
The Journals: Volume 1

John Fowles

Part One

Oxford

63 Fillebrook Avenue, Leigh-on-Sea, 11 September 1949

This so dull life, mingled with hate and annoyance and pity. No attempt here at method or speed. The housework drags on all day – cleaning, hoovering, dusting, making beds, sewing, washing-up and so on. No one ever sits down before suppertime. It is wrong, but the smallness of the rooms and the house is so noticeable now. The nursery stuffed full of things, always untidy; the dining-room dark and gloomy – only the lounge is tolerable, and one never lives there. The cloistered life with no one to talk to, no one to laugh with – here I am like a hermit, and quite unnatural. An absolute craving for new faces, new meetings, new places. I would tell them so much, but a curious obstinacy prevents this. Always an air of mulish hostility.

24 September

Two beautiful things. A big, spacious sunset sky – elegant and not ostentatious, but curiously in the east, to the west nothing but a bank of low, dark clouds. The end of a *Spergularia* in the microscope – like a minute green saturn. A tiny shining ball with a ring of gauzy skin around it. Also the sails of some Thames barges half-hidden by mist. A curious thing. About to throw a piece of screwed-up paper into the yellow jug which serves as waste-paper basket, I said to myself, 'As much chance as you have of being genius.' It fell into the jug without a murmur, a 20 to 1 chance, at the least.

Another day of silence, listening to other people's trivialities – a dreadful hour at night when all the completely banal information gained from a visit of relatives is repeated and reviewed. Two mathematical impossibilities I should like to see. One, a graph of the words spoken by me each day over a year – the rise and fall would be

eye-opening. Near zero here, and normal everywhere else. Two, a count of words spoken by my mother and myself – David and Goliath!

The visit by unknown relations is frightening, slightly, to the ego, and being. I feel awkward, not because I feel superior, but because I feel that they feel I am. Probably oversensitivity. But they are definitely not at home with me.

Trying to get at oneself is a continual unwrapping – each new skin decreases steadily in beauty and value after it is exposed. Always the seed of truth, the maximum fulfilment of self, appears to be just beneath the next layer. Plainly there is no end to this unwrapping, but the sensation is damping.

Being a poet, divining beauty, is like divining nature – a gift. It does not matter if one does not create. It is enough to have the poetic vision. To see the beauty hidden. As I did tonight, hearing someone whistle in the distance as I stood by an open window. I felt all kinds of moods of streets at night, of walking with loved women, of the dark blue and whiteness, and the strange, magical desertion of streets at night. I felt it all exactly in a moment, such a rush of impressions that they can hardly be seized. Algernon Blackwood: 'To feel like a poet is not to be a poet.' True, yet, poetry, making, is not necessarily the printing of words. It is a philosophical outlook, an epicureanism, a hedonism.

25 September

3 a.m. Beautifully played New Orleans jazz, with clarinet in low register, and very jazzy tuba and cornet. Bessie Smith singing. This sort of stuff has in it the germ of music that will last.

Op. 55. Splendidly vigorous, with some of the secret lyricality of the last quartets.

Writing fever. Can't get any university work done. Full of ideas for 'Cognac' and full of frustration at not having the time to do them. 'Cognac' must aim at being popular, with art overboard. The idea came all in two hours last night and this morning.

30 September

Another appalling half-hour of talk. When screaming was close. Talk of the utmost banality, on prices of mattresses, on Mrs Ramsey's daughter who married a doctor in Montreal. A few comments are made on poetry. So hopeless to try and explain. They would never understand. No mention of art can ever be developed in case we are 'highbrow' – God, how I hate that word! No philosophy is mentioned, without Thomas Hardy and Darwin getting dragged in. It is la mère. Her attitude to conversation is one of complete alertness. I must break in, and I must say something – and in she breaks and says something, whether she has any knowledge, real opinion or not. It is with great difficulty that I can keep my oyster silence. But I must not hurt. With le père, it is partly a defence; modernity is ignored, age is suspicious of invention.

I feel violent with 'hate' against this bloody town. Least violent, now, against the geographical situation (once I longed for Devon), most against the way of life, and then the people who allow it to sap all the beauty of life out of them. All my sympathy goes out to the boy who ran away to be a bullfighter. I'm sure he must have 'felt' the complete horror of this place. This town can have as much horror mentally for a sensitive person as a blitzed city may have, physically, for a turnip. It is the unsociability, the not-knowing-anyone, the having-no-colour, that kills. No interesting people to talk to, no sincere people, no unusual things to do.

