

Brasch was no domestic tyrant, but through his severe demands (and perhaps some lack of imagination and trust) he increasingly lost the confidence and affection, if never the respect, of both his children. Looking back years later with a kind of sad fatalism, Charles wrote: 'I had had no father, and he no son.'

So, though Brasch was happy as a boarder at Waitaki and made friendships that were to last for life, the atmosphere at home remained stiff and strained. Before he was seventeen his father wrote to tell him, without any further discussion or explanation, that he was to go to Oxford. In the event this proved a pleasant enough interlude, which brought new friendships and a much closer association with Esmond de Beer, then in Oxford as a research assistant to Sir Charles Firth. The de Beers lovingly and expertly introduced him to Italy; other vacations were spent in France and Germany. This was true education for which Brasch was later to be immensely grateful, but formally he left Oxford with a very indifferent degree in history, and no book to his credit: he had written a good deal of verse, but that very experienced bookman Basil Blackwell wisely persuaded him against any premature publication. He left England at the end of 1930 with a deep sense of failure, both public and private: 'I had failed in love too, in a hopeless long-drawn-out devotion which came to nothing and left me defeated. I had longed for a complete impossible union of souls and bodies, physical and spiritual in one, a living together of perfect openness, absolute trust, total sharing and reciprocity. When it was over, I knew I should never love in that way again, and never find what I sought; that I was alone and would always be alone.'

That is the voice of a very romantic young man of twenty-one. But if you picture that same young man back in Dunedin, entering the warehouse of his grandfather's firm with the idea of working his way up from the bottom, urged on by his father to further studies in law and accountancy, you can guess how he felt. 'I was only partly back in New Zealand', he wrote in *Indirections*. 'The centre of my world now was England, Europe; there my heart remained; there my thoughts turned.' By Easter 1931, sitting among the trees his great-grandfather Bendix Hallenstein had planted in Queenstown Park, he had already made the firm decision to renounce business and any kind of money-making; to escape back to London and somehow prove that he could be a creative writer. It meant a bitter showdown with his father, but his grandfather was prepared to make him a private allowance. After helping with the first number of a new literary journal in Auckland, *The Phoenix*, he sailed again for England early in 1932.

He was not to return for another six years. These years were filled