, I can't and will not, if there be a God! (P69)

'If there be a God!' Clemo never doubted there was a God, and here we see that he appears to doubt God while not doubting the devil or the idea that turning away from God means ultimate death. In fact, he is spiting God, and such moments can be shocking, though again they are unique to the mid-1930s. They appear at no other period, and in no other format. Nor do they appear except in the context of romantic pain. In the following passage, Clemo confronts God directly:

> O God why need we quarrel so? […] Last night my heart was broken about in the anguish of pleading. I cried for Evelyn – cried, cried to make it up with her […]. How long, O Lord? You hide yourself and will not answer me, and then I grow bitter and curse you; and then when the dark mood passes I come with my bleeding heart and confess that I have sinned, I plead for you to forgive when all the while it is your fault because you do not answer me. How easy it would be for us to live always close to each other: but you are stubborn, just as I am, and will not give her to me; and then you blame me because I, too, grow sullen and resentful . . . oh, it is so silly, so stupid, Lord, this endless fooling, this eternal folly and rising up to blame myself and crying to you,

> cry, cry, when always you mock me and make me fall again to repeat the silly thing all over […] oh, my God! (P68)

This was on 8 April 1935. The following day he continued:

> Hour by hour I sit and cry out for love – for love – not spiritual, not God-like, but love as men know it when it kills them and dooms them. The only joy I want is sensual […] body with body oh, how good it is – a lie down in twilight where there is no God, to yield with pure nakedness and crying with the [?constancy?] of rhythm in blood and life-force. It is all the heaven a man should want, this intoxication of sense and warmth with lips pressed on lips, breast heaving, naked and soft beneath the straining of body to [??] with body as the life-seed quivers, awakes, thrills and rushes to contact – . Bliss – bliss – till it is past – and then – Hell – hell of remorse – for what? God! What a mistake for man to have a soul! I'd give anything to get rid of mine, to live entirely in that sensuous straining – intoxication of forbidden fruit! (P68)

Entries for the following week have been torn out.

In the same vein, though more direct and disingenuous, is this passage from the end of 1934: 'I tell you there is no God. You are deceived. Religion is a myth – Christianity a lie, Christmas a fable. If it were true it would surely let a fellow be happy' (P68). The idea that God will make one happy – or 'let' one be happy – in this world will be seen again. Later, when Jack reads C.S. Lewis, he formally adopts Lewis's idea that suffering is essentially good for us, though

personally he believed that the promise God made with Jack's mother could not be broken. Jack expected God to make him happy, and he expected God to do what he asked. This is made clear throughout the earlier diaries, and is justified in the 1949 correspondence with Eileen Funston, who queried the expectation that God will do whatever He is asked (P55). Jack replied to Eileen with a shortened Bible quotation: 'If ye ask anything I will do it' (John 14.14).

Such passages illustrate the nearness of God in Clemo's world-view. Clemo talks to Him directly, shouting at Him like He is a frustrating parent in the next room, a plastic presence, a man he can insult and upset. And not only a plastic presence, but one who is challengeable, changeable. This conception of God as a real presence is central to Clemo's cosmology, and especially to his conception of 'mysticism'. At the moment this is not the orgasmic mysticism of a Teresa of Avila, but a day-to-day immediate perception of God's presence, interest and intervention in his life. Clemo's theology will develop, but some basic assumptions about God's nature are already clear. He is present in the world at all times; He answers prayers; He has favourites; He intervenes; He is both present and transcendent; He ought to make Jack happy.

That God had no intention of making Jack happy yet is shown by a major development of the 1930s. At the same time as Evelyn Phillips was growing tired of Jack's attention, Eveline Clemo began to reveal the full story of his father:

> She did not disclose it all at once, but gradually, hint by hint, during our many discussions of marriage and morals. My views on these subjects were already becoming heterodox – I championed free love and would argue for hours about what I was pleased to

> call 'sanctified smut' – and it was partly as a warning to me that my mother forced herself to tell the ugly secrets which she had kept for nearly twenty years. (*CoaR* 90)

The revelations probably included the story of the 'nymphomaniac' aunt and whoring father. The reference to 'twenty years' may be significant. The year is 1932-33, and 'nearly twenty years' brings us back to around 1913, when Reginald returned from America and Eveline became pregnant by him. She seems, then, to be referring to her premarital sex, pregnancy, the death of her daughter and the contraction of syphilis. She introduced Jack to the guilt of sex and its awful presence in his own body and history.

It was to these revelations that Clemo reacted with a deepening antisocialism and masochistic self-alienation. He writes that Eveline's facts 'were to have a far-reaching effect for good upon my spiritual and literary growth; but their immediate result caused her to regret bitterly that she had burdened me with such knowledge' (*CoaR* 91). The revelations 'plunged my whole life for a while into dark chaos' (*CoaR* 90), Clemo writes; 'I was aware only of the awakening of something malicious and cynical, a destructive force that had been biding its time' (*CoaR* 91). With this 'destructive force' he debased himself to appear slovenly, offensive and rougher, and it is while masochistically indulging this shabby sex-obsessed identity that his congenital syphilis progressed, requiring urgent treatment.

From the letters of local writer Frank Baron, we know that Clemo had an operation in Plymouth in 1934, at the end of September or beginning of October, when he was eighteen (WM 1992.32.1-25). Details of it all have been cut from the remaining diary fragments, though some mention of ear troubles

may be found. We do know that Jack had his first course of injections in 1934, however, from the two-year anniversary he marked on 6 October 1936. In November 1934 the deafness improved and he was able to listen to his neighbour's gramophone again. But this new symptom was unyieldingly progressive, and the moments of reprieve were fleeting taunts, a test to his nerves. The disease was treated in Plymouth through the 1930s, then in Truro through the 1940s.

Weekly or fortnightly, Jack visited South Devon and East Cornwall Hospital in the Greenbank area of Plymouth, ten minutes' walk from the train station. He sometimes referred to it as 's.d. hospital' in the diaries. These trips were painful, distressing and expensive, and the Clemos appealed to various charitable bodies for help. They were also Jack's only journeys outside of the county, so they were liberating and enlightening. He would travel on the train, walk through the large stores and bookshops, watching the girls of the city, hoping to catch one's eye or elicit a smile. The pleasure of a girl's smile is recurrent in the diaries. 'I went into Smith's for the *Author's Handbook* and typing paper, and the girl smiled, smiled as she handed me the parcel. Life is worthwhile while there's one girl who looks at me and smiles' (P69). Wandering about the Barbican, Clemo saw the Blackshirts, Oswald Mosley's fascists, 'lounging around outside' their headquarters on Lockyer Street (*CoaR* 150). He accidentally saw lovers when he looked over a wall on Plymouth Hoe – they were 'lying about in the grass … My God!' – and for the rest of the day, 'I could think of nothing but those lovers lying in the sunlight' (P68). Most weeks he would be given his arsenic injections of Salvarsan or Neosalvarsan, drugs with nausea and headaches among their side effects, with regular 'blood-lettings', as Clemo called the Wassermann reaction tests (P69). The sensorineural deafness would

come and go through the second half of this decade, giving Jack and his mother frequent false hopes of recovery. Deafness is an unpredictable syphilitic symptom, but the doctors would have known it was very likely to remain and gradually worsen. Yet Jack would hope for and expect recovery, either medical or miraculous, and several times it was announced that a miracle had been worked. In 1934 his mother told him:

> If it hadn't been for my prayers you would never had heard again. The specialists at Plymouth didn't think you ever would. They told me only a miracle could ever bring back your hearing . . . that worked me into a fever, and I prayed – prayed – and God answered. (P68).

Following another course of injections in 1935, the doctors appeared to agree:

> To Plymouth – with mother today – the last trip of the course. There all day – first to S.D. Hospital, where I saw in the report book some interesting remarks about me. Left ear fixed, right opaque . . . . opacity at bottom corner of left eye. Nose healed, leaving perforation of [??] plate . . . . H'm. They report that I'm looking much better, which is a consolation, anyhow . . . . . (P68)

As well as the hope that he might be improving, this second entry suggests the deterioration of his nose. It is unclear whether it refers to the caving in of the cartilage, or to his sense of smell. In an unpublished paper by Clemo's friend and correspondent, Helena Charles, Charles quotes Clemo: 'for nearly half my

life three of my senses, sight, hearing and smell, have not been normal. These senses being dulled I was naturally stimulated to the defensive conviction that after all, I was not missing much' (L28). Jack and Helena met in 1949, so it seems that the loss of his sense of smell dates to this period in the mid-1930s.

In spite of believing himself to be improving, 1934 was the year which, in hindsight, Clemo would consider the first year of his deafness. If the prayer was answered at all, then the magic worked only briefly. Jack's hearing slowly worsened, and the reports of 'good' days grew fewer as the days of 'no improvement' or 'no change' increased. The emotional strain of this was considerable, for although the specialists may have told the Clemos that his hearing would probably never improve, Jack and Eveline both believed in the power of prayer and that God's will was for Jack to be happy. The ear troubles, as the earlier eye troubles, were God's 'strange testing' (P74), but if they kept their faith and continued to pray and to thank God, then 'What God has done for other "Uncurables" He can and will do for me' (P79). This last quotation comes from the 1949 diary, fifteen years after the onset of deafness. Over these years, as for many subsequent years, Jack would expect improvement, looking out for slight changes in his health or mood or for a sign. Ecstatically, he might observe a mild improvement and hastily announce his imminent 'full recovery', only to be thrown back into dismal silence days later. Always expectant, overjoyed at the vaguest hints of health, fiercely disappointed at each relapse and regression, Jack was straining his damaged nerves, and it may be little wonder that his personality was at its most volatile over these years. The following entry from 1934 shows the passionate confusion typical of the period:

> By train again to Plymouth, in dull weather again. Girls in the ’bus – oh, my heart! It has come back – I do not know why, or how – but all day the old agony has been tearing me. I walked about Plymouth like one in torment, looking everywhere – everywhere, for a smile in some girl’s eyes, for a love-glance, some food for my heart which is sinking and faint and tormented with all the mockery of hell. Through Spooners and Woolworths I went, pushing against the eager throngs of people, mad with rage and defeat. I was cursing them, cursing God, striving terribly to throw Evelyn out of my thought and find among this teeming crowd another – another for whose kisses, for whose love avowals and passion-hearings I did not have to wait and plead and spend my strength in praying for. Oh! it shakes me to the core . . . the old uncertainty, doubt, fear, hate and lust. The tears [?blinker?] my lids as I [??] myself through the unheeding crowd. What was I? Who cared – who knew? Defeat, defeat, and no Evelyn, no heart in God’s whole world to share my suffering. (P68)

This was a tense period. Jack’s hopes for love were being thwarted, the syphilitic symptoms had returned and worsened, he was (as we will see) in continual press controversies, and the truth about his father was being gradually revealed. In other words, on top of the usual pains and pressures of adolescence, and as well as Clemo’s circumstances and temperament having prevented any understanding of his young self through peers or parenting, the problems were heaped ever higher onto the boy, and the weight was unsustainable.

When considering the apparent cruelty of Evelyn in her rejection of Jack, it must be borne in mind that there is no evidence that she ever encouraged him. All we have is a moment of kindness when she helped him at the wedding, and a walk they took home from chapel one day, the anniversary of which is kept in the diaries. Otherwise there is little sense of Jack and Evelyn interacting. Jack's affections were not reciprocated, but were an annoyance to the girl. Mrs Clemo observed this later: 'I don't believe Evelyn ever loved you – it was all on your side', to which Jack mused, 'But what – oh, what was on God's side? What did He, does He, feel?' (P69). Evelyn married in 1937, though still Clemo wondered: were his unhappiness and Evelyn's marriage really the will of God, or had Evelyn turned from God too (P70).

By this time, Jack's affections had begun to turn to the young daughter of their next door neighbour, a girl named Barbara Rowse. One of the most frequent entries of these early years is along the lines of 'Playing with B. all morning', and she is mentioned even then in a physically stimulating way:

> Barbara was so very loving today, as if to answer my craving for love-love-love. She kissed and kissed me and heaved her little body against mine; and I tried, tried to snatch out of it all something of the reality I seek. Pitiful – pitiful, my God – why should I be starved, [?wasted?] – like this? (P68)

She is only three years old, and for the next few years Clemo is split between the physical presence of this girl and the more conventional love for Evelyn. At the same time, he was declaring himself in love with a third girl, Violet. When Evelyn was rejecting Jack, she teased him for flirting with this schoolgirl.

Violet gets scant mention in the autobiographies, with little more than a note that he had been, for a short while, in love with her, and that Evelyn's teasing had caused him to use bad language for the first time (*CoaR* 110). He is rather downplaying the infatuation. Violet was a less frequent visitor to the Clemo cottage, but in the diaries he records dreaming of her often, and Barbara is sometimes spoken of as a stopgap until Violet sees sense or the 'real thing' comes along (P69).

However, in *Confession*, Barbara is given the prominent role and said to have been 'leading me towards my true faith and work' (156). Her 'influence soothed and adjusted me for the grafting of the dogma in its true Christian form' (140). By the time he came to write *Marriage of a Rebel* in the late 1970s, Clemo had begun to distance himself from this unorthodox infatuation: 'I knew that this friendship was only a slight foreshadowing of the real drama', he wrote (14). The suggestion that all along Jack knew that Barbara was not the right girl for him is misleading. In the diaries, Jack wonders whether Barbara might return even as late as 1946, after most of *Confession* had been written. Barbara was then coming to an age when questions of marriage might be more seriously asked.

In the earlier diaries, Barbara provides 'relief' for Jack, her kisses and innocent affection turned into a fantasy of romantic love. The fantasy in itself, of course, is not problematic. The presence of any girl was a way of gaining experience of what girls were like, of what they wanted, of how one behaves towards them, how they differ, and so on, and preferring a younger girl might well have been a kind of self-preservation. When Evelyn outgrew Jack she mocked him, his naivety and immaturity, his childish outbursts and fancies. Barbara was younger, and her innocence had many years left. She would not

mock Jack, reject him, challenge him or leave him, so long as he continued to amuse and attract her. Actually, Jack was very good with children, enjoying their games and innocence above all else, their lack of inhibition, their simple honest pleasures, the absence of sophistication and self-consciousness. Children were easier for him to be around, and they gave him room to explore his own character, to try out personae, even to enact the lover. He would remain in charge of the relationship he fancied, and he would not be hurt so easily.

But Jack acted the role of lover with theatrical violence. He pined and raged and wept and prayed, cursed and blew kisses, poetized and sighed, climbed the clay peaks and gazed over at the villages and farms where the girls he loved lived. In the diaries and *Confession* we find two inadequate accounts of this. In the diaries we see Clemo as a lover, although he is the only one aware of it. His choice of a child may be troublesome because the love would always be one-sided and the power all his own, and this one-sidedness indulged and grotesquely developed the tendency to solipsism. In *Confession*, the inadequacy is that Clemo is looking at his ‘relationships’ with a lover’s hindsight, imagining the past loves were never the real thing and only the present love was really real. Also, it ought to be remembered, none of the girls presented in the biographies agreed with their portrayal. They all criticized, corrected or complained. So Clemo was not, perhaps, an accurate chronicler.

More than this, there was some controversy in the villages over his expressions of love for children, and so the innocence of the relationships is sometimes overstated to counteract the vicious gossiping. The village gossip was founded on Clemo’s reputation, so it developed over considerable time, and it was, unfortunately, nurtured by Clemo. The rumours about his illness and

his father’s past were commonly shared, but his mother also suffered from gossip about his not attending chapel, apparently receiving anonymous letters of disapprobation. His press controversies did not help either, and one of his correspondents almost growled through the paper that the real young Jack was not this all-knowing Lothario of election he claimed to be. Parents did not want their children associating with him, however they may have respected Mrs Clemo, and rumours of queerness in his behaviour towards the children is exaggerated by the more general distaste many felt. This sort of gossip would always find a role in Clemo’s novels, a devil’s discourse or fallen playmaker, and the villagers themselves are more often portrayed as despicable. It is why the people seem so scurrilous and cruel.

The ‘relationship’ with Barbara is Clemo’s most controversial, and has been both over- and understated. The villagers often thought the worst, while other writers decided to ignore it altogether and have encouraged me to do the same. Jack made the situation slightly worse for the modern student by appearing to talk about the ‘relationship’ so frankly and at such length in *Confession*. If there had been greater distance between the events and his writing of the autobiography, it is unlikely Barbara would have been given such a prominent role, and Clemo would have had less reason to justify himself later and correct his account. His wife, too, added to the problem by editing Jack’s diaries and letters posthumously. The effect is a deep suspicion, and it is probably the same suspicion that has led so many writers to avoid the question. Clemo did not necessarily find Barbara sexually attractive, but conveniently present and innocently unreserved, affectionate, and her childishness gave Jack the opportunity to act the lover without mockery. He was able to dictate terms

without contradiction, and this gave him space for experimentation and meditation. He thought of Barbara as his muse.

Within this fantasy, Clemo recorded the kisses he shared with her as though the child's innocent kisses were a real lover's. He wrote of them holding hands, walking together, of her leaning back in his arms while she sat on his knee, and of playful 'romps' in front of the fire as though they were passionate embraces. And, of course, he treated them as such, as though he was in a relationship. He knew that his mother and Aunt Bertha did not approve, so he would disappear with Barbara into the back garden and hide by the wall or in the outhouse to receive her kisses and hold her in his arms. Sometimes these embraces had greater significance than others, as when Clemo was sexually aroused. But conclusions should be guarded. His naivety of expression with regard to sex in the newspapers has already been observed. He did not use the word in a correct way, and though he strongly implied that he had had personal experience of physical sex, all the evidence suggests that he had no experience and that even masturbation was rarely deliberately indulged. In *Confession* he implies that he avoided masturbation altogether, and this was also suggested by Father Benedict Ramsden, a good friend of Jack later in life, although the erotic satisfaction Clemo derived from his contact with Barbara may be considered very close. The point is that Clemo's language of love and sex cannot be trusted, and his reflections on his relationships are reflections on one-sided fantasies. We have to be very careful to pick out facts from the often extravagant phrasing. For instance, Clemo often talks of a 'full expression' of love in the diaries, which he differentiates from kissing and which he intends to mean something physical. Had someone less sexually foolish written this we

might conclude that they meant intercourse. But Clemo appears to mean nothing more than achieving sexual arousal.

Barbara would come in before or after school, as well as at weekends and during holidays. Often the two families would make daytrips to the coast, and several photographs remain of them all paddling and posing together. Jack called her 'B.', or sometimes 'Baby' or 'Barby', as in: 'Darling Baby – how she is mine now' (P70). This is all a part of the lover's role, and from 8 December 1937, Barbara would have a new and lasting pet name: 'Ba.'

Through 1936 and 1937 Jack had become increasingly besotted with the poetry and life of Robert Browning, and for Christmas 1937 his mother bought him *The Browning Love Letters*, a large volume containing letters exchanged between Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning from 1845-1846, beginning with the inspired declaration of love – 'I do, as I say, love these books with all my heart – and I love you too' – which Browning wrote in his very first introductory letter to Elizabeth Barrett (2). This impressed Clemo deeply, and these letters, along with A.R. Skemp's short biography and Rudolf Besier's play *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, which Clemo read in 1935 when it was serialized by *John O London's Weekly*, had an unexpectedly significant impact on Clemo's life. It was 'in the light of Besier's play', wrote Clemo, that he perceived the pattern for the solution to his own problems and desires: 'a love-life in which Christian mysticism and normal human feeling were ideally balanced' (*CoaR* 128-9). He read how two people could connect instantly, deeply and lastingly, and he saw his own hopes for a spiritual and physical love realized in their swift, dynamic marriage; the sickly Barrett being freed from her oppressive symptoms and confinement through Browning's optimistic devotion. Clemo, like Browning,

could be ‘priest and lover’. This was how love was meant to be, and how his own *had* to be.

The original picture of the lovers was taken from Besier and petrified in Clemo’s mind by the letters. As with *Jane Eyre*, Clemo saw in the Besier play many parallels and ‘promises’. The promise of predestination and spiritual connection is overtly present, but so is the promise of physical recovery:

> ELIZ. As I told you before, I am a dying woman.
>
> BROWNING. (*Passionately*) I refuse to believe it. For if that were so, God would be callous and I know that He’s compassionate. (39)

The play is acted with a single scene, Elizabeth Barrett’s ‘bed-sitting room’ in the Barretts’ ‘melancholy house in Wimpole Street’ (Chesterton 35). When Barrett and Browning first meet they find themselves immediately intimate, excited, stimulated and understanding of one another. The impression is that they were made for each other, destined to be together, again like Rochester and Jane. Much is made of ‘Providence’ and of their special compatibility.

Clemo found this emphasized in Browning’s poetry, too, initially in the conversion described in ‘Pauline’. The merely human love for Pauline was surrendered to God, and, following conversion, there came ‘the exultant declaration of a reborn, eternal love’ (*IG*, 29). This was the blueprint for Clemo’s search for sexual, erotic or marital fulfilment on earth – ‘an earthly search in the state of grace’, as he called it. A phrase in Browning’s ‘Pauline’ also serves to justify the apophenic impulse of Clemo, the narrator admitting the same pattern-

seeking behaviour: ‘and thence I date my trust in signs / And omens – for I saw God every where’ (Browning *Poems and Plays* 10).

In short, everything Clemo desired – health, love, predestined happiness, God – were illustrated in the life and work of Browning. In the ‘Wimpole Street Miracle’ (P75), as he came to call it, Clemo recognised the template for his own life. Here was further evidence of the promise God made with his mother through the passage in Isaiah.

This is the ‘Browning pattern’, then, the observation of similarities between Jack’s life, faith and expectations, and the biographies of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. From the observation of similarities, Clemo inferred the revelation of his own destiny and aspired to their perfection in faith and love. The ‘Browning pattern’ is possibly the best known eccentricity of Clemo’s biography, and the most important and pervasive manifestation of the apophenic impulse. In Clemo’s words, what he gained from it was the belief that ‘the sort of faith towards which I had been groping, and which Browning had so perfectly expressed was sane and practical when rightly focused and integrated’ (*CoaR* 128-9). At its root, the ‘Browning pattern’ is romantic, although the romanticism is so central to Clemo’s self-identity that the ‘pattern’ imposes on all areas of his life, including his writing, and resonates through Jack’s biography. As well as informing predictions for ‘Years of Destiny’, such as 1945, the centenary of the Browning marriage, Clemo applied the pattern directly to his relationships, in the first instance to the one with Barbara:

> Everything I could write to my Ba has been written already either by R.B. or his Ba. Have I not for years – yes, years! – thought of

> my love as a miracle ‘ordained granted by God’ – to make room for which my love was ‘devastated’? (P70)

Later: ‘How I wish it could be here as at Wimpole St. – ostensibly a friendship, the love growing between Ba and me’ (P74). And there were more mundane examples of the influence, as when Jack’s pet Pomeranian Gyp died in 1935 and he was replaced with another Pomeranian, named after Elizabeth Barrett’s dog, Flush, ‘believing that he would live to see something similar to what his namesake had seen in the darkened room at Wimpole Street’ (*CoaR* 236). (Here again, the vicissitudes of Providence were reflected in a Pomeranian.)

Later, in 1946, Clemo would declare 12 September ‘a special day of prayer and dedication. As that was the only way out for E.B.B., so I know that something similar is the only way out for me’ (P76). This was the date of the Browning wedding, and it would be used as an important sign in future relationships.

Clemo’s own ‘lover’ at the time was Barbara, and of course it is ridiculous that Clemo expected such a young child, aged six in 1937, to be his Elizabeth Barrett (or his Robert), and it surely illustrates the depth of unreality in this fantasy. And yet, the connection informs Jack’s language and writing, so that we start to read entries like: ‘Poverty, scorn, hatred I can bear gladly, only let Ba be on thy side, my side!’ And we find poems ‘dedicated to Ba aged 6’ (P70).

In Clemo’s fiction, Barbara becomes at times conflated with and at times separated from the Evelyn characters, as the true love interest. She is his muse, and he believes he cannot write without her:

> I took Barby again, outdoors while mother was at St Dennis. It rained, and we went into the outhouse and loved – loved with all intensity. AB came out and almost saw, and then mother: and I know by her manner, the way she looked at me, that she understood, realised: but oh, God! there was no other way, if I am to live, if I am to write, if I am to grow and be strong for service. (P68)

It is a striking diary entry for several reasons. In the first case, there is the element of Barbara as muse. Jack always believed that he wrote more and better when he was in love, a belief he held contrary to the facts, as will be seen again in the 1940s, when Jack repeatedly writes how he is lacking love and all inspiration while at the same time composing three of his most memorable works. The inspiration he drew from Barbara only helped him to produce a handful of domestic dialect tales and some immature, unpublishable novel drafts.

But there are some stronger and troubling themes developing in this passage. The phrase 'loved with all intensity' is suggestive, though within the context of the other entries it would appear to refer only to their usual kissing and holding. But there is the desire to evade Eveline and Bertha, and the sense that Jack considers his physical experience with Barbara necessary to be of 'service' to God. It was Jack gaining 'experience'. The idea that Barbara is some sort of bolstering or training 'for service' is rare in the diaries, though God is certainly considered to be involved in what could potentially be a dangerous way. We have seen that Clemo pursues patterns, in fate, destiny, predestiny and Providence. We know he believes in prayer and in the day-to-day

involvement of God with human affairs. Here, he runs the risk of seeming self-obsessed. Events in the world are being interpreted not only *by* oneself, but also as *for* oneself. This is the case with the Barbara fantasy:

> Nothing can be more certain than that God over-rules it –: He has brought it about in answer to prayer; prayer has kept it a secret between Himself, B. and I – the more intimate sides of it, I mean – I do not fear. […] Her love came, not of my choosing: it was given. I did not seek it nor take but when it is offered. (P69)

God has given Barbara to Jack, and she and subsequent girls are being considered almost as commodities, or servants of Clemo's will. This is repeatedly observed through the 1930s. Because his mother has not found out the more intimate details, God is approving the relationship. Because God is presenting Barbara to Jack, Jack has to 'take' what he is given. And because Clemo has prayed for Barbara to come round, that means that when Barbara does come round it is only in answer to prayer. This idea that God will change another human being's mind in response to Jack's desires is shockingly egocentric, and one might worry that if Clemo considers his sexual excitement and fulfilment divinely justified – not only *allowed* but also *given* by God – then he may feel justified to take the flirtation further. A religious reader might have other problems. One could be the question as to whether this relationship really was endorsed by God. If so, what implications does this have? Was Clemo being shown the preference of the elect in having his unconventional desires indulged? What evidence is there that it was God and not the Devil offering the child? If this possibility ever did cross Jack's mind he did not mention it. Rather,

he prayed daily for the deliverance of a girl, and when she came it was an answer to prayer:

> Last night B. playing with ink and got it over her dress, and her mother's […] threatened to keep B. from coming in at all. I prayed passionately that God would defeat that aim, and today she's been in! Thank God! (P69)

Or, in a more volatile mood.

> This morning until 10 o'clock I was in a horrible mood of rebellion, cursing, vowing never to write another word for God […] because B. hadn't come in. […] I raved still more violently, and wanted to lay hands on something to kill and destroy. […] Then, after I had come to my senses and prayed […] God sent my B. in. (P69)

When his prayers are not answered Jack has terrible outbursts. When Barbara laughs at him he will 'Curse her', or begin 'Raving like a demon': 'Life is too hellish to endure . . . – wild thoughts of suicide – oh, I'm going mad: I *know* it's madness, and prayer can do nothing' (P69).

Again:

> B. in, and so good! Playing here with me, playing wheelbarrow race, and rolling on the floor, and sitting close, and then making models from comics, [??] she stood close to me and I felt her warm body and her hair caressing my face. Went out full of [??], to

> pick blackberries – so thankful for the ‘little nurse’ – hoping that it would lead me to a fullness of praise. But d-n it, God is so utterly idiotic – when I came back, mother gone to shop, and AB not there; and I just asked her to sit on my lap – only that – and she sneered and said: ‘I don’t want to….’ Everything crashed again, curses pounded in. (P69)

The same formula was applied to his literary success: ‘This morning it was very hard for me to see the postman pass by with nothing for me after I had prayed, and I went wild with rebellion’ (P68).

There is another development in the Barbara fantasy here; a pleasure which followed from Barbara sitting on his lap, and which Clemo is sensitive to because nobody else approved, and it appears from the above quotation as though Barbara did not always enjoy it either. That nobody approved would make it seem self-satisfying to Clemo, which was incompatible with the fantasy. He wanted to feel like a real ‘lover’ and ‘mystic’, not like a pervert, but several times Barbara is uncomfortable. In the earlier quotation, it upset Clemo and made him curse God, though it may be worth noting he did not attempt to force her into anything. Another time, her rejection is considered endearing by Jack: ‘A little love with B. today: but she doesn’t lead me outdoors now; afraid, I believe. Oh, dear girl!’ (P69).

Ruth attempted to edit the details that sounded most salacious, but her work was done inconsistently, as though by a tired or distracted mind, and the result is mixed. On first reading, one might believe that the missing passages would reveal something horrendous, making the editing process somewhat counter-productive. However, on further study, by decoding the euphemisms and

attending to the anniversaries and patterns marked out in Jack's diaries, one would conclude that the handful of overlooked diary entries are of the same nature as those torn out. For example:

> Rejoice not against me, oh mine enemy: when I fall I shall rise! The devil has – or thinks he has – good cause to rejoice today, since I yielded myself to love again with B. and for nearly an hour gave myself up to an orgy of kissing and – other things. It was in the afternoon, mother being at Dorothy's, papering.
>
> Oh, God – God only understand the remorse, the shame, the sense of utter, utter frustration and weakness. …
>
> I have prayed all evening for B. that God will not allow her to suffer for my weakness. If she went away I should feel, to my dying day, the agony of remorse, the shame of guilt, the fear that it was I – *I* – a son of God, redeemed by Christ – who had led her first into the evil path. Forbid, oh my God! Send Evelyn to satisfy and sanctify my yearnings! (P68)

More explicitly:

> Only one kiss because AB. would have heard, but in each other's caresses we found all that had been 'locked away since and lost awhile' – so much so that I had an orgasm. I lived […] the day in a sort of dream, hardly daring to believe it had really happened. . . . but if any man has ever known the presence of God I know it now. (P69)

There are two aspects to be considered here. The first is that the orgasm is not at all usual, but a surprise to Jack. So the phrase commonly used, of a ‘full expression’ of love, does not mean orgasm, and sexual gratification is not the object of Jack’s ‘sexual’ ‘experience’. This should be remembered when Clemo calls himself a ‘sex mystic’ or uses the sub-title ‘*A Mystical-Erotic Quest*’ for his second autobiography. A further aspect is that the orgasm is expressed as a mystical experience, as ‘the presence of God’. God is not only complicit here, but facilitating and rewarding Jack’s physical relationship with Barbara. The passage recalls a statement in *The Invading Gospel,* in which Clemo describes his preoccupation with finding a relationship between sex and Christian mysticism: ‘few adolescents would claim that saying their prayers gives them as profound a revelation as love-making’ (20).

At no point, one might observe, is Barbara’s enjoyment considered, and this might be the more basic character flaw – Jack’s solipsism. Consider the weakness of the following justification from 1936. Jack and Eveline have been discussing the inappropriate pressure he has been placing on Barbara. Jack reflects later:

> I am really living only for B. now, humanly. […] I feel rather bitter towards mother because she so often keeps B.’s love from me. B. in again in day, playing dominoes. It’s certainly not hurting her. I’ve never seen fear of shock or shame on her face because of my love. (P69)

Jack appears to be writing that it is fine for him to continue as he has been, so long as Barbara does not express fear, shock or shame. These are hardly the conditions for a loving relationship. It is utterly one-sided, only about Jack and not at all about Barbara's happiness. There is more evidence of this in the manipulative techniques he would sometimes use when Barbara did not want to kiss him. He would sit in his chair with his face in his hands pretending to cry until the girl relented (P69). Many nights Jack and his mother sat and talked through his prospects, butting heads over this affair:

> Talked with Mother last night about B. and I – still she will not believe that God is behind it – 'If He were, you wouldn't get such bad moods.' Oh, she won't see that the bad moods are present only when B. isn't – when the devil lies and dares to suggest that God has not fulfilled His pledge and supplied all my needs. (P70)

Eveline also believed that Jack was destined to love and marry, and that his wife would be provided by God. She supported him in all aspects of the theory of love-making, and for this reason she seems to have found it difficult to argue with his convictions that first Evelyn, then Violet, then Barbara, were God's chosen mates for him. For long nights they argued in front of the fire, Bertha sitting quietly. 'Got talking with mother in the evening' is a common refrain, and for all of Jack's idiosyncrasies and tempers, these evenings reading and talking with his mother – listening to her, considering and respecting her opinion – are a constant and endearing presence. They are a part of daily routine in the cottage, and it was only on the subject of girls that they fell out. Sometimes, this

was because instead of paying Jack attention, Barbara had gone to Eveline, or even to Aunt Bertha, as in this 1937 entry:

> B. on my knee […] – felt the ardour and was glad. […] And then – suddenly, unexpectedly – she kissed A.B. – damn the sight for ever! […] The kiss I prayed for – given to another before my eyes! […] I broke down and cried until we went to bed – cried and sobbed my heart out. (P70)

He loathes when Barbara kisses his mother or aunt, and is even struck with jealousy when she kisses her own mother (P70).

In March 1938, the ‘romance’ is severed by circumstance. In February, Barbara’s grandfather, Marshall Rowse, having moved to Trewoon to escape a family feud with the Angilleys, crashed his motorcycle and died. Barbara’s parents decided to relocate to Trewoon to live with the widow, and were gone within a few weeks.

Jack’s initial response was dramatic:

> I must not – oh, I *must* not write much now – too horrible it is – I feel that I am dying, my life ebbing away in this grief, grief inconsolable. I can’t bear to stay here […] beyond all my understanding or my faith is this horror of darkness. Ba to leave, to go away! It can’t be – oh, Lord, Lord, how I have prayed today. (P70)

The following day he has calmed:

> trying to see God's hand even in this, working for me and Ba. Absence makes the heart grow fonder, they say […]. It is a terrible shock but I feel God upholding me.

Next day, the family left. Jack was devastated, and it is said that the 1939 and 1940 diaries were destroyed by him because of the desperate misery he suffered as a result. In 1938, however, his faith appeared healed almost immediately, within twenty-four hours. In later years, this period is looked back on as the occasion of Clemo's 'conversion'. This is worthy of note, as it is central to his mature theology. In hindsight, Clemo writes that he experienced a gradual conversion, completed around 1937-38 (P48). But it seems that the sense of this conversion's finality comes from it being punctuated by Barbara's move to another village, as well as the revelation that Evelyn had married (P70). These facts gave the impression of the end of an era, further confirmed by the start of the Second World War and the arrival of evacuees. The event of the conversion, Clemo states, was sex, though the diaries for the period show nothing emphatically different, no monumental change in outlook.

The moment, on 4 September 1937, where Clemo writes 'Surrender of everything to God', does not stand out in the diaries, but is one among many absolute statements of faith and conviction. A few days later, he writes about Barbara, 'She's a child and I must not forget it', as though he is intending to change his treatment of her following his epiphany (P70). But nothing changes, and there remain even more uncomfortable entries, usually followed by remorse: 'Oh, it's all tears – tears when I sin, tears when I plead, tears when I doubt, tears when I trust – only tears!' We read of Barbara being 'ardent' and

placing Jack's 'hand beneath her skirt' (P70). One week: 'I feel so different this week – free not only from sin but from the desire to sin' (P70). The following week he is marking 'love' and 'kisses' in emphatic red crayon. It was a period of heightened turmoil, with Clemo falling, repenting and falling again. He was arguably at his lowest point to date, intellectually aware of the sin, emotionally certain of the correctness of his love, physically tempted to impropriety, and unable to repair the rift.

It was at this point that the world around him changed, almost as though he could not live a good Christian life without outside help. As the rift appeared to grow, seeming irreconcilable, the miracle came. God intervened and removed temptation. Barbara left, Evelyn married, and Christ drew nearer. This appears to be the root of Clemo's conversion experience and the mark of his new life. Now, in the diaries, it will be more frequent to read of his suffering in terms of frustration and dullness, rather than the 'demonic raving' of these earliest years.

Before looking at Clemo's literary output during the 1930s, it ought to be noted that there was a peculiar and pronounced interaction between his biography and his writing. He famously wrote in *Confession*: 'I am one of those writers whose creative work cannot be fully understood without reference to certain broken boundaries in their private lives' (vii). So, what were these 'broken boundaries'? Sex? Girls? Syphilis? Faith? In the 1930s, Jack's differences became more pronounced and strained. His interest in sex naturally developed, and his relationships with girls were enthusiastically announced. The syphilis progressed, enveloping him in deafness and dulling his sight. He was testing personae, trying voices and personalities. He was the lover, the elect, the prophet, the poet. His life and body were a battleground between warring forces: on the one side despair, disease and solitude; on the other

hope, love, promise, faith. In the midst of these dramatic and damaging developments, Clemo determined to become a writer, and inevitably these diverse straining boundaries spilled out into his work. Theoretically and experimentally, they were revealed in the inflammatory newspaper letters in the *Cornish Guardian*. Defensively, they were revealed in the dialect tales, ‘throwing off the stagnant gloom’ (*CoaR* 71). Ideologically, the boundaries were intimated and overcome in the narratives of novels. The following chapter will be looking at the early boundaries, these uncertain years of self-discovery and experimentation as Clemo reaches out to a general public.

1. Trethosa Pit, with Goonvean incline, Dry and Engine House (courtesy of the China Clay History Society).

2. Tolbenny Dry Kiln (courtesy of CCHS).

3. Goonvean Sand Tip (courtesy of CCHS)

4. Bloomdale Dry (courtesy of CCHS)

5. Reggie Clemo and his brother John, in Butte, Montana, c.1910 (P147).

6. Eveline, Reggie and the baby Jack, 1917 (P147).

7. (Courtesy of CCHS)

8. Reggie Clemo and friend 'on a ranch', 1911 (P147).

9. Eveline and Jack Clemo, c.1920

10. Trethosa School, 1922. Jack is centre row, fourth from right (P147).

11. Jack, Eveline and Reggie (P151). Although appearing to be a family portrait, it has been made by splicing two images, one of Jack and his mother c.1920, and another of Reggie in late 1916.

12. *Top*, Jack (far left), Bertha (front, in white hat), 1930 (P145).
13. *Bottom*, Jack, 1929 (P145).

14. Jack, 1926 (P147)

15. Aunt Bertha and Eveline Clemo, 1935 (P147).

16. Clemo with novel ms, c.1935 (P145)

17. Clemo on the Scillies 1937 (P138) (P138)

18. Clemo, 1935 (P147)

19. Eveline Clemo and Jack on the River Fal, c. 1937 (P149)

SEPTEMBER, 1936.

14 Monday

[illegible]

15 Tuesday

[illegible]

16 Wednesday

[illegible]

20. Diary page, 1936 (P69)

IV

‘Teach me, Only Teach Love’[7]

> Lord Jesus, Thou seest I patiently wait;
> Come now and within me a new heart create;
> To those who have sought Thee Thou never said’st ‘No’ –
> Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. (Sankey 569)[8]

Clemo’s literary influences at this point are diverse and conflicting, and his output reflects this in a useful way. The quantity of material available through the 1930s has been mentioned, and here we will see how the young ambitious man approached his audiences, in the *Cornish Guardian* newspaper, the dialect tales, the poetry, and the published music lyrics. It was a time of experimentation in life, ideas and styles, and as well as a number of false starts and aberrations we will find the nascent origins of the celebrated poet.

The best record of Clemo’s early ideas is collected in the archive of the *Cornish Guardian*. It is the most extensive and illuminating of Clemo’s publications in the 1930s, in particular for the emergent literary voice that would mature into the autobiographical voice of *Confession of a Rebel*. There were, however, a handful of false starts. The one that immediately stands out is ‘“Gyp” and the Cats’, published by *Tail-Wagger Magazine* in January 1931, around the same time as the dialect tale ‘Benjy an’ his Sweetheart’ was published by *Netherton’s Almanack*. ‘“Gyp” and the Cats’ was a sentimental piece of nonsensical anthropomorphism, written from the point of view of Jack’s Pomeranian. The narrative voice is similar to the fleeting online trend of ‘lolcat’:

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[7] This was declared ‘my life motto’ in 1942 (P72).

[8] This simple hymn, written by James Nicholson in 1872, is indicative of the decade’s development. One day in 1936 Clemo kept singing the chorus of it in his head, and he remarked poignantly of God: ‘I love Him and His love is breaking my heart into utter surrender’ (P69).

‘To hold pen hurts paw-paw and not much more I can write’ (P154). Happily, the voice was not given a second outing. The contemporaneous dialect tale, however, is of more value, as it is almost the only literary account of regional perceptions of events for the inter-war period in the quickly changing clay region, and it is an intimate record of a now-almost-unspoken language form. In terms of publishing history, the dialect tale marks Clemo’s first narrative success and led to the publication of around twenty similar pieces through the 1930s, a handful of which were returned to in the 1980s and reproduced for a children’s book, *The Bouncing Hills*. The tales have only recently been collected together and published as *A Proper Mizz-Maze*. But the dialect tale and the *Tail-Wagger* piece are similar in one way. They are both light-hearted attempts to write in an unnatural voice. Jack does not know how he is meant to write yet and he experiments with voices distant from his natural idiom. Elsewhere, at the same time, Clemo was experimenting in verse. The verse developed in a kind of microcosm away from the prose, it appears. The earliest poems are dramatic Cornish renderings and death-obsessed reveries in the style of the Graveyards, metaphysical love poems and symbolist landscape verse. The following is the first stanza of one of Clemo’s dramatic poems, ‘The Legend of the Doom Bar’, published in a Plymouth annual in 1932. It is an adaptation of a folktale accounting for the notorious ship-wrecking sandbar at the mouth of the Camel river:

> On the strand the mermaid lay,
>   Basking idly in the sun:
> Came a man with deadly spear,
>   And the deed was swiftly done.
> Too late he found out his mistake –
>   ’Twas a seal he’d meant to take –
> For while life was ebbing fast,
>   With the breath that was her last,
> She reached out, and in her hand

  Took some pebbles from the sand,
And threw them with a curse
  Into the bay.
Then the man in terror fled.
  But ere he the news could spread,
Night came down before its time
  Upon the day.[9]

These poems found their way into the *Cornish Guardian*, *Doidge's Annual* and *Christian Herald*, while other verses were sent to London in Clemo's early flirtation with the music business, when he wrote to 'one of the fee-snatching music publishers, inviting lyrics' with some slushy pieces inspired by Evelyn (*CoaR* 74).

Clemo was a lifelong lover of music, and said that musicality came easily and naturally to him. His mother played the organ and gave lessons, and both his parents had been in the chapel choir. Indeed, in *Confession*:

> the picture that remains most compellingly in my mind is that of mother seated at the organ, absorbed and remote in the pale light of the oil lamp, playing and singing hymns out of a tattered, red-backed copy of Sankey's Sacred Songs and Solos. (*CoaR* 51)

Their neighbours, the Trevertons, owned a record player, and Mr Treverton would invite Jack over, 'to sit on the bench while he played his gramophone to me' (*CoaR* 51). Publishing music was attractive, as well as a money-making scheme. The manuscripts for all three songs have survived: 'Dreams of Yesterday' and 'Flower of the Vale' from 1931, then 'Heaven Number Eight' from 1935 (P154). The tunes are catchy 'popular' pieces for voice and piano, the earliest two being parlour music, and the third a foxtrot. In 1937, Jack was

[9] For the full poem and more uncollected verses, see Appendix I.

invited to submit further work, 'but God overruled wisely, and has taught me not to write that kind of thing again' (P70). The process seems to have been that one sent one's lyric away and the publisher had a composer set it to music. The contributors were told that they would receive a percentage of any profits after costs. The company, having received Jack's lyrics, assured him that his work would be a tremendous success and all he had to do was send them £15. Eveline Clemo had managed to scrape together £20 of life-savings over the years, and, in faith, she gave it to Jack for his music. She lost every penny:

> No money, no money from anywhere. M[other] almost breaking down under the weight of this – feels she's at the end of things – no money for rent, which is a week overdue already – and there's debt to pay back. Think of it. £1.8.0 a week – that's all she gets, to keep herself and I in everything – food, clothes – and to pay rent and rates out of! I don't know how she does it. (P69)

The music of these pieces does not bear any relation to the lyrics. Clemo's first submission, 'Dreams of Yesterday', had a melancholy sentiment with the refrain 'I know it's no good wishin' for what can never be, but I just can't help a'thinkin' o' those happy days wi' thee', over the top of cheery piano music, and it ended with a triumphant chord sequence. The opposite happened to 'Flower of the Vale', Clemo's second submission. This time, the romantic sugariness of the lyric – 'Flower of my heart! sweet flow'r of the vale! None can excel thee, nay, none can compare' – is set to a dark and sombre tune. According to a chart Clemo drew up, recording where and when he sent his youthful writing, 'Dreams of Yesterday' sold just eight copies (WM 1992.31). 'Heaven Number Eight', did

not fare any better, albeit the music was a more appropriate fit – a bouncy tune that could almost be the theme music for a sitcom. Jack left six copies in the shop at St Dennis, though none sold. Not long after, the music company wrote to Clemo:

> I am rather disappointed to have to report that so far there has been no demand whatsoever for this song, and our efforts to date, to popularize the number have proved singularly unsuccessful. (P11)

Clemo did not attempt another, but the story is given a postscript in the 1941 diary: 'I see in the paper that the publisher of my last song, which ruined us financially, has been sent to prison for such pursuits' (P71).

More encouraging were Clemo's experiments in the local paper. The *Cornish Guardian* put Clemo in contact with the world beyond the surrounding villages. He could talk about the arts, education, religion, sex and culture, and expect a response. It was an unconventional social education, but such unconventionality would be typical of Clemo. This newspaper archive is important for several reasons. Biographically, it is through the papers that Clemo developed relationships, particularly with older men. Frank Baron, S. E. Burrow and John Rowland were all first encountered in the *Cornish Guardian*, and these volatile and ambivalent connections were the closest Clemo came to friendships. We can also follow Clemo's development of thought through them, as he tried out new ideas, then was forced to explain himself, to debate and adapt. This was something most people got to do with friends or at school. Clemo's writing in the papers is often hyperbolic, contradictory and poorly

expressed, but the roots of his later thoughts and convictions are to be found here, allowing us to trace a definite progression.

The first of these progressions is the literary voice. Clemo is shocking, dismissive, peremptory, at times exposed and vulnerable, usually self-important and provocative. The effect he is trying to achieve is of a formal, authoritative register, precocious and impressive. He wants to impose himself as an exciting, rebellious individual, transcending the soppily pious establishment. This is the juvenile voice of *Confession of a Rebel*, the uneducated genius. In the local newspaper we observe the voice undergoing a brutal maturation process. Jack was stuck in a frustrating, friendless world, a life lived at his desk in the corner, or wandering over the sand dumps with his Bible. He reached out to the public with the same feelings of severance and impunity a young Facebook or Twitter user might have today, toying with personalities and ideas, and to some extent the newspaper controversies were a kind of practical play.

By the time Jack was sending his inflammatory pieces, the paper was already established as a cultural and theological battleground, with a handful of regular contributors dominating the field. One approached these men expecting an argument, and Clemo provoked many of the most striking and violent disputes of the decade. His first letter was about books for boys and was published in October 1930. The writing is unnaturally heightened and indulgent, and is as melodramatic as his novel drafts from the period: 'I think there are far too many "thrillers" read today by the younger generation', he says, adding in an optimistic timbre, that, as the youth matures, his manhood will pull him 'upward' and 'the books he despised he will love, those he loved he will despise … Wait; the voice of the man is calling, and it shall not call in vain. Ere long it will burst its upward way despite every handicap. Then he will see his mistake' (*CG* 23

Oct. 1930). Jack was fourteen when he wrote this, so he had not experienced this 'growing up', but the ebullience of overwritten enthusiasm reflects an unevenly balanced teenager, immature but ambitious, inexperienced but more than competent. The overall message of the piece is leave the boy alone and he will come good in the end, which is almost reminiscent of Isaiah's 'Fear not'. It is a liberal message, and it will often be observed that Jack can be both surprisingly liberal and surprisingly conservative in his outlook. Also, that first letter shows the familiar anti-establishment position. There are two premises to it: boys read lots of thrillers, and people condemn boys for reading too many thrillers. Jack contradicts both: boys should read fewer thrillers and people should just leave them alone. Clemo's cynicism towards the establishment and established wisdom is a predictable personality trait. He was both a teenager and largely self-educated.