Then there is 'niceness' as a standard of judgement – God, how I hate that word, too! – 'a nice girl', 'a nice road'. Nice = colourless, efficient, with nose glued to the middle path, with middle interests, dizzy with ordinariness. Ugh!

Oxford, 6 October

Reread some early poems. All bad. It is like seeing oneself in a film walk naked through a crowded street.

But then to feel oneself unfolding, like a flower.

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7 October

Lunch with Guy Hardy and Basil Beeston and a serious Pole. In the Kemp. I cannot concentrate on those with whom I happen to be. Always there are more interesting people at the next table. Beautiful women to be watched. G and BB seem so set up in the world – they sit on a terrace by the sea and I drift past, watching them, jealous, unhappy. Yet I have the jewel. I may drift to even-more-to-be-coveted terraces, and land. * Immortality is a convention, a white elephant. A futility. There is no logic in planning for it. No enjoyment, no beauty can come out of it. All life should be designed to be contained within life. Within the closed circle. Outside the theatre, the bouquets won't be seen. The turnip who gains fame in his life, and lives, has an immense superiority over the poet who becomes famous after his death, and obscurely exists. Immortality is the gravestone of the spirit. What use is the gravestone?

5 November

Guy Fawkes night. A great crowd of people, vaguely contented at shaking off the discipline of the world as it is. The undergraduates form the largest part, for the most part just watching, with a few active spirits shouting, calling, singing, making speeches. A certain air of forcedness about all these crowds. Fireworks shooting up, and people exploding away from them when they land. The police and the proctors standing ineffectively. Buses moving slowly, cars being rocked and thumped. Many climb up the scaffolding around the Martyr's Memorial, then a vague move is made to the Taj Mahal restaurant where there is a man climbing up, men shouting, and a solid mass of people. Water out of the windows.

Basically one cannot help feeling contempt for all this canaille, noisily and offensively drunk yet not doing anything positive. Most of them posturing in a ridiculous manner. A good many girls, who seem the most genuinely excited.

To a certain extent there is a vast good will that can be sensed; roughly everyone is together and enjoying themselves, with the police and the proctors symbolizing all kinds of emotion and, ultimately, the determinism in life. GH and BB both enjoy themselves, and look for some means to manifest their lawlessness. I have absolutely no desire to do anything else but watch, wanting to be everywhere and see

everything, observing people's faces. Roger Hendry is like me but not so finely 'set', for he has to pretend to a certain lawlessness which isn't innate in him at all.

Too many of the faces are vacuous and want filling.

The sight of the girl in green, about whom I wrote the Hospital story, with a thick well set-up young man, is distressing. Above all the sight of the moon, nearly full, in a clear night sky, not particularly cold, after a dull, rainy day. I wanted very much to see one of the people who climbed the Memorial fall down to his death. The indrawn breath and sudden laugh would have been most effective.

12 November

A self-searching night at the Podges,' with Faith.

Faith, a curious kind of extrovert, conversation-dominating, with the same strident rise in pitch (when she wishes to break in on top of anyone else) as M. Confidential, bold, tomboyish – revealing about her monastic father, whom she says worries her greatly at times.

Podge and Eileen are a perfect duo; in harmony or perfect discord.

During this evening (having felt ill all day, with a certain amount of pain) I keep very quiet and feel unable to assert myself in any way. Not particularly self-conscious and oversensitive but lacking more than lost colour. Two mes: ego, thinking with and at tangents from the others, full of the right words, curious ideas and so on; and the alter ego, not being able to break into the discussions.

An empty walk home with Faith, yawning myself and she whistling and singing. I feel a vague need to explain myself, and also to know what she is thinking. A wet, warm, windy night.

