

**THE AGE**  
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**Jack Lindsay Sums Up In  
His Final Autobiography**

If one omits fabricators of paperback fiction, Jack Lindsay must be among the most prolific writers of the day. For nearly 40 years he has poured out novels, plays, translations, and volumes of verse, criticism, history and biography in an almost ceaseless flood.

*"FANFROLICO AND AFTER," by Jack Lindsay, (The Bodley Head, London; Aust. price, 37/3.)*

A handlist printed at the end of "Fanfrolico and After," shows him to have published 108 books. It shows him also to have edited 17 works, presumably of book-length, and been co-editor of three literary magazines.

Thus Jack Lindsay, born in Melbourne 62 years ago, the eldest of Norman Lindsay's three sons, and the only one still living, has added something to the remarkable literary and artistic record of the Lindsay family.

"Fanfrolico and After" is the third volume of his autobiography, and in it he tells the story of his life and intellectual development, from his arrival in England in the middle of the 1920's, until his induction into the army in 1941.

He left Australis, as a young man of 25 or 26, imbued with a spirit of rebellion against every kind of orthodoxy, and as some kind of disciple of Nietzsche, whose theories he had embraced while sitting at his father's feet.

Ten years later he made what he calls "my discovery of Marxism," but for some reason he fails, in "Fanfrolico and After," to give any clear picture of how this revelation came upon him.

To be frank, "Fanfrolico and After," although it contains some excellent material, and some brilliant writing (as well as some writing which is murky to the point of incomprehensibility), is not good autobiography.

It is the work of a man who seems fiercely determined to be honest with himself and his readers, but who, at the same

time, is handicapped by an undisciplined, though large, literary talent.

Astonishingly, for a son of Norman Lindsay, Jack Lindsay has one other marked deficiency as a writer: he lacks a sense of humor, and the result is that, in the whole 280-odd pages of "Fanfrolico and After," there is no comedy, nothing more than a few wintry smiles.

In a subjective sense, the book's main concern is with two things. One is the short, but by no means negligible, history of the Fanfrolico Press, a London publishing house dedicated to fine book production.

The other is the mutually destructive association between Lindsay and Elza Craig, whom he lived with from soon after the time of his arrival in London until he went into the army.

Elza died of cancer, in a mental home, and for a good many years before that she bore little resemblance, in Jack Lindsay's words, to "the delicate pre-Raphaelitish dreamer I had first met."

The story of their penurious years together, as he tells it at any rate, is one of almost unrelieved misery.

Elza was married, with a young daughter, and was living apart from her husband, and Lindsay who had married young, had a wife in Australia.

His must be one of the frankest stories of such a relationship ever set down on paper by one of the parties. Nothing in the telling could offend the sensibilities of the most narrow-minded prude, but it is less like autobiography than the confession of a man trying to purge himself of a guilt-complex.

"The image of her fine dreaming self haunted and haunts me; and I have written this book, not to exorcise the ghost, but to give it a home," Jack Lindsay writes in bringing "Fanfrolico and After" to a close.

How could I pay her a fitting tribute except by attempting to tell the whole truth as far as I understand it in my long wrestling with her, my long brooding over her?"

These read like the words of a sincere man, and quite probably a tormented man, also, but many readers will doubt that, in writing the story of his life with Elza to serve his own needs. Jack Lindsay has served the purposes of autobiography equally well.

It is a mystery how, for the greater part of his time with Elza, he managed to get any writing done at all, let alone the large volume of publishable work he did turn out, in the emotional tempests which volleyed and thundered about him.

He must possess almost superhuman powers of concentration. When the turmoil of his life with Elza was at its height, he wrote a novel (not inappropriately, considering its author's circumstances, entitled "Story Violence") in three weeks, and most of his work was evidently done hardily, if at all, less fast.

In "Fanfrolico and After" he tells with good effect the story of the birth, the life, and the death of the Fanfrolico Press, in which he and P. R. Stephensen, a Queensland Rhodes scholar, now living in Sydney, were the moving and the dominant spirits.

He rightly describes this episode as an "odd Australian invasion of British culture"; and later, looking back at events made mellow by the passing of 30 years, remarks: "We remained at root an Australian explosion in the English scene, which politely ignored the noise, held its nose, and went on with its business."

Almost from the first, Lindsay appears to have enjoyed the freedom of the London literary world, and he had known, more or less well, many of its major personalities, as well as a good many of its seedy hanger-on.

Robert Graves, Liam O'Flaherty, Aldous Huxley and Norman Douglas are a few of the celebrities who flit through his narrative; he pictures most of them sympathetically, and with a refreshing absence of awe.

He devotes several frank pages to Aleister Crowley, who, by setting up as a practitioner of Black Magic and a kind of virtuoso of wickedness, won brief notoriety, as well as a following of ratbags, in Europe between the wars.

Lindsay "felt Crowley a fraud at first sight," and found "a mustiness about him that perhaps came from the scent of mingled civet, musk and ambergris, which was said to have a compelling effect on women and to make horses neigh after him in the street."

When Lindsay writes of such people—to cite another example, of the collection of human oddities he met on an early holiday he took on the Ile de Brehat, off the Brittany coast—he is at his best.

One wishes, then, he had devoted more of his book to such entertaining and unpretentious reminiscence, and thrown out some of the agonised introspection he goes in for, along with the chunks of psychological mumbo-jumbo.

Any volume of autobiography by Jack Lindsay, a man of both talent and wide experience, should be wholly absorbing, but too much of "Fanfrolico and After" is not. The reason of this is to be found in Voltaire's words: "The way to be a bore [for an author] is to tell everything."