In the next series of letters, his liberal anti-establishment ideas again emerge. The view was expressed in the *Cornish Guardian* that belief in Father Christmas should be discouraged in children. Clemo disagreed, arguing that children should be allowed to enjoy the magic of Father Christmas: 'When at length the truth comes, the old memories will alleviate the blow and the child will thank its parents for having been allowed the joys of childhood's illusion' (*CG* 25 Dec. 1930). It was a mild disagreement, and some might think it hardly worth writing in to the paper, but Clemo was trying to pick a gentle fight, and he was clearly disappointed with the limpness of responses. Still, it did not take him long to learn how to really upset his audience, and the following Christmas he wrote: 'I believe […] that until a child knows the full facts of sex, it cannot grasp the full significance and therefore the full enjoyment, of Christmas.' This is a more confident Clemo. He has settled into the newspaper and is pleased with

his ability to engage, shock and upset – and so surpass – his readers and interlocutors. He ends the letter with a telling narcissistic uncertainty: ‘This letter may reveal me to your readers in a new light’ (*CG* 24 Dec. 1931). Such a conclusion was unnecessary, drawing attention away from the argument and turning it to himself. Clemo is inviting feedback, not just on ideas, but on himself personally. This is what he is appealing for, reaching out to the readers and correspondents, inviting them to look at him and consider him. The inappropriateness stands out on the page, and predictably the readers and correspondents were hostile and derisive, instigating a long sequence of defensive and defiant letters.

Clemo’s most prolific combatant in the paper was S. E. Burrow (1855-1939), an elderly vicar and novelist, who responded to Clemo’s outbursts with well-aimed mockery, firstly of Jack’s repetition of the word ‘full’ in his letter on sex and Christmas:

> Master Jack was evidently ‘full’ to overflowing at the time of penning this revealing communication […]. He has evidently heard or read something about ‘human contact’ until he has become obsessed by it, and places it high on a three-legged pedestal before which we are to bow! […] I am more disposed to regard him as a priggish, self-inflated dogmatist, who has tried to look clever by putting on his grandmother’s spectacles. This is bad for the sight – things get blurred! (*CG* 31 Dec. 1931)

Wounded, Clemo replied:

> Sir – Mr Burrow's letter is puerile in the extreme – a meaningless jumble of quotations and comments – an anaemic apology for criticism, since he evidently had none of the real thing to offer. (*CG* 7 Jan. 1932)

Clemo explains what he meant by 'sex', which was, simply, the physical birth of Christ. That is, Jack wanted children to understand that Jesus was born in the usual way. These are his 'full facts of sex'. It is possible that Jack is disingenuously back-tracking here, but more likely he has misunderstood the context in which he used the word 'sex'. For Jack, the concept of sex is inevitably linked with childbirth, so that he could be referring to anything from intercourse to parturition.

In the wake of this argument, Jack attacked popular culture, particularly the movies. In 1928 he had gone to the cinema with his mother, probably to The Savoy[10] on Truro Road in St Austell:

> Not so very long since, I saw my first film – and most likely my last. It was a wanton, glamorous affair. It dealt with marriage problems, seduction, divorce – all that much of immorality without which the cinema would cease to exist.

He claims that while it disgusted him at first, soon 'I was fascinated, thrilled. I desired to see more like it. Thank God I did not!' It may be assumed that the

[10] Originally, The St Austell Picture Theatre. There seem to have been three cinemas in St Austell in 1928, The Savoy, The Picturedrome (in the Town Hall), and The Capitol. All three had adverts for films in the *Cornish Guardian*. It has been suggested by St Austell historian David Stark that the Truro Road cinema was the most likely venue (Stark letter).

seductive element of his criticism is fabricated, to allow the indignant conclusion: ‘Youth to-day, taken in the mass, is a victim of the films. I repeat, a victim’ (*CG* 5 May 1932).

It cannot be known what film he might have seen that was at once so immoral, repellent and hauntingly seductive, though it is tempting to look through the 1928 cinema advertisements and guess. The Savoy had a weekly choice of films, mostly two or three years old, and in 1928 they showed a 1926 Rin Tin Tin movie, *The Night Cry*, as well as Betty Balfour’s *Blinkeyes* and Fay Compton’s *London Love*. Charlie Chaplin’s *The Gold Rush* was also playing, and though it does not cover the listed topics, Clemo did nourish a hatred of Chaplin, which emerged several times, as in this 1944 diary entry:

> Charlie Chaplin’s been arrested for selling a girl to the brothels. What a vile lot these film stars are – as bad as the Nazis – yet the crowds go on idolizing them. Better bomb Hollywood than Berlin if we want a moral clean-up. (P74)

This was untrue. Clemo was listening to the salacious scandalising he usually condemned. Chaplin had been arrested after an actress and mistress claimed that he was the father of her child. He was not, but the scandal gained momentum, and the case that went to court was a charge of human trafficking, related to the vaguely-worded Mann Act, of which Chaplin was acquitted. He did not sell a girl to a brothel, but the news suited Clemo’s disgust in the ‘perverse jazz-born culture largely imported from America’, as he wrote in the paper (*CG* 12 Sept. 1936).

As well as the movies, Clemo could never abide dancing. It was worldly and, essentially, a flirtation. Jack was influenced by his chapel childhood, and possibly by his father's American history, but the fierce hatred persisted. He condemned Barbara for her involvement in dances in the 1940s, and used it as a narrative device in early novel drafts, where dances were held in clay-drys. He would also demand that any future wife should never go to a dance after they marry, and when he discovered that future romantic interest, Susie Powys, the adopted daughter of Dorset writer T. F. Powys, enjoyed dancing, Clemo expressed a passionate despair (P22, P80).

The combatant in the above exchange, the Reverend Samuel Edwin Burrow, became a correspondent outside the paper as well. He was one of the *Cornish Guardian*'s most frequent contributors, writing articles and letters, as well as a weekly feature in Cornish dialect under his alter-ego Ebenezer Trewiggen, or Eb. Though born in St Columb, Burrow was living in Bournemouth. This was by no means the most vitriolic exchange between the teenager and septuagenarian. Disagreements would begin in the letters pages until they became unsustainably personal and offensive, at which point either the editors would refuse to publish any more, or Burrow would switch to the voice of Eb and continue to mock Jack in dialect, to which Jack gamely responded. Outside of the paper they wrote to one another with perfunctory politesse, offering birthday greetings and compliments on publications. Inevitably, however, the correspondence turned sour and Burrow would frequently use passages from their private exchanges to attack Jack in the newspaper.

In terms of Jack's maturation, being able to argue with his elders was an important part of clawing his way to adulthood, although it was learnt in a very

teenage way, Jack at once enjoying the compliment of being taken seriously while also trying to dismiss everyone as fools and charlatans. Burrow found Clemo's posturing self-importance ridiculous, but he recognized that Jack was extraordinary: objectionable and arrogant, but also young and talented. Part of Burrow's disbelief in Clemo's swaggering conviction was that Jack had not had any experience of the world beyond his cottage. Here was a young teenager telling grown men, reverends and war veterans, what the world was really like, what love, sex, God, battle, politics and people were about, when he knew no one beyond the clay country. This was a common criticism of Clemo, and we see it again when Cecil Day Lewis questioned some generalizations in the submitted draft of *Confession of a Rebel* (P7). The following letter from Burrow reflects their relationship:

> Dear Jack R!
>
> Many thanks for your kind congratulations on attaining my 80th and for your good wishes.
>
> Frankly, I had not intended writing you again – your wild effusion in the Guardian, replying to Mr Slater + myself, in which you politely said we might 'go to the devil and nobody be the worse for it', seemed more than usually offensive from your pen. I wrote what I thought was a fitting reply, but the Editor did *not* print it!
>
> But I should have learnt better by this time than to take serious notice of anything you write – you are yet young, and in the raw. I *hope* you will mature + ripen into decent citizenship by + by.

I notice that you renew your invitation to visit you when in Cornwall, and you add – ‘call and tell me just *what you think of me*’! Now, in that request you give yourself away. You are absorbed in *Self*! You have very exalted + extravagant ideas concerning yourself – your wisdom, so profound and so wise that you need no other teachers! Your religious opinions so vastly superior to the orthodox and generally accepted that you can’t waste time in listening to others preach! You see from this that I am not waiting to visit Cornwall to tell you what I think of you! I think you are clever – and you have gifts which if sanely cultivated might mean much to yourself + others. But you have already arrived and there is nothing more to learn!

My dear Jack. Go to school again, and first of all learn *how to write* so that others can decipher what your pen is meant to say! It is not a sign of superlative wisdom + learning to write in hieroglyphics which call for the services of an expert with a magnifying glass! It is rather an insult to your correspondents! I see you purpose resuming your Self effusions! Don’t! Decent people are ashamed of you, + most laugh at you. Is that what you desire? It is time you pulled yourself together and played the man + not the fool! Yours sincerely
SE Burrow. (P15)

There is an uneven mix of propriety and insolence in Jack’s having written to Burrow as he seems to have done. He has obviously pretended to be polite and respectful by writing on Burrow’s birthday, but then used it as a way of

continuing an argument. He wants Burrow to approve of him, as a child might, but he also wants Burrow to appreciate his ‘genius’. In Burrow’s reply we see the same perfunctory courtesy in thanking Clemo for his letter used as a veil for the assault that follows.

In his response to Jack, Burrow gives a strong sense of what Jack had written to him. There is mention of his philosophy of experience, an idea that litters manuscripts, newspaper correspondence and personal letters. This philosophy, Clemo says, is derived from his reading of Galsworthy’s *Forsyte Saga* (P69), and for Clemo it is the root of mysticism; it is the touch of God by a special sort of grace. Jack finds God in the erotic, and we have seen in his response to an accidental orgasm that he viewed this as literally divine. *There* is God. The philosophy of experience is woolly, but it reappears in the paper and in his correspondence with Burrow. In his next letter to Burrow, Clemo has explained that ‘experience’ is not about going into the world and finding adventure or observing different cultures. Jack can experience humanity by looking closely at himself. Burrow does not quite understand Jack, and writes in reply: ‘you admit ignorance of anything but Self. You ask what you can do under such circumstances and answer your own question by deciding that the only course is to use your self material in the realm of “fiction”!’ (P15).

Burrow’s observation of the selfishness of Clemo’s solution is valid, but it could not seem so to Clemo. Jack was alone and self-involved by both circumstance and determination. According to his philosophy he had been put into this position by God, and it was his own to cope with. It was this ‘experience’ which Jack thought he had to understand and interpret. Experience is primary, but it is the experience of God in one’s life, rather than the ‘worldly’ and ‘extrovert’ experiences of travel or adventure. Those extrovert experiences

Clemo called ‘Natural’, ‘Nature’ being the force opposed to God. Burrow did not know the history of suffering, sickness, alienation and poverty in Jack’s life, and did not fully comprehend him, partly owing to Burrow’s character and partly owing to Jack’s confused elucidation.

In his reply to the letter in which Burrow calls Jack a laughing-stock, Clemo wrote that he did indeed want to be laughed at. It has been noted how Jack affected a thicker accent and dialect to alienate himself from the villagers who had already outcast him, and how he refused to change his clothes and wash. When personal circumstances and disease were forcing him into defensive isolation, he chose to take control of them, to determine the conditions of detachment, to make of them a decision, strength and virtue instead of a weakness and victimhood. In his paradoxical programme of self-alienation, Clemo wanted to be laughed at and despised, but for his own actions rather than for the things he could not help.

In the newspaper, debate usually swung around Clemo’s unpredictable and violent expressions of faith. The vehemence of his outbursts is reminiscent of the firebrand preachers he loved, such as Billy Bray and his own grandfather John Polmounter. The difference is that Clemo, at this time, was not referring his congregation back to the Bible as the Wesleyans were, but inverting the formula and directing people into the world and experience. In 1932, he wrote to the paper: ‘Of God we must learn from life, not from the monotonous routine of so-called “religious instruction” in a schoolroom’ (*CG* 21 July 1932). Similarly, three years later: ‘Experience is always a sacred thing’ (*CG* 19 Sept 1935). And in 1936, in *Jack O’ London*, he adds: ‘A faith that is worth having must be the product of experience, and must remain plastic, moulded by circumstance’ (P154). God is not in the church, then, but in the world around, and the ‘true’

Christian experiences Him directly. This sounds like a pantheistic mystical formula, but it is simply an extension of a primitive faith, with God acting within the world in a day-to-day way, through revelation and through observed patterns. It is consistent with Clemo's later idea of a 'divine covenant' between God and the individual, and of God's role in the life of the 'elect'. But that is not to say that Clemo's later theology is fully formed in the 1930s. We find ideas he would later retract, such as: 'Creed is for the nominal believer; the real Christian gambles with God',[11] and 'dogma blunders against the fact that Christianity is indefinable' (P154). Note the difference between his derision of dogma in 1936 and his strong taste for it in the 1940s, as expressed in the poem 'A Calvinist in Love', from *The Clay Verge*: 'Our love is full-grown dogma's offspring'. This is the final poem of the sequence, and is meant to show the lovers who have abandoned 'Nature' for Christ, who have redeemed their physical love by submitting their wills to Him, 'Making the wild heats of our blood an offering' (39).

Not long after this private correspondence, there was a useful public exchange between Jack and another newspaper combatant, Peter Dartnell. Jack had made another grand statement in favour of experience and, in this case, against Tolstoy and Carlyle, and both the Reverend Parkyn (a regular opponent) and Dartnell responded. Parkyn was rude, largely because in his previous letter Clemo had claimed that the clergy did not believe half of what they said, but Dartnell was quite constructive. In the same piece to which Parkyn had replied, Jack said that the teachings of Christ were of 'no more value to mankind than the teachings of Plato, than the guesses of Euripides, than the code of Mohammed' (*CG* 23 Sept. 1937). He was becoming obscure,

[11] It is unclear whether Clemo intends 'gambles' or 'gambols'.

and Dartnell responded that if he does not believe in the Creed or dogma, nor place any special value on the teachings of Christ, what does he believe? He questioned Clemo systematically, and Clemo leapt at the chance to explain himself.

Firstly, Dartnell asked, what does Clemo mean by the 'Revelation of God in life'? Clemo replied: 'Suffering any evil, the workings of "coincidence," the rhythms of change – these are revelations of God, and should be studied'. Evil, here, is either done or allowed by God, and 'coincidences' are patterns to be interpreted. It is unclear whether Jack would have accepted other attempts at observing patterns and coincidences, such as astrology. Divination as a general principle is an 'abomination' (Deut. 18.12), although Clemo's method of looking for clues in the order of the world certainly seems more like divination than prophecy. Having said this, Clemo's idea of his 'mystical' experience of God at this time does not seem a direct apprehension of God either, but rather the human experience being interpreted within a presumed divine framework.

Secondly, Dartnell asks whether Clemo considers the Bible to be the word of God, to which he replies: 'Yes, I accept the Bible as the inspired word of God, though secondary to the revelation of experience.' Potentially, this too could be problematic, since the interpretation of these experiential revelations depends on the mind, of which Clemo writes:

> I do not regard the mind of man as God's greatest work. In fact, I regard it as being today God's greatest handicap. Men will accept as religion only what they can 'explain,' and so they never touch religious experience at all. The mind can only serve God while it is

> the servant of emotion, religious instinct, passion, impulse. (*CG* 14 Oct 1937.)

But is the mind that divines God's intention from 'coincidences' a 'servant of emotion'? It could be, in the sense of La Rochefoucauld's aphorism: 'The mind is always the dupe of the heart'. The desire to find patterns is the 'heart' or passion aspect, while the search itself is of the 'mind' or reason. But this is simply the formula of all problem-solving. The sentiment behind Clemo's unusual statement, of course, is pure D. H. Lawrence, and risks the same solipsistic and perverse self-justification. Recall Lawrence's outburst in *Fantasia of the Unconscious*:

> If a child makes you so that you really want to spank it soundly, then soundly spank the brat […]. Never be ashamed of it, and never surpass it […]. The only rule is, do what you really, impulsively, wish to do. (51)

The risks on a humanistic level are dangerous enough, but Clemo had the intensifier of God's approval. In spite of the dangers, the sense is fairly clear: feeling is primary, and the purpose of the mind is to find the best way of indulging one's desires. In doing this, one is serving God. In later work, this idea became more nuanced, swapping this Lawrentian, pseudo-Nietzschean 'Do what thou wilt' for an idea of 'vocation', a 'personal covenant' with God and an individual's 'contract' with Him.

Clemo states that the Bible is secondary to the 'revelation of experience', but it is still the Word of God, assuming that the two will not contradict one

another. That is, the Bible and ‘experience’ are both valid ways of approaching God, and they should reveal the same message. If this is so, then to value one over the other is at best arbitrary.

Clemo skips quickly over the third of Dartnell’s questions, asking whether he is Catholic or Protestant, by answering that he is neither, and then gives a more important answer to the fourth enquiry as to whether man himself is evil:

> While not declaring that man is ‘evil and rotten to the core,’ I do believe that, of his own efforts, he will never realise his own ideal, much less Christ’s. We have to insist more and more on the impotence of man. History about us, philosophy behind us, urge this truth. What is the sum of human philosophy but a commentary on the self-frustration of man? […] Man is obviously by nature at the mercy of unknown influences. (*CG* 14 Oct 1937)

Let us take from this sentiment only that man cannot ‘realise his own ideal’ alone. This is Clemo’s response to humanism, and the implication is that man needs to submit to God and to Christ. But how can he know what he is submitting to? Clemo would argue that he knows ‘by experience’. It is the ‘revelation of experience’ that alerts one to God in the first instance. This argument would seem to invite a question about how one first comes to believe in God or to know Him. If experience is primary to belief, then what is it about this experience that is so explicitly Christian? That is, it rather seems to be the case that Clemo’s ‘experience’ of God is predicated on a Biblical understanding of God and Christ prior to the experience, unless Clemo is some sort of prophet.

Practically speaking, too, there is a problem. Clemo's conclusions from the 'patterns' he observes, and from the passions he feels, are consistently thwarted. We have seen in the case of the child Barbara how Clemo said that she 'must' come round, because his passions are telling him so. Most of the time she does *not* come round when she is supposed to, but when she *does* the essentially randomised reinforcement is imagined to be a great triumph of the divine pattern. Further, in his diaries Clemo makes very firm predictions, including the years in which important events will take place, particularly with regard to his marriage. 1939 was a key date of romantic destiny. It was intended to be the year when circumstances were arranged for Jack and Evelyn to marry, though when the year came Evelyn had already been married for two years to another man. Similarly, 1945 was a 'year of destiny', but when nothing important happened he moved the year back to 1946.

Clemo's direct answers to Dartnell may have opened more questions for the reader, but they were a useful exercise, as well as an informative statement of his progression. They comprise the most mature of his public utterances up to this point; more mature since they contradicted some of the violent statements from previous weeks. For example, the teachings of Christ are no longer of as little use as Plato, Euripides or Mohammed, but of a significance second only to direct experience of God. (Clemo appears not to have read any of these at this time. In 1980, however, he did request a Braille version of Euripides' *Alcestis*, following his friendship with Patricia Moyer, an academic with a special interest in the tragedian.)

In *Confession* we see more how Clemo is using the word 'experience', putting pressure on a common understanding. His 'experience' is an internal response to stimuli, which we see several times in *Confession*, as when he

writes of the Browning love letters that they ‘gave me just the imaginative poise I needed, balancing the “childishness” of my actual experience, broadening its significance and rooting it in a sense of spiritual maturity’ (*CoaR* 142). Not only is his ‘actual experience’ maintained, but it is increased by further reflection. In normal formulations of ‘experience’, there is implied a variety of external stimuli being internalized usefully. Clemo’s formulation reduces the external stimuli and emphasizes the importance of thoughts and feelings.

The philosophy of experience also informed his reading. The Browning love letters were an influence, but before them Clemo was looking urgently for other writers and artists in a situation similar to his own. Of course, he was reading for enjoyment, to observe style and to show off in the paper, but he was also looking for a writer who had suffered and succeeded, or had similar faith and ideas. He was clearly aware of D. H. Lawrence as a teenager, and was bound to be attracted by the biography and work of that miner’s son writing so dynamically and directly about sexuality and sexual liberation as an uncompromising individualist at odds with the world, just as A. L. Rowse had been. Mostly, though, Jack read biographies and biographical sketches in the papers, and the cutouts from these fill his scrapbooks. He looked for people like himself or in circumstances similar to his own. This is why he looked in particular at syphilitic authors, such as James Joyce and Alphonse Daudet, however unlikely they were to appeal. (As a matter of fact, he hated both Joyce and Daudet, and the closest he came to syphilitic sympathy was Van Gogh.) Jack wanted to find a connection, a pattern, a model; clues to his own mess and uncertainty. In 1935 he read a biography of Hall Caine and declared it

> A fine book, amazing me with the likeness of H.C.'s youth and outlook with mine. He almost became a sceptic in early manhood – like me. His interest was in humanity, the […] lost, outcast as is mine. Great man! (P68)

Clemo's enthusiasm for having found a writer in some ways like him led him to pronounce Caine 'Great', though he fell from grace as Clemo matured, and by 1941 he had been relegated from Clemo's list of writers among his 'Elect' down to 'Minor Influences', with G. K. Chesterton for company (P71). Chesterton could not be one of Clemo's 'elect', he said, because he seems not to have reported any answer to prayer or to have experienced any personal communion with or guidance from God (P73). There were six men (no women) considered of the elect: Browning, Spurgeon, Galsworthy, C.T. Studd, Hardy and T.F. Powys. The only unexpected inclusion, a writer not often associated with Clemo, and whose role in Clemo's development has not been explored, is Galsworthy. Galsworthy, along with a number of writers who would prove influential to Clemo's literary development, was recommended by Gordon Meggy, a writing coach who helped Clemo to prepare some of his early stories for publication. (We will return to the correspondence between Meggy and Clemo in Chapter V.) Both Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* are strong and unexamined influences on Clemo's prose in the 1930s and early 1940s, when all his novels were written.

By discovering similarities to the celebrated, Clemo was looking to show his own extraordinariness. It did not especially matter what the similarity was, and could be any triviality or chronological coordination. In the *Cornish Guardian*, his youthful desire to be considered a 'genius' got Jack in some trouble when he

compared himself to a number of celebrated men, including Epstein, Tolstoy, Carlyle and Hardy. This was ambitious for an unpublished teenager, notwithstanding that the aspects of their personalities he observed in himself were not especially flattering, and included ‘hypochondria’ and ‘eccentricity’. To infer any meaningful similarity between a great writer and an opinionated boy from such qualities was absurd, and naturally his old sparring partner S. E. Burrow responded, as ‘Eb’: ‘“Like Epstein”, Jack R. Clemo does not care what people think or say about him! That’s fine, that is – “Like Epstein”!’ Burrow’s mockery ruffled Clemo, and the young man responded, but blundered into the same mistake, this time comparing his ‘justifiable self-confidence’ with Chatterton, Pitt and Hugo, then adding that he was like Rossetti in so far as he was ‘using grown men as my toys’. Burrow’s criticism stood; there was no reason for Clemo to invoke these names to describe his character unless he was intending to infer that he was like them in another way, too. He must not, he declares, be dismissed as ‘a mere scribbler of letters’. Pardoning himself if he seemed immodest sometimes, he wrote: ‘the knowledge that one’s mind has given birth to something like 700,000 words – which mine has done during the past three years […] well, it brings a sense of achievement […] which, I admit, is at times liable to break down the barrier of prudence.’ He added that his novel, at this time entitled ‘Gwinbren’, ‘has been passed as up to publication by a famous London literary institution’ (*CG* 6 July 1933).

In this instance Clemo appears ridiculous, posturing as a genius and comparing his flaws with the flaws of established writers to suggest that he deserves to be considered among them. He continued to show off in this vein, making wilder claims to genius and sexual experience as the year progressed. ‘For several months’, he writes, ‘I studied embryology’, though it ‘makes one

regard child-bearing as mere cold, hard biological fact' (*CG* 15 June 1933). Clemo did not study embryology, certainly not in the way implied, and he makes similar claims when talking about Freud. On 23 June 1934 he pompously wrote how 'disgusting' Freud's libidinal link between God and 'Nature' relating to one's parents was, and the blasphemy of God being described as 'nothing but an exalted father'. The attack was so vicious and generally wide of the mark that any psychoanalyst reading the piece might have found it stimulatingly aggressive, deflecting and defensive. When questioned, it turned out that Jack had only read a fragment of a single essay of Freud's, 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', and a biographical sketch that he had cut out for his scrapbook (P153). Not only was there no special insight, but there was a lack of basic understanding. This might have been the result of arguing with men older than himself. To keep up with them, Jack took shortcuts, relying on summaries from his scrapbook cutouts and his copy of Arthur Mee's *Children's Encyclopedia*, given to him in 1926. Clemo's literary education was similarly piecemeal. On a hospital trip to Plymouth he bought *The International Library of Famous Literature*, a twenty-volume collection of poetry and prose collated by Richard Garnett and first published in 1898. The collection contains a vast range of recent and historical world literature (including Garnett's own), from Classical Greek to the present day. Entries were short, the prose being only a single story or chapter from a greater work; sufficient to get some sense of a writer and sufficient to claim familiarity in the *Cornish Guardian*. Clemo later reduced these twenty volumes, as he did not have enough bookshelving in the cottage. He cut out the bits he liked and put them all into just two volumes of his favourite pieces. He rewrote the contents page, carefully glued the pages in and saved himself around three feet of book space. The salvaged works show his

preferences and professional interests. The presence of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Carlyle, the Romantics, Hugo, Donne and Blake is not surprising, though others, such as Pierre Loti and Pasquale Villari, are more so. The selection also included several theologians, and it was here that Clemo first read Calvin, specifically the exciting though unilluminating ‘Prefatory Address’ of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. It is likely that this is the only work of Calvin’s that Clemo ever read, which is remarkable considering that almost all commentaries and reviews call him a Calvinist, and Clemo identified himself as a Calvinist or sometimes ‘Neo-Calvinist’ (P167). The emphasis on Calvinism was toned down when it became the most frequent context of criticism, but Clemo’s ‘Calvinism’ was never the Calvinism of Calvin. It was an agreement with specific foci viewed through the filters of, to begin with, Charles Spurgeon (arguably the most important theological influence on Clemo) and, after 1943, also Reinhold Niebuhr and Karl Barth. All three of these figures were influential to Clemo, albeit for rather different reasons. Spurgeon was a Calvinist who also enjoyed Bunyan and Wesley, and he was one of the most popular preachers of the nineteenth century. He was a powerful speaker and an imposing presence, reportedly captivating congregations of up to ten thousand (Fullerton 83). He published broadly, including many volumes of his sermons, which were transcribed as he spoke. Clemo read these sermons in the *Christian Herald* (*CoaR* 53), along with other influential favourites Talmage and Torrey. Clemo’s own volumes of the sermons appear to have been inherited from his mother or his grandparents, dating from the late nineteenth century. In *Confession of a Rebel*, Clemo notes that ‘on the purely spiritual side I owe more to Spurgeon than to any other man’ (144). Niebuhr and Barth, on the other hand, were theologians rather than preachers, and Clemo came to them as an adult. Both

men tackle the key themes of Clemo's writing, the fall of man and the natural world, election and predestination. Clemo found Niebuhr difficult, declaring that 'one or two points are even beyond my own grasp' (P73), and in his published works he more often cites Barth as an influence. Clemo first came across Barth in Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, but did not read him thoroughly until 1946 (P48). Clemo read at least three works of Barth's, *The Epistle to the Romans*, *Dogmatics in Outline* and the essay 'No!', in *Natural Theology*. Barth was one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, and he introduced Clemo to concepts such as Neo-orthodoxy and crisis theology. Barth's influence led Clemo to modify his position on election and predestination, ideas fully developed in his 1958 *The Invading Gospel*. There were also several poems that make direct reference to Karl Barth, including 'The Broadening Spring' (*MoC* 51) and 'On the Death of Karl Barth' (*ET* 54).

In 1934, following the protracted debate on sex, Clemo received a putdown that cut deeply. It hurt Jack so much, in fact, that he tore it up and burned it. The letter came from a new novelist who had received some recent attention. Daphne du Maurier, writing here as Daphne Browning, was the author of three novels at this time, albeit none of them very well known. She was living in Surrey, performing duties as an officer's wife, having married Frederick 'Boy' Browning. The du Maurier family also had a second home at Bodinnick, the opposite side of the river from Fowey. The letter is headed 'From the Late Sir Gerald du Maurier's Daughter', which might imply that Daphne du Maurier was not famous at this point. However, it is more likely the case that the editors chose their header owing to the recent death of Daphne's famous father in April 1934. By July, she was already half way through her biography of him.

Sir, As a great lover of Cornwall and its inhabitants, though forced by necessity to live many months away from both, a weekly link and reminder comes with the ‘Guardian,’ which is sent me with unfailing regularity by one of the truest and most genuine of Cornishwomen.

In the name of those who like myself wish to breathe something of the very air of Cornwall with our weekly paper, may I protest against the inevitable and wearisome exchange of personalities between Mr Hawken, the Rev. Parkyn, Mr. Clemo and Ebenezer Trewiggen, which is threatening to spoil, if it has not done so already, the tone of your paper.

Let these gentlemen settle their differences privately in correspondence, but not before our eyes in print. We are not interested in their views, religious, political or sexual, and we object to valuable space, which might have been given to descriptions of Cornish people and their towns and villages, being filled with unpleasant discussions tainted with malice, serving no purpose whatsoever and verbose to the point of imbecility, not only worthless but irritating, and ugly to the eye.

The tendency appears to spread, others are following their example, and surely it would be happier for all of us if you closed your Correspondence Column, rather than let it be monopolised by people who, at our expense, thus gratify their lamentable desire of seeing their names in print.

Daphne Browning. (*CG* 19 July 1934)

The editors appear to have been impressed by the letter, apologising immediately and assuring du Maurier and the public that the 'correspondence is now irrevocably closed'. Jack never forgave du Maurier. When he read *Rebecca* a few years later he could only say it was 'merely a gripping story' (P73), and in *Confession* he recounts the letter in a somewhat dismissive way. He does not have it to hand, of course, having burnt it, so he quotes from memory and the only phrase he recalls with complete accuracy is 'ugly to the eye'. This phrase, he remarks, 'suggests that even fashionable lady novelists can lose their sense of humour when trying to suppress something they do not happen to like' (*CoaR* 113). More revealing in the account in *Confession* is that Clemo tells the reader that du Maurier's attack was levelled at him. He misquotes her as having written: 'We are not interested in his views, religious, political or sexual, and if he wishes to express them let him do so in private correspondence and not before our eyes in print' (*CoaR* 112-3). Clemo has writen 'his' and 'he' where du Maurier had written 'theirs' and 'their'. Clemo has imagined that du Maurier singled him out personally for attack, when really she criticised all the men involved. He continues that it hurt especially because she was 'one of the class who should have recognised my talent and encouraged me'. The obligation of du Maurier's 'class' is repeated as Clemo criticises Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch for not championing the working class boy when, later in the decade, Jack sent him one of his early novel drafts. Quiller-Couch wrote a kind and encouraging letter in response, with suggestions on what worked and what did not. It was a great disappointment to Jack, who had expected Quiller-Couch to launch his career.

It would have seemed more valid for Clemo to have criticised du Maurier's suggestion that the correspondence pages be scrapped in favour of

'descriptions of Cornish people and their towns and villages'. She appears to have wanted to read of a romanticised, simplistic rurality; a patronising reduction and 'containment' of the region. It was almost indecent for her distant and contained Cornish folk to be anything but local. This outlines a key difference between the two writers and their perceived positions within Cornwall. Clemo felt no need to promote or reinforce any prescribed regional identity. He would not become any more or less a son of Cornwall or of the clay. He was writing from a particular place and region that directly informed his metaphors and contingently informed the grounding of his theology and personal experience. But he was not a writer of local concerns. He wrote from home out into the world, never to arbitrarily contain or enclose a location or homogenised identity. The idea of du Maurier's that the *Cornish Guardian* should ignore the underlying humanity and politics of its readers when it reached beyond village concerns, and should only showcase common desires when they subscribed to her picture of an isolated and romantic localization, is deplorably naïve.

The closest Clemo himself came to the appearance of regional reductiveness was also his chief literary success of the decade: the short farcical dialect tales with their gentle humour and homely themes. These easily escape the prescriptive accusation. They are not imposing any containing values, but reflecting everyday scenarios in a locally specific idiom. For example, there are stories about painting a window frame, fetching 'smutties', losing a fire poker, and doing the washing. The humour of the pieces does not lie in the scenes themselves, but in the language used. It is a self-aware and ironizing humour. An established dialect writer, Frank Baron, encouraged Clemo to continue writing these stories, helping him place them in journals and

telling him not to waste his time on press controversies (WM 1992.32.1-25). In these early days Clemo leaned on Baron for help, and Baron did his limited best, putting the tales and poems in the hands of minor journals and publishers. One collection of stories was said to have been accepted by the publisher Jordan, but eventually the book fell through (P68).

Dialect became the subject of a minor controversy in the *Cornish Guardian*, during which Clemo engaged with another writer, John Rowland. Rowland is a figure who appears now and then throughout Clemo's life. In his own autobiography, *One Man's Mind* (1952), Rowland describes himself as a novelist, scientist and criminologist (14). He says he began his career as an agnostic, rationalist and journalist, whose work included interviews with many of the major minds of the day, such as H.G. Wells, George Bernard Shaw and Julian Huxley (65). He also says that reading Clemo's first novel and autobiography helped him with his defection from rationalism to Christianity. Rowland was a writer of absurd yarns in awkward prose, and even in his autobiography he manages to squeeze in a handful of horrible pop-science howlers, particularly on Darwinism, undermining his asserted experience as a 'scientist' and 'rationalist'. As a criminologist, Rowland consciously wrote for the popular market, with titles such as *A Century of Murder*, which carried the tagline: 'A famous criminologist selects some of the most sensational crimes of the day.' His novels, too, were crimes, including the debut *Bloodshed in Bayswater* (1935), which would have been accepted for publication by the time of his press correspondence with Clemo. Later, in 1950, the novel *Time for Killing* was dedicated 'To Jack R. Clemo from one Cornishman to another'. Rowland possibly dedicated the book to Clemo because of Clemo's recent literary success. Jack would not have enjoyed Rowland's books, but Rowland is

notable to Clemo as a Cornishman (living on Castle Hill in Bodmin) as well as a published novelist. More significantly, Rowland was the man who introduced Clemo to one of his biggest literary influences, the novelist T. F. Powys, when he sent him *Mr Weston's Good Wine* (P36). In the end, however, Clemo marked Rowland's 1984 death glibly: 'John Rowland has died – a likeable man, though superficial' (P114).

In their 1935 exchange in the paper, Rowland described his admiration for the swift progress of the Cornish language. Jack disagreed: 'The attempt to found a Cornish literature in the ancient tongue is patriotic folly run to seed […]. I am convinced that it is more profitable at present to focus attention on the preservation of Cornish dialect'. Why, he is asking, is so much effort paid to an extinct language being flogged back to life while the live and spoken dialect is ignored? 'Ugly its words may appear in print,' Clemo said, 'but spoken dialect is one of the most refreshing sounds one can hear amid the roar and din of this mechanised age' (*CG* 24 Jan. 1935). It is being suggested that the Cornish Celtic Revival Movement's promotion of language over dialect is an attempt to unify Cornwall's identity, homogenizing characteristics for the whole county, to define Cornwall in a more simplified way and to give the county a stronger sense of its identity and position within the wider Celtic diaspora.

Clemo's own use of dialect is almost contradictory. On the one hand he is exercising his understanding of domestic normality, while on the other he uses it to offend those around him. 'I fought ["intelligence"] all along the line, even in speech, using the Cornish dialect, the rough slipshod English of the working people', Clemo writes in *Confession* (37). He is distinguishing himself from 'the working people' here, seemingly only for the facts that he himself did not have a job and he had learnt better 'Standard English'. In *Confession*, he writes:

> I read everything I could find about ancient Cornwall, and wrote poems about its legends, customs and prehistoric atmosphere. […] I sprinkled my stories with Cornish phrases copied from the text-book, learnt the Cornish equivalent of many simple English phrases, and amused the Phillips's by repeating them at Nanpean. […] I must have bored [Evelyn] with my talk of the Gorsedd, the Tyr ha Tavas (Land and Language) cult, the Old Cornwall Societies; and when I prophesied that I would one day become a bard, standing amid some hut circle in my ceremonial robes, recognized by the crowd at last as a remote and mystic personage – well, she was sensible and refused to be interested. (*CoaR* 89)

In 1933 Jack wrote a glowing piece in the *Cornish Guardian* about the Bardic ceremony he had observed at Roche Rock, evidently enjoying himself: 'beneath the granite pile of the Rock, with the soft mists creeping, and the blue-robed bards and the chanted Cornish – there, for a little while, one could forget, and fold one's arms, and sleep, and dream…' (*CG* 31 Aug. 1933). The same ceremony was dramatized in novel drafts of the period, and finally published in *The Clay Kiln*. The speaker in the following passage is one of the lead girls, Marvran:

> 'The summer after I left school, the day they held the Gorsedd here […]. There were crowds everywhere, filling the roadside and all the fields and downs between here and Roche school. Looked like a carnival, only a bit dull – all the bards were dressed alike in

> blue robes. The ceremony was boring, just jabber in Cornish, a foreign language to us moderns. We just ate ice-cream and pretended it was a fete or something. When it was nearly over some of us girls began climbing round the rock; and we found Joel Kruse sitting up there […] behind a pillar. All by himself glowering at the crowd as if he was the spirit of the place […]. All those modern bourgeoisie – pretending they're Druids or Bards'. (*CK* 66-67)

His sense of Cornish-Celtic identity is clearly strained, as it would continue to be throughout his life. It was a party to which Clemo wanted an invitation, although he was not always sure whether he would accept it. Three times in his life he was invited to become a bard, in 1961, 1966 and 1970. On the first invitation he wrote in his diary: 'This would fulfil my adolescent dream, but my tastes have changed since then, and my handicaps bar me anyhow' (P91). Next time, in 1966, he was in a turbulent relationship and did not want to accept unless his fiancée could be with him, which she could not. In 1970, Clemo was at last in a position when he felt he could accept the bardship, but even then this was not a straightforward decision, as Clemo worried about buying his robes and about not being a Cornish Nationalist (P100).

A second Cornish language disagreement developed in the *Cornish Guardian*, again in 1935, when Jack took on the driving force of the Cornish Celtic Revival movement, Robert Morton Nance. Nance was one of the key developers of the Cornish language, a founder member of the Gorsedh, a Grand Bard, and also founder of the Old Cornwall Societies. As such, he was one of the two most important figures in the early history of the revivalist

movement, along with Henry Jenner. Clemo's disagreement with Nance was about the Cornish prayer being spoken in a church, which Jack thought inappropriate:

> The Gorsedd prayer […] is admitted to be equally suitable for Christians, Mohammedans or Jews. The movement therefore cannot be termed Christian, and it seems the height of irreverence to utilize Christianity as a medium for the revival of principles so obviously irrelevant.

He soon warms to his theme:

> I was at one time as ardent a Celt as any member of Tyr ha Tavas. […] I dreamed of becoming, one day, a Bard of the Gorsedd, and wrote to Cornwall noble panegyrics, poems, eulogies. All that has fallen from me […]. And now that I am no longer fanatically eager to establish Cornwall as a distinct nation, isolate it, glorify it at the expense of the great outside world – well, I do not regard myself as less truly a Cornishman. (*CG* 3 Oct. 1935)

Note that Jack uses the word 'Cornishman'. He is arguing that he is no longer a nationalistic exclusionist, but also remarking that the Cornish are different from the non-Cornish. The implication is that one can be proud of one's Cornishness without excluding or denigrating others. This idea seems to have remained with Clemo, and is formed again in a 1980 interview for *The Observer*, when he

says: ‘I dislike nationalism of any sort as it weakens charity and creates racial prejudice’ (Kendall). Clemo’s argument against nationalism (and racism) is that it is anti-Christian, excluding people and declaring them unequal. Clemo adds that the purpose of his own writing in dialect is more appropriate than the Revivalist method; that he explores the beauty and ‘mystery’ of the land and people.

Nance responded that the movement is ‘an initiation into this very mystery, making one no longer a stranger in one’s own land’ (*CG* 10 Oct. 1935). Overtly, Nance is talking of *reclaiming* Cornwall.

Jack responded softly, perhaps surprised by the interruption of such an eminent figure:

> My communication was not so much a wholesale condemnation of the Celtic Movement as a plea for some sense of proportion. The Movement is harmless and may even be beneficial, kept within limits, but in intruding itself upon definitely religious ground is it not rather over-stepping these limits? (*CG* 17 Oct 1935)

With persuasive calm, Nance wrote that ‘Cornish is very much at home in a church that was built and worshipped in by Cornish speakers’ (*CG* 24 Oct. 1935).

Anti-Revivalist sentiment is expressed most strongly in *Confession*, although it was softened afterwards as other friendships developed. In *Confession* the Revivalist movement is referred to as the ‘Cornish “national” movement’ and described as ‘misguided, futile and wasteful’ (*CoaR* 88), then accused of ‘pathetic pretentiousness’ (*CoaR* 121). Frank Baron, whose Cornish

bardic name was ‘Colon Len’, meaning ‘Faithful Heart’, wrote to Clemo following the publication of *Confession* and referred to its (brief) anti-revivalist sentiments:

> I quite agree with your attitude towards the Cornish Gorseth. When I spoke at St Austell Old C[ornwall] Soc. recently I had a quiet jibe at the Cornish language as spoken by the Blue-robed dignitaries!
>
> It is rather fun to process in Bardic Robes and watch the picturesque ritual, but inwardly I regard it all just as I look upon Freemasonry which I have avoided. (WM 1992.32.1-25)

This would be one of the last letters they exchanged.

There was one other unusual relationship in the late 1930s that developed through the *Cornish Guardian*. William Martin was a much older man, and in 1937, after their newspaper correspondence had led to a private correspondence, he visited the Clemos at Goonamarris. Clemo describes ‘the short muscular figure with the fresh-coloured, ravaged face and grey moustache’ (*CoaR* 134) of this ‘Northumberland poet and socialist’ (P71). His chief significance to the Clemo story is that he was the template for the ‘atheist’ character Mervyn Griffiths, in *Wilding Graft*. Martin was not an atheist himself, but Clemo did not always use the word conventionally. Certainly, both Martin and Griffiths disliked the Church, were desperately emotional, and had similar mining and marital backgrounds and similar political opinions.

Martin was writing from Castle Hill in Bodmin and sent Clemo ‘the most extraordinary letters I have ever read […] so full of contradictions that I was quite unable to tell from them what he really believed’ (*CoaR* 133). A damaged

veteran of both the 1899-1902 Boer War and the Great War, Martin presents himself to Clemo as a man of the world. He had worked for many years in the coal industry, travelled extensively, listing Borneo, Russia, Siam, France, Italy, Spain, India and China as places visited, and he was trained as a Wesleyan Minister. His tone in the letters is taut and heightened, often apocalyptic. He describes himself as a ‘miner poet’ and invites Clemo to treat him as a father:

> I like you Jack, I love you my Boy, as if you were my own Boy. Three years ago my own son (Dan) was killed in a motor accident, he was 23 years of age, he is gone from me, a fine great man 6ft 3 in height, so I pass my love on to you. (P25)

He offers fatherly advice:

> Don’t hate, don’t discard, don’t be moody when you think some would shun you, love comes to those that work for it, the clouds are only nature’s blotting pad to ease the glare of the sun from the mental vision, so I do ask you, as a father to a son, do your best, keep a stiff lip, until the day breaks, and the shadows fly away. (P25)

He tries to encourage Jack’s writing in a fatherly way, saying that Jack was ‘one who was looking into the far future, as a soul that had come down through the ages, as one who had drank of the wine of the farewell gathering, before the judicial murder that shook the world, and blackened the pages of the centuries’ (P25). It is understandable that Clemo was bemused. The letters show an

inconsistent and extreme character, and even the biographical elements expressed in the letters are difficult to untangle.

This awkward relationship did not last long: ‘The reason for the swift collapse of our friendship was that I was no longer the only or the chief object that drew his mind and heart to Goonamarris’ (*CoaR* 134). Martin was trying to be too fatherly. He had wanted to marry Eveline Clemo (P25). Martin’s confusing theology was not compatible with Eveline’s, and when his intentions became clear his visits were discouraged.

The volatile veteran also disagreed with the Clemos politically. In one letter, Clemo wrote of the cruelty being displayed in Russia at the time, to which Martin replied that young Jack was all wrong. He drew on his extensive travel experience to educate Clemo, stating that the Russians only ‘kill spys who try to make a hell of a peaceful nation. Spys that are sent by so called Christian England, Germany, land of hope and glory, Italy, the enemy of a true Christ’ (P25). This was written in 1937, in the midst of Stalin’s ‘Great Purge’.

Clemo’s interest in Russia was a new development, showing that world politics were imposing even on the remote and unworldly Clemo cottage. The threat of war, fascism, Germany, and the personalities of Mussolini and Hitler, filled the correspondence pages of the *Cornish Guardian*, and while Clemo may be applauded for his perspicacity on the Russia situation, the same was not the case of his thoughts on the imminent war:

> I entirely agree with ‘H.J.W.’ that ‘the prospect of a continent under arms is an ugly monstrosity’; but then, many other cheerful things are ugly monstrosities – pigs, for instance, and ladies’ trousers. And sabre-rattling and bomb-dropping are mere fashions that will

> pass away as surely as female trousers-wearing or any other form of destructive madness. (*CG* 20 Apr. 1939)

In *Confession*, Clemo notes that the war seemed ‘vague, distant and irrelevant’ (*CoaR* 116) to him, and to an extent this was inevitable. Not too far away at St Austell, A. L. Rowse suggests the same in his own diaries: ‘Sitting after breakfast at this familiar view again. War on, but there is hardly a sound, except the seagulls clamouring on the surface of the water’ (R1). Clemo was certainly a good distance from the front line, and when bombers did pass, when the roads were blocked, when Plymouth burned, he was still a passive observer. There was nothing he could do, and we might read in his enforced passivity the root of his bombast. In 1938 in the paper, under the heading ‘Is Pacifism Enough?’ he writes:

> I know people pretend that modern life is a nightmare because Mussolini and Hitler were born; but the actions of dictators could not disturb people unless they were spiritually unsound.

The stupidity of this is the implication that people would only care about their children and loved ones suffering and dying if they were bad Christians. If people were good Christians they would not care about their family members being shot or drowned, gassed or tortured. Clemo almost certainly did not mean to suggest this, but he is still showing more immaturity than might be expected of a man in his twenties. He continued: ‘If war comes to England it will be God’s judgment on us, not merely because we were immoral, or ignored the church, or gambled, or got drunk, but because we were afraid.’ What he means to say is

that a Christian should not fear death. If they fear death then they do not have true faith. It is a position he would retain, expressing it in a better context in his poetic response to Dylan Thomas, entitled ‘I Go Gentle’ and written in 1970 (see Appendix I), as well as in ‘William Blake Notes a Demonstration’, both of which were published in his 1971 *The Echoing Tip*.

There has been some questioning of Clemo’s apparent support of Mussolini during this time. In the *Cornish Guardian* he wrote:

> No one independent of Press tirades could share the common fanatical hatred of the Italian Dictator. He has made colossal mistakes because he is a colossus among men. A truly great man has been defined as one who ‘commits immortal follies.’ Mussolini is that. So was David, you may remember. (*CG* 7 May 1936)

Clemo is testing out his reading of Nietzsche here, and has become carried away. In subsequent correspondence he retracts the impression given of Mussolini being ‘great’ and condemns the dictator’s actions roundly. In *Confession* he returns to the theme to set out his meaning more clearly. Unfortunately, this led to further misinterpretation, culminating in the poet and critic Donald Davie writing an eccentric essay for the *PN Review* in 1979 about what he considered to be Clemo’s development from ‘fascism’ to ‘monarchism’. Although both of Davie’s start and end points here are emphatically incorrect, they remain unfortunately relevant, as one of the most recent academic studies of Clemo, by Rosemary Sandford, not only took Davie’s argument at face value, but compounded Davie’s errors with some of her own. The quotation Davie used initially to establish that Clemo was a fascist was from *Confession*:

> The religious aspect of an enthusiasm was the only one that could grip me for long. Thus I should have become a misfit even among the Fascists had I been able to join them. […] The foundations of democracy were, in my view, undermined by its complete ignoring of theological truth. Its avowed purpose was to make life as agreeable for those who crucified Christ as for those who shared spiritually in His crucifixion, and this I knew must lead to moral apathy, religious impotence and chaos in all human relationships. I wanted, in short, a world run much as Calvin had run Geneva, a government that would not allow the proud and greedy and frivolous to persist in their illusion that they were on the winning side. If the Fascist and Nazi leaders were attempting something on these lines I entirely approved of their policy. (151)

Davie took from this that Clemo supported the fascists, ignoring the big 'If'. *If* the fascists and Nazis promoted humility, generosity, sobriety and Christianity *then* Clemo would support them. They did not, so he did not. Equally, Clemo did not support violence, nationalism or any form of exclusionism. These he considered to be anti-Christian. In fact, as a result of Davie's article, Clemo felt he had to spell this out in his interview with *The Observer* (Kendall).