I can feel more concretely a philosophy of life on occasions like these. To be persuasive, to watch and analyse, externally; internally, to record and create. It is absolutely necessary to remain balanced; that is, never to become submerged completely – always to have the intention of creating beauty for others, however reduced this infusion into action and society becomes. Theoretically I want to become a core receiving prehensions, being moulded by them, yet remaining pointed in the one direction, towards creation of beauty. I can't pretend that this is a natural attitude; it leads to compression of feeling, to a dangerous bottling of the need to express, an overtense introversion. The advantages are 1. the forming-house for creation (although some kind of objectivity and self-criticism must be obtained), 2. that the final axion is one of external expression in fame through beauty created. It is creation which acts as a safety-valve, as well as being the ultimate purpose. The essentials are constant attention to practice of the means and a self-confident devotion to the end.

I think that this is the nearest I can get to self-fulfilment, considering, as I do now, that everything is purely relative, and that no beauty is immortal. I can see little point in immortal fame; yet can believe in the human illogic of doing good by the creation of beauty, even though it will only be temporarily existent. (Not forgetting the time-space question, when nothing that has existed can disappear.) Must strive after living glory; it is unnatural to push, but it is necessary.

We also talked of the parent-child relationship.

The crux is when the bridge of realization is reached. The otherness of parents, their separate personality, their defaults and often their inferiority. A solid link of respect should be maintained (E)– but respect can't come when the 'truth' (however false) seems to be clear. One's parents seem inferior 'x' and nothing can make them respected 'y'. Only hypocrisy and convention. It's like being C of E when there is no faith. Eileen's interesting theory that this break is good for creating individuals; that happy families are those when the children have failed to 'personalize' or 'separate' their parents and so become submerged within the family 'soul' with unrealized individuality.

Going through a long period of self-discontent; no faith. Fair certainty that several of the projects, especially the plays, are good, but impossibility of long concentration and doubt about powers of technique and realization. Moreover, the consciousness that nothing will be done for at least a year. And at times the deliberate withdrawal from the world becomes too much of an effort to permit any surety.

21 November

The constant quantum of self-estimation and the temporary urges to write which must die away because there is no time to canalize the inspiration. Sense of waste.

JW. Dapper, impeccable, and fairly well off. Conventional and sociable, but without great originality except for a certain facility of wit. Easy to get on with. Not strikingly dressed. Slightly French in manner, not thoroughly English (brought up for some years in France).

GH. Ex-RAF – still a flyer in the OR. Self-possessed, insensitive, often unintentionally rude because of his certainty in self. Intelligent, but apparently not imaginative. His egoism is annoying, partly because it is not fully conscious on his part; it is not deeply objectionable, but annoying. A question of limited assurance, but still assurance. No one sensitive is ever assured. Well-liked by others.

RF. Religious, obtuse, wet. Wishes to be a schoolmaster. Earnest worker, never relaxing. Constantly a Boy Scout badge in his lapel. Bad French accent, with many stupid remarks. Naïve to an infuriating degree. Reliable, always willing to help. Keen on amateur photography; no sense of art, of beauty. Insensitive.

PW. The most interesting character. An ex-POW, with a brilliant Oxford career. President of French class and OUDS, editor of Isis. A very quiet and silent little person, chubby-faced, with dark glasses always. A problem because his past and his present silence seem to suggest hidden depths, which may or may not exist in truth. By no means infallible or intolerant – an excess of diplomacy, never impolite, brusque or outspoken. Sense of humour; well-chosen opinions and remarks. Listened to deferentially. Today, revealed a little about himself to me for the first time since I met him, i.e. his shyness in discussion, which he confessed.

MLG. An easy character. Provincial Provençal, but with no great meridional traits, except a certain quickness of temperament. Great sense of humour; polite and very conventional. Not basically a prude, yet unapproachable externally. No warmth of relationship, such as one might find in an English girl (without any implication of love).

HF (Henri Fluchère). Small, temperamental, Provençal. Sense of humour, excellent conversationalist, with sophist and sophisticated dissertations on literature. Unprepossessing appearance – a certain foxiness, slyness, which is misleading. Excellent but badly pronounced English.

3 December

Feature of twentieth century – the mass of authors; difficult to rise above a struggling welter. Need for order; genius is crowded out, stifled. It is pleasant to think of some perfect state where only the official writers may write. Increased education means increased tyroism in the arts – everyone tries their hand. Need to find a striking individuality.

Cycling along a wet road under a sky full of scudding clouds, with a full moon shining through them with a variety of strange effects, pinknesses, opaque masses. The wind very strong from the west. A feeling of momentary jubilation, being at one with nature, and sensing the good fortune of being human, the leading actor standing out from the harmonious background. This is a rather eighteenth-century sentiment, but one which is full of happiness for those that can still genuinely feel it. Everything related by love within the whole, a pantheistic joy. Science and civilization are encroaching on this relationship between man and nature, but the irreducible element of comparative immortality prevents any kind of total conquest. The sky remains. Feeling such a moment is like looking back into the Promised Land.

Three days running, a red ladybird lands on my desk in spite of the cold weather. The superstition still vaguely makes itself felt.

The question of intimacy in style – the objectivist always writes for a potential reader other than himself; he is never half alone and chez soi, never getting to the rock-bottom of things, for the style affects the expression. The subjectivist writes purely for himself, egotistically saying a thing in the way which seems to himself best to express exactly his own view of it. All creation tends to one of these two poles, which are, very approximately, classical and romantic. This is an interesting test to perform on all memoirists and diarists. What if the greatest combines the two qualities?

The vital thing is time. It is the fundamental problem of life, around which all metaphysical speculation ought to turn. Time as a notation, as a measurement, is

valueless, an artificial invention. The important thing is the becoming, the dynamism.

Some arts use time more than others. Painting, sculpture, present a more or less static object. Poetry and music, the cinema, a fluidity absolutely reliant on time for effect. The miracle of photography, challenging time, fixing.

Death is simply not becoming, a loss of fluidity. The loss of the element of presence. Death kills time and enthrones, enhances place.

Life is the gift of consciousness of time. A gift which, once it has been given, cannot be rejected. Awareness is becoming. There is a continual awareness of presence.

Could death punish by stopping enjoyment and awareness, which are the benefits of time, and reward by changing time?

Awareness can give our highest imagined happiness. We cannot imagine timelessness and unawareness as a higher happiness, since they are conceptions unrelated to our present condition.

Given the gifts of awareness and time, it is futile to pursue timelessness, like the mystics. The gift of awareness must be fully enjoyed, since it is the highest potential in the present condition. This belief is necessary, though not absolutely true. It has relation truth.

Absolute happiness is timelessness and unawareness, but imperfect organisms cannot apprehend absolutes.

Leigh-on-Sea, 16 December

Spasm of hate. Trying to listen to Mozart 465 Quartet, when M[other] seems, almost deliberately, to spoil it. Mounting unease and fury and sense of martyrdom. Partly the fury is the fact that all (fundamentally and now in this incidental environment) is arid to them, and all reproach creates a guilty conscience. Finally (in the middle of the third movement) the decision that the decorations should be put up: 'Everyone else has put them up. The Farmers have put them up.' We are out of line, horror! Father, up till now, a passive spectator, infuriates because he remains passive, i.e., instead of saying, 'Whenever! It can wait,' he mumbles, 'Better get it done,' and starts fiddling about with the streams of coloured paper. Partly I feel this is to annoy the highbrow in me. I switch off the wireless, and help in a savage, couldn't-care-less way. For some time I feel willingly that I could like killing them. When they remonstrate about burning some barren strips of holly, I find joy in burning it deliberately, to show that I think it nonsense and that hanging Christmas decorations is for me a duty, not a pleasure. Hazel begins to cough and cry, she is ill. I feel an accession of pity, and in a way the spirit of Christmas immanent in the decorations, though only very vaguely, releases my fury. I help carry coal to light a fire and so on. F scorches a hole in his new flannel trousers against an electric fire. I cannot help laughing when he tells me this. A thing I inherit from him – amusement at minor pains and misfortunes. It is the point of absurdity which pricks the situation, and the progress of the evening ends up on a Beethoven sonata and the feeling that an ugly series of incidents have resolved themselves.

This atmosphere of tension is frequent here at home, being mainly caused by the confined space, living all the time in the same small room, when all relationships have to go on the level of the LCD, i.e. M, on the level of triteness and mundanity. My sympathy goes towards F now. The difficulty for me is correlating the mood – dutiful and necessary attitude which is to be adopted and the actual attitude I have created at Oxford. There is a wide gap between the two milieux. In the intellectual and aesthetic sense I have developed out of the rest, yet I have to try and conceal that in order to make life livable. Always present, too, is the guilty knowledge that financially I am a passenger in a leaking ship.