There is an admiration of Mussolini in the newspaper correspondence, but it is not for what Davie claims. Quite simply, what Clemo admired was the force of his will, the personality cult, the idea of someone enormous, persuasive and magnetic. It is a similar admiration to that Clemo would feel for Billy Graham in the 1950s.

Politically, what Clemo wanted was a Christian kind of philosopher king, a charismatic benign ruler chosen and supported by God, one of the 'elect'. This sense that he preferred the personality to the policy is borne out by the boldest statement of support he offered to Mussolini in the paper, in 1936, at the end of the Italo-Abyssinian War, as well as by the autobiography:

> I had a vague but deep admiration for Mussolini and Hitler: the qualities in them which the cold English temperament derided as bombastic and theatrical appealed irresistibly to me with my mystical bias towards epic vitalism and fanaticism. (*CoaR* 150)

Rosemary Sandford, in her 2011 doctoral thesis, reinvigorated Davie's errors. Davie had mentioned Clemo's pre-war 'fascism', placing it in the mid-1930s when many people were momentarily seduced by the party. Sandford, on the other hand, wrote of Clemo's 'wartime support of Nazism and fascism'. It is a careless corruption of Davie's article. Not only do we see the 'fascism' unquestioningly restated, but Sandford has added 'Nazism' to the charge and then replaced these pernicious sympathies anachronistically into the war, making them appear even more extreme and awkward.

In the newspaper, the controversy raged and Clemo enjoyed being the provocateur. He argues that Britain has little cause for assuming the moral high ground over Italian war crimes:

> We are asked to condemn the Italians because they are using poison gas in an effort to obtain a colony by force. Yet, if poison gas had been available a few hundred years ago, Britain would

> have employed it to build up her ‘great and glorious’ Empire. (*CG* 7 May 1936)

Clemo knew that many of his readers would be veterans of some of the wars he invoked, including the Zulu and Boer wars, and he knew the response he would receive. One from a pacifist suggested that the comparison between Mussolini and Drake had little meaning, and that society had ‘evolved’ since then anyway. Clemo’s response discloses a number of persistent beliefs. Four centuries of evolution, he writes:

> have doubtless put on another coat of whitewash to the ‘sepulchre’ called civilization, but the essential ‘uncleanness’ of human nature is, I doubt not, as prolific as ever inside. The Italians have allowed it to break out. They, at least, are honest, and know better to pretend, as Britons pretend, that an abstract evolutionary force has brought the human race to a more angelic condition. (*CG* 21 May 1936)

Human nature is bad, Clemo says, but it is better to express the badness. Moreover, Clemo’s attack on ‘social evolution’ is a nascent attack on humanism, as he understood it. Clemo’s understanding of humanism is relevant to all his work, as he so frequently attacks it in his writing. Instead of the humanistic focus being on one’s ability to improve oneself, Clemo thinks that humanists believe that special (as in, ‘of species’) perfection may be attained by a directedness of the collective will; a kind of self-determining evolution which in Clemo’s mind places man in the role of creator and in charge of destiny. The

emphasis on man being in control or responsible for his own life is correctly attributed to humanism, but the implication of special perfection is not. Humanism is not a genetic process favouring the proliferation of any particular set of either mutated or inherited individual variations. Clemo is misunderstanding both humanism and evolution.

Another comment made on Darwin in the newspaper, in 1933, shows further scientific and philosophical naivety. Clemo argues that Darwin was an unhappy man, and that so were his followers, like H. G. Wells: ‘So the evolutionary theory does not seem to have made anybody happy. That, in my opinion, is proof enough that there is something wrong with it’ (*CG* 30 Nov. 1933). The scientific validity of a statement is determined by whether it makes one happy or sad. This is a very unsatisfying use of the word ‘proof’, and a facile mode of dismissal. But it is a mode of dismissal used in Clemo’s prose, too. In *The Invading Gospel* Clemo dismisses the perspective of the ‘modern Church’ that God and Christ were ‘nice’, by calling the position ‘dull’ (35-6).

A more biographical response might be to ask whether Jack himself was happy. Had faith made him happy? Certainly, he was an optimist, but his diaries suggest that his overwhelming emotions were disappointment and frustration. He is bitterly lonely and suffering from syphilis. He is also poor, which distresses him. So it cannot be the case that Clemo believes that God makes us happy *now*; instead, it must be the case that God will make us happy in the future. But in so far as the reward is deferred, so too must the conclusion that God makes us happy. We do not yet know that God will make us happy. This is a matter of faith, and it is faith itself that we are trying to ‘prove’. Clemo uses the word proof in both an archaic theological sense and in the more conventional sense used here, meaning something like conclusive evidence.

Perhaps what Clemo means is that we believe in God because *belief* makes us happy. But to say we believe because it makes us happy is still a weak statement, and liberal Protestants, spiritualists, pantheists and pagans might well make the same claim. This is clearly not Clemo's intention. Rather, he seems to be appealing to the reader's preference for feeling good and saying that the idea of God makes you feel better than the ideas of humanism and Darwinism.

In the press controversies, Clemo explored considerable literary, theological and political ground. He was buffeted, embarrassed and abused, sharing his opinions on sex, God, Darwinism, humanism, fascism, war, films and books, schooling, celebrity and genius. He constantly tried to write about himself, offering readers not only ideas but also biography and self-interpretation. This is the nascent voice of *Confession of a Rebel*'s narrator. It has been assumed all along that he is of the elect, a chosen one and a genius, and these are ideas that should be approached in discussions on Clemo's theology, as well as in his relationships with women. We will see in *Confession* a stronger attempt to collect and frame the narrator's life, work and faith into a coherent structure. Clemo will return to reconstruct the period, and even though he will try to distance himself from the juvenile newspaper controversialist, the ideas are clearly developed from these intellectual experiments. This is true in the non-fictional prose to a greater degree than the fictional. The earliest fiction was more influenced by a handful of unfashionable writers, so that Clemo's first novel drafts reflect this combination of juvenility, inexperience, ambition and a dated literary context. But the manuscripts of these earliest attempts are central to an understanding of Clemo's literary and biographical progression, and the

professional critical work undertaken by Gordon Meggy was definitively important to the evolution of his novelistic style. It is on this narrative talent that his reputation and career were founded, albeit the poetry on which his legacy depends.

V

Travail

> I am the man that hath seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. He hath led me, and brought me into darkness, but not into light. Surely against me he is turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. My flesh and my skin hath he made old; he hath broken my bones. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travail. He hath set me in dark places, as they that be dead of old.
>
> Lam. 3.1-6

In his lifetime, Clemo published only two novels, *Wilding Graft* in 1948 and *The Shadowed Bed* in 1986. A third novel, *The Clay Kiln*, was edited and published posthumously, in 2000. However, they were written in reverse order, the earliest novel draft that would be included in the composite *The Clay Kiln* having been written in 1930, the earliest version of *The Shadowed Bed* completed in 1938, and the earliest draft of *Wilding Graft* in 1943.

The histories of *The Shadowed Bed* and *Wilding Graft* are fairly straightforward. *Wilding Graft*, in particular, was much the same in published form as it was in its first good draft, with only the ending being completely rewritten. *The Shadowed Bed*, too, had a fairly easy linear progression. It had begun as a short story, entitled 'Potter's Lane', which developed into a novel, 'The Lamb of Carn Veor', both written 'in the style of Powys' "Mr Weston's Good Wine"', with 'God and the devil struggling for the possession of sex' (P70). In

Clemo's original tale, as in Powys's, the story is set within a single night and village, along the lanes where courting couples could liaise. The 'lamb' of the earlier draft was changed to a 'rock' in later versions, both symbolizing Christ and redemption through sex in a way reminiscent of the tree and the lion in Powys's *Mr Weston's Good Wine*. Clemo's novel was rejected many times, but was eventually published in 1986 by a Christian publisher, much against the will of Clemo's wife, who thought the sexual elements were too prurient and would cost them friendships (P195).The final version, which was most significantly developed through the 1940s, bears an even closer resemblance to Powys's allegorical novel, being critical of the clergy, set in an isolated rural community and inordinately concerned with sexual encounters along the lanes and fields. Although in 1986 Clemo removed any mention of Powys from his preface, the influence did not go unnoticed by the poet and reviewer Norman Nicholson: 'T.F. Powys, in his curious brand of devout, fatalistic atheism, is perhaps the one writer who might have been able to make a success of *The Shadowed Bed*' (P157).

The Clay Kiln, on the other hand, is a composite novel, made up of well over a dozen drafts and seven or eight separate early novel attempts. By the end of the 1930s Clemo had written a million words towards these various novels, and although he is remembered for his poetry, he identified himself as a novelist for much of his life and always regretted the lack of attention paid to his fiction. Writing in *Confession of a Rebel*, Clemo put the failure of the early novels down to the onset of deafness:

> The tendency to patch and re-write old incidents instead of inventing new ones was increasingly characteristic of my method,

> and was probably due to my deafness, the inability to get in touch with active life that would supply fresh material. I expended tens of thousands of words in re-fashioning scenes so feeble in themselves that they should have been scrapped at the outset. My writing was always haphazard, undisciplined, without conscious direction. (*CoaR* 136)

The idea that his deafness thwarted his ability to write novels is called into question by the fact that his most successful, *Wilding Graft*, was both conceived and completed when deaf, as was *The Shadowed Bed*, his other prose triumph. Likewise, Clemo claimed in his 1941 diary that his writing suffered without a muse, though again this would be the year that he began both *Wilding Graft* and *Confession of a Rebel*, his two most successful prose works. It appears that Clemo mistook what made him work well with what made him happy, which again suggests an exaggerated submission of reason to desire. Clemo had neither hearing nor muse when he began *Wilding Graft* and *Confession*, but he did have experience, time and discipline, which proved to be of greater value.

The Clay Kiln's history begins with a group of novels which will collectively be referred to as the 'Cuckoospit' sequence. This starts with the short novel, 'Travail'. It was redrafted many times throughout the 1930s, and submitted to agents and publishers under at least ten different titles, the last of which was 'Cuckoospit'. Drafts varied from 30,000 words to 90,000, though they were all versions of the same story.

The book was begun when Clemo was just fourteen, and he finished two versions extremely quickly; 'Travail' and 'The Heart of the Celt'. Fragments from four of the earliest drafts have survived, but they are difficult to read and the

story is disjointed. However, there is sufficient to get an impression of the style. In the following passage, from a 1931-32 draft, the narrator is describing Jowan's love interest, Gwinbren:

> There appeared to be about her no alluring quality and one wondered whatever Jowan could see in her. She had not been a good scholar; she was not 'charming'; was not even pretty so people said.
>
> People took only that first glance. Jowan took a second, a third. . . then his eyes were dazzled by a great light and he fell on his knees and cried: 'Girl! Girl!' For the first time he realised what the word really meant. (L2)

The melodrama in these fragments is cringeworthy, but we find in this manuscript the nascent themes of the Jack-like hero's exceptionalism, specifically his romantic or erotic exceptionalism, and of a providential sort of love. Gwinbren is described as unattractive to everyone except Jowan. It is as though they were made for one another. Notably, too, the story is of a first love. This is the narrator's first understanding of 'girl', and, indeed, Gwinbren was based on Clemo's own first love, Evelyn. This is unmistakably a youthful exercise, but it is possible to perceive in the juvenilia a number of key themes of Clemo's mature and published writing.

As with all of Jack's endeavours, his mother supported him wholeheartedly with his writing, and although she appears to have been surprised at his decision to leave school and become a novelist, once she had come to terms with it she applied herself to her son's success fullbloodedly. In the first

instance, she wrote to Jack's distant cousin Joseph Hocking for advice. Hocking was ill when he received the letter and he had been ordered to lay aside all work. As a result, his response was brief and disappointing:

> With regard to the lad of whom you spoke, he, if he has the real stuff in him, will make his way. Editors and publishers are always on the look out for ability and the only way is for him to persist in doing his best and then sending his writings to what seems the right quarters until he succeeds.[12]

She contacted the various church and council bodies asking for financial help. Particularly encouraging was Sam Jacobs, an old Labour politician from Trethosa. This is the same Sam Jacobs described by A. L. Rowse in *A Cornish Childhood*: 'a natural leader of men, firm as a rock, like a rock in physique, staunch and unbreakable; uneducated, but with a great respect for education, a touching humility towards the educated, as modest and shy with them as a child' (119). When Jacobs heard of Clemo's eye troubles and ambitions, he determined to help and to get the boy appropriate writerly training, and after many frustrating rebuffs, Jacobs was asked to submit an example of Jack's writing to the Ministry of Pensions at Plymouth. The only presentable piece early in 1931 was the dialect tale 'Benjy an' his Sweetheart'. Jacobs must have been a persuasive man, because armed with just this tale he convinced the Ministry to pay for a correspondence course at Gordon Meggy's 'Premier

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[12] There is no archival reference for this letter, which may be found in the Special Collections' Jack Clemo library, in Clemo's own copy of *Confession of a Rebel*. Jack pasted this letter into the book, along with one from Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, another from T. F. Powys, and photographs of both Browning and Powys.

School of Journalism'. This was a London-based firm occupying two floors of the large building at the end of Adam Street. It was an apparently popular service for budding writers looking to get published. Most of the correspondence from Meggy has survived, bound in an old manuscript of 'The Dreams of Yesterday' (P27). It covers the years 1931-33 and reveals much about Clemo's early literary development and first attempts at writing the novels that would later be chopped up, tossed about and re-forged into *The Clay Kiln*.

Meggy comes across as a generous man; when funding ran out for Jack, he offered to keep the boy on as a student free of charge. It was Meggy who encouraged Clemo to cut articles out of the paper and place them in scrapbooks, a habit he maintained throughout his life. Years later, these scrapbooks would be shown by the Clemos to students and interviewers working on the poet, and they constitute a bulky part of the archive. Meggy also encouraged Clemo's philosophy of experience, defining the important sort of experience as 'not actual experience […] but mental' (P27).

The correspondence course invited Clemo to post his writing off with a letter, to which Meggy would reply with detailed, forthright commentary and tasks for Clemo to undertake. The first adult story disappointed Meggy, and he told Clemo that if this was the best he could do then he should stick to writing for children. Clemo tried again, sending a second story that woke Meggy up to Jack's potential. The new story was 'so much better than anything I should have expected from one of your age'. Still, he said, it was 'not […] a particularly strong story'. A third was attempted, the dialect story 'Postman Treziz Vinds Out', which Meggy condemned for having no plot, no obstacle to overcome and an implausible relationship: 'I suggest therefore that you scrap it.' Further discouragement came when Clemo posted Meggy the novel, 'Travail'. Before

he had even read it, Meggy wrote: 'I must warn you that first novels are rarely more than a clearing of the mind for better work'. Heaps of criticism landed with the Clemos' post: 'The emotions described seem out of all proportion'; 'I find a certain pretentiousness in the writing which I would like you to try to eliminate from all future work'; 'Put this story in the wastepaper basket and make a resolve not to indulge in anything of the kind in future.' Meggy condemned the melodramatic elements: 'No normal healthy young man is going to lose his self-control and start trembling because he is asked to go to a party.' It is true that the characters 'tremble' and 'quiver' rather more than is common. Clemo sent several drafts from the 'Cuckoospit' sequence, though none of them impressed Meggy. It was too short, and 'more hysterical than dramatic', he explained. 'If you keep the character emotionally exposed all the time it is like presenting something inside out – and just as unpleasing.'

The effect of this relentless criticism on Clemo was expressed in *Confession*, where he wrote that Meggy was 'plainly disappointed and perplexed' by him (78), although it is clear from the letters that Meggy thought well of his pupil. 'You are bringing to the job a good measure of original talent', he wrote, followed by: 'I know that you are going to succeed because with your spirit there is nothing that can stop you' (P27).

Nevertheless, Clemo was upset by Meggy's verdict on the novel, especially the way in which the love affair was damned. This had been based on Clemo's feelings for Evelyn. Meggy wrote:

> I see that you deal in the first part with a love affair between a boy and girl of fourteen or thereabouts. This is a great mistake, for you

> will never get a reader to take an affair between such youngsters seriously. (P27)

This hints at the main point of conflict between teacher and pupil, a hint that becomes more explicit as Meggy repeatedly stresses the absolute importance of the length a novel has to be: ‘it is not the slightest use submitting a novel that is under seventy thousand words’. Meggy wrote this in 1932, the year of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Stella Gibbons’s *Cold Comfort Farm*, two of the most memorable books of the year and both far below Meggy’s magic word count. The difference was that Clemo wanted greatness, while Meggy was training him to get published. It was Meggy’s stated job to make Clemo’s writing as easily marketable as possible, not to make Jack the writer he wanted to be. Similarly, Meggy encouraged Jack to write to the *Cornish Guardian*, because he considered any publication and engagement with an audience to be good. They were, then, at cross-purposes, and Jack replied, wounded and pompously, to inform Meggy that Lady Treffry had been impressed with the novel even if he had not been. ‘Nevertheless,’ Meggy retorted, ‘I hope very much that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch will not read your novel until you have worked on it a great deal more.’

Meggy’s focus on marketability over artistry gave Clemo a reason to ignore some of the advice. Jack did not think that romances between teenagers were any less authentic than those between adults, and he was protective over criticism of the male lead in the novels, since each of these was based on Clemo himself. (It might be noted as one reads through Clemo’s manuscripts that the hero ages in pace with the author.) Clemo also would not give up the idea that the majority of clay country villagers were trivial gossips, wicked

sinners, fools or bullies, as they appear in these early manuscripts. He used his novels as both defence and vengeance against the gossip he himself had suffered. This portrayal seems to have been amplified by Clemo's reading of D. H. Lawrence, especially of *Kangaroo*, in which there is a chapter set in Cornwall, entitled 'Nightmare'. Lawrence's narrator describes the pettiness of locals and their persecution of the 'individual', and it is possible that Jack's second title for the 'Cuckoospit' sequence, 'The Heart of the Celt', was adapted from *Kangaroo*. Meggy observed this tendency to exaggerate the malevolence of the community and remarked that the love-interest's father is described as full of 'malice and venom', without the reader being shown these qualities. The narrator was imposing his own views of real people without showing their justification in the novel. This happens again in *Wilding Graft*, as the reader is continually told how awful the antagonist Griffiths is, without having been shown anything especially bad.

A crude expression of this sense of persecution by wicked neighbours is acknowledged in the title 'Crucify!', the 1936 draft of 'Cuckoospit'. It is a reference to the cry of the gathered hoards when asked by Pontius Pilate what should be done with Christ. It would follow that the novel's persecuted characters ought to be venerated, and later we will see how this is expected of the carpenter Garth, protagonist of *Wilding Graft*.

In the diaries there are a number of entries concerning village gossip, such as this from 1937:

> Mother complaining that 'people who pass must think you're a child of sex – I bet they have fun over you, playing all the time with a little girl like B.' I said: 'As if I cared about that!' and mother was

> silenced. Yes! What *do* I care? Let everybody laugh, and, if they care to make dirty guesses at what our relationship is when we're alone together – I care not a jot! (P70)

The cruelty of these gossiping villagers was observed by A. L. Rowse when he wrote to Clemo following the publication of *Wilding Graft* (P46). Rowse was born at nearby Tregonissey, now a part of St Austell, but he considered Clemo's area – the 'Higher Quarter' – to be almost a different world, a place of 'grinding poverty and stunted lives', as Philip Payton writes (*Rowse* 26). In his letter to Clemo, in 1948, Rowse enquired:

> You know so much more about the life of the people than I, *are they really like that?* You give a terrible portrait of them in the book […]. You must know pretty well what I have always, or for so long, felt about them: their hypocrisy, their narrowness and meanness […], their back-biting and ungenerosity, their love of doing some-one down […]. But are they really so appalling, do you think, as you see them? (P46)

A counterpoint to Jack's dismissal of the people around him is his desire to write about himself. Not only did he fictionalise himself in the 'Cuckoospit' sequence as Jowan, in the same way that he fictionalized himself in subsequent books as Joel, Euan and Garth, but he also wrote long prefaces to his works. When Jack sent Meggy an updated draft in 1933, now entitled 'A Star Shall Lead', it appears that even then, at the age of seventeen, he had written about his literary achievements in a biographical preface. Meggy discouraged this, saying

that it is too dramatic and self-absorbed, ‘too unwieldy and […] lays unnecessary stress upon the labour you have put in upon the book’ (P27). But Jack submitted similar prefaces to most of his early work, and they were usually rejected, including those for *The Shadowed Bed*, *The Clay Verge* and *The Map of Clay*. Clemo wanted to be read on his own terms, and always within the context of his personal ‘travail’. He wanted to look at himself, to analyse his experience and hold himself out for either justification or approbation. His Methodist upbringing, being an only child, fatherless, an outsider at school, living outside the villages, his disease and disabilities, the heaping of ill-fortune and the temperament determined by these factors, all led to an intense introspection that made him susceptible to solipsism and narcissism. While immature, these would be his weaknesses, but later they would prove his strengths. Without the belief that God was personally and specially invested in Clemo’s life, the constant hope and optimism that mark his work from this time forward would not be possible; the tension between warring faculties, and the painful juxtaposition of present suffering against promised relief in the poetry would not exist. One of the first observations a reader will make of Clemo’s novels is that they all have happy endings. None of them was written when Jack was stable and happy, but all when he was uncertain, alone and physically deteriorating, and it is this same basic optimism in the face of facts that unmistakably marks his poetry, prose, religiosity and personal outlook. Indeed, the absence of optimism was one of the strongest criticisms he had of his beloved Thomas Hardy, and late in life, when reading a Braille copy of Hardy’s *Desperate Remedies*, Jack notes what a relief it was to find a happy ending at last (P19).

Gordon Meggy prescribed a course of reading that included Hardy, to cure Clemo of the Hall Caine and Marie Corelli influences. Clemo was told to read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and any of the other novels he could find, and then to 'mould yours as nearly in the form' of Hardy's as possible (P27).

In spite of Clemo using himself as the model for his novels' heroes, it was the female characters that impressed Meggy. 'The girl is delightfully sketched', he wrote; 'I have very little fault to find with the way in which you have sketched her.' However, 'The boy Jowan is less happily sketched. It seems to me that his thoughts and his utterances are considerably at variance with the type he is supposed to be.' He 'appears somewhat effeminate', and is never with other men. Then there is the mysterious question: 'Why on earth should [Jowan] think of his dead sister when he is making love?' It is true that Clemo's male characters are uneasy in dialogue with other men. Even when they are workers, they do not converse easily or convincingly, and rarely does a leading male have a friendship with another man. Meggy recognised that the characters were based on Jack, but he suggested that they suffered from a compromise between the autobiographical and the ideal, the temptation to put highbrow philosophical and theological ideas and poetic quotations in the mouth of an uneducated miner. This, Meggy considered, was the 'main defect'.

There is one intriguing biographical comment from Meggy in these letters: 'I do not think that you need worry about the fact that story incidents remain so vividly in your mind'. It is never explained exactly what Clemo had written to Meggy, or whether it was images from his reading or from his writing that were haunting Jack. The sentiment is not paralleled anywhere else in the archives. It is tempting to imagine that the passage is suggestive of the force of Clemo's memory. He was able to reproduce dialogue and landscape in his writing long

after he had lost the ability to hear and see them, and it has been remarked by friends and family that Jack's memory was astonishing (Brown interview). He composed poetry in his head, drafting it and editing it before committing to paper, and his memory impressed the American poet T. R. Hummer so much that he came to exaggerate it in his largely fictional essay on meeting Clemo, 'In the Palm of the Poet's Hand' (Hummer 79-88).

Correspondence with Meggy dissolved after the course finished, with Clemo understandably disappointed. Although Meggy had dismissed the majority of Clemo's writing, especially the novel, the correspondence was useful as Clemo's first introduction to popular markets and editorial criticism. Some of the stories submitted to Meggy would be printed by the almanacks and small journals later in the decade, but mostly Clemo continued to work on 'Cuckoospit', the novel Meggy had recommended for abandonment. By the time Meggy's final letter arrived in 1933, 'Cuckoospit' had been through innumerable revisions and at least five titles: 'Travail', 'The Heart of the Celt', 'March Dawn', 'A Star Shall Lead', and 'Gwinbren'. Before long, it received five more: 'Shame of Thy Youth', 'Crucify!', 'The Halt and the Blind', 'Devil's Prize', and 'Cuckoospit'. Many of these show Biblical references. 'Travail', for example, is a word frequently used in the King James Bible, rendered as 'hardship' in more recent translations. 'A Star Shall Lead' seems to be a reference to the Gospel of Matthew, the only Gospel to describe a number of wise men with a star that 'went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was' (Matt 2.9). The title in this instance parallels Clemo's pattern-seeking and 'revelation from experience'. By observing natural phenomena as revelations from God one may be drawn closer to Christ, as the wise men were. The phrase 'Shame of Thy Youth' is from Eveline's Isaian passage, her promise from God that

suffering was only a temporary state for her and Jack, and that they would be rewarded in the end. The two titles ‘Devils Prize’ and ‘Cuckoospit’ suggest a freshly empowered influence. They date from 1937-38, when Jack was submitting to the influence of Robert Browning and, although not certainly the case, ‘Devil’s Prize’ is probably a reference to Browning’s ‘A Soul’s Tragedy’:

> I seem content
> With ruining myself, why so should they be,
> And so they are, and so be with his prize
> The devil… (Volume V 11)

‘Cuckoospit’, too, may be a reference to Browning’s metaphorical use of the word in ‘Fifine at the Fair’, one of Clemo’s favourite poems. ‘Cuckoospit’ is used to represent the jealous spite of ‘the elf’: ‘Then thrice the bulk, out blows / Our insect, does its kind, and cuckoo-spits some rose!’ (Volume IV 322). John T. Nettleship, a contemporary of Browning’s, interprets the passage to mean that ‘the touch of hate makes such a spiteful man do his best to poison the life of a real true man, as the aphis, according to his nature, tries to kill the rose by surrounding it with the poisonous foam’ (242). It is a title suggestive of the role of malicious gossip in Clemo’s novels, gossip being essentially the language of fallen nature.

The life and works of Browning had become devotional Sunday reading during these years, alongside the Bible and Spurgeon (P70). It was the optimism of Browning that seduced Clemo. Optimism was a personal ideal with which Clemo wrestled constantly, in the face of increasing solitude and hardship. ‘This is the title I want to merit’, he wrote in his diary: ‘The Browning of

fiction' (P68). The Browning influence further punctuated the sense of a new beginning and the 'gradual conversion' of Clemo in 1937-38.

In spite of a developing outlook, influenced by Browning, the next novel had exactly the same problems as 'Cuckoospit'. 'The Former Rain' was written as a sequel and finished in 1937. In the seven years that had passed since the first draft of 'Travail', this was Jack's first new idea for a novel. Before then, he could only tinker with the tired manuscript, rearranging chapters and making long lists of alternative titles ('Her that Halteth', 'Private Plot', 'Shallow Feet', 'Culled Thistles', 'Culled Briars', 'Serpent's Prey', 'Serpent's Home', 'Twine Amaranth'). He continued to send the failed novel to publishers for rejection, apparently receiving twenty-one for the 'Cuckoospit' sequence alone, including from his future publisher Methuen. Of these, the majority were standard printed slips, and only John Green offered anything like critical feedback: 'The general feeling is that it is far too sentimental and romantic, and makes much high-flown tragedy over nothing very dreadful' (P11). Also among these rejections is a reference to a work that has disappeared completely, entitled 'Peace and Sex: Four Fantasies', the only record of which is the rejection slip sent by C.W. Daniel stating that the manuscript was too short for them to consider.

One literary agent, A.M. Heath, recognised sufficient promise in 'The Halt and the Blind' to attempt to place the novel: 'Quite frankly, we are taking this up on the strength of its promise, since we feel that the latter part of the story is rather weak and that we may have difficulty in placing the book' (P7). Although the novel failed, Heath asked Jack to offer them first refusal on his second attempt, the plot of which Jack describes in his diary:

> Thought of theme for next novel today – out of my own exp[erience] as in the first – the hero has a girl (Evelyn) […]. He is desirous to save another (V.B.) […]. Saves her thro' a 'criminal offence' (draw on relation with B here). All but a transcription from my personal experience – must write subjectively – nothing else has life. (P69)

This was 'The Former Rain', a title taken from the Book of Jeremiah: 'Neither say they in their heart, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season' (5.24). Spurgeon makes sense of this passage in his expositions, writing that what is meant is rain being given at the correct time for growing and harvesting crops. He adds, characteristically, that the passage shows the day-to-day way in which God personally manages affairs (Spurgeon, 'Expositions'). Other bandied titles for the novel included 'Wide Compass', 'Marred Clay', 'Locusts have Eaten', 'Gourd of Jonah', 'Bloom for Locust', 'Private Snow', and 'Fished Murex', all references to the Bible, Spurgeon or Browning.

In theme, 'The Former Rain' is not very different from 'Cuckoospit'. It is an overwrought romance about a young man pursuing the wrong girl, and then pursuing the right girl. It was immediately rejected by Heath, and both manuscripts were returned to Clemo as a result. Still, Jack was reluctant to let go and only recognised the novels were failures much later. 'The Former Rain', he wrote in *Confession*, was 'drab and colourless, without a gleam of poetry or humour' (135). In the 1930s he did not see the faults so clearly, and instead of giving up two failed novels, he decided to work the best bits of both into other stories. He even tried to squeeze one phrase from an early 'Cuckoospit' draft

into *Wilding Graft*. It was an ugly phrase, describing the girl and the boy kissing, 'her mouth sucking at his as if it were a nipple' (P69, P7). It seems a childish and overtly Freudian projection, but Clemo thought it poignant. When he submitted *Wilding Graft*, the literary agent Raymond Savage, who would become a pivotally important champion of Clemo's writing, said the first thing Jack had to take out before he would consider the novel was that 'disgusting' description about the nipple (P7).

In 1937, then, there are two failed novels, 'Cuckoospit' and 'The Former Rain', both set within the same area and using the same characters. The next evolutionary step was 'Private Snow'. This was begun in 1937, using the best bits from 'The Former Rain'. Again, it was rejected. Harmony Press explained why in 1939:

> Characterisation has been carefully conceived, and the descriptions of the clay area and the work carried on there are especially commended.
>
> Drawbacks lie in the length of the work – 80, 000 words is more or less essential to the commercial publisher […] and a doubt is expressed by the Reader as to whether the technique of the work is of sufficient excellence to command publication at a publisher's risk. (P47)

It was 'Private Snow' that Clemo sent to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch at the end of 1939 for his opinion, which, surprisingly, was given: 'There's a deal of power and promise in it and I think it should find a publisher', he began, although, 'You guess, I dare say, that it is not the kind of story I like at all.' (This letter may be

found in Clemo's library, in his own copy of *Confession of a Rebel.*) The Clemos had hoped that sending the book to Quiller-Couch would be a shortcut to publication, success and celebrity. He was known to help young Cornish people, as he had A. L. Rowse – and who could be in more need of help than young Jack? It was an unreasonable expectation, considering the subject matter and the quality of the novel. Nevertheless, Quiller-Couch believed the work showed sufficient promise to offer four pages of criticism and encouragement. He, like Rowse, queried the vileness of the characters described: 'I know Roche pretty well, and its people […] are a tribe – almost a race – apart. But I confess I hadn't realised their habits of dirt, open lust, and filthy talk, and hope your readers won't take this clan as representative of Cornish folk in general'. He continued to give helpful feedback, stating where the work was 'heavily over-written – especially in descriptions of scenery', with 'too much repetition of the Egdon Heath business'. He made note of places where the action of a scene had been spoiled by Clemo pausing to describe minuscule details of a character's facial expressions. The criticism was kindly, and the overall impression encouraging, with Quiller-Couch concluding: 'the story itself is well-knit and strong and in certain descriptions […] quite in place and very good indeed.'

'Mother and I were bitterly disappointed', wrote Clemo in *Confession of a Rebel*:

> We had hoped for much from Q., having heard of his generosity to talented Cornish boys, his determination to give working-class Cornish youngsters of promise an equal opportunity of educational advance. One point we had overlooked – the obvious fact that all

> these children were normal school products while I was a wild Ishmael of the moors, untouched by such refined institutions. (169-170)

Clemo's account of Quiller-Couch is not borne out by the letter itself. He interpreted the letter idiosyncratically. In *Confession*, he states that Quiller-Couch had written that the 'Bloomsbury intellectuals would smack their lips over my work' (170). This is used as though a compliment, but the context is not given. Quiller-Couch had actually written:

> I know that the exposure of our common humanity 'without benefit of laundry like a rag on a clothes-line' is the vogue among novelists just now, and some Bloomsbury reviewers will smack their lips over Irene and Ann and even Marvran's slangy talk in places. But perhaps you won't resent a few technical hints, by observing which I think you will greatly improve the story.

Clemo also recalled the reference to Hardy and the 'Egdon Heath business' in a similarly skewed way. In his diary he wrote:

> I feel my work will be the Christian counterpart of [Hardy's] – glanced thro' 'Tess' and 'Jude' and saw for the first time what 'Q' meant in saying that I'd put too much of the Egdon Heath business into P.S. It gave me a pleasant surprise that a keen critic like Sir Arthur should compare my first novel with one of Hardy's. (P71)

We could put this down to Jack's unquenchable optimism.

When he came to write *Confession*, Clemo still had not come to terms with Q's lack of practical support, and he attacked the older man's novels, ideology and character. Clemo was inexperienced and likely unaware that Quiller-Couch would have been posted many novels from ambitious young writers. It was generous of him to have read it, let alone to have given it such critical attention. Quiller-Couch died in 1944, and it would not be until 1949, when A. L. Rowse wrote a long defence of his friend, that Jack began to revise his opinions of the Fowey man.

'Private Snow' was redrafted through the Second World War, as Quiller-Couch had instructed, and retitled 'Roche Snow' because Jack thought there were too many other novels with the word 'Private' in the title (P73). The replacement of 'Roche' would make it stand out in the 1943 Tom-Gallon Award, he thought. As it happened, the winning novel was *A Well Full of Leaves*, by Elizabeth Myers, whose husband, Littleton Powys, Jack would come to know. At the time of the award, however, Clemo wrote bitterly and suspiciously about Myers being awarded the prize when she was already an established writer and related to the Powys dynasty: 'there were a lot of strings pulled behind the scenes to get her the award', he wrote in his diary (P73). Meanwhile, Clemo was at work on yet another 'new' novel, 'Unsunned Tarn', using material recovered from the 'Cuckoospit' sequence. The title is again from Browning, this time from 'Paracelsus':

Shall I sit beside
Their dry wells, with a white lip and filmed eye,
While in the distance heaven is blue above

Mountains where sleep the unsunned tarns? (Volume 1 43)

‘Paracelsus’ is being read by the scholarly hero Euan in a later, amalgamated typescript of ‘Unsunned Tarn’, as he considers his girlfriend, Lela (L10). Lela will leave Euan for one of the debauched, worldly men of the novel, proving herself to have been merely a preparation for Euan’s real love of Gwen. In the earliest draft, the hero was named Jowan, though as the novels were combined, the name seemed too similar to the other hero, Joel, and was altered.

To be clear, then, ‘Cuckoospit’ has been butchered and blended into ‘Unsunned Tarn’, while ‘The Former Rain’ has been used for ‘Roche Snow’. At the same time, there was an original work being drafted. The first version of this was complete in 1938 and entitled ‘The Lamb of Carn Veor’. This was the first version of the story that would be published as *The Shadowed Bed* in 1986, a story deeply indebted to the influence of T. F. Powys.

The final base component of the posthumously published *The Clay Kiln* was ‘Sown Light’, a novel beginning in the Scilly Isles, at Hugh Town, and leading back to Cornwall. The title has two references, one to Psalm 97.11 – ‘Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart’ – the second to Spurgeon’s sermon ‘Sown Light’. The theme of the sermon, as of the novel, is of God’s justness, his presence in the world, and predestination (Spurgeon, ‘Sown Light’).

‘Sown Light’ uses the characters of ‘Unsunned Tarn’ and ‘Roche Snow’, so that Clemo now had a trilogy or village saga by the end of 1941. With this trilogy, its story ending at the outbreak of war, Clemo conceived an ambitious plan. He would publish the three novels as a sequence, collectively titled ‘A Comedy of Clay’, and would then begin a second trilogy of novels to span the

duration of the war (P72). At the end of 1941 Clemo had even begun work on the first volume of this second trilogy, *Wilding Graft*, and had mapped out notes for the following two, to be entitled ‘The Hired Razor’ and ‘Mainmast’. At the time of planning this second trilogy, nobody knew how long the war was going to last, though Clemo always believed the end was imminent.

The manuscripts and typescripts of this original trilogy are patchy, but in his 1942 diary Jack handily summarises the ‘theme’ of each volume. ‘Roche Snow’, the first volume, is about the ‘need for Christian ideal of love’, and it was intended to introduce the ‘germ of predestination idea’ (P72). Clemo’s mature ideas on predestination were given in summary to Sara Ramsden, who wrote about Clemo in 1990. Clemo believed in ‘a predestination to Heaven or Hell of those who choose or deny God through the assertion of their free will’ (P167). The picture parallels the two choices between ‘fate’ and ‘predestiny’, or ‘Nature’ and ‘faith’, already touched on and developed in Clemo’s poetry.

The second novel of the trilogy, ‘Unsunned Tarn’, is described in the diary as a ‘re-emphasis of Christian love-ideal’ with greater ‘stress on predestination, more philosophy through Euan Kella as a mouthpiece and very much a self-portrait. Much veiled autobiography in the shaping and essence of situation.’ The third novel, ‘Sown Light’, was to include a ‘deeper probing of essential Christian love, predestination theme fully developed and healthy mysticism infused through Bryn Vosper, another attempt at self-portraiture, stressing the more dully acquiescent side of my nature linked with vigorous and almost vulgar sections.’ This final work was going to satirise ‘the modern Church’, and to have ‘more use made of international background – as far as it serves to enforce my theme’ (P72).

As the 1940s progressed and the novels continued to be rejected, Clemo made the decision in 1945 to weave ‘Roche Snow’ into ‘Unsunned Tarn’. Now, instead of having three related novels, he would have two, the original ‘Sown Light’ and this composite novel which retained the title ‘Unsunned Tarn’. ‘Unsunned Tarn’ is at this point made up of the ‘Cuckoospit’ sequence, ‘The Former Rain’, ‘Unsunned Tarn’ and ‘Roche Snow’.

In 1946, as Clemo prepared to submit the novels again, he made some final changes to ‘Sown Light’, retitling it ‘Penance of the Seed’, a quotation from new influence Francis Thompson’s ‘Ode to Easter’. At this critical time, Jack had four works to show a publisher: the two novels that would at length be successful, ‘The Lamb of Carn Veor’ and *Wilding Graft*, and two destined to fail in their current format, ‘Penance of the Seed’ and ‘Unsunned Tarn’.

The agent interested in Clemo, Raymond Savage, was impressed with these to begin with, writing that he thought ‘Unsunned Tarn’ as good as *Wilding Graft*. He sent the manuscript to the publisher Robert Hale, who replied in profound disagreement:

> The promise [shown in *Wilding Graft*] has not been fulfilled. [Clemo] has rectified none of his faults and has lost the freshness of touch that characterised his earlier work. He is a bad character drawer; the people in this book do not act or speak like live beings; there is not light and shade, and the bad characters are so naively portrayed, and with such hatred that they are almost funny. He has also a great liking for scandal and fills the book with bits of gossip about all sorts of quite irrelevant people. This is, in a way, very

> similar to his other book but is not as good. I would not recommend publication. (P7)

Hale had been led to believe that ‘Unsunned Tarn’ was a new novel and *Wilding Graft* a first attempt. The impression he had, then, was of Clemo getting worse, whereas the exact opposite was really the case. Savage invited Clemo to send the other novel, ‘Penance of the Seed’, but when he did, Savage was wary of it:

> I can see what is really the whole trouble with regard to your work in these three books and I think I am right. You have got a huge canvas and you have got too many people coming and going in the picture. After all, each book is in some measure a repetition of the others, and I believe that by careful elimination of extraneous people and incidents you could compress the whole into one really first-class volume. (P7)

Savage sent the manuscripts to be independently read by Osyth Leeston. Leeston came back with extensive suggestions for all three manuscripts – *Wilding Graft*, ‘Unsunned Tarn’ and ‘Penance of the Seed’ – adding that ‘Unsunned Tarn’ was, over all, the strongest (P7). Then Savage was sent ‘Lamb of Carn Veor’ (by now titled ‘Lamb of the Green Bed’) and immediately told Jack that this was ‘far and away the best thing you have written’. Savage’s role in Clemo’s literary development blossomed at this stage, although the only novelistic success he had with Clemo was *Wilding Graft*.

Following the interest shown in *Wilding Graft* by Chatto & Windus, the editor and future Poet Laureate, Cecil Day Lewis, offered his criticism of the

'Unsunned Tarn' and 'Penance of the Seed' manuscripts. In disagreement with Leeston, Day Lewis believed *Wilding Graft* to be considerably better:

> in these two novels more than in Wilding Graft, we become aware of the machinery by which he achieves his purpose: the 'message' is not deeply integrated with the action: the author is too obviously manipulating his characters to certain moral ends, indeed at times we feel he has invented them simply as vehicles for these ends and that he is not enough interested in them as human beings.

This criticism marks the beginning of Cecil Day Lewis's considerable impact on Clemo's career. Not only will he oversee the work to be undertaken on *Wilding Graft*, but he will also inform *Confession of a Rebel* and be responsible for the selection of poems collected as *The Clay Verge*. Day Lewis was frank and accurate. He went on to write that the old novels appear 'tired and perfunctory' compared with *Wilding Graft*, and that the 'passion is too often stated rather than implied', that Clemo comes 'perilously near to melodrama […] probably the inevitable result of flogging a tired theme', and that the 'most obvious defect' was the 'inability to handle sophisticated characters', stemming from Jack's lack of 'knowledge of the world'. Lastly, 'his "modern" girls, Joan in Unsunned Tarn, Lela in Penance of the Seed […] are very crudely portrayed, and sometimes are indistinguishable from the stock bad-girl figures of Parish Magazine serials' (P7).

Clemo was devastated by the rejection. 'The blackest day of the year', he wrote in his diary. 'Chatto refuses my books […]. I feel sick and stunned, abandoned and hopeless. How can there be a future for me? And why was WG

ever accepted to bring me into this terrible plight?' (P77). But the editor had added a strong compliment to his criticism, which should also be acknowledged:

> I have so firm a belief in this writer. There is much in these novels which is impressive: for instance, the village prostitute, Olive Buzza, is a really remarkable creation: his skill in first isolating a number of characters on the periphery of his story, and then drawing them together, holds out great hopes for his future: and his descriptive power, though the images it creates in these two novels are not so illuminating or essential on the whole as those of Wilding Graft, is evidently that of a born poetic novelist. (P7)

It is profoundly frustrating that Day Lewis's prediction was nullified by the progression of Clemo's syphilis. It would never be seen how good a novelist he might have become, as his disabilities precluded him from writing any more.

After this exchange, Clemo returned to Savage's suggestion that he should compress the other books into 'one really first-class volume'. Savage had written to him:

> Let us summarise the position – you admit that your work has been turned down by 37 publishers, and we can only say that if you do not take the advice of experts you will go on having your work refused. We are fully aware of your circumstances, but it is penny wise and pound foolish to try and get a publisher to accept three books which are not quite good enough than one which is really good.

Now that *Wilding Graft* had been taken out of that equation, Jack had ‘Unsunned Tarn’ and ‘Penance of the Seed’ remaining. He understood Savage to mean that he should blend these stories together, a task begun in 1950 and finished in 1951. The new work was named ‘The Dry Kiln’. The typescripts show that the version completed at this time was Clemo’s final draft, ready for publication, and its history afterwards is easily documented. It was rejected in September 1951 by Chatto & Windus, and then set aside for forty-seven years (P7).

In 1998, four years after Clemo’s death, this over-worked and abandoned novel was given to the publisher Charles Thurlow of Cornish Hillside Publications. Two versions of the typescript exist, one in Exeter’s Special Collections archive and the other at Wheal Martyn China Clay Museum (L11, WM 2000.59.2). The Exeter typescript shows Clemo’s own intentions for the book before it was abandoned. The one in Wheal Martyn, on the other hand, shows the version edited by the Padstow writer and publisher Donald Rawe, on Charles Thurlow’s request and with Ruth Clemo’s permission. Rawe had been visiting and corresponding with the Clemos since around 1970, and was a natural choice. In his ‘Editor’s Note’ to *The Clay Kiln*, Rawe explains that ‘only where the writing appeared to our 21st century expectations difficult to interpret and, at times, jarringly unsubtle, have I dared to change the occasional epithet or phrase’ (*CK* 8). This is an understatement of the work carried out. The first and most obvious change is to the title. Rawe discarded ‘The Dry Kiln’ and renamed the book *The Clay Kiln*, which Rawe said ‘may be better understood today’. It is one of a number of questionable amendments. A ‘clay kiln’ does not mean anything specific to clay-mining in Cornwall, and might even be

considered tautological. ‘The Dry Kiln’ was correct and descriptive, being the phrase used to refer to the long buildings where the slurry is dried. Besides which, the story explains what a ‘dry’ is, and any reader even slightly familiar with Clemo’s work will be aware of the term. It is in his poetry, autobiographies and fiction. Such decisions might suggest that the intended readership was not primarily those familiar with Clemo’s work or those familiar with the clay region. It would be valid to ask who the intended readership might be. The publisher is a Cornish-interest house, marketing within Cornwall and specifically within the St Austell area. They are publishing a St Austell writer out of favour at the time, except within Cornish and Christian literary markets. Moreover, this is clearly the weakest of Clemo’s novels, and would be damaging to his popularity and future readership if taken as typical or representative of his output, rather than as juvenilia or as a failed work of academic interest. But if it were to be regarded as the juvenilia of an exceptional writer, it would have made more sense to have stuck to the author’s intentions. If the book were to be sold within Cornwall, but was not intended for people familiar to Clemo or the clay district, and not intended to be of academic value, the only obvious market remaining is that of the visitors and tourists. Yet this seems an unlikely market for Thurlow to target, especially with a Jack Clemo novel. It is possible that intentions were muddled and never fully reconciled.

The Clay Kiln’s real interest is as an academic or biographical piece, and the manuscript should have been published as Clemo intended it. Instead, a number of minor errors were introduced to the text, and a significant number of alterations were made, which ought to be acknowledged before considering the book as a work of Clemo’s. Some of the changes are subtle, and others quite intrusive. Of the latter, new descriptive passages have been inserted into the

text, written by Rawe rather than by Clemo. For example, the passage describing Marvran's journey out of Falmouth is entirely Rawe's invention: 'dawn broke over Pendennis Point; she saw again the abandoned castle rising from the mist' (26). Changes were then made to the dialogue and especially the dialect. The dialogue of 'The Dry Kiln' was intended to be relatively free from dialect, to make the work more readable, just as *Wilding Graft* had been. In Clemo's original dialogue a Cornish accent is implied, without being distracting. For example, an accent is evident in Clemo's sentence, 'I aren't going to bandy words'. This is about as close to dialect as the writing gets in Clemo's version, and the implied accent is saved only for particular characters. Rawe changes this sentence to, 'I aren't going to bandy words with 'ee', which introduces an unnecessary phonetic spelling, but also alters a localised derivative of the saying 'I'm not going to bandy words with you' into an anglicised formulation with Cornish pronunciation imposed, at the same time depriving the phrase of a regional characteristic and making it more awkward to read. Another example is the phrase, 'Anyhow it soon brought him to boiling point', which was changed by Rawe to 'Anyhow it soon brought 'n to boiling point'. It is only slight, but the effect again is negative, and the accumulated effect is that the dialogue becomes untidy and the Cornish voice imposed rather than implied.