Hazel is an interesting test-object for egotism. Financially it is to my benefit that she should not exist. I don't feel particularly jealous that love should be diverted from myself to her, but annoyed and pitiful that she should swallow up the affection of such old parents. I pity her because she will grow up in an old-fashioned way, with antique views and a conventional cliché mind. Her only hope of being modern is that she is left an orphan, or that I distract her away. Also she is a sister, my family; but the disparity in age destroys all close love and family sense. She merely seems like a small pet. But the change will come when she is fifteen, or at the most by the time that she is twenty. Then I shall, perhaps, be a middle-aged failure in need of rejuvenation, et la voilà! But now, at present, she seems to threaten all the peaceful old age of the two people whom I must wish to see happy. She is a Fowles, nervous, intelligent, sans intellect, sans culture, I see it all coming. Also she is weak in health and there will be trouble. I realize that they, now, could not be happy otherwise. But

it is the now and the otherwise which jar. To me it seems they would have been happier in another set of circumstances, where they had little but their own comfort to consider. Admittedly having to be parents to youth makes them artificially younger, but that does not make me happier. And the child H twists the dagger in the wound when she says, 'John's my father, you're my grandfather and M's my mother.' With a kind of diabolically inglorious perception.

Writing a poem is like standing on some shore and saying, 'I shall row to that enchanting island over there.' But when I start rowing, the joy of the action makes me lose all sense of direction, and of course eventually one returns always from where one set out, plus experience, but minus perfect success, which is unattainable. And when, later, I look back over the route, the rowing which was joy, it seems ridiculous, petty.

Beauty of Leigh marshes. The wasteland, the wilderness, the sanctuary. The narrow ugly line of Canvey Island, a thin, distant bar with the square blocks of houses, low clumps of trees. Canvey Beck, the deserted point. The Hadleigh hills, graceful and English, soft and solid, and the thoughtful ruins of the castle. The smug, impersonal town, with its rows of similar houses. Old Leigh, with its spikery of masts and patterns of boat's hulls, with character. Southend pier, beastly like the railway line, scarring the sea as the other scars the land. The Thames, flat and magnificent.

The mud-flats, all distance and middle-distance, and no nearness. The desolation of the sea-walls and the saltings. Only winter is congruous. The austere birds, the meadow-pipit, the curlew and the redshank the perfect soloists and inhabitants. Aloofness and wildness. When the wigeon whistle all the town recedes into oblivion. Their spirit transcends all its badly constructed material.

The constellations of black stars, the moving skeins of gulls and curlew flying out to sea in the distance, against a yellow western sky. A sunset, a red, tawny sun sinking into the golden, ragged tops of a low, heavy layer of blue clouds, miles and miles away over London. The excited chattering of flocks of small waders as they follow the edge of the ebbing tide, an insight into a society as far removed as that of Mars. Hearing them is like some sight of a fabulous planet. The pleasure of fighting the wet and the cold, and feeling animal and strong, elemental. Of being alone on a difficult quest, with all the lights of those in comfort twinkling ashore.

The smell of the tide and the islands of reeds in the flat water. The two trees.

The pleasure of knowing a place intimately. The run of the tide, the guts, the runnels, the kinks in the walls, the mussel-bed, the places to hide.

29 December

Confused Christmas with many petty worries and malaises. Unpleasantness of small children. Stupidity of adults. Impossible to talk with, unless it is mundanities. All a bit puzzled and embarrassed by me. I want to be myself to them, but the slightest move in that direction leads to puzzlement.

Sensitivity is one of the easiest diagnostics of the quality of humanity. No one truly sensitive can hurt another human being.

Adrift, waiting for a current, or a view of land which isn't a mirage. So many abstract -isms, so many real and minor troubles now. So many little mice scratching, when there should be dragons to kill. Being in a cell and searching for a loose brick; and if it was loose, would my future commit itself? Here I have to make life into a prison, and lock the door upon my real self. It is a kind of suicide for reality. For if only what is, is real, then the what I feel I would unrestrainedly be, in other circumstances, is a ghost. Hate for this town, its cheap, shoddy travesty of life.

2 January 1950

A girl in Southend High Street, cheap, sloppy. But pretty, and curiously, afterwards, I realized with a touch of Lawrence about her. I tolerate Southend High Street; it has a certain brassiness and individuality of character which is refreshing.

Hazel, at tea: 'I suppose you were all sitting here at tea, facing the fire like this, before me, when I was in heaven.'

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Another phase of vague illness again; like sleeping in a haunted house and not seeing the ghost. This morning I escaped the miaiseries and walked along the path between Chalkwell and Old Leigh. A raw, dull day with a wind and all-pervading greyness. The tide full in, and the sea faintly grey-green, ugly. Few people about; at sea the hulls of the small yachts and motorboats wintering at their moorings. No birds but seagulls, resting silently on the sea, or uneasily flying up. The fishing fleet moved out of Leigh into the gloom of the east coast, smacks painted grey and green, with their crews on deck. I envied them for their free life. Old Leigh is a single narrow street, with salty, muddy houses, still retaining strongly the character of fishing and naïveté. The railway line, in this case, preserves the community – its special nature. Past Old Leigh, the cockle-sheds, a dark line of huts. The boat-building shed. The beginning of the sea-wall, the corporation dump, the loneliness. In a sense all nicely divided and gradated. A bleak sort of affection is possible.

5 January

A whim to go afar. To Canvey Island, up the sea-wall to Shell Haven. A pale, cold, half-fine day; obscure blueness and insistent clouds, general bright blue-greyness, making in the morning the grass very green and the water grey and ruffled, an aqueous brightness everywhere. Later the weather settled into a cold, windy dullness. This part of Canvey isolated, overrun by rabbits. I meet a friendly man, with a red face, carrying an old sack bag with a bottle in it. One of the few countrymen left. Then on into a wasteland of rubble-dumps, with toad- fro lorries, cranes, wharves, distant oil-tanks. One or two houses deserted, forsaken; few birds. A strange part of the world. It seems so deserted in contrast with the oil-shipping atmosphere given by the tanks. I don't pass a soul. The creek here is wide, bleak and impersonal, another world from Old Leigh.

Past the oil-tanks home, they seem without men; past a white house set in a few shrubby trees, with one room lit on the top floor, past and around a deserted army camp, full of huts, towers and desuetude, back into the myriad-housed centre of Canvey. All bungalows and jerry-built, yet full of television aerials. The people, this centre, seem to ignore the desolation and harshness of the rest of the island east, with its hundreds of acres of grassland and marshy drains. Like the heart of the lettuce.

Denigrating effect of Oxford, like a pin balloon-pricking. Essential unfriendliness. Thirst for purpose and duty. Complete doubt as to future and literary ability. Depressing Schools results – either failures or successes.

All day walking about, seeing tutors, meeting people. A wet, warm day. The pavements at night remind me of things I have forgotten, summer somewhere and feeling very happy – a curious smell, very West wind, blossoming from them. Nostalgic; and above the nostalgia a layer of unhappy what's-the-good-ness, being sensitive, feeling, living in the past, when the present is what it is. Here is the home of rivalry, of comparisons. Chacun pour soi, socially, academically. Everyone has assets beyond me.

Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*, listened to on a grey, dull Sunday, when I feel alone, as always on Sundays. Deeply enjoyed. So many things felt. The optimism wrung out of the mass of pessimism, the absurd fardeau of life. 'There is no happiness; only the longing for it.' 'My soul is like a piano, whose key has been lost.' Frustration, ennui, acceptance. Chekhov knew how out of the sisters' misery, so typical, so universal, so timeless, would come the beauty, the joy and tragedy, catharsis, the strangest help. Basically, a realization of man's position in an indifferent world, the glow of full consciousness vaguely felt. Masochism, pity for the general through the individual, the general being incomprehensible, non-existent except through the individual. Tragedy should create pity, should broaden, deepen, emancipate the sympathetic imagination into a realm where the consequent will to creation, action, can be realized; should create ghosts with the will to climb into real life.

19 January

News that the specialist has diagnosed my illness; relief, sense of vindication, slight regret for the past state, masochistic. Not altogether an ill wind; so many depths would have been unplumbed. Suffering is essential to know oneself. Introspection. A return to normality is not altogether a blessing.