From beginning to end the novel has been altered to its detriment, and it is the ending that best shows how unnecessary the editing became. In Clemo's version, daybreak is described as it approaches Hugh Town in the Scillies, where the lovers Joel and Lorraine are standing. The narrator follows the risen sun across Cornwall to the clay district, as the light 'fanned out over the grey roofs of clay-dries until its seaward flash from Land's End struck the tower like a sundering blade and dropped in broad warmth of peace upon the lonely

watchers.' This is altered by Rawe for publication, so that the light 'struck the tower like a sundering blade, casting the broad warmth of peace upon the lonely watchers.' (For reference, in 'Penance of the Seed' the ending is very similar, with Bryn and Lory honeymooning at Hugh Town, and the light like a 'sword' in the final phrase (L9).) Again, it is only a slight alteration, but there is no value to it and it is to the detriment of the passage's purpose. The phrase altered was not problematic, imprecise, difficult, archaic, or in any other way inappropriate. More importantly, the alteration muddles the metaphor of the dropping blade. In Rawe's version the blade reference is doing no work at all. In fact, it makes little sense for the 'blade' to be 'casting' warmth on the couple. Instead of a violent warmth dropping with the blade, the light has become more like a blanket in Rawe's version.

The published book is, then, doubly flawed, an unsuccessful amalgamation of too many other works inappropriately edited. To understand the book's intentions better we should look at the unpublished versions – the final draft of 'The Dry Kiln' and its component parts, 'The Comedy of Clay'.

The 'Comedy of Clay' trilogy, as conceived in 1941, would have had three heroes: Joel in 'Private Snow', Jowan in 'Unsunned Tarn' and Bryn in 'Sown Light'. As the books merged, Joel remained the main hero, a tough, surly dry-worker from a bad family. Jowan becomes Euan, a bookish young man who finished school but decided he preferred employment in the clay industry. And Bryn was a slightly slow-witted character of primitive faith who, since leaving school, had read nothing but the Bible.

Each of the three characters is an idealized aspect of Jack himself: the social outsider, the bookish outsider, and the religious outsider. They are strong and attractive young men with special talents who reject the triviality of

everyday village life and are rejected themselves, in spite of which they all find perfect Christian love and marriage. One might almost see the act of writing these stories as a kind of repetitious prayer or meditation. Clemo introduced his problems, added the principles of his faith, and enforced a happy, inevitable resolution. Much later, in 1990, he would explain this to a friend and correspondent, Felicity Warner: 'Every novel or short story I wrote had a happy ending – chiefly because I was its hero and I felt that if I meted out tragedy to this fictitious person I would suffer the same fate' (Warner letters). This approach made for an unusual blend of realism and idealism. The industrial rural landscape and people are described excellently, if cruelly, with intimate awareness and attention to detail, but working behind them is the force of divine predestination, guiding elect Christians to a hybrid spiritual-worldly fulfilment. They are realist novels with a hidden but explicitly stated optimistic faith driving them to conclusion: Christian Realism, perhaps.

When Clemo drew the three stories into a single volume, he was reluctant to reduce the number of characters, so that most of the fringe characters remained with no space to develop them. Bryn was edited out completely, and Joel's original lover, Marvran, was turned into a false-start. All the other novels had involved a failing relationship at the beginning, so this is not a problem in itself, but the writer appeared unwilling to reduce the importance of the Marvran character, and it is not until well into the second half of the book that we are introduced to the destined love interest, Lorraine (142). The many scenes of tension with Marvran have been a waste of time, a pointless and unresolved distraction.

The formula of the separated novels had been that a new heroine was introduced at the beginning and an old fringe character developed afterwards,

and their drama would play within the established framework of the village and the villagers' chatter and sin. As the old characters reappear, the reader feels a comfortable sense of context which juxtaposes well against the excitement of the new protagonist and the exposition of a previously minor figure. Clemo did all of this very ably, structuring the stories with easy competence. The amalgamated novel lost almost all the vigour and structure as the stories merged. When Day Lewis and Savage suggested that Clemo boil the stories down into one book, they had intended for Clemo to reduce the number of characters and to focus the novel on a single love story using the best features from previous attempts. Instead, Clemo kept practically all the characters and ran parallel narratives. The trilogy's charms were lost, and a new set of problems introduced. Replacing the resolution of the trilogy, in which the three successful couples from each of the novels congregate in Joel and Marvran's house, effectively resolving the tripartite split of Clemo's own personality, 'The Dry Kiln' has the Scilly Isle ending from 'Sown Light' and 'Penance of the Seed', in which Bryn (now Joel) and Lorraine return to Hugh Town for their honeymoon, meditating on Providence and predestiny (L9). It becomes an unbalanced and underwhelming finale.

In spite of all this, a number of useful features remain. In its evolution we can see the effect of Jack's disabilities and biography on the story. We can trace his reading, as well as his theological and moral beliefs as they develop, and we may derive from the work a considerable commentary on the people and place of his native region. When Clemo combined the various novels, the ghosts of former influences and beliefs remained. There is the base melodrama, with characters quivering, gasping and anxiously gripping furniture, from Clemo's earliest reading, and the use of Providence, fate and God's romantic

will, as he found in *Jane Eyre*. There is also the influence of T. F. Powys, which Savage asked Jack to tone down in 'Unsunned Tarn': 'three times during the book you refer to T.F. Powys. Don't you think it might be a good idea to cut this out, otherwise, you might be accused of being too influenced by him in your writing?' (P7). Like Clemo, Powys set his stories in small rural communities, often with recurring characters and a clear allegorical purpose, and it was after reading Powys's *Goat Green* (sometimes called *The Better Gift*) that Clemo decided to make Joel a footballer, as he noted in his diary:

> The idea has been in my mind ever since I read Powys' *The Better Gift*. I'd thought reference to sport out of place in my mystical type of writing, but when I read Theodore using […] the two so convincingly I changed my mind. (P76)

The Clay Kiln's emphasis on divinely ascribed lovers, while not originally conceived from Jack's reading of Robert Browning, was impressively bolstered by it. There are several mentions of Browning in the text, including an inscription from 'Ixion' and a reference to 'The Statue and the Bust'. The latter poem, Jack notes in his 1937 diary, was an inspiration for the novel sequence, which may be imagined in the love-at-first-sight scene between Joel and Lorraine in *The Clay Kiln*. In 'The Statue and the Bust' a young bride sees a Duke passing and they fall immediately in love. It is this aspect and the apparent narrative sympathy with the socially condemned lovers which Clemo used. He, too, fell in love quickly and often, as though inspired, believing that God approved his love in spite of its tendency to head in forbidden directions.

The theology of *The Clay Kiln* is not as deliberately constructed as in the mature works. Clemo is informed primarily by his personal beliefs, Bible studies, and his reading of Charles Spurgeon's sermons. Predestination is central to the story, and it might be worth outlining where Clemo's ideas on the doctrine derived. It was Calvin who emphasised the importance of predestination. Calvin's picture is of the 'predestination of some to salvation, and of others to destruction' (Calvin 140). For Calvin, those who would be saved and those who would be damned were predetermined from the very beginning by God and there is nothing anyone can do to change their fate. These are the elect and the non-elect, respectively. Clemo's impression of predestiny came from post-Calvinists like Spurgeon, whose position is neatly outlined in the sermon 'Predestination and Calling'. For Spurgeon, election is a call from God that has been answered by man:

> Many are called but few are chosen, because there are many kinds of call, but the true call, and that only, answers to the description of the text. It is 'an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.' This calling forbids all trust in our own doings and conducts us to Christ alone for salvation, but it afterwards purges us from dead works to serve the living and true God. If you are living in sin, you are not called; if you can still continue as you were before your pretended conversion, then it is no conversion at all; that man who is called in his drunkenness, will forsake his drunkenness; men may be called in the midst of sin, but they will not continue in it any longer.

The word ‘chosen’ seems odd here, as odd as it will seem in Clemo’s own work. The picture Spurgeon very clearly outlines in his sermon is that many people hear the call to salvation, the call of and to God. This is their ‘conversion’ experience. However, for it to be considered a ‘true’ conversion, the called individual must respond, by aligning herself with God’s will and teaching. If the individual continues in debauchery and sin then it is not a ‘true call’ and they are not ‘chosen’.

> If I be called I must have been elected, and I need not doubt that. God never tantalized a man by calling him by grace effectually, unless he had written that man’s name in the Lamb’s book of life. Oh, what a glorious doctrine is that of election, when a man can see himself to be elect.

This is the ‘Consolation’ of Spurgeon’s sermon, but is it really any such thing? ‘If he hath called thee, nothing can divide thee from his love.’ *If* he hath called thee. What if he hath not? This could only be considered a consolation to Spurgeon’s audience if they had been called. Spurgeon seems to consider that anybody exposed to the Church or the Bible has, in a sense, been ‘called’, exposed to this great ‘truth’, and they may either respond by submission to it, or they may carry on with their lives as before. Both sorts of person might believe in God after the ‘call’, but only one is elect. Submission amounts to election in Spurgeon’s argument, it is suggested. So the two groups of people comprising the non-elect are those who are never exposed to the ‘call’, and those who did not respond to it. Those who are never exposed are not dealt with in this

sermon, as there was no one in Spurgeon’s congregation who had not heard of God and the Bible. It is considered a ‘consolation’ that all those in front of Spurgeon may join the elect by submitting to the call of Christ which they have heard.

This is a kind of compromise between the doctrine of election and that of free will. Many have been called, but only those who choose to submit are the elect. And who could complain of being excluded if they have chosen to ignore the call? Those who know of the doctrine are aware of the ‘call’, and those who have not heard of the doctrine or the call cannot care.

There is an uncomfortable playing with the idea of freedom here, and it is worth looking at, since almost all of Clemo’s beliefs are filtered through Spurgeon. In another sermon, ‘Election’, Spurgeon says:

> But there are some who say, ‘It is hard for God to choose some and leave others.’ Now, I will ask you one question. Is there any of you here this morning who wishes to be holy, who wishes to be regenerate, to leave off sin and walk in holiness? ‘Yes, there is,’ says someone, ‘I do.’ Then God has elected you. But another says, ‘No; I don’t want to be holy; I don’t want to give up my lusts and my vices.’ Why should you grumble, then, that God has not elected you to it? For if you were elected you would not like it, according to your own confession. (*Sermons* 2, 75)

If God had made you want to submit to Him then you would submit and you would be grateful. If God has made you so that you do *not* want to submit, then you do not want to submit and you have nothing to complain about. The obvious

and unanswered problem here is that God could have made everyone want to submit, and He could therefore have saved everyone. God has taken away this person's freedom by making it causally impossible to accept the 'call'. He has determined that they are unable to accept the call, and yet this is the individual's fault. It is a complete argument, because if that individual finds themselves later able to submit to the call of God, then they are saved and elect. But it is as abjectly unfair as the original formulation of Calvin, even though it appears to be a softening of the doctrine.

Clemo accepted a version of predestination in this novel, but it is slightly different from the version proffered in his 1958 *The Invading Gospel*. That later version is informed to a greater degree by Karl Barth, and is at once more forgiving and more personal than Spurgeon's picture. The predestiny in *The Clay Kiln* is very like the fatalism of Hardy, but instead of there being only one malign spirit, leading people irrevocably to their doom, there is a second, a benign God, who leads those that he favours through the same trials and suffering, but towards final satisfaction and gain. The malign spirit remains in Clemo's work, the guiding hand of 'Nature' towards one's fate, but the faithful force of predestiny can overrule it. Intriguingly, Clemo adds to this formula the possibility of the (fallen, Natural) world still threatening the predestined pattern. In *The Clay Kiln* it is the Second World War that offers this possibility:

> Quietly they had discussed the possible effects of the war upon their marriage: inconvenience, separation, material uncertainty. Having conquered their personal fate they were confronted by a wider fate, with its monstrous threat to the predestined pattern of their lives. (243)

This appears an anomaly. There is Natural fate, Christian predestiny, and now there is another worldly force – a ‘wider fate’ – apparently made of some other quality. It is a more general fate. So, in other words, one’s personal predestiny may be ruined by a ‘wider fate’. Here are at least three competing forces, all of them defined by their certitude and none of them achieving certitude. One is ‘fated’ to Hell *unless* one submits to God, in which case one is ‘destined’ to Heaven, *unless* the ‘wider fate’ intervenes and one is damned back to Hell. It seems here that, far from solving the problem of Calvinistic predestiny, Clemo has reinstated both free will and contingency to chance. It is a very obscure way of arriving at a stance that to all appearances remains simply causal. By making the multiplicity of fates and predestinies potentially conflicting, Clemo seems accidentally to be challenging the quality of the Creator’s forethought, or otherwise to be sacrificing the meaning of ‘destiny’. If one can submit fully to God and so enter a route of divinely predestined fulfilment, and yet have this route blocked by an unforeseen fate – remembering that ‘fate’ has been evaded by the submission to Christ – then there is a problem.

The happy ending, too, introduces a claim about fate and destiny, the happy ending being Clemo’s own promised, divinely approved and achieved marriage. That is, it seems to be the moral of the story that worldly pleasures are the expected reward for renouncing the world in favour of Christian devotion. Physical, passionate, erotic love – albeit ruled by spiritual companionship – is the reward for putting your faith in God. Clemo also believed personally that his disabilities would be healed, his hearing returned, and, later, his eyesight and sense of taste. Indeed, Clemo’s personal situation challenged the boundary

between the spiritual and physical aspects of a human being. He was forced to confront his faith and his God in a very personal and immediate way.

The questionable moral of this outlook is that the reward for escaping 'Natural fate' and worldly indulgence is in fact worldly pleasure: marriage, sensuality and companionship. One gets what one desires most if one is a good Christian. This is a tension at the heart of Clemo's fusion of personal experiential mysticism and dogma. The depth of his desires, Clemo felt, could not be there for nothing. God would not nurture and excite these desires vainly after he had submitted wholeheartedly to Him. This individualistic belief accounts for the early attempt to sublimate sex, marriage and physical love. If they can be considered somehow a bridge between the spiritual and physical worlds, then they are a divine gift, a point of mystical contact.

The Clay Kiln also reveals a number of similar biographical parallels between the work and life of Clemo. Marvran, for example, is Evelyn, and her changing role in the evolving narrative echoes Clemo's changing feelings towards the real-life girl. In 'Private Snow' and the earlier versions of 'Unsunned Tarn', Marvran is the destined lover, but when the novels are finally combined and Evelyn has married someone else, the Marvran character becomes 'cheap', flawed and 'worldly', a mere 'preparation' for the real thing. Euan is reading books on sex and D. H. Lawrence, just as Clemo read books on physiological aspects of sex by R. T. Trall and T. W. Standwell, loaned to him in 1934 by Frank Baron (WM 1992.32.1-25). There are many such details: Marvran's dog is named Flush, just as Jack's was; Joel's reprobate family was modelled on Esther and John Clemo; and Joel's awkwardness around women is similar to Clemo's, with the feeling that he is missing some subtle technique of flirtation which he would understand if he were a 'slick fellow' (106). The representation

of women in the novel is characteristically conflicting. There are puritanical expectations, with virginity being more attractive (107), makeup being 'garish artificiality' (127), and the repeated references to the sinful frivolity of dancing. These are inherited from the fundamental Methodist upbringing of Jack and his mother. But it is worth recalling that while Clemo is conservative on matters of sexual attraction and marital expectations, there is not a hint of misogyny in his approach to women who are academics, theologians, artists or friends. This again may show the influence of the Bible Christians and chapel circuit, which used a greater number of women preachers than any other Methodist sect. Equally, his progressive attitude towards women could have been assumed by the strength of the cottage's matriarchy.

There remain in *The Clay Kiln* some of the solipsistic tendencies observed in other juvenilia. We are to infer, for example, that the villagers and God alike have an all-consuming investment in the progress of young lovers. However, there is also a reaching out towards a more mature expression. Clemo's descriptive writing begins to reveal the inspired and vigorous intimacy he had with his industrial environment:

> The 'dry' was some fifty yards in length, and low-roofed; its outer side was the storage linhay, closed by wooden shutters swung between stone pillars and hinged, not at the sides like a door, but to the timber beams supporting the roof. Most of these shutters were now hanging down, and as the building had no windows the kiln, some twelve feet above the storage area in which dried clay-cubes were stacked, was deeply shadowed. Through the fetid

> steam the slurry on the kiln-pan glinted, bubbling whitely up like a leprous skin. (44)

A ‘born poetic novelist’, Cecil Day Lewis had said, and these descriptions are immediately evocative to anyone familiar with the moorland around St Austell. Jack wrote of the character Euan that he ‘knew the idiom of the countryside, the bleak lyricism of the flowing sand’, and he would have been aware that this applied to himself too (55).

The Clay Kiln is a juvenile work of the pre-war period, a grotesque composite beast, unruly, unattractive, with inherited flaws exacerbated by eccentric editorial decisions, but Jack’s talent is budding. The theology grounded in personal experience is a bold undercurrent of the novel, however trying it might be philosophically, and the use of malicious gossip to drive the plot is achieved successfully.

The novel ends as Britain is due to enter the war, and this moment would mark a new chapter in Clemo’s development. The first two years of the war diaries are missing, their commentary lost, as though the narrator disappeared in hibernation, or perhaps into a pupa stage, since a great deal is about to change for him. He is a young man in his mid-twenties, unevenly self-educated, alone and suffering from the strain of failed romance. He is deaf from the progression of his syphilis, the only real inheritance from his dead father, and he is poor, living with a crippled aunt and widowed mother in a workers’ cottage. His teenage urges have been typical, but they have all been discovered in darkness and interpreted within a peculiar framework. The most wild and treacherous waters of youth have been navigated in an oarless dinghy. From the villagers, he received only taunts and the hurt of gossip about the shame of

his father. Socially, Jack tried to 'confess' his shame by acting in a 'shameful' way – never washing, shaving or changing his clothes, and there was an 'incident' recalled in *Confession* when he seditiously ate a pasty in the street. Jack set a theological context for his solitude and individualism in order that he might resolve the tensions between his faith and circumstances. The confessional exhibitionism has not yet been outgrown, as records from the *Cornish Guardian* show, but it has matured and will continue to do so throughout the following decade, away from the controversial and towards reconciliation.

The extraordinary conditions in which Clemo grew up made him unevenly balanced in a unique way. The awakening of sexual awareness was given excessive significance, so much so that it had to be related to God. Indeed, Christianity seems to have been the only ideology strong enough to sustain the suffering. The death of his father, the syphilis, the poverty, the isolation, the novelty of sex – there *had* to be a reason. The recurrence of pain year after year, the relentless losses, these could not have been chance. So why choose Jack? What was so special? Was he the damned offspring of a sinner? He did not feel himself to be. Then perhaps the suffering was a purification process, a mystical favour gifted by God, preparing him to be received. In this way, sex really could be Clemo's path to God, with the suffering of his inheritance and the ecstasy of orgasm perfectly poised.

Clemo's faith towards the end of the 1930s is more consistent, more self-aware and adoring. Less frequent are the violent rages spat at the Almighty, and less poisonous his letters to the paper. Reaching out to the *Cornish Guardian*, Clemo often made sensible points, but he made them in a perverse way, his maturity and intellect at different developmental stages. The following

decade is a period of maturation and control. Politically and theologically, Clemo becomes engaged, the quality of his prose improves markedly, and he moves gradually away from the timid sexuality of child romances. Yet the intensity and confusion of youth remain, and this duality of his nature – this rupturing tension – is reflected in the work; the potent clay-set romance of *Wilding Graft*, the sublimely uneven chronicle of *Confession of a Rebel*, and the brutal industrial metaphorical poetry that would constitute *The Clay Verge*.

Still Clemo has hardly set foot from the cottage and the sand dump, and his routines continue through the war. Thursdays he walks to Foxhole for the paper. Tuesdays he goes for his injections and his mother leaves for choir practice in the evening, returning by 8:30pm – any later and Jack panics. In the mornings, he lies in bed late reading the Bible, then sits at his writing bureau by the window of the front room, looking out at the hedge and the stone wall, and the road where clay trucks pass. There the Italian prisoners of war would wait for Harry's bus to take them out to the farms, peering in at Jack hunched over his desk, teasing and flattering the poet and his mother. The facts of the Second World War would remain remote to him, passing through the front door with the newspaper and the charming Italians, or with the evacuee children sent down from London. Jack kept his own dramas within the cottage, for which the war was an inconvenient but appropriate metaphor.

VI

War Comes to Goonamarris

> 'War's bound to knock out a industry like ours where so much depends on the exports. Germany was one of our biggest customers on that there continent o' Europe, and now, o' course, none of our clay isn't goin' there – though you'd think they'd need more clay instead o' less, considerin' the amount o' crockery Hitler must ha' smashed up in these tempers he'd get.' (*WG* 79)

The clay industry and villages suffered during wartime, with impeded exportation, difficulty replacing machinery parts and a severely diminished male work force. Many pits were forced to close, and even when the war ended, the industry continued to suffer, with ill-maintained equipment and a shortage of coal (Bristow 112, Barton 195). The works needed to maximise efficiency and minimise waste, which led to further machination and the development of aggregate companies able to use the discarded sand and rock. These waste products are found everywhere today, from road construction and mortar sand to bird feed and golf bunkers, and they define some of the new-build houses of the clay towns, which are rendered a storm-cloud grey by the aggregate. Even now the war's influence remains evident, as the pressure was felt most keenly by smaller concerns. There were forty-one companies mining china clay at the outbreak of war, but as they struggled and closed, the bigger companies took advantage, buying up the smaller concerns so that today there is a near-monopoly held by the French mineral-giant Imerys.

As well as industrial stress and anxiety, the new war brought new threats of attack to Cornwall. There was the fear of naval strikes, to which the long coastline was especially vulnerable, but the 1939 war also brought with it the threat of attack by air, a threat realised as soon as France fell in 1940. The Germans set up bases along the Gallic coast, which meant Cornwall had a tactical value and vulnerability. Attacking planes would pass over, and while the small fishing and mining villages might not seem natural targets, there were many unpredictable strikes from retreating German aircraft needing to offload their bombs before returning to France, having been unable to drop them on the targeted military bases, larger towns and ports (Trethewey 63). Around the clay area, Par, Pentewan, St Blazey and Goss Moor were hit in the 1942 raids, destroying homes, churches, harbours and livestock. In 1941 four bombs were dropped on Foxhole, an attack mentioned in Clemo's *Confession*, having come soon after Jack had given his first religious address at Trethosa Chapel, on Psalm 46 (189). The Foxhole explosions could be heard from Goonamarris.

The fall of France and the threat of air strikes also increased the urgency of evacuating children from London and the south-east into rural areas. Cornwall was still much safer than London, and floods of evacuees arrived. Trains would take them to St Austell, and a coach would drive them out to Nanpean or Trethosa School to be billeted (P75, Barnard). In their cramped cottage, Eveline, Bertha and Jack took two children, Pat and Doris Jauncey. Originally billeted elsewhere in the village, they came to the Clemo cottage following a death in the summer of 1940, soon before the London Blitz (*CoaR* 180). They left again on 27 February 1942 (P72), when the threat was thought to have lessened, although Pat returned in July 1944, with two of her younger siblings,

David and Rita. They finally left in June 1945, but would return to Cornwall sporadically (P75-8).

Another evacuee, Irene Howell, arrived with the Jauncey girls just before her eighth birthday in July 1940. She was billeted with the Kessells next door. Irene spent her time playing with the slightly older Jauncey sisters at the Clemo cottage, but by 1941 a tension had arisen between the two families (P71). The Kessells were suspicious of Jack and thought his friendships with children unhealthy. This was largely the result of the gossip surrounding Jack's turbulent infatuation with Barbara. Barbara herself visited the cottage to see the London girls, and the manner in which she now ignored Jack hurt him, leading to a number of childish and 'hysterical outbursts' overheard by the Kessells next door until they 'thought it prudent to keep Irene away from me as much as possible' (*CoaR* 191). The Clemos, on the other hand, thought that Irene would be better off living with them and the other evacuees: 'Mother says I[rene]'s begged her time and again to take her away from Mrs. K.', wrote Jack in 1941 (P71). Unfortunately, some damage had been done to Jack's already brittle reputation, and 'being unfamiliar with the latent peculiarities of my temperament these village folk took my violent behaviour very seriously' (*CoaR* 191). The Kessells reported Jack to the billeting officer, claiming that he was unstable and a threat to children, the result of which was that in October Jack 'had to endure a revolting psycho-analytical test by Dr Coleman of Bodmin Asylum before they were satisfied that it was an innocent friendship. Perhaps they weren't *satisfied* even then' (R3). In his diary, Jack records his initial thoughts:

> Our Dr had reported what Mrs K said and I had to see the hospital psychoanalyst and go through a gruelling test while he probed for

> abnormalities. All in vain! […] He told mother he was fully satisfied that there are no sexual aberrations in me – in ref to Irene, of course, but it applies to my whole outlook. The devil has received a crushing blow over this business, foiled and routed at every point. […] And the dramatic sense of being 'on trial' – for he told me I was 'accused of assaulting an evacuee girl' – this will be a wonderful help to my writing – the real sensational touch which is always so fruitful for me. (P71)

In *Confession* Clemo seems to implicate himself. When asked who his favourite writers were, he became flustered, mentioning 'Galsworthy and Hall Caine, both of whom had ceased to be my favourites years before. But it was probably just as well that I did not admit that my favourite author was T. F. Powys' (*CoaR* 192). The sense is that had the doctor known the truth then his conclusions might have been different. Dr Coleman continued to question him about his sexuality.

> He did not refer to masochism or sadism, and I thought it unnecessary to mention these traits […]. I was very relieved that he did not ask whether I had been in any way obsessed with other young girls. I was anxious that Barbara should be kept out of this, and that our old spiritual attachment should not be dragged into this murky by-path. It would be very difficult to explain to a psychiatrist what she had done for me, and what I still felt about her. (*CoaR* 193)

The approach here appears very similar to Jack's approach to the process of writing his autobiography. He does not want to tell a direct lie, but he will omit key information in order to construct a false account. Such misleading does not cause him the same quantity of guilt.

In the last part of Coleman's examination, Clemo writes, 'I was quite calm and collected. I had read enough books on sex and psychology to give intelligent answers to the psychiatrist's questions. I knew what he was talking about, what he was trying to get at' (193). The impression given is that Jack was getting away with something. It is not pleasant reading, but the episode served two functions. Firstly, it exonerated Clemo. He confessed the ignominious event in his diaries, letters and books, so the effect ought to be freedom from or transcendence of public oppression. Secondly, Clemo used the event to exalt himself:

> My mind was unusual but sound and wholesome, with firm moral control. [Dr Coleman] added – and I mention this as a mere factual detail – that there was no doubt that I possessed the mentality of a genius and was likely to show a taste for extreme simplicity which would be misunderstood by average adults. (*CoaR* 193)

The following page, he refers to this as 'the official confirmation of my "genius"'. It was certainly not told to Jack himself, as he was deaf for the visit, and it is also not recorded in any of the other accounts of the psychological analysis in his diaries or correspondence. The gentle, favourable distortion of events is a feature of confessional literature, in which the writer is in a 'privileged position to

dictate readings' of events (Coetzee 279). And favourable distortion is certainly a feature of Clemo's own *Confession*.

With the doctor's absolution, Irene was able to move into the Clemo cottage with the Jauncey girls within a week. This new girl knew how to please Jack, writing notes like 'I love God' or 'I love Jack' and handing them to him. She soon rivalled his other favourite, Pat, for his affections.

At the same time, in November 1941, only a month after Irene arrived at the cottage, Jack read *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* very quickly, finishing them both over two days, and in December he began thinking about some new work of his own – a novel, to be entitled *Wilding Graft* (P71). This was a fruitful period for Jack. Both *Confession of a Rebel* and *Wilding Graft* were begun in 1941, the first 500 words of the former having been written back in June. *Wilding Graft* progressed swiftly, and within twelve months Clemo had written 75,000 words of it (P72). By this time the situation in the house had changed. Pat and Doris had left in February, only four months after Irene had moved in, a sort of movement quite typical for evacuees, just as their return in 1944 would be typical, following the threat of the unmanned V-1 flying bombers, or Doodlebugs (P74). After the Jauncey girls left, the cottage felt empty, and Eveline Clemo went looking for a new girl. She found Joan Slade, a ten-year-old from Dulwich, intended to be a playmate for Irene. Joan was the same age as the other girls, with her birthday a few weeks away when she moved in. She stayed with the Clemos until September 1944, but is mentioned only a handful of times. In his 1942 diary, Jack writes that he does not want her to come at all, but instead wants the old evacuees back (P72). He dislikes her before she has even arrived, and it is no surprise that he tries to find fault immediately, not even attempting to befriend her. In *Confession* she is dismissed as 'a pathetic little

slum product', 'a silent, remote shadow' (201), and in the diaries, when she leaves, Jack remarks that he won't 'miss her at all' (P74).

Pat, Doris and Irene, on the other hand, appear disproportionately frequently in *Confession of a Rebel*, which gives an inflated sense of their importance to Clemo's biography. This is because the girls were all present while he was writing *Confession*, and there may be a sense in which they are important to Clemo's readers as a corrective to the earlier concerns over Jack's apparent sexualising of the child Barbara. It becomes clear that Barbara was an exceptional infatuation that went too far, rather than an habitual taste. Clemo revelled in infatuations and enjoyed playing the lover. He also loved the company of children. But the case of Barbara was unusual, and although in his answers to Dr Coleman there is the suggestion of some further fall, Jack did not respond to subsequent girls in the same way. He found Irene charming, particularly her artless simplicity:

> We've had Irene's school report, and the Master says she's backward […]. I know that's one of the chief reasons I like her so – I hate this cleverness which dries up all the human feeling in girls, makes them cold, aloof, competent. God give me a girl with a warm heart, simple and emotional, and I shan't care much what sort of mind she has. (P73)

Clemo is delighted with Irene, but she is not desired in the way that Barbara was. He is not asking for Irene to love him, but praying for a more mature girl with her qualities to enter his life. In *Confession*, it is suggested that Irene was almost as important to Jack as Barbara, and he even found a pattern to support

a connection between the two girls, writing that the weather on the Saturday that Irene arrived was ‘oddly similar to that other fateful one on which Marshall Rowse had been killed’ (178). That is to say, it was raining.

But Irene’s importance is not borne out by any source other than *Confession*, and it seems as though her textual presence is exaggerated by her closeness at the time of writing, and by her leaving in June 1945. It is only in 1945, as she edges towards a more appropriate age for courting, that Jack wonders whether she was, after all, intended to be his wife.

By this time, Eveline Clemo is as committed to finding Jack a partner as he is. At the very least, she needed some help at home. Her health was not good, and in 1942 she had been critically ill and hospitalized. She worried about who would look after Jack when she was gone. It was a problem, as Jack was an awkward burden to inherit and there would be few people willing to bear him, with perhaps fewer still he would be willing to bear. Jack, too, felt this concern, and it would haunt him whenever his mother fell ill.

Two years after the war had finished, Eveline went to see the evacuees and was dismayed to find that Irene had a boyfriend her own age. She was not the least interested in returning to the dark, isolated cottage in the clay. So Jack returned his affections to Barbara:

> Cheered […] by the news that thousands of girls are marrying at 16 or 17 – in 1941 over 30,000 English girls were married under the age of 18. It gives me such heart for Ba – oh, I do believe I shan’t have to wait long. (P72)

When ‘Roche Snow’ was finished and submitted again in 1944, Jack wanted the dedication to be for Barbara, and to read: ‘remembering happy days at G. while this book was being written’ (P74). Barbara’s photograph remained above his writing desk, and he still believed that they were destined to be together. In the opening few pages of the 1945 diary, this belief was expressed in his expectations for the year. Clemo nearly always announced the start and the end of each year, summarizing what was past and planning what was to come. In this entry, the apophenic impulse leads him to observe: ‘the coincidence of the numbers (14, 29) of the promise “when it is come to pass” fits the present year – if Ba is the right one’ (P75). What Jack means is that this year Barbara would be fourteen and Clemo would be twenty-nine, and their ages then became a Biblical reference, to the book of John, 14:29: ‘I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe’. Clemo goes on to observe that 1945 would be ‘the seventh year since the old life ended with Ba’s leaving here, so that, like Jacob, I’ve served 7 years for the promised blessing’ (P75). Jacob waited seven years to receive Rachel, just as Clemo expected to be given Barbara. Then, of course, he noted that 1945 was the centenary of ‘the Wimpole Street miracle’, when Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett met. These were all ‘proofs’ assuring Clemo of romantic success in 1945. It was the ‘Year of Destiny’.

True to form, nothing romantic happened. In fact, Clemo later noted that 1945 was the darkest year he had endured since 1939, when he had torn out his diary pages and destroyed them. The past, one may note, was always desperately gloomy and pained, while the future was to be brilliant and fulfilled.

The war years, then, were a muddle of childish happiness and deep loneliness. There was no romantic physical love throughout the war, but only

the hope of Barbara one day returning to him and the immediate playful affection of evacuee children. Still he maintained that he could not write without romantic love, simultaneously preparing his most powerful novel, most extraordinary autobiographical work, and some of his greatest poetry. Jack's war was fruitful but solitary. His record of events during these years, in *Confession* and in the diaries, is a unique wartime document.

For much of the war the action remained distant to Clemo. He was not disturbed by night-raids and searchlights as his mother and the evacuee children were, because his deafness meant that he could not hear the bombs or aircraft: 'Jerry planes around here at 3am – mother heard bombs dropped and saw searchlights. […] I slept thro' it all' (P74). Quite early on, the war tried to approach, when Jack was called up 'to be medically examined by the military authorities':

> Mother accompanied me and explained that I was deaf and had been blind, so after a quick glance at me the doctor filled in my exemption certificate declaring that I was 'suffering from complete blindness and deafness' – a statement that made me grin when presently I read it on Redruth station. (*CoaR* 171)

On the way back he bumped into Evelyn with her baby in St Austell, apparently for the first time since storming out of the Phillips's farm: 'I knew from the complete absence of emotional turmoil that there was no possibility of my ever being ensnared again by the illusory values of an ideal world' (171). Jack was 'starting again', confirming his faith, resolving to progress and never to return to a particular viewpoint or state of mind. And this resolution would last no longer

than many others. Clemo's love of resolutions was attached to his pattern-seeking and schematic manipulation of events. By processing events so consciously, and externalising them as though objectively, he separates himself from them and puts them behind him, so to speak. We see a similar attempt at self-analysis and objectivising through the graphs and charts Jack drew in his diaries, reductively plotting his emotional wellbeing between the perceived poles of happiness and misery. Elsewhere, Clemo delineates his religious development before 1955 into six tidy sections (P75), or marks his reading out of a hundred (P73). By ordering the world in this way, it is as though he is able to take control of it, to cordon it off and remove himself to a safe distance. If he can show that something misguided or humiliating is categorically distinct from how he is now, he is able to become morally distanced. It is a tendency that remains with Clemo, always emergent, a perpetual phoenix. It is the mark of one who suffers too much, as well as of one incorrigibly optimistic.

In *Confession*, it is Jack's intention to suggest that he hardly cared about the war at all, a bold declaration in 1949. There is a passage where he describes what appears to be his greatest concern, after he unsuccessfully entered a writing competition with one of his novels:

> I had become very anxious about *Private Snow*. Daily news of the blitz on London was disturbing, and when I read of the great fire raid of December 29th I was horrified to learn that the premises of the publisher who held my novel had been burnt down. I entered 1941 with the paralysing fear, almost amounting to certainty, that my manuscript had been destroyed. (*CoaR* 175-6)

Clemo was aware how many British people lost their lives in the war – he had written some of the statistics on his diaries and notebooks – and he knew that making the threat to his novel seem a greater event than these hundreds of thousands of deaths, or than the incalculable millions worldwide, could have been difficult for readers to sympathise with. More than this, it does not seem likely that even Clemo believed what he was writing. In his 1941 diary, Jack hardly remarked his worry for the manuscript, only mentioning it in passing *after* it had been rejected, when he was trying to look on the bright side of the novel being returned: 'I bear up – the worst has not happened. That would have been the destruction of my MS. […] This [rejection] is another flesh-wound, not a breaking of the bone' (P71). There was concern again in 1944, when 'Roche Snow' was with a London company at the time of the Doodlebug raids: 'Hitler's secret weapon, the ~~rocket~~ flying bomb – hundreds sent over without pilots […]. Pray God He will keep R.S. safe, as during the […] blitz' (P74).

There is another moment, in 1943, when Jack's distance from the realities of the war is evident. In a detached mood he bemoans the fact that he has 'never seen or heard a bomb fall'. It's a 'pity I've no first hand knowledge of the war' (P73). This idea of the war being to some degree a good spectacle is described in *Confession*, as people walk up to the higher moorland to watch Plymouth burn:

> During the blitz on Plymouth early in 1941 many people in mid-Cornwall climbed to ridges of the moors after nightfall and watched the lurid glare from the burning city, forty miles away to the east. Such a spectacle was inspiring to the imagination, and one would think it the very thing a sombre-minded novelist would wish to

> contemplate, seeing in it material for a thrilling story. But I remained stolidly within the cottage at Goonamarris, cutting myself off from such external drama. (*CoaR* 195)

Perhaps Clemo was not aware of the false impression he was giving in *Confession*. Or perhaps he was trying to show his lack of concern for worldly affairs, as he had so often tried to do in the *Cornish Guardian*. The diaries contradict this nonchalance. Jack received *The Daily Mail* every day to keep up with war news, and the *Cornish Guardian* weekly for the local news, paying very close attention to the epic story unravelling away from the dumps, and in his diaries he wrote his own daily commentary on the war's losses and victories, praying for Hitler and the Nazis to be defeated. He marked the battles, the bombings, the taking of certain cities across the world, and rated the military leaders: 'cheered by news that [Douglas] MacArthur has taken control of the Pacific war zone. I believe more in him than in any other military leader' (P72). There is local celebration when Montgomery triumphs over Rommel in 1942, so much that a thanksgiving day is held, and the 'church bells ring for the first time since July, 1940' (P72).

Aside from very rare moments of cavalier selfishness, the diaries show Jack's strong concern over world affairs and Hitler's progress, a picture rather different from that of the *Cornish Guardian*, *Confession*, or indeed from subsequent publications. 'Still depressed – about the war mainly' (P72) was a common entry, or else, 'Cheered by war news' (P72). He reported on developments in the Solomon Islands, Egypt, Libya, Bulgaria and Greece: 'Nazis overrunning Greece and Yugoslavia' (P71); 'Hitler has seized unoccupied France' (P72); 'depression abt. war news – it looks hopeless again,

Hitler announcing jubilantly that Russia is near collapse and will soon be at his mercy' (P71); 'Grand news – Russia has launched a great offensive to trap the Nazis at Stalingrad – Hitler's whole plan crumbling at an amazing pace' (P72); 'War news good – Tripoli captured' (P73); 'Horrible details in paper about Belsen concentration camps – thousands tortured and killed there. Yet people still go on believing in the goodness of human nature!' (P75). He listed the horrors, the torture, starvation and death, and for a moment in 1942 his faith wobbled as he quoted from Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover': 'And yet God has not said a word' (P72).

Against this backdrop – the evacuees, the bombings, the slow malevolent encroachment of war – the Clemos had to navigate their poverty and illness. Jack was attending Truro hospital weekly for the latest course of arsenic injections. In 1942, the treatment caused an abscess on his hip, preventing him from walking properly: 'those injections poisoning my blood again' (P72). Some sort of war was waging over his body, as well as over the world. In terms of his physical condition, the most frequent refrain from this period is: 'Hearing no better'. Nevertheless, Clemo retained the belief that he was going to recover, occasionally bolstered by perceived improvements: 'Cheerful – my hearing improved. Wondering much when it will be fully restored – this year?' (P73). But rather than improvement, 1943 saw another physical effect of Jack's condition surface; the sudden greying of his hair. 'A bit worried about my hair', he notes. 'Have begun taking treatment […] and pray it will restore it to normal' (P73). The treatment is curious, and there is no hint what it might have been, but after six weeks: 'Much cheered in the evening – Mother telling me my hair is turning quite black again. I do thank God for this renewal of youth.'

A miracle was still expected, but in the meantime the trips to Truro would double as research expeditions for *Wilding Graft*. Jack made notes on the city's streets, gardens, cathedral and scenery, and bought books when he was able. Without these trips, he would not have been able to reproduce the Cornish capital so effectively in his novel. He is, however, 'sick of these visits' to the hospital, 'as they don't make my hearing better' (P73), and often he uses a headache or bad weather as an excuse not to go. Jack had started making these hospital visits on his own, his mother staying home to work and look after the girls. It was on one of these lone trips, when Jack was kept longer than usual at the hospital, that he missed the last bus back and had no option but to make the sixteen-mile journey by foot. He had not eaten, and after four hours he was exhausted, when a man saw him struggling and invited him in to his home to rest. Jack followed, but was awkward and embarrassed about not being able to hear or communicate with the man and his wife. A replenishing tea was soon made for him and Jack recovered sufficiently to continue. He arrived in St Stephen two hours after dark and found his mother waiting there, distraught, along with 'Irene crying her heart out.' Jack enjoyed Irene's tears and remarked how her display 'comforted me – the thought of coming home to someone who *cared*' (P73).

Another time, Jack believed that his course of treatment was over for good, after the hospital was bombed one August evening. Two bombs were dropped on Truro, one hitting the hospital and the other Brucefield on Agar Road, and there were reports of machine gun fire. More than ten people were killed, but to Jack's disappointment the Germans missed his ward and his treatment had to continue.

The threat of bombing remained constant, but it was not until 1944 that the action closed in around Goonamarris. On 1 April: ‘From today we’re living in a military zone, cut off from parts of the country more than 10 miles inland. Invasion at hand, no doubt – God bring swift victory’ (P74). There is a sense of fear in this diary entry, landmarking a terrible development. Suddenly, war is at hand.

Americans were camped on Rostowrack Downs, Trethosa and Nanpean, ‘many of them negroes’, and ‘it was impossible to move anywhere without being bawled at by drivers of Army vehicles or challenged by sentries’ (*CoaR* 218). One Sunday, his mother was prevented from going to Trethosa Chapel by ‘the Yankee guard at Stepaside’, so she had to work back and along to Nanpean instead (P74). The stationed troops were preparing for the Normandy landings, and ‘the roads became lined with camouflaged guns and other equipment for the Normandy front – a tempting target for Nazi bombers’ (*CoaR* 218-9). After the troops had gone, their presence left some residual drama: two women were ‘sent to prison […] for neglecting their children who’d been left home with a soldier to look after them’, while there were ‘Trethosa women fined for keeping a negro soldier in hiding’ after the other troops had left (P74).

If the allied Americans were not welcome, the Italian prisoners of war, held at White Cross, certainly were. Clemo recalls them with affection in *Confession*. Harry’s bus took them to work at the farms and clayworks, dropping them off and collecting them again from Vinegar Point:

> While awaiting their buses they would sit on the field hedge opposite our cottage and stare across at me as I lounged idly at my desk. There was much nodding and whispering, and on one or

> two occasions, when my mother happened to be outside, they strolled over to her and courteously asked whether that young man in there was a poet? Mother was surprised at their insight, but they assured her that anyone could tell at a glance that I had the peculiar 'look' of a poetic or artistic type. (*CoaR* 219-220)

They were charming, and it is clear from some surviving notes that they were invited round to the Clemo cottage. In the 1946 diary, there is a letter which has only been preserved because it was recycled and used for note paper. It is addressed to Eveline Clemo from Sergeant Pierinio Serio, explaining that he is unable to come that day but would like to another time. This may well have been the same 'sergeant' mentioned in *Confession of a Rebel*, who told Eveline that Jack ought to be in Florence, his own home town: 'Florence is the place for him' (220). The Italians enjoyed a warm welcome, with a striking level of freedom around the villages and intimacy with the villagers. Indeed, true to stereotype, the Italians were rather too warmly received: 'The Italian prisoners were the chief causes of scandal: with their feline grace and self-assurance they were irresistibly fascinating not only to the young girls but to many middle-aged women' (*CoaR* 219). It all made Jack wonder 'how much I'm missing through my deafness – what a novel I could have made with an Italian hero if I knew their stories. Still, God knows it all and must have a true purpose in mind' (P76).

On the back of that letter from Sergeant Pierinio Serio is a series of notes from Eveline to Jack, which invite the reader to consider an alternative future for Clemo, influenced by conversations with the visiting Italians:

> We ought to have been able to start on a fish and chips business somewhere, there is a good living in that. I can't see for the life of me why you should ever have started writing if it wasn't your job, we didn't either one choose it. (P76)

After all, she wrote, if the novels are rejected yet again 'it looks almost as if faith is a failure and that cannot be, or life would appear meaningless.' 'If they do come back it will be a great blow to my faith. I shall feel lost in a bog'. Jack tried to tell her it was his destiny to write, but Eveline was having a moment of doubt: 'Then why have you been led on so long' (P76). The exchange offers us the alternative image of Jack as a thwarted novelist sitting silently in the backroom of a fish and chip shop.

The Italians had a practical reason for befriending Jack and Eveline. They could not freely receive or send letters from the prison camp without them being 'closely scrutinized', so they used the Clemo address. This way, they could write whatever they liked without fear of their correspondence being read. Clemo says in *Confession* that they were all love letters, often to local girls, a fact he considered a bitter mockery of his own romantic failures (220).

Jack was also one of the only people nearby with a typewriter, which drew a new contact into the cottage who would prove influential to his poetry. Brenda Snell was a local girl who visited the house infrequently, first with her sister Sheila and then with her friend Genevieve Jago. The initial reason for their visits was that Brenda's brother, Reg, had been taken prisoner at the fall of Singapore in 1942 and the Japanese would only allow prisoners to receive typed letters twice a year (Thompson, *Roots of My Story*). When the time came, they would take their letter to the Clemo cottage and Jack would type it up. The Snell girls

became friendly with some of the evacuees, and so also with Jack, inspiring the poems ‘The Token’, ‘The Burnt Bush’, ‘Surrender’ and ‘Intimate Landscape’. Clemo had been writing incidental verse for the local press and the *Christian Herald* throughout his teenage years, but it was now, in the mid-1940s while under the influence of Brenda, that he began to produce the kind of poetry that would define his career and reputation. In 1945, Brenda was also the herald of more internationally good news: ‘I opened the door late last evening to find Sheila and Brenda outside, come up to tell me the war was over’. It was ‘VE-Day – at last!’ (P75).

Brenda was unaware of the scale of her influence on Clemo’s poetry, and of his romantic consideration of her. She knew only that the poem ‘The Token’, printed in *Confession*, was about her. Of the four Brenda-inspired poems, ‘The Burnt Bush’ is the most striking, and as was always the case, the narrative of the poem was based on a real event. In interview, Brenda did not recall it, although it is mentioned in Jack’s diary. It was, in fact, David, the young brother of Pat and Doris, who set fire to the gorse bush one day in July 1947 (P77), but it was Brenda who ‘set fire’ to Clemo:

> She fired the gorse – fired too
> One gnarled old bush of Adam’s seed
> Which in a cleft of naked need
> Within my soul had fouled indeed
> White purity, and as it grew
> Spread doubts in scent and hue. (*CV* 20)

The boy, David, had arrived at the cottage in 1944 with Pat and their little sister Rita, following the Doodlebug threat. The cottage was now overfull, with Irene, Pat, Rita and David, as well as Bertha, Eveline and Jack, all together in the two-bedroomed cottage. But while Pat and Irene, in particular, were favourites of

Jack's, it was the more mature village girl, Brenda Snell, who had the real impact on the next phase of his life and work: poetry.

Most of the girls had felt the war keenly in the twelve months leading up to its end. Brenda and Sheila Snell lost their brother on 23 June 1945, only a day after the Japanese lost the famous Battle of Okinawa. Reg Snell had been taken prisoner at the Fall of Singapore in 1942 and imprisoned on Borneo, where he died, aged 24. The previous year, the Jaunceys, too, had been dealt a blow, when in August the Clemos received word that their mother had died. Their father had written to Eveline, telling her the news but asking that she not inform the girls. Instead, he wrote them a separate letter, pretending that their mother was 'in the country' (P74). The Clemos did not approve of this deception: 'In the evening mother thought it best to tell the children the truth. They have taken it very badly'. A few months later and Irene's family were suffering: 'Today we've had news of tragedy […] – V-bomb fell in their garden last Sat – her uncle killed, aunt and cousins in hospital' (P75).