Splendid evening light over afternoon London, gilding quite literally everything with beauty. I have never felt so sensitive – in all directions, in all objects, sudden apprehensions of subtle charms. The River Thames a beautiful pale glowing blue, the concrete of the normally off-white bridges, a pink-gold soft opal. The sky intense, tinged turquoise.

Curious interstate of a dream – an exact continuity. I dreamed I was exactly where I was, lying in bed in the home, waiting for the nurse to come and inject. But in the dream someone was also waiting and the lights were on (actual time 4 a.m.), and an

announcer had just said on the wireless that someone called Ray(mond?) Noble was going to play the piano. When the nurse came in actually, she came in in the dream. For once I didn't seem to wake immediately.

30 January

Three nurses here, strong types in the subtle distinction category. One a full big-breasted strong girl whose body smells, whose approach, with a bright smile and a bright remark, is healthily sexual, like a barmaid or a Scandinavian (she is blonde). Her natural element and position is bed and open-limbed. Two, a mousy, unobtrusive, small, flat-cheeked girl, feminine and unsexual, with a certain gentle prettiness. Shy and unassertive in approach, a faint, conversational smile. All her life in a minor key, in the background, negative, though not without its charm of faintness. Three, better, a year older, trim-figured, good legs, nice breasts, quite a pretty face, tinge of Jewishness. Practical, aloof, cold. Suggestion of sexuality, but carefully locked away. The best-uniformed. Self-contained, indifferent to all but the quick, efficient execution of the job. Smart office-girl, gin-and-orange type. Interesting to have them on a voyage, or to sleep with them all, not particularly from desire, but better to be able to classify and distinguish them.

The tissue of life. The pain and embarrassment of the cure; its apparent unsuccess; the boredom; the frustration, sexual and adventurous; the three young nurses; the mad old senile women, vaguely heard, never seen, phantasmagoria from outside; the dull, little room, the empty bed, the green chair, the china Alsatian climbing up the green steps, the insufficient wireless, the silver half-hunter wall-engraved; the unattractive meals; the routine, the bed being made; the ugly patch of garden out of the window; the occasional golden light (Claude) in the sky. The parental visits, the prompt retreat into the shell, the banalities, the poses, the indifference, the guilt of ingratitude. The withdrawal from life, from reality, from responsibility, like a toad in his flower-pot by a busy walk. Like a bee still in his honeycomb cell. Waxed, silent, indifferent, falling into a despair, self, groping back into the cave so that no one is at the mouth of the cave to deal with passers-by. Only a voice shouting out of the darkness, angry at being disturbed, back over my shoulder.

Extraordinary inversion of sickness. Because I feel myself no better, a kind of compensatory masochism, not so much a psychologically whining self-pity as a tight-lipped stoic self-dramatization, arises. The tragedy of the vague illness and its vague effects on life become real, and the sense of difference, the growing away from the normal world is universal. Most of my day-dreams are violent reactions into a hard, active, adventurous, romantic life; I become lost in them more easily in a stagnant situation like this. Some are the ideal fulfilment of past or future

potentialities, more often, naturally, the latter. Others are outside even the realm of potentiality. This placing of the ego in a tragic (or again a day-dream tragic, a potentially tragic) frame, though pernicious, cannot be willed away. It's like a leak in a boat; for a long time one can keep pace, then it wins. Baling is done in two ways – by an effort of will, by concentration on externals, both periodic things. The natural self-interest will always win through, though again it is equally periodic, even when there is no will to persist. As always, it opens doors into gardens and storeyards of self-realization.

Writing it down and reading it, objectively, make it seem all false.

3 February

Dostoevsky, House of the Dead. The calm objectivity, the coolness of it all. Immolated. Also the monotony, greyness, illuminated by his superjournalistic spirit. 'The passionate desire to rise up again, to be needed, to begin a new life, gave me the strength to wait and hope' . . . 'though I had hundreds of comrades, I was fearfully touchy, and at last I grew fond of that laziness' . . . 'and sometimes I bless fate for sending me this solitude, without which I could not have judged myself like this'.

His prison was like this illness of mine, a barrier from freedom, a thing to be hoped past, imagining freedom a much more real thing than it is. In such a situation there are only two loopholes, hope, or if that is impossible, like his old Russian Believer, martyrdom; glorification and suffering through abject humiliation.