Jack and Eveline had a difficult task with the girls, caring for them in an alien and uncertain environment away from their parents, raising them through their early teenage years, and being responsible for their discipline and education while their families were under fire in London. And Jack's role was an unusual one. Partly he was an over-sized playmate, but he was also an older brother and a kind of surrogate father-figure, concerning himself with their well-being:

> Troubled a bit about the girls. Mother and I have tried to get them interested in reading good story books instead of knitting every evening, but they don't seem able to grasp anything beyond fairy-tales (P74).

In particular Jack worried about the girls when they were in London, or due to go back. He had read many stories in the newspapers about the city's depravity, and in a quaintly puritanical fashion he aimed his concern at the hazardous and abhorrent act of dancing. It remains unclear exactly why Clemo held this lifelong phobic moral revulsion, but here again it surfaces as he worries about the girls 'flocking to dances and contracting V. D.' (P73). A year later, he was 'Ruffled too by the daily reports of a London murder trial – a prostitute sentenced to death – and a year or two ago she was an innocent girl in Wales ruined thro' dancing and the modern craze for glamour' (P75). Once more: 'Much discussion about dancing being allowed on Methodist premises. Nothing to be surprised at: the Churches have been spiritual brothels for years' (P73). Dancing and promiscuity were indivisible to Jack, and he worried that busy city life would lure the evacuee girls away from his faith and towards destruction. When the war was over and the girls were recalled by their parents, Jack worried for their moral resolve. Of course, he would also miss them personally, their company, play and the joy he felt around them. The house would feel empty again – just Jack, Eveline and Bertha. He feared that the village girls would stop visiting, and he would not have any contact with prospectively marriageable young women. And his mother still needed help around the cottage.

Sorrowfully, Jack counted down the days before the girls had to leave, a sadness made more poignant by the progress of his writing. At the end of May 1945, *Wilding Graft* had been sent to the agent Raymond Savage, and by the time he had received Savage's note of receipt the evacuees were being

removed. The diary shows Jack crying helplessly at the prospect of their leaving, until:

> I can hardly believe it, but they are gone and God has not delivered me in any way – went to Nanpean with the luggage – we all broke down out by the corner, mother crying first and then all the children – and I came back feeling the good news *must* come. (P45)

Jack sat by the door for this good news, waiting anxiously for the post to arrive daily, hoping for letters from publishers or news from the girls. The post held a signal importance in Jack's life, and is recorded in the diaries with urgent frequency. It was Clemo's only interaction with the world beyond the cottage walls. He was friendless and detached from others by the enclosure of his deafness. His speaking voice was reduced to a quiet, breathy sibilance. He could not overhear the village gossip and conversation, let alone partake in them. By post he was able to speak with literary friends, the London girls, sympathetic Christian contacts, the *Cornish Guardian* and other journals. Later he would await post from fans and girlfriends, as well as from other artists and writers: Cecil Day Lewis, Charles Causley, Lionel Miskin, A.L. Rowse, E. W. Martin and D. S. Savage. It was only through the post that he was able to converse with others and to receive the world. It held an almost magical fascination, remarked on daily. It was through the mail that Jack's life was transformed.

As he waited for the agent's response to the novels, Clemo continued to read and write. He was working on some of his most exciting poetry now.

‘Prisoner of God’, ‘Christ in the Clay-Pit’, ‘A Calvinist in Love’ and ‘New Creation’ were written this year, as well as sufficient minor poems to compile a manuscript. These were primarily influenced by Francis Thompson, in theme and form, although the placing of the poetry within the clayscape and the language of the industry gave the verse an awkwardness and potency that was quite original. On top of this, a further seven thousand words were added to the autobiography. It was the period of Clemo’s greatest output, written against the backdrop of war and an uncertain future.

War had suggested to Clemo the most natural and appropriate of metaphors, with threat and personal destruction being all-consuming symbols of his existence. The literary device of a fallen world, incidental to the real divine drama being lived within it, might have held a fourfold poignancy for Clemo, who had matured and written so much of his work through a war that ravaged towns and country alike; who had been raised on a land perpetually consumed by the clayworks; who theologically believed in a warring Nature/God dichotomy; and who had his own body and senses being destroyed by syphilis. In the early and mid-1940s, these coincided with the increased work rate and maturity. The breakthrough began with Raymond Savage agreeing to represent him in August 1945.

VII

Wilding Graft

> Today I begin my career as a public man. Nearly every day for the next few months people all over the country will be going into bookshops and libraries and coming out with Wilding Graft under their arms, reading it by firesides and in bed, in trains, buses and on seats in parks, discussing it with their husbands, sweethearts and friends. 'Fine book by that new writer Clemo' or else 'The most awful tripe – not a single divorce in it!' I'm quite satisfied about the book itself, looking back on the wonderful 'education' that led me step by step to the writing of it, and I do believe that the best is yet to be through my Irma . . . A thrilling morning, receiving the parcel of presentation copies, reading the blurb – 'great things expected' – God must vindicate all this promise and confidence. Sent off copies to Barbara and Savage – I trust God to guide now for it is an hour of destiny. (P78)

Clemo's debut novel, *Wilding Graft*, was released on 4 March 1948. In England it was published by Chatto & Windus, and in America by Macmillan. Soon after, it was also translated into Swedish and published as *Hon Kom Till Sist* ('She Came at Last') by J. A. Lindblads. Jack received a welcome advance of £40 for this Swedish issue and it sold 400 copies in the first few months, but it was not to be a sensational hit.

The plot of the novel opens on 24 January 1940 at Meledor with Garth Joslin, the hero, returning home after burying his mother at Bodmin Asylum. (He lives alone in a four-roomed granite claywork cottage.) Garth had previously been in a relationship with Edith Chirgwin, who had since married Seth Spragg. This relationship turned sour when Garth's mother showed signs of mental illness, but only ended after a scandal, in which Garth had been physically intimate with a fifteen year-old girl named Irma Stribley, whose character is loosely based on the evacuee Irene. Originally, Irma's family were from the area, but her father had embezzled money in St Stephen and they had run away to London for a fresh start. Both Irma's parents were unfaithful, but especially Bert, who had so many affairs that in the end he killed himself. The novel begins four years after Irma's encounter with Garth in his workshop. Irma is believed to still be in London, and Garth is suffering from missing her, as well as from the malice of the villagers following the event. A man named Griffiths appears on the scene, delivering atheist and pacifist pamphlets and becoming romantically interested in Minnie Lagor, who has an illegitimate daughter by the scoundrel Ted Blewett, a man said to have 'carried on wi' the maidens once too often and gone and hanged hisself' (*WG* 23). Griffiths was a Welshman who had lived in London and escaped to Cornwall after his wife killed herself following a bad extramarital relationship. By now, the quantity of suicides will seem staggering. It shows the causal connection Clemo made between bigamy and despair. Philandering leads to ultimate spiritual destruction, but within the realist structure and the material facts of the story it feels overstated.

This Griffiths is the antagonist, a Hardyesque fatalist and anti-theist, rather than a real atheist. He is the counterpart to Garth, who is based on Clemo and believes that suffering is part of his God-ordained destiny, a belief proved

correct by the end of the novel. When Minnie Lagor's illegitimate daughter is killed in an accident, it is Garth who finds the body, and while Minnie is mourning for her daughter, Garth comforts her with his faith, leading to her rejection of Griffiths. As Minnie is explaining to Griffiths how Garth had helped her, she learns that Garth's old love, Irma, has evacuated to Truro, so that Minnie, now converted to Garth's faith, becomes convinced that everything is working towards Irma and Garth meeting again. Griffiths is furious with Garth for turning Minnie against him, and envious that his faith appeared to be proving correct. Minnie tells Garth that Irma is back and Garth goes wandering the streets of Truro in search of her, at the same time as she is in search of him. She finally catches sight of him entering the Cathedral and follows, providing the climax of the story. But all is not yet resolved, as Griffiths becomes more and more menacing. There is a fear of threat to Irma, so Garth brings her and the evacuee children she was caring for to his cottage at Meledor. Griffiths arrives there in the night, has a heart attack in a claypit and is rescued in the morning by Garth.

The abundance of characters is intimidating at first, Clemo weaving around forty people into the narrative. But he draws them tighter and tighter together until it becomes clear that every seemingly unrelated detail and event was pressing Garth and Irma back to one another. It is neatly structured, and in terms of style and period, difficult to pin down. With regard to speech and realism, the novel feels modern, but it has an unusual supernatural pulse. The region's social dynamics are well observed, and Clemo uses the intimacies, gossip and tensions of the rural-industrial hamlets and villages to drive the plot.

A natural comparison from the period might be Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter*, which was published the same year as *Wilding Graft*. Both Clemo

and Greene were Christian novelists, although their styles, lives and religion were markedly different. Greene was a Catholic from a large family and wealthier background. He travelled extensively, and he undertook spy work in Africa with MI6. He had a wealth of experience, and this shows in the complexity of his characters and the ease of his descriptive writing. By contrast, Clemo's characters are confined, stiflingly held within a small, local setting, and Clemo's prose almost growls with tension and frustration. This is the potency of a limited setting, the intensity of isolation, which Clemo had admired in Hardy, Powys, Emily Brontë and in Besier's play.

Contrasting Greene and Clemo shows just how unique Clemo was. Even within the context of Christian writers, he was an outsider, practically solitary, overwhelmingly outnumbered by Catholics. The same was true of his optimism. The story of *Wilding Graft* is of two young people finding happiness and fulfilment. The story of *The Heart of the Matter* is of a couple falling apart, of 'the pain inevitable in any human relationship' (81). 'To be a human being', Greene wrote, 'one had to drink the cup' (125). As the hero tries to do good in a place of undisguised cruelty and malice, he only causes himself more pain, more guilt, more suffering, more responsibility, and, in the end, he kills himself. Greene's story opens with marriage and ends in despair. It is Clemo's narrative in reverse.

Wilding Graft emerged into a market largely defined by pessimism, misery and dirty realism. Camus, Sartre, Orwell, Hemingway, Norman Mailer and Gore Vidal were just a few of the major novelistic figures of this period. Clemo's optimism and non-conformism were breaking new ground, so that the novel appears at once modern and antiquated. It is Hardy with a happy ending, although it also shares some of the unfashionable qualities of cheap

melodrama. There is much lip-biting, lurching, writhing and sharp intaking of breath. These betray Clemo's literary history, the immaturity and hyperbole of the 'Cuckoospit' sequence. They are relics of a youthful style and are relatively infrequent in *Wilding Graft*, but this only makes them stand out all the more starkly. The following passage is probably the worst offender. Garth, having discovered that Irma is in Cornwall again, walks out late into the night, where his silhouette is observed by chance:

> Just after midnight Colly Snell got out of bed to fetch brandy for his wife, who was threatened with a heart attack. He drew aside the curtain and stepping close to the window he peered out, up towards the ridge of the downs. The sky was moonless but brilliant with stars scarcely filmed now by any cloud. Colly noted the familiar landmarks, and he saw too, with sudden astonishment, that on Meledor pyramid a human shape thickened the bar of the fence beside the tip platform. The figure stood like a sentinel, facing west, alone with the night wind, mysteriously remote in starshine. As Colly watched the young man half turned, wafting kisses out along the sky, then remained with both arms stretched in vehement yearning towards Truro. (211-12)

The passage follows a chapter of realistic dialogue, so that the 'wafting kisses' and 'arms stretched in vehement yearning' seem almost comic. Such mawkish behavior sharply contradicts the picture of the tough, primitive clayworking character Clemo had been building. And it is made worse by discovering Irma doing the same fifty pages later, 'wafting kisses up towards his home' (261).

The genre of melodrama was populist and said to have been preferred by the working people of the clay country, and it may be that Clemo was influenced so heavily by the form because it, along with religious literature, provided the literary context of his youth. Certainly, Eveline Clemo admitted to a misspent girlhood reading the Hockings (*IPT* 4).

If *Wilding Graft* stood out from other British novels of the time, how much more did it stand out within the Cornish literary scene? Clemo's brutal portrayal of the clay country's working people, his dark and vibrant evangelism, his cultural background and geography, were sharply contrasted against the other bestselling novels of the period, such as Winston Graham's *Poldark* series, or Daphne du Maurier's Cornish novels. While his Cornish contemporaries were writing about Celtic wildernesses, smugglers and wreckers, or wealthy families in romantic landscapes, Clemo was exploring waste dumps and quarry roads, hardness and poverty, and writing about them with a surprising beauty. The clayscape of *Wilding Graft* is not pretty. It is not a 'wild' place, conservation project or transcendental curative. Man's connection with his environment is defined by his employment, home and culture being placed within it. There is a relationship implied, as it is in the poetry, in which 'Nature' is opposed by God, or God by 'Nature', and man stands inbetween, a natural creature whose divinity has to be forced on him by God. This connects man and landscape more essentially than the transcendental awe-struck tradition of 'nature worship'. Connectedness with the natural world is assumed in Clemo's picture and is at the heart of the problem. Man, industry and the natural world are inextricable:

> To Seth and Martin the landscape meant nothing at all, yet as they impressed themselves upon it, passing between the high hedges overhung here and there by stunted, misshapen trees, their figures blended with a mood, a pervasive power that dwarfed their humanity to a symbol. (110)

The men scramble across manmade paths, blasted pits and sand dumps, railroads, bogs and wasteland, and there is no clear point where 'Nature' ends and man begins. They are of a type: 'St Stephen gleamed just opposite – church tower, trees, rows of houses thinning out north-east towards the vast pyramidal wedges of clay-dunes driven upward from the bleaker folds of moorland' (258-9).

Village, clay and moor are the same environment, the same place, essentially connected. It is shown again when the liveliness of the landscape itself is diminished by the Easter holidays:

> The labourers had been on holiday since Thursday, and the huts, pit-workings and mica beds had taken on an aggrieved air of neglect. The waggon stood motionless on the track, a dull sullen shape about which the wind whistled and the rain poured, dripping from its frame, mingling with the tar of an underlying roller, and oozing slowly like black treacle into the cracks between the rotting sleepers. (87)

Both the 'mood' of the landscape and the details of it are used to reflect the fallen state of man and his purgative suffering at God's invasive will. But behind

this symbolism is Clemo's own unique intimacy, and the clay-miners' ecological relationship. This sort of familiarity, however, is considered parochial rather than attractive or useful. The value of the landscape to Clemo's work is largely symbolic, although the exhibition of his intimacy with it might be considered a sign of the audience he was writing for, a readership familiar with Cornwall but unfamiliar with the clay district. He may be deliberately placing himself alongside writers like du Maurier and Quiller-Couch in order to criticise them, in the same way as he later places himself alongside (or inside) other writers in his poetic monologues and dedicated verses.

The destructive landscape symbolism will be seen in its strongest form when considering the poetry of *The Clay Verge*. In *Wilding Graft* it is slightly less imposing, although there is a chronological as well as a geographical setting to the story, the war being used with similar symbolic value, to mirror the jeopardy of the individual. The horrors of war are secondary to the salvation of individuals, an observation that draws us back to Clemo himself and how his biography imposes on the novel.

Wilding Graft was begun when Jack was twenty-five, the same age as Garth. Indeed, most of the characters were based on real people, some to the extent that when it came to publication the libel lawyers asked him to change details, such as the names of Cora and Irving, who had to become Bella and Martin Stribley. In a letter to A. L. Rowse, soon after publication, Jack wrote:

> Incidentally, the woman I portrayed as Bella has read the book, knowing she is the original, yet instead of suing me for libel she tells my mother it's 'a wonderful book, as gripping as *Wuthering*

> *Heights*' – which I lent her the other day. One must be prepared for paradoxes if one lives in contact with these folk. (R3)

He was also asked to change details about Minnie Lagor, but he assured the lawyers and publishers that nobody else could be recognised. This was not quite true, as a letter from Barbara suggested, in which she tells Jack – perhaps spitefully – that she recognised everyone in the book except for Irma. Irma was a compound of Irene and Barbara, with aspects of the other evacuees. For instance, the name of Irma's stepfather was Slade, which was also the evacuee Joan's surname, and the heroine lived in Stoke Newington, from where both the Jauncey family and Irene came. The other London placename mentioned notably is Dulwich, Joan's evacuated home. Years later, in a letter to Ruth, Clemo listed the bases of some of the characters: 'Edith is Evelyn, Seth is her brother Harry, Bella is Irene's foster-mother, Sal is my grandmother Esther, Minnie is Gladys, Colly Snell an old man I knew in my youth – his real name was Sam Snell' (P193).

It is the carpenter Garth, however, who is most relevant to the biography, being an idealised version of Jack himself, as well as inviting conscious comparisons with Christ and Job. Garth is described as 'sphinxish' in appearance, reflecting the religio-mystic aspect of his character, but also a physical description applied to Clemo's own profile, of being 'leonine' (P195). He is handsome and rugged, desired by women, favoured by God and freshly recovered from illness. He wins all his arguments, his enemies all fall, and he gets the girl. This is the happy ending Jack had been promised, free from disabilities and suffering, no longer living with his mother, and betrothed. Yet Garth is a complete character, 'One of the most underrated in Cornish fiction',

according to the writer Alan Kent (interview). Although Garth is an idealisation of Jack, his flaws were not omitted. Rather, the novel shows how the flaws and setbacks were to be overcome. Aside from the hyperbolic emotional moments, the character is a well-conceived working class hero. He is not a caricature of a simple villager, but a clearly realised individual.

Clemo believed the novel was ‘given to [him] by God as a prophecy for [his] own life’ (P82), and as such it developed extra significance. He did not consider it to be a projection or fantasy, but his own future fictionalised: first healing and then marriage, with both just around the corner. He even began to interpret the world by holding it up against *Wilding Graft*, as though the novel had become a sacred text. Previously, his life had driven the fiction, but now the fiction was driving his life. Sometimes it was an innocuous comparison: ‘Was upset last night to hear that J. has gone to France for a holiday. Felt like Garth when he heard Irma was enjoying herself in London’ (P82). Or: ‘I go out after dark and pour out my heart to God – like Garth’ (P82). But when he came across a new romantic infatuation, he began to look for the novelistic pattern, the strange ways they might be drawing towards one another according to God’s will. In turn he would refer to prospective lovers Barbara, Irene, June, Eileen and Susie each as his Irma.

Jack’s disabilities, too, impose on and are solved by the novel. Garth is said to have been seriously ill just before the story begins, a statement with little narrative value, but with considerable personal meaning, as it afforded Jack the opportunity to heal himself in his writing. Jack’s disabilities might be evident in other aspects of the writing. In particular, it is tempting to suggest that his poor sight is revealed in descriptive choices, especially the repetition of the word ‘blob’. A group of walkers are hidden behind ‘a blob of trees’ (9); a strip of

verdure in Truro is a ‘foaming green blob’ (241); cottages lining the road to Virginia were ‘dark blobs’ (17); on Meledor dune was ‘the dark blob of the thicket’. And the reader is shown the figure of Bella Stribley, ‘superimposed upon the scene like a gliding blot’ (54).

Garth is also similar to some of Thomas Hardy’s characters, particularly to Yeobright from *The Return of the Native*, the high-thinking working man, as Jack observed in his 1944 diary. Chatto & Windus thought the similarity between Clemo’s work and Hardy’s marketable, which was why they invited the comparison in the blurb and on the jacket of the first edition. Yet in *Confession* Clemo denied the influence:

> I was nearly thirty before I read any of Hardy’s mature works. Those reviewers who thought I was deliberately imitating Hardy in *Wilding Graft* did not know that I had been writing in that vein for ten years before I felt the stimulus of Hardy’s influence. (102)

This passage is misleading. *Wilding Graft* was begun in December 1941, following an intense reading of Thomas Hardy’s later works. Clemo was twenty-five when he read both *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the D’Urbervilles*, and within just a few weeks he was writing in his diary about a new idea for a novel: ‘Dull weather – nothing to do now but wait for the […] growth of that “Wilding Graft”’ (P71). The intention of Clemo’s deception is obvious; he wants to show that he and Hardy are temperamentally similar and supernaturally connected. The claim that he was ‘nearly thirty’ is vague enough for him to feel that he is not completely lying, but it very obviously leads the reader to imagine that he was reading Hardy *after* the novel had been finished, submitted and accepted,

rather than just weeks before it was begun. Not only was Jack deeply ensconced in Hardy's writing immediately before planning his latest novel, but he continued to read Hardy's novels and life throughout the writing process, beginning in the New Year of 1942 with *The Return of the Native* and the *Life* written by Florence and Thomas Hardy. He re-read old favourites and congratulated himself when he had written a passage similar to Hardy's: 'I've been so tickled today reading chap. VIII scene – very Hardyish in humour' (P72); 'scene between Garth and Edith – very tense and gripping, like Hardy's Clym-Eustacia scene in "Ret. of the Native" when he charges her with murdering his mother' (P72).

The scale of the influence is further suggested by a diary entry written immediately after Clemo had flicked through *Jude* and *Tess* in 1941: 'I feel my work will be the Christian counterpart of his' (P71). In 1944, he made a similar remark: 'dipping into Return of the Native, feeling how close it is to my own outlook and that my life-work *must* lie in the production of similar work from the Christian standpoint' (P74). Clemo saw himself as the optimistic mirror of Hardy.

Clemo and Hardy had the same rural and working-class concerns, and used the landscape, destructive gossip and propriety in similar ways. The difference was Hardy's anti-theism, which led him to propose a kind of fatalism. There seem to be two fatalistic drivers in the later works of Hardy, being the 'nature' inherited from one's ancestors, and the 'irresistible law' (*Tess* 165) of some 'sinister intelligence' (*Mayor* 197). The 'sinister intelligence' appears often like a God, although not a benevolent one. The deity suggested in *Jude* and *Tess* is a malicious torturer, plotting a course of destruction for those on whom he focuses his attention. There is also the suggestion in Hardy that one might be of a right or 'wrong breed for marriage' (Jude, 201), which parallels Clemo's 'faith

in my “election” for marriage’ (C4). Fatalism, inherited characteristics, modernism, gossip, romance, marriage, landscape and symbolism – the comparison was inevitable. But the great difference was that Clemo did not believe that suffering and misery were the inevitable conclusions of life. There was the other way, the Christian path to joy and fulfilment, guided by God.

In 1942, when reading the Hardys’ (auto)biography, Clemo reflected on their differences:

> Rather saddened – I’ve been much moved in reading Hardy’s Life: there are such problems to face when one gets outside the rut in which most people live. I know I’m fundamentally of the same artistic type as Hardy, *compelled* to approach things from a new angle and be honest, ruthlessly honest with myself whatever religions perish for me thereby. And if Christ had not broken down the screen between my soul and His ultimate truth, I should not be able to help *not* believing any more than I can now help believing. I should then have been a Hardy – by whose fault? . . . I know he’s wrong, yet I’m not shocked by his blasphemies: but for the force of God they are what *I* should have written. (P72)

God battered down the wall between Clemo’s soul and the ‘truth’ of God. In this way, God showed Clemo preference, but ignored Hardy.

There is a pleasing footnote to add to the contrast between Hardy’s perceived pessimism and Clemo’s optimism, written into the margin of Jack’s copy of *Jude*. Where Hardy quotes Browning’s ‘By the Fire-Side’, and describes

Browning as ‘the last of the optimists’ (97), Jack has scribbled: ‘Slightly incorrect – but T.H. couldn’t be expected to know who would be born in 1916.’

Hardy was not the only influence, of course. Another Dorset writer, T. F. Powys, was still a favourite, and Powys’s portrayals of the village ‘fallen woman’ bear a marked similarity to Clemo’s, in character and also in the writer’s sympathies. Then, single phrases, such as the ‘quenching of Shirley’s clay’ to indicate Shirley’s death, owe something to Powys’s *Unclay* (135). Other influences included Emily and Charlotte Brontë, and Thornton Wilder’s *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (P72). By 1943, Emily Brontë was said to be one of Clemo’s six ‘favourite novelists at the moment’, Clemo having recently read and enjoyed *Wuthering Heights* (P73). As a teenager, Clemo had cut out fragments from various magazines and newspapers about the Brontës, including one with photographs of Haworth parsonage, which Clemo recalled when he wrote the monologue ‘Charlotte Nicholls’ for *Cactus on Carmel*:

> My husband smiles in sleep beside me;
> The beck froths happily under Haworth hill,
> And moonlight softens the wild tossing heather
> On the frosty slopes towards Keighley.
> Our coming child has stirred
> In my womb, and perhaps I see now
> What Emily never saw for the depth
> Of her scarred isolation.
> Warm truth taps through the decay
> Of the artist-urge: a curate’s wife, living her vow,
> Shames the impassioned fantasy. (*CoC* 40)

The title of the poem overlooks Charlotte Brontë’s more famous maiden name in favour of her married name of Nicholls, revealing the flaw Clemo perceived in her sister Emily: Emily was not a Christian and she did not marry. Emily’s influence, then, is one of tone and mood. It is her ‘scarred isolation’ (*CoC* 40) and her ‘bruised ecstasy’ (*AtM* 24) which appeal to Clemo. She is the ‘fugitive’

and Charlotte is the ‘homegoer’, and in ‘Haworth Keys, 1840’ Clemo seems to be contrasting the sisters in a way reminiscent of how he spoke about the two opposing types of ‘blood’ which informed his own nature (*AtM* 25). Emily is the passionate, pagan ‘Moor-Sybil’ (*AtM* 25) and Charlotte the happy wife enjoying the ‘calm of ordinary bliss’ (*CoC* 41).

There is a helpful series of charts in the 1943 diary, showing all Clemo’s reading from 1943 to 1947 and marking it with scores out of a hundred (P73). There are four columns to the charts. The first shows the author and work read, while the other three show the qualities to be marked: ‘General Interest’, ‘Artistic Quality’ and ‘Usefulness’. Predictably, Powys, Hardy and C.S. Lewis feature most prominently and receive some of the best marks, with Powys’s scores going up considerably after Jack received a letter from him. Before then, *Soliloquies of a Hermit* had scored a poor 10-80-20, and his *Interpretation of Genesis* an awful 5-30-10. Only *The Left Leg* fared well in 1943, with a 90-90-30, giving an average score equalled and beaten only by a few obscure books, such as Osbert Burdett’s biography of the Brownings (80-60-70), Nicholson’s *Man and Literature* (90-60-80), and the unexpected top entry of the year, Beverley Nichols’ *The Fool Hath Said* (90-70-95), a testimonial book of the sort Clemo always keenly devoured. Occasionally, Clemo returned to a book and reconsidered its value. Burdett’s high-scoring work on the Brownings, for instance, received a second score in 1947 of 30-10-20, while *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, once a favourite, was later given a dismal 10-10-10. Yet this is nothing to the popular novelist I. A. R. Wylie’s 0-0-0 for *Prelude to Richard* (P73). Robert Browning hardly appears on the charts at all, in the same way as the Bible does not. He was, nevertheless, read on an almost weekly basis, and

Clemo elsewhere mentions that ‘Pauline’, ‘By the Fire-Side’ and ‘Evelyn Hope’ were strong influences on *Wilding Graft* (P48).

Still, it was the inspiration of Hardy that set *Wilding Graft* in motion, and by 1942 Clemo had not only an outline for that novel, but plans for two sequels, to form a second trilogy. This would begin with *Wilding Graft* at the start of the war, then continue with ‘The Hired Razor’ and finish with ‘Mainmast’. Their titles came from familiar sources; the Book of Isaiah[13] and Browning’s ‘By the Fire-Side’. Not a great deal is known about the two novels, and only a few lines in the beginning of the 1942 diary offer any details. ‘The Hired Razor’ was to be set at Karslake, while ‘Mainmast’ was to be set in St Austell town and at the docks. In the same set of notes, Clemo shows that he already had some fairly clear ideas about *Wilding Graft* at this time:

> Wilding Graft: Hero a clay labourer of Brighton or Meledor, heroine a London evacuee billeted at Truro. Story shaped round police-court case (newspaper cutting, Cornwall Gazette, Sept 17, 1941) – ~~parents~~ mother returns to London, this girl, 17, left in charge – her father a deserter from the army. She’d stayed near hero’s home 4 yrs earlier when his girl got in trouble with another man. He lives with aunt, is artistic (one scene set in Truro Museum Art Gallery). His first girl ~~dies~~ (wife of the other man) at opening of book. (P72)

We learn in this diary that at one stage in the novel’s conception, Griffith’s wife and Irma’s father were going to gas themselves together, a death not fully

[13] It is probably relevant that the theologian Thomas DeWitt Talmage, one of Clemo’s key influences during this period, gave a famous sermon on this section of Isaiah, entitled ‘The Lord’s Razor’ (*New Tabernacle Sermons* 72).

explored in the finished novel. We also find that the heroine is intended to die: 'Should the end be tragic – Irene killed by Home Guard? There's risk of bathos and incongruity in a happy-ever-after theme in war time. Possibly Irma shot in the second book' (P72).

Neither 'The Hired Razor' nor 'Mainmast' was written, but Clemo did make a start on 'The Hired Razor'. It was to be 'set during the Battle of Britain, showing God using the Nazis' "razor" to shave off the superfluous outgrowths of our national life' (P73). In May 1944: 'Today I've surprised myself by writing 2,000 words or more to – The Hired Razor – workmen's talk of Kurt, Garth and Bryan, for one of the early chapters' (P74). But this was the only writing done to 'The Hired Razor', and it has not survived. Within a few months, Jack was returning to the old manuscripts again. This was frustrating for Clemo's publisher, as it was unanimously agreed by the agents, readers and reviewers that the second book was bound to be better. Indeed, Robert Hale had stated that if Savage did not find a home for *Wilding Graft* then he would take it, on the belief 'that the next book this author writes may well be an exceptionally good novel' (P7). It has already been seen that instead of a new novel, Clemo sent Hale 'Unsunned Tarn', and Hale retracted his offer.

Wilding Graft had been written quickly, with seventy-five thousand words ready by December 1942 and a good full draft completed on 27 April 1943: 'Today *Wilding Graft* stands complete in typescript – 481 pages – 105,000 words – my longest and strongest book to date. My next job will be the final revision of *Private Snow* before submitting it for the contest' (P73). Several novels were sent to competitions, and Jack used the letter from Q as a reference. They were all rejected, and success only came when Clemo stopped

sending the weak old typescripts and instead started to think more seriously about *Wilding Graft*. The epiphany came on 22 March 1945:

> CB have returned [Roche Snow] – no chance for it yet, and I feel it can't be God's will for me to start with that book. I've been spared weeks of suspense and didn't feel the blow as I know R. S. isn't outstanding. May God lead me – I feel drawn to venture with W. G. next – God can't have let me write that for nothing. (P75)

Clemo is showing great resilience by persisting with this worldview. It has taken him ten years of rejection to conclude that it might not be God's will for 'Roche Snow' to be his first published novel. Added to this, he believes that God must have let him write *Wilding Graft* for a reason. It is unclear whether Clemo believed that God let him write 'Roche Snow' (or any of the other failed novels) 'for nothing'. Presumably he did not believe this, and he had two ways out. Firstly, he might imagine that 'Roche Snow' would be published after *Wilding Graft*, justifying it. Or, when this does not happen, all the failed novels could be considered as preparation for the real thing, in the same way that, romantically speaking, Evelyn, Violet, Barbara, Irene, Pat, Brenda, Marie, Eileen, Susie, June, Rosine and Mary would be considered preparation for his eventual wife, Ruth.

It was a good decision, at any rate, and after only a couple of rejections, on 29 May 1945 the manuscript was sent to Raymond Savage, the well-respected literary agent whose clients had included T. E. Lawrence and George Bernard Shaw. The event was marked simply in the diary – 'To Newquay – and posted W.G. Spent most of the day on the beach' – with the proof of postage pasted

beside the entry (P75). This was his last outing with the evacuees, so it had special significance, and in the diary along with the proof of postage Jack kept a piece of seaweed from the Newquay beach.

Savage was not quick to reply, and Jack was not patient waiting. As it turned out, although Clemo did not know it, Savage was exactly what a new writer needed, an honest and sympathetic agent who understood what the author was trying to achieve. He made a number of suggestions for changes, creating a list that was then augmented by various readers and publishers. He invited Clemo to send any other work he had, which included the other two novels and a few poems he had begun to write recently. Savage then sent all three novel manuscripts to a reader he considered 'one of the best in literary circles', Osyth Leeston. Her feedback was thorough and severe, and upset Jack. Leeston wrote that the three stories were too similar and the three heroes 'so much alike that they might well be different facets of the same person'. The dialogue, she said, 'should not consist entirely of scandal', and Clemo's 'too frequent insistence on the baser instincts of sex defeats its own end. Surely young girls may have a more sensible outlook on life than continual preoccupation with sex?' (P7).

Clemo protested, but by this time Savage was beginning to understand his client and allowed himself to be a little firmer: 'I am afraid you will really have to take her and my view and get down to this or you will not get anywhere' (P7). After speaking further with Leeston, Savage wrote with further criticism:

> There is no question but that there is little justification for Garth's spiritual love for Irma as you have at present expressed it. There must be a stronger reason for this and you must show it. It does

> not read naturally for this great love to arise from the beginning, i.e. the incident with a girl of 12 in a tool shed. […] There is no doubt that Irma should be a bit older, because the age of 12 is repellent. Make her 15, which is reasonable, and develop the growth of the spiritual love. (P7)

With regard to Irma's age, Clemo made the necessary change 'with some reluctance, but no doubt the change made the novel more palatable to the general reader who knew nothing of the author's private life' (*CoaR* 204).

It was then that Clemo had his first major success. Savage had sent *Wilding Graft* along with some of Clemo's poetry to John Lehmann, a publisher involved with Hogarth Press, Penguin and, in 1946, his own company, John Lehmann Ltd. Lehmann took 'Christ in the Clay-Pit' for *Orion* magazine, and then 'A Calvinist in Love' for *Penguin New Writing*. The poetry was like nothing Clemo had written before, and the first of these, 'Christ in the Clay-Pit', remains his most important and influential:

> Why should I find Him here
> And not in a church, nor yet
> Where Nature heaves a breast like Olivet
> Against the stars? I peer
> Upon His footsteps in this quarried mud;
> I see His blood
> In rusty stains on pit-props, waggon-frames
> Bristling with nails, not leaves. There were no leaves
> Upon his chosen Tree,
> No parasitic flowering over shames
> of Eden's primal infidelity.
> Just splintered wood and nails
> Were fairest blossoming for him who speaks
> Where mica-silt outbreaks
> Like water from the side of His own clay
> In that strange day
> When He was pierced. Here still the earth-face pales
> And rends in earthquake roarings of a blast

> With tainted rock outcast
> While fields and woods lie dreaming yet of peace
> 'Twixt God and his creation, or release
> From potent wrath — a faith that waxes bold
> In churches nestling snugly in the fold
> Of scented hillsides where mild shadows brood.
> The dark and stubborn mood
> Of him whose feet are bare upon this mire,
> And in the furnace fire
> Which hardens all the clay that has escaped,
> Would not be understood
> By worshippers of beauty toned and shaped
> To flower or hymn. I know their facile praise
> False to the heart of me, which like this pit
> Must still be disembowelled of Nature's stain,
> And rendered fit
> By violent mouldings through the tunnelled ways
> Of all he would regain. (*CV* 25-6)

Lehmann remained uncertain about *Wilding Graft* because of its ending, which he said was more like a sermon than a novel. Both Savage and his partner at the firm, Stella Shattock (later Savage's wife), agreed. Lehmann offered Clemo a £20 forward, providing the last quarter of the novel was rewritten (P7).

Jack was stunned. He did not know what Lehmann meant. How could he rewrite a quarter of the novel? In the original version (L16), the ending is an anti-climax. Garth and Irma meet up in the Cathedral, and they know that the agnostic Griffiths has become violently unhinged. The couple remain in Truro with the children, staying up all night worrying and imagining that Griffiths is going to burst in at any moment. In the morning they discover that far from posing a threat, Griffiths has left Cornwall altogether and they had been worrying for nothing. Tension had been building through the book for some sort of grand conflict, and then it is all hopelessly dissipated.

Clemo wrote back to Savage and Lehmann. What was he meant to do? Cryptically, Lehmann told Jack that he should not have to spell it out. Jack thinks Lehmann wants a violent ending, so considers killing off Griffiths, either

by another suicide or in an act of heroism, 'rescuing Irma's brother or sister from the river at Truro' (P76). On 30 August 1946, it came to him while out walking: 'hurried in from Slip in evening to finish writing it – the last phrases came to me out on the burrow – "We've both paid the price . . . and you've won, Garth"' (P76). The new ending was better, with Griffiths confessing that Garth had it right all along, but it was not the dramatic climax the publishers were hoping for. For Clemo the real climax was the romantic resolution, rather than anything to do with Griffiths, but Lehmann was unsatisfied and suggested instead that they try the book with the new senior editor at Chatto & Windus, Cecil Day Lewis. Almost immediately, Harold Raymond of Chatto and Windus contacted Savage, and on 23 October 1946, Savage sent the following telegram to his client: 'Success has crowned all our efforts. stop chatto and windus accept wilding graft enthusiastically. stop Congratulations, writing: Raymond Savage' (P7). At last:

> V.G. DAY (Victory at Goonamarris)
>
> Tonight while I was on St. Dennis Downs – THE NEWS CAME. Telegram from S. – Chatto and W. God's chosen publisher for me as for Theodore. At last after 15 years struggle which only God has enabled me to endure 'He has set my feet upon a rock and established my goings' […]. I set it on record here and now that I am not beginning a worldly career but a witness for Christ […]. It does awe me – who am I to figure in the same publishers' list as Aldous Huxley, Powys, HG Wells, Faulkner and such great intellectuals? It is the Lord's doing and marvellous in my eyes. And

> what joy for mother after all the tears and heartache – *her* work! (P76)

Knowing Clemo's poverty, Savage negotiated that an advance of £330 be paid to Clemo in instalments over the next two years. The idea was that this gave Clemo time and space to write, and it was contracted that his next two books would both have to be offered to Chatto & Windus. Terms arranged were for Jack to receive 10% of the published price up to 1500 copies, 12.5% from 1500-3000 copies sold, and 15% beyond that. Savage said that he would not take any percentage until royalties were coming in. The book was dedicated 'To my mother whose faith prepared me for the grafting.'

Critically, *Wilding Graft* was considered a promising novel. The publisher's blurb invited comparisons with Hardy and Powys, and very few reviewers failed to acknowledge the similarities. Mary Ellen Chase, who had studied and published on Hardy, was especially attentive to the comparison in her review for *The New York Times* on 7 November 1948. The review was one of great support and praise for Clemo and his 'Hardian' *Wilding Graft*:

> Jack Clemo, a Cornish writer, should attract deserved attention both from those who like an excellent story and from those who are interested in the novel as a form of art [...]. Mr Clemo's story possesses a certain stature seldom seen in distinctly modern fiction. (24)

Angela Milne, writing in the 14 March 1948 *Observer*, recognised the work as an 'act of faith':

> his sincerity is immense, his purpose, at any rate in his first book, so high as to make *Wilding Graft* most fairly described as an act of faith […]. [Jack Clemo] is a richly promising writer who should eventually distinguish himself. (3)

There were, of course, unsympathetic reviews. Orville Prescott, also for *The New York Times*, focussed solely on the novel's flaws, such as the 'theatrical gestures' and 'picturesque' brooding of the hero, Garth Joslin. He recognised the autobiographical elements of the novel, and suggested these made the lead character implausible (27 October 1948, 25). The Cornwall-based Welsh writer, Howard Spring, shown the novel by A.L. Rowse, gave a criticism that was later echoed in Jack's correspondence with Helena Charles, although Charles wrote the problem most succinctly: 'a superficial reader might take the moral to be "if you believe in god, you get your girl. If you don't you don't"' (P17). Clemo responded to this in *The Marriage of a Rebel*, where he explains the difference between desire and vocation:

> I knew that many frustrated bachelors had been theists, and some of them had prayed for a partner and never found one. But to pray for a certain pleasure because you want it was very different from receiving a divine 'grafting', a mystical sense of *vocation* which involved painful training and identified the seeker with the sufferings of Christ. (35)

This is a development of Clemo's belief in election, or a particular sort of election. God has singled Clemo out to identify with Christ through a special desire or 'sense' for marriage and a course of suffering preparing him for it. By turning to Christ, Clemo handed the erotic desire over to Him, as though purifying it. It might seem remarkable that Clemo persevered with this outlook. In spite of false predictions, in spite of the strange messages with regard to young girls, and in spite of Clemo's prayers not being answered, he still believed in his own prophecies and interpretations of the patterns in his life. He remained certain that the next prophecy would come true and that all his prayers and desires would be answered imminently, especially those relating to healing, fame and women. This position raises questions about the role of suffering in Clemo's life, and what he considered the value of suffering.

C. S. Lewis, who influenced Clemo a great deal during the 1940s, wrote of suffering in *The Problem of Pain* as a necessary possibility in a free world granted by God: 'We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved', Lewis wrote, but 'rebels who must lay down our arms' (88). But the problem goes back to creation. How did God make the first beings capable of sinning? That is not to ask, 'How did He allow man the freedom to sin?', but 'How was it in man's nature to sin?' This is a problem suggested by Lewis, and attempted by Niebuhr, another important influence on Clemo.

Clemo did not resolve this issue, but focussed his writing more on the role of suffering in his own life, which was complicated by his personal experience. On the one hand, suffering to him was a 'test':

> there are times when God's hand is clenched, the promised blessing withheld and concealed. These are trying periods – until

> the believer dares to look above the clenched hand of God and catch the twinkle in His eye. (*IG* 101)

The sense is of God having a benevolent purpose behind the clenched fist. It is an image borrowed from Powys's collection of stories, *God's Eyes A-Twinkle*. As well as a test, or a necessary delaying of joy, suffering for Clemo was also a punishment for the sins of his progenitors: 'The "ancestral mesh" was an indisputable fact. […] My handicaps belonged to the world of my pagan forebears' (*MoaR* 95-6). Jack was suffering because of their mistakes, although he was also purifying the nature he inherited. The inherited syphilis and the sexual deviance meant that Clemo's own path to God had to be sexual.

While the suffering was beneficial, Clemo wrote that it 'taught me nothing'. However, it 'created the conditions in which joy could teach me' (*IG* 125). He did not believe it was his destiny to suffer, yet he did suffer, and there is a conflict between his belief that he is intended to be happy and the observation of his perpetual suffering and frustration. To an outsider, God appears either indifferent to the idea of Clemo's happiness, or hostile to it.

Expressions of his faith in *Wilding Graft* caused a good deal of consternation to reviewers. Maurice Lane Richardson, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 27 March 1948, gave a mixed review, praising Clemo for his depiction of the region and recognising his potential, but criticising him for including too much 'mystical religiosity' and not enough 'humanism' (173). Such criticism would have thrilled Clemo, who identified himself as a mystic and loathed humanism, but it shows how the framework for receiving a novel such as his was not ubiquitously acknowledged.

Still, overwhelmingly the criticism was positive and *Wilding Graft* was considered an astonishing debut. So highly was it rated, the neighbours and villagers could not believe that Jack had written it. He was to them a brooding misfit, an undesirable. In an interview for Radio 2, Eveline Clemo said: 'Some of them wouldn't believe that he wrote it […]. They think his mother done it.'[14] This sentiment is still repeated occasionally in the villages today, a testament to how little people thought of Jack, and how much of Eveline.

Financially and emotionally, this success was a relief. After having sat day after day hunched at his writing bureau, Clemo was now an international success, held up for comparison against his literary heroes and boasting UK sales in the region of 2000 copies in the first week alone. Letters of approbation came in from A. L. Rowse and from T. F. Powys himself, reviews were aired on the radio, congratulations given in the local press and announcements made on Clemo in the chapels. The praise gave Clemo confidence, so that even when a rogue bad review arrived, such as that by the distinguished scholar Gorley Putt, Jack seemed hardly to care at all, joking idly in the corner of his diary:

> There was a bright critic called Gorley
> Who read Clemo's work and said 'Surely
> The critics are daft
> Who applaud Wilding Graft:
> – I think of it ever so poorly.' (P78)

But the excitement was short-lived. Within a few months, gloom and depression returned. Jack found himself just as lonely as before, and the absence of romantic achievement seemed to him a 'harsh mockery' of the novel's message and success. It had been the same story when *Wilding Graft* was accepted and

[14] A recording of this is held by the University of Exeter's Special Collections archives, although at the time of writing it is without a reference number. The recording is of an interview with Eveline Clemo, broadcast daily from 13-17 November 1976.

Chatto & Windus had forwarded a large cheque. Initially he had thanked God for relieving the lifelong burden of grim poverty from his mother, but the lustre of comparative wealth and sated ambition wore off within days. The Clemos had puritanical tastes, so once the bills could be met they had little use for money. They did not go out, drink or travel, and it was not really until 1956 that Clemo did something even close to extravagant: 'Today I've done what is from the standpoint of common sense one of the most foolish things I ever did – spent £13 on a gramophone in faith that I shall soon hear Renee's record' (P86). 'Renee' was the American evangelical Renee Martz, who became famous in Britain in 1947, when at the age of seven she sang, preached and trumpeted her 'hot gospel' message to thousand-strong crowds. She claimed 'to have been converted through a vision and the voice of Jesus in a Los Angeles street' (*IG* 121). The recklessness of buying a record player was not so much the expense of the item, as the fact that a deaf man had bought himself a record player. It was, as so often, a blind act of faith (and one that paid off).

Clemo found himself bored and frustrated again, 'the thrill past and the need of further uplift pressing' (P76). 'It's clearer every day that nothing but love will touch me', he wrote after receiving a large cheque from America (P78). Several days are described as 'the blackest' of the year, with the gloom only dissipated for fleeting moments when another review fell through the door or one of the village girls popped round. It is a solid illustration of the great pessimist Schopenhauer's formula: 'Man is a compound of needs and necessities hard to satisfy; and […] even when they are satisfied, all he obtains is a state of painlessness, where nothing remains to him but abandonment to boredom' (23).

Clemo suffered the pains of aspiration to a greater extent than he suffered the dullness of satiety, allowing him to remain an optimist. The key frustrations

were his deafness, failing sight and the absence of a plausible love interest. He had become optimistically infatuated with Brenda, and at the same time he was still thinking of Barbara. When the book was accepted, contracts signed and payments posted, Jack sent Barbara a note, telling her how much he is earning, so that ‘it looks as if I shall be really rich one day’. He promises to send her a copy when the book is released, as well as a copy of Penguin’s *New Writing*, featuring one of his poems, adding, ‘I don’t forget how much you helped me when you lived here’ (P76).

Jack handed a copy of the novel to Brenda personally when she visited the cottage in November 1948. She stayed for five minutes, wrote Jack a note – ‘I have to go home for tea’ – and left. ‘This is the way Brenda thanked me for her book’, Jack writes, pasting the note beside his diary entry. ‘It’s all so disappointing and makes my success a mockery’ (P78).

Wilding Graft was written to show the way in which God works and triumphs over atheism, paganism and worldliness. Its publishing success was God finally honouring His promise to the Clemos. He gave Clemo celebrity so that he might continue to praise God through his writing, and He gave money, which had been a relentless cause for concern throughout the Clemos’ lives. Previously, they had known nothing but poverty, and God had relieved it. But this was only a fraction of a reward. What good was it all if his senses were still deteriorating and he was still so lonely? Healing and marriage, Clemo believed, were his destiny, and God’s erotic favour was the very theme of *Wilding Graft*. Why had God confirmed the novel’s message by allowing it to be published, but not granted the happy ending promised by the novel itself?

In *Confession of a Rebel*, intended to illustrate further the Christian principles of *Wilding Graft*, Clemo states his beliefs in this regard very concisely.

He was chosen by God, and through a form of divine bludgeoning he was prepared for his conversion and faith:

> I know some Christian teachers, orthodox in other respects, deny that God ever acts in this way, ever *forces* a soul into His service. But being concerned with logical theories and not raw experiences, they are mistaken. At times when there has been no special strain upon me I have freely chosen Christianity, whatever the cost. But at the turning points of my life, the crises that produced my novels and poems, God has never consulted my will. His providences have struck like thunderbolts. (*CoaR* 160)

This assault from above is how Clemo describes the invasion of God's grace on the 'elect'. At the beginning of *Confession*, he writes that the need for grace comes from the fallen state in which a person naturally arrives into the world: 'the human soul is darkened by original sin and needs a saving illumination of divine grace, distinct from the revelation of God's wisdom and power in Nature' (ix). It is grace that comes and illuminates from outside the natural world, rather than from within it. Clemo's conversion and his sense of election are intimately connected, and we are reminded of the fact here. But election is sometimes violent. The elect are *used* by God to connect with the non-elect, and it is not necessarily a pleasant process. Clemo explains it in *Confession*:

> a man's spiritual life passes from the control of the general Mood of Providence, which operates only through the laws of Nature, to the control of the Galilean Mood, the Will of Christ which subdues

> or adapts the tendencies of Nature when they impede the
> purposes of grace. (ix)

This is the idea of *Wilding Graft*, suggested in the very title, which was taken from Browning's 'Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society':

> The seed o' the apple tree
> Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:
> 'T is the great gardener grafts the excellence
> On wildings where he will. (*Poems and Plays Vol. 4*, 276)

Wildings are self-sown crab apples, onto which fancier or better-tasting varieties are grafted. The grafting of a finer variety onto a sturdier one is intended to make the grafted tree hardier and stronger. The 'great gardener' of Browning's poem is God, who chooses which rootstock to graft onto. The crude, rough crab apple is transformed into a fine and fruitful noble tree. The metaphor is given greater meaning by the discussion of the grafting of wild olives in Karl Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*, especially the passages describing the nature of the hybrid olive, when a 'wild' branch is grafted onto a 'good' olive tree (410-412). The process is described as 'contrary to nature' in the passage Barth is illuminating, from Romans 11. God, Barth says, 'is the holy root of the tree', and the wild branches are cut from their natural, fallen olive tree and grafted on to the tree of God. The discussion parallels Clemo's belief that there are two possible paths: the natural, fallen path of fate, and the sacred, salvaged path of predestination.

Inserting this system into the plot of his novel and its crude setting among the clay district was one of its curiosities, this epic story of God's involvement in the world and invasion of individuals narrated within a small, bleak, cruel-spirited mining region:

> No one guessed that a hamlet on one of the most remote ridges of the district was now the scene of a spiritual drama whose grandeur, stain of bled sap and scars of grafting, would have shown them the proper use of crisis and the conditions of success in any appeal for Divine intervention. (*WG* 274)

At home, Jack hung the photographs of Browning and Powys above his desk, ‘the two writers who’ve meant most to me’. He considered hanging Hardy too, as ‘the style and atmosphere are nearer to Hardy, but he was an atheist and I don’t think it fitting to hang an atheist’s portrait in a Christian home’ (P76). Clemo wrote to Powys with a copy of the novel: ‘Now that success has at last come to me […] I am writing to thank you for all that your work has meant to me during the past 10 years’. To Jack’s astonishment, Powys replied, with a ‘letter I shall treasure all my life – a lovely appreciation from Theodore’ (P76).

There was another motive for this correspondence besides the literary, which has been omitted from the autobiographies and biographical work on Clemo. Clemo believed that Powys’s adopted daughter Susie might well be the girl he was intended to marry, and when he later received an invitation to visit his old literary hero in Mappowder, Dorset, Jack’s excitement was primarily for the opportunity to meet the girl. The certainty that overwhelmed him prior to the meeting, followed by the abject disappointment afterwards, caused Clemo to omit this hope and expectation from all later autobiographical and poetic accounts of his day in Dorset (Thompson, ‘Chalk Heart’).

Before this meeting with Powys, Jack had two novels to write for Chatto & Windus and no inclination to write anything but poetry: ‘two new novels that I

feel I can't write. Forced into a work which I can't do while I'm deaf and loveless – what can it mean?' (P76). Pressure was building for him to show something new. He sent off the old failed novel manuscripts, which Cecil Day Lewis dismissed as a waste of time. He also sent them 'The Lamb of the Green Bed', which was rejected as a self-conscious imitation of Powys. 'What that man wants to do', one reader for Chatto & Windus wrote, 'is to forget about Hardy and forget about Powys and write like Jack Clemo. He is good enough to travel under his own steam' (P7).

Clemo was desperate. 'I feel sick and stunned,' he wrote in his diary, 'abandoned and hopeless. How can there be a future for me? And why was WG ever accepted to bring me into this terrible plight?' (P77). 'Chatto want me to write a new novel instead of revising the old ones' (P78). This should not have been a surprise to Jack; it was in all of the letters. Indeed, it is more of a surprise that he should have submitted such tired juvenilia when he had been asked for two new books. At the end of 1946, after reading *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, Clemo at last had a new idea, a variation on his earlier plans for 'The Hired Razor', to be entitled 'Howling Fir': 'Kurt [Hardy] returned from war to live with grandmother at Karslake. His girl has become a school teacher, lodging at Coombe […] she is an atheist, finding her relief in poetry and nature and humanism' (P76). The character was to be developed in exactly the same way as Edith in *Wilding Graft* and Marvran in *The Clay Kiln*, to be given up when 'another girl of uncultured type attracts Kurt and he yields to her'. When Kurt's grandmother dies, he is to move into Grampound. Kurt will do something to prove that 'dogma is really more human than the humanists' while 'the girl carries on with an artist'. To show what a sinner she is, she is to arrange a dance in one of the drys, although her father will intervene. The story was going

to end near Terras Mine the day after Hiroshima. A ‘Conflict between dogma […] and poetry […]. A subject exactly to my taste’ (P76). It never got off the ground. Clemo wrote a few speeches and planned the locations, but he quickly lost interest.

The strain and disappointment were evident, so much so that Harold Raymond recommended that Jack take a break from writing. Cecil Day Lewis was going to look at the poetry, and then, he suggested, ‘an autobiography might prove to you a useful stop-gap’ (P7). It was clear to everyone that Jack had hit a rut. His eyesight had taken a turn for the worse, on top of which his supportive but ageing agent, Raymond Savage, had married and retired, recommending Cyrus Brooks of A. M. Heath as his successor. Heath was the agency that had seen promise in Clemo’s early novels in the previous decade, and had requested to see more. Jack continued to write to Savage for help, and asked whether he might still read the autobiography. Savage agreed, offering his vulnerable and needy writer some welcome encouragement.

Jack’s inability to write a new novel was built into a personal crisis. Day after day the diaries filled with angst: ‘Mother and I still struggling through what she nightly describes as an “awfully contrary atmosphere” […] as if the devil is pouring his full fury around us, a thick spiritual fog – it’s strange, unlike anything we’ve known’ (P76). Such was his state of mind until publication day. Then followed a period of success and congratulation, during which Clemo collected references to the book and to himself in the media, and wrote to the local papers informing them of his triumph. Over in America, Harold Latham, the Vice-President of Macmillan, had heard about the novel and was looking for new talent. His search coincided with a visit to Oxford and a meeting with the St Austell-born academic A. L. Rowse. Latham was an energetic editor, whose

work included a defining contribution and publication of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, as well as procuring H.G. Wells and Vachel Lindsay for their books. He wanted to publish *Wilding Graft* and had already been in contact with Heath about it. Rowse was approached as a knowledgeable and celebrated Cornishman with a reputation across the Atlantic, who might be willing to promote Clemo's novel for them. Rowse wrote to Clemo:

> I have at last got hold of [*Wilding Graft*] and am enthralled by it. I am still in the midst of it, very much moved by it, especially by the character of Garth. That's quite right, isn't it? I am afraid I am a very unprofessional reader of novels and don't think much of most contemporary ones. But I love this one. There are all sorts of things I long to ask you about it – if you can bear to have a meeting. Can you? I should very much like to meet you, if you are free one day this week.

This led to a lengthy correspondence between the two men, geographically neighbours, but a considerable distance from one another in outlook. Jack was keen to have his novel sold in America, a place he felt was responsible for his condition, but he was anxious about his disabilities as well as about meeting the atheist academic Rowse. He told Rowse it would be 'impossible' for them to meet because of his disabilities: 'This unrelieved loneliness is part of the price I've had to pay for my independence and for any originality that may exist in my work' (R3).

Clemo was surprised to read Rowse's praise, expecting him to have been 'repelled by the "mystical religiosity"', though he was deeply grateful and

naturally agreed that any promotion by Rowse would be invaluable, since ‘you are the only product of the clay district whose name carries any weight with the reading public’ (R3). The Rowse-Clemo correspondence continued for several years, becoming more significant when they wrote about the next book, *Confession of a Rebel*. It was always a one-sided exchange. Clemo showed no interest in Rowse’s work or life, and only discussed his own work, beliefs and biography. Indeed, there was occasionally a hint of contempt in Clemo’s letters, which Rowse either did not notice or overlooked, showing no signs of impatience until much later, when Clemo only wrote to ask favours. These more demanding letters began at the end of 1949, when Clemo was trying to raise money: ‘Chatto has advised me to approach the Royal Literary Fund for a grant. They suggest that you should be one of the two supporters required – the other being Cecil Day Lewis.’ Rowse agreed, and offered on top of this to read Clemo’s latest novel, *Shadowed Bed*. Two weeks later Clemo was chasing Rowse again for the letter. Rowse sent this shortly after and Clemo acknowledged receipt with perfunctory thanks. But soon, he wrote again, asking Rowse to help him apply for a £200 Civil List Pension: ‘My handicaps will prevent me from being a prolific writer’. Again, Rowse agreed, even though he was about to be caught up in the local elections. Clemo gave him a very brief reprieve while the elections were running, but as soon as they were over, waiting for Rowse was: ‘Dear ALR, Now that the Election is over I am wondering what steps are being taken about the Civil List pension. I hope a start has been made, for it looks as if I shall need it pretty badly’ (R3).

This is the last correspondence from Clemo kept in Rowse’s meticulously ordered collection of letters. Jack had become pushy, assuming that everyone had as much free time as he had, and it is a pattern repeated through later

relationships. The reason for Jack's neediness was his vulnerability. He could not converse with others, unable to speak or to hear them, and he felt unable to travel or meet new people. Moreover, he was socially and professionally unconnected, a poor and remote man living with his mother, who knew nothing of the literary or media worlds. Jack needed help.

Rowse, like the poet Charles Causley, who would become of signal importance in Clemo's literary life, was unfailingly courteous and generous in his correspondence, assuring Clemo that he was not at all bothered by the 'pestering', although immediately following the latest barrage of demands, the correspondence was closed.

With the support of Rowse, Latham published *Wilding Graft* in October 1948. He had wanted to change the title to 'Clay of Meledor', to which Clemo would not agree. Nevertheless Clemo was sent a substantial advance of $750 – 'far more than I expected' (P78). It gave Jack hope of becoming better known and more widely read: 'I believe I'll be like Browning more fully appreciated in the U.S. than in England' (P78). It was, then, with some pride, if not excitement, that Jack received his first fan letter from an American autograph hunter. Disappointingly, 'not a girl though' (P78).

Meanwhile, Clemo had been informed that Cecil Day Lewis was recommending him for an Atlantic Award. This was a scheme set up by the Rockefeller Foundation in 1946, 'to aid young British subjects whose work in creative writing or criticism has shown particular promise but has been interrupted by the war' (Birmingham). The fund was $50,000, to be allocated over three years by a team of adjudicators at Birmingham University, among which was Louis MacNeice. Clemo received an award of £100, paid to him at the end of July 1948.

The sales figures of *Wilding Graft* went down considerably after the first month. In the first week 2,000 had been sold, but through the whole of April it only managed a further 280 and Clemo was upset to learn that his advance still had not been paid back by the royalties (P78). He had not understood the nature of an advance, and had written to Heath complaining that no one had been forwarding his money (P7). Overall it was a good seller, and went through a second impression, after which it was out of print for thirty-five years, until being picked up by Anthony Mott, a personable but disorganised publisher who had set up his own firm and intended to produce an ambitious series of Cornish classics, 'The Cornish Library'. 'It will be good to feel myself a novelist again', Clemo wrote to a correspondent in 1983; 'I only thought of poetry as incidental till my sight began to fail' (Spinks correspondence). *Wilding Graft* was the fifteenth title in the series, and at different times in the early 1980s Mott had told Jack he would also take *Confession of a Rebel*, *Marriage of a Rebel*, *A Different Drummer,* and a 'Collected' volume (P1, P112). None of these materialised. Mott even advertised volumes of 'The Cornish Library' which not only were never published, but had not even been written, including E. V. Thompson's 'A Short History of Cornwall', a book discussed but never commissioned or drafted. The project, as the company, was unfortunately short-lived, a fact made doubly unhappy by the failure of a similar deal made with Chatto & Windus in 1982 (P112, P115). It remains, like all Clemo's works at the time of writing, out of print.

Wilding Graft is a unique novel in Cornwall, capturing in an individualistic way the postwar realist Zeitgeist, and it is an excellent depiction of the time, place, landscape and culture of mid-Cornwall's mining villages. It is an entertaining

read, well-structured and controlled, tense and powerful, ambitious but populist, with a mix of approaches, theological, working-class, melodramatic and symbolist. It is also flawed and difficult to review. As popular working-class melodrama, it had too serious a message and too raw a realism, but as a work of literature there were too many moments of naivety and melodrama. It was as though Clemo had been caught between the desires to write a popular potboiler, such as many of the working people used to enjoy, and a literary work of artistic value. As it is, the novel stands alone, a unique and powerful gesture, a page-turning romance with an undercurrent of divine interference and a surface of realism uncommon in writing about Cornwall.

His next book was the autobiography *Confession of a Rebel*, which would return to some of the themes of the novel and show how these were manifest within his own life. There is a clear agenda to this *Confession*, a paradoxical self-regard and self-mutilation, but its strange confidence and strength of voice make it probably Clemo's prose work with the greatest longevity.

CORNISH NIGHT

Here the sandhills white on the downs are spearing
And the ripped pits gape at the sky
With the feeble lights from the lanterns flaring
Where the workmen toil; and the cry
Of some night bird wheeling above them heightens
The pulse of a terror that glides
Thro' a dark which no streak of dawn glow brightens

Here the cottages cower in the gloom-wrapped valley,
Silent and stark; creep like ghosts
Past each shuttered window cold shapes that dally
And linger and slink - the hosts
Of dread things abroad in the blackness thickening
On the hillsides where in fright
A phantom wind in a demon-quickening
Screams in the womb of night.

MIDNIGHT OF THE FLESH

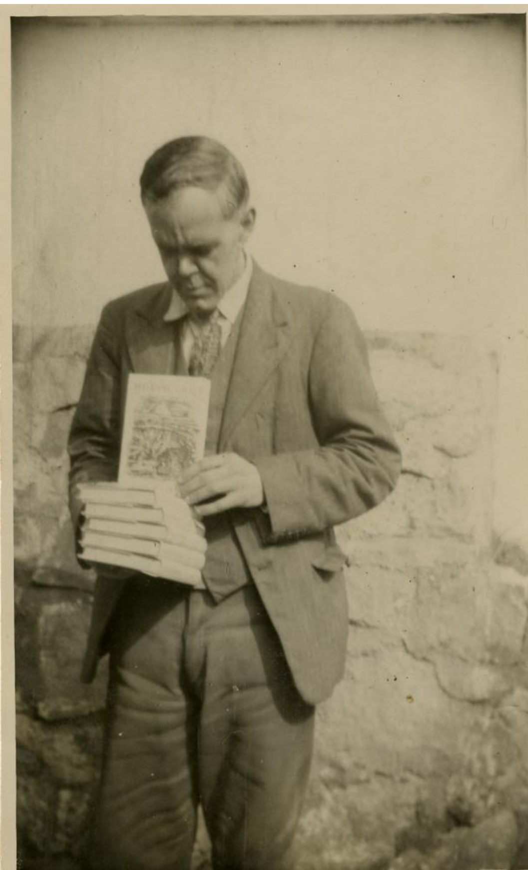
To lie awake and stretch tired, yearning arms
Where you, girl-phantom of my prison, glide,
And try and make love's wanton, secret charms
Turn shade to flesh for seed unsatisfied.

To call your name and woo the heedless air
To speak, myself, what your ripe voice should say,
And burrow to the craven help of prayer,
Imploring Him who sneers in this delay.

Is He afraid earth-sparks would foul His lip
In that great hour when we together cling
As I ascend the fountain steps to dip
My torch in waters whence the rainbows spring?

Torch that now sears my vitals: Nature still
Glares with the greedy glint of lecherous fire.
Your breasts are rounded into Calvary's hill,
And 'gainst the sky His Cross is on the pyre

21. *The Clay Verge* manuscript, with early poems and corrections (L28).



22. Publication day. Clemo with *Wilding Graft*, 1948 (P147).

23. Clemo, 1949 (P147)

24. Evacuees playing outside the Clemo cottage, 1944 (P147).

25. Clemo, Spark and Eveline at Stourton, 1950 (P146).

26. T. F. Powys and Jack Clemo at Mappowder, Dorset, 1950 (P146)

27. Jack and Eveline with foster-girls Violet and Fran Allen, 1950 (P146).

28. Causley and Clemo, 1961 (P138)

29. Daniel Hoffmann and Clemo, 1961 (P138).

30. Clemo posing for artist Lionel Miskin, 1957 (P146).

31. Clemo with sculptor Pat Jenkins, 1957 (P146).

32. Left, Clemo holding *The Invading Gospel*, 1959 (P146).

33. Right, Jack and fiancée Mary, c.1963 outside the Clemo cottage (P138).

34. Jack and Eveline Clemo, 1966 (P137).

35. Clemo and Lionel Miskin in Mevagissey, 1963 (P137).

36. Clemo with E. W. Martin, 1966 (P138).

37. *Top*, Jack, Ruth and Eveline meeting for the first time (P137)
38. *Bottom*, Charles Causley, Clemo and Eveline at the wedding, Trethosa Chapel, 1968 (P132)

39. Jack and Ruth's wedding reception, (P132)

40. Eveline Clemo, c.1975 (P140).

41. Ruth and Jack Clemo in the Goonamarris cottage, 1980 (P143).

42. Ruth talking to Jack, writing into the palm of his hand, 1978, (P140).

VIII

Confession of a Rebel

> But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand. (Isa. 64.8)

Clemo's confession was an idiosyncratically relevant act. It fell into two established markets, one Christian and one relevant to Cornwall, but it was also an act of justification, stating the sins of the past and of nature and the way in which these could be burned away, forgiven, absolved. Clemo had Donne's lines from 'Goodfriday, 1613, Riding Westward' in mind, lines he would use again in *The Invading Gospel*:

> O thinke mee worth thine anger, punish mee,
> Burne off my rusts, and my deformity,
> Restore thine image, so much, by thy grace,
> That thou may'st know mee, and I'll turne my face. (Donne 358)

In *Confession* Clemo writes:

> Only an undisciplined type can prompt the 'stain of fire' that burns out a man's natural faith, whether through remorse – as might happen in a case of prostitution or adultery – or through an agonized conviction of moral rightness beyond moral convention, as in the actual case of Garth Joslin. (203)

Clemo identified with both the sexually remorseful and the 'agonized' moral transcendent. He showed guilt for his semi-accidental ejaculation, as well as for his behaviour towards Barbara, and even concern for Irene: 'Thinking a lot of Irene and wondering how much she remembers – praying she may "remember and understand" as I quote in *WG* and not feel ashamed of anything between us' (P75).

Some moments Jack burned with shame, while others he was staunchly committed to his own goodness, righteousness and divinely approved exceptionalism, 'beyond moral convention'. The conflict between these feelings of guilt and election suggests the tension necessary for the genuinely confessional aspects of this autobiography. Clemo records his personal history in great detail, partly to protect from prying biographers, but partly also to transform his guilt into an aspect of faith – indeed, a condition of it – an inevitable suffering and strain. In this way, guilt is turned into a virtue, a confession, with the idea that forgiveness will follow.

'Absolution is the indispensable goal of all confession', wrote Coetzee in 'Confession and Double Thoughts' (252). It is an opportunity for the confessant to present himself and events on his own terms with a view to being able to put sins behind him. The act implies two people, the one confessing and the one absolving. For Clemo, the act of confession meant two audiences absolving him. One is the reading public, the other is himself. The reason for this is that his guilt involved both a public accusation with a feeling of shame, and a self-accusation. The self-accusation may be one of conscience, or of self-esteem, such as the feeling that one does not deserve something like success. Clemo's own senses of guilt and shame had several roots. He perceived a shame in his disabilities, the result of a sexually transmitted disease. He was locally

persecuted for this, as well as for his self-imposed alienation and his inappropriate romantic attachments. He was also aware that he would seem guiltier if his sexual arousal and ejaculations were known. So Jack had reasons for both a private confession and a public one, and both are attempts to turn the facts of his biography into an absolution. The public nature of Jack's confession gave him the special opportunity to feel validated nationally and internationally, transcending the malice and condemnation of the villagers. When he told his story to the public, he claimed that even his flaws and sins had been divinely arranged and were the conditions of his eventual submission to God. The 'Browning pattern', the 'vocation' for marriage, the idea of election, were all connected to this confessional instinct, the need for self-justification, forgiveness, absolution, and a restoration of esteem. On top of this, we see Jack taking revenge on his persecutors – on Q, on his school, his enemies in the *Cornish Guardian*, Daphne du Maurier, his father and the neighbours.

Foucault wrote influentially on the act of confession. Western man has become a confessing animal, he tells us (59). Foucault is looking at the (Catholic) Christian confession in particular, which claims that regularly admitting your sins to a confessor breaks you free from your sin and makes you better ready for God. The polarity Foucault is interested in is between power and servility, drawing attention to the (false, according to Foucault) link between, on the one hand, truth and freedom, and, on the other, error (or lie) and servility (58-63). The formula ought to be that confessing the truth leads to freedom from sin and error, while not offering the truth leads to servility and post-mortem suffering.

However, according to Coetzee and Peter Brooks, senses of guilt and inferiority tend not to be so easily dissipated, and there is a tension between the

need to confess and the desire not to be condemned, a tension illustrated best by psychodynamic psychological models. There the confession offered to the therapist has to be interpreted rather than taken at face value:

> What the analysand confesses most easily – what he or she thinks is what needs confessing – is always an object of suspicion to the analyst, since the matter easily confessed is usually not what is causing the neurosis. Confessions by the analysand can serve any motives – shame, guilt, revenge, self-justification, self-abasement – but the deeper sources of shame and guilt are blocked from confession by repression and resistance. (Brooks 52-3)

Clemo's act of confession invites a psychodynamic approach. The subject and the witness of events are both Clemo himself, and to an extent the person being appealed to for absolution is Clemo. He both exposes and excuses himself. The ultimate aim of confession is to find peace, although it seems unlikely this was achieved, since Jack was not able to tell the full story. He gave a mythologised, pattern-wrought interpretation and apology. The approbation and absolution of others may have been achieved on his own terms, but the appeal to himself cannot have been wholly satisfied. By not telling the full story, the confession is incomplete and might exacerbate further guilt, leading to further confession, further interpretation.

A perfect example of this and the complexity of the confession would be Clemo's account of the Barbara affair. Of course, he did not have to mention Barbara at all, but there were conflicting reasons why he might. In the first

instance, there was the hope that Barbara would read it, realise her importance and reciprocate Clemo's feelings. The diaries make it clear that this would be a desirable outcome. But to state it plainly would be a great risk, as Barbara could say she did not feel anything of the sort for Jack and did not know what he was talking about, which would undermine him and be a final rebuff. There was also the risk that stating his continued hope of marrying Barbara would make his youthful infatuation more sinister and less forgivable to the reader, not to mention putting off other marital possibilities, such as Brenda. Clemo desired forgiveness and hoped for love, but he did not want to compromise the posture of innocence or risk humiliation. We find here the desire to expose, to confess, to be absolved, but at the same time to conceal. It would be no good if instead of absolving guilt and shame, the confession augmented it. Yet, paradoxically, that is what happens. Clemo did not risk a full confession, so the confession is only partial, and a cause of further guilt, though lesser shame.

If Clemo had been unable to cope with the guilt, then the confession might have been of a different nature. However, it appears as though the confessional aspect of *Confession* is weighted more towards relief from shame. He attacks his enemies too often, over-justifies his actions and emotions, and compares himself flatteringly to other writers, like Hardy. Audience and absolution are both implied in the act of confession, but unlike, for example, Augustine's *Confessions*, it is not God whose approbation he desires, but his readers. It is sensitivity to the gossip and contempt of the villagers that drive this confession, and we see it again in the repeated fear of 'mockery' in both the diaries and the work. (The diaries themselves might be considered a form of confession, with subject, writer and audience all the same.)

Clemo's habit of writing lengthy prefaces to the earlier manuscripts, explaining how difficult the writing was for him because of his extraordinary suffering, has been mentioned already. In spite of being dissuaded by publishers and readers, he needed to place himself within the work, to attach his history and personality to the justified novel or poetry collection, and he needed to be in charge of interpreting himself. *Confession of a Rebel*, it will be recalled, was begun before *Wilding Graft*. That is, even before Clemo had achieved any success with his work, he had an autobiography planned, to describe the lives of his father and mother, his inheritance, the plan God has for him, and how in spite of his suffering and the ill-will of others, he is and will remain triumphant.

A further confessional context is that of the Methodist testimonial. Testimonial literature is an attestation of one's personal experience of God. It can be the testimony of someone who has always been a Christian, or it can describe the conversion experience, either within an established Christian framework or out of atheism. There are overlaps between confessions and testimonials. Testimony in law is the evidence given by a witness, where confession is a voluntary admission of one's guilt. The hint here is that testimony is about God, whilst confession is more autobiographical, about one's journey towards God. In practice, the emphasis often seems almost reversed. The confession tends to be more humble, while the testimonial often seems self-absorbed, especially those of the earlier twentieth century when they, too, frequently positioned themselves against rising interests in evolutionary science.

Jack loved the genre. Testimonials, confessions and biographies were all part of the same urge and support. They provided a link to others with

extraordinary lives and outlooks, and he learnt that he was not as alone as he felt day to day. The apophenic impulse can be considered in this light too: if Clemo is like the people he is reading about – Browning, Hardy, Chatterton, Tolstoy or Rossetti – then he is not doomed to the life he was born into, the turbulent withering in the shadows of the clay dumps. The patterns he found in both secular and faith-based biographies enabled him to place himself among the biographees and escape from the despair which now and then closed in on him.

Particular favourites were Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and Mary Fletcher's *Life*. In 1961, Jack was pleased to read Kenneth Allsop's review of *The Map of Clay*, in which Clemo is described as the 'Bunyan of this century'. *Grace Abounding* was read several times during the writing of *Confession*, and was listed as a favourite book in 1943, as well as in 1938-39, when he first read it. Bunyan's testimonial begins, as Fletcher's and Tolstoy's, when 'I was without God in the world' (Bunyan 10). Clemo was never 'without God', but the God serving his teenage years was less considered than the God he converted to at the end of the thirties.

A third context of *Confession* is that of the autobiography in Cornwall. The 1940s saw a number of regional classics published, including A. L. Rowse's *A Cornish Childhood* (1942), Anne Treneer's *School House in the Wind* (1944) and J. C. Trewin's *Up from the Lizard* (1948). Clemo and Rowse produced the most extraordinary works, being native local working-class writers with a natural intimacy and no desire to romanticise or idealise their towns and villages. Clemo read *A Cornish Childhood* as soon as it appeared, hoping it might help with his own autobiography. In a 1948 letter to Rowse, Clemo made the comparison, writing that his own autobiography is

> as different from yours as it could possibly be, much more raw and elemental: no story of struggle for scholarships […] but a record of spiritual and emotional upheavals which drove me out of Methodism (I was reared in strict Nonconformity and never lost my respect for the best type of Nonconformist, the Sam Jacobs type: even you admired *him*), into various forms of pantheism and at last to my present faith, a mixture of sex mysticism and Barthian Theology. The whole development is related to my physical handicaps. (ER3)

It is a gentle but unnecessarily antagonistic letter, and it shows Clemo's wish to distance himself forcibly from the irreligious and academic.

Perhaps it was the war that made people think nostalgically of their childhoods in the 1940s. The sense of a loss of innocence, as well as of friends and family – the violence, destruction and depression – might have led to periods of self-reflection and spiritual re-evaluation. There was, also, a greater sense of social equality following the wars, allowing more opportunities for working class people like Rowse and Clemo. Among Cornish autobiographies, Clemo's stands out. His life experience and perspective remain alien and remote, even within Cornwall, where the literary scene is still eclipsed by the non-native talents of Daphne du Maurier, Winston Graham and E. V. Thompson, all of whom were drawn, one way or another, by the romance of the region. Clemo's style has not dated either, unlike that of Anne Treneer's autobiography, which seems too sentimental now. The unusual centrality of

God, the personal vendettas, the clayscape setting, the poverty, disabilities, and the misfit character of Clemo, make *Confession of a Rebel* a compelling work.

The writing was begun in 1941, and the first title toyed with was ‘Confession of a Calvinist’, reflecting Clemo’s latest theological affiliation and his readings of Spurgeon, Thomas De Witt Talmage and Karl Barth. He kept the title for a couple of years, certainly until 1944 and probably until 1945. However, by the time it was submitted to publishers and agents, in 1948, it had been renamed ‘Confession of a Misfit’. Cecil Day Lewis told Jack he thought misfits were not very marketable and requested that he come up with a few better options. *Confession of a Rebel* was soon agreed. It was, though, always intended to be a ‘confession’, rather than ‘confessions’. The difference is subtle and often overlooked, with even well-heeled Clemo scholars at times miswriting it. The singularity of ‘confession’ suggests the singularity of the theme and narrative. All aspects of the biography, it is being said, are a part of the one story, the plot of a journey to God. It is the confession of a nonconformist, not the confessions of a Catholic. And it is a dogmatic declaration of faith, like the ‘Apostles’ Creed’, sometimes known as the ‘Confession of the Apostles’.

The autobiography was worked on intermittently to begin with. It was first mentioned on Friday 13 June 1941: ‘Have written 500 words or more to my autobiography!’ In six months’ time he would be beginning *Wilding Graft*, the progress of which was swifter. Even so, by 1943 he had 30,000 words of his life story. In *Confession* we read that Clemo did not write anything in 1943 and 1944 except old manuscripts (213). Clemo must mean that he wrote no new fiction, since he continued to work on the autobiography, completing the preface towards the end of July 1943, and writing 13,000 words in February 1944 alone.

By the end of 1944 he had written somewhere in the region of 60,000 words to *Confession*. He continued sporadically through 1945, adding another 7,000 words, mostly in September, by which point he was almost writing the autobiography as events were unfolding. This accounts for the emphases on the girls living in or visiting the Clemo cottage at the time, and the inclusion of the poem ‘The Token’, which was published only in *Confession* during Clemo’s lifetime and never included in any of his collections of verse (see Appendix I). The poem was written on 29 July 1946 and intended to be the ‘counterpart of Francis Thompson’s “Poppy”’ (P76). Thompson’s poem was dedicated ‘To Monica’ and shows a number of similarities to Clemo’s verse:

> With burnt mouth, red like a lion’s, it drank
> The blood of the sun as he slaughtered sank,
> And dipped its cup in the purpurate shine
> When the Eastern conduits ran with wine.
>
> Till it grew lethargied with fierce bliss,
> And hot as a swinked gipsy is,
> And drowsed in sleepy savageries,
> With mouth wide a-pout for a sultry kiss. (Thompson 59)

Both poems use an *aabb* rhyme scheme and sprung tetrameter, and both were influenced by children, Thompson’s by Monica Meynell and Clemo’s by Brenda Snell. They also share that intimate, slightly eroticised language and imagery. The poppy flower is loaded with meaning for the opium addict Thompson. It is handed to the poem’s narrator by the little girl he is walking with, a ‘token’, a ‘withering flower of dreams’ (Thompson 61). The withered dreams are also the verses, immortalising the dying moment. For Clemo, instead of a beautiful description of an early summer flower, the ‘token’ was orange peel tossed at him mockingly by the teenager Brenda. The story, as told by Brenda, goes that, still under food rationing, her mother had somehow procured some Jaffa

oranges and given one for Brenda to share with her friends. A small group of children took it up the burrow with Jack, where Brenda divided it between them into segments, or ‘pasties’, as she called them. Only, when it came Jack’s turn to be given a piece, Brenda pretended that she had run out of orange and instead threw the peel at him (Thompson, *Roots of my Story*).

Clemo had come across Francis Thompson in 1943 and did not like the poetry initially, although soon he was perceiving parallels, specifically in the inspiration both poets received from girls:

> Rereading T.’s poems and am profoundly moved – I *feel* the agony of the great prophetic soul in him, childlike and divine gratitude. ‘A Child’s Kiss,’ ‘The Omen of the Child-Woman’ are nearer to my own actual circumstance than anything I’ve ever read, even in Browning. (P73)

In 1947, *Confession* was requested by the publishers. Clemo had been unable to finish any new novels, so he reverted to the autobiography and began reworking the manuscript and typing it up. He was surprised how good it was. Soon after he had submitted it to Chatto & Windus, a long encouraging letter arrived from Cecil Day Lewis: ‘I think the autobiography may well turn out to be one of the most remarkable records of our time’, he began. He said how much he loved the back story of the Polmounters and the Clemos, although:

> I must frankly put on record my own impression that, when you turn to religious experience and to comment based upon your own religious faith, rather often a note of rancour, intolerance, or of

> spiritual pride creeps in. The worst example of this seems to me the comments on your father's death […]: to my ear this passage says in effect, 'My father was no loss to me or anyone else when he died, but, if his life and death had any value at all, it was that they exploded the humanist fallacy and enabled ME to see the light.' It is rather odd, a few lines further down, to read 'the smug hypocrisy and swagger of the crowds (on Armistice days) were too remote from the lonely pain, the massive dignity of our loss.' The reader asks himself, 'Are Clemo and his mother the only people capable of lonely pain and massive dignity? Is it really true that all the other people – the people who kept the two-minute silence – were just smug, or swaggering, or hypocrites? Were they unable to feel their own losses?'

Day Lewis went on to question whether the sense that Jack and God are on the same side and that no one else matters is the intended impression of the autobiography, and put pressure on Clemo's use of 'facts' and statistics. Which biographers, Day Lewis wonders, really do 'morbidly insist on' presenting addictions to masturbation and homosexuality? And when Jack writes of the abnormality of modern marriage, Day Lewis asked, does he mean 'Marriage in Polynesia? or Belgravia? or Cornwall?' These are

> generalisations, unsupported by argument, revealing nothing but the writer's contempt for his readers: and sometimes, when I can check yours against my own experience, I feel convinced that you have not any arguments or facts to support them with.

Day Lewis had been a schoolmaster, and he tells Jack that what he claims in *Confession* a schoolmaster *should* have done is precisely what 'no schoolmaster *should have done*.' Lastly, he perceives 'the suggestion of a sneer, of a too facile dismissal of beliefs or opinions which run counter to your own a hint of self-righteousness' (P7).

Jack reports this long letter in his diary, removing the critical parts: 'Splendid report on my auto from Chatto – C. D. L. says it may well become "one of the most remarkable reads of our time"' (P77).

By March 1948 Clemo thought the book was complete:

> Revised more of Confession and rounded it off as I feared I'd have to, with Mrs Phillips' funeral, it's a complete record of my spiritual and literary struggle and the ripening of my vision and I'd be satisfied with it as the *first instalment* of a confession with a second volume to follow about the real love and 'personal rewards' – I can't believe God would let me down. (P78)

Note this plan for a second autobiography. Clemo expected it to follow very quickly after the first, expressing the realization of the happiness promised by God. As it happened, the sequel, *Marriage of a Rebel*, would not appear until 1980.

More immediately, many revisions were needed before *Confession* was ready, and Chatto & Windus's libel lawyers were again anxious. Day Lewis sent their verdict, along with many demands for changes, both litigious and aesthetic. Clemo's references to his own work being like Hardy's, Day Lewis

wrote, sounded too much like boasting. They were, unquestionably, braggadocio, though Jack wanted them kept. Other suggestions and concerns included the following list: ‘references to your own talents, spiritual and intellectual, will tend to alienate the reader’; ‘comment about “Elizabeth Myers” is probably libellous’; ‘Humanist philosophies […] have never rejected the great art and literature which did not “prophecy smooth things”’; ‘don’t call the Hockings “superficial”’; ‘this libels J.C. Powys. We suggest omitting the words “maniacal”, “the appalling” and “in which that other ‘Loony John’ delighted”’; ‘Will you please cut out the reference to me by name’.

For a dedication, Jack was uncertain. He wanted to dedicate it to Brenda, but by the end of October he was starting to doubt whether his feelings for her were really reciprocated. Brenda has since stated very plainly that they were not, and that there was no romantic feeling or exhibition between her and Jack at all. In her mind, they had been playmates. Nevertheless, after *Confession* was submitted Jack wanted to include more on Brenda, and so in November 1948 he posted an extra section to Chatto & Windus. He also added a very late mention of Eileen, a new correspondent and promising marriage prospect. Eileen is introduced on the very last page:

> the progressive grafting […] was not yet complete, and those touches of it which involved Christian fellowship were still to come – through a Hertfordshire girl whom I first heard of a few weeks after Phillips’ death. (245-6)

In subsequent impressions, in 1975 and 1988, the ‘Hertfordshire girl’ was named as Eileen Funston, now a Christian writer.

Eileen was eighteen when Clemo wrote to her, having read an article of hers in the *Christian Herald*, 'What are the youth looking for?', in January 1949. 'If only a girl like this Eileen Funston knew what I'm going through – how she could write in exactly the way I need', Clemo noted in his diary (P76). Eileen, too, felt a connection, although by the time *Confession* had gone to print, the relationship was over. Eileen had been uncomfortable about how quickly Clemo was urging her into marriage, and her parents and friends were firmly against the idea. Realising these impediments, Clemo wrote ferociously and impatiently, occasionally with remarkable vitriol, threatening to 'reveal to the world how fickle' Eileen was in his next book (Mitson 88). Their correspondence is a blend of romance, literature and theology, with teasing arguments, barbs, rebuffs and manipulations throughout, Eileen challenging Clemo strongly on his interpretation of the Bible and his personal experience (P55). Clemo's decision to include Eileen at the last minute in *Confession* was to him a statement of faith, of certainty that God was in the process of rewarding him, bringing Christianity into his love life for the first time (*CoaR* 246). But it was also an embarrassing naivety. Clemo had learned nothing from the sequence of previous failures and identical statements of love and faith. This was a book of confessional testimonial, and required more than the happy hope of absolution and divine favour. It needed Eileen. It needed *proof*. By publication day, 16 September 1949, the Eileen affair had fallen apart, a further 'humiliation and mockery' of the book's optimistic message and certainty (P79).

Sales and reviews of the autobiography were not as good as *Wilding Graft*'s, and Macmillan chose not to publish it in America, the novel having sold so poorly for them. In the UK, the second Chatto & Windus edition was produced in 1975. Charles Causley seems to have been instrumental in this

edition. Clemo had already proposed the idea of reissuing *Confession* to Chatto, although they had rejected it, but when, in 1973, Causley suggested trying them again, they accepted immediately. Causley had always admired *Confession*, and had told Clemo in 1951:'I think the "Confession" – with A. L. Rowse's autobiography – the two most important books to come out of the west of England ever' (P16). The book was reissued in a striking glossy red hardback, with a handful of factual corrections. It might be noticed in the 1975 edition that the relative who 'married a German' became the relative who 'had a son by a German lover', and the description of the evacuee Joan is changed from 'a pathetic little slum product from Dulwich', to 'a dark, shy orphan called Joan from Dulwich'.

The second issue was not given as much attention as the first. The publishers did not even think to change the biographical details on the back of the book, in spite of more than twenty-five years having passed. Norah Smallwood, who would become Managing Director of Chatto & Windus the same year that this edition of *Confession* emerged, was Clemo's contact, but most of the letters from her are apologies. Not only did they forget to change the biographical information, but they forgot to send Clemo copies of the book, failed to send any review copies, and they forgot to pay him. The book was scarcely noticed and sales were consequently poor, so in 1977 Jack was able to buy fifty cheap copies when it was remaindered.

By 1982, Chatto & Windus seem to have been even less interested in Clemo and even more disorganised. This was the year that Norah Smallwood retired from her position, and Carmen Callil, the founder of Virago, took over as Managing Director. A representative of the publishers, Jill Rose, had spoken to Jack and offered to reprint both *Confession* and *Wilding Graft*, at the same time

as the small publisher Anthony Mott was showing interest. Jack offered Mott the novel and accepted Chatto & Windus's offer to publish *Confession* at their associated company, the Hogarth Press. It was to be a paperback issue for mass publication. Their offer was better than Mott's, with a larger advance, wider distribution and an established company. Terms were agreed and a publication date set for 1985. But it turned out that Rose had no authority to make the offer, and when Jack wrote in 1985 to find out when the book was going to print, the reply came that it was not. There was no record of the offer and Rose had left the company. No one at Hogarth or Chatto knew anything about it, Clemo was told (P1). Later the same year, Mott's company went into liquidation.

The latest issue of *Confession* was published by Spire, an imprint of Hodder & Stoughton, in 1988, which they reissued at the same time as the second volume of autobiography, *The Marriage of a Rebel*. At Spire, Juliet Newport was an admirer of Clemo's work and keen to publish him. For the cover, they used a watercolour landscape of the clay tips looking like angry volcanoes, by the artist Lionel Miskin, an influential painter and sculptor who befriended Clemo in 1956 when he drew a series of portraits of the poet and his mother. By 1988, Miskin had not been in touch with Jack for some time, and no one seemed sure where he was. They tracked him down in Cyprus, but he did not remember painting the watercolour. Nevertheless, he said if they had it they could use it for free, and he even offered to pay for the image to be copied properly.

Juliet Newport then suggested that Clemo write another book, more typically testimonial than the others, and more of a counterpart to *The Invading Gospel* of 1958, but Jack felt too old to take on a project of such magnitude (P1).

Response to *Confession*, from the very first edition, was unpredictable and exciting. On 28 October 1949, the *Times Literary Supplement* printed one of the strongest reviews, acknowledging what a unique writer Clemo was, when 'recent Cornish writers have been romantics' or 'passionate loyalists', and describing *Confession* as 'a surprising porcupine of a book to shoot its quills from Cornwall.' At the other end of the scale, a bad review from Australia caused Clemo to reconsider his literary position: 'It's all too true that much of my suffering has been "mystical self-pity", and I can't be content for my witness to remain on the level of what's already published' (P80). This diary entry anticipates Clemo's next prose work, his 'spiritual manifesto' *The Invading Gospel*. Clemo wants to 'witness', to say more, and he wants his writing to be more positive and less focused on the turbulence of his upbringing. His confession was incomplete.

In other reviews, the *Evening Standard* called Jack 'A queer fish, a misfit, a man with a kink', and said he was 'coming up the hard way' (20 September 1949). The *Daily Mail* found *Confession* 'extraordinarily irritating yet oddly absorbing'. It was 'One of the queerest and most candid self-portraits that I have read for a long while' (8 October 1949). V. S. Pritchett, writing in the October *Bookman*, wrote sympathetically: 'At first he sounds crankish, obstinate, conceited, arrogant, but this is merely the shell of the solitude in which he has lived and which he makes so profoundly interesting […]. His remarkable devotion to very young girls recalls the innocent mysticism of the Kilvert Diaries, his pictures of working-class life are faithful; his thought is grim, strong and candid' (P154).

Clemo's fan mail became equally mixed and suitably weird. Most correspondents wrote to tell Jack their own life stories and to say that they, too,

were misfits. One would begin: ‘My own life has, in some ways, resembled yours’. Another: ‘I too am a modern Calvinist’ (P9). One wrote in sympathy, saying that she also has always hated people. A surprising quantity responded to Clemo’s relationships with children, sharing their own feelings and experiences, usually innocent, but occasionally suggestive. He kept two lists of the people who sent him fan mail. The first was a list of critics and celebrities that included A.L. Rowse, John Rowland, Raymond Savage, Denys Val Baker, Lewis Wilshire, David Stribley, Monica Hutchings, Littleton Powys, E. W. Martin, H. J. Wilmott and Frank Baron. The second was of mail from the general public, a list that included Helena Charles, who became a regular correspondent. Undoubtedly the oddest letter came from Richard Lea, a curious figure who declared that Clemo was a prophet of the Apocalypse destined to lead mankind after the imminent deluge. According to Lea, Clemo was to found ‘the new religious basis that will be needed’ following God’s purge, instituting ‘new religious conceptions and a new social system’ (P9).

One other letter stands out, written by a young man named Philip Callow in 1953. It is in most ways exactly like the others, being an account of his own working class background and biography and stating that he intended to write his own ‘Confession’. The difference was that Callow did go on to publish his life story in a number of successful autobiographical novels, as well as several lives of writers and artists, including D. H. Lawrence, Robert Louis Stevenson, Chekhov and Cézanne.

Through the continued media attention, Jack became a major figure in Cornwall. Causley, Rowse and Lionel Miskin befriended him, as did the editor and critic Derek Savage, who lived in Mevagissey. There was a tight community of artists and writers in Cornwall at this time, which included people like W. S.

Graham, Daphne du Maurier and Denys Val Baker, and Clemo was well ensconced. Derek Savage was an especially important character amidst these better celebrated names, and he introduced Jack to ‘Founder of the Beats’ Kenneth Rexroth in 1959 (P89). Savage also wrote a number of supportive and helpful letters and reviews for Clemo. Among them, relevant to *Confession of a Rebel*, is this note he passed to Jack from an unnamed man who, he says, is ‘great’, ‘a mystic and philosopher’. (It is just possible that this man is Rexroth himself. Rexroth first visited Savage around the time *Confession* was published.) The unnamed man wrote about *Confession*:

> Greatness is too hackneyed a word to use in connection with this book; it belongs to the same category as Genesis and Exodus. I do not feel that I have been reading a book so much as sharing the vision of an elementally living humanity, similar in its basic character to that which is offered by the account of Moses before the burning bush; an experience which I shall not forget. (P37)

In spite of this support, *Confession* did not sell. A religious biography of a writer who has only written one book was never going to hit the charts, but at the end of 1949 Clemo says his literary hopes have been ‘dashed by news of poor sales’ (P79). It was at this time that Cecil Day Lewis and A. L. Rowse submitted their support for Clemo’s application for a Royal Literary Fund grant. The grant was awarded and Jack received £100 in January 1950. He also applied for a Civil List Pension on the grounds of his disabilities. The application was supported by a number of eminent writers, among them Aldous Huxley, V. S. Pritchett, W. Somerset Maugham, Isaac Foot, J. C. Trewin, John Betjeman and

T. F. Powys. ‘How ironic is God’s way still – probably half these supporters are agnostics or atheists’, wrote Clemo in his diary (P80). The Civil List Pension was not granted this time, in spite of the eminent support, but in the rejection letter dated 7 April 1951 Clemo was offered a ‘Royal Bounty Fund’ grant worth £300 (P163). The Civil List Pension application would be successfully reconsidered in 1961 and maintained throughout Clemo’s life, an enormous relief for Jack and Eveline and a release from uncertainty.

Confession of a Rebel has informed many unfavourable opinions of Clemo. Its author was emotionally immature and volatile at the time of writing, and the work can seem cruel, self-congratulatory, self-justifying and narcissistic. He used the public exposure to criticise the people around him, the girls who let him down, and several recently deceased writers. As a writer, however, Clemo was continuing to prove himself. The unrelenting tension remains, a threatening buzz of barely contained electricity within the prose, and there is a primitive ferocity and frustration to *Confession*, aided by the idea of God’s immediate presence, His constant looming over Jack’s shoulder. It gives the theological perspective some vitality.

Clemo had a stronger sense of intimacy with his readers than many might. He had grown up being mocked and assaulted in press controversies, much like he would have been in a playground. His writing, then, is a constantly extended hand, which we see most conspicuously in his autobiographies, although it is present in the fiction and poetry, the forewords and prefaces, and in the newspapers. He puts forward an idea of ‘Jack Clemo’, writer, mystic and elect lover, through a confident and self-aware alloy of sincerity and misdirection. The autobiography is him ‘playing Jack Clemo’, so to speak. He knows that the story

he is putting forward is not the whole truth, although he believes the conclusions of his untruth are true – the presence of God in his life, and God's proven election of him. With the story unfinished, the 'proof' has not materialised, and along with the guilt of untruth there is a self-perpetuating motive for self-concern and autobiography. It is a classic case of what Sartre, Clemo's contemporary, would call 'bad faith'. So when Clemo writes that his work cannot be understood without studying those 'certain broken boundaries', it seems he does not mean to be studied as we are here, working behind the myth, but on his own terms and by his own confessions.

1941 saw Jack's letters to the paper all but cease, and conduits for his prose dried up as the almanacks suffered from paper rationing and ceased printing. *Wilding Graft* was the new outlet for his fictional prose, and *Confession of a Rebel* was the receptacle of Clemo's urge to public confession and self-appraisal. The third literary drive has hardly been considered yet, and emerged almost spontaneously in 1945, when *Wilding Graft* was all but finished and the back of *Confession* well broken. This was his poetry. Clemo remained unable to produce a new novel, although he still had one book to write for his contract with Chatto & Windus. It was at this point that Cecil Day Lewis suggested putting together a selection of verse. And it is on this poetry that Clemo's literary reputation and longevity depends.

IX

The Clay Verge

> Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of Him that framed it, He had no understanding? (Isa. 29.16)

It was never Clemo's intention to be a poet, although it is for his poetry that he will be remembered. Novels were his writerly meat, while poems were brief moments of vision and inspiration. In the preface for his proposed collection, he wrote:

> These fifty poems are all that I care to preserve of my output in verse. It is very unlikely that I shall write anything further in the medium: the lyrical form of expression was natural to me only before my talent had found its true medium in novels. (L28)

After *The Clay Verge* he would get back to novels, the urge to write poetry, he says, having left him as soon as he began 'Roche Snow' in 1937. The manuscript was intended to include most of the juvenile verse submitted to the *Cornish Guardian* as well as the new work emerging. He finished the preface in February 1945 – 'prefaces are so much easier to write than the books!' (P75) – the same day that he finished the first of a new style of poem, 'Christ in the

Clay-Pit'. The reason for writing the preface so early was that Clemo envisaged submitting a collection of juvenilia, these 'fifty poems'. There are several drafts of the list of poems Jack wanted to publish, but he seems to have sent just over forty to Raymond Savage in February 1946, by which time the collection was bolstered by a handful of poems in a new and stark idiom, three of which would appear in *The Clay Verge*: 'Christ in the Clay-Pit', 'Prisoner of God', and 'A Calvinist in Love'. The original title of the collection was to be 'Poems Christian and Erotic', which was soon changed to 'Crucifix of Clay', and from 1948 became *The Clay Verge*.

Savage sent the manuscript to John Murray, who thought 'the author deserves – and probably needs – encouragement' (P7). Murray suggested submitting to Faber, Macmillan, and the new magazine *Orion*. Savage tried *Orion* right away, the editors of which were Cecil Day Lewis, Rosamond Lehmann and D. Kilham Roberts. As a result, 'Christ in the Clay-Pit' appeared in the Autumn 1946 issue, alongside the work of Louis MacNeice, Laurie Lee, Day Lewis himself, Edith Sitwell, Frances Bellerby and the critic who had written negatively of *Wilding Graft*, Gorley Putt, and Clemo was paid four guineas. Of the four guineas, he gave his tithe to charity, 'carrying out the Scriptural rule of giving a tenth of all earnings to God's cause' (P76).

Further poetic triumphs followed. 'A Calvinist in Love', written November 1945, appeared in Penguin's *New Writing* collection in 1947, edited again by John Lehmann. Then 'The Excavator', written September 1946, appeared in Reginald Moore's *Modern Reading 17*. Other poems were brought out in *Facet*, *West Country Magazine* and *West Country Life*, as Clemo put the finishing touches to his autobiography and wasted time with the old novels. When it became clear that there would not be a new novel, Day Lewis wrote:

> I look forward to reading more of your verse when you have enough to send in a collection of it. There are traces of Browning and Hardy in them – two of my favourite poets – and I think of Francis Thompson too. […] I particularly admire 'The Excavator': in this poem, except for a little fluffing […] at the start of the fourth stanza, you have carried the thought on, though you control your central image, with great power and momentum. (P46)

The only poets Clemo was reading at this time were the Brownings and Francis Thompson, with Clemo adopting the ode form he associated with the latter. The influence of Thomas Hardy on the poetry is not as great as the influences of Thompson and Browning. Clemo did write a number of poems to, about or featuring Hardy, including 'Max Gate', 'Daybreak in Dorset', 'Wessex and Lyonesse' and 'At Hardy's Birthplace'. These poems have little in common in terms of form, but they do highlight the influence of Hardy in terms of theme and atmosphere. 'Daybreak in Dorset', for instance, opens: 'It is not my fate that brought me here, / Though this is Hardy's land' (*MoC* 71). This is a reference to the pessimistic fatalism often associated with Hardy's novels, which Clemo attempted to refute in *Wilding Graft*. But references to Hardy's poetry in Clemo's work are far less frequent than references to the prose or to Hardy's biography. In *Confession of a Rebel* there is an unreferenced quotation of Hardy's 'The Impercipient': 'That with this bright believing band / I have no claim to be' (Hardy 61). Hardy's poem is a meditation on his lack of faith and his resultant sense of loss. The full stanza reads:

> That with this bright believing band

I have no claim to be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a strange destiny. (59)

Clemo felt great sympathy for Hardy's reluctant atheism, and he ended his Hardy poem 'Max Gate' with the lines: 'I almost could conceive / That to blaspheme with tears is to believe' (*MoC* 71). Other than the quotation in *Confession*, there is surprisingly little mention of Hardy's poetry, and throughout Clemo's diaries and letters Hardy is mentioned not as a poet, but as a novelist. In 1943, Hardy is Clemo's 'favourite' novelist (P73). Similarly, forty years later, in 1983, Clemo writes to a correspondent: 'Hardy is my favourite novelist, and I would urge people to read him in spite of his agnosticism, just as I would advise poetry-lovers to read Dylan Thomas' (P48). It is also worth noting that when Clemo's archive was donated to the University of Exeter, the poetic works of Francis Thompson and Robert Browning were included and there were four of Hardy's novels, but none of Hardy's poetry. Although Day Lewis perceived some similarities, it was the novel *Wilding Graft* that really bore Hardy's stamp, rather than the poetry, and it was a similarity of temperament that determined the longevity of Hardy's influence. As Clemo wrote to A. L. Rowse: 'My nature is very much like Hardy' (R3).

Day Lewis had also picked as his favourite the poem which Jack considered his best to date: 'The Excavator'.

In 1947, Clemo submitted more poems, and in 1950 the full manuscript was requested. The future Laureate discarded the majority of these, selecting only twelve: 'Prisoner of God', 'Neutral Ground', 'Snowfall at Kernick', 'The Water-wheel', 'Quarry Snow', 'The Plundered Fuchsias', 'Christ in the Clay-Pit', 'The Excavator', 'The Irony of Election', 'The Clay-Tip Worker', 'Sufficiency', and 'A

Calvinist in Love'. But Clemo was writing poetry quickly and easily now, and in May 1950 he noted in his diary: 'Have over 40 pages of my second book of poems done' (P80). He posted these off for Day Lewis to consider with the others. Once again, almost all of them were rejected, Cecil Day Lewis and Ian Parsons thinking less of the second batch than the first. They accepted just three: 'The Flooded Clay-Pit', 'Burnt Bush', and 'The Winds', the last of which was reworked from a poem written for the *Cornish Guardian* to commemorate New Year 1939 (see Appendix I). Clemo, disappointed, begged for 'The Child Traitor' to be included, which was agreed, and the final poem, 'The Cinder-Heap', was accepted in January 1951.

So, from two full collections, Cecil Day Lewis selected only seventeen poems. The rejected work would bleed into later volumes, and some of those considered unsuitable by both Clemo and his publishers were collected posthumously in *The Awakening*. Day Lewis was not interested in the poems to or about theologians or writers, such as were submitted on Spurgeon and Browning; nor was he interested in the purely observational landscape poems or the purely theological ones. From the ramshackle and undefined submissions, Day Lewis extracted a handful of tight, gritty, industrial clayscape pieces with a harsh fallen-world symbolism and theology.

The collection opens with 'Prisoner of God', originally entitled 'De Profundis' (a popular working title used for several of Clemo's earliest poems), then retitled 'The Captive Lover', and then 'Revelations in the Clay-Pit'.[15] The final title, 'Prisoner of God', might be a reference to Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, which Clemo was reading at the time. In his introduction, Barth writes of the

[15] Inexplicably, this poem was included in *The Awakening: Poems Newly Found*, in 2003 (25). It is word-for-word identical with the published version, only missing some of the correct punctuation and using the title 'Revelations in the Clay Pit'.

man of faith being a ‘prisoner’ in this fallen world, and his only way out is through God and the grace of God (37-38). The poem seems to date from the mid-1930s, as Andrew Symons suggests in his introduction to *The Awakening* (9). Clemo told Symons that the poem related to the breakdown of his relationship with Evelyn, and there is a hint in it of one of his favourite poets from the 1930s, Edgar Allan Poe. The poem is more abstract than some of the other poems, with imagery of ‘turrets’ and the line, ‘When you were slamming, slamming all my doors’, which is reminiscent of Poe’s raven ‘gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door’.

The original title, ‘De Profundis’, was apt in this instance. The poem is a supplication ‘out of the depths’ of the narrator’s painful experience. He is appealing directly to God, as in Psalm 130, and is waiting for the answer to his prayer and query: ‘What grace do you confer / Through tricks like these? What love could shape such doom?’ This is the collection’s starting point, a statement of suffering, a question as to why it is allowed, and the narrator waiting for God’s response, accusing Him who ‘tore our fates apart and broke the shape / And pattern’. It shows the desire for a narrative to be running through Clemo’s poetry collections. This is not the strongest poem, but it is the natural starting point, the depth to emerge from. Later, when Charles Causley rearranged the work for *The Map of Clay*, one can see the importance of this narrative thread to Clemo as he complained that Causley’s new order spoiled the narrative progression. Causley’s ordering was more striking, but the story became less clear.

The second poem, ‘Neutral Ground’, introduces the collection’s methodology in a more direct way:

> God’s image was washed out of Nature

By the flood of the Fall:
No symbol remains to inspire me,
And none to appal.

It ends:

I have lost all the sensitive, tender,
Deep insights of man:
I will look round a claywork in winter,
And note what I can. (12)

If it were not for the need to have a strong emotional and erotic narrative, this should have been the opening poem. The clay scenery is set. The narrator is speaking from the clayworks, a fallen world of destruction and redemption, and turns not to 'Nature or God', but to the clayworks, where the 'derision of Nature / Is rigid and shrill'. In a very direct way the statement of intent is given. The next poem, 'Snowfall at Kernick', then introduces us to the clayscape:

Here with a burly flutter and sting
The snow-blast scampers winnowing,
And dribble of foam-flakes seeps and bores
Through clay-dump thickets, under doors;
While flurry of snow-mist rises where
The waggons tug till rails are bare.
The smoke is battered round the stacks;
Soot falls with snow on trolley-tracks.
Even the mica-channel planks
And narrow walls of settling-tanks
Are frilled and ice-splashed there between
The frozen pools now sickly green.
The pit-edge merges with the fields,
A softened gash the clay-bone shields;
Beyond it in the valley's fold
Virginia woods loom taut and cold.[16] (13)

The emotional turmoil, religious principles and the idiom of clay have all been introduced, and now the symbols begin to blend. In 'The Flooded Clay-Pit', the

[16] In *The Clay Verge* 'clay-bone' is misprinted as 'clay-cone'. This is corrected in *The Map of Clay*.

landscape slowly comes to life. It starts as though continuing the clay language of ‘Snowfall at Kernick’:

> These white crags
> Cup waves that rub more greedily
> Now half-way up the chasm; you see
> Doomed foliage hang like rags;
> The whole clay-belly sags

But soon we see the zoomorphic and anthropomorphic language develop: ‘Those iron rails / Emerge like claws’. The poem ends:

> Those thin tips
> Of massive pit-bed pillars – how
> They strain to scab the pool’s face now,
> Pressing like famished lips
> Which dread the cold eclipse. (14)

It is as though the works are beginning to wake up.

The narrator of ‘Neutral Ground’ continues to cast his eye over the works, moving to ‘The Water-Wheel’, where the Christian symbolism creaks out, and ‘The Cinder-Heap’, where the erotic imagery is developed and the collection’s over-used ‘sap’ is introduced. Both ‘The Cinder Heap’ and ‘The Flooded Clay-Pit’ develop imagery of the mining machinery being grotesque and monstrous, with brambles ‘pushing with live brown claws’. The sense of menace is palpable, although the image is perfected in the 1967 collection, *Cactus on Carmel*, with ‘Crab Country’, where the traditional grotesqueness of the crab is exaggerated, over-sized and inland, and instead of sand it scuttles across the bleached kaolin quarries:

> Pincer movement on the hills.
> Salty clay-crabs advance, edging sideways
> Or straight ahead over fields, lanes and thickets.
> The whole scarp slowly fills
> With vast crusted shells, gleaming like armour,

And the gravelly claws
Baulk the bus, stop the plough of the farmer. (*CoC* 32)

These dynamic symbolic landscapes are immediately compelling, and the eroticism unavoidable. In a 1977 statement for students at Exeter University, Clemo said: ‘I had a strong erotic vision, and though the excavators and kiln-fires might be symbols of God at work on the human spirit, the white sand-cones and the curved rocks in the pits were symbols of woman’ (P48). The idea is developed in *Marriage of a Rebel*:

> I often felt that my rarest talent was not a talent for writing, or (as solemnly pious people have said) a talent for suffering, but a talent for the erotic, for being mystical and theological about it. I spent a lot of time trying to work out the ultimate religious meaning of the minor but vivid thrills which girls had given me. (36)

The erotic influences evident in *The Clay Verge* are primarily the teenager Brenda and the girl Iris. Iris was the cousin of the Jauncey girls, who continued to visit for long holidays after the war had finished. In 1946 the Jaunceys visited with their uncle, aunt and Iris. For the short periods she was there, in 1946 and 1947, Iris offered the warm contact Clemo felt he needed for his poetry. He wrote ‘Clay Fairy’ for her, which was not accepted for publication in *The Clay Verge*, but also ‘The Child Traitor’, which was. The latter poem is ‘about Iris picking foxgloves’ (P76) and the same fallen world:

She has turned from God and me
To pluck a foxglove tenderly,
And pressing through the brambles snapped
The thick green stem, fondling the purple bells

[…]
Each thorn among those blackberries
Has pierced the Hand that made it, yet she loves,
Most plainly loves each little tugging spike,
And witlessly approves
Its freak – unhooks it gently; and were I to strike,
Cutting it dead, or wrest the foxglove flowers,
Trampling them underfoot to thwart the bees
That press old snares upon my mind,
Nuzzling for nectar they could find
In the white feathery womb beneath the velvet towers –
Were I thus to make
A gesture of the way my faith must take,
Her eyes would turn in quick dark mutiny
Of protest, loyal to the staining beauty
And not to God's grey truth that spurred my act. (23-4)

The language is sensuous, if not sexual, so that even without the overt sexualising of some of the contemporary poems overlooked for *The Clay Verge* but included in later collections, there is an undercurrent, a sexual suggestion in the loving observation, the sense of 'betrayal', the tenderness and 'fondling'. It is an intimate language, exaggerated by the Lawrencian 'sap', 'blood' and 'seed' littering Clemo's poetry at this time. They are depictions of the natural urge, potency, life, efflorescence and excess, and so they need sanctifying. Often it seems that Clemo is using 'sap' merely as a symbol of the natural world, but it is difficult to read such a Freudian gift as Clemo without observing intrusive and forceful post-Freudian symbolism.

A more lasting influence than Iris was Brenda. For some reason, through 1947, Brenda was being kept away from the cottage, which led to Jack writing more poetry about her. In *The Clay Verge* the only poem reflecting her influence is the most highly charged, 'The Burnt Bush'. (There was another Brenda poem in *Confession of a Rebel*, and two more in *The Map of Clay*.) In *The Marriage of a Rebel* Clemo complained about reviewers reading 'unpleasant sexual

implications' into 'The Burnt Bush' (a reference to a review in *Poetry Quarterly*), writing that the poem was 'really' about how:

> 'a gnarled old bush of Adam's seed' had produced doubts about divine love because of the loneliness and frustration I had suffered since Irene left me. Brenda's tender gaiety had burnt up this sickly growth so that I could once more affirm God's goodness. (28)

Although it is not the clearest explanation and analysis, the gist is that Clemo was doubting the possibility of finding a divinely approved love, but contact with Brenda changed that. The important part of the explanation would be *how* she did this, and to say that it was her 'gaiety' is not very helpful. It shows the explanatory gap which Jack too often fails to cross in his non-fictional, theological and explicatory pieces. What should be clear by now, however, is that the theology is governed by Jack's feelings. He doubted the possibility of 'divine love' because he happened to be lonely at the time, but was convinced of 'divine love' again when a girl was paying him attention.

The language of 'The Burnt Bush' certainly is suggestive of sexuality, and the apparently ingenuous despair of Jack that it should be interpreted overtly in those terms seems naïve, unless he thought the 'unpleasantness' of the interpretation was pederastic. Following *Wilding Graft*, in which the hero falls in love with a fifteen-year-old girl, and following *Confession of a Rebel*, in which Clemo describes some of his feelings for Barbara and also writes that the girl in *Wilding Graft* was intended to be twelve, it is not surprising that this biographical context is brought to the poetry. On the other hand, it might be a fault when reading Clemo's poetry to assume that the narrative voice is always the writer's

own. Jack encouraged this in *Confession of a Rebel*, suggesting that people should study his life alongside his work, but in the case of 'The Burnt Bush' we are not merely looking at a poetic confession. Sexuality bursts out of it; the bushes, thorns, stumps; the 'curl of crackling flame' and 'cleft of naked need'; the 'licked', 'flicked' and 'pricked' rhyme; 'Nature's vein' and the 'slow / Thin pulse of smoke'; and then the repeated language of ignition. 'Fresh too was my desire', opens the fifth stanza, 'desire' rhyming with the 'fire' of its final line, implying that their meanings are related, an idea supported by 'the flame' leaping when 'her hand held mine'. The poem seems to be of purification achieved through the action, the 'hush / Of clay delivered from the push / Of Nature's sap: now in God's ken / I stand unsoiled again.' Note the connection between sexuality and the Biblical burning bush and one of Clemo's favourite reads of 1944, the Christian psychologist Leslie Weatherhead's *The Mastery of Sex*. Many of Clemo's more frank ideas of sex and sexuality derive from this book. Weatherhead states that 'understanding the facts of sex' (5) – a phrase very close to Clemo's provocative outburst in the *Cornish Guardian* – is essential to a child's psychological wellbeing, and that the avoidance of sexual education 'is hardly less than criminal' (9). Weatherhead condemns the Church's silence on sexual matters and talks of common symptoms of unhealthy attitudes, which would have reminded Jack of his youthful self, and he talks of masturbation as masochistic self-abuse. The union of a truly loving marriage, Weatherhead argues, can make a (heterosexual) couple 'more like God than ever before' (49). Weatherhead also makes the observation that if the feeling does not bring you closer to God, then it may be lust instead of love. However, all Clemo's driftings into love made him feel closer to God. Weatherhead uses a very Clemian phrase when describing the feeling of love

as a ‘divine spark’. Flashes, sparks and flakes are favourite imagery in the poetry.

Weatherhead then makes reference to Havelock Ellis’s ‘Sex is an ever-living fire that nothing will extinguish. It is like that flame which Moses saw on Mount Horeb, burning the bush which yet was not consumed’ (48). The idea, then, of Clemo’s ‘Burnt Bush’, which fires fiercely, smokes and then is burnt into cathartic silence, is strongly suggestive of a sexual act.

Sex is reclaimed, redeemed, spiritualised and sanctified here. As yet it is still immature in Clemo, and the period of maturation continues until his hazy engagement to Mary Wiseman, lasting from 1963 to 1966, and his marriage to Ruth Peaty in 1968. It is the poetry to Mary, written in the mid-1960s, which has the strongest erotic roots and imagery, although even then the published versions of the poems had been stripped of some of their more overtly sexual language. A good example of this process is the poem ‘Dungeon Ghyll’, reproduced here first as it appeared in the 1967 *Cactus on Carmel*:

> Rowans – tender, shy, elusive rowans,
> Swaying, summer-warm, as a symbol
> Of a woman’s gift at her nocturnal base:
> Soft puffy leaves and sleek stems brushing
> Like shaken tresses or the first kiss;
> And, with the rowans’ whisper, you hear the purl
> Of a mountain stream, the pure, blissful cascade.
>
> Here at the foot of Langdale all is guarded:
> A flat rocky gulch, a turfed bank for the sky embrace;
> But farther up there are rowans, berried so brilliantly
> Under the bold green peaks.
> And if you ascend to them there is danger;
> There might be death, and the resplendent rowans
> Would seem to shrug coldly as you fell,
> And the torrents would laugh in the moonlight.
>
> Why should there be beauty
> On the lip of the ledge where you’re tempted.
> There could be nettles and a thorn hedge
> To keep you safe,

Down at the base, at your innocent meeting-point.
Is the awesome beauty there as a pledge
Of a coronal beyond the shock and the sundering?
Flesh against flesh may chafe
When the wind swoops and blusters;
But suppose you mount the nocturnal height
Sure of a rapture, sensing her perfect seed,
And never plundering?

Unberried rowans shadow the path
Where she clings to you still: you must go on
Up to the blood-red clusters. (47-8)

And now, in its 1964 draft:

Swaying, summer-warm,
Like wisps of a woman at the nocturnal base:
Soft tethered leaves like foaming tresses,
Smooth puffed stems like a pouted nipple
Escaping the lips in love-play.
And with the whisper of rowans there's the burble
Of mountain streams, the pure blissful cascade.

Here at the base of Langdale all is secure:
But farther up there are rowans, berried more bounteously.
And the clear peaks have a lure,
And if you ascend there is danger;
There might be death, and the rowans
Would nod gaily as you fell,
And the streams would laugh in the sunset.

Why should there be beauty
On the lip of the ledge where you're tempted?
Oh, there should be nettles and a thorn-hedge
To keep you safe,
Down at the base, at your starting point.
Or is the beauty there as a pledge
Of something beyond the stab, beyond the fall,
Beyond the death of the dream image?
It is a great thing to mount the breast,
And the lips closing on the dry tense teat
Were near the living God,
The thirst for resurrection. (P94)

The references to breasts repeat throughout *Cactus on Carmel* – as does the association of Mary with rowan trees – although breasts are treated very differently here than they were in 'The Excavator'. There, Clemo had

sympathized with the destructive clay machinery, borrowing imagery from a report on the murderer Neville Heath, who had almost bitten the nipples off one of his victims:

> That broken-mouthed gargoyle
> Whose iron jaws bite the soil,
> Snapping with sadist kisses in the soft
> White breasts of rocks. (*CV* 28)

In 'The Excavator', the 'sex killer' was Christ and 'the action of grace is a complete act of dominance much like a sexual assault', as Heather Martin wrote (55). In 'Dungeon Ghyll', the sexual metaphor is in the natural world – the rowan berries – rather than in the violent mining landscape, and it is less imposing. The poem is still about the redemption of sexuality and the temptation of nature, but in the published version this is more conventional. There are many bare trees lining the way and easily approached – many sexual temptations – but the narrator will only approach the tree berried with 'blood-red clusters', the colour of Christ's suffering. It is, as yet, 'unplundered'. This is a reference to marriage, to an erotic urge submitted to God, a redeemed Christian sexuality as opposed to the temptations of premarital, or merely natural, sex.

In Christian terms, the message of *The Clay Verge* is ferociously nonconformist. The narrator 'needs no ritual voiced / In speech or earthly idiom to draw / My soul to His new law'. God is not in the churches and rituals. Neither is He in the leafing trees, bird song or budding flowers. Recall *Wilding Graft*'s final chapter, in which the suitability of the landscape as a symbol is explored:

> He shrank instinctively from the lush natural landscape lying towards Falmouth. […] His mood was one for the desert, a stripped barren expanse suggesting the ultimate conflicts. And he

> realised through an imaginative, poetic nerve still keen at times amid the general cloudy flux, the fitness of the clay area as a setting for his desperate spiritual battle. (285)

The symbols of Christ are here, in the industrial clayscape: 'I felt that human nature had to be purified just as the clay industry purified the tainted soil and turned it into material for beautiful pottery', Jack said (P48). These themes are used to great effect in his most anthologised poem, 'Christ in the Clay-Pit':

> I peer
> Upon His footsteps in this quarried mud;
> I see His blood
> In rusty stains on pit-props, waggon-frames
> Bristling with nails, not leaves. There were no leaves
> Upon His chosen Tree,
> No parasitic flowering o'er the shames
> Of Eden's primal infidelity.
> Just splintered wood and nails
> Were fairest blossoming for Him. (25)

And again, in the 'The Clay-Tip Worker', one of two monologues from a worker's perspective, along with 'The Excavator':

> I love to see the sand I tip
> Muzzle the grass and burst the daisy heads.
> I watch the hard waves lapping out to still
> The soil's rhythm for ever, and I thrill
> With solitary song upon my lip,
> Exulting as the refuse spreads:
> 'Praise God, the earth is maimed'. (32-3)

The landscape and its Christian symbolism allowed him once again to juxtapose the natural and divine in reference to love and relationships. In 'A Calvinist in Love', we catch a glimpse of ideal love. It is fitting as the final poem of the collection, having a message of optimism, if not consummation. It begins:

I will not kiss you, country fashion,
    By hedgesides where
    Weasel and hare
Claim kinship with our passion.

I care no more for fickle moonlight:
    Would rather see
    Your face touch me
Under a claywork dune-light.

‘A Calvinist in Love’ was one of two poems written over the course of two days in November 1945, along with ‘The New Creation’. They could well be considered companion pieces, although they were never published together. ‘A Calvinist in Love’ appeared in *The Clay Verge* and then in *The Map of Clay*, while ‘The New Creation’ was not published in a collection until 1967. Yet the two poems contain identical messages and themes. Indeed, they are so similar that they were considered practically interchangeable and it was originally Clemo’s intention that ‘The New Creation’ would conclude his debut collection, rather than ‘A Calvinist in Love’. They not only share a message, but also some of the same language. Compare, for instance, the opening lines of ‘The New Creation’, ‘If you were Nature’s child / I could not love you’ (L28), with ‘A Calvinist in Love’’s ‘Our love is full-grown Dogma’s offspring / Election’s child’ (*CV* 39). One is the negative of the other, contrasting the narrator’s inability to love ‘Nature’s child’ with his love of ‘Election’s child’. There are many other parallels. One has a ‘hostile sea’ and ‘tides unclean’ (L28) while the other has ‘sterner oceans’ with a ‘sensuous swell’ (*CV* 39). There are repeated rhymes, such as ‘wild’ with ‘child’, and repeated images of the bestial spring-time ‘mating call’ (L28) and ‘mating season’ (*CV* 38). The poems are very different, however, in terms of form. ‘The New Creation’ looks like one of Francis Thompson’s irregular odes on the page. It is of a similar length, with similar rhyme schemes and line indentations, and could sit quite unobtrusively alongside many of

Thompson's romantic child-inspired verses, such as 'The Child-Woman', 'A Child's Kiss' and 'To Monica Thought Dying'. (Thompson himself had been influenced by Coventry Patmore, but Clemo did not come across Patmore until 1950 (P80).) The form of 'A Calvinist in Love', on the other hand, is not so obviously derivative. Of Clemo's influences from this period, the enclosed rhyme quatrains are more similar to Robert Browning's 'A Pretty Woman':

> So, we leave the sweet face fondly there:
> Be its beauty
> Its sole duty!
> Let all hope of grace beyond, lie there! (Browning *Selections* 184)

Browning's lyric, like Clemo's, is directly addressing the beloved, and the lines of each stanza are generally made up of 9-4-4-9 syllables, similar to Clemo's 9-4-4-7. Clemo's reduced final line is reminiscent of a similarly enclosed romantic and religious lyric by Charles Wesley, written 'During his Courtship':

> Keep from me thy loveliest Creature,
> Till I prove
> Jesus' Love
> Infinitely sweeter;
>
> Till with purest Passion panting
> Cries my Heart
> 'Where thou art
> Nothing more is wanting.' (Davie 163)

Clemo's is a poem of eleven stanzas, each composed of a single sentence. The first three stanzas begin with the pronoun, 'I': 'I will not kiss you', 'I care no more', 'I want no scent'. Here the narrator is negating the natural world; the 'hedgeside', the 'weasel and hare' and 'fickle moonlight'. Such a place of 'soft' beauty is not the landscape of 'Our love'. The following three stanzas reveal the

appropriate setting for such a divine love as the narrator describes, replacing the negated landscape with the 'bare clay-pit' and 'sand-ledge' in 'winter'. These three stanzas place us within the industrial clayscape, with demonstrative openings such as 'This bare clay-pit' and 'This truculent gale'. Once this has been established, the poem progresses, drawing the lovers together with pluralising first person openings: 'We need no vague and dreamy fancies'; 'We cannot fuse with fallen Nature'. These are still negatives, statements of what is *not* the case, and it is only in the final stanza that the fusion becomes wholly good:

> Our love is full-grown Dogma's offspring,
>   Election's child,
>   Making the wild
> Heats of our blood an offering. (38-9)

By 'dogma', Clemo wrote to a friend, 'I mean the doctrines of the New Testament and the Church creeds' (P48).

There were further events that informed this pair of poems. One was a walk Clemo took the day before writing 'The New Creation', on which he meditated over the evacuee Irene and the day he kissed her goodbye at Drinnick Wharf (P75). Irene provides much of the romantic-erotic context of these two poems. Another event informing them was Clemo's reading of T. F. Powys's *Interpretation of Genesis*. In 1945, Clemo was intrigued by Powys but often found himself in disagreement with the Dorset man. When he read the *Interpretation*, on 31 October, Clemo had not liked the book, marking it very poorly on the chart he had drawn and commenting in his diary:

> Reading Powys's *Interpretation of Genesis* – very mystical and cloudy, but I felt a thrill as I looked at his signature … it was moving to feel that Theodore's own hand had rested on the page. (P75)

The *Interpretation* is a peculiar book and it was Powys's debut. It is, as the title states, an 'interpretation', and it is written as a dialogue between 'The Lawgiver of Israel' (Moses) and a character named Zetetes. Moses and Zetetes talk through the Book of Genesis, discussing the creation, the light and the dark, the role of nature, and of the fall and of women. We find phrases such as: 'In the days before Noah daughters were born that became natural women, women that were wise mothers, whose bodies of beauty led them not unto lust but unto Truth' (18). (Throughout the *Interpretation*, 'Truth' is the word used for God.) The word 'natural' here is a good thing, a position in contradiction to Clemo's. Further, right at the beginning of the book, emphasis is placed on the phrase 'It is good', which is repeated throughout the beginning of the Book of Genesis as God creates the world and admires it. Powys uses Moses and Zetetes to highlight the importance of this judgment: 'And what was good in the beginning is good even to the end. This is thy great word that should never have been doubted by man' (3).

Powys's poetic interpretation is rebellious and eccentric, criticising priests as deceitful 'ravens' (25), stating that Abraham was worshipping some sort of pagan god when he took his son to be sacrificed, and Powys appears to have left room for evolution in his creation story, stating that man was 'naked' and a 'beast' before 'Truth' came along (40). It is indeed a 'cloudy' book, as Clemo

said, and although the theology might not have had a lasting influence on Clemo, the subject matter, tone, mysticism and language do appear to have had an effect. 'The New Creation' is, then, a blend of post-Calvinist fallen nature theology and soteriology, Irene-inspired eroticism, the Francis Thompson ode form and a Powysian creation narrative. It is an unusual blend, but it produced at once two of Clemo's most recognisable poems.

In a BBC interview with Causley, Jack offers a further erotic influence on 'A Calvinist in Love', providing good insight into his method of working:

> I wrote it at the end of 1945, our evacuee girls had gone back to London six months before and I'd been wandering about the clay works every day, thinking of the happy times when I'd rambled around with the girls. […] Then one Sunday afternoon a local girl who'd been a friend of our evacuees and joined in our rambles and parties, called to get their address so that she could write to them. She only stayed a few minutes, but the young feminine atmosphere was back in the house again and during the next few days I knew a poem was on the way. I couldn't get it through into words – it seems the feminine influence wasn't quite strong enough. On the Saturday morning I was sitting at my desk, trying to get the poem started. As I looked out of the window I saw the milkmaid coming up the path. She was a pretty girl of 12. That extra bit of feminine beauty on my doorstep at that particular moment brought the poem through – it began to flow at once and within ½ hour it was finished. […] a lot of my poems are written

> almost automatically – I don’t give much conscious thought to them except in revision, and there isn’t usually much of that. (P43)

It is from *The Clay Verge* and from Clemo’s *Confession* that he got his reputation as a bleak, nature-hating Calvinist. He did not really hate nature, of course, nor was he especially Calvinistic, and it is peculiar that he was not often challenged on his theological self-identification. The formal anti-nature stance is a common nonconformist position.

The influence of Calvinism – or rather, post-Calvinism – is evident in the themes of election and predestination, but even there the perspective is Neo-Orthodox rather than Calvinist. Jack had struggled with Niebuhr’s *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, but it became an important influence and led him, in 1943, to the other celebrated Neo-Orthodox theologian Karl Barth. But ‘Calvinist’ was a much stronger and more attractive appellation to Clemo than ‘Neo-Calvinist’ or ‘Neo-Orthodox’. It was cleaner, more poetic, more radical. ‘Neo-Calvinist’ gave the sense of a broken theology, something tinkered with, manufactured. This desire to ally himself with the more radical statement – the more misfitting and rebellious – would prove a nuisance later in life, in the same way as his repeated emphases on his disabilities and hardships would prove a nuisance. These factors would obscure the critics’ reading of his work in the future.

In *The Clay Verge*, the world is fallen, as is man. It is not fallen and ‘ravaged’ by God’s will, but because of original sin. The claywork machine-monsters digging over the earth, destroying the natural world, are a metaphor for ‘tough truth attacking sentimental falsehood’, a response to ‘the pagan slop of nature poets’ (*MoaR* 26). Throughout *The Clay Verge*, Clemo makes it clear that he is attacking the ‘nature poets’ – the Romantics – particularly, it would

seem, Shelley and Wordsworth. He dismisses their landscape in ‘Neutral Ground’ when he states that God’s ‘Hand did not fashion the vistas / These poets admire’, and again in ‘The Excavator’ when ‘Nature’ tempts the narrator with the ‘doom of poetry’. If God is to be found, He will be here, in the pits, rejoicing in the destruction of sinful ‘Nature’. This is not, of course, a theological argument, and the metaphor should not be pressed too hard, but it certainly suggests several tensions: between God and ‘Nature’ itself; between God and ‘Nature’ in man; between man and ‘Nature’; and between man and himself. It naturally parallels Clemo’s own ‘broken boundaries’, his degenerative syphilis and the assault of his bodily nature, the sense being that for Jack to be ready for God’s work he first has to be chastened, purified ‘under the dripping clay with which I’m baptized’ (*CV* 30). Whether it is God or the Christian narrator destroying the earth, it remains an act of Christian revolution against the natural world.

In spite of this straining subject matter, the poems were composed with remarkable ease, and the themes and symbols came so easily to Clemo that he started to grow tired of them:

> Wrote another poem [‘The Plundered Fuchsia’], but feel this theme is worked out – it’s time I wrote about something else instead of always attacking flowers and resisting creation. I don’t know that I want any girl to share that mood, only it’s nature-lovers who’re always belittling dogma and I must get my own back somehow. (P77)

Later that year he noted: ‘Wrote a poem called “Sufficiency” – same old theme. I wish I could get beyond it’. The following year he is still being haunted by it: ‘Wrote another poem – “The stones cry out, but the flames die dumb” – good, but it’s always the same theme, my thought going round and round in a circle – Dogma vs Nature’ (P78). So easy and absorbing was his poetising that he believed his talent for writing novels had left him altogether, and in 1947 he wrote that he was ‘troubled by the way my talent has changed: it doesn’t see a novelist any longer’ (P77). Jack still wanted to write novels, but he was alert to the possibility that ‘the novel-writing phase of my witness may be over’ (P81).

Poetry had always been too easy for him to take it seriously. Clemo tried to contradict the poetic impulse and the ease of composition by suggesting there was a pattern to the inspiration and instilling a sense of the poetry coming from somewhere other than his desire. He wrote in *Confession*: ‘While I lived for poetry I wrote only doggerel; it was only after I turned my back upon poetry that I became a poet’ (222). There is no sense in the autobiography, or in the diaries, that there was ever a period of living ‘for poetry’ in his youth. His ambition was always to write stories and novels, from that earliest, ‘What about if I was to write stories like – like they ‘Ockings?’, through the correspondence with Meggy, the sentiments in the *Cornish Guardian*, numerous drafts and submissions, and into the 1940s, as he was planning his second trilogy. It is because of his ambitions as a novelist that the success of his poetry was unsettling, and for the rest of his life he would express regret that his novels were not published or paid the attention he felt they deserved, believing that his ‘best work as an artist was in [the] novels’ (P101). ‘If I’d been able to go on as a novelist,’ he wrote, ‘how different everything would have been’ (P89). In the BBC interview with Charles Causley, he went further:

> I have never thought of myself as a literary man at all in the professional sense. I'm just a free-lance witness to the transformation of life through Christian faith. I would have preferred to have continued as a novelist because in that way the challenge gets across to thousands who wouldn't dream of reading a theological book or collection of poems. My increasing handicaps forced me into the kind of writing which is least influential as far as the masses are concerned.

This adds a practical element to the desire to be a novelist: novels get a wider audience. The idea was echoed in 1976, when Clemo blamed the decline of interest in his work on his movement away from prose:

> When the word 'novelist' was replaced by 'poet' and then 'blind and deaf poet,' the public interest in me waned, and probably won't reach another peak level till more critical attention is given to my prose. (P48)

Not only was the inspiration for poetry flowing freely while the novelistic urge had withered, but when his sight worsened again in 1947, remaining in constant decline, Jack lost the ability to write long works. Poems he could write in his head, but a novel was too big to remember. After he turned completely white-blind, he had no option. If he was to write, he would have to write poetry. In this further way, disability was defining Clemo's literary legacy, as he continued to produce these striking, lively and alien, alienating and appealing verses.

Clemo may have begun to hate his poetry, but his friends believed that it was the poetry that would survive. Writing to the Devonshire literary man E. W. Martin, Derek Savage recalled talking to Jack's mother about his legacy:

> She asked me if I thought any of Jack's work would 'live', and I assured her emphatically that his work as a poet would ensure for him a permanent place in English literature, while his 'Confession' would remain as a unique document, both of human, and of regional significance. (M1)

Savage was at the centre of the Cornish literary scene, a poet and critic living in Mevagissey, friends with Causley, Miskin, Colin Wilson and Martin, as well as Clemo. Mrs Clemo told her son what Savage said, and it is worth comparing Savage's account with Jack's in his diary: 'D.S. Savage called – said my work is immortal. Yet there are times when I just want to forget it, it's so bound up with morbidity and tragedy. Mother feels I'm going too far now in belittling my own work' (P84).

In spite of such appreciation, *The Clay Verge* was a financial disaster, apparently only selling 180 copies in five years. Meanwhile, reviews were mixed. *The Scotsman*, *Time and Tide* and the local papers all reviewed it pleasantly, but *Poetry Quarterly*, the *TLS* and *The Spectator* gave it a horrible press. Writing for the latter, Ralph Abercrombie said: 'Mr Clemo's clogged and cumbrous verses […] are full of shop-worn tropes and faded poeticisms – an unpleasant mixture of clay and dead flowers' (P155). The review goes on to show just how far Abercrombie had missed the point, but he was not the only one. Anne Treneer praised Clemo's originality, defiance and force in the

Cornish Review, but regretted that he did not write more about ‘the singing of the larks’ (P155). Considering that Clemo had declared the theme of his poetry a ‘renunciation of the natural vision of the poet’ (*CoaR* 222), Treneer’s response is unfortunate. Worse still was the *Poetry Quarterly* review, which Clemo considered so bad that the copy he kept of it in his scrapbook was defaced to hide the worst passages.

Nevertheless, it is to *The Clay Verge* that readers, editors and critics most frequently return. Those poems are the most popular and anthologised of Clemo’s writing, appearing in collections such as Faber & Faber’s *Book of Landscape Poetry*, Bloodaxe’s *Poetry with an Edge*, Peter Redgrove’s *Cornwall in Verse*, Charles Causley’s *The Sun, Dancing*, Lions’ *Book of Christian Poetry* and D. M. Thomas’s *The Granite Kingdom*. In many ways, they represent the height of Clemo’s fame and longevity; they express the greatest intimacy with his native landscape and they are the harshest and most awkward of his poetic output. Being so forceful, uncompromising and unique, it is no wonder that these poems made an impression and established Clemo’s reputation.

At the same time, Clemo had found success with a second sequence of poems, ‘The Wintry Priesthood’, winning a prize in the Festival of Britain. The sequence was published by Penguin in *Poems 1951*, and would be republished alongside *The Clay Verge* in *The Map of Clay*, ten years later. ‘The Wintry Priesthood’ is comprised largely of biographical and tribute poems to Spurgeon, Lawrence, Kierkegaard, Barth and Powys, mostly written in February 1950 and owing much to the new enthusiasm he had discovered for Theodore Powys’s work. The recurrent ideas of the hermit ‘priest’ and God’s ‘moods’ are straight from Powys’s *Soliloquies of a Hermit*. These poems had already been rejected by Day Lewis for *The Clay Verge*, and Clemo had regretted their omission,

feeling ‘the seventeen poems that remained in the collection did not give a true or fair picture of me or my beliefs’ (*MoaR* 66). He wanted to ‘do a series of “Poems in Tribute”, entering into the hearts and minds of men who’ve influenced me’ (P80), and ‘The Wintry Priesthood’ was close to this intention. Biographical poems remain a preoccupation, a response to Jack’s habitual reading of lives and autobiographies. In these earliest poems they are as often tributes as admiringly hostile responses, but they will become more frequently the latter. As Rowan Williams wrote in his preface to the 2015 *Selected Poems*, Clemo sought ‘to find in his interlocutors the question to which his poetry and his experience are in some sense an answer’ (6).

The Clay Verge marks the end of Cecil Day Lewis’s personal influence over Jack’s work, although Clemo would continue to follow his career. He began to read Day Lewis’s poetry more seriously and objectively in 1970, writing in his diary: ‘it’s great art, with a wide range and deep feeling. I wonder what he thinks of my later work’ (P100). Within two days of this entry, Clemo had written ‘Smoke’, ‘using Day-Lewis verse form’. The poem was actually written ‘to’ the Irish playwright Sean O’Casey, a collection of whose work Clemo had enjoyed reading in Braille that year:

> At length someone unlatched the window;
> I would creep out coughing, my eyes in pain,
> Stand beside the gooseberry tangle,
>   Welcome the night wind’s keen
> Capers and watch the smoke-clouds fumble slowly
>   Into frost or rain. (*ET* 34)

This is the form Clemo would associate with Day Lewis, and he would use it again when he wrote the dedicative poem ‘On the Burial of a Poet Laureate’ in 1972:

Laureate, your heart rests, after a rainy Whitsun,
    Close to grave Hardy's heart which bore
Much the same toils: warrant of Western sunset,
The church towers fading, the unransomed moor
Thrusting the outcasts, stoic or Promethean,
    To sea's verge and poet's core. (*BA* 56)

Almost certainly, Clemo found this rhyme structure in Day Lewis's 'Emily Brontë' monologue, in *Poems 1943-1947*, which began:

All is the same still. Earth and heaven locked in
A wrestling dream the seasons cannot break:
Shrill the wind tormenting my obdurate thorn trees,
Moss-rose and stone-chat silent in its wake.
Time has not altered here the rhythms I was rocked in,
Creation's throb and ache. (387)

The connection between Brontë, Hardy and Day Lewis is striking. Clemo had thought of Day Lewis as one of the rare, good sorts of humanists and agnostics, placing him with Hardy, a man he thought sympathetic to faith and yearning for it. Similarly, Clemo perceived an unfulfilled religious temperament in Emily Brontë. Earlier, in *Confession of a Rebel*, he seemed to dismiss her with, 'Nor was I much interested in vague agnostic mysticism like Emily Brontë's' (126), but Clemo returned over and over again to the Brontë sisters, with notable mentions of Emily in *The Echoing Tip*'s 'The Islets', which was dedicated to her, and in *Approach to Murano*'s 'Emily Brontë'.

Cecil Day Lewis, however, fell from grace following the biography written by his eldest son Sean in 1986, *Cecil Day-Lewis: An English Literary Life*. Clemo had already read Cecil Day Lewis's autobiography, *The Buried Day*, in 1964, but when he read Sean Day Lewis's biography his feelings changed: 'Troubled by the notorious […] life of Day-Lewis. It's ironic that such a godless man would be used to open the door for my work in 1946. But he soon dropped me in

favour of Causley' (P116). In a letter to Michael Spinks, he added: 'I had no idea he was such a lecherous and treacherous man' (Spinks correspondence).

The Clay Verge was the last of the three titles contracted by Chatto & Windus. A powerful but imperfect first novel, a striking autobiography, and a volume of some of the most unusual poetry, as well as freedom from the burden of extreme poverty, were Day Lewis's pivotally important legacy in Clemo's career, which, it is fair to say, was established and defined by the editor and poet. Had the volume of poetry come out in its entirety, it would have been a disaster; had *Wilding Graft* gone to print in its first draft, the reviews would almost certainly have been less favourable. Had *Confession* been released as submitted, Clemo might have found himself in court.

Happily for Clemo, the second great literary relationship of his life began at the same time as Cecil Day Lewis's influence ended. Charles Causley's poetic debut, *Farewell Aggie Weston*, was published the same year as Clemo's *The Clay Verge*. The coincidence prompted Causley to write to his fellow Cornishman on 19 October 1951, in the light-hearted and politiely deferential manner typical of Causley:

> I simply tell you the truth when I say that in your books Cornwall wriggles and comes alive. That […] you are obviously a writer of genius: and a tremendous inspiration to writers such as myself – merely pecking away at the barbed wire around the goldmine. […] Your books blow the bogus Cornwall of Quiller-Couch, dear Miss Du Maurier and Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all […] a million miles higher than Stonehenge. I hope you go on blowing 'em; strength to your guns. (P16)

It was through Charles Causley and their mutual friend Colin MacInnes that *The Clay Verge* was given a second outing, in the definitive 1961 collection *The Map of Clay*. This volume placed *The Clay Verge* alongside two further sequences of Clemo's poetry: his Festival of Britain prize-winning entry, 'The Wintry Priesthood', and a new sequence, 'Frontier Signals'. As a discrete collection, 'Frontier Signals' had been rejected through 1958 and 1959, before Colin MacInnes recommended it to Methuen: 'I shall not let go my teeth from the publishers' backsides until they do themselves the honour of presenting you', he told Clemo (P2). Methuen rejected the idea of 'Frontier Signals' being published as a separate volume, but then Derek Savage, MacInnes and Causley submitted it again with a grander proposal: a collected edition of all three sequences. Clemo was sceptical about the idea:

> The difficulty about a collected edition is that the constant repetition of the same ideas and clay work images through 40 poems would be tedious, and there is no clear development. At the end of 'The Wintry Priesthood' I repudiate Cornish symbols, only to go back to them again in 'Frontier Signals' and repudiate them again in the Dorset poem. There are mature love poems in 'The Clay Verge', but 'Frontier Signals' shows me still moving towards love as a goal not yet attained. The three series don't make sense if read consecutively. (C6)

The enthusiasm of his friends finally proved irresistible, as did their influence. Methuen agreed to the proposal right away, with the condition of Causley's further involvement.

It was an important friendship for Clemo's life and literary development, Causley introducing Clemo to the media – to radio and television – and encouraging interviews and readings of Clemo's work. Before Causley, Clemo had rejected the idea of giving interviews on the radio, afraid that he would sound unattractive or ridiculous because of his disabilities (P81). Clemo felt that his disabilities had dominated reviews and discussions of his work, and now he only wanted to project the positive aspects of his faith and life. He pursued that thought in an interview with Causley from 1961, admitting to having 'depressing experiences', but explaining that he no longer submitted to them:

> I don't surrender to depressing experiences, I don't regard them as authentic. A poet is vitalized by the things he surrenders to. In my youth I let myself be inspired through misery and resentment, but for a dozen years now I've drawn all my inspiration from happiness. I can't stand this mood of pessimism in modern literature and I'm determined not to make any contribution to it. (P43, P76)

Clemo's new ease with the media eventually led to a film being made about his early life, shot in 1979 by Norman Stone (the man who first made the C. S. Lewis biopic *Shadowlands*), and aired on Easter weekend 1980. It also led to the Christian censor and 'moral crusader' Mary Whitehouse visiting the Clemo cottage in 1972. When Whitehouse visited Goonamarris, Clemo said she was

'very enthusiastic about my blend of Christian values and art', expressing her admiration and suggesting that Malcolm Muggeridge would enjoy *The Invading Gospel* (C7).

Causley's influence was crucial to *The Map of Clay* and to Clemo's career. Not only was the book rejected before Causley became involved, but Causley also altered the order of the poems, to which Clemo objected (C6). The publishers, however, preferred Causley's suggestions and Clemo was overruled. Similarly, Clemo submitted a preface for the volume (P87), but in the end Methuen asked Causley to introduce the book. Lastly, when it came to choosing a title, Clemo suggested 'Selected Poems' or 'Clayland Poems' (C6, P190), but the publishers ignored his ideas in favour of a line from one of Causley's verses, 'Homage to Jack Clemo', published in *Survivor's Leave* in 1953:

> In the deep wood dwells a demon
>   Taller than any tree –
> His prison bars are the sailing stars,
>   His jailer is the sea.
>
> With a brain and ten fingers
>   He ties Cornwall to his table –
> Imagination, at battle station,
>   Guards Pegasus in his stable.
>
> He walks the white hills of Egypt
>   Reading the map of clay –
> And through his night there moves the light
>   Artillery of day.
>
> Turn, Cornwall, turn and tear him!
>   Stamp him in the sod!
> He will not fear your cry so clear –
>   Only the cry of God. (*Collected* 37)

The influence did not end there. Later in Clemo's career, he felt that Causley was attracting more attention, and we see Clemo playing with some of

Causley's ideas in an attempt to write in a more popular fashion. Only months after Causley published 'Helpston', a poem about John Clare, Clemo too wrote a poem entitled 'Helpston' about John Clare (P102). In 1962, Causley was included in the *Penguin Modern Poets* series, to which Clemo responded in his diary: 'I've been excluded from the series and feel disheartened' (P92). In 1964, when Clemo was invited to contribute, he complained to Penguin that Causley had been allowed more space. Richard Newnham from Penguin wrote to pacify Clemo, explaining that his submission actually exceeded Causley's. Yes, Causley had been allowed more poems, but Clemo's were considerably longer. 'There will, of course, be no question of a reduction in the advance', wrote Newnham. 'It is as nice to have you there with 20 poems as with 25' (P5). The Penguin series was extraordinarily popular, and Clemo's volume sold ten thousand in the first year alone.

Further, in 1969, Clemo can be found experimenting with the ballad form he associated with Causley. Clemo's 'School of Clay' was written for a local exhibition brochure, *Kernow 70*, but it was revisited five years later, in 1974, and published as 'The Harassed Preacher' in Clemo's collection *Broad Autumn* (P104). The two versions appear side by side here for comparison:

School of Clay (May 1969)

Now summer has come to the clay lands,
The dunes gleam white in the sun,
And over the slag and the outcast crag
A tangle of green is spun.

Bushes have burst into blossom,
Flicked by the dancing sand;
There are milk white brooks in the valley nooks
And larks in a lunar land.

The Harassed Preacher (1974)

Now that summer has brimmed on the uplands
White mine-crusts seed in the sun,
And around each pit and its outcast grit
A gabble of green is spun.
Soon silenced by bomb and gun.

Bushes have bragged into blossom,
Flicked by the teasing sand;
Milk-wan streams vein the valley's dreams;
Larks lilt where the tip-beams stand.
Faith's dream and song are banned.

Our forefathers dug in the field here,
Built us a house of God,
So His truth might spread from the big clay bed
Deep in the spirit's sod.

A hundred summers have ripened
Around these village lanes
Since that hungry gang of children sang
Inside our window panes.

The seats were clumsy benches;
No piano struck the tunes;
The bare bleak room held a stuffy gloom
Even in those boiling Junes.

But grains from the Holy Scriptures
Were flicked by the winds of prayer;
In our sheltered nook these children took
New shape in Christian air.

Midsummer is the season
When the clay shines white on the hill;
Our tools advance, but we catch the glance
Of that shining Potter still. (P156)

Our forefathers dug in the field here,
Built us a preaching place,
So that truth might spread from the ringing bed
Ruled by the Galilee base.
Too distant now – no trace.

A hundred summers have panted
Along our zigzag lanes
Since the first raw crowd of converts bowed
Inside these window panes.
But the analyst explains. . . .

The seats were rough bare benches;
No organ spun a tune;
The squeaky hymns and unwashed limbs
Made a meagre mock of June.
The new age mocks the boon.

Grains from the towering scriptures
Were flicked by the winds of prayer:
In our grit-ringed nook those drab lives took
Fresh shape in Wesley's air.
Now shapeless atoms wear. . . .

We toil in a fevered season;
Soul-crusts lie hard on the hill.
Do our tools ring true? Don't we signal through
To a ruling Potter still?
Our super-egos spill. . . .

A plague on the heckling voices
That would check my sermon's flight!
It's eleven o'clock and here's my flock –
Five villagers, old and bright,
Knowing their faith is right. (*BA* 30-1)

The earlier version is a straightforward ballad, a simple, rousing, sing-song summery hymn. But when Clemo returned to it in 1974, the tone changed, becoming bleaker, and the heaps of alliteration and lengthening of vowels slowed the pace, making it more awkward to read out. The most obvious change Clemo made was the additional italicized line – the 'heckling voices' – at the end of each stanza. This is the voice of modernity, threatening the buoyant ballad. It seems a very simple idea, but it deepens the piece, dramatizes it and allows for the final stanza's triumph, where the form is reclaimed and the italics

abandoned. Effectively, the innocent chapel setting of the original ballad is spoiled in 1974 by the creeping materialism of the 'new age', which is then, in the added stanza, silenced by the approach of the resolutely faithful few. Clemo was unable to submit fully to the facility of the traditional ballad.

With the support of Causley, *The Map of Clay* sold extremely well and Clemo became better known than ever before, although it was *The Clay Verge* poems that the reviewers liked best. Walter Allen at *The New Statesman* summarised the critics' feelings:

> At his best – and he is at his best, I think, in his early poems, the poems of *The Clay Verge* – he has rendered an industrial landscape more completely and more successfully than any English poet except possibly Auden, and rendered it as the compelling image of his own bleak creed. In these early poems, where the quarrel is still with himself, the language is taut, strong and naked. His recent verse, written as it were from settled conviction, is disappointing. The quarrel is now with others and the verse has become rhetoric. (P155)

It was *The Clay Verge* that launched Clemo's poetic career and it has sustained his reputation to a large degree. Yet, at the same time, by 1951 the opposite force of Jack's narrative was gathering momentum. His syphilis progressed. As his literary status ascended, his body fell into decline, and increasingly reviews of his writing included references to his disabilities, a fact Clemo deeply resented. Causley had observed in his introduction to *The Map of Clay* that 'Clemo has a livid and lively horror of being regarded, because of his physical

handicaps, as some kind of literary freak or as a pathetic wreck of a man deserving only pity' (10). Clemo's own responses in his diaries reflect this assertion. Even when a review was positive, he would comment: 'it's all tribute to the blind-and-deaf wreck and his devoted mother'. Or: 'Sunday Times photographer here all afternoon […] more publicity for the lonely wreck and his mother' and 'dragging in handicaps and poverty again' (P92).

Contrarily, the beginning of this final syphilitic decline declared itself just as Chatto & Windus were preparing *Wilding Graft*, Clemo's first book, for publication.

X

‘I have kept the faith’

> And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.
>
> Matthew 9:28-9

It must not be forgotten that Clemo considered his poetic success inextricably bound to his health. Celebrity, healing and marriage were three threads of the same rope connecting Clemo to God. Celebrity came with the publication of those three first volumes, *Wilding Graft*, *Confession of a Rebel* and *The Clay Verge*, but marriage and healing did not. Indeed, by this time, Clemo had suffered more romantic knockbacks than ever before, and his physical condition was swiftly worsening.

It was in 1947 that Clemo’s eyes suffered their most serious attack, and by March he was unable to read. Eveline visited the doctor and was told to take Jack to Truro, where the specialist might prescribe penicillin, the newly available wonder-drug for syphilis that ‘might act as a stimulant to my mind and possibly help my hearing’ (P77). The applications of penicillin were not known until Alexander Fleming’s discoveries in 1928, and it was not until 1943 that it was applied successfully to syphilis (Hayden 11). Nerve damage caused the loss in eyesight, which is why Jack spoke in terms of the need for his brain or mind to be stimulated.

After collecting the penicillin from Truro, the Clemos went to St Austell Hospital where, on 3 April, Jack was admitted for the nurses to administer an intensive and painful ten-day course of injections, with doctors monitoring his response. Jack was optimistic about the penicillin: 'I've got real faith in that stuff' (P77). His diary for this period is full again, describing the nuisance and the pain of administration, with injections sometimes twice a day, and he expresses his angry disappointment that Brenda did not come to see him. Still, after a few days of adjustment, Jack starts to enjoy himself:

> Getting used to it and enjoying […] fun with the nurses and especially the nursemaid who cleans my room and brings meals – a dark, solid girl who tells mother I'm 'such a good boy'. I lie very politely hour after hour and they all say I'm marvellous. (P77)

He had never received attention quite like this, and he found the constant interaction stimulating. Before long he was asking his mother to bring in the copy of *Orion* with his poem to show everyone. There was, he notes, 'a handyman' particularly impressed, who came in to ask whether this was *the* Jack Clemo. During these days he deeply regretted his inability to communicate directly, believing that if he had been able to speak he would have found a girlfriend among the nurses (P77).

Between these moments of amusement, Clemo felt an unexpected depletion of joy. It was a sensation he would remark on during every hospital stay, including the last one, soon before his death in 1994. Everything felt 'so empty', he wrote in 1947, adding later that he could not feel God's presence 'at all vividly only the dull prayer "Lord help me" in my heart while the injections

were actually going into my hip' (P77). The impressive implication is that usually Jack *could* feel God's presence.

He left the hospital on 12 April: 'Well, it's over – the last injection at 2:30 and then home at 3 – not much better than when I left but they say when the penicillin begins to work through I shall get better every day and in a few months the full effects will be felt' (P77). Clemo's syphilis was cured, but the nerve damage could not be reversed and his eyesight would never recover. Aside from a short reprieve following hospitalization, Clemo's sight would be in constant decline.

As the world disappeared, Clemo read Aldous Huxley's *The Art of Seeing*. Huxley had suffered with his eyesight since he was a teenager and he had written of a method of making reading possible for a little longer, which Clemo adopted. In a piece of black card a slit was cut, large enough for a single line of text to be seen. This was placed over the text, apparently assisting the partially sighted to focus and reducing the glare of the white page. Although Jack would say that he did not go blind until 1955, his diaries give a better sense of the deterioration. In 1948 he says he is 'semi-blind', likening his condition to that of James Joyce (P78). The world moved vaguely about him, behind a thick kaolin-white opacity. By 1952, Clemo was writing that he was unable to work on his old manuscripts: 'my sight isn't quite good enough – mother trying to type and messing it' (P82). In 1950, Clemo described himself as fully blind for short periods, then 'nearly blind' for all of 1951 and 1952. Year after year his eyesight would decline in waves. Clemo described a wave of deterioration that announced itself only a few days after publication of 'The Wintry Priesthood' in 1951, with 'a swirl of red sparks that left the sight clouded for a minute or two'

(*MoaR* 70). By 1954, Clemo was describing himself as ‘a blind deaf wreck’ (P84).

The difference between Clemo’s ‘blind’ and ‘nearly blind’ was not great. It was a white-blindness, a cloud that thickened, sunlight colouring it with a little brown or yellow. In strong sunlight in the early 1950s, he was able to read, very slowly, with his piece of black card covering the page. But reading in bright sunlight had its drawbacks, for while strong light was needed for Jack to see the print, it also caused inflammation and discomfort. He wrote to Charles Causley in 1953: ‘It often takes me days to read a letter, as I have to pick out a few words at a time with long rests between’ (C2). Soon, Jack’s mother had ceased passing notes to communicate with him and had begun writing words out on the palm of his hand with her index finger in capital letters. From the 1950s until the end of his life, this was the only way of ‘talking’ to Jack.

One of the most useful portraits of Clemo at this period comes from a personal letter sent from Derek Savage to E.W. Martin in 1954. Martin was showing interest in Clemo, and Savage had been described by a mutual friend as one of the only people to understand him. Derek and Jack would remain close friends as long as they lived:

> Jack himself is not in a condition to conduct a conversation; but he shook hands with me on my arrival, sat in silence during the hour and a half during which I talked to his mother; and when I left, shook hands again and said, in a soft mild voice: ‘Thank you for coming.’ Jack’s appearance is not unpleasing – his expression is calm, almost serene, and he was neatly dressed; but he is almost totally blind and deaf and can communicate only with his mother.

> He can read, in a strong light, just a word at a time, very slowly; but cannot read books, nor write. His heart is very weak, the doctor can hold out no hopes for him – says his ‘system is worn out’. He apparently told his mother that he feels as if he were slowly atrophying through lack of stimulus and impressions. He looks twice his real age, is quite grey-haired, and his head is bent down on his breast. He sat with his back half-turned to us, at a little bureau in the corner of the tiny room, and ate his tea separately. I felt an intense sympathy for him, which I tried ineffectually to convey in my handshake. His mother, a sensible sort of woman, is very much the ordinary village housewife, with a strong religious streak, but I would say without ‘spirituality’: that is, not an enlightened person. It is, I feel, somewhat the same with Jack. […] To put it very briefly, I could see that they had staked everything on a wrong definition of Faith, which was related to a wrong understanding of God. I say this very humbly, but I am convinced that it is the case. (M1)

Savage wrote a similar account to Causley, apparently to ascertain how much financial support the Clemos might need, as they prepared the latest application for a Civil List Pension. To the above account is added:

> He cannot write; and this frustrates him, for he feels that people are expecting further work from him, and wants to write a book of his religious and philosophical ideas. Besides this, the doctor says

> that physically he is worn-out. His heart is damaged, and while he may hang on for a few more years of life, it may fail at any time.
>
> I asked Mrs Clemo, a stout, grey-haired woman of sixty, whether this meant that, medically speaking, her expectation of life was greater than Jack's, and she said that she thought this was so. (C8)

The weakness of Jack's heart is an understated symptom, but Savage is right, and as Clemo himself noted in *Marriage*, 'doctors feared that I had not long to live' (83).

As Jack's health deteriorated, his desire for a miracle increased. Welfare officers encouraged him to learn Braille, and he refused. 'I must practise what I preach', he wrote in his 1952 diary (P82). He wrote to Causley: 'The Braille instructress, Miss Williams, tells us she has had a talk with you about me. These people are very kind, but I feel the normal methods don't fit the general pattern of my life' (EC2). In an uncollected poem, 'Words to the Blind', from 1960, he wrote:

> Why should I track my way
> To men's minds through clotted Braille
> Bold gooseflesh on the corpse of words?
> My song is the clear-eyed bird's
> As I blaze a trail
> Where earth lies normal in the blithe day. (P90)

Clemo felt he must wait to be healed. It would be a sign of faithless submission to his disabilities if he were to learn Braille, as though he did not believe God was going to perform the miracle. Instead, he would wait and pray.

Encouraged by Helena Charles, the Clemos began to visit faith healers and to coordinate prayer groups across the country so that they would all pray for

Jack at the same time, their prayers together presumably more likely to catch God's attention. At a specified time, Jack would kneel in the cottage with his mother, her hand placed on his head, focussing the prayers of the distant groups. Clergy of all denominations tried to help, and the Clemos travelled to various vicars, pastors and priests for 'healing services' and 'laying on of hands'. The result was the same, wherever they went: 'The Mission people in London have been praying for my healing today; yet I am not healed' (P80).

The most spectacular attempt Helena made to facilitate Jack's healing was when she paid and arranged for him and his mother to visit the celebrated blind healer Godfrey Mowatt in London. Mowatt was an Anglican who had lost his sight after stabbing himself in the eye with a knife in childhood (Lonsdale 7-8). He, too, had spent time as a boy sitting in darkened rooms with bandages over his eyes and, like Clemo, Mowatt paid considerable attention to meaningful patterns and 'coincidences'. He was constantly flooded with letters for help, and clearly Jack's case was one he thought worth attending. Clemo recorded this meeting of 17 October 1951 in his diary:

> Mowatt was awaiting us at St Anne's House, Dean St., and mother [?talked?] with him while I drank some tea to brace myself. She told him about June and he confirmed our belief that it was God's work. Then we went through the […] church to the little chapel and I knelt before the altar, broken and crying […] while M[owatt]. prayed. The laying on of hands steadied me, the sense of panic and darkness passed, and though still blind and unable to sleep much I had a comfortable night, knowing we couldn't have come across England in vain. (P81)

The memory is developed in *Marriage*:

> I closed my eyes and waited, unable to hear the blind man move up behind me. His assistant guided him, and suddenly his big bony hands grasped my head and began to vibrate. […] An absurd spasm of guilt and remorse gripped me, due largely to physical exhaustion and the emotional upheaval of the past few weeks. […] The blind man was wasting his time, fastening his fingers around my skull, pressing, attempting to transmit. . . . I started to cry, the tears splashing down on my sleeves, my slumped body convulsed with sobs. (73).

The 'guilt and remorse' and the 'emotional upheaval' were the result of a relationship with a woman named June Trethewey – 'T.' in *The Marriage of a Rebel* – which failed just before Clemo was due to visit Mowatt. June was from Stepaside, down the road from the Clemo cottage, and she became interested in Clemo's writing when she was a student at Exeter. Eveline Clemo persuaded June to come and meet Jack, and the strangeness of the situation convinced June that there was a 'connection' between them. She was invited to return, and when she did:

> Mrs Clemo was waiting for me and took me into the kitchen. She started to say at once that she believed that Jack and I were destined by God for each other. She believed that God had sent me to them and that if I were to marry Jack he would be

miraculously healed of his sight and hearing problems. (Morcom correspondence)

As June recalls, Mrs Clemo left the cottage for the evening service at Trethosa Chapel, where ‘she announced to my astounded parents and an equally astonished congregation that Jack and June were engaged to be married’ (Morcom). June’s parents stormed over to the house, forbade the relationship and took June away. This caused many months of emotional turmoil for Clemo.

In 1952, the Clemos were driven to Dorset by Jack’s correspondent and friend, the writer Monica Hutchings. They stayed at her farm and were taken on to Malvern, where the American Baptist, Pastor Brown, was to appear. After the service, Jack was given a private audience. Brown held his wrists, told him that ‘a strong healing current was flowing into me’ (*MoaR* 78), and said ‘Give back sight to these eyes and hearing to these ears. That your servant may be set at liberty to do your will’ (P82). The process was moving and Jack had faith in Brown. He told the pastor, ‘I believe it will cure me’. ‘Well done’, replied Pastor Brown. ‘Keep believing and be patient’ (P82). Sometimes, Clemo was so confident in a healer that he would perceive signs of improvement. According to *The Marriage of a Rebel*, a few days after the Malvern meeting he felt a change. In the evenings after dark, he could now go outside and look up towards the tips and see ‘the white flare of the arc-lamps more clearly than I had done for months’ (78). But this sense of progress with his healing was humiliatingly short-lived. In exactly the same way as Clemo had announced the arrival of Eileen in *Confession of a Rebel* moments before she told him not to write anymore, so he announced the apparent improvements in his health to friends and local newspapers, and each proclamation was followed by failure. Still, he

would write, ‘I know physical healing is coming’ (P81), or, ‘I dedicate to God the restored sight and hearing which I shall receive this year’ (P82).

In 1954 the Clemos wrote to the famous American preacher and self-publicist Oral Roberts. In the mid-1950s Roberts was already filming his healing professionally and had written an autobiography. He would hit the headlines later in life with sensational claims that he had raised the dead, and again as the extravagance of his jewellery and several homes in Beverly Hills and Palm Springs became known. Roberts features more prominently in the earlier drafts of *The Invading Gospel* than he would in the later, as Clemo came to doubt the healer on account of his emphatic appeals he made for more and more money. The method of Roberts came to be called ‘prosperity gospel’, although in *The Invading Gospel*, Clemo described Roberts alongside Billy Graham as one of ‘the two most obviously elect men of my generation’ (158). The letter the Clemos received from Roberts in reply to their enquiry was exciting. ‘I pray definitely that this request will be granted completely’, Roberts wrote, in a characteristically dynamic and slightly awkward idiom. The request was not granted.

All the while, Jack, his mother and their friends were cutting out articles and adverts in the national press, both Christian and secular, with stories of the blind suddenly becoming able to see, the crippled throwing away their walking sticks, mental disorders soothed, cancers, tuberculosis, asthma – all healed. Why not Jack too? Jack believed in miracles and healing, and he was sure that God intended him to recover his senses. What was he doing wrong?

In 1952 he visited a Roman Catholic healer, Father Guy Barnicoat, who lived in the St Agnes vicarage. He met Clemo many times for healing, although he also hoped to convert Jack to Catholicism. In a letter Clemo kept, Barnicoat

wrote: 'All I want is to make sure that there is nothing in the way of worry or sins known which might hinder the Grace of God working in you. After all, one must assist the healing by showing trust and faith in God, and endeavour to live according to His will' (P82). If Jack was to confess, Father Barnicoat argued, the process would be more likely to succeed. Clemo acquiesced, an elaborate anointment was arranged, and again nothing happened. Jack enjoyed these meetings and this new sense of connection with the Catholic Church, but they were ultimately another disappointment. Week after week, month after month, prayer after prayer, service after service, the requests all failed. Whatever pattern Jack observed, whatever church he attended, and whatever appeal or offer he made to God, the response was always the same: silence.

By 1955, it should have been clear to Clemo that his literary reputation and physical condition were following opposite courses. As his fame rose, so his body declined.

The future would hold a similar dynamic. Clemo married in 1968 under strange circumstances (Thompson, 'The Happy Chance'), but the couple did not settle quickly or easily into married life. At Clemo's wedding, Charles Causley was the Best Man, even writing a poem about the day, suggesting his own concerns about his friend's marriage. It was a poem Causley never satisfactorily finished or published, and it may be read in Appendix II. Causley's concerns were for the effect marriage would have on Clemo's poetry, but the newlyweds had more practical and immediate problems. Ruth, Jack's bride, did not like Cornwall or the clay country and she found Eveline Clemo a hard taskmaster about the house. Neither of them was 'exactly fulfilled', Jack wrote in 1969, and his boredom with life during this period is a frequent refrain. He feels 'dead', and the time 'drags'; he is 'still stagnant' and 'still tested' (P99). It was not until

Eveline Clemo died, in 1977, that the couple were really able to settle. One of the reasons was that Eveline's death proved to him that Ruth was not going to leave: 'Thankful to know absolutely that R. loves me and our marriage is secure' (P107).

Here again, in 1977, we observe those opposing trajectories. As Clemo's marriage settled into a simpler, less conflicted domesticity, the poetry begins to decline. This was also when Clemo gave up on the idea of healing and resigned himself to the permanence of his disabilities. After years of hope and failure, he ceased pursuing and attending healers. The final blow appears to have been the failure of the celebrated Trevor Dearing's sensationally reported services. In a 1976 Newquay service so many people were collapsing in trances that before Ruth allowed Jack to go in, she took off all of his breakables – like his Braille watch – preparing him for a salubrious fall (P106).

Throughout Clemo's life, contrary to his 'philosophy of experience', contrary to the 'inspired' narratives of his published books, contrary to his basic faith and to 'God's promise', as one of the three essential aspects of his system of belief approached fulfilment, another departed. The most poignant and desperate instance was the final failure of Jack's eyesight in the 1950s. Raised up out of poverty at last, reviewed in the best national and international English language newspapers, appearing on radio and television, at the start of a career in poetry that would see him catapulted from clay-clagged obscurity into the hands and minds of poets, academics, preachers, noblemen, and even a Prime Minister (Harold Wilson's wife was a fan, her favourite poem said to be 'Crab Country' from *Cactus on Carmel* (P30)) – it was at that moment, on the cusp of fame and celebrity, that Clemo lost his eyesight.

And, as ever, instead of doubting or cursing God, and in place of adapting his faith or philosophy, on the event of his descent into blindness and deafness, Clemo contrarily started work on his most emphatically evangelical testimonial, his ‘Christian manifesto’ (*IG* 5), *The Invading Gospel*. It is a spiritually jubilant work, and Clemo considered it his contribution to the ‘hot gospel’ triumphs of conversion happening throughout England at the time, led by Billy Graham’s 1954 twelve-week ‘Crusade’, when Graham preached to around two million people. The joyous energy of Graham’s mission incited Clemo to write, and within a few months the first draft of *The Invading Gospel* was ready. As his spirits were at their lowest ebb, he felt the greatest need to state his faith in praise. Whenever the flames and the ashes seemed to build, the ‘clay phoenix’ could be found preparing for flight. At his funeral, in 1994, perhaps nothing could have been more appropriate than his chosen reading, from 2 Timothy 4.7: ‘I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.’

The root of Clemo’s story is this contrary narrative: the progress of his syphilis – ‘Nature’s stain’ (*CV* 26), his ‘leprous scars’ (*CoC* 16), the ‘shameful token’ (P195) of his ‘ancestral vomits’ (*MoC* 60), the ‘battle on the river’s edge’ (*CoC* 17) – and his response to it. His response was not only to praise God, but to do it publicly, confessionally, in his poetry and prose, to recite his personal covenant with God that this collapsing fleshly edifice, razed to dust, will reveal those ‘windows of agates’ and ‘gates of carbuncles’, the ‘borders of pleasant stones’ and the great peace of that Isaian promise. The poetry, autobiographies, novels and short stories were statements of faith, repetitive prayers voiced defiantly against the natural, mechanical progress of his body.

The story of Jack Clemo is driven by the antagonism of a sexually transmitted disease. As a child, this defined him by the gossip of the villagers, his isolation and sickliness, his lack of education, his surliness and embracing of outsiderism. Jack courted controversy, dressing in a slovenly way, speaking in an exaggerated dialect, attacking elderly reverends and war veterans in the newspapers, and developing a philosophy of personal experience and of God's election which not only formally secured him from the condemnation of others, but allied Jack to a greater power – to God and to Christ. They had singled the boy out for a higher calling, as one of the elect, and Jack's path to God was to be the way of sex. It was sex that defined his disease and degeneration, and sex at his very core would have to be cleansed. In his books, Clemo never fully explains why sex was his determined path, but the replacement of the syphilitic narrative into his life story – a narrative omitted from the published material – shows the urgency and the depth of his approach. If Clemo is to be cleansed in preparation for God, then it is the sin and the sex at the centre of his being that has to be submitted. This is why Christian marriage, healing and literary success were at the heart of Clemo's faith and God's promise. Healing and marriage were the salvation of sex, and Clemo's literary talent – his 'genius' – was given by God. As a gift from God, Clemo devoted his writing to praising Him, submitting himself wholly, he believed – his sex, his genius, his life. This was the picture defined by Clemo's apophenic impulse, his observation of the patterns in his life. The promise was that the vile mortal clay of his body would be purified, the crude raw stuff triumphantly cured like the kaolin into a strong, fine and beautiful form – a porcelain figure, or blank page. In his later books, Clemo continued this metaphor of purification, but found it then in the clear glass of Murano or in the purified waters of the River Arno.

In 1955, Clemo's biography presents the key problem in his life as well as a conclusion. His literary reputation is in ascendance, while his physical condition traces a precisely opposite trajectory. In spite of the statements of the later poetry, in which Clemo assumes a purified, purged pose, God's promise was never kept. Clemo would never have the large audience (or congregation) of a popular novelist and he would never be healed. Even his marriage, unlikely and miraculous though he claimed it to be, appears to have been less impressive than the Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning template – the Browning Pattern – had suggested. It lacked the 'dazzling splendour' (P99) of the Browning affair, and there followed no exciting, vibrant Browningesque honeymoon, but only a dreary anti-climax. The comparison with the Brownings' relationship troubled Jack. How could this tedium be considered in any way similar to the Browning marriage? 'There's been no drama, no flight to a foreign country, no epoch-making sensation' (P99). Marriage was not what Clemo expected. It was not what God promised. It was not liberating, healing, ecstatic or mystical.

The delicate protective mesh of Clemo's apophenia frayed and fell apart. God did not keep His promises, but Clemo kept his faith. He kept it, like so much else in his life, in spite of the odds and because of the odds, and instead of concentrating on the fall and the failure, the Clay Phoenix focussed on his ascent.

Appendix I

The Excavator
(written 1946, published *The Clay Verge*, 1951)

I stand here musing in the rain
This Sabbath evening where the pit-head stain
Of bushes is uprooted, strewn
In waggon-tracks and puddles,
While the fleering downpour fuddles
The few raw flowers along the mouldering dump –
Ridge hollowed and rough-hewn
By the daily grind and thump
Of this grim excavator. It shields me
From lateral rain-gusts, its square body turned
To storm-lashed precipices it has churned.

I feel exultantly
The drip of clayey water from the poised
Still bar above me; thrilling with the rite
Of baptism all my own,
Acknowledging the might
Of God's great arm alone;
Needing no ritual voiced
In speech or earthly idiom to draw
My soul to his new law.

The bars now hinged o'erhead and drooping form
A Cross that lacks the symmetry
Of those in churches, but is more
Like His Whose stooping tore
The vitals from our world's foul secrecy.
This too has power to worm
The entrails from a flint, bearing the scoop
With every searching swoop:
That broken-mouthed gargoyle
Whose iron jaws bite the soil,
Snapping with sadist kisses in the soft
White breasts of rocks, and ripping the sleek belly
Of sprawling clay-mounds, lifting as pounded jelly
Flower-roots and bush-tufts with the reeking sand.
I fondle and understand
In lonely worship this malicious tool.

Yes, this is Christian art
To me men could not school
With delicate aesthetes. Their symbols oft
Tempt simple souls like me
Whom nature meant to seal
With doom of poetry,
And dowered with eye and brain
Sensitive to the stain

Of beauty and the grace of man's Ideal.
But I have pressed my way
Past all their barren play
Of intellect, adulthood, the refined
Progressive sickness of the mind
Which throws up hues and shapes alien to God's
Way with a man in a stripped clay desert. Now
I am a child again,
With a child's derision of the mentors' rods
And a child's quick pain,
Loving to stand as now in outlawed glee
Amid the squelching mud and make a vow
With joy no priest or poet takes from me.

I cannot speak their language; I am one
Who feels the doggerel of Heaven
Purge earth of poetry; God's foolishness
Laugh through the web man's ripening wisdom spun;
The world's whole culture riven
By moody excavations Love shall bless.
All staining rhythms of Art and Nature break
Within my mind, turn grey, grow truth
Rigid and ominous as this engine's tooth.
And so I am awake:
No more a man who sees
Colour in flowers or hears from birds a song,
Or dares to worship where the throng
Seek Beauty and its old idolatries.
No altar soils my vision with a lax
Adult appeal to sense,
Or festering harmonies' magniloquence.
My faith and symbol shall be stark.
My hand upon these caterpillar-tracks
Bogged in the mud and clay,
I find it easier to pray:
'Keep far from me all loveliness, O God,
And let me laud
Thy meaner moods, so long unprized;
The motions of that twisted, dark,
Deliberate crucial Will
I feel deep-grinding still
Under the dripping clay with which I am baptized.'

The Legend of the Doom Bar
(*Doidge's Annual* 1932)

On the strand the mermaid lay,
Basking idly in the sun:
Came a man with deadly spear,
And the deed was swiftly done.
Too late he found out his mistake –

’Twas a seal he’d meant to take –
For while life was ebbing fast,
With the breath that was her last,
She reached out, and in her hand
Took some pebbles from the sand,
And threw them with a curse
Into the bay.
Then the man in terror fled.
But ere he the news could spread,
Night came down before its time
Upon the day.

For upon the western sky
Came a cloud of awful gloom;
Swift it spread across the heav’ns,
Like a wingèd horse of doom.
’Mid the darkness rose a cry,
Scarce above a quiv’ring sigh –
Wraught with horror, dread and fear
As the people watch’d it near –
Watch’d and trembled with affright,
As th’ untimely shroud of night,
Fell in shuddering silence over
Land and sea.
Then each turn’d with bated breath,
And each face was gray as death
‘’Tis the end!’ the whisper echoed
Shudderingly.

For three days and nights the gloom
Was unpierced by any light;
Land and sea lay dead beneath
A canopy more black than night.
When at length the darkness fled
And the sun its wan light shed
Thro’ the gloom,
At the entrance to the bay
There a mighty sand-bank lay,
Now called, alas! but aptly
‘Bar of Doom.’

The Comer
(*Cornish Guardian* 18 July 1935)

Did He tread these waves in a lingering twilight,
When gulls above in the sky were wheeling,
When the coastline in sombre mystic haze grew
Dim, and the shadows from earth were stealing?

Was she alone and did she see Him,
His form on the darkening waters glowing,

Treading towards her, pained over black grim
Rocks, where the murmuring Gannel's flowing.

Alone on these cliffs, where the wafting breezes
Bore the heat of a noontide in midmost summer,
Where land enchants and sea view pleases
Eye and heart, did her soul know the Comer?

Did she pause in the street where the noisy bustle
Of life in a turbulent stream bewilders,
And hear a voice speak, clear 'mid the hustle –
'Come, soul of Mine, we will now be builders'?

Did she kneel just here in a dawn-glow warming,
With my face, fresh from a dream, before her,
While the sunrise leapt with a light transforming
That face to His, while to heaven He bore her?

Love in a Wood
(*Cornish Guardian* 3 October 1935)

Sombre now the river's gleam,
Overhead the stark trees loom;
Dead and sere upon the stream
Leaves, new-fallen, toss with fume,
Rush and swirl 'mid water's boom,
Now supreme
In the woods' autumnal tomb.

Grey heav'ns stretch from sinking sun
Where pale fingers clutch for cloud,
Light that flickers, almost done,
Strikes where chill winds think aloud,
Shrilly summon pall and shroud;
Night begun,
Gathers, broods, with death endowed.

In these branches not a bird
Dares defy the rigid law,
Not a twitter once is heard –
Only death is here, and awe –
Urge to murmur fear of flaw;
Purpose blurred
Since the vernal buds we saw.

Nature at life's cost, 'tis read,
Seeks for rapture, vainly turns,
Like a sleeper on this bed,
Bare, of earth, and stretches, yearns
For the warmth, the quick'ning, Burns
Birth instead,

In our hearts as love returns.

War
(*Cornish Guardian* 21 November 35)

I come with the frenzies of hate,
With rapture of devilish glee;
I hover with death as my mate,
Desiring you, mortals, and She,
Great Death, in her hunger for seed,
Reaches out with a skinny, cold hand
To you, and we both in our greed
Desire you for birth as we planned.

Your heritage – swirl of the flood,
Delirium of waters which bear
Grim skulls, with a flowing of blood
Tinged red as a fiend-kindled flare.
I will rear you in vapours of night,
With curses of rage for your prayer,
With spurtings of madness for light,
And feasts in which devils may share.

For music your ears shall awake
To the roar and the shriek of the shell,
The rattle of guns; while you take
For learnings the sophisms of hell.
I bring you adventure untried,
Wild quests of the hideous blind;
Torn bodies shall quicken your pride,
And the wails of bereavement your mind.
And love shall be nought on the earth,
The flesh it exalts will I claim
To wreck and to murder; while birth
I mock – for its fruits are my game!

The Winds
(*Cornish Guardian* 5 January 1939)

There is a tree grows upside down,
Its roots are in the sky,
Its lower branches touch the earth
As Old Year's wind goes by.

On one lone branch there starkly hangs
A man just crucified,
And all the other branches bear
The choice fruits of the Bride.

When Old Year's wind goes whimpering past,

As mournful as a dove,
It drives dead leaves from earth-sprung trees,
Man’s trees of peace and love.

The heavenly fruits are hidden by
Dead leaves of one more year;
The Crucified beneath His load
Shudders as if in fear.

But swift springs down the New Year wind,
It thrills thro’ all the boughs;
Man’s dead leaves scatter and are lost;
The Christ renews His vows.

His bleeding hands direct the wind
Branch after branch to shake;
The Bride’s fruit drops, and all mankind
May of the feast partake.

Clay Fairy
(written 1946, unpublished in full, though the first half appears in *The Awakening*)

How good to have you here! This dense
Cold drizzle cannot blur the sense
That clay work sand enchanted lies
Under the witchery of your eyes.

If this fog lifted we should see
The clay-dunes towering massively
Beyond the pit – a score at least
Rudging the upland to the east.

A year ago I used to creep
Each evening to this fence and keep
Tryst with old Death: no muted shape
But told me I could not escape.

As far as eye could reach the scarred
Grim landscape stretched, one huge graveyard.
The sand-sumps all like headstones loomed;
The pits my rotted youth entombed.

The furnace fires where stacks upreared
Like grisly crematoria glared;
Even the rows of pulley frames
Were crosses over my battle-shames.

But now – what is this sorcery
That makes a new earth guilelessly?
The hues of your child heart have run,

Bewitched these objects – every one.

The dumps are fairy castles now
Which you have climbed with me; they glow
With dancing warmth your footsteps leave;
The dazzling palpitations heave.

The pits and tanks are magic caves
We have explored – no sign of graves!
I chased you on the cinder-stack –
No ash – a magic mountain black.

And now we stand here by the fence,
Alone and hand in hand; the dense
Grey fog about the claywork clings,
Yet still the fairy revel rings

Deep in my heart ad all around
Your bright form, keeping e spell-bound.
You shyly smile and closer press,
Clay fairy of my milderness!

Strange transformation! Why to me
Grant this incongruous fantasy?
My manhood's mystic bane is dead,
But where now am I being led?

I Go Gentle
(written 1970, published *The Echoing Tip*, 1971)

That terminal rage gets us nowhere
Except into the wrong grave, the dead end.
My day's light slackens gently
Among these quiet, mystical white horns,
Clay horns that sounded my entry
And are silent only while the clues cohere
For a fuller enactment. I touch a tip,
Feel the echoes, feel the pictures blend
In the bleached cone with no nudge of farewell.
What need of anger as I await the dawn-swell
Of each particle after the lean hour's dip?

My entry was justified
When cloven tongues knit Bedford to Wimpole Street,
Answering my horn;
When taper-blooms bound Mary to the Lourdes foothills,
Answering my horn;
When a Valkyrie's shadow tautened Derwentwater,
Answering my horn;
When a parched face kindled under Weymouth palms,
Answering my horn.

These stirrings were timeless, rising to remake me,
Giving me a voice that rang clear,
A form that wrestled through Promethean myth,
Through fire and bondage, shredding the shams
Till each emerging horn held the true-born
Key and hue. I go with them gently to meet
The unflagging counterpart, beyond death,
Of that creed, that grace of amorous tendrils,
Which your fumings barred from your psalms.

The Clay-dry
(*West Country Magazine*, winter 1950-51.)

Within this barn-like shed
The yield of seedless ribs is stored,
The crop of crags mown down and gored,
Here hidden, weather's whims ignored:
No sun has ripened, no rain fed
This alien harvest bed.

No rhythm of seasons here!
In winter still the crops abound;
The stubble of this wayward ground
Is piled upon the fields all round
In gritty shocks, remaining drear
And mouldering year by year.

The wooden awnings swing
Between the kiln-pan and the tanks
Where slurry settles into banks
Like ghostly stooks in rotting ranks
Till shovels delve and trolleys bring
Full mood of harvesting.

The leprous kiln gapes wide
'Neath steam-veiled rafters, fetid gloom
Through which the white stone pillars loom,
And ferry-like above the fume
Of bubbling mud the waggons glide
With sodden loads astride.

And then 'mid furnace-heat
And choking dust when vapours dry
The cutters cleave, the clay-cubes fly
As workmen toss and pile them ,
Each stack in its tarpaulin sheet,
Where shed and roadside meet.

The Burnt Bush
(written 1947, published *The Clay Verge*, 1951)

A bush was on that dump:
A single stain of green and gold
'Mid glacial whiteness fold on fold –
A fang of Nature from the cold
And clay-purged sand: denied a clump,
She put forth one gorse-stump.

I climbed there with a girl:
We squatted in the cleft to watch
The clay-land shadows till a snatch
Of fun led her to strike a match
And set it to the twigs. A curl
Of crackling flame, a swirl

Of smoke, and we were penned
Behind a knot of fire which licked
Along the bristly stems and flicked
Petals and thorns as ash that pricked
White gravel far below the bend
We waited to descend.

The clay-face soon was bare.
A few charred twigs remained to show
That Nature's vein was dried: a slow
Thin pulse of smoke trailed in the glow
Of sunset as we climbed with care
Down to the fresher air.

Fresh too was my desire.
I looked upon her laughing play
There in the gully's winding way:
A dry cool breeze had bared her clay.
Rain fosters sap and fashions mire,
But dry clay prompts the fire.

She fired the gorse – fired too
One gnarled old bush of Adam's seed
Which in a cleft of naked need
Within my soul had fouled indeed
White purity, and as it grew
Spread doubts in scent and hue.

Her hand held mine – and then
The flame leapt in and burnt the bush:
My soul knew smoke and fire, then hush
Of clay delivered from the push
Of Nature's sap: now in God's ken
I stand unsoiled again.

The Token
(written 29 July 1946, published *Confession of a Rebel*, 1949)

A shift of His mood brings an hour's relief
From the cloudy pressure of grinding grief,
This hammering grief that kills all worth
In woman's bounty and gifts of earth.

No woman again, no flesh mature,
With the serpent rhythm in its tidal lure;
But He drops amid my hermit pain
The old thrill purged of creative stain.

In a field on which the sand-dump spilt
A vomit of gravel where grasses wilt
My ice-world broke for an hour of flame
With one who shared it in childish game.

We romped in the sun, but the warmth I felt
Came only from her as she tried to pelt
My face into smiles with orange-peel.
She skinned the fruit with her teeth – would steal

Close up, undeterred by the threatened smack,
Her hand curled tightly behind her back,
Her hand clenched warm on the missiles broken,
Growing soft and moist with her blood's shy token.

She would pull and push till my face was free,
Then snuggle closer and shower on me
Those trivial tools of her childish freak,
Splintered from Nature mature and sleek.

No symbol here to adjust, adapt,
Be fogged and bogged by: beauty lapped
So calm her childhood's nakedness,
I needed not mask its frank caress.

She is the real: I taste and see
Her girlish magic, unflinchingly:
Unstripped to Nature's evil core,
She shows her bounty of sense the more.

Each scrap of yellow peel she flung
Lay fierily on the turf, a tongue
Speaking of bliss I dared not name
Till I saw in her the new way it came.

With hints like this I can bear His shade,
Nor fear His jealousy's blasting blade
Back under the cloud: here His eye shall see

I am purged at last of idolatry.

Shall I praise Him again when, as Nature’s foe,
I emerge to deride its creative flow,
Hating flesh and flower when ripe for seed,
But for sex, bare rind, feeling love indeed?

Appendix II

After performing as Best Man at Clemo's wedding, Causley began to draft the following verse. It was never published and never satisfactorily completed. The first version began by calling Clemo a 'granite Archbishop' and likened him to Wesley. In the second draft, Cornish imagery made way for Egyptian. Here is the slightly more polished, but still unfinished, second version:

> I see you crouching like Aminhotep
> In your sarcophagi of granite stone
> Under the clay-white mountain.
>
> I hoped, that autumn in Trethosa Chapel,
> When, dressed to cure, I shakily shepherded you as your best man
> Before the altar, the brazen cross, in the metallic fragrance
> Of Chrysanthemums. And when, at a warning stab
> Of your mother's Methodist finger you recited your vows
> As the poem they are, a profound silence fell
> On the chapel, on the village, on Cornwall.
> Even those cows, mooing with Cornish accents in the smearing mist and rain
> In the chapel field made – for that moment –
> No sound: and we emerged to where a clay dump
> Spilt milky waste across the road and painted our
> Shoes and the car-wheels the colour of sex as we addled towards
> The wedding breakfast of sausage-rolls and Wincarnis.
>
> Ah well, my old friend, I thought, you've made it at last
> And good luck to you; though I must confess I wondered
> If Wincarnis could be strong enough a brew
> To repel the demons that for forty years pursued you
> To the edge of a pouring grave that now, suddenly, put forth orange blossom.
>
> You, honoured by having your book burned by a local preacher,
> You, honoured by being dubbed village idiot as a child,
> You, of whom it was said your poems were all written by your mother –
> You having no brains nor gifts to do so.

The poem breaks down at this point, as Causley tests out a few lines about the minister who

> Gazed with a natural suspicion at his glass.
> Old Mrs Clemo speaks reassuringly –

> ‘You may drink it with impunity, minister,
> ’Tis only grapes.’

But Causley wanted to finish the poem with a doubt about the future of Clemo’s poetry, and we find him playing with the end couplet. In the first draft the ending is:

> But as to what it’s doing to your verse
> Ah well, my friend, is quite another matter

Then the page fills with variations:

> My God, I thought, a prince could have done worse
> – and hope the whole thing wouldn’t stop your verse.

As he played with the couplet, he might have imagined that Clemo would be upset to read that his friend thought marriage would affect his poetry, so he changed the doubt from his own (‘I thought’) to that of the newspapers:

> How all the papers cried out at the news
> - And only wondered how it would affect your muse.

Again:

> And several papers, joyful at the news,
> Wondered just how it would affect your muse.

And at last he gives up:

> And somewhat anxious at the joyful news…

In a hastier scrawl, possibly written later, Causley wrote on the page: ‘Though, as it turned out, there was no cause to worry’ (C1).

Appendix III

Dear Luke

Many thanks for your email and attachment which I have shared with Bruce Hunter. I can confirm that we are happy to grant non-exclusive permission for you to include all of the requested material in the Jack Clemo biography for the purposes of your PhD. Acknowledgement should be made to Causley as the author, of course, and to Bruce Hunter as literary executor of the Causley Estate for granting permission. In respect of *Homage to Jack Clemo,* you should include reference to its publication in the COLLECTED POEMS, published by Macmillan.

Permission is granted free of charge for use of this material in connection with your PhD. In the event that you find a publisher for the biography you will need to contact us again for further permission and a copyright fee may be payable.

Regards
Georgia Glover

Georgia Glover
David Higham Associates
[Literary, Film & TV Agents]
7th Floor, Waverley House, 7-12 Noel St, London W1F 8GQ

T +44 (0)20 7434 5900
www.davidhigham.co.uk

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Jack Clemo Papers

L1: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/1 – Travail
L2: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/2 – March Dawn
L3: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/3 – March Dawn
L4: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/4 – A Star Shall Lead
L5: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/5 – The Former Rain
L6: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/6 – Private Snow / Lamb of the Green Bed
L7: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/7 – Private Snow
L8: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/8 – Penance of the Seed
L9: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/9 – Penance of the Seed
L10: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/10 – Unsunned Tarn
L11: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/11 – The Dry Kiln
L12: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/12 – Lamb of the Green Bed
L13: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/13 – SB
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L15: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/15 – SB
L16: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/16 – WG
L17: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/17 – WG
L18: EUL MS 68/LIT/1/18 – The Dry Kiln
L19: EUL MS 68/LIT/2/1 – CoaR
L20: EUL MS 68/LIT/2/2 – IG
L21: EUL MS 68/LIT/2/3 – IG
L22: EUL MS 68/LIT/2/4 – IG
L23: EUL MS 68/LIT/2/5 – MoaR
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L38: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/12 – BA
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L40: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/14 – Exercise book of poems

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L42: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/16 – Poems and Rhymes
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L45: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/19 – Poems 1986-88
L46: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/20 – BP / AtM
L47: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/21 – BP / AtM
L48: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/22 – Cornish Banner / CA
L49: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/23 – CA
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L55: EUL MS 68/LIT/3/29 – SB
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L57: EUL MS 68/LIT/4/1 – 'A Vocation for Marriage', by Ena Kendall
P1: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/1/1 – Correspondence: WG / CoaR / MoaR
P2: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/1/2 – Correspondence: MoC / CoC / ET / BA
P3: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/1/3 – Correspondence: SB / A Love Story
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P52: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/4/8 – Correspondence: Miscellaneous 1981-1983
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P54: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/4/10 – Correspondence: Miscellaneous 1959
P55: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/4/11 – Correspondence: Romantic and Monica Hutchings
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P57: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/5/1 – Correspondence: Condolences
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P59: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/5/3 – Correspondence: Sally Magnusson 1997
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P61: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/5/5 – Correspondence: ACG 1998-2000
P62: EUL MS 68/PERS/1/5/6 – Correspondence: Posthumous literary
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